

## The readers' turn: the return from the disaster

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**Abstract:** In this article we discuss issues about the ethical role of creation and imagination in the face of disaster remains. We examine the theoretical articulations within the reflections on the concepts of testimony and place of speech, putting them into perspective as regards remembering or retelling the hard times. To this end, we identify aporetic creases in these concepts, which insist on exploring the place of reading and of reader before a paradoxical time that also stands as production and invention of the present time. We explore the possible articulations between time, imagination, image, catastrophe and responsibility, resulting in an ethical point of view broadened by the act of creation, which considers reading as a producer of memory.

**Keywords:** listening, memory, history, image, imagination.

*"Images with no handhold, images freighted with  
all the orphanhood in the world".*  
(Bolaño, 2010, p. 206)

### Tables to pick up the pieces of the world

This text is an exposition and an opening to the problems of creation and truth in the account of the catastrophe. Theoretical constructs function like objects on a guidance table for returning from the disaster. Here, the word "table" holds a range of meanings that converge to a space for sharing and uniting mobile and heterogeneous elements. It can also be thought of as a plan to organize chaos, enabling both ex-posing and dis-posing elements that, once gathered in a certain way, impart meaning to the transmission of the trauma experience (Deleuze & Guattari, 2010).

Didi-Huberman (2018a) recalls that *Mensa*, in Latin, initially designated a kind of candy that was divided into pieces, arranged as an offering to the gods and as consumable food on an operating field that soon appropriated its name. An offering table, a table for cooking, a dissecting table, or a montage table. The philosopher opposes the notion of table to the notion of tableau – so close in the French vocabulary: *table* and *tableau*. The tableau brings us something ready, finished – a tableau we hang on the friezes of a museum like a work of art, a result in which everything has already been played out. A table, we use for new feasts, new configurations, functioning as a board or spatial plane in which heterogeneous elements assume a position, configuring

an arrangement or agency of bodies in a contagious relationship. On a table, everything can always be repeated, although it is necessary to point out that the repetitions will already come dissimilar in relation to the origin. This fact leads us to recognize each repetition as an expression of a variation. Of course we can put a tableau on a table, but we can put other tableaux next to the first one, and everything can change in this previous tableau.

The table serves as an operating field of the disparate and the mobile, of the heterogeneous and the open. The table is the support of a work to be taken up again, to modify. What we focus on in our text allows us to think of a montage table as the space where legibilities are built, as the worksite being done and redone, as a place of cohabitation between destruction and construction, death and life, what was and what will be. Like a board stretched out on a swimming pool's springboard, the laboratory table for the emergence of legibility shows itself as a place of passage, jump and flight suspended between two abysses: the one of heights and the one of depths, a place of uncertain and non-predetermined conduction, place of choices and expertise, of art and invention. Defined as an in-between times and between-spaces, the table operates as a neutral background to what can be turned on and off on its surface. This, in turn, becomes enchanted and mutated by the effects they allow to be seen and read from the events brought about by the gestures of a multitude of authors. It is not, therefore, about deriving meaning from an individuality, from a single author or subject. At the dinner plan of the feast of possible legibilities, an entire medium associated with small perceptions collaborates, becomes an accomplice and even an invader of what will come as a possible future or becoming.

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## After the disaster: aporetic works

We are faced with the complex work of remembering the catastrophe. Our crossing takes place over rickety broken-down bridges towards the dimly lit or even totally unclear remains and tracks that operate as visible tips of icebergs before our gaze or groping. We travel through a palimpsest in whose temporal layers are recorded, in a situation of near erasure, traces and marks of past situations, already holders of what could be called memories liable, to a greater or lesser degree, to be remembered and saved from their sinking and perdition in the mud of deposited materials and silence in the great past of oblivion. Our conceptual choices are centered on the gestures of establishing conditions of existence for what subsists in a minimal and virtual situation, seeking to enunciate disaster through the aporias of the impossible. These are the dangers of crossing the images of the disaster and the ordeals to which the reassemblies of the time suffered are exposed; this fact places us before the ethical challenge of reading the disaster, which will have to do with the proof and probation dimensions of the archive. It is the ethical challenge of opening our eyes to history.

A reader's image survives the similarities and dissimilarities of the concepts discussed here. This image concerns one time, that is, one "turn", a moment when the past meets the present like a lightning bolt that forms an ephemeral flash. This moment is also the meeting of an author and a reader, but an author who is no longer there except for his remains. Authors who tell about disasters suggest that we explore something of the epistemological cunning of the concepts of testimony and place of speech.

The question of similarity will be supported by the thought of Blanchot and Didi-Huberman when they think about the similarity of images. Armed with this conceptual apparatus, we consider it possible to think of the reader as a survivor: the survivor as akin to the dead, the reader as akin to the author. We will see how the readers' turn is made, equally, as the turn of a Herculean work of imagination. It is about an effort and a torment that expand points of view through the act of creation and place reading as a producer of memory.

If we take the premise that we can only talk about disaster when we return from it, or survive it, then we recognize that we are all after the disaster; that is, situated as its readers. This is how talking about disaster becomes, inexorably, talking about a time that has two ends: the end of a past-past and, the other, of a duration, that is, of what still insists even in its condition of remain asking for passage. It is a paradoxical time that indicates that, if an orientation is needed to return from the disaster, it should be that of an epistemological construction that links the after as the very insistence to reorient the reassembly of the past. Testimony and place of speech organize what we could call the readers'

turn, those who come only in some after, only after the writing (or only after the disaster), but who constitute the writing itself and the survival of the disaster; and, in a collective work or by a people (or even by a missing people), they build an hour of legibility.

Of the aporetic creases between testimony and the place of speech, there will remain a reader in spite of all, from something that the disaster itself inflicts on his images and on the work of reading them. The work of reading the disaster also entails the work of writing it. Hence the explorations on the similarities and dissimilarities between author and reader, or the reader as a producer of present and creator of past.

## Turns and voices in spite of all

There are at least two traditions for thinking about testimony in terms of its anthropological dimension of memory of the catastrophe: *zeugnis* and *testimonio*. Both allow themselves to be translated from German and Spanish into Portuguese as *testemunho* (testimony), but the permanence of the untranslatable terms saves the anchoring of time and space that uniquely envelops them.

In order to know these aspects of testimony, it is important to think about the distinct etymological roots of the word testimony (this time, from Latin) in order to locate the position that the witnesses of violence occupy at the time of their account. *Testis* and *superstes*: the former refers to the person who witnessed an event and can, therefore, give his testimony of what happened; on the other hand, *superstes* concerns the one who went through the event, that is, who was directly implicated in what is narrated. Some authors like to think of Homer as the first *superstes* of tradition. But the concept of testimony has little to do with Homer in fact; the example of the Greek hero sounds more like an idea to recognize the *superstes* as the one who completely crosses the event and narrates the story. However, there is nothing heroic about the theories of testimony. What makes reflections on the testimony, or even what will make it relevant to differentiate *testis* and *superstes*, are the 20th century catastrophes – from which there were no heroes, but survivors.

Agamben points out, starting from Primo Levi, that there is no real witness in the *Shoah* case, as those who really went through the event to the end would be those who did not return, "those who stared at the Gorgon" – these would be the "full witnesses" (Agamben, 2013). Here, however, the person who witnesses in their survivor dimension is taken into account. Since then, the philosopher, and even Primo Levi, mark the essential precariousness of the testimony that affirms itself under the sign of its collapse and its impossibility. What remains of Auschwitz, for Agamben, is its own inefficiency in telling. The *Shoah* survivor may be a *superstes*, but at the same time, a *testis* of the drowned.

He will always be in a precarious position in the report. And still, he will have to narrate, in spite of all. For if those who gazed upon the Gorgon cannot speak, the testimonies that remain serve as Perseus' shields to gaze upon horror.

In the Greek myth about Perseus, the face of Medusa Gorgon, with her huge teeth and protruding tongue, was so horrible that a mere glance at her turned men and beasts to stone. Perseus uses his polished shield to see Medusa's face without looking directly at it. Seligmann-Silva (2008) places literature and art as an artifice like a shield of Perseus to gaze at what would be unrepresentable or represent the unrepresentable with regard to disaster. We can also think of a reality that is reflected in a pool of water, although a gust of wind can cloud the surface and thereby the image. This turbidity is the very effect of time that moves the image; in the testimonial situation, the past is the present time, as in mirrors that do not grow old.

Primo Levi (1990) reminds us that those who witnessed were only those who just managed to stay at a distance from the event: "almost exclusively by those who, like myself, do not reach the bottom." (p. 5). For, he says, "those who did so never come back, or his capacity of observation was paralyzed by suffering and incomprehension" (p. 5). In a way, we can only imagine; but is it possible to imagine? Robert Antelme, in *The Human Race*, tells us about the concentration camps he survived as "a reality that seems to surpass the imagination" (Antelme cited by Seligmann-Silva, 2008, p. 70).

That said, the impossibility that haunts the testimony concerns not only the fact that the speaker has not completely gone through the event in the sense of having survived, but also the constitutive problem of narrating something that exceeds the references of the narratable. This direction encourages research that seeks to work with reports and memories of catastrophes, such as Seligmann-Silva (2013), Oliveira (2013), Rafaela Scardino (2013), Fonseca, Cardoso Filho and Resende (2014), and Fonseca, Caimi, Costa and Sousa (2018). Narrating what exceeds the references of the narratable is similar to seeing what exceeds the references of the visible, since this problem repeats itself even in the case of photographs. An ethical question of imagination and images, as images that remain, prompts us, therefore, to research what we can glean from the relationship between imagination and history.

In this debate, Didi-Huberman (2012) stands against anything unimaginable and tells us to "*imagine in spite of all*" (p. 227, emphasis added) by building a readability for certain images of concentration camps. The French philosopher, standing in the discussion of four particular photographs taken clandestinely by prisoners at Auschwitz in August 1944, reminds us that an ethic of images must take into account a permanently cleaved situation. Therefore,

the expression "in spite of all" denotes a laceration: while "everything" sends us back to the power of historical conditions for which we still cannot find answers, the "despite" resists this power solely by the heuristic power of the singular.

The 1944 images existed due to a complex job, but they delegate another job to the future: that of imagining what happened there. In this case, imagination works as a shield-image (Didi-Huberman, 2012) that, insofar as it protects us, helps us to face, to confront. This is a position in relation to the image that does not serve to cover the true face of the past: it serves to face it, to confront it, to question it, even to cut off its head.

Such reflections on imagination, image possibilities and narrability are the result of the proliferation of the need to narrate the atrocities involved in the Nazi concentration camps in World War II, whose greatest aporia will be the constant of the impossible to represent, but the essential to do so. This generates a lot of squeamishness and constitutes Didi-Huberman's position on imagining in spite of all. Because, as Agamben (2013) states, in the case of testimony, it will be necessary to accept this inefficiency in the language – if one wants to accept something that remains from Auschwitz.

Therefore, it is important to point out that the witness in the *zeugnis* tradition occupies a place not so much in the event in its legal consequences, but rather with regard to a new ethical normativity and an ethics of representation. "The survivor does not only bring the testimony of what happened, brought by the true/false of the court scene; his testimony implies a new ontology of the archive and a new epistemology of history" (Brito, 2013, p. 62).

This new ontology of the archive and the epistemology of history meets a need to circumvent what is considered indescribable, making the edges of *proof* and *ordeal* be extended to the point where they are included in each other without losing their differences. While the proof seeks to establish the facts in their immediate and timeless visibility, the ordeal is about establishing the difficult state of time of these experiences – which is where the requirement for the literary bias of the testimony is placed. If, on the one hand, the legal protocol wants to establish the facts with their proof, the writing of the testimony seeks to figure the event in its temporality, which is that of the ordeal. For Didi-Huberman (2018b), "we cannot give the camp images their 'legibility in spite of all' unless we observe an ethics of writing according to which, in the face of the unnamable, we must decidedly go on, that is, relentlessly temporalize" (p. 33).

The art historian evokes an account by Primo Levi in which he tells that, at the time of the opening of the concentration camps, when the survivors were already trying to tell what happened there to the soldiers, "the soldier listens at first, but then the guys go on and

on, they talk and they talk, and pretty soon the soldier isn't listening anymore" (Didi-Huberman, 2018b, p. 37). Then the philosopher interprets that those who had just opened their eyes to the proofs (what Levi calls "dead bodies lie on the ground amidst the trash, and guys just walk past them"), were already closing them to the ordeal itself, that is, "who were still unable, because they did not find the time, to find a legibility for the experience of those who were nevertheless standing before their eyes, those who were already attempting in vain to tell them about their experience" (Didi-Huberman, 2018b, p. 37).

The testimony of the *Shoah* starts to tension the relationship between imagination and history, and this sets up a crisis in the indices of representation of what happened. Here is an antagonistic debate about the unimaginable and the place of imagination in the account of the catastrophe. According to Seligmann-Silva (2008), imagination presents itself as a means to face this crisis of testimony, which originates in the victim's own inability to testify, the inability to imagine the fields – the unlikely element of that reality alongside the imperative need to testify as a means of survival. "Here, literature is called upon in the face of trauma to serve it" (Seligmann-Silva, 2008, p. 70) in what concerns the ordeal. We add that not only literature, but the images that – in turn, according to the support of Maurice Blanchot (2011) to be explored in the last item before the conclusion of this writing – have to do with the literary space itself, which will then have to do with time and with similarity – similarity of the author and the reader of the responsibility of the time they share.

The *testimony*, or Hispanic-American *testimonio*, aspect of the testimonial tradition sustains this debate on the constitutive impasses of narrating the time suffered. However, it relies on a specific context whose decisive reference is no longer the *Shoah*, but the murderous dictatorships perpetrated in Latin America during the Cold War. Thinking about "this body, this pain, this hunger" (Penna, 2013) will result in an important emphasis in the *testimonio* literature on the idea that literature can function as a counter-archive; that it can function as a version of history to detriment of the silence and secrecy of the violence they intend to denounce – including in the legal field. Hence, today, before us, we have a proliferation of first-person testimonies, frontally opposed to the official version of dictatorial regimes. According to Brito (2013), "in the memory of the Testimonio, many reports move away from the strict concept of 'literature' by seeking to reestablish the truth of the dictatorial persecution" (p. 72). It is about raising ("raising" as a child is raised?) the word, in search of a record of history that, until then, only others have spoken about, who were not granted the role of author of their own texts.

These reflections on the tradition of the *testimonio* can be accurately and forcefully updated in the

propositions of Djamila Ribeiro (2019) about the place of speech. With this concept, the philosopher, who in addition to being a woman and a black writer, presents us with voices that have been silenced for centuries by race, gender and class oppressions and, thus, exposes an existing system that makes narratives impossible.

Recent studies point to this perspective of the place of speech as a concept capable of opening up history, of presenting us with another history. In the article "Rehearsing places of listening: dialogues between psychology and the concept of place of speech" (Gorjon, Mezzari, & Basoli, 2019), the authors emphasize the relationship between the place of speech and "listening" as a concept explored by psychology and psychoanalysis, which is fundamental as an exercise in alterity. In "Of whom does the place of speech speak?" (Name, 2020) and "The 'place of speech' and the 'speeches of the place' in literary enunciation: the postcolonial dilemma" (Mattos, 2021), the concept is added to feminist studies and decolonial literature, permeating the discursive conflicts about the production and legitimation of knowledge and to whom authority and credibility are attributed. This is also the path of the article by Rayann de Carvalho (2020), who speaks of an epistemic right commonly denied to those who suffer from the violence, exploitation and domination of a colonial mark. In the article "'Place of speech': enunciation, subjectivation, resistance", Mónica Fontana (2017) operates the place of speech to expose the crisis triggered when historically silenced voices enter the scene. There is a profusion of research that focuses on voices that suffer from history, in which the fact that such voices are historically silenced is not without effect on how what is said is heard or legitimized in the present.

In reflections on testimony, there will be an ethical construction on the gap that implies speaking for others, because either these others are no longer here to speak, or the act of speaking itself is corrupted by the traumatic dimension of the referent. In the case of the place of speech, these others speak for themselves, they speak precisely while their place of speech is recognized only as the Other – the "foreigner", the "exotic", the "subaltern". Here, there is no need to measure the distance of what happened and what this implies in the indices of its representability; in this case, saying that the report is precarious or that it goes beyond imagination seems to corroborate the violence that the theoretical construction on the place of speech intends to denounce.

The place of speech concerns the insurgence of a voice that demands to speak for itself – no longer for others to speak for it. Hence, Djamila Ribeiro points out that it is not just a matter of legitimizing the voice, as the right to speak, but legitimizing the story that is told. The philosopher tells us that to understand the place of speech it is necessary to echo the Portuguese black thinker

Grada Kilomba (2019): “Who can speak? What happens when we speak? What are we allowed to speak about?” (Ribeiro, 2019, p. 77). As certain identities have been historically silenced and disempowered in the epistemic sense, it is a question of locating or temporalizing who can speak or not, which voices are legitimized and which are not.

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Subalternized subjects' place of speech and testimony can be studied as theories of memory insofar as they assess and seek to give visibility to the weight of times in the possibility of enunciating time itself: possibility of some and impossibility of others. In this approach, in the case of the place of speech, it would be possible to think of a “full witness”. The places of speech are hierarchical: those at the top can speak, those at the bottom cannot. So there are certain places that are violated daily by their silencing, based on this hierarchy. Here, indeed, there is the report of those who stare at the Gorgon, when this means delegitimization/paralysis of the word always every day. Furthermore, here there is not always a shield of Perseus, but rather the survivals of the image of the slave Anastácia.

Anastácia, whose African name is unknown, was an enslaved woman whose image comes to us today in the form of a bust of a black woman wearing a torture mask that covers her mouth – preventing her from eating and speaking. However, Anastácia's mask is not a definitive image of the black woman's place of speech, according to the articulation proposed by Djamila Ribeiro. It denotes, rather, the difficult state of time, that is, the ordeal that certain places of speech need to go through to make themselves heard and exist. And it is “the mask” that gives its name to the first chapter in a book by black thinker Grada Kilomba (2019) on the memory of everyday racism. The author shows us the memory of having heard about this mask many times in her childhood, which leads her to recount this story of the mask of silencing, remounting it in the present haunted by it.

The black writer Conceição Evaristo reminds us of this image when she speaks of an insistence on the word despite the mask. Djamila Ribeiro uses the following comment by Conceição Evaristo about this image: “we speak through the holes in the mask and sometimes we speak with such power that the mask is shattered. And I think that shattering is our symbol, because our speech forces the mask” (Evaristo quoted by Ribeiro, p. 76).

Place of speech, in spite of all. As Djamila Ribeiro (2019) points out, we all have a place of speech. What the thinker does is to affirm the place of speech that has always been silenced in history as a place of legitimate speech – of blacks and, mainly, of black women. These places of speech can also relate

to an aporia, characterized by mischaracterization and silencing. However, while thinkers have this diagnosis, they also refute, in order not corroborate what you want to fight, working themselves as the very proof of a splintering of the difficult possibility of displacements of places of speech. Therefore, they point to a creative use of the place of speech in order to build emancipatory solutions.

It is in this sense that Djamila Ribeiro reminds us, in the first pages of her book, about the black feminist thinker Lélia Gonzalez, in an article published in 1984, entitled “Racism and sexism in Brazilian culture”, about the issue of using the dominant language as a way of maintaining power and delegitimizing the word. Lélia Gonzalez talks about people whose form of speech differs from the cultured form. Faced with disdain and condescension (in front of those who speak *Framengo* instead of *Flamengo*, for example), he named as “Pretuguese” the valuation of the language spoken by black African peoples enslaved in Brazil, in which the linguistic mark of an African language in which the L does not exist survives.

We note, therefore, an act of creation that updates a temporary ballast occupying a reality given as ready, a language given as ready – another readability for the mask image. A legitimacy of the past that the present of the concept of place of speech allows us to read; hence, it would not only be a legitimacy, but also a readability: it allows us to read a difficult state of time.

The signature of the disaster does not only pose a problem of the representability indices of what happened or whether the past is imaginable; in this one, it would be necessary to interrupt to ask: but from which place of speech is the story being told?

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Perhaps something that can converge these epistemological trends on the voices of disaster is to come to think of them in their dimension of proof and ordeal as a way of inhabiting the aporias. “Revealing the truth without having a way” (Brito, 2013, p. 70) or speaking without having a way. This makes us jump to another notion of testimony implied in the reflections about the readers' turn and which finds an exception, or rather, resistances similar to those pointed out by the issue of the place of speech.

This other notion of testimony, which is not really a new notion, but the other face present in those two traditions mentioned, is a condition for every testimony. Anna Basevi (2013), in an article about literature as a way of inhabiting the aporias of testimony, points us to the importance of expanding this concept.

It is a concept proposed by Jeanne Marie Gagnebin, which concerns testimony as “one who does not leave the table” or “one who does not leave”. These expressions are decanted from a much talked

about dream of Primo Levi (1988) described in *Is this a man?*, which he says is a kind of recurring dream in the countryside. In this dream, when he returns home with the intense happiness of telling others about the horror already passed and, still alive, the author suddenly realizes, with despair, that no one is listening, that the listeners get up and leave indifferently. A threat makes the listeners leave the table, in Levi's dream, and it is the exile and the impossible of the narrative. Gagnebin (2014) comments that the listeners "go away, they do not want to know, they do not want to let this story, breathless, always threatened by its own impossibility, reach them, threaten, also, *their* still quiet language" (p. 57). The philosopher freezes this scene to speak to us from a testimony perspective. Here, she presents us with a reading that says that "a witness would also be the one who does not go away" (p. 57).

In the case of the place of speech, this scene can be approximated to when Grada Kilomba (2019) tells us about being necessary, by those who have always been authorized to speak, to listen.

The philosopher speaks of a white fear that concerns remaining unconscious as a protection against truths and realities arising from the knowledge of the "Others" – those who are outside or minored in the power circuit that gives legitimacy and reality to what is said. Following Djamila Ribeiro's (2019) exposition by reading Grada Kilomba (2019), white people's difficulty in listening occurs because they are confronted with collective secrets (secrets such as slavery, colonialism, racism) "and unpleasant truths of 'very dirty story'; thus, white subjects argue that they do not know, do not remember, do not believe or have not been convinced" (Ribeiro, 2019, pp. 78-79). These are movements to maintain their still quiet place of speech.

Through these studies, it is unveiled that the difficulty of listening comes from a possible awareness and even from a supposed guilt for what is being reported. It is a reading that also involves the reader and entangles him in the event itself, as an accomplice. Entangled, he appears before himself in the folds of the testimonial narrative, and he, the reader, appears as a criminal, as one of the possible executioners, as an ignoble person about whom he himself can harbor shame. The narrative would be like the distension of a sheet of time and, in this distension, in this sheet spread as a kind of table appears the figure of the one who listens as one of the silent protagonists of the moral crime of infamy. Or even of the crime, in its strict sense of killing the expendable.

The novel *Noturno do Chile*, by Roberto Bolaño (2004), tells the memories of a priest in the historical time corresponding to the disappearances, persecutions and mass arrests in Chile. At a certain point in the book, in a kind of soiree for artists and intellectuals, a drunk character wanders through corridors looking for a bathroom, goes out looking for relief, goes down

stairs, accidentally crosses doors and corridors, which are like a mist, until he opens a door where he catches the tortured man in a metal bed, blindfolded, in a basement below the meeting where guests happily discuss literature and frivolities.

For Brito (2013), who evokes this scene to think about the work of reading the testimony, "reading the testimony is going through the mist to find the victim in bed" (p. 76). Mist of paralysis and urgency. In the insurgence of speech from places of speech whose mouth is muzzled by the hierarchy of legitimacy of voices, this tortuous crossing concerns the ethical requirement of the work of imagining (which, at the same time, takes place as *hearing*) the shattering, despite the mask. The relationship between reading the testimony and recognizing these places of speech has to do with the difficult state of time of these experiences, that is, a memory that, in order to be readable, in the sense of visible and understandable, the proof is not detached from the ordeal. Therefore, capturing such voices as inappropriate or aggressive is a symptom of the past that they echo, it is to close one's eyes to the ordeal that makes one deny the proof (which, in this case, can be understood as the very place of the voice as inappropriate or aggressive). Silence and invisibility of "subjects considered implicit within a certain hegemonic standardization" (Ribeiro, 2019, p. 43) who, when speaking, find listeners who simply get up from the table. They rise from the montage table, as montage is a readability operation. So, we reiterate that the time of readers implies remaining on the table and taking it a montage table.

### **From similarity to similarity: reading and emancipating images from disaster**

The arrival of the readers' turn involves not leaving, but also crossing the mist and, in other words, handling the shield: reading what was not written in Anastacia's image – imagine: composing the ordeal of the proof. In handling the shield of Perseus, there is actually a detour, to look directly at the monster that turns the men who face it to stone. Thus, handling the shield adds up to an argument for looking away from what we refer to as "opening your eyes to history". From a straight and ostentatious look, inquisitive like that of a judge, to another type, half crooked, artful, wandering, childish, cleaved. It is the reader's strategy to stand the evidence that can bring him down and kill him for the content of what they reveal and the shock they cause. A detour to take longer, to infinite patience in the face of what is to come and never arrive in full, but gradually, as long as there is an opening to arrive and be seen and heard.

Not leaving, crossing the mist, handling the shield, locating the places of speech: active verbs that speak of taking a position before time and images,

or the inexhaustible time of images. The position of a *lego* assembler child – looking for the possible in the inextricable of the fragment – would be equivalent to a position of reader of unprecedented violence in an active movement of imagination on the legibility of the story. For history is not there for us to reap as it was; historical knowledge is not an act of displacement to the past to describe and collect it “as it is”. In his theses on the concept of history, Benjamin (2012) already told us that historical knowledge only happens from the “now”, that is, from a state of our present experience from which it emerges.

As we think of the image in the field of history, we see, with Benjamin (2006), that every image carries a historical index. For the German philosopher, this historical index not only indicates that the images belonged to a certain period; it indicates, most of all, that they achieve readability only at a certain time. And the fact that images reach legibility only at a certain time represents a certain critical point in the movement that animates them. This critical point is a moment of memory and legibility – once, a chance – which, until then, offered the past its more or less recognizable picture. Didi-Huberman (2018b) asserts that this critical point is called, by Benjamin, image.

Therefore, reading the disaster poses an ethical challenge to the present, touching on this thought of what imagination and image can do for history.

When we talk about a position of similarity between author and reader, it is in the sense of a production of the present in the form of a co-engendering of these two figures in the face of the unimaginable and the unheard of. It is an ethic about reading the disaster that also touches on an ethic of looking at the images that, according to Didi-Huberman, as already said, must take into account a permanently cleaved situation. Why “cleaved”? Here, the thinker is operating the concept of dialectical image proposed by Benjamin. Dialectics as one that does not seek a synthesis or resolution, but that puts it in permanent conflict and paradox; Benjamin speaks of a “dialectic at rest” – that is, this cleavage would keep the parts at rest, preventing the elements from being unified, assimilated or resolved. In this sense, the image does not resurrect the past; at most, it *recites*, despite as little as it can, the memory of the times. In Didi-Huberman, therefore, the image is not a thing, it is an act. It is an act of imagination that always puts into play what we see and what looks at us, or we can think of the movement of proof and ordeal of the memory of the catastrophe. “It is necessary, in front of each image, to ask how it looks (at us), how it thinks (us) and how it touches (us) at the same time” (Didi-Huberman, 2018a, p. 85).

The energy of Perseus unfolds in the image, in the sense of a “courage to know” (Didi-Huberman, 2012, p. 224), which would be the courage to “incorporate in our memory a knowledge that, once recognized, suppresses

a taboo that horror, always paralyzing, continues to weigh on our intelligence of history”. Taking images of the disaster as dialectical images is equivalent to demanding a dangerous work on its readability indices:

not ceasing to widen our children’s eyes at the image (accepting the ordeal, the not knowing, the danger of the image, the failure of language) and not ceasing to build, as adults, the “knowability” of the image (which supposes the knowing, the point of view, the act of writing, the ethical reflection). (Didi-Huberman, 2018b, p. 70)

The similarity to which we go back at various points in this text responds to a disjunction or to this permanently cleaved situation, insofar as we think of similarity as the *endless*. Didi-Huberman explores this notion in an article dedicated to thinking about image in Blanchot, showing how Blanchot sought the experience of literature in image and similarity, and even how the concept of image fits into the concept of literary space. The title of this article by the art historian is “From likeness to likeness”. In it, we will have the elaboration of a similarity that does not limit itself to the repetition of the same, but drags its infinite differentiation; this allows us to think of resemblance as disjunction. For Blanchot (2010), the world of resemblances is vast as night, because one can never end with a similarity: “if the realm of image can be said as vast as night, it is, therefore, above all because of this perpetual – ruminant – remission from likeness to likeness” (Didi-Huberman, 2011, p. 31).

Didi-Huberman reads these words as the call to understand the image as a fundamental modification of temporality. It does not treat the past in such a way that it explains the present, but rather, what is at issue is how the now meets the past to form a constellation of meaning. As in the dialectic that Didi-Huberman presents from Benjamin, for Blanchot the image is both evidence and enigma (Didi-Huberman, 2011). Therefore, it is a time that stands as an enigma to be collected and deciphered when recited.

This makes us think of another character by Roberto Bolaño (2016), this time from the novel *2666*: Almafiano, looking at the city through the windows, sitting in the back seat of the car, in a state of almost sleep, sees “Images with no handhold, images freighted with all the orphanhood in the world” (p. 206). What the Chilean writer is doing here is asking us to imagine, in an insoluble and endless way, what such images might be. They contain something in themselves, but something we need to keep looking and imagining because of their strange expression “all the orphanhood in the world”, which fits only in images that require a gesture of imagining in spite of all.

Blanchot (cited by Didi-Huberman, 2017) speaks of an image that

it is no longer the one that allows us to keep the object absent, but the one that catches us by its very absence, there where the image, always at a distance, always absolutely close and absolutely inaccessible, escapes us, opens itself to a neutral space, in which we can no longer act, and opens us, also to us, to a kind of neutrality in which we stop being ourselves and oscillate strangely between the Self, Him and nobody. (p. 236)

## Final considerations

If remaining at the table after the disaster would be taking it as a montage table, then opening our eyes to history would be tantamount to temporalizing the images of it that are left to us. This look includes a duration outlined in the concepts of the dialectic of the image. Here, we want to conclude by saying that temporalizing images has to do with emancipating them.

Emancipate – a word as political as it is full of history. In a brief genealogy explored by Didi-Huberman (2018), we learn that emancipate comes from the Latin *emancipare*. *Mancipare* means “to sell”; and *mancipare* means releasing something or someone from an authority which, in turn, is itself linked to a right of property, a right acquired by a commercial operation, an act of sale. “An image is sold and bought, and this is common”, says the art historian. But it must not be forgotten that, by acquiring it, its owner acquires the right to hang it in his room (or even lock the image in a safe), as well as to make it disappear from the public sphere, from the spectators community.

*Mancipas* refers to what can be sold and traded (even people when they are bought as slaves).

Didi-Huberman chooses two aspects of the survivals of *emancipare* to think about emancipating images. The first is this sense of emancipating as

to displace the place of a sale value, that is, to read something invaluable in the images. Didi-Huberman speaks of something invaluable that signals the present towards an issue raised in the past. In this sense, the philosopher provides us with an example from the world of Roman law, with regard to the practice of the *imago*. The *imago* refers to busts of emperors that could be reproduced but not sold, and could only be passed on from generation to generation. The *imago*, one might say, was “*ex-mancipata*”.

A second aspect points out that emancipate resides in the memory that the commercial word *mancipiun* comes from *manus*, “hand”, and from *capere*, “to take”. Here is the ethical aspect of emancipating, because one can do better or worse with one’s hand; one can take a mobile to immobilize it, an object to possess it, or a person to immobilize and possess it at the same time. Or the other way, the other use value of taking it by hand, because one can take a friend, a child by the hand. “*Mancipare* is taking something – even someone – in one’s hand that will make your property private. *Emancipare* would be taking someone by the hand to guide him towards a free zone, a space of freedom where they will not be ‘owned’ by anyone” (Didi-Huberman, 2018b, p. 143).

Emancipating images is taking them as dialectic, which implies affirming an invaluable sign of the present towards the past, articulating time and space in a changing way. Taking by the hand, reading, taking the position of a reader to follow, from likeness to likeness, to an area of open possibilities.

Our hypothesis, in this text in which we seek to raise the readers’ turn, is that the true reading of the impossible report of the disaster will only occur with the possibility of the reader to *emancipate* the image through a *work* (of imagination, after all), seeking the similarity, not assimilation, of author and reader. Fossil in motion. Table. Time shared at a table and lingering at the table.

## A vez dos leitores: o retornar do desastre

**Resumo:** Neste artigo levantamos as problemáticas sobre uma função ética da criação e da imaginação diante dos restos do desastre. Objetivamos percorrer articulações teóricas que enredam as reflexões sobre os conceitos de testemunho e de lugar de fala, colocando-os em perspectiva no que concerne a remontar ou recontar o tempo sofrido. Para isso, localizamos vincos aporéticos nesses conceitos, os quais insistem na exploração do lugar da leitura e do leitor diante de um tempo paradoxal que se coloca também como produção e invenção do tempo presente. Exploramos o caminho das articulações entre tempo, imaginação, imagem, catástrofe e responsabilidade, tendo como resultado a ampliação de um ponto de vista ético pelo ato de criação, que coloca a leitura como produtora de memória.

**Palavras-chave:** escuta, memória, história, imagem, imaginação.

## Le tour des lecteurs : le tour du désastre

**Résumé :** Cet article addresses questions relating to the ethical role of creation and imagination in the face of vestiges of catastrophes. In our examinations of the theoretical articulations au sein of reflections on the concepts of Temoignage et la Place de la Parole, concerning the souvenir or the recital of difficult moments. Pour cell, in our identifications of the plis aporétiques of the concepts, which insist on the exploration of the place of the lecture and the lecteur devant a paradoxical temps which also



involves the production and d'invention du temps present. Nous explorations of the possible articulations between the temps, the imagination, the image, the catastrophe and the responsabilité, the entrant l'élargissement of a point of vue éthique à travers the act of creation, which consider the lecture comme productrice de mémoire.

**Mots-clés :** écoute, mémoire, histoire, image, imagination.

### El turno de los lectores: el regreso del desastre

**Resumen:** En este artículo planteamos el papel ético de la creación y la imaginación ante los restos del desastre. Pretendemos pasar las articulaciones teóricas que fundamentan las reflexiones sobre los conceptos de testimonio y de *lugar de enunciación*, poniéndolos en perspectiva en cuanto a volver a montar o volver a contar el tiempo sufrido. Para ello, ubicamos las arrugas aporéticas en estos conceptos, que insisten en la exploración del lugar de la lectura y del lector antes de un tiempo paradójico que también aparece como producción e invención de la actualidad. Exploramos el camino de las articulaciones entre tiempo, imaginación, imagen, catástrofe y responsabilidad, ocasionando la expansión de un punto de vista ético por el acto de creación, que sitúa a la lectura como la productora de memoria.

**Palabras clave:** escucha, memoria, historia, imagen, imaginación.

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