



The Politics of Silence: art and education at *Política do Impossível*/collective's poetic

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ABSTRACT – The Politics of Silence: art and education at *Política do Impossível* collective's poetic – The paper aims to think the articulations between art, politics and education within the action titled *Traga Sua Luz*, carried out in 2008 by *Política do Impossível* collective. Intended to question the process of gentrification in Luz neighborhood – downtown São Paulo –, it consisted of a silent and collective performance in which candles and small lamps were carried and deposited on lands expropriated by the then mayor. Through the theoretical contributions of Walter Benjamin, Georges Didi-Huberman, Roland Barthes and Jacques Rancière, this paper elucidates how the suspension of the merely communicative function of language permeates art, education and a politics of silence.

Keywords: **Artistic Action. Politics of Aesthetics. Art and Politics. Collectives. Education.**

RÉSUMÉ – La Politique du Silence: art et éducation dans la poétique du collectif *Política do Impossível* – L'article est destiné à penser les relations entre art, politique et éducation dans le cadre de *Traga Sua Luz*, action réalisée en 2008 par le collectif *Política do Impossível*. Visant à mettre en question le processus de gentrification engendré au quartier de Luz – au centre de São Paulo – il s'agissait d'une performance collective et silencieuse, dans lequel des bougies et des petites lampes ont été portés et déposés sur des terres expropriées par le maire de l'époque. À travers les théories de Walter Benjamin, Georges Didi-Huberman, Roland Barthes et Jacques Rancière, cet article explique comment la suspension du devenir uniquement communicatif du langage imprègne art, éducation et une politique du silence.

Mots-clés: **Action Artistique. Politique de l'Esthétique. Art et Politique. Collectif. Education.**

RESUMO – A Política do Silêncio: arte e educação na poética do coletivo *Política do Impossível* – O artigo trata das articulações entre arte, política e educação no âmbito da ação *Traga Sua Luz*, realizada pelo coletivo *Política do Impossível* em 2008. Destinada a questionar o processo de gentrificação que atingia o bairro da Luz – região central da cidade de São Paulo –, ela consistiu de uma performance coletiva e silenciosa, em que velas e pequenas lâmpadas eram carregadas e depositadas em terrenos desapropriados pela prefeitura. Por meio dos subsídios teóricos de Walter Benjamin, Georges Didi-Huberman, Roland Barthes e Jacques Rancière, o presente artigo elucidada de que modo a suspensão do devir meramente comunicativo da linguagem permeia arte, educação e uma política do silêncio.

Palavras-chave: **Ação Artística. Política da Estética. Arte e Política. Coletivos. Educação.**

Introduction

Based in the city of São Paulo, the *Política do Impossível* collective carried out several actions of education and collective artistic productions between 2007 and 2008. Its composition included participants from other collectives especially active in São Paulo on the first decade of the 21st century, such as *Esqueleto Coletivo*, *Contrafilé* and *Frente Três de Fevereiro*. Like the collectives mentioned above, *Política do Impossível* mobilizes its actions in the interstices between activism and art. In this paper, we give special attention to the action *Traga Sua Luz* [Bring Your Light], held in 2008, aimed at questioning the gentrification¹ process that reached the neighborhood of Luz, which caused the rapid expulsion of local populations and crack users from this central region of São Paulo. In a collective publication, we find the following diagnosis of this process:

At Luz neighborhood, ‘with the power of inspection and administrative sealing’, starting from a public decree that determines an area of 269 thousand square meters for expropriations, the city hall has been inspecting, interdicting, expropriating and demolishing real estate in the region, to make way for companies the government considers most trustable, such as advertising, call centers, besides culture, technology, and information agencies. These credits, indirectly financed by the public purse, take the form of tax rebates and ‘development certificates’ (Coletivo Política do Impossível, 2008a, p. 24, translated).

The intervention proposed by *Política do Impossível*, later described in greater detail, consisted of the mobilization of a night walk through Luz neighborhood, carried out silently and collectively. Each participant carried candles and lights, that would be deposited on land expropriated by the city hall at the end of the walk.

Although the action could be read and understood as a performance, this category does not completely match the collective’s proposition, even though some photographs of its interventions were eventually incorporated into artistic exhibitions and museum collections². This paper is not concerned with classifying or inserting it within the context of art history, but rather in observing the way in which the collective departs from the social movements’ own claims and agendas to propose actions permeated by what we call *poetics*³.

In this paper we also show how the activism of *Política do Impossível* collective is not based on the most common ways of political mobilization, namely: the faith on the effectiveness of the transparent diffusion of an agenda that, by denouncing social structures and conflicts, would lead to a collective awareness. More deeply – or more superficially⁴ – we explain how *Traga Sua Luz* privileges the eruption of disruptions or intervals in what the French philosopher Jacques Rancière (2004) would call the distribution of the sensible⁵, therefore assuming politics as an aesthetic⁶ matter, the result of a dissent (Rancière, 1999).

We are especially interested in the image of the light, which at the same time condenses the name of the neighborhood where the action took place and associations with the distribution of visibilities and invisibilities that permeates the idea of politics as an aesthetic matter. This paper relates this cartography of the visible, where survivals and disappearances abound, to the image of fireflies, as conceived by the French critic Georges Didi-Huberman (2011). The abovementioned analogy is built in visual and conceptual terms.

Thereafter, the paper shows how, within *Traga Sua Luz*, the use of silence as a strategy for meaning production points to a denial to believe in the transparency of language as a driving force for politics. We juxtapose the privilege the collective gives to silence to the principles of an economics of meanings, following Roland Barthes' thinking, in which politics is inextricably linked with a refusal of the merely communicative becoming of language. The French literary critic condenses these attributes on what he calls the *Responsibility of Form* (Barthes, 2013).

The collective conceives its artistic processes in the intersections between “[...] politics and education, permeating them, undoing the categories that demarcate what is one discipline or the other” (Coletivo Política do Impossível, 2008a, p. 9, translated). But how does this juxtaposition between art, politics and education make itself thinkable? What horizons of these three categories is the collective referring to? This paper seeks to understand this collective's statement throughout Roland Barthes and Jacques Rancière's thought, which merges the three disciplines⁷.

In this regard, it is relevant to examine some of the poetical and political logics that underlies the actions of *Política do Impossível* collective, since they give rise to cross-cutting questions addressing both the field of art and the universe of possibilities of education and politics. How does the collective question the use of urban land, a classical claim of social movements, without being restricted to raising a flag or offering a pamphlet? What happens when activism refrains from articulating a discourse and invests on the uncertainty and vagueness of meaning as a possible field of political repercussion? How should we think of educational paradigms that retreat from the task of informing? Would this investment in the unfinished, in meanings that unfold randomly, constitute the core of the imbrications between art and politics, as conceived by Jacques Rancière (2010)? What kind of tension between collectivity and individuality does the action mobilize?



Image 1 – *Política do Impossível* Collective: *Traga sua Luz* [Bring Your Light] (2008).

Source: Author's archive.

***Traga sua Luz* [Bring Your Light]**

On May 15, 2008, the *Política do Impossível* collective called interested people and the local population to walk from *Luz Train Station*⁸ to land

expropriated and demolished by the then City Hall, carrying candles, lights, lamps or lanterns. The silent and nocturnal action gathered about fifty people and ended with the installation of two hundred paper bags and lighted candles on one of the expropriated lands (Image 1). Here is a brief account of the action:

Citizens mobilized by *Fórum Vivo*⁹ and *Política do Impossível* ensemble held, on Wednesday, May 15, 2008, a collective and illuminated walk in the streets of Luz neighborhood in São Paulo. The main objective of this symbolic action was to promote the meeting between different people who live, act or think the region [...]. People lit by candles, LED necklaces, bicycle lights, and lanterns walked from Luz station, in São Paulo downtown, to Gusmões street, where one can find the first two blocks expropriated and demolished by the so called 'Projeto Nova Luz' [New Luz Project]. Two blocks had vanished. Dozens of buildings where hundreds of people used to live or work (Coletivo Política do Impossível, 2008a, p. 111, translated).

Traga Sua Luz unfolds from the word *Luz* [light], which names the neighborhood where the action took place. Here the light appears literally, resulting in a collective walk that can be associated with a political demonstration, a funeral march or a religious procession. But what was the purpose of mourning in Luz neighborhood? What did it mean to be lost in the unfettered process of gentrification that struck it? What lights went out, and which bodies were thrown into darkness and destined for invisibility? What multiple political senses can be mobilized from the idea of light? These seem to be some of the main concerns of *Política do Impossível*. The collective takes the name of the neighborhood as a matter of conceptual and poetic elaboration, some kind of lenses from which emerge a series of questions and even the formal strategy for action:

For me, this other look also brings the desire to avoid erasure. In this situation, for example, we are seeing that a neighborhood can be completely destroyed and erased and that it can make no difference to many people, only to the people who are there. So, this is a movement to look at it in another way, to bring out other meanings regarding what is happening (Coletivo Política do Impossível, 2008a, p. 135, translated).

At first, we could refer it to the paradigms of visibility very close to aesthetics: bringing something to light is to make it visible, but also to make it exist. Perhaps some of the multiple facets and meanings Georges Didi-

Huberman (2011) attributes to fireflies may be useful for us to think about *Traga Sua Luz*. The French critic finds in the image of the luminescent animal a possibility of theorizing about the small, weak and intermittent resistances, similar to the candle lights carried through the streets of Luz neighborhood. Wouldn't this collective body be similar to a swarm of fireflies, crossing the night and wandering aimlessly, creating aerial drawings? Didi-Huberman's analogy is not restricted to the visual aspect: the figure of candles and fireflies at the same time materializes the ephemeral character of the political act, whose precariousness is so often underlined by Jacques Rancière (2005). It is a finite and burning matter whose brightness can be interrupted by a blow.

But Didi-Huberman thickens the metaphor of fireflies, always opposing them to the great lights: overexposure does not give us complete visibility, but it overshadows, making it impossible to grasp the small lights. The critic proposes an inverse practice, that of "saying *yes* in the night crossed by light glimmers and not being satisfied in describing the *no* of the light that overshadows us" (Didi-Huberman, 2011, p. 155, translated). It is certainly a way to combat the prevailing pessimism that permeates our present:

[...] the political and aesthetic urgency, in a 'catastrophe' period [...], therefore, would not consist in drawing logical conclusions from the decline until its horizon of death, but in finding the unexpected resurgence of this decline in the background of images that keeps moving in there, like fireflies or isolated stars (Didi-Huberman, 2011, p. 124, translated).

In a metaphorical way, the author invites us to the Benjaminian enterprise "to brush history against the grain" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 392), to observe the small survivals and make visible the smaller narratives lost in the great history, unveiling the "hidden power of the smallest gesture, the smallest word, the smallest face, the slightest flash" (Didi-Huberman, 2011, p. 88, translated). This exercise that interrogates the microscopic must also be transposed to *Traga sua Luz*. After all, how would the action proposed by the collective prevent the gentrification process that reached Luz neighborhood? The group did not intend to solve the problems of the neighborhood, nor to communicate or broadcast the local issues:

We believe the symbolic construction is our place of resistance: it has the power to interfere with the social narrative, to generate – however minimal – displacements in the established configuration of the possible [...]. When we speak of symbolic intervention, we refer not only to a result or a form, but to a whole space and time in which we deal with the subjective dimension of the construction of what is ‘public’, relating ourselves with the ‘invisible’, the ‘dreamed’, the ‘fragile’ (Coletivo Política do Impossível, 2008a, p. 144, translated).

Couldn’t we relate this “symbolic construction” with a certain distribution of the sensible, instituting the possibilities of time and space, precisely what politics, in all its fragility, would disturb? In this sense, the flickering and weakness of the lights emitted by candles and fireflies may express the very expectations of the effects of *Traga Sua Luz* on social reality: something very uncertain, hardly measurable and ineffective. This must not point to the inexistence of this potential, but to the necessity to look at the reality with other lenses. If we are able to interrogate all that is derisory, minimal and subtle, then we find in the interstices of hegemonic visibilities the little lights of Didi-Huberman.

But the significance of dazzling lights is not only metaphorical, it emerges literally in the processes of gentrification: the obliteration of twilight zones is invariably one of the consequences of urban transformations of this kind. The darkness is surpassed by a total, almost panoptic visibility, for the sake of safety and urban cleanliness. The standardization of urban design, which prevails in processes of this kind, is also a way of erasing the small stories and local narratives. Didi-Huberman invites us to think exactly what survives in these processes, such as “fleeting fireflies trying to make themselves as discreet as possible, while continuing to emit their signals” (Didi-Huberman, 2011, p. 17, translated). We should just be able to recognize these signs, but it is always difficult to capture phenomena operating at a deidentification basis, that refuses the purely communicational registry.

Despite making visible an extremely urgent urban agenda, the politics of the action is linked to the interruption of normality, on disrupting what Jacques Rancière (2004) calls a distribution of the sensible. This interruption, however, must be seen in its immanence. It is not a means to achieve certain ends: the very uncertainty it generates, the dissent that

constitutes it, is the point where *Traga Sua Luz* finally anchors its politics. The power contained in *Traga Sua Luz* is to place in the bystanders a promise of senses and sensations always to come, and not to instruct or raise awareness. Here the regime of complete visibility gives way to partial visibilities, always unfinished, like a proliferation of Didi-Huberman's small lights. But how can we make sense by refusing the urge to communicate? What interstitial zones may exist between communication and the production of senses?

At this point we can draw a parallel with some of the principles outlined by French philosopher and literary critic Roland Barthes, who opposes what he calls "intentional language" (Barthes, 1979, p. 71) within art. It is a logic of creation in which the artist shows his/her belief in a transparency of language, conceiving in advance the meanings that should be detached from the artwork. Referring to "shock photos", the theorist announces that:

[...] as we look at them, we are in each case dispossessed of our judgment: someone has shuddered for us, reflected for us, judged for us; the photographer has left us nothing – except a simple right of intellectual acquiescence: we are linked to these images only by a technical interest; overindicated by the artist himself, for us they have no history, we can no longer invent our own reception of this synthetic nourishment, already perfectly assimilated by its creator (Barthes, 1979, p. 72).

That is why the suspension of the purely communicative becoming of language – the intentional language –, which frees the artwork to be overloaded of meanings in advance, is a matter Roland Barthes dedicated so much of his thinking: "writing is in no way an instrument for communication, it is not an open route through which there passes only the intention to speak" (Barthes, 2009, p. 19).

Similarly to the principles mentioned above, the *Política do Impossível* ensemble struggles to avoid the "pamphleteering [discourse] as a medium that carries an ideology", seeking "to act first of all in the reconstruction of the world, and not in the creation of another possible world" (Coletivo Política do Impossível, 2008a, p. 136, translated). Thus, the collective works with an idea of resistance that is contiguous with what is given, in proximity to power itself, avoiding the transcendental idea of an exit, the

utopia of the outside of power. Interestingly, the effort to think about the suspension of language in its communicative becoming, which permeates Barthes's thought, stems from the conception that language would constitute an ubiquitous instance of power, but from which there would be no possible outside¹⁰ (Barthes, 2013).

Following Jacques Lacan's thought, Barthes thinks language as constituting the raw material of the unconscious, of an imaginary that never ceases to speak. According to the literary critic, language is not so much what we speak, but something through which we are incessantly spoken, in a "kind of internal radiophony continually sending from within us, even in our sleep" (Barthes, 1992, p. 4). Thus, language is bound in a kind of tiredness: "speech is that which is never castrated. It is what starts over and gets born again" (Barthes, 2013b, p. 272, translated): we resume, "[...] on our own, a speech a thousand times said, heard (worn speech), as if we were inventing it, with the certainty it was the first time" (Barthes, 2013b, p. 282, translated).

Thus, everything that wipes away the profusion of meaning repeatedly released in the imaginary, or interrupts the unstoppable chatter within the unconscious, would invariably stand against power, and therefore be provided with a political force. The presence of silence within *Traga Sua Luz* is symptomatic of the attention to establish a certain void of meanings where we can place ourselves, in contrast to the chattering of the ordinary political scene, in which discourse generally assumes the primacy. In Roland Barthes' thought, that economy of meanings is a task that arises not only for art but also for politics.

And no wonder Roland Barthes was always opposed to the vices of language, which he has so brilliantly scrutinized in his book *Mythologies*. They consist of a mythological matter that, once permeated with fixed and unchanging senses, loses its history and assumes the status of nature. According to Leyla Perrone-Moisés, Roland Barthes insists on pursuing "every commonplace, every slogan, every expression of common sense and good conscience" (Barthes, 2013, p. 63, translated). These sticky speeches, soaked in the glue of the imaginary, performatize a series of commonplaces, which the work of form would be able to stretch.

Thus, the French critic states that the struggle of a writer, or an artist, must be accomplished through language, within the language: “cheating with the language, cheating on the language” (Barthes, 2013, p. 17, translated). This carefully crafted language cheats the paradigm¹¹ or produces an interruption, either of rhythm¹² or of repetition discourse. In his words, “[...] form thus becomes more than ever an autonomous object, [...] and this object is a trouble-saving device: it functions as an economy signal” (Barthes, 2009, p. 27), which gets close to its zero degree. For Barthes there lies precisely the possibility of counter-servitude, of a politics immanent to *scripture* practice.

We could interpret the silence as a point where this care with a certain economy of meaning appears inside the poetics of *Traga Sua Luz*. The silence is responsible for airing the aesthetic-political form and making room for a multiple production of meanings, thus avoiding the clichés that watch and threaten to reduce them to stereotypes. If the walk with candles and luminescent objects is not exempted from the attribution of meanings – after all, as Barthes himself explains, nothing escapes the meaning, everything means – the silence of those who perform it distances the action of any communication becoming of language. Thus, it still works with a certain opacity of language, enabling the profusion of a myriad of wavering senses which are not only based on discursive order.

The French philosopher opposes this saturation of meanings, which subjects the artwork to the imperatives of univocal communication, to what he calls a responsibility of form (Barthes, 2013) or morality of form (Barthes, 2009). It is based on a pursuit of a rigor that both suspends the exclusively communicative becoming of language and affirms a proper form:

[...] writing is then reduced to a sort of negative mood in which the social or mythical characters of a language are abolished in favor of a neutral and inert state of form; thus thought remains wholly responsible, without being overlaid by a secondary commitment of form to a History not its own (Barthes, 2009, p. 77).

It is precisely this impulse of sense-wiping that places Roland Barthes in opposition to every virtuous operation in the use of artistic technique. It is not, however, a matter of believing in a brief form, but in a proper form.

In his search for the figures of emptiness, neutrality, absence, silence, etc., Roland Barthes finds Japan, or rather his Japan¹³. There the theorist glimpses a whole universe of production of minimal senses where the responsibility of the form recurrently appears.

In analyzing the haiku¹⁴, the theorist finds a certain indiscernibility between form and matter which is constitutive of it: “the brevity of the haiku is not formal; the haiku is not a rich thought reduced to a brief form, but a brief event which immediately finds its proper form” (Barthes, 1991, p. 75). While speaking about the careful way the Japanese pack objects, Barthes also seems to address the same topic in a playful and surreptitious manner. According to him, in Japan the package “[...] is no longer the temporary accessory of the object to be transported, but itself becomes an object; the envelope, in itself, is consecrated as a precious though gratuitous thing; the package is a thought” (Barthes, 1991, p. 45).

Similarly, *Traga Sua Luz* does not convey a speech through an external form. Conversely, the action is based in a thought that makes form and content indistinguishable. After all, the collective does not seek to convey a message through communication, but they develop a unique strategy for the action to produce meaning. Language is not naively taken as a transparent medium intended to broadcast a message, but a matter that must be carefully conceived, maintained in tension, with its meaning at risk of disappearance.

Walter Benjamin (1994), as early as 1934, sought to understand the nexus between art and politics from an overcoming of the dichotomy that used to oppose form and content. The author explains that it is not enough for the artist to assume a certain “tendency” if he or she continues to “supply a productive apparatus without – to the utmost extent possible – changing it” (Benjamin, 2005, p. 774), propelling elsewhere the logic of the Capital. It would be necessary for the artist “to be able to simultaneously rethink their own work, their relation to the means of production, or their technique in a really revolutionary way” (Benjamin, 2005, p. 772). In other words, their task consisted of an “*Umfunktionierung* of the form of the concert” (Benjamin, 2005, p. 775), taking control of the means of production themselves, thinking politics from the core of the artistic form, and not as the transparent broadcast of the right tendency.

Also, for Jacques Rancière, the intimate links between art and politics that characterizes the aesthetic regime¹⁵ depend on a dilution of the dichotomy opposing form and matter, constitutive of the representative one (Rancière, 2011). Therefore, we could notice a link to some of the privileged sensemaking logics on contemporary art, and not by chance the actions of *Política do Impossível* cross the borders between activism and art. The political and educational strategies used by the collective emerges from a series of constitutive logics of art in its aesthetic regime. However, as explained by Jacques Rancière, the art

[...] only ever lend to projects of domination or emancipation what they are able to lend to them, that is to say, quite simply, what they have in common with them: bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parcelling out of the visible and the invisible (Rancière, 2004, p. 19).

Thus, it is important to match expectations regarding the effectiveness of *Traga Sua Luz* in producing changes in the real – in curbing the process of gentrification – with the strategies employed by the group.

The collective uses a singular strategy, conceiving the action from the means of production, to think with Walter Benjamin. If *Política do Impossível* takes care that its action does not remain pamphleteer, if they avoid articulating a transparent discourse, such logic emerges in the form of silence, which also unfolds as an effect of their own sensitive apprehension. In the words of Roland Barthes, the work “causes knowledge, or the subject, to vacillate it creates an emptiness of language” (Barthes, 1991, p. 4). The collective seems to associate these two forms of muteness:

There is something that happens in the invisible place of gathering, the performance is not only in the place of the synthesis, of the image [...]. In the action with the candles at Luz, where were all together in that situation, there was something that couldn't fit so much on words, on designation, but that we felt in the silence of that group, which was only there for that reason, something the image wouldn't capture, something in the act of doing (Coletivo Política do Impossível, 2008a, p. 136, translated).

Perhaps in these dissension lies the difficulty of capturing within a speech the meanings driven by art, the product of an incessant mismatch between words and the artistic experience. It is impossible to close the artistic experience at a structured speech and to establish a perennial truth about it. This phenomenon is characteristic of the powerlessness to identify

art under the aegis of the aesthetic regime and to completely circumscribe it. Similarly, to the original misunderstanding of politics in Jacques Rancière (1999), it houses a multitude of simultaneous and non-excluding meanings. Thus, paradoxically, what was initially silent opens up the way for an unlimited profusion of meanings yet to be done.

Art and Education

As mentioned above, at *Traga Sua Luz* the gentrification agenda does not emerge as a structured discourse that must be communicated, but rather the results of a very careful formal elaboration. However, it is curious that the *Política do Impossível* collective makes use of a language that exempts itself from the function of communicating and yet associates its practices to educational processes. After all, whatever means used, would education not consist in familiarizing certain individuals with a previously selected set of knowledge? How do we think of educational processes that understand the uncertainty, inherent to any language that makes itself opaque, as a pedagogical potential?

We suggest a way of conceiving the bonds the collective establishes between art, politics and education, based on the thinking of Jacques Rancière (2010). The author establishes a common ground in which these three categories join, especially through the principles of an equality of intelligences and emancipation of the spectator. According to him, it is a matter of understanding these principles as presuppositions of artistic practice and not a final goal, and then political artworks get detached from any emancipatory end. Through the thinking of Roland Barthes (2013) we also mentioned how the paradigms of artistic intentionality and a transparency of language goes together with an infantilization of the spectator. Both authors unfold a discussion about pedagogy from thinking about the links of cause and effect an artwork can arouse in its spectators.

However, it is a paradoxical pedagogical thought. Its logic opposes what Jacques Rancière calls the “pedagogical model of the efficacy of art” (Rancière, 2010, p. 136), based on direct cause and effect relations between an artwork and its spectators, which is the basis for the representative regime of art. This regime presupposes a hierarchy of intelligences, a submission of the sensible to the intelligible. *Política do Impossível*

collective, on the contrary, conceives an education that exempts itself from the task of informing or raising awareness. The collective states that “[...] reinventing, every time, the forms of denunciation and announcement of facts is, therefore, a fundamental part of our work” (Coletivo Política do Impossível, 2008b, p. 4, translated). This reinvention involves the creation of a paradoxical language that denounces, but simultaneously avoids the task of communicating. Thus, a certain distance is set in, an interval that allows the imagination to drift. How do we produce senses without predicting them? How do we communicate without knowing for sure what is being communicated?

The pedagogical elaboration of Roland Barthes may offer some answers. If his classes took the fragmentary as a kind of teaching method originated by a *phantom*¹⁶, it is because the author not only renounces the will to make sense, to close, or provide a *telos* for his lessons. He resigned clearly defining the starting point of his formulations, unfolded from the uncertainty of a desire. What guarantees Roland Barthes’ phantasmatic and emancipatory teaching is precisely the fact that it houses the abyss of the unthought in its lessons, slightly shifting the paradigm of rationality that usually moves the pedagogical proposals. For Barthes it is not a matter of conveying a certain amount of preconceived information, but to produce some effect on his students.

This paradigm of uncertainty could be juxtaposed with the importance given to the question within the creative processes of *Política do Impossível*. It is symptomatic of the collective’s concern to embody the unthought inside its actions, a sort of question whose answer cannot be given immediately. Thus, the group distances itself from the will to preconceive a set of possible ends for the action, giving rise to the production of uncertain effects and knowledge, similar to the pedagogical paradigms of Roland Barthes. The educational processes emerge less from the desire to find answers, but are based on the incessant production of questions, which, in turn, give rise to a sharing situation:

A question arises from learning anxieties, from learning desires. Formulating a question is a way to open doors, inaugurate meanings and provoke reflections. Issues move a group toward building shared knowledge, in transforming and enhancing. Questions may not be answered and generate

so many other questions, in a continuous search for meanings re-imagined (Coletivo Política do Impossível, 2007, p. 12, translated).

Similarly, the dissenting efficacy models of art require that artworks still retain something of unthought to themselves, the freshness of a language that cannot be circumscribed inside the borders of discourse. However, the links between Jacques Rancière and Roland Barthes must be done with caution¹⁷, since the authors disagree in several ways. Barthes produces a sophisticated aesthetic theory, although this expression may embody a seriousness and a rigidity that does not match the sense of his airy and dizzying writing, filled with reveries and digressions of enormous poetic-critical power. It certainly does not reach the systematic sense of closure of Rancierian theory but provides important insights to understand the political strength of art and education.

In any case, some theoretical affinities may be traced between the two authors, since many of the conceptions developed by Roland Barthes can be referred directly to the set of logics that Jacques Rancière associates with the aesthetic regime. The privilege of an unthought known, for example, is at the core of Barthes's reflections and is one of the key elements of the identity of contraries that underlies the aesthetic regime. It is the prevalence of a thinking that slips, that cannot be fixed, but mistakes itself at each attempt to be captured inside the network of discourse. Perhaps it is an effective way to dismantle a series of consciousness mechanisms that police the production of meanings and give them well-delineated figures. This paradigm is transposed to the very methods of pedagogy proposed by Roland Barthes:

[...] the ideal course would be one in which the teacher – the speaker – would be more banal than the listeners, in which what the teacher says would be less than what he arouses [...]. But if the course is a symphony of proposals, the proposal must be incomplete – otherwise it is a position, a phallic occupation of an ideal space (Barthes, 2013b, p. 263, translated).

The possibility of teaching the unknown is at the basis of Jacques Rancière's pedagogical assumptions in his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Rancière, 1991), published in 1987. The philosopher departs from the writings of Joseph Jacotot, a pedagogue who, as early as 1818, proved the ability of an ignorant to teach another ignorant what he himself ignored.

The method of his Universal Teaching, which may seem absurd at a first glance, would be that “[...] something must be learned and all the rest related to it, on this principle: everyone is of equal intelligence” (Rancière, 1991, p. 101). Jacques Rancière observes this case beyond a picturesque achievement, unveiling its potential to think about the conditions of possibility that precede any production of knowledge. The philosopher builds a curious theory of education departing from a transcendental point of view, in which he operates a disjunction between intelligence and knowledge, distinguishing the ability to know and the content of that knowing.

Through this thinking, the assumption of equality of intelligences emerges as a fundamental starting point for the educational process: “[...] the one who establishes equality as a goal to be achieved, from a situation of inequality, in fact postpones it to the infinite. Equality never comes as a result to be achieved, but it must always be placed before” (Rancière, 2018, p. 11). It is a matter of thinking about education differently from the republican practices that took shape in the nineteenth century and still prevail today. According to the philosopher, the task of reducing inequality indefinitely, of building an equal society of unequal men, could only result in the “[...] integral pedagogicization of society – the general infantilization of the individuals that make it up” (Rancière, 1999, p. 133).

This is one of the central concerns that govern the educational, political, and artistic strategies of *Política do Impossível*. The collective makes explicit their carefulness “not to attribute to the other the ingenuity and the alienation” (Coletivo Política do Impossível, 2008a, p. 116, translated). We have already observed that the collective exempts themselves from the task of merely communicating and instructing, avoiding assuming someone’s else ignorance in advance. Joseph Jacotot highlights how this assumption is stultifying.

Jacques Rancière calls *enforced stultification* the set of procedures moved by the explicator master, always willing to pass on to a collectivity a certain content, an ensemble of knowledges. Based on the fiction of incapacity, the explicative conception of the world would eventually reproduce inequality, which is merely a historical and material contingency. However, as the equality of intelligences does not manifest itself as a

sensible evidence, it must be verified. In any case, in proposing these ideas, Rancière does not stand up for any kind of homogenization, but for the right to their singular development and manifestation: equality in the multiple and not in the identical. For this reason, “[...] whoever emancipates does not have to worry about what the emancipated person learns. He will learn what he wants, nothing maybe. He will know he can learn [...]” (Rancière, 1991, p. 18).

These questions about education would unfold in the set of texts that compose *The Emancipated Spectator* (Rancière, 2011), published by Jacques Rancière twenty years after *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. The book displaces a series of discussions around the philosophy of emancipation and raises questions about the passivity status generally attributed to the spectator’s gaze. The philosopher states the relations between art and politics cannot be restricted to a certain message, but must interfere in the enunciation itself, in which the viewer is not considered as a passive matter that must be informed, but as an active character within the process of attributing meaning.

The understanding of what Rancière calls the *pedagogical model of the efficacy of art* resembles the stultifying teaching of the master explicator. Both reproduce the paradigms of a hierarchy of intelligences, according to which the artist would be able to convey certain messages to the viewers through his artwork. Similar to emancipating pedagogy, the aesthetic regime refuses the assumption of a transparency of language, through a disjuncture between the sensible and the intelligible. Both for the philosopher and Roland Barthes, both a political art and an emancipating education must abandon the purpose of conveying certain messages or a set of predetermined contents. This undefinition is constitutive of both fields.

Once it takes language in its opacity, *Traga Sua Luz* is based on the efficacy of a dissent, an eminently political model that underlies the aesthetic regime of art, anchored in the principle of the equality of intelligences. It is an educational paradigm that refuses the task of instructing and informing, operating not only in the order of the intelligible, but of the very core of the sensible. The collective relates changes and displacements of gaze and perception to self-education

processes, which could be associated with the politics resulting from disturbances on the distribution of the sensible:

There is also a way of intervention involving the gaze, which always appears in our processes, the first step being: how do I look to the place of the living, the everyday, how do I look to my own look, how am I looking and from where am I looking what is happening [...]. Gradually, we realize an urgent situation serves as an exemplary situation to broaden our gaze, to make us understand something in another way, and there resides a process of self-education that transforms on another scale, neither more nor less important, but we manage to create relations that were not possible before, relations and perceptions expand (Coletivo Política do Impossível, 2008a, p. 135, translated).

However, these interventions within the gaze should not be mixed with the idea of consciousness raising or taking away someone else from an alienated state. *Traga Sua Luz* only seeks to give rise to other gazes, to the creation of other relations and perceptions, which are awakened without the previous control of the collective. These are transformations that take place on a microscopic scale, with hardly quantifiable effects. *Traga Sua Luz* can be thought as an educational process, but not as an ensemble of knowledges to be passed on to a mass of ignorant people: it is not based on teaching about the gentrification processes that affect Luz neighborhood.

The collective considers the action as a radical education practice, which cannot be compared to a workshop or a formal school. They mean “education [...] in the broadest sense, related to what Fatima Freire calls *drivers of political literacy*” (Coletivo Política do Impossível, 2008a, p. 133, translated). Here we observe a reference to the daughter and spreader of the ideals of the important Brazilian educator Paulo Freire¹⁸. She was a collaborator of *Política do Impossível*, and a kind of methodological mentor of the practices developed by the collective, in which uncertainty have the primacy.

Despite proposing the action, *Política do Impossível* does not claim to have definitive answers to the questions it poses. The collective prefers to understand their process as a way of “[...] being together and as a place of fragility, as we have so often been in a place of having to discover something together, not knowing the answers” (Coletivo Política do Impossível, 2008a, p. 134, translated). But it is not a matter of thinking the question as

in the stultifying method established by Socrates and vehemently criticized by Rancière via Jacotot:

He knows the response, and his questions lead the student to it naturally. This is the secret of good masters: through their questions, they discreetly guide the student's intelligence – discreetly enough to make it work, but not to the point of leaving it to itself. There is a Socrates sleeping in every explicator (Rancière, 1999, p. 29).

Being together around an unanswerable question, the situation alluded by the collective, is what at the same time seals a distance and incites a link between the participants of the action, creating a sharing situation. The idea of sharing here must be understood according to the double meaning given by Jacques Rancière, therefore in its simultaneous dimension of separation and convergence. That's why the questions play a role within the collective's processes which opposes the one developed by Socrates:

But why think from questions? Why ask ourselves before stating? There are many questions that may arise from the moment we accept the unspoken. To think from questions is to invite the other to ask oneself. Thoughts that begin with a statement do not invite dialogue; they do not establish in the other an interest in sharing what to do. Rather, they affirm what was already given as knowledge or ignorance; When the ways of thinking arrive as answers, there is no place to develop the thickness of the different layers of meaning that awake in each subject while facing of a situation. When it appears an early answer to the question, a false resolution of the problem is produced and therefore a false understanding of the given situation (Coletivo Política do Impossível, 2007, p. 11, translated).

We can notice here another affinity between the collective's practices and the thinking Jacques Rancière develops with *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, in what concerns the social nature underlying any learning process. Contrary to the fiction that there would be a natural bond between all individuals in a society, the philosopher observes the distance which puts them in a sharing situation. It would be the "arbitrariness of language that makes them try to communicate by forcing them to translate – but also puts them in a community of intelligence" (Rancière, 1991, p. 58). According to him, the educational process would be permeated by a "poetic labor of translation" (Rancière, 2009b, p. 10) that seeks to mitigate, without ever canceling, the separation between people.

This is also one of the central characteristics of the society that took shape after the French Revolution, and which Jacques Rancière calls an *Aesthetic Community* (Rancière, 2011). It is characterized by a tension between the sensitive particularity of each individual and the virtual possibility of the universalization of that private sensation. This heterogeneous sensible would at the same time separate and put people in a sharing situation, therefore building contingent ties, similar to those underlying the gathering around a collective. Art in its aesthetic regime, once refusing all truth and engaged in producing an infinite amount of simultaneous and non-excluding meanings, would be the dissension object especially capable of gathering around itself a controversial multiplicity of individuals.

The collective embodies that dissenting exercise of being-together, seeking to integrate conflict into its own creative process. For the collective there would be no “[...] way of building a collective thought other than through the clash with the collectivity itself. Especially because we usually learn to think from an image of the world, of education, of knowledge, where conflict does not fit in” (Coletivo Política do Impossível, 2008a, p. 115, translated). This, in turn, would be the path to create a political subjectivity. Therefore, the processes of the collective overlap two meanings of dissent: as a clash of opinions and the dissent as a difference of the sensible from itself.

Final Remarks

Therefore, we understand how *Política do Impossível* collective intertwines art, politics, aesthetics and education. In *Traga Sua Luz*, silence materializes a specific idea of politics, which is less based on the task of communicating a message, and more in disturbing the distribution of the sensible. The intermittent flickering of candles and lanterns carried across the neighborhood of Luz produces a multitude of possible meanings, in which politics appears as the fragile glimmer of a firefly, as a counterpoint to the erasures produced by the gentrification processes. The refusal of the merely communicative becoming of language, in turn, is what at the same time underlies the principles of an emancipatory education and establishes a

link with art in its aesthetic regime. Dissent is responsible for juxtaposing a political art and an emancipating education.

However, the reflections brought by Roland Barthes, Jacques Rancière and *Política do Impossível* collective also raise a fundamental question about the possibilities of teaching art, since the advent of the aesthetic regime has ended with the idea of models to be followed. Art now depends on unique strategies to be elaborated by the particular poetics of the artists. In this case, the impossibility of identifying intelligence and knowledge is a point of departure, since art does not only depend on the intelligible: the sensible matter is also fundamental to it.

It is not the case, of course, of believing in the paradigm of the genius, someone born with the necessary skills, but understanding there is no formal knowledge sufficient to make someone become an artist, although the necessity of theoretical and practical knowledge cannot be neglected. Therefore, especially for art teaching, the models Jacques Rancière characterizes as stultifying are particularly useless. Art in its aesthetic regime stumbles upon the powerlessness of a pedagogy grounded in knowledge. Even within the scope of art criticism, what is taught are theoretical keys that can be transposed from one work to another. There should always remain the spectator's capability to establish relationships, seeking to understand and translate case by case the unique poetic strategies of the artists. There is no theoretical model providing any sort of base or security.

Therefore, art in its aesthetic regime is immersed in an immanent politics, which can provide to education words filled with silence and uncertainty, once renounced from the task of communicating. In this sense, it is symptomatic the way *Política do Impossível* collective conceives *Traga Sua Luz* as an intervention that at the same time thinks about art, activism and education. Here the questions and uncertainties do not emerge for the purpose of being answered, but as an invitation to a dissensual profusion of possible meanings to be woven. It is the opportunity for a specific type of sharing, of division and grouping, in which the collective and the individual are tensioned.

Notes

- ¹ According to Bidou-Zachariassen, this term was first used in the 1960s by Ruth Glass, who characterized the phenomenon as “[...] the transformation of the residents’ social composition of central neighborhoods through the replacement of popular strata by a salaried middle class; and a process of a different nature: that of investing, rehabilitating, and appropriating a stock of housing and working-class or popular neighborhoods by these middle classes” (Bidou-Zachariassen, 2006, p. 22, translated). More recent research on this topic, conducted in various cities around the world, highlights “[...] the same types of factors that represent the ‘spontaneous’ practices of the inhabitants, their technical instruments (financing, real estate loans, etc.) and ‘voluntarists’ policies of local administrations” (Bidou-Zachariassen, 2006, p. 29, translated).
- ² See, in this regard, the Fundo Criatividade Coletiva / Doação Funarte [Collective Creativity / Federal Foundation for the Arts Donation Fund, formed through the 6th edition of Marcantonio Vilaça Visual Arts Award, housed at the Museu de Arte do Rio.
- ³ What we call poetics refers precisely to the identity of contraries, the disjunction between poiesis and aisthesis that characterizes what Jacques Rancière calls the Aesthetic Regime (Rancière, 2004). Therefore, we do not understand the poetics according to the logics the philosopher relates to the Poetic Regime, which correspond to the Representative and is governed according to the set of Aristotelian narrative conceptions.
- ⁴ According to Jacques Rancière, “politics is a matter of aesthetics, a matter of appearances” (Rancière, 1999, p. 74).
- ⁵ Jacques Rancière calls the distribution of the sensible “a generally implicit law that defines the forms of partaking by first defining the modes of perception in which they are inscribed [...]. This partition should be understood in the double sense of the word: on the one hand, as that which separates and excludes; on the other, as that which allows participation. A partition of the sensible refers to the manner in which a relation between a shared common (*un commun partage*) and the distribution of exclusive parts is determined in sensory experience. This latter form of distribution, which, by its sensory self-evidence, anticipates the distribution of part and shares (parties), itself

presupposes a distribution of what is visible and what not, of what can be heard and what cannot” (Rancière, 2010, p. 36).

- ⁶ The term Aesthetics here assumes the meaning given by Jacques Rancière, therefore according to the “[...] Kantian sense – re-examined perhaps by Foucault – as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience” (Rancière, 2004, p. 13).
- ⁷ One would argue that the Brazilian social movements, art and politics are radically distinct from the European ones, the reality experienced by the theorists who base this article and from which they unfold much of their research. However, we believe that their thoughts may still contain important theoretical support for the understanding of the Brazilian artistic, political and educational spheres. After all, the colonization processes are broad and diffuse, underlying even the sensitive and epistemological horizons. Thus, applying to this work a genuinely Brazilian grid of analysis would not necessarily guarantee greater fidelity to the national reality. On the other hand, by transposing French philosophical thought to Brazil we also intend to distend it and question its limits.
- ⁸ Major train station at São Paulo downtown.
- ⁹ The *Fórum Centro Vivo* (FCV) [Live City Center Forum] was founded on December 10th, 2000, meeting the need for a place to gather and debate, in a struggle to democratize and defend rights in São Paulo city center. It consisted of a counterpoint to projects and actions that, in many cases, served only private interests, disregarding and negatively affecting vulnerable groups. The FCV aimed at bringing together people and organizations that struggled for the right to stay in the city center, willing to make it a better and more democratic place, thus opposing the process of urban renewal and exclusion that has been occurring in São Paulo.
- ¹⁰ The idea of a multiple and ubiquitous power is also central to the political theories of Michel Foucault and Jacques Rancière. In the first it appears in the coextensive relationship between power and resistance (Foucault, 1995), while in the former between police and politics (Rancière, 1999).
- ¹¹ Roland Barthes defines the Neutral “[...] as what cheats the paradigm, or rather, I call the Neutral everything that cheats the paradigm. I do not define a word; I name one thing: I gather under a name, which here, is the Neutral.

What is a Paradigm? It is the opposition of two virtual terms in which I update one, to speak, to produce meaning” (Barthes, 2003b, p. 17, translated).

- ¹² Roland Barthes considers there is an “inherent link between power and rhythm. What power imposes, first of all, is a rhythm (of all things: of life, of time, of thought, of speech). The *idiorhythmia* is always a demand that goes against power” (Barthes, 2013b, p. 68, translated).
- ¹³ Roland Barthes does not seek to portray Japan, but a country the critic imagined and fantasized. Through a kind of differential operation, he glimpses another horizon of meaning production.
- ¹⁴ Short and minimalist type of poetry invented in Japan.
- ¹⁵ Willing to conceive an asynchronous historiography of art, Jacques Rancière (2004) employs the idea that it can be associated with three regimes of identification. They continue to exist in the present time and may overlap, but they arose at different historical times. According to the order of their appearance, there are: the ethical regime, governed by the Platonic ideals; the representative regime, working according to Aristotelian logics; and the aesthetic regime, which works under romantic ideals. It is a thought which considers the historically built conditions of possibility to identify art as such, therefore involving the horizons of production, enjoyment and criticism. The philosopher understands the efficacy of a dissent as the reason why art touches politics in the aesthetic regime (Rancière, 2010).
- ¹⁶ According to Roland Barthes: “[...] I sincerely believe that, at the origin of such teaching, we must always accept placing a phantom, which may vary from year to year” (Barthes, 2013b, p. 46, translated).
- ¹⁷ See in this regard, *A imagem pensativa* (Rancière, 2010a) e *O efeito de realidade e a política da ficção* (Rancière, 2010b).
- ¹⁸ In the scope of this paper there is no room to approach in depth all the affinities and differences between Paulo Freire’s (2014) pedagogical thinking and what Jacques Rancière calls an equality of intelligences (1991). Their thinking could be opposed at first glance, since Paulo Freire starts from a structural inequality that opposes oppressors and the oppressed (Freire, 2014), while Rancière starts from a potential equality of intelligences (Rancière, 1991). Education, for Freire, would constitute a tool that contributes to end of relations of exploitation of man by man. Similarly, to the French philosopher, the Brazilian educator understands inequalities as a historically and materially

produced contingency, perpetuated even by the educational paradigms aimed to mitigate them. We could also establish a similarity between the thinking of the two authors in what concerns the relations between teacher and student, once both criticize the idea the first would hold a knowledge to be transmitted by the latter. Thus, it would be possible to juxtapose the figure of the master explicator, in Rancierian thought, to Paulo Freire's banking model of education. Regarding the similarities between the thought of Paulo Freire and Jacques Rancière, see the work of Tyson E. Lewis (2014).

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