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Chasing the Ordinary Way of Meaning: Amongst Language-Games and Everyday Practices / *No rastro do ordinário do sentido: entre jogos de linguagem e práticas cotidianas*

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we attempt to develop an essay on the concept of “ordinary meaning,” initially proposed by Michel Pêcheux. The concept, however, was not fully developed due to the French philosopher’s premature death in 1983. Thus, this essay aims to conjecture what this “ordinary way of meaning” might be. To do so, following Pêcheux’s suggestions, we will explore the “analysis of ordinary language,” as proposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein, and its culturalist reinterpretation by Michel de Certeau in everyday practices. At the end of the path, we arrive at two hypotheses: the first is that the “ordinary way of meaning” would not configure an “aspect” of meaning (or the inclusion of new objects, such as conversations, etc.), but a new paradigm to practice Discourse Analysis based on a “practical materialism”; the second is that thinking about meaning in its ordinary way causes Discourse Analysis to take into account discursive practices and their diagrams of action. Finally, as a simple homage to the more than 660,000 victims of COVID-19 in Brazil, the discussion around language-games and everyday practices will be guided by the reading of a *Memorial Inumeráveis* post in one of its social networks.

KEYWORDS: Discourse Analysis; Ordinary way of meaning; Language-games; Everyday practices

RESUMO

Neste artigo, busca-se desenvolver um exercício de elucubração sobre o conceito de “ordinário do sentido”, proposto inicialmente por Michel Pêcheux. O conceito, contudo, não foi plenamente desenvolvido devido à morte prematura do filósofo francês em 1983. Assim, o que se pretende é conjecturar o que poderia ser este “ordinário do sentido”. Para tal, em acordo com as sugestões de Pêcheux, segue-se explorando a “análise da linguagem ordinária”, conforme proposto por Ludwig Wittgenstein, e sua reinterpretação culturalista elaborada por Michel de Certeau nas “artes de fazer” cotidianas. Ao final do percurso, chega-se a duas hipóteses: a primeira é que o “ordinário do sentido” não configuraria um “aspecto” do sentido (ou a inclusão de novos objetos, como conversas etc.), mas sim um novo paradigma para se exercer a análise de discursos a partir de um “materialismo prático”; a segunda é que pensar o sentido em sua via ordinária faz com o que a análise do discurso tenha de levar em conta as práticas discursivas e seus diagramas de ação. Como singela homenagem às mais de 660 mil vítimas da covid-19 no Brasil, a discussão em torno dos jogos de linguagem e das práticas cotidianas será balizada pela leitura de um post do Memorial Inumeráveis em uma de suas redes sociais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Análise do discurso; Ordinário do sentido; Jogos de linguagem; Práticas cotidianas

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It is in the smallness that I see the
exhuberance¹

Manoel de Barros

Introduction

During the conference *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (University of Illinois), in 1983, Michel Pêcheux begins his intervention by announcing his critique against the figure “of this old Marxist theorist (Scholar) who wanted to make his library,” who, to accomplish such task, “the old Marxist was convinced that he was equipped with single Marxist wooden screws, when in fact he only had metallic ones ... but without any nut” (Pêcheux, 1990b, p.304).² Pêcheux goes on insisting on the necessity of bringing Marxism closer to other disciplines of knowledge, warning, however, that this approximation should not go in the direction of (re)constituting a “royal science” or a new ontology. On his part, the concern seems to have been raised by the emergence of a hitherto unprecedented problem in Discourse Analysis: the statute of those discursivities that, working an Event, produces both “propositions that seem logically stabilized and therefore may be univocally responded to (yes or no, *X or Y*) with those formulations that are irredeemably equivocal.”³ In this movement, the quarrel related to the ways of working with discursive materialities through their relations to everyday life and to the “ordinary way of meaning” eventually arises – and this is the theoretical quarrel that I intend to resume and debate here.

Despite the many passages that directly or indirectly allude to this “ordinary way of meaning,” Pêcheux did not stop to give it clear outlines.⁴ Unfortunately, his premature

¹ In the original: “*É no ínfimo que eu vejo a exuberância.*”

² In the original: “Connaissez-vous l’histoire de ce vieux théoricien (Scholar) marxiste qui voulait fabriquer lui-même sa bibliothèque? (...) Mais il régnait à ce propos une étrange confusion dans le marxisme: ainsi, le vieux marxiste avait l’absolue conviction d’être équipé de vis à bois marxistes célibataires, alors qu’en fait il ne disposait que de vis à métaux ... sans écrou.” For some reason, the first passages of Pêcheux’s conference weren’t included in the English translation, cited below.

³ PÊCHEUX, M. Discourse: Structure or Event?. Translated by Warren Montag, with Marie-Germaine Pêcheux and Denise Guback. In: NELSON; GROSSBERG (eds.). *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Illinois: MacMillan Education LTD, 1988.

⁴ On the same page, “the ordinary of the masses” becomes an “ordinary way of meaning” (PÊCHEUX, 1988, p.645) and, further on, returns as an “ordinary register of meaning” (PÊCHEUX, 1988, p.646). In other texts, Michel Pêcheux’s uneasiness with everyday circulations appears at least twice: as “subterranean discourses” (2009 [1981], p.25) and as the possibility of a conversational interdiscourse of everyday registers (2011 [1990]).

death prevented him from transforming this allusion into a more elaborate concept within the theoretical framework of Discourse Analysis. Since the year before the conference, however, according to Denise Maldidier (1990), there was a plan to hold a second edition of the colloquium *Materialités Discursives* – first held at the Université de Paris X – Nanterre, in 1980 –, now dedicated to this “ordinary way of meaning,” which bared the potential to renew the discursive research by broadening the interdisciplinary perspective of the academic event and by the reception of unfamiliar references. Hence, following the same “non-monogamous” spirit of Michel Pêcheux’s last production (which would also sustain the second colloquium), I intend to develop an exercise of elucubration to, in the end, trace some potential outlines to comprehend and incorporate this concept in Discourse Analysis.

With this task in mind, I set myself to chase the track of clues (or at least some of them) that Pêcheux has left us, notably the oeuvres of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Michel de Certeau. On his part, Pêcheux elaborates a long-standing dialogue with logic and philosophy of language, in which Wittgenstein has become an increasingly present figure. This is the case, for example, in the book he wrote with Françoise Gadet, *La Langue Introuvable* (1981), in which the Austrian philosopher is characterized as paradigmatic of both currents (of Life and Law) that constitute the fundamental contradiction of the linguistic discipline – without, however, being reduced to any of them. In the same direction, in his conference, Pêcheux (1988, p.645)⁵ openly acknowledges the possible advances of an approximation between the interpretive practices of archival reading (such as Discourse Analysis) and “practices of ‘ordinary language analysis’ (within the antipositivistic perspective that may be drawn from Wittgenstein’s work).” Finally, for Maldidier (1990) Wittgenstein was definitely one of the interlocutors standing at the horizon of the colloquium.

In his conference, Pêcheux (1988, p.48)⁶ also hints *en passant* at Michel de Certeau’s *L’Invention du Quotidien* (1980)⁷ as characteristic of the listening posture of “everyday circulations.” However, the interest in de Certeau’s reinterpretation of the “Wittgenstein model” was much more significant than his brief mention of it would have

⁵ For reference, see footnote 4.

⁶ For reference, see footnote 4.

⁷ CERTEAU, M. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

us believe. Again, according to Maltby (1990, p.81),⁸ the everyday ruses seemed to offer Discourse Analysis the “new object” it sought, accentuated by the interest in the less stabilized circulations: “But how, in this new object, to seize the resistance of the language [*la langue*]? One finds once again the question that Michel Pêcheux has always asked.”

Therefore, the path ahead is designed as follows: starting from the possible contributions of the analysis of ordinary language to discursive studies, following its unfolding in everyday practices and finally closing it up on the discursive techniques for reading archives. With this approach, I intend to take the initial step towards the “ordinary way of meaning,” feeding the fundamental restlessness of Discourse Analysis: the existence of language and the existence of history.

1 Ordinary Language and Language-Games

In his *magnum opus*, *Les Vérités de la Palice* (1975),⁹ Pêcheux argues that either by empiricism or by rationalism the philosophy of language had gravitated around the phenomenological thesis according to which the construction of knowledge resulted from the subject’s sensitive relation with the objects around him. The linguistic and mental representations of objects-to-know would thus be how this subject of knowledge could discover the truth or essence of things. One of the problems that would have been imposed on the philosophy of language, moreover, would be that of the link or even of the representational adequacy between language and thought. Echoing Pêcheux’s theses, one can still easily maintain, as Helena Martins (2000, p.23, author translation)¹⁰ does, that much of the philosophy of language is therefore guided by the essentialist inclination according to which “language is basically an instrument of representation – words function, first of all, as substitutes for extra-linguistic entities.”

Among the many philosophers who have engaged in this task, however, Pêcheux (1975) singles out Gottlob Frege as one of the few who, in turn, would have questioned

⁸ In the original: “Mais comment, dans ce nouvel objet, saisir la résistance de la langue? On retrouvait, entière, la question que Michel Pêcheux posait depuis toujours.”

⁹ PÊCHEUX, Michel. *Les vérités de la palice*: Linguistique, Sémantique, Philosophie. Paris: La Découverte, 1975.

¹⁰ In the original: “a linguagem é basicamente um instrumento de representação – de que as palavras funcionam, antes de mais nada, como sucedâneos de entidades extra-lingüísticas.”

the phenomenological premises, especially when the Austrian philosopher approaches materialist thought by demonstrating, through linguistic structures of embedding-in this case, relative clauses-that if mental representations of objects-to-know “appear” to the subject, he is but their bearer – not their origin. Frege’s objection would thus open space for considering signification outside of a sensible but material paradigm. However, the “blind spot” of Fregean materialism, as Pêcheux (1975) points out, was to treat every logical disorder caused by the non-coincidence between object and representation (the ambiguities, the contradictions, the polysemy, etc.) as “illusions” introduced into thinking by natural languages, delegating to the philosophy of language the development of a logical writing – his *Concept-Script* [*Begriffsschrift*]¹¹ – that should resolve or dispel them.

In a sense, even in his critique of the sensible premise, Frege and much of the philosophy of language would still respond to the ancient “Aristotelian desire,” as Helena Martins (2004, p.466)¹² calls it, to “ensure (...) that language works in such a way that a term (...) objectively means the same thing in the multiple circumstances in which it is used.” Thus, even if Pêcheux (1975) finds in Frege’s work a way outside the phenomenology of the sensible to elaborate the discursive construction of objects-to-know, the Austrian logician, however, would still be trapped in the logicist ontology according to which objects and thought, as well as their link, would be of a calculable order. It’s precisely due to how Wittgenstein, when facing similar problems to Frege’s, deconstructs this Aristotelian desire, suggesting diametrically opposite outcomes, that his ideas can be of interest to Discourse Analysis.

In the philosophical tradition, the most current interpretation is that there would be an epistemological rupture in the 30 years separating his first book, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*,¹³ published in 1921, and his second, *Philosophical Investigations*,¹⁴ published in 1953, which would divide his thought between a “first” and a “second” Wittgenstein. In this sense, the inherent contradiction in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophical thinking becomes particularly interesting: if on one hand,

¹¹ FREGE, G. *Begriffsschrift* (1989). Translated by P.T. GEACH. In: GEACH; BLACK (eds.). *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960.

¹² In original: “garantir (...) que a linguagem funcione de tal forma que um termo (...) signifique com objetividade a mesma coisa nas múltiplas circunstâncias em que é utilizado.”

¹³ WITTGENSTEIN, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by C. K. Ogden. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1999.

¹⁴ WITTGENSTEIN, L. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967.

his first work served as an inspiration for the apex of the Aristotelian desire manifested among the neopositivists of the Vienna Circle¹⁵ – followers of Frege, Bertrand Russell and the “first Wittgenstein” –, it was also the “second Wittgenstein” who inspired the analytic philosophy to refuse or deny it all. However, some contemporary commentators argue that behind the “Wittgenstein effect”¹⁶ there is a process of theoretical redirection due to a new philosophical need: “the requirement that language must be capable of being compared with reality directly” (Hintikka; Hintikka, 1986, p.176). In other words, the ostensive principle which sustains the logicist ontology – and was summarized by Wittgenstein in the Augustinian scene on §1¹⁷ – would no longer be adequate for explaining the ordinary link between language, objects, and meaning.

Facing these new epistemological constraints, the ethical-political posture of philosophy about language needed to be reviewed, which thereby unveiled “the fundamental misconception of a certain human intellectual endeavor, namely, the philosophical speculation about what things are, the search for the determination of their essences” (Martins, 2000, p.21, author translation).¹⁸ Wittgenstein, therefore, would have advanced over the phenomenological position by questioning its “essentialist project, in a clear attempt to undermine the millennial wager on the existence of metaphysical absolutes” (Martins, 2004, p.471).¹⁹ I believe that if there is an anti-positivist perspective in his work, this is where it should be found.

However, if it is true, as Gilles Deleuze once wrote, that “The logic of someone’s thought is the whole set of crises through which it passes,”²⁰ it is rather fitting to refer my discussion back to the first paragraphs of the *Philosophical Investigations*, where Wittgenstein experiments with the ostensive perspective that sustained his former work.

¹⁵ According to Mélika Ouelbani (2006), despite its heterogeneity, composed of self-proclaimed neopositivist philosophers, the Vienna Circle aimed to combat metaphysics through a purification of language.

¹⁶ This is how Françoise Gadet and Michel Pêcheux (1981) named the contradictory posterity of the dual interpretation that Wittgenstein’s work authorizes.

¹⁷ Consistent with the philosophical tradition, the passages in *Philosophical Investigations* will be referred to by the entry number of the cited aphorism.

¹⁸ In original: “o equívoco fundamental de uma certa empreitada intelectual humana, a saber, a especulação filosófica sobre o que as coisas são, a busca da determinação de suas essências.”

¹⁹ In original: “projeto essencialista, numa investida clara para desestabilizar a própria aposta milenar na existência de absolutos metafísicos.”

²⁰ DELEUZE, G. Breaking Things Open, Breaking Words Open. In: DELEUZE, G. *Negotiations: 1972-1990*. New York: Columbia, 1995, p.84.

For this purpose, the “primitive language” speculated in the language-game in §2 is exemplary:

Let us imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right. The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with buildingstones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words “block,” “pillar,” “slab,” “beam.” A calls them out; -B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. - Conceive this as a complete primitive language (Wittgenstein, 1967, p.3).²¹

As said, ostension claims that the rapport between language and the world is referential: every word would point to the object it designates. Now, as its counterpart is the ontological proposition – that is, concerning the status of being – that the fundamental relation between words and things are monistic identity relations of object-designation: “Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands” (§1, emphasis in original). That is to say that each word fits one, and only one, object (and vice versa) (Barbosa Filho, 2008). It is in the designated substance (the object or thing) where the hidden essence of the words lies – and the role of logic and philosophy would be to unveil and bring it to the surface.

At first glance, ostension would underpin the language in §2: each of the words announced by builder A (“blocks,” “pillars,” “slabs,” “beams,” etc.) would point to one (and only one) of the objects that the helper B must bring (the blocks, the pillars, the slabs, the beams, etc.), thus constituting its meaning. Since a prior identity is assumed to be somehow always present, the logical interest would be to construct, for example, a notation in which it would be possible to ensure that each word announced by A would always correspond to the same object picked up by B, no matter the situation in which they were spoken. However, taking a step back, Wittgenstein (§19) questions the premises of this operation: how does B know, for example, that, when saying “slab,” A is referring to the object slab as a whole, and not to its shape, color, etc.? Or that with “slab” A is always referring to the same object (slab) or, furthermore, that they are always

²¹ For reference, see footnote 14.

announcing the same command (to bring it)? That is, in what would consist, then, this identity designative act of pointing? How is it done?

Wittgenstein rejects any “psychologizing” reply from the sensitive subject; his position is categorical: “What we deny is that the picture of the inner process gives us the correct idea of the use of the word ‘to remember’. We say that this picture with its ramifications stands in the way of our seeing the use of the word as it is” (§305). But, and perhaps even more importantly, by turning their interest to ordinary language, as Merrill and Jaakko Hintikka (1986) ponder, the multiplicity of objects to be defined is also much more complex than that of objects of immediate experience, as in “slab,” “block,” “beam,” etc. That is, the stability of the relation between word and object is by no means guaranteed by the words or objects in question.

Thus, Wittgenstein criticizes the basic premise of logicist ontology according to which the name would establish a representative identity relation with its object, precisely because one central point of this thesis would be “that a word has no meaning if nothing corresponds to it” (§40). To follow the object-designation monism would thus only be “to confound the meaning of a name with the *bearer* of the name” (§40) – a great “metaphysical” specter that positivist logic fights against. One of his examples is surgical: “When Mr. N. N. dies one says that the bearer of the name dies, not that the meaning dies. And it would be nonsensical to say that, for if the name ceased to have meaning it would make no sense to say ‘Mr. N. N. is dead’” (§40).

Unfortunately, the situation experienced in Brazil due to the global covid-19 pandemic, associated with the complete governmental neglect of the spread of the disease, allows us to exemplify with a certain empiricism this Wittgenstein’s remark. Until the moment I am writing this text, more than 660 000 people have lost their lives due to the virus. In an ostensible perspective, since there is no way to assess their conditions of truth or falsifiability (their “concrete existence”), all these names would be, so to speak, “meaningless” names (Ouelbani, 2006). But to defend the representative identity of the names would be to ignore, for instance, that the name of each of these people is still capable of producing effects of meaning. As we will see later on, several popular manifestations are indications that this is not the case; on the contrary, the fact that these people died gives their names other meanings, precisely because of the neglect reflected

in the avoidable conditions of their death – which re-signifies, therefore, not only these names but consequently the entire Brazilian political and social conjuncture.

Indeed, if one takes this fact as a starting point, there is no way to argue that these designations have no meaning (“it would be nonsensical to say that”); after all, it was the very event of the death of the “object” that incited these multiple designations and the new meanings evoked by them. The critical point of the ostensive position, therefore, is that even if there is the possibility of a monistic object-designation relation, it is still subject to another kind of determination: “So one might say: the ostensive definition explains the use—the meaning—of the word when the overall role of the word in language is clear” (§30).

Facing this limitation, Wittgenstein alerts to the fact that “Words are also deeds” (§546), and therefore that “the meaning of a word is its use in language” (§43). To be able to understand and produce sentences would be to master a diagram of action (a praxis): “is not to decipher something that the isolated sentence represents, but to have some mastery over the moves it may play in the language-game as a whole” (Martins, 2000, pp.33-34).²² In other words, “To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to be master of a technique” (§199). What he argues, finally, is that when we learn a language we are not taught to establish monistic designative relations, as supposed by the classical Augustinian model, but rather that we are trained to perform activities, to use words in regulated and regular tasks, and to respond in a certain way to what we are told (§6) – in short, to play language games (§7).

This is perhaps the most important aspect of the present consideration. Thus, I propose to explore it a little further, again through the problematic of pandemic and death, but now by the practices of mourning, specifically the *Memorial Inumeráveis* [the Innumerable Memorial].²³ In Westernized societies, mourning rituals – such as obituaries, memorials, funerals, etc. – conform to a politics of memory, “they are practices to remind

²² In original: “não é decifrar um algo que a sentença isolada representa, mas ter algum domínio sobre os lances que ela pode desempenhar no jogo da linguagem como um todo.”

²³ As cautioned in the paper peer-review, although well conducted, this inflection would lead more to baffle than to elucidate the theoretical problem addressed here. However, this potential confusion does not seem negative to me in at least two aspects. The first is that the uncertain occupies a crucial space in the thought of both Wittgenstein and Certeau, as I intend to demonstrate here. Second, that a fundamental part of the discourse analyst's work is to confront theory (of language, discourse, history) with the “fact of language” in its political and social existence - it is only in and through analysis that theory gains body or interpretative legitimacy. For these reasons, I would like to thank the reviewers and assume the risks they have warned me about, in the hope of confusing in order to clarify.

the living of tomorrow of the existence of the dead of yesterday and today” (Rodrigues, 2021, p.81).²⁴ Thus, as a practice, mourning is structured by a double organization of social life: on one hand, mourning performs the community function of “building a social bond upon the experience of death” (Rodrigues, 2021, p.75);²⁵ on the other hand, it performs the therapeutic function of giving concreteness to death “as a mechanism to elaborate all the losses that constitute us” (Rodrigues, 2021, p.70).²⁶ In short, a process in which the bereaved subjects engage in an attempt to fill the void (personal and social) left by the lost but still desired object²⁷ – an attempt, therefore, to name the nameless.

The impossibility to mourn the dead thus interdicts the work of mourning, becoming an obstacle to the recognition of the loss – an obstacle aggravated when the interdict is unrestricted, as it happened during the pandemic, during which communal rituals were forbidden as an effort to contain the spread of the disease. It is in this context that the Uncountable Memorial appears, providing an alternative by building a memory policy that “takes the form of the writing act of a loss and the public circulation of these words in the digital space” (Baldini; Nascimento, 2021, p.76, author translation).²⁸ As Baldini and Nascimento (2021) explain, the memorials are composed in two ways: by a poetic prose written based on the account sent by those who wish to honor the deceased, prepared by a “witness” member of the Memorial team; and by a summarized version, published as an *Instagram* post on a dedicated page at the digital platform. In one of these posts, whose tributary goes by the name of “Wanderson Rêgo da Silva,” one can find the following propositions:²⁹

- (1) “Uanda era pura alegria, transformava o cotidiano em piada. Era impossível se zangar com ele.” [“Uanda was a pure joy, he turned everyday life into a joke. It was impossible to be angry with him.”]
- (2) Wanderson Rêgo da Silva, 43 anos, vítima do novo coronavírus em Imperatriz (MA). [Wanderson Rêgo da Silva, 43, victim of the new coronavirus in Imperatriz (MA)]
- (3) Não é um número [Not a number].

²⁴ In original: “são práticas para lembrar aos vivos de amanhã a existência dos mortos de ontem e de hoje.”

²⁵ In original: “construir um laço social a partir da experiência da morte.”

²⁶ In original: “como mecanismo de elaboração de todas as perdas que nos constituem.”

²⁷ For a more detailed introduction, see Carla Rodrigues (2021) and Baldini & Nascimento (2021).

²⁸ In original: “toma a forma do ato de escrita de uma perda e circulação pública destas palavras no espaço virtual.”

²⁹ Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CS9NTogr0Ac/>. Last access: 27 ago. 2021, 14:52.

In these examples, the named “object” “Wanderson Rêgo da Silva” evokes at least four designations: the most generic are (2) and (3), with regular structure among the posts, which respectively indicate the name and provenance of the deceased person and contest the health statistics. Moreover, “Wanderson” also receives more singular meanings, typical of eulogizing obituaries (as is the case of Memorial), when described in (1) from his remarkable qualities, but also when rewritten as “Uanda,” an affectionate nickname. Thus, through flattering and informative designations (each of them composing another game in themselves),³⁰ shared on social networks and the project’s website, that name is collectively claimed as a life lived, at once singular and integral to a community that, in turn, remains. Concerning this example, the designations of the name “Wanderson Rêgo da Silva” are woven through luteous politics: faced with the unrestricted impossibility of ritualizing all/any of the deaths lost to covid-19, his life (as well as all of those honored) is celebrated. It is the mourning rite thus practiced – and not a “lost essence” – that gives meaning to this name.

Thus, when Wittgenstein proposes that linguistic deeds happen as language-games, much more than following pre-defined linguistic norms or patterns, he seeks to point out “that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” (§23). One speaks of language-games not only as a set of rules but as practices elaborated in communities in which the performance of these rules will be evaluated based on their consonance with social criteria of achievement (§§242, 261, 269). In this sense, it is proposed that games compose, on the one hand, “schemes” of rules that grant words their meanings, that is, that assign the roles they must fulfill (§§197, 563); on the other hand, that these games are the result of linguistic practice profiled by human institutions and sedimented over time through their continuous, habitual, and customary exercise (§198). In short, by inserting praxis within linguistic production, Wittgenstein’s break makes the “common” and the “social” integral and fundamental parts of language performance, rather than their accessory exteriority. The call to “Seeing what is common” (§72) thus refers to both the shared and the ordinary.

³⁰ The identification of the deceased, for instance, participates in a different language game (follows other rules and engenders other relations) from those in which his eulogizing description or the forms of his naming (such as “Uanda”) participate in. In a sense, language-games presuppose some sort of recursivity.

However, as Balthazar Barbosa Filho (2008) warns, one must keep in mind that much more than a slogan stating that “the meaning of a word is its use,” the paradigm shift proposed by Wittgenstein with the primacy of language-games affects the whole language operation: if the role of a word is defined by its practice, one can no longer conceive language as the link between the experience of the subject, the things of the world and their essences, since there would be necessarily senses (uses) which are not referential or ostensive. Instead, one must conceive it as the foundation that enables us to act in the world utilizing words, being composed also by the total set of these diagrams of action – that is, the language games (§7). Therefore, the epistemological break operated by Wittgenstein when formulating the model of ordinary language causes both epistemological and ontological changes which are themselves constitutive of that what would be an anti-positivist position on ordinary language analysis.

The proposition of the primacy of language-games shows that the logical desire to normalize propositions or to construct a language of “crystalline purity” (§§107, 108) should not only be refused but abandoned: “We think it [the ideal] must be in reality; for we think we already see it there” (§101). In this sense, the philosophy of language should not solve the imperfections of language or unveil the hidden meaning of words, but only observe how they are practiced (§81). With this, Wittgenstein states that logical writing does not resist the independence of the concrete world, since the subject is not a logical but a practical being (§208). By refusing the ostensive primacy, therefore, philosophy could no longer be guided by the experience of the phenomenological subject, a refusal expressed in the new epistemology proposed by Wittgenstein: “don’t think, but look!” (§66) – that is, do not calculate the meaning from the sensible data apprehensible by the subject, but observe it in action through his linguistic practices. Finally, to think of the “ordinary” would not be to circumscribe it to the banal or the mundane, but to oppose the idealization, to approach the use as it appears to us.

This proposition, as will be seen, satisfies Pêcheux’s (2015, p.49)³¹ three requirements for the approximation of archive reading techniques with ordinary analysis (or any other approach to everyday circulations): (a) that description takes precedence over interpretation, that is, that “the recognition of the specific real on which it leans: the

³¹ For reference, see footnote 4.

real of langue” (Pêcheux, 1988, p.646);³² (b) consequently, that every description is open to equivocity, and thus every statement is a linguistic series of “possible points of diversion, leaving room for interpretation” (Pêcheux, 1988, p.647);³³ (c) finally, that every discourse is subject to the destructuring-structuring of its conditions of production.

Indeed, through the primacy of language games, Wittgenstein adopts a descriptive, rather than elaborative, stance on language (§66), since rules are in order as long as they fulfill their purpose (§87): “‘Inexact’ is really a reproach, and ‘exact’ is praise. And that is to say that what is inexact attains its goal less perfectly than what is more exact. Thus the point here is what we call ‘the goal’” (§88).³⁴ Moreover, if the exact and the inexact (the “right” and the “wrong”) equally hit the target—that is, both are concrete and effective realizations of a given language game—it cannot be assumed, either, that the games are always played in the same way - that would only be to shift the essence from the thing-object to the thing-game. As to this, the Wittgensteinian angle is irreducible: the essence, now, is not something that can be found in an object (a thing), but in the acts of enunciation (a deed) (§371) – “And an action, in Wittgenstein’s eyes, is precisely something other than a thing” (Barbosa Filho, 2008, p.179, author translation).³⁵ To approach signification through ordinary analysis, therefore, would be to “bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there – like our life” (Wittgenstein, 1969, §559).

With his primacy, Wittgenstein exposes the logical-positivist tautology between logical writing and the concrete use of language: there is no more ideal to compare the uses of language; the very desire of normalizing language – “to achieve a universe of ‘fixed and unequivocal’ statements embracing the whole of reality” (Pêcheux, 1982c, p.44)³⁶ – that would be nothing but an illusion, “an imaginary satisfaction in the mode ‘as if’” (Pêcheux, 1982c, p.44).³⁷ Therefore, in the vein of Balthazar Barbosa Filho (2008), Helena Martins (2000) argues that “the kind of stability ascribable to meaning [via the

³² For reference, see footnote 4.

³³ For reference, see footnote 4.

³⁴ Written with other words, we rediscover here the proposal of a negative encounter with the norm, as discussed by Françoise Gadet and Michel Pêcheux (1981).

³⁵ In original: “E uma ação, aos olhos de Wittgenstein, não é, justamente, uma coisa.”

³⁶ PÊCHEUX, M. *Language, Semantics and Ideology: Stating the Obvious*. Translated by Harbans Nagpal. London: The MacMillan Press, 1982c.

³⁷ For reference, see footnote 36.

primacy of language games] is not greater or lesser than that which we can ascribe to the human life forms with which language maintains mutually constitutive ties” (p.39, author translation).³⁸ In this sense, agreement over the games is not reduced to a kind of contractualism of meaning or society: as he reminds us, people “agree in the *language* they use” – i.e., not in their opinions, but in their forms of life (§ 241).

And so, the most strikingly anti-positivist aspect of the “logical writing” that Wittgenstein proposes is to take, in the same measure as regularity and repetition, that which is absent, unpredictable, and indefinite.³⁹ That is, in ordinary language, the lapsus (§54) and the nonsense (§282) also play their roles: they are no longer obstructions to be eliminated, but a consequence of the difference between games and forms of life, which are constituted in turn by the act of a sense taken out of circulation (§500) – a patent materialist position of language.

On the other hand, if Wittgenstein provides an understanding of language that can intertwine with Discourse Analysis, it seems to me that this approximation would necessarily have to go through a reworking of how the discipline understood the enunciative event. As argued by Pêcheux and Fuchs, “processes of enunciation consist of a series of successive determinations which gradually constitute an utterance, and which are characterized by their ability to posit what is said and to reject what is not said.”⁴⁰ Therefore, to put it succinctly, if a discursive formation determines “*what can and should be said* (articulated in the form of a speech, a sermon, a pamphlet, a report, a program, etc.),” (Haroche; Henry; Pêcheux, 1982c, p.111),⁴¹ the processes in which the said/unsaid are articulated (the series of determinations that appear as a speech, a sermon etc.) should be considered not as mere supports, thereby inert, but as the diagrams through which a linguistic practice could be realized – transversal practices relative to a shared

³⁸ In original: “o tipo de estabilidade atribuível ao significado [no primado dos jogos de linguagem] não é maior nem menor do que aquele que podemos atribuir às formas de vida humanas com que a linguagem mantém laços mutuamente constitutivos.”

³⁹ In his commentaries, Paul Henry (1981) interpreted the “Wittgenstein effect” as a transition from a geometric (representational) writing to an algebraic writing, in which one can effectively write that which is absent. For example, it would be impossible to geometrically represent a square with three sides, but not algebraically. “One might even argue,” Henry (1981, p.109, emphasis added) concludes, “that it is the writing of the absent that rules algebraic writing.” [In the original: “On peut même soutenir que c’est l’écriture de l’absence qui règle l’écriture algébrique.”]

⁴⁰ PÊCHEUX, M. Overview and Prospects. In: HAK; HELSLOOT (eds.). *Michel Pêcheux: Automatic Discourse Analysis*. Translated by David Macey. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1995, p.137. Unfortunately, Catherine Fuchs’ authorship has not been attributed in this English translation.

⁴¹ For reference, see footnote 36.

way of life. It would be necessary, finally, to account for the performative aspect of the enunciation – going beyond, of course, the concern with its “felicity”: to account for the particular order of the different diagrams of action in which language meets history. It is something along these lines that can be found in “everyday circulations.”

2 Everyday Practices and the Uses of Language

Like many others, Michel de Certeau’s (1980, p.1)⁴² reflection develops around the configuration of the “anthill society,” a modern consequence of the emergence of the “masses,” “who were the first to be subjected to the framework of levelling rationalities.” However, the singularity of his investigations lies in the proposal of mapping popular culture through the glasses of what he called “anti-disciplines”: addressing especially to Michel Foucault and the analysis of the disciplinary dispositive⁴³, Certeau maintains that it is necessary to go beyond the analysis of the surveillance apparatus, claiming attention to the “dispositives of ruses that play with all these procedures and counteract them” (Certeau, 1979, p.26, author translation).⁴⁴

In a rather unusual way, therefore, de Certeau finds the problem that Wittgenstein had formulated regarding logic and language but now confronted with the forms of life proper to capitalist-western-modern societies: in what the scientific disciplinary order hides as insignificant, mistaken or “pure” mimesis, discover the transversal poetics “that ordinary people practice in their daily life, in their ways of doing things” (Certeau, 1979, p.24, author translation).⁴⁵ Thus, *L’Invention du Quotidien* (1980) can – and possibly should – be read as an unappealing critique of the homogenizing treatment of culture by a social reading authorized only to a few legitimate experts, that ends by reducing individuals to the dictates of technical rationality.

To address these ruses, however, it was first necessary to distance oneself from the premise according to which consumers – to which one could replace by “subjects”

⁴² For reference, see footnote 7.

⁴³ Position expressed by Foucault mainly in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 2020) and in writings from the 1970s (Foucault, 2015).

⁴⁴ In the original: “Car, aux dispositifs de surveillance, répondent les dispositifs de ruses jouant avec toutes ces procédures et les déjouant.”

⁴⁵ In the original: “la circulation transversale que pratiquent, dans leur vie quotidienne, dans leurs manières de faire, les gens ordinaires.”

without too much difficulty –, organized by the expansionist mappings of culture, would assume, like cattle on the prairies, “takes on the appearance of something done by sheep”: “The only freedom supposed to be left to the masses is that of grazing on the ration of simulacra the system distributes to each individual” (Certeau, 1988, pp.165-166).⁴⁶ For de Certeau (1980, p.166),⁴⁷ this hegemonic position in cultural studies is untenable – even unbearable – because it would be guided by a fundamental mistake: “This misunderstanding assumes that ‘assimilating’ necessarily means ‘becoming similar to’ what one absorbs, and not ‘making something similar’ to what one is, making it one’s own, appropriating or reappropriating it.”⁴⁸ It would correspond to this framework the figure of the “expert,” a specialist who would bring light to everyday practices and reorient them toward less “alienating” and more “emancipatory” ways of living – analogously, though with other values in mind, to how the philosophers of language did (and still do) through their prejudice of “crystalline purity.”

In other words, de Certeau also faces the theoretical setting that, according to Pêcheux (1988, p.646),⁴⁹ encloses the oscillation of meaning “in the inferno of the dominant ideology and practical empiricism. It has been considered as the blind point of a pure reproduction of meaning.” That de Certeau (1980) turns to Wittgenstein as a “model,” is, finally, no accident. As he acknowledges,

Rarely, has the reality of language - that is, the fact that it defines our historicity, that it dominates and envelops us in the mode of the ordinary, that no discourse can therefore “escape from it,” put itself at the distance from it in order to observe it and tell us its meaning - been taken seriously with so much rigor (Certeau, 1988, p.10).⁵⁰

Like “exact/inexact” – as well as “serious/poetic”⁵¹ –, the difference between “work” and “leisure” would not be a qualitative distinction marked on one side by labor occupations dictated by the capitalist regime and, on the other, by idle practices that

⁴⁶ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁴⁷ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁴⁸ For reference, see footnote 7, p.166.

⁴⁹ For reference, see footnote 4.

⁵⁰ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁵¹ Françoise Gadet and Michel Pêcheux (1981) argue that in the face of the theoretical isolation of the “poetic” as something adjacent to language - a place for “special effects” - Saussure’s break made it a coextensive foundation to it. There would be, then, no poetic language, but only work with language.

would thus mark a kind of “Sunday of thought.”⁵² There is, instead, a division of labor over language and over things, marked by the divisions inherent to capitalist societies – a division in which the daily practices of “popular culture” would be hegemonically conceived as trivial phenomena, mere reproductions of the prevailing order.

From this angle, the use of ordinary language allowed Michel de Certeau to shift his investigation away from this axiological division: in contrast, in ordinary everyday life, there would be no imperfections to fix or hidden workings to reveal – that is, there is nothing that an expert could improve or enhance in culture for any purpose whatsoever. Cultural practices are “in order” as they are; therefore, rather than trying to fix them, one should observe how they are practiced.⁵³ To rely on Wittgenstein’s proposal, therefore, would be a way of reaffirming that we are strangers in our own home: we are thus submitted, even if not identified, to ordinary language and culture.

To avoid the reduction of everyday practices to assimilative consumption and the myth of mimesis, therefore, Michel de Certeau’s solution is to turn his attention to the diagrams of action: to reveal what individuals do with the signs provided to them by language and history. Faced with the politics of “leveling rationalities” (such as criminal law, medicine, logic, biostatistics, etc.) – and the “experts” who draw their power and legitimacy upon them – he aims to “wonder which tiny popular practices, which ways of doing things respond to the mute processes of socio-political ordering by the ‘discipline’ on the part of the practitioners” (Certeau, 1979, p.26, author translation).⁵⁴ See how, by and through these tiny practices, power unfolds and branches out everywhere, yet without conquering everything where it passes.

Therefore, a distinction that is imposed on everyday movements refers to “the formalities of practices,” (Certeau, 1988, p.29)⁵⁵ and it is thus necessary to “specify the operational schemas” (Certeau, 1988, p.30).⁵⁶ Following a Wittgensteinian spirit, one

⁵² Concerning this issue, I refer to Michel Pêcheux’s (1982b; 1988) critique.

⁵³ Albeit emphasizing his difference regarding the privilege Foucault gives to the dispositives of production in his “microphysics of power,” Michel de Certeau (1979; 1980) also approaches the proposal of a genealogy of power, especially in what it seeks to defend local knowledges, thus fighting “the power-effects characteristic of any discourse that is regarded as scientific” (FOUCAULT, M. *The Society Must Be Defended*. Translated by David Macey. New York: Picador, 2003, p.9).

⁵⁴ In the original: “se demander quelles minuscules pratiques populaires, quelles manières de faire répondent du côté des pratiquants aux procédés muets de la mise en ordre socio-politique par la ‘discipline’.”

⁵⁵ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁵⁶ For reference, see footnote 7.

should see how everyday life is constituted as the space of association between “Two logics of action” (Certeau, 1988, p.XX).⁵⁷ On one side there are the strategies of technical reason, rooted and legitimated by institutions, which construct disciplinary knowledge and normalize society. The strategies aim at establishing “proper” places, being able “to produce, tabulate, and impose” (Certeau, 1988, p.30);⁵⁸ they are actions of surveillance, (bio)metrification, colonization, etc., for which examples can be found in the disciplines of knowledge, of course, but also in all political forms of control and regulation of life.

On the other hand, there would be the tactical actions, which, lacking a proper place (or the power to produce one), would cunningly rely “on a clever *utilization of time*, of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundations of power” (Certeau, 1988, pp.38-39).⁵⁹ They are ephemeral and silent, “because it does not manifest itself through its products, but rather through its ways of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order” (Certeau, 1988, pp.XII-XIII).⁶⁰ They are arts of deviation, of manipulation, of transformation, and their examples are more fleeting: tactics act on a pre-existing space, conforming to every kind of furtive gesture that gambits with the products of power: “We are concerned,” de Certeau clarifies, “with battles or games between the strong and the weak, and with the ‘actions’ which remain possible for the latter” (Certeau, 1988, p.34).⁶¹ Ordinary culture, or everyday life, is the battleground woven into this combat.

The two forms of action can be illustratively observed in the statement (3), discussed above. When stating that “Wanderson Rêgo da Silva” is not a number, one evokes the policies of social biometrics, which, while helping to combat disease by measuring population phenomena, also flatten social differences and inequalities: based on a purely statistical ratio (a life is equivalent to a number), it erases the subjectivities regulated and scrutinized by them.⁶² At the same time, however, this statistical reduction, despite being recognized, is refused: even if it is possible to calculate the infections and the victims, the bodies are not reduced to this calculation – a way of remembering that

⁵⁷ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁵⁸ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁵⁹ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁶⁰ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁶¹ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁶² As an example, reducing each death to a number to be calculated statistically erases, among other scissions, the fact that the mortality rate among indigenous peoples, historically marginalized by the Brazilian State, is 150% higher than that of the rest of the population (cf. Fellows *et al.*, 2020).

we are not dealing with numbers, but with lives. Here is very succinctly what would be at stake in this simple refusal: the agonistic between inscribing the body in a leveling apparatus and, on the other hand, taking advantage of the inevitable traces of this inscription to divert it to other ends.

To legislate, to educate, to mold, to regulate, to measure, to level, to normalize – quintessentially, the colonizing practices of a power which is based on technical rationalities. This is also a central consideration for Michel de Certeau: what underlies the tension between power and astuteness is, finally, an undefined work over the body, this “volume in perpetual disintegration” (Foucault, 1984, p.83).⁶³ To those strategic practices correspond countless others, ephemeral and fleeting “consumptions” that take advantage of what is produced as waste, undesirable noises produced by the inscription of the body in a logophilic productive system. Listening to “the oceanic rumble of the ordinary” (Certeau, 1988, p.5),⁶⁴ therefore, has something to do with freeing “traces of the body” from the technical mechanisms that silence them.

Among these mechanisms, the one of greatest interest is certainly that of the “uses of language.” For Michel de Certeau (1980),⁶⁵ the specific division of labor over language, marked by the relationship between scriptural activity (productive and active) and reading (silent and passive), more than one among others, would be translated as the event structuring capitalism, its founding myth: “for the past three centuries learning to write has been the very definition of entering into a capitalist and conquering society” (Certeau, 1988, p.133).⁶⁶ The scriptural activity, in which a subject of “will and power” (the Author) establishes and isolates a “proper” (the blank page) and manufactures in it his product (the Text) to modify and control the outside to which it was previously isolated (the reader/the meaning/society/individual), is thus configured as the capturing and colonizing diagram that is metaphorized in all of modern Western societies’ strategic actions to impose a power – in other terms, the binomial “production-consumption” would have “writing-reading” as its general equivalent.

The establishment of the scriptural activity, thus organized in this “new” way of using language – split by the dual existence between that which can be measured and

⁶³ FOUCAULT, M. Nietzsche, Genealogy, History. In: RABINOW, P.(ed.) *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Parthenon Books, 1984.

⁶⁴ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁶⁵ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁶⁶ For reference, see footnote 7.

captured and that which is fleeting and therefore must be silenced – is umbilically related to “the virtually immemorial effort to place the (social and / or individual) body under the law of writing” (Certeau, 1988, p.139).⁶⁷ The practice that founds modern Westernized capitalist societies is “the multiform and murmuring activity of producing a text and producing society as a text” (Certeau, 1988, p.134)⁶⁸: isolating a “self” by removing from it everything that refers to the “body” and to that which marks its inscription in history. It thus configures the basilar Cartesian gesture in which the ontology of the subject of knowledge is instituted and that excludes, in the name of (technical) reason, all traces of the living body – reminiscent matter of the subject’s inscription in history and, therefore, an untimely risk for the predatory activity of modern power.⁶⁹

However, if the colonizing practices of the scripture spread everywhere investing in the normalization of bodies, society is not limited by them: to all scriptural practices of power correspond multiform reading activities that deviate it, “trajectories, not indeterminate, but unexpected, that alter, run and change little by little the balance of social constellations” (Certeau, 1995, p.250, author translation).⁷⁰ Between scripture and reading, finally, there would not be a qualitative difference, but a prolongation instead: “there is no difference that divorces passivity from activity, but rather the distinction between different ways of socially marking the deviation made in a data by a practice” (Certeau, 1995, p.249, author translation).⁷¹ Reading, a practice of generally silent production, is the tactical way of assimilating the products of power, of diverting and transforming them, eventually manifested in ephemeral productions, invested in and on

⁶⁷ For reference, see footnote 7. There is also a long discussion in de Certeau (1980) about how modern scriptural politics produces the body on which it will inscribe its codes and laws, in such a way that the body does not pre-exist it. Unfortunately, it is not possible to go over this discussion here. However, I leave the indication for future reference (cf. Certeau, 1988, pp.131-164).

⁶⁸ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁶⁹ Michel de Certeau’s critical examination of language policies at the time of the French Revolution also brings to light this double exclusion of the social and individual body - in this case in the name of absolute “national French.” On the one hand, attempts were made to capture and silence Patois (a group of rural dialects of French) on the grounds that it varies, “It escapes the regularities and the fixations of a ‘language’.” It is the mobile voice through which the stabilities of the scripture vanish” (Certeau; Julia; Revel, 1975, p.110. In the original: “Il échappe aux régularités et aux fixations de la ‘langue’. Il est la voix mobile par où s’évanouissent les stabilités de l’écriture.”) On the other hand, the linguistic description of French gave preference to consonants, since vowels - produced through breath and therefore elusive - “marks in the language the singularity of the soil and the body (Certeau; Julia; Revel, 1975, p.114. In the original: “marque dans le langage la singularité du sol et du corps.”)

⁷⁰ In the original: “trajetórias, não indeterminadas, mas inesperadas, que alteram, correm e mudam pouco a pouco os equilíbrios das constelações sociais.”

⁷¹ In the original: “não há a diferença que separa passividade e a atividade, mas que distingue maneiras diferentes de marcar socialmente o desvio feito em um dado por uma prática.”

the space postulated by a power – thus denouncing that the “audience” is not shaped by scripture, but “make do” with it: “to read is to wander through an imposed system” (Certeau, 1988, p.169).⁷² In short, if strategic writing seeks to make us deaf to bodily noises, tactical readings allow us to listen to them, reinscribing them in and transforming social dynamics. Writing-producing the bodies; reading-consuming its traces.

I return one last time to Memorial’s post. As discussed above, a pre-construct of logically stabilized characteristics – “a life is always equal to a number” – underlies the statement (3). However, the agonistic between the biostatistical writing and the reading performed by Memorial goes one step further. The statistics of population phenomena have other reasons than just planifying the subjectivities it scans: as a form of inscription of a law on the social body, the sanitary policies of contagion control of covid-19 are guided by the capitalist logic of making the “productive” things live, letting the “unproductive” things die, besides preventing and making mourning difficult. Death, relegated to the hospital environments, pudorized, loses its value as a social fact experienced by these individuals, responding now to the rational logic of efficiency/effectiveness: “life must go on, despite everything. And, in Brazil, denouncing death becomes obscene itself, since, all in all, the economy must continue, despite everything” (Baldini; Nascimento, 2021, p.69 author translation).⁷³ Lubricate the social gears as much as possible so that it works without being troubled by the conflicts harbored by the memory of those who are gone and those who remain.

However, as Baldini and Nascimento (2021) point out, while subjected to technical rationality, several similar initiatives, in the civilian sphere, demonstrate that the biopolitical ways of dealing with death (such as the hollow ceremonies of minutes of silence, of raising flags at half-mast, etc.) are insufficient, or, more simply, “a violence over which something must be done” (Baldini; Nascimento, 2021, p.75; author emphasis and translation).⁷⁴ In the face of the austerity of death, it is urgent to build ways for mourning to take place and to make the therapeutic of individual and social bodies: between the calculation of one death and another, the Memorial seeks to reinscribe that which was expurgated, that is, that to these numbers correspond singular subjectivities.

⁷² For reference, see footnote 7.

⁷³ In the original: “a vida precisa continuar, apesar de tudo. E, no Brasil, denunciar a própria morte passa a ser obsceno, já que, no final das contas, a economia precisa continuar, apesar de todos.”

⁷⁴ IN the original: “uma violência a respeito da qual se deve fazer alguma coisa.”

As an example, this fabrication is materialized linguistically in the project's motto, "no one likes to be a number, people deserve to exist in prose,"⁷⁵ but also in the statement (3), which accompanies all of Memorial's posts. As the maxim indicates, the tactical reading is not identified with a simple refusal of the calculation. Rescuing elements of technical rationality, such as the legal appearance data of the honored ("Wanderson Rêgo da Silva, 43, victim of the new coronavirus in Imperatriz (MA)"), the Memorial fabricates the occasion to restore the names of the "numbers," bringing along a little of the prose of the world that constitutes them: poetically, it narrates their affective relationships (the nickname "Uanda," for example) and some of their life experiences ("Uanda was pure joy, he turned everyday life into a joke. It was impossible to be angry with him"), thus building alternative ways to share the pain of individual and collective loss and to perform the mourning rituals in other ways. Insisting on the limits that modern power itself created for itself – that is, the fact that "to measurable data corresponds a non-measurable risk – that of existing" (Certeau, 1995, p.251, author translation)⁷⁶ –, the Memorial assimilates (reads, interprets...) the data of the social biometry of the pandemic as the repertoire for its fabrications.

In everyday ruses, therefore, "these facts are no longer the data of our calculations, but rather the lexicon of users' practices" (Certeau, 1988, p.31).⁷⁷ These "arts of the weak" constitute a movement, a gesture, which despite being marked by the absence of its power, is a consequence of it: "It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. (...). It is a guileful ruse" (Certeau, 1988, p.37).⁷⁸ The weak, lacking the power to assert themselves alone, "make do" with the products of a power in the latitudes that, in turn, he himself offers.

The radical nature of Michel de Certeau's reasoning, therefore, is to show, at the very moment of interpellation – in its philosophical and ordinary sense – the astuteness of a practical subject that fabricates, that itself "makes do": "clever tricks of the 'weak' within the order established by the 'strong,' an art of putting one over on the adversary on his own turf, hunter's tricks, maneuverable, polymorph mobilities, jubilant, poetic, and

⁷⁵ In the original: "não há quem goste de ser número, gente merece existir em prosa." Available on: <https://inumeraveis.com.br/>. Last access: 09 nov. 2021, 13:51.

⁷⁶ In the original: "a dados mensuráveis corresponda um risco não mensurável – o de existir."

⁷⁷ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁷⁸ For reference, see footnote 7.

warlike discoveries;” (Certeau, 1988, p.40)⁷⁹ by demonstrating that to every strategy correspond countless (and ephemeral) tactics of deviation, transformation, and alteration – perhaps even “fleeting forms of appearance of something ‘of a different order’, minute victories that for a flash thwart the ruling ideology by taking advantage of its faltering” (Certeau, 1982d, p.218).⁸⁰ The everyday life of the societies of ants, rather than marked by a generalized passivity, is the space of combat in which the weak inscribe “Innumerable ways of playing and foiling the other’s game (*jouer/dejouer le jeu de l’autre*)” (Certeau, 1988, p.18).⁸¹ Thus, if modern capitalist society is produced as writing, the unexpected irruptions of a recalcitrant voice or the silent production of reading – linked to the subject by its historically produced body – configures the occasions when, in the uses of language, individuals do something.⁸²

It is clear, finally, that the problem faced by Michel de Certeau, and which led him to ordinary language, is not strange to Discourse Analysis – on the contrary, both are dealing with one of the fundamental dilemmas of this discipline: the subject and the practices of its subjectivation. In this sense, guided by a kind of ordinary maxim – *what do we do with the determinations that are imposed over us?*, suggests Ferreira (2020a; 2020b) –, the way the practical ontology of ordinary language analysis is reinterpreted by de Certeau could meet some discursive readings of subjectification. This dilemma cannot be resolved here, but two considerations become important: on the one hand, as Ferreira (2020b) warns, by proposing a practical subject, Michel de Certeau (1980) does not assume a transparent agency to the subject: assimilation, as said, is as much “to become similar to” as “to become similar to oneself” - a matter more of social subsistence than of an individual choice or will, in which power is always present as a vital, productive, and conditioning necessity.

Moreover, even if we do not accept the thesis of fabrication as it was formulated, it is important to note that, whether by Wittgenstein’s philosophy or by its re-reading in de Certeau, Pêcheux’s signaling to these authors necessarily follows the direction of

⁷⁹ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁸⁰ PÊCHEUX, M. Appendix 3: The French Political Winter: Beginning of a Rectification (Postscript for English Readers). In: PÊCHEUX, M. *Language, Semantics and Ideology: Stating the Obvious*. Translated by Harbans Nagpal. London: The MacMillan Press, 1982d.

⁸¹ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁸² In this regard, I believe it is clear how the tactical actions or arts of deviation can be compared to the forms of discursive resistance listed by Michel Pêcheux (1982a), as Ferreira (2020a, p.9; 2020b, p.327) argues.

increasingly putting in check interpretations of subjection that would enclose the subject in the dominant ideology as a place of pure repetition – aspect pointed out by Pêcheux as “one of the weak points of the Althusserian reflection on the ideological state apparatus, as well as of the initial applications of this reflection in the domain of Discourse Analysis in France” (Pêcheux, 1988, p.650).⁸³ Along different paths, therefore, de Certeau and Pêcheux find themselves on the same side of the quarrel against “the old elitist conviction which claims that the dominated classes never invent anything, as they’re too absorbed by the logics of everyday life” (Pêcheux, 1982y, p.21).⁸⁴ To think of an ordinary way of meaning is to recognize in it a practical and resourceful subject facing language and power, showing how the urgencies of everyday life do not suffocate the dominated classes, but that they also invent.

Conclusions

At the end of this dialogue with the analysis of the ordinary, what seems to grind is theory itself, the epistemology of the techniques of reading – archive, language, culture. The ordinary is not reduced, as one might think, to only those language-games which do not allow themselves to be so easily documented, such as rumor, ‘popular poetry,’ humor, gossip, chatter, etc., typically found in the “registers of everyday life” (Pêcheux, 1990a). It is present in these forms of games, naturally, but it is equally present in those utterances with which archives have traditionally been built (the political, religious, scientific, media discourses, etc.) – it is thus transversal to “logically stabilized” and “non-stabilized” spaces. Therefore, the ordinariness of meaning would not be a localized phenomenon, but a paradigm. Thus, it seems safe to say that listening to the ordinary way of meaning is more than increasing the list of Discourse Analysis objects – the ordinary would not be an aspect of meaning –, but rather to retake how this interpretive discipline constructs them through its gaze.

It is important to reinforce that this hypothesis is supported by the concerns of Michel Pêcheux, for whom the approach with these authors is directly concerned with

⁸³ For reference, see footnote 4.

⁸⁴ In the original: “la vieille certitude élitiste qui veut que les classes dominées n’inventent jamais rien, parce qu’elles sont trop absorbées par les logiques du quotidien.”

“ways of working on the discursive materialities implied in ideological rituals, philosophical discourses, political statements, and aesthetic and cultural forms, through their relations to everyday life, to ‘the ordinary’ of meaning” (Pêcheux, 1988, p.645).⁸⁵ Therefore, the agonistic of everyday life are ordinarily present from the least to the most controlled fields of society. In this sense, the reflections of Wittgenstein and de Certeau bring at least two interesting problems for the archive reading within Discourse Analysis.

First, both strongly emphasize that there is a specifically performative order to speech; thus, both point to a particular enunciative dimension: the plane of language games and everyday practices. Far more than mere empirical rituals, it may be necessary to look at discursive practices also in their performative aspect, which would mean resuming dialogue with the long analytical and pragmatic tradition of “speech acts” – bearing in mind, of course, that “there is no completely ‘successful’ identification; that is, there is no sociohistorical link that is not affected in any way by an ‘infelicity’ in the performative sense of the term-” (Pêcheux, 1988, p.648).⁸⁶ There are several possible paths, and some are already quite close to a materialist Discourse Analysis: such is the case of the concept of scenography, originally elaborated by Dominique Maingueneau (2006), which plays with the playful and legal roles of the enunciation.⁸⁷

Second, ordinary analysis proposes a practical subject, a subjectification that “manufactures” itself by playing with the signs of power. Briefly, the problem revolves around ideological efficacy: as Jean-Jacques Courtine and Jean-Marie Marandin (1981, p.27, author translation)⁸⁸ provocatively questioned, “Would the interpellation/subjectation of the individual in an ideological subject consist of a miracle?” To return to the performative aspect of discourse is, in short, to pay attention to what happens in subjectivation when an individual is interpellated by power. In this sense, the politics of the performative proposed by Judith Butler (1997) presents itself as another fruitful path, considering that her reinterpretation of the performative act is based on readings of authors familiar with the discipline, such as Althusser and Foucault.

⁸⁵ For reference, see footnote 4.

⁸⁶ For reference, see footnote 4.

⁸⁷ Décio Rocha (2006; 2014) explores this possibility when discussing the differentiation between “representation” and “intervention” through language.

⁸⁸ In the original: “L’interpellation/assujettissement de l’individu en sujet idéologique tendrait-elle du miracle?”

Either way, the “ordinary way of meaning” calls for an ethical stance: to be aware “whereas the scientific apparatus (ours) is led to share the illusion of the powers it necessarily supports, (...) it is always good to remind ourselves that we mustn’t take people for fools” (Certeau, 1988, p.176).⁸⁹ Michel Pêcheux opens the conference in which he brings forth the ordinary way of meaning by calling for an end to disciplinary celibacy – it would be astute to do something with that.

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⁸⁹ For reference, see footnote 6.

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Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana*. Journal of Discourse Studies to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review I

The article “Chasing the Ordinary Way of Meaning: Amongst Language-Games and Everyday Practices,” as the very title indicates, is an investigation of the concept of

“ordinary way of meaning” proposed by M. Pêcheux, but not fully elaborated by him (SUMMARY, p.1). This paper shows a vast knowledge of a very rich bibliography, and its arguments are very well grounded. In fact, the author manages to bring into dialogue (and on “equal footing”) Pêcheux, Wittgenstein, Michel de Certeau etc. to propose, in a much well-founded way, a very original reading - which would already justify its publication.

That is why, at the same time, I find that the analysis of the “Memorial Inumeráveis” post (e.g., pp.18, 19), instead of helping, ends up “blurring” the larger purpose of the text, that is, it’s fairly important conceptual work not only for discourse studies, but also for a History of Linguistic Ideas. In short, I believe that the examination of “Memorial” confuses rather than contributes to the development of the text. In terms of copydesk, I only suggest revising the end of the article right before the “Conclusion” (p.21), when “two interesting problems” are going to be highlighted. I suggest that, after this sentence (which would then finish with “bring at least two interesting problems for the archive reading within Discourse Analysis”), the text would be clearer if the two considerations were made explicit. (Still at the end of p.24, I think there is an inaccuracy when it says “to recognize in it a practical and resourceful subject facing language power.” I wondered if it wasn’t “in the face of the language of power”).

Having made these brief considerations, I underline the excellent analysis undertaken and the great contribution that this article can bring to language studies with its thesis that “The ordinary way of meaning is thus transversal to ‘logically stabilized’ and ‘non-stabilized’ spaces, not corresponding to a localized phenomenon, but rather to a theoretical paradigm” (p.25), and that “the ‘ordinary way of meaning’ calls for an ethical stance” (p.23). Thus, I recommend acceptance of the article for publication. APPROVED

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