

Notes on an Aesthetics of Trauma in Brazil / *Notas sobre uma estética do trauma no Brasil*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to demonstrate how the mediatization of cases of woman shearing builds, in language and through language, an aesthetics of strangeness which reassures discourses that point out social, historical and cultural borders. In order to achieve this goal, two thoughts are articulated theoretically: the Bakhtinian thought, especially his insistence on the semiotic-ideological dimension of language, and Barthesian postulates, especially his understanding of the semiological construction of trauma. From the methodological point of view, two registers and the propagation of the shearing of women in two historical events are contrasted: in France, during the period called Liberation, in the 1940s, and in present Brazil, in Rio de Janeiro's slums which live side by side with the culture of drug traffic. In this study, we try to answer the following question: after so many decades, how does this French post-war voice emerge in the Brazilian context, (re-)signifying the same practices? The analysis developed here shows that the "prose" of shorn women mobilizes different voices which, by imprinting their marks on utterances, stratify language and draw socio-cultural borders.

KEYWORDS: Dialogism; Ethics; Aesthetics; Language; Trauma

RESUMO

Neste artigo, o objetivo é demonstrar como a midiatização de casos de tosquiadas de mulheres constroem, na e pela linguagem, uma estética do estranhamento que referenda discursos flagrantes de fronteiras sócio-histórico-culturais. Para isso, articulam-se, teoricamente, o pensamento bakhtiniano, sobretudo sua insistência na dimensão semiótico-ideológica da linguagem, e postulados barthesianos, em especial o entendimento da constituição semiológica de trauma. Metodologicamente, cotejam-se registros e divulgação de tosquia feminina em duas inscrições históricas: na França, por ocasião da chamada Liberação na década de 1940, e no Brasil da atualidade, em comunidades cariocas que convivem com a cultura do tráfico. No estudo apresentado, procura-se responder à seguinte questão: como, depois de tantas décadas, essa voz do pós-guerra francês emerge no contexto brasileiro (re)significando as mesmas práticas? A análise empreendida aqui mostra que a "prosa" das tosquiadas mobiliza vozes diferentes que, ao imprimirem suas marcas nos enunciados, estratificam a linguagem e desenham fronteiras sócio-culturais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Dialogismo; Ética; Estética; Linguagem; Trauma*

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In collective memory, shearing is an issue of “intensity” (a “scene” that the memory cannot erase, a memory that traumatizes).¹
Alain Brossat

In those men, courage and even heroism do not exclude the role of affection, the weight of traumatism, the pregnancy of social representation.²
Fabrice Virgili

It is not enough for the photographer to signify the horrible for us to experience it.
*Roland Barthes*³

First Words⁴

The excerpts highlighted as epigraphs to this article cause us to wonder if it is possible to draw, through the description/interpretation of the functioning of language, an aesthetics of trauma in the discursivization of cases of the shearing of women’s hair. Starting with the notion of language as a socio-historic arena in which values are built, acknowledged and altered, and understanding that, no matter how it is realized, language is necessarily updated in real human interaction, we recognize the ideological implication in the disclosure of practices of feminine punishment. It is not possible to mobilize the shearing of women in language without assuming an evaluative position. Thus, we establish a dialog between two processes of making meaning of such practice – one from the French context of post-World War II, in the 1940s, and another one from Rio de Janeiro’s slums in Brazil, in the 21st century – in order to contrast two semantic-ideological orientations. In this sense, we also aim to identify, in the conditions of emergence of the utterances which are constitutive to the events analyzed, both the

¹ Text in original: “Dans le souvenir collectif, les tontes sont une question d’‘intensité’ (une ‘scène’ dont la mémoire ne peut pas s’effacer, un souvenir qui traumatise) [...] (BROSSAT, 1992, p.10)”.

² Text in original: “Le courage et même l’héroïsme n’excluent pas chez ces hommes le rôle des affects, le poids des traumatismes, la prégnance des représentations sociales (VIRGILI, 2004, p.13-14)”.

³ BARTHES, Roland. *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*. Transl. by Richard Howard. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1997, p.71).

⁴ This discussion about the French context was inspired by the lectures of Professor Jean-Jacques Courtine at Université Sorbonne Nouvelle (Pariss III) in 2010/2011 attended by one of the authors of this article. The idea of examining the event of shearing from a dialogic perspective, associating the discourses inherent to this time/space and to the French time/space came from those lectures.

semantic convergence which makes it possible to dispose the events into a discursive flow and the singularities which draw socio-historic-cultural borders.

In this light, in this article we aim at showing that, although there are similarities among the utterances about *tondues* (shorn) during the Liberation of France, and the utterances about shearing in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the case in Rio de Janeiro is built through an aesthetics of trauma which is made possible by the place journalism holds and the reception of this place in contemporary society. It means that, even showing similarities, the social convention which places TV journalism in the cultural field of “reality representation” produces “trauma” in a renewed way if compared to what circulated in French history. Therefore, there are different effects for different ways of discursivization of the same practice. This is the analytical route we should follow in this article. It makes us think that meaning is not “in the practice of shearing itself,” but in the way it is held in discourse. Besides, dialogism is presented as the key category to understand the mobilization of language in cases of shearing women’s hair in France in the 1940s and in Brazil in the 21st century.

1 Dialogism as the Key Category for the Construction of a Case

Among various aspects which can be highlighted in the Bakhtinian *démarche*,⁵ there is one related to the understanding language inherent to the research of the Russian scholar and the Circle which invites us to consider everyday life. In this regard, it is important to highlight the polemics which this group created against Russian formalists. Lest us consider, for example, the Circle’s concerns about the dialogic-historic-social nature of language, which, according to their postulates, constitutes and crosses various spheres of human communication, from the most prosaic, as a simple ordinary chat, to the most elaborated ones, as literary work. The Circle pointed to an ideological articulation – decisive to the constitution of social groups – as the condition to semiotization, being, therefore, inherent to all and any language. This way, they were

⁵ We call *Bakhtinian démarche* the theoretical contribution which derives from a thought collective. We acknowledge the B. M. V. Circle in general when we deal with aspects postulated by different Russian thinkers of this Circle, who were dedicated to the discussion of dialogism, and we acknowledge an author in particular when we mention a specific work. For further details about what has been understood as the *Bakhtinian thought*, especially the Brazilian reception of the Circle’s oeuvre, see, for example, Brait & Magalhães (2014) and Magalhães (2010).

opposed to the dichotomy between practical language and poetic language supported by the formalists:

Pure signality is not evinced even in the early stages of language learning. In this case, too, the linguistic form is oriented in context; here, too, it is a sign; although the factor of signality and its correlative, the factor of recognition, are operative.

Thus, the constituent factor for the linguistic form, as for the sign, is not at all its self-identity as signal but its specific variability; and the constituent factor for the linguistic form is not recognition of “the same thing,” but understanding in the proper sense of the word, i. e. orientation in the particular, given context and in the particular, given situation – orientation in the dynamic process of becoming and not “orientation” in some inert stage (VOLOŠINOV, 1973, p.69).⁶

We observe that one of the aspects which separate the Circle from the formalists⁷ is the consideration by the latter that poetic language is “achieved” by means of an artistic procedure which leads to the deautomatization of interpretation. In other words, literary art should be seen as a procedure that “increases the difficulty” of meaning perception through a formal “cut.” From the point of view of this trend, the study of literariness should be carried out in terms of pure linguistic form; consequently, ideological aspects should not interfere in poetic studies. Therefore, the material is not exceeded; on the contrary, the formalist study suggests paying a special attention to the signal, which must become strange to the reader in order to break the “perceptual automatism.”

At this point it is worth quoting Eikhenbaum’s words (1965, p.114):

art [is] a means of destroying the automatism of perception; the purpose of the image is not to present the approximate meaning of its object to our understanding, but to create a special perception of the object—the creation of its “vision,” and not the “recognition” of its meaning. Hence the image is usually connected with the process of defamiliarization.⁸

What some members of the formalist group claim to be a procedure to break with the “automatism of perception” seems to be, from Vološinov’s point of view, a way to

⁶ VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik. New York ; London: Seminar Press, 1973.

⁷ Among the formalists, we find exceptions, as, for example, Roman Jakobson.

⁸ EICHENBAUM, Boris. The Theory of the “Formal Method”. In: LEMON, Lee T.; REIS, Marion J. (Ed.). *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Transl. by the editors. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965. pp.99-140.

hold on to the signal⁹ and, thus, a way of abstracting language from its living form. What makes language living is exactly the fact that the signal is surpassed by the sign, creating, thus, comprehension. The real living reality of language should not “make objects unfamiliar” – as if we were dealing with a “foreign language” – but should provide understanding through signic-cultural interaction which produces meaning.

For the Circle, comprehension is not a passive apprehension by the listener of what is meant by a speaker. To comprehend is the action by which speaker and listener, inserted in a historical context, renew the great social dialog. Dialog is more than a compositional form; it is also an active process in which subjects mark their socio-cultural position and make other voices speak in their discourse/interpretation. Thus, to comprehend is an act of answering; it is a standpoint. Not only does the listener listen to (read) an utterance, but he/she also adopts an agreement standpoint or a polemic standpoint. In this dialogic game, utterance is seen not as a mere linguistic sequence, but as the discursive communicative unity, which determines an axiological position (BAKHTIN, 1986a).¹⁰

Bakhtin (1986a)¹¹ approaches Vološinov (1973)¹² in relation to the idea that language is stratified at the moment it integrates the social reality of verbal interaction. In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*¹³ the reference to the use of language by different social sectors is frequent.

We highlight the theoretical concern of the Circle when dealing with language in its socio-historical materiality. From their point of view, neither signality nor the studies that deal with language as an abstract system are taken for granted. That is not the issue. The issue about which they are actually concerned is studying how language works, knowing that its form and content are not defined in terms of an abstract system, but in terms of its use and its historical reality.

⁹ We do not propose to prove that the formalist studies considered the “signal” in such a radical way, but Vološinov’s criticism is actually incisive, perhaps for a matter of counter-positioning to the formalist methods of poetic study.

¹⁰ BAKHTIN, M. The problem of Speech Genres. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Transl. by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986a. pp.60-102.

¹¹ See footnote 10.

¹² See footnote 6.

¹³ See footnote 6.

In his criticism to the literary studies of his time due to their purely abstract concept of language, Bakhtin (1981)¹⁴ highlights that the absence of a thorough study about the novelistic prose is linked to the conception that art must be detached from ordinary language. This conception distinguishes poetic (literary) language from practical (extraliterary) language. For him, the novel is constituted as a genre that translates ordinary languages, i. e., the heteroglossia that makes the life of discourse possible – which was “excluded” from literary studies by the formalists. Let us see, for example, what Shklovski (1965, p.10) says:

These ideas about the economy of energy, as well as about the law and aim of creativity, are perhaps true in their application to “practical” language; they were, however, extended to poetic language. Hence they do not distinguish properly between the laws of practical language and the laws of poetic language.¹⁵

Shklovsky’s words create the effect that poetic language does not integrate the great dialog of social languages. In other words, language can be understood by means of a suspension of historical conditions, as if poetic language dismissed history in favor of the comprehension of pure forms. This approach conveys the idea that poetic meaning must be immanently apprehended.

From the Bakhtinian point of view, discourse, which is materialized in language and integrates the great socio-historical dialogue, is not restricted to its object. This is not because there is an indecipherable signality, but because other voices, other discourses speak about this object. This means that it is impossible to speak about an object without dealing with what has already been said about it or without being influenced by the expectation of the answers which will be raised by the act of uttering. The obscuring signality subtracts language from this socio-historical dynamics. It kills it as a socio-ideological representation, which is born as a singular point of view, but it is necessarily implicated as an answer to what has already been uttered.

¹⁴ BAKHTIN, M.M. Discourse in the Novel. In: BAKHTIN, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: Texas University Press, 1981. pp.259-422.

¹⁵ SHKLOVSKY, Victor. Art as Technique. In: LEMON, Lee T.; REIS, Marion J. (Eds.). *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Transl. by the editors. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965. pp.5-24.

The poetic attempt to achieve a “pure” level through linguistic work has its theoretical merits due to the deepening of the phonological studies. However, it restricts its scope and reach because it puts the historic-ideological nature of sign in the background. Out of the interactive moment of concrete utterance, it “ceases to live.”

Thus, dialogism, which surpasses the pure signality¹⁶ and places discourse in the historical mesh, makes the pure relation of the subject with the object impossible. Between them and in them, the language that makes possible the meaning of the subject, the object and the interaction (which implicates them as subject and as object) is evident. In order to be constructed, discourse enters a net of discourses with which it agrees, disagrees, and then it establishes socio-historical places. According to Bakhtin (1981, p.279; emphasis in original),

[...] every extra-artistic prose discourse – in any of its forms, quotidian, rhetorical, scholarly – cannot fail to be oriented toward the “already uttered,” the “already known,” the “common opinion” and so forth. The dialogic orientation of discourse is a phenomenon that is, of course, a property of *any* discourse. It is the natural orientation of any living discourse. On all its various routes toward the object, in all its directions, the word encounters an alien word and cannot help encountering it in a living, tension-filled interaction. Only the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world with the first word, could really have escaped from start to finish this dialogic inter-orientation with the alien that occurs in the object. Concrete historical human discourse does not have this privilege: it can deviate from such inter-orientation only in a conditional basis and only to a certain degree.¹⁷

From an object, different social voices start to speak, to interpret, i. e., to build readings. These different voices are settled in the quotidian, or in Voloshinov’s words, they integrate discourse in life (VOLOSHINOV, 1983).¹⁸ It is important to highlight that those voices are not situated at random, but they integrate the “institutional life of language.” They are inscribed in various sectors of language, from which language is stratified (in commerce, brothels, in the streets, in hospitals, on the media). Among those

¹⁶ Although we point out Bakhtin’s and Voloshinov’s criticism to the “privilege of signality” – object of the formal method – we do not consider that they disregard form.

¹⁷ See footnote 14.

¹⁸ VOLOSHINOV, V. N. Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry: Questions of Sociological Poetics. Transl. de John Richmond. In: SHUKMAN, Ann (Ed.). *Bakhtin School Papers*. Somerton, Oxford: Old School House, 1983. pp.5-30. (Russian Poetics in Translation; v. 10).

daily discourses and social practices which they make current, artistic discourse starts to occupy its socio-historical place and, as far as aesthetic finish is concerned, “incorporates” this heteroglossia.

Based on what has been exposed and considering the discursive communicative heterogeneity, we would like to take the translinguistic standpoint of language (TODOROV, 1984)¹⁹ to build various objects in their social, historical, and dialogical reality. It allows us to consider media nowadays, particularly its way of functioning on TV-journalism as an arena of voices that fight one another and produce an effect of return.

This way, we selected two TV reports that present the ritual of shearing in the slums of Faz Quem Quer [Do It Whoever Wants to] and Pedreira [Quarry], in the Northern area of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, as the renewal of a dialog among social voices and discourses. The videos were accessed from two sites: Uol Tv,²⁰ Monica Puga’s report (originally, it was broadcast on Jornal Bandnews on the 17th of January 2012), and YouTube²¹ (the report was dated the 24th of September 2014 and broadcast on SBT Rio). Both journalistic products translate the language of the “trial” and “conviction” of two women accused of delation. The report shows a “law-court” represented by drug dealers who impose not only a physical but also, and mainly, a moral punishment. By cutting and shaving those women’s hair, the “lords of the traffic” not only punish them, but they also de-feminize, animalize, and convict the “sinners.”

That is why a dialogic look is enlightening. The ritual of shearing women for delation, widely practiced in the context of *Libération*, marked the post-war French history. It is the object of important studies by French historians, among whom we highlight Virgili (2004) and Brossat (1992). Our question is, “how, after all these years, does this post-war French voice emerge in the Brazilian context (re)signifying the same practice?”

¹⁹ TODOROV, T. *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. (Theory and History of Literature; 13).

²⁰ Available at: <<http://tvuol.uol.com.br/video/traficantes-cortam-cabelos-de-garota-como-punicao-assista-0402CC9A346CD0A12326>>.

²¹ Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9TWeHEuzGs>>.

2 Ethical and Aesthetical Aspects of Language as a Reading Key of the Case

At first sight, it seems odd to relate the French and the Brazilian cases into a discursive flow. In fact, the juxtaposition of episodes does not seem productive to the recognition of what is at play by the process of signifying the events of shearing in slums in Rio de Janeiro broadcast by TV-journalism. The dialogic relations built by the reading that recovers the conditions of meaning production from the semantic potentiality of each event make possible the articulation of the two contexts. As it has been registered in Bakhtin's notes (1986b,²² 1993),²³ dialogic relations go beyond logical relations and articulate subjects, which necessarily implicates the aesthetic finish, inherent to the process of constructing meaning and the ethical responsibility of the singular place which the subject socially, culturally, and historically occupies. They are relations among values, among judgements. How do they take place?

An event is not given, but is meant as such. Different from a natural phenomenon, which derives from physical-chemical elements, as for example, water precipitation from the sky, an event results from the human act of judging something. We call this precipitation rain, and we attribute some value to the rain: it can bother us, it can cause damages, but it can also be condition for life, for refreshment. The same natural phenomenon can lead to different events that build a net of judgements. This net feeds the semantic potentiality, which is condition to the construction of meaning. This way, when someone engages into a discursive communication, he/she actualizes the semantic potentiality of that which is taken as an event, giving it aesthetic finish so that it makes evident the social place where someone values this event. From this perspective, it is impossible to make meaning without the aesthetic work with the language which renews the event or without the ethical responsibility of the axiological position which the subject assumes before its realization.

For the case being analyzed constructed, evidently there is an incommensurable repertoire about the possible events which derive from the relation between the act of cutting someone's hair and violence. As it is an ancient practice that is still current in

²² BAKHTIN, M.M. From Notes Made in 1970-71. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Transl. by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986a. pp.132-158.

²³ BAKHTIN, M.M. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Transl. by Vadim Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993.

various religious spheres, in different regional circumscriptions, it escapes the scope of this article to recover the historicization of the practice of cutting someone's hair or shearing someone as acts of violence. We must highlight, however, its cultural pertinence and relative recurrence as symbolic practice. For example, the Judeo-Christian memory, which integrates the Western cultural repertoire, registers the myth of Samson, in which the cutting of his hair results from the betrayal of his plebeian wife Delilah and configures a violation of his religious commitment. In a contemporary time/space and circumscribed in the Brazilian context, the case of the transvestite Verônica Bolina, who, suspect of murdering an old woman, was arrested and supposedly tortured and shorn in jail, generates a controversy whose emblematic utterances are “#SomosTodasVerônica” [#WeAreAllVerônica] and “Nem todos são Verônica” [Not everyone is Verônica].²⁴ Nevertheless, despite the repeatability of this practice, which articulates hair shearing and violence, and the multiple ways of interpreting it, the ethical implications and the variegated aesthetic finish, which singularizes each event, also make evident the axiological universe that favors each emergence. This way, among the multiplicity of ethical-aesthetical relations that base and traverse the cases of shearing, what guides the selection of this *corpus* is the evaluative space associated to woman shearing as a penalty for delation. Even if we do not enter the discussion on genre, this puts in evidence and delimits the object investigated discourses such as “women are gossipers” and the practice of shearing. This practice is conceived as a discourse structured through an implicature relation of the following type: shearing → de-feminilization → dehumanization → animalization.

Thus, we must identify the historical conditions of the French and of the Brazilian event in order to establish the dialogic relations that make evident the confluence and the singularization in the emergence of the utterances in focus. After all, it is not the concrete gesture of hair cutting that is under analysis here, but the judgement that defines the events and the aspects that redefine them in the media spectacle.

From the French context, we select here the discussion developed by Virgili in *La France “Virile”: des Femmes Tondues à la Libération* [*The “Virile” France: Women Shorn at the Liberation*]. In this work, the author seeks to give voice to one episode of

²⁴ In order to illustrate this controversy, see, for example: http://www.brasilpost.com.br/2015/04/16/somos-todas-veronica_n_7079882.html, and <https://br.noticias.yahoo.com/blogs/guy-franco/nem-todos-sao-veronica-145927127.html>.

the French history, which has caused disgust and, therefore, has been considered marginal in the historiography of the country. The existence of a vast “documentary” stock of the phenomenon (films, literature, songs, and photographs) establishes the memory of the post-war events and materialize “an evocation of a certain disgust” (VIRGILI, 2004, p.12).²⁵

Because of this kind of disgust, which produced a sense of “repressed shame” in French society for a long time, the historiography did not delve into the practice of shearing satisfactorily. Indeed, it was frequently reduced to numbers and statistics:

The shorn are mentioned, but they remain on the fringes of the narrative and of interpretation. Their photographs are used as mere illustration, some lapidary phrases sometimes recall them, some other work does not even mention them (VIRGILI, 2004, p.13-14).²⁶

The moment pictured by Virgili is exactly that of the German withdrawal from the French territory, when the allies finally win the war. This period of history, when Germans were expelled from France, which slowly started to belong to the French people, was known as *Libération* (Liberation). At that time, according to Virgili (2004), there was an enormous instability in all sectors of the French society (laws, politics, and so on) because, apart from the material damage caused by the war, there was also the suspension of the French state apparatus as the country had been under the Vichy Regime during the German domain.

During that Regime, the country was ruled by Henri Phillippe Pétain – subject to the orders of the German state. Many Frenchmen and Frenchwomen – like their ruler – thought it was more viable to “join” the Germans so that their lives would be “easier.” This was the condition of the “allies to the German” during the Vichy Regime, which would be judged afterwards during the *Libération*. According to Virgili’s oeuvre, it is during *Libération* that “traitors” and women accused of treason had to pay for their “desertion.” In that historical scenario, hair shearing constitutes a punishment affected by the feelings of liberty, peace, and anger:

²⁵ Text in original: “[...] une evocation d’un certain dégoût”.

²⁶ Text in original: “Les tondues sont mentionnées, mais restent à la marge du récit comme de l’interprétation, leurs photographies sont utilisées comme simples illustrations, quelques phrases lapidaires en rappellent parfois l’existence, d’autres ouvrages n’en font nullement état”.

Anger, desire for revenge, misogyny coexisted with passion for liberty. With that, it is necessary to keep the otherness of the past constantly. The past is not the present, and the perception of the shearing in Liberation has nothing in common with the perception people have nowadays (VIRGILI, 2004, p.15).²⁷

In the Brazilian context, “dishonor” is not built on the nationalist ethics and/or libertarian pillars, but on the values of a social group that, despite being inscribed in this context, is not subject to Brazilian laws and rules. At least at the time of the events taken as the object of the news, these slums in Rio de Janeiro were defined by the influence of the culture of drug dealing. This culture imposed its own rules for that social group to function. Thus, the ethical issue at stake is different. The “treason” punished with hair shearing is defined by a supposed non-submission to the values of that culture, and not by a nationalist ideal.

Moreover, the event of shearing in Brazil is accessed by its transposition into another register. Originally filmed by the tormentors, the image is re-signified in the TV-journalistic production, which conveys the value of its social place. Whatever circulates on TV and on the internet afterwards does not share the same ethics that sustains the original footage made by the dealers. That is the key to understand what is at stake in the event broadcast in Brazil: the strangeness of the ethics implicated in the episode taken as a media event producing trauma, or, in Barthes’s words, shock (BARTHES, 1997).²⁸

Differently from what Barthes observed in relation to the shocking photographs, when he stated that the shocking photos artistically exposed at Orsay Museum were not at all shocking because they accomplished an ethical-aesthetical finish inherent to the artistic field, the moving image mobilized in the journalistic representation produces a traumatic effect. The aesthetic finish – which for Bakhtin is not detachable from the ethical act – of those journalistic products makes room for judgement of the scenes of shearing in the slums as something from the order of the horror. Actually, the scenes broadcast on TV news and spread on the internet have no “artistic proposition,” and are not thus conceived in our cultural sphere. Sounds, image, and gestures of the act of shearing, the victim’s pleas, the narrative of reporters, the amateur character of the

²⁷ Text in original: “La haine, le désir de vengeance, la misogynie ont coexisté avec la passion de la liberté. Il faut en cela garder constamment à l’esprit l’alterité du passé. Le passé n’est pas le présent, et la perception des tontes à la Libération n’a rien de commun avec celle d’aujourd’hui”.

²⁸ See footnote 4.

footage (the shaky movement of the camera in the amateur hands of the one who registers the scene) and of the settings and, most importantly, the fact that the journalistic product is socially established as a “place of ordinary truth” share this aesthetic of trauma with the interlocutors.

3 Remarks about an Aesthetics of Trauma in Brazil: Interpretative Notes on the Case of Woman Shearing

The events dialogically related here – woman shearing in French Liberation in the 1940s and in Brazilian slums in the 21st century – do not figure as mere sequence of facts. As far as the intentional dimension of the actants involved in the events is concerned, there is no evidence that the episodes in Brazil are due to the French one. However, the value projected over the women’s actions that resulted in this specific punishment enables us to compare those two contexts. Empirically, there is a material similarity: cutting/shaving women’s hair. Symbolically, they are alike because of the way those women’s action is valued – delation – and because of the respective punishment they receive – shearing.

In the oeuvre *La France “Virile”: des Femmes Tondues à la Libération* [*The “Virile” France: Women shorn at the Liberation*], especially in the section entitled *De quelles collaborations sont accusées les “tondues”* (Of what collaboration are the “shorn women” accused), Virgili states:

The denunciation symbolizes the daily cowardice of the occupation. Those thousands of letters which reached the German were object of countless comments. They represent, however, only 6,5% of the cases of collaboration of which the shorn women are accused. Nevertheless, this low number does not hide the diversity of the reasons for delation. According the *dossiers* consulted, there is an infinite variety of personal situations. Thus, in 1940 a woman in Macheumont, Oise, claims to have denounced a Senegalese soldier to the Germans for fear: “It was the fear of seeing a black man that made me act so foolishly [...] I had my hair cut because I had denounced a soldier” (2004, p.22-23).²⁹

²⁹ Text in original: “Les dénonciations sont le symbole des innombrables lâchetés quotidiennes de l’Occupation. Ces milliers de lettres de dénonciation qui parvenaient aux Allemands ont été l’objet de très nombreux commentaires. Elles ne représentent pourtant que 6,5% des faits de collaboration dont sont accusées les femmes tondues. Ce faible nombre ne cache pas cependant la diversité des motifs de délation. Ao gré des dossiers consultés, apparaît une infinie variété de situations personnelles. Ainsi, une femme de Macheumont dans l’Oise prétend avoir dénoncé en 1940 um soldat sénégalais aux Allemands par craite:

The example mentioned in this quotation, i.e., the woman who denounced a Senegalese soldier to the Germans for fear during the Vichy Regime, consists of a testimony given after the shearing of one of the victims of the punishment. This case is relevant here for the reason of the shearing: delation. In the period of the Liberation, this reprehensible practice – delation – was listed among the crimes against the French nationality. It was mainly an act related to treason. Delation was understood as “moral deviation” rather than associated to a war crime, punishable in a traditional way, such as imprisonment. In this sense, the figure of the informer went against the ideals of liberty and the resumption of the French state after the victory in the mid-1940s. At the same time, the informer configured material place for the visible exercise of the French power, which seemed so impotent before the destruction. How to start? By punishing those who had left the very French ideal, no matter what reason they had, and, therefore, did not “deserve” to be recognized as a member of the recomposing society.

In this scenario, the nationalist discourse grounds, justifies, and conveys meaning to the practice. Despite the value of the punitive practices, the ethical reference functions as a parameter to the national reconstruction and the discursive ordination. This parameter makes possible the identification of those who were deserters, deviants. Even then, when revisiting such practices, French historiography projects some reprehension. The enforced violence does not seem justifiable; then, it is shameful. In the disclosure of the practice, shearing is re-signified as a fault, a mistake. Its thematization in films, documentaries or studies such as those highlighted here (aesthetical work) seems to figure as a social retraction (ethical responsibility).

This network of meanings present in the context of Liberation – which configured “reasons” and justification – significantly differs from the practice broadcast in Brazil on these days. The relations which derive from the cases are neither the reproduction of the same nor the establishment of absolute consensus, but a responsivity that implies new utterances that echo utterances of some other time and space. In this sense, it is possible to state that the utterance in the reports on shearing in slums in Rio de Janeiro is in relation of responsivity with the practice at some other time.

“C’est la peur de voir un homme noir qui m’a fait agir aussi bêtement [...] j’ai eu les cheveux coupés parce que j’avais dénoncé un soldat”.

On the first selected video, a scene recorded with one of the hair shearers' mobile phone is exhibited. While they enforce the sentence, the executors judge the actions of the "convicted" and sing some funk describing the procedure and the reason why the "convicted" suffers the sentence.³⁰ This way, on the funk beat one of the "judges" of the traffic who punishes the girl with shearing – because she would have supposedly disclosed some of the dealer's secrets on the internet – sings: "It's the law of the slum, if you 'rat on' any bandit, you're beaten up and get bald."³¹ On the second video, which also shows scenes recorded with the mobile phone of one of the hair shearers who judge the practice, another girl has her hair shaved, constituting, therefore, another event. This time, the sentence is applied because the girl would have told the dealer's wife he had a lover. After beating her on the face, the aggressor asks, "To gossip around, You didn't think about that when you gossiped around?"^{32 33}

The slang words used – "gossip around," "ratting on" – are not comparable to the delation to be punished during the resumption of the French state. There is no synonym here, and "to rat on bandits" does not integrate the same order as "to denounce a Senegalese soldier" – thinking of Virgili's quotation above (VIRGILI, 2004). The finish of the report establishes the event as an "absurd," something "unthinkable," something that is not classified as "accepted" by anyone else, except for the dealers who apply the punishment. While the shearing in the French context was surrounded by a kind of "aura of massive adherence of the population" – which is valued as an exercise of popular justice –, on the news in current Brazil it is built as "singular activity" or as an "isolated case." This is true even if this case is compared to some others cases belonging to the criminal world.

Nevertheless, there are similarities which allow us to establish a dialog. Both in France and in Brazil, delation ("gossip," "ratting on") is not only punishable by imprisonment or any "ordinary" sentence, but it is also publically punishable by stigmatization, humiliation, and animalization. These are the effects of meaning reproduced. The ritual follows a specific ethic-religious pattern that refers to purification of sins by corporal punishment, which creates a verbal-visual regime of "trauma."

³⁰ Available at: <<http://tvuol.uol.com.br/video/traficantes-cortam-cabelos-de-garota-como-punicao-assista-0402CC9A346CD0A12326>>.

³¹ Text in original: "É a regra da favela, se 'caguetar' qualquer bandido, 'toma um pau' e fica careca".

³² Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9TWeHEuzGs>.

³³ Text in original: "Fazer fofoca dos outros; Tu não pensou quando fez a fofquinha?"

Punishing is not enough. The spectacle of the punishment must be also evident and must convey a peculiar visual regularity. The victim remains seated or on her knees. She is assaulted on the head or on her back with blows from top to bottom, as if reinforcing her prostration. The scenes capture haircuts, scissors and razors, objects used in the performance of the practice.

As an ethical, aesthetical and moral activity, the shearing seems to recall a hunting trophy as well. In one of the moments of the report, the narrator, i.e., the reporter, states: “To the bandits, the hair plucked from the victim is a trophy.”³⁴ It recalls the typical hunting image in which the hunter steps over the slaughtered animal and photographs the scene to register the moment.

A particular point, however, must be highlighted. It is not a mere practice presented immediately to us, but it is mediated by the images registered by the dealers’ mobile phones and reassumed by the voice of TV-journalism – which, in this case, is considered sensationalist. The dealers’ voice – through the practice they perform – and the journalists’ voice are mingled. But when reporters speak, their evaluation is revealed: “A teenager is cruelly tortured;” “the victim experiences moments of horror;” “the scenes are shocking;” “[...] the bandit uses a razor;” “torture section;” “Even a funk has been composed to demonstrate their cruelty.”³⁵ These and other linguistic excerpts can be presented to re-determine the reporters’ and the anchor’s enunciative-discursive standpoint while they describe the scenes on the screen.

This seems to be a quite ambiguous place that is de-limited by the safe distance of the one who “does not adhere” to that discourse at the same time that it becomes “productive” along with the practice. TV News is the space of productivity that mobilizes the spectacle in order to make other voices speak. We highlight that the voice of denouncement and that of daily sadism. In the French context, this place was filled by the photographer. According to Virgili (2004, p.115), “Photographs have this peculiar characteristic of being at one time source and event: they influence the development of shearing, structure their organization, and modify their attitude.”³⁶

³⁴ Text in original: “Para os bandidos, o cabelo arrancado da vítima é um troféu”.

³⁵ Text in original: “Uma adolescente é cruelmente torturada”; “momentos de terror vividos pela jovem”; “As imagens são impressionantes”; “[...] o bandido usa um aparelho de barbear”; “sessão de tortura”; “Até um funk foi feito para demonstrar a crueldade dos bandidos”.

³⁶ Text in original: “Les photographies ont la particularité d’être à la fois source et événement: elles influent sur le déroulement de la tonte, structurent son organisation, modifient les attitudes”.

Comparing the photos of the *tondues* with the Brazilian TV image, we must point out another difference. Indeed, one cannot say that, in the photographic register, the signification has this nature of “spectacle.” Looking at the photos presented by Virgili (2004) and Brossat (1992), it seems sensible to sustain Barthes’s (1997)³⁷ point of view, according to whom there is nothing there that produces “horror.” We are not saying, however, that it is impossible for the spectator of those pictures, recollected by the authors of the story of the shorn women, to associate them to horror senses. However, we can say that the place in which the photos are inscribed is more related to “documental” and “artistic” sphere rather than to a spectacle. There is a documental nature in the sense that many of those photos were attached to the *dossiers* of the convicted women as a way of procedural record (VIRGILI, 2004; BROSSAT, 1992). Besides, there is an artistic nature to them in the sense that there is necessarily a typically formal technical-artistic finish of the photos. One of the most known pictures of that time (*La tondue de Chartres/ The Shorn of Chartres*) was taken by the photographer Robert Capa, who is worldwide famous not only for capturing scenes, but mainly for the art of his pictures. From the point of view of the shock, according to Barthes,

[...] the mistake in principle is the same; they have attempted, for example, to catch, with great technical skill, the rarest moment of a movement, its extreme point, the leap of a soccer player, the levitation of objects in a haunted house. [...] the spectacle, though direct and not at all composed by contrasting elements, remains too constructed (1997, p.72).³⁸

On the scenes of the report, those aspects stand in the background, not to say they are absent. Loosely speaking, the crudeness of the image registered by the dealers and the dramatic descriptions made by the journalists help to build an effect of spectacle.

Considering the meaning network which is established by the construction of a memory, the image on the screen discursivized by TV-journalism is inscribed in another series of meanings. It is not art and is not committed to technical skills – the film itself (made by the dealers) is poorly finished and has no professional resource for edition. However, it is linked to the reality of facts and to the quotidian – even if turned into a spectacle – of the spectator. This ordinariness – which could be paraphrased by

³⁷ See footnote 4.

³⁸ See footnote 4.

utterances, such as “you see, this happened on an ordinary day, in an ordinary week, in an ordinary neighbourhood”; “it could have happened to any of us” – generates the effect of shock and draws an aesthetics of trauma. Because it is interpreted as the “lengths of reality,” TV-journalism reframes the practice, this time re-signified as shocking.

Final Words

The brief analysis of the production of discourses about the shearing of women seems to raise debates rather than answer questions. According to Brossat,

In other words, beyond the “impossible narrative,” shearing – as a historical, social, cultural total phenomenon – constitutes a formidable challenge, an invitation for the researcher to exceed the gaps which separate specialties in order to happily walk along the diagonal of the so called “human sciences” (1992, p.20).³⁹

Before the potentiality of the utterances which the episodes catch, we come back to the question: how does the voice of the post-war French context emerge in such a disparate historical inscription as the Brazilian context, re-signifying practices of shearing women’s hair? The web of voices present in the analyzed report demonstrates that the “prose” of the shorn women in Brazil is built through the lengths of the daily language of Brazilian News, bringing different voices to its interior: the journalistic voice with its tone of reproduction of facts/truths; the voice of a cultural functioning whose ethics is unfamiliar to the social relations that are accepted by the collective to which the news is addressed; the voice of the right to punish the practitioner of delation, which integrates the semantic potentiality of the event, among others. Those different voices stratify language, since those multiple voices evoked relate to variegated ideological references and leave their prints on the utterances by means of which they represent their axiological positions.

³⁹ Text in original: “En d’autres termes, par-delà le “récit impossible”, les tontes – comme phénomène historique, social, culturel total – constituent un formidable défi, une invitation pour le chercheur à faire sauter les cloisons qui séparent encore les spécialités, à cheminer crânement le long de la diagonale desdites “sciences humaines”.

On the one hand, in the French context, the discursivization of the event firstly appeals to national pride and, secondly, provokes shame before the impinged violence. In this scenario, the photographic record implies some aesthetic work that generates the revisiting of the ethical posture. On the other hand, in the TV-journalism that covers the Brazilian cases, the discursivization of the shearing of women builds old-new unfamiliar meanings: not unfamiliar meanings that derive from the signality of the utterance form but an ethical unfamiliarity, which characterizes the aesthetics of trauma. The particular conditions of the ethical and aesthetical emergence of so different utterances in similar practices draw remarkable evaluative borders. While in France shame, but not shock is produced, in Brazil, the spectacle generates horror and produces trauma.

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