Without an immediate understanding, without recognising the details which belong specifically to a miscegenated culture, rich in appropriations and conversions elapsed over time and territories, despite all this, it is still possible for strangers to reconsider their interpretations on art and culture in Brazil, to approach an understanding, certain that questions will remain to be answered.

The work of Anna Maria Maiolino consolidated itself during the 1960s, that unique time of utopia and socio-cultural expectation that spread across almost the entire world. Of Italian origins, she lived in Venezuela before settling in Brazil. Philosophical and poetic responses to such voyages mark her oeuvre, with the metaphorical subtlety that the word invokes, whether through sight or touch, yet always stemming from within the self.

Since 1966, Maiolino has included in her work letters or actual words, as visual elements, broadly speaking. They are, in this sense, a perceptive substance, pure and lean. In the painting Minha Família (My Family) of 1966, the words ‘MÃE’ (mother) and ‘PAI’ (father) are contained within figures, respectively interspersed by ‘ANNA’ – the presentation of which is focused on the figure’s neck and head. The letters, which comprise the words look as if they were stamped, symbolising the generality, the extensiveness of the societal statute and parental emotive psyche.

Words are spoken through mouths: mouths which open and close over themselves, simultaneously giving and storing these same words and individual nominations. The words express the personal subjectivity and otherness; they preserve the intimate consistency of the subjects, yet promote interrelationships. The spoken, drawn words suspend private and public senses, which serve, which assist, which consubstantiate communication.

The open mouth, the lips, the teeth inhabit the representation of the top half of a body which, unidentified, could be that of one single being or of everyone. In the case of Glu Glu Glu (1967) this existential theatre is associated with properties which target the situation of the individual in the everyday space, making the organic chain explicit: food, excrement. The reading, in semiotic terms, which is left to the spectator to decipher, is condensed into three upward or downward planes. One could interpret this work, and others, as a definite example of the artist being:

Inspired by comic book strips and ‘clothesline’ chapbooks, popular magazines sold on the street [Cordel literature], Maiolino’s narrative juxtaposes fragments of intimate testimony with stories of collective sentiment induced by the mass media’s conformity and its resulting loss of individuality.

In Maiolino’s performances, as well as in her cinematic experiments, the mouth is taken and possessed by the egg, that same egg which avoids being trodden on (in a public space or
a gallery – 1981 and 1991). The egg is here the metaphorical and pragmatic substance of the aesthetic and ideological game of an historical time when people shut, precisely, their mouths.

The shape of the mouth outlines the two curves of the primordial egg: that which corresponds to the upper world and that which respects the lower world, specifically the lower jawbone. It is precisely these same shapes which can be found ‘ripped out’, turned into sources of communication between the interior and exterior of her object-books, as well as being inducers of communication between the book’s author and its ‘readers’. This is also the case of the poetic suggestion, the aesthetic and ideological intention that seem to come together in Trajectórias (Trajectories) of 1976. The shape of the open mouth refers to an almost perfect circle, alerting us of the almost illusory/apparent perfectibility of the human being when he/she intends to assume an absolute condition. As we know, the circle, as a symbol of the divine, of that totality which fits into the rectangular format of the book as matter/continent, the presence of symbology of the homo quadratus, to retreat only to Leonardo, ensures this dual dimensioning, the ill and obsessive character of the individual human subject.

The mouth is the symbol of the creative force, through it pass breath and food. Through the mouth pass words, delivered to oneself or to others. It is the organ of the ‘verb’ which externalises the ‘logos’, which exhales the breath, the ‘spirit’, it also symbolises the higher level of consciousness, assuming the organisational power through reason.

The mouth swallows, the mouth absorbs, the mouth retains; it possesses a susceptible force for constructing, insufflating, generating; it dominates the exercise of destruction, death, disturbance, suffocation. But it allows one to breathe, whisper and transmit the life force. It is the point of departure or convergence of two directions, symbolising a matrix, the origin of oppositions, of contraries, ambiguities.

The mouth, the propulsive vehicle for the word, materialises the thought which reaches the other, which demands before all else the ‘self’, the ‘imago’ of oneself; consolidates the speech of truth, of accusation, of hatred, of legitimacy, of seduction, of survival, of clamour. In fact, of all situations, restrictions, circumstances and emotions, it serves the entire human being as well as possessing a mythical character in collusion or conjunction.

By analogy to Minha Família, the woodcut print ANNA (1967) establishes three levels of identity: in the former they are organised vertically, in the latter, horizontally.

ANNA is the name that serves as the central axis, if both works were overlapping:

Father and mother connected by the name ANNA (my name, printed in white letters) leaving the mouth in unison, calling the absent daughter: ANNA. This word is a palindrome, which may be read forwards or backwards. Like a mirror game, the name ANNA is repeated below in black letters, within a rectangle that serves as the base (it could be a tombstone) that supports the primitive figures.

Minha Família and ANNA are further articulated with the work of the series Foto-poema-ção: Por um Fio, (Photo-poem-action: By a Thread / By the Skin of One’s Teeth) of 1976, in which, as the author mentions, the generations are connected by a thread to the mouths of each
female figure of the family, giving presence to the past, the present and the future, guaranteeing the continuation of life in time:

_Poe sem Fio_ is a photographic work, through which I attempt to reach poetic sublimation, the continuity and repetition of life, the fragility of life stuck to the thread of time.2

Remember that ‘ovo’ (Portuguese for egg), the conceptual matter and substance of the work mentioned previously, is also a palindrome, and is also ‘principle-end-principle in itself’.

Focusing an analysis on the hermetic domain and in line with the terms of alchemy, two dominant associated meanings can be highlighted: the cosmic egg and the philosophical egg. As regards the ‘cosmic egg’, a concept in force since ancient times in (namely) the Western hermetic tradition, William Blake’s reference to it stands out, giving it an optical property, inscribed in the shape of the universal egg. In the 16th century, John Dee, the Dutch astronomer and mathematician, made use of the egg concept as a ‘glyph of the ethereal sky’, considering that the rotation of the planets trace an oval trajectory. To quote Paracelsus, in _Paragranum_, ‘the sky is a shell which separates the world and the divine heaven, just like an eggshell’.3

As for the concept of the ‘philosophical egg’, it is understood as the ‘chaotic raw material destroyed in the putrefaction so that new life may emanate therefrom’, according to M. Maier in _Atalanta Fugiens_ (1618). William Blake looked for substantial meanings in the isolated elements within it: the shell would symbolise mankind’s limited field of vision, ‘an immense/shadow hardened by all things on Earth vegetating/widened in dimension and deformed in indefinite space.’

Like M. Maier, Blake alluded to the after-death, the ‘time’ when man would tear off this ‘evil of nature which congeals him in life’. On the other hand, the Greek alchemical doctrines which circulated in Europe from the 13th century, in particular the constants in the _Aurora Consurgens_, consider art as comparable to the egg, ‘in which four (things) are connected’. The outer shell is the earth, and the white is water; but the very fine membrane next to the shell (...) is the air (...). And the yolk is fire. ‘The fifth element or quintessence was the bird itself. The faps is the ‘philosopher’s egg’, a body clarified with the gift of immortality; which (...) is elevated above the four elements in the purest centre as the fifth essence of all nature, and it is now much more splendid than its sublime parents, the Sun and the Moon.’

Following the European iconography which exposes the egg shape, finally one can recall the pictorial insertion of the ‘egg’ in numerous compositions since H. Bosch (1510), although previous work, in Hildegard von Bingen (12th century), already comprised a profound matter-like substantiality, an integral part of the anthropological structures of creation.

Transporting such a hermetic and philosophical ascendency, duly packed in its cultural anthropological stratification, the ‘egg’, for Maiolino, grounded the ideological clarification and socio-political explanation of the 1960s. In the words of the artist:

This installation [Entrevidas (Between Lives) 1981] was conceived and assembled at a sensitive time in Brazilian life: the opening of democracy I use the simplicity of the egg, the archetype _par excellence_ of life, to talk about life. How it resists, despite everything. The dictatorship was still in power, however, there was the light of a new day on the horizon and with that light the resistant, latent life would reaffirm itself in its nature. On the other hand, the return of democracy had not yet been entirely consolidated; we lived in a state of uncertainty, literally stepping on eggshells.4

On the other hand, one can highlight the double psychoanalytic meanings, whether based on the imaginative power, of the Jungian archetype, or whether, as according to Paulo Herkenhoff, of Freudian origins, consigned in the ‘state of abandonment’, in the ‘prematurisation’ of the human being – that matrical condition intrinsic to every demand to be loved. In the words of Maiolino: ‘This installation inspires confidence and hope present in the repetition of the eternal return of the egg, persevering life which returns apparently the same, but always different.’

_Entrevidas_ is an installation situated between the pre-verbal and non-verbal levels. Considering the former as ‘the egg as its metaphor, life before birth’ and, the latter as ‘the validity of the space of insecurity and unfamiliarity’.

Is it by chance that the most prominent element in _O buraco preto do espaço_ (The black hole of space) (1973), that forms the letter ‘o’, is obviously the oval shape of an egg? With this work being an ideological and poetic system of intervening sublimity, the icon becomes a letter. Conducting the hermeneutics of the word and the image as a whole, as a composition, it synthesises the opening, the unknown, the ludic (luso) in _Sent Poem_ (1971) in which one is drawn to mentally write the poem that one’s soul or body desires. Without being child’s play it is nevertheless a necessary educative process for us to judge and establish our poem, our life!

Only the author knows the true content of the _Sent Poem_, as most of the letters are substituted...
by small rectangles. Only the prepositions 'A' and 'In' appear, which fail to clarify the enigma, leaving the spectator the only option of decomposing his/her own poem, guided only by substituting the rectangular signs for letters and phrases.

Although without exploring the pertinence of the different series, but in accordance with the interrelationships referred to initially, I would not want to fail to mention Vestígios [Vestiges], Indícios [Indexes] and Marcas de Gota [Drop Marks], as well as the Codificações Matéricas [Material Codifications] and Outras Codificações [Other Codifications] series.

The first three series mentioned, as recent works, carry a graphic refinement and austerity, the concentration of the inner world which communicates not through the recognised semantic appropriations of the real – vocabulary/writing, but rather through indicative elements which steer the spectator's eye and recognition.

Vestígios, Indícios and Marcas de Gota, if understood as such, are events, consequential acts, inventories, in the sequence of the research and sinalectic/poetic production of Maiolino. They are conceptual-gestural works, in which the work of the 'doing hand' weaves the inhabited surface. Vestígios and Indícios refer directly to one of the categories established by Philippe Dubois regarding the photographic relation to the real, in terms of the determined, intended 'appropriation' model. Photography, as we know, is memory, and memory is invention, however factual and strict it may wish to be.

One of the ways of dealing with the real, with the learning in photography, is by only showing one's remains, one's tracks, one's marks. Advancing only with scarce, almost non-existent elements, but which contain the essence, the substance of this real. It is not the presentation of the factual, documental intention of the real as immediate recognition; nor is it the real transformed, transfigured, as a pretext of absolute distancing to the field of a imaginary, oneric quality.

To which vestiges and which indexes did Maiolino want to draw our attention? First and foremost, it would seem to be me to be the unique and long-lasting elements which reflect the multiple dimensions of the human subject. Elements which stem from the body of the subject as a creator, driven by the inner need – to paraphrase Kandinsky, before the assumption of the body by Pollock or Klein for art as an extension and essence of oneself, elements which are concentrated on themselves, on the graphic parsimony, whether it be a ludic advantage which should underlie any creation, or the visibility affected by the presence of the idra transposed in the subtle materiality. Any reality contained in both the series is of a subjective condition – that is already well understood – but in its individualising and unique (ontogenetic) condition it also respects the conjugation manifested in philogenetic terms. That reality includes the sometimes conflicting and almost paradoxical dual dimensionality between intimacy and the wider public mediations. Therefore it is a reality in which the genuine is empowered by the private fluency of the author, optimistically contaminating the feasibility capable of being recognised by any one of us.

They are ‘Vestiges’ and ‘Indexes’ of the author as an individual human subject, in that which subsumes the reality adopted, not only in privacy, but registering it for different aesthetic/poetic levels of reception – in accordance with the principles which rule the duplicity of presence, of the written and of the pictorial in these same works.

Vestiges and indexes are required to shape the consistency which crosses through the various other series by Maiolino, namely those which use three dimensions and those with a more immediate intervention of her body, of the bodies of others. These unnamed/unnameable others – going back to Samuel Beckett – who may be repeated (only in their most fallacious...
variations of simple elements, whose power of iconographic and quasi-semantic concentration is immanent. These elements are small, almost identical; they appear and elude like people seen from afar, from where one cannot distinguish the facial features, the wrinkles and the look, similar to when hurriedly one looks at oneself and sees others, we want to verify personal and societal identities.

The positioning on the surface, on the wall, postulates a supporting purpose, of an open continent (in balance which would oppose the law of gravity), of a box with the lid off. But the supposed bottoms, artificially eluding like voids, contain an almost ontological force that ensures the essential credibility of the elements, which may assume the posture of signs, symbols or segmented and/or circumscribed visions, according to the intentionality of the spectator.

Whether these are traced motives, almost like stamps, or icons which have been transfigured regulated by the principle of internal mutability and of aesthetic nature.

The act of moulding clay is related to the act of writing, of any calligraphy and of all the mobility of drawing that can be affirmed. The hand dominates and is dominated simultaneously in an aesthetic systemization. Alone, in solitude or accompanied by itself, it is recognised in small, lean and rich artifices, which serve the rhythmic creations of the look. The continuity of the works, regimented, consigned, in specific series developed over the years, allows a stretched-out temporality, a perpetual quality, an almost sounding repercussion that accompany one’s visual perception.

This is nevertheless sculpture, modelling in this case, an act that demands skill, controlled handwork, the primacy of touch, like in writing, painting or drawing, which are also cases of a refined moving force. The act of seeing is associated to the act of touching, of stirring, of dominating not only the matter, but fulfilling the intentionality (in a phenomenological sense); wanting the idea to correspond to the creation/production, thus conciliated in a new object. Fernando Cocchiarale names this ‘tactile intuition’.

appearance), in multiple substances, whose repetition merely ensures the difference and the singularity: perhaps the vestiges and the indexes that they themselves are and nothing more.

Finally and without developing the theme to the extent it deserves, I must not fail to outline some points of the three-dimensional series in which Maiolino controls her writing and her image once again through the body – hers and ours too.

A population is present in the collection of cast cement pieces, which form one of Maiolino’s works. The small anonymous beings work well because they are together, brawling on each other, showing themselves and hiding. Self absorbed and peaceful, they do not wish to be alone and above all they do not wish to be scandalous. They are formed in relief. They are no longer objects but do not want to be sculpture. In the dimness between these different areas, they found their place.

The poetry; the words are in the image, submissive and controversial. They are untamed words. In their apparent hieratic character, their established fixation, they could be thought of as tamed. But that is not the case: the submission generates dynamism, made of will, decision and unconformity. Although stored in images, the words warn of a performative power; a performance filled with intention and ideology is expected of them. Hence the intimate shared quality of the drawings and paintings with this other order, this other domain which exists in the artist, and is evident in the performance works such as Antropofagia and Entrevidas, just as the resulting product of the video experiments is cinematographic. It can be said that the role assumed by the people in the performances – as protagonists and object in themselves – is subsumed in words, ideograms, stains, formal elements of an almost periodic regularity, in a supporting role and, also as shall be mentioned below, in a three dimensional version.

Their presence is not necessarily visible to the unbelieving or hurried ‘naked eye’, one must see, in the time and space, to re-establish the words, to make use of their most intimate constitution, almost characteristic of privacy. The rhythms of poetry are externalised in visual
"The doing hand" is an expression which reminds me of the presupposed aesthetics developed by Michaelangelo where the hand is one of the components of the ‘eye/mind/hand’ triad. Likewise the sculptor underlined the fact of the shape being withdrawn from the matter. Both assumptions remain pertinent in relation to the works developed by Maiolino. The clay transports a symbolic load that cultural anthropology has celebrated and furth ered in a systematic and strict manner. Harking back to the first manipulation, which persists as documents and memories of the history before History, the magic, mythical and religious indications, working the clay we are presented with something compelling, intimate and resident in the human condition. The simple decorative elements, primordial geometric shapes (circle, rectangle, square, triangle, spiral...) which since then have been integrated into objects, fulfilling an aesthetic purpose, but also responding to a pre-existence of registration, of an ‘almost universal’ language shaped in the incision, the cuts, embodying a proto-writing, a forewriting, if you will.

Clay bears a very strong archetypal character of creation, of the multi-form possibility of the modelled. When you put your hand in the argil, that already constitutes the act of creation itself. And it is earth. There is always a commutation.10

The small, apparently equal, pieces glossing the quasi-repetition, revitalise the Manoel de Barros aphorism: ‘repeat, repeat, repeat, until it becomes different’. The pieces, understood as unique elements, reproduce amongst themselves, giving rise to a composite and reversible vocabulary.

As stated by the artist.

As stated by the artist.

As stated by the artist.

As stated by the artist.

As stated by the artist.

As stated by the artist.

As stated by the artist.