

## **The Decline of Exegesis: on the teaching performance of Gilles Deleuze**

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**ABSTRACT – The Decline of Exegesis: on the teaching performance of Gilles Deleuze.** Based on some discussions on the teaching performance of Gilles Deleuze, present in some recent francophone literature, this essay will seek to present some correlations between this Deleuzian teaching performativity and elements of the author's philosophy. To this end, we will present a brief overview of the discussion found in a series of commentators, correlating them with conceptual discussions present in the Deleuzian and Deleuzian-Guattarian corpus. As a guiding hypothesis, we argue that Deleuze has a concern to philosophize from a sensitive rather than rational perspective, being impossible to understand his teaching practice without taking into consideration his appeal for a philosophical sensitivity.

**Keywords: Gilles Deleuze. Philosophical Sensibility. Teaching Performance.**

**RESUMO – O Ocaso da Exegese: sobre a performance docente de Gilles Deleuze.** Recuperando algumas discussões sobre a performance docente de Gilles Deleuze, presentes em certa literatura francófona recente, esse ensaio apresenta algumas correlações dessa performatividade docente deleuziana com elementos da filosofia do autor. Para tanto, apresenta-se um breve panorama da discussão presente em uma leva de comentadores, articulando-as com discussões conceituais presentes no corpus deleuziano e deleuzo-guattariano. Como hipótese norteadora, defende-se haver em Deleuze uma preocupação em filosofar a partir de um lastro sensível mais do que racional, sendo impossível compreender sua prática docente sem levar em consideração seu apelo por uma sensibilidade filosófica.

**Palavras-chave: Gilles Deleuze. Sensibilidade Filosófica. Performance Docente.**

## Introduction

An excellent teacher, in his classes Gilles Deleuze sought to build a certain pedagogical atmosphere, considered by many as little usual or unusual. An atmosphere that, according to Charles Sourié (2015, p. 303), could be designated as “charismatic,” given Deleuze’s exacerbated concern as to promoting the “affection or sensitivity of his audience” and thus enabling complex philosophical themes to be addressed both from a sensitive and from a purely intellectual perspective<sup>1</sup>. Usually, Deleuze encouraged his students to carry out a reading capable of operating a *philosophical sensitivity*, considered by the philosopher as a counterpoint to the “bitterness” characteristic of those readers interested only in the elaboration of extensive comments merely due to that “coming with the territory” (Deleuze, 2008, p. 51). Previously, I would tell them, it would be more prudent to build a passionate relationship with certain texts, selecting the desired authors and, through an affective reading of their works, intensely experiencing their ideas (Deleuze, 2008, p. 161, our translation)

I dream of doing something about this philosophical sensibility, because that's the only way everyone will find the authors they love. I'm not telling you to become Spinozists, I don't care about that. What really matters to me is that you find what you are missing, that you find the authors you are missing, that is, the authors who have something to say to you and to whom you have something to say. What interests me in philosophy is this selection. [...] I defend, rather, that you establish molecular relationships with the authors you read. Find what attracts you, don't spend even a second criticizing something or someone. Never, never, never criticize. And if someone comes to criticize you, say 'okay' and move on, there is nothing to be done (Deleuze, 2008, p. 161).

This encouragement for another relationship with the authors under study, more in the order of affection<sup>2</sup> than necessarily of exegesis, would be based on an acute perception that philosophy would always need a relationship with its outside, with that which Deleuze once called non-philosophy. In *What is Philosophy?*, a work written in partnership with Félix Guattari, we often come across such reading. In that book, its authors insisted on the importance of the non-philosophical for the development of the philosophical practice or to produce a “becoming of philosophy” (Deleuze; Guattari, 1992, p. 279), being impossible for philosophers to renew their modes of thinking without producing a connection with somewhere else<sup>3</sup>. This appeal resonated with another, older one, launched by Deleuze long ago in the famous prologue to *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze, 2006a). At that time, the philosopher called on his readers to continue with the research of new modes of expression initiated by different artistic fields, because only through the resumption of such research would it be possible to produce another style of philosophizing and, concomitantly, promote another mode of existence<sup>4</sup>. Although expressions change throughout the Deleuzian corpus — from the pursuit of the

construction of another style of philosophizing to the pursuit of a becoming of philosophy — the intention always seemed to be one: the need to abdicate a purely intellectual perspective in philosophy in favor of that so-called *philosophical sensitivity* advocated by Deleuze in his classes.

The correlation between this pursuit of another way of practicing philosophy, expressed in several texts in the Deleuzian corpus, and Deleuze's teaching practice, concerned with evoking a *philosophical sensitivity* in his listeners, has been a recurring point of discussion in certain Francophone literature (Jaeglé, 2005; Charbonnier, 2009; Boudinet, 2012; Mengue, 2013). According to these commentators, the Deleuzian pursuit of another mode of philosophizing would not have been limited to some theoretical perspective or appeal within his thought only but would echo in many other spaces occupied by Deleuze, such as that of teaching. The classes taught by the author of *Difference and Repetition* could be understood as a kind of sensitive laboratory, in which some theories would be performed (Jaeglé, 2005) or dramatized (Charbonnier, 2009) or incarnated (Boudinet, 2012; Mengue, 2013). Having written little or nothing about education (Gallo, 2008), apart from some notes on the issue of learning (Corazza, 2006), the commentators mentioned above revisited their experiences as listeners of the seminars taught by Deleuze in Vincennes and sought to attest their positions by recalling a certain performative foundation of Deleuzian thought that would have manifested itself in the teaching rituals adopted by the author of *Difference and Repetition* in his classes.

In the famous interview given to Claire Parnet and released under the epithet of *Abecedário* (Deleuze, 1988), Deleuze did not abstain from commenting on the importance of the teaching profession in his life. There, in the letter *P for professor*, Deleuze showed his high degree of consideration for his classes, understanding them as a space capable of inspiring him. Notwithstanding the expression of such appreciation, Deleuze argued how, at that time in his life, the inspiration derived from his classes seemed to be increasingly scarce, especially when taking into account the exhaustive rehearsals he carried out before each meeting<sup>5</sup>. It is curious to see how these rehearsals, according to reports collected by François Dosse (2010), were not restricted only to the content to be addressed in the classroom, but to an entire teaching performance adopted by Deleuze. Due, perhaps, to this ritualistic character of his classes, Deleuze came to be considered by the aforementioned authors as a kind of performative teacher.

These readings, from the outset, presented an important positive task, namely: to re-signify Deleuze's figure from a perspective other than that of the anecdote<sup>6</sup>. Regarding this anecdote, we often read something about Deleuze's excessive preoccupation with his figure. Starting with his clothes, considered by many as something caricatural (Cressole, 1973), always worthy of appreciation and responsible for conferring on him a certain dandyism, including his long nails and even the way he modulated his voice, adopting a soft and mono-

chord tone, being considered by some as something mesmerizing (Beaubatie, 2000) and, by others, aristocratic (Soulié, 2015). When asked by Parnet about his figure, Deleuze (1988) argued that such elements would configure mystifications of his personality that, despite the effect produced, would be nothing more than supplements. However, the reports collected by his former students seem to indicate that this concern was not something merely ancillary or supplementary, but integrated a gestural experimentation interested in producing an ambience capable of reconfiguring the sensitive and intelligible atmosphere of those who encountered such a unique character. In other words, his presence in the classroom was marked by certain *performative games* (Jaeglé, 2005) interested not in reaffirming the dandyism of professor Deleuze, but in producing that so-called charismatic pedagogical atmosphere (Soulié, 2015). Some of his most dense speeches, for example, were uttered with a low voice, allowing only those students close to the teacher to understand in detail Deleuze's interpretation to some complex passage of Leibniz or Espinosa, different from some jokes and other interpellations, shouted with full voice. In short, there were certain performative elements in the classes taught by Deleuze, always interested in operationalizing sensitive aspects of his interpretation beyond rational interpretations and, thus, producing a style of philosophizing fraught with affection.

This performative aspect of Deleuze's classes, according to Gilles Boudinet (2012), would flirt with elements of a so-called Deleuzian aesthetic, defined not as a set of knowledges about the beautiful or the artistic phenomenon, but rather as part of a *theory of sensation* (Buydens, 2005). The object of this theory would be the intensive aspects produced by a certain encounter with some sensitive sign, a sign capable of producing a sensitivity beyond feeling and dragging us to other fields of thought. Deleuze worked on his distrust with a certain naturalization of the act of thinking in *Proust and Signs*, among other works, defending there that we do not have an innate propensity to think, but only think coerced by a sensitive sign that forces us to think. Deleuze argued on that occasion:

There is always the violence of a sign that forces us to seek, that robs us of peace. Truth is not discovered by affinity, nor with good will, it betrays itself by involuntary signs. The error of philosophy is to presuppose in us a good will to think, a desire, a natural love for truth. Philosophy attains only abstract truths which neither compromise nor disturb. [...] The ideas of intelligence are only valid because of their explicit, therefore conventional, significance. One of the themes on which Proust insists most is this: truth is never the product of a prior goodwill, but the result of a violence on thought. [...] Truth depends on an encounter with something that forces us to think and seek what is true. The chance of encounters and the pressure of coercion are the two fundamental themes for Proust. For it is precisely the sign that is the object of an encounter and it is it that exerts violence on us. The chance of the encounter is what guarantees the need for that which is thought (Deleuze, 2010, p. 14-15).

An aesthetic interested in movement, therefore. This movement is capable of dragging us from a field of knowledge to a field of non-knowledge, thus operating a shift that is both sensitive and intelligible. Here, once again, we encounter the prominence of sensation over thinking, something commonplace within the Deleuzian corpus, as noted by Mireille Buydens (2005); since sensation is understood as something that goes beyond individual beings with their own modes of feeling and thinking, triggering other modes of thinking. This reading dialogues with that offered by Jacques Rancière (2000), author according to whom Deleuze would have a sensitive mode of thinking, understood as “the power of thought that inhabits him prior to thought, without the knowledge of thought” (Rancière, 2000, p. 505). A power that can be sensitively apprehended only through the intensities triggered when there is an encounter with any sign. In short, this Deleuzian aesthetics would concern this sensitive mode of thinking and not aesthetic objects or the beautiful itself and, more importantly, it would have a pedagogical dimension still little explored, associated with the proper movement that would lead us to a dimension of non-knowledge. In Deleuze, all education — if we follow the argumentative path opened by Boudinet (2012) — would prior be of an aesthetic order.

This essay, interested in experiencing some of the correlations triggered by the aforementioned readings, will seek to think about this performative foundation endorsed by this recent francophone literature. Based on elements in the Deleuzian corpus, we will seek to detail the ways in which this performance would operate or, in other words, which elements – sensitive or conceptual – Deleuze would incorporate into his teaching performance. Aware of the Deleuzian appeal for a non-philosophical understanding of philosophy, or for a philosophical sensitivity, we understand this teaching performance carried out by Deleuze as a mode of operating in the key of sensation beyond mere intellection<sup>7</sup>, in order to promote an erasure of the exegetical rage that takes philosophy classes by storm. We believe that the Deleuzian appeal for a philosophical sensitivity urges us to operate with a thought under an aegis of creation, recovering elements of an author to develop them in the heterogeneous, and not only of recognition, through the imitation/replication of certain ideas and/or even a certain performance; therefore, it is necessary to proceed with a cautious reading of this teaching performativity of Deleuze, in order to avoid recovering the teaching records of the thinker under the aegis of imitation only.

### **A performative Deleuze?**

In his *Portrait Oratoire de Gilles Deleuze*, Claude Jaeglé (2005), a former listener to Deleuze’s seminars in Vincennes, sought to reconstruct the teaching performance of his former teacher, recalling the ceremonials adopted by the author of *Difference and Repetition* in his classes. Such seminars, according to Jaeglé, were more like an artistic event conducted in a workshop crowded with people, many of whom

completely uninterested in the content developed in class, than like a class properly. Deleuze always repeated the same ritual, entered a somewhat timid room and, after placing his books on the central table, requested the closing of the doors, at which time a thunderous silence was imposed; with the doors closed, after some crazy hand gestures, he demanded the closing of the windows, resulting in a few seconds of creaking, only then he cleared his throat and began his presentation calmly and monochordially. Throughout his speech, however, his voice underwent variations of timbre. At certain times, his speech transmuted into a shrill sound difficult to be deciphered, a noise soon interspersed by any joke in a low and clear tone, followed by an exchange of glances with his observers. What's the subject addressed? Jaeglé (2005) says he never remembers the content addressed by Deleuze in class: it could be the issue of individuality in Espinosa or the soul in Leibniz — he remembered only the vocal variations of his teacher.

According to Jaeglé (2005) these vocal variations were not something random, due to some physical malaise, but arose at specific times of the exposition of certain concepts — “it was as if the substance of the concept resulted from a hidden sound operation” (Jaeglé, 2005, p. 10). Therefore, he was able to identify a *conceptual character* for each vocal variation: the rascal, with the nasal and malicious timbre; the *clown*, with repetitions and rhythms; the dying man, that emitter of shrill and agonizing moans; and, finally, the host, issuing bureaucratic orders, being considered by Jaeglé (2005) the only character who works for the public teacher and not for the philosopher properly<sup>8</sup>. This vocal work, still according to the commentator, would not be something ancillary, but would echo the Deleuzian appeal for the construction of an intensive reading of philosophical texts.

[...] we have treating a book like we listening to a record, like watching a film or a television broadcast, like receiving a song: any treatment of the book that demands special respect, attention of another kind, comes from the past and definitively condemns the book. There is no question of difficulty or understanding: *concepts are exactly like sounds, colors or images*. These are intensities that are or are not convenient for you, that pass or do not pass. Pop'philosophy. There is nothing to understand, nothing to interpret (Deleuze; Parnet, 2004, p. 14, emphasis added).

If concepts, in the Deleuzian conception, must be understood as sounds, it would be expected, argues Jaeglé (2005), that in Deleuze's teaching vocalization we find something like the “substance of his concepts” (Jaeglé, 2005, p. 10). This substance, he continues, should not be confused with any explanation, the vocalization would not replicate something that would be latent in the texts written by Deleuze, but would rather perform a thought in action, recovering the forces that agitate and drag him. About that, Jaeglé said

A philosopher can say something about his philosophy, but not explain it. The exposition of concepts would be a testimony of thought in action, the main objective of the seminars. The explanation times, imbued with a certain pedagogical importance, are not representative of the state of mind and the forces at work in conceptual elaboration (Jaeglé, 2005, p. 23, our translation)<sup>9</sup>.

Professor Deleuze's own vocalization, therefore, would not be prior or subsequent to the conceptual formulation, would not represent a work of thought expressed earlier or later in his books, but would express the clashes in the field of the thinkable — such clashes, according to the commentator, would be the very substance of conceptual creation. If thought would not come from an innate propensity, as Deleuze (2006a) wishes, but rather from a violence, these vocal modulations would be the greatest expression of these violent movements that dragged Deleuze into the fields of the unthinkable. The Deleuzian vocalization would be a kind of “primitive mode of expression by which an overflowing principle is signaled in thought through an immanent exclamation” (Jaeglé, 2005, p. 50).

For the first time since the accusations launched by Michel Cressole (1973)<sup>10</sup> to Deleuze, the French thinker's ways of behaving and expressing himself have been correlated with larger discussions of Deleuzian philosophy and not considered as a certain anecdote. This correlation, between work and life, opened an unprecedented path of discussion, prolonged by other many commentators. Sébastien Charbonnier (2009), for example, revisited this portrait built by Jaeglé to think about how the pedagogy elaborated by Deleuze involved a singular dramatization, in dialogue with certain methodological aspects of his work.

Charbonnier structures his reading based on a commentary to the text *The method of dramatization*. There, Deleuze (2006b) had insisted on the dissociation between thought and a formed consciousness, understanding it as “one of these terrible movements irreconcilable with a formed, qualified and composed subject such as that of the cogito in the representation” (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 133). Only larval subjects, preformed or not individualized, could withstand the movements of thinking. Thought, in this view, should be understood as an intensity, more than a capacity and/or a faculty proper to individual subjects. The difficulty in accessing this intensive character of thought stems from the fact that we, individual subjects, rarely have the means to access this latent force immediately. In general, in our daily lives, we deal with thinking through the key of recognition. More than thinking, argues Deleuze (2006a), what we commonly do under the epithet of thought implies only a mimetic game through which we base our experience with categories built previously. Any novelty, any happening, would therefore always be referred to according to the past, to prefabricated models and concepts<sup>11</sup>. Thus, we do not escape the assumption of identity, since there is nothing that does not refer to some previous assumption and refers to it. For operating through this key of recognition, the intensive force of thought would eventual-

ly be silenced. How to free the thought, there where it is imprisoned? One possible path, in the reading undertaken by Charbonnier (2009), would be to recover the dramatization proper to each concept.

Each concept, understood by Deleuze (2006b) as the maximum creation of philosophy<sup>12</sup>, would involve its own drama, a kind of schematism that updates in some lines all the intensive force of thought that originated it. According to Deleuze: “The concept would never be divided or specified in the world of representation without the dramatic dynamics that thus determine it in a material system under every possible representation” (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 134). These dramatic schemes would refer to the clashes between different qualitative forces in the field of thinking, clashes whose traces would evanesce upon their actualization in certain ideas — in the case of philosophy, ideas are understood as concepts (Deleuze; Guattari, 1992). Upon their actualization, such concepts would eventually open the field of the thinkable to never imaginable problematizations, since they would manage to rupture “the dualities of ordinary thinking and, at the same time, give things a new truth, a new distribution, an extraordinary perspective” (Deleuze, 2012, p. 103). This rupture would not operate in an intellectual key only, but through sensitive elements that would modify the image of current thought — the one responsible for affirming that we think by recognition, only — and would point to another sensitivity, capable of opening us to new ways of thinking and, ultimately, living. Therefore, Deleuze (1976) conceived conceptual creation as a kind of both sensitive as well as intelligible happening. Apprehending this movement, taking into consideration the moment of eruption of a concept and regressing to the field of forces that originated it, would correspond to the so-called Deleuzian dramatization. Recovering such process, therefore, would imply recovering this happening force typical of the concept; a force capable of opening our field of thought to other problematizations.

Charbonnier (2009), in dialogue with this method, understands that the discussion of dramatization was not restricted only to the theoretical field, but inspired a certain pedagogy used by the French philosopher in his seminars. Professor Deleuze’s performance, argues the commentator, would seek to bring to light the specific dramatization of some concepts, in order to enable access to the intensities proper to each one and instigate his listeners to another apprehension of the philosophical exercise, more sensitive than rational. To feel in another manner so, thus, they can get rid of the ties of the current intelligibility and sensitivity regimes, enabling the construction of unique fields of problematization. How would this performance be the basis for a Deleuzian pedagogy properly? Following the Deleuzian discussion on learning, Charbonnier (2009) insists that we do not know how someone effectively learns something; therefore, it is appropriate to develop a teaching style that appeals not to the memorization of contents, but to the affective engagement of the listener — such premise, moreover, could be recovered by teachers interested in promoting another access to philosophical exercise. In this sense,

Deleuze's classes would be laboratories in which theoretical elements would be presented in a disinterested manner, through a performance focused on the exercise of conceptual dramatization, in order to enable the development of ideas in a heterogeneous<sup>13</sup>. For some, a certain idea in Spinoza would really be interesting; for others, it would not be significant, and it would be advisable to return to Descartes — it does not matter. The important thing would only be to produce an atmosphere through which each one allows himself or herself to be dragged along a learning path, being called to think based on a singular field of problematizations to, finally, allow the emergence of their own concepts.

Although Charbonnier does not share Jaeglé's reading of Deleuze's own vocalizations, he considers that the author of *Difference and Repetition*, when performing his dramatizations, would also embody a character in his classes, namely that of the idiot<sup>14</sup>. Only the idiot, in his conception, could fight the evils of nonsense, this force that emerged in the nineteenth century and became one of the main rivals of philosophy. According to Deleuze (2006a), nonsense would be a kind of unfulfilled thought, responsible for creating obstacles to thinking. By means of nonsense, we would believe to be thinking when in fact we would only endorse the knowledge and values built previously, thus operating in favor of thought understood as recognition. Therefore, nonsense would concern the childish game of questions and answers long denounced by Deleuze in *Bergsonism*, text in which he noted:

In fact, we make the mistake of believing that the true and the false concern only solutions, that they begin only with solutions. This prejudice is social (because society, and the language that transmits its slogans, 'give' us problems totally made, as if out of 'administrative cards of the city', and force us to 'solve' them, leaving us a thin margin of freedom). Moreover, prejudice is childish and school-like, because the teacher is the one who 'gives' the problems, and the student is responsible for discovering their solution. Thus, we are kept in slavery. True freedom lies in a power of decision as to the constitution of our own problems: this power, 'semi-divine', implies both the disappearance of false problems and the creative emergence of true ones (Deleuze, 2012, p. 11).

This condition of slavery, in which we could not build our own problems, would be the main product of nonsense, responsible for allocating us in a relationship of submission to the current powers and preventing the emergence of thought, understood by Deleuze (2006a) as a creative act. Why would the idiot fight nonsense? Now, as argued by Deleuze and Guattari (1992), at first the idiot would identify with the image of the private thinker, one who "forms a concept with innate forces that each one has by right on their own (I think)" (Deleuze; Guattari, 1992, p. 83). The strength of this strange conceptual character would be in their willingness to think, but not to think what everyone thinks, the everyday nonsense, but to think for themselves to the point of being led to doubt anything and everything. At this point in

their argument, Deleuze and Guattari think about the way the idiot expresses himself in René Descartes' thought plane, with his hyperbolic doubt. At another time, in nineteenth-century Russia, the idiot assumes another feature, more interesting for the philosophical horizon of Deleuze and Guattari, namely: he begins to desire the absurd, the creation of new modes of thinking and living.

The old idiot wanted evidence, which he would arrive at himself: in this expectation, he would doubt everything, even  $3 + 2 = 5$ ; would put all truths in doubt. The new idiot does not want evidences, in any way, he will never 'resign' himself to the fact that  $3 + 2 = 5$ , he wants the absurd – it is not the same image of thought. The old idiot wanted the true, but the new one wants to make the absurd the highest power of thought, that is, to create. [...] The old idiot wants to realize, for himself, what was understandable or not, reasonable or not, lost or saved, but the new idiot wants to be given back what was lost, what was incomprehensible, what was absurd. It's certainly not the same character, there was a mutation. And yet, a tenuous thread unites the two idiots, as if it were necessary for the first to lose his reason for the second to find what the other had lost at first, gaining it (Deleuze; Guattari, 1992, p. 84-85).

The force of the absurd, in this view, would be confused with the possibility of inventing our own fields of problems, as well as the concepts that would populate them. The concepts, according to Deleuze, would make it possible to overcome the dualities and banalities of ordinary thought, the one that would always operate under the aegis of recognition, giving things “a new truth, a new distribution, an extraordinary perspective” (Deleuze, 2012, p. 103). To promote this change in his students, or in the current policy (Mengue, 2013), Deleuze would start to perform a certain idiocy in his classes.

It can be seen how, in Deleuze, there would be an effort to produce a shift in relation to traditional philosophical practice that, according to both Jaeglé (2005) and Charbonnier (2009), would also manifest itself in the author's teaching performance. Philosophizing would not mean the elaboration of an intricate system, nor the formulation of certain schematisms, but the opening to another thought, understood as creation, capable of modifying the sensitive and intelligible schemes to which we are subjected in quotidian life. Thus, a whole reconfiguration of our lives. Deleuze's himself said about that:

Instead of knowledge that opposes life, a thought that affirms life. Life would be the active force of thought, and thought would be the affirmative power of life. Both would go in the same direction, linking together and breaking the limits, following each other step by step, in the effort of an unprecedented creation. Thinking would mean discovering, inventing new possibilities of life (Deleuze, 1976, p. 83).

Philosophy, therefore, must serve the creation of new modes of existence. It is natural, consequently, that this understanding echoes in the classes taught by Deleuze. If the theorist is interested in promoting other modes of existence, the same would be valid for the

teacher. Accordingly, from Jaeglé to Boudinet, including Charbonnier, everyone seeks to think how this incitement to another way of philosophizing would echo in Deleuze's pedagogical practice. Undoubtedly, as we have exposed so far, we can draw numerous parallels between certain Deleuzian conceptual discussions and his pedagogical practice, but would there not be, in this literature, a certain confusion between conceptual characters and aesthetic figures? In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish conceptual characters from aesthetic figures. For the authors:

Some are powers of concepts, the others are powers of affects and percepts. [...] The great aesthetic figures of thought and romance, but also of painting, sculpture and music, produce affects that overflow ordinary affections and perceptions, in the same way concepts overflow current opinions (Deleuze; Guattari, 1992, p. 88-89).

While conceptual characters populate the philosophical planes of immanence, giving expression to problems and imparting movement to thought — transmuting themselves into “agents of enunciation” (Deleuze; Guattari, 1992, p. 87) of a certain philosophy — aesthetic figures accomplish something similar, but in planes of artistic composition and giving expression to percepts and affections. Both characters deal with chaos, the dark background of thought, but in distinct manners and with diverse intentions. The former seek to populate the plane of immanence erected by a philosopher with problems and questions that demand, for their resolution, a movement of singular conceptual creation. The latter, in turn, inhabit a field of composition in order to produce affects and percepts capable of breaking the sensitive chain in which we are immersed, opening our perceptual field to another sensitivity.

Despite their differences, conceptual characters and aesthetic figures, as well as plane of immanence and plane of consistency, always intersect, and cannot be considered isolated entities without any relation to each other. We can, therefore, populate a philosophical plane of immanence with an aesthetic figure, as well as an artistic plane of composition with a conceptual character. About that relation. Deleuze and Guattari say:

A thinker can therefore decisively modify what it means to think, trace a new image of thought, establish a new plane of immanence, but, instead of creating new concepts that occupy him, he populates other instances, other entities, poetics, novelistic, or even pictorial or musical (Deleuze; Guattari, 1992, p. 89).

Although conceptual characters and aesthetic figures may fork, we can never confuse them. Each has a specificity, but this does not prevent them from working together. Usually, an aesthetic figure ends up being summoned by a philosopher as a kind of intercessor. Intercessors, Deleuze (2007) tells us, are encounters with sensitive signs capable of producing the notorious thinking in thought. It can be an encounter with a person — such as Deleuze's encounter with Guattari —, with something, with a plant or even animals. Anything can serve

as an intercessor, if it produces a sensitive shift and leads us to other fields of thought. Art, therefore, can become an important intercessor for philosophical exercise — “[...] Philosophy, art and science enter into relations of mutual resonance and into relations of exchange, but each time for intrinsic reasons. It is due to their own evolution that they impact one another” (Deleuze, 2007, p. 156). As Vasconcellos (2005, p. 1225) argued: “The concept of ‘intercessors’ is fundamental in Deleuzian démarche. It is through him that we can relate philosophy and art, creation of concepts and invention of images, because in Deleuze the fundamental question of thought is creation: thinking is inventing the usual path of life, thinking is doing something new, making something new again. possible thought. Thinking is producing ideas.”

In his teaching performances, Deleuze perhaps uses certain aesthetic figures — the clown, the dying man, and the others noted by Jaeglé (2005) — for the elaboration of his concepts. Such figures, acting as intercessors, would make it possible for the philosopher to escape from certain philosophical ties responsible for preventing thought from really thinking, making him hostage to nonsense, and, through this movement, would assist him in conceptual creation. However, the concept does not properly belong to such aesthetic figures, but to the conceptual character favored by Deleuze, namely: the idiot. In this sense, we emphasize the importance of the readings of Charbonnier (2009), one of the few authors to note that the only conceptual character that we can deduce from both Deleuze’s teaching performance and the Deleuzian corpus would be that of the idiot — Mengue (2013), more radical, even suggests that the idiot would be the condition of any and all philosophy, a kind of a priori. Only the idiot, as Charbonnier insists, could overcome the daily nonsense that impels us to say what everyone says, to think thoughts constructed previously, etc., only he could promote the ultimate goal of Deleuzian philosophy, namely: the decline of exegesis.

### **The Decline of Exegesis**

Deleuze, in a short text interested in discussing intercessors in philosophy, revisits the issue of nonsense and claims: “nonsense is never mute or blind” (Deleuze, 2007, p. 161). This statement is based on the assumption that we live in the midst of an excess of communication, an excess responsible for surrounding us with “useless words, with a demented amount of speeches and images” (Deleuze, 2007, p. 161). In *What is philosophy?*, Deleuze, together with Guattari, would return to the question of excess of communication, understanding it now as an impediment to conceptual creation. There, we read: “We do not lack communication, on the contrary, we have too much communication, we lack creation. We lack resistance to the present” (Deleuze; Guattari, 1992, p. 140). This communicational mass, fraught with uselessness, represses thought while encouraging individuals to express themselves. This individual expression, however, only replicates certain consensual ideas erected by common sense and en-

dorsed by common sense. In *Difference and Repetition* (2006a), Deleuze insists on the pernicious character of common sense and good sense, understanding both as models of operation in the service of recognition. Both common sense and good sense operate as an assumption of so-called dogmatic thought, an assumption that binds the act of thinking to a certain natural exercise inherent in all rational beings. Deleuze (2006a, p. 218-219) tells us:

In this sense, philosophical conceptual thought has as an implicit assumption an Image of thought, prephilosophical and natural, taken from the element of common sense. According to this image, thought is in affinity with the true, formally possesses the true, and wants materially the true. And it is about this image that each one knows, that is presumed that each one knows what it means to think. It matters little, then, that philosophy begins with the object or the subject, the being or the entity, while thought remains subject to this image that already prejudices everything, both the distribution of the object and of the subject as well as of the being and of the entity. We can call this image of thought a dogmatic or orthodox image, a moral image.

Thus, we continue to be immersed in a problematic field built previously, reacting to their questions with predictable responses. In this view, we create nothing and thought continues to operate under the aegis of recognition. According to Deleuze (2007, p. 162), breaking this typical communicational cycle of nonsense requires the construction of “vacuoles of solitude and silence”. But, how to produce such vacuoles, especially in a classroom?

Deleuze knew that in his classes, although silence loomed, certain noises insisted on enduring. The questions of his students, for example, usually pointed to the need to elucidate an obscure passage of a certain author, better understand the way a philosopher dealt with some concepts, etc. However, this eagerness for an impeccable interpretation of the analyzed authors would be due to the old repressive function exercised by the History of Philosophy long denounced by Deleuze (1988). Such function would establish that, before seeking to think on one's own – as the idiot does – it would be appropriate to understand in detail the thought of one or another author, as well as the ways in which certain problems have been treated over the centuries by a different range of thinkers. Faced with this demand, few are those who find their own tone. For this reason, Deleuze (2005) insisted so much with his students about the need to learn to dephilosophize.

What I would like to do is almost an operation of dephilosophizing. I truly believe that there is no complete philosophical reading except when it coexists with a non-philosophical reading. That is why philosophy is a matter of experts and, at the same time, of non-experts. A good philosophy is eminently a thing of experts, since it consists in creating concepts, but it is also fundamentally a thing of non-experts, because concepts are true outlines, outlines of sensitive intuitions (Deleuze, 2005, p. 148).

Dephilosophize, if we dared to define the term, would concern a certain exercise of thought that operates from a sensitive and not only

intellectual perspective. The concepts presented are of interest insofar as they address vital issues, understanding here not the individualized life, but that life defined by Deleuze as “an impersonal and, nevertheless, singular life, which recovers a pure happening released from the accidents of the inner and outer life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of that which occurs” (Deleuze, 2016, p. 410). This life, singular and immanent, emerges sensitively reconfiguring the space of the real, producing the outbreak of individualities and enabling the objective reconfiguration of certain scenes, albeit in an ephemeral way. Like the example recovered by Deleuze in his text, extracted from a book by Dickens in which

A scoundrel, a bad guy, despised by everyone, is collected dying and, those who are taking care of him, manifest a kind of care, respect, love towards the smallest sign of life of the dying man. Everyone rushes to save him, to the point that the villain himself feels, in the depths of his coma, something sweet penetrating him. However, as he returns to life, his saviors grow colder and he recovers all his rudeness, his wickedness. Between his life and his death, there is a moment that is nothing more than a life playing with death (Deleuze, 2016, p. 409-410).

It is always a matter of a change — it should be noted — of an aesthetic order, only with the dissolution of our system of sensitive representations — the way I feel to myself and others, based on preconceived judgments — can we apprehend other possibilities of acting and thinking, that is, only by modifying our perceptual mode can we experience other possibilities of thinking.

In the case of his classes, the adoption of certain aesthetic figures aimed to produce a shift from a form of systematic listening, interested in understanding an alien thought system, to one of an intensive order. To evoke attentive listening to singular elements, sensitive signs capable of leading listeners to regions of non-knowledge and triggering problems whose concepts capable of solving them would still remain to be invented. This movement would be typical of the act of learning, as Deleuze understands it:

Learning is only the intermediary between non-knowledge and knowledge, the living passage from one to the other. It can be said that learning, after all, is an infinite task, but this is still rejected for the side of circumstances and acquisition put out of the supposedly simple essence of knowledge as innatism, a priori element or even regulatory Idea. And, finally, learning is, first of all, on the side of the mouse in the labyrinth, while the philosopher outside the cave considers only the result – knowledge – to extract transcendental principles from it (Deleuze, 2006a, p. 238).

This living passage is what is important to foster in a class, producing it is difficult, it requires the abandonment of old teaching formulas and the construction of a pedagogical space that favors encounters with unique sensitive signs. A joke, a noise, a Proust reading, a movie, anything. Deleuze knew that, so he insisted on adopting a singular teaching performance, in order to produce unusual encounters and disconnect his students from that yearning for understand-

ing, aiming to cause the sunset of the exegetical exercise so dear to classical philosophers. All this to make them access the vital element of a thought; the spiritual signatures of the concepts and the modes of life they engender. As Deleuze argued in a class: “Concepts are spiritual signatures, but this does not mean that they are only in the intellect, concepts are also modes of life” (Deleuze, 2005, p. 19).

### **Final Considerations**

In his classes, Deleuze sought to favor the sensitive not simply to the detriment of the intellectual, but in connection with it. There was no goal to be achieved or a content to be assimilated, nothing to understand from the start. For this reason, Gilles Boudinet (2012) insisted that we cannot think of a pedagogy with Deleuzian traits, at least in classical terms, since his teacher figure is defined as that of an anti-pedagogue, because he understands that the emergence of thought — the ultimate activity of any pedagogical action — does not arise from the replication of a ready-made thought, but from something else. “One never learns by doing like someone, but by doing with someone, which has no relation of similarity with what one learns,” Deleuze argues in *Proust and Signs* (Deleuze, 2010, p. 21). We perceive, according to the excerpt in question, the importance of an intercessor, a company capable of triggering thought. This company does not teach us anything, it just shifts us. It makes us see something we had never seen, feel something we had never felt. These sensitive experiments silence the useless words propagated by nonsense, force us to experience a field of experiences without any intellectual mediation — we lack words, in other words. This lack of expressions capable of giving shape to the unknown produces the vacuoles of solitude and silence; vacuoles that enable us, finally, to think.

No doubt, such a discussion sounds too abstract: Deleuze never imagined himself offering a ready-made formula to produce thought, because he considered it impossible to know how one produces thinking in thought or, in other words, how one learns. This did not prevent him, however, from thinking about strategies or seeking allies in the construction of expressive modes capable of producing another relation with thinking – books such as *Anti-Oedipus*, one of Deleuze’s most radical experiments, prove this. Throughout his oeuvre, in turn, we find clues about these strategies: the use of intercessors, the reference to certain literary experimentations, etc. All these strategies indicate an attempt to operate philosophically with non-philosophical elements, because only in this way would it be possible to cause the said becoming of philosophy. Discussions about how these strategies were incorporated by Deleuze in his teaching work open a new field of investigation for those interested in his philosophy, since it enables us to realize that such strategies were not limited to the theoretical field only, but echoed in a unique teaching performativity. When we examine the reports of his former students, we realize how much Deleuze employed aesthetic figures, gave vent to conceptual characters — the

idiot —, and sought to emit sensitive signs more than intelligible formulas in his classes. How to operate with this fact, though?

Well, although we can observe performative elements integrated into Deleuze's teaching practice that echo strategies used in his theoretical works, which does not mean we should seek such close correlations between these spheres. Deleuze's appeal for his readers to seek to establish an intensive relation with his writings could also extend to thinking about his teaching performance, fraught with "intensities that are convenient for you or not" (Deleuze; Parnet, 2004, p. 14, our translation). We cannot deny, however, the existence of a demand to evaluate our own teaching performance considering this discussion, seeking to probe the elements we operate in our classes — the intercessors and the connections we make. This appeal, in fact, is already found in Deleuze's theoretical writings, his classes demonstrate that it is possible to take such instigations into the classroom space, but not as Deleuze did. Rather, the performative games of the author of *Difference and Repetition* should be considered as signs, understanding that "we learn nothing from one who tells us: do as I do. Our only masters are those who tell us 'do it with me' and who, instead of proposing gestures to be reproduced, know how to emit signs to be developed in the heterogeneous" (Deleuze, 2006a, p. 48)<sup>15</sup>.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Claude Jaeglé, a commentator interested in discussing a certain teaching performativity of Deleuze, argues that, at the end of a class dedicated to Spinoza's thought, the author of *Difference and Repetition* gave the floor to some eager students to question him about one element or another of the Spinoza corpus, but not without first alerting them: "No theory. Feeling, huh!" (Jaeglé, 2005, p. 17). According to Sourié (2015), speeches similar to those reported by Jaeglé would be the manifestation of the "evil omen of a philosopher who laments the naivety of those who speculate on the theory only based on the theory" (Sourié, 2015, p. 303).
- <sup>2</sup> According to Deleuze and Guattari, affection should not be understood as a personal feeling, individualized and rationalized, but rather the "realization of a power [...], which elevates and makes the self-vacillate" (Deleuze; Guattari, 1997, p. 80). Affection, therefore, does not concern the individual feelings of a self, but rather the desubjectifying powers that drag the self to other places, or, in other words, it would refer to the very process of becoming.
- <sup>3</sup> In another moment, in an interview published in *Magazine Littéraire* and later inserted in the compilation called *Conversations* (Deleuze, 2007), the philosopher resumed this theme and argued: "It was there [in the classes in Vincennes] that I understood to what extent philosophy needed not only a philosophical understanding, by concepts, but a non-philosophical understanding, which operates by percepts and affections. Both are necessary. Philosophy is in an essential and positive relation with non-philosophy: it addresses non-philosophers directly. There is, on the other hand, an excess of knowledge that kills what is alive in philosophy. Non-philosophical understanding is neither insufficient nor provisional, it is one of the two halves, one of the two wings" (Deleuze, 2007, p. 174).

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- <sup>4</sup> According to Deleuze, it should be noted, philosophy is eminently critical, but such criticism does not follow Kantian parameters, but rather those elaborated by Friedrich Nietzsche. Philosophy, in its critical aspect as envisioned by Deleuze in the Nietzschean corpus, would not seek to probe the limits of what we can know or do, but to evaluate these limits and, in its most radical form, to overcome them, thus leading us to experience other modes of existence. Such experimentation involves a sensitive reconfiguration, always. For this reason, in *Nietzsche and philosophy*, commenting on this singular task, Deleuze argues: “in criticism it is not a matter of justifying, but of feeling in another way: another sensitivity” (Deleuze, 1976, p. 77).
- <sup>5</sup> We find a similar comment in the aforementioned interview with *Magazine Littéraire*, in which we read: “Classes were a part of my life, I taught them with passion. They are by no means like conferences, because they imply a long duration, and a relatively constant audience, sometimes for several years. It is like a research laboratory: teaching a course on what is sought and not on what is known. It takes a lot of preparation time to obtain a few minutes of inspiration. I was pleased to stop when I saw that I needed to prepare more and more for a more painful inspiration. And the future is bleak because it is increasingly difficult to do research in French universities” (Deleuze, 2007, p. 173).
- <sup>6</sup> It is also important to note how Deleuze's courses prepare discussions that would later take shape in his books, that is, the discussions promoted in class are not mere appendages to the French philosopher's work of thought and have important philosophical developments that should not be restricted to the mere personal anecdote.
- <sup>7</sup> It is worth pointing out that, according to Deleuze and Guattari, in *What is Philosophy?* (1992), the concept also has a sensitive aspect, that is, the distinction between the sensitive and the intelligible would be merely formal and, in a way, each of these aspects are not sustained without the contribution of the other. In short, as in other moments of his work, it is a false dualism, being important rather what occurs in the “between” one term and another, in the passage from one point to another of this binary pair. Once, Deleuze pointed out to Claire Parinet: “One only effectively comes out of dualisms by shifting them as if they were a burden, and when one finds between the terms, whether they are two or more, a narrow gorge like a bank or a border that will make the set a multiplicity, regardless of the number of parts” (Deleuze; Parinet, 2004, p. 160).
- <sup>8</sup> Deleuze, in some moments of his work, works with the distinction between public teacher and private thinker. For an overview of this discussion, we refer the reader to (Vinci, 2018).
- <sup>9</sup> From the original: “[...] un philosophe peut dire sa philosophie, mais non pas l'expliquer. La diction des concepts comme témoignage d'une pensée en act est bel et bien au coeur des séminaires. Les temps d'explication, d'importance pédagogique, ne sont pas représentatifs de l'état d'esprit et des forces à l'oeuvre dans l'élaboration conceptuelle”.
- <sup>10</sup> In the 1970s, Cressole introduced the first commentaries on the Deleuzian philosophical corpus. In his book, *Deleuze* (Cressole, 1973), the commentator directed a series of attacks on Deleuze, many of them *ad hominem*. These criticisms were addressed in a letter to the philosopher who responded to them in the famous “Letter to a Severe Critic”, published as a preface in Cressole's book and later integrated into the compilation entitled *Conversations*.
- <sup>11</sup> On this question, which implies a reconfiguration of the uses of our faculties to operate under the aegis of recognition, Deleuze argues: “recognition is defined by the concordant exercise of all faculties on an object supposed as being the same: it is

the same object that can be seen, touched, remembered, imagined, conceived” (Deleuze, 2006a, p. 221).

- <sup>12</sup> According to Deleuze, thought would always be creation. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze insisted with his readers: “thinking is creating, there is no other creation, but creating is, first of all, to engender thinking in thought” (Deleuze, 2006a, p. 213). How to engender thinking in thought? Through violent encounters with sensitive signs that would force us to think.
- <sup>13</sup> Interestingly, Gilles Boudinet (2012) presents a similar reading, but differing radically from Charbonnier. Precisely because of this appeal for the sensitive, it would be impossible to think of a Deleuzian pedagogy, since each one would unfold his sensitive encounters into a heterogeneous one that would rarely coincide. If we understand pedagogy as a set of knowledges that aims to attest/regulate certain results, Deleuze cannot be considered a pedagogue, rather an anti-pedagogue, since his teaching performance aims at the unprecedented, the creation of something that has no reference in the world and, therefore, could never be derived from a pedagogical action.
- <sup>14</sup> Another author, Philippe Mengue (2013), corroborates this reading, insisting that the only model of conduct that can be extracted from the Deleuzian corpus would be that offered by the figure of the idiot. Regarding a discussion of this figure within the Deleuzian corpus, we refer the reader to (Vinci, 2017).
- <sup>15</sup> The author thanks Espaço da Escrita – Pró-Reitoria de Pesquisa – UNICAMP – for the language services provided.

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