

University of Oxford Centre for Brazilian Studies

Working Paper Series

Working Paper CBS-34-02

**Deterritorialization and literary form: Brazilian
contemporary literature and urban experience**

by

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May-June 2002
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DETERRITORIALIZATION
AND LITERARY FORM:
BRAZILIAN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE
AND URBAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The study deals with the mediations between the urban social organization and the artistic form in contemporary Brazilian literature. It tries to contrast close, direct accounts, works that register explicitly the violent and excluding elements of everyday life in large Brazilian cities, works based on duplication and representability, to some processes of defiguration and deterritorialization which are also structural to Brazilian contemporary literature, and function as particularly critical interlocutors of an urban experience of violence, instability and segregation. For, if an imaginary representation of fear and violence is what fundamentally organizes the dominant urban landscape of Brazilian contemporary literature, what is habitual in the more documentary and illustrative urban literature is not the unfolding of perspective but rather the criminal-pathological cataloguing of places and human types, the fear of social heterogeneity, the criminalization of social divisions, the reinforcement of a kind

of urban paranoia - which partly explains the popularization, in tune with a generalized insecurity, of crime stories and detective thrillers in Brazil since the 1980-1990 decades. But this does not necessarily mean an increase in the complexity of formal processes, of literary practice and of the recent historical experience. A growing formal complexity and social awareness often resulting not exactly from this representational imposition, from the explicit, illustrative literary portraits of the urban, but rather from the production of non-representational spaces and liminal, ambivalent, transitional zones of subjectivity, which I try to put into focus in this essay.

Resumo

O estudo trata das mediações entre a organização social urbana e a forma artística na literatura brasileira contemporânea. Tenta contrastar, de um lado, relatos diretos, parajornalísticos e testemunhais, textos que registram explicitamente o cotidiano violento e as exclusões que marcam a vida nas grandes cidades brasileiras, trabalhos baseados na duplicação e na representabilidade, e, de outro, alguns processos de desfiguração e de desterritorialização também estruturais à literatura brasileira contemporânea, e que têm funcionado como interlocutores particularmente críticos de uma experiência urbana de violência, instabilidade e segregação. Pois, se um imaginário do medo e da violência é o que organiza fundamentalmente a paisagem citadina dominante na literatura brasileira contemporânea, o mais habitual na vertente diretamente documental e ilustrativa dessa literatura urbana não é o desdobramento, a instabilização da perspectiva, ou o tensionamento formal, mas, ao contrário, uma espécie de catalogação patológico-criminal de lugares e tipos humanos, o medo da heterogeneidade social, a criminalização das divisões sociais, o reforço de uma recorrente paranóia urbana - o que explica em parte a popularização, em sintonia com um sentimento generalizado de insegurança, das histórias do crime e de thrillers detetivescos no Brasil desde as décadas de 1980-90. O que não apontou necessariamente para uma complexificação nos processos formais, na prática literária e na figuração da experiência histórica recente. Combinando-se, via de regra, ao contrário, tematização policialesca e catalogação simplificadora. A complexificação crescente da forma e da consciência social resultando, frequentemente, não exatamente dessa imposição representacional, desses retratos literários explícitos, ilustrativos, do urbano, mas sim da produção de espaços propositadamente não-representacionais e das zonas liminais, ambivalentes, transicionais da subjetividade, processos cuja dimensão crítica procuro enfatizar neste ensaio.

1. Introduction

Brazilian literary imagination has been predominantly urban over the last decades. This is evidenced even in works with strong regional content, such as those by Raimundo Carrero, in stories about migration or difficulties in social adaptation, as in As Mulheres de Tijucoapapo [The Women of Tijucoapapo] by Marilene Felinto, or where traces of the rural experience, such as in Angu de Sangue [Blood Cornmeal] by Marcelino Freire, are sometimes juxtaposed with everyday urban life. This urban dominance is a reflection of the fact that the country's population is now 80 per cent urban, as well as the reconfiguration of tensions between localism and cosmopolitanism, the rural and the urban. These are fundamental aspects for local cultural self-awareness and are increasingly marked by the hypertrophy of one of the poles, by the unfolding of mediations between the urban social organization and the artistic form, where duplication and representability do not necessarily mean an increase in the complexity of formal processes, of literary practice and of the recent historical experience. Since this growing complexity often results not exactly from explicit, documented representations of the urban, but rather from the production of non-representational spaces and liminal, ambivalent, transitional zones of subjectivity.

Thus I have opted, in this paper, to examine, in Brazilian literary culture, a production other than rap or funk lyrics, for example, which register explicitly the violent and excluding elements of everyday life in the outskirts of large Brazilian cities, or than the trend in recent prose marked by close, direct accounts, such as the novel Capão Pecado [Sin Capão], purposely written in ghetto language, with autobiographical material, by Férrez, a former baker, son of a bus-driver, a resident of the Capão Redondo neighborhood in São Paulo's south zone, or such as the prisoners' stories which have been compiled into the volume Letras de Liberdade [Letters of Freedom]. A kind of testimonial prose containing also street memories, such as the book Por que não dancei [Why I didn't Dance/How could I survive], written by a former homeless girl, Esmeralda do Carmo Ortiz; or homoerotic itineraries, such as those by José Carlos Honório; and dominated by a neo-documentary work which has been intensified in Brazilian contemporary fiction. A fiction that is sometimes marked by a kind of overlapping of the ethnographic and the fictional – of which both the novel Cidade de Deus [City of God] by Paulo Lins and the group of accounts and fragments of everyday street-life that make up Vozes do Meio-Fio [Curb Voices], by anthropologists Hélio R. S. Silva and Cláudia Milito, are good examples – and other times marked by a double record, where photos and accounts are mirrored, giving place to a succession of illustrated books which would almost become a genre pattern of this representational imposition.

This is what happens in Capão Pecado [Sin Capão], where the narrative is accompanied by two sets of professional and amateur photos, which seem to materialize the romanesque geography, and in Estação Carandiru [Carandiru Station], an account by Dráuzio Varella of his voluntary work as a doctor in São Paulo Prison, to which he added a vast pictorial archive taken from his private

property, private collections and newspaper files, by way of a supplement, lending the report a photojournalistic referendum.

The books' structures are similar, based as they are on producing a relationship of similarity between photographic images – of a segment of urban periphery in Capão Pecado [Sin Capão] and of the largest prison in Brazil in Estação Carandiru [Carandiru Station] – with texts that are free of ornamentation, use short sentences, a sprinkling of paradox, of anecdotes, are full of nicknames, ghetto expressions, proverbs and examples of verbal violence, many dialogues and a true exercise in typology, based on the one hand on a prison population, and on the other, on the destiny of the survivors of one of the poorest regions of São Paulo. In both cases, it seems that the function of the photography is to supply evidence for the narrative, which, though lending it immediate visibility and recognition, also produces a relationship of discursive dependence evident in the narrative style as regards its visual counterpart.

Though at first glance this pairing of photo and word seems to bring the reader closer to the urban material in question and produce a literary materialization of the urban experience, a different meaning comes about when it is seen that the fundamental operation in these illustrated accounts is actually to put the narrative resources between brackets, as if they were tools for amplifying the field of contextual visibility, which is reinforced by the photos and the parajournalistic discourse.

The narrative process is, then, neutralized to make way for a series of images, a documental imposition. This, however, tends to reproduce already visible typologies and prevailing, standardized conceptions¹ as far as these populations are concerned, and in so far as the fact that the perspective for observing – approximate perspective, that is – is frozen in a restrictive presentification, whose model is the collection rather than the historical experience.

Though in a very different way, this representational imposition can be perceived also in works like Angu de Sangue [Blood Cornmeal], by Marcelino Freire, where the purposely 'derealized' photographic images nevertheless perform an illustrative function, or in Treze [Thirteen], by Nelson de Oliveira, illustrated with photos extracted from the admissions file of an Victorian English asylum, books where the grotesque aspect of the images serves equally, but perversely, to reduplicate the unusual, but ordinary, urban scenes and types in these tales.

2. Reterritorializations/Deterritorializations

The reiterated mutual mirroring movement between account and illustration generally functions in these illustrated books as a presentification

¹ This explains in part why in October 2001 Estação Carandiru had been on the best-sellers' list for 88 weeks (Veja, 27 October 2001).

expedient, as a production of evidence by means of shifting the reader's attention from the narrative process towards the context, towards the extra-literary referent of these accounts and fictions. But, as they seem to capture, with documentation, the urban referent and frequently bring it closer to the reader, when these images are observed, we find that they operate as clichés, re-impressions of a predictable repertoire of types and situations which (contrary to what they seem at first sight) stress social distinctions already fixed in everyday life. The broadening of the area of visibility may partly correspond, in these cases, to a re-statement of the distance between observer and documented matter, to restriction and immobilization of the historical perspective, to a conservative movement of reterritorialization.

This does not happen in Treze [Thirteen], where the mere fact of resorting to a Victorian photographic/hospital file already produces tension between this anachronistic photographic image and present storytelling. Nor does it happen in "Minha História Dele" [My History of Him], another illustrated text, by Valêncio Xavier, published in the first issue of the magazine Ficções. There, only four images of a Korean man are available, a street-dweller of Curitiba who, as a sandwich-board man, carries his own story handwritten and hanging on his body. In this case, the re-duplication between text and image seems to reach such an extreme that even the account and the handwriting used for it are elements extracted from the posters hanging on the city wanderer's body - the account itself being apparently inscribed in the photos. The alternation between proximity and distance, noticeable in the internal contrast of each of the two pairs of almost totally identical photos, which constitute the tale, makes the beggar's observation temporal and points out, by means of the pronominal ironic play on words ("My History of Him") in the title, the link between the observer and the homeless man.

Valêncio Xavier's story gets closer, in this sense, to one of the most expanding topoi in Brazilian urban imaginary – that of the "chance encounter" between disparate people -, defined by the São Paulo film critic Ismail Xavier as "isolated experiences, marked by a certain singularity", offered by "migration" or by the "city space"². It would seem that such experiences also have recent cinematographic examples, as Ismail Xavier points out, in the fictional meeting between Sarah Bernhardt and three 'hillbillies' from the interior of Minas Gerais in Amélia by Ana Carolina; between the boy Josué and a former teacher, Dora, in Central do Brasil [Central Station] by Walter Salles Jr.; between poor boys who, by chance, are armed and an American man and his family in Como Nascem os Anjos [How Angels are Born] by Murilo Salles; between a fugitive prisoner and a middle-class young lady on New Year's Eve in O primeiro dia [Midnight] by Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas. These are meetings that, in a dialogue with Baudelairean urban pictures, also manifest themselves in Brazilian contemporary poetry; as in "Spiritus ubi vult spirat", a poem by Sebastião Uchoa Leite where

² Xavier, Ismail, "O cinema brasileiro dos anos 90" (entrevista), in Praga. Estudos Marxistas nº 9. São Paulo, Hucitec, 2000, pp. 110-111, 116-117. See also Mário Sérgio Conti, "Encontros Inesperados" (entrevista com Ismail Xavier), in Mais!. Folha de S. Paulo, 3 Dec. 2000, pp. 8-9.

the subject, when crossing Presidente Vargas Avenue, comes across “a survivor”, with her skirt raised, while all the other people pass by, indifferent; as in the meeting with the street dweller in “031197”, by Régis Bovincino, of whom it is said, at a certain point: “He could suddenly have drawn out the knife, on the sidewalk, they say”; as in the poem “Em sua cidade” [In your town], by Duda Machado, where, in the middle of the Bahian landscape, boys and beggars circulate among sellers and fruit baskets, while, from the perspective of the subject, “an intimate device,/destined to annul/ all presence,/ intercepted the contact/ and retracted it, while tender,/ to the root of the panic”.

But if from retreat we go to breathing, as in Duda Machado’s poem, to a “return to oneself” that “re-erected the world” “beyond any attempt/ to escape or dominate”, while going back to the short story “Minha História Dele” [My Story of Him] by Valêncio Xavier, then the extreme realism of the photos, as well as their reduplication and the fact that part of the text is presented on the boards hanging on the beggar’s body, function as an almost immediate expedient for removing perspective, for transiting – and not for separation – between subject and object, between the invisible narrator and the photographic image of a street dweller.

This effectively erases both the possibility of the subject retreating and of a merely illustrative relationship between text and photo, since it is the very succession of images (including those containing text) that produces the conflicting, uncomfortable narrative, set in action by the meeting with the homeless man, by the visual cut-outs and additions imposed on the board-text that covers him and by the exercises of moving away and getting closer to this urban picture. Unlike the experience of segregation that dominates everyday city life, the implicit violence in this urban picture would then seem to result in a kind of unfolding of the visual intake, producing a double perspective of the account. For, in this case, the homeless man also seems to observe his text observer, besides the fact that the raw reproduction of his handwritten board also materially grants him a narrative function.

This device would become structural also in João Gilberto Noll’s work, where the narrators, invariably wandering and homeless, fictionally re-portray the urban experience of the homeless and their multiple strategies for surviving on the streets. The title of one of his novels involving, not by chance, a type of erratic narratorial auto-classification as a “quiet animal of the corner” (*quieto animal da esquina*).

Nevertheless, what is habitual in this illustrated urban literature is not the unfolding of perspective but rather the criminal-pathological cataloguing of places and human types (which is ridiculed in the collection of physiognomies in Nelson de Oliveira’s *Treze* [Thirteen]), the fear of social heterogeneity, the reiterated criminalization of social divisions, the reinforcement of a kind of endemic urban paranoia - to which the middle classes and financial elite respond by imposing self-segregation in the form of residential enclaves, shopping centers, business centers with, oftentimes, controlled attendance, and with investment in private security, body guards, night watchmen, alarms, fencing, privatization of streets and squares. This partly explains the popularization, in tune with this generalized

insecurity, of crime stories and detective thrillers in Brazil between 1980 and 1990, such as the fiction of Rubem Fonseca.

For an imaginary representation of fear and violence is what fundamentally organizes the dominant urban landscape of Brazilian contemporary literature. That can be partly explained as a direct relation to the rise in the rate of violent crime in the country's big cities during the 1980s and 1990s, with the strengthening of organized crime, the inefficiency of the police force and of the legal system in enforcing public security and justice, the growing visibility of the population contingent in absolute poverty that wanders through big cities, expelled from both the slums and from the fortified middle class enclaves, and a kind of generalized violence, reaching from traffic to family relationships, from football stadiums to professional killers and to private security and vengeance activities. This sometimes brings detective fiction closer to "discourses of fear", to the proliferation of "speeches of the crime"³ – both expressions used by Teresa Caldeira in Cidade de Muros [City of Walls], a study on "crime, segregation and citizenship in São Paulo".

These "discourses" reorganize symbolically not only urban panic but also, in an equal measure, the fear of losing social status and property, the financial instability, internal dilemmas and structural social issues of Brazilian society. This criminalization of the social relations becoming more marked precisely during the period of political redemocratization in the country. And this movement appearing to function discursively by means of rigid classifications, stereotypes and segregation, recurrent not only in crime-related news stories and individual stories of muggings and different forms of violence and homicide, but also in the literary production of recent decades. A literary production that reterritorializes, with well-known criminal vocabulary, "a new pattern for organizing social differences in urban space"⁴, a distabilizing process of social change that affects the dominant relations of power and the exercise of citizenship.

The urban thematizations of the country's recent cultural production are not limited, however, to literary workings of ethnographic or criminal reterritorialization. Some defiguration and deterritorialization⁵ processes, which are structural to Brazilian contemporary poetry, function, thus, as particularly critical interlocutors of an urban experience of violence, instability and segregation. And it is these processes that will be examined next.

This does not mean, of course, that defiguration is the only path to a critical dialog between literary form and urban experience in contemporary Brazil. It is enough to remember, in this sense, as a counter-example, the book Sob a

³ Caldeira, Teresa Pires do Rio, Cidade de Muros. Crime, Segregação e Cidadania em São Paulo (São Paulo: Editora 34/ EDUSP, 2000), p. 9.

⁴ Id. Ibid., p. 11.

⁵ I borrow, here, expression first used, as it is known, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and reworked by Fredric Jameson in his book The Cultural Turn, but submitted to sufficiently distinct unfoldings and to a particular context, in this essay, that of the relations between the urban literary imagination and the cultural process in contemporary Brazil.

Noite Física [Under the Physical Night] by Carlito Azevedo. In this case, one urban image in particular – that of garbage scattered around Rio de Janeiro – turns into a privileged sign for the reader. From the initial poem of the book, which announces “the last flight of the blowfly”, from “the garbage on the corner”, running through the initial texts of almost all sections, with their references to “garbage dump”, to “the garbage bin on the corner”, to garbage bins that, in the “convulsed pitch-black” look like indistinct shapes, to the “pain in the glimpse of a dream” which, “with its speck of dirt, infiltrates” into the body. Transforming itself from external to internal, the garbage (which is in fact an aspect of the city’s physical space) almost turning into an inhabitant, an animated shape and a constituent element of the lyrical self. An incorporation through which an aspect of the nocturnal landscape lends painful physical materialization to the embodiment of the subject.

But if, in the case of Carlito Azevedo’s book, thematization of the urban is employed, in these images of the garbage, via proximity, via incorporation, this movement seems, however, to point simultaneously to an itching, a painful corporeal experience which is close to defiguration mechanisms, to bloody exposure of the bodies, by which means the subjectivity in Brazilian cultural production (especially since the 1980s) has been constituted, frequently by means of horror.

3. Subjectivity and horror

It is not difficult to notice a trace of some kind of Guignol in Brazilian cultural life in the last few decades: from the detailed descriptions of the corpses and murders of women in Acqua Toffana by Patrícia Melo to the exhumation of the corpses of the father and of a brother reported in the short story “A Carne e os Ossos” [The Flesh and the Bones] from the book O Buraco na Parede [The Hole in the Wall] by Rubem Fonseca; from the exposure of a child’s corpse pierced by a wooden stake, in one of the photographs by C. A. Silva exhibited in FUNARTE’s Gallery in 1996, to “the homeless girl killed naked” in the text, full of real portraits and police registers, by Valêncio Xavier. Or to the “teeth of putrefaction” that “swallow the body” in one of the poems from Cheiro Forte [Strong Smell] by Silviano Santiago, to the voracious living in the poem “Os Vivos” [The Living] by Ferreira Gullar, where “ferocious gluttons...devour the other living beings” and “even the dead eat/ fleshed bones voices”. From the amputated leg of the narrator in the novel Hotel Atlântico [Hotel Atlantic] by João Gilberto Noll to the subject – “all wired up” –stuck in a hospital bed in the section “Incertezas” [Uncertainties] from the book Ficção Vida [Fiction Life] by Sebastião Uchoa Leite.

Guignolesque reference is also particularly stressed in recent theatrical production. From O Livro de Jó [The Book of Job] and Apocalipse, by Antônio Araújo and the “Teatro da Vertigem” group, to As Bacantes [The Bacchante] by

José Celso Martinez Correia, from the descriptions and exposures of torture that constitute Bugiaria [Monkeyshines], by Moacir Chaves and the “Péssima Companhia”, to the work of Gerald Thomas in the 1990s in general. His Nowhere Man, for example, started with its “Faust” wearing rather bloodstained clothes, with a female pseudo-cadaver as interlocutor. And, in his second production of Quartet, by Heine Müller, the two characters, also with bloodstained clothes and knives, walked around amidst huge pieces of suspended meat and a backdrop with blood dripping everywhere - a horror component that has regularly been present in his theatre. Remember the parts of bodies scattered on the floor in Matogrosso, or the heart and head pulled out of the female figures in The Flash and Crash Days.

What seems to have happened in some of the Gerald Thomas productions of the last decade, however, is an increase in emphasis on these signs of blood, mutilation and physical torment, accompanied by his own ironic explanation that he is working, much of the time, with some of the most characteristic tricks of the “Grand Guignol” genre. From knives with retractable tips to tables that hide corpses, from color nuances to variations of composition and texture of the fictitious blood, to the loose head of the actress Fernanda Torres, pulled out from her body in The Flash and Crash Days and in O Império de Meias Verdades [The Empire of Half Truths] or to bodies riddled with arrows (such as Fernanda Montenegro’s) and large knives (as in the opening of Nowhere Man).

If the theatre of Grand Guignol, hugely popular from the end of the 19th century until the period between the World Wars, anchored its scenic effect to the medical or criminal fait divers and to a mixture of interpretation and skilful exercise of magic, what seems to make it specially curious is, on the one hand, its transformation of technical innovations (from lighting tricks to sound effects for telephones, automobiles and to medical novelties) into dramatic elements and, on the other hand, the presentation of a kind of horror pastiche of not only the modern experience of the body and of subjectivity itself as unstable and fragmented, but above all of the figuration of the body as “body in pieces”, which is dominant (though with variations of meaning) in modern and post-modern art. And undoubtedly there is, in this sense, in recent Brazilian Guignol, a dialogue with extreme cruelty to the body present in some examples of contemporary body art, a dialogue with tormented figuration, the paradigmatic and multivalent fragmentation in artistic production of the 20th century, from the mouths of Bruce Nauman or Francis Bacon to the huge eyes, pieces of legs, hands and several dismemberments employed by Louise Bourgeois, from the photographs of corpse fragments by Andres Serrano to the corporeal suppressions in the work of Samuel Beckett.

However, there may be other sources, not exclusively plastic, for this trace of the guignol. And some of them might suggest themselves, as in the theatre of “Grand Guignol” itself, with a mere reference to the country’s journalism at the end of the 1990s: for instance, the succession of photographs of bones and file images of old portraits and of corpses killed by the leftist militants; the Brazilian politicians gone missing during military authoritarianism, which invaded the

newspapers at the end of the 1990s thanks to new information having been brought to light; to the discovery of bones and to the lawsuits filed by families involved in the identification of their dead.

Alongside this political picture file from the period of military dictatorship in the country, it is not difficult, however, to notice a near-exacerbation of everyday life that is marked by the banalization of violence, by brutalization exposed daily on the crime pages of the Brazilian press. And exposed with intensified repercussions, in the case of slaughters perpetrated by the police force, such as the eleven youths killed in Acari, Baixada Fluminense, Rio de Janeiro, in 1990; the ten adolescents murdered in Morro de São Carlos in 1992; the massacre of 111 inmates of the Carandiru prison, São Paulo, in the same year; the executions of 21 people in Vigário Geral and eight homeless boys at Candelária Church, Rio de Janeiro, both in 1993, and of nineteen landless workers in the municipality of Eldorado dos Carajás, Pará, in 1996; or the murder of eleven people in Ponto de Encontro, a bar in Francisco Morato, São Paulo, in 1998. These events standardize, via photojournalism, a peculiar type of painful corporeal iconography, highlighting the dissemination of violence, the bloody aspect of contemporary Brazilian history.

In this refiguration in pieces, in agony, of characters, portraits and narrators in recent Brazilian cultural production, there seems to be a combination of dialog with the corporeal fragmentation characteristic of modern art, and with one of its artistic pastiches, the Guignol; with the torture, executions, banishment and political experience of the 1970s, and with the increase of violent crime, including that committed by public security forces in Brazil during the 1980s and 1990s. Attention must, however, be paid to the fact that, in these attempts at bloody identification of fictional subjects, the exposure of these subjects is not anchored to subjective idealizations, to cohesive corporeal images, that the very process of figuration and subjectivization involves a kind of non-disposable awareness of instability, an obligatory concomitant impulse for defiguration, for the guignolization.

It is, however, an ambivalent defiguration. For if it sometimes points at victimization, at other times masks of the agents of violence are superimposed on characters, narrators and subjects, often maintaining equally a kind of hybrid register where a combination of victim and persecutor is what moves the literary subjectivization process. Hence, also, the proliferation of hybrid types, aberrations, figures which are self-defined as monsters in recent Brazilian literature. And which, in direct dialog with a particularly bloody context, by way of monstrous form, point to an epistemological gap, a classificatory destabilization, a confrontation in the cultural practice itself, with its limits of expressiveness and identification mechanisms, tried out before the affirmation of new forms of organizing social differences in cities based simultaneously on a globalizing homogeneity of space and an exacerbation of the panic of social heterogeneity, in the emergence of autonomous fortified citadels, in the expansion of violent criminality and the continuous violation of citizenship rights - precisely within the context of the political redemocratization process which is in motion in the

country. In the midst of this motion, it is by means of victimization and protean aberrant forms that it seems possible to engender fictional portraits, literary subjectivity, shapeless representations of differences, hybrid cultural bodies closely related to an historical process of redefinition of identities and of ways of managing the social aspect.

This does not mean that the monstrous forms and animalizations of contemporary fiction are univocal. We must note, in this sense, the differences between, on the one hand, the hybrid adolescent – arms too long, ostrich's legs, hair all wrong – in the short story "Pequeno Monstro" [Little Monster] by Caio Fernando Abreu, where two liminals are superimposed on this "small, small monster nobody wants" – puberty and the discovery of homosexuality; and, on the other hand, the self-cannibalizing ritual performed by a woman in "Canibal" [Cannibal], a short story by Moacyr Scliar in which we see the character forced into the ritual because her rich "foster sister" refuses to share her big food trunk, in a particularly cruel figuration of the social divisions in the midst of apparent economic prosperity.

What seems to be at stake, however, in these recent fictional anomalies and zoologies is a disquieting closeness, not in the least exotic, of those animals and monstrosities. Such is the case in the purposely invisible "aberrations" of Bernardo Carvalho. Or, in the short story "Mandrill" [Mandrill] by Zulmira Ribeiro Tavares, the proximity of the zoo housing the animal to a Sunday in a room with the television tuned in to a talent show. Or, in a seemingly inverse motion, as in Decálogo da Classe Média [The Decalogue of the Middle Class] by Sebastião Nunes, with the horrendous symbolizations of the middle class ("unlikely cross between cicadas and ants"), proliferation of genital organs, lizards, diverse insects, skulls full of mice, chameleons, dogs, pigs, tricephalic bodies, but always in the midst of the most habitual activities, weddings, business meetings, parties, sports. Or, in Nelson de Oliveira's short stories, full of "animals from the strangest places", "imprisoned creatures", haunted figures, people "moving against their own feet", sleepwalkers, cannibals, "primitive-mannered and malformed" people, "more beast than man", monsters at times hideous which, however, devote themselves to the most trivial of things - to telephone calls, checks, accounting, everyday things. In a kind of particularly perverse hybridization between everyday life and the bestial, between perversity and victimization, paralysis and annihilation. Hence the figure of the invincible dragon, which is able to turn into whoever, dissolving any possibility of self-identification, of differentiation, in the short story "Não sei bem o quê, aqui" [I don't really know what, here]. Hence the impossibility of self-recognition for the "little girl Victor" in the beautiful short story "A Visão Vermelha" [The Red Vision] from the book Naquela época tínhamos um gato [We had a cat in those times]. Hence the disappearance, piece by piece, of Mr McPiffs's body, another of Nelson de Oliveira's characters, similar to Angelina, the "slender and dark" creature "with big scared eyes", who devours herself in the short story "Canibal" [Cannibal] by Moacyr Scliar. In an act of destabilizing the actual boundary of the monstrous, these examples look like a

kind of laconic refiguration of G.H's "We are not human" in Clarice's Lispector's novel A Paixão Segundo G.H. [The Passion According to G.H.].

4. Sebastião Uchoa Leite, the indetermination of identity and the noises of the polis

From the point of view of contemporary Brazilian poetic production, animalized, hybrid, anti-physical refigurations of the self, ambivalent or negative unfoldings of the subject, would function as a reinforcement of the anti-lyrical perspectives, as dramatizations of identity, as broken conciliation between voice and figure, and would play a particularly crucial role in works such as that of Sebastião Uchoa Leite, for example, where the subjective alter-representations, "entanglements of the self", "bifid tongues", fictions of the self, are composed of nuclear aspects of methodical negativity. Negativity that, above all in his most recent books, and in an evident dialog with biographical circumstances, would involve an agonizing reiterated exposure of the subject, often in a hospital environment, examples of which being the "Animal Máquina" [Machine Animal] section in A Uma Incógnita [The Incognito One], or the ten texts that form the section "Incertezas" [Uncertainties] in Ficção Vida [Fiction Life], and poems such as "Agulha" [The Needle] or "Uma Voz do Subsolo" [A Voice from the Underground], from A Espreita [The Lookout]. But also a negativity that has in this subject in agony only one of the many "fictions of the self" – "Here am I: all-the-selves/ self-scatological/ self-cryptic/ self-end" – which Sebastião Uchoa Leite worked on. These 'fictions of the self' range from serpents, "monster/ wound around syllepsis", to vampires - Dracula, Nosferatu - from detective heroes to replicants and various murderers, from "Mr Leite" to "a cornered João Cabral/ or a laughable Valéry", from Bogart, Robert Walker, Yves Montand, Delon, Montgomery Clift to "cockroach without feelers", "bat from the bar", from "doubly metamorphosed monsters" to "residue from sweeping/ that is collected/ with a dustpan".

Disguises, concealment, exchanged identities which frequently convert poems into police micro-narratives where the central element is here a climate of general suspicion and there a kind of persecution of identity – of the subject, of the poetic element 'on the edge of a cliff'. In this sense, it is no coincidence that in Jogos e Enganos [Games and Mistakes], one of his collections of essays, the poet has devoted himself to the study of the "metaphor of persecution", of the structure and fundamental repertoire of variations on the persecution theme in modern and contemporary cinematography. This functions as an exercise in self-reflection, bringing to mind the scenes in shadow, the preference for slants and sinuosity, the disguises and inversion of roles, the types of persecution which are dominant in his poetry.

At times, it is the perspective of the 'fleeing persecuted' that dominates, as in "Vida é arte paranóica" [Life is paranoid art]: "simply run/ soul of replicant/ until

they hit the plexus/ perplex target”. At other times, it is the voice of a persecutor, of a spy-poet or a vampire with “spiky nails/ pointed teeth”. Then again, it is the poetry itself that is persecuted: “We need/ radar/ and sonar intelligence/ to pick up shapes”. Still other times, in a third-person distanced perspective, it is the subject of the poem himself that is sought: “The non-hero searches for his negative:/ his inner jack-the-ripper/ that would not want/ only to kill./ But also much more:/ to see the entrails hanging out”. Frequently, however, as Sebastião Uchoa Leite points out in “A Metáfora da Perseguição” [The Metaphor of Persecution], “what seems to be perfectly marked territory – on the one side, the persecutor, and on the other the persecuted; on the one side, reason and on the other non-reason – is never so in an absolute way”⁶. As is represented in “Os Assassinos e as Vítimas” [The Murderers and the Victims], a poem where murderers, detectives and persecutors of all types go through an inversion of roles and are persecuted by their victims or by the objects they chase.

Besides the exchange of roles, however, a poetic method is forged, itself based on an ambivalent perspective – that of ‘lookout’, which suggests as much the need for a hiding place as it does a possible strike; as much the expectation of suffering an attack as the perpetration of a condemnable action. “(... There am I/ still as though I were another/ hired to commit a crime...)”, we read in “Um Outro” [Another One]. “(He, in general/ prefers to slip/ into a corner/ static/ as a viper/ before the strike/ he observes/ silently/ the passing of time/ controlled by the clocks/ he leafs through the pages/ of the half-open book/ the humid index of fear)”, we read in another poem from 1997. Notice that in both cases the texts are, not by chance, limited by parentheses, in a mixture of concealment and suspension, a kind of graphic characterization of the lookout. In both poems we anticipate potential violence of which the subject could be the agent as much as the victim.

The indeterminacy of identity would not be limited, however, to those representations of the subject, but would be equally spread over the relationship between the images of the self and those of space, in the poetry of Sebastião Uchoa Leite. Not for nothing does he point to a mutual aquatic dissolution of subject and landscape in the series of poems on rain in the book A Espreita [The Lookout]. “Andando na Chuva: São José” [Walking in the Rain: São José] is a good example: “My self-dissolving/ water-self/ hair/ body hair/ eyes/ all pores/ letting go”. Or it reveals – see “Numa incerta noite” [On an uncertain night] – a two-way contemplation, “inverted vertigo”, between the passer-by, “looking at the canopies of the trees”, and the leaves and canopies, whose “cyclopic vegetable eye” watches him while he crosses the streets. And neither is it by chance that his poetry points out the loss of limits between inside and outside, observer and urban landscape, as in “Inside/outside: Rio de Janeiro”, where the “stony street/

⁶ Leite, Sebastião Uchoa., Jogos e enganos (Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFRJ; São Paulo, Editora 34, 1995), p. 140.

with hurrying/ pedestrians” seen “there, outside”, “through the glass”, seems to slide “into the glass”, to come “from the other side of the table”. One of the most characteristic masks of the poetic subject, that of the serpent, is even attributed to the landscape of Rio. The serpent is transferred to Guanabara Bay in “O grande brilho” [The great sheen], a 1991 poem: “Infused in the sea of yellows/ The green/ red spots/ Of the serpent-bay”.

And, as opposed to the ethnographic and classificatory territorialization usually employed in the neo-documentary fiction of the 1990s, the production of a transitional zone between inside and outside, poet and landscape, in Sebastião Uchoa Leite’s poetry, seems to reduce hierarchic distances of observation between subject and urban matter. Particularly as the roles of observer and observed may always be inverted in his work. There are no moves towards cataloguing urban characters, the excluded, the homeless, criminals, as in ‘reporting’ literature, in the near-photographic prose of recent decades.

And if Sebastião Uchoa Leite’s urban portrayals are populated with “un-beings”, passers-by “under blue plastic tents”, specimens of “squatting mankind”, “static/ homeless/ facing the vile crowd”, the poetic perspective – always marked by a deaf violence – is not hierarchic or systemic: it is oblique. Or, as is explained in “Exibicionistas e Voyeurs” [Exhibitionists and Voyeurs], a poem from Ficção Vida [Fiction Life]: “Voyeurs look askance”. And, in this case, we could also add that they sometimes exchange roles. This happens in two note form poems from Ficção Vida [Fiction Life]. In one of them, “O Sobrevivente” [The Survivor], a subject watches “a mad woman” who “loudly debates Hamlet/ with herself” and registers with personal pronouns the overlapping of observer and observed: “That ‘being over there’/ amusing himself greatly/ With my sound mind”. In the other note, “A Obra Lírica” [The Lyrical Work], poem and feces are literally superposed, for the said “work” results from urban litter, from a character in a squatting position defecating right in the middle of Azevedo Coutinho street, in Rio de Janeiro.

It is partly through this constant possibility of crossing identity, social and spatial boundaries that, even though Sebastião Uchoa Leite regularly works with police storylines and recognizable narrative plots, an uneasy feeling is intensified in a reader exposed to liminal, ambiguous, discontinuous zones which unfold even in the most common, everyday environments and among immediately recognizable signs of urban landscape such as, in the case of Rio de Janeiro, the statue of Christ, the tunnel that links Botafogo to Copacabana, and Presidente Vargas Avenue. It is a movement towards destabilization and deterritorialization, uncomfortable from the point of view of poetical acceptance, which - assuming its direct relationship with the emergence of new urban practices, with the intensification of the asymmetric segregation of social space and of the generalization of violence and daily uncivil acts - does not limit itself to the inventory of Brazilian urban experience.

Rather, such experience becomes a fundamental element of structural indeterminacy and negativity, of a difficult process of literary formalization which, in Sebastião Uchoa Leite’s work, takes advantage of the clichés of criminalization

and destabilizes them into unusual acts of confrontation and solidarity between the subject and the “noises of the polis” and which converts the modern topos of walks around the city, and their implicit plots, into real antilyrical figures with a self-corroding narrative based on a construction made from syntactic and imagined cuts, from “non-localities” and from a “hyper-realistic game/ between the self and the margin”.

If, in the poetry of Sebastião Uchoa Leite, deterritorialization of the urban landscape is found to overlap a series of identity exchanges and defigurations, one would have distinct poetic results, the expedient in a similar procedure by Ítalo Moriconi, in whose collection Quase Sertão [Almost Sertão]⁷, a hybrid spatial figuration is formed – a city-desert; or by Angela Melim, whose poetry is marked by the recurrent problematization of the horizon; or by Duda Machado, in whose poems space is depicted as drifting, as an escape from formalization. This is to name but three significant examples of a movement of indeterminacy in urban figuration in contemporary Brazilian poetry. We could also add to this movement, from the window that is closed to the sight of the seascape “in such a way as to banish, to veil the unfurled/ seafaring afternoon”, from the poem “Proscrição” [Proscription], to the mist in which the bay is portrayed in “Enseada” [Bay], also by Lu Menezes; from what is almost a sidewalk inscribed on the body – “imperceptible/ trail of gadfly” – in one of the poems from Fábrica [Factory] by Fabiano Calixto, to the horizon “out of all perspective”, to the recurrence of the desert image, and a self-figuration of the subject as a cactus in Solo by Ronald Polito.

And if, strictly speaking, what demands attention is mostly spatial destabilization, these deterritorializations are not lacking in bloody components. From the “party suffering” referred to in one of Lu Menezes’s poems to the “armored” body of Ronald Polito, to the “sensation of heavy lead”, to the “stainless foot” of the factory worker, to the “fallen body”, “coagulated landscape” in Fabiano Calixto’s book. From the mass thefts/ megalopic slaughters/ infanticides” to the “man shot dead”, to the “Dantesque hell of the poor”, in Sebastião Uchoa Leite’s work. From the “breath of hard mortality” in Quase Sertão [Almost Sertão], to the “clothes line traversing the throat/ the comfort/ blunt dagger blade cutting the sky/ privation/ in the wire of the hanger” in the poem “Crente” [Believer] by Angela Melim. From the “wish to escape” in “Giro” [Whirl] by Duda Machado, to the “battle/ fought/ somewhere”, to the “I don’t know late at night/ if I’m hurt/ if my body/ is streaked/ with bruises” in the poem “Mau Despertar” [Bad Awakening] by Ferreira Gullar. Or to “I am poor, poor, poor”, “it differs and hurts, hurts”⁸ from “Vers de circonstance” by Carlito Azevedo.

The signs of violence in these figurations of the urban refer, of course, to the increase in violent crime and the equally violent responses to it, to the generalization of a feeling of risk and potential conflict and to the loss of collective

⁷ Sertão is a region of dry hills and scrub in Brazil’s drought-ridden northeast.

⁸ In Portuguese this is a play on words “difere” = differs/ “fere” = hurts: “difere, fere, fere”.

feeling in everyday big city life in Brazil. These issues have stimulated an equally increasing number of studies in the field of social science in the country. They have, at times, the advantage of tension between political redemocratization and expansion of bloody crimes, which doubled according to Angelina Peralva “between 1980 and 1997”. In her point of view, these signs are the result of insecurity amplified by the “interpenetration of the universe of the slums and that of the middle class”, by “authoritarian continuity” and by the restructuring of the relationships which were dominant until the end of the military dictatorship “between State, political system, nation and society”⁹. On the other hand, in Cidade de Muros [City of Walls], Teresa Pires do Rio Caldeira, points out that this contradiction “between the expansion of the political citizenship and the delegitimatization of civil citizenship” and the “disjunctive character of Brazilian democracy” are nuclear elements of a segregationist urban experience, relating violent criminality not only to the transformation of the “traditional configurations of power” but also to the “delegitimatization of the judiciary system as mediator of conflicts”, to the “privatization of the processes of revenge” and to the “legalization of forms of abuse and violation of rights”¹⁰. Or they can be related, as Luiz Eduardo Soares emphasizes, to the constitutive duplicity of Brazilian social organization - a society guided by elements of a “hierarchic cultural model” and “socialized according to a cultural model which is characteristic of liberal, egalitarian individualism”, a “liberal-democratic process” in the context of a “strong national tradition both authoritarian and excluding”¹¹. For when “the patterns of political exclusion are intense and most of the population does not acknowledge itself as participant of a collective journey”, as Maria Alice Rezende de Carvalho puts it, “the city becomes the object of private appropriation, of predatory practices and of rapine, a place where social resentment and distrust prosper”¹².

Thus, the perception of the city and of its literary figurations as defined spatial units, as common spaces of socialization, becomes problematic. Sometimes this perception expands into “sudden spaces” as in “Neste fio” [In this wire] by Régis Bonvicino; at other times it undergoes intense understanding as in the “four close walls”, in the “compact, null/ cocoon”, in the “sparse space” suggested in the book Solo by Ronald Polito. Sometimes the urban unfolds into desert, as is the case in Ítalo Moriconi’s Quase Sertão [Almost Sertão] or in the “desert city” mentioned in Duda Machado’s “Giro” [Whirl]. Sometimes this perception takes advantage of the “in-between spaces”, the transition zones, as in Angela Melim’s work. But with the difference that, in the case of this literary

⁹ Peralva, Angelina, Violência e Democracia: o paradoxo brasileiro (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2000), pp. 22, 59, 84, 89.

¹⁰ Caldeira, Teresa, op. cit., p. 343.

¹¹ Soares, Luiz Eduardo, “Uma Interpretação do Brasil para contextualizar a violência”, in Pereira, C. Alberto Messeder; Rondelli, Elizabeth; Shollhammer, Karl-Erik and Herschmann, Michael (eds.), Linguagens da Violência (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2000), pp. 34-36.

¹² Carvalho, Maria Alice Rezende de, “Violência no Rio de Janeiro: uma reflexão política”, in Pereira et alii (eds.), Linguagens da Violência, p. 56.

deterritorialization, it is not only the urban form that is the order of the day but also an internal process of formalization set in motion by contradictory guidance. Thus, the spatial indetermination, the formless geography points in the direction of the exposure of a formal experience marked by the exacerbation of the tensions between horizon and drift, figuration and destabilization, persistence and dissipation.

5. Ítalo Moriconi and the city as sertão

The mere superposition of the title Quase Sertão [Almost Sertão] on the photograph of a clearly urban landscape on the jacket of the 1996 compilation of poems by Ítalo Moriconi already indicates, through nomination, the dominance of an urban visual, albeit exposed from one of its potential opposites. The protean movement, the real condensation of the two images, however does not come into effect. Thus the adverb “almost”, which is responsible for the persistence of the two geographical references and the disparity evoked by them, for this conjugation of city and sertão, accumulation and desert. The structural images of the book then point simultaneously to a common environment and to the impossibility of metaphoric conciliation. The difference and latent conflict between them thus suggests a methodical amorphia, a deliberate limit – “word that is missing”, “half-words” – within this reversed figuration of the urban.

It is evident that, in this case, the images of the desert - the silence, the rough, the “odd vegetation, full of splinters” in the midst of the drift, the streets, “carnivals”, a “faceless crowd”, a “rain of shapes”, “arms”, “hips”, “delayed cars”, “unlit buildings”, “sidewalks” and a succession of anonymous love chases, “scratching in the asphalt” - lend to the evocation of the “sertão” the possibility of the exposure of the homoerotic paths of the city, the other city inserted into the regular city, into Rio Branco Avenue, into Copacabana, into the beach, into the everyday street corners. And also the possibility of recurrent tension between the most intimate and the most public, the sertão “further inside” and the “excessively urban”. A tension between the ganglions imploding in the neck and the McDonald’s restaurant in “(Notícias da AIDS)” [(News of AIDS)], “between a street corner and old anguishes” in “Noturno” [Nocturnal], between “my space”, “my insoluble look”, subjectivity, and a series of transitory anonymous forms, “sharp curves”, “surfaces”, “cliffs”, “vacant places”. Or between the city as described as the hollow of the night and the hollows of the male bodies haunting the erotic imagination in “Noturno” [Nocturnal]. A tension which is also accompanied by class tension between “the mature man and the street boy”, between the educated references spread throughout the poems and the object of the love chase, defined as “simple people”. And between a spatiality marked by the accumulation of “so many bodies”, of streets, buildings, corners and the reiteration of images of a “rural scheme”, of the desert, “imaginary plane tree”, a limitless void”.

The reference to the sertão in the poems of Ítalo Moriconi is not limited, however, to the trace of a homoerotic urban experience. It also seems to indicate dualities which persist in Brazilian literary life, oppositions and mediations between cosmopolitanism and the local datum element, between universalization and themes of regional, coastal and interior character. A duality which is latent, in a somewhat ironic way, in the city that is read as rural, and in the sertão, entangled with urban forms; the sertão, a paradigmatic image of 'brazility', of open skies geography, with inclement light and usually peopled by "cangaceiros" and survivors, but which is converted into the emptiness of the night, privileged landscape of the solitary love drift in Quase Sertão [Almost Sertão]. A spatial duality that serves as structuring principle to, for example, "Brinde" [Toast], a poem in the form of a dialog with the "Dead Ox" by Manuel Bandeira where images of the sertão-desert ("there is no Nile, plain or desert, only/ extension as a trace of the silence that flows") and a possible defined spatial configuration are opposed, and an enumerative drift ("dragging in the dark/ chains, martyrdom, rotten logs,/ mirrors and broken glass and the rest") contrasts with a "blind nostalgia/ on the open sea, unknown, abandoned sea of the corners".

And if the sertão is already usually simultaneously seen much as vastness, desert, wide horizon and as marked by sudden vegetable entanglements, rough, rare, intricate shapes, cacti, scrub, thus suggesting a certain potential figurative conflict, it is not strange that it has served as reference, in the poetry of Ítalo Moriconi, to the exposure of opposed, conflicting images, not only of the urban landscape but also of the poetic form and the very process of writing. For it is by means of a split image ("All is conflict of figure in the garden of powers of the sarcastic street"), which is, on the one hand, abstract figure, desire of "pure, undivided form", "the form, the form of the forms, the desert", and, on the other, "dislocated by fits, stars", "rain of figures", city. Spatial figurations which are defined in Quase Sertão [Almost Sertão] as internal disjunction both of the urban experience and of the poetic form.

This image conflict, related to the historical experience and conditions of literary production in contemporary Brazil, would involve above all, in the poetry of Angela Melim, the unfolding and disfiguration of the horizon and a methodical emphasis on the indetermination of the figured space. Such image conflict would also, in Duda Machado's work, overlap drift and form, constructive desire and dissipation.

6. Angela Melim and the dramatization of the horizon

If the reproduction of the jackets of all her previous books in the collection Mais Dia Menos Dia [Sooner or Later] (1996) by Angela Melim functions as a dividing mark, as a way of dating and singularizing the different sections of the volume, then equally the jacket illustrations, if carefully observed, highlight one of the privileged images of her poetry – that of the horizon. From the irregular horizontal line that crosses the bottom of the jacket of O Vidro O Nome [The

Glass The Name] (1974) to the straight cut that separates in two the title Das Tripas Coração [Taking Heart / Displaying Guts] (1978), to the female body lying down which seems to duplicate the outline of the background mountains in the illustration on the jacket of As Mulheres gostam muito [Women love it] (1979), to the title in miniscule, almost imperceptible letters displayed horizontally on a deliberate emptiness of representation in Vale o Escrito [What counts is what is written down] (1981), to the boats loose on the water with the mere suggestion of a possible limit which can almost be mistaken for the top cut of the thicker paper of the jacket in Os Caminhos do Conhecer [The Paths of Knowledge] (1981), to the empty space, further on, at which the female figure seems to point, in Poemas [Poems] (1987) or, finally, to Nelson Augusto's illustration in Mais Dia Menos Dia [Sooner of Later] (1996) where two lines and a little dark spot evoke the relationship between subject and landscape, poetical experience and thematization of the horizon and, through a limit line, delimit in space the duration and image of a time to come, which is suggested in the potential, almost near future of the title.

"I'm looking for the right word/ for the superposed parts of two spheres/ Intersection?/ And loneliness": the quest expressed in "Rabo de Galo" [Cock's Tail] in the 1996 book underlines Angela Melim's concern with the limiting, transitional spaces, the "rare clamps", the in-between spaces, the half-way, the horizons. And there is indeed a vast succession of seas and skies in her poetry. The water that "shines tranquilly at midday", "deep blues versus high seas", "torn blues/ huge/ clear landscapes", "an occasional purple coconut tree against the pink sky", "the lines of shimmering water and the blue, somewhat foggy mountains". A succession of atmospheric and maritime horizons which, with a tendency to the unlimited, to mirroring the "states of the soul", and seeming to reproduce a romantic-picturesque version of the landscape of Rio de Janeiro, would, in the case of Angela Melim, point in another direction.

They function, at once, as a way of cutting out the presence of the world, even if, at times, in the background – "green/ mined/ field", "mountain of cadaver", "violated ear, ruptured tympanum/ arms cut off/ heads"- as a constitutive element of the poetical experience. Thus there is a tension, via landscape, of the self-referent, expressive model dominant in Brazilian poetic production of the 1970s of which Angela Melim's first books are contemporaneous. And, as is suggested in the text of "Minha Terra" [My Land], marked by an image in negative of the land – "roots in the air" – and of the "going back home" theme, of taking root – "Nothing is natal" - it is about a landscape in direct contrast to descriptiveness in the romantic mold, a descriptiveness which would leave traces in subsequent Brazilian literature. In the poetry of Angela Melim, the fixedness of the target point is frequently eliminated and thus diverse forms for objectifying and lyrical distancing are exercised, as in "Assim uma Linha Verde da Janela – Um dia" [Thus a Green Line of the Window – One Day] : "Thus a green line of the window – one day/ instant, sudden/ running/ parallel to what is fast/ hill/ plain/ thin metal stiletto/ in the background". The "thin stiletto" is discreet, almost imperceptible, serving a similar function to the "mined/ field" of

the poem "Fogos Juninos" [Fireworks of June] in terms of the bloody unfolding of something similar to a mere descriptive picture.

Likewise, contrastive unfolding of the voice is also attempted. As in the casualness of the subject that gives information to the traveler in "Roteiro" [Travel Plan] and the systematic interruption of his speech by descriptive, impersonal and greatly detailed parentheses - duplicity that also attains the figurations of space. Hence the transformations – into diaphanousness, gauze, cloud, the silly cheap pink – that the very idea of a pink sky should get through in "No Céu Cor-de-Rosa" [In the Pink Sky] or the mobile, suspended definition of the landscape contained in "A Duna vira Nuvem, se quiser" [The Dune becomes Cloud, if it likes].

It is not, then, as extension, infinity open to the look, or as fixed, outlined limit that the image of the horizon seems to guide Angela Melim's poetic writing. Rather, it is, above all, as in-between space, as dislocation zone, exploration of blind spots, of the margins of indetermination in language and in landscape"¹³ as Michel Collot puts it in L'Horizon Fabuleux, which she thematizes and transports to the poetic space, the notion of the horizon. This, from the point of view of the graphic-syntactic organization of the poem, explains the number of structural blanks, intervals, parentheses, dashes in her texts. It also explains the marked taste for the isolated, loose verse that goes through the page, cutting or closing some of the poems like a divisor, like an internal line of the horizon and many times intensifying the unfolding or liminal conflict. Such as in the long sentence in "O Mar não Existe" [The Sea doesn't Exist] that, after five short verses, internalizes a sea of absence and impossibility in a sort of organic horizon in a state of corrosion: "Acidity is a fire that eats the dark pipe that runs throughout the body". Such as the verse in "Ronca um motor" [An engine roars] from Mais Dia Menos Dia [Sooner or Later] – "It is summer opening up". Separated from the other verses by two blank spaces and seeming to synthesize, by means of graphic highlight, the previous images of the boat, the sea and the heat and also seeming to represent a temporal-landscape extension "in open skies", accompanied, however, by another horizon, one which is conflicting, that inverts not only its amplifying movement but also the temporal reference to a period that is beginning, the genesis of summer transforming itself into the image of a past that is close to dissolution: "Afternoon, ice-cream, love/ balcony/ in bowls of the past/ melting".

Instead of being a spatial/temporal foundation or point of guidance from the subjective perspective, the awareness of the horizon in the poetry of Angela Melim points, therefore, to a systematic motion for mutual re-dimensioning of subject and landscape, of which the reflection on death in "Lemon Brother" is a good example. That reflection is, in fact, the mere register of a fruit that falls and rolls on the ground "which now engulfs/ the open/ desperate flesh/ of the lemon". A further good example is her preference for intervals, for the lines that figure

¹³ Collot, Michel, L'Horizon Fabuleux (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1988), p. 17.

and disfigure the space and the writing, for a kind of dramatization of the horizon, unfolded into diverse, albeit obligatory, forms of conflict and indetermination.

“And she would like”, we read in Os Caminhos do Conhecer [The Paths of Knowledge], “to paint her nails red. While she wrote the words in the notebook she would notice the fingers with shiny tips holding the ballpoint pen and feel conflicting pleasures”. A movement similar to that where - between a “there, inside” and a “jasmine tree” in “Mulheres” [Women], between an “on the surface” and a “deep pit” in “Faca na água” [Knife in the water], between “suspended crests/ stones of salt/ threads of sea” and “its faraway bottom/ anchor/ the sand beds and their spotlessly clean sheets” in “A Ship” - “windows”, “lakes on the chest”, “ship”, borderline images, types of ‘non-places’ are figured. To those images we could add the sheath, the clothesline, the sea front, the gaps, the edges, the empty space, the bars and the margin from so many other of her poems where these conflicting directions are tensioned and live with each other. Or, amidst a succession of seascapes and landscapes which at first sight are sparsely populated, almost ‘storyless’, they activate a sort of deaf, almost imperceptible conflict between the natural picture and the historical horizon. Between a lyrical exercise around the sun, flowers and loss as in “Corajoso como a Beleza” [Brave as Beauty], with its succession of warlike images: shots, bullet, pain, roars, combat. Between “the tiles/ the green dull chlorine/ the swimming pool” and the “wire” that preserves, in “Álbum” [Album], the “smell of jasmine” and “live blood/ held with difficulty”, the “clear blue sky” and “grenades” “fire, smoke”, in “Fogos Juninos” [Fireworks of June]. Or between the horizon of the city and that of the writing process, in “Trilha” [Trail], with the mediation of a third, warlike horizon and of “siege, casualties, barricade, weapons”, elements that seem to set new dimensions historically to those horizons.

7. Duda Machado and the methodical drift

Duda Machado’s poems, on the other hand, though equally marked by a conflictive exposure of space, seem to be moved by a counter-organizational principle, by a methodical indetermination of a more varied sort which unfolds and re-invents from within, indicating a purposely unstable poetic form - one of escape. This poetic form is, not by chance, figured repeatedly by images that are marked precisely by movement, transparency and the tendency towards the formless, towards the deterritorialization. Such as the images of the wind and the wave which are fundamental elements for the self-explicitness of poetic narrative based on modulation (“who reigns?/ a modulation/ capable of tuning/ understanding”), based on the tension between going off course and condensation, drift and a wish for settling down (“breeze/ just formed/ the confluence/ between passing-by and dwelling”). These elements dominate Margem de uma onda [Edge of a wave] (1997), his latest book.

There is, however, a recurrence of those aerial, aquatic, mobile images from his earlier work Zil (1977). From the association of the book to the river, which is present in the initial text of this volume, to the “sea/ on the edge of the hulls” in “Verão” [Summer], to the “liquid, cascading, filling” vowels or to the images of cereus jamacaru¹⁴ flying in “Ária” [Aria] or to the poem/question about what would make a louder sound, “the flight or the singing of a bird”. These images in motion also dominate his second book, Um Outro [Another One] (1990), as in his several routes, targets in motion, the crowd defined as “windmills of arms”, the rain that follows the young lady, a cyclist that passes by and the setting on wheels of even “fixed ideas”, the latter an almost paradoxical example of the aeolian, unstable poetic narrative of Duda Machado.

However, in Um Outro [Another One], winds, flights and perpetual motion are contrasted with an exploration, also recurrent, of the margin, the horizon, the limit, the happening, the language. These elements also show a contrast between “contemplator, sky and sea”, “sea and asphalt”, “garden and evening”, “death-life”. Between a wish for contour, outline, formalization and a sort of hesitation of forms, of inevitable dematerialization. “Life,/ without measure/ that meaning / severity”, we read in the second poem in Um Outro [Another One]. “The horizon”, so the first stanza of “Juntos” [Together] goes, “is the light/ that in such unanimous color/ extinguishes the surfaces/ which it lives on”. Just as, in the cloudy internal mirror, we read in “Tanto Ser” [So Much Being] “acts are disfigured” and the body is shown as “impalpable, carcass/ that the spirit cannot find”.

In Margem de uma onda [Edge of a wave], this tension between formalization and dissipation, figuration and imminent defiguration, thematized, in different ways, throughout the whole the book, would give way to the singular poetic narrative as exposed in “Fable of the Wind and the Form”, “Swimming Pool Morning” and “Edge of a wave” – which is partly connected to “Imitation of water” by João Cabral de Melo Neto. An analogy is established, through denial at first, between the wind and the form, incompatible elements in a state of undiminishing disagreement because, on the one hand, of the desire for persistence which is characteristic of the form and, on the other hand, of the fleeting aspect which is characteristic of the wind. In both cases, however, the diverse routes would signal a correspondence, in reverse, between these differences, which would lead to mutual self-denial. With the form, through the activation of a process of multiple unfolding in metamorphosis. With the wind, due to the possibility that it can suddenly take a form, supposing its movement strikes, for example, “an aeolian harp/ or Calder’s mobiles”, as the poem’s two last verses emphasize.

The curious fact, in the case of this fable, lies not only in the “unison disagreement” on which it is based, but also on the very fact that the two images necessarily lead towards their own demise, as is the way with the voice that “withdraws” in “Interferência” [Interference], with the color that “falls on itself” in

¹⁴ In Portuguese, mandacaru, a characteristic plant of the sertão

“Aventura da Cor” [Adventure of the Color], with the details that are “shaped by desegregation” in “Poética do Desastre” [Poetry of Disaster], with the “fatigue” that “to each thing/ unfolds and dissipates” in “Dentro do Espelho” [Inside the Mirror], with the bedroom that “after condensing/ time and space” focuses on the window and finds the emptiness and “the limits of the sidewalk/ below” in “Resumo quase abstrato” [Almost abstract summary]. In the midst of this succession of dissolution and the threat of self-annihilation which is built into the images that dominate so many of those poems, it is not strange that some of them are converted, on the contrary, into genealogies of form, such as “Traço e Movimento” [Line and Movement], “Fragmentos para Novalis” [Fragments for Novalis], “Condição” [Condition] or “À Noite na Estrada” [On the Road at Night]. Neither is it strange that form and drift are presented in an explicitly geminated way in the poem “Trevo” [Clover]: “an image in drift/ so dense/ in its self-absorption/ that it excites/ the desire for form/ until it dies away/ and its drift is reaffirmed/ eight octaves higher”.

And, a fundamental element of Duda Machado’s poetic method, it is not merely a reflection on indetermination, but rather a composition process which is in itself – and not only in its images - internally tensioned by structural negativity and resistance to formal unification. An internal tensioning that is manifested both by means of an expedient that is recurrent in the enumeration (exemplified by his two “Almanaques” [Almanacs]) and in contradictory images (“and at 40°, a wintery unhappiness”) as well as by means of sudden cuts in the poem: another voice (as in the third stanza of “Fala” [Speech] or in the middle of “Corte e Costura” [Sewing]); dots (as in “Album”); an interval (as in “Psiu” [Hey] and the rest of “Fantasma Camarada” [Friendly Ghost]); an exchange of register (as in the impersonality of the first six stanzas and the intimacy of the last two verses of “Oração com Objetos” [Sentence with Objects]); a question (as in the verses in brackets of “Edge of a wave”).

A tensioning that is equally manifested, in the poetry of Duda Machado, through the irruption, among aerial figures and formal dissipations, of extremely concrete, almost brutal images: the beggar in “Flores de Flamboyant” [Flamboyant Flowers]), the scenes showing persecution, searching and execution in “Fim de Semana” [Weekend], the bus passengers converted into indistinct hybrid beings in “Carapicuíba”, the egg-laying and the carrion children in “Urubu-Abaixo” [Vulture Below]. In spatial figuration work as represented by the poet himself in “Devoração da Paisagem” [Devouring the Landscape]. In this poem, an appropriately tranquilizing first stanza, with a simple description of a view – with houses, hills, trees, road and brook – is followed by three deterritorializations: the first in the sense of an expansion – “colors that surpass distances”, “the look that wanders and remains/ in search of its home”; the second in the sense of an unfolding of the target, a contraction in the landscape – “from somewhere,/ away from the retinas/ the beast bursts forth”; the third showing the imprisoned landscape, relating its devouring. And pointing to the suggestion of a sort of historical and formal impossibility of the landscape and of bloodless spatial figurations. Hence the frayed superposition – “almost”- of sertão

and city in the poetry of Ítalo Moriconi, the conflicting unfolding of horizons in Mais Dia Menos Dia [Sooner or Later] by Angela Melim, Sebastião Uchoa Leite's indeterminations of identity, the counter-formalization converted into active principle of composition in Duda Machado's work. Distinct exercises of deterritorialization and spatial non-representability which, through denial and conflict, seem on the contrary to contribute to the intensification of the perception of the present moment and amplify the formal investigation itself when it intersects the poetic practice to the recent historical unfolding of a violent, segregating, authoritarian urban experience, such as that of Brazil.

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