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Rumor(s)... in the alley

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Translation: Christopher Mack

Freud's expression, *unheimlich*, as translated to Portuguese from the English version of his work (uncanny), is rendered as "sinistro" [sinister] or "estranho" [strange]. In the most recent translation direct from German, the term "infamiliar" [unfamiliar] is used, which would sustain the term *heimlich*, familiar, preceded by its negation. I personally prefer "estranho familiar" [strange familiar] since this effectively supplies what is at play in what Freud attempts to refine. A familiar interior, yet which at the same time produces an affect of unfamiliarity and horror. In other words, for everyone there is something of the familiar, although this is not recognized as belonging to the being itself.

In the history of civilization horror has always been present in the scenario of humanity, be it in artistic work, or in the "monstration" (*mostração*) of human violence – which is, in fact, highly accentuated in current times. Violence and brutality are not new facts – their existence dates back to the birth of language for human beings, or rather, it is inherent in the actual structure that passes through and sustains the being of language that inhabits the fragile and mortal body of the human. The resulting horror determines that this being of language encounters comfort in the actual chain of meaning engendered by speech. Belief in meaning distances us and consoles us in our own condition of being mortals. However, over the centuries, the advent of science has marked a before and after. The "before" has been characterized by "beliefs" with universal values that retain, in a certain way, being in the world based on determined coordinates and, in particular in terms of what can be said of life's mystery and the space this occupies. Here religion played a fundamental role in maintaining a truth whose universal value was written into Christianity in Western culture, which does not mean to say that long before Christianity, religions did not also play this role, functioning as a "structural necessity" when faced with life's fragility.

The “after” is marked by the proliferation of beliefs that lead in a paradoxical manner to a devaluing of truth, in favor of the fleetingness of the symbolic coordinates that science calls into question. In other words, where once there was belief in the meaning sustained by religions, by myths, and by the supreme power of a universal truth, science has placed question marks. Truth or falsity is taken to a limit, superimposing one field over the other. True and false are no longer “absolute values”.

The public square where horror once took center stage today takes the form of social networks. Before, the horror that was demonstrated publicly was justified in the name of universal order. I speak here of the executions practiced during the Middle Ages in which the public were summoned to watch and live through horror as an example of the application of law - foolish or otherwise, it was in its name that civilization kept its mark. By this I am saying that the legitimization of horror through the power of law made its assimilation possible, even though history was written so that the memory of the unassimilable would be continually actualised.

As time goes by, we face the fragility of the law, given that the power of truth has faded, leaving horror out in the open and without contours. What is new is not the production of horror itself, but the emergence of an unassimilable “real”, that takes the place of the symbolic coordinates that sustain the power of belief.

“For modern man, there is no longer a place for the myth”, wrote Claude Lévi-Strauss. According to his thesis, the power of belief has therefore lost its central place. An appeal to belief is no longer possible when faced with the “real”. There is something in language that makes it impossible to reach and science increasingly demonstrates this. This real that holds the human back, does not hold back the ideal of science which, hand in hand with capitalism, induces in an exponentially growing curve, the absorption of the subject of language into its object of unfamiliarity – there is a coalescence of the subject with “strangeness”, which could previously be bypassed via the power of belief and myths. The brutality of the real no longer has a mediator. Politics in vigor today provides us with an example of this. The balance of forces between the powers of the republic has been broken in the interests of capital. And nostalgia for the symbolic coordinates that have disappeared is nothing more than a symptom, among others, of the contemporary world.

It is in this context, in which the real produces a symptom of civilization, that Renato Pera shows us his artistic work – fleeting like a performance, but with the letter (*letra*) of art made to survive the time. The viewer or listener does not leave that space in indifference. The Beco do Pinto, as it is known, is in the center of the city of São Paulo, and, of itself, already brings with it an aura of the “strange”. Renato takes advantage of what is already there by making it exist in the form in which it is given to him. The fiberglass speakers in the color red already capture the gaze of the viewer, personifying the gaze and the voice of the Other. However, the technological and futuristic aspect of the equipment produces a contrast with the original scenario...what voices will be heard in this junction of the old and the contemporary? Of the old traditional and the new? I would say that, in its aesthetics, this work represents the ironic spirit of the new that falls back on history, covered it in the “real” but with an aesthetic that it needs so that the unassimilable can produce the desired uncanniness in the viewer. In this sense, I would roughly define Renato’s work as an incursion into the affects of the body through irony.

There are two points to consider here: the first speaks of the affects of the body, or, as Jaques Lacan would say, the affect of the body that does not lie (in relation to the real), the only one he considered – anguish. The second deals with irony, and as both a characteristic and effect involves the deconstruction of a pre-established meaning. In other words, irony runs contrary to meaning and, as such, holds back something from the real which contains anguish as an unequivocal sign.

In addition to the visual aesthetic, the speakers personify horror by reproducing afflicted voices, shouts, laughs, cries, which, unlike everyday scenes of horror, demonstrate an unnameable presence of the objects “gaze and voice”, yet devoid of a visual representation – this is left to the viewer’s imagination which belongs to the work of elaboration, as in a dream in which the point of reality slips away in the images to protect the dreamer, except in those dreams of anguish in which the real makes the dreamer “awaken” from the dream in order to continue sleeping. The intrusion of image and language is nothing more than an attempt to produce meaning where there is none. But Renato’s work produces a rumor that awakens the viewer from a dream in which reality is nothing more than a defensive screen against the real. The rumor is what remains of this harrowing encounter between these two objects: the “gaze and the voice”. A rumor that is unassimilable in the presence of the horror, however, with beauty as the protagonist. Therein lies the irony which makes terror an enlivened character in the Beco do Pinto, and also in the arrangement and positioning of the speakers along the stairway and, naturally, the sounds

emitted by them. The rumor, as a remainder of the lived experience with the objects, becomes the letter (*letra*) of the work which echoes out for each viewer. Something can only produce an echo in the presence of a void whose representation is impossible.

This text is nothing more than a manifestation of that rumor in me.

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