

## Anna Maria Maiolino Articulations and Translations of and in Anthropophagy

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In the short story, 'The Library of Babel' (1941), Jorge Luis Borges imagines a library so vast that it is all-encompassing. Its architecture consists of superimposed hexagonal galleries. These are connected by a spiral staircase that cuts across the centre of the entire structure. The endless library holds all possible combinations of the letters of all alphabets, whether the languages are extinct, currently in use or yet to emerge. This random collection of letters is compiled in standard-size volumes, displayed in no particular or known order. All known books, whether based on fact or fiction, or yet to be written, are interspersed among an inordinate number of nonsensical compilations.<sup>2</sup> The library is absolutely dysfunctional, since its totality denies the possibility of both specificity and order, which must always be deferred, cast to the field of speculation.

A similar sense of totality is evoked in certain works by Anna Maria Maiolino. I refer to her poured ink drawings and installations with clay, where the single and simple action that gives form gains significance through repetition. As in the case of Borges's library, this significance pertains not to the specific, whether the individual drawing or object, but to the absolute completeness of the work, which must also always be deferred. While the accumulation of marks or objects tends towards totality, each single gesture evokes, but never achieves, the primordial act it seeks to reproduce. Similar to the two infinite extremes of Borges's library, these serial gestures are thus expansive in two directions: they tend towards both an origin and an end.

Elaborating on art historian Maria de Fátima Lambert's suggestion that Maiolino's drawings and installations can be 'read'<sup>3</sup> as a form of proto-writing, it may be useful to refer to Walter Benjamin's essay, 'The Task of the Translator' (1923).<sup>4</sup> One can associate the sequential mark or form-making in Maiolino's work as a search for the perfect translation of that primal mark. The failure to achieve this (as all translations are ultimately inadequate) leads to the potential infinite reproducibility of those attempts. This potentially infinite translation of a primal code invokes a notion of essence, that which lies beyond strict communicability. While Borges's narrator poses the question, 'You who read me – are you certain you understand my language?'<sup>5</sup>, Benjamin asks:

*For what does a literary work 'say'? What does it communicate? It 'tells' very little to those who understand it. Its essential quality is not communication or the imparting of information. Yet any translation that intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but communication – hence, something inessential. This is the hallmark of bad translations. But do we not generally regard that which lies beyond communication in a literary work – and even a poor translator will admit that this is its essential substance – as the unfathomable, the mysterious, the 'poetic'?*<sup>6</sup>

A similar conjunction of the singular act and its endless expansion has been proposed by Catherine de Zegher. The curator observed a resemblance between the making of Maiolino's clay 'rolls' and the act of kneading bread. Suggesting another analogy that the work sets into play between origin and finality, de Zegher went further by recalling the resemblance between bread and faeces.<sup>7</sup> The association of that which is ingested with that which is excreted presents us with a cycle that connects humanity, its past, present and future. This analogy was intended to go beyond the repetitive nature of the act of making the work itself. De Zegher refers to the relationship that Maiolino, as an artist, possesses with a particular art historical genealogy: the myth of origin that it evokes and what seems like its eternal recurrence. Once again, Benjamin's reflections on translation are particularly enlightening:

*The history of the great works of art tells us about their descent from prior models, their realisation in the age of the artist, and what in principle should be their eternal afterlife in succeeding generations. Where this last manifest itself, it is called fame. Translations that are more than transmissions of a subject matter come into being when a work, in the course of its survival, has reached the age of its fame. Contrary, therefore to the claims of bad translators, such translations do not so much serve the works as owe their existence to it. In them the life of the originals attains its latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding.*<sup>8</sup>

Maiolino invites a reading of her work in relation to the 'complete unfolding' (the fame) of the concept of anthropophagy within Brazilian art. In the catalogue for her retrospective exhibition at the Tàpies Foundation, the artist declared that she considered herself 'the faecal pellet resulting from the anthropophagous Brazilian banquet'.<sup>9</sup> Arising as an irreverent means of national assertion amid the apparently inescapable prospect of cultural derivation, Oswald de Andrade's 'Manifesto Antropófago' of 1928 proposed that the Brazilian people, irrespective of their ethnic origin, hold an archaic, pre-Cabralian Amerindian character.<sup>10</sup> Anthropophagy thus became a metaphor for the appropriative nature of Brazilian culture, one defined as inherently (culturally) cannibalistic. By claiming that, 'Only anthropophagy unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically', the manifesto sought a totality by invoking a mythical origin.<sup>11</sup> This original Amerindian spectre pervading the national character was perceived by Oswald de Andrade to be entirely coherent with the dynamics of modernity itself. The Brazilian translation of European modernism was doomed to betray its source, like a mirror that sometimes distorts, but always inverts and multiplies the image it reproduces. Brazilian *Modernismo*, from which the concept of anthropophagy emerged, thus emulated the Parisian 'call to order' wherein purism, with its Arcadian landscapes, classical and primitivist references, sought to re-affirm French culture as the rightful

inheritor of the Western tradition. Similarly, anthropophagy associated the specific, that is, the myth of origin, with a universal ideal of culture. In other words, it proposed the presence of a mythical indigenous spectre within Brazilian ethnic heterogeneity, and juxtaposed it with another myth, that of the universal character of European culture. The reflected image thus undermined the purported purity of its source.

The fact that anthropophagy, since the late 1920s, has been re-contextualised through the work of several generations of artists proves the ongoing versatility of the concept. With regard to the international dissemination and interpretation of Brazilian contemporary art, the concept is often seen as synonymous with notions of cultural hybridity or transculturation.<sup>12</sup> Some caution is necessary in such associations, the latter being perhaps a better ‘translation’ than the former, for its implied transience. Benjamin is useful here since not only can anthropophagy be understood as a form of translation, but also, and perhaps more significantly, as an inter-generational and thus genealogical art historical unfolding.<sup>13</sup> This unfolding becomes evident when considering the distinctions between the paintings of Tarsila do Amaral, who first transposed the concept pictorially in the late 1920s, and work by artists from Maiolino’s generation. While Tarsila responded to the notion of anthropophagy through the portrayal of a mythical primal figure in *Abaporu* (1928), placing it in ‘tropical Arcadian’ scenery, Maiolino re-enacted the anthropophagite feast itself.<sup>14</sup> The subject matter thus evolved from the *Abaporu* (‘the one who eats’ in the Tupi-Guarani language) to the act or sound of eating (as in Maiolino’s *Glu Glu Glu* from 1967 [p.19, p.74], for example). Maiolino’s creative trajectory is exemplary in this respect. The evolution of her work delineates how the Oswaldian notion of Anthropophagy was transformed from an overt representational theme into a procedure that would become integral to the materialisation of the work itself: a shift, in other words, from iconography to immanence.

Of course, such a transition within the internal formal procedures of art production responded to external factors. Tarsila’s paintings, and her attempted insertions into the Parisian artistic milieu, seem to have sought a Brazilian modernism for export.<sup>15</sup> While she translated the Parisian 1920s *negrofilia* into Brazilian primitivist themes, the re-emergence of anthropophagy during the 1960s responded to internal, national impasses. In yet another case of extremes resembling each other, reference to anthropophagy emerged in the mid-1960s as a form of negotiating a generalised aversion towards foreign culture. This was expressed across the political spectrum: if the left criticised American imperialism, the right-wing military government glorified Brazilian culture in the name of patriotism. Anthropophagy, in its 1960s tropicalist reincarnation, thus articulated Brazilian popular culture, kitsch and the rise of mass communication, in the face of censorship and political repression following the 1964 coup d’état. During the 1960s and 1970s, Maiolino’s work would respond to the ambivalence between the intimate and the public, between the singular, the subjective, and the critical-political potential of the work.

Maiolino identified with the notion at a level that was more profound than a mere appropriation of hegemonic culture of the *other*. It is perhaps her relation to anthropophagy that lies behind her insistence on being described as a Brazilian artist despite her Italian upbringing and the biographical references that continuously reappear in her work, such as those to the Calabrian landscape of her childhood, her experience of migration, and her complex, transnational family history. It is indeed striking that during the 1960s, an artist recently arrived in Brazil and at such a young age would become so rapidly and so intensely connected to the cultural pulse of her adopted nation. Her integration within the *Nova Figuração* group and subsequent participation in key exhibitions such as *Nova Objetividade Brasileira*, held at Rio de Janeiro’s Museum of Modern Art in 1967, are cases in point. In the latter, Hélio Oiticica’s catalogue essay invoked the anthropophagite legacy as a means of understanding the diversity of references and styles that had emerged in Brazil in the aftermath of the 1950s constructivist *avant-gardes*. Another interesting reversal took place here: rather than emulating the artistic movements arising in Europe and North America, such as pop, conceptual art and minimalism, Oiticica invoked Oswald de Andrade in order to claim an internal coherence and logic within Brazilian contemporary art. The vocabulary of popular culture and its associations with ‘bad taste’ had been important themes for the *Nova Figuração* group. As such these interests could also be understood as precedents to the cultural effervescence spurred by Oiticica’s concept and installation *Tropicália*, which was first presented at the *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* exhibition.

Settling in Rio de Janeiro in 1960, while still a teenager, Maiolino attended the – then conservative – Escola Nacional de Belas Artes, where she joined a circle of artists that would later form the core of *Nova Figuração*: Antonio Dias, Rubens Gerchman, Roberto Magalhães and Carlos Vergara. In the early 1960s, the art milieu became enthusiastic about popular imagery and its imaginary. Maiolino had enrolled in the woodcut printing course at the Escola Nacional, a technique that had strong traditional associations with popular *Cordel*<sup>16</sup> literature, to which the artist was introduced by Rubens Gerchman. *Cordel* evoked the drought-ridden culture of the country’s northeast, a region that from the early 1960s had attracted the attention of leftist movements involved with projects of alphabetisation and agrarian reform.<sup>17</sup>

Although it is unclear precisely when Maiolino became aware of the concept of anthropophagy, even the earliest surviving examples of her work absorbed the aesthetics and themes of the local *avant-garde* while conveying expressions of an intimate, affective – in short, subjective – experience. Such a diverse set of influences, combined with the artist’s invocation of the affective domain, can be found, for instance, in works such as *ANNA* of 1967 (p.17), where two figures utter the artist’s name in a speech

bubble shared between them. A number of opposing relationships are placed in tension here. The innate expressionism of the woodcut contrasts with the elegant simplicity of the palindrome. An aesthetic that evokes popular culture is configured within the picture frame, while the emphasis is on the written word and the relation between the black-and-white surfaces. Other contemporaneous works such as *A Viagem* (The Journey) or *Minha Família* (My Family), both of 1966, are more forthcoming about the identity of similar silhouettes. From these we can deduce that the figures in *ANNA* represent the artist's mother and father. The two silhouettes that pronounce the name 'ANNA' recur in another woodcut print, *Glu Glu Glu* of 1967 (p.19), which, together with an earlier version in acrylic on fabric and wood from 1966 (p.74), reference Oswald de Andrade through the onomatopoeic title and the digestive system represented in the lower half of the works. Turning concept into subject matter through figuration, these are representative examples from the iconographic period of Maiolino's relation to anthropophagy. The ways in which this reference evolved can be ascertained by comparing *ANNA* with a later work, where the genealogical theme re-emerges. In her *Photopoemaction* work *Por um Fio* (By a Thread) of 1976 (pp. 80 – 81), the artist reappears at the centre of the image. In this photograph she is connected to her mother on the left and her daughter on her right by a thread held in each of their mouths. The text in *ANNA* is replaced here by the simple thread, a line, the primal mark that precedes written language itself. Anthropophagy is still present through the oral reference but the process of making is significantly different. The transition from a manual and popular printmaking reproduction technique to a mechanical means is accompanied by a conceptual shift: the finality in *ANNA* is replaced by the notion of a potentially endless thread, where origin and infinity are set against each other.

Oswaldian irreverence was powerfully ambivalent, enough so to contain a critical positioning in light of geopolitical hierarchies, a mockery of a regime that proclaimed what it desired as the essential national character, and the possibility of absorbing a set of cultural references in order to express subjective experiences. Maiolino's work from the 1960s to the 1970s would touch upon a similar range of positions, as can be observed in *O Herói* (The Hero) of 1966 (p.75), with its mockery of military regalia, and *É o que Sobra* (What is Left Over) of 1974 (pp. 58 – 59), with its powerful commentary on violence (against the female body) and/or (self) censorship, while *Arroz & Feijão* (Rice & Beans) of 1979 (p.50) consisted of an installation that invited participants to ponder on hunger and the worldwide distribution of food.

The idea that the burden of the individual is inescapably shared with the collective is also invoked in her early work using Super 8 film and photography. The first examples of this work, produced under the military regime, refer to censorship, torture and more generally to the psychological, subjective experience of living under such conditions. As the artist herself put it:

*With the new media I attempted to elaborate on the political moment, to reflect while doing, searching in the act of poetic freedom the resistance to that which is established, imposed by the military dictatorship ... with its repression, [that] prevents human beings from reaching their plenitude ... I made use of my own body at that particular moment, not as a mere metaphor but as a truth, something that belonged to the domain of the real. Since, in a moment of repression and torture, all bodies become one in pain.*<sup>18</sup>

The body, whose frailty and finite nature is for Borges the principle impediment to deciphering the secrets held by the Library of Babel, becomes in Maiolino's work the carrier of the burden of repression and its poetic/ subjective vehicle.<sup>19</sup> It is both the single, subjective entity and the total collective self. Beyond the specifics of the historical moment of their production, Maiolino's films also recall Borges's tales by referring to the non-linearity of narratives in a similar manner to the way in which the ordering of the books in the Library of Babel (or the pages in his other related short story, 'The Book of Sand') does not follow any pre-established logic. Maiolino has stated that her films allow the possibility of interchanges within the sequential order of the images, precisely because they do not depend on a linear language.<sup>20</sup>

In the film *In-Out (Antropofagia)* (In-Out [Anthropophagy]) of 1973–74 (pp. 66 – 67), two mouths – a male and a female – undertake a wordless conversation. The frame is limited to these mouths only, shots alternating from one to the other. The female mouth is initially gagged with tape. The film progresses through a number of situations in which objects or substances are placed upon it, taken in, or expelled. In one instance, the female mouth expels a number of coloured threads leading one to associate *In-Out* with Lygia Clark's group performance-therapy, *Baba Antropofágica* (Anthropophagite Drool), also of 1973. In Clark's work a number of participants, holding cotton reels in their mouths, 'vomit' multi-coloured cotton lines over another participant. Despite the fact that Clark's performance took place in Paris, Maiolino openly acknowledges that she had been an important mentor during the 1960s. The Oswaldian reference here becomes a testament to the narrow conceptual path both artists held, and is demonstrative of the general complicity between Brazilian artists during that period.

It is perhaps no coincidence that Maiolino's association of the single with the collective body bears similarities with the fundamental basis of Oswaldian anthropophagy, where the spectre of the native is present in the collective socio-cultural being. For practitioners in the 1960s the re-emergence of anthropophagy invoked ideas around viscosity that increasing privileged the body, participation and performance. But for Maiolino, anthropophagy would additionally have personal significance as a poetic tool through which the artist could articulate her own search for belonging. Although immediately recognisable as a comment on censorship, *In-Out (Antropofagia)* can also be understood as a response to the condition of being culturally displaced, with the

communicative limitations that this implies.

Maiolino's work over the course of the 1980s would undergo significant changes, particularly with the gradual dissolution of the military regime and the fragmentation of artistic practices characteristic of that moment. Yet, while it is not entirely surprising to find Maiolino confessing her disappointment with the fragmentation of concepts, themes and issues that had informed much of the artistic production of the 1970s, it seems paradoxical that she would express her discontent with the general abandonment of the belief in totality, in the transcendental power of art. This seems odd, coming from someone whose practice survived despite personal trials, and whose feminine and migrant subjectivity had been such an important aspect of her work. The artist explains this paradox as resulting from anxieties generated by the sense of lack produced by displacement, which in turn drives a desire for totality, for a kind of communion within the collective. The foreigner is, after all, always incomplete in her new environment. Such a moment of creative crisis, it could be argued, would mark the beginning of the artist's own transformation of anthropophagy as a concept:

*My work ... produced by the 'doing hand' as the critic Paulo Venancio Filho called it, tries to bring a totality of fragments to the state of being a single work. There is an immanent anxiety about the totality, the longing for a whole is part of the process.*<sup>21</sup>

Maiolino's realisation that her work must respond to the abandonment of certainties and the fragmentation of judgement recalls Borges's account of the gradual dissipation of joy following the hypothesised wholeness of the library. Interestingly, it is at this moment, from the 1980s onwards, that the relation with anthropophagy becomes absorbed by the process of art-making itself; in other words, Maiolino becomes engaged with the articulation of the very myths that sustain that concept.

Entrevidas (Between Lives) of 1981/ 2010 (pp. 84 – 85) is perhaps the moment when this first occurs, as the individual body walks carefully through eggs scattered across the street. A multitude of proto-beings, archetypal symbols of origin, are invoked. Reference to Anthropophagy has lost all connection to its traditional iconography and is now translated into the realm of the symbolic. The photographic medium frames the photopoemaction as the 'self' traverses a multitude of points of origin, rendering time both still and transient. In a statement made in 2002, Maiolino expressed the significance of the egg in her work as:

*OVO, Portuguese for 'egg', has an 'O' before and an 'O' after the 'V', 'V' being the first letter of Vitoria (Victory) and its symbol. A parallel reading gives us the meaning: 'Ovo Vive, Vive Ovo' (Egg Lives, Live Egg). Thus, looking at the way the word itself is written reinforces it as an archetype par excellence of the OVO – life. Furthermore, it reinforces the presupposition that the word OVO forms a palindrome in that it can be read forwards and backwards. The OVO shares the simplicity of the ovality of the zero '0' – the smallest form par excellence – which to the Hindu means: 'previous to realisation – the aura of nothing', and considered the 'root of diversity'. Hence, faced with the egg we are faced by nothing and everything; the empty and the full; the beginning as past, the end and the infinite.*<sup>22</sup>

To conclude this tentative conjunction between a short story about an infinite library, a 1920s manifesto, an essay on the theory of translation and the work of a contemporary artist, it is worth remembering Maiolino's last solo exhibition in London. Her clay installations at the Camden Arts Centre occupied the site of a former north London library reading room. The coincidence was uncanny, although perhaps not improbable, since this was precisely what led me to suggest the association with Borges's tale in the first place. The library, in other words, already contained this text before it had been written, as well as its different versions, its translations and enunciations. How appropriate, then, that this essay re-emerges to accompany an exhibition that begins its itinerary at the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in Italy, Maiolino's country of birth, and ends at Whitechapel Gallery, which has incorporated the neighbouring library as part of its recent expansion.

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1 This essay has been adapted from a keynote paper, 'Anna Maria Maiolino: Utopias e Subjetividades', presented at the 20th annual meeting of the ANPAP (National Association of Researchers in Fine Arts), held at UERJ (Rio de Janeiro State University) in September 2011. A shorter version of that paper, 'Anna Maria Maiolino's Articulations of the Notion of Anthropophagy', was delivered in February 2010 at the conference, Sub-Objects and Studio Work: From Eva Hesse to Anna Maria Maiolino, held at the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Art, University College London, University of London.

2 Borges's narrative discusses the theoretical speculations of a 'librarian of genius' through which he evokes some interesting examples: 'All – the detailed history of the future, the autobiographies of the archangels, the faithful catalogue of the library, thousands and thousands of false catalogues, the proof of the falsity of those false catalogues, a proof of the falsity of the true catalogue, the Gnostic gospel of Basilides, the commentary upon that gospel, the commentary on the commentary of that gospel, the true story of your death, the translation of every book into every language, the interpolations of every book into all

books, the treatise Bede could have written (but did not) on the mythology of the Saxon people, the lost books of Tacitus.' Jorge Luis Borges, 'La Biblioteca de Babel', in *El Jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*, Editorial Sur, Buenos Aires, 1941, trans. Andrew Hurley, *The Library of Babel*, David R. Godine, Boston, MA, 2000, p. 23.

3 Maria de Fátima Lambert, 'Anna Maria Maiolino', in *Anna Maria Maiolino: Order and Subjectivity*, ed. Michael Asbury and Garo Keheyan, exhibition catalogue, Pharos Centre for Contemporary Art, Nicosia, October 2007, pp.79 – 89.

4 Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in *Selected Writings, Volume I, 1913 –1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1969, pp. 253 – 263.

5 Borges, 2000, p. 35.

6 Benjamin, 1969, p. 253.

7 Catherine de Zegher, "'Ciao Bella": The Insand Outs of a Migrant', in *Anna Maria Maiolino: Vida Afora / A Life Line*, ed. Catherine de Zegher, exhibition catalogue, The Drawing Center, New York, January – February 2002, pp.81–105. Hélio Oiticica suggested a similar analogy in his essay 'Brasil Diarréia', in which he discusses the dilution of the notion of anthropophagy and its relation to the appropriation of Tropicália by the culture industry. See Hélio Oiticica, 'Brasil Diarréia' in *Arte Brasileira Hoje, Paz e Terra, Rio de Janeiro, 1973*, trans. in Hélio Oiticica, exhibition catalogue, Witte De With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, February – April 1992, pp.17–20

8 Benjamin, 1969, p. 255.

9 Anna Maria Maiolino, in *Anna Maria Maiolino*, ed. Helena Tatay, exhibition catalogue, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, October 2010 – January 2011, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela, February – May 2011, Malmö Konsthall, May – August 2011, p. 97.

10 The expression 'pre-Cabralian' refers to the period prior to the 'discovery' of Brazil. Pedro Álvares Cabral, the Portuguese navigator (according to consensual history) first landed on Brazilian soil on 22 April 1500.

11 Oswald de Andrade, 'Manifesto Antropófago', in *Revista de Antropofagia*, May 1928, trans. in Dawn Ades, *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1820 –1980*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT and London, 1989, p.312.

12 Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas Híbridas: Estrategias para Entrar y Salir de la Modernidad*, Editorial Grijalbo, Mexico, 1989, trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1990; Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y del azúcar*, Biblioteca Ayacucho, Caracas, 1940, trans. Harriet de Onís, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1947, repr. Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 1995.

13 Benjamin expresses this transitory nature of translation as follows: 'For just as the tenor and the significance of the great works of literature undergo a complete transformation over the centuries, the mother tongue of the translator is transformed as well. While a poet's words endure in his own language, even the greatest translation is destined to become part of the growth of its own language and eventually to perish with its renewal. Translation is so far removed from being the sterile equation of two dead languages that of all literary forms it is the one charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own.' Benjamin, 1969, p. 256

14 Michael Asbury, 'Parisienses no Brasil, brasileiros em Paris: relatos de viagem e modernismos nacionais', in *Concinnitas: Revista do Instituto de Artes da UERJ*, year 9, no.12, July 2008, p. 47. Other publications where I explore the subject of anthropophagy as a tropical Arcadian myth and its association with French purism and the 'return to order', include: Asbury, 'Tracing Hybrid Strategies in Brazilian Modern Art', in *Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Painting: Hybridity, Hegemony, Historicism*, Critical Forum Series, ed. Jonathan Harris, Liverpool University Press and Tate Liverpool, 2003, pp.139 – 70. Asbury, 'Some Notes on the Contamination and Quarantine of Brazilian Art', in *Art/ Histories in Transcultural Dynamics: Narratives, Concepts and Practices at Work, 20th and 21st Centuries*, ed. Pauline Bachmann, Melanie Klein, Tomoko Mamine and Georg Vasold, Wilhelm Fink, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2017, pp.141–15

15 See Paulo Herkenhoff, 'Tarsila: deux et unique', in *Tarsila do Amaral: Peintre Brésilienne à Paris 1923 –1929*, exhibition catalogue, Maison de L'Amérique Latine, Paris, December 2005 – February 2006, pp.12 – 52.

16 Cordel literature is a popular genre of unbound printed booklets or pamphlets containing folk novels and verse, written and oral, most prevalent in northeastern Brazil. Illustrated with woodcuts of representations of the popular imaginary, they are sold regularly in markets and fairs where they are displayed on rope clotheslines (cordão), from which they derive their name.

17 With the coup d'état that installed the military regime in April 1964, much of the proximity between left-wing militants and marginalised sectors of the population was curtailed. Intellectuals and artists were still able to continue certain connections until 1968 when hard-line repression was imposed.

18 Anna Maria Maiolino, 'Notes on Works', 2009, pp. 96 –100.

19 Borges describes the Babel librarian as seeking to understand or at least speculate on the wholeness of the library while being restricted by the limitations of his own mortality.

20 Maiolino, 2009, p.103.

21 Anna Maria Maiolino, in 'A Conversation between Holly Block and Anna Maria Maiolino', in Anna Maria Maiolino: Vida Afora /A Life Line, ed. Catherine de Zegher, exhibition catalogue, The Drawing Center, New York, January – February 2002, p. 356.

22 Maiolino, 2009, p.90. Note that 'Vitoria' recalls the name of Maiolino's mother, Vitalia, which further associates this work with ANNA and Por um Fio.<sup>2</sup>