

From Polarization to Oblivion: A Brief Study on Chronotopes of *Incident in Antares* by Erico Verissimo / *Da polarização política ao esquecimento: um breve estudo dos cronotopos de Incidente em Antares, de Erico Verissimo*

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ABSTRACT

This essay aims to investigate a few chronotopes that organize the narrative of *Incidente em Antares* [*Incident in Antares*], by Erico Verissimo. In particular, it intends to examine how political polarization and oblivion are constitutive elements of the novel and, for that reason, chronotopic. The first being a motif of chronotopic nature and occupies a permanent place in the (fictionalized) life organization of the society. The second leads to the epilogue of the narrative and reveals the *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi* of the actors. Modes that, in turn, establish a relationship with the oblivion and deceit chronotopes related today to *fake news*. The research intends to understand the vision of man and the world carved in the Verissian universe, if they are still present in society 50 years after the publication of the work or if they have undergone transformations.

KEYWORDS: Chronotope; Bakhtin; *Incidente em Antares*; Political polarization; Oblivion

RESUMO

Este artigo tem como escopo averiguar alguns dos cronotopos que organizam a narrativa de Incidente em Antares, de Erico Verissimo. Tenciona-se examinar, em especial, de que modo a polarização política e o esquecimento são elementos constitutivos do romance, por essa razão, cronotópicos. O primeiro é um motivo de natureza cronotópica e ocupa um lugar permanente na organização da vida da sociedade (ficcionalizada); o segundo direciona ao epílogo da narrativa e revela o modus operandi e o modus vivendi dos atores, modos que, por sua vez, estabelecem relação com os cronotopos do esquecimento e do engano relacionados hoje às fake news. Pretende-se compreender a visão de homem e de mundo entalhadas no universo verissiano, se ainda estão presentes na sociedade 50 anos após a publicação, ou se sofreram transformações.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Cronotopo; Bakhtin; *Incidente em Antares*; *Polarização política*; *Esquecimento*

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“Look, mister, nobody is what they seem. Not even God.”¹

Erico Verissimo

Of the Preamble

In 2021, the most important work by Erico Verissimo turned 50 years old. It is *Incidente em Antares* [*Incident in Antares*] (1971), a final novel that reveals a writer in full literary maturity and, for this reason, is considered as the most important. At the time of publication, – precisely in 1972 – the critic Fábio Lucas writes an essay for the book *O contador de histórias: 40 anos de vida literária de Erico Verissimo* [*The storyteller: 40 Years of the Literary Life of Erico Verissimo*], entitled “O romance de Erico Verissimo e o mundo oferecido” [“The Novel of Erico Verissimo and the Available World”] (1972, p.144). From the perspective of the essayist, many authors would try imposing on their works a preconstructed world, disassociating them from “transient factors of the time;” other authors, however, would add to them the available world and leave open an “explicit truth” (1972, p.144).² According to Lucas, in the case of Erico Verissimo, in the pages of the last novel, there is more of the second than the first, a rather advantageous particularity.

Whether in the created world and/or available world, voices and events roam the space-time of the diegesis, which directly refers to the chronotope concept created by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981).³ According to the Russian thinker, space and time are notions rooted in the nature of man and life, and, in literature, they are assimilated artistically. Bakhtin understands that space and time together structure and trigger the scenes, being therefore decisive in narratives. That is why the choice of the Bakhtinian approach is justified.

The *corpus* selection lies in an effort to show the importance of the contribution of the *Gaúcho*⁴ writer to national literature for having created a work that represents the human complexity, divided among various necessities, being affected by diverse tensions.

¹ In Portuguese: “Olhe moço, ninguém é o que parece. Nem Deus.”

² In Portuguese: “fatores transitórios da época;” “verdade explícita.”

³ BAKHTIN, M. Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel. In: BAKHTIN, M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp.259-422.

⁴ Refers to a person born in Rio Grande do Sul; of or relating to Rio Grande do Sul.

It should be reminded that the unfavorable critique to the writer circulated “in word of the mouth in the academy and among the most demanding right - and left-winged audiences.” (Bordini, 2005, p.14)⁵ In this sense, in addition to reviving the work 50 years after its publication, the intention is to highlight its meritorious aspects, distancing itself from the negative tone to which the epithet “storyteller” (coined by the author himself) often refers. Flávio Aguiar (2005a, p.430),⁶ in the commemorative postscript edition, qualifies the work as “a cry for freedom,” due to the fact it is a notably engaged work, a posture which contradicts the critics who thought him inattentive.

In *Incidente in Antares* it is possible to ac(know)ledge the formation and transformations (historical, cultural and geographical) through which Brazilian society undergoes (resuming to the idea of the created world and available world). The narrative allows the reading of the action of time that spans for several generations, which are inserted in a historical space-time. To each period depicted, it is possible to infer a particular view of man and the world. It is argued that, after 50 years of its publication, the novel enables unveiling themes constituted in the Brazilian scenario which deserve to be brought to light. Among them, the recurrent theme of political polarization and, the one more explicit recently, of misleading news intended to confuse and lead unacceptable facts and actions to oblivion.

The objective of this work is to examine: a) the chronotopes of the *archaica* manifested in the work, how these chronotopes explain the political polarization scenario in the novel, and the strategies which mold oblivion in the narrative of Erico Verissimo; b) the enunciative-discursive procedures used to reveal the material and concrete chronotopes – that is, registered in the figurative scope: the city, the public square, and the newspaper office – and immaterial and abstract chronotopes – embodied in the thematic scope: the political polarization, the *Operação Borracha* [*Operation Erasure*], the deceit, and the oblivion; c) the chronotopic aspects that remained and those that changed or were disguised in regard to the view of man or the Brazilian society, 50 years after the book publication.

⁵ In Portuguese: “a boca pequena na academia e entre os públicos mais exigentes de direita e de esquerda.”

⁶ The title of the postscript of the commemorative edition for the centenary of the author, in 2005. At the time, Companhia das Letras began to publish the works which, until then, had been rightfully reserved to the publisher Editora Globo. The 2005(a) edition will be used here as reference. The title does not have any proper translation into the English language.

The reading hypotheses are that the political polarization is a chronotope derived from the encounter chronotope and is revealed in the customs of the characters depicted in the city of Antares, whom, in turn, are fruits of history; that the *Operação Borracha* [*Operation Erasure*] figured in the novel is a chronotope, not because it brings forth the scene, but because it directs to the narrative epilogue and enables the unveiling of the actors' *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi*, whom, in turn, establish a relationship with the oblivion and deceit chronotopes related, today, to fake news.

Thus, based on the postulate of the Russian thinker, certain chronotopes discussed by Bakhtin will be imputed to the work *Incidente in Antares* and others will be proposed. In order to examine the first hypothesis, points of the Bakhtinian historical poetics about the chronotopes that were a part of the genre *archaica* will be cut out, among them, the geographical novel, provincial novel, and historical novel. For the second hypothesis, it will serve as a basis for the comparison of the chronotopes within “the limits of a single work and within the total literary output of a single author” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.252).⁷ With this strategy, the objective is to reframe the Bakhtinian chronotope, because chronotopes are renewable, otherwise, “everything that belongs only to the present dies along with the present” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.4).⁸

1 Of the Brief Considerations on Chronotope

One of the most prolific scholars with regard to research on time and space is the Russian Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975) who, in the coexistence with intellectuals of diverse formations – a group later labeled as the Bakhtin Circle –, composes theoretical elaborations on discourse, utterance, intonation, dialogism, ideological signs, architectonics, among others. Amongst the most precious ones, which are directly connected to space and time, are those in which discourses are historically set, crossed by extraneous speeches, and always addressed to someone.

⁷ BAKHTIN, M. M. Discourse in the Novel. In: BAKHTIN, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

⁸ BAKHTIN, M. M. Response to a Question from the Novy Mir Editorial Staf. In: BAKHTIN, M. M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.

It is necessary to clarify that, since Mikhail Bakhtin's background is in the philosophic-linguistic-literary field, it is natural that the thinker would delve into the novelistic prose, a genre of permanent interest for him, when examining the language and discursive processes. The meticulous study he carried out on Western novel comprises the genesis of the novel – since its beginnings to realism – its poetic, and, mainly, matters related to aesthetics, among which are the studies on structured chronotopes of the genre, a topic raised in the *Estética da criação verbal [Aesthetics of Verbal Creation]* (2011)⁹ and deepened (but not completed) in *Questões de literatura e de estética: a teoria do romance [Questions of Literature and Aesthetics: Theory of novel]* (2014).¹⁰

The chronotope concept results from the dialogue with various disciplines that had space/time as theme, among other subjects which had been discussed by the Circle intellectuals. Therefore, the chronotope compiles ideas from several areas such as Philosophy, Biology, and Physics (in this discipline it retrieves Einstein's concepts of the fourth dimension and relativity). Back in 1937, the Russian philosopher redesigns this perspective, getting hold of the concept of chronotope, and applying it to literature, specifically in the novel, because of his belief that perceptions of time and space are meaningful to man. In everyday life subjects are not always aware of these categories, but in literature they are enhanced through the lines of the text, enabling the reader to perceive time in space and space in time.

In literary prose, the characters are constituted by a spatial whole and a temporal whole that give them form and content, which are indissoluble. Space is configured both externally and internally and is influenced by time, and this inside-outside existence interacts permanently. The boundaries of real and imagined experiences are articulated in the character, who carries the spatio-temporal unity of experience and memory. Time is internalized in the subject and modifies the character's life and destiny in the face of transformations aesthetically inscribed in the narrative. In this trajectory, the chronotope is responsible for the impulse of the driving forces of characters' special experiences that, at times, lead them to identity reassessment.

⁹ BAKHTIN, M. The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee and Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp.10-59.

¹⁰ For reference, see footnote 3.

Although space and time are inseparable, Bakhtin raises the issue of temporality, which, in the novel genre, takes center stage, being the chronotope basis. Time is the agent of change, represented by the vicissitudes that come upon the enunciated subjects, which, in turn, modify the space in a reciprocal movement. As in real life, in the novel, the past, present, and future only exist due to the time of the world (a world understood as space) and the time marked by the calendar and the clock, of which hands move forward and remind us of the finitude of the individual. Internally, time is not governed by any logic, manifesting itself as a set of simultaneities that are not moments, but events, becomings.

Bakhtin considers that aesthetic act is always engendered in history and culture and is crossed by values. In his extensive examination of the novel genealogy, Bakhtin establishes that each era creates its own ways of fictional representation of the world. That is why the image of man in literature is always chronotopic. The Russian thinker identifies the changes Western societies have gone through over the centuries; he emphasizes the importance of understanding which conception of time prevails in each era of novel history, given that multiple times correspond to various subjects and various activities which are materialized in chronotopicity. In creative language, the image of the unfinalized subject is constructed, of which time (chronological and/or internal) is responsible for remodeling the subject's image and destiny. From this approach, time is the agent of passions, for every moment desires transmute, intensify, and, therefore, it has a productive and creative power.

In these brief remarks,¹¹ it is noted the observation of theme involves several topics. It is idiosyncratic in Bakhtin's ideas the unfinizability of facts, sometimes presented in an entangled and fragmented manner: one point leads to another, which opens up to others and so on. Such peculiarity has its advantages: it places the theme facing exterior, subjected to multiple interpretations in the dialogic movement, a fundamental concept to the Russian thinker. Otherwise, the remarkings proposed here would not be viable.

¹¹ Chronotopes will be presented and revised as they become necessary for the analysis. Since it is a vast subject, it needs certain restrictions. For this reason, only a few aspects and chronotopes will be relevant.

2 Contextualization and the *Archaica* of *Incidente em Antares*

To the constructed world in *Incidente em Antares*, the available world is added, presented in a linear and successive narrative. The *Gaúcho* author retells and reinterprets facts that took place in Brazil during a century of History, and merges reality and fiction, which leads to the concept of historiographic metafiction examined in depth by Linda Hutcheon in her *Poética do pós-modernismo: história, teoria e ficção* [*A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*] (1988). The historiographic metafiction¹² is characterized by “textualized remains of the past (documents, archival evidence, witnesses’ testimony)” (Hutcheon, 1988, p.96),¹³ which become fictional motives. According to the author, “the shift from validation to signification (...) is one that implies a pluralist (and perhaps troubling) view of historiography as consisting of different but equally meaningful constructions of past reality” (Hutcheon, 1988, p.96).¹⁴

Following this premise, it is stated Verissimo finally consolidates his fascination for the dialogue between Literature and History, always aiming at retrieving the past to understand the present and raise questions about the future. The meshes of the Verrisian novelistic fiction combine facts and characters (real and fictional), house the ideological debate, political discussion, and direct exposure, and establish the principle of dialogism. The metafiction strategy anchors the discourse in spaces, dates, and people, and materializes actors of History: Getúlio Vargas, Jânio Quadros, Jango, Costa e Silva, among others, in a simulacrum of reality. According to this understanding, at first glance, the *archaica* that is highlighted is the historical novel: “Parallel to these individual life-sequences—above them, but outside of them—there is a time-sequence that is historical, serving as the channel for the life of the nation, the state, mankind” (Bakhtin [1973-75], 1981, p.217).¹⁵

Historiographic metafiction in *Incidente em Antares* structures the narrative in two very distinct parts. The first is entitled “Antares” and intends to give a social and geographical overview of the city. The starting point of the plot movement is the

¹² The critical heritage that relates to *O tempo e o vento* [*The Time and The Wind*] and *Incidente em Antares* (particularly the latter) under the meta-historiography perspective is significant. This topic is not proposed to be explored at the moment.

¹³ HUTCHEON, L. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, theory, fiction*. Canada: Routledge, 1988.

¹⁴ For reference, see footnote 13.

¹⁵ For reference, see footnote 7.

presentation of the region prehistory, including a curiosity about animals that roamed there in the Pleistocene: the “Glyptodonts” and the “Megatherium.” (Verissimo, 2005a, p.20) The action takes place in a distant geographic environment, in a small city in Rio Grande do Sul. A city so small it seemed lost on the map, as the narrator testifies:

What, to this day, still occasionally irritates them [the Antarians] is the fact that cartographers, not only foreign but also national, never mention the city of Antares on their maps (Verissimo, 2005a, p.21).¹⁶

Antares, which, in its “prehistory” is known as “Skull's Little Folk,”¹⁷ (Verissimo, 2005a, p.24) is located at a border, crossed by the Uruguay River. The first historical news comes from the travel narrative of Gaston Gontran D’Auberville, a naturalist who stays at the house of pioneer Francisco Vacariano. In his document, the scientist describes peculiarities of the region and the population (a few tens of people), the fauna, flora, and types of birds that inhabited there. From the naturalist perspective, Antares is an alien world, divergent from the viewpoint of the narrator, who sees this world as a representation of homeland and his ancestors. The space constitution (captured by animals, plants, and geophysical aspects) and the pioneers’ lives engender certain characteristics that recall, on the one hand, the geographical novel within the framework of physical and human geography by establishing the local color and the study of the region’s population in that period. On the other hand, in this brief historical-geographical presentation of the city of Antares, it is possible to observe another ancestral genre, the provincial novel. In this type of novel, we can see the society formation, the *modus vivendi* of the population and the transmission of these habits and customs from generation to generation. This is only enable by oral tradition as there had been few records of basic facts and the first inhabitants. According to Bakhtin (1981),¹⁸ the fundamental principle of provincialism in literature is the unbreakable ancient bond of generations’ life with a particular location. In the unveiling of the population, attention turns to two rival families who played the role of founders (not founding fathers, a topic that will be discussed later).

¹⁶ In Portuguese: “O que até hoje ainda os deixa [os antarenses] ocasionalmente irritados é o fato de cartógrafos, não só estrangeiros, como também nacionais, não mencionarem nunca em seus mapas a cidade de Antares.”

¹⁷ In Portuguese: “Povinho da Caveira.”

¹⁸ For reference, see footnote 7.

Due to the fact that it is a city located on the border, Antares is chosen to be examined by a team of sociology students led by Martim Francisco Terra, a distant relative of the Terra Cambarás from *O Tempo e o vento*. With this feature, the novel incorporates the self-parody.

To carry out his task, Martim Francisco keeps in contact with the personalities of the city, as an inquirer-witness, that is, as a subject who carefully examines human types. With funding from “Ford Foundation,” the work culminates in the controversial publication of the book *Anatomia de uma cidade gaúcha* [*Anatomy of a Gaúcha City*] where, the social types, habits, preferences, ways of *being* and *existing* of the Antarians are outlined in detail. The life *in* and *of* the city is reported according to the historical episodes of the country.

The diegesis continues until it coincides with the eve of the singular event that puts Antares on the radar of Rio Grande do Sul and the rest of Brazil. The event opens the second part of the novel, entitled “O incidente” [The Incident]: it consists of seven corpses unburied due to a general strike. The seven corpses demand their right to be buried, to this end, they head to the city square and, there, reveal the secrets of that oligarchy. This part is divided between the events of that day and the epilogue, when the dead return to their coffins and are buried. From then on, the government tries to erase all news that could prove the occurrence: not allowing the publication of photos and news reports, in order to hide any traces of it.

“O incidente” is written through the bias of the aesthetics of the absurd¹⁹ given the “unusual naturalness” (Bordini, 2005, p.17) with which the grotesque event in Antares' square is received, which becomes the stage of a world turned upside down. While the elite of society is disgusted by the sight of decomposing bodies, people who are invisible

¹⁹ Many analyses place the novel in the field of fantasy literature and magical realism due to the supernatural element. Maria da Glória Bordini (2012, p.279) places it within the aesthetics of the absurd, orientation that will be adopted here. According to the author, Erico Verissimo's scrapbook (ALEV 04 a0029-1970) reveals he was probably inspired by *The Rebel Man/The Myth of Sisyphus*, by Albert Camus, for the construction of the character Martim Francisco: “Everything indicates Erico was inclined to the aesthetics of the absurd, which invalidates the assumption he would have followed the *boom* of magical realism at the time” [in Portuguese: “Tudo indica que Erico se inclinava para a estética do absurdo, o que invalida a presunção de que teria acompanhado o *boom* do realismo mágico na época” (Bordini, 2012, p.287)]. The aesthetics conceptualized by Albert Camus brings a pessimistic view of life and the natural result facing the lack of perspective would be suicide, but the man refuses such act, which creates a paradox, an absurd.

within this social system “accept the dead as better than the living”²⁰ (Bordini, 2005, p.17).

It should be noted that the date of the incident (Friday, December 13) alludes to gothic narratives, implying superstition, foreshadowing a day of misfortunes. It also implies (most importantly) the military dictatorship *Ato Institucional no. 5* [Institutional Act Number 5] (AI 5), passed on that date in 1968, during the government of General Costa e Silva. This was the most arbitrary of all the 17 institutional acts passed between 1964 and 1969. It institutionalized the power of exception to rulers in order to punish those who were considered enemies of the regime (“the subversives,” “the communists,” or “the leftists”).

Within the scope of the absurd, the disguise of history in historiographic metafiction finds in this motif fertile ground to focus on historical events of the dictatorship (the repression of public demonstrations, torture of prisoners, persecution of suspected subversives, etc.). It also uncovered the experiences of a hypocritical, degraded society. A diegesis may be said to be recreated, referring to an unusual occurrence in order to critically discuss the abuses of the dictatorship. A diegesis that flowed into a version as tragic as the social ills, projected in authoritarianism/sexist abuse, such as beatings of women in their homes, among other violences.

The conjunction between time and space artistically produces repercussions on the concepts of individual and society. Therefore, the before, during, and after the incident must be examined through the chronotopic bias.

3 Times of [the] Political Polarization...

Amongst the essential questions for the understanding of the narrative in focus is the particularity of time in the first and second parts of the novel. The temporal progression of *Incidente em Antares* is linear, a strategy that aims to justify the events. By not being oscillatory, the pace of temporal passage is faster: the closer to temporal parity, the slower the pace of the narrative. While the first part addresses more than a century (from 1830 to 1963), the second covers 21 days. It begins on December 11th,

²⁰ In Portuguese: “aceita[m] os mortos como melhores que os vivos.”

1963, and ends on the night of December 31st of the same year. That is, when the two parts meet, it seems time passes in hours, minutes, and seconds. The action epicenter runs from December 11th at 16 o'clock until 6 o'clock 20 minutes on the 13th. The summit of the 13th takes place in just nine hours.

As for the first part, time is the privileged element, since it operates changes (even if few and slow), it is historical, concrete and the organizer of the past, present, and future, producing a sequence of facts disposed in line. A characteristic of this time is its cyclical nature that connects life and events, elements inseparable from the place concretely situated in space, the city of Antares. In this remote and forgotten microcosm, the action of time has been recorded since its formation: first a village, then it receives the *status* of town and, finally, city. The days and hours are unified in a temporal series: they are the days and hours of human life; through the temporal series one understands the reality of a certain period, as well as the power relations of the various ideological spheres. Moreover, biographical time is presented within historical time (meaning the history of the country). It is noted the chronotope builds the image of the individual, materializes the space, and sets the relationships among characters. The national changes in politics, the initial rivalry of the founding families, and their subsequent union in the face of “the communist threat” are presented.

In the second part, this category acquires a very special meaning, since it emphasizes the place of enunciation, that is, *who* looks, *from where* and *when* (premises that will guide the entire analysis). In this sense, those who are dead comprehend time differently from those who live: for the former, there are no more expectations, hence, they are free of constraints; for the latter, the future is alarming, for they have to give explanations regarding the allegations. There is also the audience,²¹ which shall soon try the defendants; among its occupants are those on this side, the *us* (the oppressors), and those on the other side, the *them* (the oppressed), all with their biographical time. Among the participants, the historical time is what they have in common.

A pause is suitable for the highlight of a particularity of *Incidente em Antares*: the absence of a hero. There is no person who performs great deeds; who renounces their own needs for the benefit of others or personal growth; who undergoes a major transformation

²¹ Since it is a rather complex subject—requiring the examination of characters emphasized in the narrative – this aspect will be addressed at another time.

throughout their biography. The oppressors who founded the region, the Campolargos and Vacarianos, are highlighted and receive more relevance. Those names refer to agriculture and cattle farming. In this social system, there is no potential for learning, growth, and change and, when they occur, they are for the long term, reflecting in subsequent generations (which will later be seen). Nor can it be said they are antiheroes, since these lie on a gray zone, on the threshold, crossing it is where the dramatic action falls. The antihero is the result of their past traumas, losses, and disappointments, which leave them deep scars and explain possible contradictions in character. The Antarian characters identify with the identity marks of the collective, with emphasis on the oppressors (on *us*), and steal the voice for the oppressed. Therefore, here is the chronotope theme: the oppression, the abuses of landowners, represented by these actions of the clans. They also have the particularity of conserving *status quo*, they have no mission and are represented by private men who become public at times convenient to them, or on the day of the official unmasking in the public square. In Verissian architecture, traces of the Greek novel can be observed: “the world and the individual are finished items, absolutely immobile (...) nothing in its world is destroyed, remade, changed or created anew (...) is a mere affirmation of the identity between what had been at the beginning” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.110).²²

The image presented in this temporal unfolding is that of usurpers and manipulators who want to remain in power at all costs, even if it results in irreparable social inequality; a situation that is still seen in some portions of Brazilian society 50 years after the publication of *Incidente em Antares*.

Slowly, Anacleto Campolargo began gathering friends and asserting himself to the respect and esteem of a good part of the Antarian population. He was the first man in the history of that community who dared to face “Chico Vaca”—as his foes called him behind his back. Aggressive, opinionated, authoritarian, the patriarch of the Vacarianos clan was a rough fellow. His words in general sounded like whips. However, the head of the Campolargos, slithering and sleek, cultivated the murmur; he knew how to manipulate his emotions and modulate his tone of voice according to his convenience and purposes (Verissimo, 2005a, p.28).²³

²² For reference, see footnote 7.

²³ In Portuguese: “Pouco a pouco Anacleto Campolargo foi conquistando amigos e impondo-se ao respeito e à estima de boa parte da população antarense. Era o primeiro homem na história daquela comunidade que ousava enfrentar o “Chico Vaca”. – como lhe chamavam pelas costas os seus desafetos. Agressivo,

Here, these characters who are irrelevant in terms of heroism, will be called *os prevalecidos* [the prevailed]²⁴ with all the negative connotation the word acquires in the Southern region. If Antares, metonymically, represents the national collective (both the situation experienced before the incident and after it) it is possible to infer that the absence of heroes in the narrative represents the scarcity of heroes in society. Might there have been any changes to the present?

Winners and defeated, here and there, there and here, *us* and *them* form opposing pairs and converge to the theme of political polarization. One should think of political polarization as meeting/parting of two ideas, which refers to the motif of encounter, highlighted by Bakhtin (1981, p.97).²⁵ However, if the elite depicted in the narrative is in the same place, if its members are from the same class and origin, why would they be polarized? The political polarization is a result of dispute, rivalry, of the fact that one cannot occupy the privileged place of the other. Thus, the seed of political polarization is the fight over space, the space of *us* and *them*, which is reflected throughout the novel on different levels. The chronotope builds the image of the individual, materializes the space, and sets the relationships between characters. The biographical/historical time is the polarizer of customs, since the narrative is based on a field of permanent oppositions.

Neutrality, however, was a nonexistent word in the political and social vocabulary of Antares. The outsider who arrived there, even for a brief visit, was practically forced to take sides at once (Verissimo, 2005a, p.28).²⁶

The rivalry mentioned by the narrator reflects the scenario of political polarization in Rio Grande do Sul, whose origins lie in the Regency period. That is, when the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party respectively had platforms opposed and

opiniático, autoritário, o patriarca do clã dos Vacarianos era um sujeito sem tato. Suas palavras em geral soavam como chicotadas. O maioral dos Campolargos, porém, sinuoso e macio, cultivava o murmúrio, sabia manipular suas emoções e modular o tom da voz de acordo com sua conveniência e os seus propósitos.”

²⁴Term used in the Southern region of Brazil, it refers to someone who takes advantage of circumstances; who abuses their position or power to demonstrate authority or superiority; an exploiter.

²⁵For reference, see footnote 7.

²⁶In Portuguese: “*Neutralidade*, entretanto, era uma palavra inexistente no vocabulário político e social de Antares. O forasteiro que ali chegasse, mesmo para uma visita breve, era praticamente obrigado a tomar logo partido.”

favorable to political decentralization. It is worth noting that the political dispute was an internalized struggle of the same social class, the large landowners, represented by the two rival families of *Incidente em Antares*: the Vacarianos and Campolargos.

The constant political confrontation continued after the Farrapos War, even when the tentacles of the political action of the liberals had reduced. This situation led the Liberal Party to be reestablished in 1860 with a view to support the monarchy, but at the same time sheltering elements with more radical views regarding slavery and political freedom. They even welcomed republican elements that had just begun their demonstrations. The passage below explains it:

A man of some letters, Anacleto Campolargo organized the Conservative Party in the town, which was enough for Chico Vacariano, until then somewhat indifferent in matters of politics, to take charge of organizing the Liberal Party. Thus, Antares came to have two equally powerful men (Verissimo, 2005a, p.28).²⁷

With the Proclamation of the Republic the political segmentation continues, with the Liberals forming the Federalist Party that rivals the Republicans. The terms right and left had not yet been used as they are currently known. In the work, in the period mentioned, right and left were places the elite occupied in the church, a rescue of what happened in the French Assembly.²⁸ This fact is depicted by the author-creator in the location of the place reserved for the clans at the religious service:

It was precisely this equality of forces that prevented the two factions from engaging in pitched battles of extermination. Carrying on an old tradition, on Sundays and holy days of religious services, conservatives sat on the pews on the right, in front of the high altar, and liberals on the ones on the left (Verissimo, 2005a, p.28).²⁹

²⁷ In Portuguese: “Homem de algumas letras, Anacleto Campolargo organizou na vila o Partido Conservador, o que bastou para que Chico Vacariano, até então um tanto indiferente em matéria de política, tratasse de organizar o Partido liberal. Assim, Antares passou a ter dois senhores igualmente poderosos.”

²⁸ The origin of this term dates to 1789 and regards the French Parliament. They members of Parliament were involved in the Constituent Assembly that would define how much power would be given to King Louis XVI. In the room were the supporters of the crown, the Girondins, and the revolutionaries interested in overthrowing it, the Jacobins. The debate was so intense that, naturally (and strategically), the opponents ended up settling down according to affinities. On the chairs located to the right of the group of the president sat the members of the more conservative wing, on the left, gathered the progressives who called for change.

²⁹ In Portuguese: “Era exatamente essa igualdade de forças que impedia as duas facções de se empenharem em batalhas campais de extermínio. Continuando uma velha tradição, nas missas de domingo e dias santos, os conservadores sentavam-se nos bancos da direita, à frente do altar-mor, e os liberais nos da esquerda.”

With the rise of the Republicans and dominance for forty years without alternation, the party bundles all power without allowing the participation of the Federalist opposition in the debate. This oppression leads to violent reactions, with two civil wars (Federalist Revolutions of 1895 and 1923) and a ruthless radicalization, narrated in this passage:

When, years later, Princess Isabel signed the decree abolishing slavery in Brazil, Antônio Vacariano told his family this act of madness would begin the end of the Empire. It was with reluctance that, at least formally, he freed his slaves. Now, Benjamin Campolargo, who had long founded the Republican Association of Antares, rejoiced at the news of Abolition and later let out cheers and fireworks when he learned the republic had finally been proclaimed in Brazil. For days, Antares was on the brink of war (Verissimo, 2005a, pp.30-31).³⁰

Incidente em Antares fictionalizes this context of repression of the opposition with the figurativeness of the Campolargos and Vacarianos' actions; groups of socio-political, monopolizing, and monolithic domain in their sphere of action, leading them to hostility and fights among themselves to prevent one's expansion of the territory control at the expense of the other. This scenario refers to struggles among medieval fiefs, and also replicates several moments in Brazilian history, fictionally represented in *São Bernardo* [*Saint Bernard*] by Graciliano Ramos, and in *O tempo e o vento* by Erico Verissimo. Years later, the pendulum which had previously pointed to the polarity between groups of socio-political domains moves to another direction.

In the described spatio-temporal conditions, the image is of a world undergoing continuous transformations (whether biographical, organic, social, or technological):

In the days when the settlement was still known as Skull's Little Folk, Chico Vacariano, its founder, would have had continuously to send verbal or written messages to a person who lived in a certain distance. He used a courier, a carrier, a "herald." In the late 19th century, Antares

³⁰ In Portuguese: "Quando anos mais tarde, a princesa Isabel assinou o decreto em que abolia a escravidão do Brasil, Antônio Vacariano disse a seus familiares que esse ato de loucura ia principiar o fim do império. Foi com relutância que, pelo menos formalmente, liberou seus escravos. Ora, Benjamim Campolargo, que havia anos fundara o Grêmio Republicano de Antares, exultou com a notícia da Abolição, e mais tarde soltou vivas e foguetes ao saber que a república fora finalmente proclamada no Brasil. Durante dias Antares esteve em pé de guerra."

had already enjoyed the benefits and conveniences of the telegraph, not to mention the postal service (Verissimo, 2005a, p.39).³¹

The “heralds and carriers” remained active and useful (...). When the first power plant was installed in Antares, Xisto Vacariano (...) said to his children, “In Little Folk, your grandfather had lived very well with fish oil lighting.” To the general surprise, in 1911, it was a Vacariano who brought to Antares the first automobile, an Oldsmobile, which he had sent for in Buenos Aires (Verissimo, 2005, pp.40-41).³²

Nonetheless, the man who acts in this world remains with equal power goals and privileges. The conservative and reactionary elites, who want to maintain the “order” and once figured in Brazilian literary works, occupy, today, the space of “us,” being ideologically represented by liberals/conservatives, who capture the Integralist motto “*Deus, Pátria, Família*” [God, the Homeland, and Family] cunningly concealed under the emblem “Brasil acima de tudo, Deus acima de todos” [Brazil above everything, God above all]. These elites remain as prehistoric as the Glyptodonts fossils found in the geographical space of Antares. That is, the world changes, transforms, but old traditions continue, as if the wheel of Brazilian history did not turn.

“And for how long do you and those of your class imagine you can maintain your privileges?”
“I hope to die before the victory of the scoundrel.”
“But, have you ever thought, colonel, that an army coup can take the country both to the left and the right? (...)”
“The military, young man, will one day tighten the loose screws of this country. We need, first and foremost, order” (Verissimo, 2005a, p.417).³³

³¹ In Portuguese: “Nos tempos em que a localidade era ainda conhecida como Povinho da Caveira, Chico Vacariano, seu fundador, sempre tinha de mandar um recado, verbal ou escrito, a uma pessoa que morasse longe. Valia-se de um portador, de um chasque, dum ‘próprio’. Em fins do século XIX, Antares gozava já dos benefícios e facilidades do telégrafo, isso para não falar no serviço postal.”

³² In Portuguese: “Os ‘próprios e os chasques’ continuavam ativos e úteis (...). Quando se instalou em Antares a primeira usina elétrica, Xisto Vacariano (...) disse aos filhos ‘No Povinho, o avô de vocês vivia muito bem se alumando com óleo de peixe.’ Para a surpresa geral, foi um Vacariano que, em 1911, trouxe para Antares o primeiro automóvel, um Oldsmobile, que mandara vir de Buenos Aires.”

³³ In Portuguese: “– E por quanto tempo o senhor e os da sua classe imaginam que podem manter seus privilégios?”

“– Espero morrer antes da vitória da canalha.

“– Mas já pensou, coronel, que um golpe do Exército pode levar o país tanto para esquerda como para a direita? (...)”

“– As forças armadas, moço, um dia vão apertar os parafusos frouxos desse país. Precisamos, antes de mais nada, de ordem.”

Regarding the second part, historically situated in the year 1963, the diegesis of the struggle between farmers eager to show their political strength over the Antares region is disrupted. The rural aristocratic power game becomes the backdrop for the masking of the Brazilian history as of the year 1964, when the dictatorial military regime is established. On this stage, other polarizations take over the scene, heavily triggered between communists and capitalists, because of the general strike described as “a leftist political conspiracy to seize power by force” (Verissimo, 2005a, p.179),³⁴ and between poor and rich, a fact that reveals the deep social inequality in Brazil, exposed by the voice of the narrator, as will be seen in section 4.

Political polarization exits the Campolargo and Vacariano family nucleus and opens up the scenario for class struggle. In this sense, the families united by a “greater good” proceed to focus attention on the fight against the “them,” the “leftists,” who are, in fact, those who advocate for a more equitable society. Thirty years later, the Cold War ends, the Berlin Wall falls, the Iron Curtain opens, and still, society remains divided between “communists” and “capitalists.”

The city is the starting point of the plot movement and the arrival point of essential events in the life of the prevailed. Political polarization is the motif in this scenario as it is in the time of the establishment of the city that this motif organizes the plot, thematizes as the us *versus* them. Political polarization is confirmed as a constitutive element of the novel; it is a motif of chronotopic nature, and occupies a permanent place in the organization of the life of society (to this day).

4 ... To the Times of Oblivion

There is no lie, whatever one may say, without the intention, the desire,
or the explicit will to deceive (*fallendi cupiditas, voluntas fallendi*).³⁵

Saint Augustine

The first sign of oblivion is the lack of traces of time on buildings or any objects that recount the history of the city: “And time, with its nerve, its patience, and its subtle

³⁴ In Portuguese: “uma conspiração política esquerdista para tomar o poder pela força.”

³⁵ DERRIDA, J. History of the Lie. In: RAND. R. *Futures of Jacques Derrida*. California: Stanford University Press, 2001. pp.65-98.

and invisible brush, ran its oblivion hands over the Antarians' spirits and *even over the stones and plants of the city (...)*" (Verissimo, 2005a, p.421; our emphasis).³⁶

At the beginning of the diegesis, the narrator creates anchoring elements that specify time, space, and actors, creating the referential illusion. These clues are left by textual marks that convey the impression of truth, that is: there is mention of the city on the map; it has an archaeological site; it is cited in the lines of a scientific speech (the diary of French ornithologist Gaston Gontran D'Auberville), in speeches belonging to the Official History, of which circulation is allowed. The discursive strategy is installed to ensure the hesitation/ambiguity between what is fiction and what is real, between what is deceitful and what is truthful. The text is supported by the following questions: did the events occur? Did Antares ever exist?

This resource relates to the mnemonic erasure strategy created by the "local heroes" in order to ensure that the accusations revealed on the day of the incident had been forgotten.

"Here is what I propose," replied the friend of Plato, Socrates, and other ancient philosophers. "Organizing a very skillful, most subtle, campaign to erase this fact not only from the annals of Antares but also from the memory of its inhabitants. I suggest (here, among us) a name for this movement: *Operação Borracha* [*Operation Erasure*]" (Verissimo, 2005a, p.408; emphasis in the original).³⁷

The narrative predominantly anchored in the third person intends to ensure the veracity of the "gruesome events" on December 13th. According to evidences, this narrator *may be* Lucas Faia, editor-in-chief of the city newspaper: "This march of the dead towards the center of Antares would be described in baroque prose by Lucas Faia" (Verissimo, 2005a, p.235).³⁸ The language game of *it is*, *it is not*; *it is not*, but *it seems to be*; *it seems to be*, but *it is not*, predominates throughout the novel, which leads to the theme of deceit. It should be emphasized that, regarding the authority of the

³⁶ In Portuguese: "E o tempo, com sua pachorra, sua paciência e sua sutil e invisível broxa, foi passando mãos de esquecimento no espírito dos antarenses *e até nas pedras e plantas da cidade (...)*."

³⁷ In Portuguese: "– Eis o que proponho – respondeu o amigo de Platão, Sócrates e outros filósofos da Antiguidade. – Organizar uma campanha muito hábil, sutilíssima, no sentido de apagar esse fato não só dos anais de Antares como também da memória de seus habitantes. Sugiro (aqui entre nós) um nome para esse movimento: *Operação Borracha*."

³⁸ In Portuguese: "Essa marcha dos mortos rumo ao centro de Antares seria descrita em prosa barroca por Lucas Faia."

narrator/narration, the enunciative-discursive processes used are complex and are not revealed with the simplicity presented here.

For the moment, it is important to clarify that the narrator is on the threshold between observation and testimony: he wants *to appear* impartial, for this, he uses journalistic tones and, at the same time, places himself in the speech flow by weaving in remarks, characteristic of a literary chronicle.

Better to tell first, in a manner as succinct and impartial as possible, the history of Antares and its inhabitants, so that one can get a better idea of the stage, scenario, and, especially, the main characters, as well as the *comradeship* of this drama, perhaps unheard of in annals of the human species (...) Purely for reasons of saving space—since the purpose of this narrative is to weave a terse historical backdrop against which fittingly present the *gruesome* events of that Friday the 13th of December, 1963 (...) (Verissimo, 2005a, p.21; our emphasis).³⁹

In order to keep the enunciation distant from the subjective discourse and ensure a supposed impartiality, the narrator uses the third person, in the time of “then” (Friday the 13th of December, 1963) and in the space of “there.” The narrator uses discursive mechanisms to create the illusion of truth, feigns a detachment from the enunciation, neutralized with the use of the words “comradeship” (which, indirectly, communicates the existence of some sort of conspiracy) and “gruesome.” Another resource used is making room for the discourse of the enunciator and, to this end, he internally delegates his voice in order to assign discursive responsibility to others:

School books, whose purpose is to teach us the history of our land and our people, are generally written in a Manichean spirit following the classic antitheses – the good and the bad, the heroes and the cowards, the saints and the bandits. Generally, intermediate colors are not used, since their authors seem unaware of the virtue of hues and the truism that history may not be written only in black and white (Verissimo, 2005a, p.21).⁴⁰

³⁹ In Portuguese: “Melhor será contar primeiro, de maneira tão sucinta e imparcial quanto possível, a história de Antares e de seus habitantes, para que se possa ter uma ideia mais clara do palco, do cenário e principalmente das personagens principais, bem como da *comparsaria* desse drama talvez inédito dos anais da espécie humana (...) Por motivos puramente de economia de espaço – uma vez que o objetivo dessa narrativa é tecer um sumário pano de fundo histórico contra o qual apresentar oportunamente os *macabros* eventos daquela sexta-feira 13 de dezembro do ano de 1963 (...)”

⁴⁰ In Portuguese: “Os livros escolares, cujo objetivo é ensinar-nos a história da nossa terra e do nosso povo, são em geral escritos num espírito maniqueísta seguindo as clássicas antíteses – os bons e os maus, os heróis e os covardes, os santos e os bandidos. Via de regra não se empregam as cores intermediárias, pois os seus

The school books, in this case, would serve didactic purposes, that is, they should be nonpartisan and show both sides of the fact. However, according to the narrator's view, they have a polarizing profile, "following the classic antitheses," which is a dysphoric aspect given to this material. In addition to producing the effect of objective truth to the journalistic report with the apparent distance, this strategy avoids bearing the responsibility of what is said, since it always conveys others' opinions, the knowledge of the sources. Soon after, he explains he must follow tradition for there is a veiled censure and he will not be able to present "the virtue of hues." The power of reporting the facts with neutrality or showing the limbo of society is taken away from him. At the end of the narrative, in the epilogue, it is revealed that the object of his desire (to write the narrative report of his lifetime) is taken away from him. This leads to the chronotope of erasure, which will evolve into oblivion in the future. The narrator is mentioned to have taken the official position of the authority discourse, being denied the right to take a stand. To this end, he uses periphrases so as not to exactly expose what he thinks:

These pages have unfortunately been following the spirit of the said books, focusing their preferences on the two great oligarchies that, in Antares, for about seventy years, disputed the political, social, and economic predominance. Thus, those who – to use a Spengler's expression – do not "make but suffer History" were left in the gloom of the second, third, and final planes, namely: smaller landowners, small-scale farmers, members of the liberal, teaching and public ministry professions, government employees, merchants, artisans and, finally, this human jumbled mass composed of pariahs – the white, *caboclo*, brown, Black, mestizo, *mameluco* population –, people with no assured profession, carriers, idle native Indians, beggars, "riffraffs" ragged and barefoot, who lived on a more vegetal or animal plane than human and whose situation was accepted by the privileged as part of a natural order, an irrevocable divine act (Verissimo, 2005a, p.39).⁴¹

autores parecem desconhecer a virtude dos matizes e o truísmo de que a História não pode ser apenas escrita em preto-e-branco."

⁴¹ In Portuguese: "Estas páginas lamentavelmente têm seguido o espírito dos citados livros escolares, focando suas preferências as duas grandes oligarquias que em Antares, durante cerca de setenta anos, disputaram o predomínio político, social e econômico. Ficaram assim na penumbra do segundo, do terceiro e do último plano aqueles que – para usar duma expressão de Spengler – não "fazem mas sofrem a História, a saber: estancieiros menores, agricultores de minifúndios, membros das profissões liberais e do magistério e do ministério públicos, funcionários do governo, comerciantes, artesãos e por fim essa massamorda humana composta de párias – brancos, caboclos, mulatos, pretos, curibocas, mamelucos –, gente sem profissão certa, changadores, índios vagos, mendigos "gentinha" molambenta e descalça, que vivia num plano mais vegetal ou animal que humano, e cuja situação era aceita pelos privilegiados como parte duma ordem natural, dum ato divino irrevogável."

The narrator *wants to look* impartial, convey an illusory distance, and, to this end, he quotes the German historian and philosopher Oswald Spengler⁴² as an authority discourse. The choice of this quote is not accidental. At the time of the intellectual output of Spengler (which took place in the early 30s), he had been banned by the Nazis for not supporting the racial superiority ideas. There is a certain identification with this philosopher since the narrator will also be ostracized. In his words, those who “suffer History” are the outlawed, those “who lived on a plane more vegetal or animal than human;” in these linguistic marks one can see he feels troubled by not informing anything about the invisible, as if he was indebted to society. Trying to repair this debt he presents the undifferentiated under the perspective of a certain divine determinism, denouncing how naturally the elite accepted the situation, as if it was not a consequence of human action. On the plane of expression, the words *the others*, supposedly responsible for the designation of the disadvantaged one as “riffraffs” and “jumbled mass,” emphasize the fact that the narrator is left out of the discourse, as if *the others* did not include him. Not talking about this share of society also leads to the oblivion and deceit. These points raise doubt on the credibility of the narrator and, consequently, call into question the reliability of facts.

The *other* in the discourse is the apprehension of the various discourses that circulate in a said social formation which, in turn, is divided into groups of diverging interests. In the Antarian society, one perceives various “ideological formations” and “conditions of discourse production” corresponding to the “discursive formation,” which concerns what can and what *should be* said at a given time, in a given society (Pêcheux,1990).

At this point in the present narrative, it is natural that the reader should be inclined to ask whether there were no good and peaceful men in Antares. With Christian behavior and feelings. The question is relevant and the answer, without the slightest doubt, is affirmative. There were, surely, and many of them. Unfortunately, their sayings, doings, and gestures were not collected by the official History. Only a few of them had been incorporated into the oral tradition of the city and the

⁴² See: SPENGLER, O. *The Hour of Decision*. Germany and World-Historical Evolution. London; New York: Routledge Revivals, 2017 [1934].

municipality: the rest had been lost into oblivion (Verissimo, 2005a, p.39).⁴³

The narrator appears as an intruder – “it is natural that the reader” – and brings into his discourse the discourse of *pathos*, that is, of an audience that is “good,” “Christian,” excluding those who “are not good.” In narrating the trajectory of the two families belonging to the oligarchy and who are on the side of the “winners,” he implicitly says these “are not good.” However, the narrator cannot position himself, given that he is at the service of this elite. He places the reader’s discourse within the text, in a rhetorical question: were there no good and peaceful men with Christian behavior and feelings in Antares? This is the *pathos* of the enunciator, meaning, he is based on the premise that the readers are “Christians,” therefore, “good people.” To confirm it, he reiterates “good men are Christians,” which refers to the Integralist motto “Deus, Pátria, Família.” The answer to the question is given with the assent of the narrator, putting himself in the place of the *phatos* and, indirectly, including himself in the list of good people: “There were...” His enunciator is the middle class, of which he is part, thus, he identifies with their way of feeling and acting. Those who do not fall into the discourse are the unfortunate, that is, sentenced to insignificance: not because of social status, but because their deeds are not allowed to remain in the history records. Once again, the chronotope of political polarization is revealed: society is divided between those who are “good” and those who are “bad;” those who are “elite” and those who are “disadvantaged;” those who are “Christians” and those who are not, those who have “good reputation” and those who do not.

The veridiction is textualized in the sources the narrator offers about the history of Brazil, and is, greatly, depicted in the name of the newsweekly *A verdade* [The Truth]. To give more credibility to the narrative and content of the news, the narrator displays the foundation date of the newspaper: 1902, just as registered in printed daily papers (today, in circulation also through digital means). With this gambit, he *leads one to believe* it is an old newsweekly, traditional, therefore, reliable. However, this artifice comprises a

⁴³ In Portuguese: “A esta altura da presente narrativa é natural que o leitor esteja inclinado a perguntar se não existiam em Antares homens de bem e de paz. Com comportamentos e sentimentos cristãos. A pergunta é pertinente e a resposta, sem a menor dúvida é afirmativa. Havia, sim e muitos. Desgraçadamente seus ditos, feitos e gestos não foram recolhidos pela História oficial. Apenas poucos deles incorporam-se à tradição oral da cidade e do município: os restantes perderam-se no olvido.”

sarcasm of the author-creator: *it seems to be* a newspaper that only issues true news; however, he (the author-creator) assigns an honest attitude to the narrator. The latter assumes this responsibility and does so through circumlocutions, indirectly saying the newsweekly publishes only matters of interest to the ruling class. For this reason, it must adopt the point of view of this elite to whom it is subordinate. There is a twofold interpretation: the newspaper content would serve the interests of the “good citizens” of Antares, which would be the place occupied by the editor. The narrator finds himself on the threshold between manipulator and manipulated, which leads to dissimulation and ambiguity.

Diana Luz Pessoa de Barros (2011) says narrative structures simulate the history of men who are in search of values and must deal with contracts and conflicts that mark the human relationship. This way narrative structures position themselves in conjunction or disjunction with their values and/or objects of desire. In this sense, Lucas Faia intends to make the best journalistic chronicle of his career, hence, he values his object of desire, hoping to achieve it, but fails.

As stated, chronotopes are the organizing centers of the main events, in this way, oblivion is a chronotope because it directs to the epilogue of the narrative and reveals the *modus operandi* and the *modus vivendi*. However, there are a few steps to get to the oblivion chronotope, manifested concretely in *Operação Borracha* [*Operation Erasure*]: deceit, erasure and oblivion.

So far, its been sought to demonstrate how the author-creator and the narrator manipulate the narrative, leaving it ambiguous and leading it to deceit. Among the manipulation maneuvers is the shuffling the official and unofficial discourse; the said and unsaid (the implied); the natural and supernatural. However, there are other ways that lead to deceit, such as distortion of facts and rumors, the latter concerning non-authorship and spreading of false news. In the diegesis, it is possible to verify that, before pretending it did not exist, the incident reverberated in a false manner, it is perceived that truth (honesty) and falsehood (malice) emanate from the oriented character of the enunciator:

The prosecutor proposed the appointment of a three-member committee to go to the state capital and explain in person “the misunderstanding,” that is, the

rumors, to the governor, newspapers, and radio and television stations, so that Antares' name would be cleared (Verissimo, 2005a, p.411).⁴⁴

It is noted that the prosecutor occupies the *ethos* of a subject who has ethical duties to the public service, among which are taking action when he is aware of any irregularity and providing the information requested by the bodies of the institution. The prosecutor's attributions do not correspond to his actions, his discourse is insincere, there is an intention to lead to deceit by affirming that the news about the incident were "misunderstandings," "rumors." This authority figure is hypocritical, establishing in him lying as language practice. He *wants us to believe* there was a mistake, there is no good faith on the part of the enunciator (the prosecutor). It should be noted, currently, fake news have the same characteristics: they are acts directed at another (and not to oneself) with the purpose of taking the *pathos* to deceit.

It is important to point out misleading news hide in anonymity and gain an intercontinental dimension. Since neither the source nor the origin is known, the interpretation that can be given is unlimited. It can be said that this aspect represented in the literary prose of Erico Verissimo is the predecessor of fake news. Obviously, the ways of dissemination are others, there are agencies that are concerned with it and try to fight this phenomenon. However, there are stations that manipulate the news and broadcast it inappropriately, favoring certain hidden interests. The matter is that fake reports spread in a few minutes to millions of people, but its erasure is not as fast and can leave indelible marks. The spread around the world with totally or partially false (but intentional) statements is materialized through a long paragraph with scarce pauses:

The truth, however, is that, by arts of the quixotic goateed reporter, correspondents of the news agencies UPI, AP, and France Press broadcasted to newspapers of the world news about the strange incident in Antares, whose name, thus, appeared in many newspapers and magazines, 412 international, that week between December 16th and 22nd, The Times of London (...) interpreted the fact as a *hoax* (mystification); meanwhile, *Ashashi Shimbun*, from Tokyo, reporting the same occurrence, classified it as a case of collective hallucination. Later, Time magazine published a story on its Latin America section (...) in Prague, Istanbul, and Budapest the case arrived distorted, and Egon Sturton won a stellar role in the "drama," as the head of a pseudo-

⁴⁴ In Portuguese: "O promotor propôs que se nomeasse uma comissão de três membros para ir à capital do estado explicar pessoalmente "o equívoco", isto é, os boatos, ao governador, aos jornais e às estações de rádio e televisão, para que ficasse limpo o nome de Antares."

neo-fascist underground movement, attempting to implant Hitlerite Nazism in Southern Brazil (...) (Verissimo, 2005a, pp.412-413; emphasis in the original).⁴⁵

The action suggested by the prosecutor was strictly followed, although with the hindrance of Lucas Faia. In his speech, it is confirmed he is part of “pro-men” of Antares represented by the conservative middle class, subservient to the elite. Telling the truth and elucidating the facts are not his object of desire. What afflicted him is his unconfessed desire to gain notoriety and rise in class with it. Conversely, if the article would have not been published, he would succumb.

“Gentlemen, do not be deceived! The opposition will spread around the world, either verbally or in writing, its own version of the case. It would not be prudent of us, representatives of the conservative classes... (...) Think carefully, for God’s sake! Denying what happened is a hazard. And then, my friends and compatriots, try to look at the phenomenon from another perspective. If the facts are truthfully narrated, in the way they happened, Antares shall enjoy its moment of notoriety and appear on the news of the world and in History” (Verissimo, 2005a, p.409).⁴⁶

It was considered there are several stages to reach the oblivion of the facts, which are established in the *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi*. The first process presented was that of deceit which evolves into erasure. Erasure consists of denying the facts and eliminating any material evidence that may reveal them. Lucas Faia cannot publish in *A verdade* his “best literary piece” ever. It is noted the inoperativeness of the writer in the face of the possibility of taking action and the malicious diligence of the prosecutor.

⁴⁵ In Portuguese: “A verdade, porém, é que, por artes do repórter da barbicha quixotesca, os correspondentes das agências de notícias UPI, AP e France Press transmitiram aos jornais do mundo notícias sobre o estranho incidente de Antares, cujo nome assim apareceu em muitos jornais e revistas 412 internacionais naquela semana entre 16 e 22 de dezembro, O Times de Londres (...) interpretou o fato como um *hoax* (mistificação) Já o *Ashashi Shimbun*, de Tóquio, noticiando a mesma ocorrência, classificou-a como um caso de alucinação coletiva. Mais tarde o magazine Time publicou na sua seção intitulada Latin America uma história (...) em Praga, Istambul e Budapeste o caso chegou deturpado e Egon Sturn ganhou no “drama” um papel estelar, na qualidade de chefe dum pseudo movimento neofacista clandestino, que tentava implantar o nazismo hitlerista no Sul do Brasil (...).”

⁴⁶ In Portuguese: “– Senhores, não se iludam! A oposição vai espalhar pelo mundo, verbalmente ou por escrito, a sua própria versão do caso. Não seria prudente que nós, os representantes das classes conservadoras... (...) Pensem bem, pelo amor de Deus! Negar o que se passou é um perigo. E depois, meus amigos e conterrâneos, procurem olhar o fenômeno por outro prisma. Se os fatos forem narrados honestamente, da maneira como aconteceram, Antares gozará o seu momento de notoriedade e aparecer no noticiário do mundo e da História.”

“I think this article is a double-edged dagger,” said the prosecutor, who did not sympathize with the journalist. “Although our dear reporter did not mention in his brilliant essay the calumnies uttered by the shoemaker and doctor Cícero, this description may be useful to the enemy, for it confirms the fact.”

“But that is absurd! It is the best literary piece I’ve written in my entire life!”

“I would advise you to burn these originals,” perversely suggested the prosecutor (Verissimo, 2005a, p.410).⁴⁷

The journalists who went to Antares to cover the incident could not collect any evidence, they managed to get only a few testimonies from people who preferred to remain anonymous. In all circumstances, image preservation was related to the maintenance of the *status quo* and, to achieve this goal, it was necessary to erase any evidence of conduct that discredited the authorities: the man “is the public and political man of ancient times, a man governed by his sociopolitical (...) interests” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.104).⁴⁸ There is an entanglement between truth and secrecy, between what *can* be revealed and what should be hidden, between the public man and the private man.

“Gentleman, you don’t even look like people from the big city, with experience in so many cases of deceptiveness. How come in the electronic age, in the century of cybernetics and interplanetary flights, is it possible we still believe in the resurrection of the rotten dead?” Saying these words, he took three sharp steps back. “No! I do not allow my words to be recorded. I am a member of the Public Prosecutor’s Office. I also do not state any written declarations. I prefer to appear anonymous. I’m very grateful you have thought of me” (Verissimo, 2005a, p.400).⁴⁹

⁴⁷ In Portuguese: “Acho esse artigo uma arma de dois gumes – opinou o promotor, que não simpatizava com o jornalista. – Embora o nosso caro periodista não tenha mencionado em seu brilhante ensaio as calúnias proferidas pelo sapateiro e pelo Doutor Cícero, essa descrição poderá ser útil ao inimigo, pois ela confirma o fato.

“– Mas é uma barbaridade! A melhor peça literária que escrevi em toda a minha vida!

“– Eu o aconselharia a queimar esses originais – sugeriu perversamente o promotor.”

⁴⁸ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁴⁹ In Portuguese: “– Os senhores nem parecem pessoas de cidade grande, com experiência em tantos casos de mistificação. Como é que na era eletrônica, no século da cibernética e dos voos interplanetários é possível a gente ainda acreditar na ressurreição dos mortos apodrecidos? – Ao dizer essas palavras deu três passos bruscos à retaguarda. – Não! Não permito que gravem minhas palavras. Sou membro do Ministério Público. Também não afirmo nenhuma declaração escrita. Prefiro aparecer anônimo. Muito grato de terem se lembrado de mim.”

The strategy of confusing and erasing the facts is successful. The reports present an opposition clearly marked by the discourse, which confuses the Antarian population that does not know who or what to believe.

Operação Borracha [*Operation Erasure*] continued, despite efforts to the contrary by the Left party and by the anonymous letters. (...) Some came to the conclusion it had all been just a case of collective hallucination, a rare, but possible, phenomenon. The majority, however, was convinced the whole thing was nothing more than mystification (Verissimo, 2005a, p.415).⁵⁰

The manipulation fell to the prevailed, but the one who executes oblivion is time, the agent of change, whose place is constantly present in organizations of social and governmental life (Bakhtin, 1981),⁵¹ as can be observed in this passage: “We can count on several allies in this campaign, namely: time, which has the function of an eraser and the water, because slowly it erases and takes everything away...” (Verissimo, 2005a, p.408).⁵²

The biographical time of the characters is inseparable from historical events and is irreversible. The historical reality is the arena for the revelation of these facts, and the stage of this irreversibility is the city of Antares. After the erasure of the story, everything goes back to how it was before, the city goes back to its doldrums, with the cycles of the day, the week, the month, the cycle of a lifetime. Seven years after the incident, the miserable population returns to their usual miserable life, in distant and forgotten neighborhoods. And the oligarchy remains. Until the end of time. *Fallendi cupiditas, voluntas fallendi*

Seven years after that terrible Friday the 13th of December, 1963, one can affirm, without risk of exaggeration, Antares has forgotten the gruesome incident. Or is very good at pretending (Verissimo, 2005a, p.428).⁵³

⁵⁰ In Portuguese: “A Operação Borracha continuava, a despeito dos esforços em contrário feitos pelas esquerdas e pelas cartas anônimas. (...) Alguns chegaram à conclusão de que tudo havia sido apenas um caso de alucinação coletiva, fenômeno raro mas possível. A maioria, porém, ficou convencida que a coisa toda não passou de mitificação.”

⁵¹ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁵² In Portuguese: “– Podemos contar com vários aliados nessa campanha, a saber: o tempo, que tem uma função de borracha e de água, pois aos poucos vai apagando e levando tudo...”

⁵³ In Portuguese: “Sete anos após aquela terrível sexta-feira 13 de dezembro de 1963, pode-se afirmar, sem risco de exagero, que Antares esqueceu o macabro Incidente. Ou sabe fingir muito bem.”

Of the Conclusion

This material of the work is not dead, it is speaking, signifying (it involves signs); we not only see and perceive it but in it we can always hear voices.

Mikhail M. Bakhtin

This article did not aim to make an analysis of the incident, because the fact itself is not the focus of this work, nor are the deceased characters. It was proposed to look sideways, to the before and after, not just a day in the space of the public square (although it is the fundamental chronotope of this work). The chronotope of the public square, normally linked to the concept of carnivalization (defended by Bakhtin in his doctoral dissertation, *Rabelais and His World*,⁵⁴ in 1965), is widely debated and, regarding *Incidente em Antares*, it is much discussed by researchers, including the award-winning translator of Bakhtin's work into Portuguese, Paulo Bezerra (1983). The aim was to look around, to the before (how society was formed) and the after, which is the execution of the erasure of facts. The thematic-figurative readings extracted are metonymically linked to the isotopy of political polarization and oblivion and, due to the thematic aspect, are chronotopic.

To build the idea of chronotope, traces of ancient chronotopes were covered, which are always renewed and developed in new literary forms, and systems of representation of life, and human culture over the centuries (Bakhtin, 1981).⁵⁵ In the literary fact it is possible to see the normal course of time in the life cycle of beings, who are born, grow, and vanish. However, the ever-changing world seems to remain stationary in the city of Antares. And, if the world halts in Antares, it means it also halts in the society it represents.

Behind the scenes, through the aesthetics of the absurd, an unusual situation denounces dictatorship and censorship, intersecting the created world and the available world. This strategy of telling one story to convey another is closely related to the activity of writers, playwrights, etc. during the military dictatorship in Brazil. This allegory of the

⁵⁴ BAKHTIN, M. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

⁵⁵ For reference, see footnote 7.

absurd has a specific address as a representation of the political situation. It is not always grasped by the censor's eyes, though. When reading a narrative about the feuds (disputes between the great rulers of the land), as apparently displayed, the censor was deceived by those disagreements.

In the last fiction work of Erico Verissimo the engagement of the writer is noticeable, with the firm purpose of shedding some light, albeit “with a candle stump”⁵⁶ the injustices of reality and the horrors of reality and the world. A true “cry for freedom” (Aguiar, 2005a, p.430).

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⁵⁶ “(...) the least that a writer can do, in a time of atrocities and injustice like ours, is to light his lamp, to shed light on the reality of his world, preventing the darkness from falling on it, propitious to thieves, to murderers, to tyrants. Yes, hold the lamp, in spite of the nausea and horror. If we do not have an electric bulb, let us light our candle stump or, as a last resort, repeatedly strike matches, as a sign we do not desert our post.” (Verissimo, 2005b, p.65) In Portuguese: “(...) o menos que um escritor pode fazer, numa época de atrocidades e injustiças como a nossa, é acender a sua lâmpada, fazer luz sobre a realidade de seu mundo, evitando que sobre ele caia a escuridão, propícia aos ladrões, aos assassinos aos tiranos. Sim, segurar a lâmpada, a despeito da náusea e do horror. Se não tivermos uma lâmpada elétrica, acendamos o nosso toco de vela ou, em último caso, risquemos fósforos repetidamente, como sinal que não desertamos nosso posto.”

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Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana*. Revista de Estudos do Discurso [*Bakhtiniana*. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review I

We recommend publishing the article "From Polarization to Oblivion: a Brief Study on Chronotopes of *Incident in Antares* by Erico Verissimo", considering the originality of the approach and the timeliness of the focus chosen for the analysis of the novel by Erico Verissimo. The review is favorable. ACCEPTED

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Review II

The work aims to analyze chronotopes associated with the sense of political polarization and chronotopes linked to the senses of erasure/oblivion and deceit (including the contemporary notion of "fake news") in the novel *Incident in Antares*, by Erico

Veríssimo. The novel is contextualized both in relation to the publication's historical moment and in relation to the entire Veríssimo's work. Bakhtin's concept of chronotope is well explained, in a clear writing text. The work's affinities with Linda Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction concept are also observed.

However, there is room for some revisions. It would make it clearer adding in the title, and sometimes in the text, the adjective “political” to the noun “polarization”. A revision is also necessary, especially of the English version of the "abstract". In regard to the analysis, I question whether the chronotopes are really represented in the quotes presented. Considering time-space involves the relationship with physical space (but associated with ideological, psychological, and social connotations, among others) I notice a greater association between place (effectively described) and ideas (also associated with specific moments of the plot development more in the analysis of polarization than deceit and oblivion). In the second type of analysis, the objects are ideologies present in the discourses, without a direct reference to the description of a place.

With these reservations, it is a work rich in interesting observations, for which I recommend the publication, considering it can be improved with the changes suggested here. ACCEPTED WITH SUGGESTED REVISIONS

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Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.