

# Silence in the Coffee Plantation: The Painting-poetics of Candido Portinari

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**ABSTRACT**— *This article wants to analyze how Candido Portinari in his paintings with rural theme, engages a poetry of silence. To understand the functioning of this poetic language, we will adopt the Groupe  $\mu$  analysis method (both the General Rhetoric and the Treatise on the Visual Sign). Whereas the language is manifold as the forms of representation, and it present in all media, whatever the lack of speech - silence - would find its richest form in both directions through the metaphors and metonymy engaged in metasemes of the paintings studied.*

**Keywords**— Candido Portinari, Visual Rhetoric, Poetry, Painting

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The language is multiple on ways of representation, it being present in all media, whatever. The existence of this diversity allows the study of variability of types of texts, whether written, oral, pictorial or gestural. The lack of speech allows communication through other forms of expression may be through images, gestures, looks. The silence itself is a way to communicate. In this way,

abstaining from speaking establishing paradigmatic forms whose use sets some of the most significant properties of an act of communication. By the end, everyone learns, sometime and somewhere, that silence, in certain situations, is not only, as they say, gold, but also, and this comes full in the communications field, through more shrewd to solve certain types of social situations. [1]

Silence is a form of communication like the others, including being structured like the others. Yet for Peñuela,

From this point of view, silence is as important as any code of other codes that we use to speak, because making a movie or a cartoon, does not run away by talk of these texts also be speech acts, to this rule. Even if the Basso study favors communication situations mediated by the verbal code, their analysis put in evidence the ambiguous status of the protagonists of the evidence that he studied and especially his remarks incite to think at first that behind the silence always implied a line, which is equivalent to admit that behind a spoken language lurk "quiet phrases". I believe (...) that this principle is also applicable for the non-verbal messages. It is not difficult to record, for example, that the words and images of a news item referring to an event "outline of silence phrases" and that sometimes these "mute statements" provide more information than the explicit text of the news, as well as put by the case, which is outside the images framed by a television screen may put the viewer on the trail of information that is not necessarily omitted on purpose [1]

However, does the text can be confused with poetry? Into Lotman's semiotics, there is an argument, well defined by Silva, that there is a distinction between poetic text and poem:

the first step is to conceptualize the poetic, inseparable quality of the artistic text, but goes beyond it, differentiating it from the poem concept. A poem is usually a pre-established structure, vertical, consisting of verses. May have stanzas, meter and rhyme, which, above all, from the modern Brazilian literature and the European avant-garde, is no longer a rule, as there are so-called blank verse, or without rhyme, with varied metric, as well as visual poems, collages, etc. The poem is also generally perceived as instance of verbal thing of words, though, we reaffirm, exist and are widely known, aspects of experimental poetry that puts the name of the visual poem, and even three-dimensional sound structures. It is the poem that we treat this text, but poetry as quality, present in texts (verbal and nonverbal) media [2]

And when the poetic text is a painting? In the tradition set by Jacques Derrida, inspired by Immanuel Kant, the poetic text of a painting is defined by parergon. The concept of parergon is highlighted in Aesthetics with the publication of "Critique of Judgment". Kant [3] notes that the ornaments (parerga) as the frame of a painting, although not part of the artistic representation and even undermine the genuine beauty, are essential for expansion and recognition the aesthetic taste.

This consideration of Kant - it might even go unnoticed - is taken up by Jacques Derrida in his Aesthetics studies. In them, Derrida indicates that the parergon a work of art indicates a need, a fault that has in its representational process. What is the parerga, the reasoning Derrida [4] argues that is not just its externality as an addition, but the internal structural connection that secure them in the inner lack of work (ergon). And this lack is constitutive of the unit's ergonomic. Without this lack, the ergonomic not need parergon. The lack of ergonomic is the lack of a parergon.

The combination of these forms of language can be made from the perspective of Groupe  $\mu$  through the concept of metasememe, put into perspective by Venancio:

On the General Rhetoric, we find the definition of what a "metasememe is a figure that replaces an sememe by another is to say that it modifies the zero degree semes groups. This kind of figure assumes that the word is the same as a collection of nuclear semes without internal order and without taking the repetition". They come into relation with other three areas - called metabolic, by requiring a change - the language (they are: metalogisms, metaplasms and metataxes) through a triangle update Ogden-Richards where there is the relationship among common language (concepts), figurative language (word) and poetic language (thing) [5]

Based on these concepts, it is intended with this article, to connect different representations of poetic language of Candido Portinari's rural painting. This act of deciphering images-words and words-images is described by Azeredo [6] as not "in this case, the establishment of precise, but of possible elements. Thus, the crack is here as an experimental exercise in which each element found opens new combination possibilities to interpretation and therefore experimenting with their own thinking".

The relationship between text and image, poetry and painting is, above all, the passage of the issue for contemplation. This transition occurs by a silencing process, making signs in images, written and oral visual. "That is the central question that, in our view, motivates the search for a different way of communication and expression. Ultimately, it needs to build a language that, on returning to the nature of the image, veicule the singular, the multiplicity in the median and unambiguous face" [6].

The painting of the twentieth century, such as that practiced by Candido Portinari, as a representation of reality can be associated with painting as a representation of another form of language. This polymorphism in metasememe value both depictions, adding different modes of perception of this discourse in poetry. She moves between silence and the message, and with it the value of poetic language, bringing the experience of emotional way.

This emotion strengthens the poetry of speech, in other words. We can even draw a parallel here of twentieth-century painting function as analogous to photography or at least to photograph the conceptualization posed by Chamie [7] which

tells us that "photography is violent, not because it shows the violence but because it fills force the view and because it nothing can refuse or turn".

This article wants to analyze how Candido Portinari in his rural paintings, engages a poetry of silence. To understand the functioning of this poetic language, we will adopt the Groupe  $\mu$  analysis method, both the General Rhetoric as the Treatise on the Visual Sign. The idea here is to demonstrate that violence contained in the photographic silence, as recalled in Chamie, a violence that Portinari with his brush brought more intensely than any picture ever made.

## 2. THE METASEMEME

As mentioned earlier, in the Groupe  $\mu$ 's General Rhetoric, we find the definition of what a "metaseme is a figure that replaces an sememe by another it is to say that it modifies the zero degree semes groups" [8]. If we think its relation to the domains of language (metalogisms, metaplasms and metataxes), we can find the update of the triangle of Ogden-Richards cited where concepts, words and poetic language unite [8]:

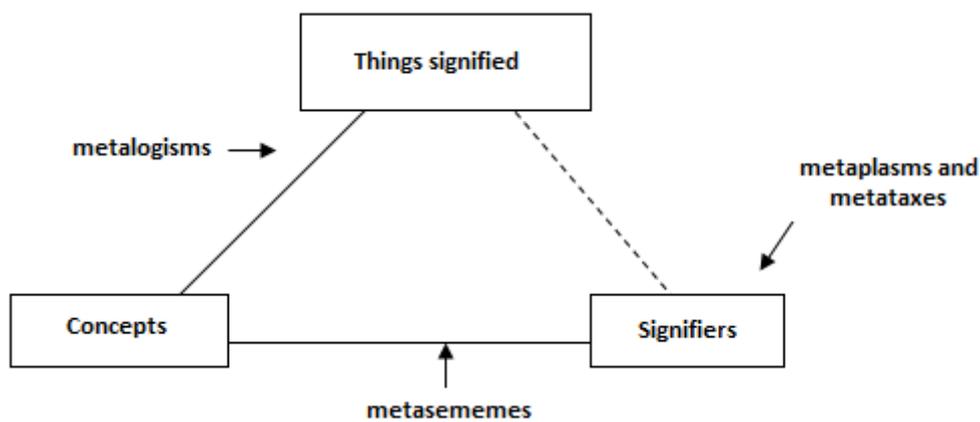


Figure 1: Update triangle of Ogden-Richards by Groupe  $\mu$

Thus, we find that the metasememes are at the semantic level, what the traditional rhetoric call tropes, figures to change in meaning (metaphor, metonymy). The other, in turn, operate in different fields: (a) metaplasms are figures involving a change of sound or graphics; (b) the metataxes are changes in syntax; and (c) the metalogisms are changes in the reference value, whose greatest example is hyperbole.

It is particularly on the issue of metasememes noted that the validity of the review of W.G. Regier [9] that the "Groupe  $\mu$  builds [his theory] over Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca". Now the tropes are a major highlight element in the New Rhetoric, but only with the inclusion of Groupe  $\mu$ , is that they and rhetoric as a whole are reinserted in the field of Language Sciences without being mere adjuvants or are reduced to logic.

However, realizing the greatness of theoretical concept, it is the question of how one is formed metaseme. For this, a conceptual dissection is required. We start by sema, whose preparation we owe Eric Buysens, which is nothing more than the smallest possible unit of meaning analysis. To Buysens [10] "the word seme designate any conventional process whose concrete realization (called semic act) allows communication". Thus, "the seme is only a functional part of the semic act, and noticeable action is only semic act, if it is the realization of a seme" [10].

The sememe, in turn, is composed of semes, each being a unique feature of sememe. As part of the content form, sememe in the field of significance operates the same function as significant as the element has the shape of expression. Then, as defined above, it is metaseme replacing a sememe other causing change of significance. The visual sign, this metaphorical and metonymic replacement that metaseme does can be classified, according to the Groupe  $\mu$  in his Treatise on the Visual Sign in four types:

- (1) the *in absentia conjunta* mode (IAC): the two entities are joint - that is, they occupy the same place of the statement, for total replacement for one another;
- (2) the *in praesentia conjunta* mode (IPC): the two entities are combined in one place, but with only partial replacement;
- (3) the *in praesentia disjunta* mode (IPD): the two entities occupy different

places without replacement; and (4) the *in absentia disjuncta* mode (IAD): one entity is manifested and the other is external to the statement, but projected on this. [11]

With this, we can draw the following comparison table:

field / mode	<i>In absentia</i> conjunta (IAC)	<i>In praesentia</i> conjunta (IPC)	<i>In praesentia</i> disjuncta (IPD)	<i>In absentia</i> disjuncta (IAD)
linguistic	tropes	<i>Portemanteau</i> vord	comparisons, rhymes	proverbs
visual iconic	iconic tropes	iconic interpretations	iconic pairings	designed iconic tropes
visual plastic	plastic tropes	plastic interpretations	plastic pairings	designed plastic tropes

**Figure 2:** The metaphor and metonymy of metasememes in the Treatise on the Visual Sign

Thus, the study of Visual Rhetoric, seeking a poetic in Candido Portinari’s rural paintings, lies in identifying these four modes of metasememes to accomplish the necessary exercise of interpretation. Only then we can check the silence contained in those paintings, a silence beyond the absence of words, within the conjunction of images.

### 3. WHO IS CANDIDO PORTINARI?

Candido Portinari was born at a typically Brazilian historical time, which held reduced relations with the planetary chronological time. Brazil was even closer to the roots of its miscegenation and of various economic stage hurdles: from slave-owning survival to an incipient nucleus of capitalistic evolution which emerged conditioned by the interests of a feudal-type latifundiary monoculture.

Planet-wise, Portinari lived, from childhood to the end of his days, in the period named by Eric Hobsbawn as “the era of extremes”, melancholically defined by violinist Yehudi Menuhin, portrayed by Portinari, as the century “which aroused the greatest hopes already conceived by mankind and destroyed all illusions and ideals [12].

Born in Brodósqui, Candido Portinari (1903-1962) lived intensely the climate of the rural economy of the State of São Paulo, Brazil, the driving economical force of his time. Coffee plantations in the Ribeirão Preto region, where his small town was, dominated the landscape as well as local jobs.

But the fate of Portinari, son of Italian immigrants, was not the coffee plantations. With innate talent for drawing, he worked as apprentice of Italian painters of the Catholic Church at Ribeirão Preto region (namely the Batatais Cathedral paintings was their biggest work) and had a chance to attend the prestigious National School of Fine Arts [Escola Nacional de Belas Artes], in the distant Rio de Janeiro, then the capital of Brazil.

In 1928, wins the Foreign Travel Award from the National School of Fine Arts, the most coveted prize of Brazilian painting at the time. Portinari, who still resisted joining a more modern style and focused on the so-called academic painting, would see and feel the European cultural climate and make radical changes in his style.

However, his change would not be concentrated in European painters, but the Mexican muralism that was the “hit” in the arts halls in the Old Continent.

Mexican muralism emerges in the 1920’s and would bear influence on Portinari, not by chance, but rather because this kind of art was latent in his temperament and in his painter’s imagination. And all this because it was a pictorial genre which identified itself with his own life story. Brodósqui, the small city where he was born and discovered the world, was always present in his memory and his way of seeing Brazil. It was Brodósqui which identified him with the poor peasant, with the Brazilian who existed outside History. Mural painting is, by definition, the vehicle of a wide message not individual – the vehicle proper to a painter who wished to depict and change the country where he was born [13].

This influence of Mexican Muralism has made Candido Portinari to create a unique style, marked by his childhood memories and socio-economic conditions of his Brodósqui. The first work, despite not having the necessary gigantism of mural painting, has founding elements of what we call here a poetics of silence. We are talking here about *Café*.

In the opinion of some critics, Portinarian muralism began with a small canvas, of an original theme: *Café*, painted in 1935. It already bore the way of composing and using figure design and colors in a different manner from what he did on easel paintings. This canvas also stakes off the painter's leap to an effectively distinct language, unhinged from the conservative model which still remained in his painting. He also innovates in coloring, which becomes predominantly brown and which shall feature an extensive period of his art [13].

So with this importance, *Café* will be discussed in this article to understand how Candido Portinari creates a poetic painting of silence. This is a canvas, whose importance for Brazilian art is priceless, which marks the beginning of a new understanding of Brazilian society. An understanding that seeking cling our eyes and shout out loud without uttering a single word.

#### 4. THE SILENCE OF CAFÉ

In 1939, Portinari held a major individual exhibition at the MNBA [Museu Nacional de Belas Artes], with emphasis on the work *Café*, awarded with an honorable mention in the Carnegie Institute contest, held in Pittsburgh, United States of America, in 1935. After this show, *Café* remained at the museum until its incorporation to the collection in 1941. A sentimental work, according to Mário Pedrosa, it started the “so-called brown or Brodosquian series”, characterized by the dominant brown surface and the purple color of the soil of this mother town.

They comprise childhood memories, very present in his artistic construction. The problem of man and reality are focal points in the Portinarian iconography. The landscape-scenario which hosts them is a redefinition of the space of a land lived, bound by lines and perspectives, characteristic of his memory of the trails in coffee plantations, in a hierarchy of planes and chromatic masses which reveal the cosmic force, the depth of the horizon, and the luminosity of the essence of life brought out by the theme of painting [14].



Figure 3: *Café*, Candido Portinari, 1935 (Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Brazil)

*Café* shows the construction of a social and economic context quite refined by Candido Portinari. Bringing together elements of modernist Brazilian painters (such as Tarsila do Amaral and her *Abaporu*) and the Mexican muralism (especially Diego Rivera), the Brodósqui painter portrays the coffee plantations of his hometown as a mix of critical realism and reflective fantasy.

Real and fantasy blend together to build a poetics of silence from the construction of metaphorical metaseemes and willing metonymic from the use of colors, shapes and perspectives on the board. We will describe, with the help of our analysis methodology explained above, five representative metaseemes the diegetic construction made by Candido Portinari. Them, which can be seen in Figure 4, are key points to understand the thinking of the Brazilian painter in the construction of his art.



The geometric and exaggerated construction of metaseeme # 1 is a summary of the formal style set by Portinari in *Café*. As Tarsila do Amaral in *Abaporu*, draw the arms and hands of larger proportions than the actual represents a hypertrophy of the social and economic role of the manual labor in rural Brazil. This is a metaseeme whose metaphor is built in IPC mode (in praesentia conjunta) giving a plastic interpretation in the *portemanteau*-like order. Thus, physical strength and manual labor of coffee farmer are combined to promote an instant social criticism, screaming to our eyes the difference of bodies between the Urban Brazil (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo) and the Rural Brazil represented by Portinari through his Brodósqui memories.

The metaseeme # 2 is a metaphor built in the IPD mode compared to the metaseeme # 3. The force of the foreman and the fatigue of woman farmer alternate between the power that commands with finger upraised and resilient acceptance of a low head. A commanding voice in a dull picture, a muted cry of social inequality.

In turn, the metaseeme # 4 is a metaphor, built in the IAD mode, where we see a ladder without the footrest. A simple detail to show the absent criticism that this rural-style production had no economic future. It represents a famous Brazilian proverb that says that things "without foot" has no future. A proverb which is put on the canvas silently, subliminally, but it shows, through fantasy (after all, there is such a ladder in the "real world"), one of Portinari concerns about the future of his hometown.

Finally, the metaseeme # 5, a metonym constructed through IAC mode represents a conversation between two women farmers. A silent gossip demonstrating the criticism of the plantation workers themselves while their situation. After all, they are not reaping any of coffee fruit, just gossiping and criticizing before our eyes.

It seems that is through these mute mouths (not even drawn) of these women farmers that Candido Portinari, with *Café*, tells us: “This is Brodósqui of my memories, probably Brodósqui today, but should not be Brodósqui in the future, much less Brazil”.

## 5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Thus, Brazilian art will only come into existence when our artist completely abandon useless traditions and surrender, with their entire soul, to the sincere interpretation of our milieu [15]

The search for a Brazilian art and its dissemination to the Brazilian people and its role as a “calling card” for foreign countries has always been the mission of Candido Portinari. A Brazilian look, a Brazilian trait, a Brazilian poetic. *Café* is the first example of this quest that resulted in one of the most original artists of the twentieth century.

The purpose of this article is only to point out some features of this poetics of silence that *Café* engages in its colors, purple and brown as the soil of the coffee plantations of Brodósqui. A poetic silence that arises as a vibrant criticism, simple and powerful.

There is no realism that supports this critical Portinari. We did not find real traits that make the audience imagine the sound of coffee plantation. There is here an imaginary coffee plantation, deformed, but evident. A coffee plantation which has been deformed by cultural, social and economic perspective. A criticism that only poetry can bring us, going beyond realism. *Café* is one of trace of Portinari’s memory that becomes the critical memory of an entire nation.

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