

**Retreat and collect reading and writing: for an aesthetical assemblage  
of thought**<sup>1 2 3 4</sup>

***Recolher e colecionar a leitura e a escrita: por uma montagem estética  
do pensamento***

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**Abstract**

This article aims to explore, by means of education, philosophy and visual arts, the aesthetical possibilities of reading and writing. Therefore, a conversation is drawn authors and authoress, the stoic philosopher Seneca, the Walter Benjamin, the image philosopher Didi-Huberman, and the plastic artist Elida Tessler, to think the concepts of collection and assembling about writing and reading to think the difference. In this way, rather than understanding reading and writing as informative functions, the article discusses its political, aesthetical, and ethical dimensions that crosses modes of existence in the present, like a phosphorus that sparks in a moment.

**Keywords:** Reading, Writing, Montage, Aesthetic, Education

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## **Resumo**

*Este artigo busca pensar, por meio da educação, da filosofia e das artes visuais, as possibilidades estéticas da leitura e da escrita. Para tanto, se traça um diálogo entre autores e autoras, como o filósofo estoico Sêneca, Walter Benjamin, o filósofo da imagem Didi-Huberman e a artista plástica Elida Tessler, para pensar os conceitos de recolhimento, colecionar e montagem, tratando da escrita e da leitura como formas que podem tornar possível pensar a diferença. Desse modo, entendemos a leitura e a escrita para além de sua função reduzida de informar, mas também em sua dimensão ética, estética e política no atravessamento dos modos de existência no presente, tal como um risco de fósforo que sagulba por alguns instantes.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Leitura, Escrita, Montagem, Estética, Educação*

## Opening notes

A fundamental value appears in the intense attention that educated societies give to the learning of writing and the correct position of the young student, even more than the perfection of what he writes. Before being the exercise of competence, the act of writing is a way of occupying the sensible and giving meaning to this occupation. (Rancière, 1995, p. 7)

Primarily limited to the informational function, writing seems to have little scope in the contemporary academic universe for invention: we follow models, we have objectives, production standards, and text presentation so that it can be within reach of those who read it; not to mention that the entire process undergoes an evaluation based, predominantly, on the logic that reduces writing to a competence — a scope that is given by the reader's apprehension of the text itself —, but which also occurs due to the need for its publication and dissemination, since, if it is not per current editorial standards, it will be available to a very restricted range of people.

Jorge Ramos do Ó (2017, p. 227) says that “the conflict between rule and creation, in which the constitutive *aporia* of modern science is revealed, remains in front of us because we have not yet found, outside the framework of disciplinary knowledge, that school conducts and manages, alternative ways of thinking and working.” Modernity's utilitarian character imprinted on pedagogical devices placed writing as a great instrument of veridiction, purging it of its ethical, aesthetic, and political particularity. According to Rancière (1995, p. 7), “it is not because writing is the instrument of power or the royal road to knowledge, in the first place,

that it is a political thing. It is a political thing because its gesture belongs to the aesthetic constitution of the community and serves, above all, to allegorize this constitution.”

Therefore, problematizing the writing processes that take place in the educational field today seems to us urgent to think about other formative possibilities for the new generations, in which “learning is effectively subordinated to *creating* and acquiring to *producing*. (Ó, 2017, p. 227, *emphasis added by the authors*). We agree with Aquino and Sayão (2004, p. 35) when they state that “it is not just about offering to the new generations what is their right to receive. Furthermore, it is up to professionals to optimize daily a certain public spirit among the youngest, [...] or, as Hannah Arendt wants, for the task concerning the public world.”

Thus, this text raises some questions about writing and reading, taking them as an essential practice of production of modes of existence, thought of as a possibility of aesthetic opening to the world. To this end, it is argued that writing can be a procedure, in the manner of Foucault, Walter Benjamin, and Didi-Huberman, which enables the *montage* of thought, which provides a broader understanding of the very act of writing and the affirmation of the difference. The *montage* is worked here as a method and form of knowledge and a political gesture, philosophical procedure, and aesthetic creation, taken as an act of pedagogical understanding. Thus, this article traces a dialogue between the writing operated by Seneca in Antiquity, who performed it as an exercise of the self that passes through recollection, and Walter Benjamin’s concept of collecting to think about extraction and appropriation. If operated as a procedure in line with the transmission of experience, this differential thought by assemblage could be essential for us to think about the force of writing as an ethical, aesthetic, and political power when it collects, transforms and makes us others. We close the text with a dialogue with the work of the artist Elida Tessler based on her provocations between the visual arts and literature.

## Writing as an *etopoietic* attitude

Among the various themes present in the theoretical-philosophical discussions of Western societies, human training has played a central role. According to Pierre Hadot (2014, p. 31), the education of young people is already constituted, in Homeric Greece, as “the great concern of the noble class, of those who have the *areté*, i.e., the excellence necessary for the

nobility of blood, which later, with the philosophers, will become a virtue, i.e., the nobility of the soul.” Thus, philosophy becomes crucial in the formation of character and virtue, making it possible to speak of philosophy “before philosophy,” i.e., a set of “practices and theories that refer to a fundamental requirement of the Greek mentality, the desire to form and educate, the care of what the Greeks called *paideia*” (Hadot, 2014, p. 30).

However, how does philosophy manage to articulate its presence in the constitution that the individual makes of himself? Alternatively, in the words of Michel Foucault (2006a, p. 167), through which “institutional mediations” philosophy aspires that “the philosopher, in his existence, in his practice, in his speech, in the advice he will give, will allow who listen to him do the practice of themselves, take care of themselves, and finally achieve what is proposed to them as an object and as a goal, and which are themselves?” Foucault refers to two primary institutional forms: the Hellenic and the Roman, based on this question.

The Hellenic type, says Foucault (2006a, p. 167), is the *skholé* (school), which “can have a closed character, implying the communal existence of individuals,” as in the Pythagorean and Epicurean schools, in which the spiritual orientation has a privileged place. The other type, the Roman one, confronts the *skholé*: it is that of the private counselor, who “represents a formula that is almost the opposite of that of the school. The philosopher is at school: you go to him and ask for him” (Foucault, 2006a, p. 174). In both cases, however, one sees the work of oneself for oneself, a work of intense dedication, which comprises a series of exercises, practices that seek formation, the asceticism. This philosophical way of life, practiced throughout Antiquity, seeks to form the individual, modify him, and take him out of his current state of ignorance towards self-care, which involves self-knowledge, but is not reduced to that.

Writing and reading were some of these practices, which, along with others — memorization, abstinence, silence, listening to the other — played an essential role in technologies of the self<sup>5</sup> and have existed since the so-called Greek archaic period. As an exercise of the self, writing acted by converting truth into *ethos*; an “*ethopoietic* writing,” in the words of Foucault (2006b, p. 147), present in documents from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries, but

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<sup>5</sup> It is essential to point out that the rigorous study developed by Foucault on the practices of the self in Antiquity opens up possibilities for us to think about the practices of the self in Contemporaneity.

which was already found in two other forms of writing, previously practiced for other purposes, which are the *hypomnemata* and the *correspondence*.

The *hypomnemata* were a kind of notebook in which quotations, fragments, examples of what was heard or read could be recorded; not constituting a reminder for memory lapses but as an instrument for carrying out exercises that should be done with some frequency, such as reading, rereading, meditation, talking with oneself and with others, and whose purpose was the “constitution of the self” (Foucault, 2006a, p. 149). Therefore, the practice of notes reinforces and systematizes these sets of information collected in the different types of speeches (oral and written). This practice, however, does not seek to store the excerpts in an archive but to make this archive a living matter for thinking and exercising oneself; an exercise, a practice that “opposes the great defect of *stultitia* [...]. *Stultitia* is defined by the agitation of the mind, the instability of attention, the change of opinions and wills, and consequently by the fragility in the face of all the events that can occur” (Foucault, 2006b, p. 150).

This mind agitation implies an inordinate openness to everything and anything. The *stultus* does not reflect on the information coming to him from the outside world, mixing it with his desires, thoughts, and passions without differentiating and discerning such elements, its own and what comes from outside. The *stultus* is also characterized by dispersion in time: its attention is not returned to anything, its “existence passes,” Foucault tells us (2006a, p. 162) “without memory or will [...] a will that is not free,” continually changing its way of life, which “wants several things at the same time, things that are divergent without being contradictory. It doesn’t want one and absolutely only one. The *stultus* wants something and at the same time regrets it” (Foucault, 2006a, p. 162). Thus, we can think that writing crossed by the care of the self constitutes a practice that operates principles of action in life, and the *stultitia* would be the other of the care of the self since it does not take its own life and the world that surrounds it as an object of concern and problematization. This is because Sêneca (2012) differentiates a simple life from a neglected life. Thus, “nothing is further from the busy man than living; nothing is more difficult to learn” (Sêneca, 2011, p. 41).

A reason for concern in Antiquity, this symptom is powerful in the present; when faced with the endless supply of stimuli of all kinds, we find ourselves encapsulated over choices and modes of existence that we take for ourselves, oscillating between the various

possibilities that open indistinctly. Possibly this symptom will explain the problem of attention in the educational field, in which its lack is considered one of the solid reasons for not learning. It also explains the success of best-selling self-help books and the growing demand for alternative modes of existence (life in communities, “healthier” eating practices, physical exercises, psychological assistance, meditations, etc.) Such success can be highlighted as a contemporary symptom of nonconformity with this agitation in which we are immersed. However, it is an agitation linked now to another type of society, which Han (2015) designated as being of super performance, in which we need to compete with ourselves. However, what remains regular is the preoccupation with a kind of agitation that takes our focus away from our own life and its aesthetic formation.

Fighting against the agitation of the soul, against the dangers of this *stultitia* constitutes, in the Antiquity analyzed here, a constant exercise. Hence Seneca’s insistence on the importance of reading and writing for the exercise of oneself, since no one manages to conduct himself only from what exists in himself: the help of others, either as a direction or as an example, is fundamental (Foucault, 2006b). Seneca points out that, like reading, writing constitutes an essential practice in the work of oneself towards oneself: both practices must be exercised as complementary to each other, done in an intercalated way so as not to provoke exhaustion, “we must alternate both activities, balance them so that the pen will shape the ideas collected from the readings” (Sêneca, 2018, p. 380). Writing feeds on reading, but it is not a result: it is an exercise, an activity that requires attention, dedication, and method. It is important to remember that writing, at that time, took place in styled inscriptions (stylus) on wax tablets. Therefore, the fatigue referred to by Seneca comes from mind exercise itself for the written production and the physical exercise that such practice provoked.

Another important aspect concerning *hupommemata* concerns the choice of fragments to be written: it is not a matter of deepening the reading or studying a theme. This is opposed, according to Foucault (2006b, p. 150-151), “to the work of the grammarian who seeks to know a work in its entirety or all the works of an author; it is also opposed to the teaching of philosophers by profession who claim the doctrinal unity of a school.” From these written records, from these notes, Seneca extracts the maxims that he addresses to Lucilius in his correspondence: maxims that have the formative purpose of guiding conduct. Foucault (2006b, p. 151) argues that these notes, these records, this “notebook” is based on two principles:” ‘the local truth of the sentence’ and ‘its circumstantial value of use.’ Seneca

chooses what he notes for himself and his correspondents in one of the philosophers of his sect, but also in Democritus or Epicurus.”

Such notes, such writings made for oneself, also serve as a discursive resource of the basis for another form of personal writing, of exercising oneself towards oneself and which also intends to serve another, which is the *epistle* or *correspondence*, having, therefore, a double meaning: to serve, at the same time, as a source of reflection on the one who writes and on the one who receives it. However, Foucault warns that the letter should not be understood as an extension resulting from the *hypomnemata*. It makes the writer “present with an immediate and almost physical presence” (Foucault, 2006b, p. 156). In the letters addressed to Lucilius, Seneca also exercises himself, carries out an examination of conscience, recalls his day, talks about his afflictions, details his daily life, talks about his health, his travels, his reflections on life, in a search for the truth, by his way of thinking, in an understanding that “writing is a gesture that guides and aligns thought” (Flusser, 2010, p. 20), as shown in the following excerpt:

Whatever the value of my writings, read them as the work of a man in search of the truth, not in possession of it, but a continuous and tenacious search. I have not alienated my rights in favor of anyone; I have not engraved the name of any owner. I trust a lot in the thinking of great men, but I claim my right to think. Otherwise, they did not bequeath us finished truths but subject to investigation; and perhaps they would have discovered the essential if they had not also investigated superfluous subjects. However, they spend much time on word games, on capricious discussions that uselessly sharpen their wits. (Sêneca, 2018, p. 151 – Letter 44)

The intention here was not to exhaust the work or doctrine of a particular author but to “provide an opportunity for meditation” (Foucault, 2006a, p. 428); it was a formative intention. It can be seen that reading intends to take the text as an exercise in which “the subject puts himself, through thought, in a certain [...] fictitious situation in which he experiences himself; this is what explains that philosophical reading is — if not totally, at least to a large extent — indifferent to the author, indifferent to the context of the phrase or sentence” (Foucault, 2006a, p. 430-431). Foucault (2006a) continues that it is not a matter of the subject’s relationship with his thought but placing him in the experience through thought. Therefore, in this reading situation, the authorship, or even the understanding of what the text intends to say, does not matter but serves as equipment for life, per the following excerpts.

However, it is time to end this letter. All that remains is to print the seal on it, i.e., quote some important maxim you meditate on. (Sêneca, 2018, p. 43 – Letter 13)

[...] a small offering – a Greek saying – will now add to the benefit I have already made you. (Sêneca, 2018, p. 53 – Letter 15)

[...] entertain yourself with these meditations, but don't forget to make time to write to me. (Sêneca, 2018, p. 337 – Letter 78)

I will offer you a lapidary sentence that will weigh you and assess your degree of perfection [...]. (Sêneca, 2018, p. 704 – Letter 124)

Who is the author? – you ask. To see how tolerant I am, I decided to quote you other authors: the phrase is from Epicurus, Metrodorus, or from some other thinker from that sect. However, what interest has the author's name if he spoke for the benefit of all? (Sêneca, 2018, p. 49 – Letter 14)

Another important aspect of writing concerns the method that will imply unnecessary effort when the writer fails to do so. The task will be performed several times; it must be redone, implying a loss of time and failure to reach the proposed objective. The method is time-bound: don't read quickly, don't write quickly. This slowness was considered of fundamental importance in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, becoming a problem only in Modernity. This delay — in which chronological time is suspended, as the attentional focus turns to read, to the text — constitutes an essential exercise of the self. In the following excerpt, Seneca details this relationship established with reading: an extended, attentive reading.

That book of yours that you had promised me came into my hands. To read it more slowly, I just opened it as if to taste it. It, however, tempted me to prolong the reading. Moreover, you can understand how grateful I was for your language if I tell you that it is easy to read, even though it exceeds the standard dimensions of my works and yours, seems, at first sight, a volume by Livy or Epicurus. The truth is that the pleasure of reading thoroughly took over me, and I read it to the end without further ado. The sun attracted me; hunger showed itself, the clouds threatened me: nothing stopped me from completing a reading that filled me not only with pleasure but with joy. “What talent, what strength of soul this man has! I would even say ‘flares of enthusiasm’ if, by chance, I wrote more calmly, sometimes more warmly.” However, it wasn't bursts of enthusiasm; it was a continual inspiration. Your style of composition is full of virility, and ownership, which does not exclude, occasionally, and at the right moment, a softer expression. You have a high, direct style; keep it, keep it that way. Admittedly, the subject also helped; therefore, choosing an abundant theme that attracts and awakens the imagination is necessary. I'll tell you more about your book when I've reread it. For now, my opinion is not yet firm; it is as if he had heard, not read. Allow me to analyze it carefully. (Sêneca, 2018, p. 154-155 – Letter 46)

The whole body was reading, in “extremely pure ecstasy,” creating “the false difficulties for that clandestine thing that was happiness” (Lispector, 1998, p. 12), in an ethical attitude, in an *ethos* of commitment to life; “because the *ethos* contains the double meaning of custom and value. The first designates regularity, stability, and permanence; the second is an appreciative sense, designating an inclination. These two senses configure a way of being and living” (Kastrup & Barros, 2009, p. 12). Seneca also brings some clues about the form of writing: a pleasant text, which provokes, in the other, the desire to read; a strong style of language, interspersed with softer language (which we could conjecture is the movement he is talking about); the choice of the topic to be discussed. However, Seneca briefly pointed out that such aspects constitute a first impression of the reading that a text written by his correspondent, Lucilius, had provoked in him. It was necessary to return to it and reread it to make a more consistent opinion. One can see the powerful presence of a master who, even from a distance, is busy with the formation of his disciple. A master who puts himself entirely in the reading of that text: a text that “took him completely,” that nothing “prevented him from completing a reading that filled [him] not only with pleasure but with joy.”

This description of sensations made by Seneca is close to what Barthes says about a text being plural. He says that the text is “Plural,” not only because it has multiple meanings, but because it makes “the very plural of meaning: an irreducible (and not just acceptable) plural. Here, the “text is not the coexistence of meanings, but a passage, crossing; it cannot, therefore, depend on an interpretation, even if liberal, but on an explosion, on a dissemination” (Barthes, 2004, p. 70). This is also linked to reading and writing as philosophical and not necessarily religious, spiritual exercises: the text taken as a crossing brings the movement. This displacement operates in the way we perceive and live the world. There is a change in the way of being that reading provokes; reading as a work of asceticism on oneself and writing.

Writing, therefore, as a spiritual exercise, is not limited to a performative game that aims at technical improvement — even though the technique is in no way neglected —, nor in a practice that aims at the individual achievement or overcoming of the subject, submitted to a metric, to a measurable system, as we find in modern writing practices and which still insist in contemporary educational spaces. Attention to careful writing, the pause for ideas to settle down, and the self-criticism necessary for a good text, which was considered essential 20 centuries ago, is a reason for growing concern today in the formative processes of our children

and young. Some writings are far-fetched and empty of content; others could be fruitful if time had been devoted to improving them — an increasingly limited time in academic spaces, faced with the imposition of quantified publications.

We speak of academic productivity, in which writing is operated by the logic of the market and is not taken by its creative force, by its formative content that can produce other modes of subjectivation, because “the intense and laborious experience of the waiting time for something that transforms is consolidated does not currently have many supporters among those who govern university institutions and those who finance research” (Ó, 2017, p. 12-13). If in Antiquity the work of writing is confused “with an intensive way of conducting one’s existence” (Aquino, 2011, p. 644), what we are witnessing today are writing practices whose performances say little about those who practice them, or in another way, writing does not change the person who writes, becoming a mechanical task, reduced to information, communication, and grammatical skills.

Nevertheless, it is conceivable to take the writing inside out, twist it, catch it in its irruption, and make it a means, a possibility, an opening for thought and life. From this inspiration in Seneca and without falling into anachronisms, we use his indications to think about writing in schools and universities in the present so firmly crossed by the logic of productivity, competition with oneself, and repetition of the same. This is because Greco-Roman philosophy and education profoundly marked the modern culture to which we are heirs.

From the Homeric epics, we have fundamental texts in the moral formation of Antiquity, from this warrior spirit to the culture of the scribes (Marrou, 2017). There is always the figure of the master, who could be a spiritual mentor or a teacher paid only for instruction in ancient times, which will only coincide in the monastic schools of the Medieval period. However, the idea of a collectivity to educate free men is an idea that has been giving support to what we now call schools and universities. Seneca, however, acted in ancient Rome as a private counselor. What interested us in the production of this stoic philosopher was precisely the power of reading and writing for human formation, i.e., it aims more to form than to inform. This is because “[...] the important thing was not to learn doctrines but to change one’s life” (Veyne, 2016, p. 11), and one of the philosophical, spiritual exercises of Stoicism will be the reading of good authors who are always suspicious of ready-made ideas and the

majority. That is why reading and writing as practices of the self are linked to a “[...] critical activity concerning oneself, to one’s cultural world, to the lives of others” (Foucault, 2006a, p. 85). It was, therefore, a general formula of the art of life.

In addition, we can ask ourselves what kind of training we are operating with children and young people when we work on writing and reading apart from life and its problematization, with little access to classic texts and many exercises that reduce the power of reading and writing in the division by textual genres in schools (Aquino, 2011) and the quantification of academic articles. Seeking not to fall into a denunciation of schools and universities, nor into a romanticism that thinks that the past was always better, we will now try to trace a dialogue between writing and reading in Seneca operated as a force of recollection in the constitution of a body with the concept to collect in Walter Benjamin, artist Elida Tessler, and image philosopher Didi-Huberman through their concept of assemblage as a way that makes it possible to think about the difference when reading and writing are taken in the present.

## ***Collecting words: the assemblage of thought and writing in Walter Benjamin, Georges Didi-Huberman, and Elida Tessler***

Writing is dealing with the emptiness of writing. It is a work that is always *unfinished*, open. In writing, “it is not about the manifestation or exaltation of the gesture of writing; it is not a matter of binding a subject to a language; it is the opening of a space where the subject who writes does not stop disappearing” (Foucault, 2009, p. 268). Writing usually gains its final point close to its delivery. The *insertion* of a period does not mean the interruption of thought. It tells of its opening. The text has the *word* as its component, which governs the insertion time and sometimes asks for another word to accompany it. However, how is writing created?

A *word* can be that tiny spark that erupts with the creative fire, like a “lamp that we carry on our paths of artistic creation, tracing with a thread of light the path that allows us to move forward” (Tessler, 2012, p. 207). For Flusser (2010, p. 21), “whoever writes not only prints something within himself, but also expresses it to the other. This contradictory impression gives writing tension.” For this reason, concludes the philosopher, that writing

constituted the “code that supports and transmits Western culture, and gave this culture such an explosive form” (Flusser, 2010, p. 21). Explosion, irruption, sudden, violent blast, capable of causing breaches in our forms of existence.

The visual artist Elida Tessler (2012, p. 206) would say that we can “consider the act of writing as a match strike,” as well as the poet Armando Freitas Filho (2006, p. 45), in his fragment 23 of *Numeral/Nominal*, when he says that “to write is to strike a match | and under its little flash | to give wings to the air — distance, destination | holding the flame against | wind inattention, keeping | the light on, even if the thought | blinks, until the fingers burn.” *Striking out the word as striking a match*, in a permanent job of giving visibility — to that small flash —, to an incompleteness, to a time that lasts the size of the match — in a constant game against the inattention of the wind.

From a Brechtian perspective, didi-Huberman (2017b; 2013b) writes about a permanent *work in progress*. He refers to the process of working in the field of the arts. However, we can think of the field of the art of writing a text and putting together a thought. In a presentation about her creative process, Elida Tessler expressed that her work is always about the same thing, in different ways. A variation of thinking with objects and words. With each work, each research changes and expands a little. She comments that just like the *work in progress* used to say about this ongoing work, she has her *word in the process*. *Word* as the *Windows* word processor that stores your writing, but also *word* as in the process of being written.

In writing a text, we assemble a collection of words and a collage of fragments organized by *montages* of nexuses and meanings on a page. For Agamben, the page is a discontinuous unit “and closed in on itself, separated, each time, one textual element from the other, which the gaze apprehends as an isolated whole that must physically disappear to allow the reading of the next page” (Agamben, 2018, p. 129). In the interval between one word and another, writing is done in assemblages in the composition of a text. In the “Origin of the German Tragic Drama,” Benjamin comments that he presents the ideas when shown the discontinuous. The philosopher’s idea is to exercise himself in the sketch (Benjamin, 1984). Moreover, as Perec (2000) would say, to sketch is to make something survive, the crumbs of the void to observe these traces of the unfinished.

One of Elida Tessler’s works that are in the permanent process is called “*Do you give me your word?*” It consists of a series started in 2004 and, at the moment, it has more than seven

thousand clothespins with handwritten words. The words originate from encounters, and the artist invites, “Do you give me your word?” “as an initial procedure, I ask for the floor, requesting that it be written on a wooden clothespin, in the interlocutor’s mother tongue” (Tessler, 2012, p. 201). “Your word” is an opening of senses and meanings for each reader when the work on display is a flash “where a simple gesture becomes an act of creation” (Tessler, 2012, p. 200). It is a work in permanent dialogue with the lived experience, “everything is pulsating, like words from a text that has not yet been written” (Agamben, 2018, p. 129).

Marilia Garcia (2017, p. 43), in her poem “Is there a country in the landscape?” mentions Georges Perec’s *infra-ordinary* and asks how to see the infra-ordinary. In his text, *l’Infra-Ordinaire* (1989), Perec (2010) also asks himself:

“What really happens, what we live through, the rest, everything else, where is it? What happens every day and always comes back, the banal, every day, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the usual, how to account for it, how to interrogate it, how to describe it? Interrogate the usual. However, precisely, we are used to it. We don’t question it; it doesn’t question us; it doesn’t seem to cause problems; we live it without thinking about it as if it doesn’t convey either questions or answers, as if it doesn’t carry any information. It’s not even conditioning anymore, but anesthesia. We sleep our life in a dreamless sleep. However, where is our life? Where is our body? Where is our space? How to talk about these “common things,” or rather, how to surround them, bring them out, rip them out of the shell where they are trapped, how to give them a meaning, a language: that they finally speak of what is, of the that we are.” (p. 179)

What we manage to register is just an *aperçue*, an apperception, just a glimpse, something we catch in passing, a piece, a fragment of something bigger. For Georges Didi-Huberman (2018, p. 35), the infra-ordinary is an *aperçue*, an apperception that “I got used to naming trinkets of things or events that appear before my eyes. They never last long. Trinkets, splinters of the world, chips that go, come.” Walter Benjamin dialogued with the lived, the infra-ordinary, and what appears as chips of time when connecting one word to another one. It provides us with subsidies to think about the epistemology of *montage* as a method in line with the transmission of experience as an image and form of thought. In “One-Way Street” (2013) and “Passages” (2018), he creates a textual assemblage with memories and fiction through quotes and fragments; they are word lines like Elida Tessler’s clothespins.

“One-Way Street is a threshold in the process of textual assemblage in which Benjamin operates with a rupture in current university thinking. It was meant to be a text

composed of small fragments but ended up with 60 texts. The texts are of the most varied themes; they talk about infra-ordinary, common things like the breakfast room, gloves, and writer's techniques. The text is a "great miscellany, bringing together political and philosophical considerations, aesthetic and literary ideas, travel notes, reflections on love, notes on the behavior of children when they read, play, and hide, speculations about presentiments and premonitions, accounts of dreams, and even comments about postage stamps and their collectors" (Konder, 1999, p. 49). It is a textual assemblage of the apperceptions, the splinters of the world.

"Benjamin uses assemblage as a literary procedure, which is also a form of narration of his own experience of modern cities, of his experience of Berlin – but also of Moscow, Riga, Naples, and Paris – in *One-Way Street* and of Paris in the book of *Passages*." (Jacques, 2018, p. 214)

Walter Benjamin's method of writing and research is one of deviation and appropriation. We can see this way of assemblage thought and knowledge in the two texts cited, "*One-Way Street*" and "*Passages*." For Leonardo Villa-Forte (2019, p. 20), appropriation is understood "as the act of using something produced by someone else to propose, expose, show, present, sell that something associated with a second signature." This appropriative gesture is another way of thinking about authorship: creating something different and working in an inventive way using already written material, such as ready-made. Benjamin (2018) comments on his practice of appropriating quotations, which he calls *literary montage*:

"the method of this work: literary assemblage. I have nothing to say. Just show. I will not steal anything precious or appropriate witty formulas. But of the arrangements, of the leftovers: I don't want to make an inventory of this, but to allow them to obtain justice in the only possible way: using them" ([1a, 8] p. 764)

In another fragment, Benjamin comments that one of the first principles of history would be assemblage, "i.e., building large constructions from tiny elements, cut out with clarity and precision. Moreover, even discover the crystal of the whole event by analyzing the small individual moment. Therefore, break with vulgar historical naturalism" (Benjamin, 2018, [N2, 6] p. 503). In the text "*The Crisis of the Novel*," Benjamin (1994, p. 56) says that the assemblage "is far from being something arbitrary"; on the contrary, the "assemblage is based on the document." Using Benjamin's thought, Georges Didi-Huberman (2015) comments on

the idea of assemblage as a suspension, an interval, a beautiful restlessness of thought to operate with textual writing. For this author, assemblage “induces a new style of knowledge, new procedures for dealing with the real, therefore, new contents of knowledge, within the scope of an original and, so to speak, a subversive conception of historical time” (Didi-Huberman, 2015, p. 52).

The assemblage creates a relationship between the fragments; in the case of writing between words, cutting, and pasting, it can be dealt with as a *method and form of knowledge*. When an approximation of words is carried out in writing and reading — or the approximation of images in cinema — this arrangement of ideas — which sometimes would not be together without this *montage* process - can be considered an act of creation, a craft of *bricoleurs*. It can be said that the act of *writing is to deal with the montage of words* because we work all the time with fragments of other texts and authors, which we cut and paste, which requires a particular collection and a particular collection. However, that requires restoring to the fragments, the remains, and their value in use by using them, to remember Benjamin’s method of literary assemblage.

It becomes essential to deal with assemblage as a method and form of knowledge, to disassemble to know. To think of the work of dismantling writing for a later assemblage of a text as an art — as a science — and practice — as an act of writing and citing — is to make this craft a laboratory for experimentation. The *montage* can be operated as a *political gesture, aesthetic creation, and philosophical procedure* in a movement that dismantles and denaturalizes the look to diagnose the symptoms of the present producing other possible compositions, from these tiny elements, as Benjamin comments (Rodrigues; Schuler, 2019).

It is understood that the *montage* looks at how the relationship between things takes place. This procedure works by denaturalizing the gaze to operate with knowledge by disassembly and reassembly, problematizing the perspective of representation and the subject. For Didi-Huberman, *montage* is the art of producing this way of thinking about difference, an approximation, and a transgression of disciplinary boundaries. To ask how writing is assembled is to deal with it on the hinges of philosophical, literary, and artistic thought, understanding writing and reading as an *montage of heterogeneous times*, as a process of singularization, i.e., a “*montage of singularities*.” The composition of writing and thinking deals with singularities — of the text, the author, the writer, and the reader. The exercise of a text is

carried out with choices of fragments, sundries, details of thought, and singularities, but also crossed by editorial policies, institutional deadlines, and academic rules. It is worth remembering that the montage does not hasten the conclusion of anything, nor does it close or enclose; it opens up possibilities and does not “abusively schematize them. When it allows us to access the singularities of time and, therefore, its essential multiplicity” (Didi-Huberman, 2012, p. 156). The assemblage, therefore, can be taken as a floating listening, attentive to the networks of details, to the sensitive plots formed by the relationships between things, rags, remains, and fragments.

For Leonardo Villa-Forte (2019, p. 20), “copying and pasting, and displacement, which, in the contemporary world, through technology, are disseminated as usual procedures, are relatives of what the historical avant-gardes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and Constructivism, proposed as the character of gestures of rupture with the mimetic representation, rationality, the beautiful, the linearity.” Villa-Forte (2019, p. 37) defends the thesis of appropriation as the production of new meaning from the assemblage carried out by a second author, “what the practices of appropriation operate as a difference is precisely the change of reading as implicit authorship for an explicit authorship.”

The cut and paste procedure mentioned by Compagnon (2016) in his book “*La seconde main: o, Le travail de citation*” is the beginning of a procedure that uses scissors and glue as tools, but it is only the first gesture, a second one is necessary, which passes through the *montage* of these clippings for the manifestation of a text, as a displacement of nexuses of meanings. At the same time, Leonardo would say we sample texts, “sampling basically consists of removing or copying fragments from one or several sources and displacing them, repositioning them in a certain context different from the one where the fragments were taken” (Villa-Forte, 2019, p. 24).

Didi-Huberman (2015, p. 117), commenting on Benjamin’s writing, says that it is essential to become a “racker of the memory of things” by adopting “the floating listening of the psychoanalyst attentive to the networks of details, to the sensible plots formed by the relations between things.” We can update what Georges comments about the historian and think of the ragpicker as a researcher, and who knows, a writer who collects words, in the manner of Elida Tessler with “Do you give me your word?” To collect the rags of *memory* is to collect fragments, “it means to claim to be a collector of all things and, more precisely, a

collector of rags in the world” (Didi-Huberman, 2015, p. 119), which reminds us of a lot of the *collection*, which Seneca speaks in the letter LXXXIV to Lucilius, entitled *On reading and writing*. In this letter, Seneca brings the example of bees collecting, distributing, and disposing of what they have collected. He says that art is not making honey but precisely collecting because they transform what they collect.

Thus, it is the exercise of a particular extraction, gathering to collect. However, collecting not as an accumulation of dead repertoire but as what gives us strength, transforms us, and makes us other. Moreover, this would not happen without hard work and continuous vigil, being able to use examples from different times, according to Seneca. Nor does it happen without the figure of a master, who is not the memory master transmitting knowledge, but who pulls the other out of himself. Collect, therefore, the reading; collect yourself; concentrate thought on oneself, on the action; and take care of oneself are principles of a specific formula of living to equip oneself for different occasions in life. They are, therefore, exercises of thought, transforming them into principles of action. As Foucault (2006a, p. 320), “this explains the expected effect of reading: not the understanding of what the author wanted to say, but the constitution for himself of an equipment of true propositions, which is effectively his.”

## Final Considerations

Thus, whoever writes and reads works on things, on traces; gathers, collects, appropriates, transforms. Traces are a matter of research; they are cut-ups, fragments, this infra-ordinary, “traces, remnants of history, counterpoints and opposites, falls or irruptions, symptoms or malaise, syncope, or anachronisms in the continuity of past events” (Didi-Huberman, 2015, p. 117). The invitation that Seneca, Walter Benjamin, Didi-Huberman, and Elida Tessler make is to look like an archaeologist: *memories*, words, and collections from different times and countries. For Didi-Huberman, “to look at things from an archaeological point of view is to compare what we see in the present, what has survived, with what we know has disappeared” (Didi-Huberman, 2017a/2013a, p. 41), excavate and remember, as Benjamin would say, is what makes it possible to *assemble* the present with the past and the future.

Georges comments that to excavate is to “make an anamnesis of the material where the hand has sunk: what the hand extracts from the material are nothing other than a present form where all the times of the singular place that constitute the material have coalesced, inscribed [...] Memory is a quality of the material itself: matter is memory” (Didi-Huberman, 2009, p. 55). Excavate to write, to break out of the blank page syndrome “to bring to light — an unknown human form. A place where the essential can arise, that is, the disquieting strangeness” and, working with writing as memory, as it is “certainly in the traces that archaeological excavation brings to light; but it is also in the very substance of the soil, in the sediments stirred up by the excavator’s hoe; it is, finally, in the archaeologist’s present, in his gaze, in his methodical or hesitant gestures, in his ability to read the past of the object on the current soil” (Didi-Huberman, 2015, p. 123).

“*Do you give me your word?*” is an anachronistic assemblage that narrates stories from different parts of the world with the *word*, a “narrative thread woven on walking” (Corpas, 2017, p. 332), dialogues with everyday encounters, and the *infra-ordinary* of Georges Perec and the *montage* of Benjamin and Didi-Huberman. Gathering strength in the text in the manner of Seneca and collecting words in the manner of Benjamin and Éléida Tessler can turn out to be a political gesture of disassembly and reassembly, an aesthetic creation, and a philosophical procedure that dismantles disciplinary barriers, which could open a space for a language worthy of the experiences that transform us and of a multiplicity of sensitivities that cross us. According to Didi-Huberman, assembling thought aesthetically would be strongly tied to this way of thinking about difference. This form needs to be created so that we can get rid of a distracted existence to live aesthetics of existence and ethics of immanence.

This text points out some significant symptoms of the present: automatic and mechanized writing for academic productivity; reading as acceleration and clogging; *stultus* as time dispersion and lack of attention to life. The image of a word on a clothespin shifts these symptoms to another ethical possibility of thinking about an interruption as a political act.

Gathering and collecting reading is about asking how a text is heard, how a text is assembled in the act of reading and writing — which, for us, always go together — as if gathering these words in clothespins. It is a writing and reading procedure that uses assemblage to create a possible, inventive thought. We could also say that it is about operating

with a differential thought, to change what is thought and what we are producing about ourselves in the processes of a text constitution.

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