

SILENT LANDSCAPES:
A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO
JOSÉ LEONILSON AND LOUISE BOURGEOIS

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So the piece is the product of a challenge.
It is so many other things, by the way.

—Louise Bourgeois (170)

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Essa luta mostra suficientemente a força da escritura,
isto é, as palavras que escrevemos, sem aviso, diria,
sugerem ao escritor outra coisa e forçam o *scriptor* a
deslizar sobre outros sentidos e reorientar sua história.

—Philippe Willemart (92)¹

Criar não é imaginação,
é correr o grande risco de se ter a realidade.

—Clarice Lispector (19)²

One of the most characteristic features of Comparative Literature in terms of methodological practice is that of operating “in between” spaces. Not only does this feature suggest the comparative approach as something that originates through movement, thus making it imperative for the researcher to deal with the notion of mobility, it also characterizes many of the concepts with which it operates. Considering the possibility, as well as the fertility, of practicing this methodology in the analysis and critique of contemporary visual art, we understand that it fits the analysis of any enterprise regarding the in-betweens of visual and verbal texts. This paper employs these fundamental aspects in a comparison of the works of two visual artists whose *œuvres* operate in in-between spaces between the visual and the verbal as much as between the self and the Other. Comparing the works of José Leonilson (Brazil, 1957-93)³ and Louise Bourgeois (France/USA, 1911-2010) reveals creative and constitutive activity in a space that can best be described via the metaphor of a seaside land-

scape in which the line we try to draw to divide salt water from sand never stands. In what manners, however, could the poetic space these artists create be significant for a broader spectrum than literary interests? In our understanding, Leonilson's and Bourgeois's poetics operate through a silent hearing of the Other, whether that be loved ones, stone, or cloth. This conceptual notion, required for creative action, thus establishes a particular notion of balance between them and the Other. It is this precise aspect that also operates the mobility of the notion of love through their *œuvres*, and through the selection of personal emotional narratives as the thriving force for creation. What could be more needed nowadays, here as elsewhere, than considering, together with Leonilson's and Bourgeois's images, love as the perpetual moving space that at times brings us together, and at times distances the self from the other?

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Ana Lúcia Beck, from the series *Desenhando ontem* (*Drawing Yesterday*), 2013, drawing on paper.

Accessed Aug. 2016. paraisionaotemnnome.blogspot.com.br/search/label/desenhando%20ontem

ENGAGING COMPARATIVELY

Comparative Literature has evolved from comparing literatures from different countries and places into a fertile methodology that enables a critic to place productions from distinct fields, such as visual art and literature, in relation with one another, as Carvalhal indicates. Nevertheless, if the notion of comparing by establishing relations between works from different fields is possible, it would also be possible to establish a relation between the critical understanding of literature and the understanding of related aspects in the visual arts.

On the one hand, a reflection on creation in literature can be associated with that of art as a creative practice. From the shared use of the idea of both art and literary works as constituting a *poetics*, a comparative analysis of art allows for the mobility of gaze and thought in the in-between space that grounds expressions of all kinds. What I refer to here is something that is at times perceived as distance, other times as proximity: the tension that holds together images and words, that also holds together the critical effort of commenting on and analyzing visual productions such as artworks. If Italo Calvino understood that he needed to operate on visual images in order to create literary pieces, his *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* does indeed develop from the tension between images and literary forms. Such literary operation in images does not, however, as Calvino himself acknowledges in his last memo on visibility, indicate the influence of images on his writing. Calvino, therefore, also addresses the tension between word and image as he considers the necessity of counterbalancing the weight of life with literary lightness. He concludes that literary lightness does not suppress, but is rather gained from, the weight of life. We could say, then, that when addressing the relation between images and literature, Calvino operates in the space between them.

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On the other hand, the interrelation between images and words considered as a comparative in-between space is a valuable opportunity to enhance the interartistic practice built on analogy. In this regard, when comparatists seek to examine the tension established by a comparison, it proves fruitful to observe that this tension is brought about by distance and differences, rather than by the proximity or similarities in a comparative pair.

When discussing Manet's paintings, for example, Foucault affirms that "distance cannot be given to perception" because "one does not see distance" (41). However, most of Foucault's writing on Manet's compositions express in words the painter's compositional effort and visual achievement in making distances and invisibilities perceivable. If distance is not visible, the sense and the feelings of being distanced, of being invisible, of being faced with the impossibilities of expression, might not be, especially for art and poetry.

Not always searching for similarities, not always trying to bring things together, but rather, operating in the space between differences by delicately balancing those differences together might be the comparative characteristic gesture *per se*. I will therefore assume a similar attempt in comparatively approaching the works of José Leonilson⁴ and Louise Bourgeois,⁵ further opening this in-between space by comparing their creative process and its issues to my own⁶ drawing practice in an attempt to reveal in which ways a comparative approach of these artists' creative process might enlighten on engaging comparatively. Nevertheless, in accordance with such proposals, engaging comparatively relates in my understanding to a silent gesture.



Louise Bourgeois, *NO (1)*, 1973.

(Left) Photostat version. Accessed Aug. 2016. www.moma.org/collection/works/61697?locale=pt

(Right) Newspaper and magazine clippings on paper. Accessed Aug. 2016. www.moma.org/collection/works/193021?locale=pt

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SILENT RASURA

Dealing with silence as profound discourse within artworks may demand dealing with negation, thus denying verbalization. In this sense, I could propose a silent experience. However, as that is not possible, I shall bring back the word: *no, no, no*. Louise Bourgeois's image full of "no" affirms as much as denies the verbal presence and its visual duplicity. Bourgeois visually depicts contradictions and oppositions by repeating and emphasizing, throughout the image, a word that denies all; a possible answer in attempting to deny the very possibility of saying anything at all. Bourgeois's many "nos" situate themselves on the verge of saying and not saying as much as of saying about denying. This image serves as a visual reference to begin thinking about silence in its interrelation with speech and the creative process.

My first Yoga instructor, Francisco Cosmelli,⁷ used to say: "Yoga is efficiency in action." Contrary to common belief in western thinking, the practice of efficient action demands the constant practice of silence, as the silencing of bodily mobility prepares the yogi for meditation. In the practice of exercising the observation of images and words constantly babbling in the mind, by exercising observation without reacting, one finds that silence is what is already there. In Yoga, the practice of silence is known as *Antar Mouna*. As Saraswati explains, the practice of silence is intricately connected with self-investigation and inner communication:

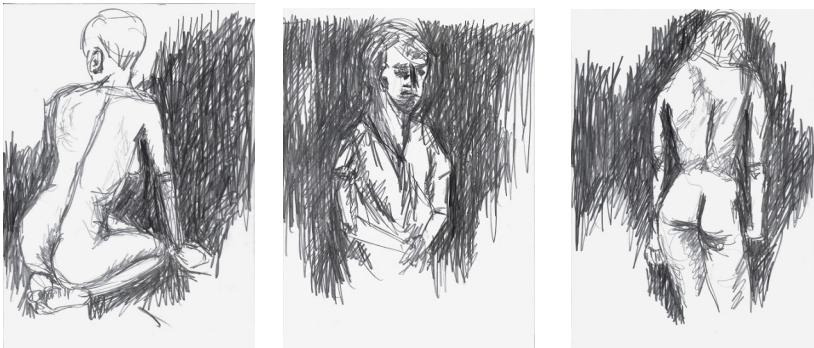
One of the best practices for purifying the mind is *mouna*, or silence. During *mouna*, one fasts the mind from its usual heavy diet of continual conversation, interaction, and stimulation. In this way mental energy is freed, and can be applied to self-investigation and inner communication. Observance of *mouna* is also a discipline, a *sadhana*, which increases self-control and willpower. Control of the tongue is a major step towards control of the mind. (Saraswati)

Bringing the mind to stillness and locating a silent place within means reaching a place far beyond the sea of images and words that float in the mind, by suspending the thrive to respond. Letting self not be spoken of and suspending the desire to express oneself entangle themselves in the meditative practice. Even so, bringing the self to such a place is the most difficult practice of all. To become quiet, to observe, to dive into silence, to be in this very moment, is the very challenge one has to face when trying to meditate. In a never easily identified place, a moving place that oscillates between watching and thinking, observing and letting all go, the meditator places him/herself, through constant practice, in an in-between condition.

The meditative in-between space might be compared to the challenges an artist faces when his/her desire to express him/herself encounters reality, an especially revealing challenge for artists who relate their creative practice to salvaging their emotional reality. Both Leonilson and Bourgeois acknowledge the creative process as an act of emotional salvaging. Bourgeois indicates this aspect in many of her writings,⁸ as does much of the critique of her work, which considers it as both art making and psychotherapy. Similarly, Leonilson claimed that his art-making process was not intended to produce artworks, but was predicated on giving something back to his loved ones.⁹

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To recall silence experiences, considering that it would not be possible to silently approach silence theoretically, is an attempt to elicit the ways in which silence interests me, and furthermore, indicate in which ways silence as a notion contributes to the understanding of certain aspects of Bourgeois's and Leonilson's *œuvres*. It is not my intention, however, to give a definitive reading of these artists' works, but rather to develop a reflection on the perpetual tension between speech and silence, doing and letting it not be done, which relates to fundamental aspects of their creative processes considered in terms of a relation between self and other.



Ana Lúcia Beck, from the series *Desenhando ontem* (*Drawing Yesterday*), 2013, drawings on paper.

Accessed Mar. 2014. paraisonaotemnome.blogspot.com.br/search/label/desenhando%20ontem

Before embarking on this reflection, I would like to clarify two aspects of the discussion. The first is my interest during the development of *Drawing Yesterday*; as I drew, I would take notes on my perception of the drawing process during each session. As can be seen in the above images, one of the striking characteristics of these drawings is the multitude of movement, gestures, and lines, which sculpt the human figure and unfold in revealing a visual environment, a landscape for the figures. These drawings evolve from embracing failure, for they are full of *rasuras*. They take part in the *rasura* as the materiality of change, of un-decision, as an in-between space *per se*, as drawing potency, in the manner Agamben defines potency as “this power to do (and to not do)” (*Nudities* 8). This is the potency of presenting something that is because it can also cease to be; being and not being do not exclude each other, but are intricately balanced. Similarly, lines can be wrongly placed, and overplaced, and still become right by constituting both the drawing process and its final image.

322 The second clarification refers to the problem of the notion of *rasura*, a Portuguese word that cannot be translated into one single English word. *Rasura* refers to a thing, a visual mark, created by the overlaying and superposition of lines with the varying intensities and directions that are common in the execution of rapid drafts. Nevertheless, if *rasura* refers to a mark, it further implicates the constitutional gesture, the movement of the hands while drawing, especially in the case of looser drawings. Furthermore, in Portuguese, the word *rasura* also refers to the literary “overwriting” that is common in the process of revision, implying the sense of making corrections or changing directions.¹⁰

Literary changes and modifications are never seen in the final work, as the reader/audience is not given access to the process. This is the aspect of the creative process with regard to which a *rasura* in drawing becomes enlightening. The drawing process is still there to be seen, entangled with its final constitution, marking all that is as much as everything that has ceased to be. Because *rasura* is such a peculiar word, I use it in this text for reasons that will be clarified later in this paper. At this time, however, one may already sense that the *rasura* can be seen as the very space between the verbal and the visual, between art and literature, at least within its meaning in Portuguese.

The *rasura*, which at times has acquired a negative value as a mark of failure, as the mark of an attempt to correct an observation, is, in the case of my work, preserved, searched, and even praised as a visual reality that, on the one hand, gives the drawings a sculptural value, and on the other hand shows an attempt to mark a relation between the artist’s gaze, his/her observation of the model, and the sculptor’s touch. This variety of meanings of, and implications for, the notion of *rasura* is important to understand in which ways and for which reasons I have chosen to produce these drawings in this manner:

I wanted the dirtiest possible line for my drawing. As if the line could unbalance my most primary and superficial desires, my desire to control, as much as the limits of what I already knew and my own certainties. By erasing, by drawing line over line, over line,

I was actually defying my own self. What would it actually mean to take risks when drawing? [...] ‘Unspokens’ revealed in the line’s silent noise, this non-linear line, this casual line, this over-imposing erasing drawing line. Uncontrollable line. There was a cut in risk; there was an opening in superimposed lines. Creation happened whenever control was lost. And to reveal my own self meant to transgress my own surface, that superficial image I would stare at in the mirror every morning as I brushed my teeth. (Beck, September 26, 2013)

The notion of *rasura* relates to a multitude of meanings and aspects present in both the reality and the creative process of a drawing. In these terms, the *rasura* defies a formal, visual characteristic and its constitutional gesture, a poetic gesture. As a poetic gesture, the *rasura* is the product of not controlling the drawing process, thus implicating a certain degree of suspension of the self: a conversation.

LISTENING TO PAPER AND STONE

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Bourgeois’s and Leonilson’s creative processes relate to the idea of conversation that I elaborate as I listened to my creative process and to that of Bourgeois. The image of the creative practice as a conversation is also perceived in the series *Drawing Yesterday*, as I dove into the space between words and images. While producing live model drawings, I turned my attention to observing and drawing the model, while acutely observing how the process affected me and what I could perceive of this process. Trying to retain the freshness of the impressions as much as the freshness of the drawings demanded taking notes during the execution of the drawings. Therefore, my blog *Paraíso não tem nome* (*Paradise Has No Name*) includes both the drawings and my personal accounts of their creation, which I here compare to Leonilson’s and Bourgeois’s accounts of their own creative practices.

When perceiving the drawing process, I establish a conversation with and a relation to the materials on which I draw:

The white paper almost hurt my eyes. Actually, a cream paper would be better, for it was capable of absorbing touch, paint and ink. But I felt I was hating it, for the paper absorbed everything, absolutely everything. It reminded me of Louise [Bourgeois] and her speech about the decision to abandon wood at a certain point. Wood was too soft; it was too docile, she said; not the stone, though. The stone was all about resistance. One could call its resistance its own will. It was necessary to deal with it, listen to it. So she decided to keep the very plain letter size, white paper. (*Paraíso*)

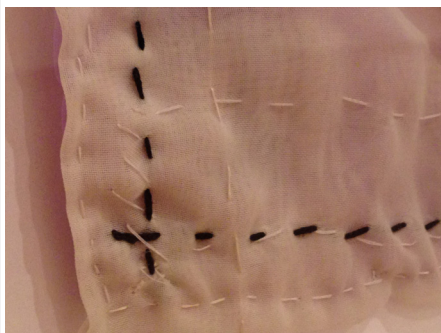
My perception of the paper is an observation on the interrelation between what I am trying to develop, my gestures on the paper, and the responses of the paper. These responses underlie the potential that reminds me of Bourgeois’s creative process:

The transition [from wood to marble] stems from the fact that the aggressive side of my nature liked the resistance of the stone. Wood is too soft a material, and above all it’s [sic] perishable and offers no resistance. Whereas the resistance that must be overcome in

stone is a stimulation [...]. It's a playing with the impossible. [...] It is a fight to the finish. So it is a challenge. (Bourgeois 184)

To be challenged by paper, by stone, or by immobility are similar situations in regard to the potency of silence, as all these experiences demand similar attitudes. Silencing requires observation and care, attitudes that contrast with the mind's immediate responses and the impositions of verbal discourses that do not open up to listening. Being challenged, one has to suspend the desire to answer in order to go beyond one's own resentments listening to and beyond the surface; listening to the place from which the other speaks, whether the other be stone, paper, or even my own body.

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Leonilson, *We Talk, They Don't See*, embroidered voile, 1991.

Accessed Aug. 2016. www.antoniomiranda.com.br/poesia_visual/img/leonilson5.jpg

Detail of the former photographed by the author in 2014 at the Leonilson Truth-Fiction exhibition.

In similar ways to how a karate fighter must feel the exact force needed in his/her knock to guarantee that he/she might crack a pile of wood without hurting his/her hands,¹¹ resistance sustains the desire to act towards the world. This means that the fighter necessarily needs to allocate an exact force, suspending the rush to hit. This attitude is similar to that of an artist, from whom it is required that he/she balances the desire for expression with the observation of matter, thus sustaining a gesture that places affirmation in a silent place. To place affirmation in a silent place is, in other words, to deal with one's own self while balancing existing forces with the absorption of matter. Thus, the conversation between artist and matter might have been considered by Bourgeois as a struggle, an attitude evident also in Leonilson's textile works, particularly where sewing and embroidery were involved, as Leonilson himself has described:

There are works that I begin and they start coming out badly made—badly made—and then I think, “I can’t try to do *haute couture*. This is not Balenciaga. This is my work.” Earlier I used to think that the sewing had to be perfect. I even tried, but I took such a beating! I realized that it’s different when a fashion designer makes clothes and when an artist sews. They are two related attitudes, but really different. So I relaxed and it became a pleasure, like painting. (Lagnado 85)

Despite the subjective dimension of Leonilson's emotional relations with textiles, sewing, and embroidery,¹² the kind of familial relation also indicated by Bourgeois as fundamental in her choice to work with those materials, it is evident that these artists dwelt with their working materials while also having an objective dimension in mind. This objective dimension is connected to the idea of sewing as language in its relation to the impotency of the human condition:

A ação da costura não se detém numa atitude determinista em função de um conceito, nem da resolução de uma necessidade energética. A potência da linguagem se realiza diante da impotência da condição humana. (Derdyk n.pag.)¹³

Like Derdyk, Leonilson realized that the impotency of humanity with regard to language is a challenge one faces when dealing with matter. This might have been the reason why Bourgeois described this objective dimension as "resistance." For example, Leonilson cared at a certain point to enhance his knowledge of something he first understood as related to fashion.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it is undeniable that he developed a poetics of sewing and embroidery that did not correspond to his initial ideas and expectations towards the materials and techniques, but were rather acquired by his careful observation of the creative process and by the counterbalancing of his initial desires through his observation.

The commentaries of these artists reflect the notion of *rasura* in the creative process as well as in speech. *Rasura* refers to the listening space that is opened while speaking; thus, Willemart defines writing and other creative procedures as the space between two *rasuras*. In these terms, he understands the creative process as that of going back and forth, doing and undoing, drawing and erasing, conceiving and letting all go, within whose interval the artist's subconscious acts, for writing occurs in the time of "a battle ground bombarded by strange forces which operate in each *rasura* and not that of constant [uninterrupted] flow" (*Além da Psicanálise* 117).

For Bourgeois and Leonilson, as for myself, to face resistance means to not impose one's will on matter and reality. Acknowledging the necessity of facing resistance is an exercise in silencing, a careful listening to the conversation between artist and material:

In *She-Fox* the material didn't give me anything. To hunt, to seduce, to deal with a stone is really to deal with terrific resistance.

How are you going to turn this around and make the stone say what you want when it is there to say "no" to everything. It forbids you! You want a hole, it refuses to make a hole. You want it smooth, it breaks under the hammer. It is the stone that is aggressive. It is a constant source of refusal. You have to win the shape. It is a fight to the finish at every moment. (Bourgeois 142)



Louise Bourgeois:

(Left) *She-Fox*, 1985, marble sculpture. Accessed Mar. 2014. www.mcachicago.org/exhibitions/collection/browse/artist/1/188

(Right) *The Sail*, 1988, marble sculpture. Accessed Mar. 2014. www.artnews.com/2013/07/10/artnews-retrospective/

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It is important to acknowledge Bourgeois's notion of resistance. This perspective is revealed in her reference to dealing "with" the stone. "With the stone" is a verbal distinction that marks a conversational landscape between artist and matter. This conversation is present not only in my choice to work with a very ordinary white paper, but in the literal conversation I establish between my own creative process and Bourgeois's declaration. Leonilson similarly addressed such a conversation when he decided to incorporate failed and irregular examples of sewing and embroidery into his artworks. The possibility of error or failure, which both Bourgeois and I call resistance, is also present in Lispector's *Passion According to G.H.*, as the main character, a sculptor, ponders preparing herself to work:

E não me esquecer, ao começar o trabalho, de me preparar para errar. Não esquecer que o erro muitas vezes se havia tornado o meu caminho. Todas as vezes em que não dava certo o que eu pensava ou sentia—é que se fazia enfim uma brecha, e se, antes eu tivesse tido coragem, já teria entrado por ela. Mas eu sempre tivera medo de delírio e erro. Meu erro, no entanto, devia ser o caminho de uma verdade: pois só quando erro é que saio do que conheço e do que entendo. (Lispector 109)¹⁵

According to G.H., to work on a sculpture means to prepare herself to fail, and, moreover, not to see her thoughts and feelings accomplish in material reality what she understands or knows. Thus, G.H. also addresses the special place into which the artist has to place him/herself while creating. Whereas Lispector introduces the idea of an opened breach into which the sculptor can dive, she nonetheless addresses the notion I have been following of the creative practice establishing a conversation between artist and matter when she implies that the creative process can establish another place for the artist to be: a creative place, a landscape, a conversational landscape.

CONVERSATIONAL LANDSCAPE

The image of a conversational landscape elicits how the artists view their creative processes and their search within those processes. When discussing the creation of her work *The Sail*, Bourgeois reflects this aspect, referring to the technical difficulties she had to overcome in order to create a marble piece with a hole within, which had to, despite its internal hole, maintain its resistance and formal integrity at the same time, especially since it was intended to be displayed in an external environment (Bourgeois 169). In the creation of *The Sail* and of *She-Wolf*, as much as in Leonilson's textiles and in my *Drawing Yesterday*, the notion of resistance relates to the artist respectfully positioning him/herself towards the material, engaging in a conversation in which reality and desire talk and listen to each other. This conversation is sustained while artist and material talk and listen to each other, alternating speaking and silencing.

Regarding Bourgeois's remark about the resistance of stone, the notion of resistance relates to careful persistence in observing external and internal dimensions. In other words, the artist must observe the exterior matter, the stone, the paper, as much as his/her impressions, sensations, and thoughts about and in response to the material. This dual observation can therefore be understood in terms of observation of the creative process itself, which would propitiate a poetic gesture that differentiates itself from an authoritative gesture towards the material. It is in these terms that my and Leonilson's choices of gesture and line for drawing and sewing must be conceived, as a gesture that thus potentially suspends the self.

From an objective, bodily perspective, to face resistance means avoiding being hurt. Yet, this perspective is in marked contrast to the common idea that relates being hurt to facing resistance. The difference in both perspectives creates tension precisely over the positioning of a subject trying to place him/herself through discourse in the world. Is it not possible that the conversational landscape, this landscape of silence, itself relates and creates tension between these perspectives? Can and do Bourgeois's and Leonilson's works tell us not only about their sorrows and emotional dramas, but about the effort it takes to express self through language?

If so, the conversational landscape of creation is the place where conversation happens as perpetual tension with silent hearing, thus bringing forth the potency of language by being ultimately affirmative through silence, once the self can be balanced with the hearing of the other through this exact attempt of expressing the self and relating emotions to material:

According to Gilbert Simondon, emotion is the way we relate to the pre-individual. To have emotion, to be moved, is to feel the impersonal within us, to experience *Genius* as anguish or joy, safety or fear. On the threshold of the zone of unconsciousness, Ego must shed its own properties; it must be moved. Passion is the tightrope, stretched between us and *Genius*, on which our *funambulant* life steps forward. (Agamben, *Profanities* 15)

My reflections on un-knowing myself during the drawing process, like Bourgeois's and Leonilson's listening within struggles, further relate to Agamben's comment on thinking about *genius*, for Agamben considers that if Simondon understood that emotions could be not simply personal, but could actually be what connects us to the "pre-individual," then, on the borders of what we know, the *I* would have to let go of itself in order to be truly emotionally moved. In these terms, creation, even if first moved by emotions as with both Bourgeois and Leonilson, opens the possibility of reaching a wider subjectivity and a less personal emotional dimension once the artists open themselves to the unknown through their relations with the material. This emotional dimension relates to the artist's self as much as to the other, and thus acquires an emotional significance for the viewer as well.

328 Leonilson's peculiar approach to sewing and embroidery produced many pieces that look as if they were badly done; however, this does not relate to the characteristics of textiles in garment and household functionalities. Positioning a poetic gesture as suspension, Leonilson elaborates pieces with a significant body. The textile body in his works is so fragile in its loose sewing and tortuous embroidered words that its heavy visual presence seems to be as material and embodied a thing itself as any of Bourgeois's sculptures. Leonilson's textile pieces are nevertheless produced with a gesture that relates as much to his desire to express his feelings as to the reality of his relation with material, in very similar modes as that of Bourgeois when she listens to stone. Both actions reveal a poetic gesture gained through suspension of the self.

Yet, if this place of suspension is a space between artist and material in which individual and pre-individual emotions may be at sight, it is nevertheless a region bordered by speech and silence, as Willemart acknowledges when he refers to a silencing and listening to that can be marked in each *rasura*:

Mas o homem se distingue profundamente de Deus quando, tendo silenciado, chama o Outro e escuta um texto-corda ou um texto-móvel ou um primeiro texto antes de escrever, esculpir ou pintar. Sabemos também que essa escuta não se estabelece uma vez por todas, mas se repete em momentos muito irregulares a cada rasura e a cada acréscimo para o escritor, a cada pincelada ou burilada para o pintor ou escultor. (*Além da Psicanálise* 103)¹⁶

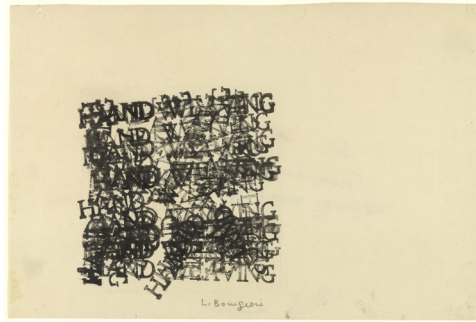
Listening to stone, listening to the pencil tracing lines, place into perspective the fact that the artist must silence him/herself at times. If the process requires a conversation between artist and material to bring the artist's desire into the world, this conversation demands listening as much as speaking. Thus, a conversational landscape is constituted by the interval between affirmations and silence, becoming a silent landscape.

Bourgeois's, Leonilson's, and my silent landscapes evoke on the one hand the difficulties we all face verbalizing our unconscious desires and our deep emotions. On the other hand, it recalls the presence of silence in the potency of speech. Being challenged by the uneasiness of speech could therefore be considered a superficial problem, for silencing cuts the affirmation of authorship open by making room for

listening. Silencing traces are as perceivable as the author's and the artist's gesture, if, as Agamben understands:

we call 'gesture' what remains unexpressed in each expressive act, we can say that, exactly like infamy, the author is present in the text only as a gesture that makes expression possible precisely by establishing a central emptiness within this expression. How should we understand the modality of this singular presence, by which a life appears to us only through what silences it and twists it into a grimace? (*Profanities* 66)

The potency of language listening becomes a line marked on stone. That is the place at which the stone becomes potent as well, by marking the dialogical possibility of saying by listening to the Other, a potency latent in the presence of words, sentences, and verses within visual productions. Some of Leonilson's and Bourgeois's works elicit the tension between speech and silence and the presence of that tension in the creative process, in the relation of that process with a subjectivity that tries to be in the outer world by becoming embodied matter.



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(Left) Leonilson, *Cheio, vazio* (*Full, empty*), embroidered voile, 1993.

Accessed Aug. 2016. mam.org.br/acervo/1996-069-leonilson-jose/

(Right) Louise Bourgeois, *Weaving Word*, rubber stamp, 1948. Accessed Aug. 2016.

www.moma.org/collection/works/63370?locale=pt

In the above examples and elsewhere, Leonilson and Bourgeois address what is not said as much as what they could have tried to say. In Bourgeois, this is particularly suggested in images in which overwriting creates a speech *rasura* more than any readable word. There is still much to be listened to and heard in these *rasuras*, almost as much as is there to be heard in Leonilson's image of emptiness, an emptiness reinforced by the textile embodiment and the embroidered words on the corners of each square: *full, full, empty, empty*.

SILENTLY ENGAGING COMPARATIVELY

These works depict fullness as much as emptiness; images full of emptiness, of the silence of images not accompanied by words. Silence is present in images as much

as in words and speech. Some of these pieces include the tension of the metaphor of the borders between saying and silencing, metaphors of language that capture the reader's experience of feeling suspended between the possibility of seeing and not seeing, of reading and not reading. The artist not only addresses his/her emotional history of feelings to which many of us can relate, but is also able to touch what is inexpressible for all of us, like Lispector's G.H., considering that when art is great, it has touched the inexpressible:

quando a arte é boa é porque tocou o inexpressivo, a pior arte é a expressiva, aquela que transgride o pedaço de ferro e o pedaço de vidro, e o sorriso, e o grito. [...]

Falar com as coisas, é mudo. Eu sei que isso te soa triste, e a mim também, pois ainda estou viciada pelo condimento da palavra. (Lispector 143, 161)¹⁷

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There are affirmations in both, but their sayings are distinct. How much difference is there between these arguments and my own as I try to unsuccessfully write about silence? How can one transport to the density of language what one is definitely going to link to it, this experience of a landscape contemplation that Leonilson's pieces offer?

When Bourgeois chooses stone, when I choose plain white paper, creative decisions that cannot be explained by the tradition of materials and techniques happen. Traditionally, such decisions would rely on the adequacy of materials and procedures within certain techniques. This notion of adequacy is intrinsically linked with guaranteeing certain final results. In other words, if one is to achieve certain effects, it would be necessary to undergo certain procedures, which would mean choosing gestures and procedures already known for guaranteeing this or that formal product. Yet Bourgeois's and Leonilson's speech, which silence these aspects, address a place beyond tradition and their own personal desires to place itself beside a very important question in the creative process of contemporary art. For contemporary art, a problem can be more desired and pursued than a solution, with regard to the artist's interest in the creative process as a fundamental aspect in the development of a poetic identity. In this sense, guaranteeing a solution does not even matter, for finding the right form would derive from the artist positioning him/herself to deal with the problem as someone who understands the material as the other. Both Bourgeois and Willemart clearly indicate this notion when they claim that finding the form is a struggle to the very end. This struggle, this fight, is nevertheless less about imposition and much more about suspending one's self, suspending speech, being as effective on silence and emptiness as on speech and form.

Being in between speech and silence is further enhanced by this other in-between space with moving borders: the limits between decision-making and results. That is the "in-between" of the creative process. For Lispector and her sculptor character, that meditation has an end in itself, which must be the reason for it to be fundamentally an experience of in-betweens: between mobility and silence, between suspending speech and listening to pure observation. It is a place in which subject

and object change position, as Willemart indicates in his commentary on Freud's ideas about writing:

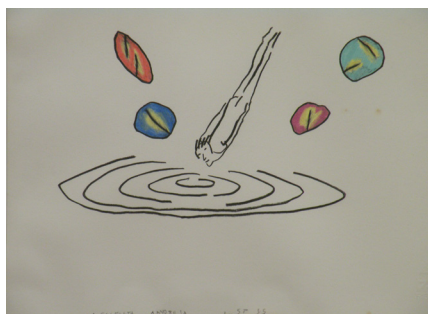
For Freud, writing is still an expressive form in the sense that it derives from psyche by explaining and expressing it. *Freud is still not able to understand that writing, like any art form, defines a symbolic field which the artist enters and which changes him. The chosen matter, be it the stone, language, sounds or colours, do also play their part by working on the sculptor, the writer, the musician or the painter.* (*Além da Psicanálise* 84)

As much as silence is what is already there, being neither a product nor a result, form in an artwork is the embodied itself. It is a body full of potency, full of being and not being. Its potency is that of embracing and incorporating what it becomes as much as what it denies by being what it is. The struggle within the creative process is not a struggle, but a conversation, a dialogue between artist and material in the exact sense Willemart defines the desire for the other in Lacan's terms. For Willemart, the artist's unconscious is not a simple drive that must be expressed, but a thriving force that allocates the artist within the other's place. Creation thus is what "happens in the path of desire for the other as much as in the path towards the other" (*Além da Psicanálise* 114). The intricate relationship between desire and material is clearly related to the struggle to which the artists refer.

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Willemart also understands the *rasura* as a region in which the writer or creator gives himself to the passions of ignorance, a place in which the limits of knowledge retreat (*Além da Psicanálise* 163-64). This place is a landscape, a region drawn by the creative movement, like Willemart's reference to Prigogine, for whom the notion of a region is "a group of points and trajectories which, being part of a determined space, still switch position and cross each other relativizing the dimensions of time and space, thus creating new trajectories and new descriptions of the exact same region" (*Além da Psicanálise* 36). A region is therefore identified as a space of mobility, a going back and forth in space that even draws geographic accidents, a region drawn by the *rasura*, which is also a sort of silencing: of the line I had just drawn, of my own mind by effectively engaging in conversation with matter by alternating being and not being. The landscape of creation might be characterized as a region of indefinable borders, in which lines erased by alternations and superposition nevertheless insistently draw lines between the salt water and the sea strand. Willemart also refers to the landscape of creation as a seaside when reading Lacan (*Além da Psicanálise* 143-44), suggesting an image that speaks of the potency of silent observation, of the possible meditation on coming and going waves. In relation to meaning, a seaside is forever a suspended landscape. As if the mobility of the line drawn between sand and sea could speak about the mobility between speaking and silencing, Bourgeois and Leonilson incorporate into their creative processes the desire to say as much as the need to listen. This is the line at which speech and silence, saying and silencing, alternate and exchange places. This is the suggestion that a comparative approach of these artists' creative processes can make towards engaging comparatively, by actively listening, by becoming what we are, not by feeling denied reality when faced

with opposition, but by understanding that it is through difference that we can all become what we ultimately are. After all, as suggested by Leonilson and myself, an amorous response will always demand diving into silence.



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(Left) Leonilson, *A resposta amorosa* (*The amorous response*), 1985, drawing on paper.

Photo by the author, 2012.

(Right) Ana Lúcia Beck, from the *Infinitude* series (*Love Silently Feels*), 2005, embroidered shirt. Accessed Nov. 2013. paraisionaotemnnome.blogspot.com.br/search/label/infinitude

NOTES

1. "This struggle elicits writing power; that is, written words suddenly suggest something else to the writer, forcing the *scriptor* to slide into other meanings, changing his story." All translations from Portuguese, where English editions are not indicated, are mine.
2. "To create is not an imaginary task; it is in reality facing the great threat of owning reality."
3. All reproductions of Leonilson's work are presented courtesy of the *Projeto Leonilson* foundation. For Louise Bourgeois, © The Easton Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.
4. José Leonilson Bezerra da Silva Dias (1957-93), a.k.a. Leonilson, was a Brazilian artist who was part of the "80s Generation" in the Brazilian art scene. The movement marked a resurgence of painting after the previous decades marked by conceptual productions. Hence, Leonilson's subjective approach, his use of words within paintings and drawings, and his fabric works were viewed as significant influences on Brazilian contemporary art. See www.projetoleonilson.com.br and mam.org.br/artista/leonilson-jose/.
5. Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) was a French-born American artist known for over five decades' worth of sculptures, drawings, and fabric works whose themes and subjects were related to her personal emotional life. Despite having been recognized relatively late in life, her first major retrospective having been presented at MOMA in 1982, she became an important figure in discussions of the relation between art and self. Many of her works are catalogued at MOMA; see www.moma.org/explore/collection/lb/about/chronology.
6. I, Ana Lúcia Beck (b. 1971), am a Brazilian visual artist and art teacher whose works can be seen at *Paraíso não tem nome* (*Paradise Has No Name*), paraisionaotemnnome.blogspot.com.br/, which features drawings, photography, and poetry, as well as theoretical reflections on art and its practice.

7. Francisco Alberto Cosmelli (1928-2003) was a Hatha Yoga teacher in the Sivananda tradition, having studied in the Bihar School of Yoga as well as with André Van Lysebeth. He was responsible for introducing Yoga in southern Brazil, having run a Yoga school in the city of Porto Alegre for over four decades.
8. *Louise Bourgeois, Destruction of the Father, Reconstruction of the Father* (1998), and many of Bourgeois's interviews, operate on the perspective of her art as an act of salvaging that is always grounded in her emotional history. This perspective, with regard to its psychological dimension, is extensively incorporated into Larratt-Smith's curatorial project and the publications that accompanied the exhibition.
9. Lagnado emphasizes this perspective in her book on Leonilson, released five years after the artist's passing; this in turn produced an interpretation of his work that, if not unjustifiable, does not relate to the entirety of his work as much as it contrasts other affirmations and declarations of Leonilson himself, such as in his interviews with Pedrosa.
10. *Rasura* relates to the following notions and words in the English drawing vocabulary: erasure, layering, scratching out, sketching, and scrapbooking, as well as to overwriting.
11. For a study of this matter, see the National Geographic Channel series *Fight Science*. The episode on karate shows that, in similar ways to those conceived by Shaolin practice (www.shaolin.org.cn/en/index.aspx), a fight must be understood as a conscious exercise of desire. In both cases, it is evident that the strength within a hit or kick, which is the action of desire on matter, is a gesture toward the materiality of the world that must be perceived in balance with the perception of the fighter's own movement. It is in this sense that the image of the fighter approximates itself to my primary concern in this article: addressing the deterministic aspect of a kind of gesture consciousness that corresponds to a consciousness of movement, of the desire towards the world. See also Zhang's movie *The Hero*, in which the movement of a sword fighter is compared to that of a calligrapher.
12. Leonilson's father sold textiles, and his mother and sisters sewed and embroidered in a sewing room that became familiar to Leonilson as a child. He also learned and became attached to these practices in the boys' school he attended for several years (Lagnado 86).
13. "The act of sewing is not defined by a concept or even by the resolution of an energetic demand. The potency of language is constituted on the impotency of the human condition."
14. According to his *1988-89 Notebook*, in September 1988, Leonilson attended Studio Berçot Paris for a few days, having also had a meeting with its director, Marie Rucki.
15. "And I couldn't forget, at the outset of the job, to prepare myself to err. Not forgetting that the error had often become my path. Every time something I was thinking or feeling didn't work out—was because finally there was a breach, and, if I'd had courage before, I'd have already gone through it. But I'd always been afraid of delirium and error. My error, however, must be the path of a truth: since only when I err do I step out of what I know and what I understand" (Lispector 1200).
16. "Man, however, differentiates himself from God when, silencing, he calls for the Other and listens to it in a thread-text or in a moving text, a primordial text even before he starts to write, sculpt, or paint. We also know that this listening does not happen at once, but rather repeats itself on irregular times, at each *rasura*, at each addition during the writer's, the sculptor's, or even the painter's gesture."
17. "since when art is good it is because it touched upon the inexpressive, the worst art is expressive, that art which transgresses the piece of iron and the piece of glass, and the smile, and the scream. [...] Speaking to things, is mute. I know this sounds sad to you, and to me too, since I am still addicted to the condiment of the word" (Lispector 1562, 1743).

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