

ESSAY ON THE SIGN: EXCHANGE, LANGUAGE, SPACE AND A WORK BY NUNO RAMOS

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ABSTRACT

In *Ensaio Sobre a Dádiva* (2014/2015), Nuno Ramos starts out from and refers to Marcel Mauss' *The Gift*, reaching a cumulative turning point that remits to a decisive assemblage in his poetics: the production of planes of articulation between heterogeneous elements. While putting into action a problematic of exchange, Ramos re-enunciates a space of aesthetic-historical remissions central to certain passages between modern and contemporary arts, relaunched into the relations between body and space. Therefore, starting from a reading of the sign as the elementary entity of linguistic and anthropological structuralisms by Patrice Maniglier, this article explores a possible field of reciprocal translations between visual arts and poetry, anthropology and philosophy, also delving, further, with Jacques Rancière, into Stéphane Mallarmé and Marcel Broodthaers, with Lévi-Strauss and Saussure and certain lines of debate within contemporary arts, into the problems between the visual arts milieu and an ontological horizon of thought with the arts.

KEYWORDS

Nuno Ramos; Sign;
Poetry and visual
arts; Exchange;
Ontological turn.



With *Ensaio Sobre a Dádiva* (Essay on the Gift), the writer and visual artist Nuno Ramos recasts, within a new order of consequences, a poetics anchored in the production of crossing-points between media, practices and heterogeneous modes of assemblage developed throughout the last three decades. From the point of view of the artist's trajectory, the work echoes, initially, a statement of the insufficiency of the "matter-form" pairing, as the central interpretative operator of the plurality of the aforementioned poetics. However, more importantly, what appears at the forefront in the structuring of this work, as elementary as it is prone to immoderation, is exactly an opening field of binary oppositions charged with an elevated historical and aesthetic density: determination and indetermination, materiality and immateriality, verbal language and plasticity, finite and infinite, reversible and irreversible, intelligible and sensible, as well as the long-lasting and vastly inoperative opposition between "art" and "life". Thus, the opening of these pairings should necessarily pass through the acumination of a mode of attention that incides on the continuous gradients that constitute their environment, which means following latent developments in that environment of environments of human intellect, namely, language.

In both variants of the work¹, Marcel Mauss' (2002) classic essay inspires, according to the artist², the construction of a system of "impossible exchanges", exchanges between things that cannot be traded or in the exchanging of which no clear meaning can be found. In his essay, Mauss (2002) studied circuits of "giving, receiving and returning" which would be indispensable to the functioning of the societies in question, specifically, however, within a mode of social causality wherein reciprocity transcends the production of mercantile value. Far from suggesting a solely voluntaristic logic that would escape from all forms of obligation, this functioning led to a peculiar synthesis between voluntaristic and coercitive dispositions. Therefore, there would be something in the very things being exchanged that would compel the agents to exchange them, which leads the author to a new conceptualization of the inextricable nexus, or co-extensivity, between symbolism and the natures of social relation.

It is at this point that Lévi-Strauss arrives at his critical intervention in the celebrated essay *Introduction to the work of Marcel Mauss* (Lévi-Strauss 1987). Mauss would extract the magical notions of hau and, mainly, mana, from an order of reality other than that of the exchange relations themselves, notions which would arise, then, from the realm of "feelings, volitions and of beliefs", making mana an "emotional-mystical cement", which would articulate exchange relations. Lévi-Strauss, on the other

1 Fundação Iberê Camargo, 2014; Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, 2015. All artworks mentioned in the present article have their documentation available on the artist's website: <http://www.nunoramos.com.br>.

2 See, for example, Giufrida (2015).

hand, proposes thinking of mana's statute as a "symbolic value zero", in the same gesture through which he shifts the emphasis on the gift from "a complex edifice built on the obligations of giving, receiving and returning" toward "a synthesis immediately given to, and given by, the symbolic thought" (1987, 58). It was a question, therefore, of radicalizing in another direction the approximation between the nature of social relations and that of symbolism, which would be distinguished by a kind of synthesis "which, in exchange as in any other form of communication, surmounts the contradiction inherent in it, that is the contradiction of perceiving things as elements of dialogue, in respect to self and others simultaneously, and destined by nature to pass from one to the other" (1987, 58-59).

As we shall see further on, Nuno Ramos' work maintains the whole dimension of the effective agents of the exchange in suspension, configuring what amounts solely to an open system of exchanged objects. Thus, it becomes possible to understand this contemporary rereading of *The Gift* as a poetic exploration of what Lévi-Strauss suggested as the overcoming of the "contradiction" proper to that notion of exchange. An overcoming which Patrice Maniglier formulates as remitting to the "property" or "force" of the things themselves, (Maniglier 2017, 172) which would mobilize the exchange acts with the "dual and overdetermined" nature of things as signs (Maniglier 2005).

Maniglier's comment on Lévi-Strauss' reading of *The Gift* is situated within a project dedicated to "rewriting" the birth of structuralist thought following a revision of Ferdinand de Saussure's intellectual legacy (Maniglier 2006). Anchored mainly on a dialogue between philosophy and semiology, while making use of recently discovered secondary materials allowing for a new vision of the "semiological project" that Saussure announced for structuralism, Maniglier reconstructs the Saussurean legacy as a "symbolist philosophy" of the spirit (Maniglier 2006). In remitting the dimension of symbolic thought to what has been called, in the passage from the XIXth to XXth centuries, "symbolist poetry", the author allows for a return to the dialogue between Lévi-Strauss and Mauss, taking it up as a co-extensive relationship between the symbolic functioning of exchange and the functioning of language.

It is an issue, therefore, of reading Ramos' work through the reception of Mauss' studies on a transversal level, initially philosophical-semiological, bringing to the fore an ontological dimension where the real is structured according to the dual and overdetermined nature of signs. Furthermore, it is an issue of opening a space for reciprocal translations between this reception, the problematics of the sign in the field of poetry and its relations to another notion of exchange incidental to certain nexuses between poetry and the visual arts.



FIGURE 1: *Dádivas* ("Gifts") on show at Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, 2015. Artist's archive.

ARTFORSIGN


In Ramos' work, the proposed materialization of the dialog with Mauss' essay resulted in three pairs of *Dádivas* (gifts): Pierrotporcavalo (pierrotforhorse), shown at both exhibitions; Copod'águaporvioloncelo (glassofwaterforcello) and Casaporarroz (houseforrice), shown respectively at the first and second exhibitions. In all three cases these exchanges are materialized in the form of sculptural configurations made from objects and materials standing for the terms mentioned in the titles – a sound system emitting a song related to the pierrot and a merry-go-round horse; a glass of water and a cello; an old wooden cabinet and a pile of rice. On another side, the dialogue is materialized in the form of videographic narratives, which fictionally mold the space between the exchange objects. To these are added, finally, replicas of the sculptural pairs, now forged in brass and aluminium and integrated in a circulatory mechanism through which two substances communicate, glucose and morphine. So that these multiple orders of resonances seem to find some foundation and synthesis precisely along the mediating axes that materially and conceptually support the relations between the terms, which resembles something like a scale: the axis of the bodywork of a truck, a section of roller coaster track and a segment of a boat.



FIGURE 2: A view of the exhibition at Fundação Iberê Camargo. Source: Ramos, Nuno. *Ensaio sobre a dádiva*. 2014. Porto Alegre: Fundação Iberê Camargo.

Indeed, with the *Dádivas* (all three sculptural pairs in dialog with the videos) everything occurs in the in-between, on a plane of open and mutual commensurability between incommensurable elements. In the video for *Copod'águaporvioloncelo* a girl drives to the beach, gathers water from the ocean in a cup, goes to a small store and exchanges it for a cello. She then returns to the beach, plays a couple of abrasive, scattered sounds and finally casts the cello out to sea, while we watch its slow departure. Between the cup that gathers the ocean and the cello, itself thrown out to sea, all the symbolism of the ocean can spring up, close, for example, to the semantic field of the offering (Tassinari 2014, 10). However, a more abstract opposition also appears, between that which has no discrete units and the act of scanning the mass of the continuous into discrete units.

In each of the exchanges, different series of remissions begin to germinate and refract between the exchanges of objects and the videos, between the small coastal town and the city, a donation, an offering, an abduction and so on. In the video for *Casaporarroz*, a woman donates all of a



house's furniture, which is then thrown in a clearing through which passes a wide sheet of water, receiving rice in exchange, which she takes out of her pocket to fill the house's floor before sinking her body into this strange telluric resting place. The result is the formation of an interior spanning the exterior and an exterior walled into an interior, with the body submitted to a gesture that unites both poles.

Let's think a while. House and rice, on the one hand: the delimitation of an interior, perhaps of a space for conserving memory; on the other, fertility, the feminine, nature, exteriority, vast expanses... This however isn't, structurally, all. Glass of water and cello: the ocean, the origin of life, thirst, containment, the mere object, the most charged symbol, to quench thirst creating thirst...; musical instrument, music, cultural elevation, production of affective states, the mere object and the object which stands for its incorporeal effects. Pierrot and horse, between the duplicity of the sad clown, carnival, samba and animality, the "gratuity" of nature as treated in books like *Ó* (Ramos 2008) – what else?

Alberto Tassinari (2015) suggests that the pierrot is the central figure in the work. This is given a few semantic arteries that persist throughout the secular transformations of the figure, like the figuration of art itself, subject *par excellence* of a kaleidoscopic variation of images that return in its historical repertoire (cf. Tassinari 2015, 13 ss.). However, it is possible to identify in a definite manner a gravitational center among the systems of exchange, a sort of scale's fulcrum. Which, in turn, points toward the fact that if it seems possible, up to a point, to arrive at a median for the series around the closure-opening and discrete-continuous axes, as long as this median, however, does not reduce the infinite proliferation of remissions that the work sets into motion.

The fact is that we can only begin to set loose the remissions in and between the series. How can we say that everything occurs between two terms when everything here may be symbol and matter, perception and semantics, remembrance and potential, with every network of differences open to twists inside each actualization? The house, for example, that harbors the rice field as its interior, that in turn receives the body in its interior, making itself continuous with the infinitely granular interior-exterior ocean of rice – a cup-house?

As Lorenzo Mammí, who already highlights the sign-oriented functioning of the work, has pointed out, the *Dádivas* "are a perfect system of exchanges – so perfect that anything equals everything else":

The exchange allows for all interpretations, but authorizes none. Indeed, exchange systems are proper to signs themselves, who stand for things. But when things are too ready to

obey them, signs lose control of meanings. We have then, on the side of the names, a disorder analogous to this material magma [on the artist's vaseline-based paintings shown at the same 2015 exhibition]. Both disorders converge toward infinity, toward a word that might finally utter itself, unifying sign and reference, a word we may be sure will never come.

In this sense, it seems worth pointing out that if the Pierrot serves as a synthetic image of both aforementioned axes, it maintains a structural kinship toward another, perhaps more decisive figure: that of the horse. After all, in the videos, just as the happy-sad clown finds himself mal-adjusted within the circus and all other environments, the horse ends up being, quite literally, abducted from its context, and set free to roam in the city. As seen in Nuno Ramos' most recent work of fiction *Adeus, Cavalo* (Ramos 2017) (Goodbye, horse), we're dealing with a floating signifier, adhering to Brazilian cultural history while also maintaining existence as a pure sign in constant reactualization. A multiple body, that the artwork sets free as language's sort of free radical, a signifier of the very undecidability of the language dynamic it produces, besides, of course, being a virtual entity, a piece in this same play of remissions. After all, what is imprinted on it is a dynamic where the centrifugal and the centripetal, roaming and circularity, closure and opening, continuous and discrete, orbit around along a plurality of axes, to which the superposition of all series can only give further movement. This the work itself, this is all.



FIGURE 3: *Pierrôporcavalo* and *casaporarroz*. Artist's archive.

THE LANGUAGE OF POETRY, THE POETRY OF LANGUAGE: NUNO RAMOS IN CROSSINGS

In *Ensaio sobre a dádiva*, the arranged objects do not function as icons of things. They exist as clusters of relations, entities that present themselves as momentary crossings between all variation parameters that a receptor in a given moment can actualize. In fact, what the work does, according to Maniglier (2006), directly encounters a seminal nucleus of a certain comprehension of language in modern poetry, the main emblem of which can be found in Stéphane Mallarmé: “make the signs utter themselves” (cf. Maniglier 2006, 269).

In the words of Maniglier, what is at play is the sign as an arrangement of “regular correlations between heterogeneous variations”, or a space of continuous redetermination of “terms” resulting in the production of values (Maniglier 2005, 157). From the outset, the crux of the problematics circumscribed by Saussure would not rest on the fact that a single sign corresponds to different significations and vice-versa, nor on the dislocation related to the opposition between sign and reference. In truth, the very opposition between “signifier and signified” would remain open: these terms are also not given in advance, but are constituted “in the sign itself” (Maniglier 2006, 255).

“‘Spiritual’ but ‘real’ entities”, as Lévi-Strauss would allow us to think, both “material and incorporeal”, “at the same time something and something else” (Maniglier 2006, 23, 25 e 276), signs would render visible the symbolist tenor of Saussure’s thought (2006, 257-276). In lieu of presupposing that language in itself is incapable of expressing the singularities of sensible qualities, we would rather say that the sign itself is an inexpressible quality apt to express other qualities, virtually determining the perception thereof. In other words, the right word would not index a thorough referentiality, but would be, rather, the “impression that captures” the “nuances”, themselves expressed with nuances, “undefinable sensations” (266 – highlights are our own). This fits in with the paradigm proposed by Mallarmé in *Crises de Vers* (Mallarmé 2010), words relate to the world as “qualitative realities” (267). The symbolist poet would then do nothing more than “gather, amplify and make ring a system of echoes already interior to the world” (Mallarmé apud Maniglier 2006, 269).

In this sense equivocation would be precisely language’s mode of functioning, rather than that which it must settle in order to work, even if the controlling of this equivocation is proper to the regularity of the sign itself. The poetic is in, therefore, on the very basic level of language, precisely its dimension of evocation, a key term in symbolist poetry. Which, after all, does not prevent us from thinking of the sign beyond the sound-sense relationship. The sign is “something that circulates” (Maniglier 2013, 165)

in a given system of points of view and also between such systems. All that is required is that a “plurality of levels of experience” (2006, 280) be condensed at the intersection of the networks that determine produced values as clusters of relations.

Ensaio sobre a dádiva constructs an elementary language-machine, both restrictively determined and semantically inexhaustible. It would be more precise than stating that the terms of each exchange are signs than to affirm that that which each of the three *Dádivas* structures is, itself, a sign. Accordingly, the materiality of the arrangement works most of all as a catalyst of the immaterial relations they project into space. If, as we shall see ahead, the whole of the 2015 exhibition keeps the physical neighborhood of materials in its order of the day, the objectual character of the *Dádivas* is presented as split, or better yet, refracted, between sculpture and an open network of signs, situated in groups of sensible formations that live only as supports of the expansive incorporeality of the association networks that allow the experience of the work to germinate.

All a possible spectator sees before their body is a material-immaterial machine, generated by an arrangement of multiple reciprocal incidences, spinning upon its axis in regular, infinite refraction. Opening only in uttering itself, in rendering possible the very transformation of the closure-opening, discrete-continuous axes, around which all remissions acquire greater consistency. Here, rendering the gift visible means giving an incorporeal language body to the overdetermination arising out of intermediation.

A Mallarmean Nuno Ramos? The question is beside the point; however, it acquires some value when posed in accordance to the artistic trajectory that led to *Ensaio sobre a dádiva*. The actualization space circumscribed by the work is already evident in the exhibition in which it was presented for the second time. Perhaps starting from its very title, *Houyhnhnms*, the intelligent race of horses from Gulliver’s Travels whose speech or (pre) semantic sounds are used by Jonathan Swift as matter for their name. Swift, by the way, had already been alluded to previously by Ramos, in a text that shares its hybridity with the figure of the centaur, the horse-man whose entering the scene concludes *Minuano [diário de um trabalho]*, simultaneously opening it to its double nature (Ramos 2007, 221-244). However, most of all, the field of remissions configured by the shown artworks is highly revealing: besides *Ensaio sobre a dádiva*, the reliefs and vaseline-based paintings and the series of drawings Proteu – sign, matter and myth.

Returning to the artist’s first endeavours, we reencounter the signifier “matter”, which has become indissociable from the greater part of the

most well-known images of Nuno Ramos' work, in two fields of signification. On one hand, as a virtual plane of potentials, the complementary face of the different aceptions of the unformed; on the other as a remission to the physical pregnancy of the material dimensions of semantic processes. Before arriving at the vaseline paintings that, taken up again in 2015, characterize his first authorial propositions, it is worth pointing out that Nuno Ramos' work begins at the "end".

His artistic initiation began during the 1980s when, associated with the Casa 7 painters, Ramos responded to the arrival in Brazil of "the return to painting", the central reference of which were European Neoexpressionists, on the rise after repeated declarations of the "death of painting" and of art itself. The supposedly terminal stage of what had traditionally been the most paradigmatic genre in art became a sort of landfill of its own recycled historical repertoire, the gaps therein allowed for rehearsing more propositional projections. The difficult differentiation of pictorial elements was accompanied, according to Alberto Tassinari (1985) by an unignorable sense of "impropriety", relating to the possibility of painting itself. Alongside art's problematic individualization in the contemporary world lay a primary impossibility regarding the attempts at returning to the virtual figuration of the plane, or to the canvas as a stage for the artist's expressive performance, thrown into a state of crisis since Abstract Expressionism. The pictorial plane "is now a territory invaded by remains of forms and meanings", suspending like a "husk" or a "fossil", "the very capacity of signification", ushering in a space-time relationship related to "garbage" (Mammi 2014, 183).

In the vaseline works from the late 80s, "material" and "physical materiality" formed an inextricable pair. The artistic medium (cf. Krauss 1999), assumed a particular importance, in its classical, both literal and material sense: vaseline, like oil, for example, was the pictorial vehicle that brought to light potentialities of pigments. At the same time, the pasty amalgam of the paints, along with the handling of chromatic tonalities, placed the paintings constantly in the vicinity of the amorphous, on an unstable limit, subject to the risk of homogenization, between determination and indetermination.

It is in the passage from the 1980s to the 1990s that early critics of Nuno Ramos situate a first decisive turning point. From the vases onward to the later paintings, marked by the use of more diverse materials and by a greater emphasis placed on differentiation between pictorial elements, a new assemblage comes into play, a "making by juxtaposition" (cf. Tassinari 1997, 18-21). Freely approximating two comments by Lorenzo Mammi, one on the vases and one later comment, on another artist, we arrive at a revealing analogy with the musical universe. In the first

paintings, we have something akin to white noise in acoustic physics, in which “all frequencies are heard simultaneously; therefore, none are intelligible. A form of silence reached not by subtraction but through saturation” (Mammi 1997). The juxtaposition-paintings, however, are closer to another type of operation, which will acquire different forms throughout the artist’s career, similar to the “combination or ghost tone phenomena”, where a third note is produced from the shock between different notes played simultaneously (Mammi 2012, 299).

In these new paintings, which elaborate a research in plasticity which was also taken up in the 2015 exhibition, a stubborn tension is introduced, central to what is at stake. When “painting” means, for example, producing tension between a broken mirror glued to the canvas and a strip of red fabric, the plane becomes a “swamp-plane”, “a deposit, a place receiving materials” (Ramos 2004, 39 e 44). In the foreground, the irreducible immanence of the pictorial surface. Furthermore, however, the multidirectional flutter of the combinations seems to cross the surface with the multiplicity of what emerges between potential and act. Reassembled, the “poor” materials – fabrics, glass, metal sheets, leaves, plush – shed their original statute which might be associated with debris and begin to compose a number of germinative points of organization and differentiation. In the very center of the surface’s irreducibility, as Rodrigo Naves would say, we find cultivated “a sort of origin” (2007, 319-328).

However, the germinative multiplicity seems to actualize another order of potentials with the coming onto the scene of a new entity intersecting with the others: language. Initially, unassuming verbal inscriptions are introduced into the paintings. Soon, these begin to take part in exhibition spaces with works such as *Vidrotextos* (Glasstexts) from 1991, compositions in which material formations, such as glasses blown into banana tree leaves, are articulated with texts by the artist printed large enough to make reading difficult, on media such as wax, installed at the halfway point between writing and objectuality. An operation which is presented again in the well known exhibition *III*, from which point on the mediums configured by the artist spread out into a number of other directions.

Sequentially, Nuno Ramos’ first book *Cujo* is composed of texts that integrate some of those visual works, among other textualities. To the hypothetical spectator of these works, attention is drawn to a translational nexus between both dimensions. Starting from a basic scene, similar to the manipulation of matter in a workshop, diverse modes of the assemblage of verbal matter spring up, in formations and rearticulations producing heterogenous materialities. If the signifier “poetry”, inscribed in the book’s classificatory register, does fit in with a number of conventions in editorial organization typical of the genre, we notice,

at the same time, a potential opening of the normative fiction mobilized by such a signifier, which will be unceasingly actualized.

Indeed, throughout the following decades, between literature, visual arts and other forms of mediality, other modes of producing heterogeneous materialities and of recombining their articulating operations will emerge. In the intervals between the irreducibility of the literal and the potentials of the relational, between stagnation and motion, circularity and openness toward alterity, dynamics of overdetermination are progressively set off, which, to make use of terms inherent to the artist's reasoning, may be called crossing operations.

In 1995, *Balada* is presented as a “896-page book pierced by a revolver bullet” (Ramos 2010; 1995). In this book-thing, both symbolic and material, writing and plasticity, writing as formal action, the “ballad” as literary form and the literal action of the bullet³ pierce into a hole-filled objectuality, while taking it to its paroxysm. In *Para Goeldi II* (2000), a woodblock carving by Goeldi is transported to the floor of the gallery, next to old used furniture, the elements of which are in turn crossed by sheets of glass and granite. It is as if, coupled with the radicalizing replication of the material act of engraving, memory's objects were literally crossed through with planes, in a pictorial sense.

Examples could very well continue in a flux, but it is useful to highlight here a nucleus of transformations inciding on the role and statute of language. If, as Alberto Tassinari argues, the *Vidrotextos* seek something on the level of a “translucidity between words and things”, eventually reflecting a wider search for the alike in unlikeness (1997) (words and paintings, heterogeneous materials and so on), a highly significant inflection in this field of questioning seems to progressively insinuate itself, reaching a heightened pitch in *Ensaio sobre a dádiva*.

Alongside this work, another which appears as particularly unavoidable is *Vai, Vai* (2006). A peculiarly scenic installation, acted out by three voices, the “voice of water”, the “voice of salt” and “the voice of hay”, emitted from loudspeakers disposed on top of six barrels of water and six piles of salt and hay as well as on the backs of “three pack-mules” which randomly trace the closed circuit of the scene (Ramos 2006). The sedimented imaginary universe that the work intends to burrow into and open up is beside the point here, while we do wish to highlight the work's central tension: on one hand, the expectation of a fable-like setting, in which animals and things “have a voice”; on the other, the breaching of fable-like

3 Translator's note: “bala” is the Portuguese word for bullet, and aside from a play on the “ballad” as literary form, its homophones explored by Ramos also denote a literal bullet-strike

enchantment by the progressive revelation of the installation's underlying scenic immanence.⁴ This breaching, furthermore, is operated in a more impactful manner not by the transspecific conflict of voices, but by the scenic play between each of its incarnations. Incarnations which, split and paradoxical, ambiguously embody the voices in material formations which are adequate or inadequate, according to each agency. The voices do not belong to the bodies, but cross through them as foreign emissions, simultaneously in both the surrounding bodies and in those they correspond to. Between voices and bodies, a productive spacing crosses a supposed language-based continuity between the human and the non-human, in a play between conjunction and disjunction. "Everything speaks", as the artist is known to say, but, at the same time everything falls silent. Each body, both symbolized and unsymbolized, a body of one's own and the bodies of others.

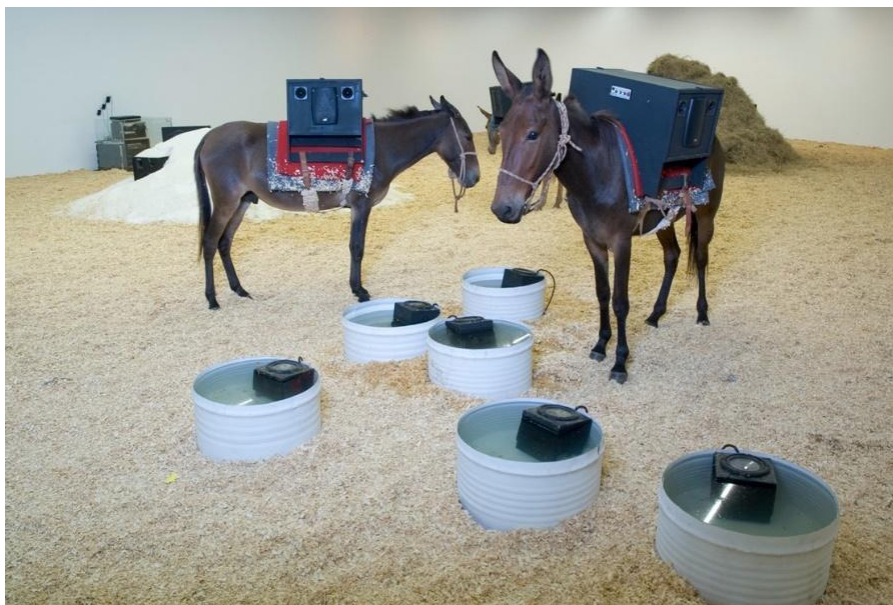


FIGURE 4: *Vai, vai* (2006), artist's archive

Thus, according to *Ensaio sobre a dádiva* and *Vai, Vai*, it is possible to affirm that language is not exactly a medium that "finds likeness in the unlike", that approximates heterogeneous, predetermined and essential entities. Rather, it is a medium that, in providing the relations through which we apprehend the real, crosses through the heterogeneity of its terms, revealing the different in the self-identical, the multiple in the singular. Language, after all, as the potential for revelation, an opening, as well, of a translational border between language and life. Therefore,

⁴ While "the voice of salt" verbalizes a harsh order for spectators' expulsion, a fundamental part of the project is that the loudspeakers, initially covered over, would be exposed at the pace with which the mules ate the hay and salt and drank the water.

after a brief incursion into a more obviously poetic work by Ramos, our path of reading may continue, returning to an ending, to another end.

This return may come on horseback. In *The End of the Poem* (1999b), Giorgio Agamben sheds light on the ever-ambiguous materiality of the medium in poetry. At the core of his argument is the enjambment, which in French originally meant the little leap that someone on horseback takes to throw one leg over the horse while the other foot lies on the stirrup. The enjambment however is a simple poetic resource, occurring between established divisions between a poem's verses. We have, therefore, a statement; on the other, the various possibilities of assembling it as enunciation, over one or more verses. In the latter case, however, what determines, from the outset, that the extension of a statement, of a thought, should coincide with the extension of its sonorous materiality? Nothing that the duplicitous overdetermination of the semantic-acoustic continuum does not immediately place in multiple suspension. How, then, are we to finish a poem without impinging upon this nuclear hesitation that operates in "tension" and in "contrast" (therefore in the possible interference between) sound and sense, between the semiotic and the semantic series (Agamben 1999b)? Some echo of an answer seems to spring up between *Vai, vai* and poem number "1" in *Junco*:

Cachorro morto num saco de lixo
areia, sargaço, cacos de vidro
mar dos afogados, mar também dos vivos
Escuta teu murmúrio no que eu digo.

Nunca houve outro sal, e nunca um dia
matou o seu poente, nem a pedra
feita de outra pedra, partiu o mar ao meio.
Assim é a matéria, tem seu frio

e nunca vi um animal mais feio
nem pude ouvir o seu latido.
Por isso durmo e não pergunto
junto aos juncos⁵

The whole poem hinges on a relationship of tension and interference between sound and sense, set into action by enjambment. On one hand,

5 Dead dog in trash bag / sand, flotsam, shards of glass / Ocean of the drowned, ocean of the living too. / Hear your murmur in what I say.// There has never been another salt, never has a day / killed its eastering, nor has the rock / made of another rock, split the sea in two. / So is matter, it has its cold // and I have never seen an uglier animal / or been able to hear its bark. / Which is why I sleep and don't ask / among the driftwood.

the statement, by definition immaterial, of the continuity of matter, the reading of which is already split between a supposed absolute permanence of the material (second stanza) and a continuity between the voice that utters the poem and non-human beings (first stanza). In the first stanza, the speaking subject is presented as a sort of acoustic shell that sustains a speaking-listening circuit, reverberating the continuous voicings between beings. Like in the rest of the poem, the rhythmical dynamics are anchored in oscillations around the decassilable, the ten-syllable verse line that is the most traditionally given to poetic listening in Portuguese. The poem begins in total musical enchantment, sound and sense, thought and caesura, in harmonic accord.

Now the second stanza emits the central statement: in the world of matter nothing is lost, there is no cut. Once this is spoken on the immaterial level of the statement, what is stated, on the sonorous plane of enunciation, is precisely the opposite. So, the enjambments come onto the scene, cutting into pieces at each step the seamless continuity being stated. The magical correspondence between sound and sense⁶ is broken, the enchantment of musicality is broken, with the rhythmic bifurcation of the decassilables and the dissolution of the rhyme scheme. Finally, after the overlapping of one stanza into the other, we return to harmony between “durmo” (sleep), “pergunto” (I ask), “junto” (next to), “juncos” (driftwood)⁷. The fall back into the active inaction of the unconscious and the reflexive faculty resound something of the order of participation in the natural.

However, inside this conjunction-disjunction game, the idea of participation is overdetermined by the play of tensions between statement and enunciation springing from the paratopical location that organizes the poem, assembling the sound-sense continuum: the voice stated is joined with driftwood, but the voice that states establishes a disjunction in the center of the saying itself, the continuum is actualized specifically in the cut. Like in *Vai, vai*, if there is a link between the multiplicity of beings, this link is the cut-up, multiple statutes of each being, both dual and overdetermined in their presentation as language. The voice that speaks and sleeps has its synthesis open into rhyme, an audible-semantic disjunction-encounter.

6 The relationship between poetry and magic is so vast and intrinsic, overall in its modern rehabilitation, that we find ourselves obliged to remind the reader of the title of the central work of the poet who defined poetry as “the prolonged hesitation between sound and sense” (Valéry 2011): *Charmes* – enchantments.

7 Translator’s note: We have maintained the words relevant to the audible dimensions of the poem in Portuguese, so that a reader, however slight their grasp of the language, may at least intuit the relevant acoustic and rhythmic coincidences, for example, in the recurrence of vocalic syllables grouped around a “u” sound.

To begin at the end and to keep returning on horseback is a poem's vocation. If the horse is a sign standing for the exchange between books, diaries and physical artworks in Nuno Ramos, it might be useful to remember, with Agamben, that enjambment not only marks the infinite opening-remission between the poetic and the prosaic, but "brings to light" the "essential hybridity of human discourse" (Agamben 1999a, 32). Without having to apprehend, as we have just done, the sign placed into a vocal act, Nuno Ramos' *Ensaio sobre a dádiva* seems to materialize, in a minimal language machine, a functioning of signs that remits to every other symbolic system, expressing itself with particular force in myth: to close a "cycle of transformations" is possible only as an opening toward other "re-chainings" (Maniglier 2008). It becomes necessary, then, to pursue, between different arts and systems of thought, the language of media, with a renewed return to the multiple in-betweenness of the material and the immaterial, virtual and actual, when in "the artist of matter" and of irreducible materiality an immeasurable unpretentious pretension can be heard:

Abolished is the pretension, aesthetically an error, even though it produced some real masterpieces, of including in the subtle paper of a volume something other than, for example, the horror of deep woods, or the scattered mute thunder of foliage: not the the intrinsic and dense wood of the trees (Mallarmé 2007).⁸

SPACES IN EXCHANGE

To think of art not as the field of inscription of predetermined entities, embodied in univocal material arrangements, but as the production of material-immaterial clusters, triggers of multiple relations (the "forest" and "the horror", the "foliage" and its "scattered mute thunder"): this seems to be the wager at stake in Nuno Ramos' *Ensaio sobre a dádiva*. As we have seen, the work condenses and distills a functioning of the sign that crosses through and precedes other fronts of the artist's activity, such as the exploration of the hesitations between voices, bodies and modes of agency, a functioning which sets into action the very dynamic of successive re-chainings that qualify Ramos' work. As Jacques Rancière (2020) suggests, this proposal for the creation of a plane of commensurability between language and space invites us to think of a "space of words", a notion that is both non-physical and non-specific but conceptual, pertaining to an inter-artistic space. Such a notion reverberates between the 19th century and the 1960s, making the work of art into a space of relations between the arts, and the relations between those and their

⁸ Cited in Maniglier 2006, 267.

modes of circulation a “space of exchange” (2020, 22). This is what might be insinuated when another decidedly liminal artist, Marcel Broodthaers, utters a revealing temporal fold: Mallarmé would be “the founder of contemporary art” (apud Rancière 2020, 10).

With *A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance* (1887), Mallarmé establishes a seminal version of poetic modernity which sets all conceptual oppositions discussed thus far into a state of perpetual revolution. The poem presents a succession of events occurring in the virtual intervals of a shipwreck/consecration, between potential and act, circumstance and eternity, ideality and event. Structured like a musical score, on double pages graphically configured as the surface of a visual and spatial experience of poetic events, the poem enacts the unfoldings of an action of throwing dice, visible only as a theatre of mental operations. The title proposition *A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance*, runs through the whole poem, with its structuring position marked by the typography. At the same time, at each moment segments of the main proposition are unraveled in propositions of a second order, which results in a space of emergency, of unstable figures and multiple relations.

In *The politics of the Siren*, Rancière has already provided us with a wide-ranging reading of this proposal, which found in *A Throw of the Dice* the maximal realization of the search for “a true choreography of the idea” (Rancière 2011, 53-54). Mallarmé’s horizon is the ideal, a quest for the poem which is fit to present the Idea. This, however, in an historical situation where all that is left is the “golden dust” of ideas, that is, placed before the finding that all normative models for collective life had disappeared. This is the Mallarmean paradox: to find the poem “apt to reproduce the topography of the theatre of the spirit”, precisely when “a crisis of the ideal and the social”, is reflected in a “crisis of verse”. Reflected, therefore, in the current state of nascent modern poetry, where the hegemony of poetic conventions gave way to new configuring processes of the minimal units and modes of organizing poetic discourse (Mallarmé 2007, 201-211).

Indeed, Mallarmé’s diagnostic regarding his social and historical situation led him to a radical questioning of the issue of community, which in turn leads to an artistic thought unequivocally nurtured by the pluralities of the arts. Before the general imperative of constructing a new religion and new myths in the disenchanted core of the XIXth century, initially put forth by German Romanticism, Mallarmé glimpses a “musical religion”. Its true “end” would not be the essentialist determination of man, but “a restitution of language to its powers”, which would coincide with the fictional, open and productive character of “the very procedure of human spirit” (Rancière 2011, 22).

Hence Mallarmé's critique of the model of thought regarding the articulation between the arts as proposed by Richard Wagner, precisely in what refers to its relation to the inextricable issue of community. Given that in Wagner the religion built into art would be made concrete in an essentialist belief in the possibility of a Hymn for The People, the Wagnerian total artwork would transform the "communion 'through the vacant space' into the people's real presence to itself, invited to the celebration of community origin" (40).

These are a few of the historical, aesthetic and social factors implied in the founding paradoxes of Mallarmean poetics, the formulation of which passes through a crucial dialog with the other arts, namely music and theater, pantomime and dance. The virtual, anticipatory presentation of what Mallarmé called "a conflagration of the unanimous horizon" could only be given in a Work that would "make the poem into the religion of the future, and simultaneously to refuse all incarnation for this religion or a body of any sort to guarantee the poem" (Rancière 2011, 58). Hence the notion of a writing that is "more than writing" and "less than writing", a "simultaneously painted and effaced" Book, "body and idea of the idea", material-immaterial, so that the poem may be made into the religion of the future (2011, 60).

These are the main aspects that lead from Mallarmé and Broodthaers to contemporary art, under the sign of exchange. What is at stake pertains to four problems: the issue of the relationships between "art and life"; a revision of the autonomist paradigm for comprehension of the relations between the arts, hegemonic in influential readings of European Modernism; the contagions and distancings between the regimes of art and those of commodities; the problem of the comprehension or establishment of a plane of the common.

This is the path that leads Rancière to *The space of words: from Mallarmé to Broodthaers* (2005/2020) and to 1969, when Broodthaers appropriates *A throw of dice* in order to simultaneously limit and recast the horizon of infinity in Mallarmé's poem⁹. This is Broodthaers paradoxical gesture, as Rancière has it: to present *A throw of dice* anew, as twelve plates correlating to the double pages occupied by the choreographic-plastic distribution of characters, while at the same time substituting the whole text, line by line, for black rectangles of varying sizes.

In so many words, Broodthaers recasts the double spatialization of Mallarmé's poem, which is both virtual and material, in an "indifferent spatialization" (Rancière 2020, 16). The artist would pay homage to

⁹ Broodthaers, *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard* (1969).

Mallarmé, defending “the power of words to create spaces”, while in the same gesture demonstrating that “there is no space proper to words. What there is are words and extension”. Relaunching the potential of the Mallarmean unravelling between the immateriality of the word and their constitution in a concrete material space, Broodthaers “closes Mallarmé’s poem at both ends: words without space and space without words” (54). In short, he reopens the analogy between “the spatializing potential of the poem and the alphabet of the stars” in order to, we may say, paradoxically enclose it in a new folding-unfolding potential.

What is at stake, initially, is Mallarmé’s position as a trigger of the aesthetico-historical revision of the modernist paradigm of autonomy in the arts. As a counterpoint, Rancière remits to the most emblematic incarnation of this paradigm, put together by the North-American critic Clement Greenberg.¹⁰ Greenberg’s approach took as its starting point the decisive role that European modern art ascribed to painting’s reflexive attention to the fundamental properties of its medium, characterized by the two-dimensionality of the plane and of its material components. This path, developed by the author into a reading of the new American painting being made from the 1950s onward, was based on an identification of artistic modernity with a generalized process of purification and specification of each artistic medium, whose fields of operation would be based exclusively on the constitution of their singular legalities.

However, in commenting Broodthaers’ dialog with decisive modern artists who made art into fields for the circulation of verbal language and plasticity, Rancière points out that it would suffice to take a glance at a Paul Klee, or an Apollinaire, to recognize a different paradigm. Once the empire of representation is thrown into a state of crisis, far from sedimenting into a progressive self-purification, the surface of the painting, but perhaps that of the poem and so on, becomes a “surface of exchange where the procedures and materialities of the other arts slide into and over one another, where signs become forms and forms become acts”. Which is to say that both Mallarmé and Broodthaers institute and reinstate the modern statute of relations between arts, making visible the fact that the autonomistic paradigm in art “is no longer valid (...) since it never was to begin with” (2020, 18-22).

Simultaneously poetry, theater, choreography, pantomime and typography, Mallarmean space presents and anticipates, with maximum acuity, this “space of exchange”. However, at the same time, this space would be born grafted together with a modernist utopia, that of the supposed identity between a revolution of the forms of art and a revolution in the forms of

10 Cf. for example, Greenberg 1961

social life. Mallarmé's own attempt, as Valéry proposes, was to "raise a page to the power of the starry sky" (apud Rancière 2011, 56), even given the admission of a "blackout of the sky of Ideas". In *A Throw of dice*, creating a field of commensurability between verbal language and graphic space corresponded to the constitution of a space harboring "communities of signs, forms and acts" where the poetic act could configure the very collective horizon of a new possible.

Hence the unravelling gesture proposed by Broodthaers: to enclose Mallarmé's poem means opposing oneself to the identification of "the surfaces of image-words with a new collective sky" (Rancière 2020, 34). This is because on the hinge of the 60s and 70s, a preoccupation already pre-established by Mallarmé regarding what Rancière calls his "double economy" had irreversibly taken root. For Mallarmé, taking the side of the sign constituted an alternative to the hegemony of communicative, transparent language, which would merely be a different face of commodities' regime of circulation. In this direction, what Broodthaers would have established is that the risk glimpsed by Mallarmé of an identifying dissolution between the "symbolic gold" prospected by the poet and the "exchange gold" of commodities had already taken hold¹¹. The political-economical name for this ironic realization of the mallarmean utopia itself, that of transforming objects into signs, a "prosaically accomplished form of life", would be "commodity fetishism"¹² (51).

Thus, Broodthaers appears as the spokesman for a new situation in the arts, which places them on two contrasting horizons. On one hand, a recognition of the depletion of the utopia in which forms of art and forms of social life would establish a community between them, and of an irreversible process in which *equivalence*, proper to the conversion of things into signs of market exchanges, becomes generalized. On the other hand, a wide range of possibilities stemming from Broodthaers' gesture of "reintroduction", "on the surface plane", of "heterogeneities of the sign and forms" (39). Indeed, the "conquest of space" by Broodthaers recasts the inter-artistic turn of language in Mallarmé, crossing through the post-utopian horizon in contemporary art toward a prospective explosion of the relations between the arts, as much as the very comprehension of artistic media, which is joined with a transformation of the very statute of the "artist".¹³

11 Cf. Marchal, 403-450.

12 If Pop Art presented a more solid embodiment of this convergence between the modes of circulation of commodities and art from the XXth century onward, this diagnosis also carried with it an artistic and theoretical attention to the assemblage of language and of the sign in this context. See Foster, 1996, 71-99

13 A poet who left poetry to become an artist., then an artist who left art to become a rare sort of curator, Broodthaers exploded the notion of the artist on a scale comparable to Duchamp. The universe of modes of articulation between plastic, textual and conceptual operations he conceived configured itself reciprocally with a situated critique of the modes of

In fact, Nuno Ramos' *Ensaio sobre a dádiva* appears to enunciate a singular articulation of these two horizons. Here, the visual arts appear as a space of mutual assemblage between sculptural, conceptual and poetic medialities. However, concurrently, this space of signs, the definition of which is nothing more than a trigger for multiple, virtual relations, reformulates decisive tensions in the artist's trajectory, making clear a historical and theoretical direction of the preceding investigations toward a liminal position in between determination and indetermination in the media articulated by art. We can explicitly see a manner of extracting poetic value from a tenuous limit between *equivalence* (everything means everything, echoing the homogenizing character of the monetary scale) and *equivocation* (every sign, like everything, actualizes signifying relations on various scales).

If, since Nuno Ramos' first steps, the opening of sedimented forms to the multiple virtualities of the continuous could not escape a counterweight in the "funeral march of merchandise"¹⁴, *Ensaio sobre a dádiva* finds itself side by side with the remains of "utopian imagination"¹⁵, placed in infinite hesitation regarding its own impossibility. Something that reminds us, still, of the relation between the reversible and the irreversible. In Nuno Ramos, the limit of life's material expiration is always in the vicinity of the prismatic turns of language. The horse-voice in his aforementioned 2017 book finally settles where it had begun: in an old washed-up actor who is giving an interview from his bathtub filled with lukewarm water. The Proteus of the 2015 drawings was already, in a story from *O Pão do corvo* (The Crow's bread), an old man tired of transforming (Ramos 2001). After all, real symbolic machines also die (Almeida 1999). Which is not to say, after all, that immersion in a funeral space cannot give rise to other modes of organizing sensible experience between points of view, discourses, forms of life – shedding light on "fittings we do not yet understand, but with many more alternatives than our male-female polarities"¹⁶

circulation, classification and institutionalization of artworks. At the same time, Rosalind Krauss situated Broodthaers as "spokesman" of a "Post-Medium condition", in an effort to provide an alternative to its conception as a physical vehicle given beforehand, instead thinking it in terms of a "recursive structure – a structure that is, some of the elements of which will produce the rules that generate the structure itself" (6).

14 "O som da chuva contra o som das fontes, o contínuo do céu de fora contra o contínuo do chão de dentro. Olho o desfile das vitrines misturadas, a prata enlutada dos seus brilhos e o cortejo fúnebre das mercadorias" (Ramos 1993, 69). (Translator's note: "The sound of the rain against the sound of the fountains, the continuum of the sky outside and the continuum of the floor inside. I look at the parading intermixed shop windows, at silver aggrieved of its shine and the funeral march of commodities".)

15 As can be seen in the titles of the same exhibition in 2015, whose artistic references the artist associates to "utopian imaginaries". Private communication.

16 *Títulos*, in Ramos 2008.

Nuno Ramos' *Ensaio sobre a dádiva* seems to echo a question that operates a supplementary twist regarding Broodthaers' return to Mallarmé: is it still possible to excavate something out of the irreducible surface of contemporary art, so that we may hear, perhaps not with our ears, what Mallarmé thought of as "music of relations between everything" (Mallarmé apud Rancière 2011, 53)?

SIGN MATTER

The affirmative reply provided by Ramos' work to the above question can be found in the thought paradigm that informs it, directed at an *ontology of multiplicity* (Maniglier 2006, 465). Initially, it is possible to excise this kind of thought from the work's inscription in relation to the theories and historicities of visual arts. Further, this means establishing the differences between this ontological paradigm and certain aspects of the *phenomenological* paradigm which has crossed through many theories in modern and contemporary art. In the modern context, the phenomenological statute of the artwork pertains to a relationship between form and perception that centers debate around these works' modes of appearance, taken as transitive, unstable processes of actualization, determining singular experiences of reception according to each subject. From the 1960s onward, however, a "phenomenological turn" specifies this perspective through emphasizing the production of singular and situated articulations of the artwork, modes of the relation between the objectual and material character of the work and the presence-based experience of the spectators. In both cases, the basic presupposition is that the works are given as *objects* (in an epistemological sense) and usher in different possibilities of experience for the *subject*, different points of view.

The most emblematic case here is probably that of Richard Serra. Serra radicalized a distinction between painting and sculpture, turning the latter into a field of experience in which the spectator's situated body, far from dominating the field of the gaze through a determined, front-facing perspective, discovers diverse and singular ways of looking. This means refusing the possibility of a *Gestalt* that would totalize on a single plane the possibilities of configuring the experience of the work (Krauss 2000). Take something like *St. John's Rotary Arch*, a large tilted plate of Corten steel disposed in the middle of a rotary in New York City, designed to be looked at from innumerable heterogeneous positions. If the experience of the work consists of the infinite superposition of multiple points of view made possible by the object itself, in the artist's own words the form of the art object becomes "indeterminable, unknowable as an entity" (Serra apud Krauss 2000, 140).

These words seem to echo something akin to Nuno Ramos' *Ensaio sobre a dádiva*. However, given the peculiar material-immaterial, plastic-linguistic statute of this last work, an inflexion regarding the problematics of the *object's* statute appears. The notion that the work stands for the pluralities of points of view it determines, in an open and infinite manner, is maintained. On the other hand, given the work of the sign, the intrinsic variability of the object assumes the position of an arrangement of possibilities for presentation and variation of the real, according to the limits and potentials of language.

It remains to be determined, however, in what way Nuno Ramos' work relates to Rancière's preoccupation regarding the *aesthetic* configuration of a plane of the common. That is, the constitution of the field of that which may be presented in sensible terms, of the limits of what is visible or sayable in a given context of interaction between two subjects (Rancière 2018). What Ramos seems to propose is the encounter between a "space of exchanges", between artistic media – the work as the singular invention of a multiple, dialogical field – and a radical exploration and decomposition of the sign, fundamental receptacle of the exchange dynamics that characterize symbolic thought.

In *From Mauss to Claude Lévi-Strauss* (2006), Maniglier carries out a cross-reading of the comments of Lévi-Strauss and Marcel Merleau-Ponty regarding Mauss' *Essay*. In both cases, what is at stake are alternatives to a positive apprehension of the social as factual totality. Following phenomenological thought, Merleau-Ponty starts from the notion of a regime of *intersubjectivity* that would make "social reality a system of substitutable points of view or of correlate movements of signification" (Maniglier 2013, 164-168). For Lévi-Strauss, on the other hand, the initial datum would be the symbolic origin of the social, that is, that which precedes the relational determination of the points of view would be the overdetermined nature of objects structured according to the nature of the sign. In Merleau-Ponty, the first differing occurs in the subject (2013, 166). In Lévi-Strauss, Maniglier suggests, this differing would be found in the object, in the structuring precedence of the sign's overdetermination over the singling-out of an object. "Before the object, there is an apprehension of the object as an opposition" (167).

As becomes clear in mythical thought, this is valid for any symbolic system, since thought itself singles out objects as dual, overdetermined entities, actualized according to points of view. The thing itself is only the system of points of view it actualizes. In the words of Lévi-Strauss,

It cannot be said purely and simply of the world that it is; it exists in the form of an initial asymmetry, which shows itself in a variety of ways according to the angle

from which it is being apprehended: between the high and the low, the sky and the earth, land and water, the near and the far, left and right, male and female, etc. This inherent disparity of the world sets into mythic thought in motion, but it does so because, on the higher side of thought, it conditions the existence of every object of thought. (Lévi-Strauss 1981, 603).

After all, speaking about signs means speaking of the entities that constitute the fabric of our sensible-intelligible world, attributing to the discontinuations extracted from its continuity the characteristic of its essentially being “incessantly between-two, always virtually another” (173). In so many words, “the real is itself symbolic”: “the nature of things” is “made of these virtualities, that are signs, and not of their passing actualizations, it is itself purely differential and non-positive”. This is the “symbolic matter of the world” (174-175).

This, too, is the new field of signification established by the signifier “matter” in Nuno Ramos’ recent work. In earlier works, an infernal alternative was put forth, as was uttered in *Ó*: “matter or language?” (2008, 18). Now, this opposition seems overcome, through thinking not of “matter” and “language”, but through “language as matter”. Now, the plane of virtual potentials that draws all things together is language. This is a twist that prolongs a hesitation between an infinity of relations and the finite nature of the world, that assumes a historical sense in the horse-actor protagonist of *Adeus, cavalo*, a book openly directed at a post-utopian horizon, in its multiple and unstable incarnations of other-voices:

There is no beat common to all things, like there was before [...] Everything sings, dispersive and percussionless, looking for an audience, singing life away. Bodies spat from the safe rails to the ravine and the wall, walled-in love, sons who weren’t born, little poems that became screams, sound with no order or return, all this formed an invincible mass, a point with no counterweight on a *scale*¹⁷ that no one sees (2017, our italics).

Thus, on the tenuous limit between the pull of a logic of equivalences and the opening of a logic of equivocation, *Ensaio sobre a dádiva* makes the posthumous finitude of the “art-life” utopia spin infinitely. As we have seen, this microsystem of exchanges suspends any conjecture as to modes of social organization, limiting itself to showing that each presentation of the real by any kind of language contains the possibility of making

17 Translator’s note: the interplay, between the Portuguese noun for “scale”, “balança”, and the Portuguese verb for “sway”, “swing” or “wave”, which is also “balança”, is to be made clear in the author’s use of italics.

visible the multiple layers that interweave each singled-out object. To think with *Ensaio sobre a dádiva* implies, therefore, experimenting a version of Mauss' anthropological intuition, enacted in the way that its reception here suggests: as an opening to a relationist conception between the fields of knowing and making, taking its objects as a challenge to what we consider *being*. Hence the possibility of “a constant labor of exposing the contingency of our forms of life” as “active practice of disobedience” (Maniglier 2013, 254).


In conclusion, all that this simple, beautiful poem by Nuno Ramos does is reverberate the reciprocal opening between the world and the constitutive equivocality of language, under the form of a political conjecture as to what it means to exist. A minimal machine of symbolic thought, a minible device of maximal openness, makes a space of exchanges between the arts reverberate, from a sensible-intelligible prism, languages and modes of thought; making visible, though refraction, some chords in a music of relations between everything.

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