

## "I AM A HALLUCINATION ON THE TIP OF YOUR EYES": POETRY READING AT THE ROBERTO PIVA LIBRARY

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### ABSTRACT

This article develops a visual approach of the meetings for reading poems present in the works that belong to the Roberto Piva library, located at São Paulo downtown. By presenting photographs taken during the encounters, extracts of poems and a description of the environment, the reader is invited to participate of the reading sessions and of the urban landscape to which the poet Roberto Piva belonged.

### KEYWORDS

Roberto Piva;  
contemporary poetry;  
São Paulo; library;  
poetry reading.

### VISION OF SÃO PAULO AT NIGHT<sup>1</sup>

It was seven o'clock on a hot Thursday night at São Paulo. Downtown, the streets were filled with an infinity of red lights coming from the rear lamps of cars, as if an almost motionless fire snake was slithering. The heavy traffic on the streets reaffirmed, each night, its metropolis character; but, for a moment, it was the garbage trucks and the constructions of the gas company that were giving the tedious rhythm to the scene. The city then invited me to get off the bus. From the pavement of República Square, it emerged people talking on the sidewalks, tents that belonged to people that live on the streets, sellers of cell phone cables, smoke coming from barbecues, very loud music and some piles of garbage. Perhaps I have also passed by rascals playing with yo-yos by the abyss' door, Chet Baker howling on the gramophone and sparrows drunk of soda, the same ones that Piva saw there, decades ago.

One could smell the urban summer all over the place. But the synesthetic experience of walking in downtown's streets did not smooth over my hurry to arrive where I had planned. Not even when I passed by the "monument of time" – description of Nichile's watch made by the poet Guilherme de Almeida – that stands eight meters above the floor of Antônio Prado Square. I kept going a few more steps by São Joao Avenue, crossed the corner of Martinelli building and, finally, stopped in front of the number 108.<sup>2</sup> The entrance door of the building announced a shooting range on the under floor. I checked the address: the Roberto Piva library was really there, but on the second floor.

1. Reference to the poem "Visão de São Paulo à noite / Poema Antropófago sob Narcótico", the fourth of *Paranoia* (1963), by Roberto Piva. A facsimile of the book was reedited by Instituto Moreira Salles (IMS) in 2000, with the same graphic project designed by Wesley Duke Lee. In 2009, the work was republished by IMS, but this time it received a new graphic and editorial project, as well as a preface by Davi Arrigucci Jr.

2. From the window of the room used for the meetings, there is a view of Pedro Lessa Square, at Anhangabaú Valley, where is located the Correios Cultural Center and, across the street, is Martinelli building (photo 1). On the background, the iconic Banespa Building emerges as a continuation of the lines of the sidewalk and of the other buildings, almost like a mirage.



PHOTO 1

“The world would have to be divided  
horizontally by affinities,  
not vertically, and without borders.”  
(Joan Brossa, *Sumário astral*)

Located at Bertolli Palace, the library began its activities, open to the public, on March 27<sup>th</sup>. The collection has around 6 thousand volumes that belonged to the poet Piva, and began to be known and consulted by people that did not visit his apartment at Canuto do Val Street, next to Santa Cecilia’s church. Instead of being fragmented into thematic collections to be donated or even sold to public institutions or universities, the library was conserved in its unity and began to have a double role. On one hand, it allows the work of Piva to be contextualized through his own literary references, since he read classic authors, like Dante; surrealists, like Artaud; and he did not leave aside a variety of works on occultism, anarchism, use of drugs and social sciences. On the other hand, the library gathers people around the practice of reading and listening to poetry, which permit – as the poet, editor and responsible for the project Gabriel Kolyniak told me later – “people to reach certain states of poetry”.

I hurried up. On the second floor of the building, one of the poetryreading sessions, that take place on Tuesday nights, had just begun in the library. I was a little late, but since the meetings are open to the public, nobody was waiting for me. Actually, people arrive and leave all the time during the sessions because they are free to do so. I decided to go up it by the stairs that go around an ancient elevator with manual closing of the doors, going through the innumerable shoe marks impregnated on the steps over the decades. In the aisles that connect the different

rooms, the floor was covered with an adhesive paper that looks like parquet floor. A curious contrast between the industrial modernity from the plastic and the big ancient windows from where one can see the windows of the other apartments and a small courtyard covered with cement. I was very curious to see some people that were smoking on the windowsills. On the exact window in front of where I stood, I saw Gabriel talking to people in one of the rooms.

I have met Gabriel Kolyniak by a common friend, Tomás Troster, perhaps in 2012. Tomás and Gabriel have met at PUC-SP a few years before, where they studied philosophy and literature, respectively. Their interest and enthusiasm for poetry and visual arts – besides a great friendship – led them to create, in 2010, *Córrego* journal (and, later, Gabriel created *Córrego* publisher). Tomás had invited me to make a contribution, so I had sent them a poetic prose,<sup>3</sup> which was published in the third edition of *Córrego* – and I would have become a collaborator in other editions – so Gabriel and I had met in a few occasions.

Since October 2015, Gabriel and other poets and Piva's friends were involved in the creation of a cultural center for Piva's collection, which was consulted by many people in the poet's apartment.<sup>4</sup> I have heard about this project due to a financial campaign on crowdfunding<sup>5</sup>, and I contributed to it even though I did not attend this literary group. The project seemed important and urgent to me and I also believed that Gabriel was a serious editor. Besides that, there was something both moving and courageous in preserving the private collection of a marginal poet, especially because it was an independent project in a city like São Paulo. Finally, on March 2017 the project succeeded and the result was the reading sessions on the collection's works. Those were the steps that conducted me to that library for the first time.

3. The poetic prose is a modern genre of literature and seems to indicate a contradiction. However, it consists in a literary composition that presents poetic qualities or techniques, such as symbols, metaphors, fragmentation, poetic voice etc., without presenting line break or metric, which are usually characteristic of poetry writing. Fernando Paixão, writer and professor of literature, mentions *Finnegans wake* (1939), by James Joyce, as a radical example of this modern genre which has an experimental character and "explores, in an integrated way, the formal, musical and imagistic aspects of writing" (Paixão 2013, 152). In Portuguese, a work of a comparable magnitude is *Grande sertão: veredas* (1956), by Guimarães Rosa, in which Riobaldo's narrative is charged with a strong poetic which is integrated to the environment and to the Brazilian sertão's language.

4. Among those who collaborated with the beginning of the project were Gabriel Kolyniak, poet and editor of *Córrego*; Claudio Willer and Roberto Bicelli, poets and close friends of Piva; Gustavo Benini, ex-companion of the poet and also copyright owner of his works; Vanderley Mendonça, editor of *Demônio Negro*; and Guilherme Ziggy, poet and translator (Kolyniak 2017).

5. In the last few years, it has been common to appeal to crowdfunding, which is an online platform available to receive funding to develop projects (for example, to publish a book, to make a reportage or to open a cultural center). The donations can be made during a certain period of time on a webpage where the project and the way the financial resources will be used are explained to the public.

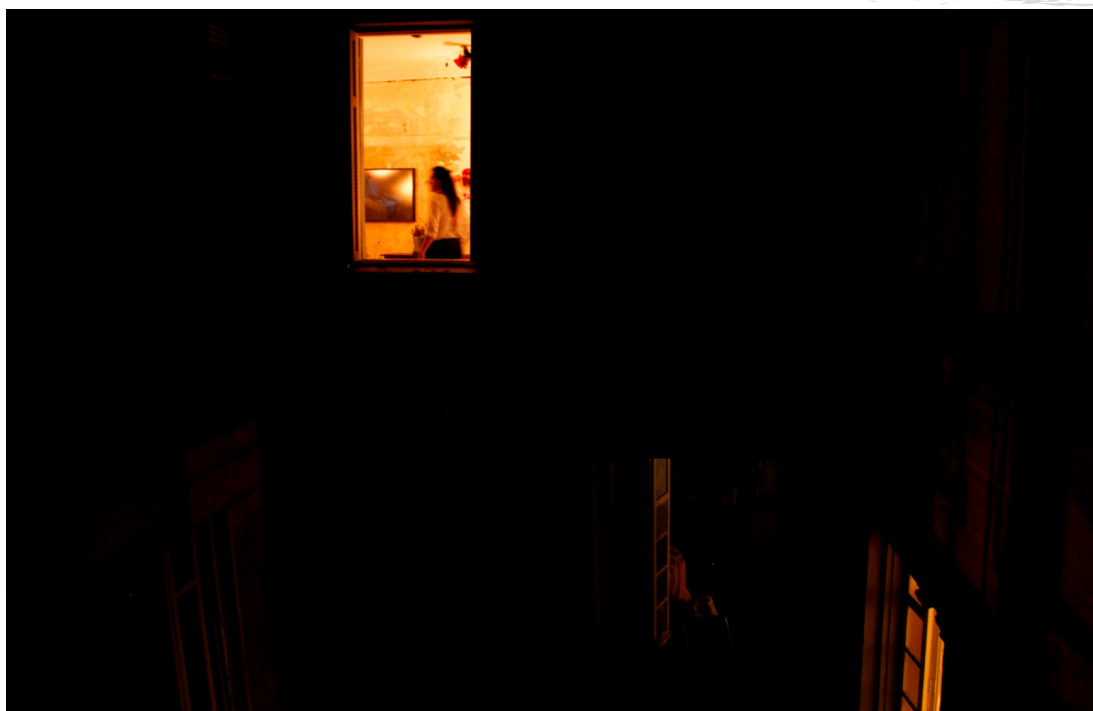


PHOTO 2

“This society is a cage for the mammal.”  
(Michael McClure, “99 theses”)

#### **I AM A MACHINE GUN IN A STATE OF GRACE:<sup>6</sup> THE POET ROBERTO PIVA**

Roberto Piva was born in São Paulo, on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1937, at the Pro Matre hospital. He spent his childhood between Brotas and Analândia (cities in São Paulo’s countryside), where his parents were farmers and, during his adolescence, he studied at Mackenzie, Piratininga and Oswaldo Cruz, returning to the farm on weekends by train. Piva said that he had no interest whatsoever in formal studies, considered by him as “a dead wisdom”, “neither efficacious nor efficient”, so he abandoned school (Piva, cited in Hungria and D’Elia 2011, 11). According to his memories of this period, Piva said the following:

*Before I first came to São Paulo, I did not have any access to literature. (...) There [at the farm], my father’s personal library had Stefan Zweig’s romances. It was heterogeneous but full of useless books that do not reveal the human soul in its deepness. When we moved to the city, I started to read. My parents bought an apartment on Major Sertório Street, close to João Sebastião bar, number 577, Jacobina building. They did not like poetry, did not encourage it and did not have any interest whatsoever (Piva, cited in Hungria and D’Elia 2011, 12).<sup>7</sup>*

6. This is a verse of “Poema vertigem”, from the book *Ciclones* (1997), by Roberto Piva, republished in volume 3 of his complete works, edited by Globo (2008).

7. This statement is in the beautiful work *Os dentes da memória*, by Camila Hungria and Renata D’Elia, who organized a series of interviews done between 2007 and 2010 with Roberto Piva, Claudio Willer, Roberto Bicelli and Antonio Fernando de Franceschi, along with many people that knew them and made part of this group of friends. All four of them were poets born in São Paulo’s state, and have animated the cultural scene in the city, circulating in the streets, bars, theaters, movie theaters and poetry readings. In this journalistic book, full of photographs, the authors have not only recovered the trajectory of the four friends, but also São Paulo’s cultural events and scenarios that have left their mark on the history of Brazilian contemporary poetry.

Therefore, we can notice that Piva did not have any contact with what is considered acclaimed literature during his childhood and part of his adolescence. This contact would happen – very intensely and by means of a profusion of writers that appear in Piva's work in a dialogic and intertextual way, with citations and references to authors, and also in epigraphs and mentions – only when he arrived at São Paulo. Curiously, when mentioning some of his artistic references when he was young, he evokes comic books and movies, rather than literature:

(...) my formation years, as I always say, consisted in soccer, sex with boys, Hegel and São Paulo's countryside woodlands. And comic books, which are something very important. Those days there was no television. (...) Most people would skip the movies to go to school, I skipped classes to go to the movies (Piva, cited in Cohn 2009, 166).<sup>8</sup>

A few years later, Piva graduated from high school in an adult school so he could work. Between 1971 and 1974 he studied Social Studies at Faculdade Farias de Britto, located in Guarulhos, and also studied Social Sciences at Escola de Sociologia e Política. Then, Piva taught History, Moral and Civic Education, and Brazilian Social and Political Organization, both in public and private schools, until 1983, when he abandoned teaching for good (cf. Hungria and D'Elia 2011, 97-101). One of his former students, the artist Maria Teresa Louro, tells her bewilderment at the unconventional classes of that eccentric teacher:

Piva was the teacher of my first class, at 7:30 a.m., at Externato Assis Pacheco, located in the neighborhood of Perdizes. It was the fifth grade, and he gave classes of Brazilian Social and Political Organization. Sometimes he would not follow the program and read Marquis de Sade. No one would say a word, but none of us understood a thing. Suddenly he decided to give us practical exercises: "well, we will make a surrealist poem". Then each one of us took a piece of paper and wrote a phrase, then we folded it and passed it to the person behind us. And the one that was behind us wrote another phrase without reading what was written before. Then Piva read all that. It did not make much sense, but he explained us that it was a surrealist process of creation and he said to us that he should be teaching us poetry (Louro, cited in Hungria and D'Elia, 2011, 100).

8. The influence these media have had on Piva's poetry can be noticed. In an introduction to Piva's work, Claudio Willer states that the images present in *Paranoia* "have a cinematographic syntax, which justify everything that Piva has declared on the importance of the cinema and the comic books in his formation" (Willer, cited in Piva 2005, 152). Still on the matter of cinema to the poet, it is interesting to notice that Piva had a peculiar interest in Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975). In the library, there is a whole section filled with rare works of the Italian filmmaker and also a file with newspaper cuttings about him. Gabriel Kolyniak says that Piva's fascination for Pasolini can be found in at least three elements: the possibility of having an erotic relation in unexpected places (behind a bush, in a park, at a sauna) and the freedom to openly talk about these experiences; the interest for the eroticism of marginality, the underworld, as well as the political provocations done to the right and the left wing; and the obscure and controversial circumstances involved in Pasolini's brutal assassination, which – due to Piva's provocative personality and life style – could have resulted in a similar act against himself.

Piva's explosive, transgressive, scornful and excessive personality, associated with his muscled body and deep voice, made him very known in São Paulo. Claudio Willer reminds of his first impressions of Piva, in 1959, of whom he became a very close friend:

Piva was already a legend in this town in late 1950s, when I studied at Dante Alighieri School. I already knew who he was since he was renowned as a perverted and a pederast, and for getting involved in all sorts of mess, but he was also known for being cult, erudite and for participating of groups and studying philosophy. He was "the character" (Willer, cited in Hungria and D'Elia 2011, 9).

Piva has said in several occasions that "there is no experimental poetry without an experimental life" (Piva, cited in Hungria and D'Elia 2011, 35). His verses express this almost total identification between lyrical and empirical subject: his experiences in the cities he has been through, the authors he read, his lovers, his lysergic experiences and also his interest for shamanism are in his poems.

There is a beautiful introductory essay to Piva's work, written by the poet, essayist and translator Claudio Willer (2005), published as the postface to the first volume of Piva's complete works published by Globo. In this essay, Willer organizes and comments Piva's works and, also, he makes clear the inseparability between his biography and his poetic work. Piva emerges in the literary scene in 1961, in the *Antologia dos novíssimos*, edited by Massao Ohno, who has gathered 24 young authors. In that same year, Ohno published *Ode a Fernando Pessoa* as a pamphlet in a long paper stripe. However, the author's first book, *Paranoia*, was published only in 1963 by Ohno. In this book, Piva could not "be situated and [did not] fit himself in any literary movements, in which the Brazilian poetry was spread in the second half of the XX century", and also this work moved between "the scatological, the pornographic, the grotesque" and "the lyrical and passionate, the sublime and the marvelous". Nonetheless, it has had a cold reception among the critics.

In the following year, Piva published *Piazzas*, which was full of poetic images and visuality, just like the previous book. After twelve years of an editorial silence – but not of poetic production – emerges *Abra os olhos e diga Ah!* (1976), a work full of enthusiasm and with a lyrical subject who is accompanied by "an angel in the bathroom loving the Paris Commune". A few years later, Piva publishes *Coxas* (1979), a work with a lot of erotic and erudite elements, with references to *Mèphistophélès et l'androgyne* (1995), by Mircea Eliade, as well as other references to myths, rites of initiation and shamanism. *20 poemas com Brócoli* (1981) was the following book, which resulted of a rereading of Dante Alighieri's *The divine comedy* – one of Piva's favorite works, of which he had a deep

knowledge – but without leaving aside dialogues with other authors. In *Quizumba* (1983), he suggests a pact with the devil; according to Willer, “if, formerly, he had visions of Dante’s Hell, now he meets he Devil himself” (2005, 176). After another long pause, Piva makes a comeback with *Ciclones* (1997), which has shamanic trance poems, and he finds sacred manifestations and the nature inhabited by gods, and also contains the libidinous ecstasy that characterizes all of his works.<sup>9</sup>

Even though Piva had a large poetic production – about which its quality and unique diction was never denied – in several moments there was a silence concerning his work coming from the literary critic and the academia. Even considering that Piva declared himself as a marginal writer, who made part of counterculture and who has never been attached to schools of institutions, the new readers of each generation probably did not read his works and remained unaltered. Moreover, the recent publication of Piva’s complete works and the re-edition of *Paranoia* have attracted a new interest for him. He may have been boycotted in a few periods but he was never completely forgotten. As he stated himself: “I am not a marginal poet, I am marginalized. And it means that my poetry has its own dynamite and reaches generations that I have never expected to reach” (Piva, cited in Lima 2005).

Roberto Piva died on July 3, 2010, at São Paulo, at dawn, a few weeks before turning 73 years old. According to Camila Hungria and Renata D’Elia, a moment after the group of friends that were saying their final goodbye to the poet arrived at the Vila Alpina crematorium, an immense hawk flew over carrying a dead bird on its beak (2011, 186). The hawk was the animal that Piva considered as his shamanic animal.<sup>10</sup>

#### ON POETRY AND PHOTOGRAPHY

I have participated of some reading sessions in the beginning of 2017 but it did not last very long, due to the winter and to the rushing routine in the metropolis. A few months later I came back to the library to produce a visual narrative, searching for ways to relate photography and the experience of reading poems. More than portraying what happens during the reading

9. In the introductory note to the third volume of Piva’s complete works (2008), Alcir Pécora, professor and literary critic, says that Piva’s poems that were written after 1980s are oriented in a contemporary poetry style that is known as “etnopoetry”. This term was created by the North American poet Jerome Rothenberg (who is cited by Piva in the epigraph), and it refers to poems that gather the roots of native North Americans’ chants, its ritual power and native’s cosmovision. Piva preferred to define his works that were written in such style as “shamanic poetry”.

10. Piva’s approach to shamanism has remote origins. His interest for archaic techniques of ecstasy – to mention one of the ways the poet used to refer to these spiritual manifestations – begins in his childhood, in his family’s farm. There, he had meetings with a “*mestiço* of Indians and black people, who light campfires” and read people’s visions (Hungria and D’Elia 2011, 89). In the 1960s, he started to attend to Dona Mãezinha’s Umbanda *terreiro* [backyard], at Cidade Dutra. Later, he was initiated in Catimbó (a traditional ritual that incorporates Pajelança, Spiritism and some Catholic influence), and he even worked as a healer shaman for a period. Furthermore, Piva said that he had a great interest and a bibliographical knowledge on this subject (Piva, cited in Weintraub and Damazio 2001).

sessions with photographic images, with the intention of “attributing authority and realism to the ethnographic account”, I aimed to construct a visual narrative that allowed to “elucidate non-verbal communication”, that is, “situations, lifestyles, gestures, social actors and rituals” of the library’s attendees (Bittencourt 1998, 199). In the process of constructing this narrative, I realized that both poetry and photography “are world’s cuttings transformed into language, a window that separates and also communicates with reality through its distances” (Navas 2017, 20).

Therefore, photography seemed to be a way of establishing a dialogue between poetry and the library’s images: the photography mediates both and, at the same time, it turns the image’s meaning into a quicksand, with no fixed points. The reading sessions become, then, an open poetic space, provoking the imagination of the ones that look at the photographs.

Photography and poetry produce images by cutting reality, beyond codification – this is what assures keep their relation with the present, despite of their historical localization. Ultimately, the cut, that is, what is occulted and presented, shows both the production and the interpretation of these images and, consequently, compels the person who receives the image to find meanings for it (Navas 2017, 21). The visuality created by the photos presented in this article, which implies a cutting and an organization of that space and temporality, is also constituted of a temporal suspension. Barthes calls attention to a certain immobilization of time in photography, to “an enigmatic point of inactuality, a strange stasis, the very essence of a *stoppage*” (1984, 136). In this sense, images produce meaningful cuts in time, which can be stressed by discontinuities of space itself.

In making the assemblage of this visual narrative, I tried to construct an *imaginary* of the reading sessions, where the atmosphere is only suggested by the photographic image (fragmented by definition) and an excerpt of one among the poems that have been read in the meetings. For this reason, I withdraw any realist pretension of photography, leaving open to interpretation to you, the reader-participant of the reading sessions, an articulation between description, poem and photography, as you visually explore the photos presented here, as an invitation to a visual *flânerie*.

To blend visual images with poetic images does not indicate an intention to illustrate or to represent the library. I present here just some cutouts of my presence in the field, symbolically negotiated through the camera lenses. For this reason, the excerpts of poems that go along with the photographs do not correspond to what was being read in that moment, in a synchronic logic. From affinities that I found as I re-read some poems of the reading sessions, poetic and photographic images agglutinated.<sup>11</sup>

11. It should be mentioned that the poems read on the reading sessions that took place in the library – and that make part of this montage – are in works that can be found in Piva’s collection but also in other books that are eventually brought by the attendees to be read in the group.



PHOTO 3

“(…) there was no more space for the words to grow, unless they got entangled in each other and their screams mingled and the words were all inevitably united and screamed all at the same time in a way that far away it was one huge scream, that further away it was transformed into a whisper and even further one could not hear a thing.”  
(Ana Hatherly, “39 tisanas”)

#### WHY GATHER TO READ POETRY? SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON SURREALISM

On October 10, I went to Palacete Bertolli again. That time, I went to a room on the third floor. Since last July, reading sessions started to take place in a room that serves as dressing room, meeting room, collective art studio of painting, photography, engraving and printing. Since the use of the room is multiple, its configuration is permanently changing: the chairs and the tables are each day in different places, depending on the activity that has taken place there; new objects appear and also disappear on the next week; the lighting can be dramatic and emphasize certain places, being sometimes cold and harsh, other times being warm and intimate. In that room, daily time and space are suspended. The participants read and talk about poetry in a time and space artificially created by the reading session and by the poems read.

The collection itself had been transferred to the 4th floor, in a room with controlled access at the Lâmina studio<sup>12</sup>, which shares certain rooms

12. “Place dedicated to polymorphous art and to make inventions in contemporary art, located on the 4th floor of a building that was constructed in the 1940s, at São Paulo’s historical center. It was inaugurated on November 2011 as a gallery, creative studio and artistic residency, as an independent cultural center. Lâmina studio stimulates research on art and promotes the works of new artists in the contemporary scene, creating an environment where there is a permanent exchange between visual arts, music, dance, contemporary circus, cinema and poetry. The studio animates debates aiming new poetic narratives and new public and cultural policies in Brazil, since it is located on the center and the margins of São Paulo” (Circuito Polifônico 2014). In photo 3, it is pictured one of the studio’s bathroom walls, in which the writings make prominent the relation of this cultural center with theater, poetry and visual arts.

with Roberto Piva library – like the one where the reading sessions take place. The books that Piva had in his apartment were not kept in a strict organization. On the contrary, the books were organized solely based on how they were close to his research or his poetic thoughts (Pavam 2016).<sup>13</sup> And, according to Gabriel, many volumes were sold in antiquarians or offered as a gift by the poet to his friends or to people he knew and had relationship with. This has significantly changed Piva's collection throughout his life and, in its final form, presented some gaps.

Despite of Piva's non-systematic organization, as the collection was being assembled in the library that has his name, Gabriel and a librarian have catalogued the volumes to make it easier to search for books. However, this organization cannot be understood from the logic of many large institutions that have libraries, since the collection's categories present, in a way, Piva's aesthetic outlines and interests. After all, they were organized and structured by friends who knew him and know his work deeply.

Piva's works were stored by Gustavo Benini, a young man who had a spiritual, affective and intellectual relationship with the poet. Gustavo lived in the same apartment with Piva; he took care of him, especially in his final years, when he was ill, until Piva's death, in 2010. Before his death, he bequeathed his collection and his work's rights to Gustavo, since he had long been distant of his biological family.

A few years later, Gustavo moved and the collection still had not found a destiny. As Gabriel told me, he stored himself the books and, in 2015, he started to think about creating activities around the collection, to have the library as a reason to gather people around it and to discuss literature. The focus of all that has always been the young people; Gabriel said that Piva has always been interested in transmitting his knowledge, and has showed interest for this kind of activity: "Poetry allows us to enter into realities that are not experienced by most people", according to Gabriel. "These are practices that allow us to enter another level of thought. We do not necessarily meet true information, in the sense of poetry's efficacy as a method to obtain knowledge".<sup>14</sup>

Besides the books, the collection has manuscripts of Piva's works, notebooks and folders where he worked on his verses, and also some

13. The German historian of art Aby Warburg (1866-1929) adopted a peculiar organizational system in his vast library (which had more than 65 thousand works when he passed away), named *Mnemosyne*. The arrangement of the volumes was not based on a chronological order or on the author's names. Warburg organized the books according to a "law of the good neighborhood", in such way that the themes and the correspondences oriented the process, which were always changing and allowed him to constantly recreate the library. Did the organization adopted by Piva follow, perhaps, a similar logic?

14. All statements by Gabriel Kolyniak that were quoted in this article were given during a conversation we had in a morning of December 2017, at the library.

unpublished texts. Córrego is in charge of editing this original material and has already published *Antropofagia e outros escritos* (with texts from 1984 to 1986, written in the same notebook), and *Poesia e delírio* (small handmade book [plaquete] with an essay that has the same title, with the manuscript's facsimile).

During the reading sessions, poetry is taken very seriously, read out and loud by the participants with presence and intensity, even if the atmosphere is relaxed. The choice to make the reading sessions at São Paulo's downtown and at night seems to make a reference to Piva's emphasis in nocturne scenarios. In the postface of the second volume of Piva's complete works, Eliane Robert Moraes says that the urban landscapes of the metropolis' downtown of his poems bring

the mundane nights of the clubs, of the illicit stores, of the suspicious galleries, of the bars full of anonymous people, of the suburban saunas, of the lascivious public restrooms and, above all, of the urban sidewalks, where there are drunks, artists, poets, prostitutes and other beings that are not seen in daylight (Moraes 2006, 153).

As we go up the stairs of Bertolli building, part of downtown's landscape remains on the street. It is not the "beings that are not seen in daylight" that attend the library. The room remains open all night on Tuesdays (and, actually, people's entrance and their circulation on the building does not have controlled access), but has something secret in it. Those who arrive at the library know what they are looking for and they have heard about it through a friend or the promotion work. Nevertheless, the city is present in the room, with its urban excitement and its contradictions, since the vision, the aromas and the sounds that come from the city insist to penetrate the windows. It is no more the provincial *Paulicéia desvairada* pictured by Mario de Andrade – evoked by Piva in some of his promenades – or the city where Piva lived and strolled. But certainly, the chaos and the contrasts between the mundane and the ethereal remain as a common experience. On the inside, T. S. Eliot, Wysława Zimboraska, Joan Brossa, Raymond Carver, Verônica Stigger, Rodrigo de Haro. Outside the windows, funk, Alceu Valença, car horns, The Doors, forró, Michel Teló, sirens. The poems and the music cross each other and seem to be in contradiction. Even though there the contrast between them is obvious, both compose a dense and complex soundscape, so typical from São Paulo's downtown for being part of its social contrasts and of its urban fauna.



PHOTO 4

“The still environment really waited that vibration;  
the ordinary paper representing forests with tigers,  
a Supper where the characters do not eat a thing  
the table with its holed tablecloth  
the wall calendar with advices followed by the housewife  
and the piano that they do not have on the living room.”  
(Murilo Mendes, “Perspectiva da sala de jantar”)

What motivates Gabriel to make the reading sessions at the Roberto Piva library? Would not it be enough to open the collection for visitors to know what Piva read, his literary universe, finding the multiple references present in his works, recognizing him as an author-reader? Not for Gabriel. After all, it is about creating the possibility to maintain this *practice* of poetry, something that Piva himself has cultivated since he was young. For Gabriel, reading sessions are a more complete form of experimenting poetry than in an institutional environment. “I believe that the school environment, for example, is not enough to assure the transmission of practices of poetry”, he said, referring to the meetings to read and to talk with this idea behind it. Besides, he believes that it is necessary to adopt procedures to reach a state of poetry.

To reach such state, Gabriel says that there is an analogy with the esoteric practices: “There are some things that only those who are familiar with the universe of poetic creation can understand. People think that it is madness, that it is nonsense, that it has no effect”. To clarify the procedures necessary to reach this universe, I asked him to give an example:

Piva was much more interested, let’s say, on surrealist practices than on the very formalization of surrealist language. He has his own diction; his work does not look

like a surrealist production; it does not look like Breton's work. That is not what he reproduces. But surrealists had something that was interesting to Piva: certain ways of being in the city, certain procedures. For example, the objective chance: you have a route but establish a few rules before you go and observe what happens in that walk. The walk proposed by the surrealists had its own rules, making you deviate from your usual route to walk through the city without the intention to arrive at a determined place. Just walk to see something. Then one begins to see certain coincidences and extracts the elements of a poem. For a person who is not stimulated by the task of finding elements for a poem this may seem nonsense, I mean, for a person who just intends to make an utilitarian walk to do the daily tasks.



PHOTO 5 “You hear me I know. My head inclines towards yours which inclines towards mine sliding to the shoulder. We go back to the house. The first leaves appear. Look my love look you tell me.”  
(Ana Hatherly, “Tisanas (inéditas)”)

It is very intriguing to find elements for a poem in the modern urban landscape. It is not anymore possible to make a distinction between reality and fiction in the metropolis, what makes them suggestive and sometimes phantasmagoric. This can be noticed, for instance, in Eugène Atget's (1857-1927) Paris photographs. In this scenario where the city transforms itself, full of artifice, spectacle and unreality, emerges the possibility of a new vision of the modern metropolis. In the crowd, observing it without distance, someone begins to feel a voyeur pleasure during his erratic walks through the city's labyrinthine streets.

This subject is the *flâneur*, a social type described by Charles Baudelaire in the essay *The painter of modern life* (1863/2010), a witness of the transforming society, a “passionate observer”, who “goes into the crowd as into an immense electric battery” (1863/2010, 30).

Walter Benjamin approaches this subject in his *Arcades project* (1927-1940/1994), describing the *flâneur* as the hero of modernity who, in the rush and the urgency of the metropolis, gets carried away by the crowd, not by the acceleration:

There was the pedestrian who wedged himself into the crowd, but there was also the *flâneur* who demanded elbow room and was unwilling to forgo the life of a gentleman of leisure. He goes his leisurely way as a personality; in this manner he protests against the division of labor (...). Around 1840 it was briefly fashionable to take turtles for a walk in the arcades; the *flâneurs* liked to have the turtles set the pace for them (Benjamin 1927-1940/1994, 185).

In Piva’s poems, the various references to places in São Paulo, as well as the characters that appear, show his intense *flânerie*. However, even if Piva is one among the three Brazilian poets that are mentioned on the *Dictionnaire général du Surréalisme et de ses environs* (Biro and Passeron 1982), Gabriel says that the surrealist practices used by Piva for his poetic writing cannot be taken as an aesthetic rule.

Piva participated, in 1963, of the São Paulo Surrealist Group, alongside with many other poet friends of his, who knew surrealist works, even though he has never followed a surrealist school. Piva’s so-called surrealism was, largely, much more related to a rupture with the bourgeois order, a subversive attitude. His book *Paranoia* (1963/2009), where “the poet emphasizes the nocturnal scenarios, [which] supposes a strong refusal of the emblematic day world, characterized by capital’s rationality and work routine, to embrace a vertiginous plunge in the darkest domains, where chaos is predominant” (Moraes 2006, 152).<sup>15</sup> According to Piva, *Paranoia* is

a huge nightmare. I have applied the critical-paranoid method created by Salvador Dalí: the paranoid person fixates on a detail and transforms that in an explosion of colors, themes and poetry. He builds a hallucinatory, imaginary world (Piva, cited in Hungria and D’Elia 2011, 54).

15. *Paranoia*’s lyrical subject is a delirious beatnik, full of oneiric visions of São Paulo. Nevertheless, Claudio Willer, who was Piva’s close friend, claimed, during a course on his work (the course was given at the library in March 2018), that Piva did not use any drugs whatsoever to write this book, not even alcohol. According to Willer, Piva had drunk a lot during his adolescence (in the 1950s), and would do it again later on. Besides, LSD (which was tried by Piva later) arrived in Brazil only in mid-60s. Considering that *Paranoia* was written between 1960 and 1961, the delirium makes part of the lyrical subject and of Piva’s readings at the time, instead of being based on an actual lysergic experience.

Besides, French surrealism's official journal, *La brèche: action surréaliste*, even published a book review:

*Paranoia* is the first delirious poetry book in Brazil. Piva, whose intellectual formation is deeply influenced by the Italian culture, finds his inspiration on the great classics of decadence, from where the exuberant images typical of Latin peoples come from. Freud and Lautréamont have a huge importance to him. Lastly, the modern North American *beat* literature has transmitted to him the fascination for neon and the hallucination for the metallic metropolis evoked by the photographs of São Paulo included in his book (*Le surréalisme à São Paulo* 1965, 127).

Even though Piva incorporated surrealist elements, practices and inspiration in his poems, Gabriel notices that he has his own diction, especially due to what Eliane Robert Moraes sees as “an effective Brazilian quality in the surreal imaginary that it [his poetic voice] shines through” (2006, 158). So, the experience of Baudelaire's urban *flâneur* or the attitude of shuffling the order (making strange what is familiar and familiar what is strange) are present in the oneiric visuality of the city's places that Piva visited and mentioned in his poems. Lautréamont's Maldoror, *e.g.*, is seen “in a dream in Santa Cecília's staircase”.



PHOTO 6

“the head in the clouds  
the hair in the poetry  
and then  
one perceives  
the Shadow  
that our face is.”  
(Roberto Piva, “Pimenta d’água”)

That book was Piva's first one and it was published by Massao Ohno in 1963 with São Paulo pictures taken by Wesley Duke Lee, in the artist's projection of what the city would be like in the future. The artist spent a few months with Piva strolling around the city, looking for images that brought "the visual expression of the poet's despair, with whom he had made an immersion in the taboo universe of pederasty, which was an aspect of Duke Lee's sexuality that he had never dealt with but that has always frightened him" (Costa 2005, 56-8). Duke Lee's visual language does not constitute a mere illustration of Piva's poetic images. As Willer emphasizes,

images are not a homogenous territory. Those from *Paranoia* vary, in each poem, from one verse to another. They alternate between a more descriptive and a hallucinatory style, a lyrical and a vehement one. This book's poems are, therefore, like collages (2005, 152).

This preamble on surrealism was necessary to explain some of the historic and symbolic reasons for the library to be situated at São Paulo's downtown. But let us return to the reasons why the reading sessions are a fundamental activity to reach certain states of poetry, which are, in a way, analogous to the *esoteric* practices – a fundamental component of Piva's life and work.

Gabriel claims that "the magma from where Piva has produced his poetic discourse was the issues that have crossed civilizations". In this sense, he explained that Piva has always been interested in researching on for peoples that do not correspond to the model created by European civilization; cultures that were in the peripheries of knowledge, so to speak. Then, on occultism, the poet searched for different paths from those of his contemporaneous: he was way more interested in shamanism and pajelança in a period that people were more interested in Eastern religions. In Piva's collection, there is actually a large section of books dedicated to a variety of themes that Gabriel interprets as occultism and esotericism. Some of the themes that Gabriel has already identified and organized are: ufology, tarot, occultism of European origins (demonology, alchemy, druid magic, pre-Romans, pagan magic), Egyptian magic, Sufism, Zen Buddhism, Taoism, Tibetan Buddhism, Hinduism, pre-Colombian cults, religions of African origins, Inquisition, shamanism and parapsychology.



PHOTO 7 “We walk by the river. It is nighttime we walk among the holes on the pavement and the ruins from someone else’s everyday life. There are huge piles of boxes.”

(Ana Hatherly, “Tisanas (inéditas)”)

Books on this subject have an important role in a poetry library. For Gabriel, the role is to understand that “poetry has a rite, similar to that of different religions” and, in this sense, “different areas of occultism can collaborate to learn poetry”. As he affirms, “there are many historians of occultism that have done a history of images or even a history of occultism through images”. An example mentioned by Gabriel is the *Treatise on the History of religions* (1970), by Mircea Eliade, which is in Piva’s collection.

In this work, Eliade approaches religions not by looking for affinities or historical developments, but approaches the images that are present in not lettered religions. Images related to agriculture, for instance, form a *land of images*. The sowing, the planting and the seasons make part of this land, which can cross different cultures and religions, which in turn do not necessarily attribute the same meaning to those images. What these images have in common is the agricultural experience and the forms of constructing a minimal knowledge on how to grow plants; to be in contact with the soil and its own time generate certain images that are recurrent. For Gabriel, this is one of the key points on the formation of images in poetry. After all, there are images that form territories in the thought, creating regions in it and agglomerating. The images form a unity of imaginary and appear in cultural symbols, even though they change throughout history.

In this sense, there is a relation between this inspiration of Piva's poetry and a certain ethnographic attitude that was close to surrealism in the first decades of the XX century. The ethnographic juxtaposition of certain objects is done, according to Clifford, "with the intention of disturbing the established symbols" (1998, 151), and

share with surrealism the abandonment of a distinction between "high" and "low" cultures, [giving] both a source of non-western alternatives and a predominant attitude of ironical participative observation among the hierarchies and the meanings of collective life (Clifford 1998, 148).

Such disturbance allows "natural" entities to be recoded, authorizing the surrealist and the ethnographer to clash with non-conventional objects or identities. For this reason, non-European cultures, considered as exotic, become privileged as they question reality deeply. "The exotic", says Clifford, "was the main court of appeals against Western standards of rationality, beauty, normality" (1998, 144). Poetry deals with the imaginary's geography in producing images and dealing with culturally produced images. Perhaps its proximity with photography is, I believe, in that point. After all, photography also creates images, which are not merely on the domain of visibility. Images are culturally contextual in its production and its interpretation, and that means they can be continuously interpreted and re-signified. It is in this visual perception, tensioned by what is veiled and unveiled by an image (whether photographic or poetic), that the moving territory of culture and imaginary is. We develop, then, a "grammar of seeing" (Sontag 2016, 13), a way of seeing things: the world becomes visual and it seems that images dominate not only photographs but also poems.

The photographic image has a temporal discontinuity, between the "That-has-been"<sup>16</sup> that Barthes mentions in his *Camera lucida* (1984), and connotation, culturally codified, of *studium*.<sup>17</sup> When it comes to images used in anthropological research, there is a mismatch between two shores: the

16. According to Barthes, the photography's referent can be distinguished from that of other systems of representation. In the painting, for instance, it is possible to "simulate reality without seeing it" (1984, 115). In photography, by contrast, there "is the necessarily real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph" (1984, 115; highlighted by the original author). In this sense, for Barthes, the essence of photography is the conjunction of reality and past, in such way that the reference is photography's foundational order. Nonetheless, this is what makes photography a form of hallucination: "false on the level of perception, true on the level of time" (1984, 169).

17. In photography, Barthes identifies the co-presence of two distinct elements, *studium* and *punctum*. *Studium* is the field of cultural interest, of the elements (scenes, gestures, figures, actions etc.) present in the photographic image (Barthes 1984, 44-8; 141). The interest of a *spectator*, that is, "ourselves, all of us who glance through" (1984, 20), for a photograph comes through culture, which allows the spectator to read, to recognize and to understand what is being informed, represented and signified in the image. The *punctum*, on the other hand, is the chance in a photograph, which contains a point that causes an effect over the spectator. It is not just any effect but something in the photograph that pierces the spectator, whose effect "is acute yet muffled, it cries out in silence" (1984, 83).

moment in time frozen by a reality scheme that survives in time (Bazin 1991), and the spectator's memory,<sup>18</sup> evoked by the discontinuity between the present and what has already been. So "photographs are like intermediary symbols of ethnographic research and need explicit and interactive interpretations of the creative process of the image and of the context in which the image's meaning rests" (Bittencourt 1998, 208).

PHOTO 8



“the minds were dreaming hung by the phosphorus skeletons  
invoking the thighs of the first love like a  
saliva flower”  
(Roberto Piva, “Visão 1961”)

18. It is interesting to notice that Barthes makes a distinction between the *spectator* (the ones who look or spectators), already mentioned; the *operator* (the photographer or producer of the image); and the *spectrum* (what is photographed or the referent) (Barthes 1984, 20).

### HANDS AND FEET: ELOQUENCE AND LISTENING

People in the reading sessions are organized in a circle, where each one sits on chairs, armchairs and other furniture in the room.<sup>19</sup> This organization allows any person to get in and out of the circle or to start reading a text without the need to go to a special place, detached from the other participants. The circular organization favors, then, this dynamic. During the sessions, I realize there is a *polyphony* of readings: everyone reads, listens, discusses or propose text or approaches but there is also the voice of the authors read. Even though some of the participants are more familiar with poetry – its writing, reading or editing – everyone is authorized to express themselves and also has to listen to the others.

Taking that into account, it is possible to understand another reason why the library does not have formal relations with educational institutions. After all, this kind of reading and discussions would not work in a scholar environment. Gabriel endorses this perception:

The school has rites – like the evaluation rite – which would ruin these dynamics. The time of reverberation of a poem is not the same of the duration of a class. Sometimes, a person mysteriously remembers of a verse. It can even happen for years. I have written a text on what would it be like some activities involved in a literary formation without the academic rites.

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19. It is important to mention that the reading sessions presented in this article have taken place between October and November 2017. For this reason, it is an ephemeral portrait of the library, which has been through many significant changes since then. In the end of 2017, Raul Fiker (1947-2017), who was a poet, translator and Full Professor of philosophy at Unesp, has donated his collection to the library, which has become a neighbor collection but conserving its own unit. In the first semester of 2018, the library was contemplated, alongside with Lâmina studio, with financial support by the Program of Cultural Action (ProAc), from the Secretary of State of São Paulo for Culture. In July 2018, Piva's and Fiker's collections started to occupy a new place at São Paulo's downtown and, due to Gabriel's intense editing work at Córrego, the meetings for reading sessions have taken place less frequently.



PHOTO 9

“Ah, so this is the Himalaya.  
Mountains running to the moon.”  
(Wisława Szymborska, *Poemas*)

To maintain the library’s independence regarding academic rites turns out to be a very important choice, since *reading* and *listening* to poetry are considered by Gabriel as other fundamental components to reach certain *states of poetry*:

A poem is not a theater play. Some people believe that reading well a poem is to read it as if it was a theatrical interpretation. I disagree with this point of view. A poem has to be understood as a musical score. Therefore, the line and strophe breaks, the use of punctuation and other graphic signs that collaborate to describe the aimed reading rhythm – are all musical score elements. It has to be said the way it is written. For this reason, the tempo and the intonations of a poem should not follow the rules of a dramatic text. To learn how to read and to listen to a poem in this level of (musical) tension allows you to fill the literary conventions with sense. It allows that they stop being just poetic conventions and to become tools to produce poems. For instance, many people think that to rhyme is a rule. But it is not a rule: it is a poetic resource.

During the reading sessions, the organs that correspond to the senses used to read (the eyes) and to listen (the ears) perhaps are not the most adequate to understand social phenomena through visual language. Well, at least not in a narrative in which the adopted language consists of photographic images instead of words.

I observed, in the occasions that I was in the reading sessions, that the *hands*, or should I say, the way people hold books, papers, cell phones, cigarettes or glasses can transmit the actions and the affections of the moment. By means of a closed composition and framing, and of a dramatic cut of the body and the face that express the action, it is the *spectator's* task to recreate or imagine the intensity and the musical tension of the scene. These are images without voice – an apparent absurd for poetry reading – but, still, they are eloquent. After all, as Navas remarks, poetry and photography “are metonymic arts *par excellence*: they take the whole by its parts, they are synthetic – regardless the reason and the objective” (2017, 21). In this sense, there is an emphasis in the particular before a more general set of things.



PHOTO 10 “The floor is a difficult space to define on the framing, unless it is the basis of the total image. A horizontal plane in relation to the vertical ones formed by the delimitation of the total image consented by the framing. Inside the rectangular zone the eyes perceive the diagrams in a fan.”  
(Ana Hatherly, “O pastor em imagens”)

As I organized the photos, I realized that I had produced another series of images, considerably extended, of people’s *feet*. Since the participants usually remain seated most of the time, I noticed that feet are directly related to listening. Covered, naked, fresh feet. Sometimes, feet and legs can be compulsively shaken. In other cases, they are still but reflect an attentive listening of verses.



PHOTO 11

“Forget about the Web.  
Observe the spider,  
its concentric legs  
of star. The huge  
ancientness of the deaf  
spider on the wall.”  
(Rodrigo de Haro, “Inseto”)

The circle that is formed, the lighted cigarettes, the glasses of wine or beer, the books that pass hand by hand to be read and shared, the reading aloud, the complex choices of intonation, rhythm and dramatic tone: more than practices of poetry, there are many rites associated with poetry at the library. Perhaps part of the gesture of these rites involve the creation of an atmosphere that demands contemplation but also action. By contemplating the poetic images, the body is available in a way that it makes possible the listening, and creates an imaginary of how the poem affects the body.



PHOTO 12

“Following the steps of the thought  
even beyond appearances,  
today I only pay attention  
to triangular forms.”  
(Joan Brossa, *Sumário astral*)

#### **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: A PSYCHOLOGICAL ALCHEMY**

The reading sessions at Roberto Piva library develop in different ways and can be either linear or not. Some nights develop calmly; other nights are inevitably less focused. The course of authors and affections are unpredictable and unusual relations can be established. Poetry seems to be equally untamable, so to speak. Gabriel said that some poetry books present a propositional composition, in which poems are placed in a certain order to be read. However, this order does not need to obey a unidirectional sequence. According to him, there are book's constructions that need to be revisited; textual reflux, in a way. “There is a need to go back and forth. Poetry's linearity is pretty different from other genres”. And he continues: “It is like an opera; there is an evolution of states of spirit. In a pre-established sequence, there can be a real psychological alchemy”.

Certainly, this alchemy happens at each reading session, where different elements can meet, provoking unexpected and, in some cases, magical reactions. Piva was known for having a libertarian personality, a new and potent voice among the cultural transformations of his time. He wandered in his neighborhood, in the streets, in the bars, he was

known in town, talked to lots of people and was able to mobilize and gather people – not only his poems but also his friends testify this. The library makes possible to keep alive this power of mobilization. It is possible by means of the materiality of the books but, above all, by means of an imaginary of Piva.



PHOTO 13

“my soul my song open pockets  
of my mind  
I am a hallucination on the tip of your eyes”  
(Roberto Piva, “Meteoro”)

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