



The Mystery of the German Writer's Vessel: provocations from literary and film montage to research in Human Sciences

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ABSTRACT – The Mystery of the German Writer's Vessel: provocations from literary and film montage to research in Human Sciences – This article investigates the politics of the image and montage in the literature and filmmaking as an experimentation with an ethical bet on research in Human Sciences. In the light of Walter Benjamin's concept of montage, as well as Didi-Huberman's analysis of image as taking a position, it problematizes the insurmountable distance between the subject and the object, the fracture between form and content, ethics and aesthetics in research in the face of the intolerable of an ordinary world. The questions are presented through fragments that deal with the intertwining between body, memory, revolt, and creation, to emphasize the ethical bet of the montage not only as a balm for the body suffocated by the abject, but as the oxygen necessary for the multiplication of paths, senses, overcoming limits for the creation of resistance to the numbness of thought.

Keywords: **Montage. Literature. Cinema. Research. Ethics.**

RÉSUMÉ – Le Mystère du Pot de L'Écrivain Allemand: provocations du montage cinématographique et littéraire pour la recherche en sciences humaines – L'article analyse les politiques de l'image et du montage dans la littérature et le cinéma en tant qu'expérimentation d'un pari éthique sur la recherche en sciences humaines. D'après le concept de montage de Walter Benjamin et des analyses de Didi-Huberman sur l'image en tant que position, il analyse la distance infranchissable entre le sujet et l'objet, la fracture entre la forme et le contenu, l'éthique et l'esthétique dans la recherche face à l'intolérable d'un monde commun. Les questions sont soulevées à travers des fragments qui traitent l'entrelacement du corps, la mémoire, la révolte et la création, afin de souligner le pari éthique du montage non pas comme un baume pour le corps étouffé par l'abject, mais comme l'oxygène nécessaire à la multiplication des voies, des sens, au dépassement des limites pour la création de résistances à la torpeur de la pensée.

Mots-clés: **Montage. Littérature. Cinema. Recherche. Éthique.**

RESUMO – O Mistério da Jarra do Escritor Alemão: provocações da montagem cinematográfica e literária à pesquisa nas Ciências Humanas – O artigo indaga as políticas da imagem e da montagem na literatura e no cinema como experimentação de uma aposta ética na pesquisa das Ciências Humanas. À luz do conceito de montagem em Walter Benjamin, e das análises de Didi-Huberman sobre a imagem como tomada de posição, problematiza a distância intransponível

entre sujeito e o objeto, a fratura entre forma e conteúdo, ética e estética na pesquisa frente ao intolerável de um mundo comum. As indagações são apresentadas através de fragmentos que versam sobre o entrelaçamento entre corpo, memória, revolta e criação, no intuito de ressaltar a aposta ética da montagem não como o bálsamo para o corpo sufocado pelo abjeto, mas como o oxigênio necessário à multiplicação de vias, sentidos, ultrapassagens de limites para a criação de resistências ao torpor do pensamento.

Palavras-chave: **Montagem. Literatura. Cinema. Pesquisa. Ética.**

Preamble

Creators of images in cinema and literature provide the disturbing estrangement to the world where the intolerable is irretrievably inscribed. Image production available to thought dissatisfied with the protagonism of the human reduced to the exclusive source, from which, what the eyes see would be representations of consciousness, or traces of the Subject. The gaze would have no history. The image would not look back, it would not think. Heterogeneous aesthetic modes of image craftsmanship would be reduced to the choice of the creator. In this essay, we wish to bet on the politics of the image as a historical artifact, as well as on montage as an ethical act in research in Human Sciences. The revolt against the fascist projects of today finds in this craftsmanship the estrangement inducing the escape of the paralyzed body by *the naught to do*, by excess of pain, or by indifference. The stupor, the strangeness produced by the film and literary montage when the breath is taken away and, simultaneously, the thought stiffens. It offers by indicating not the balm for the body suffocated by the abject, but the oxygen necessary for the multiplication of paths, senses, overcoming of limits for the creation of resistances to the torpor of asphyxia.

The act of montage in this essay is inspired by the creative destruction of Walter Benjamin (1987, p. 236): “The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room. And only one activity: clearing away. His need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred.” Dangerous eviction, requiring the renunciation of crystallized concepts, the comfort of political conceptions inattentive to the unique appeals of today. The eviction of the *étui-man* [case-man], immune to the discomfort of thinking where his traces, like the marks imprinted on a fabric, will give him the security of a horizon: “The destructive character is the enemy of the *étui-man*. The *étui-man* looks for comfort, and the case is its quintessence. The inside of

the case is the velvet-lined trace that he has imprinted on the world. The destructive character obliterates even the traces of destruction” (Benjamin, 1987, p. 236). What provocations would the concept of montage pose to research in Human Sciences? What risk would it offer under the shelter of a velvet case?

The montage, in order to provide *fresh air* and at the same time the *eviction*, so that in the empty space something happens, requires taking a position, not taking sides, in the production of knowledge through images. A choice that requires movement and risk. The neutrality of the researcher is refused:

One must involve oneself, accept to enter, confront, go to the heart, not border, decide. It is also necessary – because the act of deciding entails this – to ‘withdraw’ violently from the conflict, or else slightly, like the painter when he moves away from his canvas to know the point to where his work has progressed thus far. [...] In order to know it, it is necessary to take a position, which implies moving, and constantly assuming the responsibility of such movement (Didi-Huberman, 2017, p. 16).

Taking sides aims to maintain the direction to the truth in the foreseen direction, a path in which nothing can divert or indicate other routes to the path. Act of strategic distancing, of “pure abstraction, in haughty transcendence, in the sky of too far away” (Huberman, 2017, p. 16, our translation). Image, knowledge and research gain the pride of non-interference of that which exceeds the limit of their goals. Didi-Huberman, in the light of Benjamin’s reflections, presents connections between the act of montage and the “destructive character” as taking a position:

The montage has this ‘destructive character,’ by which a previous narrative — of temporality, in general — is displaced so that the immanent conflict is extracted from it [...] On the other hand, the montage proceeds by clearing away, that is, by creating voids, suspense, intervals that will work like so many other open roads, paths to a new way of thinking about the history of men and the disposition of things. There where sides impose the preliminary condition of a side to the detriment of others, the position presupposes an effective and conflicting co-presence, a dialectic of multiplicities among themselves (Didi-Huberman, 2017, p. 113).

To know, according to the researcher of the history of the arts, it is necessary to exercise the risky act of taking a position requiring the inter-

twining between the politics of the body, memory and desire. Intertwining that induces the *eviction* of subjectivism, of the compactness of the real, of the *haughty transcendence* to despise politics of the sensitive plotted in the researcher's flesh. The interweaving artisan of the inexhaustible relations between revolt, desire, finitude and creation:

To take a position is to desire, to demand something, to situate oneself in the present and to aim for the future. However, all this only exists on the background of a temporality that precedes us, that encompasses us, calling for our memory even in our attempts at oblivion, rupture, absolute novelty. To know, it is necessary to know what one wants; however, it is also necessary to know where is situated our not knowing, our latent fears (Didi-Huberman, 2017, p. 15).

To know through images, Didi-Huberman (2018, p. 105, our translation) suggests “[...] Raising one's thought to the level of anger. Raising one's anger to the level of work [...]. To know how to open our eyes to the violence of the world inscribed in images.” A proposal that denotes to literary and film montage an act that is not at all innocent. Fury and creation would not be dampened by sentences from the dead ends of thought. The act of montage would be attentive to the signs of terror. Art of war, of the exiles of heterogeneous modes of territories, who refused, and refuse, the violence of the sentence decreeing the exhaustion of experimentation. Art capable of making anger into a creative destruction of fresh air, evictions, paths.

Anger in this essay materializes through three fragments. The first presents the discomfort in the face of the sacralization of the excluded in research in Human Sciences. The sacred that obscures the infamous, the banished from social life from interfering in history, as well as omits the researcher as liable to be affected by the miseries of an ordinary world. It also discusses the vigor of the detritus, junk, remains, produced by the inattention of the official historiography to probable montages. The montage, in the light of Walter Benjamin, which desecrates the conversion of the humiliated, of the scum into dematerialized entities. In the second, scenes from a dream of Benjamin's will indicate relations between montage, memory and politics. A German writer's vessel containing something indefinite, Benjamin's crying as he touched a body, the unbearable heat in the environment feature in the dream. In the third, the agony of the canary in the cage in Chile, the suffocation of a Sergipe man indicates alarm signals that escape

the visibility of everyday life. Montage and body are present in these images. They are fragments that aim to problematize methodologies in Human Sciences. Fragments that question the insurmountable distance between subject and object, the fracture between form and content, ethics and aesthetics in the face of the intolerable of a common world. What is the power of waste, of junk, of what is left of debris? Why make a montage?

The Cortege of the Remnants

On the dusty plain of the wasteland, under the grey sky, men marched hunching. They were unaware of where they were going to, but they were driven by a need to walk. “Each of them carried on their backs a huge Chimera, as heavy as a sack of flour or coal” (Baudelaire, 2006, p. 283, our translation). They walked resignedly as if the weight on the body did not exist. “In the dust of a soil as desolate as that of the sky, they marched with the resigned appearance of those who are condemned to hope eternally” (Baudelaire, 2006, p. 283, our translation). In the Paris of the French poet, in the Brazilian hinterland, in cities where bodies are permeated by dreams, chimeras that they did not choose, men are condemned to hope. Eyes of an erect body glimpsing the sad march are moved, others are not. The moved ones aim to lead the march, to make it less tiring, but the curvature of the body towards the desolate ground is diverted from the gaze. These men’s sentence “to hope eternally” does not attract them. The gray sky becomes the object of concern. The sensitized eyes, witnesses of the melancholy march, may want light to lead them on the walk. Where to? What light?

The hunched shoulders of the men ‘sentenced to hope eternally’ would represent the indolence of the heart, the *acedia*: “According to the theologians of the Middle Ages it counted as the original foundation of sadness” (Benjamin, 2005, p. 70, our translation). Indolent, under the gray sky, they occupied resigned plains and hinterlands:

Acedia is the melancholy feeling of almighty fatality, which deprives human activities of any value. Consequently, it leads to a total submission to the order of things that exist [...] it is attracted by the solemn majesty of the cortege of the powerful (Lowy, 2005, p. 71, our translation).

In the plains, hinterlands, cities, the curvature of resigned walkers can be questioned in their fatality. The weight of chimeras, of dreams that do

not belong to them, as well as sadness. However, eyes of upright bodies, religious or not, will claim the luminosity of the sacred, and Walter Benjamin's warning would be deprecated: "The authentic and creative overcoming of religious illumination does not occur through the narcotic. It occurs in an *unholy illumination*, of materialistic and anthropological inspiration" (Benjamin, 1994, p. 23, our translation). What materialism? What illumination would literature and cinema offer these men to free them from indolent hope?

The cortege formed by helpless, infamous, vulnerable creatures runs through research in Human Sciences. Themes where sadness prevails, suffering predominates, justice is claimed. A cortege whose image approaches the universe of the sacred, in which to sympathize, to bow to the other would plead for the salvation of the excluded. Researches describe inhumanities, formulates hypotheses about the origin of hardships, indicates solutions to remedy them. The aim is to include, give voice to, dialogue with the object investigated in the search for salvation. Dialogue where the other suffers, resists, in their luminous difference. Light that denotes to their words and silences the precise meaning; the enigma to be deciphered. It clearly draws the limits of the body as private or collective property. It denotes to the voice, to the cry the particularity of their pain. It reveals shadows that belong only to them. For this humanism, they are condemned to the trash of history, waiting for inclusion, empathy, the right to voice. The other would have a place, fences, banks. Spaces and barriers sharply delimited and sharable when the light of consciousness brings out the redeeming empathy. Each unfortunate in their proper place, until another presence occupies it, illuminated by the light of compassion. Safe transfer, from which the visitor would come out unscathed. The human junk would remain at their post, also unscathed. The restlessness, the disturbance arising from the encounter with otherness to destroy fences, places, margins would not exist. What is the power of a remnant, of a fragment?

The cortege passes slowly due to the weight of misfortunes. It runs slowly along the termites of the old archives. Numerous meanings, confessions, divergent explanations, appointments, classifications would justify the reason of the weight. Although long-lived, it also mixes with the current themes captured on glass screens. The infamous, precarious life is seen by

eyes eager to care, to redeem, as if the researcher's gaze were immune to miseries of any kind. The gaze of apprentice of a sacred being, inspired by theology, in which the image of the other, of the ills of existence, would not return the gaze: "Only theologians dream of images that were not produced by the hand of man [...]. Faced with each image, what we should ask is how it looks at us, how it thinks of us and how it touches us" (Didi-Huberman, 2014, p. 14, our translation). What effects follow the research if the image were to gaze back?

The procession goes towards paradise, or hell, as if the failure of these existences were written in the predestination of the soul, socius, or destiny. Paradise would be the victory of the cursed existence integrated into the world in which the curse of these creatures was foreign to the truths that make it work. The procession goes through the screen glass, through yellowish pages corroded by insects as if the evils were chapters of continuous stories towards the conclusive end. Past, present and future become pages describing time, in which the pulse of those who touch them, or of any unusual event, would be inoperative. The danger of the now, unavoidable appeals that erupt between the subject-object pair, capable of dissipating the delimitation of that which defines them, is ignored. In the present one would glimpse what remained, or what is still left of the rubble of the past. Subject and object, time and space, body and world would inhabit un-touchable universes, similar to the limits of borders where time is alien to the pulsation of something living that interferes with the impermeability of its edges. From paradise and hell a flash would be avoided: "Historically articulating the past does not mean knowing it as it actually was. It means appropriating a reminiscence, as it flashes at the moment of a peril" (Benjamin, 1996, p. 224, our translation). What is the peril of the flash for the leaders of the cortege of the underprivileged?

The cortege passes watched by the immunity of the gaze that observes it. When handling the archives, the glove would protect the researcher's hands from contamination. The glass of the screen would immunize him through the presumed distance. Strange images, unrecognizable to the sharpness of his object's failure, would not affect the skin. The immunized body would protect itself from the effect of touching the sheets, or from anything that still insists on saying, ruminating, or silencing something un-

usual. The helpless pass heavy, inventoried, observed by the eye immune to the risk of contamination, to the dangers of the now. The contagion that can interrupt the linearity of the story, of the origins, of the exclusive supports of personal pronouns is remedied. The researcher's breathlessness in the face of the sharp radicality of otherness, of the bewildering event, of the image that gazes back is avoided. Subject and object separate in the absence of the destabilizations of a common world. Through this comfort a question is avoided: "What does the historian make of human flesh, in fact, of that which desires, loves, suffers or contradicts the straight line of clear analyses?" (Farge, 2015, p. 79, our translation).

From the desiring flesh, refusing a "fragile life," something happens:

Affections, passions, pains emerge as political action: single, multiple bodies, and not 'the body,' in general - are affected by history and affect it [...] history is not narrated only through a sequence of human actions, but also through the entire constellation of passions and emotions felt by peoples (Didi-Huberman, 2021, p. 466, our translation).

In research in which the abyss between heaven and hell is the rudder of the investigation, the story told by human flesh, felt in the epidermis, bones, viscera, is avoided, in which the design of the body takes provisional form at each encounter, or non-encounter, of desires and memories in clashes. It is prevented the manipulation that by touching, by using the fragments of existences, destabilizes the solidity of the method. The protection from contagion blocks the continuation of another and inconclusive story where death and creation are intertwined. Death of exclusive authorship, of the expected result, of hope, or hopelessness, paralyzing. Contamination, dissipating the protagonism of the researcher's worldview, germinated in the arrogance of the immaculate gaze when denying the dirty body by heterogeneous affections. The contamination of oneself requiring juxtapositions of heterogeneous presences of histories in the skin to interrupt the linearity of time. Requirement of writing where fumbling hands are protagonists of creation:

Writing is fumbling. That is why 'we interrupt ourselves here and there,' says Benjamin. To write is to be unaware of 'how to proceed.' It is this interruption that gives the writer the right to say: 'once is naught' [...] Writing is not obsessively filling the empty spaces of thought and, in turn, fumbling is not the same as lack of rigor in writing, but simply the gesture of the

writer, who with his careful hands, ‘learned to start over each day.’ The fumbling hand is a trained hand, it is it that performs in the writer’s search a ‘sharp cut in the field of words and thought’ (Oliveira, 2013, p. 16, our translation).

The desecrated image calls for the emergence of the researcher’s unsettling present, incites the *sharp cut* that makes him wonder at the logic that leads him. The *sharp* now interrupting the planned goal, the saving word, the convinced thought. The comfort of the conclusion in defending a thesis would be suspended. Desecration carried out on the ground, in fumbling, in the materiality of the empiric produced by a peculiar mode of montage that appropriates remains not yet totally eaten by the worms. Walter Benjamin inspires this essay by introducing his method:

Method of this work: literary montage. I have nothing to say. Only to show I will not steal anything of value and will appropriate no spirited formulations to myself But the rags, the waste: I do not want to make an inventory of these, but rather let them come into their own in the only way possible: by using them (Benjamin, 2006, p. 502, our translation).

In dark times, the methodology is exposed. The terror of fascism induces the Berlin philosopher to refuse historiography inattentive to waste, to minor facts. Totals to explain the harmony, or disorder of the human systems, in which, the inexpressive, the remains of great deeds allude to the representation of what moves them are rejected in their method. Showing would require the prior act of montage, the appropriation of what was despised by a method in which frictions, paradoxes, clashes between dreams and desires crossing the researcher’s body, are disregarded. After the montage, the legibility of a city, of the world, of an era would be possible, but it would require the necessary tone of the reader to withstand the discomfort of estrangement. The montaged remains would disorganize irreversible paths of projects unrelated to the bewildering field of immanence. Showing requires “disjoining the evidence to better unite, visually and temporally, the differences [...] art of historicization: an art that breaks the continuity of narrations, extracts differences and, composing them among themselves, restores the essentially critical value of all historicity” (Didi-Huberman, 2017, p. 63, our translation).

The showing of the montage, similar to the explosion detonated by dynamite, an image created by the Berlin philosopher to characterize the

legacy of cinema. From the explosion, prisons imploded, producing detritus, fragments, waiting for other unimaginable narratives. Reality would lose the compactness of the edges by intensifying the opening of roads, possibilities previously vetoed by a logic naturalizing the real:

Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms [...] appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-clung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling (Benjamin, 1994, p. 189).

In the dark room the spectator would be faced with the strangeness of the usual gesture. The landscape would be deformed. “Adventurous travel” would upset the boundaries imposed by everyday life. On the screen, images would shatter the spatial and temporal order that delimits the stories. The body would become unrecognizable:

If cinema does not give us the presence of the body and cannot give us that, perhaps it is because it also proposes another goal: it extends over us an experimental night or a blank space, it operates with dancing grains and luminous dust, it affects the visible with a fundamental disturbance, and the world with a suspense that contradicts all natural perception. Thus, it produces the genesis of an unknown body, which we have behind our heads, like the thoughtless in thought, the birth of the visible that still hides in plain sight (Deleuze, 2013, p. 117, our translation).

Film editing would not be immune to political neutrality. For fascist aesthetics, clear responses to what is soul, homeland, family, the collective are displayed to the viewer. The “thoughtless in thought” is vetoed. The “experimental night,” the “blank space” give way to the luminosity necessary for the recognition of the community where everything is born and germinates the future. Empty, blank spaces are occupied by the eternity of the essence of the immaculate soul. Fascism has peculiar carpentry of montage. Images take sides by avoiding inaccuracy, the infinity of a face on screen. “Fiat ars – pereat mundus [Let art be made, let the world perish], says fascism” (Benjamin, 2012, p. 123, our translation). Fascist art despises the sharp edge of everyday materiality, of the affections of ordinary life capable of disfiguring the contour of eternal beauty to be preserved. In literature and film, montage educated, shaped warrior spirits towards the victorious future.

Artists resistant to fascism bet on the presence of the world; the mundane in the likeness of the sharp disfiguring thread, the blade of the creative destruction of history interrupting the eternity of myth, fidelity to a mission. Those attentive to the "flash" of the now resisted. The act of montage is denied the innocence of creation. What is the power of a waste?

The rubbish of the world, the humiliated, the excluded, would not await the salvation announced by humanism eager to include them. According to Benjamin, doing justice in the use of the remains would aim to perform caesurae, create cracks, air passages in finished, "incarcerated" narrations, so that the act of telling stories would continue inconclusively. The remains would gain intensity when removed from the peculiar functions arising from the places that define them. Junk, detritus handled, would unfold stories, making it possible to create images capable of legibility that is disturbing to clichés, to the rationality of the light that illuminates them. Legibility handcrafted by the contaminated body in the face of the violence of an ordinary world.

The legibility comes from the montage: the montage considered as a form and as an essay. Namely, a form patiently elaborated but not enclosed in its certainty (its intellectual certainty: 'this is true,' its aesthetic certainty: 'this is beautiful,' or its moral certainty: 'this is good'). As a thought raised to the level of anger, it takes a position and makes the violence of the world legible (Didi-Huberman, 2018, p. 110, our translation).

The researcher, like a ragman, the scavenger of the remains to assemble, "[...] would not speak for anyone, would not give voice to anyone [...] is disfigured in the act of collecting. Estranges himself and estranges what he collects" (Baptista, 2022, p. 25, our translation). Similarly to a collector of used objects, he is driven by a destructive passion, like cinema:

The true passion of the collector, too often ignored, is always anarchic, destructive. For this is his dialectic: to associate to fidelity for the object, for the unique, by the hidden element in it, the subversive and inflexible protest against the typical, against the classifiable (Benjamin, 1984, p. 100, our translation).

The Vessel

"The knife does not cut the fire¹," this is the revelation of the mystery of the vessel. In Walter Benjamin's dream, the German writer's office is the

only setting. There the mysterious vessel was delivered to him. The small room had a single window. “A monstrous heat reigned in the room” (Benjamin, 1987, p. 13, our translation). At the writing table was Goethe at a very advanced age. Benjamin stood beside him. The old writer senses the presence and interrupts the writing. He gets up and offers the visitor an old vessel. Why? Would it be empty, would it contain what?

The German writer leads him to the next room. In the room, the long table seemed “calculated for many more people than counted” (Benjamin, 1987, p. 13, our translation). It implied that it was prepared for dinner with the visitor’s ancestors, or for unknown dead. The two sat down at the table. After the meal, Benjamin asked permission to support him. Goethe tried to get up painfully. “A monstrous heat reigned in the room.” In the act of help he touched the old writer’s elbow. The touch moved Benjamin. He cried. The dream ends after the commotion. The reason for the vessel in the dream account is not revealed. Why the crying after touch on the body of old age?

“The knife does not cut the fire”; the answer would be in this statement, if the vessel contained ashes. At the touch of the bodies, the commotion converted the dust into flame, the friction promoting the fire that destroys, creates, goes out, is rekindled by affirming the encounter between matters, between times. Flame that, when rekindled, reveals the modulation of its forms, the corrosion of combustion. From it, the fragility embodied in the finitude of a gesture, in the rubble of the universality of a truth, would give space for something to emerge as another. Destructive combustion also found in history when inflated by the transgression of the human to the bonds of eternity of irremediable destiny. Artisan warmth of infinite transmutations. The infinite, not defined as an attribute of the transcendent, of the universal, but as an effect of varying tangibility, encounter between bodies, crunches, shocks, interruptions, intermittent deaths of the unsettling empirical world. According to Jeanne Marie Gagnebin, the German writer offered Benjamin a peculiar treat. Something infinite was happening.

Perhaps a funeral urn, and he will dine, with him at his side, at a table set for the ancestors. Under the sign of common caducity and finitude, however, reigns an emotion, an infinite tenderness between them, manifested by Benjamin’s gesture of support to the old poet. A little as if there was at the same time the acute awareness of the end of this configuration of writing

and writer and the reaffirmation of its fragile beauty (Gagnebin, 2017, p. 32, our translation).

In the Berlin philosopher's dream "a monstrous heat reigned in the room." The shadows of Nazism permeated the old writer's office. The ashes inside the vessel waited for the breath for emergence of the flame. In the dining room, the table was set for the unfinished past of the ancestors, along with the unknown dead of different times. It waited for what they would have to say about the "monstrous heat." Deprived, infamous, failed, tortured ones would stalk the invitation to the meeting, in which they would have something to say, exchange, interfere with the heat choking their breath. The host might propose to the guest to bring his face closer to the vessel and blow the ashes, "[...] and blow slowly so the ember, underneath, restarts to propagate its heat, its luminosity, its danger. As if, from the gray image, a voice were raised: *Do you not see that I am still burning?*" (Didi-Huberman, 2015, p. 317, our translation). From the flames he would hear screams refusing unintentional silence, images of the unexhausted past and would hear, "Stacked corpses will speak forever. They will shout through the ages. Just like those thrown overboard, incinerated, buried in clandestine ditches. An incessant, deafening scream" (Mudado, 2015, p. 149, our translation).

"The knife does not cut the fire," hinted that voice. The incessant scream burned in the refusal of the softening of its strength. The edge of the blade cutting, tearing, dismembering, slaughtering lives would transmute into something else when pierced by the flame. The fire would prevent forgetting the pains of yore when the breath incited the corrosive heat. The knife would end, the flame would remain. Past and present would no longer be the same. As well as the face from which the breath was blown. Goethe's ashes waited in the old vessel. Inside it a murmur stated: "At any time, the living find themselves at noon in history. They are expected to prepare a feast for the past. The historian is the herald who invites the dead to the table" (Benjamin, 2014, p. 523, our translation). What for?

On the trip to Italy, the landscape stunned the German writer. In the diary, written during the stay in Italy, he recorded the exuberance of what he saw: natural accidents, residents' habits, colors, odors, textures of the

materials. Something else was written in his diary: the strength of what he saw interfering with the design of his soul

I am now interested only in the impressions captured by the senses, and these no book, no painting offers. The fact is that my interest in the world is renewed; I test my power of observation and examine how far my science and knowledge go, whether my eyes are clean and see clearly, how much I can learn in the midst of speed, and whether the wrinkles furrowed and imprinted on my spirit can again be removed. Already at this moment, when I am on my own, when I need to be always attentive and present, these few days give me an entirely new elasticity to the spirit (Goethe, 1999, p. 30, our translation).

Being attentive to what the world presented to him and destabilized him gave the German writer the elasticity to remove wrinkles in his spirit. Affected by heterogeneous sensations, he glimpsed other aesthetics for existence. What he felt at the moment of the fruition of a sensation offered him the removal of marks from the past. Empiricism interfered with the once supposedly definitive. Would this passage from Goethe's diary have the corrosion of the flame rekindled? What danger would this citation bring to a body that is paralyzed, or indifferent, to the intolerable of an ordinary world?

Plucking the German writer's citation from its time, dislodging it from the mythical nature, appropriating it in confronting the unavoidable dangers of the now, making it a fragment waiting for a montage is inspired by Walter Benjamin's use of the act of citing: the citing of interrupting the comfort of unquestionable truth, as well as of hopelessness, or hope, contained in inattention to the appeals of what goes beyond the edges of the self, or of the us: "Citations in my work are like robbers on the way, who break out armed and steal conviction from the stroller" (Benjamin, 1987, p. 61, our translation). Robbery that, by interrupting the stability of a chronology, by blurring the sharpness of the authorship, would clear the conclusive closure of a story. Interruption of the political act of montage, in which authors, ideas, theories lose their quotation marks by becoming available fragments of inexhaustible compositions: "This work must develop to the maximum the art of citing without quotation marks. Its theory is closely related to that of montage" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 500, our translation). The montage that requires attention to the dissipation of the unbreakable limits between ethics and aesthetics, body and world, past and the dangers of the now.

In the German writer's office "a monstrous heat reigned in the room." The visitor's commotion when he touched the host's old body resembled the breath toward the ashes contained in the vessel. The verse "the knife does not cut the fire" was stated juxtaposed to the "incessant, deafening scream" inside the vessel. A monstrous heat ravages the country. On the corners of Brazilian cities, ashes await any blow. Scenes from the Berlin philosopher's dream are available for probable montages, or for "the mumble of another future":

It is up to the present, in particular to the historian of today, to be aware of what lies in the events and works of the past as a promise or protest, as 'confidence, as courage, as humor, as cunning, as tenacity' Benjamin lists in the fourth thesis 'On the concept of history,' as a sign or mumble of another future. In this precise sense, Benjamin's materialist historian deconstructs the plastered image of tradition and seeks in the interferences of time, past and present the breath of another possible history (Gagnebin, 2009, p. 157, our translation).

On Brazilian street corners, the monstrous heat threatens the breath for the mumble of another future. Screams insist on facing the oblivion of the unfinished past. The hearing of the voice, saying "*Don't you see I'm still burning?*", is also threatened. What is the power of the blowing of a montage?

Gas

The guira cuckoo feeds on the eggs in the nests of other birds. This predator bird is known as the Shadow Porter, the messenger of death. Canaries avoid them. In the mines of Chile, they indicate the presence of odorless gas that kills ruthlessly. On rainy days, the singing of the Shadow Porter announces the unpredictable signal to the inhabitants of Brazilian cities. Birds cross the sky of South America with their warning signs to humans. Miners in Chilean coal mines used canaries in cages to detect the existence of the toxic gas. If the canary agonized, the work would be interrupted. Carbon monoxide is invisible and odorless. The agony of the bird alerted to the urgency of evacuating the area. Workers could not detect invisible dangers. When the health of the canaries persisted in the cage, the workday under the ground went on without ceasing, as if death in life was not a scandal. Birds cross the sky of South America indicating possibilities of life and death. What life would occupy the Chilean mines if the canary

did not agonize? What happens to the body when invisible dangers go undetected? Which body?

Literature and cinema provide research in Human Sciences with images where invisibility, which goes beyond the limits of the perceptible, would indicate disparate conceptions about what would be body, death, life, and death in life. Images piercing solid convictions while creating routes to escape from the suffocating universe of the unproven truth. Images that interrupt the comfort of hope, or the paralysis of the dead ends of thought. They incite estrangement toward the already known. They suspend hasty runs of the argument toward the conclusion of the analysis. They bewilder, fumble, in unblocking paths dammed by the anesthesia of the cutting presence of otherness.

In the oeuvres of Kafka, Guimarães Rosa, Clarice Lispector, among other authors, animals escape metaphor as an ornament of the word, of the hierarchy of ways of life. Animals would be strangers to the functions of the symbolic, they would be stunned in the search for traces of familiar emotions of the human universe. Body, life and death would shatter in other senses, an act disruptive to the opportunity of imprisoning them to nature, dogmas, or morals. In Kafka's tales, animals do not refer to a mythology, nor to archetypes. They would be becoming, zones of intensities: "[...] animal becoming is precisely to make the movement, to draw the line of flight in all its positivity, to cross a threshold [...] to find a world of pure intensities, in which all forms are undone, all meanings too" (Deleuze; Guattari, 2014, p. 27, our translation). In Clarice Lispector, the intersection between animal and people would not be reduced to the denunciation of racist and classist animalization, it is also "[...] the tool of a knowledge that challenges a biopolitics that produces bodies and orders them to dominate them: to draw from there the distinctions between livable lives and insignificant lives" (Giorgi, 2016, p. 107, our translation). In the tales of Guimarães Rosa, "[...] the pure craft of living attributed to the knowledge of animals resumes the zero degree of life in nature [...] creating a zone of indistinction, domain of the indeterminate, of the unpredictable, of what is understood by becoming" (Souza, 2011, p. 84, our translation). Animals, in certain aesthetic proposals of literature and cinema, question the politics of bodies and life:

It is, then, a matter of thinking about the ways in which the animal transforms logics of its inscription in culture and aesthetic languages, questioning, at the same time, a broader reordering of bodies and language that this new proximity of the animal attests. In other words, it is about seeing how the redefinition of the animal illuminates broader 'rhetoric' of the corporeal and the living that, in turn, refract a biopolitical imagination of bodies (Giorgi, 2016, p. 31, our translation).

Canaries and guira cuckoos traverse the sky of South America. They destitute the self of the sovereignty over the body's destinies, deprivatize it, announce chance, undo forms of the predictable threat, indicate the strength of what goes beyond the barriers of the perceptible. In the cages of the mines in Chile, in the flights of Brazilian cities, they affirm the "[...] body: surface of inscription of events, place of dissociation from the Self (which supposes the chimera of a substantial unit), volume in perpetual pulverization" (Foucault, 1998, p. 22, our translation). They break the irreducible signification, because it is "[...] unqualified rupture. It is this strange beginning and new beginning that can call into question a little of everything, thought, narration, signification, communication, history: it introduces a catastrophe in the time that flows" (Uno 2014, p. 51, our translation).

In a city in Sergipe, the event inscribed on the body, a catastrophe interrupting the flowing time, presented the effectiveness of the gas that exterminates "insignificant lives." What "catastrophe" occurred in the asphyxiation of Genivaldo de Jesus Santos?

A body swallowed by smoke struggles inside a police car on the side of a road in Northeast Brazil. The feet are the only part seen out of the vehicle. They squirm for an infinite fifteen minutes, while the throat dries with tear gas and despair. Another fifteen minutes pass with feet and throat immobile, left to the misfortune of the truculent and torturous police stop. A witness tries to avoid the presumed, but is intimidated by the officers. Faced with the abuse, the only choice remaining is to record on video the horror that burns to the eyes. There is no eye drop that mitigates the effects of explicit police torture. There are no sunglasses for the effect of the suffocating gas that transforms the trunk of a vehicle into a gas chamber (Fonseca; Baptista, 2023, p. 12, our translation).

In 1930s Europe, Walter Benjamin was concerned with chemical warfare. In the essay *Theories of German Fascism* he indicated the danger: "It is known how there is no effective defense against chemical attacks from the

air. Even individual protective measures, gas masks, are powerless against gas” (Benjamin, 2012, p. 1130, our translation). The Berlin philosopher foreshadowed the plurality of forms and consistencies, the odorless and tastelessness of fascist actions.

South of Sergipe, in Umbaúba, what happened inside the gas chamber dissolved in minutes the contour of the body of Genivaldo de Jesus Santos. It made it the “surface of inscription of events.” The “catastrophe” took place in the “I turned into chimera,” dissolved in the vagueness of a profile, of the place, of the precise date. Transmuted into many, and no one. What remained exhibited “a junction of creatures, a meeting point, of alliance, of linkage (or clash, of war) between living forces” (Giorgi, 2016, p. 188, our translation). Those who witnessed “the horror that burns in the eyes” saw blacks, madmen, women, workers, creatures humiliated by the violence of the State of the past and the present “in perpetual pulverization.” Inside the vehicle, the pulverized body made impersonal signaled the “community of heterogeneous,” the surface of many and no one. The impersonal blurring the sharpness of a face, magnifying the intensity of a pain by unfolding it, dislodging it from a fixed landing. The witnesses who witnessed the “horror that burns in the eyes” foresaw the power of the cry:

When René Char, in turn, wrote that ‘the eyes are able to scream,’ one can open this sentence towards the idea that the eyes would also be able to resist, to stand up, to bifurcate the intolerable injustice of the world, even if only by imagination (Didi-Huberman, 2018, our translation).

In 1920s Germany, artists who admired the Aryan warrior spirit despised the effects of chemical attacks. Canaries failed in Umbaúba. Guira cuckoos persist in signaling the danger of State violence visible to some, opaque to others, when inattentive to death in life, as well as to the power of an ordinary world. On northeastern soil, contrasting times escaped perception. The explosion of heterogeneous times was approaching as an ethical proposal to those who witnessed the murder of Genivaldo de Jesus Santos:

The montage is an exposition of anachronisms in what it proceeds as an explosion of chronology. The montage carves the things habitually gathered and connects the things habitually separated; therefore, it creates a shock and a movement: “The shock. We are out of us. The gaze falters and, with it, that which it gazed. Exterior things are no longer familiar, they move. Anything there has become very light, that comes and goes’ (E. Bloch, our

translation). The explosion having happened, it is a world of dust – rags, fragments, residues – that then surrounds us. But the dust that the explosion of the non-contemporary raises is more dialectical than distraction: it, in itself, is explosible, a way of saying that it now offers a very subtle material, in short, for historical movements, revolutions to come (Didi-Huberman, 2016, p. 6, our translation).

What “catastrophe” would have occurred to the body of those who witnessed the gas chamber in the city of Sergipe? What montages of the rags, of the remnants would be available to the researcher in Human Sciences? What is the power of the scream in the eyes?

Note

¹ Verse by poet Herberto Helder cited by Molder (2013, p. 235, our translation).

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