

## THE WORD “PAULO FREIRE”

### A PALAVRA “PAULO FREIRE”

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#### ABSTRACT:

In this present text, we undertake a performative interpretation of the relationship between the work and the life of Freire, that is, between the interpretation of his thought and the remembrance of the individual behind the work. Therefore, it does not primarily problematize the work or the thought of Paulo Freire or any aspect of his practice, but rather the discursive relationship between the memory of an author and the interpretation of his work. To do so, we draw upon concepts such as *author*, as discussed by Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, and the *archive*, as articulated by Jacques Derrida.

KEYWORDS: Paulo Freire; patron; author; archive.

#### RESUMO:

No presente texto, ensaiamos uma interpretação performativa da relação entre a obra e a vida de Freire, isto é, entre a interpretação de seu pensamento e a lembrança da vida do indivíduo por trás da obra. Por isso, nele não é problematizada propriamente a obra ou o pensamento de Paulo Freire ou qualquer aspecto de sua prática, mas a relação discursiva entre a memória de um autor e a interpretação de sua obra. Para tanto, recorreremos a conceitos como *autor*, segundo abordado por Michel Foucault e por Roland Barthes, e *arquivo*, segundo Jacques Derrida.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Paulo Freire; patrono; autor; arquivo.

#### INTRODUCTION

Urban legend has it that, once upon a time, during the screening of the documentary “Beard-less Paulo Freire” at the *Institute for Latin American Studies* at the University of California (UCLA), in the presence of an image of Paulo still without a beard, a mutual friend suddenly interrupted the presentation and shouted, claiming that this was not the “real” Paulo Freire, but an impostor, “invented by Chilean neoliberals”. George C. Stoney himself, the creator of the documentary, reported not knowing how to react to the situation, especially when, still dissatisfied with the interruption, his interlocutors “[...] removed his video and put another one on, where Paulo appears with his white apostolic beard. ‘This is the real Paulo Freire’, they would have said” (Gajardo, 2021, p. 74).

If we bear in mind that his iconic “Northeastern prophet” beard only grew after his time in Chile and the United States, as protection against the cold, and it is posterior to the publication of his best-known books, *Educação como prática da liberdade* and *Pedagogia do oprimido*, we might also realize that “beardless” was the very context for the development of the foundations of his theory and the maturation of his practice. It was the context of a world in turmoil, the source of the generative themes of his time: it was the time of the Revolution in Freedom in Chile, the struggle for civil rights in the United States, social democracy and the Welfare State in some northern European countries, the Cold War that divided the world, and so many others ignited by proxy in the name of “freedom”, against the still-living specter of communism, the time of the Cuban Revolution, the Cultural Revolution in Mao's China, and the May '68 events in France.

What could “truly” name the words "Paulo Freire"? The white, gentle, and loving beard of a Northeastern prophet, like that of a Counselor, or the words of another Paulo, also bearded, who followed from denouncing an unjust world to proclaiming good news? Or the boy from the Casa Amarela, under the shade of the mango tree, son of Joaquim and Tudinha? Or an inert seated figure sculpted in stone by the Swedish artist Pye Engstron, in a square in the Västertorp neighborhood of Stockholm? Perhaps, then, a “praxis”, a “Paulo Freire method”, a “Paulo Freire theory”, a “Paulo Freire pedagogy”, a “Paulo Freire philosophy”, or a “Paulo Freire system” (Torres, 2007, p. 120)? Or even concepts like “being-more”, “pronouncing”, or “reading the world”, “praxis”, “theme”, or “generative word”, etc.? Or principles – or, as Walter Kohan beautifully puts it, “ways of being born in the world” (2020, p. 46) – such as life, childhood, Northeasterness, wandering, or lovingness?

Of course, these are words that name a man born in Recife in 1921 but also an author, perhaps the greatest in the field of education in Brazil. These words, therefore, do not just evoke the recognition of his importance – perhaps even before knowing his work – but, almost inseparably from him, a plethora of affections and memories, not only in those who knew him and lived with him, but even in every new reader of his books. When reading Paulo Freire or about him, even for the first time, it is difficult not to feel a certain sense of closeness, of familiarity. This sensation, in me, perhaps, is subject to suspicion: although I did not live in the same time or under the same conditions, I am also myself a son of Recife.

This essay, therefore, does not primarily question the work or the thoughts of Paulo Freire or any aspect of his practice. It is not a critique of concepts such as word, praxis, ideology, or reality (as we have already explored in other studies). Instead, we attempt an performative interpretation or performative writing of the relationship between Freire's work and life, that is, between the interpretation of his thoughts and the remembrance of the man behind the work. To do so, we draw upon concepts such as

the *author*, as discussed by Michel Foucault (2009) and Roland Barthes (2004), and the *archive*, as outlined by Jacques Derrida (2001). In this sense, and without damaging the memory of the man, we follow the idea that the author, in the forms in which he appears, beyond being a form of discourse individuation, is a discursive creation formed by tropes that became obligatory, a reiterated imagistic product that, with each engagement and repetition, solidified, imposing upon the reading of the work the limits and attributes of the image of the man's life.

With this study, a bit *avant la lettre*, we hope to awaken the reader to another mode of openness, reception of Freire's thinking. In the meanderings of this essay, then – perhaps, a bit like the stone of Exu in a reversed reading of the Yoruba<sup>1</sup> saying – we invite you to drift, to get lost with us from the origin. We invite you, then, to a loss whose rediscovery can only occur through the transformation of the very point from which one set out. Let's begin, then.

## 1. THE NAME, THE LIFE OR THE WORK

So, let's revisit the question: what could “truly” name the words “Paulo Freire”?

Once, in an interview with Ricardo Kotscho, which resulted in the book-conversation *Essa escola chamada vida* (1998), in response to the first question that opens the work, namely, “who are you?” Paulo immediately indicated that, to attempt an answer, it would be necessary to tell a little story; it would be necessary to remember or recap moments from his own life, to rehearse moments of openness like adolescence in Jabotão or the dawn of his life as a popular educator at the Social Service of Industry (SESI): it would be necessary to bring the lived life into the present. And it is this presence of life that Ricardo himself confessed to wanting to share. As the interviewer relates, the conversation that would result in the book was Paulo's idea. He had invited Frei Betto, and on a Sunday in October 1984, they gathered to record “a chat among friends” at Ricardo's house. As he aptly describes it, “at the end of six hours of recording, my house had *more life*” (p. 3, *Our Emphasis*).

Although the question “who are you?” was already linked to the issue of popular education, it could only be towards life that, in Paulo's words, the answer could be attempted:]

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<sup>1</sup>Here, we are referring to an old Yoruba saying that goes, “Exu killed a bird yesterday with a stone he only threw today.” Instead of interpreting the saying as a future belonging to ancestry, for the critical work of our essay, we read it as a metaphor for the belonging of the past to the contingency of the future. Something that we will address later under the concept of the *archive*.

Because, even when I hadn't yet realized it due to my age, I was already preparing myself for something I would later begin in Popular Education. The experiences I had in my adolescence with peasant boys, with urban boys who were the sons of workers, with boys who lived by streams, on hills, at a time when we lived a bit away from Recife, were important. (Freire; Betto, 1998, p. 8)

It was indeed the account of a dawn, of "preparing" the educator, who was still in the future, for "a different way of thinking and expressing oneself", of attempting very early in his thinking the "popular syntax" through which the life of the people would be *pronounced*. At that time, five years had passed since his return from the long exile forced upon him by the dictatorship, and he had lived, rehearsed for fifty-eight years. However, even at the age of 73, as he would confess in *À sombra desta mangueira* (2015), it was not up to old age, perhaps witnessed by the white beard of a Northeastern prophet, to reinterpret the Brazil that Paulo so eagerly wanted to relearn upon his return from exile (Freire, 2015, p. 72). It was also a relearning of Brazilian democracy itself, which, at a slow pace, was getting rid of its old generals to finally, once again, be reborn. Old age, the old age one can still have in youth, was nothing more than the abandonment of the dream, the burial of utopia, and the preservation of what should be radically changed. Beyond counting years, old age was, therefore, the very renunciation of the youth through which the world could renew itself.

– But, Paulo, after so many rebirths, how old did the youth of Brazilian democracy become.

And as for Freire's work, it has become almost impossible to discuss it without delving into Paulo's life. This requirement often pretends to appear as a certain application of a notion as central in his writings as that of praxis – according to which theory and practice would be inseparable and indivisible – with the latter (the practice dimension), among accounts of experiences and explanations of the method, being the fragments of life that would witness the very birth of a work. It is enough to note that it is through the youthfulness of life, through the many lives attempted, remembered, and recounted that touched him with "sensitivity, purity, and wisdom in their actions and narratives", and that he himself touched – as Nita (Freire, 1996, p. 64) will say – it is through this commitment to life itself that the concepts of existence and praxis in Freire's thought would be synthesized: "[he] *exists* his thought in a pedagogy in which the totalizing effort of *human praxis* seeks, within it, to retotalize itself as the 'practice of freedom'" (Fiori, 2011, p. 11, *Our Emphasis*). After all, as mentioned, it would be precisely our ability to embrace life in its unfinished state, to commit ourselves to it, that would make us human and would therefore also transform immersion into emergence; animal survival into existence; vital support into a meaningful and symbolic world, a world that encompasses culture and history (Freire,

2011, p. 124). Thus, it would be life itself, human life, this “[...] life that questions itself, that becomes a project”, capable “of speaking about itself and about others around it, of pronouncing the world, of unveiling, of revealing, of hiding truths” (Freire, 2000, p. 51): it is this life that would open us up and rehearse for us a world already founded on responsibility and hope.

So, how could one understand what the words “Paulo Freire” name without thinking of this connection between Freire's thought and the never-ending youth of Paulo, this eternal “youth who never grew old” (Freire, 2015, p. 72)? How to comprehend the thought named by the words, by the author's own name, without the recurring return of life through memory in his own thought? How, then, to understand without allowing the return or remembrance of Jaboaão, which would have “forged him in the discipline of hope”, where he felt, learned, and lived the joy of playing soccer and swimming in the river, watching the women squatting “beating” the clothes they washed for themselves, for their families, and for the wealthier families they depended on to survive; where he learned to passionately embrace the studies of the popular and erudite syntax of the Portuguese language, which taught him “[...] to harmonize the balance between having and not having, being and not being, power and powerlessness, wanting and not wanting” (Freire, 1996, p. 30)? How to understand without recalling the educational experiences in his chronological childhood that would illuminate and give meaning to his adult educational thought (Kohan; Fernandes, 2023, p. 10)? Wouldn't “Paulo” and “Freire” together already be words that name the thinking of the once and always boy “from the Northeast” who learned to read and write on the backyard ground, surrounded by mango trees and who greatly disturbed the “conservative, racist, and misogynistic Brazilian bourgeoisie” by becoming a worldwide reference in thinking about the transformation of the world through education (Ferreira; Hermida, 2021, p. 57)? And wouldn't they already name, in the man who never separated from his childhood, for always being with it, in its company, due to the still vibrant boyhood desires, the endless memories, the lived and remembered experience of poverty, and the difficult life of the people? Or would they not already be ways of naming the very marks of boyhood and poverty in the heart of the common people from which they would eternally return, and from which the thought and pedagogy of the oppressed would be born?

This connection with childhood, [...] in relation to Freire, gains political momentum to think and practice an attentive and sensitive education, aiming to transform the status quo. In other words, the perpetual boy is a figure that inspires disruptive and revolutionary forms of exercising the power to teach and learn, not only with children but with people of all ages (Kohan; Fernandes, 2023, p. 10).

Words that would name marks or traces of a life-infancy, expressed through curiosity and restlessness, the eager to asking questions and wanting to grow, to create and transform, and, even more,

the fearlessness to dream. Words that would name the “wanderer of the obvious”, as he himself would define (LIMA, 2018, p. 30). And, in Freire's words, “obvious” would hardly mean what is easily known. After all, if the Latin word synthesizes what is placed “before” or “in front of” (*ob-*) the “path” (*via*), what is presented before us, like the stone in the middle of Drummond's path or the path after the Cabral's education by stone, for Paulo, could well connote what is placed before us as a challenge of our time, as a limit-situation, but also as something that, even though it is in front of our eyes, we are not yet capable of seeing – the *viable unpublished* (inéditos viáveis).

On one hand, Paulo Freire's *wandering* is situated between the concrete needs of his historical time and his political duty, but his ideas and experiences did not arise from “erring paths”. Instead, they originated from the wisdom and humility of someone who reads the world. By reading the world critically and problematizing its contradictions, recognizing himself as a maker of it, he continually acted to make it just (Streck; Moretti; Pitano, 2018, p. 37, *Authors' Emphasis*).

Indeed, Paulo “wandered”. In the service of the World Council of Churches during the 1970s, he “wandered” through the limit situations and the *viable unpublished* (inéditos viáveis) of peoples in Asia, Oceania, and the Americas, helping countries that had achieved political independence to rethink their educational systems (Freire, 1996, p. 42). This is why he was also called the “wanderer of utopia” (Gadotti, 1996, p. 81). Through his wanderings, Freire had become international, global, and universal.

And the “refractoriness to rigid paradigms” or to the abuses of pedantry and erudite discourse, or even the “visceral incompatibility” with bureaucratic and institutional power schemes and models through which Freire's thought was so often interpreted: where would these traces come from if not from that life-infancy or that mark of “Northeasterness”, if we may call it that, to which, in his very name, his proper name could refer? As Nita and Gadotti will say, Freire was a “son of the Northeast”: “in his way of respecting honor and integrity in men and women” (Freire, 1996, p. 66), in his strong and passionate feelings, in his way of speaking and writing metaphorically through stories. Moreover, this would be a mark of his own theory<sup>2</sup>: “there is a northeastern flavor in his work” (Gadotti, 1996, p. 78).

And if, in the end, from the myriad of stories, the impression remains that from one account arise so many different Freires, as Rosa María Torres puts it, it will only be due to the inherent movement of Paulo's living thought, in a permanent state of learning and continuous self-improvement, or perhaps due to the multitude of interpretations and reinterpretations of Freire's work, whether orthodox or

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<sup>2</sup>As Gadotti aptly highlights from the vivid memories of his own experience, “when reading him or listening to him, a great storyteller stands before us. There is no reader who, in the face of Freirean language, does not break down their resistance to academic text” (1996, p. 78).

heterodox, enchanted or defamatory (2007, p. 122). Nevertheless, a common trace would still prevail in so many versions:

From this perspective, it matters little whether some understood Freire better than others, whether there were those who truly grasped his thought or not. Perhaps Paulo Freire's greatest contribution lies in his ability to communicate and connect with the most loving and genuine fibers of many people – a Babel of ages, races, creeds, economic and social positions, educational levels, professions, and trades – helping them to understand that there is something called education and something called poverty/marginalization/oppression, that there is a relationship between them, and that this relations may be both of complicity and disruption, useful both for oppressing and for liberating (Torres, 2007, p. 124).

From the intensely relived memories with each story from those who lived and interacted with him, for whom it would be impossible to speak of his ideas without remembering the man, from those who knew his calm countenance, his strong, gentle, and profound gaze, his always expressive hand gestures, his serene, captivating, and affectionate way of expressing himself, his constant willingness to exchange experiences, to engage in dialogue; to the nostalgic recollections or rememorings of those who never personally knew him but feel touched by him in their “most loving fibers”. From the vivid memories of those whose lives intersected with his, to those whose reliving of borrowed memories became the main or sometimes the only path to understanding his thought. And it doesn't matter whether they are lived or borrowed, with each cycle of fifty or a hundred years since his birth or death, of the man or his work, we bring these memories together once more, that is, we co-*memorate*. In his memory, we come together and celebrate to revive and revitalize the convictions, beliefs, and political commitments that, with his proper name, we have also learned to name – promises present or past, sometimes lost and for which we may even have had to grieve but did not know how. Hence, a certain reluctance to refer to him in the past tense: “the impossibility of leaving the work, the labor, the life, the lovingness of Paulo Freire in a tense that is no longer” (Cortella, 2018, p. 21). And in this verbal confusion of absence/presence, we end up leaving, in his own name, the words of his proper name suspended in time.

And we also end up telling Freirean thought as history, as if, at every moment of his long life – from the “loving anger” of the baby, to the “ball games in Jabotão”, from the first experiences with “this beautiful language that is ours”, as Professor Eunice would say, to his work at SESI or the 1958 report on adult education and marginalized populations – as if with each memory, this thought insinuated itself or had already gradually unfolded, long before the manuscript of *Pedagogia do oprimido*, which he would subject to Álvaro Vieira Pinto's scrutiny. In the history of thought, intertwined, we recount the

life of the man, gathered in an inexorable indivisible entirety, almost as if facing backward, from the end to the beginning, almost like the Aristotelian habit we've come to call teleology.

## 2. FROM THOUGHT WITHIN AN INSTITUTION TO THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THOUGHT

In 2017, on the eve of co-memorating the fifty years since the publication of the work *Pedagogia do oprimido*, Flávio Brayner (2017) published a critical essay, inspired by Foucault, not about the thought or practice of Paulo Freire, but about the process of “building” what he called an “institution Paulo Freire”. It was not necessarily about the Paulo Freire Institute, based in São Paulo and with branches around the world – which the author of the essay might have considered more of an effect of this process – but about what he named “paulofreireanism”. According to his description, it was not so much about the impact or resonance of the seminal or critical thought of an author in different institutional contexts, how it could disrupt the established habits and norms in various institutions and transform their mode of operation or their relationship with society. Instead, it was about the process of institutionalizing this thought itself, creating a following that, in the name of preserving its intellectual memory, could fix and police the various forms of interpreting this thought, its modes of application, or even its translation and standardization as it turned into a university chair or a discipline. Through this process, the thought would lose its original subversive power and take on a doctrinal or theological character, largely driven by a cult of personality, leading his name to be “sacralized”, “[...] his ‘presence’ remembered, his image worshipped” (Brayner, 2017, p. 856). Later on, we will return to this *spectral* relationship between a name – that is, a proper name, “Paulo Freire” – a presence – a massive and intense presence of memory – and an image – fixed by the constant recourse to biographemes re-memorized in establishing a consensus on a general interpretation of the theory.

Still, as Brayner pointed out, “it is necessary to distinguish between what the thought of an author means within an institution and the institutionalization of the thought of an author” (Brayner, 2017, p. 862), for the second case would hardly be possible without the possibility of the first. Just think of the case recalled by Paulo himself, namely, SESI, which marked the beginning of his long and notable career as a popular educator: it was “[...] an institution with welfare objectives, created [...] to obscure reality and thus obstruct the working class from taking charge of itself” (Freire; Betto, 1998, p. 8). And it was in such an institution, created for this purpose, that he could “reveal reality better”; as well as in an



institution like the former University of Recife (now the Federal University of Pernambuco), where he worked as the director of the Cultural Extension Service, that he could unveil, in its practice, “authoritarian forms of ‘donation’ or ‘transmission’ of knowledge” (Brayner, 2017, p. 862). This was a gesture he repeated even in institutional contexts that, despite their declared emancipatory goals, could also give rise to sectarian forms. For example, while he was responsible for the adult education sector of the Popular Culture Movement (MCP) in Recife, he warned of “the danger of dehumanization, massification, and de-spiritualization of the population in the face of lived reality” (Haddad, 2019, p. 48), a possible consequence, according to a document produced by him, of the lack of dialogue between elites and the people, between teachers and students, between parents and children, whether in unions or in social work, or even within the MCP itself.

However, although there were plenty of examples of the impact of his direct actions, it should be noted that his thought shook much more than the institutions he was a part of. In the case of Latin America, for example, the popularity of his early writings could not be dissociated from the context of intense political conflict in which class struggle gained significant expressive force, especially against American McCarthyism, after World War II. According to Carlos Alberto Torres (1996, p. 119), for instance, the hegemonic crisis of the bourgeoisie was clearly evident in some countries on the continent, given the “Bonapartist populist experience” of Peronism in Argentina and Getulism in Brazil, which emerged in the interlude between the crisis of the oligarchic state in the 1930s and the attempt to establish capitalist hegemony through industrialization in the 1960s. This “failure” in the attempt to mobilize the masses politically, as he recounts, which gave rise to forms of authoritarian populism, eventually led to bourgeois coalitions and the consolidation of military and civilian-military coups, as well as the establishment of violent military and civic-military dictatorships under the pretext of restoring order.

A major consequence of this process was the emergence of revolutionary popular movements in Latin America with different expressions and strategies, according to the historical experience of each country. Therefore, Freire's proposal for *education as a practice of freedom* – in opposition to the prevailing positivism and educational pragmatism in educational circles at the time – and for the *pedagogy of the oppressed* was naturally heard and put into practice by progressive Latin American educators (Torres, 1996, p. 121).

In this context, the Latin American reception of *Pedagogia do oprimido* cannot truly be dissociated from its potential as a tool in emancipatory struggles, whether they belong to the political field – urban or rural –, pedagogical, or even epistemological. In the latter case, for example, it is worth noting how much the work and the ideas gathered in it would enable *decolonial* responses in the field of knowledge, being, and power, inviting us to see the world and ourselves from the perspective of the global *South*, as

an oppressed margin, and challenging us to “reorient pedagogical and epistemic action and thought based on principles constitutive of our *Americaness*” (Streck; Moretti; Pitano, 2018, p. 37). Something similar could also be said of its reception in the United States, given the context of conflicts and anti-racist struggles, or of its reception and application on the African continent, considering the challenge of decolonization in countries that achieved their independence relatively late.

And perhaps it was the strength of his name, this spectral presence of the author of *Pedagogia do oprimido* and *Educação como prática da liberdade*, felt by Paulo himself during his lifetime, that would lead his critics and admirers to situate him historically, to leave him in this “virtual suspension”, to not recognize the evolution of his thought, as if they denied him “the right to continue thinking, to continue learning, and to continue living beyond his works” (Torres, 2007, p. 119). In Paulo's own words:

[...] I believe that *today's Paulo Freire has a certain coherence with yesterday's Paulo Freire*. Yesterday's Paulo Freire is not dead. I mean that I have been alive all these years... But today's Paulo Freire necessarily carries the marks of experience. [...] So it would be a disaster, it would be very sad if I hadn't learned in these five or six historical moments, if today I were still the same as when I arrived in exile 20 years ago, first in Bolivia and then in Chile. (Freire; Torres, 1988, p. 118)

Today, *Pedagogia do oprimido* has been translated into more than forty languages, and Freire is the third most cited author in the field of human sciences worldwide, according to a 2016 survey conducted by Elliot Green using Google Scholar. Indeed, even during his lifetime, Paulo had experienced the projection and power of his name. In the book organized by Gadotti, *Paulo Freire: uma biobibliografia*, Nita Freire (FREIRE, 1996, p. 50) listed, along with a long list of honorary doctorate awards, some of the important honors and awards he received from around the world. Among them, it is worth mentioning: “The Paulo Freire Awards” (an award named after him) by the International Consortium for Experimental Learning in the United States in 1994; the “Reconhecimento Fraternal” from the city of Los Angeles in 1986 and Cochabamba, Bolivia in 1987; the “Mestre da Paz” award from the Asociación de Investigación y Especialización sobre Temas Iberoamericanos in Spain in 1988; the “Libertador da Humanidade” medal from the Legislative Assembly of Bahia in 1993, as well as the title of “Bambino permanente” (Permanent Child) from the Biblioteca Comunale de Ponsacco in the province of Pisa, Italy in 1990. Of course, after his death, the titles and honors continued to multiply. Finally, on April 13, 2012, by law No. 12.612, Paulo Freire was declared the Patron of Brazilian Education.

## 2.1. PATRONAGE, MEMORY, AND RESTITUTION

In Brazil, since 1959 when the title of “Patron of Brazilian Municipalities” was granted by the National Congress to former deputy Aureliano Cândido Tavares Bastos (1839-1875), patronage is considered an honor bestowed upon individuals who have excelled and become memorable in their respective fields of activity, or who *represent* certain categories, classes, groups, or branches of knowledge, arts, social movements, or national interest. It would be a form of tribute, that is, a form of *recognition*. In large part, this gesture of recognizing a specific name and memory on behalf of society involves a reinterpretation of the past through the recognition of a symbolic debt. Just as it was the case with Paulo Freire, who, on behalf of society, was exiled and defamed by agents and representatives of the Brazilian state for his practices and ideas, the same can be said for Chico Mendes, who was assassinated in 1988 for his political activism and was declared the “National Patron of the Environment” in 2013, among others such as Carmen Velasco Portinho, Rose Marie Muraro, and Luiz Gama. Historical reparations, restitution of memories: in these cases, the recognition through patronage implies a certain character of an unpaid debt; a certain character, thus, of historical dispute; a debt contracted by society. Hence, also, a litigation or a dispute with it.

However, the concept of patronage (or *patrocinium*) carries with it a long history, possibly dating back to the time of the Roman Republic, as a means of regulating relationships of dependency between unequal parties: between patricians and plebeians, between former masters and their ex-slaves, between consuls or emperors and cities or colonies – sometimes conquered by them themselves. Hence, the idea that a patron would be a kind of *amicus*, a protector of their clients, to whom they would be loyal, pay homage, and so on (Nicols, 2014, p. 1). Among patrons, that is, among the nobles, it could also be a measure of comparative strength and wealth, hence the long list of achievements, favors, and clients accumulated in their name, which were recorded in countless inscriptions and documents, giving rise to a unique form of almost banking-like accounting (Wiedemann, 2013, p. 13). Far from being a mere empty formality, among the Romans, patronage characterized a kind of exchange, in which the equivalence of goods and services exchanged would be assumed on a moral plane that would establish mutual obligations: despite differences in status and resources, as well as in need, essential to the relationship, both parties would presume to share the same degree of moral commitment (Nicols, 2014, p. 12). Although it was a very ancient form of exchange relationship, it would not be difficult to see its traces spreading throughout history, whether in suzerainty and vassalage relationships, in Renaissance patronage, or in modern political practices such as clientelism, or even in the symbolic way of naming

institutions, chairs, awards, etc., after the names of those who, like the gargoyles of Victor Hugo's Notre-Dame or the Sphinx of Giza, would be their symbolic protectors.

Therefore, modern patronage has also become a form of homonymy, a way of naming, attributing one's name as a form of tribute or recognition, and a means of historical restitution or reparation as well. When a school, a chair, a library, or an institute declared a patron and started adopting their name, it would be under that name that it would be recognized and recognize itself, not as what it is but as what it should become. This is because the name, the proper name it would adopt, would also be a reference to be followed; it would serve as a normative horizon to prescribe the values that the named institution should follow – or, at the very least, that it would publicly assume to follow, in the eyes of the public, that is, in the eyes of those on whose behalf the proper name had been adopted and on whose behalf the reparation should be made. And this naming would not only affect or spread to the one named, as the very name that once named an individual, a body of writings, discoveries, deeds, etc., would now, by naming institutions, itself operate as an institution. In short, through modern patronage, names become institutions. And it's worth noting that in Freire's case, even during his lifetime, numerous institutions adopted his proper name<sup>3</sup>.

However, in order for it to function as an institution, since it could be a matter of restoring a missing, erased, or forgotten memory, that is, a form of historical reparation, it would be necessary to connect the proper name to the *production* and *safeguarding* of this memory, meaning that archival work would be necessary. This is because “the archive takes place in the place of the original and structural absence of so-called memory” (Derrida, 2001, p. 22), that is, the lack of memory or anamnesis in its spontaneous, living, and internal experience, such as the still passionate memories of his second wife or those of his friends who lovingly collected reminiscences of the master. It's worth noting that, for the purpose of documenting, informing, disseminating, and studying Paulo Freire and his work, not only was the well-known Paulo Freire Institute established – an idea of Paulo himself – but also, during his lifetime, many centers were created for this purpose.

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<sup>3</sup>According to Nita Freire, before Paulo's death, we have news that several institutions adopted Freire's name: “educational institutions in the cities of São Paulo - SP, Niterói - RJ, Olinda - PE, Jundiá - SP, Pimenta Bueno - RO, Angicos - RN, and Itaguaí - RJ, in Brazil; Arequipa, in Peru; Mexico City, in the country of the same name; Cochabamba, in Bolivia; and Málaga and Granada, in Spain. An organization in the Netherlands, founded in the 1980s to guide and benefit Nicaraguan peasants, also adopted the name Paulo Freire because it was based on Freirean thinking as a principle. Academic directories of the Education Faculties at USP, the Federal University of Ceará, the University of Mogi das Cruzes, and the University of Ijuí (Unijuí), Santa Rosa Campus, also carry his name” (1996, p. 49).

## 3. THE NAME, A PRESENCE, AND AN IMAGE

“Paulo Freire”. The proper name of a man, but also that of an author. Both, initially, would retain, as words – that is, signifiers – a relationship with a meaning, and therefore, we could say, with a sense and a referent. In other words, the name would be like an indication to a referent, like a gesture fixed in language, a finger pointing to someone; and at the same time, it could equate to a description or a series of descriptions: “the son of Joaquim and Tudinha”, “author of *Pedagogia do oprimido*”, “the representative of popular progressive education”, “the greatest Brazilian philosopher of education”, and so on. It would also be in this way that, with meaning, the name, as a signifier, would establish or produce a sign. In this sense, just as the leather ball (signifier) that Paulo received from Nita on Christmas in 1995 – by itself, nothing more than an inert object made of leather, fabric, and compressed air – could, because it signified, for him, his humble childhood (meaning) in a compassionate gesture, transform into a “nostalgia ball”, a proper name, despite being meant to signify the uniqueness of a person, when it enters the realm of a language and its system of references and meanings, as well as the culture and history that surround it, it can also undergo transformation, acquiring a quite peculiar form of generality, which we will discuss shortly.

However, the proper name of an author would be more than an indicator, as it would name more than just the individual. “The connection of the proper name with the named individual and the connection of the author's name with what it names are not isomorphic and do not function in the same way” (Foucault, 2009, p. 272). The author, their proper name, would not be located in the civil status of the person, or even in the fiction or argumentative content of the work attributed to them, but “in the rupture that establishes a certain group of discourses and their singular mode of being” (Foucault, 2009, p. 274). More than just the mention or inscription of a person in the order of statements, it would ensure an evaluative and classificatory function for a set of texts and could serve as a principle to explain them or even to include or exclude them, whether from a *corpus* or from a specific political position within a field marked by antagonism – it could even become a mandatory reference for reading and/or an object of censorship. In broad terms, it would manifest the occurrence of a certain set of discourses, referring to their *status* within a society and a literate culture.

However, the author, or the concept of authorship, has not always been a subject of interest. Aside from the need to attribute credibility or danger to texts and the possibility of punishing their authors, and more recently the inscription of authors in the realm of commodities through copyright and intellectual property rights, which has given authorship the relevance it seems to have today.

Therefore, the *author* would be this modern character that our society has produced by

discovering, perhaps influenced by the teachings of English empiricism, French rationalism, and the personal faith of the Reformation, the prestige or danger of the individual, that is, of the "human person" (Barthes, 2004, p. 58). It seems that what began in literary criticism in the 18th century has increasingly extended to broader fields such as philosophy, the sciences, education, and so on:

[...] the image of literature found in current culture is tyrannically centered on the author, their person, their history, their tastes, their passions; criticism most often still consists of saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of the man Baudelaire, Van Gogh's is his madness, Tchaikovsky's is his vice: the explanation of the work is always sought on the side of the one who produced it, as if, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, it were always the voice of one and the same person, the author, revealing their "confidences" (Barthes, 2004, p. 58).

It would, therefore, not be the result of a spontaneous process, without history or without *praxis*, but rather a complex operation that would give rise to this "being of reason" that we call the *author*. Hence the need to give them a "realistic" appearance, an interiority, a psychology, a "deep instance", with their dreams, fears, quirks, and vicissitudes, or even a "creative potential", an infinity of disruptive experiences, historical experiences, or even to make them more "real" and vivid for those who lack memory: hence the need to presentify them through discourse. The need to resist the erosion of time through the production of an archive would thus be conflated with the very humanization of the text, with providing it with an original place for writing: "To give a text an Author is to impose a brake to it, to furnish it with a final significance, to close the writing" (Barthes, 2004, p. 63).

And even the "firm hand" or the gesturality of writing would not be excluded from this operation. For example, notice how Nita described the way Freire would simply sit and write, almost never changing his paragraphs, words, syntax, or the division of chapters in his books; or even the beauty of his manuscripts: "They fit on the paper with such harmony that they resemble a drawing that can be looked at and admired even before we read the meaning of his words" (Freire, 1996, p. 61). Freire "didn't make many corrections. He wrote them slowly, thinking a lot before writing" (Gadotti, 1996, p. 69), as Gadotti recalled the moments when Paulo would read the handwritten texts to him in Geneva. And, as would be repeated so often, working from cards, notes, and transcriptions, working through the night, it took just three weeks to produce the first three chapters of *Pedagogia do oprimido* (Haddad, 2019, p. 81).

And at this point, one cannot help but think of a certain relationship or kinship between writing and death. One might think of the Greek epics, designed to perpetuate the immortality of heroes through the *ceaseless* retelling of their deeds, or of Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*, who would always narrate more stories until dawn to ward off death, that is, "to keep death out of the cycle of existence" (Foucault, 2009, p. 268). And wouldn't it also be to ward off death that the author's life would be presentified for their benefit? Whether it's to ward off the death through the oblivion of the person who

did so much, keeping their gestures, actions, and thoughts alive, or to prevent a second death brought about by the institutionalization of a thought so resistant “to bureaucratic and political models”, which is archived by lending the author so many memories of the person and those who lived with them, making them so vivid and “real” in the memory of those who did not experience them?

An image that would take the place of the “real”. An image fixed, reproduced, reenacted with each published book, article, or piece, interview broadcast, or documentary posted on platforms. Baudelaire, Van Gogh, Tchaikovsky, Gregório de Mattos, Aleijadinho, Monteiro Lobato, but also Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Euclides da Cunha, Gilberto Freyre, or even Paulo Freire, and many others. And wouldn't it be a matter of how an author, especially after their death, could become sayable? Well, the sayability of an author, although belonging to the realm of discourse, would draw on the imaginary to acquire consistency and the appearance of “reality”. It would be composed of experiences and events, memories and feelings, lived by those who lived with them, but also repeated, told, heard, and read, which, because they are taken as “living” testimonies, would establish a discourse to then fix it, imposing it as “truth”: the true Karl Marx, the true Monteiro Lobato, the true Paulo Freire. Experiences, events, memories, characters, images, texts that would become exemplary, archetypal, and would seem resistant to the very history to which they are irrevocably inscribed. Nevertheless, it would be precisely by taking shape in social movements, political and educational practices, institutions, and processes of subjectivation that this process in which the sayability of the author takes place would express its character of historical positivity.

And, as mentioned earlier, the author, as an institution, owed its own survival, continuity, and reverberation in present-day political and educational practices to the very work of the archive; that is, the work that would take the place in the absence of lived memory, sheltering and preserving testimonies, accounts, notes, manuscripts. The archive would be the place of gathering signs, that is, of con-signation, and therefore also where the limits and regularity of their repetition would be established, the legitimate conditions of their own reproduction. Through the con-signation of the archive, a scattered set of statements and images, attributed to a common origin, would be brought together into the unity of a work, a *corpus*, reserving for everything heterogeneous the fate of exclusion or oblivion, anything that might threaten the very possibility of con-signation (Derrida, 2001, p. 14). And in the case of the author, given the very need for authenticity of what would be con-signed under their proper name, and therefore could be co-signed and reproduced in their name, it would also be necessary for this *corpus* – a gathering of philosophemes, that is, arguments, ideas, concepts, methods – to already allow itself to be traversed by biographemes and autobiographemes, serving as a brake or law of interpretation; stopping the endless

flow of differences arising from various assemblages, through constant re-translations or disruptive re-readings inherent to every discursive process and allowing thought itself “the right to remain living”.

In other words, even though Freire may have given rise to an entire line of thinking on the margins of institutional processes – considering the presence in his texts of concepts like dialogue, the vocation to being-more, or the relationship between revolution and love, a view of reality that involved breaking with the established order, and more – it would only be through the institutionalization of his name that we could access his thinking. A name, of course, whose naming would traverse two bodies in one: on one side, the gathered *corpus* of his work, and on the other, the individual's life behind the name. And note that institutionalization – made possible by the representativeness and recognition of his proper name, or even the historical dispute associated with it – would reserve for him the very place of exemplarity. It is as if, through the biographemes and autobiographemes present and so frequent in the presentation of Freirean thought, under the guise of practice or affection as interpretive keys, one wanted to purge/ward off/avoid/interrupt/prevent the incessant process of institutionalization without which we couldn't even call a thought “Freirean”, that is, by a proper name to refer not to the person who thought it but to a unique way of thinking and doing, to specific and historically dated political positions and commitments. Hence the censorship that could, perhaps, be directed at any perspective that focused on criticism of the theory, which, because it was heterogeneous to the forms of criticism and exegesis prescribed in the *corpus*, might be perceived as a threat to the work or even its historical strength, under accusations such as “excessive erudition”. After all, Paulo Freire was the man of practice and intense affections, a man whose theory was made and could only be spoken in the language of the people, and so on. What may not have been realized is that, through the biographemes and autobiographemes, the more they were inscribed in discourse, the more they would subtly reinforce the very process of institutionalization that his thought was supposedly meant to purge.

But there is something more to add. A proper name whose meaning becomes entangled in the duality of its *corpus* between the work and life, and through its exemplarity, it shifts towards a very particular form of generality. Not the generality of common names that name a category of phenomena in reference to their discoverer – such as “Joule's law”, “Chagas disease”, “Humboldt current”, etc. – but that of a secondary process of signification, capturing as a form a given relationship between a signifier and a signified, making the sign a kind of signifier (a form) for another concept. Roland Barthes called this secondary process *mythology*, whose main function was to neutralize or naturalize. Myth would be what “transforms history into nature” (2001, p. 152). In the case of the name “Paulo Freire”, it would be



the very generality of the values of a “Pátria Educadora”<sup>4</sup> (Educational Homeland). Through patronage, it would be Brazilian education itself that would receive from his name, the name Paulo Freire, through recognition, a normative reference for its own identity. Thus, frozen in the *forms of life*, childhood, wandering, or lovingness, the proper name would no longer correspond only to the individual's singularity or to con-signation, but through them, the neutralization or naturalization of the relationship between a series of values and a given set of educational and political practices in the field of education. In other words, wherever the proper name Paulo Freire appears as an *example* of critical, popular, emancipatory, or more recently, decolonial education, or even of Brazilian education, it also appears as a sign of values like lovingness, childhood, or life, almost as if they were *natural* to these practices.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In our essay, we start from the question: what could the words “Paulo Freire” “truly” name? And, of course, instead of seeking to find ourselves in a possible answer that would be deemed “true”, we opt for the drift of problematizing the very act of responding to it. More specifically, we interrogate the very composition of the image commonly offered to give meaning to the name, whose verisimilitude would be the result of the *author's* presentification. From a myriad of biographical and autobiographical accounts, we would have a brake, which would serve as a privileged key to reading the work. These would be images and discursive regularities that would fixate themselves as singularities or typical characteristics of his production but would arise from expressive, personal – sometimes even intimate – aspects to serve as essential attributes of the author, the presumed originating place of the work. In other words, for the elaboration of a “true” answer, a certain archival work would be indispensable: it would be necessary, therefore, to con-sign re-memories, statements, themes, and interpretations, not only by the author himself but also by educators, teachers, journalists, representatives of social movements, etc., abundantly present in books, interviews, articles, dissertations, or theses. And from this work could emerge not only the survival of the work but, paradoxically, the very closure of the writing.

It is important to note, however, that even though it takes its place in the absence of memory, the archive itself is essentially marked by a trace of messianity. That is to say, “the question of the archive is not [...] a question of the past. [...] It is a question of the future, the very question of the future, the

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<sup>4</sup>This would concern the generality of values whose universality would encompass the institutional practices of the state that adopted his name and whose government motto, in the context of the promulgation of the law declaring Paulo Freire as the Patron of Brazilian Education, was: “Brazil, Educational Homeland”.

question of an answer, of a promise, and of responsibility for tomorrow” (Derrida, 2001, p. 50). And just as the work of memory keeps alive that which, for the sake of the future, cannot be forgotten, it would only be in view of a yet-to-come time, of a time always still undetermined, that this work of re-memory, of an attempt to fix a reading, of stabilizing a unity for the work, would take place. “A spectral messianity runs through the concept of the archive and links it, like religion, like history, like science itself, to a very singular experience of promise” (Derrida, 2001, p. 51).

And wouldn't it be the case, in this archival work, to confront the risk of a future without the memory of Paulo Freire? Isn't the very effort of re-memorizing his life and work connected to the possibility of a future for critical, popular, emancipatory, or even decolonial education? And under what spirit could it be, if not that of the promise that, with an eye to the future of a society and in his name, Paulo Freire would be declared a patron, a protector to whom the task, even if symbolic, of safeguarding that future through education would be reserved?

In Freire's case, it's not precisely the problem of an archive fever that prompts our reflection. After all, an archive would not be possible without this inherent death drive, that is, without this process of self-destruction that constantly threatens it with oblivion (Derrida, 2001, p. 23). What is at stake here is indeed the messianity of a thought, when the struggle for the certainty of its future demands from us the repetition of an image that freezes it in time under the vivid guise of a character behind the name, and it involves the very denial of the “right to remain alive” for this thought.

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