

Configurations of War
and Resistance in
Philosophy, Literature
and Other Arts

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Edited by

Golgona Anghel, Sérgio das Neves
and Ana Sofia David

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PREFACE

In an international context of the constant and accelerated expansion of warfare across multiple territories worldwide, belligerent discourses seem to narrow the debate into two irreconcilable and opposing perspectives: on the one hand, the inevitability of war; on the other, peace as a naïve chimera. The first perspective, which upholds the inevitability of war, is rooted in the logic of national security, political realism, and the belief that conflict is an inherent aspect of human nature and the international order. This view is reinforced by discourses that frame war as a necessary mechanism for maintaining the balance of power, as an unavoidable response to external threats, and as a driver of technological advancement and strategic innovation. Within this framework, war is perceived as a perennial condition of humanity, while peace, when it occurs, is merely a temporary truce within endless cycles of conflict. The second perspective, which regards peace as a naïve chimera, is often used to discredit diplomatic efforts and pacifist initiatives, dismissing them as unrealistic idealism. Advocates of this view argue that, in a world shaped by divergent interests and asymmetrical power relations, peace is not only improbable but a dangerous illusion that can weaken states and leave them vulnerable to external threats. The fragility of international treaties, the collapse of ceasefire agreements, and the ongoing arms race are frequently cited as evidence that sustainable peace is nothing more than a utopian aspiration.

However, this dichotomy between inevitable war and impossible peace constrains the capacity to imagine alternative solutions and stifles possibilities for mediation, conflict transformation, and the development of cooperative models. Breaking away from this simplistic binary, which reduces reality to rigid extremes, is therefore essential. In this sense, rethinking the narratives of war and peace is not merely a theoretical exercise but a practical endeavour aimed at expanding the possibilities for mediation and conflict transformation. With this spirit in mind, from 3 to 5 May 2023, a group of researchers gathered at the Faculty of Social and

Human Sciences of NOVA University Lisbon for the International Colloquium “*Infin che un giorno senso non avrà più dire: domani*”.

This gathering, which gave rise to the present volume, was motivated by the need to rethink the various configurations of war and resistance within the spheres of philosophy, literature, and the arts. The quotation from Primo Levi, taken from *If This Is a Man*—“Until one day there will be no more sense in saying: tomorrow” (1959, 156)—resonates as an urgent call to reflection: it evokes the image of a tomorrow that, once filled with promise, becomes unattainable or devoid of meaning in the face of human self-destruction. Even before tomorrow ceases to exist, we find ourselves on the brink of being unable to utter it. In other words, perhaps worse than not breathing is breathing in silence. What kind of life would we have if we were unable to speak of tomorrow with the certainty that it will come, and in freedom? For this reason, we deemed it imperative to speak about war—not only as a form of resistance but also as a means of constructing a future. The tomorrow that refuses to arrive is a rupture with the passive expectation of an idealised future, underscoring the necessity of confronting and understanding the present in its starkness, without restricting the space for transformative imagination and action.

The challenge posed by this vast theme has been taken up by diverse literary voices from the Homeric era to the present. In a war poem, Patroclus reproaches those reluctant to fight: “war is the use of arms, words are for council. / More talk’s pointless now; we need more fighting!” (*Il.*, 16.602–603). This early voice emphasises the urgency of action, suggesting that the transformative power of deeds can, at times, surpass that of mere rhetoric. When time runs out, speech must yield to combat, where the efficacy of action becomes decisive. And yet, what if speaking is already a form of combat? In contrast, Achilles observes: “The portion’s equal whether a man hangs back or fights his best; [...] One who’s active dies like the do-nothing.” (*Il.*, 9.688–692). Resignation to inevitability as a motive for inaction disregards the fact that worse than our own death is the death of those we love. When Hector exhorts his men “to meet destruction or to come through” (*Il.*, 18.191–192), he lays bare the existential dimension of conflict: survival and sacrifice are intertwined in the very essence of our relationship with life. War is also tragic. As a situational metaphor for total surrender, it ultimately leads to self-annihilation. Thus, conflict is not

confined to physical confrontation but extends into the realms of memory and subjectivity.

Questioning, alongside Leo Tolstoy in *War and Peace*, “why men can’t get on without war” (1900, 20), we fundamentally interrogate the human condition, which, paradoxically, finds itself trapped in cycles of conflict, even when the yearning for peace is intrinsic to existence itself. “What an awful thing war is!” (234); the same work echoes. The visceral repudiation of the destruction wrought by war reflects, in turn, a rejection of our own inevitable destruction by time. This raises the question: if we were immortal, would we still reject war? Or would we make it a way of seeing and being? For this very reason, speech is the most effective form of action, for it removes the necessity of death and resists the logic of erasure; each word defies the silence of death and constitutes a revolutionary act. To speak about war thus becomes a vital impulse that challenges fatalism and fights for change—for the possibility of saying *tomorrow*. If violence is accepted as a mode of being, then it must be rethought as a force of thought and creation that does not dispossess the other—neither of their life nor of their freedom. Yet, as the character Alberto in *If This Is a Man* concludes, “this life is war” (1959, 60). Fernando Pessoa, through his semi-heteronym Bernardo Soares, extends this view, affirming that “all life is war, and the battle is life’s synthesis” (2001, 303). Even if we conceive of life as a battleground, we must alter its coordinates.

Bernardo Soares further challenges the logic of orthodox discourses and actions: “Only poets and philosophers see the world as it really is, for only to them is it given to live without illusions. To see clearly is to not act” (275); “every form of action, from war to logical reasoning, is false” (292). Thus, resistance is an action of non-action. Thought and language, devoid of teleological purpose, may offer a solution to war: simply do not wage it. Every action is overstimulated by an illusion of meaning, of purpose. From this perspective, action is always false, as it reduces the complexity of existence to mere utilitarian practice. Art, as Bernardo Soares further describes, “is Cinderella, who stayed at home because that’s how it had to be” (304). She did not *have* to remain behind due to her stepmother’s oppression, but because it was in her nature to serve as a refuge for a sensibility that transforms—perhaps not the world itself, but the perception

of it. Since reality eludes total comprehension and control, what then remains for us?

Each of these voices contributes to a mosaic of experiences and perspectives that call for an essential act of resistance and reflection. It is proposed that resistance, ultimately, constitutes a mode of existence—whether through active combat, poetic memory, or the silent subversion of the everyday. In this light, the present volume takes shape as a space where the confrontation between the inevitable and the futile becomes, at once, an opportunity to reinvent the future and to reaffirm freedom. While exhaustiveness is not sought, it is nonetheless imperative to engage in a profound reflection on war, positioning it across its manifold expressions—from the Arts to Literature, from History to Philosophy.

The contributions assembled here have been structured to explore the multiple thematic axes that shape this vast debate. Among these, particular attention has been given to investigations on memory, archives, and spoliation, questioning how the history of war is recorded, preserved, or manipulated, thus deconstructing the past; testimony, protest, and correspondence, addressing both individual and collective narratives, in which the act of speaking and bearing witness serves as denunciation, affirmation, and resistance; maps, territories, and borders, critically analysing the physical and symbolic spaces that define the boundaries and possibilities between coexistence and conflict; conflict, discord, and negotiation, examining the dynamics of confrontation and mediation that shape human relations, revealing both fragmentation and reconciliation; flight, migration, and exile, offering a space for reflection on forced displacement and the complex relations between identity and alterity, centre and periphery; and finally, (Post)colonialism, imperialism, and independence movements, interrogating historical legacies and power structures, while also valuing processes of cultural emancipation and affirmation.

Having sown the seeds of encounter and debate, we were compelled to cultivate their fruits, inviting potential readers to an experience of reflection that transcends mere historical record and points to the urgency of action in the present. This volume, therefore, offers a critical and interdisciplinary analysis, seeking to unravel how the spectre of war intersects with manifestations of resistance and artistic, cultural, and intellectual

production. To this end, we have structured the book around three major themes: *War and Literature*—war as a force of literary creation; *War and History*—the past projecting the future and the future rereading the past; and *War in Philosophy and the Arts*—more specifically, war as a language. The volume follows a tripartite structure: *War, Creation of a Language (War and Literature)*, *The Past in the Hands of the Future (War and History)*, and *Warfare Languages (War, Philosophy, and Arts)*. Each section gathers texts that, while not necessarily converging towards similar perspectives, share thematic and disciplinary affinities.

In *War, Creation of a Language (War and Literature)*, we explore how war acts as a catalyst for literary creation. In each essay, conflict not only fuels the text's intrinsic desire to be written and read but also becomes the very material upon which writing operates and is shaped. On the one hand, conflict serves as a pretext, an opportunity for discourse, an opening for thought, and a substratum that nourishes both form and theme, while also functioning as a means of knowledge. On the other hand, conflict becomes the very essence of the text, seizing the textual body that breathes solely in the language of war—whether as an account of historical and sociological realities or as a means of engaging with their tangible effects. Furthermore, war itself becomes an instrument of linguistic transformation, a site of stylistic metamorphosis, and a point of tension between ethics and aesthetics.

The first essay, titled “Francis Ponge and René Char: Two Poets in the Second World War”, by Patrícia Soares Martins, offers a reflection on how war can function as a force of literary creation through the works of Francis Ponge and René Char. The study examines the evolution of Ponge's poetics, revisiting and reconfiguring his wartime writings, culminating in the creation of *Le Savon*. The metaphor of soap, within both language and the intellectual life of society, unveils a new understanding of the fluidity and subversive potential of words—capable of cleansing consciences and dismantling the oppressive logic of silence. Set against the backdrop of the Second World War, the essay also traces the trajectory of René Char, who, deeply engaged in the clandestine activities of the Resistance, transforms the fragments and notes of his daily experience—charged with tension and real-world struggles—into an enigmatic poetic corpus, exemplified by *Feuillets d'Hypnos*. His writing reveals how the violence of war disrupts the

flow of thought and threatens the freedom of expression, while his work prompts reflection on the relationship between poetry and the writer's commitment to a cause or idea. Both Ponge and Char, in Soares Martins' reading, engage in exercises of metamorphosis and dissolution "to remove man from a dimension of absurdity". She demonstrates that, for both poets, conflict acts as a catalyst, compelling them to break with traditional forms of expression and to adopt a language that is simultaneously one of resistance and reconstruction. The essay thus brings to light innovative perspectives on how war can be understood as a space of creation, where the tension between chaos and order is transfigured into poetry and, ultimately, into an assertion of the very transformation of humanity itself.

The second essay, "'Qualquer coisa a mais no ambiente tremulante'—Mário de Sá-Carneiro and the First World War", by Pedro Eiras, explores Mário de Sá-Carneiro's literary experience in the context of the outbreak of the First World War in Paris. Through an analysis of the poet's letters to Fernando Pessoa, Eiras reveals how Sá-Carneiro, confronted with the turmoil of war, transforms horror and tension—described in the Parisian atmosphere as "Something More in the Trembling Atmosphere"—into poetic material. Pedro Eiras argues that the transition from an initial ethical repudiation to a subsequent aesthetic metamorphosis is not merely a detachment from collective sentiment but a rhetorical operation that converts political, social, and psychological events into a singular narrative. He further concludes that "the war capable of causing muteness also prompted a multiplicity of texts". The essay thus demonstrates that from this complex interplay between ethics and aesthetics, art can emerge as a response—one that, rather than negating horror, reconfigures it, suggesting that war itself can, paradoxically, serve as a generative force for literary discourse.

Cláudia Sousa Pereira's essay, "Anger, Misgovernment, War and Other Nonsense for Children", examines two picture books and a short story: *A Bomba e o General* [*The Bomb and the General*] by Umberto Eco, illustrated by Eugenio Carmi; *Daqui ninguém passa* [*Nobody passes from here*] by Isabel Minhós Martins, illustrated by Bernardo P. Carvalho; and the micro-narrative *Contra os canhões* [*Against the cannons*] by Ana Saldanha. Adopting a comparative approach, Cláudia Sousa Pereira focuses on how the experience of war is presented and mediated within the realm of

children's literature. Her analysis moves beyond the conventional moral framework typically associated with children's literature, demonstrating that, through humour and an aesthetic and playful performance, it is possible to engage with the theme of war in a profound and critical manner. The author explores how the interaction between text and illustration transforms the book into a battlefield of its own, where the literary object becomes a vehicle for the staging of behaviours and the development of an expressive and performative reading—an essential means of introducing young readers to the complexities of discourse on war. These texts serve as pretexts to stage a debate on the concept of diplomacy, “in the sense of claiming the use of reason through the word that commits”. The essay broadens the discussion of war as a driving force in literary creation, establishing dialogues with previous essays that explore the transformation of conflict into poetic material—or the confrontation between poetic material and everyday reality. In this case, war itself becomes a metaphor for the struggle against silence and the imperative to speak of *tomorrow*, ensuring that the generations of the future engage with the ongoing discourse on humanity.

Leonor Santa Bárbara's essay, “Three Women and War: Responsibility, Suffering, Solution”, also dedicated to the theme of war in literature, focuses on three women from the Ancient Greek literature: Helen, Hecuba and Lysistrata. Although they are sometimes presented as the cause of war, women do so against their will and grieve of its consequences. In this respect, the history of Western literature has confronted us with a so-called evident fact: if Helen emerges in the *Iliad* and two comedies by Euripides (*The Trojans* and *Hecuba*) as the root of the Trojan War, Hecuba is its victim. But to what extent is it possible to attribute total responsibility for the war to Helen? And how should we consider the status of victim? Lysistrata, the main character in a comedy by Aristophanes, which is set during the Peloponnesian war, manages to involve and bring together an entire community of women who discover in the strength of their resilience a way out to peace. These are the issues that engage Leonor Santa Bárbara's thinking around three authors and different literary genres, to show how war consolidates processes of singularisation of female figures and how their existence is affected by the experience of war.

In “Female War Captives in the *Iliad*: Were There Any Chances of Escaping Slavery?”, Rui Tavares de Faria offers a reading of the *Iliad* that

centres on the condition of women captured during the Trojan War. Rather than privileging the heroes and their pursuit of immortal glory, the author shifts the focus to the silent victims—those who, reduced to war trophies, bear the indelible mark of oppression. The essay examines who these women were, their roles once captured, and the underlying reasons for their subjugation. Ultimately, it poses a crucial question: was there any alternative fate for them? Rui Tavares de Faria weaves the Homeric narrative in a way that highlights the duality between the celebration of heroic deeds and the revelation of a backdrop of violence and dehumanisation. By foregrounding the role of female captives within the context of war, the essay expands our understanding of warfare as a literary space that not only glorifies combat but also records the bodies of those who are not protagonists in battle—peripheral figures who, nevertheless, play an essential role in sustaining war itself. Here, conflict is not merely a catalyst for the production of works that exalt bravery; it is also fertile ground for ethical and aesthetic inquiries into the human and social costs of victory. Faria's study enriches this volume by unveiling another dimension of the epic discourse: that of a testimony to silenced voices—marginalised yet indispensable narratives that expose the paradoxes of war. The essay resonates with the other contributions in reaffirming literature's power to illuminate the darkest recesses of conflict, transforming violence into a raw material for profound reflection on the human condition and the art of writing in times of war.

Through these essays, the possibilities of linguistic transformation, the aesthetic enjoyment of horror, the playful and performative reinterpretation of war, and the reassessment of epic narratives take shape. Each author highlights literature's ability to reinvent the discourse of war, breaking away from traditional forms and making space for new expressions that challenge silence and oblivion. The moral dimension, the human cost, and the subversive power of art remain at the heart of these inquiries, with responses diverging in multiple directions. Ponge's *writing-as-tool* and Char's new myths shape war by reconstructing it through language. For Mário de Sá-Carneiro, war becomes both poetic material and an ethical-aesthetic question. Children's literature initiates young readers into both literary practice and the realities of war. Meanwhile, the *Iliad* interrogates itself through its marginalised portrayals of female figures. If war leaves scars,

literature too is one of its wounds—perpetually open—revealing its structures while constantly reconfiguring the discourse of conflict.

Thus, having examined war as a force shaping literature, we now propose literature as a force reshaping war—that is, as a means of making history. This is the foundation of the second section, which seeks to explore history through literary texts, memory, and the very process of war itself.

In the first essay, “An Endless War: *Se o Passado não tivesse Asas* by Pepetela”, Agnès Levécot offers a reading that highlights how Pepetela’s novel *If the Past Had No Wings* functions as a metonymic representation of the Angolan Civil War while also taking the form of a *Bildungsroman*. Through two parallel narratives—one set during the civil war (1995) and the other in the post-war period (2012)—the Angolan author examines the consequences of the conflict, not only for its direct victims but also for those on its margins, such as abandoned children or those forced to fight for survival. Levécot demonstrates that the novel, by shifting between the protagonist’s struggle to reconstruct her identity and its critique of the inequalities and corruption embedded in Angolan society, reveals literature’s testimonial role. By depicting the war-torn environment through “metonymic shifts”—such as the comparison between battles among groups of children and the conflicts between adults—the novel transcends a mere description of war’s horrors, becoming instead a tool for reflecting on its profound impact on life and collective memory. Above all, the essay exposes “the absurdity of war as felt and experienced by those who are its true actors and/or victims”. In this analysis, Levécot engages with the notion of modern narrative as conceived by Jean Kaempfer and explores both the individual and collective dimensions of mourning, following Jean-Claude Métraux’s perspective. Furthermore, the essay highlights how the novel’s dual structure enables Pepetela not only to denounce the immediate consequences of the civil war but also to critique the evolving social values over time. By portraying the Angolan Civil War as a process that shapes and transforms both individuals and society, the study reinforces the central theme of this chapter: the past lies in the hands of the future, and literature emerges as a vital means for historical understanding and transformation.

In the second essay, “*Ontem, Hoje, Amanhã*—Luandino Vieira’s Prison Notebooks as Prison Writing in the Context of the Estado Novo Dictatorship”, Gustavo Infante explores the prison notebooks of Luandino

Vieira, an Angolan writer, as an emblematic corpus of prison writing. By situating the texts within the context of the Estado Novo dictatorship (1933-1974) and Portuguese colonial empire, as well as the broader framework of prison literature, Infante highlights how personal narratives—spanning from poetry to drawings, traditional songs to daily memory records—are able to articulate an analysis that transcends individual experience to address writing capable of freezing time, as proposed by Philippe Lejeune. Infante investigates how the process of imprisonment, as understood by Donald Clemmer, is reflected in Vieira’s work, from the dehumanisation and loss of identity to the physical and psychological effects of confinement. In *Ontem, Hoje, Amanhã* [*Yesterday Today Tomorrow*], the author highlights moments of introspection that reveal not only the violence and harsh conditions of prison life but also the mechanisms of resistance—whether through camaraderie, political agency, or literary production itself—that allow the prisoner to transform suffering into a form of protest. The analysis emphasises how Vieira uses his notebooks to reflect on the oppression that pervades the prison environment. The essay also engages with the colonial dimension, demonstrating how the dynamics of oppression and segregation present within the prison align with the logic of colonialism. Infante’s study concludes that Luandino Vieira’s prison writing not only documents the horrors of the dictatorial regime but also functions as an act of resistance and affirmation of agency from the margins. In this way, the essay broadens the understanding of the relationship between war, repression, and historical memory, contributing to the debate on how literature can serve as a tool for contestation and the reconfiguration of official discourses.

In the essay “From Ravensbrück to Villa Devoto: Resistance Through Writing by Women Political Prisoners”, Amandine Guillard offers a comparative analysis of the mechanisms of resistance through writing adopted by women in contexts of political imprisonment. By contrasting the experience in the Ravensbrück women’s concentration camp during the Second World War with the reality of Villa Devoto (Buenos Aires), one of the main detention centres for women in Argentina during the dictatorship, the author investigates how, despite significant temporal, cultural, and institutional differences, writing strategies emerge as a fundamental response to oppression. Through interviews, data analysis, and field studies partly conducted by herself, Guillard demonstrates that in these extreme

environments, writing is not merely a record of suffering; it becomes an instrument of sabotage against the oppressive logic of authoritarian regimes. By gathering testimonies—from Germaine Tillion’s operetta to the unpublished manuscripts of Villa Devoto—the essay highlights the importance of the collective practice of literary and feminine resistance. In particular, the author emphasises how women resorted to humour, self-irony, and the sharing of texts to transform the everyday violence and dehumanisation into a space of subversion and identity affirmation. Ultimately, the essay asserts that, regardless of adverse conditions, the literature produced in these contexts constitutes a living and resilient testimony—a community of resistance that defies oblivion and contributes to the construction of historical memory: “everything which has been done to convey and deliver this literature of testimony was a beautiful act of sabotage against oblivion”.

In the fourth essay, titled “*Os Dias Levantados*: a tiger’s leap into history”, Mariana Nascimento offers a reading of the operatic libretto by Manuel Gusmão, set to music by António Pinho Vargas, which is dedicated to reconfiguring the memory of the 25th of April, the date of the Portuguese revolution that ended the dictatorship the country had lived under. The author begins with the concept of “obsession” to investigate how the obsessive repetition of the phrase “What shall I do with this sword?”—a verse by Fernando Pessoa—functions as a device that breaks the linear narrative of history, emphasising the unfinished nature and constant re-signification of the past. In this approach, Nascimento draws on ideas from Walter Benjamin and Fredric Jameson, discussing the notion that writing about a historical event is, in itself, an act of making history. The hypothesis posed by Gusmão and explored by Nascimento is straightforward: “Literature is History”. In this sense, the study argues that the nature of literature is not foreign to the nature of historical configuration; a nature made of obsessions, repetitions, fragments, and leaps. Thus, Gusmão and Vargas’s work, in its structure and organisation, as well as its textual body, becomes the most significant object of study in Nascimento’s proposal. The researcher traces the voices and images as a collective construction of multiplicities, which also draw on other artistic objects, including the cinema of João César Monteiro and the writing of Maria Velho da Costa, both of whom are also Portuguese. The essay demonstrates that Gusmão’s

work transcends a mere narration of revolutionary events, positioning itself as a political and aesthetic intervention that questions the consolidation of memory and proposes new ways of imagining the future. In this way, we close the chapter on war and history with an expanded view: on one hand, we remain within the realm of literature; on the other, we never leave the realm of history.

The essays presented here converge towards the idea of the vitality of literature, challenging hegemonic narratives, and operating and fabricating memory in a distinct manner. In the first part, we observe how war stimulates literary creation and is poetically worked; in this section, literature also shapes war itself, as a record, struggle, and reflection. The writing that registers the abused and incarcerated body becomes the war itself, existing as the same writing across different times and spaces. On the other hand, this writing remains a representation of the externality that is war. Whether the writings of Vieira or those of the women from Ravensbrück and Villa Devoto, their texts bear witness because they observe, but they also act because they live and speak. Between fiction and reality, memory operates in writing, manifesting itself through metonymy and metaphor, as seen in Levécot's study, functioning as a vehicle that travels between past and future. For this, writing is able to freeze time and breathe the same substance, in different places, as Infante's research suggests. The strategy of such writing is one of sabotage, as Guillard proposes, infiltrating the problem, making it its own, and preventing it from being forgotten. If nothing is resolved, at least everything remains open to be redefined. This movement of obsession was explored by Nascimento, urging us to persist in writing as a reconfiguration of history and as a possibility for dialogue with the present's time and space.

The final part of this volume aims to explore war outside of war, that is, to explore war less as a historical event, contingent and more as an inherent violence and force in the act of creation itself, even becoming part of the nature of language and thought. Therefore, this section addresses the relationship between war, as language, mediated by philosophy and art.

The first essay, "Effaced Names. Art and the Ethics of Immortality," by Carlos Gutiérrez Cajaraville, proposes a reflection on the intimate relationship between art and resistance, positioning the creative act as an ethical response to the violence and erasure that characterise conflicts.

Drawing inspiration from Deleuze's lecture "Qu'est-ce que l'acte de création?" and anchoring his analysis in Doris Salcedo's sculptural intervention *Palimpsesto*, the author explores how art can transform absence and invisibility into political presence. Through Salcedo's work, the essay demonstrates how the artistic act not only witnesses the tragedies of war but also reconfigures the subjectivity of the viewers. This intervention implies that art, by bringing forth erased names and silenced voices, creates an "ethics of immortality", where the end of lives is transfigured into continuous resistance against oblivion and domination. Cajaraville articulates ideas from philosophers such as Deleuze, Derrida, and Meillassoux, to question whether artistic creation itself can be forms of resistance that operate in the space between the visible and the invisible, the present and the past.

By demonstrating that the act of creation arises from a "shame of being human", as Deleuze denounced—an emotion that drives resistance—the essay highlights that art has the power to shape new ways of feeling and imagining existence, opening pathways for the construction of peaceful bridges between the living and those erased by violence. Defining the creative act as an act of resistance, Deleuze compels us to question: what do we resist against? And if we have analysed how literature resists war, can we expand this struggle and consider that any creation resists the war that is the tension between subjects and worlds? Creating, then, becomes resisting, to the extent that it ensures the world does not forget that it itself is a creation, and thus, a form of resistance against itself. The act of creation investigated by Cajaraville is, therefore, questioned as "an immeasurable and inexpressible experience" through which war victims pass. Fundamentally, it is a matter of intensities, an "impulse from an unsatisfactory and painful present". Again, the research between war and the arts provokes the tension between ethics and aesthetics. What this study ultimately concludes is that there is no reason to disconnect the role of imagination in the field of political transformation. Thus, the essay reaffirms the central idea of this chapter: war, as language, reveals that the creative act is a subversive gesture capable of reconfiguring collective memory and transforming reality.

The second essay, "Hand-to-Hand: The Cinema of Wang Bing", by Pedro Florêncio, explores the cinema of Wang Bing, positioning it as a

paradigmatic example of how cinematographic practice can be transformed into a form of ethical and humanist combat, particularly in contexts marked by oppression and repression. Investigating the intrinsic relationship between cinema and war, the author proposes that the camera should not be seen merely as a tool for reproducing reality but as an instrument capable of generating and even subverting it. Florêncio delineates his objects of study by analysing imaging techniques employed in military operations and Wang Bing's distinctive approach, which employs a proximity-based aesthetic to turn the act of filming into a gesture of resistance.

Florêncio's methodology is based on a comparative analysis between traditional military imaging models, whose instrumental function aims at producing an operational image, and Wang Bing's cinematic practice, which establishes an "ethic of care" to transform visual experience into a tool of resistance. This approach allows for a reassessment of the idea that cinema merely documents war, demonstrating instead that it can "give life to life, both below and beyond death". According to the author, Wang Bing's cinema stands out for its ability to transform observation into "hand-to-hand combat"—an intimate and physical tactic of engagement that foregrounds an ethics of care and the humanisation of filmed subjects. Drawing on Grégoire Chamayou's analysis of drones as "war machines" within the "phenomenology of perception", the essay argues that Wang Bing's work reverses the cold logic of such modes of seeing by cultivating an intimate gaze that establishes a reciprocal relationship between the viewer and the filmed subjects. Throughout the essay, Florêncio contends that Wang Bing's cinema does not merely reproduce reality in a dehumanised manner; rather, it privileges close observation, touch, sensitivity, and attentive listening. By emphasising prolonged close-ups and a narrative that immerses itself in the vulnerability of bodies and individual experiences, the director challenges the traditional aesthetics of surveillance, transforming the camera into an instrument of reconnection with reality. Ultimately, Florêncio's essay expands the discussion of war as a language of thought, demonstrating that cinema can function not only as a witness to conflict but also as an active means of resistance and transformation.

In the final essay of both the chapter and the volume, "Poetry: a War Machine", Sérgio das Neves investigates the disruptive and transformative nature of poetry, positioning it as a mechanism of resistance that operates

through the very violence inherent in language. The author builds upon the analogy established by Novalis in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, in which poetic activity is equated with an act of war, and deepens this idea in light of the concept of the *war machine* developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Neves further engages with the ideas of Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, and Slavoj Žižek regarding the notion of violence, exploring how poetry's *war machine* functions to destabilise dominant linguistic structures. Finally, Neves examines the poetics of Portuguese poets Herberto Helder and Yvette Centeno within this theoretical framework. In his reading of these poets, the author questions the nature of representation, arguing that poetry is simultaneously a product of and a resistance to language itself, acting as a mechanism that dismantles and deterritorialises language to enable the emergence of new forms of truth. For Neves, this poetics of war entails the destruction of language's communicative function, which, paradoxically, facilitates the recreation of new modes of expression. In conclusion, the essay argues that the poet, by committing to a process of continuous self-destruction and recreation, becomes a warrior against the structures imposed by the linguistic system and state power. This stance, which assumes both an aesthetic and an ethical dimension, reinforces the idea that "the war machine represents language functioning against itself", creating space for a new way of seeing and feeling the world through words. In the poets under study, poetry behaves both as a forceful and solid substance and as a corrosive, fluid material, operating simultaneously within and beyond the very language it employs to bring itself into being. Thus, poetry, as a war machine, is defined by "never being definitive, always needing new escape lines to the ontological condition of language still being language, of time still being time, and of both constituting being". Neves contributes to the central theme of this chapter—war as language and a form of thought—by demonstrating that poetic violence is, in essence, an act of liberation, and even of love, towards the very act of writing itself.

The three essays in this section seek to reveal something invisible that exists within the act of creation, itself constituted as an act of war. A central concept emerges from these essays: the *war machine*, as theorised by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The authors demonstrate that war, as language and a mode of thought, provides a fertile ground for artistic creation and cultural resistance. Carlos Gutiérrez Cajaraville, in his analysis of Doris

Salcedo's *Palimpsest*, explores how art can transform oblivion into political presence. His study highlights how the creative act not only bears witness to violence but also reconfigures the subjectivity of spectators, forging connections between a traumatic past and a present rich with possibilities for re-signification. Similarly, Pedro Florêncio, in his examination of Wang Bing's cinema, argues that cinematographic practice, by employing technical and operational devices from the arsenal of war, reverses processes of dehumanisation. By subverting this logic, Wang Bing renders the invisible visible, reconstructing the relationship between the spectator, reality, and history, and demonstrating that cinema can embody an *ethic of care*. Finally, Sérgio das Neves undertakes the task of exposing the hidden violence of poetic language through the works of Herberto Helder and Yvette Centeno. By illustrating that the poetic act is both a product of and a resistance to conventional language, his essay underscores how poetry functions as an instrument of resistance—one that, through creative violence, opens space for the emergence of new truths and the liberation of meaning.

Together, these studies argue that art—whether in sculpture, cinema, or poetry—is not merely a passive record or a fixed model but an active medium of contestation and transformation. By exposing the tensions between the visible and the invisible, the essays reaffirm that to create is, ultimately, to resist; it is to transform war into a language of renewal and hope. However, this inherent logic of war, which lies at the very core of creation, raises questions explored throughout this volume—most notably, the shared power of Literature, Philosophy, and the Arts to rupture the logic of erasure by revealing and reconfiguring memory and identity. Artistic and intellectual practices thus emerge as modes of shaping narratives of war and violence, becoming part of the very fabric of History.

Accordingly, *Configurations of War in Literature, Philosophy, and the Arts* presents a multifaceted approach to war. In the sphere of Literature, war is examined not merely as a theme but as a force acting upon writing, transforming its impact into metaphor and the experience of conflict into raw material for the production of new discourses. Likewise, historical narratives intertwine with literary creation, demonstrating that the past, far from being fixed, remains alive and reconfigurable through memory and resistance. In this sense, understanding History through Literature, the Arts,

and Philosophy implies that historical production is never entirely detached from subjectivity. On the contrary, it is precisely the practice of subjectivity that renders this inquiry essential, as it constitutes the very process through which the present acts upon a future yet to be conceived. Thus, it has also been crucial to move beyond the perception of war as an external phenomenon and to consider it as something intrinsic to thought and language—an act of creation that disrupts repressive models and reconstructs the interdependent relationship between subject and world.

Keywords such as resistance, memory, transformation, ethics, and writing permeate all these studies, highlighting that artistic creation is both a political and existential act, inseparable from the subject's gaze in the face of war. Thus, this collection of studies not only broadens our understanding of the multiple ways of confronting and reinterpreting war but also compels a continuous reflection on how art, literature, and philosophical thought can reconfigure hegemonic narratives and forge new paths toward emancipation and the construction of a future in which freedom may manifest itself. In essence, to create is fundamentally to resist; and in doing so, the vital role of artistic language in shaping and transforming reality is reaffirmed. We may then return to the initial premise that inspired this debate: “until one day, there will no longer be any meaning in saying: tomorrow”. This volume demonstrates that there is still time to say *tomorrow*, and that it still holds meaning. Yet, meaning itself is born from the will to generate it. In other words, only insofar as speaking is an act of combat does the imperative of *tomorrow* make sense. The studies presented here are true acts of resistance, reaffirming the vitality of things and revealing the fundamental impulse to create meaning itself.

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I

WAR, CREATION OF A LANGUAGE (WAR AND LITERATURE)

FRANCIS PONGE AND RENÉ CHAR: TWO POETS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

PATRÍCIA SOARES MARTINS¹

Abstract

In 1943, René Char ran the SAP (“Section Atterrissage et Parachutage”) in the town of Céreste, in the Basses-Alpes region, a clandestine organization responsible for receiving and distributing weapons dropped by Allied aircraft during the night. In ‘44, in Algiers, he was an officer in charge of paratrooper training. During these years, he left notes and fragments in a diary that he turned into a book of poetry, *Les feuillets d’Hypnos*, which he included in his first post-war collection in 1945, *Fureur et mystère*. After the war, Francis Ponge, on the pretext of a request for a conference by a German radio station, returned to his texts written during the war, between 1942 and 1946, gathered them, added an introductory note and a few appendices, finally giving the heteroclite collection the form of a book, *Le Savon* (1966). By bringing each of these authors closer and further apart by reading their poems, I propose to reflect on how the war left its mark on the works mentioned here and on the authors’ poetics.

Keywords: Resistance; Propreté; Digression; Fragment; History

The correspondence between Ponge and Paulhan from 1923 to 1968, which was not interrupted by the war, is an indispensable document for understanding the history of French literature in the 20th century and the genesis and evolution of Ponge’s work. Just before and during the Vichy government in his correspondence with Paulhan, Ponge still seems unsure of the literary quality of his texts, constantly asking for his friend’s opinion, which he doesn’t hesitate to give, often harshly. Many the letters they exchange at the time focused on the use of a word in a verse or debated whether this or that poem was good enough to be included in a publication.

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In the years leading up to the Second World War, in 1936, Ponge was thirty-seven years old and still a little-known writer, with only one book published, *Douze petits écrits* (1926). During that year marked by strikes and factory occupations, he developed an important trade union activity, as he was assistant secretary of the CGT journalists' union and a member of the inter-union committee (Boareto [ed], 1986, 219n) and joined the Communist Party.

For reasons related to his greater involvement with the Resistance from 1943 onwards, Ponge was forced to leave Roanne, in central France, where he had lived since 1940 and where he had found a job with an insurance company (Boareto [ed], 1986, 241), and to settle in Coligny, a small village near Lyon, in the “Zone libre” of southern France (Ponge, 1967, 21). Paulhan had already left the leadership of the NRF in 1940, having been replaced by Pierre Drieu La Rochelle (Boareto [ed], 1986, 24). It was already under this leadership accepted by the Vichy authorities that Paulhan published an important book of literary criticism in 1941, *Les fleurs de tarbes—ou la terreur dans les lettres*. In the early years of the war, despite the repressive measures adopted by the authorities, some important books were printed, such as *L'étranger* and *Le mythe de sisyphé* by Camus, in 1942, and in the same year, *Le crève-cœur*, by Aragon, as well as *Le parti pris des choses*, by Ponge, the latter already composed and prepared for publication long before that date. In fact, in a letter to Paulhan dated 30 July 1937 and sent from Haute Loire where he had gone for trade union matters, Ponge announced that the book *Sapates* was almost finished, the first title planned for what would become *Le parti pris des choses* (Boareto [ed], 1986, 211-212).

From 1940 onwards, the correspondence between Ponge and Paulhan consisted of the types of forms that the Germans allowed to circulate between “zones”. Nevertheless, using the telegraphic style imposed on him, Ponge wrote mainly about his expectations for the publication of *Le parti pris des choses* and about his concerns regarding the future of NRF. After Sartre's critical text and the long-awaited publication of the book, Ponge was finally more confident of his abilities as a writer: “*Le parti pris* me semble une des plus belles choses parues en littérature depuis longtemps: je ne suis plus très loin d'être sûr de moi depuis que je suis si sûr de ce petit livre”, he writes to Paulhan (Boareto [ed], 1986, 274).

His wartime writing, in particular the “Dossier du Savon” (Ponge, 1967, 11) that he began in the 1940s, seems to have contributed to the evolution of his style, leading him to abandon the brief, self-enclosed form that we find in *Le parti pris des choses*, and adopt another form, no longer brief and contained, but sprawling, as evidenced by the texts written between 1940 and 1941 and gathered in *La rage de l’expression* (Ponge, 1976) and as later demonstrated by the torrential and digressive prose in *La seine* (Ponge, 1950). If we accept that, as Ponge intended, each object must have its own rhetoric, it becomes clear that, from this last book onwards, form is no longer constrained in any way, acquiring the properties of fluidity and digression in close relation to the liquid character of its object. Ponge’s writing progressively became more capable of integrating the preparatory sketch, the version, the reformulation, or even, as would happen later in *Le pré*, in 1967, the diary of its composition between Les Vergers and Paris, over a long period, analogous to that of a “germination” as described by Ponge (“mon essai sur le Pré” [Ponge, 1971, 240]).

Yokomichi Asako recalls that in his text on Ponge, “L’Homme et les choses” (Sartre, 1941), Sartre had emphasized the importance of the “solid” in Ponge’s work and that Ponge, in turn, had subsequently chosen to favour the liquid element in his texts, namely in *La seine* (Ponge, 1950) and in “Le verre d’eau” (Ponge, 1961). For Yokomichi Azako, this latter poem, which opens with three rhyming lines: “Spectacle/ d’un / Translucide réceptacle...” (Ponge, 1961, 119), clearly shows that the text is integrating various writing styles: description of the object, methodological considerations, rhyming poetry, etc. Asako also notes that in other poems, such as “Les Berges de la Loire”, water is frequently associated with the renewal of poetic expression in the sense described above. However, in “Le verre d’eau” (Ponge, 1961), for example, water is mainly symbolically associated with cleanliness, the immaculate character of the things it cleans (Asako, n.d.). In French, the word “propre” has two meanings, “clean” and “appropriate” (or “fair”), something that Ponge emphasizes in *Le savon*, extending the domain of “propreté” to the moral sphere. The aforementioned duality of the solid and the liquid in Ponge’s poetry is also evident in *Le savon*, since soap, an object in every way similar to a pebble before water dissolves it, undergoes a metamorphosis under the action of tap water, ironically described as a catastrophe (“catastrophe subite d’eau pure” [Ponge, 1967,

29]) capable of loosening its “dry tongue” (“déliier la langue sèche du savon” [36]). The praise of soap is based simultaneously on its “propreté” and on its prolixity, and for that reason the poem on soap seems to be inexhaustible.

So, let’s turn to *Le savon*, a book whose composition began during the early years of the war, in the 1940s, and to which he returned on various occasions in the following decade. The texts written between 42 and 44 make up the first part, entitled “Dossier du savon” (Ponge, 1967, 11), while the rest consists of an extensive array of prefaces, dedications, various notes and five appendices. It was to this composite material that Ponge would finally shape into a book in 1956.

It is inevitable to relate *Le savon* to Mallarmé’s book because it seems like an ironic version of it. Ponge explains in the first pages that he thought of writing about soap because there was no soap during the war, only poor quality *Erzätze* that barely foamed at all. Writing about soap could be seen, thus, as an attempt to make soap emerge from words.

Nous étions donc, alors, en pleine guerre, c’est-à-dire en pleines *restrictions* de tous genres, et le savon, le vrai savon en particulier nous manquait. Nous n’avions que de mauvais *Erzätze*—qui ne moussait pas du tout. (Ponge, 1967, 15)

Ponge once wrote that Mallarmé had invented an “anti-logical utensil” seeing it yet as another argument to proclaim the superiority of poetry over philosophy. A claim he would later defend with further arguments in *Pour un Malherbe* (Ponge, 1965):

A ceux qui ne veulent plus d’arguments, qui ne se contente plus des proverbes en fonte, des armes d’enferrement mutuel, Mallarmé offre une massue cloutée d’expressions-fixes pour servir au coup-par-supériorité. Il a créé un outil antilogique. Pour vivre, pour lire et écrire. Contre le gouvernement, les philosophes, les poètes-penseurs. Avec la dureté de leur matière logique. (Ponge, 1976, 136)

The praise of Mallarmé outlined here has an ironic counterpart in *Le savon*, where Mallarmé’s orphic gesture is evoked only to be immediately turned into an object of derision. Jean-Luc Steinmetz has observed that the poem develops from an absence—soap during the war—a lack out of which

a new presence is to emerge. Yet, we can't call this gesture Orphic, because it's not a question of restoring the presence of something absent through words. It's not a question of restoring an absent reality, but of finding a correspondence thereby creating an astonishing reality:

...une réalité inouïe réalité qui se constitue, une réponse à ce qui n'est pas là, une correspondance sans jamais croire que la lettre qui correspond à fera mieux que correspondre avec. (Steimetz, 1990, 2019)

In other words, for Steinmetz the lack of soap moulds a kind of semiotic matrix. Besides, the text on soap does not seek to be merely another poor echo of the thing itself. Rather than simply reproducing the object in words, it aims to extract meaning from its proper use: the word speaking freely, without being silenced by the absurdity of a situation. It encourages us to use words as one uses soap, and for the same purpose: any speech should be like a stream of pure water that washes the consciences and actions of men. This is, above all, the lesson of soap, an exercise in “toilette intellectuelle” (Ponge, 1967, 30): that we should speak where we are asked to remain silent, so as not to be deceived by our own lack of expression.

The opening pages of *Le savon* reproduce a radio broadcast in which Ponge addresses a German audience. They also serve as a prologue, warning the reader about the repetitions and variations on the same theme that will follow, and drawing literature and music closer together by referring to a composition in the form of a “fugue” (Ponge, 1967, 9-13); this is followed by a second section composed in Rouanne, where Ponge and his family had taken refuge in 1942, when the “inspiration of soap” came to him because it was missing. The third section, written in Coligny between the beginning of June 43 and 8 July 44, is perhaps the most extensive: dated like a diary, the fragments that make it up are attempts to define the object based on its characteristics. Throughout the various sections of the book, Ponge notes the characteristics of soap: its enthusiasm, its volatility, ease of speech, and modesty. The latter refers to its unsuitability for a lofty or epic discourse due to the fluidity of the expression it encourages, akin to ‘bafouillage’. Its democratic and popular nature stems primarily from its usefulness. In a text as political as *Le Savon*, this characteristic is not insignificant. It justifies the choice of soap over more elevated themes, according to Ponge's own class-conscious perspective.