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Photographed Metaphors: Meaning, Reference, and Translation in Manoel de Barros[1]

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In a brief letter written in May of 2011, Brazilian poet Manoel de Barros (1916-2014) conveyed his interest in collaborating with photographer Adriana Lafer on a book that would "express my verbal sketches; —with your images" (*Arquitetura* 48). Barros's careful choice of words is compelling, for he prefers to write "express" instead of "transform" or "translate" in his correspondence with Lafer. The shift in the medium of expression, from words to images, suggests an engagement between writer and photographer that places language at the heart of their collaborative book titled *Arquitetura do silêncio* (2015). To "express" is to convey almost without mediation, as a transparent lens that allows light to penetrate, only then to slightly refract the image. It is a playful tension between transparency and refraction, just as in the cover of their book—a photograph of what looks like a window, in which the condensation of water is in focus, displaying how light refracts into infinitesimal drops of green. In this article, I will argue that Barros' initial choice of words in describing his desire to work closely with Lafer reveals his ludic challenge of meaning and reference in language. In *Arquitetura,* Barros and Lafer display through words and photographs a mode of gazing that transfigures the world, focusing on the abandoned sites that surround us: "O olho vê, a lembrança revê, e a imaginação transvê. É preciso transver o mundo" ("The eye sees, memory re-sees, and imagination trans-sees. It is necessary to trans-see the world") (*Arquitetura* 4).

Published shortly after Barros passed away in 2014, *Arquitetura* has received scarce attention from scholars. The book, however, offers an invaluable opportunity to explore the philosophic and literary dimensions of Barros' "verbal sketches" through the unique juxtaposition of poems and photography. The composition of the book obliges the reader to linger and reflect on the relation between language and the world. It does so by shifting into and out of focus through its rhetoric of naming. Barros often names things—sometimes flora and fauna, and other times things ("coisas") such as aluminum cans—which create textual silences whenever the reader is unable to imagine what the poet is referring to. While discussing Brazilian cultural identity and performance, Kathryn Bishop-Sanchez explains that the "silences of performativity" or "that which is not viewed, not represented, not addressed, and that which remains unseen" are often present in the artistic productions of Brazil (31). *Arquitetura* expresses those "silences of performativity" so as to refocus the way in which the reader perceives the

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environment, challenging our notions of meaning and reference. Unable to see or imagine those seemingly out-of-focus poems and images, the reader's gaze is displaced by such poetic silences. More than any other collection of poems by Barros, *Arquitetura* contemplates the possibility of engaging with the world around us in a manner that is never just a translation, but rather a performance that transfigures the reader's gaze.

I am particularly interested in the latent philosophy of language that emerges in the collaboration between Barros and Lafer. This dimension has not gone unnoticed by scholars, although it has yet to be explored at length. Malcolm McNee, for example, describes Barros' poetry as "philosophically spacious and abstract" (37). This "spacious and abstract" element situates Barros beyond the limits of regionalist writing. Although set in the Pantanal wetlands, his poetry is philosophically engaged, especially in regard to language. Nery Nice Biancalana Reiner suggests that there is a meta-poetic component that informs Barros' poetry (56). Challenging the bounds of poetic language, Barros develops a writing style that is aware of itself as it expresses the world. Scholar Osmar Pereira Oliva also focuses on the philosophical traces in Barros, identifying the poet's proximity with Wittgenstein in terms of their corresponding notions of the world and language (78). I will argue in a similar vein that Barros and Lafer's book poetically questions the limits of language, more so than any other book by the Brazilian writer. I will present a nuanced discussion of his engagement with philosophy of language insofar as his poetry questions the relation between language and the world. My analysis will explore this aspect by reading *Arquitetura* alongside two notable philosophers of language in the analytic tradition: Gottlob Frege and Willard Van Orman Quine. Although present throughout the history of philosophy, the discussion of meaning and reference is particularly central to the analytic tradition. Both Frege and Quine offer insights that help bring to the forefront the significance of language in Barros' poetry. Other notable philosophers have approached language in similar vein, such as Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida. I have opted to centre discussion on the analytic tradition of philosophy in the twentieth century, because the question of meaning and reference is specifically targeted by philosophers in that tradition. As McNee argues, Barros' poetry is primarily "about language" (39). The questions raised by Frege and Quine on meaning, reference, and translation serve to fully appreciate the philosophical insights into language revealed in *Arquitetura*.

Central to Barros and Lafer's book is the notion of "verbal sketches," for it encompasses the ludic relation between words and images that motivates much of Barros' writing. His poetic diction never ceases to surprise: "Eu queria que as garças me sonhassem. Eu queria que as palavras me gorjeassem. Então comecei a fazer desenhos verbais de imagens" ("I wanted herons to dream me. I wanted words to chirp me. Thus I began to make verbal sketches of images") (*Poesia completa* 7). When reading this passage, one might be struck by its awkward construction. Could herons dream of the poet? Could words chirp him just like birds? The reader becomes aware that something seems amiss, for words by themselves make no sounds and birds may perhaps not dream at all. And yet Barros insists that his poetry does just that: it makes words

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transubstantiate into the things they name. In *Arquitetura* he writes that "Queria ser a voz em que uma pedra fale" ("I wanted to be the voice in which a stone would speak" (23). Here a stone is invited to speak through his poetic voice. Words come not from the poet, but the stone. It is the latter that leverages his voice to speak. A reversal occurs. An object gains a voice through words. Readers often take for granted the distance that separates language from the world. They know that the moment one pronounces the word "heron," no actual bird materializes in his or her mouth. It is assumed that stones have no say in the world, for they cannot express anything. Stones are stones, and herons are herons. Words represent things, and things can only await to be named—or so readers have been led to believe, claims Barros playfully.

To fully understand the ludic challenge to meaning and reference in his poetry, I will first explore the traditional distinction between sense and reference in Frege's nominal work "On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*," all the while pointing to the ways in which Barros' poetic diction questions such dichotomy in language. I will argue that Barros is engaged in a philosophical discussion of language in his poetry, one that contests some of the basic notions proposed by Frege and widely discussed by analytic philosophers. McNee points in that direction when suggesting that Barros' poetry "paradoxically seeks both to return the word to an original state of nature and, simultaneously, to free the natural world from the restrictive confines of language" (39). This tension is manifested in the questioning of meaning and reference through Barros' reimagining of the ways in which language interacts with the world. After concentrating on Frege, I will then briefly turn to Willard Van Orman Quine's inquiries into the indeterminacy of translation in *Word and Object* (1960), before focusing solely on *Arquitetura* as it challenges meaning and reference through the juxtaposition of words and images. The indeterminacy of translation as explored by Quine offers a valuable bridge to understanding both the indeterminacy of meaning and vagueness of reference that Barros fully exploits in his collaboration with Lafer. It is this precise aspect of *Arquitetura* that is most salient—the blurring of boundaries between words and images—and is particularly striking in one of the final passages of the book, when Barros explains that while observing a cicada in the sun he "photographed this metaphor" ("Fotografei essa metáfora") (5). Photographing metaphors encapsulates how his poetry plays with words and images so as to develop a meta-discourse on the nature of language.

Winner of the prestigious Jabuti literary award in 1990 for *O guardador de águas* and in 2002 for *O fazedor de amanhecer*, Barros is one of the most cherished poets in Brazil, having been praised in a personal letter by Brazilian literary academic and translator Antônio Houaiss as a "singular creator of languages" (qtd. in 2016, 96). Barros stands out in Brazil as a poet who does not quite fit into the scheme of *modernismo* and its legacy. In *modernismo*, the lyric genre gained prestige and endeavoured to make "new forms" (Perrone 2). Poets were attracted to cosmopolitan centres such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Barros, however, chose to return to a rural context in which he anchored his work. His poetry is all the more fascinating given his sensibility for the Pantanal region found in the Southwest of Brazil. Considered by geographers as a sedimentary plain, the Pantanal shares traits with the Amazonian and Savannah biomes

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(Ab'Saber 12). It is, however, an independent ecosystem that is influenced topographically by the presence of the Paraguay River, which affects the cycles of flooding and drought (Franco et al 21-24). Having been raised in the Pantanal as a child and later having returned as landowner in his family's estate, Barros is particularly fond of the region. McNee claims that Barros' "poetry is almost exclusively situated in Pantanal riverways, backwater towns, and childhood backyards" (38). He was also acquainted with other art forms, having taken art and film courses at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York, prior to returning to the Pantanal in the 1960s (McNee 39). Published posthumously, *Arquitetura* is unique in its conception, for it presents the collaboration of Barros with Lafer in two mediums of expression that weave together in the book. In many ways, it is one of Barros' most intimate projects. It is the book where Barros most playfully challenges language, writing in a manner that blurs the lines between poems and photographs, between words and images. And he does so by raising questions as to the nature of meaning and reference in language, whether it be by attempting for words to quite literally stick to the things they name or through syntactical constructions that entangle meaning and grow into a meta-discourse on language. As Barros paradoxically explains, "Eu só não queria significar. Porque significar limita a imaginação" ("I did not want to signify. Because to signify limits the imagination") (2015, 31). The fact that he claims he did not simply "want to signify" anything, already points to the profound awareness of language in his poetry. Such a meta-awareness of language engages with philosophical questions regarding meaning and reference.

Naming through words has been for centuries a contested site for philosophers. The Sophists considered language a very powerful tool, one that could transform truth through rhetoric. Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* is a staunch defence of the force of rhetoric, of how words can change the world around us (Thomas 21). In *Le problème de l'être chez Aristote* (1983), Pierre Aubenque argues that it is this aspect of the Sophist movement that struck Aristotle deeply and motivated his relentless analysis of the categories of Being, attempting to pin down the multiplicities of language. Medieval philosophers continued debating the link between language, truth, and the world in what became the problem of universals (Tweedale 215). A central issue was whether words that were universal—that named a collection of individual instances—existed or not (Galluzzo and Loux 1). Take, for example, the word "tree," which names all the different examples of trees, such as cherry trees or orange trees. Those individual instantiations of single trees are said to exist in the world. One can simply point to one and nod. But what about abstract words? Does the universal "tree" exist? Nominalism emerged as a school of thought with two salient strands, "one that maintains that there are no universals and one that maintains that there are no abstract objects" (Rodriguez-Pereyra). It questioned the limits of signification in the form of universals. For example, Peter Abelard carefully examined signification, criticizing the notion that universals are "ideas of" something or other (Tweedale 216). Although it satisfied some philosophers, many remained skeptical of the nominalist solution. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that the problem of naming and language emerged yet again in full force, this time championed by analytic philosophers looking to carefully scrutinize the logical layers of human language. This concern with the structure of language coincided with the

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discovery of non-Euclidean geometries (i.e. Riemann and Bolyai) at the turn of the century, an issue that worried mathematicians and logicians alike, for Euclidean geometry had long been considered a standard-bearer for truth in the pure sciences (Wilson 380).

The German logician and mathematician Gottlob Frege (1848-1925) completed his doctoral dissertation on pure geometry, and so the rise of non-Euclidean geometries was in no way collateral to his work (Beaney 3). Throughout much of his career, he focused on providing "arithmetic with foundations" in what would later be termed as the "logicist project" (Beaney 3). Some of his most important achievements involved the development of propositional logic, yet it was a small article written in 1892 under the title "On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*" that captured the attention of philosophers in regard to the consequences tied to our understanding of referentiality and meaning in language. In a 1970 series of lectures, Saul Kripke points to both Frege and Bertrand Russell as significant contributors to the logical analysis of names in natural languages, whilst also challenging their views (27). Quine also references Frege's article at the beginning of his famous essay "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," insisting on the fundamental difference between "meaning and naming" (21). As scholar Beaney suggests, the "distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, is probably the single most widely known and influential work in modern philosophy of language" (6).

Even Barros seems to playfully allude to this philosophical tradition when he writes "As coisas todas inominadas […] As palavras eram livres de gramáticas e podiam ficar em qualquer posição" ("All things unnamed […] Words were free of grammars and could linger in any position") (2013, 395). Whereas the "logicist project" was committed to establishing the logical foundations of language—its grammar—, Barros attempts to reach out to things before they are given names. His poetry does not "mean" anything, at least in the traditional sense (2015, 32). At stake is how to express the creatures and things he sees strewn across the ground in his native Pantanal, so that "minhas palavras fizessem parte do chão como os lagartos fazem" ("my words would become a part of the ground as lizards do") (2013, 429). He wants his words to quite literally stick to the things they name. His poetry thus challenges philosophical notions of language by taking referentiality as far as it will go—right to things themselves. To understand Barros' tongue-in-cheek play with language, it is necessary to return to Frege's initial distinction in the title of the mentioned article.

The essay "On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*" concentrates on separating an expression's connotative and denotative aspects. Interestingly, the English translations of the term "Bedeutung" have caused much confusion among philosophers, given the different uses of the word that appear in Frege's works. The literal translation of the term is "meaning," whereas the word "Sinn" means "sense." According to Beaney, "Frege's own use of 'Bedeutung' sounds as odd in German as 'meaning' does when used in translating his work into English" (37). However, the philosophical community has tended to translate "Bedeutung" into the term "reference," so as to capture the denotative element of the term in its usage in the essay "On

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Sinn and *Bedeutung*" (Beaney 36). Ironically then, Frege raises more questions regarding the distinction between "sense" and "reference" when translators are obliged to present his work in another language. One can almost imagine Barros offering a candid smile, reminding us that language cannot be imprisoned in grammar so easily. Nevertheless, Frege is committed to clarifying the two dimensions of words, one semantic and the other referential (Martinich 210).

The most cited example of this distinction is presented at the beginning of Frege's essay, focusing on a simple unit of language, proper names:

> It is natural, now, to think of there being connected with a sign (name, combination of words, written marks), besides that which a sign designates, which may be called the *Bedeutung* of the sign, also what I should like to call the *sense* of the sign, wherein the mode of presentation is contained […] The *Bedeutung* of "Evening Star" would be the same as that of "Morning Star", but not the sense. (152)

Here Frege poses the following problem. Two proper names seem to designate the same thing; that is, Venus. Yet although they refer to the same thing in the world, one would not say they mean the same thing, or else there would not be those two names. In the first case, "Evening Star" means a certain celestial body that appears during the evening, whereas the second case "Morning Star" means a certain celestial body that appears during the morning. As Martinich explains, the identity between the two names "is nontrivial and informative because, even though the *Bedeutung* of each term is the same, the *Sinn* of 'the morning star' is different from the *Sinn* of 'the evening star'" (211). Each proper name has a different "sense" but the same "*Bedeutung*." Frege claims that in natural languages "It may be granted that a grammatically well-formed expression figuring as a proper name always has a sense. But this is not to say that to the sense there also corresponds a *Bedeutung*" (153). Hence words always have a meaning, but not always a reference. Poets are well aware of this characteristic of language. Barros prompts such an aspect when he writes about "O martelo de pregar água" ("The hammer of nailing water") or "abulia vegetal sapal pedral" ("the vegetative frog-like stone-like abulia") (2013, 448; 202). Both noun clauses have a figurative meaning that transforms the possibility of a reference into something absurd, yet Barros insists in his poetry being "verbal sketches" of the world around him in the Pantanal. The reader is left to consider the meaning and reference of what he or she reads. What could possibly be a "hammer of nailing water"? Is it a hammer that does not work because it cannot nail anything? Or is it an actual hammer that somehow accomplishes such a feat? Barros pulls and tugs at the limits of referentiality, wanting his words to stick to the things' names, whilst also short-circuiting the possibility of his expressions having a reference.

Frege clarifies his position on proper names, suggesting that we expect such names to have a "Bedeutung" because "we are concerned with its truth-value" (157). That is, if a sentence has no reference it is generally considered false. He goes on to confess, however, that language speakers are not so invested in "Bedeutung" when considering artistic works:

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> In hearing an epic poem, for instance, apart from the euphony of the language we are interested only in the sense of the sentences and the images and feelings thereby aroused. The question of truth would cause us to abandon aesthetic delight for an attitude of scientific investigation. Hence it is a matter of no concern to us whether the name "Odysseus", for instance, has a *Bedeutung*, so long as we accept the poem as a work of art. It is the striving for truth that drives us always to advance from the sense to the *Bedeutung*. (157)

The denotative aspect of language is not fundamental but rather cursory to fiction and poetry, for the "aesthetic delight" is the priority of the work, not its "truth." Frege seems to push artistic works away from the referential sphere of language. One should not be interested in whether Barros' "hammer of nailing water" or "vegetative frog-like stone-like abulia" has an actual "Bedeutung," because the aesthetic emphasis of such phrases is on their sense.

This is all well and good, but what is the sense of the proper name "Odysseus"? It might be that the word has no reference, but that might depend on what one means when using that proper name. According to Kripke, Frege argues that such a proper name is "a definite description abbreviated or disguised" (1980, 27). This suggests that proper names are linked to longer descriptions that establish their meaning. For example, "Aristotle" is an abbreviation for "the man who taught Alexander the Great" (1980, 30). And once one has the sense of the proper name, he or she can consider whether or not it has a reference. Although the solution seems straightforward, Kripke is not so quick to accept it: "I think it's pretty certain that the view of Frege and Russell is false" (1980, 29). It is the "problem of vacuous names and reference to what does not exist, of fictional entities" (2013, 3). The general issue with the description approach to proper names is that it is painstakingly difficult to establish a single definition, for "Odysseus" could contain a whole set of different descriptions, none of which anything other than contingent (1980, 30).

Barros also poses a challenge to the reference of a fictional entity. He does so through one of the recurrent characters in his poetry, that of Bernardo da Mata. Considering the influence of Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa on Barros, it is only natural that many readers would consider Bernardo da Mata a fictional character—an alter-ego, just as Alberto Caeiro and other heteronyms of Pessoa (Silvério 118). That is, many would have considered Bernardo da Mata a proper name that lacked reference. Barros seems to point in that direction when he first presents his readers with Bernardo: "Esse é Bernardo. Bernardo da Mata. Apresento. Ele faz encurtamento de águas […] Como a foz de um rio—Bernardo se inventa…" ("That is Bernardo. Bernardo da Mata. I introduce him. He does the shortening of waters […] As the estuary of a river—so does Bernardo invent himself…") (2013, 221). Readers are presented with a character that can do the "shortening of waters." The structure of the sentence is every bit as awkward in Portuguese as in English, and this amplifies the fictional aspect of Bernardo. If one was to take

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the short description "He does the shortening of waters" as the sense of the proper name "Bernardo da Mata," then he or she would most likely consider the name to have no reference. Moreover, the last phrase reinforces the seemingly fictional presentation: "so does Bernardo invent himself." The reader is offered an ambiguous sentence, for it is not certain in what way Bernardo invents himself. And then there is the ellipsis at the end, suggesting that the reader must linger on the vague phrase, savouring the possibility that Bernardo is purely a figment of Barros' imagination. Yet in several interviews with the Brazilian poet, it seemed that Bernardo was a close friend, a real person that had inspired Barros. Journalist Bosco Martins recently wrote a short piece titled "Manoel de Barros renasce Bernardo" in which he inquires as to the friendship between the real Bernardo and Barros in Campo Grande, Brazil. He suggests that both Barros and his wife Stella had taken care of Bernardo in his old age. Readers are thus left feeling deceived, led to believe in the apparent fictionality of Bernardo, only to realize that he was a real person. Barros would most likely not resolve our questions of whether or not the proper name "Bernardo da Mata" has a referent, yet the ambiguity with which readers are left is a challenge to referentiality. It is as if he playfully explains that language is far more intricate—filled with awkward twists and turns—than what philosophers of language might have one believe.

Returning to Frege, the analytic philosopher offers a brief yet interesting commentary on translation and its role in the distinction between "Sinn" and "Bedeutung" at the beginning of his essay that will help establish a continuity with Quine's work on the indeterminacy of translation and *Arquitetura*. Whereas the logician Frege is invested in systematizing the infrastructure of language, the performative aspect of translation proves too difficult a challenge, even when considering proper and common names. In "On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*," he argues that translation only takes place at the level of "sense," an aspect that explains the "possible differences" in the "colouring and shading which poetic eloquence seeks to give sense" (155). Translators thus concentrate on the "colouring and shading" that modifies the sense of words. He does not, however, consider the problem of referentiality in translating names. Superficially, translations might seem to focus only on the meaning of words, but as Quine makes clear in *Word and Object*, there is far more at stake than the "sense" of the words when performing a translation.

For the sake of argument, let us consider that *traditionally* a "correct" translation would entail that a sentence in one language is transformed into an equivalent sentence in another language. This popular view of translation hinges on the transitive equivalencies between languages. In other words, the sense or meaning of the sentence is sustained from one language to the next. This is what Frege's cursory comment on translation seems to suggest, and it is precisely this comment that Quine contests in *Word and Object* (Miller 141). Quine challenges the semantic equivalencies between languages. According to Gilbert Harman, "Quine claims that meaning is never preserved—or rather that one can speak of preservation of meaning only relative to some general scheme of translation" (15). Much of Quine's argument in favour of the

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indeterminacy of translation is geared towards reformulating a theory of meaning, one that takes into consideration the role of stimuli in the acquisition of language. As scholar Dagfinn Føllesdal suggests in his preface to *Word and Object*, "From the very first pages of *Word and Object* Quine stressed that what we perceive, and what we take others to perceive, plays a crucial role in language learning and language use" (xviii). Behaviouristic and naturalistic in its conception of language, Quine's approach focuses on the public nature of language by integrating the role of stimuli in his philosophical scheme.

To fully grasp the reformulation that he envisions, it is important to take a careful look at the definition of "stimulus meaning" that he offers: "The stimulus meaning of a sentence for a subject sums up his disposition to assent to or dissent from the sentence in response to present stimulation" (2013, 30). Meaning is the response provoked when presenting a speaker with a sentence in a specific context of stimuli, so as to ascertain that the stimulus is linked to the utterance. What a word or sentence means is determined by the observable response given when presented with that same sentence as an inquiry. This fits in with the "objective pull" through which individuals are trained by society to "inculcate" the proper use of language (2013, 5). Society trains individuals by addressing their usage of language in regard to observable responses. Take, for example, the word "red." If a child points at a white object and says "red," the most likely response of parents will be to correct their child. Similar to behaviour modifications, so is language acquisition based on observable responses.

In Quine's famous example of "Gavagai," a linguist approaches a native who speaks a language that has no relation with other known languages and utters "Gavagai" when a rabbit appears within the native's visual field. The utterance "Gavagai" is a one-word sentence that the linguist deploys in an attempt to ascertain the native's disposition, given that specific stimuli context. If the native assents on several occasions to the utterance and visual cues of a rabbit, then the linguist would be able establish a semantic equivalency—the translation—between "Gavagai" and "Rabbit." If such a simple translation preserves meaning from one language to the next, no further problem would arise. Quine, however, pushes the matter further and explores the possible discrepancies in his philosophical experiment:

> Thus suppose that the stimulation on the heels of which the informant is asked "Gavagai?" is a composite stimulation presenting a bystander pointing to an ill-glimpsed object and saying "Gavagai". This composite stimulation will probably turn out to belong to the affirmative stimulus meaning of "Gavagai" for the informant, and not the stimulus meaning of "Rabbit" for most English speakers, on whom the force of the bystander's verbal intervention would be lost. Such cases would not fool our linguist, but they do count against defining synonymy as sameness of stimulus meaning. (33)

The successful translation of "Gavagai" for "Rabbit" presupposes the possibility of isolating the specific stimuli that establish "meaning," otherwise "intrusive information" may distort the

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synonymity between both terms. Synonymity is the equivalency between both "stimulus meanings." Although the linguist may be more or less successful in peeling away "intrusive information," there remains always an undecidable aspect in attempting a translation of "stimulus meaning." Radical translation from one language into a completely foreign one—one in which there are no cognates—makes evident the gaps between languages and the world around us. However public responses are to verbal cues, meaning is not fully contained in the speaker's dispositions. Meaning is indeterminate. In the words of Quine, "The principle of indeterminacy of translation requires notice just because translation proceeds little by little and sentences are thought of as conveying meanings severally" (2013, 71). That is, the "indeterminacy of translation" reveals the "semantic indeterminacy" of natural languages (2013, 71). When faced with two different translations, Quine argues that one would be hard-pressed to decide whether one translation was "correct" over the other.

Even if the philosophical experiment that Quine poses is mainly directed at a theory of meaning, it raises questions regarding referentiality. Meaning and naming are not entirely disjointed in language, especially in the use of common and proper names. Given the possibility of "intrusive information," how can the linguist ever be certain that "Gavagai" and "Rabbit" both refer to the same stimulus? When the native points to something quickly moving through the landscape and says "Gavagai," the linguist may consider that the reference is to the *rabbit*, although just as likely the reference might be to the fact that a *rabbit is running*. The linguist is placed at a juncture where "Gavagai" might refer simply to "Rabbit" or to "Rabbit running." Unable to make a decision as to which of the two is correct, he is left to ponder on the indeterminacy of naming. Quine suggests as much when he explores "the indeterminacies and irregularities of reference that pervade" (2013, 113). Language is vague in how it refers to the world. Thus speakers are confronted not only with an indeterminacy in meaning, but also with that of reference. "Gavagai" is a far more elusive word than what at first seemed.

Quine's philosophical analysis of the semantic indeterminacy and referential vagueness of language offers an invaluable entry into Barros' poetry. As I have argued, the Brazilian writer challenges the imprisoning of language into strict grammars. He rather prefers to "play" with words (2013, 390). Take, for example, the bird "bem-te-vi-cartola" that appears in *Arquitetura* (38). The name refers to what in English is known as the "great kiskadee." A translator working on the proper name can quickly come up with the English equivalent. However, Barros chooses to add the word "cartola" at the end, which literally means "hat." The construction of names for flora and fauna in Portuguese is based on linking words with hyphens, and so the common name of many animals has both a reference and meaning. In the case of the "bem-te-vi-cartola," it literally means "I-saw-you-well-hat." Besides the reference to a specific avifauna, there is also a play on the cheerful song of the bird as it greets passersby. The literalness of the name mimics the thing it names. And what is even more interesting, the actual name "bem-te-vi" is also an onomatopoeia derived from the indigenous Tupi language in its mimicking of the kiskadee's song. By adding the "cartola" particle to the name, the literalness of the word is highlighted. The

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"bem-te-vi" does indeed have plumage on its head that makes it look like it has a hat on. This play on verbally imitating that which is named is recurrent in Barros' poetry, although it becomes lost in the literal English translation.

Blurring the limits of meaning and reference is at the heart of *Arquitetura*. The composition of the book suggests the interweaving of poems and photographs—it acts like a play of mirrors that refracts the "photographed metaphors" and transforms the reader's gaze of the Pantanal. The book unfolds as a case, with a small volume of Lafer's photographs on the left and a corresponding volume of Barros' poetry on the right. This allows the reader to follow poems and photographs side by side. A closer look at the relationship between photographs and poems reveals how Lafer's images are not simply images of things represented in the poems. That is, the images and poems are autonomous, and can be read separately without hindering comprehension. Readers can leaf through the photographs and later return to read the poems, or *vice versa*. However, there is an interweaving between images and poems that provides a much richer reading of the book. Neither the photographs nor the poems are privileged over each other. Yet there is a conscious effort to integrate images and words as a whole. For example, when the reader opens the book—so as to read the first poem and photograph—the image on the left continues on to the second page of the first poem, giving the impression of continuity between the two. The left inside cover of the book also contains the beginning of a quotation "Penso que a harmonia é a arquitetura do nosso silêncio…" ("I believe that harmony is the architecture of our silence…") which finishes on the right inside cover "…que quase esconde o nosso júbilo e a nossa dor" ("…that almost hides our joyfulness and our pain").

The key to understanding this integration of words and images can be found in the first poem: "Tem mais presença em mim o que me falta. / Meu avesso é mais visível do que um poste. / Sábio é o que adivinha." ("It has more presence within me what I lack. / My reverse is more visible than a post. / Wise is he that guesses") (2015, 3). The first phrase hinges on the dichotomy between presence and absence, reversing both terms. That which is absent is most visible. The second phrase continues in the same vein, incorporating the notion of "opposite side" or "reverse" in the established contrast. The reader, however, is left wondering which is which. Are the photographs the "reverse," or is it the poems? The same could be said for the absence and presence binary. Are the photographs what is absent in the poems? Or are the poems what is absent in the photographs? The play between images and words seems to perform silences that lead the reader to reflecting on how language portrays the world. The composition of the book favours a meta-discourse that is inspired by the gaps of language. The circularity between words and images obliges the reader to reconsider whether a dichotomy is the best manner of reflecting the relationship between the two. There does not seem to be an equivalency between poems and photographs—they are not translatable in the traditional sense. Although one might be able to read the book with images on one side and poems on the other, they are not synonymous in their meaning.

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An example of this is the poem "Punhal" ("Dagger"):

Eu vi uma cigarra atravessada pelo sol—como se
um punhal atravessasse o corpo.
Um menino foi, chegou perto da cigarra, e disse que
ela nem gemia.
Verifiquei com meus olhos que o punhal estava
atolado no corpo da cigarra
E que ela nem gemia!
Fotografei essa metáfora.
Ao fundo da foto aparece o punhal em brasa. (6)
(I saw a cicada penetrated by the sun—as if
a dagger had pierced its body.
A child went, arrived near the cicada, and said that
she did not even whimper.
I verified with my own eyes that the dagger was
stuck in the body of the cicada
And it did not even whimper!
I photographed that metaphor.
In the background of the photo appears the dagger in embers.)

The poem presents a vivid image that Barros captures by photographing "that metaphor," a cicada out in the sun. It presents a concerned poet who wants to make sure the cicada is alright after being stabbed by sunlight. This concern does not seem entirely sincere, yet it evokes the playful naïveté of children experiencing the outdoors. The imagery deployed is very visual, containing a "cicada penetrated by the sun" as if "a dagger had pierced the body." Moreover, there is a strong narrative element to the poem, for Barros is describing an event in which there are two witnesses—himself and a child. The poem seems concrete, set in a quotidian scene in the Pantanal. The poet observes the innocent gaze of a child not yet aware that the sun cannot stab a cicada. There is, however, a dramatic pull away from the quotidian scene the moment the poet insists that he "photographed that metaphor." What seems like a "verbal sketch" of a child observing a cicada out in the sun, is actually a metaphor that the poet chooses to photograph—with words, no less. The scene referred to by the poem is actually a metaphor. The reader immediately loses his or her bearings as to the referentiality of the poem. If the cicada out in the sun is but a metaphor, then the sunlight as a dagger stabbing the cicada is a metaphor of a metaphor. Just like a play on mirrors, the reader no longer knows where the original reflection is to be found. The things named in the poem do not refer to a scene outside the poem, but become entangled in Barros' poetic diction.

No matter how concrete the poem seems, Lafer's photograph does not capture a cicada out in the sun, but rather an image that is mostly out of focus, except for a yellow leaf that

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appears to the left. The photograph displays yellow and brown blemishes of what appears to be a tree. As the reader looks closer, Lafer's photograph appears to be a close-up of a leaf that lights up as the sun hits its surface. The leaf is like an ember, burning with light. Even if it is not synonymous with the poem, it builds on the image of sunlight as a "dagger in embers" that appears at the end of "Punhal." It is the "reverse" of the poem, much the same way the poem is the "opposite side" of the photograph. Both "express" rather than "translate" a mode of seeing the world, through a gaze directed at the small things to be found in the Pantanal, such as a cicada out in the sun or a leaf lit up like an ember.

Arquitetura hinges on transforming the way readers see the world around them, whether it be through photographs or "verbal sketches." To "express" Barros' poetry is to capture the way he looks at his Pantanal. It is about displaying the "reverse" of the world, the marginal sites whose absence is most visible to the Brazilian poet. Lafer's photography in the book includes many images that are out-of-focus, only bringing out a small detail that is marginal at first. The drops of condensation that appear on the cover are representative of this infinitesimal look at the world, innocent yet deeply philosophical in its challenge to language. In many of the photographs, children appear playing in the background, as a testament to the ludic nature of Barros' gaze. An untitled poem in the book brilliantly captures how to "express" is to "un-see the world," to playfully break the rules of meaning and reference in language so as to create a new mode of expression that is never simply a translation. To express is rather to search for new words and images that stick to the things they name and fly away metaphorically:

> O abandono do lugar me abraçou com
> força.
> E atingiu meu olhar para toda a vida.
> Tudo que conheci depois veio carregado
> de abandono.
> Não havia no lugar nenhum caminho de
> fugir.
> A gente se inventava de caminhos com
> as novas palavras.
> A gente era como um pedaço de
> formiga no chão.
> Por isso o nosso gosto era só de
> desver o mundo. (31)
>
> [The abandonment of the place embraced me with
> force.
> And reached my gaze for all my life.
> Everything that I knew afterward came laden
> with abandonment.

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> There was no path in this place
> to run away.
> We would invent paths with
> new words.
> We were like a piece of
> ant on the ground.
> Because of that we simply enjoyed
> un-seeing the world.]

The poem has an autobiographical tone, as if Barros is describing his youth to express the origins of his "verbal sketches." It is the "abandonment" of the place he saw that shaped his gaze upon the world. "Abandonment" is a recurrent theme in his writing. Barros often writes about marginal and "insignificant" things—such as ants, dirt, frogs, or even trash. It "reached" his "gaze" and transformed the way he saw everything. Notice how the first few passages are almost oppressive. The "abandonment" caught hold of the poet and "embraced him with force," imbuing everything he would later see as "laden with abandonment." Barros' gaze carries the weight of those things that are abandoned. There is "no path in this place to run away," except through the walkways that "new words" allow. At this point, the poem shifts from the dead weight of "abandonment" to the promise of new transformations through language. The "un-seeing" of the Pantanal is linked to those "new words." He is aware that the "un-seeing" of the world requires becoming aware of language in all its multiplicity and indeterminacy. Language imprisoned in grammar or linguistic categories cannot "express" the richness of his world.

Next to the untitled poem is a top-down photograph of a marsh in the Pantanal. Lilly pads are smeared with thick, muddy waters in a composition of light and shadows that gives a sombre sensation to the photograph. Some of the lily pads are rotten with a yellowish hue, while dense algae linger just beneath. On the surface, the scene appears to be abandoned, as a place that many would avoid in favour of more sublime vistas. The muddy waters hide underneath a fecund world, awaiting the chance to burst forth. The photograph expresses well the sense of embryonic aspect that "abandonment" generates in Barros' poetry. In those abandoned sites that seem to have no escape, the poet finds a new language that imagines the world differently. Instead of offering a panoramic view of the landscape, Lafer follows Barros' gaze into the marginal sites of the region, the muddy shores of the swamps. Her photograph expresses the poet's "êxtase no cisco" ("ecstasy in dirt") (22).

Both the poet and photographer exploit the blurred edges of language as it names the world, revealing new modes of seeing what lies around us. Their gaze challenges how language traditionally represents the world. If one considers language to simply reflect the world in the form of words or images, then it becomes a prison that condemns humans to ignoring those marginalized sites that offer resistance. Barros' playful use of language—using words that imitate the things named, only to reveal that they are fictitious—obliges readers and translators alike to

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reconsider what it means to "express" his poetry. *Arquitetura* showcases his meta-awareness of language, far more than any other of his books. The incorporation of photographs pushes the reach of his "verbal sketches," weaves words with images, and images with words. What at first begins as an attempt to make words stick to the things they name, gradually transforms into a language game that shifts the reader's gaze out of focus. And then he refocuses the lens, emphasizing what had at first been neglected: "Aprendo com abelhas do que com aeroplanos. É um olhar para baixo que eu nasci tendo. É um olhar para o ser menor, para o insignificante que eu me criei tendo" ("I learn more from bees than airplanes. It is a looking-down gaze that I was born with. It is a gaze into the minor being, into the insignificant that I was raised with") (2015, 34). Barros challenges meaning and reference in language in order to playfully lead his readers to see the world in a new light. His collaboration with photographer Lafer bears witness to this profound sensibility for language and the Pantanal.

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