

Roland Barthes: walking against the absolutes / *Roland Barthes: caminhando contra os absolutos*

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a reading of some lines of forces or figures that appear in Roland Barthes's course on the Neutral, to which the author devoted himself between 1977 and 1978 at the Collège de France. We started the discussion by approaching the concept of *neutral* to Barthes, trying to highlight some central points of the discussions that permeate the whole course of the French critic. Moreover, already in this first part, we established some relations between the neutral and the constitution of a non-dogmatic language. Then, through a dialogue with two modern/contemporary authors of Brazilian literature, namely Clarice Lispector and Julián Fuks, we explain in their works the figure of silence, which we stress in the discussion about the neutral. Finally, we treat, in a slightly more panoramic way, about two other figures that appear in Barthes's course and that resize the approach to the neutral, namely, color and sleep. These two figures allow us to think about the neutral and promote a longer approach to the French author's thinking regarding the course in question.

KEYWORDS: Roland Barthes; The Neutral; Brazilian literature.

RESUMO

O presente artigo é uma leitura de algumas linhas de forças ou figuras que aparecem no curso de Roland Barthes sobre o Neutro ao qual o autor se dedicou entre os anos de 1977 e 1978 no Collège de France. Iniciamos a discussão por meio de uma aproximação ao conceito de neutro para Barthes, tentando evidenciar alguns pontos centrais das discussões que permeiam todo o curso do crítico francês. Além disso, já nessa primeira parte, estabelecemos algumas relações entre o neutro e a constituição de uma linguagem não dogmática. Em seguida, por meio de um diálogo com dois autores modernos/contemporâneos da literatura brasileira, a saber a escritora Clarice Lispector e o escritor Julián Fuks, explicitamos em suas obras a figura do silêncio, que privilegiamos na discussão sobre o neutro. Por fim, tratamos, de modo um pouco mais panorâmico, sobre outras duas figuras que comparecem no curso de Barthes e que redimensionam a aproximação sobre o neutro, a saber, a cor e o sono. Essas outras duas figuras permitem pensar o neutro e promover uma aproximação mais demorada do pensamento do autor francês no que concerne ao curso em questão.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Roland Barthes; Neutro; Literatura brasileira.

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The critical discussion about him – which has already begun – will be between the defenders of the superiority of one or the other Barthes: the one who subordinated everything to the rigor of a method and the one who had the pleasure as his only sure criterion (pleasure of intelligence and intelligence of pleasure). The truth is that those two Barthes are only one: and in the continuous and variant coexistence dosed in two respects lies the secret of the fascination that his mind has exerted on many of us.

Italo Calvino

1 Introduction

The aim of this paper is to discuss the concept of Neutral in Barthes' work (2003a) and to analyze three figures and counterfigurations of this course, as well as possible manifestations of some of these figures in a work by Clarice Lispector (1998). These figures are silence, sleep, and color, along with their counterfigurations, namely the sayable, the awakening, and the colorless, respectively.

In addition to Barthes' work, we base our analysis on authors who discuss the Neutral or the Barthesian work, such as Motta (2011), Fontanari (2014) and Perrone-Moisés (2012). Moreover, we base our research on Nietzsche (2008) and concepts derived from the analysis of Derrida's work (CRAGNOLINI, 2008), among other authors.

Section 1 presents the work *The Neutral*, as well as relations of this work with other texts by Barthes. Section 2 presents the figure of silence and possible reverberations of this figure in the work of Clarice Lispector and Julián Fuks. Subsequently, we take a more panoramic view of the color figure and the sleep figure and present our concluding remarks in section 3.

2 Preliminary considerations about the course on *The Neutral*

Roland Barthes's Neutral is the result of class notes and seminars given at the *Collège de France* in 1977-1978. Taught a few years before his death, Barthes' course aims to examine about 20 figures along 13 weeks. Each of these figures is called a trace or flicker, and calling them this way is already a first clue and gateway to that course. This is because Barthes does not intend to close a concept, but to suggest possible configurations of what would be the Neutral,

which so many scholars have associated as neighboring other Barthesian concepts, such as *punctum*, the zero degree of writing, and the obtuse meaning.

In the very beginning of his course, Barthes states that the Neutral does not exist, but there is a Neutral desire (BARTHES, 2003, p. 5). Although it is difficult to define the concept, and this does not seem to be the main question for the author, Barthes outlines the definition of the Neutral as that which “outplays [*déjoue*] the paradigm, or rather I call Neutral all that baffles the paradigm. For I do not define a word; I name one thing: I gather under a name, which here is the Neutral”¹ (BARTHES, 2003, p. 16-17).

The author adds that “wherever there is meaning, there is paradigm, and wherever there is a paradigm (an opposition), there is meaning said elliptically: meaning is based on conflict (choosing a term rather than another) and every conflict produces meaning: choosing one and pushing another one aside, it always brings to sacrifice to meaning, to produce meaning, to give it to consume” (BARTHES, 2003, p. 16-17).²

These initial Barthesian considerations make us think of the Neutral as a structure that undoes, nullifies or contradicts binaryism. However, it is not a matter of understanding this structure as constituted from any indifference or neutrality. Against these interpretive misconceptions, Barthes also points out in the preliminary notes of the course that his neutrality refers to “intense”, “strong”, “unprecedented” states, and argues that “outplaying the paradigm is a burning, glowing activity” (BARTHES, 2003, p. 18-19).³

The Neutral is also a kind of fugitive concept that dialogues, as we said in the opening of this text, with other Barthesian concepts. Fontanari (2014) notes that if we read the Writing Degree Zero against the backlight of the Neutral, we can see “that all the discussion put into this course has been already somehow on the agenda since the beginning, more precisely” (FONTANARI, 2014, p. 33).⁴

In *Roland Barthes por Roland Barthes (Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes)* (2003b, p. 100), the french critic writes:

¹ Our English version of the translation into Portuguese by Leyla Perrone-Moisés, used in this paper. Hereafter, all the Portuguese quotations have been translated into English by us.

“burla o paradigma, ou melhor, chamo de Neutro tudo o que burla o paradigma. Pois não defino uma palavra; dou nome a uma coisa: reúno sob um nome, que aqui é Neutro” (BARTHES, 2003, p.16-17).

² “onde há sentido, há paradigma, e onde há paradigma (oposição), há sentido dito elipticamente: o sentido assenta no conflito (escolha de um termo contra o outro), e todo conflito é gerador de sentido: escolher um e rejeitar outro é sempre sacrificar ao sentido, produzir sentido, dá-lo a consumir” (BARTHES, 2003, p.16-17).

³ “burlar o paradigma é uma atividade ardente, candente” (BARTHES, 2003, p.18-19).

⁴ “que toda a discussão posta nesse curso já estava, de algum modo, em pauta, desde sempre, mais precisamente” (FONTANARI, 2014, p.33).

Visibly, he dreams of a world that is meaningless (as of military service). This began with degree zero, where one dreams of the absence of any signs; then a thousand statements about that dream (concerning avant-garde text, Japan, music, from Alexandrian etc.).⁵

The dream of full absence comes true at least as a possibility of the absence of meaning crystallizations and can also be seen in other fragments of *Roland Barthes por Roland Barthes* (2003b), such as in the fragment entitled “The Arrogance”. In this text, we note that “it [the Neutral] does not like the victory speeches” (BARTHES, 2003b, p. 59).⁶ According to Barthes, these discourses are associated with Science, Doxa, the Militant.

In another fragment, “Truth and assertion” (BARTHES, 2003b, p. 61), Barthes speaks of a malaise that sometimes presents itself acutely, after a long journey of writing:

His discomfort, sometimes acute – coming some nights after writing all day, even to a kind of fear – came from the feeling of producing a double discourse, whose vision was somewhat exceeded by the world: for the aimed at his speech is not the truth, and this speech is nonetheless assertive. This is an embarrassment he felt since an early age; he strives to master it – for otherwise he would have to stop writing – by reminding himself that it is the language that is assertive, not him. What a senseless remedy, we all agree (to add to each sentence some uncertainty clause, as if something that came out of language could shake the language.)⁷

What is put in this fragment and that permeates all Barthes’ texts is the question of the search for a language that puts into question the intellectual doubt, as it appears in the fragment “The full of cinema”. In other words, there is in Barthes a clear need to put language under suspicion, although this gesture always seems ridiculous in the face of the assertiveness of the language itself. It is like being aware that only a language built on layers of uncertainty, gaps and crevices through which the senses can move (pass), and that somehow enunciates more complexly the world, the things and their features and shapes.

⁵ Visivelmente, ele sonha com um mundo que fosse isento de sentido (como de um serviço militar). Isso começou com o grau zero, onde se sonha a ausência de qualquer signo; em seguida mil afirmações desse sonho (acerca do texto de vanguarda, do Japão, da música, do alexandrino etc.) (BARTHES, 2003b, P.61).

⁶ “ele [o neutro] não gosta dos discursos de vitória” (BARTHES, 2003b, p.59).

⁷ Seu mal-estar, por vezes agudo – chegando certas noites, depois de ter escrito o dia inteiro, até a uma espécie de medo –, vinha do sentimento de produzir um discurso duplo, cuja visada era de certa forma excedida pelo mundo: pois a visada de seu discurso não é a verdade, e esse discurso é entretanto assertivo. (Trata-se de um constrangimento que ele sentiu desde muito cedo; ele se esforça por dominá-lo – sem o que deveria deixar de escrever – representando-se que é a linguagem que é assertiva, não ele. Que remédio irrisório, convenhamos todos, o de acrescentar a cada frase alguma cláusula de incerteza, como se algo vindo da linguagem pudesse estremecer a linguagem) (BARTHES, 2003b, p. 61).

In this sense, Barthes's conception of language approaches that of Nietzsche and Derrida, for example, since in these authors there is a severe critical dimension to the metaphysical perspective that intends to enunciate a final and definite dimension of being.

Both Nietzsche and Derrida are interested in language that comes close to a thought of neither/nor, as Cragolini (2008, p. 47) has pointed out. In this text, the author observes that Derrida works with a thought of the undecidable, the neither/nor, the oscillations between the poles. Knowing the many differences between the Derridian concept of the undecidable and the Barthesian Neutral, we point out how these thinkers stand before language, thinking of it as something of the order of the improper, that is, through structures that can oscillate "binary considerations and too fixed in meaning" (CRAGNOLINI, 2008, p. 58).⁸

With regard to the desire that language be a refusal of crystallizations, Barthes's conception is close to that of Nietzsche. We also consider it important to stress that, for both Nietzsche and Barthes, silence is a figure that rejects this language that aims to say everything. In several passages of his work, Nietzsche discusses the silence. In *Crepúsculo dos Ídolos* (*Twilight of Idols*), the German philosopher states that "our most unique experiences are nothing chattering. They could not communicate if they wanted to. The word is missing" (NIETZSCHE, 2008, p. 58).⁹

Similarly, Barthes knows that there is something of the order of silence in what is most problematic in experience. Perhaps this is why one of the figures in his Neutral course is exactly that of silence, which is discussed below.

3 Silence in the Neutral and Brazilian Literature: Clarice Lispector and Julián Fuks

Among the many figures and counterfigurations of the Neutral, we first analyze the figure of silence. Barthes begins his consideration of this figure by relating the silence to the egg that has not yet hatched, as something that in turn refers to a timeless virginity of things, before they are born or after they have disappeared. Silence thus relates to the dead, to a calm and mute eternity (BARTHES, 2003a, p. 49).

⁸ "as considerações binárias e demasiado fixas de sentido" (CRAGNOLINI, 2008, p.58).

⁹ "nossas vivências mais próprias não são nada tagarelas. Não poderiam comunicar-se, se quisessem. É que falta a palavra" (NIETZSCHE, 2008, p.58).

In this state of things, it is as if there was no paradigm but its pure absence. It is at this point that the author says that the Neutral is the postulation of a right to shut up – a possibility to shut up. In this sense, it does not matter the full figure of silence, but the possibility of saying and not saying, as in these movements that are drawn as breaking paradigms and forces that occur in permanent tension. Breaking the silence and muffling the sound. That is why we can read in one of the fragments of this figure:

It is known that in music, silence is as important as sound: it is a sound, or even a sign. Here we find a process that struck me already in *The Degree Zero of Writing* and has since become a fixed idea: what is produced against the signs, outside the signs, what is expressly produced not to be a sign is quickly recovered as a sign. This is what happens with silence: one wants to respond to dogmatism (heavy system of signs) with something that outplays the signs: silence. But silence itself takes the form of a more or less Stoic, “wise”, heroic or Sibylline posture: it is a pose – sign fatality: it is stronger than the individual. (BARTHES, 2003a, p. 58).¹⁰

In this sense, it is interesting to think about how some literary and artistic productions make use of silence as a breaking of paradigms that outplays the crystallizations and the forms given as true.

Clarice Lispector’s oeuvre, for example, seems loaded with the figure silence. It is not the picture fully realized in itself, but a trait that can only make sense when opposed to its counter-figure, the sound, the sayable. In *A Paixão Segundo G.H. (The Passion According to G.H.)*, Clarice Lispector speaks of silence as this possibility of counteracting dogmatic speech, as Barthes wanted, as shown in the following excerpt:

I have it as I designate – and this is the splendor of having a language. But I have much more as I can’t designate. Reality is the raw material, language the way I search for it – and how I don’t find it. But it by seeking and not finding out that what I did not know is born, and which I instantly recognize. Language is my human endeavor. By fate I have to fetch it and by fate I return empty-handed. But – I come back with the unspeakable. The unspeakable can only be given to me through the failure of my language. Only when construction fails, do I get what it could not (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 176).¹¹

¹⁰ Sabe-se que em música o silêncio é tão importante quanto o som: ele é um som, ou ainda, ele é um signo. Encontramos aqui um processo que me impressionou já em *O grau Zero da escrita* e que a partir de então se tornou ideia fixa: o que é produzido contra os signos, fora dos signos, o que é produzido expressamente para não ser signo é bem depressa recuperado como signo. É o que ocorre com o silêncio: quer-se responder ao dogmatismo (sistema pesado de signos) com alguma coisa que burle os signos: o silêncio. Mas o próprio silêncio assume a forma de imagem, de postura mais ou menos estoica, “sábua”, heróica ou sibilina: é uma pose – fatalidade do signo: ele é mais forte que o indivíduo (BARTHES, 2003a, p.58).

¹¹ Eu tenho à medida que designo – e este é o esplendor de se ter uma linguagem. Mas eu tenho muito mais à medida que não consigo designar. A realidade é a matéria-prima, a linguagem o modo como vou buscá-la – e como não acho. Mas é do buscar e não achar que nasce o que eu não conhecia, e que instantaneamente reconheço. A

Silence is not given, therefore, by the absence of the sayable, but, on the contrary, by the constant invalidations of the paradigm between what is said and what is silent. In this passage from *The Passion According to G.H.*, Clarice Lispector puts the language under suspicion, since she assumes that not everything can be said, and in this impossibility that everything is readable a counter-constructed text is created. There is a text that elects the failure of language, not its victory.

Julián Fuks's contemporary Brazilian novel entitled *A resistência (The resistance)* (2015) also plays with these paradigm breaks concerning the relation between sayable-unsayable. The book tells the life of a man who intends to tell the story of his family who lived during the military dictatorship in Argentina and then travels to Brazil in exile. The narrative is the reconstruction of this historical event of trauma, deaths, exiles and political tensions, but it is also the attempt to state something about this narrator's brother, an Argentine child who was adopted by the narrator's parents while they were still living in Argentina.

Consider the following excerpt:

My brother is adopted, but I can't and I don't want to say that my brother is adopted. If I say this, if I speak this sentence that I have long been careful to silence, I reduce my brother to a categorical condition, to an essential attribution: my brother is something, and this something is what so many try to see in him, that something is the marks that we insist on seeking, unwillingly, in his features, his gestures, his actions. My brother is adopted, *but I do not want to reinforce the stigma that the word evokes*, the stigma that is the word itself converted into character. *I don't want to deepen his scar and if I don't want it I can't say scar* (FUKS, 2015, p. 09, our emphasis).¹²

In addition to being a story about the political resistance of one of the darkest periods in Latin American history, this narrative also shows a resistance to language. The text is permeated by a silence that is constantly mocked by what is said at all times about the narrator's brother, as can be seen in the passage highlighted above. At the same time, as Barthes said, the text is constructed by the entrance of language segments that upset what is said about the past and about this brother. Reading the opening of the novel, we have a notion of this language that escapes the crystallized meanings and, therefore, approaches the Neutral.

linguagem é meu esforço humano. Por destino tenho de ir buscar e por destino volto com as mãos vazias. Mas – volto com o indizível. O indizível só me poderá ser dado através do fracasso da minha linguagem. Só quando falha a construção, é que obtenho o que ela não conseguiu (LISPECTOR, 1998, p.176).

¹² Meu irmão é adotado, mas não posso e não quero dizer que meu irmão é adotado. Se digo assim, se pronuncio essa frase que por muito tempo cuidei de silenciar, reduzo meu irmão a uma condição categórica, a uma atribuição essencial: meu irmão é algo, e esse algo é o que tantos tentam enxergar nele, esse algo são as marcas que insistimos em procurar, contra a vontade, em seus traços, em seus gestos, em seus atos. Meu irmão é adotado, *mas não quero reforçar o estigma que a palavra evoca*, o estigma que é a própria palavra convertida em caráter. *Não quero aprofundar sua cicatriz e, se não quero, não posso dizer cicatriz* (FUKS, 2015, p.09, grifo nosso).

Both Clarice Lispector and Julián Fuks, each in his/her own way, place language under suspicion and make insertions of terms that erase possible dogmatic meanings in their writings. In Fuks's novel, as the story unfolds, we realize that rather than talking about his brother, we read the story of the narrator himself, who refuses to create a paradigm from which we, the readers and himself, see his brother:

My brother opens the door and gives me no answers: in his presence the questions dissipate. My brother is a firm body posted in profile; he is an outstretched arm that invites me in, he is a room surprisingly so peaceful. He is shirtless, and his torso is neither fat nor thin, his scar no more than a broad line that I force myself to look for. I notice that I run from his eyes, I don't want to contemplate them. I enter the room with my head down and it is as if I occupy it, as if there is no room left for anything else; I notice that in the room no words fit. In seconds I'll give him the book, and maybe words will find their place. For now, yes, I just look at my brother, I look up and my brother is there, I open my eyes wide and my brother is there, I want to meet my brother, I want to see what I could never see (FUKS, 2015, p. 139).¹³

In this sense, these texts are fragments of a discourse of the defeated, of those who do not want victory, as Barthes said, when talking about the need not to give in to the discourse of victory, the discourse of arrogance and the solidification of meanings.

3 The Color: the awakening and the colorless

After the figure of silence, we highlight two other figures of the Neutral: sleep and color, as well as their counterfigurations, namely, awakening and colorless.

When speaking of Sleep, Barthes associates this figure with the Neutral because it has a kind of suspended time. This time would be the one that calls for the most delay in understanding anything. He who awakens from sleep needs more time to realize the shapes and supposed clarity of the world around him. Perhaps literature and other forms of art are always this space of coexistence, of strange rhythms that allow communication between bodies (immortal body and care body).

¹³ Meu irmão abre a porta e não me traz respostas: em sua presença as perguntas se dissipam. Meu irmão é um corpo firme postado de perfil, é um braço estendido que me convida a entrar, é um quarto que surpreende de tão pacífico. Está sem camisa, e seu torso não é gordo nem magro, sua cicatriz não é mais que um traço largo que eu me obrigo a procurar. Noto que fujo de seus olhos, não os quero contemplar. Entro de cabeça baixa no quarto e é como se o ocupasse, como se não restasse espaço para mais nada; noto que no quarto não cabem palavras. Em segundos lhe darei o livro, e talvez as palavras encontrem seu lugar. Por ora, agora sim, me limito a olhar meu irmão, ergo a cabeça e meu irmão está lá, abro bem os olhos e meu irmão está lá, quero conhecer meu irmão, quero ver o que nunca pude enxergar (FUKS, 2015, p.139).

In this figure, Barthes makes a severe criticism of those who understand everything very quickly, giving a praise to the rumination: “People who understand quickly make me afraid” (BARTHES, 2003a, p. 83).¹⁴ For the author, to understand quickly is to crystallize and close the discussion through an established truth. The Neutral, on the contrary, is the opening that intends to state that all interpretation is a construction, a violent attitude of forcing a line of reasoning. If language is naturally assertive, as Barthes states, it is necessary, on the other hand, in the logic of the Neutral, to dismantle the paradigm, to rebel against the models and the closed truths themselves (BARTHES, 2003a, p. 92).

In this sense, Barthes takes up Blanchot and speaks of understanding the paradigm and seeing that “every paradigm is misplaced, which is to deviate from its own structure of meaning: each word would thus become not relevant, irrelevant. Perhaps to interrogate very modern forms of writing in this respect” (BARTHES, 2003a, p. 100)¹⁵ as if we undid all order of the thetic.

This same desire to glimpse (writing) forms that erase the arrogant meanings also appears in the third figure we highlight about the Neutral. We refer to the figure of Color. Barthes begins his statement by saying that “the Neutral is seen when it hides the color. We are here in an ideology of depth, the apparent and the occult” (BARTHES, 2003a, p. 108).¹⁶ He adds that he refers to the “time *not yet*, when the original indifferentiation begins to draw, tone upon tone, the first differences: dawn, colorblind space (the colorblind cannot oppose red and green, but distinguishes areas of brightness, different intensity)” (BARTHES, 2003a, p. 108).¹⁷

The colorblind’s gaze cannot *definitively* identify color, but he can perceive plays of intensity and luminosity. Perhaps the Neutral is therefore associated with a kind of nuance, and that is why Barthes will work with the colorless, which does not mean something transparent, but unmarked in color. This dimension is further underlined by Barthes when he tells us about the iridescent: “the Neutral is the shimmer: what subtly changes aspect, perhaps meaning, according to the inclination of the subject’s gaze” (BARTHES, 2003a, p. 109).¹⁸

¹⁴ “As pessoas que entendem depressa me dão medo” (BARTHES, 2003a, p.83).

¹⁵ “todo paradigma é mal posto, o que é desviar a própria estrutura de sentido: cada vocábulo se tornaria assim não pertinente, im-pertinente. Talvez interrogar formas de escrita bem modernas sob esse aspecto” (BARTHES, 2003a, p.100).

¹⁶ “o Neutro é dado a ver, quando esconde o colorido. Estamos aqui numa ideologia da profundidade, do aparente e do oculto” (BARTHES, 2003a, p.108).

¹⁷ “tempo do *ainda não*, momento em que a indiferenciação original começa a desenhar-se tom sobre tom, as primeiras diferenças: madrugada, espaço daltônico (o daltônico não consegue opor vermelho e verde, mas distingue áreas de luminosidade, intensidade diferente)” (BARTHES, 2003a, p.108).

¹⁸ “o Neutro é furta-cor: o que muda sutilmente de aspecto, talvez de sentido, segundo a inclinação do olhar do sujeito” (BARTHES, 2003a, p.109).

These three figures and counterfigurations of *Neutral*, *Silence*, *Sleep*, and *Color* are just a few traits that help us start thinking about this Barthesian perspective on language and the world. What seems to pervade all of Barthes's reflections in this course on the Neutral, in his studies about punctum and photographic image, or even about degree zero, is that if language and idiom always make us say something, it is up to the one who enunciates to occupy himself with the insertion of foreign bodies that dismantle the arrogant logic or open spaces for the paradox, which always contradicts Doxa. This is why Barthes states that one should not "sterilize the tongue, but taste it, lightly polish it or even brush it, but not purify it. We may prefer enticement to mourning, at least we can recognize that there is a time of enticement, a time of adjective. Perhaps the Neutral is that: to accept the predicate as nothing more than a moment: a time". (BARTHES, 2003a, p. 128).¹⁹

Conclusion

In her book *Com Roland Barthes (With Roland Barthes)*, Perrone-Moisés states that "Barthes's concern with avoiding the paralyzing assertion of a meaning that would be the good, the right, is extreme and constant. The text is not a one-way structure, but a galaxy of meanings" (PERRONE-MOISÉS, 2012, p. 162).²⁰

In the same vein, we also learn from Barthes that every (critical) interpretation is a play with the possible meanings, against arrogance. According to Perrone-Moisés, artistic language is based on tensions between connotations and denotations. All of this is related not to a denial, but to a suspension, as the author states when commenting on Barthes's course on the Neutral:

The second course, held between 1977 and 1978, is entitled *The Neutral*. This theme, as well as displacement, figured in the inaugural lecture. It was linked to the 'fascism' of every language, which forces one to say in a way and prohibits others ways. 'In French,' he said, 'I have to choose between masculine and feminine; neutral and complex are forbidden to me.' In the course dedicated to the theme, it gains more breadth. It is no longer simply a matter of gender or mode, but concerns every inflection that *avoids or disarms the paradigmatic*, oppositional structure of meaning, and therefore

¹⁹ "esterilizar a língua, mas saboreá-la, lustrá-la levemente ou até escová-la, mas não a purificar. Podemos preferir o engodo ao luto, pelo menos podemos reconhecer que há um tempo do engodo, um tempo do adjetivo. Talvez o Neutro seja isso: aceitar o predicado como um simples momento: um tempo" (BARTHES, 2003a, p. 128).

²⁰ "é extrema e constante a preocupação de Barthes em evitar a afirmação paralisante de um sentido que seria o bom, o correto. O texto não é uma estrutura de sentido único, mas uma galáxia de sentidos" (PERRONE-MOISÉS, 2012, p.162).

seeks to suspend conflicting discourse data (PERRONE-MOISÉS, 2012, p. 162).²¹

We may conclude these considerations on the Neutral in Barthes by saying that perhaps that concept can be disjunctively synthesized by the expression *avoiding or disarming paradigmatic structures*. Motta (2011, p.130) notes that the Neutral is associated with a kind of pursuit of the Japanese principle of delicacy and, therefore, Barthes would have an Orientalizing facet, which differentiates him from Maurice Blanchot, for example. While Blanchot wanted not the politeness of the nuances, but some absolute (MOTTA, 2011, p. 78), Barthes kept going against the absolutes.

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²¹ O segundo curso, realizado entre 1977 e 1978, tem por título *O Neutro*. Esse tema, assim como o deslocamento, figurava na aula inaugural. Estava ligada ao “fascismo” de toda língua, que obriga a dizer de certa forma e proíbe outras. “Em francês”, dizia ele, “sou obrigado a escolher entre o masculino e o feminino, o neutro e o complexo me são proibidos”. No curso dedicado ao tema, este ganha maior amplitude. Não é mais uma simples questão de gênero ou de modo, mas concerne a toda inflexão que *evita ou desarma a estrutura paradigmática*, oposicional, do sentido, e visa por conseguinte à suspensão dos dados conflituais do discurso (PERRONE-MOISÉS, 2012, p.162).