Capítulo 8 - Image, art and sensation in discourse analysis

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Introduction

My purpose in this essay is to reflect on image, discourse, and sensation. I start by reporting my affect² to a series of photographs about violence and to a photograph of art, as it disrupted that series and provided me retreat during the analytical process. I reflect on two modes of silence that emerged during this event. The first type refers to a lack of verbal reference in the presence of a particular photograph; the second one refers to the need to interrupt the visual series and stop a chain of meanings in a discourse. From these considerations, I problematize enunciation and the visual field, the bodily dimension of the researcher in discourse analysis, and the potency of art to constitute a line of flight. Underpinning my discussion are the concepts of precariousness and sensation.

¹ This is a revised and extended version of the paper titled: The Silence of Images: Reflections on Visual Materialities, Production of Meaning and Discursive Memory published at the Proceedings of the II CID – II National and I International Colloquium of the Research Group Body and Image in Discourse: Body, Arts, Cinema and Other Kinds of Media. Federal University of Uberlândia, December 03-04, 2012.
² Affect is a Deleuzian-Guattarian vocabulary based on Spinoza’s *affectus* that refers to an ability to affect and be affected. As Brian Massumi points out: “It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act.” (Massumi, 1987, p. xvi).
Precariousness is a concept that can be found in works dedicated to the discussion of art and visual culture (Asselin; Lamoureux; Ross, 2008), in which authors like Christine Ross propose it refers to “the ways in which the image or the interface of an artwork interpellates the spectator into an ‘effective’ perceptual perturbation” (Ross, 2008, p. 12-14), that is, it refers less to the ephemerality and contingency of the artworks and images, and more to the order of interpellation and of difference – a somewhat dissensic movement of meaning-making where the perceptible is constituted in a distributive regime of sensibility (Rancière, 2011, 2004). Hence, precariousness in discursive analyses, as proposed in this paper, is an intellectual movement over a theme and a selected visual corpus for which a precarious (meaning provisory and emerging) analytic framework is built, and which includes the position of spectatorship. It is a vivid, necessary form of relating to the object of gaze and its perceptual order. It is a perspective to consider when images are seen as data for discursive studies and relate to the linguistic, but are not reduced to it, and in analytic frames that comply with the perturbations and responses of the analyst towards the object.

Sensation is a Deleuzian concept. In Francis Bacon: The logic of sensation, Deleuze (2002) engages with the artist’s work to construct pictophilosophical (Badiou; Cassin, 2002) concepts that refer to his understanding of Cezanne’s notion of a general logic of sensation. By describing some of Bacon’s paintings and reflecting on his style, he presents aspects he considers to be characteristic of Bacon’s work, such as the isolation of the figure, the depiction of contorted and deformed bodies whose flesh descends from the bones, the presence of flat fields of color and broken tones for the flesh, the distribution of rhythms of sensation in triptych form. Deleuze points out Bacon’s paintings depicted ordinary

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3 Precariousness was also discussed by philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, John Dewey and Gilles Deleuze in their critical positionings towards transcendence and ontology. This paper, however, is not intended to cover this specific conceptual relationship.

4 The relation between the concepts of precariousness and dissensus is explained by Ross (2008, p. 14). Dissensus and aesthetics as Rancière (2011, p. 11) argues, refer to non-essentialistic readings: “what is at stake in my research on politics and what ties it up with a research on aesthetics is an attempt to think a specificity of politics as disagreement and a specificity of the aesthetic heterogeneity that break away from the absoluticization of the dissensus as wrong or disaster. It is an attempt to think such exceptionality outside of a plot of purity.”
bodies in situations of constraint and discomfort under invisible forces that were made visible in the flesh (Deleuze, 2002, p. x). This created what Deleuze called the violence of a sensation. Thus, sensation, according to Deleuze, is vibration. It resonates in the body of the viewer. In this essay, such concept helps explain my affect to the photographs and leads me to a discussion on the effect of art and the sensitive field in analytic processes.

The silence of images

At the preface of his Le mots et les choses (Foucault, 1966) points out the book arouse from his laughs at reading Jorge Luis Borges’ taxonomy of animals in a certain Chinese encyclopedia. In the “Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge”, Borges (1942) proposed the classification of all animals into one of the 14 categories:

- Those that belong to the emperor
- Embalmed ones
- Those that are trained
- Suckling pigs
- Mermaids (or Sirens)
- Fabulous ones
- Stray dogs
- Those that are included in this classification
- Those that tremble as if they were mad
- Innumerable ones
- Those drawn with a very fine camel hair brush
- Et cetera
- Those that have just broken the flower vase
- Those that, at a distance, resemble flies.

According to Foucault, along with laughter at reading such classification, there emerged a sense of uneasiness: although some of the classes in that list would refer to animals we have known of for their real existence, they were put together with unconceivable beings, fabulous creatures, and this way of ordering them was somehow disturbing. In Foucault’s words:
It is not the ‘fabulous’ animals that are impossible, since they are designated as such, but the narrowness of the distance separating them from (and juxtaposing them to) the stray dogs, or the animals that from a long way off look like flies. What transgresses the boundaries of all imagination, of all possible thought, is simply that alphabetical series (a, b, c, d) which links each of those categories to all the others. (Foucault, 1966, p. xix).

The uneasiness mentioned by Foucault belonged to the capacity of language to assimilate, within its syntax, the unthinkable, the heteroclite, keeping in its surface items whose coherence “is neither determined by an a priori and necessary concatenation, nor imposed on us by immediately perceptible contents”. (Foucault, 1966, p. xix). Borges’ heterotopias would have the ability to dry up the meaning of words, contesting the very possibility of grammar.

Images as well may be composed of elements which fit together to the gaze or whose combination may be felt as uneasy. However, such feeling does not have to do with a lack of coherence due to instabilities of the order of a visual grammar (Kress; Van Leeuwen, 2001), or an incongruence between the representing and represented objects in an ontological Husserlian discussion, or even an issue between denotative and connotative relationships in semiotic readings (Barthes, 1977). The sense of uneasiness and transgression mentioned by Foucault, as I reterritorialize it to the interpretation of images and reinterpret it as silence, takes place when we consider the relation between word (with its acoustic and visual images) and image (as it can be named). Within a discursive theorization of language that considers images as textual elements which can supersede the verbal text and vice-versa for meaning-making, images speak – not in the sense that they would communicate something, but in the sense that they provoke us for and are susceptible to verbalization as they are gazed at from a discursive position. Silence can be an effect when what we read has an unsettling effect, like in the Foucauldian example, and when (1) we gaze at images whose elements do not match as one same unit (in the sense that there would seem to be a

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5 From a different approach, Mitchell (2005) discusses the capacity of images to want things, to be completed by the subject. According to the author, although images have certain autonomy of existence (they exist as units) they always lack something; they are always incomplete. That is why they would want us to incorporate them and be told by us.
disruption in the order of discourse, with the impossibility of enunciation) or (2) because as a unit, the image can cause a momentary suspension of a flow of meanings and discursivity.\(^6\)

During the development of a scientific project that focused on the relationship between image, body and memory\(^7\), urban violence and social exclusion came up as subthemes for attention. As national newspapers constituted daily sources of images, and as a considerable number of images made available scenes of violence, a terrible realization was that the consistent, journalistic regime of light makes regular the presence of distressed bodies: bodies in pain, tortured bodies, excluded bodies, and lifeless bodies become visible and accessible to us in different sections of the newspapers and on a day-to-day or minute basis (in the case of online updates). Back in October 2009, a photograph of a wounded body in a shopping cart was displayed on the front page of a Brazilian newspaper of mass circulation. Among other photographs of the same type that I had encountered and collected for the research, this one significantly caused the effect of silence in me. Despite previous elaborations on this particular photograph as a symbolic materiality in which a sense of humanity had been lost\(^8\), and which were my first attempt to help explain the effect of silence, an urge to readdress the matter of silence in visual-discursive processes of meaning-making remained.

The photograph was originally published at a quasi-central position on the page of the newspaper as a way to illustrate the news about a conflict between rival drug dealer groups in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The headline read: “Horrid scene: body found in cart near Morro dos Macacos (Rio); police count up to 25 dead bodies in 4-day conflict with drug dealers.” The image took 2/3 of half of the page, a size that enhanced its visibility even more. The wounded body, apparently a corpse, lay in

\(^6\) Orlandi (2002) establishes a typology of silences related to memory and conditions of production of meaning. She asserts that silence occurs in three different forms: the *foundational* silence is the space of emergence of meanings, the necessary continuum that has to be interrupted for meaning to rise; the *constitutive* silence refers to the meanings that have to be silenced for one of them to emerge, and censorship, when certain meanings are forbidden.

\(^7\) Project titled *Discourse and memory: between the verbal and the non-verbal*, developed under my supervision at the Federal University of Uberlândia, from 2008 to 2013.

\(^8\) A previous discussion on the effect of horror and a discursive reading on it is carried in Hashiguti (2012).
a shopping cart and under black and transparent plastic bags filled with garbage. The cart was half inclined over a parked car. It seemed someone had pushed it down the street and it stopped at the curb. Eleven people, mostly kids (one held a skateboard), were near the cart, and most of them were leaning their bodies and sticking their necks to find an angle from behind the car to see it.

At glancing at it on the printed version of the newspaper, I felt an immediate spine tingling sensation followed by a momentarily suspension of meaning. Besides the bodily response, at this initial moment, something about that photograph caused a sensation that I could not name, a strange strangeness, somehow like the Foucauldian uneasiness at Borge’s classification. It was through an analytic gaze, however, in a second moment, that I came to discuss (Hashiguti, 2012) this sense of uneasiness as the momentarily impossibility of speech towards the composition; there had been a suspension of discourse provoked by the combination of the elements in the photograph. Referring thus to situation (1), the presence of visual elements that belonged and represented two different discourses – a shopping cart, which is an object that helps transport products and ultimately represents human consumption and a consumeristic historical stratum, and a dead human body –, was too unsettling. Silence in this way reported to the fact that barbarity does not immediately offer a verbal referent to which it can be associated, because it belongs to the order of the humanly unconceivable, the verbally impossible, as Bhabha (2008) asserts.

Another type of silence may emerge when dealing with images of violence. There is hostility in photographs like the one described, and when a number of them are organized as a series in a research, as they were in my project, they may account for an excess of visibility. In the third moment of my analysis of that series, the photographs started to ‘scream out too loudly’, as I experienced it, and as to become the noise of the barbaric discursive formation that I had understood as being operational in the contemporary discourse of violence and its field of visibility. Speechlessness as the first form of silence was followed by excessive noise and now needed to be replaced by silence as counteracting policy. An urge for another type of visuality, one capable of silencing the series in the analytical process, rose and impelled my search for artworks that could suspend a flow of meanings and stop
the uncanny effect of a discourse. The interpretation of a machine (the Internet search system I accessed in my computer) on the entry “Mark Rothko’s paintings” – in my memory, a soothing corpus that had the capacity to silence other images and words –, made available Hiroshi Sugimoto’s *Bay of Sagami, Atami*.

Bay of Sagami, Atami is a photograph from Sugimoto’s *Seascapes* series (Sugimoto, 1997). Shades of gray, black and white depict sea and sky blurred into one single thickness. Dense and quiet, the colors and their uniform disposition seem to metaphorically repeat the stillness of the water when confronted with the horizon. For Witmann (2009), this photographic series on the theme of the sea makes a suspension of time, giving it a fluid movement where the beholder is invited to float, not in a supposedly frozen moment, but in a transcending image whose ambience can be compared to the effect of the impressionist paintings of painters such as Claude Monet. Sugimoto’s photographs depicted what Deleuze and Guattari see as a “smooth space par excellence” (Deleuze; Guattari, 1987, p. 479) – the sea. As a form of nomad art, Sugimoto’s photographs allow for the connection between viewer and image; as the space between them is haptic, it leads to a creative potentiality. The combination of colors in Bay of Sagami, Atami operated, for me, like a fog, destabilizing the previous visibility, perturbing an event, as it had been for Bal (1999 apud Ross, 2008, p. 340) in her experience of Ann Veronica Janssens’ fog installation: Jamaïcan’s Colors for Melle Léone. The silence created by Sugimoto’s image on me, particularly at that circumstance of research and analysis of images of brutal, barbaric violence, caused a disruption in a visual sequence interpreted within a discursive formation. As displayed and magnified on the screen for my gaze, it ceased a flow of meanings and momentarily muted a series. This refers to the situation (2).

The gaze and the visible in discourse analysis

Among the traditions in the discourse analysis practiced in Brazil, some researches following the Pecheudian and Foucauldian writings include images in their corpora of research. In this tradition, naming and linguistically describing the object are first steps for any discursive study⁹.

⁹ See Milanez’discussion on this topic in this volume.
It means the object of analysis and its characteristics emerge only after the analyst has limited it within the linguistic descriptive realm, which will then be followed by different moves of interpretation of the analyst in the construction of the analytic frame. There is no ready-to-use frame, so the object is only revealed as the analytic procedure takes place and discourse is identified.

Under discursive analyses, images are visual materialities whose opaqueness opens up for the dispersion of meanings, for diverse effects on the beholder, but as they are correlated to the linguistic, they become something else: in discourse, they are organized, momentarily contained in an order. As units of light, they are interpreted, verbalized, and related to the conditions of emergence of meanings. Meanings are possible in relation to what already exists and constitutes the subject – and which has been addressed as discursive memory, in the case of statements, or intericonocity, in the case of images (Courtine, 2005 apud Milanez, 2012) –, and according to their immediate relation with other images, elements and the verbal materiality. Their conditions of visibility involve the spaces that provide variant forms of circulation and light (e.g.: a wall or the page of a newspaper, an exhibition of art or a visual archive, etc.). Within this frame, gaze, in discourse analysis, represents a form of interpretation from a discursive position (Hashiguti, 2015).

The visual series on violence and exclusion which contained the journalistic photograph I described in the previous section emerged as a theme itself from a first analytical move I made when the aim was to understand how the body is portrayed or made visible in different forms of media in the contemporaneity. Formulated as a question, this first general theme built my gaze and caused my body to respond to the materials I found during my research. The regularity of images of pain and suffering caused the theme of violence to rise as an aggregating principle, as I gazed at blood, exposed wounds, facial expressions of despair, torn clothes, dust, fire, collapsed places, weapons as too regular images. The body that was depicted in many photographs was primarily the body of a discourse of violence. That is to say my work with the images up to that point had been

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10 Other authors in this book refer to these conditions with other terms – conditions of production, and conditions of possibility – being them epistemologically distinctive. See Neckel, Costa and Milanez in this volume.
11 On this matter, see Gagnon (2008).
interwoven with the discursive order, thus the reference to silence and not to an absence of light.

What interests me in this essay is the affect or effect of silence when I gazed at those two particular photographs in two different moments of my analysis. I am conceptualizing silence as a suspension of meaning, not in the sense of censorship, but first, as the impossibility of verbalization and second, as a disruption in a discursive chain. These affects were perturbations that refer to the specificity of the images and to the perceptual order. That brings the idea of an overlap between the researcher and the spectator, or to the consideration of the researcher as a spectator. That also leads me towards a reflection on the visible and on the responses of my body.

The Foucauldian works (Foucault, 1987, 1972, 1970) proposed the existence of the discursive (sayable) and the visible in every historical stratum. They are both specific and unmixable in nature, and correlative to their enunciative regime and visual field, respectively. In his review on Foucault’s assertions on this relationship, Deleuze (2005) defined the visibilities as points of light, shapes made possible by the combination of curves of light and of [enunciative] knowledge in a diagram of power; each historic stratum, he explains, maintains its way to structure light in a way to distribute and manage the visible and the invisible as well as it supports an enunciative structure. Statements made of words and visibilities as points of light coexist. However, the tradition in discursive analyses rely on linguistic materials, trusting in the primacy of the sayable over the visual. Yet, the two modes of silence I apprehended have operated in my experience have happened because image interrupted the sayable. I believe such force derives from the two extreme visual fields the photographs belong to: the unspeakable and the artistic.

I understand the unspeakable refers to the (un)limits of humanity. Derrida (2012, p. 82) asserts that when one gets breathless to a drawing or painting there is a paradox: it is not the visible that causes surprise on the beholder, but the fact that it makes the invisible, or the visibility, visible. This paradox adds for discussions on the complex relations between spectator and image, eyes and visibility, visibility and existence, visibility and memory (trace). In his hauntological constructs, Derrida relates visibility, sensibility, and intelligibility in a blurred space where binarism is replaced by the figure of spectrality – the already-there which
can come to be or which haunts. Barbarism does not find representation in words, but as image, it makes an unbearable visibility visible. It refers to the Derridian notion of ghostly presences. The unsettling sense caused by the photojournalistic image in my analysis made visible a disjunction of elements and brutality which found no possible name. I understand that this affect is not discursive effect, but my perturbation as a spectator, a human being with regards to the inhuman. The uncanny or abject (Kristeva, 1988) image has no point of discursivity (Hashiguti, 2016) as it hurls one out of the site of enunciation.

The artistic, on the other hand, as I see it, can be enunciated, but more importantly, it has a capacity to perturb and transform. It refers to the singular plural, as conceptualized by Nancy (1996): art does not represent; it presents itself as a beginning of the beginning, disengaging the senses from signification (Heikillä, 2008, p. 270). As groundless as is, art, according to Nancy, opens up space for some art, some world, the coming into presence. As it has no fixed signification, it allows the spectator to relate to some other thing. This disengagement detaches art from the linguistic determination and relates it to the sensitive, the bodily and to affect. Sugimoto’s photograph was art that diffracted my gaze, building the possibility of, for a moment, becoming a nomadic vision that could “transform flows and energies, desires and imaginings” (Braidotti, 2012, p. 33). It created space and silence between the photographic series and me. Art, in this sense, refers to the capacity of certain photographs to transport the viewer to an aesthetic regime, instead of maintaining an idea of representation of an expression (Rancière, 2012). Such perturbation was a perceptual operation that could be ignored in the discursive analytical procedure, but that I propose needs to be addressed as an essential, creative part of the analysis that pushes the analyst to

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12 The capacity of art to make visibility visible can also be related to the idea of force that Deleuze defended in relation to art and painting: “In art, and in painting as in music, it is not a matter of reproducing or inventing forms, but of capturing forces. For this reason no art is figurative. Paul Klee’s famous formula – “Not to render the visible, but to render visible” – means nothing else. The task of painting is defined as the attempt to render visible forces that are not themselves visible.” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 56)

13 Following the Deleuzian discussion on Foucault’s concepts of points of power in a diagram, and Bellour’s notion of point of visuality (Bellour, 2008), a point of discursivity was conceptualized elsewhere (Hashiguti, 2016) as the singular moment a visual materiality becomes enunciation.
follow different paths of reflection. It is, in a Deleuzean philosophy of difference, a potency that can make a line of flight – a transformation of the constrained body of the analyst into free intensity. I can be related to the precariousness of the act of gazing, and to the dimension of the body in the reception of the image.

Precariousness and sensation in discourse analysis

Precariousness means the impossibility of stable meanings and identifications, or even of a distance between the self and the image. According to Ross (2008), the idea of a precarious condition of the spectator towards an image ratifies the bodily turn in visual studies: vision is not subsumed to the capacity of the eyes to see, but contradictorily, to the valorization of all the other senses. In traditional discourse analysis, the perceptual order has been relegated to that which can be associated to or enunciated as discourse, or within predetermined discursive frames that give an impression of distance between the subject and the object or even reduce the perceptive experience to discursive regularities. Spectatorship, however, positions the analyst as a subject of affect in the blurred space between her and the image. I understand that in this space, among various possibilities of affect, both the photograph of violence and Sugimoto’s artistic photograph provoked my body to respond in the form of sensations. They vibrated and resonated with me. In my reading, such affects are associated to the indiscernibility between spectator and image, and to the Deleuzian aesthetics of intensities (Deleuze, 2007). The spine tingling sensation, and the soothing feeling related to them, respectively, were affect in my nervous system; intensities affecting another intensity. There was a vital potency of the photographs that crossed my body and placed me somewhere else.

Particularly in the case of art, there is an invisible force to it (Deleuze, 2007). As a vibration, art causes sensations in the body. As potency, it may elude capture and imprisonment of the analyst in too fixed discursive frames that could hinder broader views or reflections on language and meaning making. As art itself, it is beyond narration. Thus, in this logic of sensation, these bodily effects cannot be subsumed under discourse. According to Vivar y Soler & Kawahala (2017), the Deleuzian attention to art, throughout his work, stresses the notion of art as power of living. Art
works in the porosity of discourse and makes possible for the subject to escape the normativity of the *dispositifs*\(^{14}\).

These characteristics and theorizations on image, art, perception and sensation matter for processes of discursive analysis for three reasons: (a) to bring a hybrid perspective to the analyses that celebrates and maintains the specificity of the visual materialities and that enables the perceptual, bodily dimension of the analyst to be addressed, (b) to expand the possibilities of theorization on language, image, art, and interpretation in discourse analysis, and (c) to state the place and importance of art in discursive analyses seen as intellectual processes. I propose the entanglement image-art-word-spectator may be discussed through discursive, visual and perceptual theories in a rhizomatic way that entangles not only concepts but also materials. Art, in such context, may or may not be part of the corpora, but it can interfere and provide new possibilities for discourse analysts to relate to their themes of research and to expand their interpreting horizon. Mostly it can lead the discourse analyst to form a composition with it in an intensive field.

**Final considerations**

In my research, I interpreted images in relational movements: photographs from two different series in relation to each other; photographs and discourse. In the process of reflection, silence and noise emerged to me as possible effects when I was analyzing my visual corpus and as the theme of violence emerged as a discursive order. The exposition of the selective and descriptive steps in my discursive analysis accounted for what I considered to be the openness and instability of the analytic frame as the object of discourse was not closed, the analysis was interpretation, and I, as the analyst, was affected by the object and interpellated as a spectator. These last characteristics led me to consider precariousness and sensation in the field of discourse analysis.

I exposed the modes of silence I understood took place in my analytical event and that referred to those images: that of a lack of words (the unsayable), when a particular photograph was accessed and left no possibility of verbal expression, and that of an excess of meaning, when a piece of art disrupted and silenced a discourse of violence that could not

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\(^{14}\) *Dispositifs* are concrete social apparatuses (Deleuze, 1992).
be tolerated anymore. These perturbations and the intimate relation to language were my basis in this essay to reflect on the precarious gaze of the analyst and on discursive regimes and visual fields. It also led me to a consideration of art and the transformations it can make in intellectual processes.

As discussed, many studies and theorizations in discourse analysis have built their frames solely or mostly from the analysis of the linguistic with the risk of reducing image and art to discourse. I propose that, at including images in discursive analyses, the perceptual and sensitive dimensions can be addressed, and that they help deepen the understanding of the relationship between discourse and visibility. I also propose that art may disarrange the analytical gaze and interfere positively, enriching the chances of lines of flight in intellectual processes. In this sense, I suggest precariousness and sensation are notions that can be fruitful in discursive analyses and that stand for the multiple, dynamic and perceptual dimensions of meaning making.

References


