Uma didática da invenção:
Re-envisioning the material world
in the poetry of Manoel de Barros.

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Introduction

Manoel de Barros occupies an unusual position within the Brazilian canon of contemporary poetry. Unlike the poets who made up and shaped the main body of Brazilian modernism, he tended to avoid the highly politicized literary scenes in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, which were concerned with expressing and inventing a modernism which was both globally relevant and particularly Brazilian, with varied angles of attack and degrees of success. It would not be fair to say that Barros's poetry does not approach the same issues and confront the same problems, but he does so from an ex-centric position, both geographically and intellectually. Whilst he is clearly aware of the work of his contemporaries (the same could probably not be claimed in reverse, at least in respect of the work which he published before the 1960s) and well versed in a broad tradition of poetry, his poetry seems less affected by the fashions and trends of the intellectual milieu of Brazilian *modernismo*.

His poetic style has been compared with the prose of João Guimarães Rosa for its linguistic innovation, and to my mind there are also parallels to be drawn with the work of João Cabral de Melo Neto, whose poetry initially seems very different from that of Barros, but a closer reading reveals thematic similarities, if not always technical ones. Whichever comparator one might choose, what is undeniable is that Barros's idiosyncratic verse,

whilst often very different from that of his contemporaries, nonetheless draws on an extensive knowledge of poetry and philosophy — this can be seen both in overt references and more subtle intertextualities. His work is also often wilfully ambiguous in a way which invites interpretation and creates meaning, rather than obscuring it. As a consequence, readers of his poetry have tended to interpret it in a wide variety of — sometimes conflicting — ways.

The reading that I am proposing is one which walks in step with the relatively recent theoretical framework of 'Eco-Criticism', though perhaps not one which directly applies its theories. Indeed, I shall propose that Barros's poetry problematizes many of these theories as much as it supports them, and often in much more profound ways than the theorists themselves have ever managed. The use of ecological perspectives to frame poetic discourse, or perhaps more interestingly the use of poetry to frame ecological discourse, is an approach to which Barros's verse is particularly suited: not only is his poetry firmly grounded in the landscapes and biosphere of the Pantanal wetlands which so often serve as its backdrop, but it often proposes a degree of scepticism towards conventional ideas and configurations of 'Nature' and the 'Environment'.

Hybridity is a post-modern buzzword (see García Canclini for one seminal example of its use in cultural criticism), but it is also an apt description for what Barros proposes in his poetry — a hybridity so

profound that no part of the material world can remain unaffected by any other. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Barros's poetry also blurs the boundaries between the literary and visual arts, as well as between high and low culture. Moving beyond the cultural hybridity which has become the critical norm, Barros proposes an ecological hybridity, in which 'Nature' and 'Culture' as categories become contested. Much of Barros's transgression and subversion of these concepts is achieved through a focus on marginalized figures — both human and non-human. Whether it is children or tramps, animals or inanimate objects, marginalized subjects are given voice in Barros's poetry and frequently challenge normative world-views. This choice of subject matter is combined with a healthy disrespect for the formalities and rules of language (along with a profound respect for its creative possibilities) in order to create the idiosyncratic and inventive poetry which is examined in this thesis.

The Thing About Poetry (and Poetry About Things)

The dialogue with — or perhaps even incorporation of — things, objects and the material world is one of the most interesting aspects of Barros's poetry, and one which will necessarily be a cornerstone in discussions from any other angle. Nonetheless, I wish to look specifically at this aspect alone before tackling other themes and currents in Barros's oeuvre. His poetry challenges commonly held perceptions of the natural and material world through this radical reassessment of things and objects, and their relationship in turn to language. Barros tends to eschew traditional poetic subjects in favour of the abject things which are usually rejected or ignored by society — scrub-land spaces, insects, ruins — and in so doing elevates these things and objects to the realm of the artistic object. The specific similarities which this has to certain types of visual art will be dealt with in a later chapter, but the impetus behind such a project remains relevant here: to bring the unseen and unappreciated into sharp focus, and force a reassessment of the everyday objects of the material world.

Thanks to the fact that the philosophical problems and difficulties stemming from attempts to define things and objects are as broad as they

are profound (see for example Heidegger; Brown, *Things*; Brown, *Other Things*; Candlin and Guins), some discussion of what precisely is meant by these terms is necessary here. From Plato through Kant, to Heidegger and beyond, attempts to define what can be considered a 'thing', and what characteristics such a thing must have, have come to various conclusions which, depending on whose interpretation you choose to support, each have their own shortcomings. Heidegger's ontology of the thing is perhaps closest to the interpretation that I shall use in this thesis, particularly with regards to the unknowability of things, the relation of physical objects to linguistic definition, his ideas of nearness and the thing's juxtaposition to the object (Heidegger 163–5, 173–5). His arguments for the validity of knowledge generated outside of a scientific discourse are also compelling and highly relevant to Barros's poetry (Heidegger 167–9), although Badiou (*Manifesto for Philosophy*; *Handbook of Inaesthetics*) is clearer and more thought-provoking in his development of this issue. However, Heidegger's dense interpretation of the "fourfold" nature of things, and in particular a focus on "the divinities" (Heidegger 176) seems less relevant to Barros's poetry, and his explanations of these concepts can border on impenetrable:

> The unity of the fourfold is the fouring. But the fouring does not come about in such a way that it encompasses the four and only afterward is added to them as that compass. Nor does the fouring exhaust itself in this, that the four, once they are there, stand side by side singly. (Heidegger 178)

Such opaque explanations of what a thing entails are perhaps, as I shall

argue, what Barros is able to avoid through the deployment of poetry — and its integral ambiguity — as a "producer of truths" (Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics* xii).

For the sake of moving forward with an interpretation of poetry, rather than circumnavigating a philosophical discourse which is not my area of expertise, I will define the terms relatively simply in this thesis: *thing* will denote something that exists in itself, without any modification by social or cultural perception, use value or stigma; *object* will denote a *thing* plus all of the cultural baggage excluded from the previous definition. This broadly follows Bill Brown's definition put forth in the article which opened a special edition of *Critical Inquiry* ("Thing Theory"), preceding his edited volume *Things* (*Things*). More eloquently, if less thoroughly, than Heidegger, Brown sets out several passable definitions of the thing:

> The word designates the concrete yet ambiguous within the everyday [...] ("Thing Theory" 4)

> [...] first, as the amorphousness out of which objects are materialized by the (ap)perceiving subject [...] second, as what is excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects—their force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence [...] ("Thing Theory" 5)

It is in this sense, perhaps, that the thing is most relevant to Barros's poetic: it is not *not* the object, but it is also something before and after the object as we perceive it through the lens of social and cultural know-

ledge — the thing is what the object *was* without our human intervention, and simultaneously what it *might be* beyond our understanding.

In *Retrato do artista quando coisa*, Barros addresses the question of the relationship between human, language and object head on. In a pun on the title of Joyce's famous novel (a notable example of the *Künstlerroman*, the fact of which is not unimportant, since this collection is perhaps Barros's most clear exposition of his poetic philosophy), Barros declares himself, the artist, as a species of thing. This idea, which could justifiably be called a moment of artistic awakening, underpins the collection, and much of Barros's work before and after it. The question of 'being' and of ways of being in the world is clearly at stake here, and if the subject matter does not make this obvious enough the epigraph makes it explicit. Barros immediately begins to abolish the distance between the material world (external) and the world of the mind (internal) by ascribing a state of being to those inanimate objects which are the constant subject matter of his poetry. Here, Barros insists — apparently with all the authority encapsulated in the venerated canon of Portuguese literature — that the non-being which we traditionally require to set ourselves apart and thus categorize the world around us cannot logically exist:

> *Não ser é outro ser.*
> FERNANDO PESSOA (Barros, *Poesia completa* 365)

It's worth noting that this supposed quote from Pessoa is, as far as I can tell, Barros's invention and false attribution — something which is not

unusual in Barros's work. Both this and the playful reference to *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* hint at another slightly contradictory aspect of the poetry: a profound knowledge of and respect for the canon, but also a willingness to subvert it to Barros's own artistic ends.

In addition to this subtle subversion of literary tradition, Barros is more than willing to subvert the conventions of language — another thread which will run through this whole thesis. Rarely is this more boldly stated than in the second part of the title poem of this collection: "Bom é corromper o silêncio das palavras" (*Poesia completa* 366). Silence is a recurrent motif in Barros's work — often portrayed as something which we might learn to understand, or something which lends agency to inanimate objects. But here, silence is read as stifling convention: unless language is corrupted, disrupted, subverted, if it continues to be used in a conventional and clichéd manner, then it is so meaningless as to become 'silence'. Barros continues, listing some examples of this 'corrupted' language:

> Bom é corromper o silêncio das palavras.
> Como seja:
>
> 1. *Uma rã me pedra.* (A rã me corrompeu para
> pedra. Retirou meus limites de ser humano
> e me ampliou para coisa. A rã se tornou
> o sujeito pessoal da frase e me largou no
> chão a criar musgos para tapete de insetos
> e de frades.)
>
> 2. *Um passarinho me árvore.* (O passarinho me
> transgrediu para árvore. Deixou-me aos

ventos e às chuvas. Ele mesmo me bosteia
de dia e me desperta nas manhãs.)

3. *Os jardins se borboletam.* (Significa que
os jardins se esvaziaram de suas sépalas
e de suas pétalas? Significa que os jardins
se abrem agora só para o buliço das
borboletas?)

4. *Folhas secas me outonam.* (Folhas secas que
forram o chão das tardes me transmudaram
para outono? Eu sou meu outono.)

Gosto de viajar por palavras do que de trem. (*Poesia completa* 366)

In this list of examples there is a subtle transition from definition to ambiguity. The first example is very explicitly explained, even down to the grammatical shift which so 'corrupts' the language used. The idea of the amalgamation of human and object is re-stated very clearly ("Retirou meus limites de ser humano / e me ampliou para coisa.") and the implication is that the state of thingness is greater ("me ampliou") than humanity. In the second example, the transition (or in Barros's words, more interestingly, 'transgression') is still clear, if less explicitly explained. By the third and fourth examples it is clear that the images and metaphors offered are just possibilities. Barros subtly acclimatizes the reader to the idea that in this corrupting and reinvention of language, meanings can never be singular. The dictionary-definition style of the examples steadily degrades throughout, until finally, after the last item on the list, Barros offers an alternative to 'understanding' this poetry: "viajar por palavras". Even in this last line, though, there is a telling ambiguity, a

play on words: "trem" does not only mean 'train' in Brazilian Portuguese — it is also another word for 'thing', in particular something useless or trivial ("Trem"). Even within this short section of Barros's long poem, words, people and things have begun to interact in unusual ways, merging into and informing each other as closer readings reveal the inherent ambiguities of language.

From this jumping-off point, Barros's ambition is beginning to become clearer. Here is a manifesto for artistic creation with language as its raw material. It is, though, more akin to the work of an abstract expressionist than the classical painters and sculptors who influenced the poets of the pre-modernist Parnassian period in Brazil. Barros envisages an artist who "vai ter que envesgar seu idioma ao ponto / de alcançar o murmúrio das águas nas folhas / das árvores." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 367), that is, an artist who uses language in an unconventional and playful way, who de- and re-focuses it, makes it 'cross-eyed'. He distances himself — and his idealized artist — from the descriptive practices of more traditional poetry in favour of an (impossible) amalgamation with, and incorporation of, the material world and the world of things:

> Não terá mais o condão de refletir sobre as
> coisas.
> Mas terá o condão de sê-las.
> Não terá mais ideias: terá chuvas, tardes, ventos,
> passarinhos... (Barros, *Poesia completa* 367)

These lines will be echoed in a later poem in which the possibility of

valuing things over ideas, and the particular danger that ideas apparently devoid of any attachment to the material world, might pose to human, non-human and ecological well-being, but they also attempt to define a poetics in which the material thing, rather than ideas about the thing, is in the fore. The lines also hint at the creative possibilities of language, and the ways in which the language of poetry can be used to renew and revitalize the very reality of the material world, rather than just providing an abstraction of it. The imagery in this third section becomes almost violent as it describes the forceful awakening of the artist:

> Será arrancado de dentro dele pelas palavras
> a torquês
> Sairá entorpecido de haver-se.
> Sairá entorpecido e escuro. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 367)

The repetition seems almost liturgical, and the trance-like nature of the poem continues as the final third of the poem hinges on free associations of the word 'escuro', relating it first to the blood of a horse which has been bitten by a horse-leech, and then relating this in a visceral simile to the manner in which an artist's words must 'flow' from him: "Palavra de um artista tem que escorrer / substantivo escuro dele." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 367) The final sentence brings together linguistic, natural and material elements in a synaesthetic statement of poetic intent:

> Ele terá que envesgar seu idioma ao ponto de
> enxergar no olho de uma garça os perfumes do
> sol. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 367)

From here, through the rest of this collection, Barros continues to refine

and reflect upon this poetics and poetic philosophy, with further examples of how this kind of poetic utterance can be carried out. He also repeatedly reflects on himself as a poet — a relatively unusual occurence in Barros's work, in which there is usually an intermediary character such as Bernardo da Mata.[1] But what are the implications of this poetics for Barros's works, and for poetry in general? And how do these problems and resolutions manifest?

To approach how Barros implements this 'thingly' poetics, it is perhaps best to return to the first poem of this collection. Before the second poem (examined above) in which Barros begins to explain his poetics more descriptively, the reader is confronted with a powerful example of such poetics in action:

> Retrato do artista quando coisa: borboletas
> Já trocam as árvores por mim.
> Insetos me desempenham.
> Já posso amar as moscas como a mim mesmo.
> Os silêncios me praticam. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 365)

The opening line of the collection, with a forceful use of enjambment, demonstrates immediately the ambiguity of meaning which is alluded to in the later poem as the word 'butterflies' is given a double purpose through syntactic strain. The figure of the poet is portrayed as a space in which non-human agencies can come together and find a voice — and the

[1] Bernardo da Mata is Barros's recurrent poetic persona. This persona, part-naïf, part-prophet, will be examined in more detail in a later chapter.

poet is capable of understanding them without judgement. As the poet becomes a 'coisa' in this opening section, the normally passive things of the material world become active, even able to act upon the poet himself ("Os silêncios me praticam" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 365)). Through the rest of the short poem, the poet is both humbled and ennobled through interaction with the material world:

> Plantas desejam a minha boca para crescer
> por de cima.
> Sou livre para o desfrute das aves.
> [...]
> Sapos desejam ser-me. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 365)

In these final lines, Barros apparently allows the poet to become overgrown, an object to be used according to the whims of nature, but he also subtly alludes to the power of the poetic utterance, asserting that his mouth — his poetic voice — will become a source of growth and renewal.

This poetic power is firmly reasserted throughout the later poems in the collection: no longer is the poet always an apparently passive object incorporated into the material world at large, but is an active voice, one which has the power to shape the world around it. This becomes abundantly clear in the fourth poem of the collection:

> Experimento o gozo de criar.
> Experimento o gozo de Deus.
> Faço vaginação com palavras até meu retrato
> aparecer. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 368)

After firmly rejecting conventional understandings and systems of knowledge ("Não sei de tudo quase sempre quanto nunca." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 368)) Barros claims for the poet a creative power which is so great in its scope that it approximates "o gozo de Deus". No sooner is this heretical, but poetically conventional, stance affirmed though, than it is brought back down to the level of a material and bodily reality with Barros's neologism "vaginação", reminding the reader of the *vacilação*, the ambiguity and instability so central to Barros's poetry, whilst it simultaneously evokes the sensuality and corporeality of language.

This rejection of the ethereal, whilst maintaining the creative prerogatives normally associated with a higher power, is solidified in the collection's sixth poem:

> É um olhar para baixo que eu nasci tendo.
> É um olhar para o ser menor, para o
> insignificante que eu me criei tendo.
> [...]
> Fui criado no mato e aprendi a gostar das
> coisinhas do chão —
> Antes que das coisas celestiais. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 369)

The poet's gaze, for Barros, ought not to be toward the heavens, but toward the earth, the "ser menor" and the "insignificante". The ambiguity of the phrase "Fui criado no mato" is telling: within the sense of the poem this can be read as 'brought up', but as the pronominal form would normally be used for this, the reader is pushed to consider that the word's other meanings — educated, invented, created — all lead to

a narrative in which it is the *figure* of poet and the poetic consciousness, rather than necessarily the poet himself, that originated in the scrublands of the Pantanal. From here, the motive behind the rejection of "coisas celestiais" is clearer: as much as the poet might wield the creative power to reconfigure our perceptions of the world around us, for Barros it is the material world, the everyday object, which creates the possibility of poetry and thus the poet — without these subjects and objects there can be no poet(ry) at all.

The power of language necessarily lies at the core of a poetics which attempts to force a reassessment of the material world and bring about a change in perception — indeed language must lie at the core of any poetics. Whilst the issue of how language enables the poet and the reader to bring about this change is implicit in all of Barros's poetry, there are moments in which it is specifically meditated upon, and there is a good example of such poetry in this collection:

> O lugar onde a gente morava era uma *Ilha Linguística*, no jargão dos Dialetólogos (com perdão de má palavra). (Barros, *Poesia completa* 369)

The authority to define how language is used is immediately stripped from the academy and the institutions by a humorous devaluing of the figure of the professional linguist. Literary authorities are also dismissed later in the poem: "Camões chamava a isso 'Venéreo ajuntamento'. / Mas a gente não sabia de Camões e nem de / venéreos." (Barros, *Poesia*

completa 370). Instead of these conventional authorities which seek to categorize and define, it is invention and creativity in all its forms which is credited with explaining and amplifying our experience of the world around us: "O resto ia no invento. / Pois que inventar aumenta o mundo." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 370). In the spirit of the "despalavra" Barros declares the *Ilha Linguística* a "desnome", freeing it from the constraints of conventional linguistic definition and practice.

Barros also goes on to enlist an obvious ally in this strategic disassembly of linguistic convention: "Levei o Rosa na beira dos pássaros que fica no / meio da Ilha Linguística." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 370). Guimarães Rosa is as notable for his efforts to reinvent the language of prose as Barros is for his renewal of poetic discourse, and their aims in doing so are perhaps similar. At the very least, Barros counts Rosa as a writer who is pursuing a similar linguistic goal (Müller and Gismonti 111), and in this poem he imagines a dialogue between the great novelist and the poet. Here, the poetic invention surrounding the material world becomes the very source of Being:

> A tarde está verde no olho das garças.
> E completou com Job:
> Sabedoria se tira das coisas que não existem.
> A tarde verde no olho das garças não existia
> mas era fonte do ser.
> Era poesia.
> Era o néctar do ser. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 371)

The importance of the poetic utterance is reiterated for emphasis, and

within the philosophical context suggested by the phrase "fonte do ser" the word "poesia" takes on connotations of poïesis — strengthening the associations with creation and being-in-the-world. The image of the "tarde verde", which Barros even goes as far to stress does not exist in reality, becomes an exemplar of what Barros considers to be the purpose of poetic language: to create new ways of being through invention and creativity. As such, conventional knowledge of the material world is of no use:

> Para enxergar as coisas sem feitio é preciso
> não saber nada.
> É preciso entrar em estado de árvore.
> É preciso entrar em estado de palavra.
> Só quem está em estado de palavra pode
> enxergar as coisas sem feitio. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 371)

Only once we have discarded what we think we know, Barros suggests, is it possible to see the world anew. The repeated lines seem to equate nature and language as the poet is required to become both tree and word, revealing the proposed reciprocal relationship between language and the material world which is fundamental to Barros's poetics, but also suggesting that it is possible for the human agent to acquire some understanding of non-human agency and experience through the language of poetry. It is only once within this "estado de palavra" that Barros believes that it is possible to "enxergar as coisas sem feitio" — that is, to see *things* rather than *objects*.

In Barros's late poem 'Teologia do traste', he lays out some of the reasons that objects, and in particular mundane and discarded objects, are more relevant to his poetics than a higher register of 'thought'. Indeed, this poem is one of the few to lay out an apparently ethical stance in relation to how Barros chooses his poetic subjects, and how these subjects relate causally to the material world and the world of ideas; it might be better named 'Te*le*ologia do traste'. The poem's opening is innocuous enough:

> As coisas jogadas fora por motivo de traste
> são alvo da minha estima.
> Prediletamente latas. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 446)

This is nothing new, in as much as Barros's focus on the discarded and abject is a firmly embedded theme by this point in his poetic career. He even goes as far as to identify "latas" — which do indeed come up with great regularity — as amongst his favourite objects. In the next line ("Latas são pessoas léxicas pobres porém concretas." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 446)) Barros strings together several apparently disparate nouns and adjectives, but careful reading shows that the line is a near-perfect microcosm of his poetics: the 'thing' here becomes a person (agent) and is linked to language, marginalization and materiality. The poem continues to weaken the authority of ideas over things:

> Se você jogar na terra uma lata por motivo de
> traste: mendigos, cozinheiras ou poetas podem pegar.
> Por isso eu acho as latas mais suficientes, por
> exemplo, do que as ideias.

> Porque as ideias, sendo objetos concebidos pelo
> espírito, elas são abstratas.
> E, se você jogar um objeto abstrato na terra por
> motivo de traste, ninguém quer pegar. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 446)

In a turn of the somewhat sophistic logic which is typical of Barros's poetry, ideas are dismissed as useless because they are not concrete — but there is more to the argument than this. It is the democratic nature of the *lata* which seems most important here, the fact that it is useful to the everyman (amongst whom Barros counts the poet). Until this point, the reader might be somewhat bemused by Barros's argument, but in the final lines, Barros turns to an uncomfortable truth to hammer his point home:

> Por isso eu acho a lata mais suficiente.
> Ideias são a luz do espírito — a gente sabe.
> Há ideias luminosas — a gente sabe.
> Mas elas inventaram a bomba atômica, a bomba
> atômica, a bomba atôm.....
> ..... Agora
> eu queria que os vermes iluminasem.
> Que os trastes iluminasem. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 446)

The 'luminous ideas' particularly cherished by modernism led to an ethical and ecological disaster in the form of the atom bomb. The shock of this final twist in the argument is deepened by the statements of the second and third lines of this quotation, which seem to suggest that Barros is admitting the prevalence of ideas, that it is common sense ("a gente sabe" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 446)), whilst the repetition which follows emphasizes the all consuming nature of the mistake. Furthermore, the

ellipsis, consuming the end of the final repetition of "atômica" and nearly two whole lines of verse, demonstrates that the logical finale of nuclear proliferation is simply absence — nothing would remain. The final lines return to Barros's assertion that the things and objects of the material world can enlighten us as much as ideas can, and perhaps in a less harmful way: we should listen to the worms and the detritus — after all, following the seemingly inevitable use of nuclear weapons, they may well be all that is left.

In this chapter I also wish to examine some poetic strategies which recur throughout Barros's work. The use of repetition, appropriation and aphorism are just three examples of such strategies which Barros employs to great effect in a large part of his oeuvre. These strategies will be at play in much of the poetry examined in the following chapters but, rather than making repetitive observations later on, I shall focus on them here in depth, and then refer to this discussion in later instances.

One of the most striking things about Barros's poetry is his use of repetition, not only within individual poems, but throughout the whole scope of his published work. In many cases whole lines of poetry or titles of poems are lifted intact from earlier works; in others, words and phrases are modulated and rewritten with slight variation. It goes without saying that Barros is fully aware of this repetition, but he even goes as far as referring to it in his poetry: "Repetir repetir — até ficar difer-

ente. / Repetir é um dom do estilo." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 308). To describe repetition as a formal innovation, as quite literally a talent to be mastered, goes to the heart of Barros's poetic endeavour: through the exploration of the mundane, of the things which in our lives are so repeated and repetitive as to be frequently overlooked, Barros hopes to revitalize the readers' perceptions of the material world.

Whether or not we might choose to agree, it is clear that for Barros repetition is a means of poetic and creative renewal. I would argue that in Barros's work, it can indeed be seen as such: often, the repetition of a line of poetry builds upon its previous iterations and re-frames them. Two examples of this demonstrate the opposite ends of this strategy of repetition. In the collection *Matéria de poesia*, Barros repeats the title 'Matéria' for two short, haiku-like poems which are separated only by one other three-line stanza:

> O osso da ostra
> A noite da ostra
> Eis um material de poesia (Barros, *Poesia completa* 170)

> O pente e o vento
> Resíduos do mar
> Pétalas de peixes (Barros, *Poesia completa* 170)

In these two poems, the meaning of the title is subtly altered, and the reading evolved. The third line of the first poem, with its modulation of the title 'Matéria' to the more earthly "um material" sheds new light upon the second iteration of the title. The reader is compelled to read

both the titles of the poem, and the title of the collection from which they are in turn repeated, as changed. What started as an apparent reference to the classical *Materia Poetica* can no longer be seen as such, but instead is a break with tradition and a return to the things and objects of the material world. The second poem, no longer required to explain itself after the previous didactic tercet, is a simple list of such "material" as the poet believes is not just appropriate for poetry, but which for Barros *is* poetry.

At the other extreme of repetition, nearly forty years after the publication of 'A menina avoada' in *Compêndio para uso dos pássaros*, Barros published a second poem with the same title in his childrens' book *Exercícios de ser criança*. The latter poem can, clearly, be read without reference to the former, but nonetheless there are themes and uses of language which are shared. What is notable here is the evolution of Barros's poetics, which in the later poem — albeit written for a different audience — seems to have attained a greater level of simplicity of language and thought. Where in the earlier poem there are still vestiges of a more classical lyric style and lineation, in the later poem Barros has abandoned these for a more prosaic (indeed almost prose) style. Sections of the first poem which might have seemed mysterious or even fanciful ("O boi / de pau / era tudo que a gente / quisesse que *sêsse*:" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 110)) are revealed as figments of a child's imagination in

the second, however fanciful that imagination might be. With this repetition of the title, Barros is not attempting to replace the former poem, nor does either poem explain the other; instead, we are presented with more than one perception of events, more than one way of seeing, but all of which are valid and must be equally considered — an important tenet of Barros's poetics.

Along similar lines to Barros's use of repetition and self-appropriation, the poet often appropriates from other writers and artists. The most obvious form which this takes is in the use of epigraphs. These epigraphs seem, on face value, to be similar to epigraphs in other works of literature, but a closer examination shows that not only are many of these epigraphs quoted from sources which either don't exist or are known only to the poet, several of the epigraphs from well-known figures are either misattributed or invented. A further example of Barros's appropriation is his use of the figures of poets or artists and of their work as subjects for his poetry. The use of appropriation will be examined at greater length in a later chapter.

Another extremely prevalent and important technique in Barros's poetry is the use of aphoristic constructions and verses. There are several collections of aphoristic verse in Barros's oeuvre, and outside of these specifically aphoristic collections, aphoristic phrases are common throughout his poetry. Perhaps the most important observation to make about this

form is that it harnesses the power of a way of speaking that most people would intuitively accept as received wisdom. Clearly such aphorisms and sayings are not always, in fact, wise — indeed this is a point of view that Barros's aphorisms trouble deeply — but the form itself is one which is hard for the reader to digest in any other way at a first impression. This mode of reading is exploited to great effect in Barros's work: using a form which the reader expects to contain a common-sense statement or some nugget of received wisdom, Barros authoritatively delivers palatable snippets of apparently nonsensical verse. The effect is to force a double take. The initial reaction provoked by the form, one of acceptance and recognition, is immediately refuted by the content of the statements, which, almost like haikus, each contain a dense, playful, philosophical statement of intent or complexity. Some examples of this way of writing from the collection *Livro sobre nada*:

> Tudo que não invento é falso. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 353)
>
> Há muitas maneiras sérias de não dizer nada, mas só a poesia é verdadeira. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 353)
>
> O meu amanhecer vai ser de noite. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 354)
>
> Sempre que desejo contar alguma coisa, não faço nada;
> mas quando não desejo contar nada, faço poesia. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 355)

These aphorisms tread the line between sense and nonsense, as do many or most of those in Barros's poetry. Crucially, the phrases perhaps do not make sense by conventional understanding, but in the context of

Barros's poetics are eminently more understandable, and it should be noted that the most extensive collections of aphorisms are preceded by more conventional poetry which acclimatizes the reader to this way of thinking. Thus a conventionally cryptic phrase such as "A inércia é meu ato principal" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 354) becomes comprehensible when embedded in Barros's poetics as a statement of artistic intent: the poet must learn to be in the world as a thing so that he might reinvigorate the material world through poetic utterance and, as such, the poet's task is to create a kind of "inércia" which forces the reader to pause, to step aside from their conventional perceptions, and to learn to see the world differently. The effectiveness of this aphorism is redoubled by the fact that it is reflexive — the very aphorism itself creates the kind of "inércia" of which it speaks.

The use of this aphoristic form contributes to Barros's use of nonsensical language and syntax in his poetry to provoke imaginative readings. Whether it be in the form of invented words, neologistic uses of existing words which force a reassessment of the use of language, or of structure and syntax to impart a gloss of reason to an illogical or nonsensical phrase, the use of such constructions underlines Barros's commitment to the rehabilitation and reinvention of language and its relationship to the material world.

Through his close focus on the material world, and his use of poetic

strategies which undermine conventional uses of language, Barros is able to create new meanings from the everyday language and things which feature in his poetry. As the title of this chapter suggests, Barros's poetry can be conceived of as 'Poetry About Things', verse which makes us reconsider our perceptions of the material world through its innovative uses of language, form and subject. But further to this emphasis on the power of language to shape the material world, his work makes us aware that the 'things' of the material world have an equally profound effect on how poetry is created: if, as Barros suggests, these things and objects of the material world have their own agency, then we must readjust our perceptions of poetry itself to encompass these new forms of agency and ways of being-in-the-world. In the closeness to the material which Barros fosters, it is not just the material world which is affected, but the material word — the living, evolving, and perhaps ultimately autonomous medium of language from which poetry is made.

The Child's Gaze

Barros's interest in marginal or peripheral experiences and characters is a general theme in his poetry, but he focuses particularly on children. Not only does he write poetry and prose (and everything in between) specifically for children, and has even won awards for this, but he also frequently uses the image of the child, and invokes the idea of the childish imagination in his poetry which is, however dubious this distinction is revealed to be, for adults. Furthermore, there is little difference between his work which is purportedly for children and the rest of his poetry. It is easy to imagine the conversation where a child asks a parent what a word or phrase means, and the reply has to be either an invented meaning, or that they do not know and nobody ever will. This says a lot about the universal nature of Barros's writing, and about the way in which he presents the world — a vision which is so radical that it disrupts the normal divisions between what is appropriate for adults and children: through an appreciation of Barros's poetry, we are perhaps all like children, seeing the world for the first time. It is this creative and innovative aspect of a child's experience which is most relevant for Barros: he wants to be able to present the world as new and unreconstructed as it would be seen through the eyes of a child, with none of the preconceptions of the adult world.

This aim is, in some measure, obviously flawed: there is no way that Barros can write from the point of view of a child any more than he can write from the point of view of an animal or a tree — both of which he will, nonetheless, attempt. However, it is perhaps not the literal imaginings and perceptions of a child which are most important to consider in this poetry, but the image of childhood which Barros cultivates and relies upon. In Barros's poetry the image and idea of the child is emblematic of the unfettered creativity which, in Barros's view, is essential for the construction of poetry (Müller and Gismonti 91). It represents the freedom to create without concession to the boundaries and restrictions of conventional language and thought. This transgression of orthodox order and reason as a prerequisite for poetry is most explicitly promoted in one of Barros's later collections ("Olha, mãe, eu só queria inventar uma poesia. / Eu não preciso de fazer razão." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 414)) but it is equally visible throughout his poetic oeuvre.

The most obvious point of entry into this line of enquiry is to study those moments in which Barros explicitly invokes the figure of the child. One of the more striking and developed examples of this is in 'Uma didática da invenção' from *O livro das ignorãças*. In one of the verses of this poem, a child's apparently mistaken use of language is moulded into an example of how a similar childish acceptance of new ways of using words can become a powerful tool for a poetic re-envisioning of the world:

> No descomeço era o verbo.
> Só depois é que veio o delírio do verbo.
> O delírio do verbo estava no começo, lá onde a criança diz: *Eu escuto a cor dos passarinhos.*
> A criança não sabe que o verbo escutar não funciona para cor, mas para som.
> Então se a criança muda a função de um verbo, ele delira.
> E pois.
> Em poesia que é voz de poeta, que é a voz de fazer nascimentos —
> O verbo tem que pegar delírio. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 309)

The opening line of this verse, a corruption of John 1. 1, hints at the truly creative possibilities of language whilst subtly undermining the traditional biblical narrative of creation. Here 'o verbo', understood by conventional theology to be Jesus Christ, is simply the word as language, and its power lies in its delirium, its deviation from the norm, rather than in any canonical meaning or reading. The child's synaesthetic mapping of hearing to colour is at once a trivial, childish mistake, and a powerful reminder of the ways in which our understanding of non- or more-than-human modes of perception are flawed, and how a renewed perspective, one which does not obey the conventional logic of discourse, could perhaps help us to better understand the world around us. The figure of the poet looms large in an apparent denial of post-modern ideas of the death of the author[2], and is ascribed almost god-like powers of creation

[2] Barros was well read in critical theory, as even a cursory glance at his interviews demonstrates (Müller and Gismonti 46, 72, 123–4, 130). Barthes is even mentioned by name in one of Barros's later poems.

with “a voz de fazer nascimentos” (Barros, *Poesia completa* 309), but it is the poet-as-child with which we are presented, and this ability of the poetic voice to create new meanings is contingent upon the childish ability to pervert the word — “O verbo tem que pegar delírio” (Barros, *Poesia completa* 309). As such, the poet which we are shown is not, perhaps, as omniscient as it might appear, instead relying upon a childish discourse which is necessarily never entirely the poet’s own or under his control. The matter of fact tone, at the end almost didactic (it is, after all, a section from a poem entitled *Uma didática da invenção*) underlines the powerful simplicity of this idea, and serves to situate and realize it as a practice, rather than a vapid theory. Ultimately the verse is both an impassioned call for a renewed and re-imagined understanding of the ‘Natural’ or material world and our relationship to it, and a manifesto for poetic creativity, all of which is achieved through a focus on the corruptions and subversions of an imagined childish gaze.

Later in the same poem, Barros explores the fragility of such innovative and creative uses of language, demonstrating that the power of language can just as easily be used to close down, constrain and restrict meaning:

> O rio que fazia uma volta atrás de nossa casa era a imagem de um vidro mole que fazia uma volta atrás de casa.
> Passou um homem depois e disse: Essa volta que o rio faz por trás de sua casa se chama enseada.
> Não era mais a imagem de uma cobra de vidro que

> fazia uma volta atrás de casa.
> Era uma enseada.
> Acho que o nome empobreceu a imagem. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 311)

Here, the dry, technical description of the landscape as "uma enseada" damages the image derived from Barros's childish or poetic imagination, perhaps irrevocably ("Não era mais a imagem [...]"). The landscape of the inlet ceases to be poetically interesting and loses the agency and vitality which it commanded as "uma cobra de vidro" through its domination by, and submission to, conventional, technical language and thought. At the end of the poem, the image is not even that of an active river which is capable of 'doing' ("volta que o rio *faz*";"cobra de vidro que *fazia* uma volta" [my italics]) but has disintegrated into a single, passive noun: "uma enseada" — a noun which "empobreceu a imagem".

Thus, in these two excerpts we can see Barros demonstrating the versatility and innovation that can be derived from the synaesthetic logic of the childish imagination, and then showing how the rationalizing perceptions of society can profoundly and devastatingly disrupt these images and ways of seeing. Whilst it is clear that both of these opposing drives are enacted through language and its conventional or unconventional use, Barros frequently pushes against the rationalizing structures which can be utilized to close down alternative ways of creating meaning within language and emphasizes the power of the word to innovate, invent and re-imagine.

Whilst these examples from later in Barros's poetic career offer one of his most clear and well developed explorations of the childish imagination, it should be noted that this is a theme which has run throughout Barros's work. Even his very first collection opens with a series of childish recollections entitled 'Cabeludinho' (which we are led to assume is Barros's familial nickname from this and other poems) and includes several poems about children in the section entitled 'Retratos a carvão', the most salient of which is 'Polina'. In this poem, the beginnings of the images of childhood which will shape Barros's poetry are clear to see: the girl is described as being almost at one with the material world ("Rolava na terra com os bichos" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 33)) and Barros is already commenting on and innovating with childish uses of language and imagery ("Usava uma algaravia [...] O pirizeiro estava sempre *carregado* de passarinhos..." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 33)).

His first sustained engagement with these ideas, though, would come much later, and after a long break in his writing. In *Compêndio para uso dos pássaros* Barros explicitly evokes the childish gaze throughout the collection, beginning with the opening section, 'De meninos e de pássaros'. The title of this section begins to suggest the affinity which Barros imagines between the child and the natural world, and the title of the first poem, 'Poeminhas pescados numa fala de João', implies that these verses were simply plucked from his son's childish uses of language and

imagery. This, it goes without saying, is clearly not the case: whilst the poem begins with some believably childish language, including onomatopoeia and simplifications which sound typically childish ("*tibum*", "*pan*", "*pum!*", "João foi no casa do peixe" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 103)), by half-way through the poem is written with rich imagery and metaphor which it is difficult to imagine as simply childish:

> VI
> Escuto o meu rio:
> é uma cobra
> de água andando
> por dentro de meu olho (Barros, *Poesia completa* 104)
>
> VIII
> Você viu um passarinho abrido naquela casa
> que ele veio comer na minha mão?
> Minha boca estava seca
> igual do que uma pedra em cima do rio (Barros, *Poesia completa* 105)

Here Barros begins to demonstrate the technique and ideas which will continue throughout his later work: even if the discourse is not authentically childish, the validation and use of an *apparently* childish discourse for poetry is extremely useful, perhaps essential, for Barros's approach to the material world. In these examples the reader, disarmed by the first childish stanzas, is asked to contemplate these poetic images as real and realistic perceptions of the world rather than as flights of poetic imagery, valid not only for children, but also from their own adult perspective as informed by the childish gaze. The first of the above two stanzas is a prime example of the kind of renewal of language which Barros is advoc-

ating. Within only four short lines, listening is associated with the eye and a snake with walking whilst, even as we are compelled to reconsider these natural subjects in accordance with their new verb pairings, we are presented with a river which is both anthropomorphized as an active, wilful agent and at the same time is somehow contained within the eye of the beholder, simultaneously internal, poetic and invented and external, autonomous and free.

The subsequent poems in this collection continue to push the boundaries of the childish imagination, often creating poetry from apparent nonsense. Meaning-making is pared down to the level of the individual phrase or word as the narrative elements of the poetry slip away, and we are left with the kind of aphoristic phrases so common in Barros's poetry. Nonetheless, similar themes emerge from these poems. Barros still attempts to create a closeness to the material world which, we might infer from these poems, is far easier for the childish imagination to attain and understand than it is for the adult imagination. In 'A menina avoada', dedicated to his daughter Martha, Barros writes in a matter of fact tone about impossible-seeming closeness to the natural and material world:

> Quis pegar
> entre meus dedos
> a Manhã.
> Peguei vento. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 105–6)

The various sections of this poem continue to forge a relationship between

the child and the material world through inventive imagery, imagined objects, and linguistic playfulness. The reader is asked to consider "Um barco [...] / de minhoquinhas" and a "vaso de luar" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 106), to deduce the meaning of "pispinicar" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 107), a compound neologism from *pinicar* and *piscar*, and the narrator addresses the bird which is the subject of much of the poem directly, asking for friendship. In the fifth section of this poem, the narrator switches startlingly to the second person, and it is suddenly unclear who is being addressed — the friendly bird from earlier in the poem, or the reader. The question asked ("Você não viu?" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 107)) is a direct invitation to see the world through the eyes of the childish gaze, and indeed a suggestion that an inability to do so is, to some degree, a failing on the part of the reader.

It is, then, the imagined gaze of the child which often allows Barros to demonstrate and resolve his ecological poetics, and his critiques of the material world. One of the reasons that this figuration is so important for Barros's poetry is the way in which it legitimizes and familiarizes a discourse which might otherwise be disconcertingly strange. By relating his radical revisions of the material world to the landscape of the child's imagination, Barros is able to relate his imagery and linguistic idiom to something which, for the reader, is a space in which such imaginative flights of fancy are not just legitimate, but positively encouraged. Mean-

while, the poetry's sharp observation and more profound questioning of our ways of seeing, which stand out from this supposedly childish imagery even whilst they are embedded within it, rescue the poetry from the trap of nostalgia and condescension into which it would be only too easy to fall.

By using the idea of the child and the child's gaze to create a somewhat 'rational' basis for his exploration of a linguistic and poetic discourse which is in many ways profoundly subversive, and often extremely disruptive to a conventional rational-scientific understanding of the natural and material world, Barros recovers for the adult reader a sense of imaginative wonder which is often considered puerile. Within this sense of wonder, Barros is able to create a kind of utopian space for his ecological and poetic project — a space in which there is no obligation to adhere to the rules of either an anti-environmentalist, capitalist, rationalist understanding or a traditionally environmentalist, green or deep-green defence of capital-N 'Nature' and 'Wilderness', and in which conventional understandings of the material world are not obligatory or fully formed. Barros is well aware that this image of the child, the performative rendering of the child's gaze in a poetry which deals with such profoundly 'grown-up' ideas and problems, is a pure construction, as is evidenced in his third volume of *Memórias Inventadas*: "Inventei um menino levado da breca para me ser." (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*, "Invenção"). This

'mischievous child' is evident not only in the three *Memórias Inventadas* — which tellingly are subtitled not *Primeira, segunda* and *terceira idade*, but *A primeira, segunda* and *terceira infância* — but throughout Barros's poetry whenever such an outlook is called upon.

The three volumes of *Memórias Inventadas* are by no means exclusively about childhood, no matter what their subtitles might suggest. Indeed, it is more likely that the subtitles refer to a perceived recuperation and reliving of childhood, much as Barros's poetic references to children and the child's gaze are often closer to an appropriation and reinvention of perceptions around childhood than a true exploration of childhood itself. Nonetheless, these volumes offer a unique insight into the imagined childhood and child's gaze which is so thematically important in Barros's work. These collections are unusual in their unmediated portrayal of Barros's own observations (although it must be stressed that the title's claim to invention should not be dismissed lightly and, still, much is written in the third person) and furthermore their form and style is atypical: the works were originally published as boxed collections of individual folded sheets, each containing title, text and corresponding image, and the writing is almost entirely prose (or perhaps prose-poetry) rather than verse. This form allows Barros a more prosaic and often less cryptic exploration of his subject matter and his language, whilst still inventive, is usually more conventional than that in his poetic works.

All three volumes start with the same monologue, which is perhaps Barros's most direct treatment of his perceptions of his own childhood and of childhood in general. Entitled 'Manoel por Manoel', the short passage seeks to explain Barros's poetics with relation to childhood, and a continuation of the child's gaze into adulthood. Beginning with a description of the ways in which his childhood was lacking, Barros goes on to describe how he has responded to this in his adult life and his poetry:

> Por motivo do ermo não fui um menino peralta. Agora tenho saudade do que não fui. Acho que o que faço agora é o que não pude fazer na infância. Faço outro tipo de peraltagem. (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*, "*Manoel por Manoel*")

He emphasizes the closeness to the natural and material world which his rural upbringing created, and the freedom that this implied — a freedom to which Barros attributes his non-hierarchical view of the human and non-human:

> Cresci brincando no chão, entre formigas. De uma infância livre e sem comparamentos. Eu tinha mais comunhão com as coisas do que comparação. (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*, "*Manoel por Manoel*")

At the end of the passage, the poet explicitly summarizes how he believes this has affected his poetry and his vision of the world, and brought out in his writing the ambiguity which is crucial for poetic discourse. Barros also celebrates the idea of looking at things from unusual perspectives:

> [...] o escuro me ilumina. É um paradoxo que ajuda a poesia e que eu falo sem pudor. Eu tenho que essa visão oblíqua vem de eu ter sido criança em algum lugar perdido onde havia transfusão da natureza e comunhão com ela.

> Era o menino e os bichinhos.
> Era o menino e o sol. O menino e o rio. Era o menino e as árvores.
> (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*, "*Manoel por Manoel*")

The final lines of this passage emphasize with typical simplicity the affinity between the child and the natural world which Barros perceives in his poetry. Whether or not this affinity truly exists is perhaps less important than its effect upon Barros's poetics: it is because of this supposed affinity that ideas of ecology and nature in Barros's poetry are so often intertwined with the image of the child, able to explore and see the material world anew in a way which, for Barros, is lost to adult readers without the creation of a ludic, childish space.

Most of the prose pieces from these three volumes deal with the relationship between the human and the non-human, and several deal particularly with this relationship in the context of a child's interactions with the natural world. As I have already stressed, this should not be interpreted as a literal child, but as the idea of a child, Barros's poetic vision for the importance of an appreciation of the childish gaze. The figure of the child is transposed into situations where conventional views of the material world, and particularly the hierarchy of the human and non-human, natural and non-natural, can be called into question. One example of this, and one which resonates with not only ecological approaches to Barros's poetry, but also to the dialogue with the visual

arts which I shall discuss in a later chapter, is the text 'Desobjeto' from *Memórias Inventadas: A infância* (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*). In this prose-poem Barros demonstrates how natural processes and the childish imagination can blur the boundaries between the 'Natural' world and the material world by focusing on an everyday object which has fallen into ruin:

> O menino que era esquerdo viu no meio do quintal um pente.
> O pente estava próximo de não ser mais um pente. Estaria mais perto de ser um folha dentada. Dentada um tanto que já se havia incluído no chão que nem uma pedra um caramujo um sapo. Era alguma coisa nova o pente. O chão teria comido logo um pouco de seus dentes. Camadas de areia e formigas roeram seu organismo. Se é que um pente tem organismo. (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*, "Desobjeto")

The opening line of this section, by introducing the interlocutor as 'esquerdo', softens the blow of the disruptive and subversive text which follows; however, it is telling that the majority of the description in the poem is not, in fact, spoken by this 'menino esquerdo' but by an apparently reliable narrator. The comb, once a man-made object, has undergone a process of such degradation at the hands of what we would conventionally consider the 'Natural world' that it has almost ceased to be the object that it once was. It has, on the face of it, been destroyed by nature. This alone is not a particularly radical idea, but Barros goes on to muddle the boundaries between this man-made object and the natural world in which it finds itself. The poet even goes as far as to ascribe an "organismo" to the comb — although by hedging at the end of the paragraph

Barros somewhat weakens the radical stance. At the very least it is clear that according to the way of seeing which is described in this poem, the comb has not been destroyed by the natural world, but has become part of it even whilst it has no certain form or purpose — it has become "alguma coisa nova": the titular "desobjeto". It is the realization of this integration which is ascribed to the child's gaze and imagination: "E o menino deu para imaginar que o pente, naquele estado, já estaria incorporado à natureza como um rio, um osso, um lagarto." (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*, "Desobjeto")

A further important point to be considered in this poem is that of use value. The comb in this poem has lost its use value and as such has ceased to be the object which it once was. The use value and 'thingness' of objects are important themes throughout Barros's work, and I shall deal with them at greater length in a subsequent chapter on the visual arts. Nonetheless, in this text as well as others Barros positions the childish imagination and gaze as a primary means of undermining the use value of objects and thus seeing them in a different light. Indeed, it is often not that use value is totally removed, but that the childish imagination is willing to ascribe new and innovative uses to objects in spite of their conventionally accepted function — in this poem, for example, it is observed that "Não se poderia mais dizer se aquela coisa for um pente ou um leque", and later the comb is incorporated into the roots

of a tree and thus nature itself. This subversion of the accepted use value of objects is similar to what is encountered when children play make-believe with whatever is available to them, but it also suggests an important modification to our normal way of seeing the world, allowing objects to perform different functions and perhaps attain some form of agency. Further to this, Barros is also implicitly questioning the traditional 'uses' of poetry — an idea which is treated explicitly elsewhere in the *Memórias inventadas*.

In the only two verse poems in Barros's first collection of *Memórias inventadas*, the question of language and the way it can be used for poetry is also directly addressed. The first of the two consecutive poems, 'O apanhador de desperdícios' describes how Barros's attitude towards "coisas desimportantes" (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*, "O apanhador de desperdícios") is reflected in his language, and indeed the way his use of language might inform the reader's outlook on the material world:

> Uso a palavra para compor meus silêncios.
> Não gosto das palavras
> fatigadas de informar.
> Dou mais respetito
> às que vivem de barriga no chão
> tipo água pedra sapo. (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*, "O apanhador de desperdícios")

Even in the first line of this poem Barros challenges the conventional meaning ascribed to words, and he continues to home in on the kind of language which, for the poet, can be made most meaningful. Just as

Barros often chooses apparently simple subjects in his poetry, the words which he selects as deserving of his "respeito" are apparently simple words and the pace and rhythm of these first lines demonstrates a considered respect for the intricacies of langauge: there is no rush to "informar" here, but a slower and more meticulous approach. Nonetheless, it is these simple words, Barros contends, which are so charged with possibility as to be alive in the world ("vivem de barriga no chão"). This idea of a living language, one which can change and, crucially, one which can be seen to have some sort of agency or autonomy, is as important in Barros's poetry as the idea that an object or thing might have agency — and indeed the two ideas are at times inseparable. The poem continues in its defence of a considered and gentle approach to revitalizing language, an approach which is at odds with the more conventional modernist obsession with speed and technology, with a humorous and cunning use of enjambment to emphasize the point:

> Prezo a velocidade
> das tartarugas mais que a dos mísseis. (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*, "O apanhador de desperdícios")

Barros ends the poem with a flourish of neologism:

> Queria que a minha voz tivesse um formato de canto.
> Porque eu não so da informática:
> eu soi da invencionática.
> Só uso a palavra para compor meus silêncios. (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*, "O apanhador de desperdícios")

The point is hammered home: it is inventiveness and creativity which is

able to renew and extend language, rather than knowledge, technology, complexity and displays of stylistic and lexical prowess. It is this lack of 'loud' language, perhaps, to which Barros refers when he describes his word-filled silences.

In the second of these two poems, Barros attempts to expand the scope of the childish gaze, and the linguistic playfulness which it incorporates and relies upon, to include not only poetry, but also everyday speech. In a a series of contortions and distortions of language ascribed to companions of the poet, Barros thus democratizes his poetics as a tool for new understandings of the material world:

> No quintal a gente gostava de brincar com palavras
> mais do que bicicleta.
> Principalmente porque ninguém possuia bicicleta. (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*, "Brincadeiras")

By describing the poetry ("brincar com palavras" is, after all, as close to a definition of poetry as several of Barros's other definitions) as an alternative to a bicycle, and language as a plaything, Barros removes poetry from the rarefied and elitist sphere it might usually be attributed to, and radically redefines it as something which is materially useful. This is related to my earlier discussion of the use value of objects, but is perhaps even more important for Barros's poetics: poetry must become useful for more than its own sake. In Barros's poetry, this usefulness is manifested in a radical re-envisioning of the material world, offering new ways of understanding our relationship to the non-human and the

possibility of a renewed and revitalized perception of the world around us.

In keeping with such a radical and subversive agenda, the characters' linguistic experiments irreverently undermine the traditional value system of poetry:

> A gente brincava de palavras descomparadas. Tipo assim:
> O céu tem três letras
> O sol tem três letras
> O inseto é maior. (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*, "Brincadeiras")

This game of "palavras descomparadas" (perhaps a subtle undermining of *literatura comparada*, *linguística comparada* or *gramática comparada*) takes two extremely traditional and accepted subjects of nature poetry, the sky and the sun, and declares them inferior to insects. Barros goes on to defend the means of deciding this:

> O que parecia um despropósito
> Para nós não era despropósito.
> Porque o inseto tem seis letras e o sol só tem três
> Logo o inseto é maior. (Aquí entrava a lógica?) (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*, "Brincadeiras")

Even when this approach is decried as a sophism by the "irmão [...] estudado", the word sophism — a technical term somewhat out of place in the poem — has to be described in poetic terms, and importantly in words which are fairly simply related to the natural and material world, before it is understood: "Ele disse que sofisma é risco n'água. Entendemos tudo." (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*, "Brincadeiras") The elision

of *na água* reminds the reader of the characters' lack of formal education, and yet even without this education they are able to understand the concept as long as it is described without using academic jargon and technical language, once again undermining the idea that poetry and philosophy are the domain of the educated person. Once again, poetic language is used here not for the sake of artistry, but to explain a concept in less complex and more practical terms, and to more firmly relate it to the material world in which the human experience is grounded. Barros reinforces this point at the end of the poem:

> Outro dia a gente destampamos a cabeça de
> Cipriano. Lá dentro só tinha árvore árvore árvore
> Nenhuma idéia sequer.
> Falaram que ele tinha predominâncias vegetais do que platônicas.
> Isso era. (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*, "Brincadeiras")

Cipriano, a character who in an amusing play on words is described as someone who "obedecia a desordem", is presented as having a much more material contact with the world rather than an intellectual one. This could, from one perspective, be seen as a slur on his intelligence, but here this is not the aim — throughout the poem, the collection and indeed his work in general, Barros is careful to promote the importance of this more immediate and material, less theoretical and abstract way of being in the world. Cipriano does not *need* ideas, the poem suggests: he has trees. The final line underscores once again the grounded, practical nature of the advice and the story of this short poem, however fantastical

it might seem: this is not to be seen as a flight of fancy, but as a valid and useful way of seeing and of being in the world.

Related to this idea that poetry should have practical use is the idea that one such use is to give pleasure. Whilst perhaps less radical or transformative than other purposes in Barros's poetry, the impulse to make poetry enjoyable is strong, and particularly where the poetry is to do with children. Children, after all, spend much of their time free of responsibilities and in the pursuit of pleasure. In the first volume of *Memórias inventadas* Barros homes in on the pleasure of literature in a humorous vignette of a childhood experience:

> Quando eu estudava no colégio, interno,
> Eu fazia pecado solitário.
> [...]
> Meu castigo era ficar em pé defronte a uma parede e decorar 50 linhas de um livro.
> O padre me deu pra decorar o Sermão da Sexagésima de Vieira. (Barros, *Memórias inventadas* "Parrrede!")

The text portrays a take on a familiar scene — literature, in the eyes of the schoolboy, is a punishment. But the young poet has a revelation:

> Ao ler e decorar 50 linhas da Sexagésima fiquei embevecido.
> E li o Sermão inteiro.
> Meus Deus, agora eu precisava fazer mais pecado solitário! [...] (Barros, *Memórias inventadas* "Parrrede!")

Not only does Barros's image of being compelled to masturbate so that he might read more of the book which so enraptured him offer the reader an off-beat and amusing take on literary discovery — one which subverts

a conventional narrative of pious study — but it also directly relates physical and sensual pleasure to poetry. In the final lines, Barros also relates this experience to the world of mundane objects which is so often the subject of his verse:

> Fiquei fraco de tanto cometer pecado solitário. [...]
> A esse tempo também eu aprendi a escutar o silêncio das paredes. (Barros, *Memórias inventadas* "Parrrede!")

In this text, then, the childish imagination forges another improbable and conventionally distasteful link: between literary enjoyment and sexual or sensual hedonism. Indeed, even the experience of standing in front of the wall in silence was perhaps, in Barros's estimation, a literary exercise as useful as reading the sermons of Padre Vieira. The suggestion here is clearly not that literature is degraded by this contact with the material and the human, but that is made more visceral, real and practical, something which can be used by everyone to their advantage in whatever way they see fit. Once again, as in the previous examples, Barros removes literature from its elitist pedestal and puts it in the service of the every-man.

This is not the only time that sexuality appears in Barros's *Memórias Inventadas*. In the second volume (*A segunda infância*), the opening poem, transparently titled 'Estreante', deals with an adolescent's sexual awakening and, whilst it is not explicitly linked with poetry, the text is one of the few in the collection written in verse. The poem is one of Bar-

ros's most explicitly sexual, and it implicitly deals with the loss of childhood innocence — a theme which, whilst it remains largely untreated in Barros's poetry, is of necessary importance to Barros's poetic construction of the childish imagination and gaze. Sex is initially described as an animal act:

> Ela deixava a porta do banheiro meio aberta
> E isso me abatia.
> Eu teria 15 anos e ela 25.
> Ela me ensinava:
> Precisa não afobar.
> Precisa ser bem animal
> Como um cavalo. Nobremente.
> Usar o desorgulho dos animais. (Barros, *Memórias inventadas* "Estreante")

The description of the actions of the girl in this poem, and the persona's self-described weakening, emphasizes the loss of childish innocence, reinforced by the difference in age between the persona (presumably, although not necessarily, Barros) and the "namorada indiana" (Barros, *Memórias inventadas* "Estreante"). Nonetheless, this is not presented as something sordid: the use of the word *ensinava* and the measured rhythm and tone of the poem do not suggest a trauma. The link between sex and the animal world is strongly affirmed, particularly with reference to the shame traditionally associated with sexuality in Christian cultures — the persona is instructed to use the 'dis-pride' of the animal kingdom, the attitude that sex is a noble, normal, natural act. Towards the end of the poem this religious shame is directly challenged:

> Dizia que era um ato religioso foder.

[...]
Pregava que fazer amor é uma eucaristia.
Que era uma comunhão. (Barros, *Memórias inventadas* "Estreante")

Sex is recast here as a religious act, indeed as a Eucharist or Communion. As Barros undermines one of the most important sacraments of the Catholic faith, he also suggests that this communion is related to the animal sexuality which he described earlier in the poem, indeed that it is perhaps a communion with nature, rather than with God. This is similar to his claims in the introduction to the three volumes of a communion with the natural and material world (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*, "*Manoel por Manoel*").

Even in this poem about the *loss* of innocence, it is, unusually, the childish viewpoint which is striking — the naivety about the implications of this sexual act is clear, and the narrator still takes the position of a child, oriented by the more experienced adult. Whilst this faux-naivety might stretch the credulity of the poem as a biographical account, it attests to the huge importance of naivety and the childish imagination in Barros's work: even with the conventionally absolute loss of innocence, Barros insists on maintaining the childish gaze. This insistence points to a more subversive conclusion, and one which is crucial for the reader of Barros's poetry: that the loss of innocence and the onset of adulthood need not preclude the possibility of maintaining the childish perceptions

which can so unsettle orthodox perceptions and world-views. In this poem, Barros attempts to demonstrate that the loss of innocence is not, necessarily, the end of childhood.

Barros has also co-authored three books to date which would, at first glance, fall into the category of children's literature, and has even won the prestigious Jabuti prize for one of these collections. Aside from their pictorial format, however, there is little to distinguish the poems in these short collections from Barros's other work, and the ideas, content and even the language are of a similar level of complexity: metalinguistic and metaphysical concerns still pepper the verse; innovative neologisms and unusual language are present in almost every poem. Nonetheless, these poems reflect a necessarily increased sensibility to childhood and the childish imagination, and a closer attention on the part of the poet to the ways in which a 'real' childish experience might relate to his creation of a poetics of the childish gaze in the rest of his work. This is a complement and a counterpoint to other parts of his poetry, and in particular the *Memórias Inventadas* and *Compêndio para uso dos pássaros* which offer a more sustained engagement with the *idea* of the child and the childish gaze, and as such they are of particular relevance to this chapter.

The most obvious signal that Barros has considered the effects of childhood experiences on later ones, in particular with relation to the learning and appreciation of language, comes in the second of these three

collections. In the poem 'A língua mãe' (Barros, *Poesia completa* 483–4) from *O fazedor de amanhecer*, the poet explores the important difference between languages and culture learnt in childhood and that which is acquired later, concluding that there is an intractable essence of childhood in anyone's mother tongue:

> [...]
> Penso que seja porque a palavra *pássaro* em
> mim recuperte a infância
> E *oiseau* não recuperte.
> Penso que a palavra pássaro carrega até hoje
> nela o menino que ia de tarde pra
> debaixo das árvores a ouvir os pássaros.
> Nas folhas daquelas árvores não tinha oiseaux
> Só tinha pássaros.
> É o que me ocorre sobre língua mãe. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 484)

These lines signal that language and childhood serve a reciprocal purpose in Barros's poetry. The idea of childhood, as discussed earlier in the chapter, is crucial to Barros's strategy for subverting and innovating with conventional language, but at the same time the use of a simple, childish language — in this case without any particular linguistic or formal innovation — can still elicit a strong sense of the childish imagination through nostalgia in a way that more affected and grandiose 'poetic' language could never do. Barros asserts that the memories of our childhood selves are preserved within the words and language which we used at the time, and thus the French *oiseau* can never replace the Portuguese *pássaro*, or provoke the same emotional and instinctual response as it.

This claim also emphasizes the creative powers ascribed to language in Barros's poetry, and the conception of language as a thing of the material world. The final line of the poem, by omitting the preposition 'a' before "língua mãe" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 484), almost personifies language, and the use of the more informal "língua mãe" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 484) rather than the perhaps more correct 'língua materna' further underlines the intimacy which Barros has created between language and speaker. The preceding couplet "não tinha oiseaux / Só tinha pássaros." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 484) goes beyond simply describing the link between language and experience: the insistence of this claim suggests that our surroundings and our perceptions of them are to a great extent created by language and dependent upon it — no matter that other words exist to describe the scene; there, then, at that moment, there were only, and can only ever have been, 'pássaros.'[3] Whilst in the hands of a lesser poet, the implication of this could be a debilitating closing-off of language, shielding it from outside influence and restricting its evolution and change, in Barros's poetry, his radical and constant re-imagining of words, meaning and linguistic form and structure circumvents this limiting possibility.

The next poem in this collection is a metaphor for the kind of radical

[3] Barros's correct plural noun form in the French, incidentally, belies his claims in *Ensaios Fotográficos* to only really speak Portuguese ("A única lingua que estudei com força foi a portuguesa." (*Poesia completa* 389)).

linguistic change which Barros makes possible in his poetry, and which as above is essential for readings of his children's literature which open up new possibilities rather than closing them down:

> Bernado já estava uma árvore quando
> eu o conheci. (Barros, Poesia completa 484)

Here, Barros begins with an already-radical image of one of his most frequented poetic personas, Bernardo, who is, on this occasion, 'already a tree'. The second sentence links the poetic persona with the 'passarinhos' of the previous poem:

> Passarinhos já construíam casas na palha do
> seu chapéu.
> Brisas carregavam borboletas para o seu
> paletó.
> E os cachorros usavam fazer de poste as suas
> pernas. (Barros, Poesia completa 484)

The poet continues to paint Bernardo as the epitome of something unchange-able and immovable, reflecting the idea of language which would stifle creativity. The simple syntax and enumerative tone of the list of things which happen to Bernard reinforce this idea, and also acknowledge the younger audience of the poem — although in other poems of this col-lection Barros does not make a similar concession to uncomplicated language and ideas. Just as the reader is getting used to the idea of "bernardo-árvore", Barros overturns it:

> Quando estávamos todos acostumados com aquele
> bernardo-árvore

> Ele bateu asas e avoou.
> Virou passarinho. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 484)

This is an apt image for the kind of linguistic renewal which I have ascribed to Barros's poetry — here the image of something as apparently unchangeable as a tree is transformed into a bird, the very image of freedom and changeability. Finally, Barros once again links this bird, however different it might be from the idea of the solid tree, to the landscape of the Pantanal in which the poetry is set, and to the material world itself:

> Foi para o meio do cerrado ser um arãquã.
> Sempre ele dizia que o seu maior sonho era
> ser um arãquã para compor o amanhecer. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 484)

The final lines indicate a further complexity in Barros's understanding of the relationships between language, humans, animals and the material world: just as we are apparently able to create and manipulate the material world with language, the arãquã bird 'composes' the dawn with its call — a call which is indeed a very typical sound of the Pantanal daybreak. Subtly, the reader or listener is compelled, through a comparison between these two consecutive poems, to consider that the non-human 'language' of the arãquã bird may be as powerful in its meaning-making and its relationship to the material world as our own. The following couplet (separated by an ellipsis) confirms, if there was any doubt, that Barros is indeed attempting a radical rethinking of our perceptions of the material world by removing the automatic priority of human experience:

"Um grilo é mais importante que um navio. / (Isso do ponto de vista dos grilos)" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 485). Now not only is the orthodox order of values overturned, but the non-human point of view of a cricket is prioritized and validated as worthy of artistic contemplation.

As in Barros's other collections, such linguistic inventiveness as neologism, plays on similar sounding words, and syntactic ambiguity is important to these poems for children. From the same collection as the previous two poems, the transparently titled 'Palavras' is a clear example of this. In addition to continuing to probe the interactions between words and the material world, the end of this poem introduces a sonorous play on words in which Barros demonstrates an awareness on what I have called the materiality of language:

> Não posso ver a palavra andarilho que eu
> não tenha vontade de dormir debaixo
> de uma árvore.
> Que eu não tenha vontade de olhar com
> espanto, de novo, aquele homem do saco
> a passar como um rei de andrajos nos
> arruados de minha aldeia.
> E tem mais uma: as andorinhas,
> pelo que sei, consideram os andarilhos
> com árvore. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 485)

The repeated use of similar sounding words (*árvores, andrajos, andorinhas, andarilhos*) to build up and create ambiguity of meaning is prevalent here. In spite of their semantic difference, Barros's marrying of these near-homonyms through syntax and line position gives the reader a sense

that there perhaps *could* be a meaningful link between these words in spite of their etymological disparity. True enough, the swallow is associated with trees in an obvious semantic link; but it is also, by virtue of its sound and appearance on the page, linked to rags (*andrajos*) and tramps (*andarilhos*). This serves as a clear demonstration of the kind of innovative language use which can lead to new meaning-making possibilities in Barros, but further to this, it undermines a fundamental conventional assumption about how humans interpret language and meaning, exploding the idea that semantic meaning alone is responsible for our perceptions of meaning in the spoken and written word. This link between the musicality and sound of words and their meaning is to some extent present in any poetry, but it is particularly strongly demonstrated in these lines. Barros thus puts theory into practice, demonstrating how language, but particularly poetry, can still allow us to 'olhar / com espanto' the material world which is otherwise so familiar; that is to say, that innovative uses of language, as argued above, can plunge us back into a supposedly childish state of wonder and reverie at the newness of the world around us.

This way of using language is explicitly brought to the fore in the poem 'Poeminha em língua de brincar'. This short poem argues for the importance of playing with language over thinking with it. However impossible this might be, and indeed it is clear that within this very poem

language is being used to think through concepts which are important to Barros's poetics, Barros is able to convey through his own linguistic playfulness the relevance of this strategy:

> [...]
> Falava em língua de ave e de criança.
>
> Sentia mais prazer de brincar com as palavras
> do que de pensar com elas.
> Dispensava pensar. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 493)

The sonorous play on words in the final line of this tercet serves to reinforce the point that there is a balance to be struck between pleasure and erudition, and that there are things to be discovered from playfulness as well as from serious thought. The context and juxtaposition of "Dispensava pensar" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 493) forces the ordinary word *dispensar*, which makes good enough literal and syntactic sense in this position, to take on the new meaning of *dis-pensar*, to de-think. When this way of using language is criticized by the buffoonish "Dona Lógica da Razão", the rejection of her system of knowledge as an ultimate authority, and the affirmation of the dangers of excluding other systems of knowledge, is firm:

> Logo entrou a Dona Lógica da Razão e bosteou:
> [...]
> Isso é Língua de brincar
> É coisa-nada.
>
> O menino sentenciou:
> Se o Nada desaparecer a poesia acaba. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 494)

Barros's aim is not, I would argue, to deny the importance of science and reason, but to affirm the possibility of other ways of seeing: here he is not castigating logic and reason itself, but the use of logic and reason to close off and invalidate experiences which, for Barros, are essential for poetry to exist.

In his late collection *Menino do Mato*, Barros opens with an epigraph which is, allegedly, quoted from Kierkegaard:

> *O homem seria metafisicamente grande*
> *se a criança fosse seu mestre.*
> SOREN KIERKEGAARD (Barros, *Poesia completa* 457)

This short and probably invented quotation sums up very succinctly one of the key tenets of Barros's appropriation of the childish gaze in his poetry: for Barros, the observations which are so readily dismissed as childish or primitive are those which are the most philosophically profound. He is careful to distinguish knowledge learnt from studying from a more instinctive knowledge which is grounded in experience of the material world:

> Nosso conhecimento não era de estudar em livros.
> Era de pegar de apalpar de ouvir e de outros sentidos.
> Seria um saber primordial?
> Nossas palavras se ajuntavam uma na outra por amor
> e não por sintaxe.
> A gente queria o arpejo. O canto. O gorjeio das palavras. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 458)

That this 'primordial knowledge' is regarded as sensual is clear from the language used to describe its acquisition, but the lack of punctuation in

the second line of the quotation also emphasizes that this is a knowledge which is not subject to the constraints of conventional distinctions. This sense of creative and innovative freedom is reinforced in the third and fourth lines, and its direct impacts on language and poetry are explicitly stated, as in the final line of the quotation language is elevated beyond semantic meaning into musicality and even birdsong. From a later line in the same poem, it is clear that for Barros the only creative language is one free of the constraints which we learn as adults: "A gente gostava bem das vadiações com as palavras do que das prisões gramaticais." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 459).

Ecologies of Poetry and Poetic Ecologies

The environment, nature and the material world are clearly thematically important in Barros's work. His poetry, grounded in the landscape of the Brazilian wetlands of the Pantanal, has been praised for its evocations of the region and for its inventive approach to the Pantanal's living environment. Nonetheless, to label Barros a poet of the Pantanal, a nature poet, or an environmentalist is to circumscribe his poetry, and to co-opt it for a particular agenda. Barros's poetry does not seek simply to represent a particular part of Brazil, nor to eulogize the wonderful natural world of the Pantanal — although it does fulfil both of these roles admirably at times; instead, the poetry goes beyond conventions of nature poetry and pastoral, often questioning and redefining how the natural and material world is presented and misrepresented in everyday life.

As such, a key approach to Barros's poetry is one informed by the relatively recent critical school of ecocriticism. As I shall explore in this chapter, Barros's ecocritical credentials are evident upon any close reading of his poetry — indeed, his work often *informs* ecocriticism as much as being informed *by* it. Still, there are a variety of interesting critical and philosophical approaches to be found in ecocritical theory, and many of these methodologies can inform readings of Barros. Whilst ecocriticism is a broad church, critical theories which question the anthropocentric

nature of western thought, and the structures and categories which we use to divide and define the material world are particularly important to a reading of his poetry.

To define ecocriticism is no easy task. There is no recognizable central figure or theorist, and its deeply political motivations lead to a variety of interpretations of its central tenets. That its philosophical underpinnings in Heidegger's notions of *Dasein* and dwelling are often deeply politically uncomfortable for its proponents only adds to the difficulties (see Garrard; Claborn for the tip of the iceberg). Broadly speaking, I shall define ecocriticism as any criticism which interprets social or cultural products and phenomena through an ecological or environmental lens. The ecocritical approaches most relevant to this study place a particular emphasis on redressing the anthropocentric assumptions of most western philosophy, and problematizing notions of 'Nature' and the 'Environment' (in their conspicuously capitalized forms). It is clear that Barros's poetry falls within this category, and though many attempts have been made to link his work to landscape as a marker of regionalism, it is only recently that this more broad critical perspective has been broached in published literature (McNee, "Between Backyard Swamps and the Cosmos").

I owe a large amount in my construction of an ecocritical approach and methodology to Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature* (*Ecology Without Nature*) and *The Ecological Thought* (*The Ecological Thought*),

and his critical approaches not only to texts, but also to the idea of eco-criticism itself. His books develop a deep and questioning study, and not one with which I wholly agree, but his key critique of our perception of ecologies, and indeed a critique of ecocriticism itself, is particularly applicable to Barros's poetry: that "the idea of nature is getting in the way of properly ecological forms of culture, philosophy, politics and art" (Morton, *Ecology Without Nature* 1). Whilst the poorly defined, and likely impossible to define, concept of a "properly ecological" poetics is perhaps ultimately unattainable, Barros's poetry attempts a construction of such a poetics, with some degree of success. It is if, how, and why he succeeds at this that I shall examine in this chapter. But if we accept its existence even in an inevitably imperfect form, what *is* an ecological poetics (or eco-poetry), and can Barros's work really be labelled as such?

The terms eco-poetry and eco-poet, whilst they are gaining traction, are still not particularly common ones. Except in a few particular studies, and the work of a couple of specific North-American poets, the term is almost unused (for a few examples see Bryson; Gander and Kinsella; Snyder, *No Nature*). This must partly be to do with the difficulty in drawing the boundaries around what can — and cannot — be called eco-poetry. The main difficulty lies in separating eco-, or perhaps better ecological, poetry from the nature poetry which is an almost universal genre across different eras and cultures. Even if we accept that conven-

tional pastoral poetry can perhaps not be regarded as eco-poetry, due to its place in, and reinforcement of, a very traditional and potentially harmful way of seeing and categorizing the natural and material world (Morton, *Ecology Without Nature* 86; Williams), there are still a variety of approaches which are all very different ways of writing nature and ecology into poetry. Is Wordsworth any less an eco-poet than Gary Snyder? Morton's study ranges from Dante to the Romantics. Neruda's *Residencia en la Tierra* or *Odas Elementales*; Francis Ponge's *Le parti pris des choses*, *Pièces* and especially *La Fabrique du Pré;* Wallace Stevens's *Ideas of Order* and *Parts of a World*; these all contain poems which engage deeply with the material world and natural objects. How can we make a distinction?

Morton argues that to a great extent we cannot — but that we may apply an ecological critique and sensibility to any work in much the same way that we might execute a feminist or marxist analysis (*Ecology Without Nature* 5). Indeed, as an indication of just how flexible ecocriticism can be, there is such a thing as ecofeminism, and much ecocriticism is based heavily on marxist theories of production and capital. It is probably important, both ethically and politically, that ecocritical approaches become more common in general criticism, and to take such an approach to Barros's poetry is fruitful. This theoretical framework, or a version of it, is the basis for much of my work in this chapter.

However, I would argue that it is unfair to dismiss Barros's poetry as work which can, like any other, be interpreted through such an ecocritical lens. It is clear, at the very least, that Barros's poetry is far from pastoral, often challenging pastoral visions of the natural world, and indeed the very definitions of the Natural and the Environmental. Much of his poetry does more to add to and explore a philosophy of 'ecological thinking' than a lot of purportedly ecocritical essay writing, engaging with ecocritical concepts at a creative level and in ways which suggest a deep and intuitive understanding of its central issues. It is not simply a case of applying ecocritical theories to Barros's poetry — his poetics positively demands that the reader consider and question received ideas of capital-N Nature and the environment, and our relationship as beings to the material world. This, I believe, is what makes his a legitimate eco-poetry, if there can be such a thing. Indeed, Barros himself conceded in an interview that whilst he thoroughly rejected the idea that he was the 'Poet of the Pantanal' he did not object to the idea that his poetry could be associated with ecology (Müller and Gismonti 20, 76).

A brief note about ecological writing and thinking in Brazil: it could definitely be said that a certain brand of ecocriticism is widespread in Brazil (that is to say particularly, although not only, in Brazil), and has been for some time. Studies and literary and cultural criticism which tie authors to certain geographical or cultural regions, such as those

mentioned in the interviews referred to above in which Barros is characterized as a regional poet, are commonplace — Barros and the Pantanal, Guimarães Rosa and the *Sertão*, João Cabral de Melo Neto and the *Nordeste*. But regionalism cannot be seen as a truly ecological critique: it propagates commonly held ideas about space and place rather than deeply exploring or questioning them, and still asserts humankind as the driving force behind the definition and categorization of the various elements and spaces of the material world. Attempts to define literature through its regional provenance and vice versa do not do usually do justice to its scope: it is not enough to show the interactions and iterations of the Pantanal landscape in Barros's work — that connection is obvious; a truly ecological reading (and an ecological poetics) must go beyond such regionalism. In terms of poetry alone, during the period defined as Brazilian *modernismo* several writers have attempted to seriously engage with questions of materiality, space and place in a way which lends itself to an ecological criticism, such as João Cabral de Melo Neto (most obviously in *Educação pela pedra*, but also in earlier work like *O cão sem plumas* and *O rio* (Brandellero)), or Carlos Drummond de Andrade, or in a very different, but no less interesting, manner the concrete poets in São Paulo. Malcolm McNee has recently published a book-length study, *The Environmental Imaginary in Brazilian Poetry and Art* (*The Environmental Imaginary*), which gives a broad overview of the parallels between poetry and the visual arts in their representa-

tions of the Brazilian landscape and environment. Whilst this study does address Barros's poetry, and even identifies as avenues of future research many of the themes of this thesis (McNee, *The Environmental Imaginary* 40), the short section on Barros, focusing on "abjection, ruination, metamorphosis, and transfiguration" (McNee, *The Environmental Imaginary* 41) leaves, by its own admission, much to be explored.

It is my intention to demonstrate that Barros's poetry (and undoubtedly that of other poets and authors who are so unproductively pigeon-holed by a regionalist approach) has a philosophical, and perhaps political, importance far beyond the narrow readings advocated by regionalist studies, and a depth and breadth which McNee's book acknowledges, but does not explore. What is at stake in Barros's work is more fundamental than simplistic nationalist-regionalist discourses of place and identity, or even an attempt to "return the world to an original state of nature and, simultaneously, to free the natural world from the restrictive confines of language and modern, classificatory, categorical, and utilitarian rationality" (McNee, *The Environmental Imaginary* 39) — although undoubtedly the latter comes closer to my interpretation. Barros's poetry is an exploration of the pervasiveness of the discourse of 'Nature' and the 'Natural' and an attempt to create a new way of seeing and being in the world — an endeavour which affects humankind as much as any configuration of 'the natural world'.

This much more profound questioning of the order we perceive or impose in the world around us leads away from some of the more pedestrian (and political) trends in ecocriticism and into the construction of an eco-poetics (an ecology of poetry? a poetic ecology?) which can encompass and enrich Barros's work. Here, concrete examples of how Barros poses these difficult questions, and how he differs from other poets and comparators in doing so, will shed light on any attempt to construct a poetic theory around his verse. To pigeon-hole Barros into either an especially 'green' aesthetic, or into the Futurist-inspired obsession with speed and technology of some of his contemporaries would be to ignore the real and interesting materiality of his poetry. It is certain that Barros recognizes the damage we are doing to the environment ('Adoecer de nós a Natureza'(Barros, *Poesia completa* 310)), but his obsession with the material world is not confined to the 'natural'. He considers manmade objects as much as organic ones, and nowhere is this more obvious than in 'Materia de Poesia':

> Terreno de 10 x 20, sujo de mato — os que
> nele gorjeiam: detritos semoventes, latas
> servem para poesia
>
> Um chevrolé gosmento
> Coleção de besouros abstêmios
> O bule de Braque sem boca
> são bons para poesia
>
> As coisas que não levam a nada
> têm grande importância (Barros, *Poesia completa* 153)

Here, Barros juxtaposes (or rather, composes) anthropogenic and natural, mundane and artistic objects, declaring them all of equal (un)importance. Much ecocritical theory would propose that this distinction between man and nature is dubious in itself, as I would argue that Barros's verses above begin to show: the description of a Chevrolet as 'slimy' and of the mixture of organic and inorganic detritus in the small plot of land evoked by the poem start to compound these man-made and natural objects, blurring the boundary between the two. Barros's poetry examines neither the 'natural' world nor the 'technological' world, but rather the material world as it is, an inextricable fusion of what what we create and comprehend, and what we discover and cannot. Indeed, Barros's poetry demonstrates the 'natural world' is perhaps as 'man-made' as any 'detritos semoventes, latas' or 'chevrolé gosmento', not an inherent and self-explanatory ecological system which we happen to inhabit, but an utterly constructed "symbolic order that transcendentally pure and organic notions of nature and the environment tend to evoke" (McNee, *The Environmental Imaginary* 41).

By opening the poem with a description of a parcel of land, Barros alerts the reader to this construction and partitioning of space into something easier to conceive of and manipulate within a modern, Western political framework. The different readings of ownership and territoriality which are inscribed on the landscape by human activity are implicitly

present, but the poem simultaneously undermines this system of order by highlighting the disordered, uncontrollable materiality and vitality of the natural world within it. The reference to an area of a very specific, and diminutive, size compounds this sense of arbitrary delineation, but also emphasizes Barros's high esteem of the importance of things on a small scale, and shows that even within such a tiny area, humankind cannot exert the kind of absolute control which it often wishes or believes it can.

That such a short extract of a single poem can yield such a dense ecocritical interpretation is indicative of the wider prevalence of ecological thought that justifies the definition of Barros's work as an ecological poetics. In this chapter I shall demonstrate the ways in which Barros's poetry challenges conventional ecologies and perceptions of Nature and the Environment through a series of close readings of his work, and comparative readings of his work with that of other poets who have produced philosophically and thematically similar material. It is in this highly critical and universally applicable vein that I wish to re-examine Barros, a poet who has often been characterized as an idiosyncratic nature poet, the creator of *uma sabedoria da terra* (Savio), and to demonstrate that in many ways his poetry does not present capital-N 'Nature'. On the contrary, his poems often subtly, and not-so-subtly, subvert the idea or category of the natural as opposed to the human or technological, and mediate the many elements of material world (and us humans as a part

of it) to re-frame them as uncategorized and non-hierarchical. I hope to show that for Barros "As coisas sem importância" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 156) does not only refer to what we might ordinarily consider 'things', but extends to encompass the entirety of the material world, including humankind, and that, as such, language becomes a thing as well: Barros's exhortation to "Perder a inteligência das coisas para vê-las" (*Poesia completa* 156) applies just as much to the *material word* as it does to the material world.

The creation of fantastic and imaginary objects is one of Barros's most pervasive tactics in his attempts to reconstruct the material world through language (and vice versa). His poems, which address objects in ways that can ostensibly seem nonsensical, offer through their simplicity, their tone and their linguistic construction a possibility of new understandings of everyday objects. This is a poetry that often challenges the meaning and use value which we assign to an object and demands that we reassess our perceptions of certain objects, offering these objects new chances to 'speak' differently from their socially assigned role. In particular, Barros projects an all-inclusive world of objects which can be seen as art (indeed, Barros's treatment of the visual arts was extensive, as I shall demonstrate in a later chapter). In 'Matéria de Poesia' Barros picks several seemingly random objects, declaring them fit for poetry, and proposing a thoroughly non-hierarchical and equalizing view of the

material world and the order of objects and things which populate not only our lived reality, but any artistic or poetic expression.

The poem brings language and objects together, conflating them and removing the hierarchical structures which usually define our perceptions of the material world. Barros's linguistic tactics are innovative: by combining apparently nonsensical phrases with an aphoristic style normally associated with common sense and truisms, he condenses linguistic and formal meaning-making devices in a way that defies conventional understanding whilst still arresting the reader's attention; in addition to this, he uses a conversational style and the rhythms of speech to gloss over the elision of conventionally nonsensical words and phrases. As the images used gradually become more and more unconventional, the reader, immunized by the relatively tame images in the first stanzas, is ushered into a use and understanding of language which, through this process of acclimatization, becomes a thought provoking assault on common conceptions rather than seeming to be simply nonsense.

Where most discourse on the material world attempts to analyse it in relation to human beings, setting the realm of human thought in a different and rarefied sphere, Barros's poetry instead attempts a non-hierarchical ecology which reveals the complex play between language and the material world. Barros acknowledges that we must use language to communicate our ideas and our worlds, and that this inevitably

involves some sort of obfuscation, when he describes what we can do "em favor da poesia": "c — Esconder-se por trás das palavras para mostrar-se" (*Poesia completa* 156). However he also urges us to see beyond the linguistic and conceptual cage which we construct around objects by describing them ("b — Perder a inteligência das coisas para vê-las" (*Poesia completa* 156)) and suggests activities which might bring us closer to the mere objects which we try to describe by "a — Esfregar pedras na pasiagem" (*Poesia completa* 156). Barros seems to suggest that a certain closeness to the object is necessary for poetry to succeed, and indeed his poetry can be seen as an attempt to bring language and objects closer together.

Through writing in such a way that language, objects, thought and the material world no longer form a hierarchy, and in attempting to deconstruct a simple subject-object relationship between poem and object, and indeed between human and non-human, these objects are reinvented in Barros's poetry. Like the visual artists who were his contemporaries, Barros elevates the everyday to the status of artistic object, in this case in the form of poetry, but further to this he invents these objects, in the sense that he invests them with new meaning. The reader is forced to reconsider these objects, their apparent purpose and their existence beyond the purpose that we provide for them. What do we do when confronted with such objects? The answer, in Barros's poetry, is to

understand them by creating and inventing with them.

Despite attempts to complicate the supposed distinction between the human and material world, Barros does not always escape the trap of anthropocentric thinking — if indeed such an escape is ever possible (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 75–6). One example of the ways in which Barros fails to fully realize this blurring of the boundaries of westernized anthropocentric thought is when he celebrates the naive and the primitive in his work. He does this without condescending to recognize them as such or to see these terms as in any way demeaning — "Um dia me chamaram *primitivo*: / Eu tive um êxtase" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 379) — turning what could have been at worst an insult, or at best a comment on a specific artistic school or style, into a very typical celebration of the marginalized elements of society and the material world. Nonetheless, even the use of the term 'primitive' could be seen as problematic from certain ecocritical viewpoints.

In keeping with this celebration of the marginal and marginalized, Barros questions a conventional, post-enlightenment view of how value is ascribed to different spheres of invention: "Sábio não é o homem que inventou a primeira bomba atômica. / Sábio é o menino que inventou a primeira lagartixa." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 372) In this couplet, Barros not only expounds a very obvious and typical environmental message about the damage that human beings are capable of inflicting on them-

selves and the world around them, and the dangers of unchecked scientific experimentation, but also asserts the inventive power of language, as opposed to the descriptive or explicative power of science. When Barros asks the reader to consider the child who first 'invented' a lizard, he is underlining the creative power of language not just in the first instance of its invention or use, but as a constantly changing mode of perception. We are not asked to consider a child who, in some primordial fantasy, coins the term lizard to be set in language eternally, but the idea that as we learn and use language we are constantly inventing and reinventing our perceptions of the material world.

Later in the same collection, Barros explicitly mentions his intention to use language creatively as a way of undermining the onslaught of reason as the only way of understanding and seeing the material world. At the end of the collection's first section, 'Retrato do artista quando coisa', the poet emphasizes the way in which he aspires for his language work as a creative force:

> Agora só espero a despalavra: a palavra nascida
> para o canto — desde os pássaros.
> A palavra sem pronúncia, ágrafa
> [...]
> A palavra incapaz de ocupar o lugar de uma
> imagem.
> O antesmente verbal: a despalavra mesmo. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 376)

Rejecting the categorizing and definitive uses of language, Barros stresses the importance of the 'despalavra', language which undoes its own rules

and conventions. The idea that words can simply stand in for an image or a reality is rejected, and so poetic language is reinstated as a means of reinventing or reenvisioning the world around us rather than simply categorizing or describing it. Even the written word and pronunciation are rejected as a corrupting influence on the creative primacy and possibilities of poetic language, and however problematic this declaration might be, the intention, at least, is clear. The final line of the poem reaffirms this 'despalavra' as the driving force behind Barros's poetics and offers the reader an example of such a 'despalavra', 'antesmente', which can read either as a neologistic reimagining of *antes* to create a word which means something like *antes* and *antigamente*, signifying a kind of before-ness of language, or more interestingly as an elision of *antes* (before) and *mente* (mind) implying that Barros is trying to achieve, through his use of the 'despalavra', a state of verbal pre-consciousness, perhaps what Barros himself has called a 'verbal delirium'. This pre-cognitive language, taking place before the mind has had chance to interfere, brings language closer to the world of things, the material world without linguistic and philosophical categorization.

This sentiment is continued in the second of the collection's two long poems, 'Biografia do orvalho'. Here, Barros overtly rejects reason outright:

> Só não desejo cair em sensatez.
> Não quero a boa razão das coisas.

> Quero o feitiço das palavras. (*Poesia completa* 378)

The image of the fall is evoked as a way of understanding and mythologizing Barros's own attempts to create a different way of ordering (or refusing to order) existence, and disparaging good sense and obvious interpretations of "a boa razão das coisas", Barros favours instead the enchantment and delight of words. The following stanza redoubles this emphasis on the importance of non-rational types of knowledge:

> As árvores velhas quase todas foram preparadeas
> para o exílio das cigarras.
> Salustiano, um índio guató, me ensinou isso.
> E me ensinou mais: Que as cigarras do exílio
> são os únicos seres que sabem de cor quando a
> noite está coberta de abandono.
> Acho que a gente deveria dar mais espaço para
> esse tipo de saber.
> O saber que tem força de fontes. (*Poesia completa* 378)

Despite, once again, falling into a somewhat hackneyed characterization of indigenous knowledge as somehow supernatural, Barros is able to reinforce a notion of the unknowable and the differently-knowable which is crucial to his ecological poetics. In the final lines of this stanza, his argument for allowing for different ways of understanding is compelling, and the description of a knowledge which "tem força de fontes" hints at both the natural and the unknowable origins of thought.

This approach, besides attempting to rearrange the material world, has obvious implications and effects upon language — indeed it is no

coincidence that *Matéria de poesia* is dedicated to Antônio Houaiss, the scholar who oversaw the compilation of the primary reference dictionary of Brazilian Portuguese, whilst *Retrato do artista quando coisa* makes an obvious reference to Joyce's language-bending prose. Language is thus transformed in Barros's poetry: rather than arguing for clarity and precision in the style of his pre-modernist predecessors, Barros asks the reader to consider a use of language which through its impenetrability and apparent incomprehensibility forces a new type of imaginative under-standing. Using words which seem at odds with each other, he forces new meanings upon old words, and compels the reader to reconsider the cre-ative possibilities and potential of even the simplest and most mundane. He describes this poetic endeavour as "Aprender capinar com enxada cega" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 157), a reference, perhaps, to the fact that something new and fertile can be achieved even with the most basic of tools — in this case Barros's use of everyday language and tone. This poetry is, perhaps more than anything else, an attempt to reinvigorate language much as clearing the ground makes way for new growth — a language which is neither native to the specific landscape of Brazil nor to the material world in general, indeed a language which in many ways is as invented as the creativity and culture which it fuels. Barros insists that correct, conventional language cannot achieve this, recommending instead that "Nos versos mais transparentes enfiar pregos sujos, / teréns

de rua e de música, cisco de olho, moscas / de pensão..." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 156).

In his later collection, *O guardador de águas*, Barros continues his exploration of the significance of all objects in the material world, and perhaps the most interesting and telling manifestation of this in the collection is the reference to "coisas de nada, nadeiras". Barros's use of a neologism to describe this collection of objects elevates the "coisas de nada" to a new level of significance, whilst the word's similarity to *nadadeira* (fin) subtly reiterates the link with the natural world. The plays on the word 'nada' continue later in the poem, when Barros refers to 'nadifúndios' in section V.[4] Barros is careful to distinguish what he is describing from other philosophical and linguistic definitions of nothingness:

> O nada destes nadifúndios não alude ao infinito menor
> de *ninguém*.
> Nem ao *Néant* de Satre.
> E nem mesmo ao que dizem os dicionários: *coisa que não existe*.
> O nada destes nadifúndios existe e se escreve com letra minúscula. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 250)

Apparently rejecting weighty philosophical or existential ideas, or commonplace definitions, Barros underlines the existence of 'O nada' as an

[4] This is one of the poems which McNee (*The Environmental Imaginary* 43–5) analyses in his substantial chapter on Barros, and it is not necessary repeat his analysis, which centres on Morton's concept of intersubjectivity and what McNee reads as Barros's attempt to remove subjectivity from his poetry entirely. I shall focus instead upon elements which his analysis does not explore.

entity in the material world, one which is defined by its almost-invisibility and apparent unimportance: one which is not granted a capital letter, not a concept for a proper noun but an everyday reality. The focus on objects and objectivity in the poem is clear not only from the narrative: in this section Barros's technique underscores the lowly object as one of the most important aspects for his poetry:

> Nadifúndio é lugar em que nadas
> Lugar em que osso de ovo
> E em que latas com vermes emprenhados na boca.
> Porém. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 250)

Avoiding verbs almost completely, these lines reflect in their linguistic construction a focus on objects and things, in this case nouns, the most object-like parts of speech. The lack of punctuation at the ends of the first two lines quoted leaves the reader expecting an action (which would necessarily entail, in this case, the presence of a subject), but this action is deferred and left unresolved. The effect of this — the stilted sense of time, continuity and cause and effect which it causes — is profoundly uncomfortable in a conventional linguistic framework, and this is reflected later in the same section: "Vê-se um relógio com o tempo enferrujado dentro" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 250). The image of time literally decaying, captive inside a watch, reminds the reader that our concept of time is ours alone, a solely human temporal perspective and not one that is necessarily shared by the objects and elements of the material world (Lorimer 2–3; Berger, *Why Look at Animals?* 13).

As Barros himself has recognized in interviews, though, "Poesia não é feita de sentimentos, mas de palavras, palavras, palavras — já se repetiu tanto." (Barros, *Gramática expositiva do chão* 309). Throughout this collection Barros engages not only with the environmental and ontological concerns discussed above, but also with their impact on language and poetics. Language is constructed as another product of the material world, and nowhere more blatantly than in section III:

> *Nascimento da palavra:*
>
> Teve a semente que atravessar panos podres, criames
> de insetos, couros, gravetos, pedras, ossarais de peixes,
> cacos de vidro etc. — antes de irromper.

Barros describes the trials and travels of the 'semente' of language, through a compendium of un-poetic, everyday objects, with the neologism 'criame' — probably related to *criamento* — demonstrating the possibility for innovation and creativity which this evolutionary view of language presents. The word emerges, indeed 'bursts' forth, from these humble beginnings, as Barros creates a new history for language in which it is the small, insignificant and marginalized things which form the origin of creativity, rather than the traditional highfalutin subjects of poetry. A postscript at the end of the poem rounds off Barros's argument:

> *P.S.* No achamento do chão também foram descobertas as
> origens do voo.

This reiterates the most fundamental argument of the collection, and of Barros's poetry as a whole — that it is in the everyday, the discarded,

the ignored aspects of the material world that the most original flights of poetry can be created. The word 'achamento', translating as discovery, but also as invention, emphasizes the creative endeavour involved in this exploration, and the ways in which language and literature can indeed invent the natural and material world, rather than simply label and describe it.

In working through Barros's poetry the reader is led to reconsider words and objects which have become comfortable and conventional, the very fabric of the mundane everyday. Repeatedly, the poet insists that "O que é bom para lixo é bom para a poesia", "As coisas sem importância são bens de poesia" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 155–56). Barros's poetry imbues language with a flavour of the material world which it describes. His awareness of the impossibility of true knowledge of the material world, and of transmitting such knowledge, is clear; still, Barros insists that to write poetry we must at least attempt this and to do so by using language which is steeped in the materiality of the things which it describes: "Deixar os substantivos passarem anos no esterco, deitados de barriga, até que eles possam carrear para o poema um gosto de chão" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 157).

Barros frequently engages with the natural and material world through his most recurrent poetic persona, Bernardo da Mata. The fullest realization of this persona's viewpoint is in the collection *O guardador de*

águas — indeed Bernardo is perhaps the titular *guardador*. Bernardo da Mata is invariably presented as uniquely attuned to the natural world, a reflection of the aims of much of Barros's work. From an ecocritical perspective, the figure of Bernardo is particularly interesting as an embodiment of ways of being in the world without relying upon a perspective which automatically prioritizes human experience and attempts to reframe the material world as 'Nature' or 'Environment' in order to suit conventional narratives. Often this persona exemplifies an alternative to hard anthropocentrism, without falling into the trap, which Morton identifies, of denying completely our inevitably anthropocentric point of view (*The Ecological Thought* 75–6).

The presentation of this persona is matter of fact ("Esse é Bernardo. Bernardo da Mata. Apresento" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 247)), with its conversational, everyday tone immediately inviting the reader to consider Bernardo as both an amiable acquaintance and a realistic one. In spite of the glimpse which we catch of the character in the first section of the poem ("Seria um idiota de estrada?" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 247), this quotidian introduction is disarming. As ever, though, Barros does not leave the reader in her comfort zone for long. Even the very line following this introduction to Bernardo is typically baffling, without a clear meaning or context: "Ele faz encurtamento de águas" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 247). The poem goes on to describe Bernardo's unique and

intimate interactions with the material world ("Tentou encolher o horizonte / No olho de um inseto — e obteve!" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 248)) and emphasizes that the appreciation is mutual: not only does Bernardo manipulate the natural and material world, but he is also coveted and manipulated by it as "Até os caranguejos querem ele para chão / [...] / Lugarejos cobertos de limo o imitam. / Passarinhos aveludam seus cantos quando o veem." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 248). This portrayal does not simply show a man attuned to nature in the romantic tradition, but a nature and a material world which is attuned to humankind, affected by and reacting to its actions.

This strong link between the human and the non-human continues in a later section of the poem, where we are told that:

> O que ele era, esse cara
> Tinha vindo das coisas que ele ajuntava nos bolsos —
> por forma que pentes, formigas de barranco, vidrinhos
> de guardar moscas, selos, freios enferrujados etc.
> Coisas
> Que ele apanhava nas ruínas e nos montes de borra de
> mate (nos montes de borra de mate crescem abobreiras
> debaixo das abobreiras sapatos e pregos engordam...)
> De forma que recolhia coisas de nada, nadeiras, falas
> de tontos, libélulas — coisas
> Que o ensinavam a ser interior, como silêncio nos
> retratos. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 249)

In this description, Bernardo is not merely associated with the assorted detritus which he has collected, but is defined by it, or indeed "comes from" and is brought into being by it. Furthermore, the list of detritus, as

in poems previously analysed, fails to distinguish between conventional categories of objects, so that ants and combs, stamps and dragonflies, all share equal importance in the construction of the persona. The emphasis on ruins and rubbish reinforces the importance of the marginalized and discarded in Barros's poetics, but it seems particularly pertinent in this context because of the way that it undermines conventional narratives of the 'Natural World', demonstrating the importance of normally discounted objects, and indeed man-made objects, in an ecological system. The reference to portraits in the final lines further emphasizes an intractable link between, or even a negation of the categories of, the man-made and the natural, and eliminates the gap between everyday objects and supposedly high art — a preoccupation in Barros's poetry which I shall examine at length in a later chapter.

Bernardo da Mata thus becomes a model for a new way of being in the world, and a new way of thinking about material and natural objects. In a later collection, his position as a mediator for human and non-human experience is solidified:

> Por modo de nosso vivência ponho por caso Bernardo.
> Bernardo nem sabia que houvera recebido o privilégio
> do abandono.
> Ele fazia parte da natureza como um rio faz, como
> um sapo faz, como o ocaso faz. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 459)

Bernardo is described, certainly, as an unusual example of a human being, but still a normal human being, not some sort of mystic or supernatural

entity. His character demonstrates the possibility of becoming 'parte da natureza', and thus being able to see rivers, frogs and the sunset as sentient equals:

> E achava uma coisa cândida conversar com as águas,
> com as árvores, com as rãs. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 459)

The poem immediately goes on to ruminate on what might be necessary for the reader to understand Bernardo's interactions with the world around him:

> (Eis um caso que há de perguntar: é preciso estudar
> ignorâncias para falar com as águas?) (Barros, *Poesia completa* 460)

The parenthesis around these lines, removing them from the narrative flow of the poem, signal that this is a consideration which should be taken as significant in any context, and one which should be reflected upon in itself. The lineation playfully surprises the reader with the idea of "estudar / ignorâncias", the second line delivering an unexpected and conventionally unacceptable subject of study. Nonetheless, with the parenthesis and enjambment giving the reader pause, she is left free to consider the possibilities of what such an endeavour might entail and mean. The suggestion, on consideration, is reasonably clear: that in order to try to understand the material world without imposing our own, anthropocentric perceptions, we must cultivate a kind of 'ignorance' in as much as we must deliberately forget or ignore our preconceptions and conventional perception of the things which we seek to relate to and understand

through artistic practice.

Barros's 'ecological poetics', which as I have argued above attempts to deconstruct received ideas of nature and the environment, clearly hinges on his acute consciousness of the interactions between language and the material world, and the ways in which these two apparently very separate things can profoundly affect each other. Barros attempts to outline this project in verse in 'Retrato quase apagado em que se pode ver perfeitamente nada' — a title which also hints at the importance both of the concept of 'o nada' which has been discussed above, and of the visual arts, which will be explored in the next chapter. In section *VIII* of this poem Barros defines his project as an extension of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

> Um novo estágio seria que os entes já transformados
> falassem um dialeto coisal, larval, pedral etc.
> Nasceria uma linguagem madruguenta, adâmica,
> edênica, inaugural —
> Que as poetas aprenderiam [...] (Barros, *Poesia completa* 274)

The project of the poet is described here as a way of giving voice to the objects of the material world, of allowing them to speak in a way which creates a space for their existence outside of our human experience of them. The continuation underlines the importance of language in this re-imagining:

> Que as poetas aprenderiam — desde que voltassem às
> crianças que foram
> Às rãs que foram
> Às pedras que foram.
> Para voltar à infância, os poetas precisariam também de

reaprender a errar a língua.
Mas esse é um convite à ignorância? A enfiar o idioma
nos mosquitos?
Seria uma demência peregrina. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 274)

The playfulness of childhood is affirmed here as an important strategy, but it is the ability to circumvent and break the normal rules of language which is highlighted as the most important aspect of this poetics, and not only in this particular section of the poem ("O sentido normal das palavras não faz bem ao poema." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 273)). It is also implied that such tactics are no excuse for ignorance — a claim which is borne out by Barros's clear and perceptive understanding of an enormous range of literary and artistic referents. The role of the poet, and the poet's transformation, in this process is something which Barros also explains:

No que o homem se torne coisal — corrompem-se nele
os veios comuns do entendimento.
Um subtexto se aloja.
Instala-se uma agramaticalidade quase insana, que
empoema o sentido das palavras.
Aflora uma linguagem de defloramentos, um
inauguramento de falas.
Coisa tão velha como andar a pé
Esses vareios de dizer. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 273)

Once again, the idea of corrupting language is crucial to Barros's conception of innovative poetry, and in the final lines it is presented as something which is normal but inhibited (just as in the idea that it is something which comes easily to children), something which must be recovered and

relearned rather than learned anew. In becoming 'coisal', in democratizing the relationships between human and non-human, being and thing, poetry can be created from ordinary words ('empoema o sentido das palavras').

One example of the ways in which this poetics can be put into practice is in section IX of the long eponymous poem from the same collection, *O guardador de águas* (Barros, *Poesia completa* 252–3). It begins:

> Bernardo escreve escorreito, com as unhas, na água,
> O Dialeto-Rã.*
> Nele o chão exubera.
> O Dialeto-Rã exara lanhos.
> Bernardo conversa em rã como quem conversa em
> Aramaico. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 252)

Immediately, the reader is alerted to the relationship between language and the environment by the image of Bernardo writing in the water, and by the idea of the 'Dialeto-Rã'. A closer reading reveals that the language of the poem itself also highlights this fluidity: whilst the word "escorreito" in the first line literally translates as perfectly or flawlessly, it echoes the word escorrer, which means to flow, drip, dribble or drain. This phonetic cross-reference is backed up by the flowing rhythm and sound of the first line brought about by sibilance ("*e*screve *e*scorreito" [my italics]) and long vowels ("as *u*nhas na *a*gua" [my italics]). The connection between Bernardo, language and landscape is reinforced by the ambiguous third line, where we are told that 'Nele' — which could be either Bernardo

or the Dialeto-Rã — 'o chão exubera' (the land overflows), a powerful image of the inevitable presence and influence of the material world in language and culture, but also of its profound influence on humankind, its actions and continued existence. The use of the word 'exuberar' (to overflow) in line three reinforces a tone of excess and joy, and in line four, the verb 'exarar' once again plays on the interaction between land and language, with the suggestion that language has the power to engrave on the landscape.

This inscription or engraving can be seen both literally and metaphorically in the example of the Pantanal, where misinterpretations of early accounts led to the topographical invention of a huge non-existent lake or inland sea (the *Mar de Xaraés*), and several hundred years later the misinterpretation of geological features and theories, particularly North American theories about the possibility of inland seas on the South American continent, led to a campaign to drill for non-existent oil underneath the immense wetlands. It was during this time (the early decades of the 1900s) that the area started being referred to as the 'Mar de Xaraiés', to which Barros refers in the poem (Leite).

The asterisk at the end of the second line of the previous quotation is not my own, but is present in the original text. It refers to a footnote which is part of the poem:

> Falado por pessoas de águas, remanescentes do Mar de Xaraiés, o Dialeto-Rã, na sua escrita, se assemelha ao Aramaico — idioma falado pelos povos que

> antigamente habitavam a região pantanosa entre o Tigre e o Eufrates. Sabe-se que o Aramaico e o Dialeto-Rã são línguas escorregadias e carregadas de consonantes líquidas. É a razão desta nota. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 252)

Here Barros continues to explore the myth-making possibilities of language, introducing a pseudo-historical element to the plot of the poem, but also hints at the possibility that our environment and ecology might affect our language as much as vice versa. His assertion that the invented 'Dialeto-Rã' and Aramaic are similar because of their development in proximity to water is obviously far fetched — and we should bear in mind the tongue-in-cheek tone of this footnote before we dismiss it as ridiculous — but the sentiment remains an important one for Barros's poetics: there is a firm and crucial belief that language and the material world can reinvigorate each other, rather than simply that language can act upon and qualify the material world. The construction of poetry as a means of voicing and giving voice to the material world is a key impulse for Barros's work, and his description of language as slippery and liquid has an obvious double meaning. That the footnote refers specifically to the written word not only adds a slightly comic effect (Bernardo writes this, after all, on the surface of the water), but also highlights the tension that this first image creates: the written word is supposed to be permanent, as opposed to the transience of oral cultures, but here it is presented as impossibly fleeting. A post-modern reading would argue that this transience is always in play even in written language (which

Barros seems to be suggesting), and nowhere is this more apparent than in the ambiguities and multiplying meanings of poetic discourse.

The poem continues:

> Pelos insetos que usa ele sabe o nome das chuvas.
> Bernardo montou no quintal Oficina de Transfazer
> Natureza
> (Objetos fabricados na Oficina, por exemplo:
> Duas aranhas com olho de estame
> Um beija-flor de rodas vermelhas
> Um imitador de auroras — usado pelos tordos.
> Três peneiras para desenvolver moscas
> E uma flauta para solos de garça.)
> Bernardo é inclinado a quelônio.
> A córnea azul de uma gota de orvalho o embevece. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 253)

Here is a list of the imaginary objects and creations which crop up throughout Barros's poetry. In another context they might seem disturbing, uncanny even, but within the context of this long poem, and of Barros's work in general, this is not the case. Instead, such objects represent a deconstruction and synaesthetic reappraisal of our conceptions of nature and culture. Rather than asking the reader to imagine nightmarish and bizarre creations, Barros is questioning the way in which we relate language, culture and the material world. The word "Natureza" is thrown open to suspicion, placed jarringly alone on a new line: one can almost imagine the scare-quotes surrounding it. The neologism 'Transfazer', with its echoes of *transfigurar* and *transferir* alludes to the knowledge and creative renewal which is made possible by these new ways of

seeing, whilst it simultaneously compels the reader to invent for herself the precise (or imprecise!) meaning of the word, and dislocates her from conventional understanding both through the use of neologism in and of itself, and the hinted agenda of transferral and transfiguration.

The parenthetic list offers renewed visions of mundane objects and events in the Pantanal landscape. The various images we find are obviously not simply a random selection of juxtapositions: they all hint at various specific ways in which the natural and material world can be reassessed. The image of "um beija-flor de rodas vermelhas" is toy-like, proposing play as a means of exploring new possibilities without committing to a more serious, disturbing and destabilizing undoing of the natural; the usefulness of the arts in this endeavour is referred to with the line "E uma flauta para solos de garça." Meanwhile, the use of a simple list, and opening with the conversational and everyday "por exemplo" softens the blow of these radical revisions whilst it also emphasizes that this offering is far from exhaustive: these are just a few examples of the many ways in which the natural and material world can be re-envisioned. The final line of the section emphasizes the poetic persona's affinity and fascination with the material world, and ascribes to it a kind of sentience, the surreal image of an eye within a drop of rain suggesting vision and knowledge within non-human and inanimate objects.

It should now be clear why I claimed at the start of this chapter

that this is not simply a case of applying an ecocritical theory, and that the poetry itself is ecocritical in nature. Barros's engagement with an ecological frame does not simply merit attention, but is perhaps one of the defining features of his poetry. We also begin to see from this close reading a few of the strategies that he uses to unsettle our habitual perceptions of the material world: a deconstruction (in the most literal sense of the term) of the things and objects within it; a conversational style which suggests that such revisions are normal, everyday occurrences; and a profound attention to the way in which language affects and constructs our ideas about and perceptions of the material and natural world. These "escritos para conhecimento do chão" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 129) are to my mind as compelling and thoughtful an example of ecocriticism as any book or essay that I have read.

As in the examples above, many of Barros's poems reflect a radical interconnectedness of nature and the material world which is similar to Timothy Morton's concept of 'the mesh' (Morton, *The Ecological Thought*; McNee, "Between Backyard Swamps and the Cosmos"). Morton defines the mesh initially as "the interconnectedness of all living and non-living things" (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 28), but quickly goes on to complicate this definition in relation to other ways of thinking of this interconnectedness:

> "Mesh" can mean the holes in a network and threading between them. It suggests both hardness and delicacy. It has uses in biology, mathematics,

> and engineering and in weaving and computing [...] Each point of the mesh is both the center and edge of a system of points, so there is no absolute center or edge. [...] The mesh consists of infinite connections and infinitesimal differences. [...] The mesh is not static. (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 28–30)

This complicated series of definitions, distinctions and refinements of how Morton envisages a radical rethinking of ecology and nature is deftly mirrored in Barros's 'Paginas 13, 15, e 16 dos "29 escritos para conhecimento do chão através de S. Francisco de Assis"' from *Gramática expositiva do chão*:

> O chão reproduz
> do mar
> o chão reproduz para o mar
> o chão reproduz
> com o mar
>
> O chão pare a árvore
> pare o passarinho
> pare a
> rã — o chão
> pare com a rã
> o chão pare de rãs
> e de passarinhos
> o chão pare
> do mar (Barros, *Poesia completa* 139)

Perfectly underscoring the paradoxical nature of this interconnectedness, Barros uses the repetition and elliptical narrative of the first stanzas of the poem to elicit its inevitable and comprehensive inclusivity, whilst the title, with its implicit emphasis on the omissions, reminds the reader that there is still much that is unknown — possibly unknowable — about this

system of ecological thought. The poem's lack of punctuation and use of run-on lines and phrases is evocative of the impossibility of distinguishing the beginnings and ends of different actors in the ecological mesh, subject and object, human, natural and material (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 34–5); the language of reproduction and fertility ("reproduz", "pare", and later "viça" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 139)) brings the tone of the poem down to the most basic of natural instincts. Simple and limited lexical range combined with complex lineation, enjambment and syntax demonstrates the simultaneously simple and complex nature of the ecological systems of the mesh.

The complexity of this way of thinking is further reflected in the poem's footnotes, which are in fact poems in themselves, just as each 'point' in Morton's "mesh" is a separate-yet-connected system of complexity (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 33). The footnotes ostensibly define terms within the poem, but the definitions, being poems, in fact just open up more complexity and ambiguity. Indeed, the poems within the footnotes are as long or longer than the poems to which they pertain. The footnotes take the shape of definitions of elements of the poem, and the fact that the three different things (a lizard, a snail and a man) are referred to in identical fashion suggests that there is no hierarchical arrangement in play here: the lizard and the snail are equally as important as the human. That the footnotes are purportedly attempts to define

seemingly simple things and yet offer all the complexity of poetry demonstrate the impossibility of reducing any single element of the material world to a cursory definition. Each footnote-poem also hints at Barros's ecological poetics through simple construction and specific utterances. In 'O caracol' Barros describes the snail as a creature which can "*ficar parado diante de uma coisa / até sê-la*" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 140), an example of the kind of radical inactivity which Barros suggests can serve as a way for the human and the non-human to encounter one another on equal terms. The importance of this practice to Barros is readily seen in an aphoristic statement from a later work: "A inércia é meu ato principal" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 354).

Of the three footnotes, by far the shortest and least complex is that which describes "O Nosso Homem" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 141), hinting at a reappraisal of the complexity of human experience versus that of non-human experience; the anthropocentric view which claims human cognition as the most complex of nature's achievements is once again undermined. The second half of the poem apparently deals with the human, and its place within the natural world and the poem:

> O homem se arrasta
> de árvore
> escorre de caracol
> nos vergéis
> do poema
>
> O homem se arrasta
> de ostra

nas paredes
do mar

O homem[(3)]
é recolhido como destroços
de ostras, traços de pássaros
surdos, comidos de mar

O homem
se incrusta de árvore
na pedra
do mar. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 141)

Whilst the verses above portray humankind as literally 'dragging himself / from trees / [...] / from oysters' in a strong image of humankind's emergence from and dependence on other life on earth, the footnote to this section notes that "Esse homem / é matéria de caramujo" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 141), with humankind depicted as a building block for other natural forms. Barros uses the footnote to relate the figure of humankind in the poem, or specifically "O NOSSO HOMEM" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 141), to Gogol's Akaky Akakyevich, immediately placing human experience into a position of existential strife and uncertainty. The mention of Gogol's character, who revels in the repetitive nature of his work, is also a sly reference to Barros's claim to be constantly repeating himself, although it must be said that Barros's relentless creativity does not resonate with Akaky Akakyevich's complete inability to carry out any kind of even mildly original work. And yet rather than focussing on such a typically anthropocentric experience of existential angst, here humankind is presented as inextricably linked with the natural world, both

creating it and created from it. This contrast, perhaps even a paradox, serves both as a suggestion that humankind is a part of this ecological 'mesh' of the natural and material world, and as a gentle reminder of human fallibility and mortality — at some point, after all and in spite of any existential anguish or literary creation or poetry which we might see along the way, we will all become "matéria de caramujo". The poem, described implicitly here as a part of the natural and material world ("nos vergéis / do poema"), is portrayed as the medium in which "O homem" is created from elements of the natural world, and yet the poem itself is undeniably the product of humankind — and thus, once again, the elliptical character of Barros's conception of the human, natural and material worlds is subtly demonstrated through his verse.

A comparative reading between Barros and João Cabral de Melo Neto should serve to further elucidate the points I have made about Barros's poetry so far by throwing them into contrast against something that is certainly very different on a technical level, if not a thematic one. The starting point for many of the comparisons in this chapter has been stones. One could argue that stones hold a venerated place in the history of literature and philosophy. To cite only a few recent examples, Fernando Pessoa, under the heteronym Alberto Caeiro, writes about stones in the poem "A espantosa realidade das coisas" (Pessoa), and within the Brazilian tradition it would be impossible not to men-

tion Carlos Drummond de Andrade's incredibly famous and influential "pedra no meio do caminho" (C. D. de Andrade, "No meio do caminho"). Heidegger, in the essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" uses a stone as an example of the 'mere thing' — a reinterpretation of Kant's noumena, the 'thing itself' (*Ding an sich*). And of course Johnson famously refuted Berkley's theory of idealism by kicking a stone. In the works of various philosophers the stone comes to represent the 'thing' (which is radically unknowable), as opposed to the object (which is the human interpretation of a thing). This philosophical distinction, particularly as explored by Heidegger, sits at the core of much ecocriticism.

The poets I shall address here both constantly explore and push at the boundaries of this distinction in their works, although they both seem ultimately to be aware of its insuperability. In the first two poems that I shall examine and contrast, the image of the stone is an important metaphor, and a detailed analysis of this image and the language which constructs and deconstructs it reveals a nuanced picture. The obvious place to start is the titular poem of what is perhaps Melo Neto's most famous collection of poetry: *A educação pela pedra*.

The poem is dense, like most of Melo Neto's poetry, and like all of the poems in this collection it has two parts: in the first part, we have the stone as 'object' — the poet describes how to be-in-the-world through the metaphor of a stone, how a human being can (or perhaps cannot?)

learn the form and essence of the stone; in the second part, the poet undermines this comfortable illusion, and shows the reader the stone as thing. The effect is disorienting — the two verses seem fundamentally opposed, and in such a short poem the reader is thus confronted with two contradictory ideas seemingly as one:

> Uma educação pela pedra: por lições;
> para aprender da pedra, frequentá-la;
> captar sua voz inenfática, impessoal
> (pela de dicção ela começa as aulas).
> A lição de moral, sua resistência fria
> ao que flui e a fluir, a ser maleada;
> a de poética, sua carnadura concreta;
> a de economia, seu adensar-se compacta;
> lições da pedra (de fora para dentro,
> cartilha muda), para quem soletrá-la.
>
> *
>
> Outra educação pela pedra: no Sertão;
> (de dentro para fora, e pré-didática).
> No Sertão a pedra não sabe lecionar,
> e se lecionasse, não ensinara nada;
> lá não se aprende a pedra; lá a pedra,
> uma pedra de nascença, entranha a alma. (Melo Neto 26–7)

The first verse of this poem could almost serve as a stylistic manifesto for Melo Neto, particularly for this collection. Here is a description and an exemplar of the strict order which characterizes the collection: the "impersonal, unemphatic voice" with which the poet attempts to approach the thing itself; the "concrete musculature [...] its self-densifying compactness" of what the concrete poets called his "economy and functional architecture of verse" (Campos, Campos, and Pignatari). This

accolade highlights the fact that although the poems are, on the one hand, written in a traditional lyric manner, with impeccable technique and craftsmanship, on the other hand they develop as a kind of evolution from concrete poetry: it is very important to highlight the visual aspect of the poems in this collection — they're all very square, the lines formed precisely in an attempt to regulate their length on the page. It does not quite achieve the supposed "verbivocovisual" icon after which the concrete poets strove (Campos, Campos, and Pignatari), but the poems still have a rhythm, visual appearance and form which is extremely regular, and these elements are extremely important for the reader.

In the second part of the poem we have the "other education". After the intellectual tone of the first verse, the poet tries to show a different way of seeing the world. In this 'pre-didactic' education, the poet attempts to present the 'mere thing' to the reader in the form of an experience. The adjectives, the rhyme and smooth assonance are abandoned and replaced by strong verbs and negations. In the last two lines of the poem the image of the 'nascent stone' — alone, simple, pure — is *felt* in the sound of the words instead of described, reinforced by repetition and hard assonance, almost percussive, of the */p/*, */s/* and */d/* — "e *s*e lecionas*s*e *n*ão ens*i*naria *n*a*d*a; / lá *n*ão *s*e a*p*re*nd*e a *p*e*d*ra; lá a *p*e*d*ra, / uma *p*e*d*ra *d*e na*sc*e*n*ça, e*ntra**nh***a a alma" (Melo Neto 27) [my italics]. Here, we're not coming closer to the stone "from the outside in" to

project our ideas and perceptions upon it, but the stone presents itself, "from the inside out", the stone-as-stone which is no longer the object of the sentence, but the subject, which "bewitches the soul".

Beyond the effect of language itself, the contrast between the longer first stanza and the second much shorter one leaves a sense of imbalance in the poem, almost as though the second stanza is unfinished, and in this the reader can feel in an immediate and visceral way the sense of lack or loss which is provoked by these 'mere things', the things which we will never come wholly to perceive or understand. This is emphasized by the slowing of the rhythm in the last lines, achieved by the use of punctuation in the middle of sentences and the implicit pause before and after the subordinate clause of "uma pedra de nascença".

But this contradiction is also very informative: in the matter-of-fact convergence of these two ways of perceiving (or not perceiving) the stone, the poem highlights that the impossible choice which these poets, and indeed all ecocritics, are faced with could be an unnecessary dualism. Indeed, perhaps it is necessary to feel and experience *both* ways of seeing to benefit from this "education". On the one hand the poet, diplomat, president of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, recognizes the impossibility of seeing the thing itself — the interpretation of the material world is an integral part of human experience; on the other, the very same *impossibility* of knowing things wholly and definitively is one of the fun-

damental bases of art: if there was never a doubt, the interpretations would never differ. It is precisely within this ambiguity that poetry is created.

In Barros's 'O homem de lata', the meaning is typically enigmatic and elliptical, but the image of the stone is clearly an important one. The poem privileges the stone with an originary essence:

> O homem de lata
> traz para a terra
> [...]
>
> o que sua mãe
> era de pedra
>
> e o que sua casa
> estava debaixo de uma pedra
>
> [...]
>
> O homem de lata
> mora dentro de uma pedra
> e é o exemplo de alguma coisa
> que não move uma palha (Barros, *Poesia completa* 135–6)

Here the stone is maternal, and it is also place and space. This, on the one hand, has a twisted logic: "O homem de lata", who is "uma condição de lata / e morre de lata" must literally have been born "de pedra", and tin in its natural state "mora dentro de uma pedra". But the image of the stone as originary also develops the idea that the most basic things are perhaps the most important. The idea that the tin man "mora dentro de uma pedra", like the second verse of Melo Neto's poem, gives the material world an opportunity for agency, but this time in a different

way: similar to Bernardo, the persona that we encountered earlier, the tin man has some sort of deep affinity or interrelation with the material world.

The extreme inactivity of the "exemplo de alguma coisa / que não move uma palha" is similar to the stone in Melo Neto's poem which "não sabe lecionar, / e se lecionasse, não ensinaria nada;" (27). Such a refusal to take part in the usual goings on of the world as perceived by humankind is in some ways a form of radical resistance to this conventional way of seeing.[5] As I briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter, this is a tactic which Barros returns to more than once in his poetry and poetics, and it is certainly an important means of forcing a reassessment of the material world and the object through a removal of its conventional use value or hierarchical position. In this way, Barros (and, here, Melo Neto) returns to the object or thing a certain agency and autonomy which it is not normally thought to possess, and gives, for example, the stone the power to *choose* this inactivity rather than it being assumed as the object's only possible state.

Once again, what is most noticeable here in Barros's poetry is his extraordinarily creative use of language and imagery. As is often the case, it is these inventive images, at times almost surreal, which enliven the imagination of the reader. But in this poem it is not only the images,

[5] See Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener* for one particularly famous example of such a refusal.

there are also various neologisms and novel uses of words, another of Barros's key tactics for disrupting language and underlining its creative and constructive power. Some of these also centre on issues of the relationships between human beings and the material world as mediated through language. Placing verbs such as "arborizar" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 135) (to plant with trees; to reforest) and "relvar" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 135) (to turf) outside of their normal usages, Barros imagines this relationship anew, and this allows for different ways of seeing. By describing the tin man who "arboriza por dois burracos / no rosto" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 135) or who "se alga / no Parque" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 137), the poet forces the reader to think more deeply than normal about the corresponding nouns, in the very things themselves that these words describe. Does the word "arborizar" with its implicit suggestion that we can create the trees themselves (note the difference of the literal scope and meaning of this word from, for example, reforest) reflect our fantasy of an almost godlike power over the natural world, indeed the power supposedly granted to humankind in the garden of Eden? And the reader cannot think or imagine what "algar-se" (to algae onself) might mean without imagining the normal activities of "alga" (algae) with renewed vigour; or is it 'algar' (cavern, abyss) that we should be considering? This ambiguity is also important: it opens the opportunity for various parallel and simultaneous interpretations which cannot be refuted. It is not possible to say one or the other is correct — the

meanings and interpretations are all present and relevant at the same time.

In an ecological context, the choice of the image of the tin man is also interesting: in clear opposition to the 'natural world', the tin man maintains, nonetheless, some organic aspects. In the children's story of the Wizard of Oz, the tin man, originally a human being, is the victim of a curse which supposedly leaves him emotionless because of his lack of a heart. Here in the poem, this man ("inenfática, impessoal" (Melo Neto 26), and of metallic 'musculature') achieves a proximity and intimacy with the material world which is apparently unrivalled by human beings. The poem, in this case, has a particular objective: to force the reader to leave behind conventional images and perceptions, and to see the material world anew, reconstructing it from the basis of the poem's radical imagination and invention. In his own way, Barros constructs a poetry which is as functional, direct and objective as Melo Neto's, although its form could in no way be described as strict or architectural.

Indeed, as we have seen, the form of these two poems could hardly be more different. In direct opposition to the strict, structured versification of Melo Neto, Barros uses a poetic form which emphasizes, above all else, the patterns and rhythms of everyday speech — although the content of the poems is nowhere near the everyday. It is true that both poets write in free verse, but whilst Melo Neto's poem is predominantly

end-stopped, Barros's poem is extensively enjambed, and other poems in the collection have idiosyncratic construction (some of which I have mentioned — aphorism and prose poetry for example) which do not fit easily into the conventional ideas of poetic form. Nevertheless, these two very different styles have a common effect: to demonstrate how language acts as an intermediary between the human consciousness and the material world.

In Melo Neto's poetry, this emphasis is based on his use of a language which, whatever the level of art and craftsmanship, is obviously constructed. The individual lines tend to have a syntactic unity which allows for an easier reading experience than the jarring run-on of much modern free verse, but the meter is strict, and the form of the lines and stanzas on the page is rigid. The materiality of the language itself is manifest. This so clearly evident organization of the words on the page enforces a contemplation of the language itself, and gives the poems a sense of semantic unity, at the level of the individual poem and at the level of the collection as a whole.

In the poems from Barros's *Gramática expositiva do chão*, the enjambment of the lines permits (or, perhaps, forces) the reader to think of the different possibilities of meaning:

> O homem de lata
> mora dentro de uma pedra
> e é o exemplo de alguma coisa
> que não move uma palha (Barros, *Poesia completa* 136)

Although the stanza has the tone of everyday speech and makes sense as a whole phrase, the structure of the verse creates an ambiguity of meanings at the level of individual lines and words. The pauses suggested by the line breaks, and also their visual effect, not only oblige a slower and more considered reading, but also emphasize the importance of certain key words: "lata", "pedra", "coisa", "palha" — these words have their place in the sense of the phrase as a whole, but are also all the type of 'thing' which for Barros signifies a somewhat unknowable and autonomous entity and which, again and again, is exposed in this poetry.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Barros also addresses 'the stone' specifically in a short poem from one of his later collections *Tratado geral das grandezas do infímo*. In 'A PEDRA' Barros speaks for or through the stone rather than describing it:

> Pedra sendo
> Eu tenho gosto de jazer no chão.
> Só privo com lagarto e borboletas.
> Certas conchas se abrigam em mim.
> De meus interstícios crescem musgos.
> Passarinhos me usam para afiar seus bicos.
> Às vezes uma garça me ocupa de dia.
> Fico louvoso.
> Há outros privilégios de ser pedra:
> a – Eu irrito o silêncio dos insetos.
> b – Sou batido de luar nas solitudes.
> c – Tomo banho de orvalho de manhã.
> d – E o sol me cumprimenta por primeiro. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 413)

This poem certainly opens itself up to one strong criticism from an

ecocritical point of view: that it is anthropomorphic. Within an ecocritical frame, this is considered, by and large, to be an unethical and un-ecological way of humanising the 'being' or 'thingness' of material objects, and as such maintaining the anthropocentric distinction which most ecocriticism tries to tear down. But I would argue that this is not a strong or harmful way of anthropomorphising the stone: firstly, Barros does not really attribute human sentiments to the stone, he merely voices several observed realities in the first person. Birds definitely do sharpen their beaks on stones, herons sit on them, moss grows on them. Secondly, the experiences are not necessarily translated to recognizable human experiences: we will in all likelihood never know, or even really be able to guess, what "Eu irrito o silêncio dos insetos" might mean. Instead, the stone is 'allowed' to speak in this poem, even if its utterances are not decipherable in terms of anthropocentric ways of seeing — and I think that this is an important distinction. This use of nonsense, or perhaps we could even call it anti-sense, as Barros seems to actively dismantle conventional language and meaning here rather than simply fail to appropriately use it, is central to Barros's poetics in that it emphasizes the radical unknowability of the material world even whilst it asserts agency and a degree of autonomy for the things which are described and given voice to in his poetry. The form of the poem does seem to attribute certain qualities to the state of being-a-stone. Aside from the first line, each line is a single sentence with a single clause, and the enumeration

of the 'privilégios de ser pedra' is in a simple list. These accentuate a certain sense of 'thingness', or perhaps 'stoneness', particularly that of the simplicity which we might associate with the 'mere thing'.

Francis Ponge's 'Le Galet' (The Pebble) (Ponge 90–107) could not be more different from this poem formally. Nonetheless, parts of it, in comparison with the above Barros poem, demonstrate the two approaches (which we have glimpsed in the previous comparison) of addressing the material world: Barros's giving voice to, or speaking through, as compared with Ponge's speaking of or speaking for. These two very different approaches lead to similar conclusions. A stark contrast to Barros's startling opening line "Pedra sendo", which shocks with its combination of conventional impossibility and simple, matter of fact tone, Ponge opens his huge poem by throwing the possibility of even *describing* a stone, let alone speaking through it, into question:

> Le galet n'est pas une chose facile à bien définir. (Ponge 90)

In some ways this is as bewildering as Barros's opening line; how is it *possibly* difficult to define a pebble, the reader is compelled to wonder. But Ponge does seem to demonstrate this admirably with his long, indeed in the poet's own estimation "wordy", poem. Writing in this style, a style which "appuie trop sur les mots" (Ponge 106), is one way of focusing on the importance of language in mediating between the human consciousness and the environment. But finally, like Barros, it is perhaps a simple

proximity to the material world that Ponge seeks through this medium. In a section in the middle of his huge, philosophical prose poem — a section which is distinguished by its shortness as a whole, the comparative shortness of its paragraphs, and the concise, simpler language employed — Ponge cuts back to the lived experience of being in the world as the reason for choosing the pebble:

> Si maintenant je veux avec plus d'attention examiner l'un des types particuliers de la pierre, la perfection de sa forme, le fait que je peux la saisir et le retourner dans ma main, me font choisir le galet.
>
> Should I now wish to examine a particular type of stone more closely, I would choose the pebble both because of the perfection of its form and because I can pick it up and turn it about in my hand. (Ponge 100–101)

Ultimately, it is still 'frequenting' the stone (in Melo Neto's words), or perhaps even Barros's injunction to "esfregar pedras na paisagem" (*Poesia completa* 156) which leads Ponge to his examination of it.

In the preceding analyses I have drawn a distinction between how stereotypical nature poetry writes about the things and objects of the natural and material world, and the way in which Barros and other ecological poets attempt to give voice to them. The obvious impossibility of allowing the animals and objects of the Pantanal to 'speak' to the observer is clearly not lost on Barros, but his poetics defies the conventional abandonment of any attempt at this, and the consequent retreat into descriptive modes of constructing nature. Instead, Barros's poetry attempts to provide a glimpse of the different ways of seeing which the

things of the material world *might* offer the reader if it were possible to really see the world from any point of view but our own, allowing that these ways of seeing are far from definitive or certain.

Barros often implies this impossibility, along with the necessity of the attempt. In the opening to one of his last published collections, *Menino do Mato*, Barros writes "Eu queria usar palavras de ave para escrever." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 457) before carrying on with apparently no reference to this in the following lines. By making a blunt and simple statement of intent, but no claims to have succeeded or attempts to define a method for carrying out this plan, Barros demonstrates amply the ambiguity through which he will come close to his goal: the idea of writing with 'palavras de ave' is left hanging in the air, neither confirmed nor denied as possible in the poetry which follows. This way of disturbing conventional modes of understanding and communicating without necessarily resolving any specific new modes of doing so is also explicitly noted and defended later in the poem:

> A gente gostava das palavras quando elas perturbavam
> o sentido normal das ideias.
> Porque a gente também sabia que só os absurdos
> enriquecem a poesia. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 458)

It is clear from these lines that not only does Barros wish to unsettle our normal use of language, but also that the poet recognizes the potential of poetry and its unconventional uses of language to change the way that

we think ("o sentido normal das ideias"). This idea is significant for any attempt at an ecological poetics, which necessarily aims to change conventional thinking and narratives about the material and natural world. The claim that only 'absurdities / enrich poetry' is particularly evocative of Barros's method for subverting conventional ways of seeing, as well as a way of vindicating his sometimes apparently nonsensical poetry.

The idea that non-human things and objects can be allowed to 'speak' in this way is crucial to Barros's poetics. This is enacted through a poetic process which creates new ways of seeing, and thus new categories of experience and discourse. Perhaps the most obvious example of this transformative agenda is in one of Barros's later collections, *Poemas Rupestres*. In the collection's opening poem, Barros describes the existence of a boy who has come to understand the world in a new light:

> Por viver muitos anos dentro do mato
> moda ave
> O menino pegou um olhar de pássaro —
> Contraiu visão fontana.
> Por forma que ele enxergava as coisas
> por igual
> como os pássaros enxergam. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 433)

The poem begins with what might be seen as a quite typical eco-poetic strategy: the poet describes a process of being-with, in which the persona is apparently able to attain a way of seeing comparable with that of a bird by living in harmony with a bucolic natural environment. There is a clear reference to the originary vision which this nourishes ("visão fontana",

where 'fonte' can be understood as origin or source as well as literally a spring or fountain) and to a less hierarchical or even non-hierarchical relationship between the human, the animal and the inanimate. The lineation of "Por forma que ele enxergava as coisas / por igual / como os pássaros enxergam." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 433) creates a certain syntactic ambiguity (similar to zeugma) in which Barros is able to convey two meanings — that the persona sees things in the same way that birds do, but also that he sees things 'as equal'. Typically though, Barros quickly links this apparently eco-poetic or ecocritical point to questions of language:

> As coisas todas inominadas.
> Água não era ainda a palavra água.
> Pedra não era ainda a palavra pedra.
> E tal.
> As palavras eram livres de gramáticas e
> podiam ficar em qualquer posição.
> Por forma que o menino podia inaugurar.
> Podia dar ao canto formato de sol.
> E, se quisesse caber em uma abelha, era
> só abrir a palavra abelha e entrar dentro
> dela.
> Como se fosse a infância da língua. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 433)

Here, Barros imagines a time or place in which the material, physical world is stripped of its linguistic connotations and definitions, and emphasizes the new and radical creative possibilities which this allows. The repetition and matter of fact tone ("E tal.") create a disarming air around this idea, and Barros continues to spell out the unusual and

innovative linguistic possibilities opened up by this radical viewpoint, and of which his poetry takes full advantage in his unconventional use of grammar and syntax, and frequent use of neologism. The inventive, creative aspect is linked to Barros's conception of the childish imagination in the final line, emphasizing the potential of his poetic project to grow and be expanded upon with the powerful image of a language in its infancy — perhaps a perpetual infancy which is continually renewed by art and poetry — still developing and radically changing. This is the more innovative and original part of Barros's environmental thesis: by deconstructing the linguistic basis of our understanding of the material world, it is possible to invent new ways of understanding and to allow previously unrepresented, non-human entities to have a voice within these new systems of understanding and meaning.

The complex ambiguity which is subtly and not-so-subtly on display in these poems has implications in ecocriticism. Morton (*Ecology Without Nature*) writes at length about dualism (as a construction which emphasizes the difference between man and nature) and monism (as a construction which attempts to reconcile man and the material world by claiming their spiritual 'oneness') without reaching a convincing conclusion other than that they are each damaging in their own way. The poets discussed in this chapter solve this problem without having to adopt the impossible position of denying either of these alternatives as a valid way

of seeing and knowing the world, by allowing for ambiguities between and within the two positions. This poetry highlights the ambiguity particularly in its emphasis on the possibilities for creating new meanings with conventional language, and for seeing everyday objects in a new light. Poetic utterances thus become the space in which innovative language can alter our perceptions of the world which they describe, demonstrating the power of language to act upon our perceptions of the objects they describe, and thus could perhaps even be said to act upon the objects themselves. It is at these slippage-points — between language, perception, and thing — that a radical redefinition of our relationship with the material world begins to take place.

Barros specifically refers to this symbiosis between language and thing in 'Garça', a late poem from *Poemas Rupestres*:

> A palavra garça em meu perceber é bela.
> Não seja só pela elegância da ave.
> Há também a beleza letral.
> O corpo sônico da palavra
> E o corpo níveo da ave
> Se comungam.
> Não sei se passo por tantã dizendo isso.
> Olhando a garça-ave e a palavra garça
> Sofro uma espécie de encantamento poético. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 446–7)

Barros argues clearly here that whilst both the word and the creature are elegant and beautiful in their own right, it is the combination of the two which creates an 'encantamento poético'. This synergy between the material world and the material word is emphasized by the similar

sound and rhythm of the two lines which describe them (ll. 4-5), and the use of the religious imagery of communion further underlines this spiritual-physical union. Using words such as 'beleza' and 'elegância', the unconventional idea of word and thing acting upon each other is situated within a more conventional poetic discourse in order to lend legitimacy to a radical idea. Barros also expresses a kind of false doubt about the legitimacy of this claim as he labels himself 'tantã', but the conventional logic of this statement is reversed when taken in the context of Barros's work, which consistently focuses on the marginal and discredited, often specifically celebrating and elevating characters and personae who would be considered 'tantã'.

These poets, and particularly Barros, can be seen as ecological poets in the broadest and least restrictive sense of the term, and indeed as ecocritics in their own right. Whilst ecocriticism and philosophy struggle to define and resolve the ontological problems of a thing as simple as a stone, this poetry confronts the reality of it, the materiality of the world in which we live, and the ways in which art and literature can shape our perceptions of that world. Going beyond the idea and discourse of Nature, it is in this deconstruction of the material world that a truly ecological critique lies. There is maybe no possibility of resolving these elliptical questions — so it is necessary to find ways of being in the world alongside this absolute ambiguity, and this is what these poets attempt

in their work. Perhaps, in fleeting moments, it is even achieved.

The Visual Arts

Throughout Barros's work there are repeated and wide-ranging references to the visual arts, and to specific artists. It is clear from the scope and application of these references that Barros was well versed in the plastic arts — he was, after all, a student for a year at the Museum of Modern Art in New York — but further to this, he blurs the distinction between the visual arts and literature throughout his work. Unlike his contemporaries of the concrete poetry movement, Barros did not tend to incorporate visual elements directly into his work, although, as we shall see, this did happen on occasion. Instead, Barros used language and poetry to explore and test — often to destruction — the boundaries between the supposedly separate disciplines of literature and the plastic arts, and to point out the inherent complexities and contradictions. This exploration is obvious from titles of collections (*Ensaios Fotográficos*, *Retrato do artista quando coisa*), from the occasional incorporation of graphic elements into his poems (*O guardador de águas*, *Escritos em verbal de ave*), and from direct references to artists and works of art throughout his prolific output.

These references to the plastic arts, whilst perhaps less frequent than references to literary idiom, are equally wide-ranging in their scope and often prompt more radical questions about how we place and perceive the

arts. From Hieroglyphs to high art, from Rodin, Van Gogh and Picasso to some of his daughter's and his own drawings which appear within and on the covers of his collections of poetry, Barros does not draw a distinction between visual and literary arts. Many of these references, for example in the collection *O livro das ignorãças*[6] throughout which Barros refers to various artists, are apparently offhand: "Um girassol se apropriou de Deus: foi em Van Gogh." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 309); "Adoecer de nós a Natureza: / – Botar aflição nas pedras. / (Como fez Rodin)." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 310)

Such lines serve as an introduction to the way in which Barros uses the plastic and visual arts in his poetry. Quite typically, in Barros's irreverent style, they have a playful element: Rodin, as a sculptor, did quite literally "Botar aflição nas pedras"; the sunflower is often cited as a symbol of the need to follow God's light, and Van Gogh's religious zeal, and his desire to use his painting to discover and reinvigorate a Christian spirituality which he saw as utterly intertwined with nature are well documented in his letters (see, for example, Jansen, Luijten, and Bakker, Letter 800). But the connotations go beyond the obvious connections: not only do these lines gently remind the reader of the power of the nature which is 'getting sick from us', and the human and artistic tendency to

[6] The title of this collection is interesting in itself, not least for the juxtaposition of the claims of ignorance and the continued erudite references to the arts.

project our emotional and philosophical outlook upon natural objects; but they also highlight the inevitability of repetition and reiteration in modern artistic endeavour ("Repetir repetir – até ficar diferente. / Repetir é um dom do estilo." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 308)). Barros does not acknowledge a debt to these artists in a traditional sense of influence or homage — a typical strategy of the Parnassian school which preceded Brazilian *modernismo* (Perrone 3–5). Instead, he is presenting his work as an evolution or continuation of the work of his forebears, whilst simultaneously highlighting the impossibility of the construct of 'originality': this is not poetry that is influenced by Van Gogh and Rodin, but which is '*Como fez* Rodin', '*em* Van Gogh' (my italics) — an interpretation and reiteration of the work of Van Gogh and Rodin in poetic form. It is equally important to note that these lines forge a strong link between art and the natural or material world: the artists are shown taking advantage of or appropriating natural objects in order to practise their craft. This is a theme to which I shall refer throughout this chapter.

As I have used comparisons with other poets to elucidate and explore Barros's poetry and poetics, in this chapter I shall focus upon the comparisons that can be made, and interactions and dialogue, with a handful of plastic artists: not just those directly mentioned by Barros, but several who I believe can help us to approach Barros's poetry. By comparing some different working methods based around a similar artistic

philosophy, I hope to uncover new readings of Barros's poetry. I am by no means the first to compare poetry and the visual arts in Brazil, and indeed one recent monograph includes a chapter on Barros's poetry (McNee, *The Environmental Imaginary*). But where this study focuses on 'Earth Art' and theories of environmentalism, and refers only to Brazilian artists, I wish to widen the scope of the artists to be explored, much as Barros himself is obviously aware of a wide, international artistic tradition, and whilst I shall continue to examine the often environmental focus of Barros's verse, I shall demonstrate just how expansive this category can be in Barros's understanding.

Perhaps the most striking example of Barros's poetic interactions with the visual arts is his occasional use of sketches and graphics within his poetry. Whilst this certainly is not universal, or even widespread — and the obsession with visual form so typical of the contemporaneous concrete poetry movement is totally absent — there are several collections which use graphics as part of the poetic presentation. The inclusion of such graphics demonstrates very clearly what I shall argue in this chapter: that for Barros, the separation between the plastic arts and poetry is not just problematic, but consciously problematized.

The most obvious example of this use of graphics within his verse is in 'Passos para a transfiguração', from the collection *O guardador de águas* (Barros, *Poesia completa* 259), where there are several crude images of

a human form in various poses. These images are reused in Barros's later collection *Escritos em verbal de ave* (Barros, *Escritos em verbal de ave*), which tells the story of the death and funeral of his poetic persona 'Bernardo da Mata'. Given their use in two different collections which focus on this persona, it is probably safe to assume that they are intended to represent Bernardo himself. As such, we can perhaps glean something more about this important figure in Barros's poetic world from studying these crudely drawn sketches, as well as exploring how their use and their style interact with and reinforce Barros's poetic practice.

In *O guardador de águas*, the first appearance of the images, each section of the poem is accompanied by a rough, childish sketch, and each sketch is captioned. The sketches and aphoristic captions in this poem seem to tell a simple (if surreal) story, whilst the short, four-line stanzas above each image are typically somewhat more nuanced, even if they are just as cryptic. It is the style, rather than necessarily the content of the sketches and captions which seems to most clearly show the link between image and text. Initially they seem crude, and look convincingly as if they have been composed by a small child: simple line drawings, with no attempts or concessions made to perspective or scale, the human form which is the subject of each distorted unrealistically and differently in every one. To some extent, each reflects the action described by the caption, as the figure is pictured holding a stone, or reaching for the sky.

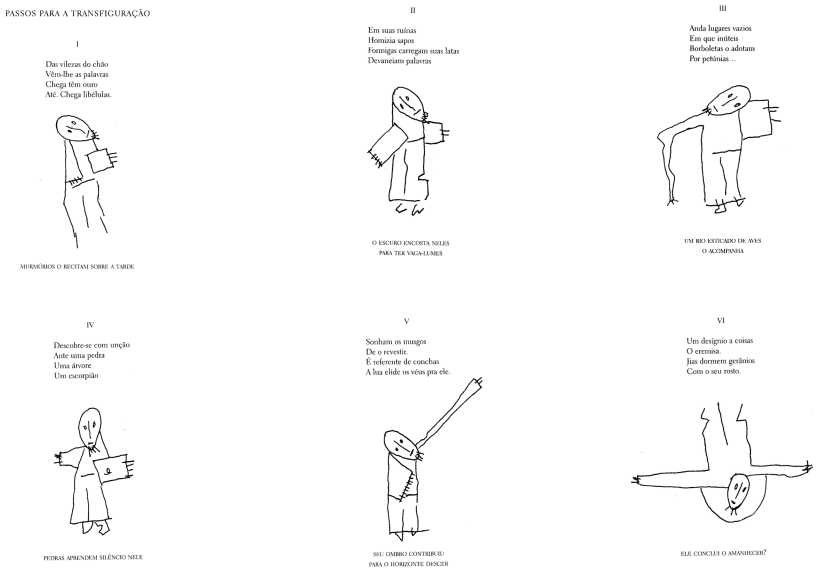


Figure 1 *Passos para a transfiguração*

It is the apparent lack of technical proficiency, and the total abandonment of the reality of the human form, that reflect the fluidity between human and non-human in Barros's poetry through his continued exploration of the childish gaze. The sketches are both immediately relatable — so similar are they to the kind of children's drawings which surely are familiar to most — and yet in the context of these collections of poetry somehow slightly disturbing. Knowing that these sketches are drawn by the poet himself, a grown man rather than a child, the reader is struck by their strange roughness, their distortions of the human form: the oddly angled head, the eight fingered hand, the blank and expressionless face. These features complement the strangeness of the poetry itself, supporting the impression of Bernardo as a persona who can commune

with the material world in a way which is not entirely 'human' (or at least what is usually understood by this description). Bernardo apparently has access to a world of communication which goes beyond conventional understanding.

In the final image, the figure is inverted, with arms spread as though on a crucifix, and what could be a halo around its head. This image resonates strongly with the figure of St. Peter, who was crucified upside down (in deference to Christ), and held the keys to heaven. Whilst there is no clear reference to the plastic arts here aside from the sketch itself, it is worth noting that St. Peter (as many other saints) was a figure, indeed an icon, who was the subject of several well known paintings, most obviously Caravaggio's *Crocifissione di san Pietro* (1600). This connection between St. Peter and Bernardo da Mata is further supported by the references to stones ('pedras') earlier in the poem, from which the Christian name Peter derives, having been bestowed upon St. Peter (previously Simon Bar-Jona) by Christ in the speech on the rock (Matthew 16.13-19). Indeed, much as St. Peter was addressed and annointed by Christ upon the stone, here Bernardo "Descobre-se com unção / Ante uma pedra" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 262). This biblical reference is built upon and extended by the caption to the image (in which the figure is displayed holding a tiny stone in an enormous hand), "PEDRAS APRENDEM SILÊNCIO NELE" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 262), which suggests that

Bernardo is so intimately attuned with the natural world and its inanimate objects that not only does he learn from and communicate with them, but also that they can learn from him. I have considered the image of the stone in a previous chapter, and its resonances as a poetic image and a philosophical metaphor should be recalled at this point. The silence of stones, a recurring poetic image in Barros's work, reminds us of the agency which can be ascribed to the objects of the material world: stones are, in our experience, silent, but here we are asked to consider this silence as a choice, an act of will, a skill which is learned and used. Saintlike, perhaps, because of his 'miraculous' and inventive relationship with the natural and material world (although this would resonate more with St. Francis of Assisi, whom Barros does refer to on other occasions, than St. Peter), Bernardo's persona exceeds or subverts the dualism of man and nature which is central to a tradition of Christian and Western philosophical thought through a by-default integration of the human and non-human presences in the poetry.

This amalgamation of Bernardo da Mata with the figure of a saint is, from one point of view, rather strange. Barros's poetry is not necessarily religious, and indeed his sometimes almost pantheistic transfiguration of the natural world threatens the order of much organized religion in the strictest sense; this is the poet who writes that Van Gogh 'stole a sunflower from God' (*Poesia completa* 309), suggesting that at its apex

art can unsettle religious authority and even replace religious experience. But here, in a persona merged with the saint named for a stone and who is said to have founded the papacy, perhaps Barros is offering Bernardo da Mata to the reader as the originator of a new and powerful way of being and believing — one in which the dualisms and conflicts of traditional Western philosophical and religious thought are subverted and reassessed.

The same image is the centrepiece of *Escritos em verbal de ave* (Barros, *Escritos em verbal de ave*), around which various aphoristic stanzas, some new and others re-appropriated from earlier works, are scattered. In the later collection, perhaps the closest Barros comes to concrete poetry, the poems are not laid out in a conventional book, but as a large, brightly coloured, fold-out reminiscent of a children's pop-up book. This physical aspect of the book is a clear invocation of Barros's interest in infancy and its linguistic and creative possibilities, and here perhaps more than in any other part of his poetry, the line between what is written for adults and what is purportedly written for children is deliberately and strikingly challenged. The collection is divided into three: 'Uma desbiografia', 'Os desobjetos' and the previously mentioned collection of aphoristic stanzas. These three sections synthesize and reflect three stylistic cornerstones of Barros's poetic output. 'Uma desbiografia' is structured as a more traditional lyric poem, like much of Barros's earlier poetry and a significant proportion of his output in general; 'Os desobjetos' is a concentrated

list of the 'dis-objects' which are often central to Barros's poetic vision, here repeated, reinvented or completely new; the collection of aphoristic stanzas which make up the fold-out part of the collection are similar (sometimes repeated) to the aphoristic verse which, though widespread, is concentrated in collections such as *Concerto a céu aberto para solos de ave* and *Livro sobre nada*. Through this process of self-appropriation, repetition and reflection Barros is able to concentrate many of the concerns of his poetic project into a tiny and dense collection of poetry, whilst constantly echoing and referring to his much greater body of work.

At the end of the first section ('Uma desbiografia'), Barros describes the trauma of losing Bernardo da Mata:

> Deixamos Bernardo de manhã
> em sua sepultura
>
> De tarde o deserto já estava em nós. (Barros, *Escritos em verbal de ave*)

The desert evoked here, although certainly not an alien landscape in Brazil, is the antithesis of the Pantanal wetlands which Bernardo da Mata inhabits and explores, and which Barros describes, rhapsodizes and invents. Almost immediately after the burial of this poetic persona, 'we' (the poet? the readers?) have incorporated the negation of the very environment which was the fuel and the locus of all of the creativity and wonder which he represents. This trauma is amplified by the repetition of the image of Bernardo inverted and with arms spread that in the previous collection was captioned "ELE CONCLUI O AMANHECER?"

(Barros, *Poesia completa* 264). Here, within the context of Bernardo's funeral, not only does the image more clearly represent the death of the persona, but the previous caption is given a new and darker meaning: Bernardo has indeed now seen his last dawn.

Visual icons also appear in one poem in the form of graphemic 'words', hieroglyphics which Barros explores in 'Caderno de apontamentos' from the collection *Concerto a céu aberto para solos de ave*. The hieroglyph-like symbols, literally small sketches of a bird and a palm tree which are 'written' in line with the text, are interrogated in terms of their linguistic possibilities. Here, Barros once again questions the limits between language, meaning and the material world:

> Não tive preparatório em linguagem de
> aranquã.
> Caligrafei seu nome assim  . Mas pode
> uma palavra chegar à perfeição de se tornar um
> pássaro?
> Antigamente podia.
> As letras aceitavam pássaros.
> As árvores serviam de alfabeto para os Gregos.
> A letra mais bonita era a  (palmeira).
> Garatujei meus pássaros até a última natureza.
> Notei que descobrir novos lados de uma
> palavra era o mesmo que descobrir novos lados
> do Ser.
> As paisagens comiam no meu olho.

Figure 2 Graphics in the verse

Caligrafei seu nome assim [BIRD GRAPHEME]. Mas pode uma palavra chegar à perfeição de se tornar um

pássaro?
Antigamente podia.
As letras aceitavam pássaros. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 288)

At the core of Barros's exploration in this poem is the materiality of language, here literally demonstrated by the hieroglyph-like image of the bird. He refers to a fictional and idealized linguistic order — that of the 'aranquã' bird — in which the signs and signifiers were less abstracted, and language was closer to the material world which it purports to represent; in which, furthermore, 'As letras' (meaning 'letters' in both the alphabetical and the literary sense) could 'accept' elements of the natural and material world without the interpretation forced by a more abstracted system such as the language we must necessarily use now. It is this closeness which Barros is constantly attempting to create in his own poetry, notwithstanding the clear impossibility of this task. Evoking, as in other poems, a pre-linguistic past in which language and object overlap, even if they are not identical, he goes on to trace a playful, if not necessarily logical, historical link between the material world, and the material of language — the alphabet:

As árvores serviam de alfabeto para os Gregos.
A letra mais bonita era a [TREE GRAPHEME] (palmeira). (*Poesia completa* 288)

Finally, Barros reiterates why this investigation of the foundations of language, and of its possibilities, is so important to his poetic project:

> Notei que descobrir novos lados de uma
> palavra era o mesmo que descobrir novos lados
> do Ser. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 288)

It is precisely through such a profound exploration of language that an equally profound exploration of human nature and the nature of being *qua* being can be embarked upon. The impulse which is on display here, to find new ways of seeing, practising and understanding what has become almost a part of the background of daily life, is clearly one of the central concerns of modernism, and has particular relevance to the idea of the readymade, which I shall revisit later in this chapter.

The other collection of works in which images and graphics play a clear role are the *Memórias inventadas* (Barros, *Memórias inventadas*), which are illustrated by Barros's daughter, Martha. Here, each fragment of poetic prose has an accompanying illustration. These are less crude than the sketches found in *O guardador de águas*, but follow to an extent the same 'naive' style, with simple, two-dimensional shapes, bold colours, and no attempt made to accurately replicate the forms of the material world. To analyse these illustrations individually is outside the scope of this thesis, not least because they are not penned by Barros himself, but once again their style seems to reflect a key tenet of Barros's poetic philosophy: whilst we cannot (ever) succeed in replicating the material world in art, we must use art as a means of reinventing what we see.

Throughout Barros's poetry there are myriad intertextual references,

and amongst these are many important references to the plastic arts. Both in the titles and bodies of poems he refers to Picasso, Braque, and Klee to name but a few. It is perhaps worth noting that the majority of these references, though not all, occur in works published after his stint at MoMA, and that these artists and works referred to after this time tend to be more modern (and indeed modernist) than the few previous references. But what do these references add to the poetry? How do they interact with the ideas that Barros is exploring? What other comparisons with the work of visual artists might be useful to our reading of Barros, and how?

In the three collections which Barros published before 1960 (which are quite different in style from his later work, as I have explained in the introduction), he refers occasionally to the work of older and more famous painters (Raphael, Millet, Van Gogh) and does so in a mostly descriptive way. Paintings appear as objects in the poems, illustrative of a scene or to reflect the mood. They are mentioned in passing, and the poetry does not seem to meditate upon their importance, nor the possible relationships that they have to the ideas of the poem itself.

In later instances of references to art works and artists, they are often still not explicitly meditated upon, but here in these later collections, the paintings and artists chosen are more interestingly intertwined with the ideas and philosophy of Barros's work. Barros's references to Picasso and

Braque demonstrate an interest in Cubism which he shared with his contemporary João Cabral de Melo Neto, and with advocates of Brazilian *Modernismo* in general (Perrone 29). Indeed, the ideas and practice of Cubism should perhaps be regarded as essential to an understanding of modern arts and literature, as John Berger affirms in his monograph on Picasso: "It is almost impossible to exaggerate the importance of Cubism. [...] Its effects on later art, on film, and on architecture are already so numerous that we hardly notice them." (*The Success and Failure of Picasso* 73). Barros's poetic practice did not, as Melo Neto's often did, seem to emulate, or attempt to emulate, cubist aesthetic principles, or to directly pay homage to its masterpieces and master artists (see Lôbo), but Cubism, and the ideas upon which it is based, are an enlightening frame for Barros's poetry. The abandonment of traditional perspectives and the imperative to present alternative ways of seeing the world around us are ever-present in Barros's verse, and Cubism's tendency toward abstraction of form is reflected in Barros's idiosyncratic and often abstract use of language.

Within the domain of Cubism, though, there are several strands and stages, and it is the later stages of Cubism, and indeed what came after (but clearly as a result of) Cubism which are of most relevance to Barros's work. Barros's poetry is nothing if not sensual, even tactile, an exploration of the materiality of language and its relationship to our physical

reality. In earlier Cubism (analytic cubism), this sense of the body and of materiality was lost:

> With Picasso, cubism led temporarily to the suppression of carnality; with Duchamp it led back to the virtually primordial point where language and the body cross. If Picasso's analytic cubism attests to a loss of the body to vision and its consequent entry into language, Duchamp's paintings of 1911-12 might be described as machines for producing language from the tangled labyrinth of the plusional body. (Joselit 27)

Duchamp's paintings, mentioned in this quotation, can be seen to serve as a bridge between earlier analytic Cubism, and later synthetic Cubism, in which collage and *papier collé* became an important practice and the materiality of the objects being represented was thus radically reintroduced into the canvas. Synthetic cubist paintings attempted to bridge the gap between life and art more clearly than earlier Cubist paintings, whilst further flattening the dimensions and perspective of the paintings and blurring the lines between painting and sculpture both with the techniques used and the blocky flattened forms. Duchamp's studies of nudes, particularly *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912), introduce an element of dynamic movement and energy which was largely absent from earlier Cubist paintings and, whilst they still fall within the bracket of analytic Cubism in many respects, this dynamism sets them apart. Synthetic Cubism, with its frequent use of found objects and textures, would in turn lay the groundwork for Duchamp's later exploration of *objets trouvés* and the readymade. As Joselit claims for Duchamp's work above, Barros's poetry does not reduce the material world to descriptive

linguistic flourishes which suppress its embodied reality, but instead offers new ways of producing language from the material world, and indeed of producing the material world from our use of language.

In a poem which mentions Braque by name, Barros's defence of his choice of poetic subject reflects the synthetic Cubist use of everyday objects and detritus, both in subject matter and in media, as a raw material for making art:

> Terreno de 10 x 20, sujo de mato — os que
> nele gorjeiam: detritos semoventes, latas
> servem para poesia
>
> Um chevrolé gosmento
> Coleção de besouros abstêmios
> O bule de Braque sem boca
> são bons para poesia (Barros, *Poesia completa* 153)

Not only are various items which are typically discarded or ignored by society described as ample material for Barros's work, but art works themselves can be appropriated and dissected (note that this is not a reference to a specific painting, but to the teapot, a recurring figure in the work of Georges Braque) and amalgamated into poetry. This conception of artistic appropriation looks forward to the practices of post-modern and pop artists, as I shall explore later in this chapter. Whilst the poetry, unlike some late Cubist paintings, uses a traditional physical medium, Barros's use of a simple list rather than a more traditionally 'poetic' description of his subject matter is also a step towards the kind of collage which was so central to synthetic Cubist thought and practice.

A reference to Picasso in a subsequent collection is similarly focused on a generic trope of Picasso's painting rather than a specific art work. The reference, in *Arranjos para assobio* is specifically to Picasso's figuring of the Pierrot,[7] rather than to the Pierrot in general, whose image was common in late 19th century art. This short (but nonetheless incisive) engagement with a key visual icon of modernist art is indicative of Barros's understanding of modern art, and of its importance for his poetry:

> IV.
> (A um Pierrô de Picasso)
>
> Pierrô é desfigura errante,
> andarejo de arrebol.
> Vivendo do que desiste,
> se expressa melhor em inseto. [...] (Barros, *Poesia completa* 179)

The figure of the Pierrot is portrayed as similar to other recurring characters in Barros's oeuvre, particularly Bernardo da Mata. Describing the Pierrot as a "desfigura errante", Barros emphasizes the ethereal quality of the figure of the Pierrot, underlining its importance as an icon and an idea more than as a specific entity. It is what the Pierrot represents and is associated with — satire, melancholy, farce — which makes it important, a shorthand for certain modernist values. The following stanza reinforces the idea of the Pierrot as a figure with ever-changing, multitudinous sig-

[7] In consonance with previous discussion of the figure of St. Peter and of the poetic and philosophical importance of the stone (Peter/Petros/Pedra), the Pierrot also derives his name from this etymological root.

nificance, rather than as a representation of a specific person or reality, whose presentation is more important than the supposed reality behind the presentation:

> Pierrô tem um rosto de água
> que se aclara com a máscara. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 179)

At the end of the poem, Barros seems to question the emptiness of such a figure, which has become an artistic trope so far removed from the realities of the material world:

> Sua postura tem anos
> de amorfo e deserto.
>
> [...]
> Solidão tem um rosto de antro. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 179)

The image of the cavernous face of something apparently so solid and established in the visual language of art, of the years of being an amorphous, deserted symbol suggests that whilst Barros understands and respects the contributions of Modernist and Cubist art, and is happy to incorporate and appropriate it for his own purposes, he is also aware that simply repeating the language and symbolism of previous artistic movements will not lead to a new and innovative poetic. The art must be used (and abused) creatively, raw material to be sculpted much in the way that the figure of the Pierrot was material for the painters of the late 1800s.

The most obvious example of a reference to a specific painting is from the collection *Gramática expositiva do chão*, whose fourth section

is titled 'A máquina de chilrear e seu uso doméstico' (*Poesia completa* 143–6). This is a clear reference to Paul Klee's *Twittering Machine (Die Zwitscher-Maschine)* — which Barros may well have seen in person, as it was acquired by MoMA in 1939.

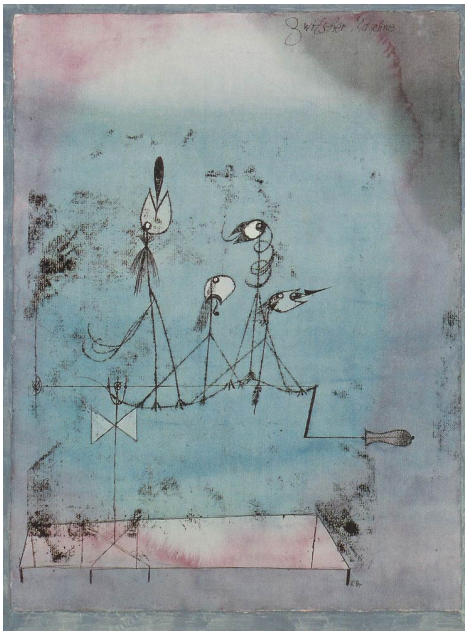


Figure 3 *Die Zwitscher-Maschine*, Paul Klee, 1922

Much could be — and has been — said about the painting itself (see, for example, Shapiro). The most superficial analysis would reveal the ambiguity between nature and machine inherent in its construction, and the naive style of the image is at once childish and sinister. Whilst in one sense charmingly simple, the stick-figure birds, starkly monochromatic against the colourful blue shades of the background wash, with their vacant, mechanical white eyes and fishing-lure tongues are from another

point of view a striking, nightmarish image. These basic observations should make obvious the relevance of Klee's aesthetic and the painting's narrative to Barros's poetry. What interests us in this analysis though, is how the painting is treated and interpreted in that poetry.

The poem, which takes its title from the painting, is atypical both in its content and its structure. Through a series of single lines of 'dialogue' between the poet ('O POETA') and various elements of the natural world, the initial verse sets out a poetic intent to avoid embellishment and the imposition of anthropocentric views upon the natural world:

> O POETA (*por trás de uma rua minada de seu rosto*
> *andar perdido nela*)
> – Só quisera trazer pra meu canto o que pode ser
> carregado como papel pelo vento (Barros, *Poesia completa* 143)

Despite this seemingly clear rejection of the ways in which representations of the material and natural world in art can be overworked, there is also an integration between man, the manmade and the natural ("como papel pelo vento"). Even the poet's face is described as a kind of landscape, and one which bears the marks of human intervention. Furthermore, Barros's explicit evocation of Klee's masterpiece illustrates that art remains a key consideration, however problematic its relationship with the material world might be. This acceptance of the amalgamation of art and nature into one 'order' of thing is crucial to any reading of the poem and is one of Barros's most profound and disruptive contributions to critiques of art, language, ecology and environmentalism.

The setting of Klee's work into an unavoidably practical ("seu uso") and domestic context immediately disarms the reader of any preconceptions about the role of the work of art. The painting is no longer seen as a work of genius to be venerated, but is put to work as an object, its 'Twittering Machine' questioned and prodded by elements of the natural world, both those found in the painting and those not ("O pássaro", "A lua", "O córrego", etc.). The machine and the poet are immediately set upon with questions and doubts. The "Máquina de Chilrear" comes to represent a faulty attempt on the behalf of art to represent and replicate nature (however unfair this might be to the subtleties of Klee's piece). Upon being mentioned, the machine is immediately moved out of the realm of human control ("É possessão de ouriços" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 144)) and placed, along with the poet, amongst the detritus of the natural world.

Half way through this section, the machine is revealed to be failing, and the voice of the poet disintegrating with it; indeed, the 'Máquina' seems to be somehow integral to poetic expression: "– A Máquina de Chilrear está enferrujada e o limo apodreceu a voz do poeta" (*Poesia completa* 145). Far from an exercise in ekphrasis, in this poem the work of art is subsumed and consumed by the poet, its own vehicle for poetic expression but also a tool which can be used in the service of poetry. With this source of poetic inspiration and vision rusting away, the poet's

own work is endangered. All is not lost though: the voice of the poet awakes, having been integrated into, indeed consumed by, the natural and material world ("– Até o chão se enraíza de seu corpo! [...] – Ervas e grilos crecem-lhe por cima" (*Poesia completa* 144)). Through reestablished and renewed relationships with, and perceptions of, nature and the natural, the poet and the machine apparently find their voice again in a true *dialogue with* the material world, rather than a merely descriptive imposition of anthropocentric views. By emphasizing the agency of the material world, and the possibility of its dominance over the human poet, Barros attempts to renew his authority to speak through the material world, giving voice to its protagonists, rather than merely descriptively of or about it.

The following section, 'A máquina: a máquina segundo H. V., o jornalista', returns to a more conventional poetic form and style, and seems to give a list of applications for, and descriptions of, the 'Máquina de Chilrear'. The list is reminiscent of other lists in Barros's work, usually of impossible or fantastic objects, and its content is similar in style. We are told, for example, that:

> A Máquina mói carne
> excogita
> atrai braços para louvar
> não faz atrás de casa
> usa artefatos de couro
> [...]
>
> incrementa a produção do vômito espacial

e da farinha de mandioca
[...]

trabalha com secos e molhados
é ninfômana
agarra seus homens
[...]

A Máquina tritura anêmonas
não é fonte de pássaros(1)
etc.
etc. (*Poesia completa* 147–8)

According to the title, this is no longer the poet's or artist's view; this is the view of the journalist or critic. Indeed, in the appropriation of the journalist's voice, Barros presents the machine and its characteristics within a discourse of truth and factuality which is normally not available to the poet, an impression which is reinforced by the use of a footnote at the end of the poem. In the eyes of the lay-person, the machine is all-encompassing, responsible for a never-ending list ("etc. / etc.") of practical and impractical effects. The machine is both personified and given mundane applications such as the production of "farinha de mandioca". There is a recurrent use of bathos or jarring contrast alongside nonsensical imagery in order to give the machine a frenetic, almost schizophrenic urgency, imbued with an intense sexuality and corporeality: "é ninfômana / agarra seus homens / vai a chás de caridade"; "influi na Bolsa / faz encostamento de espáduas / e menstrua nos pardais"

Here, after establishing its problematic importance in the previous section, Barros proposes art, and by extension poetry, as a means of

accomplishing anything, even as a means of accomplishing the impossible. The 'máquina de chilrear' becomes emblematic of the flawed power of art to describe and create, and the possibilities become endless, in much the same way that an early critic describes the work of the artist that Barros is referring to: "Klee does not state the facts, the few facts that mean leaving out all the rest. He gives the symbol which frees your imagination to supply the whole." (Thwaites, "Paul Klee and the Object" 9–10). Barros's poetry relies on the reader's imagination just as Klee's painting did, and rather than paying homage to the imaginative power of the artwork in question, the poet uses it in order to demonstrate how important it is to form our own interpretations of artworks, to incorporate them rather than venerate them, and to use their possibilities to create anew.

Indeed, Barros is in many ways echoing the very kind of imaginative power which the work by Klee demonstrates, treating the painting as an object much in the way that Thwaites claims that Klee treats the things of the material world: "The description of natural structure, which is a fact, is followed and replaced by that of its function and its being in that function, which is an idea." ("Paul Klee and the Object" 10). Barros follows this tendency in Klee's work, and amplifies it by incorporating *the work of art itself* into the material world as a thing: the final barrier between the "fact" and its "function and its being in that function" is

removed. This attempt to destroy the boundaries between reality and representation is clearly an impossible endeavour, much as it is central to Barros's poetic project. But by rendering Klee's artwork in terms of actual machinery, by enumerating the fantastical and surreal properties of the supposed machine alongside mundane functions, by emphasizing the flaws of artwork and artist, poem and poet and leaving the possibilities unfinished and infinite, a double effect is achieved. Barros simultaneously destroys a constrictive notion of art which confines it to a set of standards and conventions, and demonstrates the marvellous creative possibilities that artistic expression can offer if it is allowed to transcend these boundaries.

Klee is not the only artist who is explicitly mentioned by Barros. Another concrete reference to an artist comes from the collection *Ensaios fotográficos*, a collection which will shortly be examined in detail with attention to its references to photography. However 'Miró', the poem which concerns us here, stands alone as a meditation on artistic process and poetics. Barros focuses on the steps which Miró had to take in order to achieve 'sua expressão fontana':

> Para atingir sua expressão fontana
> Miró precisava de esquecer os traços e as doutrinas
> que aprendera nos livros.
> Desejava atingir a pureza de não saber mais nada.
> Fazia um ritual para atingir essa pureza: ia ao fundo
> do quintal à busca de uma árvore.
> E ali, ao pé da árvore, enterrava de vez tudo aquilo

> que havia aprendido nos livros.
> Depois depositava sobre o enterro uma nobre
> mijada florestal.
> Sobre o enterro nasciam borboletas, restos de
> insetos, cascas de cigarra etc.
> A partir dos restos Miró iniciava a sua engenharia
> de cores.
> Muitas vezes chegava a iluminuras a partir de uma
> dejeto de mosca deixado na tela.
> Sua expressão fontana se iniciava naquela mancha
> escura.
> O escuro o iluminava. (*Poesia completa* 393)

From the opening lines it is clear that in this appraisal of Miró's practice, Barros believes it to be similar to his own. His reflection on what he sees as Miró's methods, then, is perhaps better viewed as a reflection upon his own poetry. Certain phrases and tactics — "expressão fontana", the reference to the "árvore", the inclusion of detritus and basic bodily functions such as urination — are similar or identical to those in other poems by Barros. Indeed, it is perhaps more a case of Barros projecting his own poetic philosophy on to Miró, incorporating Miró into his work rather than paying homage to the artist. This is not unusual in Barros's approaches to the visual arts and artists.

This is not to say that the reference ignores Miró's work entirely, nor that Barros is incorrect in his assumption that there is a striking similarity in their work and philosophy. Miró also frequently referred to the natural and material world in his painting, which was as grounded in his native Catalunya as Barros's poetry is in the Pantanal, and

the figure of the tree is prevalent in the work of both poet and artist. These references to the natural and material world, and an emphasis on everyday objects are particularly relevant in some of his most important paintings — paintings which marked the beginning of a transition in his style. The figure of the tree is central in *The Farm* (1922) and *The Tilled Field* (1924) (the latter painting is often regarded as a reimagining of the former). In these paintings, and in *The Farm* in particular, Miró combines elements of the modernist, surrealist vision with a more naif, primitivist style much in the way that Barros's modernism is constructed around both a wealth of references to the modernist tradition and canon and to a primitivist understanding of the natural and material world of Brazil's Pantanal. It would be reductive to call either of these artists (one could perhaps even say either of these poets, considering Miró's attitude towards his painting and poetry) a primitivist, but it is undoubtedly an element of their work — one to which Barros explicitly refers when he exclaims in *Retrato do artista quando coisa* that "Um dia me chamaram *primitivo*: / Eu tive um êxtase." (*Poesia completa* 379)

The tree in *The Tilled Field* could easily be the tree to which Barros refers: the earth underneath it is darkened as though recently dug, around it we see scattered various recurring elements from Klee's paintings, and down the centre of the trunk is a dripping, yellow stain. Barros's evocation of the tree in the poem is almost funereal, this emblem



Figure 4 *The Tilled Field*, Joan Miró, 1924

of the natural world now as somewhere to inter — and thus consign to death in history — conventional, book-learnt ways of understanding the world. That this is followed by depositing "sobre o enterro uma nobre / mijada florestal" doubly implies this contempt for tradition — not only is it buried and past, but no respect is shown either for its burial place or for the conventions surrounding how such 'hallowed ground' should be treated. Whilst there is, nonetheless, a reverence for art and nature in this poem, both art and nature are presented as radical, unstable and transformative, rather than as conforming to any particular conventions or traditions of representation.

The way that the poem repeats itself and other poems, just as it is

both self-appropriating and cannibalizing the work of Miró, is reflected in Miró's own practice. As mentioned above, the painter often reworked his earlier paintings into newer versions, with *The Tilled Field* and subsequently *The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)* often interpreted as revisions of *The Farm*. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the series of paintings known as *Constellations*, in which Miró repeatedly uses shapes, colours and forms to constantly redefine them within a visual language and create new images, much as Barros often repeats phrases in his poetry not necessarily in order to anchor their significance, but to push the repeated words into new possibilities of meaning. An example of this is easily seen within the poem, as the word 'enterro' transforms, beginning as the disdained resting place for stale ideas, yet within the space of a few lines becoming the birthplace for new life, imagery and ultimately art. This transformation also subtly underlines that Barros recognizes the importance of the traditions which modern artists discard, even to the artists themselves — a debt reflected not only in Barros's recurrent references to other artists and authors, but also in the Brazilian modernist movement of *antropofagia*.

Further to the observations and conjectures above, the poem is informative of a certain aspect of the modernist aesthetic. The idea of an "engenharia / de cores" resonates with the modernist obsession with technology and construction, whilst the emphasis on abandoning tradi-

tional teaching and modes of expression (ll. 1-3), and the importance of chance (ll. 13-6) are particularly crucial to the surrealist theoretical and aesthetic frameworks. In spite of this apparent concession to a modernist worldview, we see in this poem a clear interference of Barros's own poetics and aesthetic as he stresses the importance of the material and natural world, of waste and decay, and of 'desaprender' — all key elements of his poetic practice. Here, as in the previous example, Barros is not simply describing or including modernist art into his work, but is incorporating it and amalgamating it with his own poetic philosophy, with scope widening from artwork to artist and, as we shall now see, even to an entire art form.

In addition to the concrete references that I have already highlighted, Barros's poetry has meaningful intersections with other work in the plastic arts. Just as in previous chapters I have made comparisons between Barros and contemporary poets within a broad, international frame, here I propose to highlight some of the confluences between Barros's poetry and modernist and post-modernist plastic arts. These are not necessarily the artists which Barros refers to directly — those which I have commented upon earlier in the chapter — but artists and artworks which, to my mind, somehow reflect or enlarge Barros's poetic vision. Through such comparisons I hope to open up Barros's poetic philosophy to a wider frame, and thus make its ideas more visible and accessible.

These comparisons will be fairly brief, and Barros remains the focus: they should serve to elucidate Barros's poetry, rather than to muddy the waters by including in-depth analyses of other artists. Nonetheless, there are interesting points to be made through these comparisons, as we shall see, and I am not alone in choosing a comparative angle as a way into Barros's poetry (see McNee, *The Environmental Imaginary*).

As a point of departure, take one of many examples of aesthetic and philosophical common ground between Barros and other modern/modernist artists and poets: a renewed interest in the everyday, the mundane and the overlooked. The foregrounding of the everyday is one of the hallmarks of contemporary art and thought. Its invisibility, as well as its pervasive nature (it is, as Stephen Johnstone succinctly points out, "below the threshold of the noticed [...] everywhere and nowhere at the same time" (Johnstone 13)) makes the everyday a particularly interesting counterpart and complement to the structures of power which were, and are, being deconstructed and revealed through modern critical theory. As such, the everyday as 'discovered' by Henri Lefebvre in 1961 is suddenly not just worthy of consideration, but is a site of considerable meaning-making and political potential. It is fair to say that artists, long before critics, have paid close attention to the ephemera of everyday life which so often pass unnoticed — one only need look at the tradition of still life as one example — but the recent and increasing critical and polit-

ical attention to these details brings their significance into sharper focus. Perhaps more importantly for this discussion, the everyday is "the place where repetition and creativity meet and confront each other" (Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* 239). This tension between the world of 'high' culture that has been inhabited by art, and the 'low' culture of the everyday is the battleground upon which much modern artistic practice makes its stand. In the elevation of everyday objects to the status of 'art', and in the corruption and disruption of mundane or everyday objects, the artists that I shall examine here seek to undermine and redefine not only the concept of 'art', or the classical constructions of originality and creativity, but also our relationships with and perceptions of the inescapable everyday world.

Barros's commitment to the exploration of the everyday is clear from his subject matter, the mundane objects which he examines and subverts, and from his language and style. Far from the flowery and erudite verse of his Parnassian predecessors, who glorified an intellectualized and very euro-centric vision of Portuguese (Perrone 3–5), Barros's poetry is conveyed through the cadence and mannerisms of everyday language. He frequently employs colloquialism and local dialect, and often uses phrases ('e tal', 'etc.') which emphasize this mode of speech. Whilst it is certainly true that his poetry is conceptually complex, the simple language employed throughout allows his poetry to escape an academi-

cized and intellectualized tradition, and be understood as an exploration of the most basic aspects of our everyday lives: how we communicate (or fail to) and how we interpret our surroundings at a most fundamental level. His simple language and tone, combined with an enigmatic and aphoristic style, force the reader to confront the fact that it is perfectly possible to create extremely 'original' and thought-provoking, and indeed wildly innovative and challenging, art using everyday language and themes.

One of the many connections that can be made in this vein is to the similar treatment of everyday objects in the work of Marcel Duchamp. Controversial and revolutionary, Duchamp's readymades, executed between 1913 and 1923, consisted of either removing these mundane and everyday objects from situations in which they were defined by their use, and presenting them as works of art, or modifying them so that their use value was negated, creating objects that defied conventional definition. These radical artworks provoked a reassessment not only of what might be considered art, but also the value, both in cultural and monetary terms, that was placed on these socially significant objects, and they forced the viewer to reconsider conventional definitions of any object, which tend to be based upon their use and their social significance. This refusal to define objects conventionally is also at work in Barros's poetry: the aim in 'dar ao pente funções de não pentear' (Barros, *Poesia com-*

pleta 308) and in Duchamp's *Fountain*, a urinal signed (with someone else's name) and placed in an exhibition is similar — 'Desinventar objetos' (Barros, *Poesia completa* 308). These 'desobjetos' serve to highlight the abyss between the material thing and the cultural object imbued with meaning which transforms its appearance to us depending on its use or cultural significance.

More fundamentally though, readymades provoked, and continue to provoke, debate about the very nature of 'objects' and how they are created (Evnine). If, as Evnine's analysis suggests, "one can bring into existence a sculpture, a new entity, by selecting an existing entity, a urinal, for exhibition" (423) then can a similar thing be achieved with language? Can Barros's neologistic and creative linguistic constructions, particularly his use of repetition and self-appropriation, be seen as a kind of poetic readymade, bringing forth something entirely unknown from the pre-fabricated building blocks of words and grammar? A single, but recurring, example of this is Barros's use of neologistic constructions stemming from the prefix 'des-'. In these constructions though, 'des' becomes more than a prefix, and certainly cannot be construed as a simple negation of the following word: "desobjetos" are not a negation or absence of the object, nor are they a kind of anti-object which refuses all object-like qualities. When Barros evokes the techniques of 'desaprender' or 'desinventar' it is not simply an instruction to forget what we know,

but also to recreate a new order from the 'desobjetos' which are offered, objects which by no means cease to exist, but cease to exist as we have understood and understand them.

The question of poetry and the readymade has already, and quite successfully been addressed by Marjorie Perloff in her ground-breaking study *21st Century Modernism* (*21st-Century Modernism*), although Perloff focuses mainly on the obviously linguistic elements of Duchamp's artistic output. In a chapter entitled 'The Conceptual Poetics of Marcel Duchamp', Perloff notes that Duchamp himself pushed the boundaries of poetry:

> even as radical a poet as Gertrude Stein was quite unwilling to concede that "poetry" and "painting" or "poetry" and "photography" might coexist in the same work. For that particular crossing, as well as for the notion that a replica of one's earlier work, miniaturized and rearranged, could itself be a new art work, a new aesthetic had to come into play — the aesthetic we now know as conceptualism (*21st-Century Modernism* 81)

If there can be any doubt as to the importance and the ramifications of Duchamp's conceptualism, and the impact which it has had upon every kind of artistic production, Perloff assures us that these implications are indeed profound: "The resulting revolution has transformed both visual and verbal language and is therefore central to poetics in the twentieth century." (*21st-Century Modernism* 84)

In readymades which rely upon the written word, such as *The* (1915) and *Rendez-vous du Dimanche 6 Février 1916* (1916), Duchamp pushes

the boundaries of metaphor and meaning in language, attempting to remove meaning altogether: "By simulating aphasia, Duchamp was able to insist upon the materiality of language. Like gibberish or an 'unknown' language, words are drained of their significance, falling back into a sensuous medium of sound." (Joselit 77). Whether he could ever be entirely successful in stripping the "metaphoric axis" (Joselit 77) from these texts and therefore create a wholly meaningless text is debatable (see Perloff, *21st-Century Modernism*), and Duchamp's attempts to write such texts are, certainly, not completely in tune with Barros's work. Nonetheless, the idea behind them seems similar to Barros's statement of intent at the beginning of the collection *Livro sobre nada*:

> Mas o nada de meu livro é nada mesmo. É coisa nenhuma por escrito: um alarme para o silêncio, um abridor de amanhecer, pessoa apropriada para pedras, o parafuso de veludo, etc etc. O que eu queria era fazer brinquedos com as palavras. Fazer coisas desúteis. O nada mesmo. Tudo que use o abandono por dentro e por fora. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 335)

The approach to language highlighted in Duchamp's work is present in this collection too, but perhaps more relevant is Perloff's reading of Duchamp's efforts. The insistence on words as meaningful, historical, symbolic entities (Perloff, *21st-Century Modernism* 97–9) is explained by the poet as a part of his working method in a footnote:

> [1] *Falar em archaico: aprecio uma desviação ortográfica para o archaico. Estâmago por estômago. Celeusma por celeuma. Seja este um gosto que vem de detrás. Das minhas memórias fósseis. Ouvir estâmago produz uma ressonância atávica dentro de mim. Coisa que sonha de retravés.* (Barros, *Poesia completa* 346)

Barros highlights the potential of language to change over time, and to evoke reactions based not simply upon the meanings of the words, but also upon their history, sound and materiality. He underlines the ancientness of language, its ability to awaken 'fossil memories' and to reach back through time for meanings and resonances. Words, used in this way, become more than simple definitions, but have layered meaning which can be difficult to understand even as it is experienced or felt. This insistence on the malleability of language, on perverting the meanings of words, and finding new meanings for words which defy and exceed any dictionary definition, is reinforced in the footnoted stanza:

> Escrevo o idioleto manolês archaico[1] (Idioleto é o
> dialeto que os idiotas usam para falar com as paredes
> e com as moscas). (Barros, *Poesia completa* 346)

Here, as in some of Duchamp's language-centred readymades, the sound of the words becomes a starting point for the development of new meanings (see Joselit 77; Perloff, *21st-Century Modernism*) much more obviously than elsewhere in Barros's work. By corrupting the meaning of idiolect, whilst maintaining a link with meanings which might be suggested by its resonances with the word 'idiota', Barros infers a more basic and instinctive understanding of this academic-linguistic jargon. Meaning in this stanza is led by our associations between similar sounding words, but by offering a counter definition Barros is also denying the authority of a purely linguistic interpretation of language: the poet sug-

gests that an attention to idiot-dialect, rather than idiolect, might be more fruitful for our understanding of the world around us.

The opening line of the collection sets out the nature of the 'thing' which is brought into being by the readymade: "As coisas tinham para nós uma desutilidade poética" (*Poesia completa* 337). Indeed, later in the collection a readymade is specifically discussed:

> Vi um prego do Século XIII, enterrado até o meio
> numa parede de 3 x 4, branca, na XXIII Bienal de Artes Plásticas de São Paulo, em 1994.
> [...]
> Era um prego sozinho e indiscutível.
> Podia ser um anúncio de solidão.
> Prego é uma coisa indiscutível. (*Poesia completa* 350)

The readymade is plainly presented — the first lines read almost like a gallery or museum's catalogue listing — and declared 'indiscutível'. The art work, a nail, which could be 'an advert for solitude' evades explication and description through its raw self-presentation, its very being in itself. Indeed, in a space in which a nail is normally employed as an invisible but essential part of the display, holding up the paintings which exemplify the most traditional of art forms, here it stands out, the everyday object removed from its normal subliminal context and transformed into a centre of attention and critique. This mundane object is allowed to show forth, no longer behind a painting but a work of art in itself. Unlike in previous references to the plastic arts, the artist goes unmentioned, the artwork-object standing alone, an example of the meaning-making

agency of the readymade. Similarly, the objects which Barros creates in his poetry defy our conventional understanding, creating a linguistic imagery which though it is based upon recognizable words and phrases has no practical use value in the material world and no conventional, prosaic communicative meaning, and as such, they are perhaps not dissimilar to the readymades which redefined art in the twentieth century.

More recently, and from a much less well established artist, Lina-Marie Köppen's *Learn to Unlearn* (Köppen) (a title which in itself resonates with the language of Barros's poetry) takes the formula of the readymade a step further. Where Duchamp removed the use-value from objects and declared them to be 'art', demanding that we consider conventionally useful objects in a new light, Köppen invites the user/viewer of her interactive artwork to define and invent uses — some thoroughly practical and others quite the opposite — for the ambiguous and apparently useless objects which she has created. What are we to do when confronted with a bottomless container, a two-legged stool or a brush which turns out to be a lamp in disguise?

Köppen argues that these objects, deliberately without a "predetermined 'perfect' function [...] overthrow the unconscious learned behaviour and expectations governing our perception" (Köppen). It is easy to see how these objects are similar to Barros's 'dis-objects', whether we are referring to those which are truly absurd (such as mentioned in *O*



Figure 5 *Learn to Unlearn*, Lina-Marie Köppen, 2013

guardador de águas (Barros, *Poesia completa* 253)) or those which simply take everyday objects and corrupt them. Furthermore, Köppen's collection of objects, and the reasoning and critical project which supports it, is perhaps even closer to being an analogue of Barros's poetic project: he does not ask the reader to consider his poems and inventions only as art, but rather to use this way of seeing as a means of rediscovering the material world without the baggage of established cultural and social associations. Barros's poetry implies that his 'desobjetos', performing simultaneously as poetic images and as referents to the material world, are as functional as they are artistic — but he's not going to tell us

exactly how. Indeed, perhaps their very use is to compel the reader to exert the force of his or her imagination in an increasingly prescriptive, meaning- and image-saturated world.

These objects and 'disobjects', presented in such a way as to encourage interaction, reinforce one of the key values that Barros's poetry shares with contemporary art: playfulness. Barros recognizes, and explores, the idea that childhood is a state of intense creativity and discovery. His poems often refer to children, that without the preconceptions of adulthood they might 'muda a função de um verbo' and 'delira', but further to this, like Lina-Marie Köppen's exhibition, he invites the reader to participate in this creative playfulness. This is notable in his aphoristic style, which compels the reader to consider the different possibilities for language and the material world by juxtaposing aphorism — a structure which is traditionally used to deliver received wisdom and truisms — with extremely inventive and even nonsensical images.

The effect is to force a sort of double take — we are culturally programmed to accept such sayings without any real thought, but immediately recognize the nonsensical content, and become uneasily aware that these phrases sound more plausible simply because of their construction. It is also evident in the titles and content of some collections and poems, such as 'Uma didática de invenção' (Barros, *Poesia completa* 307), 'Exercícios Adjetivos' (Barros, *Poesia completa* 197) or 'Pequena

história natural' (Barros, *Poesia completa* 237). These poems remind the reader that our view of the material world is taught as much (or more) than it is intuited, and invites them to revisit the lessons of their childhood with a more critical and inventive eye. Ultimately, Barros, like these artists, breaks down the barrier between what is considered playful, and what is considered serious, demonstrating that serious issues can be tackled through playful and creative means.

Where Barros's 'desobjetos' differ from Köppen's work is that he frequently incorporates elements that we would normally associate with nature into his creations. The full implications of the interaction between Barros's concern with the natural and material world and his interest in the visual arts will be discussed later in the chapter, but what is interesting specifically in relation to Köppen is that this means that many of Barros's 'desobjetos' are possessed of a varying degree of agency which is implicit in their composite parts. This is a tactic which Barros employs throughout his poetry as he describes composite animal-objects ("Formiga frondosa com olhar de árvore" (Barros, *Escritos em verbal de ave*), "Um beija-flor de rodas vermelhas / Um imitador de auroras — usado pelos tordos." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 253)), confronting the reader with other kinds of agency, different points of view and ways of being in the world which are impossible to define within a conventional framework — theoretical or otherwise. Unlike Köppen's work where the agency

of the viewer is emphasized, and indeed positively demanded, Barros's poetry not only reminds the reader of their own agency, but also goes on to question the authority usually associated with human agency. This authority with which the observer acts and passes judgement is challenged by an agency and authority ascribed to the object, and as such, any attempt at a definitive reading is — definitively — rebuffed.

A complement to the poetics of the everyday, and an equally salient feature of (post-)modern artistic practice, is a renewed and focused interest in the possibilities afforded by the use of appropriation as an artistic technique. Whilst it can be argued that artists have always 'appropriated' or quoted from their predecessors and contemporaries, most would concede that with the advent of the mass media and the near infinite reproduction of texts and images, this practice has taken on a new dimension. Such appropriation has become so commonplace outside the world of art that it has become increasingly visible and acceptable, and the need has arisen to subvert the discourse of these media precisely by appropriating their own output. A growing acceptance of the idea that all art is, at least in part, a kind of collage, has given artists in all disciplines new license to appropriate, remix and mash up the work of other artists, the effects of which can be seen in both popular culture and in supposed 'high art.'[8]

[8] For one of the more recent and comprehensive attempts to both document and practice this burgeon-

Barros's own use of the work of his predecessors is complex: certainly, he frequently quotes and references other poets and artists, but just as often these attributions are false, putting his own words into the mouths of others. In this irreverence for the accepted traditions and schema of attribution, Barros demonstrates how effective this creative permeability can be, as well as reinforcing a new tradition of appropriation and artistic flux. Frequently misquoting for epigraphs, Barros coaxes a reader into an assumption of intertextuality and homage that is, in a conventional sense, invalid: the references often simply do not exist. The implications though, go deeper than this. Barros's use of his own poetry, attributed to his contemporaries and predecessors, suggests once more the notion that we are inescapably repeating the past. As in his references to Rodin and Van Gogh, Barros seems to recognize a base of appropriation, 'unoriginal genius' (Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius*) and collage which is fundamental to contemporary artistic practice.

As a painter who constantly questions and undermines our perceptions of 'reality' as mediated through culture and who explored and interrogated the idea of artworks *as* objects rather than as representations of them, Roy Lichtenstein is another artist who bears comparison with

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ing creative method, see Shields's *Reality Hunger: a Manifesto*, whose entirely 'original' narrative and argument is composed almost entirely of unattributed quotations. For a more academic assessment of the use of appropriation in poetry, Marjorie Perloff's studies are invaluable (Perloff, *Radical Artifice*; Perloff, *21st-Century Modernism*; Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius*), particularly *Unoriginal Genius*

Barros. Perhaps the first painter to fully realize the artistic potential of reproducing the mundane images of advertising and the mass media in order to question their cultural impact, he was most famous for his interpretations of comic book panels. Another great achievement, and one which is often overlooked, was the creation of a huge body of 'Art about Art'[9], in which he used his painting to dismantle and evaluate artistic styles and their representations of everyday objects.

His paintings and sculptures — even his landscapes — cannot be seen as representations of the natural and material world or the artist's vision in the same way as the work of his predecessors may have been considered: Lichtenstein is questioning and re-presenting these very representations. Indeed, he often emphasized that his sources were not the landscapes themselves, or even other artists' originals, but postcards, catalogues and other reproductions of these originals, rendering his own work into an eternal, self-perpetuating system of copies and copies of copies. These highly stylized paintings mimic, exaggerate and parody the styles of great artists such as Picasso, Mondrian and Matisse, as well as cultural and social ephemera ranging from mundane objects such as comic books, radios and crockery to by then unfashionable Art Deco architecture.

There are several interesting aspects to the way that Lichtenstein

[9] This is not Lichtenstein's own designation, but one which was used at the most recent retrospective of his work at the Tate Modern in London (Tate Publishing (Ed.)).

(and indeed Pop-Art in general) carried out his work that resonate with Barros's poetic. Despite his unorthodox subject matter and style, Lichtenstein, like Barros, opted for a conventional medium — he was a painter, primarily, and unlike many of his Pop-Art contemporaries, or indeed modernists such as Duchamp, Lichtenstein did not use unconventional form to interrogate the artistic practices of his predecessors. Instead, he used his medium to lend legitimacy to his work which might otherwise have been impossible if, for example, he had used printmaking: Lichtenstein might well have drawn upon the simplistic style of advertising billboards and comic books, but his paintings, almost always large in scale and using conventional materials, were unmistakably painterly. Furthermore, whether simple or simplistic, his highly stylized images signalled a return to precision and a kind of realism after the dominance of Abstract Expressionism.

That this was a considered and targeted decision is clear from his *Brushstrokes* series, in which he parodies the apparently raw, abstract and emotive application of paint to canvas which was the hallmark of his abstract-expressionist predecessors by rendering in minute and careful detail such apparently abstract marks, revealing and emphasizing their often calculated application. Unlike abstract expressionist canvasses, the application of paint is completely flat and almost devoid of any indication of the hand of the artist, which is ironically reproduced in the lower

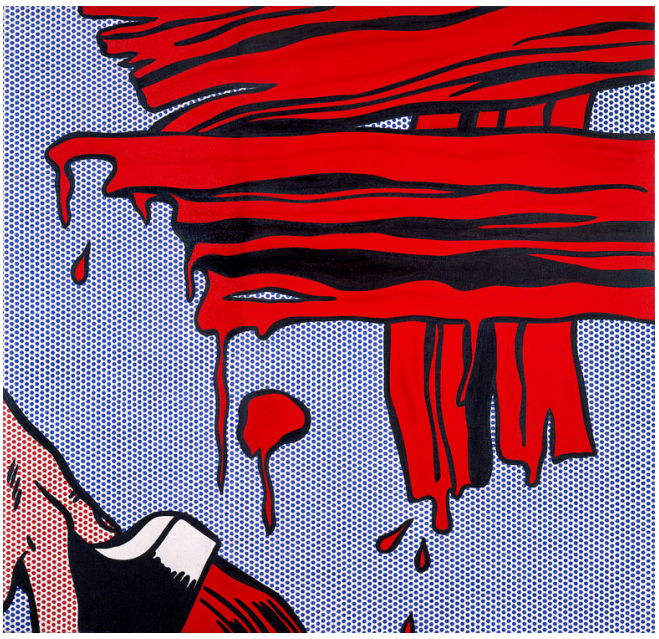


Figure 6 *Brushstrokes*,

Roy Lichtenstein, 1965

left corner. Barros's invented epigraphs and faux-homages similarly ask the reader to consider the ways in which art relies upon, venerates, and diverges from traditions and conventions, sometimes citing truthfully from established authors, but at other points putting words into their mouths, or using the epigraph to cite one of his poetic characters or personas. Like the impersonal flatness of the painting, Barros's verse, whilst its imagery is far from flat, does not partake in the stylistic flourishes of his predecessors even whilst his poetry treats the 'traditional' poetic subject of Nature and the Brazilian landscape.



Figure 7 *Cow Triptych (Cow Going Abstract)*, Roy Lichtenstein, 1964

As in the painting above, which parodies and documents the cubist journey from realism to abstraction, his mimicry was nowhere more evident than in his studies of other artists' work — both as a form of homage (Lichtenstein acknowledged the cubists as a huge influence on his work) and as a way of superseding them. As Lichtenstein used a conventional form and mimicked the style of his forebears in paintings which are unmistakably after Picasso, Mondrian and Monet, and yet simultaneously unmistakably Lichtensteins, so Barros amalgamates conventional poetic formulations — the use of free verse, epigraphs etc. — with his own invention, both acknowledging and surpassing his predecessors. His discourse is often meta-poetic, referring to the poem and the figure of the poet both with a certain respect and with a playful irreverence: in Barros, as in Lichtenstein, the hand of the artist is never far from view.

Another obvious correlation is similar to the focus on the everyday which I have already highlighted. In *Matéria de Poesia* Barros, like Lichtenstein, insists that anything, no matter how culturally 'low' it may seem

— perhaps even because of this — is perfectly capable of being the subject of a work of art, if indeed the separation of 'low' objects from 'high' art is a valid division in the first place. The celebration of the poetic and artistic value of combs, slimy Chevrolets, and 'All the things whose value can be / contested by a long-distance spit' (Barros, *Poesia completa* 153) denies this distinction, and grounds poetry firmly in the realm of the everyday. His plain style and colloquial register echoes the return to recognizable and populist forms which was the driving force behind the Pop-Art movement. Barros, like the Pop-Artists, realized the importance of creating a poetry which was widely recognizable and acceptable, which could be appreciated and enjoyed without a knowledge of a very specific canon of literature and criticism. This is often achieved by the superposition of a matter of fact tone and down to earth language with highly stylized imagery and imaginative metaphor (both linguistic and visual), to create an effect similar to that of Lichtenstein's paintings: the subject matter is both instantly recognizable and immediately estranged. In Lichtenstein the effect is often to reveal the alienation which modern, metropolitan consumerism creates through its hyperreal visual regime; in Barros, the surreal, more than the hyperreal, is proposed as a possibility for rectifying this alienation. The metropolitan is conspicuous in Barros's poetry only by its absence. It is worth noting that at its inception, one alternative name mooted for Pop-Art was New Realism — a categorization which I shall return to later in the chapter in relation to

Barros's work.

The logical extension of this approach, which appropriates objects, styles and artworks in order to provoke a renewed interaction and assessment of them, is to re-appropriate and repeat one's own output. This is a method which is extensively applied by both Barros ("Repetir, repetir — até ficar diferente. / Repetir é um dom do estilo." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 308)) and Lichtenstein (e.g. in the *Nudes* and *Artist's Studio* series, in which his own paintings are often visible on the walls). Barros even makes a false apology for such repetition in the introduction to his complete works: "Perdoem-me os leitores desta entrada mas vou copiar de mim alguns desenhos verbais" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 15). Of course the reader has no choice but to forgive the author if they wish to continue to read, and this ironic gesture suggests that Barros is fully aware of the discomfort that a reader accustomed to more conventional poetry might find in accepting such repetition and appropriation, although I can find no evidence to support the hypothesis that this is a response to specific criticism. Lichtenstein faced such criticism, and like Barros he dealt with the issue through his work. Perhaps the most blatant example of this is in his painting *Image Duplicator*.

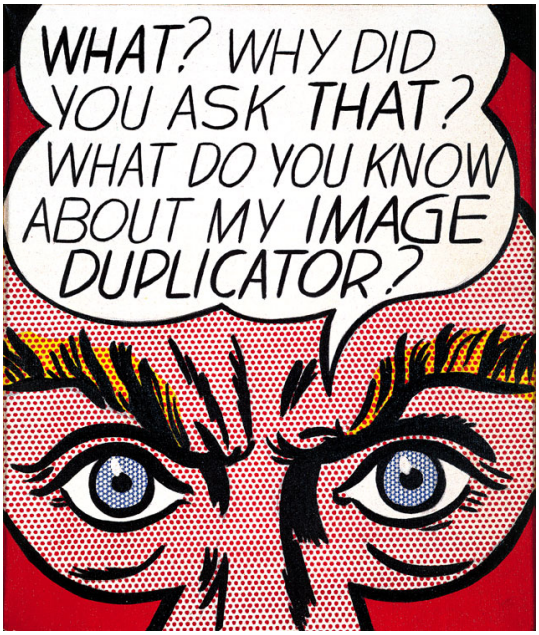


Figure 8 *Image Duplicator*, Roy Lichtenstein, 1963

Lichtenstein's response to such criticism is typical of his approach to his source material: the image is very similar, indeed recognizable as, a panel from an *X-Men* comic, but crucial detail is changed — the composition is cropped, some colouring removed and interest added to the face, and the text in the speech bubble, based on a panel from a different comic, *My Greatest Adventure*, is changed to directly challenge criticism levelled against him by establishment figures. The image is, of course, far from simply duplicated, as even a cursory comparison would reveal. The continued reference to and appropriation of their own work, and a demonstrated awareness of the criticisms levelled at it is typical of both artists.

This self-referential style's most profound effect is to further undermine the idea of originality which has been so crucial to traditional understandings of art. The artists, through their insistence on repetition of their own work, highlight the inevitable collage of any work of art and reflect upon how these repetitions can, in fact, create new meaning. In the collagist nature of these artists — the new approach to creation which Marjorie Perloff labels 'unoriginal genius' (Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius*) — the appropriation and mash-up of objects and artworks (if indeed these can be considered different) into new forms forces a consideration of new and unique perspectives, perhaps much more profoundly than any purportedly 'original' representation could.

The constant use of repetition and self-appropriation also contributes to the unity of Barros's poetry, not only reiterating constant themes, motifs and poetic philosophy, but also often repeating and iteratively modifying phrases and lines of verse. Barros asserts this poetic unity in *Ensaios Fotográficos*, claiming that his books "São todos repetições do primeiro." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 397) This claim is interesting enough in itself, but is made more confounding by a biographical detail: the first collection of poetry that Barros ever wrote, *Nossa Senhora da Minha Escuridão*, was destroyed by the police before it could be published (Müller and Gismonti 172). Thus, Barros constructs his entire oeuvre as a repetition of a lost collection, a life's poetry based upon an ephemeral,

indeed non-existent, foundational work.

Perhaps Barros's most sustained engagement with the plastic arts is the collection *Ensaios Fotográficos*. As the title of the collection suggests, Barros brings into question the photographic gaze, attempting to claim the realm of the 'pure image' — an idea whose problems are discussed below in more detail — for poetry. In a series of poems which problematize the photograph as a means of documentation whilst simultaneously trying to incorporate the mystery of the photograph into language, Barros focuses on the un-photographable, the problematic perception of the photograph as documentation of the real, and the nature of truth in the photograph as compared with the nature of truth in the poem.

As he has with other art forms, in this collection Barros considers the ways in which poetry and photography might overlap and inform one another, working around and exploring these interstices and compelling the reader to do the same. He questions and includes the object of the photograph in the poems, but the fundamental question of why a photograph, specifically, is such a rich and useful metaphor will require some theoretical underpinning. What is it about photographs — as opposed to paintings, or the moving image, or any other art form — which so ignites Barros's imagination, and is so apt as a central theme or organizing principle for this collection?

Since its coming of age with the daguerreotype in the early 1840s,

photography has proven a problematic topic for critics of the visual arts. Even at this early stage, there were doubts as to whether and how this new medium could be considered to be 'art', even as attempts were made to make it conform to the more traditional standards of high art (Trachtenberg 247–50). Whilst now the art world has embraced photography as a possible medium for both fine and popular art, in many ways its increasingly universal availability to the layman and its omnipresence in the visual experience of daily life render its inclusion equally, if not more, problematic (Trachtenberg 291). It may seem that the photography which Barros refers to in his poems is not 'fine art photography' as we know it, but nonetheless his attempt at an amalgamation of the photographic and poetic forms once again throws up this problematic contrast between 'everyday' photography and photography in the name of artistic endeavour.

The most obvious problem for taking a 'photographic' approach to poetry is the opposition of the symbolic (metaphorical, analogical) nature of the written word in poetry and the unavoidable realism of the photographic image[10]; this is perhaps related to the contrast between the verbal and the visual sign. Barros is not the only poet who has made an attempt

[10] Even though photography was used extensively by surrealists both in theory and practice, there is nonetheless an inescapable realism to the image captured on the film—the objects must have been before the camera at some point for the exposure to have registered. For discussion of the surrealists and photography see, e.g., Sontag (*On Photography* 51–82)

to bridge this gap, nor indeed the most obvious: the Brazilian concrete poets, with their theories of the verbi-voco-visual icon and poems which fully engage with the visual sign offer arguably a more challenging exploration of this issue. However, I would argue that in their enthusiasm for theoretical and formal rigour as an approach to the problem, some of the most successful concrete poems are less successful *as poems* than Barros's work. Whilst the concrete poets reconciled these contradictions by bringing the poem ever closer to the visual sign, Barros instead uses a more conventional poetic form to powerfully evoke visual imagery, and in this collection attempts to push the realism of the photograph into doubt rather than pulling his poetry toward the realm of realism. Perhaps in Barros photography is seen, as Sontag suggests, as "the only art that is natively surreal" (*On Photography* 51)

Apart from this perhaps intractable issue, what *does* the idea of photograph bring to Barros's poetry? The most obvious element of photography which is inevitably missing in the poetic medium is the sense of impartiality and objectivity that a photograph (rightly or wrongly) imparts. One hundred years after the daguerreotype brought photography into the mainstream, André Bazin noted in his seminal essay 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' that "[t]he objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making. In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer,

we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually, *re*-presented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space." (Trachtenberg 241) This is not a claim which has gone undisputed (see Trachtenberg 288, 292), certainly, but it is irrefutable that the *impression* of objectivity, whether or not it is false, is crucial to understanding the power of the photograph as opposed to that of, say, the painting.

Another key feature of photography which Barros plays upon is the idea of the absence of the artist or photographer from the final image; that the image is created to an extent independent of any prejudice or preconceptions that the artist might have. As photography became a mainstream medium, those practising it were divided as to whether this idea was desirable, but its proponents, as Kracauer notes, were extreme in their advocation of this ideology: "Positivist mentality aspired to a faithful, completely impersonal rendering of reality, in the sense of Taine's radical dictum: 'I want to reproduce the objects as they are, or as they would be even if I did not exist.'" (Trachtenberg 247) Bazin, once more, remarks on this possibility with reference to other visual arts:

> The personality of the photographer enters into the proceedings only in his selection of the object to be photographed and by way of the purpose he has in mind. [...] All the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence. (Trachtenberg 241)

And even goes further, to ascribe photography's central power and attraction to this aspect:

> Only the impassive lens, stripping the object of all those ways of seeing it, those piled-up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it, is able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love. (Trachtenberg 242)

This idea of a pure image cuts closest to what this poetry is attempting to achieve. Even early adopters of photography were quickly aware of "the power of the medium [...] to open up new, hitherto unsuspected dimensions of reality" (Trachtenberg 251). This ability to see things differently is central to Barros's poetic philosophy. Both of the epigraphs within this collection emphasize the creative power of seeing things anew ("Imagens não passam de incontinências do visual" (*Poesia completa* 387); "Eu te invento, ó realidade!" (*Poesia completa* 397)) and it is perhaps in photography that this seeing things anew, as they are, is most clear. Bazin goes as far as to claim that this reverses the role between nature and artist — a claim which has great implications for Barros's poetic: "By the power of photography, the natural image of a world that we neither know nor can know, nature at last does more than imitate art: she imitates the artist." (Trachtenberg 242). Nature is ascribed an agency, an ability to imitate art and artist as, apparently, art has imitated nature throughout its history. The further implication of this formulation is that art influences nature and not vice versa, an implication that is important for Barros's poetic practice and which I shall return to at the end of this chapter.

This is perhaps the crux of what I have called Barros's 'photographic style' — the sense that it is the objects in the poetry that are suddenly made subject and given agency by their newness; that this material world is radically unknowable, and yet must be explored. Barros seeks to reveal a different view of the material world, one which was previously unrepresented, and in this his poetry resonates with photography and the way of seeing which it advocates: "Photographic seeing meant an aptitude for discovering beauty in what everybody sees but neglects as too ordinary" (Sontag, *On Photography* 89). He uses the frankness of his tone, along with the lack of a contextual frame to provide the reader with a 'snapshot' of a scene which we are invited to see differently, the poem as a near-photographic, 'pure' image. That the verse lacks the formal and stylistic trappings usually associated with poetry — regular rhythm, lineation or rhyme — adds to this decontextualization, breaking down the gap between poetry and plastic arts by abandoning poetic convention. And by framing the poet as photographer, is Barros making an attempt to distance himself from the aestheticized image of the poet, and thus lend to his poetry an air of greater authority? Or is he demonstrating, conversely, that this idea we have of the photographer as impartial observer is manifestly false? As ever in Barros's poetry, there is no single answer amidst the ambiguity of his verse. Still, as we shall see, this frame offers great possibilities both for Barros's creativity and for our own interpretations.

The collection (its first half entitled 'Ensaios Fotográficos') begins with an immediate paradox, and one central to the problem of regarding photographic documentation as analogous to lived reality — that some things simply cannot be photographed:

> O FOTÓGRAFO
>
> Difícil fotografar o silêncio.
> Entretanto tentei. Eu conto: (Barros, *Poesia completa* 387)

Here, the poet simultaneously highlights the many things which a photograph cannot capture, and shows his intent to capture these images, in a photographic style, within the poem. In this first poem of the collection, the poet becomes the photographer, and so the poem the photograph. In likening the poem to the photograph, Barros also subtly accepts the impossibility of the task ahead: he can tell us of his attempts to take these impossible photographs — or write these impossible poems — but the final result will remain elusive. The continued references to such impossible photographs ("Tinha um perfume de jasmim no beiral de um sobrado. / Fotografei o perfume." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 387)) remind the reader of the seeming absurdity of our attempts to capture in snapshots the beauty of the natural world even as the enticing poetry of the images presses the reader to imagine new ways of seeing and appreciating the material world. It is this innovation and inquisitiveness, perhaps, that Barros aims to provoke in the reader, and the end of the poem suggests that he believes that his poem has achieved its goal: "A foto saiu

legal." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 388)

Having set up this link between the poetic and the photographic image, Barros's references to photography are less heavy handed in the poems which follow. Nonetheless, it is clear that these poems too aspire to follow the 'photographic' aesthetic that Barros sets up in the opening poem of the collection. The development of this aesthetic quickly turns to the subject of language, to how (and whether) language can ever express the type of pure image which Barros ascribes to the photograph, and specifically to the impossible photographs of the poem 'O fotógrafo'. His explicit evocation of language in 'Línguas' seems to lay out his attitude towards how language should be used in order to best fulfil this goal, and the answer seems to be 'wrongly':

> Contenho vocação pra não saber línguas cultas.
> Sou capaz de entender as abelhas do que alemão.
> Eu domino os instintos primitivos.
>
> A única língua que estudei com força foi a portuguesa.
> Estudei-a com força para poder errá-la ao dente. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 389)

The first stanza sets up a system which values the 'primitive' aspects of a language more highly than the 'línguas cultas' which have historically laid claim to literary and poetic forms. Barros also introduces the idea — developed not just in this collection but throughout his work — that animals can be considered to 'speak' with a language of their own. The second stanza sets out a manifesto for creative disruption of conventional

expression: it is necessary to master the language you use to write poetry — but only in order to better subvert it. The language of the poem's opening stanzas is unusual, following its own dictum of subverting the conventions of language. Awkward phrasing such as 'Contenho vocação' rather than 'tenho' exemplifies the idea of an uncomfortable and innovative relationship with language, and this is reinforced by the use of 'errá-la ao dente' in the fifth line, where the reader is expecting 'dentro'. The image of a tooth also suggests the living, evolving aspect of language, and beyond this reminds the reader of its bite, the power which language has and our sometime lack of control over its wildness.

What follows in the poem is an exposition of a new way of seeing and describing language, and with language. By leveraging the unknown quality of Brazil's native languages Barros is able to ascribe to them elements which we would not normally see as valid linguistic observations:

> A língua dos índios Guatós é múrmura: é como se ao
> dentro de suas palavras corresse um rio entre pedras.
>
> A língua dos Guaranis é gárrula: para eles é muito
> mais importante o rumor da [*sic*] palavras do que o sentido
> que elas tenham.
> Usam trinados até na dor.
>
> Na língua dos Guanás há sempre uma sombra do
> charco em que vivem.
> Mas é língua matinal.
> Há nos seus termos réstias de um sol infantil. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 389)

The 'photographic' impulse of the collection is clear to see here, as Barros — much in the style of his impossible photos in 'O Fotógrafo' —

attempts to provide snapshots of the native languages of Brazil, poetic images which capture their essence or character. Play on words ("língua matinal" for *língua materna*) continues to arrest the reader and undermine the authority of the "línguas cultas" and the conventional use of language in hackneyed phrases, whilst the image of the sun (photographable, but not truly observable with the naked eye) serves as a metaphor for the creative possibilities of this 'original' — as derived from 'origin' — approach to language. But further to this, Barros's descriptions begin to fuse language, the image and the material world — language becomes sight and sound and thing. Closing the distances between reality and representation, both visual and linguistic, Barros undermines conventional hierarchies of knowledge and understanding and shows how poetry, with its infinite ambiguity and possibilities, presents a different and perhaps less anthropocentric way of seeing the world. The levelling, flattening, democratizing power of the photograph as a near-universal means of communication, creation and memory-making can be recreated in poetry.

The second half of the collection is titled 'Álbum de Família'. This change in the frame of reference from the relatively intellectual 'Ensaios Fotográficos' to the everyday family album (although this family album is still subsumed under the 'Ensaios Fotográficos' as the title of the collection as a whole) is reflected by a superficial shift in subject matter, to the family of the poet. The general thematic and stylistic elements

of the poems do not substantially change, but Barros focuses even more intently on his own poetic practice in this section, offering reflections upon it rather than examples of its use. Unlike some of his earlier work, in which poems that were almost collections of aphoristic statements read almost as manifestos for poetry, the exploration of a poetic philosophy is more subtle here, and perhaps more in depth.

The first poem in this second section clearly signals this turn to self-contemplation. Titled 'Autorretrato' (Self Portrait), in the poem Barros describes his career thus far in apparently self-deprecating terms:

> [...]
>
> Escrevi 14 livros
> E deles estou livrado.
> São todos repetições do primeiro.
> (Posso fingir de outros, mas não posso fugir de mim.)
>
> [...]
>
> Tenho uma confissão: noventa por cento do que
> escrevo é invenção; só dez por cento que é mentira. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 397)

Within these lines though, are key indications of how Barros conceives his poetic project. Firstly, that there is one, underlying, poetic project which unites his many published books of poetry ("São todos repetições"); and secondly that the idea of the creative primacy of language, the ability to renew things, is crucial — the ten percent of his poetry which is not 'invention' is a lie. Upon closer inspection, his evocation of the self-portrait delves a little deeper into the style of such paintings and

photographs, particularly in that they often focus on the artist in his studio, or with his tools. Barros highlights in this poem the 'tools' of his poetry ("pensamento e palavras"; "desobjetos") and his 'studio' in the form of the natural and invented pantanal which his poetry inhabits ("[a] beira de um rio" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 397); "[o] barranco de um rio [...] [a] boca descampada" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 398)). In the following poem ('O Poeta') Barros moves on from the 'birth' of the previous poem ("Ao nascer eu não estava acordado, de forma que / não vi a hora" (Barros, *Poesia completa* 397)) to his poetic awakening, once again reasserting the image as the basic unit of his poetic discourse: "A mãe falou: / Agora você vai ter que assumir as suas / irresponsibilidades. / Eu assumi: entrei no mundo das imagens."(Barros, *Poesia completa* 398)

The evocation of the family album also marks another subtle shift — from the realm of the arts to the realm of the everyday. Here are photographs in perhaps their purest form, removed from the preconceptions and distortions of the art world and of its critics. Perhaps more than in any other kind of photography, it is here that "[i]nstead of just recording reality, photographs have become the norm for the way things appear to us, thereby changing the very idea of reality, and of realism." (Sontag, *On Photography* 87) The objects in these images are not to be interpreted, but are in some way seen as reality itself:

> The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model. (Trachtenberg 241)

This parallel reality — or perhaps better hyper-reality — is also created in the fact of their collectedness, that there is not an individual image or work on display, but a series of images which present moments in the lives of their subjects:

> [t]hose grey or sepia shadows, phantomlike and almost undecipherable, are no longer traditional family portraits but rather the disturbing presence of lives halted at a set moment in their duration, freed from their destiny; not, however, by the prestige of art but by the power of an impassive mechanical process: for photography does not create an eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption. (Trachtenberg 242)

The everyday quality of photography is also addressed here, as Bazin suggests that where conventional art's "prestige" (perhaps what Walter Benjamin would call its Aura) is what makes it representative of a set moment in time, and indeed can create that moment in time as the artist wishes it to be remembered, photography is less emphatic in its reconstruction of the past and present, simply freezing a moment and recording it for posterity. This argument is not wholly convincing, not least because in the years since the essay was written photography has been definitively accepted into the realms of fine art, but it is nonetheless informative of the unique relationship that photography has with the

passing of time and the everyday. The photograph evokes this "phantom-like" presence because any photograph is always already obsolete, the objects of its "embalmed time" necessarily already on the path to their "proper corruption". Barros's poetry differs radically from this view of photography, presenting the "object itself", sure enough, as part of a very 'real' view of the material world, but one already corrupted from the kind of object that the reader might conventionally expect to find. Barros is not "rescuing" objects and the material world from the corruptions of time, but from the straitjacket of conventional thought, rescuing them *into* the corruptions of the imagination.

Does Barros create, in this collection and others, a kind of new realism, one which can reappraise the material world and the idea of nature and wrest it from the grips of romanticism? Sontag bemoans the loss of natural beauty in *On Photography*:

> Photographs create the beautiful and–over generations of picture taking–use it up. Certain glories of nature, for example, have been all but abandoned to the indefatigable attentions of camera buffs. The image-surfeited are likely to find sunsets corny; they now look, alas, too much like photographs. (*On Photography* 85)

But this is in itself an extension of a romantic premise — the idea that there is an innate beauty which can be corrupted. What if the problem with which she is grappling is in fact that the process of photography reveals these "glories of nature" to be no better, in reality, than inglorious objects? In this case, the only realism from which we can elicit the beauty

of the material world is one in which we display the surreal interpretations of the material world as we perceive it, a realism which incorporates interpretation and abstraction as a facet of reality. It is precisely this denial of subjectivity which modernism sought and seeks to redress in a certain narrative of realism, affirming the objects of art, as much as art itself, as ever-subjective but nonetheless real. Barros stakes this claim to creativity in the final poem of the collection:

> Não quero saber como as coisas se comportam.
> Quero inventar comportamento para as coisas.
> [...]
> Mudo apenas os verbos e às vezes nem mudo.
> Mudo os substantivos e às vezes nem mudo. (Barros, *Poesia completa* 403–4)

It is in the capacity of language to alter our perceptions that the creative primacy and reinvention of reality which is so present in Barros's poetry lies. The poet makes no claims that the material world is changing with or without his writing, indeed no claims that we can ever fully understand its machinations. But it is here, in poetry, imagery and language, that we can learn to see the multiplicity of 'reality'.

The synthesis of this collection's poetic project is perhaps found in the poem which is tellingly titled 'Despalavra': "Hoje eu atingi o reino das imagens, o reino da despalavra [...] Daqui vem que os poetas podem compreender o mundo sem conceitos. / Que os poetas podem refazer o mundo por imagens, por eflúvios, por afeto." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 391) In attaining a language and style which defies conventional under-

standing, the 'unword', Barros hopes to achieve a kind of pure image, a photographic unity of form and content, in which meaning will always necessarily be ambiguous, and through which it is possible to reinvent and renew the world around us.

Throughout his poetry, then, Barros uses the visual arts as a repeated reference point for his own practice. In these examples, works of art have been used not only to exemplify and explore a certain poetic philosophy, but also as material in their own right, components of the creative imagery of objects which is a cornerstone of Barros's poetry. The practices of the artists mentioned play an important role in building a picture of Barros's poetic, as do the techniques of these artists, or techniques explored in their own right. Individual works of art serve as a theme for meditation upon the very purposes of art and poetry, and the inherent contradictions and problems of such artistic ideals and practices.

All of these aspects contribute to what I have described as the poetic readymade. Barros's poetry may seem an unlikely candidate for comparison with readymades and *objets trouvés* — certainly there are other poets and poems (including several by the artists already involved with the production of readymades and found objects in the surrealist movement) which are formally more similar to the concepts. Barros does not use cut-up technique or obvious appropriation, nor does he usually emphasize the physical and spatial aspects of poetry as the concrete

poets and the surrealists so often did. Nonetheless, it is the *subject and content* of his poetry, in particular his inventions and explorations of fabulous and useless objects, which so acutely reflect the philosophy which informed this practice in the plastic arts.

One of the core problems for so postulating the existence of such 'readymades' in Barros's poetry is both practical and philosophical: to what extent can these 'objects' be said to exist? They do not, as Duchamp's readymades once did, inhabit physical space in a gallery or an exhibition; nor do they necessarily satirize and cannibalize real and identifiable everyday objects like Lichtenstein's paintings or the photographs alluded to in *Ensaios Fotográficos*. And yet, whilst nearly all of Duchamp's readymades have been destroyed and some even replicated and placed in museums (a dubious proposition indeed), they have remained central to the development of modernist and post-modernist art. From this it is clear that the *idea* of the readymade is far more important than its physical presence — indeed the readymade as an art-object defies one of the gold standards of originality in conventional artistic thought and practice: irreproducibility. If the idea of the object, then, is manifestly more important than the object itself, Barros's evocations may indeed be seen as a kind of poetic readymade. As I have argued, Barros's evocations of artworks are not ekphrastic, but instead incorporate artworks into a poetic discourse. In some sense then, all of the artworks which are

thus incorporated into Barros's poetry become such a poetic readymade — a physical object of the material world which is subsumed into Barros's verse and thus becomes not merely object, and not only art, but specifically poetry.

Such poetry necessarily disturbs poetic traditions — although Barros was in good company in this regard, with contemporaries like Décio Pignatari, Augusto de Campos and Haroldo de Campos hard at work in the concrete poetry movement disassembling core ideals of traditional poetry. Compared with these poets, Barros's subversion is more subtle, and perhaps in some regards more successful. Unlike concrete poetry, his poetry is readily recognizable as poetry rather than visual art, and yet his corruptions and subversions of language and object challenge the prevailing lyrical mode. Even where his verse *is* lyrical, it is presenting a vision of the world which begins to erase the distinctions between the literary and visual arts, and between culture and nature. Incorporating the patterns of normal speech, whilst maintaining a fantastical imagery and metaphor, Barros removes the supposed distinctions between the 'poetic' and the everyday, and his treatment of everyday objects, like the readymade, elevates them to the status of art object.

This is a poetry which demands and forges a new relationship between language and object, and between the human and the material world. The poetic 'readymades' which are so frequently referred to represent an

attempt to invent this new way of seeing and being in the world. When the reader is confronted with such an apparently nonsensical object ("O martelo de pregar água [...] Alarme para o silêncio [...] Formiga frondosa com olhar de árvore" (Barros, *Escritos em verbal de ave*)) our imagination prompts us to invent uses for it — to try to work out what purpose it might serve. In doing so, the reader is forced to reassess and meditate upon the everyday objects which form part of these readymades, and how use value colours our perception of the world around us. These everyday objects are no longer tools for performing mundane tasks, but tools for thinking, for creating and re-imagining the material world and our typical perceptions of it.

As such, the poetry confronts us with another reality which, whilst obvious from a philosophical point of view, is often overlooked: that it is often language, and the use and abuse of language, which shapes these perceptions. The ways in which we create with language can directly affect our ideas about the reality of the material world, but language itself is also a mutable and material 'object', which can be shaped, crafted and reconstructed. By disrupting conventional uses of language, through neologism and juxtaposition, misuse of words and reinvention of meanings, Barros demonstrates that this very cornerstone of thought is infinitely flexible: if we change the way we write about things, the way we think about them must also change. We are thus returned once again to

an over-arching theme of Barros's work: poetry as an interface between language and the material world. Here in the sphere of representation, in the realm of the photograph, the found object and the readymade, the various graduations, grey areas and overlaps between things and our perceptions of them, between representation and reality, are more obvious than ever.

I have already discussed Barros's preoccupation with what we would usually consider the natural world rather than simply the material world, although, as is clear from the previous chapter, this distinction is far from unproblematic. Nonetheless, it is a theme which is present in nearly all aspects of Barros's work and, as such, it is important to discuss the ways in which this preoccupation colours Barros's explorations of the visual arts. In Barros's work, there is little distinction drawn between the everyday, the natural world, and art. Indeed, if culture and nature are impossible to separate (Guattari 28) then art and nature must inform and affect each other as part of the same ecology.

The references with which I opened this chapter serve to exemplify Barros's awareness of, and will to challenge, this paradigmatic distinction between culture and nature. Referring to both sculpture and painting, Barros highlights the interdependency of art and nature: "Adoecer de nós a Natureza: / – Botar aflição nas pedras. / (Como fez Rodin)." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 310). Clearly the material world provides the physical

material with which we make art, and perhaps, if this quotation is taken literally, 'Nature' (here given agency) is neither passive in nor happy about this arrangement. But further to this, art functions through the medium of the material world, by creating ways of seeing and shaping it, not just literally as here in the form of sculpture from stone, but metaphorically. The second reference, on the face of it, reaffirms art's reliance on nature as source material: "Um girassol se apropriou de Deus: foi em Van Gogh." (Barros, *Poesia completa* 309). A closer reading, though, perhaps reveals a different take: this is a sunflower which was taken not from capital-n Nature, but from God, with all of the creative power that this suggests. What Van Gogh has appropriated, Barros suggests, is not the image of a sunflower or a simple reflection of its supposedly innate beauty, but the ability *to create* a sunflower, to alter our perceptions of what a sunflower is and means. Perhaps, even, part of the reason that sunflowers seem beautiful to us is because we associate them with such a masterful work of art. As such, much as Barros's poetic 'readymades' question the distinctions between art and object, these references to the natural world underline the fact that our image of the natural world is shaped by art and artistic practice just as much as our experience of the natural world shapes art. These works of art do not reflect nature and the material world, but instead *create* it, as does the poetry which evokes them.

Conclusion

I hope that at this point it is clear, from both the content of Barros's work and my analysis and comparisons, that Barros's poetry sits comfortably within a much broader, international discourse — regionalist readings of his work, designating him a kind of poet-laureate of the Pantanal, simply do not do justice to the complexity of his poetry, nor to his importance within either a Brazilian or an international context. There is, certainly, material to support a regionalist analysis, but to so confine Barros's work is to ignore the obvious: although the poet's creations are often grounded in the landscape and biosphere of the Pantanal wetlands, it is the universal, difficult themes with which the poetry deftly grapples, and the democratic simplicity that it achieves, which define Barros's enduring importance and appeal both within Brazil and internationally. Similarly, as I have noted throughout, although Barros's poetry provides a rich backdrop for an ecocritical reading, it more often exceeds and expands definitions of ecocriticism than complies to them.

Modern philosophers — notably Heidegger — have rejected Plato's categorization of poetry as antithetical to philosophy, and resurrected the idea that poetry has something meaningful to say about our ways of seeing and being-in-the-world (Heidegger). Badiou takes this train of thought to its conclusion in his insistence that it is art, and indeed spe-

cifically poetry (Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*), which in fact makes the 'truth' which philosophy must uncover and explicate: "there are but scientific, artistic, political and amorous truths" (Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy* 35) — notably, there are *not* philosophical truths. For Badiou, then, poetry is *necessary* for philosophy to exist: it is a "condition of philosophy" (Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy* 35). Broadly, Badiou conceives of philosophy as a means of gathering up the various categories of truth and making them compatible (*Manifesto for Philosophy* 33–39), as "a mode of access to the unity of a moment of truths" (*Manifesto for Philosophy* 37). Barros's poetry is not only clearly written with an awareness of this new conception of 'truth' in poetry, but it constantly pushes at the boundaries of what it might mean. In Barros's work, truths can be, among other things, contradictory, inconsistent, contingent, conditional or limited to specific places, times and agents. The danger that such a radical reinterpretation of what is meant by 'truth' presents is countered in Barros's work by his close attention to the material realities of the world which his poetry creates and reflects. The scope of Barros's poetry is, certainly, not analogous to that of Badiou's 'philosophy', but in a similar way it seeks to gather up the disparate, co-existent 'truths' of everyday life and the material world.

Barros's close writing of the material world, and the inventiveness with which his poetry redefines the readers' perceptions of the world

around them, stem from an intense focus on things and objects. This poetics of things is rooted in invention rather than description — particularly with a childish creativity as explored in the second chapter of this thesis — and as such differs slightly from poets such as Ponge and Melo Neto who favour an approach that, whilst in its own way just as interesting and original as Barros's verse, is more conventionally descriptive. By placing pressure on the boundary between 'thing' and 'object', blurring the distinction between the things that we (believe that we) cannot bring into the fold of human existence, and the objects that we (think that we) already have, Barros calls into question orthodox systems of value, agency and reason.

Barros more often than not achieves this transgression through the use of nonsense, or what I would propose that we might call 'beyond-sense' — a construction which appeals to an understanding of the material world which cannot rely on our conventional, rational ways of seeing, but which is, nonetheless, an *understanding*, a way of making sense. Barros's poetry helps the reader to reach out for the 'things' beyond the objects of the material world, and to grasp, however fleetingly, the realities which lie beyond our own experience. The inherent ambiguity of poetry is essential to this meaning-making procedure, and Barros's work embraces this ambiguity in both form and content. With frequent use of appropriation and doubled or even tripled meaning through creative

uses of syntax and lineation, it is not usually a case of reading 'between the lines' for meaning in Barros's poetry, but of disentangling the various meanings where they overlap and impose upon each other.

These everyday objects, the apparently infinitely varied occupants of the non- or more-than-human world, are brought sharply into focus in Barros's work not as adjuncts to human experience, but as agents and subjects, actors in the 'mesh' of the world around us. Whether it evokes the animate wildlife of the Pantanal landscape which is so frequently the backdrop for Barros's poetry, the abject detritus of human production, or the constantly-evolving autonomy of language itself, Barros's poetry insists that the reader consider them as equal to human perception and experience, with not only a legitimate place in the world, but also with a story to tell, an agency and a real experience of the material world, however different to our own. This ecology of everyday objects is radical in its reassessment of value, and in its subversion of the subject/object divide. By providing the reader with a glimpse of what 'other' agencies might look like, Barros's verse offers a thought-provoking and powerful tool for deconstructing conventional perceptions of Nature and the material world.

Throughout this thesis, despite its several different points of focus, I have worked towards a common argument: that Barros's poetry, by various means, compels the reader to re-imagine their relationship to

the material world, to language and to nature. It is because of this forceful subversion of normative discourses of Nature, Ecology and the Environment, in their tellingly capitalized forms, that Barros's poetry is ecological in the broadest sense. If ecology can be conceived as the study of *oikos*, of our home or dwelling, then it must necessarily encompass more than a simplistic analysis of what we consider 'animals', or of a 'Nature' which is conventionally conceived as, indeed often defined as, separate and distinct from 'Culture'. It is increasingly apparent in both the sciences and the arts that all things, human and non-human, natural and cultural, are interconnected in ways which we are only beginning to understand; and yet the infinite possibilities of difference and separateness within this interconnectedness do not simply prevent any complete knowledge of a particular natural or cultural phenomena — although this idea alone is radical enough — but seem to threaten the very idea of interconnectedness itself. Conventional ideas about what such an interconnected material world might look like break down in the face of such a vast and complex system: our perception of an interconnected existence relies on our ability to spot and enumerate the connections, and in this radical ecology such a bounded and finite approach is impossible.

Barros's ecological poetics constructs a discourse in which both of these apparently contradicting truths are folded into a lucid exposition of the material reality of the world in which we dwell. The mundane

things and objects which surround and permeate our everyday existence come into focus as a result of poetic examination, and as they are elevated to ecological significance, so ecology must broaden its scope to include not only these objects, but poetry, literature and art. By creating these ecologies of poetry and poetic ecologies, Barros's oeuvre becomes not simply a plausible subject for an ecocritical exegesis, but an ecocritical discourse in itself.

Throughout his long and varied career, Barros has demonstrated that poetry is not just a valid means of ecocritical discourse and of questioning and constructing ecologies, but is perhaps a more appropriate form for ecocriticism than the essay. Poetry's inherent ambiguity and meaning-making potential allows for a variety of interpretations and possibilities which far exceeds that of the academic text. If, as much ecocriticism would have us believe, the foundations for a new ecology and perception of the material world are an acceptance of the plurality of meaning and reality, the dissolution of the subject/object dialectic and the affirmation of non-human agencies, then poetry is the obvious form for such criticism to take.

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