

From Greek mythology to the Contemporary discourse: the functioning of memory about feminine in a discursive perspective

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Abstract: *Anchored in the theoretical-analytical contribution of Discourse Analysis (Pêcheux) we aim in this paper an analysis of the statements about women relatively stabilized in the social environment. To this end, the analytic corpus will compose the discursivities about the Greek goddesses that subscribe to the special edition of the comics of Turma da Monica, available online. In different types of society, the code of rules has always been present to direct the conduct considered appropriate to the subjects in their various levels of coexistence. In Greece, stories about gods and mythological beings were circulated within the society not only to explain the natural phenomena that were often incomprehensible at that time but also to regulate the pattern of behavior of their people, in line with the prevailing order. Discursively, we understand that the senses are updated by an intrinsic relationship between actuality and memory. In our gesture of interpretation, we seek a better understanding of how the senses about (and for) women stabilize in the discursive process, and their implications for the regularization of memory about (and for) women today.*

Keyword: *Feminine; Discourse Analysis; Memory; Contemporaneity.*

Resumo: *Ancorados no suporte teórico-analítico da Análise do Discurso (Pêcheux), objetivamos neste artigo uma análise dos dizeres sobre a mulher, relativamente estabilizados no ambiente social. Para isso, o corpus analítico comporá as discursividades sobre as deusas gregas que assinam a edição especial dos quadrinhos da Turma da Mônica, disponíveis na rede mundial de computadores, na modalidade on-line. Nos diferentes tipos de sociedade, o código de regras sempre esteve presente para direcionar a conduta considerada adequada aos sujeitos em seus vários níveis de convivência. Na Grécia, circulavam na sociedade histórias sobre deuses e seres mitológicos, não apenas para explicar os fenômenos naturais que eram frequentemente incompreensíveis na época, mas também para regular o padrão de comportamento de seu povo, de acordo com a ordem predominante. Discursivamente, entendemos que os sentidos são atualizados por uma relação intrínseca entre realidade e memória. Em nosso gesto de interpretação, buscamos uma melhor compreensão de como os sentidos sobre (e para) as mulheres se estabilizam no processo discursivo e suas implicações para a regularização da memória sobre (e para) as mulheres na atualidade.*

Palavra-chave: *Feminino; Análise do discurso; Memória; Contemporaneidade.*

I. Initial Words

In different types of society, the code of rules has always been present to direct the conduct considered appropriate to the subjects in their various levels of coexistence. To this set of rules necessary for life in society, Herman (2006) assigns code of behavior, conceived as a “complex of explicitly defined or implicitly recognized rules that the community of people accepts and makes predominant”. Thus, the rules that dictate society present themselves in different ways, and can be marked in the practices of the subjects both explicitly, materialized in the laws and legitimated by the State, as well as implicitly, added to values often naturalized by common sense.

More specifically about women, unlimited words are circulated throughout the ages, regularizing an imaginary of the feminine, intrinsically linked to its predetermined place in the social sphere. In ancient Greece, women - especially Athenians¹ - were widely discursive both in literature and sculptures and other forms of expression, emphasizing not only physical attributes but also regulating a pattern of behavior consistent with their times. Dante Alighieri, Raphael, and other Renaissance painters and sculptors portrayed women, bringing to mind Greek and Roman goddesses. In contemporary society, the woman's body also does not go unnoticed and materializes in the sayings about the feminine with themes often related to fashion, beauty.

We consider that the words are structured by a relationship between history and memory, to regularize an imaginary of feminine with a view to a representation of women nowadays. Thus, having as theoretical-analytical support the Analysis of the French Discourse (Pêcheux), we undertake a gesture of analysis about the sayings about the Greek goddesses that are inscribed by a special edition of Monica's comic book *The Twelve Works of Monica*², as well as reader comments on this issue, available on the world wide web. From this gesture, we seek a better understanding of the relatively stable social functioning of the sayings about women in the social sphere and its effects in the regularization of memory of the say about women today³.

II. From theory to practice: Discourse Analysis as interpretation discipline

In the course of language studies, the Discourse Analysis founded by Michel Pêcheux in France in the mid-1960s appears as a possibility to rethink discursive and social practices, having as its object of study discourse. To this end, Pêcheux (1969; 1975) promotes a homogeneous and stable displacement of the notion of language, pointing to its heterogeneity - since it is historically and constitutively ideological, that is, the place of class struggle materialization - as well as the conception as a subject fully aware of his saying, it is understood from a psychoanalytic view, as a subject “language effect,” affected by history and crossed by the unconscious.

In this relationship between subject, language, and unconscious, Pêcheux (1988) states that memory is a structuring element of discourse since it enables the resumption of relatively stable meanings in the social sphere, providing both its reproduction through paraphrases, among others, as its displacement, slip of these senses. According to the author, it is happen because this relationship is at the intersection between history and language that the senses are constituted by processes of reproduction/naturalization of certain senses/sayings, while other senses are silenced by enunciation.

¹ In the Greek world, Athens is a cultural, social, and political reference to other city-states, while Sparta is notoriously known for its military capability (HERMAN, 2006).

² SOUZA, M. *The Twelve Works of Monica*. Available in <<http://arquivosturmadamonica.blogspot.com/2013/06/os-doze-trabalhos-da-monica.html>> Access in 20 Jul 2019.

³ This article is the result of reflections arising from the development of the postdoctoral project about the sayings about women in the intersection between history and memory, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Lucília Maria Abrahão and Sousa, with the financial support of the Brazilian funding agency Fapesp. (2018 / 13017-2)

In this process, ideology occupies a significant role, having one of its main functions to organize - through norms and rules essential to social conduct - and to induce members of society to accept, without resistance, the tasks assigned to them (ALTHUSSER, 1967). To this end, it is typical of ideology to disguise its functioning in a language in the form of an absolute truth, furnishing subjects with an evidence effect provided by the naturalization of some senses/sayings to be stabilized. Due to this bias, the discourse is conceived by the discursive approach “effect of senses” (PÊCHEUX, 1997 [1969]), since the senses are not a prior, but constitute themselves in course, that is, in the relation that is established by subject and language, given the specific conditions of its production.

Nowadays, the relevance of the media is notorious, since, from a specific way (s) of enunciation, it circulates - in its varied platforms, *online and offline* - certain sayings that, through the naturalization of the senses there inherent, materialize in social practices. Especially in the digital space, some meanings are put into circulation and, under the effect of linearity and obviousness of the senses, gain greater visibility, covering a varied audience. Thinking about the speed with which information is conveyed by the digital media available today, we are interested in thinking about the way of operation of the relatively stabilized sayings about women in the social sphere, and their effects on the constitution of an imaginary of women feminine today.

In this paper, we undertake a gesture of analysis about the sayings about women that circulate in the special edition of *Turma da Monica* entitled *The Twelve Works of Monica*, released in 1991, reprinted in 1996 and 2008 (Figures 1, 2 and 3), and currently in circulation on the world wide web.

In Brazil, *Turma da Monica* is a magazine composed of a series of comic books for children that, in their genesis, told the adventures of their characters in a playful and pedagogical way, now recounts, in special editions, the classics of civilization western.

Figure 1 - 1991's Edition



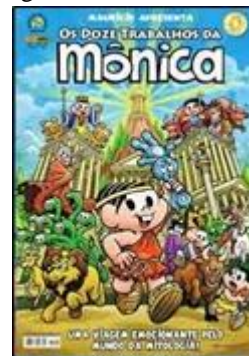
Source: SOUZA (2019)

Figure 2 - 1996's Edition



Source: SOUZA (2019)

Figure 3 - 2008's Edition



Source: SOUZA (2019)

In our view, the mere reproduction of such narratives, although in chronologically different times and, therefore, in specific socio-historical-ideological conditions, enables a memory of the saying about the feminine today, intrinsically linked to the position that women should occupy the social sphere.

According to Pêcheux (1999 [1983], p. 52),

Memory would be what, given a text that emerges as an event to read, re-establishes the “implicit” [ore technically, the pre-built, quoted and reported elements, cross-talk, etc.] that their reading need: the readable condition relative to the interesting itself.

We can thus observe the intimate relationship between history and memory as fundamental to the discursive process. In this relation, the words/meanings already said, and relatively stable in the social formation

are taken up by the discursive process, thus constituting a basis for saying it, enabling a sense update (COURTINE, 2014 [1981]).

In the movement by which the senses are regularized, according to Pêcheux (2008 [1983]), the stabilization of the meanings is the result of processes of disruption-restructuring of memory networks. In this process, there is a clash of ideological forces that occurs within the language, for the selection of some senses are reproduced, while others are silenced, consistent with the interests of current ideology.

III. The woman in the comics of *Turma da Monica*: a discursive analysis

In Greece, among the functions of mythological narratives, there is the function of dictating, through a complex set of behaviors, patterns consistent with the current ideological interests to be followed by the subjects. Such narratives operate as memory networks in order to regularize certain meanings in the discursive thread that, through naturalization, materialize in social practices.

According to Mariani (1996), it is in the social practices of memory fixation that are intertwined what should be remembered or, otherwise, what should fall into oblivion, according to interests inherent in current ideological formations.

Mythological legends operated as a practice of memory fixation as a vehicle for transmitting several values and codes of rules to be stabilized in the social sphere. Even nowadays, the myths constitute a point of reference to the Greeks, remembered in their preserved temples and exposed to public visitation, present in museums and *souvenirs* to tourists, thus functioning as practices of fixing a memory about the people and their culture.



In the following analyzes, we are interested in thinking about the way ideology works in the sayings about women today, as well as the effects of the mere reproduction of these sayings about women in the constitution of the imaginary of the feminine (to be) regularized nowadays.

In a rereading of *The Twelve Works of Hercules*⁴ for the elaboration of *The Twelve Works of Monica*, Mauricio de Sousa, points out, in his history, some characteristics of the characters. Let's look at chart one below:

From the narratives, the meanings to be reproduced

CHARACTERS	ATTRIBUTES	(IN) HISTORY
HERA	Beautiful, thin and slender, delicate, well ornamented. Very jealous; "Damned." (subjugates Hercules, her husband)	

⁴ Hercules, a demigod in Greco-Roman mythology, was handed over to the king of Mycenae, Euristeus, to serve him. Submissive to the king's orders, he performed 12 humanly impossible tasks. By demonstrating his tremendous strength and succeeding in his activities, he was considered a hero for leaving the world safe for humanity. With this, he obtained the ascent to the kingdoms of Mount Olympus, where he received the welcome of the gods (BULFINCH, 2000).

MÔNICA	short stature, fat, toothy. It has the attributes of the father, Hercules: strength, determination - in common with Hera (Hercule's second wife): genus	
HÉRCULES	Strong, brave, dominated by woman	

Source: Elaborated by the author based on SOUZA (2019)

Among the patterns of behavior to be disseminated in ancient Greece were the statements about femininity as a required attribute of women: slender and curvy, delicate, sensual, beautiful, young. Discursive in various artistic expressions, usually by men, such patterns were based by a representation of women from an idealization. As we can see, in the story retold by Maurício de Sousa, Hera corresponds to this idealization⁵ of women. However, in his work, the author seems to propose an update of these meanings about the feminine, highlighting, in character Monica - granddaughter of Hercules - some attributes that go against this standardization: fat, toothy, low.

In the clash of forces by which the senses stabilize in the social bosom, Pêcheux states that “what is at stake is the identification by which every subject recognizes himself as a man [...] and how his relationship with what he represents is organized.” (2010 [1969], p. 247), given the subject's position in the discourse.

Corroborating, the author Indursky (2000), in his studies on the modes of subject identification, states that identification occurs in the reproduction of some meanings in the thread of discourse. Counter-identification, in turn, is accomplished by the confrontation of some knowledge, producing a displacement of this and, therefore, a possibility of updating the senses. On the other hand, the disidentification of the subject is accomplished by a rupture of knowledge concerning the current ideology, thus deriving new meanings.

As we can see in the chart⁶, the character Monica possesses the opposite attributes of Hera, notoriously known, even for her beauty standard consistent with the representation of discursive women in that place and at that time. Still in the contemporary narrative, in addition to the aesthetic standards that do not match imagine of the feminine, Monica has characteristics equivalent to those of her grandfather Hercules: powerful and determined, in contrast to Hera once more physically slender and delicate.

Given this, we observe that, by recounting the classic narrative, the author is counter identified with the aesthetic standards idealized to women today, subverting certain standards/values. In doing so, we consider that the author takes a position in the discourse marked by a possibility of the emergence of the new, in a gesture of resistance, about these relatively stable sayings/meanings about women that persist in the present times. However, by highlighting the character's psychological characteristics, which meet Hercule's second wife with

⁵ It is worth remembering that Aphrodite, the goddess of love, beauty, and sexuality, was the first Greek woman to have her body publicly naked, sculpted by the artist Cnido, in the 4th century BC (ECO, 2010).

⁶ The exposition of the attributes of the main characters of the story in this special edition in a painting has a teaching way to provide the reader with a better understanding of the functioning of ideology in these statements.

difficult temperament; Since Hera is, according to the author, "damned" and Monica, in turn, "genius," we observe that, in history, there is a reproduction of a woman's imaginary that brings with it the ability to do evil, whether dissimulating, whether by persuading.⁷

Taking the meanings that are inscribed in these sayings about women, in the story retold by Maurício de Sousa, we observe that, from memory of saying, the classical narratives operate as a founding discourse (ORLANDI, 2001) to the discursivities put into a circulation situation nowadays.

According to Orlandi (2001), the founding discourse is one that enables the establishment of the new, a resignification of memory from the establishment of another memory. For the author,

It is a founding discourse that installs the conditions of formation of others, joining its possibility, establishing as a whole a complex of discursive formations, a region of meanings, a place of significance that configures a process of identification for culture, one race, one nationality (ORLANDI, 2001, p. 24).

In the special edition under review, although there is a gesture of rupture to the historically regularized senses about women in our society; the author reproduces meanings about women that meet the demands of women today, thus producing effects intrinsically linked to the position that women have, a woman can (and should) occupy in the social sphere. That's what we'll see next.

IV. Final Considerations

As we saw on the previous pages, the discursive approach by Pêcheux provided us with insights to think about the way ideology works in the discursive functioning. Considering the senses and subjects are constituted by the enunciation, we see that it has a clash of ideological forces materializes in the thread of discourse. By reproduction bias, several meanings are naturalized by the thread of speech with a view to their materialization in social practices. In this process of reproduction/naturalization of the senses, the memory occupies a structuring role in discourse, constituting a guiding link in the struggle for stabilization of the senses. In the movement in and by which the meanings regularize, the resumption of memory also marks the possibility of the eruption of the new, since they inscribe in specific speech production conditions of each time.

In the course of our gesture of analysis, a question came to our work: In the retold classical narratives, especially the special edition analyzed here, is there a reproduction or updating of meanings about the relatively stable feminine imagery in our society?

From our analyzes, we observe that, by retelling the classic narrative, the author reproduces the senses about the historically stabilized feminine imagery in our society.

Taking into consideration the words about women in the special edition of the *Turma da Monica* comic book, we take into account that, over time, Greece has become the cradle of Western civilization, whose standards, including aesthetics, values, and society models have echoed - and somehow still do - to the present day. In our country, its relevance is given not only in our language - through the Greek radicals still present in Portuguese - but also in the appreciation of the stories of their gods, myths, and heroes, discursive in our country in different materials; as we can observe in the materialities analyzed here.

The notoriety of this special edition in the comics of *Turma da Monica* is observed by us, in particular, by the reissues of these stories, which are currently broadcast by different formats, covering an even wider audience. As we have stated, the comic book *Turma da Monica* is a sequence of magazines, available in *offline* modalities - print format - and *online* - accessible on the world wide web in the form of virtual magazines and games - in addition to sales of products like character dolls of your stories. Given its notoriety in the

⁷ Regarding this theme, we also suggest the article The(in) Senses that are marked by the words of yesterday and today: the existence (resistance) of women (DARÓZ; SOUSA; GARCIA, 2019), which deals with the persuasive power of the media; it treats about the imaginary of the feminine (to be) regularized in our social formation.

country, the magazine embraces a diverse audience, comprising both adults, who have (or have not) followed the magazine's growth over time, and children, many of them already in the second generation of these literary lovers and their characters.

Taking into consideration the conditions of production of the magazine's formulation and circulation, we understand that the comics - especially the comic book *Turma da Monica* analyzed in this work - constitute memory networks that support an imaginary of the feminine, intrinsically linked to the position that Women can (and should) occupy the social sphere: the seclusion of the home. To say these are consistent with a historically macho culture still in force.

In this context, we understand that the statements about women reproduced in comics, legitimize, based on mythological histories, gender inequalities, exacerbating the constitutive tension in social relations. This tension is often marked by the unequal relationship between men and women, whether in the public space, the double shift of professional women and the devaluation of domestic work - naturalized in our social ambient - or in the private environment, which often materializes in society physical and symbolic violence, to which many women are affected today, especially in our country.

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