

Memory narratives as dispositif: *A Sirene* and the fight against forgetting

Narrativas da memória como dispositivo: A Sirene e a luta contra o esquecimento

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ABSTRACT

Based on notions as memory, testimony and *dispositif*, this article aims to investigate how the activation of memory, for the group of residents affected by the destruction of communities in the city of Mariana (MG) with the rupture of the Fundão Dam (2015), is characterized by singular intentionalities and in-tense (re)significations as a political action proper to the act of remembering to prevent the forgetting and erasure of the incident that destroyed dozens of homes and took the lives of 19 people. To do so, we proceed by analyzing textualities of a memorialistic nature of issues of the newspaper *A Sirene*, edited since February 2016 by those affected by the incident, trying to understand how these narratives are instituted as a memory *dispositif*, based on the Deleuzean reading of the Foucaultian notion of *dispositif*.

Keywords: Memory, *dispositif*, testimony, *A Sirene*

RESUMO

A partir de noções como memória, testemunho e dispositivos, busca-se investigar acionamentos da memória pelo grupo de moradores atingidos pela destruição de comunidades em Mariana (MG) com o rompimento da Barragem do Fundão (2015). Tal acionamento reveste-se de intencionalidades singulares e (re)significações em termos de um agir político próprio do ato de lembrar com o objetivo de impedir o esquecimento e apagamento do incidente que destruiu dezenas de moradias e que tirou a vida de 19 pessoas. Procede-se a análise de textualidades de natureza memorialística de edições do jornal *A Sirene*, editado desde fevereiro de 2016 pelos atingidos do incidente. Busca-se entender como tais narrativas se instituem como dispositivos da memória.

Palavras-chave: Memória, dispositivos, testemunho, *A Sirene*

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INTRODUCTION

A first remark: as memory is essentially cultural (Lotman, 1998), it is also inexorably relational and therefore instituted in a procedural way. This is the starting point of this reflection that proposes to relate memory with the Foucaultian notion of *dispositif* (Deleuze, 2005), having as object of analysis the textualities of memorialistic nature present in the newspaper *A Sirene*, created and edited since February 2016 by those affected by the socio-environmental crime that resulted in the rupture of the Fundão Dam, in Mariana (MG)¹. From notions such as individual and collective memory, testimony and *dispositif*, this article aims to investigate how the activation of memory, for the group of residents affected by the destruction of their community, with serious environmental damage, is characterized by singular intentionalities and intense (re)significations: either as a political action proper to the act of remembering to prevent forgetting and erasure of the incident that destroyed dozens of homes and took the life of nineteen people; or as to create spaces and opportunities for those affected to record and preserve memories of a past community life; or even because the act of recalling constitutes a *locus* of resistance and fight against impunity of those responsible and to guarantee the rights of those affected.

In the authors' understanding, the proposal to consider media textualities as a memory *dispositif* has rich heuristic power, at it allows to approach processes present in the tensions between remembering and forgetting, focusing both the circumstances of activation of the memorable and its textualities – verbal, imagery, etc. – through which the meanings they propose materialize, besides others they end up providing. To this end, this theoretical construct emerges in and from the articulation between the fundamentals on the memorialistic (Gagnebin, 2006; Halbwachs, 1990; Huyssen, 2014; Le Goff, 2013; Pollak, 1992; Ricoeur, 2007) and Deleuze's (2005) reading of the Foucaultian notion of *dispositif*. We sought to understand how the so-called lines of force, lines of light, of flight, among others, as well as the respective curves and points of contact they provoke in their movements – always of a relational and symbolic nature – can constitute a powerful interpretative set to, here, address some representative editions of the newspaper *A Sirene – Para não esquecer*². On the notion of memory, in our discussion, we drawn on the relations between: individual and collective memory (Halbwachs, 1990); memory and identity construction (Pollak, 1992); and memory and forgetting (Huyssen, 2014), besides the tensions between memory and history (Ricoeur, 2007). We also resort to the philosophy of testimony, proposed by Jean-Philippe Pierron (2010), for whom testimony “is not only information, but also to make something present, a presence in the present time” (p. 254). And that is how *A Sirene* seems to get entangled: with

¹The rupture of the Fundão Dam, from the mining company Samarco, considered the largest socio-environmental disaster in the country and one of the largest in the world in the mining sector, with the release of about 40 million cubic meters of toxic mud and tailings in the environment occurred on November 5, 2015, in the city of Mariana, located in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte (MG).

²The first issue of *A Sirene* circulated in February 2016. Published monthly, the newspaper completed three years in February 2019.

witnesses and testimonies in a political and moral act guided by the mission of remembering, making use of the memorialistic narrating – the nostalgia and, at the same time, the pain of the memories of the community that disappeared under Samarco's millions of tons of mud.

MEMORY TEXTUALITIES AS DISPOSITIF

Understand the activation of memory as a *dispositif* is productive because memory, in its cultural and symbolic, relational and procedural essence, exists in *dispositif-like* conditions. Since memory is instituted in circumstances of negotiation and dispute, its unstable and provisional character results from the intersections of lines of light, enunciation, subjectification and force. Memory may also be understood from the dimensions of *dispositifs*. Deleuze (2005) highlights the following dimensions (and there may be others): of visibility, enunciation, subjectification and, finally, Foucault's primordial concept, the dimension of power. The dimensions of the *dispositif* thus derive essentially from the three dimensions the French philosopher seeks to distinguish in his work: the dimensions of knowledge, power and subjectification.

We searched Gilles Deleuze's (2005) work for a definition of *dispositif* that, apparently, would contribute more to ground our reflection. The author's definition, clear and properly attributed to Foucault, perceives the *dispositif* as a "tangle, a multilinear ensemble composed of lines, each having a different nature" (p. 83). In his reading of what he himself calls a Foucaultian philosophy of *dispositif*, Gilles Deleuze³ (2005) argues that the history of *dispositifs* is the history of regimes of light and of enunciations. He emphatically emphasizes that *dispositifs* present themselves as instances crossed by moving lines and tangential curves based on diverse variables that are internal and external to them.

Dreyfus and Rabinow (1995) point out that Foucault, in the course of his career, centered his investigation on the cultural practices in which knowledge and power intersect, starting from the hypothesis that truth is a central component of modern power. In sum, Foucault sought to construct "a mode of analysis of those cultural practices in our culture which have been instrumental in forming the modern individual as both object and subject" (p. 133). It was in this context of his work that Foucault introduced the term *dispositif*, which can be understood, therefore, as a grid of intelligibility (Dreyfus; Rabinow, 1995). The authors point out that, "although the meaning has not been spelled out" (p. 134), the *dispositifs* assumed a relevant role in Foucaultian thought. For Foucault, when one succeeds in isolating strategies of relations of forces supporting types of knowledge and

³ It is important to consider that Michel Foucault, in his books, addresses the notion of *dispositif* more closely in *The History of Sexuality I* (1999) and *Discipline and Punish* (2000).

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inversely, then one has a *dispositif* (p. 134). The *dispositif* would be this “initial attempt to name, or at least point to the problem” (p. 135).

In his attempt to unravel possibilities and meanings from employing the *dispositifs*, Deleuze, in *What is a dispositif?* (2005), proposes to understand them from the movements and displacements from which they result and so many others they end up creating. *Dispositifs*, therefore, would be composed of lines of force, lines of light, lines of subjectification and enunciation that do not circumscribe or involve homogeneous systems. Rather, in a random and off-balance way, the *dispositifs* remake and reinvent themselves at all times, from circumstances, disputes and negotiations, as mentioned, considering the multiple variables they trigger and those to which they give rise. Such lines, in turn, follow directions, outline processes, these usually off balance. They move continuously, drawing together and then distancing themselves from one another – nearing, distancing, rejecting one another – thus denoting the relational and procedural nature of the *dispositifs*. For Deleuze, thinking of a *philosophy of dispositifs* means considering that they are composed of different types of lines (enunciation, force, fracture, subjectification, etc.) that criss-cross and mingle together. Between the consequences of this frantic and unstable mode of existence of the *dispositifs*, is the fact that each of them becomes a multiplicity in which several processes operate in a becoming, and thus act distinctly in each *dispositif* (Bruck, 2012, p. 42).

If an important part of Foucault’s work aimed at deciphering codes and unveiling discourses, often illegible, of the relationships between individuals and of those with power and knowledge, using the notion of *dispositif* as an operational concept can contribute to better understand the contexts and textualities of *A Sirene*, marked intensely, as discussed later, by memorialistic triggers. As Dreyfus and Rabinow (1995) argue, guiding oneself by *dispositifs*, from these disparate components, “one seeks to establish a set of flexible relationships, and merge them into a single apparatus in order to isolate a specific historical problem” (p. 134). That is, as a diagrammatic orchestration, as abstract abstraction-producing machines, *dispositifs* are allocated from one end to another in symbolic processes, resulting from very concrete assemblages and producing as many others as there are visible and enunciable objects.

For Pollak (1992), memory (individual and collective) is designed, strongly and particularly, from three elements: *events* lived personally and by the group to which the subject belongs to, the *places* related to memories and the *people* (*characters*) who have been or are part of the life of those who remember. Regarding the rupture of the Fundão Dam, these elements are essentially constitutive of the so-called *Mariana dam disaster*, which devastated the Bento Rodrigues district.

People, places and the event itself are conjured by the memorialistic textualities established in the articulation of such elements. And they seem inextricable: the characters, who died or survived; the place, buried under millions of cubic meters of mud; and the event, with such power to transform the lives of hundreds of families and to impact the environment that it ends up imposing itself.

It is in crisscrossing lines of enunciation, light and subjectification that one can understand why the residents' fight is one for maintaining the *place* where they lived and built their community life and the *characters* who lived there always alive in this memorialistic agenda. These discursive-enunciative relations between a before and an after the *event*, the dam rupture, are shaped and reshaped from complex disputes and negotiations resulting from textualities triggered as memory *dispositifs*, in a frantic and unstable movement resulting from diverse curves and points of contact that establish, by themselves, distinct dimensions of the memorable. Considering the purposes of the *dispositifs*, Deleuze (2005) reminds us that we are all somehow connected to *dispositifs* and act within them. And that the *dispositif*, driving agent of the world, but also always the result of this world, leans towards the actuality, the new.

The new is the current. The current is not what we are but rather what we are in the process of becoming – that is the Other, our becoming-other. In each *dispositif* it is necessary to distinguish what we are (what we are already no longer), and what we are in the process of becoming: *the historical part and the current part*. (p. 92)

Importantly, Deleuze's (2005) understanding of the actuality of a *dispositif* proved to be a rich possibility to discuss the textualities of *A Sirene* as memory *dispositifs*, from the conceptual architecture in which *dispositifs* are perceived by line beams of different natures and originated in different dimensions that, at all times, intersect with one another. As Deleuze himself points out, untangling the lines of a *dispositif* is "like drawing up a map, doing cartography, surveying unknown landscapes," what Foucault called *working on the ground*. And it is only possible to do so if one is willing to "position oneself on these lines", knowing, a priori, that these line not only make up the *dispositif*, "but run through it and pull at it, from north to south, from east to west, or diagonally" (p. 84).

Readings of the newspaper's memorialistic-like texts highlight, particularly, the lines of light and enunciation, force and subjectification. Deleuze (2005) emphasizes that *dispositifs*, in their workings,

do not outline or surround systems which are each homogeneous in their own right... but follow directions, trace balances which are always off balance, now



drawing together and then distancing themselves from one another. Each line is broken and subject to *changes in direction*, bifurcating and forked, and subjected to *drifting*. (p. 83)

In *A Sirene*, initially, the lines of force move in the present of a political action and inscribe the fight against the forgetting and erasure of the Fundão Dam incident. The newspaper is crossed by tangential curved lines, depending on the types of content and approaches triggered by the textualities it conveys. Lines of light and enunciation that, in the discursive and symbolic action, try, at all times, to bring forth narratives aiming to institute the memorable. Lines of subjectification that, when trying to make the past present, try to prevent the erasure of affections that marked individual and community relations with the old places and characters, making nostalgia a motivation to fight for rights and against the loss of one's own identity. Deleuze (2005) highlights, on the processes of creation of *dispositifs*, these lines of force that come about in any relationship and passes through every area of the *dispositif*. "Invisible and unsayable, it is closely knitted in with the others, yet separable" (p. 85). That is, the lines of force – power – are always present.

In relating memory and truth of the past, Gagnebin (2006) presents us with the thought-provoking question: the truth about the past would refer more to an ethics of present action than to a problem of adequacy "between words and facts" (p. 39). From there, the author's argument puts into question this possibility of rescuing the truth of past events, based on Walter Benjamin's critical view of historiography. Refuting a deterministic idea of history, Benjamin understood that the relationship with the past includes the impossibility of knowing it as it actually happened, the goal of a type of historiography that the German essayist thought of as "historicist and bourgeois," in a word, the positivist historiography. Rather, looking to the past would mean "seizing a memory as it flickers in an instant of danger" (Gagnebin, 2006, p. 40).

It seems appropriate thus to draw an approximation, in Benjamin's work, between the notion of history and that of memory, theme also discussed by Paul Ricoeur (2007), for whom the question of the duty of memory, or other crucial problems that appeal to a politics of memory, should be placed under a reappropriation of the historical past by a memory instructed by history, and often struck by it. For Ricoeur, the shift, in turn, from writing to reception and reappropriation would not suppress this riddle.

In any case, undoubtedly, the fundamental question of this tension between history and memory concerns, directly, the duty to remember. As Ricoeur (2007) points out, the duty of memory is often a claim made by victims of a criminal

history; and its ultimate justification is this appeal to justice that is due to these victims. The driving force of the memorable, in these situations, besides the struggle to affirm a *truth*, reveals the notion of memory as an “instrument and object of power” (Ricoeur, 2007. p. 435). In this sense, the philosopher reminds us of the ethical mission incumbent upon

professional specialists in memory – anthropologists, historians, journalists, sociologists – to make of the struggle for the democratization of social memory one of the primary imperatives of their scientific objectivity... Memory, on which history draws and which it nourishes in return, seeks to save the past in order to serve the present and the future. Let us act in such a way that collective memory may serve the liberation and not the enslavement of human beings. (pp. 436-437)

It should be highlighted, still from Ricoeur’s perspective, that the tensions between memory and history outline by themselves such dimensions. For historians, the incomparable dimension of an event can only be affirmed after the similarities and differences have been evaluated, considering materialities and other records. For the group that remembers, the signs of suffering attest this dimension on their own.

As Ricoeur, Huyssen (2014), in turn, also expressed his concern about the excessive importance given to memory and, in one occasion, the “very silence that hovers over forgetting in contemporary average culture” (p. 30). For the German author, it is imperative to understand that the actions of remembering and forgetting are not to be perceived in mere mechanical and simplistic oppositions. Forgetting, to him, must be perceived “in a field of terms and phenomena such as silence, lack of communication, political disarticulation, evasion, cultural erosion, political and/or institutional repression” (p. 31). That is, forgetting can result from operations as complex as memory.

Huyssen (2014) draws on the basic distinctions by which Paul Ricoeur approached memory, i.e., *le mémoire empêchée* (blocked memory), *mémoire manipulée* (manipulated memory) and a third modality, dedicated to forgetting, *l’oubli commandé* (commanded forgetting), also called institutionalized forgetting. From the latter derives another type of forgetting, the *oubli manipulée* (manipulated forgetting), which originates from mediating memory through narrative reconfiguration, resulting, for the French thinker, in the expression of a *mauvaise foi* (bad faith) or a *vouloir-ne-pas-savoir* (wanting-not-to-know).

Like memory, forgetting is built and can be imposed or even negotiated (Huyssen, 2014). It results from speechlessness, dullness, obstructions, thoughtlessness, rearrangements in the perspectives of past events or even their



complete denial. If memory is the presence of an absence, forgetting results from the symbolic denial and invalidation of the referent – so to speak, the definitive death of things, events and people.

Mobilizing against erasure and forgetting is one of the main goals of those affected by the rupture of the Fundão Dam: fighting to preserve the memory of a “before” – community life, social relations, common daily life, sense of belonging – and the memory of the terrible incident that buried all this. One must remember the before and what halted it. In this time game of past-present-future in the context of memory, those affected by the Fundão Dam fight against the loss of their community and cultural roots or, as emphasized by Ecléa Bosi (2012) in citing Simone Weil’s concept, fight for their *right to establish roots*, a right of the human being. Ecléa Bosi reminds us, therefore, that uprootedness impacts the group’s own identity.

The link with the past is vital because the sap that forms the identity comes from it. The same can be said on the notion of the right to establish roots, which is a human right similar to other rights linked to the survival of the human being... As Simone Weil stated, the human being becomes rooted by their participation in a collectivity, which keeps alive certain treasures of the past and certain inklings of the future. The uprootedness enforced upon us by modern life is a disaggregating condition of memory. One of the cruelest exercises of oppression in modern society (oppression of an economic nature) is the spoliation of memories... The neighborhood residents carry a sense of belonging to a tradition, a way of seeing that animates the life of the streets, squares, markets and corners. And all this is well reflected in the testimonies of our memorialists. (p. 199)

In the memorialistic texts of *A Sirene*, testimony is a recurring narrative resource, which expresses, so to speak, the also testimonial essence of memory. Jean-Philippe Pierron (2010), in his proposal of a philosophy of testimony, reminds us that testimony has at its core a paradox: truth would be less on the side of the objectivity one expects from evidence and arguments than that of the subjectivity of experience and emotion. The testimony would therefore attest to a truth which, while not objectively sufficient, is subjectively so. Its possibility would reside in ratifying, with the mark of reliability or fidelity, the relationship of testimony with its witness. This, in turn, makes the truth the story of one’s own life, but whose meaning will only exist when perceived by the other (Pierron, 2010).

That is because testimony carries a relational facet. It exists only in dialogue. Testimony is a testimony before and to others. One is not a witness on their own; witnessing is inevitably intersubjective. But witnesses attest and bring within themselves more than themselves. They carry a truth – forged in experience – that

for this very reason, cannot be reduced to a mere opinion. And therefore, it is also performative. That is, a subject who speaks as a subject who acts.

A kind of crossroads in visibility, icon more than idol, testimony gauges the essential difference between the one who witnesses and what one witnesses. Displacement of the survivor who addresses the present from a background of absence, so is the testimony. The testimony always comes second, insisting on what one can no longer see. (Pierron, 2010, p. 30)

Selligmann-Silva (2008) analyzes what he understands to be a paradoxical singularity of testimony. Being every testimony unique and irreplaceable, its singularity is presented as absolute and “consistent with the uniqueness of its message” (p. 72). On the one hand, it heralds something exceptional, whose strength and reliability lies in its own legitimate act of witnessing. But for Selligmann-Silva, it is this same singularity that undermines how the testimony relates to the symbolic, for language

is a construct of generalizations, it is made of universals. As a singular event, testimony challenges language and the listener. We know that the fragmentation of reality, the collapse of the testimony of the world, as we have seen, obstructs its passage and translation into the symbolic. The well-known literality of the traumatic scene – or the flattening of its images, which we saw above – hinders the symbolization. But by reaffirming this absolute singularity of the testimony, the possibility of its repetition and synapse with the symbolic, always haunted by the possibility of its fictionalization, is barred. (p. 72)

Even considering these paradoxes inherent to the singularities of testimony and, more broadly, of the very triggering of instances of the memorable, it is in this work of weaving with the threads of individual and collective memories a fabric that lasts in time and manages to hold the group united, that *A Sirene* acts as a memorialistic *dispositif*. In the newspaper *A Sirene*, the discursive movements observed are demarcation of rights, demand of immediate reparation, immediate and fair action of the constituted powers and triggering of memory – is this last point that interests us more closely in this article.

A SIRENE: FIGHT AGAINST SILENCING, ERASURE AND FORGETTING

On the afternoon of November 5, 2015 an event of vast social and environmental proportions marked the country’s history and, more directly, the



⁴Besides the nineteen deaths recognized by Samarco, we have the case of the survivor Priscila Monteiro, 28, who fights for recognition of the twentieth victim. Priscilla was three months pregnant and suffered an abortion at the time the Dam ruptured.

memory of hundreds of thousands of people from the states of Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo. Three years later, the consequences of the Fundão Dam rupture remain. The extent of the tragedy speaks for itself. It is estimated that, directly and indirectly, more than 500,000 people have been affected. Whole communities, forests, rivers, rural estates and roads have simply disappeared. Nineteen people died⁴. One of Brazil's main rivers, the Doce River, had about 400 kilometers of its extension contaminated. Environmentalists do not know if, how and when the Doce River will recover. The Fundão dam was a development owned by two of the world's largest mining companies: Vale S.A. and the English-Australian BHP/Billiton, controlled by Samarco Mineração S.A. It was declared the country's largest environmental incident and the world's largest environmental disaster involving tailings dams.

The so-called Fundão dam tragedy affected, in particular and more directly, residents of three communities: the Bento Rodrigues, the most destroyed subdistrict, where lived a group of about 220 families; 140 families from Paracatu de Baixo and 26 families from Gesteira (Barra Longa). Bento Rodrigues was wiped out. In addition to mining work, the small local population lived from family and subsistence farming, especially the production of habanero-like pepper jelly, which became the region's symbol after the opening of a cooperative undertaken by a group of resident women. The small subdistrict was crossed by the Gualaxo do Norte River whose bed also practically disappeared.

Exactly 90 days later, on February 5, 2016, the newspaper *A Sirene* was published. Published monthly, in print and digital versions, the newspaper is produced by those affected by the tragedy and maintained by an arrangement between residents of Bento Rodrigues, professors and students at the Federal Universities of Ouro Preto (UFOP) and Minas Gerais (UFMG) and advisories directed to those affected and social and collective movements. The publication, in the beginning, gathered a group of more than seventy people, including organizers and collaborators.

Besides giving voice to those affected by the dam rupture, the newspaper makes its purpose clear already in its own slogan: "Made by those affected. For those affected. To not forget." *A Sirene* prioritizes divulging the difficulties the families suffered after seeing their homes and everyday habits buried by a sea of mud and tailings. It also seeks to answer questions about environmental and legal rights and issues of mineral exploration and, above all, to prevent the 2015 event from being forgotten.

Articulating memories of remote and recent pasts, uncertainties of the present and questions about the future, the newspaper gives ample space to the residents' memories of what their lives were like in the old district;

it addresses the current struggles for rights of the affected people of Bento Rodrigues and exposes, recurrently, the prejudice experienced by the residents who decide to fight for their rights, since it is evident that if, on the one hand, the affected continues to fight for reparation, on the other, this fight does not exactly receive the support of the entire population of Mariana, since a considerable part of the city's economy – and, therefore, its workers, trade and municipal government – survives from mining activities and taxes. And it sheds light, with each edition, on questions about the future of Bento Rodrigues, the hundreds of residents plucked from their homes and what will happen to the Doce River, one of Brazil's main rivers, whose waters received a massive amount of the leaked tailings, reaching the sea, near the state of Espírito Santo.

When analyzing the narratives in *A Sirene*, we sought to observe the intensity and how the memory is triggered by the newspaper, as to prevent the history of those residents, of the streets and squares that disappeared, of the river that was erased, from being forgotten. Starting from its name, *A Sirene – Para não esquecer*, the newspaper makes it clear that one of its main objectives is ensuring that the event – one that changed so many lives – remains under permanent discussion. The name is a reference to the siren that was not ringed at the time of the dam's rupture as to warn the residents of Bento Rodrigues to the tens of millions of cubic meters of mud and tailings that were on their way.

We therefore centered our analysis on the textualities we considered to be of a memorialistic nature. In our exploratory research in 36 issues of the newspaper, we chose to divide such articles and news stories into three categories: memory as a warning, the importance of remembering and the fight against forgetting the tragedy, and the use of testimony. From the set of issues of *A Sirene*, since its emergence in February 2016 until the same month in 2019, 61 texts were considered to have a predominantly memorialistic content, being 29 in 2017, 20 in 2018 and 12 in 2016. The smaller number of memorialistic-like texts in 2016 results from the priorities of the newspaper's agenda in the first year after the tragedy: address the immediate repercussions of the incident.

We observed, in the exploratory survey, that tactically, triggering the memories of those affected seeks to ensure more than a legitimate effect, but to establish the truth of the consequences of the dam's rupture. It is Halbwachs (1990) who points us to the strength of individual memory in the permanence of the collective. On the other hand, on this insistent and tentative work of permanent discussion, Halbwachs highlights that this collective memory can only persist if the group continues to remember together the memories of which they were and are part of.



When we state that testimony will recall nothing if no trace of the past event in question remains in our mind, we do not mean that the remembrance or some part of it has to continue to exist as such in us. We only mean that, from the moment when we and these other witnesses belong to the same group and remain capable of identifying ourselves with it and merging out past with its. Putting it another way, we must from this moment on never have lost the habit and capacity to think and remember as a member of the group to which we all belonged, to place ourselves in its viewpoint and employ the conceptions shared by its members. (p. 36)

If this is equivalent to saying that the dispersion of the group means the fragmentation and weakening of the collectively built memory, it is what the former residents of Bento Rodrigues seem to believe. Reason why triggering the individual memory of those affected in Bento Rodrigues, Paracatu and Gesteira is a recurring agenda in *A Sirene*. An example is the November 2017 edition, two years after the dam ruptured, where the newspaper presented a series of testimonies of those affected by the tragedy. Under the title “Minha vida lá” (My life there), five affected residents recall what their lives were like in the destroyed communities. Opening the text is a reflection on the importance of remembering:

Memory is a way of living and remaking the past, of remembering past events and of feeling, in the present, the conditions that give life meaning. It is a way of configuring ones identity or that of a community, a unique way of inhabiting space and also of projecting expectations for the future. (“Minha vida lá,” 2017, p. 4)

In one of the statements, a former resident of Bento Rodrigues, Maria das Graças Quintão, speaks with great affection of the community life that was lost:

We could sleep with the window open and everyone lived nearby. I saw everyone every day. The neighbors, we called each other through the wall. Dona Penha called me from one side, I responded from the other. Almost every meeting I had was in the square. When there was a party, the music and the games were also in the square... It is not fun to play anymore, because we see almost no one. (“Minha vida lá,” 2017, p. 4)

What is seen in action here, from Deleuze’s perspective of *dispositif*, is the triggering of lines of light and enunciation that emerge in the narratives that have memory, the game of the memorable, as their essence. When the incident completed its first year, in November 2016, *A Sirene* published a special edition. Among the memorialistic texts (that from this edition feature more prominently

in the newspaper), is the article “A última noite” (The last night), which evokes the memory of the night before the dam ruptured from the perspective of two residents of Bento Rodrigues and Paracatu. The testimony of Antônio Geraldo dos Santos, from Bento Rodrigues, describes well those moments of terror:

It was already night and our paradise had been destroyed quickly. The radiant afternoon gave way to agony and dusk brought a sadness that persists to this day. The moment I saw the people running, desperate, up into the bush, I climbed on top of the roof slab to see the proximity of the mud. The wave that folded houses as if they were made of paper, had reached its limit and would not reach where I was. That was when we were able to organize ourselves to help those who arrived hurt and dirty. In those minutes, we thought many would not survive, but each encounter brought a momentary comfort. (Santos, 2016, p. 14)

The January 2018 issue was also markedly memorialistic: the wistful and nostalgic tone tinted the memories of community life, marked by the expression of many affections. The news story “Por amor ao Bento, onde tudo começou” (For our love of Bento, where it all began), registers the celebration of Marinalda and Marquinhos’ 25 years of marriage. They married in 1992 at the São Bento Church in Bento Rodrigues. The church was destroyed, but the couple made a point of celebrating their silver wedding in the ruins of the small church. In its opening text, *A Sirene* states that the event, essentially private, was actually very significant to the community: “Those affected, once again, show that, through unity, it is possible to occupy a place that belongs to them. Above the love between two people is the love for various life stories, the love for Bento Rodrigues” (Muniz et al., 2018, p. 8).

In this dimension of the affections that condition the memorable, one can refer here to the lines of subjectification that, when trying to make the past present, fight against forgetting the lived and even the imagined – which also conforms memory. Try to prevent the erasure of affections that marked individual and community relations with the old places and characters, making nostalgia a motivation to fight for rights and against the loss of one’s own identity.

In this same edition, the article “Nossas histórias debaixo dos pés de frutas” (Our stories under the fruit trees) brought accounts of former Bento Rodrigues residents about the families that kept fruit trees. According to the testimonies, the life of each family was raised alongside the trees and bemoan that what was left of this coexistence were only memories, after the disaster that also took away the trees. “These testimonies,” says the article, “are a tribute of all those affected by the Fundão dam for the ‘friends’ who built unforgettable moments

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Memory narratives as *dispositif*

in their memories.” The text comprises testimonies from several residents who even state that their fruit trees were part of their lives, “it was as if they were a family member” (Dores et al., 2018, p. 11).

It is in this intersection of memorialistic narratives – with intense use of testimonies –, which bring out memories about people, places and events, especially the dam’s rupture that buried everything, that *A Sirene* acts as a memorialistic *dispositif*. Criss-crossing of lines of light and enunciation and, as seen earlier, of subjectification – affections, representations, identities.

The same appears in “Histórias de nossa gente” (Stories of our people) (2017), where the newspaper seeks to portray what the tragedy meant to those affected regarding their personal life. The text shows stories such as that of 75-year-old Dona Baduína, who managed to recover an old china cabinet, amid the mud, after scavenging through the rubble and mud for several days; or cases of resilience such as that of Cássia Bernabé, 19, who claims to have found in music and dance the strength to move on. “I have loved to dance since I was a little girl... This is how I have managed to forget the horrible November 5th” (“Histórias de nossa gente”, 2017, 5).

In this same edition, a 69-year-old man, Zé Barbosa, says he is condemned to suffer from all he has lost with the Fundão tragedy.

My loss at Bento was too great. I became beside myself. One day I had five properties, a small store, \$60,000 in cash and a lot of history. Suddenly, I woke up with nothing... I have become distressed. My health is over. I floundered you know? Even at bedtime I turn on the radio to get through the night. I listen to the songs and the people talking to me all night. That is what clears my bad thoughts. I try, real hard, but they will not go away. I have this buzz in my ear from the noise of the mud. (“Histórias de nossa gente”, 2017, p. 5)

Otherwise, committed to avoiding the erasure and silencing of the Fundão tragedy, the newspaper exposes the risk of forgetting. *A Sirene* took advantage of the two-year edition of the Fundão incident and especially demanded the media to not remember the dam rupture and all its consequences only on the “anniversary” of the tragedy. In the November 2017 edition, in a session entitled “Recados para a mídia” (Messages to the media), those affected seek to highlight, through testimonials, the silence of the press regarding the difficulties they face in daily life. With the title “Eu existo além do dia 5 de novembro” (I exist beyond November 5th), the newspaper brings testimonials from those affected who criticize the superficiality and episodic interest of journalistic coverage, as in this testimony from Airton Bolão, resident from Paracatu de Baixo:

We are known for November 5, 2015, but basically, our community is forgotten by the media. After the Fundão Dam rupture, all the press came to Mariana, it was an agenda that gave audience to the news. The work and the struggle kept on, but the media did not report it... The media only shows up here when there is a hearing that is going to decide something, after that – it is over, we are forgotten. (Sales et al., 2017, p. 2).

In this crossing of lines of light, subjectification and enunciation, entangled in lines of force, in curves of visibility and subjectification, *A Sirene* is the materiality of triggering processes in symbolic and cultural practices in which knowledge and power intersect. Their narratives act, in this sense, as memory dispositifs, when established as instances crossed by moving lines and tangential curves based on diverse variables that are internal and external to them (Deleuze, 2005).

The article “Sobre viver com a reparação” (About living with reparation), from April 2018, dealt with a very thorny issue for those affected. Since the incident in 2015, those affected receive a reparation aid, an indemnity that registered victims receive from Samarco. The text reports the strong protests of the beneficiaries against bureaucratic problems and difficulties in using the card in the commerce, even three years after the incident. But living with reparation has to do, besides administrative issues, with other embarrassing situations narrated by the residents. There are regular reports of difficulty in adapting to their new reality or of prejudices that they have suffered and suffer for various reasons.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

A Sirene, certainly, is just one of the dimensions of the struggles of those affected by the Fundão rupture. It concerns the symbolic and discursive spheres that, in a society that quickly becomes more mediated and mediatic, increasingly influences the directions of public life. Disputes and tensions spread to other spheres of society, in which those affected fight for their rights – together with justice, the city hall and other constituted powers. In the unmistakable circumstance in which one can perceive discourse as action and action as discourse, here we favored the triggers of a memorialistic nature, those affected understand that their performance in the mediatic public space is of strategic and proper importance to the social and political clash. For these are the roles that *A Sirene* seems to fulfill: both as a tool and a strategy, as medicine and resistance. A a dispositif.



In an intense struggle against forgetting and, thus, establishing itself as an effective memorialistic *dispositif*, the newspaper seeks, at present, to give body and prevalence to the residents' version of the events surrounding the dam's rupture; and also, of the actual material and immaterial losses they have suffered. It is, specifically, a dispute for affirming their truths, whose validation has a testimonial tone, because memorialistic. And regarding truth, it is worth remembering Foucault again (2000), for the French philosopher perceived it as "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true" (p. 13). If the truth, for the author, does not exist outside power or without power, surely the battle to which he referred to would not be "on behalf" of truth, but about the status of truth and its social implications.

In their own way, and within their possibilities, the communities affected by the Fundão dam rupture use *A Sirene* to fight against silencing, one of the strategies of forgetting (Huyssen, 2014). As a tool and strategy, those affected seek to permanently discuss the catastrophe so that their rights are not denied in institutional arrangements within the political and justice spheres. As medicine and resistance, as they try and, mainly, are able to talk about everything they experienced after the incident – according to several testimonies given to the newspaper – they seem to mitigate at least some of the suffering to which they were and are still subjected. Finally, as a memory *dispositif*, this discursive action is built by criss-crossing lines of various dimensions that create curves also the most diverse, producing and revealing negotiations and disputes, discoveries and ruptures promoted by memorialistic triggers.

At the end of January 2019, three years and two months after the Fundão dam rupture, when this article was being written, Minas Gerais suffered a new environmental tragedy caused by Vale. The incident, this time, happened in the city of Brumadinho, with the rupture of the Córrego do Feijão dam. More than 250 people died and dozens more are still missing as a result of this other, certainly preventable, collapse. The Paraopeba River, crucial for the water supply of the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte Minas, was contaminated by the mud and tailings. Another monumental and serious environmental crime involving Vale.

We conclude this article by resuming two characters highlighted in the November 2017 issue of *A Sirene*: Cássia Bernabé and Zé Barbosa. Victims of the same tragedy, their memory act in extremely different ways. Cassia, although very young (19 years old), used her childhood memory of liking music and dancing to move on. Sometimes, one must remember to forget. But this is not always possible: Zé Barbosa, in turn, seems doomed to never forget the noise

of the mud coming and destroying the houses. Memory can very well be like this: liberation for some; almost a condemnation for others. ■

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