

The Theater was Always the Best Place for Death

**- Note on the (counter) dramaturgical method of
Gerald Thomas –**

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It may be possible to define the locus of Gerald Thomas's counter-dramaturgical method within contemporary Brazilian theater by recalling Robert Ryman's performance in the history of postmodern painting, as situated by critic Yves Alain-Bois. Ryman is not exactly an imperative reference for Thomas, as are, on the contrary, Marcel Duchamp and Francis Bacon, for example. And yet there is something about the historical place they occupy that does, in fact, appear to approximate them.

In "Painting: the Task of Mourning", a historiographical and conceptual text that became a mandatory reference in studies on "the infinite diagnosis of death" (of ideologies, of History, of man, of the author) that marks contemporaneity, and on the dissolution of painting in particular, the French critic ascribed to Ryman a movement of deconstruction, an attitude "at the threshold of negation", in which, nevertheless, "the thread never breaks".

It should be noted that Haroldo de Campos has read the work of Gerald Thomas as an articulation between the taste for destruction, on one hand, and the irruption of resurrections, on the other. And it is to this threshold that we must turn in order

to understand the dynamics of a trajectory with the extension and the potential for derision that his possesses.

Archive and Differentiation

The theatrical texts of Gerald Thomas should have been collected and published a long time ago. Clearly, the delay speaks above all to the publishing market's short shrift for readers interested in drama studies, which are erroneously believed to be practically non-existent. Yet it may be surmised that there was some reluctance on Gerald's own part in this process. Not quite with the disclosure of the texts, but with the production of definitive printed versions for the self-critical and unstable textualities with which he works. This may seem odd to those who know of his effort, during the last few years, to collect part of his graphic works in book form (which happened in the Cobogó publication of 2012) and to compile the plays, gathering originals that had been dispersed in various residences and countries, or kept with collaborators or former members of the Companhia de Ópera Seca [Dry Opera Company].

This is not so strange if we bear in mind the range of the movement of retrospection demanded by a dramaturgical compilation that proposed to account for a trajectory of four decades. To boot, within the scope of a work such as his, which not only continuously revisits the history of the artistic fields they conflate but, with each new production, revisits itself, too – as well as its references, obsessive figurations, theatrical-

scriptural marks. In his case, “to revisit” has always meant, simultaneously, “to reinvent”. So, if some of these originals have already been restaged, others, on the other hand, involve different returns to series of images, scenic framings, and narrative structures/deconstructions. Because, for Thomas, revisiting has been, necessarily, “to misguide by means of a protagonist, for a certain duration”, and also to make anew, “to correct”, as prefigured in his “Diary of a Play” (1973), a sort of micro-poetics of his youth with which the artist has, in fact, chosen to open his compilation of dramaturgical exercises.

“Revisited. Misguided, then corrected”: he synthesizes in the text from 1973. This is where revisiting may be defined, therefore, as a movement based on variation, not on a will to fixation, as is habitually the case in a work’s editorial preparation, when effort is usually directed towards “establishing the text”. The opposite of what happens in scenic-dramaturgical reinventions, such as Thomas’s, that result from a dynamic of differentiation, of destabilization of that which they revisit. And in which retrospection does not mean restoration of a textual stage or a model-version of the plays.

Not for nothing have the plays been kept practically inaccessible. Even today, videos of performances are rare and have not been systematically organized for streaming or even for mere viewing in their complete versions. Some of them have been reappearing, over the last years, in potted or longer versions, alongside precious work and rehearsal records - as is

the case with the videos that expose the making of *Nowhere Man* (1996) and *Dilúvio* (2017), for instance.

In this sense a small video collection has been established, a mandatory reference available on Vimeo, under the name of “The Dry Opera Co.”. In it, we may find, for example, a complete version of play *Entredentes* (2014), a long excerpt from *Raw War*, an opera staged in Bonn in 1999, a middle distance video recording of *Tristan and Isolde* from 1996, in addition to excerpts from *Império das Meia-Verdades* [*Empire of Half-Truths*] (1993), *The Crash and Flash Days* (1991), *Mattogrosso* (1989), an opera composed in partnership with Philip Glass, and two complete versions of *Dilúvio* (with minimal variations in duration), an extremely beautiful play presented in São Paulo at the SESC Consolação in 2017. Furthermore, we have the CCBB (Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil) and SESC collections, due to the fact that these institutions habitually record the plays that occupy their theaters.

And yet it is still easier to find the series of UOL TV interviews that the director granted to Haroldo de Campos, Fernanda Montenegro, Luiz Damasceno, Sérgio Britto, Ellen Stewart, and Ruth Escobar, among other interlocutors, in which there is the indirect trail of his aesthetic research and, occasionally, the sharing of individual recollections regarding projects on which they worked together. The absence of a methodical compilation of audiovisual records and the non-existence (to this date) of any editions of the plays has unfortunately prevented a greater reception of his work by a

younger audience unable to keep up with Brazilian theatrical life since the 1980s. And yet it is not possible to consider late twentieth/early twenty-first century Brazilian theatrical culture without the careful study of Gerald Thomas's enormous contribution as director, dramaturg and polemicist, responsible for the execution of the true cut [suture? Corte?] in the contemporary understanding of textuality and staging in Brazil.

The present collection of a significant group of his plays, to whose editing and editorial preparation researcher Adriana Maciel and SESC-SP publishers dedicated themselves for roughly three years, affords researchers of theater essential materials that, for the most part, are being made accessible here for the first time. And that, it is hoped, will be complemented, in a near future, by the publication and critical revisiting of filmed records of interventions and stagings undertaken by the artist over the past four decades.

Such has been the case with José Celso Martinez Corrêa, over the last few years, in divulging performances by the Oficina Uzyna-Uzona group on DVD. And as does regularly the Wooster Group, from New York, generally offering a new – not very mimetic – version of the group's stagings. Recovering, inclusive, in the case of Rumstick Road, for example, [a play] staged in 1977, a series of photographs, slides, audiotapes, videos and super 8 films, material submitted, nevertheless, to contemporary re-editing and filmic reconstruction, in which the group's director Elizabeth LeCompte participated alongside Ken Kobland.

Perhaps the audiovisual memory of Gerald Thomas's stagings invites a process of filmic-documentary archiving and reinvention similar to the of Rumstick Road, in which distinct materials and records are exhibited in all their heterogeneity, to be revisited not as definitive versions but, rather, as a field of tensions within which the complex composition process to which they correspond may be guessed. And in which graphic, performative and dramaturgical act and mutually interfere. A complexity that regards both the transition between these fields and the scenic-dramaturgical dimension inscribed in plays that may be read both as autonomous texts, and as scores for a virtual staging process. Better yet: that should be read simultaneously within this double dimension.

For what draws attention from the outset, from the very first reading of these texts, may well be precisely how much the ingrained juxtaposition of layers of writing with which the dramaturg-director works within them. On one hand, an evident concern with the language (fragmented, ironic, hyperconscious) of speeches and narratorial insertions, and the recognizable plots (via Beckett, Goethe, Shakespeare, Mérimée, Kafka) and, simultaneously, intentionally rarefied. On the other hand, all the plays suggest an expansive didascalical movement that projects a scenic textuality beyond the strictly dramaturgical. Hence, for instance, the frequent use of the actors' real names to designate those of the characters. Hence the precision and the quantity of stage directions (regarding light, gesture, rhythm, duration, soundtrack), that are occasionally converted to

speeches in and of themselves (such as the “Faster, faster”, that is suddenly heard offstage in *Bait Man*, for example).

The publication of this collection of texts written between 1973 and 2017 points to the constitution of another (non-spectacular) place of observation of this graphic-scenic fold and to the confluence of formal, textual, and theatrical languages that is typical of Gerald Thomas’s work (and well-known to his audiences). In this sense, it may be possible to begin at the figural transit (transition) between graphic work, dramaturgy and staging.

The figural series

An expressive part of Gerald Thomas’s graphic output has been the object of a careful edition edited by Isabel Diegues in *Arranhando a superfície [Scratching the Surface]*¹, a volume that collected 130 drawings, including illustrations for the *New York Times*, posters for plays and operas, as well as graphic exercises linked to the plays’ creative processes.

Access to this material contributes meaningfully to understanding of the genesis of some of his figural repetitions - and of the various forms of scenic-dramaturgical refiguring and narrativization of these images in his plays and in their performances. Likewise, it contributes to a verification – via serial figuration – regarding the occurrence of recurring

¹ Diegues, Isabel (ed.). *Gerald Thomas: Arranhando a superfície*. Rio de Janeiro, Editora Cobogó, 2012.

interferences between the artistic fields amidst which, as previously observed, his artistic method configures itself.

In this sense, the images of umbrellas, that made a beautiful return in the play Dilúvio [Deluge], may serve as paradigmatic example. In fact, the first aspect to observe is this recurrence. They have appeared in his work ever since the graphic collaborations for the New York Times op-ed page. And whether they appeared in full, closed or open, or broken, cast-off, useless, as in the poster for the “Beckett Trilogy” he staged at New York’s La Mama Theater in 1985. There is even a blood-drenched version in the Raw War poster.

Echoing previous versions, the umbrellas, now converted into useless utensils, multiplied and returned in Dilúvio under the guise of a mortuary chorus of abandoned objects. Or, as may be read in the play’s stage directions: “There is a graveyard of umbrellas downstage: open, broken, standing, closed...”. The list of casualties appears to compile earlier drawings of the object, thus functioning as Gerald’s revisiting (via the theater) of his own graphic work. Just as (to recall the Beckett Trilogy and Raw War posters) had been done with the object in his previous theatrical production, at some point a synthesis-image.

Another one of the director’s obsessive figural repetitions possess an equally mournful aspect. In lieu of abandoned objects, however, in this case there are agonistic figures pierced by arrows, their bodies contorted in inevitable imbalance. In this series, it is not hard to perceive the desacralized loan of

religious representations of Saint Sebastian, tied and shot through by three arrows.

The image is repeated in several of Thomas's graphic sketches and became truly structural in a play such as *The Flash and Crash Days* (1991), where – via the arrow – they presented a figural triptych of sorts. Starting with [actress] Fernanda Montenegro's stumbling entrance, bearing a piece of paper, an arrow shot through her throat, which she feverishly attempts to remove. Further on, in the play's final scenes, the arrow reappears in the chest of a faceless doll, laying on the ground. This is no ordinary doll, but a scenic object previously identified by the director's off-stage voice, as a sort of narratorial double of his: "This is me (light shines on the doll). (...) Suddenly, my god, I was no longer there, this I, this I that had transcended the boundaries of that room, was only a dead body and I...". As for the triptych's third scene, the apparition occurred when, after eating a heart, and smearing herself with blood, [the actress] Fernanda Torres likewise appears with the arrow piercing her neck, even as the doll remains inanimate and the mother crawls across the stage. To this end, it should be noted that the text is self-described as "a play about a mother and a daughter and a heart". To this triangulation, the dramaturg added, as may be observed, another – equally agonistic figure – that of the narrator-doll. Yet the series persisted.

In a notebook page reproduced in the Editora Cobogó book, there is an inscription that reads "Saying goodbye to NYC"

alongside the drawing of a similar figure – an arrow-pierced, bound and blindfolded figure with its mouth agape in a silent scream. The drawing is further accompanied by commentary in which the word Author is underlined: “One man in the piece, disguised as Author, thief of thieves, crook of crooks, is ridiculed out of his wits by Fernandona”.

Throughout *The Flash and Crash Days*, there is the transit of the agonistic statute of one figure to another, of one scene to another, in an inconclusive agony, as suggested by the throwing of cards between mother and daughter in the play. There are no cemeteries there and the end of the play/game does not indicate the endgame. In the drawing, though the triangulation is of another sort (between author, narrator, and doll), a figuration-in-effigy is also maintained rather than a mortuary effigy. However, another layer is added to the already ironic self-portrait (with the arrow-pierced body) present in the play – for, in the graphic version, it is no longer a narratorial representation but an authorial one. Thus, by insinuating a status such as that of the mother-daughter pair, it is this agonistic author’s task to proceed with the endgame.

Similarly, in another one of the series present in *Scratching the Surface*, there is an emphasis on images of a fish drowning in a glass of water. This is the same fish that may be seen in the poster for *Sturmspiel* (1989), transforming a verbal cliché (“to make a tempest in a teacup”) into a visual pun (Gerald Thomas’s version of Shakespeare’s *Tempest*). This dead fish reappeared in several graphic interventions reproduced in

the book and, indeed, becomes one of the authorial-agonistic figurations recurrently employed by the artist.

Nor is it difficult to relate it – as an abandoned, extinct body, albeit in a vertical position – to the series of hanging animal carcasses (such as might be found in a butcher's shop) that are repeated in his graphic work. And whose dialogue with the paintings of Chardin and Francis Bacon would appear to be intentionally evident. The hanging carcasses are present, for example, in the poster for MattoGrosso (an opera co-authored with Philip Glass). And they were evoked in Gerald's 1996 re-staging of Heiner Müller's Quartett starring actors Ney Latorraca and Edi Botelho, a play set in sort of slaughterhouse, the actors in bloodstained apparel resembling what is worn by butchers. The series was further scenically refigured as much in the hanging female bodies that swayed suspended, above the stage, in Dilúvio, as in the endlessly tortured body bathed in red of Marcelo Olinto in Bait Man (2008).

The compilation of drawings presented in Arranhando a superfície [Scratching the Surface] allows us to observe how these series of images move between the various fields of expression activated by the artist. Whereas they reaffirm the visual-graphic dimension of his process of writing for the theater, they simultaneously record certain procedures typical of this formal activity that are transferred to the verbal and theatrical field. Among them, graphic condensations of key images, differential serialization and inter-artistic mirrorings.

Counter-dramaturgy

In terms of mirroring, visual-linguistic puns such as that of the “tempest (Sturm) in a teacup” in the Sturmspiel poster should be noted. And that would be multiplied in games between verbal language (as in the expressions “heart in mouth”, “heart in hand”) and scenic figuration (such as Fernanda Torres literally eating a heart, Luís Damasceno carrying in his hands the heart he would later replace inside Fernanda Montenegro, in The Flash and Crash Days). And between graphic and scenic expression, with occasionally explicit and intrusive displaced elements – such as “the drawing by Gerald Thomas that illustrated Arafat’s article in the New York Times” inserted as a backdrop in Um circo de rins e fígado [A Circus of Kidneys and Liver] (2005).

These transits [movements], as well as movements of figural irruption (condensation) and intensification of imagistic-formal variations methodically affect the construction of a theatrical syntax – thus submitting it to a logic of frozen motion, of living tableau, that is to say, to operations of intentional obstruction – via figural outline – of narrative flow and of conflict (understood as sequential consequence). From this perspective, one recalls the outlined figure of Carmen suddenly dancing across an isolated, elevated frame within the scene, thus interrupting the development of the plot threads in Carmen com Filtro [Filtered Carmen]. Or the head of Fernanda Torres, served at table, in Império das Meia-Verdades [The Empire of Half-Truths], whose mere presence there, as a startling living

sculpture, interrupted the performance, exposing to the audience, in inclement literalness, the often-culinary nature of theatrical reception.

Something similar takes place in M.O.R.T.E (1991), in light of the suggestion of a pact on the part of Saint Felia [?] that follows the direct question of “You/Hamlet/Little King /Hamm”: “Theater?”. But, before the dialogue proceeds, stage direction indicates that the stage lights should be dimmed, and that “only the duck, laying on the ground”, should remain lit. In its own way, the passage from duck to pact underscores the play’s Hamletian subtext of revenge and murders. But it also interrupts and comically disarms it in this moment.

Even though impediments to a linear sequential flow are frequent, they do not occur by means of figural outline alone. Listed in minute detail in the texts, blackouts also perform this counter-rhythmic function. At times, as in the Hamlet example, they take place simultaneously. The stage is darkened, and the duck is spotlighted onstage in isolation. In Dilúvio, too, it is left to lighting to create a small corridor through which sails a paper boat, interrupting scenic motion and suggesting a fragile potential exit (the ark?) amid a devastated terrain, onward to the graveyard of twisted, discarded, useless umbrellas.

The counter-rhythmic figure of the interruption imposes itself, contradicting the conventional hypothesis of drama, and of conflict in linear evolution, but not the dynamic differential of the repetitions, of the revisited citations, of the series of

obsessive movements and variations of nuclear images. Nor still the dynamic potential embedded in contrasting or exclusive paradoxes and simultaneities. Exemplary of these are both the tension between vocal emission and arrow-pierced throats (The Flash and Crash Days), or between bodily inertia and involuntary movement evinced by the many hanging bodies, the twisted umbrellas, and the figure of Damasceno being born from within a table in Nowhere Man.

The Reading of Gerald Thomas's dramaturgical work points to many of these "non-linear dances". "I must prepare a deconstructive and iconoclastic choreography" may be explicitly read in *Asfaltaram o beijo* [They Paved the Kiss] (2006). As evinced in the texts gathered here, it is therefore a matter of developing them in "scores" that move counter-dramaturgically from the very interior of the dramaturgical construction. In these, the author works with converging series (quotations, inter-artistic interferences, stage directions with narratorial status) that are nevertheless systematically submitted to phono-semantic crisscrossing (*Lear/Liar*, *Minha Pai the fittest/defeatist*, *Fuck you/Help*); figural juxtapositions (*Hamlet/Hamm*; *Prometheus/Bait Man*; *Damasceno/Faust*); successive (visual, sound, discursive) obstructions and self-derisiveness (the author as speared dead fish, nowhere man).

From the earliest stagings of his plays, Gerald's writing for the theater has indeed configured itself as a counter-dramaturgy of sorts. And not for nothing was it emphatically or silently) rejected by the Brazilian theatrical milieu since *Carmen*

com Filtro and Eletra com Creta were presented in 1985 and 1986, respectively. For it was not hard to see that such writing antagonized the conservative movement of restoration (that succeeded the explosion of collective groups and creations of the 1970s) that would be emphasized in Brazilian theater above all during the 1990s. And that its axis would be a normative-generic movement of reterritorialization (that included both an avalanche of pre-fabricated musicals and the self-commiserating use of testimony as privileged narrative model), this alongside the implicit endorsement of thinly concealed nineteenth century notions of the “well-made play”, with their linear-empathic characters and plots (similar – claiming to be their opposites – to telenovelas and reality tv shows).

“My profession is dead”²; “To me, writing is like pissing”³ – statements such as these (made by Thomas) would appear to record as much this regressive theatrical panorama, as a certain consensus (linked to the reception of his work) according to which what truly mattered in his work was [its] staging, whether one rejected or merely ignored the mutual mirroring, in his work, of stage directions and theatrical writing. Haroldo de Campos’s critical reading (and not from this perspective alone) was an exception.

² In this sense, see *Entre duas fileiras [Between Two Lines]* by Gerald Thomas (Rio de Janeiro, Record, 2016).

³ Cf, also, Gerald Thomas’s interview to Gustavo Fioratti (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 18/11/2016) about *Entre duas fileiras [Between Two Lines]*.

In this sense, we should recall Haroldo's commentary on Nowhere Man, published in the October 27, 1991 edition of Folha de S. Paulo – an extremely penetrating critical text that points out the play's powerfully theatrical imagery, its satirical dimension and the degree of interference played by the lighting, as well as its noticeable dialogue with the works of Duchamp, Magritte, and Francis Bacon. Unlike most commentators of Thomas's work, the critic asks himself what might constitute his method of writing.

The task of mourning

Whereas the final paragraphs of Haroldo's commentary highlighted that "only onstage" would his writing "would explain itself", he simultaneously drew attention to elements he believed to be truly structural in this work – in particular, the confluence between requiem and rite of resurrection, between construction and deconstruction, and the processual nature of a "writing that is written by staging it".

Here, I have attempted to designate the force of the theatrical score in Gerald Thomas's writing method. Yet it is fitting to ask what – to Haroldo de Campos's mind – might define, with regard to Nowhere Man, as a "writing by staging it", an aspect that singularized this dramaturgical process. Maintaining an interlocution with Haroldo, one might begin by reflecting upon the matter of death and resurrection in Thomas's work.

Haroldo de Campos's immediate recognition of the relevance of Gerald's work (the repercussion of which he quickly realized was not restricted to the field of theater) is partly linked, as may be observed in his remarks, to the perception (underscored in "A M.O.R.T.E e o Parangolé" ⁴) that this method contains a dynamic confluence between, on one hand, a "deconstructive derision"; a visible taste for destruction; for ravaged earth; and, on the other hand, a simultaneous adherence to this "sense of the end" – the force of the "celebratory irruptions" and appeals to resurrection that are invariably present in his plays.

In the theater of Gerald Thomas, the omnipresence of various forms of death, agonistic figures, bloodstains, dead bodies and abandoned things sometimes led him to direct, onstage questionings regarding the possibility of the end of the end, of the imbrication between death and reinvention.

In *Nowhere Man*, for instance, death and rebirth at some point appear to be the only way out. And it is activated in spite of the risks it might represent to "a character with classical pretensions" such as the play's Faustian Damasceno. Indeed, the "hero", submitted to a rebirth, arises from a hole in a table, albeit with less than encouraging results: the mother's death and her allocation to a gurney/incubator, upon which she proceeds directly to an afterlife in which he dances the "worst choreography of all time" with her [the dead mother].

⁴ Article on "M.O.R.T.E (Movimentos Obsessivos e Redundantes para tanta Estética)" published in Folha de S. Paulo on February 14, 1991.

Likewise, in *Ventriloquist* (1999), where “death itself [...] walks beautifully” across the stage there is a question regarding the possibility of an eruption of the new amid the mortuary landscape:

“The theater was always the best place for death. This is why there is so much death in theater. This is why the stage beckons death with such intimacy. The new man... in spite of everything, he managed to escape, yes, he reinvented himself. And, if he is among us, we will not recognize him”.

In both of the aforementioned examples, Gerald multifariously evokes, albeit with similar skepticism, ex-machina conclusions beyond mourning and the “agonizing field” of the theater and art, beyond the discourses of the end. For in his case, there is no question of forging (whether in fictional or humanistic terms) exits or definitive scissions; rather, he proceeds “to craft ending” upon complex, unstable, conflicting terrain.

To return to Yves Alain-Bois⁵, and to the approximation between Gerald Thomas and Robert Ryman initially suggested, it is in this “crafting of the end” that the historical place of both brings them together. For whereas Ryman, aware of the process (in progress) of the dissolution of modern painting, had as response the effort to delay it “continuously”, “amorously”, something similar takes place in Thomas’s work.

⁵ Bois, Yves Alain “Painting: the task of mourning” (1986). IN: *Painting as Model*, Cambridge/Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1990.

And where, in Ruman's case, one reads painting, one might also think of theater as an "agonizing field in which nothing ever ends or is resolved once and for all" (Y-A Bois). Or in the literary field – and in writers such as Proust and Beckett, for example. In this sense, it would suffice to recall Benjamin's study of In Search of Lost Time [Remembrance of Things Past] and the Proustian narrator, who remains agonistic throughout the successive volumes, narrative sequence functioning as an amorous and continuous movement of this death's postponement. Which, considering Beckett, manifests itself in the tension between the impossibility and the imposition of continuation.

But there are complex dynamics in these agonies. Hence, in his commentary on M.O.R.T.E, Haroldo de Campos's juxtaposition not only of the acronym-title, but also the elegiac requiem for Tadeusz Kantor (performed in the play), to the powerful evocation of Hélio Oiticica and to the rhythm of a samba school percussion section "that clamorously irrupts onstage". Thus insinuating "a hope principle" (E. Bloch), a contrasting formal principle, amid the intense and irreverent death drive that leads this Geraldian take on Hamlet.

A Shakespearean revisiting driven by funeral corteges, crucifixions, bodies in closets, back stabbings, executions by firing squad, but with insertions, here and there, of tambourines, cuícas and preparing a massive invasion of soundspace through percussion. And pointing to the composite terrain in which complex structures – of construction/

deconstruction (per Haroldo) – are configured in order to guide Gerald Thomas’s composition process.

Dubbing/Quotation/Obstruction

When one considers that Haroldo de Campos’s publication of “Poesia e Modernidade: Da morte da arte à constelação. O poema pós-utópico” [“Poetry and Modernity: From the Death of Art to Constellation. The post-utopian poem”]⁶ is dated August, 1984 – only one year before Thomas’s Brazilian premiere with “Quatro Vezes Beckett” (Teatro dos Quatro, 1985) – it is easy to understand the immediate proximity that the poet experienced with regard to the theatrical universe of the Dry Opera Company [Companhia de Ópera Seca] as created by its director and dramaturg.

Beyond the discussion of the very notion of modernity, Haroldo’s essay outlines a brief history of modern and contemporary poetry, characterized by a will to “the productive making present of the past”, the detection of which would be the “living tradition” within the scope of the modern, to which end the adoption – as analytic perspective – of the responses that writers of diverse literary cultures provided to Mallarmé’s Throw of the Dice. A constellation-poem, characterized by the rupture with “fixed, strophic structure”, with “the traditional measure of verse”, and marked by a “prismatic fragmentation of the idea”, from this perspective, would be up to experiments guided by formal invention and the configuration of focal points

⁶ Campos, Haroldo de. “Poesia e Modernidade: Da morte da arte à constelação. O poema pós-utópico” IN: O Arco-Íris Branco. Rio de Janeiro, Imago, 1997, p. 243-269.

consisting of live re-readings of the poem. [Arno] Holz, [Guillaume] Apollinaire, [Giuseppe] Ungaretti, [César] Vallejo, [Vladimir] Mayakovsky, [Ezra] Pound, and [Octavio] Paz may be listed among such experimental readers.

But Haroldo underscores another aspect of Mallarmé's poem – the utopian dimension, programmatic hope - which, in light of the contemporary depletion of the utopias, must undergo a significant redefinition of perspective. Without modernity's progressive-messianic dimension, it would be the province of contemporary artistic practices -- to anchor themselves now in the present and in the critical appropriation of multiple pasts. Not by chance simultaneously converting artists and writers into historians and agents⁷ of language itself. In this sense, the Waltércio Caldas's trajectory within the field of visual arts is typical. And, in the theater, an oeuvre such as Gerald Thomas's, in which this critical-utopian function obstructed by the alargado presence of contemporaneity is retained as "active lacuna".

From this perspective, Gerald's appropriations of plays such as Electra, Hamlet, and The Tempest are exemplary, respectively refigured as Eletra com Creta, M.O.R.T.E, and Sturmspiel. In his version of Hamlet, for instance, we have Trudy (Gertrude), Saint Felia (Ophelia), Claudius, Horace/ Pregnant Christ, the Father, and a metamorphic figuration of the protagonist – that is at once "You", the Spectator, the Little

⁷ A reference to Paul de Man's remark, as quoted by Haroldo de Campos. Op. Cit., p. 252.

King, Hamm, and Hamlet. The only thing that remains of the monologues are minimal snippets tossed into whatever speeches; or frequent repetitions as empty clichés: “Words, words, words”. Just as the characters, likewise unexpectedly projected onstage: “Saint Felia is thrown onstage”, the “Pregnant Christ is violently pushed onstage”. Certain Sakespearean scenes are staged with switched characters. Such as the Hamlet that is unable to kill himself because “unfortunately, You came into the story through there” (the audience), “and became, therefore, invulnerable”. Like Trudy (Gertrude) piercing Saint Felia’s body with a sword. And later asking: “You all know the ending. How come you are moved?”.

The history of theater is revisited by way of exposing codes and conventions in reading and representation: “The codes are naked and unashamed (pause). I said the codes are naked and they feel no shame” (Trudy). Codes and keys to interpretation are exposed, but only in order to obstruct them and render them worthless. Throughout the play, for example, certain privileged critical are uttered, scattered throughout the play without, however, much consequence, only to be successively emptied of meaning: “Consciousness. What could be more complex and irregular?”; “Still attempting to polish this epic-rational rhetoric ... these philosophical gravediggers ... That is what they are: the disease of liberal society” and so forth.

In Eletra com Creta, there is a particularly explicit game of quotations – not necessarily theatrical or literary, but from a

variety of easily recognizable sources, and whose montage-flux even so intensifies the text's satirical dimension, in further contrast with a minutely choreographed staging. From this perspective, one may single out actress Bete Coelho's last lengthy speech in the play and the musical juxtaposition of singer-songwriters Roberto Carlos ("corro demais"/ "I run too much") and Caetano Veloso/Gal Costa ("meu mal/meu bem" / "my evil/my goodness") as well as evocations of Samuel Beckett ("all said, all badly said and disliked"). Throughout the text the repeated attempts to define conflict, tragedy, and ending should likewise be observed. Always hypothetical and abandoned once uttered. The movement of conceptualization, however, returns, always incomplete, apparently unsatisfactory.

As for *Sturmspiel*, whereas the dramaturgical structure of the Shakespearean play is retained, it is interesting to observe the "Manuscript" inserted at the end of the text. In it, as Prospero goes mad, his voice strangled, he precisely tematiza the loss of hope, the current of hope and of non-hope [despair?] thus mixing and dissolving the possibility of utopian projection (nevertheless latent in the geography of the island and in the project of political restoration):

"Hope was his last glimmer of hope but, even so, it was slightly frustrating, not loud and clear enough to the human ear. And, furthermore, imagining various other moments without imagining another extreme as hard to imagine, that would be once more impossible,

once more simply impossible, unimaginable and so on and so forth (...)".

Appropriated by the actors, this speech was reproduced backwards and "made sense this way". Unlike the interrupted speeches in most of Thomas's monologues, in this case the apparent normality of expression is nonetheless sustained by repetition and incomplete reasoning amid an apparently correct syntax; among these, however, a series of "ims" remain: impossible; to imagine; unimaginable; imagining – all these configure a phonic stratum underscored by the speed required by their vocal emission. Their semantic counterpart is easily decoded, however, for the prefixes i-, un-, im- functions as signs of deprivation, negation, and opposite meaning.

Even before reproduction in an inverted sense, the speech already underlines the discourse of negation itself – it begins with a fragile glimmer of hope but sees itself seized by the movement of inversion. As if another voice inhabited that of Prospero – and inverted the initial signs of discourse. In this case, an almost muted form of dubbing that operates by way of a morphology of language. Yet it draws our attention to a recurrent dramaturgical procedure used in Gerald Thomas's writing for the theater – the separation of voice from its emitting body.

The use of off-stage voices is highly characteristic of his texts. Examples of this may be found in the voice of [Brazilian film director] Carlos Diegues, in Ventriloquist, for example,

dubbed onstage by Bruce Gomlevsky and Fábio Mendes; the pseudo-voice of [Brazilian journalist] Paulo Francis (mimicked by Thomas) in the film Terra em Trânsito [Earth in Transit], meant to be accompanied by images of [Brazilian film director] Glauber Rocha's Terra em Transe [Earth Entranced]. Generally speaking, however, it is the director's recognizable voice that occupies this place in the off-stage interventions. Occasionally, there is dubbing by one of the actresses. These include Fabiana Gugli in Kepler, The Dog and, elsewhere, Bete Coelho. At times, there is an off-stage dialogue with that which is taking place onstage – with Luiz Damasceno in Nowhere Man, for instance. Or in a succession of narrative interventions and explicit commentaries regarding the characters' actions in Carmen com Filtro.

Foretold within the play, the actor's dubbing functions (with regard to the director's off-stage voice) as a means of obstructing the ex-machina potency of interventions that become displaced and strange, whenever appropriated by this other-body. The intentionally faulty mirroring that underscores, in this manner, a theatricalization of the author's voice, the continued self-exposure of which configures a discursive layer of its own within several texts. In an enunciative consequence that complexifies a textuality already halfway into the abyss – through its various layers of references, through the succession of sound games and figural constructs and contrasts.

And above all by the “writing by staging” to which Haroldo de Campos referred – a process evinced, as previously noted, in

the extremely detailed stage directions or the assignment of speeches through the use of actors' names. But not only there. And it would be above all via the authorial exhibition/dubbing regularly created in these dramaturgical exercises, a verbal territory, a discursive fold in which writing itself is theatricalized as voice. Thus, it is not precisely another space that is produced here, as Gerald Thomas points out in describing the dramaturgical method itself in *Diário de uma peça* [Diary of a Play] (1973), a product of his juvenilia; not another space but, rather, one "of speeches and of writings". Or a key procedure in his artistic experiment, liminal to that of negation, an emphasized, tensioned space – a space with potential "for the obstruction of the other".