# Liquid World and Solid Objects:

# Affect and Nonhuman Phenomena in Clarice Lispector




Lingchen Huang

St Cross College

University of Oxford

A thesis submitted for the degree of

*Doctor of Philosophy in Medieval and Modern Languages (Portuguese)*

Hilary Term 2025

## SHORT ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I explore the relationship between subjectivity and materiality in Clarice Lispector's writings, focusing on the affective dimension and nonhuman phenomena within her novels, *Perto do coração selvagem* (1943), *O lustre* (1946), *A cidade sitiada* (1949) and *A maçã no escuro* (1961). I reveal how Lispector anticipates contemporary theories and philosophy that aim to decentre the human in favour of the nonhuman, such as affect theory, new materialism and posthumanism. I thus highlight how her fiction contributes to the debate on the place and boundaries of the human in relation to the world. I examine the liquid-solid interplay, though which I accentuate Lispector's concern over the human subject's relation to its environment. In doing so, I foreground the relational and processual nature of subject formation in Lispector's novels.

My thesis deploys Lispector's grappling with the questions of what it means to be a human being, how an individual mediates its environment, and how politics operates when other-than-human beings take a central role. I explore these questions through the themes of Spinoza's *Ethics* as a philosophical origin in Lispector's fiction, the matter-energy continuum and individuation, the non-anthropocentric portrayal of physical environment and affective politics in infrastructure projects in Brazil, and interspecies communication in her anticipation of the Anthropocene. I argue that Lispector conceives of subjectivity as seamlessly connected with material processes. By formulating a new theorisation of subjectivity and materiality in Lispector's understudied novels, which are themes that have only been treated cursorily, I demonstrate the potential of reading Lispector's works to expand the non-anthropocentric thinking and thereby illustrates her continued relevance for our time.

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I explore the relationship between subjectivity and materiality in the writings of the acclaimed Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector (1920-1977), focusing on the affective dimension and nonhuman phenomena within her four novels published between 1943 and 1961. I traverse these texts to delineate how Lispector illustrates the boundary condition of human beings in the world as a convergence of two contradictory states: one as an ephemeral, emergent phenomenon arising from a web of interactions, and the other as a persistent, inert existence solidified by its embeddedness within an anonymous, impersonal group. I propose that Lispector addresses subjectivity and materiality as two interlinked questions, articulated through the constant mediation of the liquid and the solid – a chronic pattern embedded in her representation of a range of individuals' capacities and experiences with their environment.

By placing her works in dialogue with contemporary theoretical developments such as affect theory, new materialism and posthumanism, I offer a new reading of Lispector that underscores how she speaks to the present-day debates about the role and boundaries of the human subject in relation to the world. I suggest that drawing on theorists in the non-anthropocentric philosophical vein, such as Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and Brian Massumi, is conducive to interpreting Lispector's strategies of decentring humans from the universe to highlight their contingent entanglement with other beings that constitutes what humans are.

I propose that Lispector's grappling with the liquid-solid dynamism registers her deep concern with the human subject's relation to nonhuman beings and the physical realm. My contention is that the intrinsic connection between matter, energy and affect underscored in Lispector's fiction demonstrates her understanding of the human subject as an emergent

phenomenon shared among material flows of what Barad terms ‘intra-action’ that constitutes the universe.

My thesis deploys Lispector’s reflections upon the questions of what it means to be a human being, how an individual mediates its environment, and how politics operates when other-than-human beings take a central role. It thus contributes to the non-anthropocentric thought that has emerged as a response to the ecological transformation and technological innovation of contemporary times.

The thesis is divided into four chapters, which analyse *Perto do coração selvagem* (1943), *O lustre* (1946), *A cidade sitiada* (1949) and *A maçã no escuro* (1961). Across these chapters, my analytical focus shifts from ontological concerns to more socially oriented questions, such as gender, modernity and ecology.

In Chapter 1, I read *Perto do coração selvagem* alongside Spinoza’s *Ethics*, examining how Lispector adopts the cosmic architecture outlined in *the Ethics* to ground her conception of the human subject in relation to the world. This architecture is characterised by a plane of consistent substance with relative movements constituting multiple modes of being. Lispector inscribes Spinozan affects in her portrayal of Joana as a subject as well as her relationship with other characters and the world she inhabits. I argue that Lispector portrays human subjects as defined solely by their affective states and bound to the unyielding order of nature, where their capacities for feeling, thinking and acting serve as modes of participation in relational events governed by this regularity. Considering the unstable parameters of bodies in the novel, I further propose that Lispector depicts the subject as flows of unappropriated affects constituting the world. Influenced by Spinoza’s principle of the attributes and the philosophy of mind, Lispector envisions the human subject’s bodily and cognitive functions as interlinked events, operating in a way consistent with the nature of matter. Extending Spinoza’s

determinism and epistemology, Lispector juxtaposes the limitation of human knowledge and capacities with the perfection of nature. Meanwhile, she highlights intuition as the subject's channel for comprehending the complex cosmic order, rather than master or conquer it. In doing so, Lispector conveys the idea coherent with the contemporary ecological thinking that the human being's survival depends on the condition of staying welded with other beings and the environment.

Chapter 2 explores the formation of subjectivity in *O lustre*, with a focus on how the subject reveals itself through bodily tensions and its negotiation with objects and atmosphere. Lispector focuses on the body to concretise how the subject organises forms of alliances and resistance, bringing to light the preconscious, potential dimension of its mediation with these networks. I scrutinise the affective mechanism at work in the protagonist's development as a subject, highlighting Virgínia's visceral experience of traumatic witnessing and its unfolding potential evident in scenes of her material entanglements and engagement with power play inherent in the social space. Physical objects attain prominence in this novel, while they are delineated not as pebble-like reality but moveable clusters of interaction involving human and nonhuman beings. This interpretation of materiality mirrors the author's conception of subjectivity as both processual and relational. By bringing to light Lispector's theorisation of the unity of materiality and subjectivity, I aim to elucidate her writing strategy of prioritising the physical realm and impersonal forces to expand the spectrum of how experience can be registered. In doing so, I emphasise Lispector's practice of a non-anthropocentric perspective, which posits a way of understanding the human subject's embedded position in the material world by foregrounding their interaction and co-evolution. In light of the parallel in the novel between the matter-energy continuum and the subject's constant state of traversing between the preindividual and forming consciousness, I argue that Lispector portrays human experience

and material processes as entwined, formative movements within a complex and dynamic system of actions driven by flows of affective energy.

In Chapter 3, I turn to the representation of the relationality between the subject and their environment in *A cidade sitiada*, which features Lucrécia's fractured perspective within the urbanising process of the township. My analysis of the novel centres on how Lispector renders the pervasive circulation of optimism, which correlates with emerging signs of modernities. I interpret optimism as a form of affective politics that operates through generating desires and triggering emotions, thereby binding individuals to the collective project. The author exposes the nonconscious dimension of Lucrécia's aspiration and attachment by revealing individuals' embeddedness within a set of material conditions and collective intentionality unfolded through urbanisation. I examine how the suburb's dominating landscape of public works and its social devices function as a deceiving construct, concealing the unequal distribution and individual sufferings. Reading the novel alongside some of her *crônicas* (journalistic essays), I aim to emphasise Lispector's effort at social intervention. Specifically, I analyse her critique of the collective projects and institutional forces that encroach on individual lives as well as her questioning of group identity and the notion of order and progress as a national motto. I tease out the tension between female characters' perception of and barriers to public engagement, revealing how their decision-making becomes a homogenised affirmation of institutional context and conventionality. Through the juxtaposition of infrastructure with middle-class women's attunement to the idea of fulfilment within intertwined orders of patriarch and the modernising state, Lispector exposes how individual subjects are fundamentally implicated in the Brazilian ideals of nationhood, thereby using fiction as a medium for political reflection and public critique.

Chapter 4 probes Lispector's evolving understanding of individuals' capacities to interpret the nonhuman world in *A maçã no escuro*, a novel that showcases her experiments

with narrating ambiences freed from human focalisation. The chapter begins with an analysis of Martim's experience of sensory immersion in the wilderness, where he ceases to be a clearly demarcated individual, becoming instead a vague bundle of nonhuman elements. I demonstrate how the author satirises the notion of heroism, exposing its complicity with the insidious impacts of anthropocentrism, patriarchy and hierarchical power structures on individuals, manifest in Martim's illusion of his exclusive access to knowledge and domination. I thematise apprehension as an emergent form of ontological disposition – a dilemma between relinquishing and adhering to an entrenched anthropocentric worldview. I propose that Lispector portrays language, knowledge and masculinity as inter-validating codes sustaining this framework. In doing so, I also argue that, in her rendering of apprehension, Lispector intuits the idea of the Anthropocene that she encourages her readers to observe, which revolves around a sense of uncertainty and precarity, a heightened awareness of other-than-human relationality and the ethical considerations of individual actions. I explore Lispector's rethinking of the relation between humanity and nature in the context of the paradigms of western modernity, as expressed through the poetics of apprehension she develops. I bring to the view how Lispector delineates the Anthropocene condition at the interface of knowledge, patriarchy and human-centrism, as Martim's recurring attempts of mastery and conquest of nature ultimately lead to self-destruction.

Overall, my thesis intervenes critically in both Lispectorian studies and theories of the non-anthropocentrism. It adopts contemporary theoretical approaches to examine under-studied novels by Lispector. By formulating a new theorisation of subjectivity and materiality in Lispector's first four novels, which are themes that have only been treated cursorily, it demonstrates the potential of reading Lispector's works to expand the non-anthropocentric thinking and thereby illustrates her continued relevance for our time.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I feel incredibly fortunate to have benefited from the expertise and support of my two supervisors, whose knowledge, wisdom and enthusiasm have inspired and encouraged me throughout this academic journey. I would like to express my appreciation to Claire Williams for her sustained and thoughtful guidance on my reading of Clarice Lispector since my master's studies, and to Nikolaj Lübecker for his incisive and rigorous mentorship in theory and philosophy.

My thanks go to Claudia Pazos-Alonso and Simon Park, who generously engaged with the drafts of thesis chapters and provided insightful suggestions at the Transfer and Confirmation of Status. I am also grateful for the Paula Soans O'Brian Scholarship in the Arts and Humanities provided by St Cross College, University of Oxford.

This work would not have been possible without the dynamic and vibrant community I have been privileged to be part of. I owe my thanks to many people who have aided me during my DPhil. I am especially grateful to my friends and colleagues who read and discussed parts of this thesis and offered invaluable feedback: Vinicius Brunette, Michael Berson, Han Au Chua, Sasho Pshenko, Michelle Hsu and David Gao. Last but not least, I am deeply indebted to my parents, whose support has always been unconditional. I dedicate this work to my mum.

# Table of Contents

*INTRODUCTION* ..... *11*

1. Between the Liquid and the Solid ..... 11
2. Lispector's Non-anthropocentric Thought ..... 15
3. Chapter Structure ..... 28

*CHAPTER 1 – THE PHILOSOPHICAL ORIGINS: SPINOZAN AFFECTS IN PERTO DO CORAÇÃO SELVAGEM* ..... *33*

Introduction ..... 33

1. Fundamental Principles in the *Ethics* and the Conception of Subjectivity in *Perto do coração selvagem* ..... 36
2. Disappearance and Intra-action: the Body's Unstable Parameters ..... 52
3. On the Function of the Mind, Individual Freedom and Aesthetic experience ..... 68

Conclusion ..... 77

*CHAPTER 2 – WEAVING OBJECTS AND ATMOSPHERE: MATTER-ENERGY DYNAMICS IN O LUSTRE* ..... *80*

Introduction ..... 80

1. The Story of a Hat: Bodily Tensions and Affects ..... 83
2. Playing, Affective Atmosphere and Micropolitics ..... 89
3. Material Objects, Energy and the Nonhuman Agency ..... 99
   - 3.1 Shaping the Clay ..... 100
   - 3.2 The Chandelier ..... 104

Conclusion ..... 109

*CHAPTER 3 – CRUEL OPTIMISM IN SUBURBAN CHANGE: INFRASTRUCTURE AND POLITICS OF AFFECT IN A CIDADE SITIADA* ..... *111*

Introduction ..... 111

1. The Environment of Progress ..... 114
   - 1.1 Women and the Association ..... 114
   - 1.2 Other-than-human Characters ..... 122
2. The Formalism of Desire ..... 131
3. Infrastructure and the Liminal Experience ..... 139

Conclusion ..... 150

*CHAPTER 4 – PATRIARCHY AND INTERSPECIES EXPERIENCES: APPREHENSION IN A MAÇÃ NO ESCURO* ..... *152*

**Introduction** ..... **152**

**1. Immersion and the Interspecies Dynamic** ..... **155**

**2. Anxiety and Projection** ..... **171**

**3. The Human and the Anthropocene** ..... **179**

**Conclusion** ..... **191**

*CONCLUSION* ..... *194*

*Bibliography* ..... *200*

# INTRODUCTION

## 1. Between the Liquid and the Solid

In a pivotal scene in the dénouement of the debut novel by Clarice Lispector (1920-1977), *Perto do coração selvagem* (1943), Joana embarks on her own journey without a clear destination, leaving behind her a precarious life seeking shelters from place to place:

> Afastava-se aos poucos daquela zona onde as coisas têm forma fixa e arestas, onde tudo tem um nome sólido e imutável. Cada vez mais afundava na região líquida, quieta e insondável. Onde pairavam névoas vagas e frescas como as da madrugada. [...] Tudo impreciso, mas de súbito na imprecisão encontrara uma nitidez que ela apenas adivinhara e não pudera possuir inteiramente. Perturbada pensara: tudo, tudo. As palavras são seixos rolando no rio. Não fora felicidade o que sentira então, mas o que sentira fora fluido, docemente amorfo, instante resplandecente, instante sombrio.[1]

As Joana eschews her entanglements within her previous social and familial roles, all that she has once perceived to be solid loses its shape and definition. Therefore, she is immersed in a liquid, formless world that appears to be even more unfathomable. This passage is among a series of moments in Lispector's fiction where her grappling with the interplay of the liquid and the solid captures our attention. Joana's struggle to describe her perturbing experience of blurred boundaries between the reality, feelings and consciousness is encapsulated by the analogy comparing words to pebbles rolling in the river – linguistic expression as an effort to register elusive experience with concrete forms can never reach a static end but remains in flux. Words, once uttered, already carry the tendency of motion in the face of an overwhelming and fast-changing reality. As an assembly of matter and energy, this analogy signals an affective surplus that escapes words – a product of human cognitive activity. This surplus is depicted in

[1] Clarice Lispector, *Perto do coração selvagem* (Rocco, 2019), p. 149, hereafter PCS. Subsequent references are given in parentheses in the main text.

this passage as fluid, amorphous instants of intensity. By attending to the excess of sensations over language, Lispector reflects on the limit of individuals' cognitive capacity to fully grasp what they are exposed to and the burden that relying solely on established reference systems or cognitive patterns can place on their ability to address their experience.

The prevailing metaphor of liquid/solid opposition is a staple throughout Lispector's works, where this metaphor demonstrates unstable, evolving meanings. Her constant negotiation of this binary framework solicits key issues in this thesis concerning the relationship between materiality and subjectivity. The figurative combination of pebble-like inert objects with stable contours and river-like rapid movements with boundless presence can be adopted to illustrate Lispector's intention to formulate a universe of matter, relation and interaction through her writing, where the human-centric perspective is undermined.

In *Perto do coração selvagem*, the mixing of fluidity and solidity is found in the interplay between consistent substance and mutable modes inspired by Spinoza's philosophy in the *Ethics*. The steadfast architecture of the universe is interspersed with moveable shapes of individual subjects. Joana perceives herself as partaker of nature, which is an indivisible whole, while she is only able to access and understand this opaque, sole substance through varied modes of embeddedness in fluid networks with other beings. In *O lustre* (1946), the incessant flow of the river appears in the opening scene, symbolising an ungraspable reality that shapes the structure of Virgínia's subjectivity. As the novel's first sentence states, 'Ela seria fluida durante toda a vida'.[2] Throughout her life, the river morphs into complex modes of movement and change, while Virgínia often expresses her fascination with material objects, which, with their endurance and sturdiness, provide her an anchoring sense of permanence amidst the transience of individual existence. The oscillation between the liquid and the solid

[2] Lispector, *O lustre* (Rocco, 2019), p. 7, hereafter OL. Subsequent references are given in parentheses in the main text.

is pronouncedly illustrated through Virgínia's gesture of moulding figures to record her experience using clay and water from the river, and later dissolving them. Lispector showcases instances of agency through matter-energy that emerges at the interstices of this binary. In *A cidade sitiada* (1949), the solidity/fluidity contrast is conveyed through the juxtaposition of the firm, intractable appearance of urban infrastructure and the instability of social relations, as well as through individuals' constant gestures of negotiation and adaptation to the overarching atmosphere of optimism. Lispector reflects on the subject's positioning in relation to the pressures of the collective project of urbanisation. The protagonist's solid plan for achieving upward social mobility is embedded in a collectively assured promise of happiness. Emerging material existences such as viaducts provide a sense of reliability and assurance for the future, consolidating the uniform structure of feelings, while broken promises and precarious individual lives remain hidden. Lispector constructs a counternarrative of collective progress and modernity through the incongruity of recurring scenes of urban flooding inundating private homes and the sturdy public works foregrounded by the town's drainpipe system. In *A maçã no escuro* (1961), the problem of gender plays a more significant role. The novel's first two subheadings, 'Como se faz um homem' and 'Nascimento do herói', suggest a teleological narrative structure following a plot progression premised on a human-centred sense of meaning. This solid framework is contrasted by the novel's fluid, ambient unfolding, in which the protagonist Martim is immersed in an undifferentiated configuration of wilderness. Martim believes that the natural environment, with minimal human intervention, provides a rock-solid background of safety ('o chão definitivo'),[3] allowing him to dissociate himself from a past he perceives as definitive and his only source of danger, while establishing durable and trustworthy companionship with other beings. His pleasant disposition of being seated on a

[3] Lispector, *A maçã no escuro* (Rocco, 2019), p. 15, hereafter ME. Subsequent references are given in parentheses in the main text.

rock, imagining himself as a creator of a new world, dissolves as he finds himself in a porous assemblage of actions, while a diffuse anxiety flows and permeates throughout different aspects of his existence.

I traverse these texts to delineate how Lispector illustrates the boundary condition of human beings in the world as a convergence of two contradictory states: one as an ephemeral, emergent phenomenon arising from a web of interactions, and the other as a persistent, inert existence solidified by its embeddedness within an anonymous, impersonal group. Lispector depicts human subject as existing along a standing spectrum of solidity and liquidity. This engagement with unstable, amorphous nature of an individual subject in relation to their surroundings implies the necessity of exploring methods to detect the modes of subject formation in Lispector's works.

This thesis therefore addresses the relationship between subjectivity and materiality in Clarice Lispector's first four novels, published between 1943 and 1961, with an analytical focus on affect and nonhuman phenomena, such as animals and physical objects. I have chosen to study these four early novels because they underscore Lispector's persistent exploration of this relationship, but remain under-examined in scholarship. By placing her works in dialogue with contemporary theoretical developments such as affect theory, new materialism and animal studies, it offers a new reading of Lispector that demonstrates how she speaks to the present-day debates about the role and boundaries of the human subject in relation to the world. My thesis deploys Lispector's grappling with the questions of what it means to be a human being, how an individual mediates its environment, and how politics operates when other-than-human beings take a central role. It thus contributes to the non-anthropocentric thought that has emerged as a response to the ecological transformation and technological innovation of contemporary times.

## 2. Lispector's Non-anthropocentric Thought

Since the publication of her first novel, Lispector has received an outpouring of critical attention, particularly in existential, phenomenological and feminist dimensions. Here, I have selected works with philosophical leanings that resonate with the focus of this thesis. Criticism has long been carried out to explore the distinctive contributions of Lispector's fiction in terms of her experimental narrative strategies to probe the tension between language and meaning, and her particular expressions of women's existential conditions, especially the moment of epiphany within their complacent bourgeois lives, such as in the studies by Hélène Cixous[4] and Earl E. Fitz.[5] A rich body of scholarship tended to examine Lispector's engagement with ontological and epistemological problems through the lenses of literary feminism, poststructuralism and psychoanalysis. I will argue in this thesis that these narrative aspects to which scholars have devoted attention are relevant to the questions of subjectivity: the reflections upon established notions about femininity, individual psyche and experience of exteriority, personal histories and linguistic capacities lead to the query about the subject's position in a network of relations with regard to other beings, society and material realities.

Lúcia Villares has observed 'the subjective crisis' and its 'related narrative crisis' as a salient aspect in Lispector's fiction, which the previous major critical studies have failed to elucidate.[6] Interpreting the crisis of the subject as 'problems of agency' manifested in situations where 'there is an obstruction blocking the individual's possibilities of engaging with his or

[4] See Hélène Cixous, *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, trans. by Verena Andermatt Conley (University of Minnesota Press, 1990).
[5] See Earl E. Fitz, *Clarice Lispector* (Twayne Publishers, 1985).
[6] Lúcia Villares, *Examining Whiteness: Reading Clarice Lispector Through Bessie Head and Toni Morrison* (Maney Publishing, 2011), p. 1.

her surrounding world',[7] Villares analyses how Lispector 'portray[s] the connections between language, subjectivities and the process of constructing personal identities'.[8] I agree with Villares's observation that novel, as a genre, has the capacity to 'function as a kind of "laboratory"' where the author is able to conduct 'the exploratory work that this format enables', particularly due to its length.[9] While Villares was inclined to focus on the impacts of the cultural environment in shaping one's subjectivity, particularly one's 'position as a subject within the nation',[10] my thesis attends to this theme (see chapter 3), as well as other conditions beyond humanistic visions that accentuate Lispector's unique contribution to the study of subjectivity. By examining Lispector's articulation of individuals' entangled situations within the system of intimate relationships and the domestic sphere, local associations and communities, as well as the natural environment and ecosystem, I intend to scrutinise the ways in which Lispector speculates about the place of human beings within a wider network of connectivity and explores identity categories that are not limited to gender, social class or nationality. By extension, I aim to show how Lispector's fiction provides rich resources for understanding the relation between humanity and the physical world in our present situations.

Considering her legacies in the twenty-first century, Adriana X. Jacobs and Claire Williams have highlighted the availability of Lispector's works for a wide range of theoretical frameworks.[11] In his recent work, Earl E. Fitz emphasises 'the fount of [Lispector's] global appeal' and analyses her current relevance in world literature with regards to her commitments in religion, politics and gender dynamics.[12] This thesis aims to bring Lispector to the view of a

[7] Villares, *Examining Whiteness*, p. 2-3.
[8] Villares, *Examining Whiteness*, p. 13.
[9] Villares, *Examining Whiteness*, p. 2.
[10] Villares, *Examining Whiteness*, p. 6.
[11] See Adriana Ximena Jacobs and Claire Williams, 'Introduction: Afterthoughts and Afterwords', in *After Clarice: Reading Lispector's Legacy in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Adriana X. Jacobs and Claire Williams (Legenda, 2022), pp. 1-12 (p. 4).
[12] Earl E. Fitz, *Clarice Lispector: From Brazil to the World* (Purdue University Press, 2024), p. 4.

wider audience by situating her in the context of the twentieth-first-century theoretical developments that feature a shift from an anthropocentric focus to other-than-human realities. In light of the structure of the liquid-solid interface, through which I accentuate Lispector's concerns over individuals' relation to their environment and her conception of the pattern of the universe, I find it necessary to adopt those contemporary perspectives to approach her works, which have not yet played a dominant role in Lispector studies.

It is fitting to clarify the theoretical perspectives that this thesis will address by starting with an overview of the non-anthropocentric scholarship. Using an umbrella term, 'the nonhuman turn', Richard Grusin characterises a range of theoretical approaches in the twenty-first century, including affect theory, animal studies, assemblage theory, etc., as being 'engaged in decentering the human in favor of a turn toward and concern for the nonhuman'.[13] According to Grusin, unlike the notion of the posthuman that emphasises how humans are transformed by their entanglements with environment, the nonhuman turn underscores the indistinction from the nonhuman not as a historical development but as a constant state of human beings. This perspective takes its cue from Bruno Latour's notion, paraphrased by Grusin as 'we have never been human' but find ourselves in the process of coevolving with other-than-human beings.[14] While recognising Grusin's effort to name the collective feature of this emerging field of scholarship, Nikolaj Lübecker prefers the term non-anthropocentric to describe these schools of thought, stressing their shared attention to critiques and reflections on anthropocentrism. In doing so, Lübecker highlights how a non-anthropocentric ontology, which figures 'an always ongoing process of subject formation',[15] enables readers and critics to read literature in ways that help construct new understanding of humans' relation to the world, particularly in response

[13] Richard A. Grusin, 'Introduction', in *The Nonhuman Turn*, ed. by Richard A. Grusin (University of Minnesota Press, 2015), pp. vii-xxix (p. vii).
[14] Grusin, 'Introduction', p. ix.
[15] Nikolaj Lübecker, *Twenty-First-Century Symbolism: Verlaine, Baudelaire, Mallarmé* (Liverpool University Press, 2022), p. 5.

to current environmental and technological transformations. For this emphasis, I incline to adopt Lübecker's notion of 'non-anthropocentric' to describe Lispector's practice of portraying experience beyond human scale, and this practice is foregrounded at the moments of negotiation between liquid and solid, between human subjectivity and other-than-human materiality.

For more than two decades, critical discourses have sought to reconsider the subject-object relation by conceptualising affect. Scholars like Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth have defined affect as preconscious, noncognitive reaction constituted by relational movements.[16] To put it in another way, affect arises from bodily contact and engenders a change in the state of the body. Reflecting on current trends in affect theory, Seigworth and Carolyn Pedwell highlight one of the ascendent paths in this field that they describe as 'the Spinoza-Deleuze-Massumi line'.[17] Following this philosophical vein that represents affect as dynamic, autonomous bodily capacity, my thesis begins with the premise that this force or movement called affect, which occurs on a nonconscious and nonhuman scale through encounters of bodies, constitutes a significant literary instrument in Lispector's works. I regard Lispector's fiction as a practice of affective writing because she self-consciously associates feelings[18] with bodily materiality and strives to register feelings that are in excess of cognitive experience and linguistic expression. Through this grammar of writing, Lispector attempts to think beyond the boundaries of the human, and to inquire about what human and nonhuman bodies can do. Lispector often represents human subjects in a mode of suspended or diminished agency. By agency, I mean signs of cognitive and linguistic capacities. The noncognitive state brings to the

[16] See Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1-25.
[17] Gregory J. Seigworth and Carolyn Pedwell, 'Introduction: A Shimmer of Inventories', in *The Affect Theory Reader. 2: Worldings, Tensions, Futures*, ed. by Gregory J. Seigworth and Carolyn Pedwell (Duke University Press, 2023), pp. 1-59 (p. 20).
[18] By feeling, I refer to both emotion and preconscious experience. I use 'sensation' to designate the human's unconscious feelings.

light subjects' processes of interchange with their environment through the transmission of affects which momentarily constitute what they are.

Critics are only just beginning to read Lispector through a set of non-anthropocentric lenses like affect theory, new materialism and posthumanism. Existing criticism has addressed the affinities between Lispector's writing and contemporary theories, often applying these frameworks to interpret her literary texts and treating her as an object on which theories and philosophy act unilaterally. However, when it comes to the question of how Lispector's works contribute to the development or re-evaluation of these philosophical concepts, particularly in relation to the renewed interest in the position of human subjects within the material world, studies remain relatively scarce. Building upon Gilles Deleuze's theory of subjects-in-becoming, Rosi Braidotti uses Lispector's *A paixão segundo G.H.* (1964) as a case study for her enactment of the subject as a site of material interconnectedness and dynamic transformation. In this early example of non-anthropocentrism's interaction with Lispector, Braidotti interprets the protagonist's encounter with the roach as signs of 'the collapse of the barriers between the human and its animal and inorganic others', which consequently reveals 'the non-centrality of the human to life and to living matter'.[19] While my thesis resonates with Braidotti's challenge to the fixity of subject position, I uncover Lispector's long-term engagement with philosophies both of her time and beyond it, emphasising the epistemic virtues of her fiction in creating a space for such dialogues.

By examining the animal vision in *A paixão segundo G.H.*, Irving Goh argues that 'Lispector has preceded Deleuze and Guattari in pointing out' an alternative life 'free from all the human conditions' including 'institutional authority' and 'rational consciousness'.[20] This

[19] Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist theory of Becoming* (Polity, 2002), pp. 161-62.
[20] Irving Goh, 'Blindness and Animality, or Learning How to Live Finally in Clarice Lispector's *The Passion according to G.H.*', *Differences*, 23.2 (2012), pp. 113-35 (p.121).

observation aligns Lispector's literary expression with the exploration of an other-than-human perspective that exhibits the limitation of preconceived subjectivity. Fernanda Negrete analyses Lispector's rendering of the univocity of being in *Água viva* (1973), highlighting this aspect as a point of convergence between Lispector and Deleuze.[21] While Negrete reveals the plane of life demonstrated in the novel as relational and impersonal, she mainly focuses on the dissolved boundaries and affective tension between the writing subject and the reader. These studies that engage with the alignment between Lispector's fictional writing with twentieth-century thinkers lend crucial insights into how Lispector understands the subject-object encounter, which will be an important theme in this thesis.

In more recent scholarship, Kelli D. Zaytoun concludes from the posthumanist readings of Lispector that this approach illuminates a significant aspect of her writing, that is, an 'awareness of how human life is steeped in an immensely vigorous material context that escapes reason' whereby 'forces of nature and a variety of living and non-living things not only co-exist but are co-constitutive and deeply enmeshed'.[22] In light of this, Zaytoun examines 'the relationship between subjectivity and death' in *A hora da estrela* (1977) and the posthumously published *Um sopro de vida - pulsações* (1978), drawing on Braidotti's posthumanist theory that argues for blurred boundaries between living and dying. Zaytoun's description of death scenes in the two novels is relevant because it highlights the human subject's participatory position with regard to the 'self-organizing, material, empirical life force'.[23] The unstable relationality between the living and the non-living, the animate and the inanimate is constantly

[21] See Fernanda Negrete, 'Approaching Impersonal Life with Clarice Lispector', *Humanities*, 7.2 (2018), p. 55.
[22] Kelli D. Zaytoun, 'Writing Life beyond the Humanist Subject in *The Hour of the Star* and *A Breath of Life*', in *After Clarice*, ed. by Jacobs and Williams (Legenda, 2022), pp. 239-54 (p. 240).
[23] Zaytoun, 'Writing Life', p. 241.

at work in Lispector's fiction, which orients us to a non-anthropocentric ontology that I will discuss in this thesis.

Marta Peixoto explicitly proposes that the 'formulations of affect theory resonate with crucial moments' in Lispector's texts.[24] When Peixoto observes how Lispector displays characters' speechless struggles in her short stories that 'made of the impasses of writing the motive for writing',[25] Peixoto interprets 'the grammar of body that cannot be fully captured in words' as Lispector's writing of affect.[26] Even though Peixoto underscores Lispector's strategy of conveying non-recognisable sensations through the depiction of bodily gestures, she pays attention primarily to the linguistic struggles to represent ineffable states – a question that has long been observed by critics contemporaneous to Lispector, such as Antônio Cândido.[27] Rather than confining my investigation to the threshold of the ineffable or interpreting affects as enclosed, introspective states detached from the external reality, I argue that the affective dimension in Lispector's fiction is demonstrated not only through the depiction of feelings independent of cognitive processes but, more importantly, through the immediacy of the experience due to the subject's intense, direct exposure to its milieu. In order to present a main line of argumentation in this thesis, which addresses Lispector's awareness of the indistinction between the individual's psyche and the physical reality, I draw extensively on Brian Massumi's theorisation of affect, which builds on Deleuze and emphasises the incipience and tendencies of an experience. I will analyse how Lispector's writing represents what Massumi describes as the virtual realm, where an elusive experience grasped by the body is open to ongoing variations in the process of being registered by consciousness and becoming recognisable. These variations take place in the individual's perception of the incipient intensity

[24] Marta Peixoto, ''Prender um inefável': Affect in Clarice's Fictions', in *After Clarice*, pp. 127-38 (p.128).
[25] Peixoto, 'Prender', p. 134.
[26] Peixoto, 'Prender', p. 130-31.
[27] See Antônio Cândido, *Vários escritos* (Livraria Duas Cidades, 1970).

as well as in its transpersonal circulation. Invoking Massumi and Lauren Berlant's focuses on the political ramification of individuals' affective experience, especially due to its openness and relationality, I will argue that in Lispector's fiction, human subjects, delineated as being caught in nonlinear processes of becoming conscious of and actualising affective registers, are shaped by and organised around the potential unfolding of events in which they participate.

I contend that reading Lispector's fiction alongside a theoretical corpus concerning affect, subjectivity and materiality allows us to clearly map and analyse Lispector's pursuits of envisioning and conceptualising possible modalities of relationship between human beings and the worlds they inhabit. I now want to bring the aforementioned discussions closer to the texts that will be studied in this thesis. Lispector's intervention in the philosophical legacy is important to my analysis. I will start this thesis by discussing the intertextuality of Spinoza's *Ethics* and Lispector's *Perto do coração selvagem*, and I will argue that Lispector incorporates Spinoza's notions of substance and mode as foundational ideas in the configuration of her creative system. Drawing on Spinoza's concept of affect/affection, which refers to the extension of the consistent substance of the world engendered by contacts between entities, I propose *Ethics* as the philosophical roots of Lispector's conception of the individual's relation to the world. In light of this, I will examine her lifelong experiments with depicting the human subject as reliant on and defined by its web of relations with other modes of existence. In this manner, Lispector's portrayal of the place and function of an individual subject prompts the reader towards the contemporary affect theory, which is based on Spinoza's early modern thought and elaborated as a key concept in works by philosophers such as Deleuze, Guattari and Massumi. In this thesis, I incline to adopt the term 'affect' to designate the material forces arising from and circulating through encounters between human and nonhuman entities. Harking back to the Spinozo-Massumian definition, I use affect to signal the subject's

immediate participation in and mediation of the world made of relational events and constitutes the primary feature of the subject. I will present this key term in detail in chapters 1 and 2.

Lispector's perennial interest in humans' interaction with nonhuman beings leads us to the critical field that is nowadays described as new materialism. New idioms such as 'thing theory' and 'object-oriented ontology' show the scholarly tendency to reconsider materiality vis-à-vis the rise of commodity capitalism and advancement in technology. Theorists like Bill Brown and Jane Bennett investigate the dynamics between humans and physical objects and observe the agency of objects in forming autonomous assemblies and acting upon humans through their contacts. Drawing on Brown's theory on objects, Ami Schiess examines how, in *Água viva*, objects 'serve as indices for a constellation of artistic and ontological questions concerning seeing and knowing the nature of the world that lies outside of the self'.[28] Schiess points out the importance of 'how Lispector's approach to non-human alterity converges with her concern for the human other'.[29] This observation aligns with Brown's effort to look at objects as signs or symbols of abstract phenomena. However, I understand Lispector's renderings of material objects not merely as indexes to her representation of encounters with otherness or as tools for describing human subjectivity. More importantly, given the disruption of the artificial boundary between the human mind and the vibrant physical realm that characterises her material engagement, Lispector's focalisation on nonhuman entities serves to enact experiences beyond an anthropocentric worldview. Though I agree with Brown that material objects play a role in conditioning and shaping human behaviours, Lispector's formulation of human subjects' relation to the material reality parts company with Brown's theorisation of object/thing distinction. While Brown names thingness, the sensual dimension of an inanimate, physical object, as signs of the object's subjectification disclosed in human

[28] Ami Schiess, 'Reflections in the Porta-espelho: Clarice Lispector's Literary Theory of the Object', in *After Clarice*, pp. 255-72 (p. 255).
[29] Schiess, 'Reflections', p. 257.

experience, I argue that Lispector conceives of objects and human subjects as fundamentally codependent and inextricable, and that she eschews the assumption that thingness exists solely as a consequence of human intervention. Preserving coherence with Spinoza's ideas of substance and modes, which she has referenced in *Perto do coração selvagem*, in her subsequent novels such as *O lustre* and *A cidade sitiada*, Lispector exposes her sustained effort to portray human activities and material processes as entwined, formative movements within a complex and dynamic system of actions driven by flows of affective energy. This imbrication through affects materialises in what I have described as the unity of solidity and liquidity, which characterises the persistent peripheral conditions of both human beings and physical objects in Lispector's delineation – an ambiguous unity that signals a dissolved boundary between the perceived reality of an experience or an event involving them and its unrecognised, continuous unfolding: the tendencies in the human and the nonhuman alike to act out the potential that extends beyond their definite forms and exceeds the immediate moment of the happening. Therefore, I contend that Lispector's reflections on subjectivity and materiality are rather process-oriented, which diverge greatly from the object-oriented turn in literary criticism, despite their mutual gesture of decentralisation of the subject and the rejection of anthropocentrism.

In the Lispectorian fictional world, which is liquid with constant mutation and reinvention, individual subjects find themselves in perpetual search of what is felt as solid, without being fully aware that they are doing so, and this gesture leads to the formation of desire, community, ideology and the perception of the demands for alliances with other-than-human realities. I propose that Lispector depicts the human subject as an event interwoven in and emerging from a shared material environment with others, composed of vast processes of interrelation – the subject mediates its relation to the material milieu that envelops it and this gesture of mediation constitutes potential forms of individual life and social organism.

Lispector illustrates characters' materially enmeshed experiences within a pervasive web of relations, such as the prevailing liquid milieux in *Perto do coração selvagem* where forms of liveliness co-evolve with one another, and the expanding urban landscape in *A cidade sitiada* to which the protagonist, figuring an outcome of this material process, is constantly attuned. In doing so, Lispector affirms the unpredictable tendencies in how events unfold and mobilise through material entanglement, which serves as a generative field in subject formation. This affirmation opens up new avenues for the reflections on the ethical and political issues of our time: if human subjects are indistinguishably imbricated within an assemblage of events and material forces; if they are never stable but rather emergent phenomena caught in a vast, ongoing process of formation, how should we reconsider the complexity of individuality and collectivity, mind and body, conscious and nonconscious, culture and nature? How may we conceive of the possibility of freedom and autonomy in socio-political engagement, given that subjects and events are quintessentially relational and social? Considering human-beings' decentred and situated position in the world, to what extent can they be held accountable for their actions and decision-making in relation to other beings and the environment? In my analysis of the four novels, I trace Lispector's concerns with the preindividual, affective tensions of somatic bodies and the social dimension of feelings by scrutinising how she reckons with individuals' experience of selfhood and belonging, especially their mediations of mutational groupings and institutional landscapes.

I argue that Lispector engages with the human conditions in a similar spirit to Guattari's approach in *The Three Ecologies* (1989), where he examines human subjectivity, social relations and the environment as interlocking processes.[30] While Lispector experiments with the human subject's possible modes of participation within the environment as a relational network, she also remains alert to the exploitative relationship between the collective

[30] See Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. by Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (Athlone Press, 2000).

organisation and the individual, between humanity and other beings. In doing so, Lispector invites the reader to reflect upon the broader question relating to the socio-political implications of the reduced distinction between individuals and their environment based on her speculation of the shifts in subjectivity. To explore this question with the theoretical precision that is absent in extant criticism, I draw on Guattari and Massumi's notion of micropolitics, which illuminates how power operates through feelings and interrelations, shaping encounters and interactions in everyday settings on a localised scale – with far-reaching ramifications. In *O lustre*, Lispector portrays human characters and physical objects at their moments of discreteness and connection. Virgínia's incessant reenactment of her fleeting and intense experience of encounter with material objects and her incorporation of codes and affective registers through repeated negotiations with other characters within a web of intimate relationship, are represented as mutually constitutive tendencies in her process of becoming a subject. Lispector's characters often experience their entanglements with the material reality as an immersion in moods and collective atmospheres. She illustrates these conditions of inextricable enmeshment through individuals' identification with places and social groupings.

As a practice of the self in relation to other beings, micropolitics is inherent in the mapping of subject formation. Therefore, I want to emphasise Lispector's rendering of the micropolitical tension as it unfolds in an expanded social world in *A cidade sitiada*. In the novel centred on suburban change, the protagonist Lucrécia is deliberately hollowed out by the author. Through Lucrécia's restricted sphere of interest and immediate, unconscious response to the shifts of circumstances, Lispector demonstrates the shape of subjectivity produced in the affective environment that figures an ongoing process of urbanisation. The homogenised desire of suburbia serves only to signify the consolidation of social patterns and mechanisms, which are instantiated by the intersecting physical and political infrastructures depicted in the novel. In this fictional narrative, fused with a commentary voice that directly addresses the reader,

Lispector explores the subjective crisis played out in the public realm in a manner that resonates with the concerns of contemporary cultural-political theorists and activists, such as Lauren Berlant and Sara Ahmed, particularly regarding the affective charge in individuals' habitual mediation of socio-cultural conventions and legacies. Reading Lispector's intervention in public life, such as debates about politics and women's role in the society, pushes us to think about the precariousness of the individual's existence as constant adjustments or attunement to the environment based on the immediacy and preindividual aspect of felt experiences.

Lispector extends her focus on power dynamics and exploitation through affective environment to include animals and plants. In *A maçã no escuro*, for instance, Lispector portrays the wilderness as a natural organism observed without a human subject, and yet the wilderness forms a continuation of social scenes taking place in the human lives. Through Martim's retreat into the wild, the author disputes the central tenets of modernity such as nature versus culture, human versus animal. Recent scholarship has discussed Lispector's natural imagery and her concerns about ecology and the sustainability of livelihood. Attending to the vegetal presence in Lispector's short story, 'Amor', Fabrício Lemos da Costa examines women's imprisoned position in a system built upon the colonial and capitalist mentalities, and hence posits that Lispector demonstrates 'uma certa coerência temática ligada à leitura ecofeminista',[31] a mode of criticism that articulates oppressions in their interconnected forms. My idea is that Lispector employs the image of a suffering natural environment not merely to reenact the experience of patriarchal and colonial violence. Furthermore, her depictions of women's interactions and identification with nonhuman beings invite an expansive exploration of alternative forms of sentience. Evoking the notion of the Anthropocene, a historical period of human-induced climate change, Bruno Carvalho examines Lispector's future-oriented

[31] Fabrício Lemos da Costa, ''Amor', de Clarice Lispector: a política anticolonial, as mulheres, os vegetais e o diálogo com as outras artes', *Leitura*, 79 (2023), pp. 71-85 (p. 82).

conception of extinction in *A hora da estrela*, situating the novel in the context of the expansion of industrialisation and consumerism in Brazil and 'fears of nuclear annihilation' during the Cold War.[32] Lispector's writing showcases her responsiveness to historical moments of epochal changes such as the Atomic Age. Her frequent use of scientific vocabularies from contemporary physics, including references to basic particles and the fourth dimension (see *Água viva* and *A hora da estrela*), reveals that her complex rendition of nature is vastly informed by scientific advancement of her time. Right from her debut novel, she probes for sustainable ways for humans to inhabit the universe by situating Joana in a network of cosmic order. Lispector's consistent account of human beings as inextricably connected to their surroundings and interwoven with the patterns of the world in its movement advances the quest to develop a non-anthropocentric understanding of the universe. Such an understanding that Lispector's fiction generates is conducive to addressing environmental crises in the present and future and to rethinking how we relate to and interact with other beings. I believe that my emphasis on the non-anthropocentric formal aesthetics of Lispector's writing makes the debate on subjectivity and materiality applicable to interpreting other literary works from twentieth-first-century perspectives.

## 3. Chapter Structure

Across the four chapters, my analytical focus moves from ontological concerns to more socially oriented questions, such as gender, modernity and ecology. In Chapter 1, I read *Perto do coração selvagem* alongside Spinoza's *Ethics*, examining how Lispector adopts the cosmic architecture outlined in *the Ethics* to ground her conception of the human subject in relation to

[32] Bruno Carvalho, 'The Future as a Necessity: Reading Clarice Lispector in the Anthropocene', in *Literature Beyond the Human: Post-anthropocentric Brazil*, ed. by Luca Bacchini and Victoria Saramago (Routledge, 2023), pp. 181-94 (p. 184).

the world. This architecture is characterised by a plane of consistent substance with relative movements constituting multiple modes of being. Lispector inscribes Spinozan affects in her portrayal of Joana as a subject as well as her relationship with other characters and the world she inhabits. I argue that Lispector illustrates the subject as defined solely by its affective states – its relational position in an assembly of interconnected events happening according to the law of nature. Considering the unstable parameters of bodies in the novel, I further propose that Lispector depicts the subject as flows of unappropriated affects constituting the world. Influenced by Spinoza's principle of the attributes and the philosophy of mind, Lispector envisions the human subject's bodily and cognitive functions as interlinked events, operating in a way consistent with the nature of matter. Extending Spinoza's determinism and epistemology, Lispector juxtaposes the limitation of the human knowledge and capacities with the perfection of nature. Meanwhile, she highlights intuition as the subject's channel for comprehending the complex cosmic order, rather than master or conquer it. In doing so, Lispector articulates the idea coherent with the contemporary ecological thinking that the human being's survival depends on the condition of staying welded with other beings and the environment.

Chapter 2 explores the formation of subjectivity in *O lustre*, with a focus on how the subject reveals itself through bodily tensions and its negotiation with objects and atmosphere. I scrutinise the affective mechanism at work in the protagonist's development as a subject, highlighting Virgínia's visceral experience of traumatic witnessing and its unfolding potential evident in scenes of her material entanglements and engagement with power play inherent in the social space. Physical objects attain prominence in this novel, while they are delineated not as pebble-like reality but moveable clusters of interaction involving human and nonhuman beings. This interpretation of materiality mirrors the author's conception of subjectivity as both processual and relational. By bringing to light Lispector's theorisation of the unity of

materiality and subjectivity, I aim to elucidate her writing strategy of prioritising the physical realm and impersonal forces to expand the spectrum of how experience can be registered. In doing so, I want to emphasise Lispector's practice of a non-anthropocentric perspective, which posits a way of understanding the human subject's embedded position in the material world by foregrounding their interaction and co-evolution. In light of the parallel in the novel between the matter-energy dynamics and the subject's constant state of traversing between the preindividual and forming consciousness, I argue that Lispector formulates a mode of subjectivity that is seamlessly connected with material objects and processes.

In Chapter 3, I turn to the representation of the relationality between the subject and their environment in *A cidade sitiada*, which features Lucrécia's fractured perspective within the urbanising process of the township. My analysis of the novel centres on how Lispector renders the pervasive circulation of optimism, which correlates with emerging signs of modernities. I interpret optimism as a form of affective politics that operates through generating desires and triggering emotions, thereby binding individuals to the collective project. The author exposes the nonconscious dimension of Lucrécia's aspiration and attachment by revealing individuals' embeddedness within a set of material conditions and collective intentionality unfolded through urbanisation. I examine how the suburb's dominating landscape of public works and its social devices function as a deceiving construct, concealing the unequal distribution and individual sufferings. Reading the novel alongside some of her *crônicas* (journalistic essays), I aim to emphasise Lispector's effort at social intervention. Specifically, I analyse her critique of the collective projects and institutional forces that encroach on individual lives as well as her questioning of group identity and the notion of order and progress as a national motto. Tracing Lucrécia's life trajectory, especially her gestures of attunement to the changing environment, oscillating between fantasy and exhaustion, I also underscore Lispector's attention to women's marginalised position during the period of

massive transformation. I tease out the tension between female characters' perception of and barriers to public engagement, revealing how their decision-making becomes a homogenised affirmation of institutional context and conventionality.

Chapter 4 probes Lispector's evolving understanding of individuals' capacities to interpret the nonhuman world in *A maçã no escuro*, a novel that showcases her experiments with narrating ambiences freed from human focalisation. The chapter begins with an analysis of Martim's experience of sensory immersion in the wilderness, where he ceases to be a clearly demarcated individual, becoming instead a vague bundle of nonhuman elements. I demonstrate how the author satirises the notion of heroism, exposing its complicity with the insidious impacts of anthropocentrism, patriarchy and hierarchical power structures on individuals, manifest in Martim's illusion of his exclusive access to knowledge and domination. I thematise apprehension as an emergent form of ontological disposition – marked by the tension between relinquishing and adhering to an entrenched anthropocentric worldview. I propose that Lispector portrays language, knowledge and masculinity as inter-validating codes sustaining this framework. In doing so, I also argue that, in her rendering of apprehension, Lispector intuits the idea of the Anthropocene that she encourages her readers to observe, which revolves around a sense of uncertainty and precarity, a heightened awareness of other-than-human relationality and the ethical considerations of individual actions. I aim to explore Lispector's rethinking of the relation between humanity and nature in the context of the paradigms of western modernity, as expressed through the poetics of apprehension she develops.

Overall, my thesis intervenes critically in both Lispectorian studies and theories of the non-anthropocentrism. It adopts contemporary theoretical approaches to examine under-studied novels by Lispector. By formulating a new theorisation of subjectivity and materiality in Lispector's first four novels, which are themes that have only been treated cursorily, it

demonstrates the potential of reading Lispector's works to expand the non-anthropocentric thinking and thereby illustrates her continued relevance for our time.

# CHAPTER 1 – THE PHILOSOPHICAL ORIGINS: SPINOZAN AFFECTS IN *PERTO DO CORAÇÃO SELVAGEM*

## Introduction

In her debut novel, *Perto do coração selvagem* (1943), Clarice Lispector undertakes a pronounced engagement with the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza, both through explicit quotations and through the evolving epistemology of the novel's protagonist, Joana. The novel charts Joana's dreamy childhood with her father, her teenage years spent living with her aunt's family by the sea, her marriage to Otávio and their separation after Joana discovers his affair with Lídia. Despite often being read as a Bildungsroman, *Perto do coração selvagem* does not trace Joana's growth in a chronological order, but foregrounds the crucial events in her formation as a subject, such as her attempt to take refuge from the sea, the infidelity of her husband, etc. The novel portrays Joana's transition between different experiential, somatic states, whereby she perceives her embeddedness in, and vibration with, the material world. This transition exemplifies the modal movement of Spinozist preindividual bodies composed of the same substance. Echoing Spinoza's notion of affection as an extension of the substance, Lispector portrays Joana in a process of 'tornar-se' [becoming], which is sustained by affective flows. When Joana takes the form of a cluster of fluid forces, she represents a subject's seamless connectivity with the physical world. Through this illustration, Lispector places Spinoza's conceptualisation of the body and the mind in fruitful dialogue with contemporary theoretical developments in posthuman and affect theory.

*Perto do coração selvagem* has been read in relation to questions such as the formation of a female subject, the role of language in informing an individual's existential condition, the experimental narrative form underscoring an improvisational proclivity, etc. Marta Peixoto

interprets the novel as a Künstlerroman in particular, which traces the development of a female artist – Peixoto highlights Lispector's articulation of 'feminist rejection of conventional feminine roles for the protagonist' through the vanguardist artistic forms this novel creates.[33] Mona Lisa Bezerra Teixeira accentuates Joana's ongoing trajectory of linguistic apprenticeship through navigating her social interactions with other individuals.[34] Different from the major voices about this novel that span the feminist and poststructuralist perspectives, I take Lispector's Spinozism seriously, situating the novel within an intellectual contexts of Spinoza studies and the twenty-first-century theoretical turns regarding subjectivity and this emphasis showcases how Lispector's writing urges a reconsideration of the location and function of human subject (body/mind) vis-à-vis nature (space/time).

In this novel, Joana's metamorphoses are often captured in the sleep-related scenes and the moments of border intimacy in which she perceives the extension of her human body by ways of vanishing and melting into the atomic universe. By attending to Lispector's endeavour to translate the experience of subject-object interaction and energy transmission into writing, I intend to amplify the resonances between Lispector's formulation of subjectivity, her elaboration of bodily capacities and functioning of the mind, and the posthuman imagination of the self in the world. I propose that Joana's proliferated self and her negative gesture of becoming imperceptible demonstrate a way of inhabiting the world in which she would otherwise feel out-of-place.

Before carrying out a detailed reading of *Perto do coração selvagem*, it is befitting to give an overview of the recent scholarship on Spinoza, affect and Lispector. Scholars have examined Spinoza's thought as the philosophical origins of the affective turn and have argued

[33] Marta Peixoto, *Passionate Fictions: Gender, Narrative, and Violence in Clarice Lispector* (Minnesota University Press, 1994), p. 1.
[34] See Mona Lisa Bezerra Teixeira, 'A educação pela linguagem em Perto do coração selvagem e A maçã no escuro', *Literatura e sociedade*, 23.27 (2018), pp. 146-57.

that Spinoza's notion of affection as bodies' encounter with 'other modes of substance' offers the ground on which the 'dispersed and dynamic' posthuman subjectivity can be formulated.[35] In light of this observation, I will illustrate how *Perto do coração selvagem* provides a textual example that highlights the influence of Spinozan affects on the ongoing inquiry into unbounded individual subjects and their diffuse experience. In his biographical study of Lispector, Benjamin Moser points out the discovery, within her archive, of Lispector's collection of 'a French anthology of Spinoza', 'with her annotations and the handwritten date February 14, 1941', which offers an evidence for the connection between Lispector and Spinoza.[36] Irving Goh examines Lispector's engagement with Spinoza's philosophy of affect in the novel, *Uma aprendizagem: ou o livro dos prazeres* (1969). Goh summarises Spinozan affect as the 'vacillation of mind', or a 'pressure' that one feels 'when entering a room'.[37] He emphasises the embodied nature of affect and examines Lóri's somatic experience such as trembling through which she becomes attuned to negative affects or emotions. In my study of the Spinozan influence in *Perto do coração selvagem*, however, affect is not only seen as relational, as emphasised by Goh, i.e. the interaction between bodies, but, more importantly, unappropriated. Affect does not arise in-between bodies or flow in an empty space, but rather composes bodies and space.

Building upon the convergence of Spinoza's philosophy and more contemporary theories concerning affect and materiality by Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and Karen Barad, I will examine Lispector's formulation of subjectivity by attending to her elaboration of bodily capacities and functions of the mind. I will argue that, in her renderings of Spinoza's thought, Lispector not only stresses the subject's ability to incorporate material flows and its potential

[35] Bradley Robinson and Mel Kutner, 'Spinoza and the Affective Turn: A Return to the Philosophical Origins of Affect'', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25 (2019), pp. 111-17 (pp. 112-13).
[36] Benjamin Moser, *Why This World: A Biography of Clarice Lispector* (London: Haus, 2009), p. 109.
[37] Irving Goh, 'Affective Consisting in Lispector's An Apprenticeship or the Book of Pleasures', *Angelaki*, 28.2 (2023), pp. 79-89 (pp. 81-82).

for reorganisation and bonding with its environment, but also demonstrates her endorsement of the subject's attunement with the perfection of the laws of nature. By exploring how Lispector choreographs her philosophical ideas regarding the individual's relationship with nature, I claim further that Lispector draws creatively on Spinoza's *Ethics* as a foundation for her literary work and will thus accentuate how she uses fiction as a platform for philosophical discussion for women who, like the protagonist, have often been excluded from intellectual pursuits.

## 1. Fundamental Principles in the *Ethics* and the Conception of Subjectivity in *Perto do coração selvagem*

In the second part of the novel, which centres on Joana's unsuccessful marriage, a quotation from Spinoza's *Ethics*[38] appears, as Otávio is reading this work while planning to write a book about civil rights: 'Os corpos se distinguem uns dos outros em relação ao movimento e ao repouso, à velocidade e à lentidão e não em relação à substância' (PCS 120). When Otávio shows this phrase to Joana, she expresses her curiosity and asks to read the entire book. This citation, or rather, Lispector's paraphrasing from longer paragraphs in the original writing, epitomises the formalism of Spinoza's conceptualised universe: bodies are composed of the same material element named the substance, and can only be distinguished from one another in terms of their capacities manifested in their modes of movement. While bodies are of 'the most simple character' and inhabit and constitute the space of reality that Spinoza regards as

[38] See Benedictus de Spinoza, *The Ethics*, 5 vols, trans. by R.H.M. Elwes (Project Gutenbert, 1999), Part III, hereafter, E-III: 'Bodies […] are not distinguished in respect of substance: that which constitutes the actuality (formam) of an individual consists […] in a union of bodies' (E-III 34); 'We thus see, how a composite individual may be affected in many different ways, and preserve its nature notwithstanding. Thus far I have conceived an individual as composed of bodies only distinguished one from the other in respect of motion and rest, speed and slowness; that is, of bodies of the most simple character.' (E-III 35).

'perfection',[39] the ontological difference and transition are shown not as dissolution or rupture in the unified substance, but as states of variation or modification to their constituent elements. Hence, Spinoza's framework not only gives weight to the unity and impersonal nature of the body but also asserts the affective states as its only identifying quality. For this reason, Spinoza's system of thought adumbrates the recent non-anthropocentric ontology in which the body is revealed as both material and relational: the substance can be seen as an undifferentiated, preindividual matter whilst the relative states of 'motion and rest' are the defining feature of the body, an entity framed not by the static, substantial condition but by its positionality in processes or events (E-II 35). Brian Massumi emphasises that Spinoza's notion of movement or stasis refers effectively to 'a body's *capacity* to enter into relations of movement and rest' rather than a literal extensive act in physical space.[40] This interpretation smooths the gap between the two terms in the *Ethics*, movement and affect, and clarifies Spinoza's concept of concept of affect as the aforesaid bodily capacity.

According to Spinoza, movement, that is, the transition in bodily states of capacitation ('speed and slowness'), is engendered by the contact between surfaces of bodies and thus attests to the fluidity of the body made up of seemingly homogenous material. Spinoza explains thus this process of change, which he describes as being 'affected':

> When external bodies determine the fluid parts of the human body, so that they often impinge on the softer parts, they change the surface of the last named […]; hence […] they are refracted therefrom in a different manner from that which they followed before such change. (E-II 40)

[39] Spinoza, *The Ethics*, 5 vols, trans. by R.H.M. Elwes, Part II, p. 10, hereafter E-II. Subsequent references are given in parentheses in the main text.
[40] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Duke University Press, 2002), p. 16, italics in original.

Following this passage, Spinoza further displays the continuation of movement as a series of repetitive actions that constitute new sensory surfaces and argues that the mind's function of receiving and processing external images, which he defines as the 'faculty of imagination' (E-II 40), also belongs to the mechanism of modification of the substance that he terms the 'mode'.[41] I will analyse Spinoza's notion of imagination in Section 3 of this chapter.

Carlos Mendes de Sousa analyses the affinity between Deleuze's philosophy and Lispector's writing in terms of formal aesthetics and rhetoric. He proposes that the Deleuzian concepts can serve as auxiliary devices in interpreting Lispector's works characterised by disorder, rupture, disparity and complex implications.[42] In this chapter, I will introduce Deleuzian theories not only to help decipher Lispector's narrative form and rhetorical strategies but more importantly, I see this convergence as a salient point for discussing how Lispector's ontological and epistemological constructs hark back to Spinoza in *Perto do coração selvagem* specifically. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Deleuze and Guattari stress the significance of the paragraphs quoted above from the *Ethics* and associate Spinoza's ideas with their notion of becoming the other, which refers to the process of entering a different combination of interrelated connections. In Deleuze and Guattari's illustration, the consistent substantial elements come to belong to a certain body '[d]epending on their degree of speed or the relation of movement and rest into which they enter', and this body can belong to another body in a more complex relation.[43] Hence, in Deleuze and Guattari's plane of life, 'each individual is an infinite multiplicity, and the whole of Nature[44] is a multiplicity of perfectly individuated multiplicities' (ATP 254). This intersection between the unity in the consistent material

[41] Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Part I, p.8.
[42] Carlos Mendes de Sousa, *Clarice Lispector: Figuras da escrita* (Universidade do Minho, 2000), p. 41.
[43] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 254, hereafter ATP. Subsequent references are given in parentheses in the main text.
[44] Spinoza equates God with nature, that is, 'the eternal and infinite being' (E-II 3). Therefore, I use the terms God, nature and the world interchangeably.

components and the multiplicity in the forms of active movement of combination, between the infinity and perfection of nature as a whole, and the singularity of individuated modes, is the site where Joana and Otávio ponder upon the degrees of their power to think and sense as well as their positionality in the world.

In the same chapter, the discrepancy in Joana and Otávio's receptions of Spinoza's claims in the *Ethics* is laid bare. Spinoza argues that the ideas (thought, sensation or imagination) formed in the human mind are a modification of the substance that is achieved via the perception of its own body, and of external bodies following 'the common order of the nature' (E-II 54). Hence, the human can acquire 'only a confused and fragmentary knowledge of itself, of its own body, and of external bodies' (E-II 54). In this sense, the individual can never obtain an absolute knowledge since knowledge is only partially revealed to them on the condition of their relative position within their surroundings. Otávio is aware of the fact that Joana is well aligned with Spinoza's philosophy of mind, guessing that: 'Joana diria: eu me sinto tão dentro do mundo que me parece não estar pensando, mas usando de uma nova modalidade de respirar' (PCS 117). Indeed, Joana considers the act of thinking as a modified somatic function like breathing within the world that is inseparable to her own existence. She perceives the world, that she calls 'this world', as a plane of co-existing lives teeming with the traces of movement of other bodies to which she stays attentive: 'outro morrendo, outro ouvindo música, alguém entrou num banheiro, *isto* é o mundo' (PCS 117, italics mine). This perception reminds us of Spinoza's idea that the mind, which is relational, can 'arrange and associate' with other beings and is characterised by its instability.[45]

Otávio, however, finds this idea contradictory to his own. He regards his distinctive role as an intellectual unaffected by the world, which he calls 'that world' where the rain as a gesture

[45] Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Part V, p. 28.

of the external bodies is disparaged by him as a lie: '*Isso* é o mundo, eu sou eu, está chovendo no mundo, é mentira, eu sou um trabalhador intelectual, Joana dorme no quarto [...]' (PCS 117, italics mine). Otávio also pejoratively juxtaposes his intellectual capability with Joana's recumbent posture of sleep: 'Agora está deitada dormindo, dorme vencida pelo sono, vencida, vencida' (PCS 117). He reads Joana's state of sleep as a moment of passivity in which she is bereft of the ability to think. The repetition of 'vencida' seems deliberately magnifying, as if this interval of her being defeated by slumber is appropriated by Otávio to demonstrate his intellectual authority that distinguishes him from the docility of the animal-like woman ('um pássaro fino numa camisola branca') who is otherwise found sharply threatening ('que me espia, mentira') (PCS 117). I will further discuss the scenes of sleep in a later section. Here, Otávio's observation of Joana's sleep as a suspension of thinking is compared with his consequent gestures of putting himself in an upright position: 'Endireitou o busto, alisou o cabelo, ficou sério. Agora ia trabalhar. Como se todos assistissem e aprovassem com a cabeça, cerrando os olhos no assentimento: isso, isso mesmo, muito bem. [...] "Todos" pois assistiam-no' (PCS 117). These gestures betray Otávio's over-self-consciousness as an individual who positions himself conspicuously in confrontation with an 'everyone' he conjures and goes to great length to impress them: 'Vou comover todos' (PCS 117). Otávio's zest for the fruition of individual talent is evident in his ambition of creating a book that he has not yet envisioned, while Joana remains critical of his approach to creation:

> "De tal modo a imaginação é a base do homem – Joana de novo – que todo o mundo que ele tem construído encontra sua justificativa na beleza da criação e não na sua utilidade, não em ser o resultado de um plano de fins adequados às necessidades. Por isso é que vemos multiplicarem-se os remédios destinados a unir o homem às ideias e instituições existentes [...] e vemo-lo continuar sempre fora do mundo que ele construiu." (PCS 117-18).

Joana believes that the purpose for which human beings strive to create often lies in the concept of achievement or the actualisation of the act of creation per se rather than its utility. For the same reason, they are always bound to unified, institutional ideas and end up constructing a world separated from their own existence. For Joana, the aim of creating something or achieving a certain goal, the so-called 'para quê', seems to be an impossible demand for humans. Alternatively, she proposes that the act of construction should start with the existential question of 'porquê' in lieu of the 'para quê', with the latter suggesting a clear object or conclusion: 'O início de toda sua construção é "porquê". A curiosidade, o devaneio, a imaginação – eis o que formou o mundo moderno. Seguindo a inspiração, misturou ingredientes, criou combinações' (PCS 118). Eschewing explicit or linear causality that leads an action to a closure, Joana envisions the formation of the modern world as a process of spontaneously rearranging already existing ingredients, which results in new combinations.

Still in this chapter, the reader learns that Otávio's mistress, Lídia, embodies exactly what Joana rejects, that is, living up to a promise of certainty which can be clearly articulated in words: 'Pensou em palavras: uma pequena família. Era isso o que desejava. Como um bom fim para toda a sua história' (PCS 125). Pregnant with Otávio's child, Lídia expects to form 'a little family', an enclosure, which she regards as a perfect ending to her story. When the two women meet, Joana sees in Lídia the sameness in all women that prevents them from hating each other ('Olhavam-se e não podiam se odiar ou mesmo se repelir') (PCS 137). Joana describes this quality that they have in common as an abstract, unifying force coming precisely from their powerlessness ('aquela força, a unidade na fraqueza…') (PCS 137), which she has also observed in her aunt and cousin Armanda, women who are 'slightly' framed by their roles as mothers and wives: 'Às vezes encontrava-se o mesmo poder em mulheres apenas ligeiramente mães e esposas, tímidas fêmeas do homem, como a tia, como Armanda' (PCS 137). The adverb 'ligeiramente' indicates Joana's scepticism towards the assumption of

women's familial and conjugal statuses being their primary characteristics by which, she tends to believe, they are only superficially categorised and loosely connected with one another. Therefore, she later concludes that she would rather consider the feeling of solidarity to be more fundamentally rooted in the consistent materiality of women: 'Havia em todas elas uma qualidade de matéria-prima, alguma coisa que podia vir a definir-se mas que jamais se realizava, porque sua essência mesma era a de "tornar-se"' (PCS 137).

Rather than aligning women with passive matter, Joana understands the material quality as subversive, resisting fixity. Joana understands that this material force carries a never-ending tendency of defining itself so that her interrogation of this substantial matter as an essence can never reach a conclusion. Hence, the matter that composes countless women can only be seen as a mutational self-revealing process whereby the essential structure of the matter, if it does exist, cannot fully emerge out. Replacing the notion of an essential, determinately identifiable self with the imagery of an open-ended process of becoming, Joana realises that the temporarily separate identities are actually all bound together: 'Através dela exatamente não se unia o passado ao futuro e a todos os tempos?' (PCS 137). In addition to her perception of connectivity with other women through envisioning them as the crystallisation of an abstract image of 'the woman with the voice' ('A mulher da voz multiplicava-se em inúmeras mulheres...') (PCS 137), a lingering figure in the novel whom Joana encounters and regards as an embodiment of impersonality, Joana also embraces the continuity and entanglement between her still-evolving selves in the past and the future.

Inspired by the smooth plane constructed by Spinoza in the *Ethics*, Deleuze and Guattari propose the concept of a rhizome that keeps establishing connections between different points and thus constitutes an assemblage of self-proliferating webs across diverse circumstances, chains of signification, conditions of power formation, etc. where any hierarchical or normative patterns are destroyed (ATP 6-7). This conceptual structure may help

us understand Joana's perception of the convergence of diverse, disparate existences and contradictory powers emblematised by Lídia and herself. Potentially driven by the form-destabilising force in Spinoza's universe of motional elemental masses, Joana comprehends that multiplicity is not expressed by the differential qualities of elements that compose the space, but by lines and dimensions that complicate the networks and organisms (PCS 245). Joana draws an analogy between her contrast to Lídia and that of a line to dimensions, which concretises how heterogeneity is achieved within a plane without preestablished, absolute distinction at the elemental scale:

> Comigo acontece o seguinte ou senão ameaça acontecer: de um momento para outro, a certo movimento, posso me transformar numa linha. Isso! numa linha de luz, de modo que a pessoa fica só ao meu lado, sem poder me pegar e à minha deficiência. Enquanto Lídia tem vários planos. A cada gesto revela-se outro aspecto de sua dimensão. (PCS 139)

While Joana sees the intersection of Lídia and herself, the fact that she refrains from becoming rigidly delineated, concrete dimensions shares the affinity with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of flat multiplicity within which heterogenous points keep weaving interconnected webs without giving rise to stratification or forming a centre. Joana is inclined to expand herself into complex, fluid interrelations but not in the form of an extensive gesture that occupies the physical space. In other words, she resists erecting hierarchy or fulfilling solid occupations in the world like Lídia who finds her determinate emplacement in each dimension. Conversely, as an expectant mother, Lídia feels herself extending spatially as to occupy more positions and her existence in this world is thus reaffirmed: 'como se agora houvesse mais espaço no mundo para o seu ser' (PCS 126). Joana, however, imagines herself as a line or a beam of light that stretches through the space without extension, as if every concrete dimension were collapsed into a single, consistent level.

Given that her body is reduced to the minimal form of a line that resists being localised or grasped by anyone, Joana appears to be neither a subject nor an object but a force of motion, like what Brian Massumi calls a vector – 'a force moving through a space at a given velocity in a given direction'.[46] Her identification with a line also harks back to Spinoza's framework that underscores the relational states of movement. Situating herself within the entanglement with Otávio and Lídia, Joana also compares her promise of flight to Lídia's pledge of certainty: 'Sou um bicho de plumas, Lídia de pelos, Otávio se perde entre nós, indefeso. Como escapar ao meu brilho e à minha promessa de fuga e como escapar à certeza dessa mulher?' (PCS 139-40).

It is helpful to introduce the Deleuze-Guattarian metaphor in *A Thousand Plateaus*, 'lines of flight', to better illustrate the contrast between a line and dimensions. Massumi interprets this concept as referring to 'the act of fleeing or eluding but also flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance'.[47] Joana's metamorphosis into a line not only denotes her wish to escape from the shameful position in her uncomfortable meeting with Lídia, and to slip away from others' reach, but also her clinging to resolving the formation of solid dimensions.

Joana shows her fascination with lines also in the first part of the novel, where she regards lines, which appear to be elusive and unconstrained, as the image of thoughts, whilst circles with their closed structure resemble the work of men that aims at completion to which she feels indifferent: 'Os círculos eram mais perfeitos, menos trágicos, e não a tocavam bastante. Círculo era trabalho de homem, acabado antes da morte, e nem Deus completá-lo-ia melhor. Enquanto linhas retas, finas, soltas – eram como pensamentos' (PCS 44). By embracing the lines that escape the essential form, spread and proliferate in their creative, open-ended

[46] Brian Massumi, 'Translator's Foreword: Pleasures of Philosophy', in *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. ix-xv (p. xiii.
[47] Massumi, 'Foreword', p. xvi.

movement, Joana displays her longing for disrupting the confining frame that she sees in Lídia who is beautifully 'trimmed' [recortada] (PCS 140). The adjective *recortada* suggests both the precise, clear-cut shape indicative of Lídia's fixed identity and her passivity. By contrast, Joana melts into a formless energy, an untraceable force of desire that flows and fluctuates, the boundary of her body becoming nebulous:

> Eu toda nado, flutuo, atravesso o que existe com os nervos, nada sou senão um desejo, a raiva, a vaguidão, impalpável como a energia. Energia? mas onde está minha força? na imprecisão, na imprecisão... E vivificando-a, não a realidade, mas apenas o vago impulso para diante. (PCS 140)

Joana eagerly exposes herself to the *imprecisão* that she considers as the source of her strength. The condition of imprecision, which she explains also as a vague impulse, ceaselessly fuels the energy that overflows the seemingly clear, definite barriers towards unrestricted possibility and potential. Her energy grows unlimited and even permeates the border between Lídia and herself, as Joana feels the urge to invite Lídia also to the domain of imprecision by 'bewildering' [deslumbrar] her: 'Quero deslumbrar Lídia, tornar a conversa algo estranho, fino, escapando' (PCS 140).

Joana intends to involve Lídia in an abstract conversation that destabilises the firm shackles that Lídia regards as the steady, reliable sustenance for her living. The fact that Joana's body can only be occupied by flowing energy reminds the reader of the Deleuze-Guattarian concept of a body without organs ('BwO') which refers to 'a body upon which that which serves as organs […] is distributed […] in the form of molecular multiplicities' (ATP 30). In other words, the BwO displays self-rearranging fluidity given that its organism, that is, the organic interdependence of a body, is thoroughly demolished. Hence, Deleuze and Guattari read Spinoza's *Ethics* as an illustration of BwO where various modes of the body manifest as

forms resembling ‘waves and vibrations’ and can be understood as ‘intensities produced in a given type of substance starting from a given matrix’ (ATP 30).

In line with Spinoza’s philosophy which considers mind and body as two attributes of the same substance, Joana perceives her body and mind as a unified blend of freely distributed elements with their distinct states depicted as a bloc of chaotic dissonance: ‘Todo o seu corpo e sua alma perdiam os limites, misturavam-se, fundiam-se num só caos, suave e amorfo, lento e de movimentos vagos como matéria simplesmente viva’ (PCS 96). The amorphous nature of her body’s fundamental matter and indistinct delimitation allow for unhindered movement and transmission of intensities through which her transient characteristics are expressed – the passage of inscribing the vibrating events in each moment designates Joana’s individuality, as she describes the change of bodily state after she marries Otávio: ‘Cada acontecimento vibrava em seu corpo como pequenas agulhas de cristal que se espedaçasse’ (PCS 95). Whilst each event generates intensities that permeate her corporeal substance, the concrete image of the event as a personal experience shatters upon its impingement on the body, transforming into a myriad of vectors propagating across the smooth plane of the body (a BwO) just like transparent, delicate crystal needles. Employing a cold, colourless correlative, this analogy implies the impersonal nature of feelings as pure vibrations traversing a body devoid of a predefined shape or history. Furthermore, the body’s capture of feelings as impersonal vibrations can never alter its fundamental substance: ‘Nenhuma felicidade ou infelicidade tinha sido tão forte que tivesse transformado os elementos de sua matéria, dando-lhe um caminho único, como deve ser o verdadeiro caminho’ (PCS 96).

The feelings as vibrations cannot lead to a fixed path for channelling them or result in a single, specific way of life for the subject. Joana is not imprisoned by the identity formed after her marriage. On the contrary, through marriage whereby the temporarily individualised feelings are elicited, the indeterminacy of an individuated self comes to the fore: ‘Seu rosto era

leve e impreciso, boiando entre os outros rostos opacos e seguros, como se ele ainda não pudesse adquirir apoio em qualquer expressão' (PCS 96). Joana's face as a signifier of her individual identity becomes less conspicuous. With its contours dismantled, her face intermingles with other faces while the facial expressions as codes of identity imposition are neutralised as vibrations and resonances. As she eludes what Deleuze and Guattari call facialisation, the process through which the constraining personal identity is constructed, the traits that she has temporarily developed dissolve and she becomes imperceptible and clandestine amidst a variety of identities (ATP 171).

Joana's phantasmagorical face denotes the multiplicity of selves whereby several characters cross over into one another and various moments from different stages of her life are condensed into a whole. Deleuze and Guattari aptly depict the state of existence called BwO as 'the full egg before the extension of the organism and the organization of the organs' and it thus precedes 'the formation of strata' or fixed identities (ATP 153). Meanwhile, the tendencies and potentials (or the 'vectors') that the BwO preserves, 'involving energy transformation and kinematic movement', are its defining qualities (ATP 153). Returning to the novel, Joana's father describes her in early childhood as a living little egg ('um ovinho vivo'), an inchoate form of life with unpredictable potential to evolve and flourish through its contact with the world that has yet to be actualised, as he enquires about her daughter's future: 'O que vai ser de Joana?' Nevertheless, this question is left without an explicit answer, as the novel is not tied to a linear narrative structure: references to childhood are scattered across the episodes in Joana's adult life. I would not read the intrusion of scenes from childhood as the protagonist's imagined regression to an earlier stage of life like in Earl E. Fitz's psychoanalytical reading.[48] Joana's childhood, as portrayed in the novel, seems to be a virtual one that exists alongside her

[48] Earl E. Fitz, *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist Universe of Clarice Lispector*: the Différance of Desire (University of Texas Press, 2001), p. 183.

adult self rather than something opposite to adulthood. When Otávio shows his disdain at her mention of childhood, regarding it as a longing to go backward (PCS 45), Joana retorts by explaining that her notion of childhood is not a nostalgic one: 'Não é saudade, porque eu tenho agora a minha infância mais do que enquanto ela decorria...' (PCS 46) In other words, the not-yet-developed 'ovinho' is a perpetual state of Joana whose body is in ceaseless mutation as she connects with other things, conjugates contingent relations of interdependency that would later fall apart, and continues evolving smoothly as a line[49]. Similar to Deleuze and Guattari's emphasis on the germinal contemporaneousness of the BwO to an already-formed organism, the living egg referring to child-Joana 'is adjacent to' her established relations and identities 'and is continually in the process of constructing itself' (ATP 164).

The second chapter, 'O dia de Joana', clearly illustrates childhood as a case of synchronous happenings that compose a life. The absence of Otávio during that day provides Joana with the opportunity to unburden herself from the fixed identity as Otávio's wife: 'Mal, porém, sentia que ele saísse de casa, ela se transformava, concentrava-se em se mesma e, como se apenas tivesse sido interrompida por ele, continuava lentamente a viver o fio da infância, esquecia-o e movia-se pelos aposentos profundamente só' (PCS 16-17). Here, childhood does not refer to a memory of the past but a 'variation of [the] perpetual living present' (ATP 192). Childhood unfolds like one of the coexisting sketches of experimentation smoothly strung together through a thread which simultaneously transforms into one another. It is not an established phase into which Joana inserts herself but rather one of the concomitant virtual events in which she engages. Childhood is an expression for the virtual because it is to a large extent detached from a fixed reality, giving way to a limbo of actualisation and becoming, wherein Joana's individuality fades into a pure singularity. A child and an egg, juxtaposed in

[49] In *O lustre*, Virgínia also perceives childhood as an uninterrupted line, while the way she lives her life is to prolong her childhood: 'devia estar de algum modo a prolongar a infância numa só linha ininterrupta e que sem se conhecer desenvolvia algo iniciado no esquecimento' (OL 158).

the novel, are both metaphors for such impersonal singular entities in which individuality has yet to be actualised. Hence, Joana's experience of living through her childhood can be seen as a process of undoing personality: she becomes uprooted from the specific reality, such as her marriage, that assigns to her an identity. While marriage symbolises consummation, childhood releases a dissolving force that suspends this conclusion. All dimensions of personalities that she conjugates upon encountering realities are condensed into a thread stretching from childhood, a vector of potential taking the form of the duration of time, as Joana claims: 'tenho um corpo e tudo o que eu fizer é continuação de meu começo' (PCS 18). Her actions are considered to be both the extension of the body as a matrix and the continuation of childhood as the initial stage of life. In this sense, the line of temporality involved in the metaphor of childhood is conflated with the space composed of dimensions designating specific identities and individual occupations, as Joana enters the event of 'reliving' her childhood:

> Nesse instante mais desperta, se quisesse, com um pouco mais de abandono, Joana poderia reviver toda a infância... O curto tempo de vida junto ao pai, a mudança para a casa da tia, o professor ensinando-lhe a viver, a puberdade elevando-se misteriosa, o internado... o casamento com Otávio... Mas tudo isso era muito mais curto, um simples olhar surpreso esgotaria todos esses fatos. (PCS 22)

Carlos Mendes de Sousa posits that Joana, by recalling her childhood, summarises the key moments in her life and in this novel, highlighting the fact that she is in a permanent dialectics between the movements of reduction and amplification ('numa permanente dialéctica entre os movimentos de redução e de amplificação').[50] Indeed, the whole novel can be synthesised as Joana's relationships with others, e.g. constitution of a refuge in childhood and a family in adulthood, as underlined in the titles of chapters. However, I regard these movements of union and separation as synchronic and virtual, rather than contradictory or opposed to each other in

[50] Carlos Mendes de Sousa, *Figuras*, p. 173.

a dialectics. Joana enumerates her ephemeral identities that are expressed in fleeting, inconsecutive moments with meagre remnants of facts, wherein the life loses its impersonality amidst concrete entanglements. With the significant substance intact, she shifts seamlessly between multiple modes of existence that are distinguished from one another in terms of actions. Her bodily substance is constantly structured into forms of lives enclosed in self-contained, perfect circles: 'Sua vida era formada de pequenas vidas completas, de círculos inteiros, fechados, que se isolavam uns dos outros' (PCS 97). These forms of lives carry the tendency of escaping their defining circles and resisting being captured by the physical time, as the circles are at the same time destablised and opened up to a mixture of floating moments: 'Continuo sempre me inaugurando, abrindo e fechando círculos de vida, jogando-os de lado, murchos, cheios de passado' (PCS 97).

Joana sees her life as a repository of plural, indefinite lives (there is no definite article before the noun 'vidas'), like the aforementioned circles that, rather than designating pre-existing categories of individual identities, envelops differential clusters of elements grouped according to the potentials of actions. Joana's instantaneous individualities manifested in her entanglements only consist in moments where the potential (or the virtual) of the singular, impersonal life is caught in the process of actualising itself. Through the simultaneous practices such as closing, bordering and opening, of forming and deforming, Joana continuously inaugurates herself, not in the sense of a change in relation to the past, since she is unfettered from a linear temporality: 'O que sucedia então? Milagrosamente vivia, liberta de todas as lembranças. Todo o passado se esfumaçara. E também o presente eram névoas [...]' (PCS 96). Similar to Deleuze and Guattari's claim that '[e]very becoming is a block of coexistence' (ATP 292), instead of a chronological model of evolution, Joana's self-inauguration is an ahistorical event in which the fixed linkage between the beginning and the end is disrupted. The past, presence and the future interpenetrate like contiguous points, and memories and phantasies are

no longer rigidly divided. Every moment designates a disparate event taking the form of intensity and charged with a fugitive individual identity:

> Momentos tão intensos, vermelhos, condensados neles mesmos que não precisavam de passado nem de futuro para existir. Traziam um conhecimento que não servia como experiência – um conhecimento direto, mais como sensação do que percepção. [...] Uma vez terminado o momento de vida, a verdade correspondente também se esgota. Não posso moldá-la, fazê-la inspirar outros instantes iguais. (PCS 97-98)

Given that lives only subsist in moments, once a moment terminates, the active experience it involves will be drained, leaving no trace for other moments that revolve around the same matrix. Consequently, the corresponding truth and knowledge brought about by a single moment take the form of direct and ephemeral perceptions. In other words, truth and knowledge can only be actualised within a singular life, and thus escape being perceived, moulded or registered as an experience. Joana's body is defined by those unsettled, singular moments of intensity which cluster and decompose according to their countless modes of participation that express the multiplicity of selves.

In this section, I have analysed how Lispector incorporates Spinoza's philosophical principles, particularly focusing on substance and mode – these concepts serve as the building blocks of *Perto do coração selvagem*, upon which the author enacts her conceptualisation of subjects and explores their interactions. So far, I have argued that Lispector envisions the subject as a composition of separate, virtual events expressed as singular, identical entities with their multiplicity in relative motions. The subject is therefore unstable, always caught in nonlinear processes of actualisation that constitute transient identities. Lispector illustrates the amorphousness of subject through Joana's experience of traversing between the impingements of certain reality and the dissolution of her entanglement with other characters.

## 2. Disappearance and Intra-action: the Body's Unstable Parameters

I have discussed Lispector's account of Spinozan philosophy demonstrated in Joana's body that is devoid of concrete dimension – she exists as flows of energy generated in relational movements. This formulation of a subject as being constituted by and subsisting in affective vibration is thus parallel to the contemporary non-anthropocentric conception of human subjects. Nidesh Lawtoo describes posthuman subjects as 'eminently relational, embodied, and affective creatures who are wired […] to imitate both human and nonhuman others […] via unconscious mirroring reflexes that render [themselves] radically open to forms of contagion that find in the experience of affect […]'.[51] While Joana's porous body absorbs affects by osmosis in various situations, I read her approach to others as distinct from mere mimicry that seeks to establish exclusive relations or precise identities. Instead, the relationships she attempts to form with others eludes actualisation or conviction. While the previous section focuses more on Spinozan philosophy illustrated in the author's composition of life, in this section, analytical attention will be paid to subject's embodied, negotiated nature and embeddedness in a liquid, more-than-human world.

In the chapter, 'Alegrias de Joana', there is another childhood scene in which Joana as a little girl confronts the sea. Represented metaphorically as a womb that envelops everything in unity (PCS 44), the sea easily reminds the reader of the perfect whole of nature in Spinoza's conception. As a homogenous liquid ambiance, the sea instantiates a smooth 'plane of consistency peopled by anonymous' and 'infinite bits of matter entering into varying connections' (ATP 255). In this womb, Joana's individuality fades away so that she is left in the position of a foetus coevolving with other life forms. The sea, a substantial whole, can be

[51] Nidesh Lawtoo, 'Posthumanism and Mimesis: An Introduction', *Journal of Posthumanism*, 2.2 (2022), pp. 87-100 (p. 89).

seen as a state of BwO inhabited by unformed, foetus-like elements. With their permeable boundaries and mutual entanglements, these elements are radically open to new relations and prone to floating into different assemblages:

> Assim lembrava-se de Joana-menina diante do mar; a paz que vinha dos olhos do boi, a paz que vinha do corpo deitado do mar, do ventre profundo do mar, do gato endurecido sobre a calçada. Tudo é um, tudo é um..., entoara. A confusão estava no entrelaçamento do mar, do gato, do boi com ela mesma. (PCS 44)

As a liquid mixture, the sea encompasses both the unity of the substance and the multiplicity of modes: Joana, the ox, and the cat, all emerge from the confusion of entanglements within the whole just like relational modes as the extension of substance. The substance, embodied by the womb-like sea, is therefore not a fixed one, but figures a ceaseless process of becoming whereby the material units constitute one another: they are all in a state of emergence from their entwinement with the womb rather than existing in a stable state of being. Joana's body cannot be separated from its liquid milieu and the flowing interaction between other bodies. The relation between Joana and other forms of life brings to the fore bodies' never-ending preindividual phase and their connectedness. This symbiosis thus demonstrates the posthuman subjectivity proposed by Rosi Braidotti that is characterised by its embodied structure and embeddedness in materiality.[52]

As an ambience for the entangled beginning that is adjacent to the concurrent evolution and individuation of lives, the womb showcases the collective realm composed of multiple singular lives that never exhaust their potential of actualisation. Within the unity of the womb, Joana's body can be seen as 'an event for affective resonance […] in a multitude of vertiginous co-becomings' given that the body is in the process of emerging from the milieu teeming with

[52] See Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Polity, 2013).

the preindividual force of life.[53] Rather than forming a clear consciousness or boundary of herself, Joana is confusedly compelled by the life force ('poder-de-vida') across different entities in their mutual constitution: 'Parecia-lhe que se ordenasse e explicasse claramente o que sentira, teria destruído a essência de "tudo é um". Na confusão, ela era a própria verdade inconscientemente, o que talvez desse mais poder-de-vida do que conhecê-la' (PCS 44). Here, the 'poder-de-vida' is represented as collective, relational and virtual, transmitted between singular, preindividual lives expressed by their relative position of movement and their instantaneous vibrations in relation to one another. The overflowing aliveness across lives replaces the nameable knowledge and experience. For Joana, the perception of everything in one is active and affective, and it can be only unconsciously and directly generated by her momentary experience of interspecies entanglement that offers her an extended perceptual apparatus. As soon as she attempts to bring in her sense to parse and utter them, the unity as the essence of the truth will be dispelled. This truth, however, does not assume a concrete or practical form like a stem that takes up Joana's body but rather a subterranean root that binds her to other bodies through invisible transmissions of affect (vitality): 'A essa verdade que, mesmo revelada, Joana não poderia usar porque não formava o seu caule, mas a raiz, prendendo seu corpo a tudo o que não era mais seu, imponderável, impalpável' (PCS 45). The truth of 'tudo é um' suggests to Joana an expansion of abstract, rhizomatic interrelation across different life forms. This perception of unity and rhizomatic interconnection bleeds into her way of living as she can think and feel simultaneously in various different ways ('também podia pensar e sentir em vários caminhos diversos, simultaneamente') (PCS 46).

The following paragraphs regarding Joana living her virtual childhood also showcases her integration of the 'truth' as she establishes connections between non-consecutive moments

[53] Erin Manning, 'Always More than One: The Collectivity of *a Life*', *Body & Society*,16.1 (2010), pp. 117-27 (p. 124).

or episodes. While conversing with Otávio, she recollects a verse written by her father from childhood as a sustenance for her creativity and imagination of virtual, floating instants at the suspension of the temporal order: 'E também se podia esperar o instante que vinha... que vinha... e de súbito se precipitava em presente e de repente se dissolvia... e outro que vinha... que vinha...' (PCS 46). Joana lives on instants that gather from all over the place, precipitate into a fickle present that soon dissolves. Meanwhile, other instants swiftly morph into another receding present like a whirlpool of giddiness.

There are other renderings of womb-like, liquid ambiences that represent the preindividual dimension and intercorporeality. The sea as an often-imaginary scene of Joana's retreat can be seen throughout the novel and, in many cases, it is associated with childhood and death. After Joana's father dies, her aunt's house becomes her new refuge but she finds it suffocating: 'A casa da tia era um refúgio onde o vento e a luz não entravam' (PCS 34). Joana's aversion to her aunt propels her to flee to the sea: '[…] os seios da tia podiam derramar-se sobre ela, em gordura dissolvida. Empurrou a porta pesada e fugiu' (PCS 35). Her aunt's bosom, rather than showing to Joana signs of maternal affection or protection, is reduced to a crude, nonhuman form of dissolved fat that also represents her escape from the sentimental bond between the two. On the seashore, Joana's body and its corresponding affect are diminished – in a state of solitude, weakness and inertia, she reposes with her eyes half-closed and legs trembling with the minimal degree of sovereignty. Her gaze aligns with the sea level and her body passively receives the rhythmic intensity of the waves, resonating their tension and ease in alternation like the gesture of breathing:

> Desceu das rochas, caminhou fracamente pela praia solitária até receber a água nos pés. De cócoras, as pernas trêmulas, bebeu um pouco de mar. Assim ficou descansando. Às vezes entrefechava os olhos, bem ao nível do mar e vacilava, tão agudo era a visão – apenas a linha verde comprida, unindo seus olhos à água infinitamente. [...] O mar, além das ondas, olhava de longe, calado, sem chorar, sem seios. Grande, grande. Grande, sorriu

> ela. [...] Cada vez que reparava no mar e no brilho quieto do mar, sentia aquele aperto e depois afrouxamento no corpo, na cintura, no peito. (PCS 36-37)

Joana is recalibrated to a natural environment freed from the conventional interdependence between humans, embracing the bodily capacity of the sea that replaces her emotional turbulence. The sea is a formless, grandiose body without specific emotions or organic forms, only populated by the waves that embody the energy flows. Benjamin Bateman reads the individual's act of flattening their body and affect as a way of 'gradually minimiz[ing] [their] impact on a world that cannot handle [them] in full'.[54] He also interprets the recalibration of a flattened body to a natural ambience as indicative of 'deny[ing] human exceptionalism and devalu[ing] the importance of the preceding events'.[55] Joana's retreat to the sea suspends her involvements in actual events such as bereavement in her childhood and her shameful attempt to flirt with her teacher, both suggesting specific attachments to others and her involuntary or purposive engagements in the world. She surrenders to the profundity and obscurity of the sea which she compares to her father's death that is equally ungraspable: 'O pai morrera como o mar era fundo! Compreendeu de repente. O pai morrera como não se vê o fundo do mar, sentiu' (PCS 37). In contrast to a conventional upright humanity exemplified by Otávio, Joana's sadness takes the form of a flattened or diminished affect – it seems to be tiredness rather than anger ('E sua tristeza era um cansaço grande, pesado, sem raiva') (PCS 37-38). The loss of self to the environment prepares her for the loss of her father, '[p]roviding a pause from [her] acute and abiding anguish'.[56] By surrendering herself to fatigue and inertia, she abandons the agential mode of living that renders her sentimentally attached to her father, leaving herself exposed to the environment in her state of vulnerability and permeability: 'Olhava os pés escuros e finos

[54] Benjamin Bateman, *Queer Disappearance in Modern and Contemporary Fiction* (Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 135.
[55] Bateman, *Disappearance*, p. 151.
[56] Bateman, *Disappearance*, p. 148.

como galhos juntos da alvura quieta onde eles afundavam e de onde se erguiam ritmadamente, numa respiração. […] Deitou-se de bruços sobre a areia, as mãos resguardando o rosto, deixando apenas uma pequena fresta para o ar' (PCS 38). Joana feels her body melding with nature, entangled with the nonhuman agencies: her feet are buried in sand, resembling delicate twigs that respond to the geological rhythm like a breath. In her flattened posture of lying on the beach, she minimises her own breathing as the faintest sign of her human life. The sea marks the border of life and death. By connecting with the sea, she embraces death.

The symbolic connection between the sea, childhood and death resurfaces in the penultimate chapter, 'A partida dos homens', in which Joana's lover ('o amante') after Otávio, whose name remains unknown to her, also leaves her. She realises that another cycle of life closes ('Agora de novo um círculo de vida que se fechava') (PCS 183) – an indefinite life in which the man and herself interact as two living bodies ('tu és um corpo vivendo, eu sou um corpo vivendo, nada mais') (PCS 184). Joana's sense of an ending of a virtual life (death) resembles a reunion with a fresh start, emerging from the sea or 'regression' to infancy as an indistinguishable living creature: 'E voltar. Haveria de reunir-se a si mesma um dia [...] Haveria de se fundir e ser de novo o mar mudo brusco forte largo imóvel cego vivo. A morte a ligaria à infância' (PCS 186). Nonetheless, the reunion or resurrection does not imply that the world is a circular or cyclic unity, it is rather a continuous confusion of ephemeral happenings: beginnings and ends mix with one another ('uma grande vontade de se dissolver até misturar seus fins com os começos das coisas'), ungraspable as an empty space ('espaço vazio') populated by restless instants (PCS 186).

As a retreat for Joana, the sea-like liquid ambience reappears during other moments when her bodily capacity is diminished. The chapter, 'O Banho', charts an episode in which Joana in her puberty seeks refuge from her teacher, while learning that her aunt is going to send her away to boarding school. The arrival of the teacher's wife subverts Joana's yearning for

clandestine comfort. In envy and shame, she finds in herself an impulse to flee: 'Fugir, correr para a praia, deitar-se de bruços sobre a areia, esconder o rosto, ouvir o barulho do mar' (PCS 57). She longs to lie flat on the beach, hide her face, and merge with the sound of the sea. In these gestures, her distinctive identity is dissolved, as is her temporarily formed collusion with the teacher laid bare only in a fleeting gaze of tacit understanding: 'Joana voltou-se e viu-o. Viu seu olhar. Ah brilhou dentro dela a descoberta, um olhar como um aperto de mão, um olhar que sabia que ela desejava a praia. Mas por que tão fraco, tão sem alegria?' (PCS 57) The signs of affection and recognition shown by the teacher are so faint and weak that are insufficient for justifying Joana's existence. She feels her body shrinking and becoming invisible in response to her shame of inferiority compared to the teacher's wife: 'Joana diminuiu, ficou pequena e escura diante daquela pele brilhante. Sentiu a vergonha da cena anterior tomá-la e reduzi-la ridiculamente' (PCS 56-57). She is deflating rather than being assertive in her attempt to occupy her newly found refuge. All human characters in the preceding scene that contribute to her shame are now receding, including the teacher and his wife, her aunt who calls her a viper after she steals a book. Meanwhile, the room seems to amplify and come to the foreground, which may suggest her wish for disentanglement from her previous interactions:

> O que acontecia? Tudo recuava... E de súbito o ambiente destacou-se na sua consciência com um grito, avultou com todos os detalhes submergindo as pessoas numa grande vaga... Seus próprios pés flutuavam. A sala onde já estivera durante tantas tardes refulgia no crescendo de uma orquestra, mudamente, numa vingança pela sua distração. De um momento para outro Joana descobriu a insuspeita potência daquele aposento quieto. Era estranho, silencioso, ausente como se nunca tivesse, nele pisado, como se fosse uma reminiscência. As coisas haviam-se guardado até agora e então aproximavam-se de Joana, cercavam-na, brilhando na meia escuridão do crepúsculo. (PCS 57-58)

In Joana's distraction, seen as a sign of surrender, the potency of the room gradually envelops her like an orchestra building to a crescendo. This vitality becomes as tangible as the vibration of sound. It encompasses everything as a whole, manifesting itself in the form of resonant

materiality – the room as space is also implicated in matter. This life-power of matter erases every detailed trace of living of human existence until they become indistinguishable. The defamiliarization of the room severs Joana's social ties with other human beings who interact with her in this place, as she becomes ethereal and floats unpredictably amidst the invisible swarming of particles composing the space. She perceives herself not as isolated from, but immersed in, a material world that pushes her boundaries.

In the same chapter, the bathing scene seems to be an experimental practice for the Spinozan concepts and posthuman epistemology. The parameters of Joana are radically destabilised during her bathing:

> Suas pernas delgadas, lisas, os seios pequenos brotaram da água. Ela mal se conhece, nem cresceu de todo, apenas *emergiu da infância*. Estende uma perna, olha o pé de longe, move-o terna, lentamente como a uma asa frágil. Ergue os braços acima da cabeça, para o teto *perdido* na penumbra, os olhos fechados, *sem nenhum sentimento, só movimento*. O corpo se alonga, se espreguiça, refulge úmido na meia escuridão – é uma *linha tensa e trêmula*. (PCS 62, italics mine)

In the dark room stuffy with steams ('O quarto abafado de vapores mornos') (PCS 62), her bodily outlines dissolve – she stretches her body endlessly, her limbs morphing into wings that are fragile, flimsy constructs emerging from and disappearing in water. Joana's perception of the bath is mediated by her experience of the sea associated with the symbolic death and the virtual childhood:

> Imerge na banheira como no mar. Um mundo morno se fecha sobre ela silenciosamente, quietamente. Pequenas bolhas deslizam suaves até se apagarem de encontro ao esmalte. A jovem sente a água pesando sobre seu corpo, para um instante como se lhe tivessem tocado de leve o ombro. (PCS 63).

The relation between a bathtub and the sea is analogous to that between a childhood and the infinite virtuality. Bathed in the tub as if in the sea, she melts, expands and condenses at the

same time, dispersed into water and steams. The preindividual state of a mere singularity is crystalised in this enclosed liquid ambience – Joana loses the memory of herself and her personality. Alluding to the Spinozan principle, Joana's sentiment is only expressed in movement like the transition between different forms of water in which the overarching element, the substance, remains unchanged.

Based on the entangled behaviours of quantum particles, Karen Barad claims that '[i]ndividuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating'.[57] Barad therefore proposes the term intra-action, which rejects the presumption of 'the prior existence of independent entities or relata' implied by the notion of interaction.[58] Lispector's depiction of Joana's enmeshed position within material interaction revealingly actualises Barad's concept of intra-action: bubbles rising in water while extinguishing upon contact with the enamel, indicate the ephemerality in movement that composes and rearranges life; the agentive gesture of water pressing against her embodies the intensity of affect between material bodies. Her body and water in the bathtub are reconfigured through their interchange. She succumbs to the material force manifested in the ebb and flow of becoming – dynamic processes of intra-action which do not lead to definite growth nor complete erasure, but disappearance: in constant movement, her body seems as incorporeal as a line with its tension and vibration.

Joana's disappearance is more than an act of fleeing as I have discussed. Her body loses the concreteness but the trace of vitality remains. While being engulfed in the bathtub, the sea or the womb seems to be an obliteration as a manner of coping with her sense of dislocation, Joana envisions a rebirth in water with other beings and everything ('Seres nascidos no mundo

[57] Karen Michelle Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and entanglement matter and meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007), p. ix.
[58] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p. 139.

como a água. […] Tudo [...]') (PCS 63). She participates in the intra-action of water, an ambience of multiplicity of modes and their symbiosis, whereby she becomes molecular and imperceptible while receding from an established social framework in an entropic force – she disappears in favour of a pursuit for 'subjective potentials immune or indifferent to their actualisation'.[59] Her memory and personality are effaced during the deterritorialisation of bathing so that she is rendered unconscious and becomes a stranger of her own: 'Quando emerge da banheira é uma desconhecida que não sabe o que sentir' (PCS 63). This state of nonfeeling tends to inanimation and death. However, as illustrated in her quicksilver metamorphosis in the bathtub, Joana's disappearing is adjacent to her resurfacing, just as death coexists with resuscitation. She once again retreats to foetal position as if in the lost womb and becomes absorbed in the Spinozan wholeness that lacks clear differentiation between embodied existences: '[...] aconchega-se como no ventre perdido e esquece. Tudo é vago, leve e mudo' (PCS 64).

Becoming a line or a foetus as a sign of attenuation enables an affective amplification like a rhizome – she is 'oriented toward an experimentation in contact with' the reality and her disappearance 'fosters connections between fields' as the blockage on her bodily organism is removed (ATP 12). Her deterritorialisation is accompanied by an enhanced perception of subjectivity beyond the limit of her human body. Like an experiment or adventure of reterritorialisation, the virtual, oneiric moment of bathing collides with the rigid discipline of boarding school represented by beds arranged in a straight line ('Atrás dela alinhavam-se as camas do dormitório do internato') (PCS 64). While other girls are asleep, Joana, in her somnolent wakefulness, feels herself no longer confined to boarding school. The bed and walls are fading away, giving room to her long soliloquy:

[59] Bateman, *Disappearance*, p. 1,

> A cama desaparece aos poucos, as paredes do aposento se afastam, tombam vencidas. E eu estou no mundo, solta e fina como uma corça na planície. Levanto-me suave como um sopro, ergo minha cabeça de flor e sonolenta, os pés leves, atravesso campos além da terra, do mundo, do tempo, de Deus. Mergulho e depois emerjo, como de nuvens, das terras ainda não possíveis, ah ainda não possíveis. [...] Eis-me de volta ao corpo. Voltar ao meu corpo. Quando me surpreendo ao fundo do espelho assusto-me. Mal posso acreditar que tenho limites, que sou recortada e definida. *Sinto-me espalhada no ar, pensando dentro das criaturas, vivendo nas coisas além de mim mesma*. (PCS 65-66, italics mine)

Joana's denial of the existence of a determinate boundary of her body demonstrates how the author's portrayal of the human subject aligns with the tenets of what is now established as the posthuman condition, which is marked by the 'denunciation of the unified and bounded subjectivity'.[60] She integrates into a shared ontology with nonhuman elements: her unrooted nature and slenderness like a doe, her lightness like a breath of air, her head erected like a flower, her swift transition like clouds… Her instantaneous individualities that slip from one to another consist only of movements in a transcendent plane. In order to have a better understanding of the notion that the individuality of an entity is defined by its everchanging relations, it is pertinent to introduce the concept of a haecceity by Deleuze and Guattari that refers to a unique, singular moment or event in the process of becoming. Here, Joana ceases to be a subject and becomes events – she is defined by her bodily capacities and states of affect during the moments where she enters into composition with certain atmospheres, rather than being established by her social, ethical or familial relation. Her estrangement from humanity shows her wish to escape her displaced identities and this disposition resonates with Jack Halberstam and Ira Livingston's claim that the posthuman 'participates in re-distributions of difference and identity' that stands in contrast to the humanistic perspective that 'domesticate and hierarchize difference within the human'.[61] Without seeing herself, Joana finds her sense

[60] Gerda Roelvink and Magdalena Zolkos, 'Posthumanist Perspectives on Affect: Framing the Field', *Angelaki*, 20.3, pp. 1-20 (p. 1).
[61] Jack Halberstam and Ira Livingston, *Posthuman Bodies* (Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 10.

of a distinctly human life vanished: 'Depois de não me ver há muito quase esqueço que sou humana, esqueço meu passado e sou com a mesma libertação de fim e de consciência quanto uma coisa apenas viva' (PCS 66). She identifies with a mere living thing, liberated from purpose and consciousness.

Joana feels herself dispersed into the air, being able to live and think via nonhuman bodies. This gesture of disappearance is aligned with Barad's notion of agency based on quantum mechanics[62]. While Spinoza gives weight to the uniformity of substance and the perfection of nature in his conceptualised architecture of the world, the universe in quantum mechanics is envisioned as a seamless and boundless realm consisting of a dance of infinitesimal particles and their entanglement. Considering that 'the primary ontological units' are not defined as subjects or objects, but rather what Barad refers to as 'phenomena', which is described as dynamism of entanglements or relationalities, agency is no longer an attribute but is interwoven in 'the ongoing reconfigurings of the world'.[63] Through disappearing, Joana participates in the agential intra-action of materiality through particle exchange that constitutes the world. In this way, she rejects a human body tied to her being identified as an orphan, an outsider to her aunt's family and to her teacher's marriage, as well as a wife and victim of romantic betrayal.

Joana's subjectivity taking the form of quantum flow is well evident in her contemplation of death (disappearance) after the departure of her anonymous lover from who she also used to seek refuge. Joana is not going to die because her vitality is without end ('Não morreria porque... porque ela não podia acabar') (PCS 187). She disappears in the sense that

[62] Lispector might have been influenced by major developments in natural science in the twentieth century, i.e. quantum mechanics and general relativity. She shows an explicit fascination with particles, light and waves, as well as the space-time dynamics, which later coincides with the Atomic Age, in works such as *Água viva* and *A hora da estrela*.
[63] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p. 141.

the contours of both herself and those she engages with all blur into an indistinct haze, which prompts her to realise that her body is free from a physical form and the entanglement with other human bodies: '[…] uma mistura de fisionomias indistintas numa só […] As fisionomias se esfumaçaram, pois se ela for a sempre. Pois seu corpo nunca precisara de ninguém. Era livre (PCS 187)'. No longer rooted in the stifling Earth defined by the conventional understanding of the cosmos, Joana is dissolved into countless vibrant particles and their movement and interaction constitutes her thought and power: 'Ela própria crescendo sobre a terra asfixiada, dividindo-se em milhares de partículas vivas, plenas de seu pensamento, de sua força, de sua inconsciência... Atravessando a limpidez sem névoas levemente, andando, voando...' (PCS 188) The Earth and the air seamlessly intertwine, allowing her to move so smoothly that the distinction is blurred between walking and flying.

Joana's outsourcing of subjectivity to nonhuman agencies is well pronounced in moments of distraction and repose, often marked by the gesture of closing eyes and the position of recumbency. I have mentioned in Section 1 that Otávio sneers at Joana's slumber and sees it as a sign of defeat. The contrast between Joana and other characters like Otávio and Lídia who embody the creative and productive ambition is amplified in her diminished position that demonstrates her lack of self-possession or assertiveness in her bodily boundaries as human-being. I have examined Joana's flattened posture on the seashore with the minimal degree of agency: her bodily capacity is reduced to the physical communion with nature. Sleep and repose are the compensation for exhaustion for living bodies. Bateman reads them as site of reciprocity between humans and their environment and argues that 'the planet enjoys restorative reprieve only when its creatures rest'.[64] Joana derives her sustenance and survival

[64] Bateman, *Disappearance*, p. 132.

from continuously vanishing and reappearing, a phenomenon emblematic of what Lispector perceives as the regularity of nature.

At the end of the novel, upon reading her lover's farewell note, Joana comes to understand that since childhood, her sense of precarity regarding the conditions of homelessness and being unloved and her vulnerability to shame, exclusion and abandonment, all of which prompt her to flee and seek shelter elsewhere, are grounded in a sense of social interdependence with others – it is precisely the organism of familial or romantic relationships from which she takes shelter that burdens her, putting her in a permanent state of precarity: 'Era inútil abrigar-se na dor de cada caso, revoltar-se contra os acontecimentos' (PCS 184). This also explains the restorative function of sleep for Joana, who regards it as a state where the interdependence of the individuals is temporarily resolved ('Sabendo as pessoas isoladas cada uma dentro do sono intrasponível e secreto' (PCS 171). While she cannot find refuge from her aunt, the teacher or the lover, she survives like an embryo, a little life with its endurance, sustained by the only moisture in a dead land: 'Sobrevivera como um germe ainda úmido entre as rochas ardentes e secas, pensava Joana' (PCS 192). The temporary shelter provided by the lover, as suggested in the chapter title, 'O abrigo no homem', parallel to 'O Abrigo no professor', dissolves as a life ('um círculo de vida fechado') – an ephemerous entity composed of an aggregation of particles (PCS 192). The image of the lover, as suggested by his anonymity, is associated with Joana's depersonalisation and dispossession, as the persons, places and things that she thinks she once owned lose their individuality and become floating fragments of singularity highlighted by the indefinite articles replacing definite ones: 'Um marido, seios, um amante, uma casa, livros, cabelos cortados, uma tia, um professor' (PCS 168). It seems that these key elements that build up her individual life become independent of her, and her life thus loses its individuality. Given that there is no refuge, Joana tells herself to escape no more but leave, as she embarks on a new journey: 'naquela tarde em que recebera o bilhete do homem,

escolhera um novo caminho. Não fugir, mas ir' (PCS 192). The thought of leaving a place rather than escaping that marks Joana's shift in the understanding of home and shelter first occurs to her in the chapter, 'A víbora', after her encounter with the anonymous man:

> Estava solta das coisas, de suas próprias coisas, por ela mesma criadas e vivas. Largassem-na no deserto, na solidão das geleiras, em qualquer ponto da Terra e conservaria as mesmas mãos brancas e caídas, o mesmo desligamento quase sereno. [...] Não fugir, mas ir. Isso, tão doce: não fugir, mas ir... (PCS 172)

Joana's existential realisation regarding her vulnerability to her unfortunate relationships with others coincides with a more profound perception of her embeddedness in the universe. While she is still at home with Otávio, she feels herself dispossessed from things that she thought created by her. She comes up with a hypothesis of being left in the desert or on glaciers, places with the minimal signs of human intervention, and conjectures that there she would still survive, intact and content with the disconnection from traces of her former relationships with people. Her sense of homelessness dissipates upon the revelation that the Earth's immensity would sustain her wherever she is. Through Joana's aspiration to be integrated into diverse landscapes, Lispector reaffirms her celebration of nature and its perfection, rooted in an understanding of the human's entangled position within the environment. Just as Joana once seeks comfort and protection from the sea during her childhood, she is here once again an innocent child, ready to embrace the infinite mystery that nature reveals.

Despite the fact that drawing sustenance from nature seems to be a reenactment of the childhood, by the end of the novel, Joana is finally on her own journey, and she considers that she will live greater than she did during the childhood, a period which is usually associated with retreat and safety ('só então viverei maior do que na infância') (PCS 198). Conversely, she goes deeper into a liquid region with greater danger ('região líquida') (PCS 190). In contrast to her former diminished agency when she sinks into other liquid ambiances that function as

an affective reserve, in the last pages of the book, Joana grows – her bodily capacity magnifies, seen in clearer signs of movement and vibration that define her existence: 'Sobretudo aclarava-se aquele movimento constante no fundo do seu ser – agora crescia e vibrava' (PCS 196). Joana's increased affect differs significantly from the 'courage' illustrated by Otávio's uprightness and Lídia's fulfillment, as she distinguishes her ascension from a heroic, humanistic ambition for conquest: 'O que nela se elevava não era a coragem, ela era substância apenas, menos do que humana, como poderia ser herói e desejar vencer as coisas? Não era mulher, ela existia e o que havia dentro dela eram movimentos erguendo-a sempre em transição' (PCS 196).

Restating Spinoza's claims in the *Ethics*, Lispector concludes her conceptualisation of subjectivity: Joana grows closer to a wild force [força selvagem] (PCS 196) – a non-anthropocentric self, inhabiting the universe with nonhuman and non-living beings of the same substance. She cannot be defined as woman nor human, but, by her movements, as modification to the substance. She is not in perpetual elevation, but always in transition between disappearance and emergence, struggle and rest, in what seems to be a ritualised oscillation in accordance with the ungraspable laws of nature: 'basta me cumprir e então nada impedirá meu caminho até a morte-sem-medo, de qualquer luta ou descanso me levantarei forte e belo como um cavalo novo' (PCS 196). She survives and grows by surrendering to and immersing herself in nature, with its confusion of intra-action, and through her exposure to a range of potentials, including danger and death: 'não haverá nenhum espaço dentro de mim para notar sequer que estarei criando instante por instante, não instante por instante: sempre fundido, porque então viverei' (PCS 205-206). Attached to and sustained by the nonhuman environment, Joana continues her individuation and depersonalisation and anticipates a moment where she will emerge as a horse, an existence distinct from herself. Joana's non-anthropocentric gesture of disappearance indicates the potential for bonding with and extension into the world. Through

Joana's precarious position, Lispector formulates her theory of nature. In embracing nature's ongoing events, the human no longer possesses an absolute sense of individuality; human actions are not practices of creation, but gestures of participation in a planetary-scale perfection.

## 3. On the Function of the Mind, Individual Freedom and Aesthetic experience

I have examined the formation and undoing of subjectivity envisioned by Lispector according to Spinoza's fundamental thought articulated in the *Ethics* and have explored the location of human subject vis-à-vis the universe through the lens of affect theory and posthumanism, which are both influenced by Spinoza's ontological claims and thus produce new inquiry into functions of subjectivity such as its dispersal and relationality. This section will analyse how Lispector formulates the subject's functioning of cognition in relation to the universe under the influence of Spinoza's epistemology and philosophy of mind.

In Section 2, I have analysed Lispector's conceptualisation of the subject and its body as a process integrated in intra-action of the universe. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza claims that the human mind is constituted by the idea of the human body so 'the human mind is united to the body'. He defines 'idea' as 'the mental conception which is formed by the mind as a thinking thing' (E-II 7). Given the parallelism between thought (mind) and extension (body) as two attributes of the same substance, an idea as activity of the human mind corresponds to a change in the body expressed in its extension. In other words, the formation of an idea in the human mind and a happening within the human body are both parts of the unfolding of substance.

In Part 2, Proposition 48, Spinoza rejects the notion of an independent, free will of human-beings and explains that 'the mind is determined to wish this or that by a cause, which has also been determined by another cause, and this last by another cause, and so on to infinity'.

This idea corresponds to another claim in Part 2, Proposition 8, Axiom 2, Lemma 3 that '[a] body in motion or at rest must be determined to motion or rest by another body […] and so on to infinity'. In Section 2 of the chapter, through the analysis of Joana's body with its unstable contours, I have argued that the bodies in the novel are defined by their capacity to participate in intra-actions that compose the universe, and their defining relative state of movement is illustrated by the swarming of particles in accordance with the pattern of nature. Spinoza's emphasis on the mind-body parallelism highlights that the subject includes both the mind and body, along with the events that take place within them. In this view, the subject's cognitive functioning, inseparable from the body as previously discussed, is also formed by the intra-action – a process integrated within a larger process.

Spinoza explains that human-beings' sense of freedom derives from the consciousness of their own volitions and desires and from their ignorance about 'the causes which have disposed them so to wish and desire'.[65] If volition and desire are constituted by affect or idea, what is considered by a subject to be their 'free' decision can be understood as being determined by what happens within the human body and mind that is ultimately determined by the perfect laws of nature.

*Perto do coração selvagem* offers an illustration of Spinoza's determinism as well as the notion of mind-body union that influence Lispector. In the second chapter, Joana reflects on her body and the cause of her action: 'tenho um corpo e tudo o que eu fizer é continuação de meu começo; [...] aceito tudo o que vem de mim porque não tenho conhecimento das causas e é possível que esteja pisando no vital sem saber; é essa a minha maior humildade, adivinhava ela' (PCS 18). In the *Ethics* (Part 2, Propositions 11, 12 and 13), Spinoza posits that the first element that constitutes the human mind is the idea of the body. Joana recognises the actual

[65] Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Part I, p. 69.

being of her body and understands that all actions made by her mind are a continuation of her beginning – the existence of her body and the idea of the body constituting her mind. She emphasises her humble disposition as she always follows what appears to be her will, for fear of infringing upon its vital causes, of which she can never be fully aware.

With this suspicion of an independent will or action, Joana further elaborates on her notion of freedom: 'Mesmo na liberdade, quando escolhia alegre novas veredas, reconhecia-as depois. Ser livre era seguir-se afinal, e eis de novo o caminho traçado. Ela só veria o que já possuía dentro de si' (PCS 19). Joana realises that her sensation of liberty in choosing a new path cannot be distinguished from an affirmation or memory of how she has been determined to act. She perceives only the happening within herself that induces her to the choice. This, for her, is the source of the feeling of free will. Joana follows what she considers to be the fated path, as she understands that things operate according to a perfect order.

The paragraph quoted above from *Perto do coração selvagem* also draws attention to the function of imagination. As I mentioned in Section 1, what Spinoza terms 'imagination' is an act of representation constituted by the body's affection by external bodies. He proposes that, in imagination, the ideas we form of external bodies 'indicate rather the constitution of our own body than the nature of external bodies' (E-II 39). Spinoza thus concludes that imagination possesses less epistemic value than other types of cognition, namely, reasoning and intuition, since imagination leads to falsity rather than adequate knowledge (E-II 68). Joana's imagination is represented as being subjected to the impact of external bodies, resulting in confusion over what is real:

> Pensar agora, por exemplo, em regatos louros, compreende? assim se foge. Sim, mas os dourados de sol, louros de certo modo... Quer dizer que na verdade não imaginei. [...] Na imaginação, que só ela tem a força do mal, apenas a visão engrandecida e transformada: sob ela a verdade impassível. Mente-se e cai-se na verdade. [...] Perdido pois o gosto de imaginar. (PCS 19)

Here, Joana takes the blonde streams as an instance of imagination, which is presented as a sensory experience. This invented image is effectively mediated by the golden flecks of sunlight that alter her vision and, consequently, her act of forming an idea. Joana's imaginative cognition is thus prompted by a bodily modification determined by the impingement between the sunlight and her body, rather than by an independent, agential act of creation. In line with Spinoza's claim, Joana regards imagination as a form of deception and a force of evil that impedes her from actively accessing the impassive, unchangeable reality/nature.

Despite the intricate uncertainty of nature acting upon human beings, Joana regards a chromatic study[66] by Bach as an instantiation of the rigorous, complex pattern of perfection: 'E abaixo de todas as dúvidas – o estudo cromático – sei que tudo é perfeito, porque seguiu de escala a escala o caminho fatal em relação a si mesmo' (PCS 20). This piece by Bach, composed of continuous chromatic scales, exemplifies what Isabella van Elferen observes in Baroque arts as 'the perpetual organic folding of lines', forms that are 'vibrant, vital, and affective'.[67] The rushing scales, ascending and descending, unfold as evolving lines of encounter and interaction of notes that embody the infinite affective events composing the universe. Bach's aesthetic endeavour is expressed through his permutational arrangement of the tones – the existing materials from the nature-given chromatic realm. In doing so, he intuits a partially adequate image of the universe through his elaboration of an aesthetic form that imitates the perfection of nature's creation. In this sense, Lispector underscores the significance of aesthetic form as a demonstration of intuition, which, according to Spinoza, exceeds reason and imagination as

[66] This piece by Johann Sebastian Bach may be *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in D minor*, BWV 903, which features the sprawling chromatic scales and a sense of spontaneity of improvisation.
[67] Isabella van Elferen, 'Rethinking Affect', in *Rethinking Bach*, ed. by Bettina Varwig (Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 141-66 (p. 159).

two other modes of human cognition and grants access to an adequate understanding of the formal essence of nature.

Hasana Sharp explains Spinoza's notion of intuition as 'the single apprehension of what is concretely universal in all beings'.[68] This interpretation emphasises the function of intuition that connects the individual, finite image with the universal concept. Bach's composition, as an individual, aesthetic practice, strives to construe and express infinity and the unknown and to apprehend the universal doctrine of affects that is not confined to the spectrum of human emotions. Joana compares the sensation engendered by the Bach piece to a body's encounter with ice – an objective correlative: 'Ele é frio e puro como gelo' (PCS 19). In apprehending the impersonal affect produced by Bach's music, Joana loses clear consciousness but achieves a state of serenity vis-à-vis the piece's hallucinating complexity:

> Perco a consciência, mas não importa, encontro a maior serenidade na alucinação. É curioso como não sei dizer quem sou. Quer dizer, sei-o bem, mas não posso dizer. [...] Sinto quem sou e a impressão está alojada na parte alta do cérebro, nos lábios – na língua principalmente –, na superfície dos braços e também correndo dentro, bem dentro do meu corpo, mas onde, onde mesmo, eu não sei dizer. (PCS 19-20)

Spinoza emphasises in *the Ethics* (Part 4, Proposition 45) that the diversity of aesthetic pleasure, such as music and theatre, is necessary for individuals to attain the state of intuition. Joana acquires an intuitive knowledge of herself from a musical experience that takes the form of an elusive and incommunicable impression, reminiscent of Spinoza's notion of intuition characterised as immediate apprehension (Part 2, Proposition 40, Note 2). There is a corresponding extension in her body that parallels her mind's grasp of the essence of herself. However, given that the causality between the attributes of thought and extension remains unknown to her, she cannot locate or articulate the precise happening in her body. Spinoza

[68] Hasana Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 147.

proposes in *the Ethics* (Part 2, Proposition 17) that intuitive knowledge brings about 'the highest possible mental acquiescence'. Joana cultivates her peace of mind and mental freedom through her exposure to Bach's music: she follows the complex chromatic scales and her mind grasps them as instantiation of the perfect order. Her belief in the perfection of nature also arises from this intuitive act: 'Nada escapa à perfeição das coisas, é essa a história de tudo' (PCS 20). In the penultimate chapter, 'A partida dos homens', Joana intuits – through the abandonment by Otávio and the anonymous man – that her existence in the world unfolds as fragile and floating instants, enabling her to traverse from one plane of experience to another ('de plano a plano') (PCS 188). This epiphany, free from reasoning ('Já sem se prender a raciocínios'), is mingled with an exquisite and intense joy that Joana once again compares to the coldness of ice and to musical perception: 'Mergulhada numa alegria tão fina e intensa quase como o frio do gelo, quase como a percepção da música' (PCS 188). Through these reccurring analogies, Lispector explicitly associates intuitive knowledge with an ineffable aesthetic experience.

In the novel, Joana records her perception of *the Ethics* in a note that Otávio later discovers: 'A beleza das palavras: natureza abstrata de Deus. É como ouvir Bach' (PCS 120). She draws an analogy between the beauty of Spinoza's words and her experience of listening to Bach and she regards both as illustrations of the abstract nature of God. In Bach's careful weaving of sonic patterns through the arrangement of musical elements, his compositions enact movements and variations, producing intended collective affects in the audience that guide them towards a deeper understanding of their relation to nature. This language of music thus parallels Spinoza's words that aim to liberate individuals from falsity and ignorance and to guide them towards living in accordance with the perfect order. Joana uses the analogy between two expressions of intuition to articulate her perception. This manner points to the esoteric

nature of intuitive knowledge. At the same time, it reflects Lispector's literary ambition to convey intuition and to approach perfect knowledge through the act of fictional writing.

As a rare and potent form of cognition, intuition is illustrated in Joana's instantaneous grasp of an idea and her ensuing experience of freedom of mind. In the paragraph of her extended soliloquy following the bathroom scene, an idea occurs to her that takes the form of a yearning – a bodily desire akin to hunger:

> […] essa ânsia que me dá ao rosto um ar de quem caça para se alimentar, talvez essa ânsia seja uma ideia – e nada mais. Porém – os raros instantes que às vezes consigo de suficiência, de vida cega, de alegria tão intense e tão serena como o canto de um órgão – esses instantes não provam que sou capaz de satisfazer minha busca e que esta é sede de todo o meu ser e não apenas uma ideia? Além do mais, a ideia é a verdade! grito-me. São raros os instantes. Quando ontem, na aula, repentinamente pensei, quase sem antecedentes, quase sem ligação com as coisas: o movimento explica a forma. A clara noção do perfeito, a liberdade súbita que senti... (PCS 68)

The instants of intuitive perception transcend logical links, like a leap from conscious, rigorous reasoning: all of a sudden, Joana comprehends that movement constitutes form. This idea is consistent with what I have discussed in Section 2 of this chapter, where I argued that processes of intra-action compose the architecture of the universe. Spinoza proposes in *the Ethics* (Part 5, Proposition 36) that the human mind is more affected in intuition than in reasoning, which he classifies as knowledge of the second kind. Sharp extends this idea, arguing that 'intuition is more powerful than reason because it corresponds to opening the body and mind to being affected more determinately by other essences'.[69] Joana's experience of these rare instants involves the intensity of affection reflected in her cheerful ebullience, which highlights the embodied nature of an intuitive process. This process also entails satisfaction of mind, akin to

[69] Hasana Sharp, '"Nemo non videt": Intuitive Knowledge and the Question of Spinoza's Elitism', in *The Rationalists: Between Tradition and Innovation*, ed. by Carlos Fraenkel and Dario Perinetti (Springer, 2011), pp. 101-22 (p. 116).

what Spinoza describes as mental acquiescence. Joana thus obtains freedom – a clear state of mind infused with the notion of perfection. Similar to her appreciation for Bach's music, Joana compares her enjoyment of intuitive knowledge to organ music. In the following paragraph, she narrates an aesthetic experience of listening to organ music in the cathedral:

> Eu estava sentada na Catedral, numa espera distraída e vaga. Respirava opressa o perfume roxo e frio das imagens. E, subitamente, antes que pudesse compreender o que se passava, como um cataclisma, o órgão invisível desabrochou em sons cheios, trêmulos e puros. Sem melodia, quase sem música, quase apenas vibração. As paredes compridas e as altas abóbadas da igreja recebiam as notas e devolviam-nas sonoras, nuas e intensas. Elas traspassavam-me, entrecruzavam-se dentro de mim, enchiam meus nervos de estremecimentos, meu cérebro de sons [...] Continuei respirando baixinho, o corpo vibrando ainda aos últimos sons que restavam no ar num zumbido quente e translúcido. E era tão perfeito o momento que eu nada temia nem agradecia e não caí na ideia de Deus. (PCS 69)

The scene begins with the sublime atmosphere of the cathedral, where Joana feels overwhelmed by the tension arising from the scent and the coldness of the statues that seem to stand in opposition to her. A sense of oppression in the air suggests the inaccessibility of divine knowledge. Suddenly, however, a violent collision occurs between the sound of organ and Joana's body – an event that she describes as a cataclysm, a momentous affective happening that precedes her cognition and comprehension. The initial tension dissolves in the wake of the music's vibration, which envelops both her body and the cathedral's long walls and high vaults, accentuating its architectural magnitude. Joana feels her body inundated by the sound and vibration of the organ to the point that she becomes part of the atmosphere. This intense resonance generates a moment of intuition, in which she understands her relationship to nature/God: rather than succumbing to a passive, superstitious belief prompted by fear, oppression or humility, she actively participates in and interacts with the world so that the adequate knowledge or the divine perfection is attainable.

In her soliloquy at the boarding school, Joana comprehends the possibility of communicating at a distance with nature and the unknown in a moment when her resonance with the glow of the stars is manifested as a bodily extension: 'Se o brilho das estrelas dói em mim, se é possível essa comunicação distante, é que alguma coisa quase semelhante a uma estrela trêmula dentro de mim' (PCS 65). Joana's understanding of herself as a partaker in divine nature and vitality corresponds to an ache in her body, as if the stars were twinkling within her. The formation of knowledge, constituted by the communicative affect between Joana and the stars as external bodies, once again underscores that the intuitive process involves both the mind and the body. In the same paragraph, Joana perceives that everything is made of instants: infinitesimal units of both time and space that are conceived as seamlessly conflated dimensions in which she is freely situated: 'Analisar instante por instante, perceber o núcleo de cada coisa feito de tempo ou espaço. Possuir cada momento, ligar a consciência a eles, como pequenos filamentos quase imperceptíveis mais fortes' (PCS 66). The fibre-like instants – ungraspable but cogent beings – are the extension of Joana's consciousness. As an unbounded entity, she is imperceptibly intertwined with everything through instants that saturate the universe.

In this section, my analysis of Spinoza's influence on this novel centres on the question of the location and function of the human mind. Beginning with Spinoza's notion of parallelism between extension and thought, I have examined the novel's consistent account of the subject (mind/body) as a partaker in the intra-actions that compose the universe. Lispector endorses the determinism of Spinoza's *Ethics* in her novel, in which Joana regards her action of decision-making as expressions and instantiations of the regularity of nature[70]. Influenced by Spinoza's

[70] In his letter to G. H. Schuller, Spinoza emphasises his definition of freedom as 'free necessity' as opposed to 'free decision'. See Spinoza, *The ethics; Treatise on the emendation of the intellect; Selected letters*, trans. by Samuel Shirley, ed. by Seymour Feldman (Hackett, 1992), p. 285. In this notion, individuals' existence and action are determined by other causes, but they are able to freely understand existences and causes as their understanding follows the necessity of the existence of nature (p. 286). In *Perto do coração selvagem*,

classification of the three types of human cognition – imagination, reasoning and intuition – the novel foregrounds the function of intuition as the mode through which the individual gains access to, and engages with, the perfection of nature. Lispector presents intuition as a rare and intense experience involving mental and bodily processes, occurring within fleeting, elusive instants. These moments of intuitive understanding are often associated with aesthetic experience and endeavour, through which freedom and joy of mind arise. *Perto do coração selvagem* thus demonstrates Lispector's ambitions to explore freedom and celebrate intuition through the act of literary creation.

## Conclusion

This chapter analyses Spinoza's influence on Lispector's conception of subjectivity in *Perto do coração selvagem* on the ontological, societal and epistemological levels. Considering the explicit intertextuality in the novel, I have read Spinoza's theory of attributes in the *Ethics* as the guiding principle for the novel's overall scaffolding, through which Lispector organises her intellectual constructs. Considering the unity and consistency of the substance as the nature of every entity, an individual body can be defined only by its movement – its affective states, namely, its relations with other bodies.

In Section 1, by analysing Joana's perception of her place in the world and her relationships with other characters such as Lídia and Otávio, I have argued that the female protagonist aptly embodies the Spinozan framework: the individuality of the self is expressed through the multiplicity of relative modes, while the sameness of the substance constituting the

Lispector's conception of determinism and freedom of one's decision and perception is thus aligned with Spinoza's contention.

nature of the self enables associations of all kinds with other entities. Following this substance-mode tenet, Joana exists on a plane of consistency, where her self-defining extension generates a relational web devoid of a centre, hierarchy or stratification. This consistent plane thus eschews fixed dimensions or physical occupations that would delineate social or familial roles. Drawing on conceptual metaphors such as lines of flight and the body without organs – borrowed from Spinoza's readers, Deleuze and Guattari – I have interpreted Joana's childhood as emblematic of the virtual and of deterritorialisation, whereby the individuality of the self dissolves into a mere singularity. The diffusion of childhood scenes throughout the novel signals the subject's perpetual vacillation between the virtual and the actual, between preindividual singularity and individuality. The novel thus conceives of the subject as composed of non-contiguous, virtual events: simultaneous processes of becoming individual and dissolving into impersonal singularity.

In Section 2, I have examined several tangible models through which Lispector illustrates the shape of an individual subject. These models underscore different facets of her conception. Joana's body is portrayed as fluid, inseparable from and in constant exchange with its surroundings. It is also represented as dispersed into aggregates of particles whose relative motion coincides – this model further deconstructs the notion of organism and boundaries of the body: the subject emerges as a partaker in intra-actions that constitute the universe. I have interpreted Barad's concept of intra-action as unappropriated affects that signify bodily contact and entanglements. The subject, therefore, consists solely of the events in which it participates, while time and space – parameters of the universe – are conceived as agglomerations of infinitesimal particles and their movements. Drawing on Bateman's notion of flattened ontology and disappearance, I argued that Lispector proposes a mode of subjectivity characterised by diminished affect. Joana's recumbent body and her gesture of vanishing

exemplify a sustainable way of inhabiting the world: she extends imperceptibly, rhizomatically connecting herself to nature through intra-actions.

Section 3 focused on Spinoza's epistemological influence on the novel and examined how Lispector portrays the function of mind. I have argued that Lispector represents the cognitive process as parallel to somatic experience and that she foregrounds intuition as the highest form of intellectual achievement. Inspired by Spinoza's enigmatic notion of intuition, Lispector's rendition of intuitive cognition – exemplified through Joana's epiphany – is characterised by an instantaneous grasp of complex knowledge accompanied by intense, momentous affect. Lispector associates intuitive instants with aesthetic experience, through which individuals can be liberated from inadequate ideas and come to perceive their situatedness within the intricate arabesque of the universe. Aligned with Spinoza's determinism, the novel celebrates the perfection of nature's laws while emphasising aesthetic experience and creation as vital channels through which one participates in the ongoing processes of nature.

# CHAPTER 2 – WEAVING OBJECTS AND ATMOSPHERE: MATTER-ENERGY DYNAMICS IN *O LUSTRE*

## Introduction

In *O lustre* (1946), the young protagonist Virgínia enjoys making dolls from clay, a material that is 'maleável, pastoso, frio' (OL 46). As the objects she makes can be de-formed and recreated into new figurines by herself, there is no defined shape or meaning to her creation. The malleable clay figurines, formed through contact – an affective happening – embody passivity imbued with creative potential, evident in their capacity for reconfiguration. The figurines can thus be seen as affective bodies constituting the Lispectorian universe, a space marked by constant shifts in resistance to definition, certainty and closure. Clarice Lispector thereby reveals her interest in the human subject's entanglements within not only social but also material networks.

As Lispector's second and least studied novel, *O lustre* can be understood as a transitional work within her oeuvre. Lispector consciously undertakes an apprenticeship in writing from a non-anthropocentric perspective through her sketching of characters. The novel traces Virgínia's life from her solitary childhood in the countryside, Brejo Alto, with her abusive brother, Daniel, through young adulthood in the city, where she has brief relationships with Vicente and later Adriano, and finally to her sudden death in a car accident. Written in a fragmentary form, the novel foregrounds moods, atmospheres and material processes. As suggested by the title, the focus of the novel is not cast directly on Virgínia the protagonist, but on an object (the chandelier) that serves as an index of a stagnant environment, contrasting with the transience of individual life.

In this chapter, I will explore how Lispector envisions the relationship between subjectivity and materiality in the novel by examining the protagonist's interaction with objects, drawing on theories that have not yet played a role in the study of *O lustre*. Brian Massumi describes affect as a not-fully-grasped reaction or tendency engendered by contacts between entities. I evoke Massumi's theory to scrutinise the affective mechanism at play in Virgínia's experience and mentality. My approach will facilitate an understanding of Lispector's strategy in portraying the preindividual aspect of human activities and capacities, an aspect that figures a state of material forces. In line with the conception of the preindividual realm, it is befitting to analyse Lispector's description of seemingly discrete objects, which preserve matter-energy when enmeshed in a certain constellation. I therefore propose that Bill Brown's thing theory, which argues that 'inanimate objects constitute human subjects' and either 'facilitate or threaten their relation to other subjects', offers an instructive framework for interpreting the novel's depiction of the everchanging relations between individuals and their surrounding physical realm,[71] particularly in terms of their mutually constitutive impacts.

Scholars have read *O lustre* through the lenses of post-structuralism and phenomenology. Earl E. Fitz highlights 'the role of language' in constituting the 'essential fluidity of Virgínia's conception of life' indicative of a 'post-structural sense of existence'.[72] Attending to the protagonist's fluid existence and implementing a psychoanalytical approach, Mariângela Alonso reveals the connection between water elements and the dynamics of drives in life and death depicted in Virgínia's trajectory, emphasising how the subconscious flows of interiority inform the shape of the narrative discourse.[73] This chapter, however, will interpret

[71] Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28. 1 (2001), pp. 1-22 (p. 7).
[72] Earl E. Fitz, *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist Universe of Clarice Lispector*, p. 24-25.
[73] Mariângela Alonso, *A água e as pulsões em O lustre, de Clarice Lispector* (Appris Editora, 2019), p. 171.

impulses and drives not as instinctual or isolated internal states, but as products of relational, affective events which register through the impingement of human and nonhuman bodies.

Recent theoretical developments that shift attention to nonhuman beings have underscored the symbiosis between humans and the environment. Affect, with its transpersonal nature, as defined by Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth as 'intensities that pass [from] body to body',[74] shows its transformative capacity in the linkage between entities. Lispector's works often decentre the human characters in favour of their environments. This theme is reflected in Carlos Mendes de Sousa's work, in which he probes the depictions of atmospheres in Lispector's fiction and highlights the aesthetics of shadow as a device of organising the interrelations among characters in *O lustre*[75]. This chapter will further elucidate how the subject is produced through the interplay of connections and how it mediates and co-evolves with its affective atmosphere, which I consider to be key questions that Lispector grapples with in her lifetime's arc of writing.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Section 1 examines how Lispector elaborates affective mechanisms through a focus on bodily tensions, looking at the protagonist's visceral experience of traumatic witnessing associated with an object. Section 2 moves onto a discussion of the entanglements of affective bodies. It explores the question of belonging through the delineation of shared atmosphere and participation in play as a way of negotiating with objects. Section 3 analyses Lispector's attention to material entities and energy and their roles in the formation of a human subject by reading Virgínia's interaction with physical objects and their movements.

[74] Gregg and Seigworth, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', p. 1.
[75] See Carlos Mendes de Sousa, *Clarice Lispector: Figuras da escrita*, pp. 169-170.

## 1. The Story of a Hat: Bodily Tensions and Affects

In the opening sequence, Virgínia and Daniel catch sight of a hat in the river, and they think it must belong to a drowned man: 'O rio correndo arrastava-o com brutalidade e ele resistia. Até que perdendo a última força foi levado pela correnteza ligeira e em saltos sumiu entre espumas quase alegre' (OL 8). This episode happens to Virgínia and her brother during their childhood in Granja Quieta, which marks the beginning of the story[76]. The hat as an omen of death reappears in the ending, when Virgínia, wearing a hat, is killed in a car accident[77].

The sodden hat can be seen as a trace of life but is at the same time depicted as passive and fragile in comparison to the power of nature represented by the running river. However, this scene – a hat in the water – constitutes a space of events. It exerts a matter-energy upon Virgínia in the form of pressing, emergent tendencies to which she is exposed but cannot fully process. Lispector represents this liminal realm of experience in Virgínia's immediate, intense bodily responses: 'De súbito imobilizara-se tensa e leve' (OL 7). Before Virgínia can figure out what the object in water really is, her body suddenly stiffens and appears to be weightless at the mere sight of the hat. Her half-actualised expression in the aftermath of this scene also indicates her situatedness within this assemblage of material agency, like a wave on the river.

Massumi defines affect as intensity, that is, incipient bodily reactions and responses which are 'purely autonomic' and 'directly manifested'.[78] He further distinguishes affect from emotion, a 'subjective content' fixed by personal experience,[79] and thus underscores the

[76] Although their ages are never specified, they are young: Virgínia is still a child, while Daniel is on the verge of puberty. They come from a traditional family, once wealthy and now in decline. This may justify the significance of 'play' as a revolt to the strictness of family in section 2.
[77] A mass of pages is devoted to this episode which is crucial to Virgínia's development as a subject. *O lustre* focuses on intense, formative moments in Virgínia's life with enormous attention to sensory perception. Virgínia's childhood is the subject of the first fourth of the novel which then jumps to her life as a young lady in the city.
[78] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Duke University Press, 2002), p. 25.
[79] Massumi, *Parables*, p. 28.

asignifying, preconscious side of affect. Massumi aptly describes the experience of affect as immediate 'visceral perception' that precedes cognition and awareness.[80] Following this observation on the autonomy and openness of body that absorbs impulses more quickly 'than they can be perceived',[81] I map bodies in *O lustre* as sites where pastness links with futurity and the actual coexists with the potential.

Lispector emphasises the visceral quality in the siblings' affective exposure in their brief conversation before a long period of silence:

> – Não podemos contar a ninguém, sussurrou finalmente Virgínia, a voz distante e vertiginosa.
>
> – Sim... – mesmo Daniel se assustara e concordava... as águas continuavam correndo. – Nem que nos perguntem sobre o afog...
>
> – Sim! quase gritou Virgínia... calaram-se com força, os olhos engrandecidos e ferozes. (OL 8)

In this conversation, Virgínia interrupts Daniel's attempt to articulate the word 'afogado' that he concludes from what he has seen. Her gesture seems to be a rejection of the intrusion of language and affirmation, which, as Massumi proposes, is 'matter-of-factness' that 'dampens intensity'.[82] Their comprehension of the scene at the riverside is inhibited from fully actualising, allowing the scene to retain its affective tendency to unfold upon them. Massumi describes this unresolved tendency as the realm of potential, or the virtual dimension of affect. As a not fully articulated experience for Virgínia and Daniel, the scene they witness resists being rigidified by language and reserves a virtual space for future reactivation that they cannot anticipate. I will discuss this disrupted affective temporality in Section 2.

[80] Massumi, *Parables*, p. 61.
[81] Massumi, *Parables*, p. 29.
[82] Massumi, *Parables*, p. 25.

In the following paragraphs of the novel, Virgínia still follows this intense and vague sensation without drawing on clear awareness. She is thrown into convulsion, with increased heartbeats in her body:

> O coração batendo num corpo subitamente vazio de sangue, o coração jogando, caindo furiosamente, as águas correndo, ela tentou entreabrir os lábios, soprara uma palavra pálida que fosse. Como o grito impossível num pesadelo, nenhum som se ouviu e as nuvens deslizavam rápidas no céu para um destino. (OL 8)

Not being able to move or emit sound, Virgínia is caught in a state of suspension, which represents 'a spasmodic passivity' as a symptom of a visceral sensorial experience[83]: her body is filled with what Massumi describes as 'vibratory motion' that is 'not yet activity', since these bodily reactions are unintentional and do not help orient the subject's energy towards 'practical ends'.[84] Virgínia can no longer keep control of her own body. On the one hand, her body resembles a hat drifting in a river that can be conceived as something rejected. This affectively charged moment can be interpreted as what Julia Kristeva terms abjection, a state where one's coherent sense of subjecthood is disturbed due to an intense sensational exposure and feeling of disgust, repulsion and fear. Virgínia cannot protect herself from receding to the position of an object. The hat, associated with an unseen corpse, renders death palpable to her. On the other hand, her body forms an autonomous entity free from the manipulation of consciousness in response to the situation: her heartbeats are overwhelmed by the sound of water rushing beneath her feet and, at the same time, resonating and accompanying the tempo of the flow.

Fear permeates her, leaving her in a state of abjection: a 'choking sensation that does not separate inside from outside'.[85] Virgínia seems to be engulfed by the unceasing river and

[83] Massumi, *Parables*, p. 61.
[84] Massumi, *Parables*, p. 26.
[85] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 25.

the imagined drowned man as she becomes part of the scene that shows her the menacing condition of living: 'Sob os seus pés rumorejavam as águas—numa clara alucinação ela pensava: ah sim, então ia cair e afogar-se' (OL 9). This intrusion of awareness forces her to consider the status of death as not only an impending future but also a permanent being. Serving as a *memento mori*, the hat positions her on the hallucinatory edge between the actual event and the virtual tendency. Aligned with what Bill Brown names 'thingness', which denotes the material agency of specified objects, the suddenness of Virgínia's encounter with the scene asserts the object's force as a 'sensuous presence'.[86]

In this intense and momentous stimulation towards both self-preservation and death, her horror is mingled with excitement: 'Alguma coisa intensa e lívida como o terror mas triunfante, certa alegria doida e atenta enchia-lhe agora o corpo e ela esperava para morrer' (OL 9). Like a resonating vessel, her body even equates fear with pleasure at the moment of exaltation with magnified bodily capacity. Holding on to the bridge that marks the border between death and living, Virgínia is inclined to deny her fear and resolve or eliminate this tension by letting go.

In this tendency towards death, she is reduced to a moribund state: 'Virgínia sentiria no corpo o toque de sua presença, levantar-se-ia da cama vagarosamente, sábia e cega como uma sonâmbula, e dentro de seu coração um ponto pulsaria fraco, quase desfalecido' (OL 9). Her feeling of the drowned man creeping upon her concretises a promised future of death. Here, the realm of the virtual brushes her shoulders while the powerful presence of the sodden hat is still not apprehended by her. As Massumi points out, this edge of the virtual 'where it leaks into actual' marks the space of potential.[87] In other words, the potential of affect lies in the intrinsic connection between what has been registered cognitively by the body and what has

[86] Brown, 'Thing Theory', p. 5.
[87] Massumi, *Parables*, p. 43.

eluded it and operates at a preindividual level. I read Virgínia's inclination to death as an autonomous unfolding of potential tendencies in actual circumstances, which differs significantly from the Freudian notion of sequential stages of drive development. Virgínia's body not only conserves the unresolved intensities but also possesses simultaneously the capacity to participate in the tendency of reactivating them. As the potential of Virgínia's affective experience with the hat, her self-destructive impulse escapes confinement in her individual body and the actual temporal structure.

Virgínia becomes involuntarily appropriated by her half-perception of the scene, through which she can experience the death again and again. With a haunting effect, the disappearance and reemergence of the imagined drowned man, as well as the emphasis on the water flowing ('o rio rolava'), reiterate Virgínia's traumatic witnessing 'in repeated *possession*' by an image,[88] which even foreshadows the reenactment of the experience of death in her future.

Bereft of the ability to speak and the right to tell, the secret wound remains in her and prolongs its capacity to emerge as a reenactment of the scene. This becomes explicit in her numbed, motionless position due to Daniel's refusal to walk with her when they meet each other again in Granja Quieta in their adult life: 'como no dia do afogado, de novo ela não saberia como chamá-lo, como gritar que não a deixasse nesse momento sozinha […] o coração batendo calmo, seco, sem sangue' (OL 264-65). Virgínia's heart beating without blood constitutes an echo of her previous bodily reaction upon being abandoned by Daniel on the day they witnessed the drowning, which implies that her bond with him based on their shared memory is too entrenched to be left behind.

The convergence of the actual event and the virtual realm of unactualised possibilities and tendencies equips Virgínia with the capacity to live on the threshold – while she cannot

[88] Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 4, italics in original.

clearly tell the boundaries between being alive and dead, self and other, she transforms into a ghostlike shadow: 'ela parecia poder penetrar e fugir das coisas em silêncio como uma sombra' (OL 11). This sign of ghostliness demonstrates her ability to penetrate the world of material things through her experience of death and annihilation.

Unable to reflect on her memory of the childhood episode with clear consciousness, Virgínia inclines to preserve the potential of her experience and continue to live with her secret, as the author states at the opening of the novel:

> Porém o que dominara seus contornos e os atraíra a um centro, o que a iluminara contra o mundo e lhe dera íntimo poder fora o segredo. Nunca saberia pensar nele em termos claros temendo invadir e dissolver a sua imagem. (OL 7)

Virgínia shies away from cognitively processing or parsing the event for fear of dissolving the sensory image as a braid of ineffable intensities and bodily tensions. As a bewildering construct that lacks clear reference to reality, this affective scenario is followed by a series of repetitions and variations at certain points later in her life. In order to better explain Lispector's illustration of the aftermath of Virgínia's witnessing, it is helpful to introduce Niklaus Largier's concept of 'figuration' that refers to a practice of sensually and affectively partaking in which individuals modulate their senses in resistance to understanding the preestablished mode of meaning.[89] Virgínia's acts of revisiting the not-completely-understood scene resonate with the visceral moment that forms the secret, mystic centre, around which her world reconstitutes itself. The indeterminacy and instability of the hat episode make Virgínia unable to assimilate and move on from the event. Nevertheless, it opens possibilities of shaping her perception of the

[89] See Niklaus Largier, *Figures of Possibility: Aesthetic Experience, Mysticism, and the Play of the Senses* (Stanford University Press, 2022).

experience. The hat episode not only enriches her imagination but invites her to participate in a world beyond her understanding, and she herself gradually becomes a part of this world.

In Virgínia's process of figuration after experiencing this episode, 'A Sociedade das Sombras'[90] comes into being, not as a sum of previous affective experiences but rather through absorption of 'differential intensities that precede and resist all mimetic assimilation' of feelings and thought[91]: *A Sociedade* is not merely established upon Virgínia's bodily history to disrupt her former space of living, but also upon the new possibilities promised by the practice of figuration. This game between the siblings creates a sense of belonging that Virgínia strives to grow, and which I will analyse in Section 2.

Lispector portrays the secret episode as a rebeginning of Virgínia's life and of the world she inhabits. In this way, the author demonstrates the potential for objects or an assemblage of material agency to be regarded as a source of individual identity, given their role in shaping the subject's perception of its own capacity and its relation to other subjects.

## 2. Playing, Affective Atmosphere and Micropolitics

In Section 1 of this chapter, through the analysis of an affectively charged event and Virgínia's bodily tensions, I examined how the mechanism of affect serves to inform the subject formation by enabling the unfolding potential to perform through the body's autonomous reaction beyond the grasp of consciousness. In doing so, I have underscored Lispector's portrayal of the instability of the body's boundaries, manifested at its immediate absorption of external stimuli, as well as the varied spectrum of re-enactments of the affective scenario due to its indeterminate

[90] 'A Sociedade das Sombras' is a game created and played by Daniel and Virgínia after they experience the hat episode. It will be discussed in more detail in Section 2 of this chapter.
[91] Largier, *Figures of Possibility*, p. 6.

potential. This section will discuss how the subject-body mediates and contributes to its atmosphere and power relations, focusing on how affect is transmitted and communicated in Lispector's depiction of atmosphere and playing.

Virgínia's encounter with the sodden hat can be seen as an onset of shock, which is described by Massumi as an immeasurable 'instant of affective hit' that 'takes over life'.[92] This moment is followed by an instant when Virgínia is able to recognise the object of her fright as one of the contents of her subjective experience and register it as a narrativisable emotion within her personal history. However, as I have argued in the previous section, an affective experience always involves a virtual dimension that escapes an individual's awareness, meaning that the subject's belated perception, as a result of the modulation of affect, can be variable. Massumi's notion of micropolitics, developed upon Deleuze and Guattari's studies, can be instrumental for our understanding of how Virgínia becomes what she becomes through her social entanglements exemplified by *A Sociedade das Sombras*, a game that succeeds the sibling's traumatic witnessing at the riverside. According to Massumi, micropolitics is a dynamic process in which power operates through the modulation of affective states. In other words, the formation of power is achieved through articulating changes in terms of interrelation, so that micropolitics functions on togetherness rather than on individuals separately and results in a collective change.[93]

Jane F. Thrailkill underscores the potency of play as it 'engenders a homelier set of affects' in her investigation of the childlike playing space between William, Alice and Henry James.[94] Through the analysis of the writings by Henry James as well as his siblings William and Alice collectively, Thraikill represents playing as a relational activity involving affective

[92] Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Polity, 2015), p. 54.
[93] See Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, p. 18.
[94] Jane F. Thrailkill, *Philosophical Siblings: Varieties of Playful Experience in Alice, William, and. Henry James* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), p. 253.

and bodily experience, through which children come to perceive the world and unleash their vitality and creativity. Thraikill's conclusion can be transferable to the characters in *O lustre*, as their childhood game constitutes a space of interaction and apprenticeship.

I read *A Sociedade das Sombras* as an atmosphere, characterised by what Ben Anderson defines as an indefinite or even 'ill-defined' situation that 'exceeds rational explanation and clear figuration'.[95] The Society has unclear principles invented by Daniel, and the siblings are the only two members: 'A Sociedade das Sombras tinha objetivos estranhos e indefinidos. Eles mesmos não os conheciam e misturavam seus mandamentos a uma ignorância quase desesperada' (OL 58). Nevertheless, similar to the arresting image of the hat, Daniel's idea of creating the Society exerts ineffable affective qualities on Virgínia, expressed through her bodily response that precedes her cognitive functioning: 'Antes mesmo de saber do que se tratava Virgínia já compreendera confusamente com o corpo e acedera' (OL 58).

We can interpret Daniel's invention of rules and principles for the Society as a form of micropolitics, which deploys an inductive art of 'triggering the cues',[96] rendering bodies attuned to a certain affective atmosphere. Daniel's inculcations are not the only factor determining the way Virgínia behaves in order to be inducted into the uncanny configuration of the Society: 'Fora por causa do afogado que nascera a Sociedade das Sombras? Eles haviam pressentido o encantado e perigoso começo do desconhecido, o impulso que vinha do medo' (OL 58). When Daniel first mentions the Society, their bodies already carry tendencies to restage their traumatic witnessing and to revive their fascination with mystery. Because the scenario of (false) drowning has not been fully actualised, Daniel uses it to modulate the Society in a manner that intensifies the sense of fear and solitude for them both, as Virgínia is persuaded to experience or imagine situations of danger, suffering and impending death. Like

[95] Ben Anderson, *Encountering Affect: Capacities, Apparatuses, Conditions* (Routledge: 2016), p. 140.
[96] Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, p. 56.

what Massumi posits as an 'alter-accomplishment' of micropolitics, the establishment of the Society after the siblings' encounter with the mystery 'amplifies a previously unfelt potential to the point of perceptibility'.[97] The unresolved affective intensities of the past episode are now consciously celebrated yet exploited, continuously being manifested by Daniel and Virgínia in this newly found community. The Society is thus both manipulative and liberating for its members.

There is no definite causality between the hat episode and the invention of the Society; the latter is in fact built on the bond between Virgínia and Daniel, as Virgínia admits that 'A Sociedade das Sombras aproximava-a tanto de Daniel!' (OL 59). Virgínia's enthusiasm for the Society lies in her yearning for intimacy and togetherness with her brother, who constantly threatens her with the punishment of exclusion.

There is a stark contrast between the siblings: Virgínia is always child-like, quietly engaging herself in making dolls from clay. She is depicted as silent and lacking linguistic capacity, and her body even appears animal-like in their father's remark: 'Daniel que tinha tão bom ouvido e praticava algumas vezes num piano de Brejo Alto. Com a outra filha, dissera ele, não faria o mesmo porque "animal só se solta de casa sem dentes"' (OL 17). Daniel, who is only slightly older than Virgínia, is handsome and arrogant ('belo e presunçoso'), and musically talented. Of particular relevance here is that in one of Lispector's early short stories, 'Obsessão' (1941), which charts a sado-masochistic relationship between a married woman, Cristina, and her lover, the abusive male protagonist is also named 'Daniel' and may thus serve as a parallel to the brother in *O lustre*. In the extramarital relationship, Daniel the lover, substituting for Cristina's husband, still looms as a symbol of intellectual and even patriarchal authority. Contrary to the traditional able-bodied male figure in charge of a family, the Daniel in

[97] Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, p. 58.

'Obsessão' is ill and confined to a convalescent home, so he weaponises knowledge as a manoeuvre of maintaining his dominion. Similarly, the Daniel in *O lustre* manipulates Virgínia's already problematised body, introducing to her a new set of regularities in which he grants himself the privilege of interpretation.

Because Virgínia and Daniel are the only two members of the Society, their partaking and modulation are the fundamental conditions for the constitution of the game. Given their sense of belonging to this community and their cohesion to each other, I interpret the Society as a relational undertaking that fosters an atmosphere of collusion, secret and menace. Massumi proposes that, when politics operates on the level of affect, it constitutes an abductive 'politics of belonging'.[98] Taking advantage of Virgínia's desire for their togetherness, Daniel presides over the game by creating a resonance pattern between Virgínia and himself. He threatens to finish with both her and the game ('Não se atreva a me interromper ou eu acabo com a Sociedade e com você'), along with his statement referring to the Society as a warning against Virgínia's interruption ('A Sociedade das Sombras falava sempre por último e a fórmula empregada por Daniel significava o fim da reunião') (OL 66). This manoeuvre constitutes a process of iteration. Meanwhile, their bodies are to some extent already interwoven in this pattern of repetition, given their ability to reactivate past experience.

Virgínia's fear of losing Daniel through disobeying him is manifested through her automatic bodily reaction ('um temor que não era pensamento') (OL 62). While neither of them fully understands the principles of the Society, Virgínia's fear partly stems from her anticipation of a nonexistent reality in which this community is dissolved, and partly from a more habitual unease, reinforced by the iterative negotiations with Daniel. Nonetheless, given the relational nature of their atmosphere and activity, it is evident that Daniel enacts the politics of affect not

[98] Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, p. 18.

on Virgínia alone, but on the dynamics of their togetherness. In this sense, the Society can effectively be seen as a symbiosis, with a constant interplay between sadism and emancipation.

Although Daniel strives to maintain his dominion, Virgínia is never completely enslaved by him or by the Society, for there she can always experience a degree of freedom to access her potential to reflect and intervene: 'O temor de desobedecer a Daniel—um temor que não era pensamento nem o perturbava—assaltava-a e também uma curiosidade de prosseguir sem interrupções, que a fazia mover-se acima de seus próprios conhecimentos' (OL 62).

Thraikill emphasises the relationality that playing entails 'when it is exploratory and open-ended'.[99] Virgínia and Daniel's play-sense invention of the Society is an event that consists of interactions shared between them and only them, the secret of the game adding to its appeal. As a play space created collectively by the two siblings themselves, the Society not only shows the vitality constitutive of their interest and engagement, but also involves the growth and transition seen in their power relation: 'Daniel, no seu comando, crescia em força. Virgínia aprofundava-se perigosamente na sua natureza fraca e enlevada' (OL 60). For Virgínia, the game stirs up a tension between terror and discomfort at Daniel's dominion, and the curiosity and delight of exploring the world and her own consciousness through bodily contacts.

Virgínia's sensuous navigation of the world through affects becomes explicit in her shifting bodily capacities, evidenced by corporeal signs such as palpitations ('pulsar', 'latejar') and stiffness ('imobilidade'). Stiffness is regarded by Thrailkill as a quality in play that 'signifies the capacity of something to receive or resist shaping'.[100] Virgínia is receptive to impressions made upon her senses while her resistance and steadfastness are manifest in the way that she reserves for herself an interior zone that is intact and unchangeable: 'Obediente a

[99] Jane F. Thrailkill, 'Play Is the Thing: Affect and Affordances in Alice, James and Henry. James', *The Henry James Review*, 4.3 (2019), pp. 212-25 (p. 213).
[100] Thrailkill, *Philosophical Siblings*, p. 213.

Daniel, no entanto, ela cerrava o coração sem raiva e sem glória, como num trabalho sincero, escondendo-o intato em zona escura e quieta' (OL 61). Virgínia's experience of the embodied affects occasioned by their play serves as a form of sensuous education. Initially more impressionable and susceptible, she gradually becomes, as a consequence of this education, more fluent in her practices of navigating the external and discovering the self: 'Tendo experimentado a doçura da fascinação e da obediência ardente a Daniel, sua natureza maleável e fraca ansiava agora por entregar-se à força de outro destino' (OL 75). Taking part in the Society proffers Virgínia an interest necessary for living and forging a creative mind, which can be seen not only in her act of confabulation with Daniel, but also in her aesthetic rapture derived from her engagement with the external reality: 'Depois da Sociedade das Sombras porém ela roubaria de cada olhar seu valor para si mesma e bonito seria aquilo de que seu corpo tivesse sede e fome' (OL 74). Through play, Virgínia discovers and recognises her own values that exist in her sense of aliveness and vitality, as she negotiates her desires in relation to her surroundings.

It is in this secret play space that the normative behavioural codes of the family are disrupted or suspended, since no one else in their family engages in this space. Daniel's cruel and sadistic behaviour towards Virgínia constitutes an ethical transgression in a Bakhtinian carnival sense,[101] which appears to be 'eccentric and inappropriate', creating 'a new mode of interrelationship' other than siblinghood.[102] These abusive acts are only actualised within the Society: 'Daniel encolerizava-se, empurrava-a apertando-lhe o braço, chamando-a de ignorante, ameaçando dissolver a Sociedade das Sombras, o que a aterrorizava mais do que sua brutalidade física' (OL 74). By formulating the ambiguous and random principles of the Society in a 'half-real and half-play-acted form,' which supersede the 'structure and order of the

[101] By carnival I mean M.M. Bakhtin's notion of a temporary reversal of hierarchies and order.
[102] M.M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. by Caryl Emerson (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 123.

ordinary',[103] Daniel also invites Virgínia into a carnival sense of the world: '—Virgínia, todos os dias você vendo café com leite gosta de café com leite. Vendo pai você respeita pai. Arranhando a perna você sente dor na perna, já compreendeu o que eu quero dizer? Você é vulgar e estúpida' (OL 60).

Virgínia then follows Daniel's exhortation to embrace a subversive way of thinking and approaching the world, and this might also explain why she later betrays her sister Esmeralda.[104] Navigating the space constituted by their play where the norms and etiquette she once respected are swept away, Virgínia also perceives the plasticity of the physical environment, marked by its inversions of normalcy in an array of relations. I will further analyse Virgínia's negotiation with physical objects in Section 3.

Daniel utilises the Society to justify and legitimise his mandates by performing the ritual of gathering and repeating the incantatory phrase 'A Sociedade das Sombras falou' (OL 61, 65). However, his practice can only exert affective impacts within this limited, temporary playing space. Aware of that, Virgínia is inclined to prolong the time for playing with Daniel in an attempt to extend her joy: 'No fundo o que a tornava contente era não ter êxito a experiência. Decerto Daniel a obrigava a voltar no dia seguinte e de novo férias' (OL 65). She anticipates that completing tasks in playing will dampen her enthusiasm and her curiosity for surprise, so that her transitory liberating power vested by the vitality she acquires in playing thereupon disappears: 'depois da realização de algum ato impossível de se conter, fatal e misterioso, de repente ela só poderia dagora em diante isto ou aquilo e cessara o seu poder...' (OL 74). The intrusion of her father's voice calling to her from the mansion marks the undeniable boundary between the Society and the rest of the world, in that the father's

[103] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, pp. 122-23.
[104] Esmeralda is older than Virgínia and Daniel and already consorting with boys, bringing a potential disgrace to the family.

subsequent interrogation of her about Esmeralda's illicit meeting with a boy makes it impossible for Virgínia to be completely excluded from her family.

Nevertheless, even after Virgínia moves to the city, this playing scene in their childhood, tinted with the colour of mystery, still exerts an indelible impact on her and oddly stands out against all the other vague memories that are stripped from her: 'A Sociedade das Sombras … Lembrava-se de que ela e Daniel viviam em segredinhos, assustados; segredinhos...era isso? não, não. Sobretudo ela sempre possuíra uma memória extraordinária para inventar fatos' (OL 158-59). She carries the legacies of the Society with her, where memory blends with invention, rules and ritual mix with imagination and spontaneity. While the Society is composed of indeterminate affects emanating from its members' acts of playing, this game also constitutes the process of their own becoming.

As I have examined Massumi's notion of the virtual in the mechanism of affect, what happens to the body prior to cognition is not simply conserved in the body to be reactivated but instead constitutes 'tendencies' towards the future, since they have been inhibited in the past 'from actualizing themselves completely'.[105] Although Virgínia claims to have lost her memory of her connection to the past (OL 170), this impression stems from her belated perception, which connects directly with the beginning of affective experience in an unmediated way. She has vivid recollection only of those secrets and frights, which allows her to enter a state of invention and fantasy. Massumi posits that the affected body undergoes 'its serial unfolding' 'before it catches up with its past'.[106] For Virgínia, what has already happened immediately informs the tendencies towards the future, while a concrete, stable present is not locatable. This missing link between the actual and potential is also associated with the incompleteness of the Society as a micropolitical event, as what Virgínia expects to take place in the game does not

[105] Massumi, *Parables*, p. 30.
[106] Massumi, *Parables*, p. 103.

actually occur. This incompleteness compels her to create varied environments of potential. The Society co-evolves with Virgínia, morphing into other ambiences of togetherness as she grows and becomes entangled in more complex relational webs, which is evident in her relationships with other male figures when she moves to the city. She restages her play with Daniel and the template of their relationship, continuing her apprenticeship in micropolitical intervention that she commenced in her childhood as if the Society is being reinvented. The relational nature of the game enables her to pursue emancipation in a sadistic environment. Through practicing improvisation, she constantly attunes herself to the transient surroundings.

After Daniel's marriage, Virgínia no longer lives with him. On the day when she is going to visit her lover Vicente in his flat, the feeling of death from the hat episode comes to her again, as an extreme exposure to freedom is somehow coalesced with suffering and threat: 'E se Vicente assustado viesse procurá-la—nunca ele o faria—ela avisaria de olhos cerrados, intensa: morri, morri, morri' (OL 116). Virgínia's momentary longing for death upon imagining a worried Vicente coming to find her satisfies her desire for intimacy, which echoes her childhood attempt to approach Daniel.[107] Her body portends itself to be abandoned by Vicente and feels the momentum of leaning onto a precarious bridge as if she were once again positioned in the drowning scene from her childhood:

> [...] mesmo que seu corpo subitamente se pressentisse abandonado, perplexo, tudo. isso seria um prelúdio suportável porque ... por quê? ... Um puro impulso para a frente como inclinar-se na ponte úmida e magra cheirando a madeira podre e olhar a água que se equilibrava sob o sol incolor ... (OL 117-18)

[107] In a similar way, Virginia Woolf reveals in *Mrs. Dalloway* that death is an act of 'defiance' and 'an attempt to communicate' and to 'reac[h] the centre', which is impossible to be fulfilled when one is alive. See Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Penguin Classics, 2019), p. 202. In *O lustre*, Virgínia's attraction and repulsion attached to death constitute an alternation. Her imagination of death often reveals its limit when she bumps against solid material things or the sturdiness of her own body (OL 63). The way in which Virgínia utilises her witnessing of the drowning to create a sense of belonging may remind the reader of how Clarissa appropriates Septimus's death to cure her own trauma.

The definite article before 'ponte' serves to remind the reader of the bridge on the river that appears at the opening of the novel. The not fully experienced or comprehended past is already bestowed with the tendencies towards a certain albeit imagined future, even if Virgínia does not think she has access to the memory of her childhood.

Marta Figlerowicz emphasises the intersubjective aspect in affective mechanism, positing that one's experience of transforming their affects into conscious awareness entails negotiating discrepancies in bodily responsiveness with others. Figlerowicz argues further that this process leads individuals to better 'appreciate [their] cognitive debts to, and needs from, [their] communities and environments'.[108] For Virgínia, the ongoing process of becoming conscious of her imponderable past with Daniel is parallel to her reparative act of recalibrating her ties to fragments of memory, both of which depend on her interaction with others and her surroundings.

## 3. Material Objects, Energy and the Nonhuman Agency

In previous sections, I have indicated the siblings' childhood game, a situation in which they contribute to and are informed by an affective atmosphere, as a situation where their power relation takes shape. In doing so, I proposed that Lispector represents the subject as incoherent, porous and unstable, inflected by its interaction and negotiation with others. I have stressed the significance of atmosphere, constituted by interrelation and contact, in shaping the subject's

[108] Marta Figlerowicz, *Spaces of Feeling: Affect and Awareness in Modernist Literature* (Cornell University Press, 2017), p. 9.

cognitive and sensuous capacities. In this section, more attention will be paid to the role of material objects and processes in constituting the human subject.

### 3.1 Shaping the Clay

Virgínia's act of making clay figurines, a recurring scenario in the novel, reads as Lispector's embodied imagery of the dissolution of subject-object dialectics. As Virgínia shapes the clay by the riverside, her heart softens like the clay, melting at the touch of the amorphous segments, which seem to come alive. The gestures of the river wetting her feet heighten her sense of excitement, enhancing her connection to the physical environment:

> Só em pegá-lo, em sentir sua delicadeza alegrezinha e cega, aqueles pedaços timidamente vivos, o coração da pessoa se enternecia úmido, quase ridículo. [...] O rio em pequenos gestos molhava-lhe os pés descalços e ela mexia os dedos miúdos com excitação e clareza. [...] Conseguia uma matéria clara e tenra de onde se poderia modelar um mundo. (OL 46)

In her interaction with matter and physical environment, the transmission of energy through contact and interchange concretises what Jane Bennett posits as a 'sense of interconnectedness between humanity and nonhumanity'.[109] Virgínia mixes mud with water from the river, and obtains an ideal, plastic material, something between solid and liquid. Here, she is situated in an environment where the boundary between the self and the physical realm becomes nebulous, given that she absorbs material energy from the river in order to invent another world that bridges her interiority with the external. Virgínia transfuses vitality to the material objects, yet the figurines, once completed, are no longer attached to her, nor are they entirely detached from her.

[109] Jane Bennett, 'The Force of Things: Steps toward an Ecology of Matter', *Political Theory*, 32. 3 (2004), pp. 347-72 (p. 367).

Employing clay as an example of how material engagement shapes human cognition and behaviour, Lambros Malafouris proposes that the 'being of the potter is co-dependent and interweaved with the becoming of the pot', as this creative process constitutes 'a binding of materials'.[110] In the same way, Virgínia's creative act is entangled in the practice of making figurines from clay, an interplay of materiality and agency. On the one hand, the figurines are traces of Virgínia's experience and engagement which she holds in her power. They are fragile, evanescent and never completely solid ('delicado, evanescente e úmido'), always prone to dissolution. On the other hand, these objects made by her form independent, ephemeral entities with their own shapes and mysterious and calm aura ('misteriosas e calmas') (OL 47). Therefore, they cannot be reduced to mere inanimate objects but are rather autonomous affective bodies infused with energy, as Virgínia observes their tendency to move: 'As figurinhas assim pareciam rápidas quase como se fossem se movimentar' (OL 48). Virgínia finds the clay bodies difficult to define, describing them as something like a flowing stream but not a stream ('como um riozinho correndo, mas não eram rio') (OL 47). In this sense, Lispector illustrates what she considers to be a fluid boundary between matter (material objects) and energy (material processes) and showcases her attempt to convey a distributed form of agency.

Virgínia is amazed at the miracle of shaping a world with clay, but her fascination is mingled with an ineffable fear and alertness that render her mute and humble. A fleeting impulse that urges her towards gazing at the immobile figurine runs through her thin, open body ('corpo aberto e fino'), making it tremble ('tremia') without reason while positioning her at the tension between power and surrender ('entregando'), productivity and receptivity:

[110] Lambros Malafouris, *How Things Shape the Mind: A Theory of Material Engagement* (The MIT Press: 2013), pp. 212-13.

> Por amor ou apenas prosseguindo no trabalho fechava os olhos e concentrava-se numa força viva e luminosa da qualidade do perigo e da esperança, numa força de seda que lhe percorria o corpo celeremente com um impulso que se destinava à figura. (OL 47-48)

Virgínia is affected by the force that is destined to figurines and the boundaries between them become destabilised. In a demiurgic act, she controls her creations by kneading the clay, while she sees the threat of becoming overpowered by her creations when faced with the animation of objects. She consecrates the collection of figurines as if they are saints, bewitched and enchanted by these static and mute objects: 'Mesmo suas figurinhas mais suaves tinham uma imobilidade vigilante como a de um santo. E pareciam inclinar-se para quem as olhava como os santos. Virgínia podia fitá-las uma manhã inteira e seu amor e sua surpresa não diminuiriam' (OL 48-49). Virgínia carries the clay figurines with her when she moves to the city. They not only form a part of her secret, personal life but also record a narrative of her existence and her contact with her surroundings: 'ela comunicava silenciosa com os objetos ao redor numa certa mania tenaz e despercebida que no entanto estava sendo o seu modo mais interior e verdadeiro de existir' (OL 154). Nevertheless, even this seemingly enclosed, private space, where she is surrounded by familiar objects she has created cannot be fully grasped. It remains a part of the physical world, opaque and impenetrable, where the things she calls 'suas coisas' are independent of her thought and their existence is not confined to the order and logic of human society, even though she is often tied to sensorial memory elicited by her contact with them:

> Sentia profundamente que estava rodeada de coisas vivas e mortas e que as mortas haviam sido vivas—apalpava-as com olhos cuidadosos [...] sentia que o esforço delas não estava em terem núcleo humano porém em se conservarem num puro plano extra-humano [...] os pensamentos sobre as coisas sem se prenderem a quem as observa [...] (OL 155-56)

Virgínia develops such intimacy with her things that they become the reification of her experience. Brown observes the active role of physical objects in shaping an individual's social

relation exemplified by Henry James's fiction, positing that 'the way that objects [...] mediate the relations between characters, who are *characters* precisely in their relations'.[111] I have examined how the hat in the river informs Virgínia's relationship with her brother and later with other figures and how this material assemblage contributes to what she keeps becoming as an individual subject. While she uses the clay to temporarily materialise her contacts into 'bonecos', the shaping, dissolving and reshaping of these figures embody the ephemeral network in which she is trapped. Yet, she is aware that the clay goes beyond merely insinuating contacts between subjects. Through her engagement with them, Virgínia recognises that the objects have lives and deaths of their own within an extra-human realm, exerting their forces upon her. This illustration of nonhuman agency complicates the reader's understanding of the protagonist's act of consecrating figurines, which cannot be dismissed as a mere fetishism. In light of this observation, Virgínia's tendency to become absorbed in the domain of objects can be interpreted as an attempt to calibrate herself within a world shared with other-than-human beings, where humans no longer occupy the centre.

When Virgínia beholds the familiar, ordinary setting as if she were posited in a still-life painting, she perceives herself as an upholstered item, which allows her to approach the state of an object:

> [...] ela sempre sentira um gosto simples e ávido em fazer um esforço e dizer-se claramente: vejo uma cadeira, uma caixa de pó, uma tesoura aberta, uma gaveta negra...A grande natureza morta em que vivia. Mesmo assim parecia-lhe estar se misturando às coisas, dispondo-as ao seu agrado e perturbando-as [...] Era preciso entrecerrar os olhos. Ocorria-lhe em raros e rápidos segundos de visão que sua comunicação com o mundo, aquela secreta atmosfera que ela cultivava ao redor de si como um escuro, era o seu último existir—depois dessa fronteira ela própria era silenciosa como uma coisa. (OL 156-57)

[111] Bill Brown, *The Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p, 141.

The household objects attain aesthetic value as objects of art and bestow upon her the pleasure of interacting with them. From her childhood, Virgínia is conscious of the fact that she is tied to the world of matter (‘ela vivia à beira das coisas’) (OL 14-15). Her vitality exists at the very frontier where she engages with material existence and communicates her sensuality. She otherwise remains mute and inanimate. In this sense, Virgínia herself resembles a still life object, which is often depicted on the brink of motion, exhibiting vibrating energy upon contact with other objects in an unbalanced, precarious configuration.

### 3.2 The Chandelier

Virgínia’s perception of her position within a still life may also suggest that she views everyday objects as an anchoring existence standing against the passage of time. Throughout the novel, the spider-like, incandescent chandelier (‘lustre’), the party lantern (‘lanterna de festa’) in Brejo Alto with indelible memory attached to it (‘lembrança imóvel’) (OL 114), the candles (‘velas’) with fragile flame shedding warmth on her and Vicente (OL 201), are centres that emanate light which mark the events related to them, denoting the division of various worlds in which Virgínia lives. These radiating objects morph into different nuclei, creating circles of light that spread and diminish, their circumferences overlapping and intercepting. The pronounced representation of these nuclei showcases Lispector’s conception of materiality that combines the solidity embodied by steadfast objects with the fluidity of the flowing energy of light that also reflects Virgínia’s shifting networks.

Ambiences, rendered as spaces illuminated by these radiating centres, reflect the relationships Virgínia deals with at different stages of life. Yet the nuclei of these spaces retain the sturdiness vested by the material objects that constitute sources of light, delineating the boundaries between them. It seems that certain events and affective happenings are anchored by these luminous objects.

The chandelier marks Virgínia's childhood experience shared with Daniel. The intensity of heat and the energy of irradiation of the chandelier which dominates the empty lounge with its plain decoration accentuate Virgínia's scorching curiosity about the outside and the world of secret and conspiracy, as well as the fear of enclosure and imprisonment that urges her to escape home:

> A sala cheia de pontos neutros. O cheiro de casa vazia. Mas o lustre! Havia o lustre. A grande aranha incandescia. Olhava-o imóvel, inquieta, parecia pressentir uma vida terrível. Aquela existência de gelo. Uma vez! uma vez a um relance – o lustre se espargia em crisântemos e alegria. (OL 15)

This paragraph mirrors a scene in the closing part of the novel. When Virgínia is already on the train back to the city after her visit to Brejo Alto, she somehow feels an unnameable loss and realises in astonishment that she has forgotten to see the chandelier in her family house. The impression of the chandelier suddenly occurs to her and, for reasons beyond her comprehension, stimulates an intense and irresistible sensation within her as if she were in the playing scene in childhood:

> E sem se entender, sentindo um certo vazio no coração, pareceu-lhe ainda que na verdade perdera um de *suas coisas*. Que pena, disse surpreendida. Que pena, repetiu-se com arrependimento. [...] O lustre. O lustre. Sem se compreender, apagando minuciosamente o cigarro com o duro salto do sapato, como se através dele estivesse sentindo o calor da cinza no calcanhar, a confusa impressão voltava. [...] a pura sensação ia e voltava com uma ponta de maravilha e na verdade ela jamais saberia pensar o que experimentava. Como sem motivo, lembrou-se de que em pequena brincava de tentar não se mover [...] E de súbito o movimento era irresistível, alguma coisa impossível de se conter como um nascimento, e ela o executava elétrico, brusco e curto. (OL 272, italics in original)

The chandelier is conspicuous in the space that surrounds her in childhood. It can be seen as a symbol of the residue of the life that constantly evades her, which is as untouchable and scorching as the ash of a cigarette burning her heel. She will never be able to figure out how to

access her actual experience in the past associated with the chandelier, so she gets appalled every time she bumps against the fragments of that life. This mysterious and alluring effect that the chandelier transmits to Virgínia over temporal and spatial distances demonstrates the aesthetic dimension of objects, which, as Timothy Morton puts it, lies in objects' capacity to affect even when they are 'enclosed from all forms of access'.[112] Morton argues that the sensual energy of objects can be considered alongside consciousness, given that they both constitute 'action at a distance'.[113] The phenomenon of action is not limited to the physical interaction between a solid material thing and a human being. Virgínia's consciousness of the chandelier positions her in a specific space and time, even if she resists her full participation in this system of interaction. She finds herself in the web of relations from her childhood, her movements entangled in an assemblage of actions represented through the heat and light of the chandelier.[114]

Frédéric Pouillaude highlights the significant role the chandelier [*le lustre*] plays in Stéphane Mallarmé's poetry, describing how it 'offer[s] an infinite play of reflections, diffracting the object into multiple facets and instantaneous relations' 'as perceived by the virgin and multiple […] gaze of the spectator'.[115] This portrayal of the chandelier as a social object, reflecting fleeting relationships and events, informs an interpretation of its function in *O lustre*. This title itself suggests how Lispector's scattered sketches of places, people and objects throughout the novel are woven into the light of the chandelier, which enacts instantaneous interactions among human and nonhuman characters. As Virgínia transitions

[112] Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (Open Humanities Press, 2013), p. 20.
[113] Morton, *Realist Magic*, p. 21.
[114] It is important to note that the chandelier is part of an extensive network of metaphors linking minds, poems, theatres and collectivities. For instance, Charles Baudelaire reveals in his prose writing the role of the *lustre* as 'the principal actor' in a theatre play – an object that engages human actors and audiences through its 'luminous, crystalline' qualities and 'complex, circular, symmetrical' structure (Baudelaire 180-81). Lispector incorporates a similar aesthetic function in *O lustre*, where the chandelier stands out within an otherwise desultory narrative while informing the ways in which characters are choreographed.
[115] Frédéric Pouillaude, *Unworking Choreography: The Notion of the Work in Dance*, trans. by Anna Pakes (Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 71.

from childhood to adulthood in the novel, the chandelier morphs into other sources of illumination that correspond to her evolving entanglements.

In the city, she is exposed to more blazing sources of light at the dinner party organised by a friend, Irene: 'Um halo de pálida excitação brilhava em torno das luzes ferozmente acesas, as lâmpadas queimando-se de prazer, exangues' (OL 89). The brightness of the hall highlights the shining surfaces ('superfícies brilhantes') of things with which Virgínia is fascinated, forming a prison-like space for which she longs and from which she wants to escape (OL 89). As I have discussed in section 1 of this chapter, Virgínia's fleeting stimulus-response is manifested through the sound of the river. Lispector employs a strategy of turning outward to represent the subject's experience and capacity. Here, Virgínia is fully enveloped in matter-energy: her sensations are lit up in the pool of light that creates an intense and bewildering atmosphere where she nervously observes her own behaviours and that of unacquainted guests at the party. Blending human movement and interaction with matter-energy, the author draws a parallel between the light emitted by the lamps in the living room that gradually dwindles away from the centre, and guests' laughter encircling Irene in a vortex-like structure ('voragem') (OL 90).

In this passage that portrays the dinner party, Lispector foregrounds the dynamics between material objects and energy, as well as their ability to inform human actions. Virgínia drinks wine, a way of emboldening herself on her debut in society, which also enhances her sensual perception. In inebriation, she surrenders to this milieu with fascination and humility ('pela fascinação e pela humildade'), overwhelmed by the dazzling halo created by the encounter between material surfaces and light: 'forçava ela sua embriaguez com doçura. Um cálice estremecia em faíscas paradas, seu cristal ligava-se nervoso e ardente à luz das lâmpadas. Estendeu as mãos estreitas, tão húmidas, pegou-o delicada como se ele fosse elétrico na sua fragilidade [...]' (OL 90). The inanimate crystalline wineglass becomes luminous with the

flicker of the light bulbs, while the self-dispensing flow of vibrating intensities arises from this interaction and becomes unappropriated. The enhancement of their power to animate demonstrates what Bennett observes as the agency of assemblages, which emphasises the material entities' ability to 'form alliances' and amplify their conjoint vital power.[116] Virgínia is riveted by the wineglass whose vitality is registered in its potential to fall and shatter. With the electrical system by which the light bulbs are endowed with vivacity, as well as the spread of light in a liquid form exceeding the light bulbs' solid object form, they transmit matter-energy into the wineglass that shudders at the flicker of light and this energy is described by the author as something electric.

Lispector often presents Virgínia at such moments of intense affective exposure to material energy that is parallel to her fluid entanglements within flimsy social grouping, as suggested by the first sentence of the novel: '[e]la seria fluida durante toda a vida' (OL 7). While Lispector demonstrates the protagonist's ability of unrestrictedly fading into flows of affect during her brief encounters, this model of subjectivity is further complicated by the author's emphasis on the recalcitrance of material action held against human body. The episode following the party well illustrates the interaction and conflict between the human subject and material objects. While Virgínia falls asleep, she reflects upon the comfort and protection she derives from her involvement with her two lovers, Vicente and Adriano ('Entre os dois homens o conforto a aprofundava') (OL 113). Comfortably sheltered but unconstrained, she feels her human form dissolving into plain matter, blending with the darkness of the night, yet exhibiting vitality of movement, like a fish wagging its tail: 'Como se ela se dissolvesse e mergulhasse na própria matéria dissolvida e na leitosa e translúcida obscuridade ela mesma deslizasse em peixe

[116] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010), p. 22.

puro volteando a cauda serenamente resplandecente' (OL 113). She finds herself in a free state of flux until being intercepted by another object that impinges upon her fluidity:

> O relógio do vizinho repentinamente tocado bateu três notas transparentes em três planos de sons, o primeiro alto e assustado quase solidificando-a num começo de vigília, o segundo contendo-se entre o primeiro e o que viria, o último mais baixo apaziguando, apaziguando, cada um separado do outro e brilhantes como diamantes separados uns dos outros e brilhantes – só que as três notas eram líquidas e diamantes jamais temiam quebrar-se numa só confusão [...] (OL 113-14)

Virgínia's oneiric state is interrupted by the clock as a marker of physical time that plunges her back into childhood memory in the countryside. As an object, the clock is impermeable to her, but the potent energy it exerts on her takes the form between something liquid and solid: the chimes are akin to the light of a lamp that defies the edges imposed by its solid structure. In different pitches they communicate to Virgínia the nuance of affects as if they are a language spoken by the clock, asserting its agency. The interplay between physical existence and psychological interiority is expressed through the light and sounds emitted by the focal parts of solid objects. Lispector illustrates through this tension the matter-energy continuum, blurring the boundaries between entities and the processes and movements that connect them.

## Conclusion

This chapter has discussed Lispector's portrayal of subject formation in relation to material objects and affective processes in *O lustre*. Reading the novel through affect theories highlighted the author's awareness of preindividual bodily tensions and the role of matter-energy in shaping an individual's behaviours and cognition. By doing so, the chapter revealed the decentring of the humanistic focalisation in Lispector's writing, which features an externalised depiction of the individual's experience and capacity through privileging physical

environment and impersonal forces. It proposed that this form of writing enables the recuperation of the subject's preconscious experience and its potential, which often escape the human-centred narrative characterised by the assumed duality of external and internal, physical and psychological. This interpretation of Lispector's fiction can help foster an understanding of human subjectivity beyond the limits of consciousness and the perceived boundaries of the body. It thus offered a potential reading strategy for approaching experimental writing like *O lustre*, which prioritises moods and atmospheres from a non-anthropocentric perspective.

Lispector represents the human subject as shaped by and contributing to the material force of affect, which is concretised in the novel through the subject's conscious or nonconscious action and its relations to human and nonhuman others. By tracing Virgínia's development through scenes of visceral experience and her entanglements within certain environments, Lispector highlights the potential of affective events to freely circulate between human subjects and material things. The human subject always grapples with but can never become conscious of this unfolding potential, while material objects are represented as narrative agents, articulating and informing the subject's elusive experience.

The chapter argued that the novel demonstrates a paradoxical unity between subjectivity and materiality. On the one hand, the subject's experience and capacity are portrayed as seamlessly connected to the physical realm. I have emphasised Lispector's perception of the interconnectedness of matter and energy. Material objects in the novel are not static reservoirs that merely conserve energy; rather, they themselves carry a tendency towards movement and association with others, mirroring the depiction of Virgínia's relation to her bodily capacities. On the other hand, Lispector amplifies the sturdiness and recalcitrance of matter that composes a vibrant reality intractable to human beings.

# CHAPTER 3 – CRUEL OPTIMISM IN SUBURBAN CHANGE: INFRASTRUCTURE AND POLITICS OF AFFECT IN *A CIDADE SITIADA*

## Introduction

Set in 1920s Brazil, Clarice Lispector's third novel, *A cidade sitiada* (1949), portrays the suburban transformations of the fictional township, São Geraldo, as seen through the fractured perspective of Lucrécia, the protagonist. She witnesses and inhabits the expanding cityscape, while going through adolescence, marriage and widowhood. The novel narrates Lucrécia's relationships with her suitors, Lieutenant Felipe and a medical student, Perseu, before she marries Mateus, a wealthy businessman, and moves to a larger city with him. It ends with Mateus's sudden death, after which Lucrécia moves back to São Geraldo, and plans to marry another man who owns a farm. *A cidade sitiada* foregrounds nonhuman characters that contribute to the suburban change, such as wire mesh, pipelines and viaducts. These material elements converge with socio-political constructs, unravelling the town's modernisation project. While the portrayal of the human characters seem to be overshadowed by the evolution of São Geraldo, through representing the shifts in Lucrécia's life, Lispector highlights marriage and moving to the city as two kinds of collective fantasies for upward social mobility fermented in the ambience of hope and progress during the period of major urbanisation in Brazil.

Scholars have discussed the novel's illustration of individuals' identification with place. Carlos Mendes de Sousa stresses Lucrécia's state of incomprehension and blindness ('cegueira') in relation to her environment.[117] Commenting on the title of the novel, Lúcia

[117] Carlos Mendes de Sousa, *Figuras da escrita*, p. 224.

Villares emphasises that Lucrécia perceives modern construction as 'an impenetrable fortress of commodified objects', a view stemming from the imposition of the modernisation ideology in Brazil.[118] Taking these observations into account, this chapter, however, will go further to analyse the circulation of this ideology which, in my opinion, functions not in the shape of an impermeable siege external to the subject, but rather affectively: it seeps through everyday feelings and emotions of individuals who immediately embrace it with optimism and hope. Unable to understand what the new existences in her surroundings mean to her and how the various promises of the good life cohere, Lucrécia cheerfully acquiesces to her assigned role. The dominant ideology does not appear to be a static imposition upon Lucrécia. Rather, she herself is constituted by the ideology, an evolving process that gradually solidifies into regularities. Paralleling the urbanisation of St Geraldo, the politi*cs* of optimism, which spreads in tandem with signs of development and progress, can be regarded not as a fixed, solid structure but a dynamic, open-ended event that continually undergoes variations.

In theorising the politics of affect, Brian Massumi stresses the processual, emergent nature of what is often considered grounded, structured ideology. Massumi argues that through preconscious feeling, the 'reigning rationality' is transmitted in 'occulted, hidden, distorted' ways.[119] This idea facilitates the interpretation of how individuals in the novel are induced by the general atmosphere of progress to invest in the very power structure that oppresses and constrains them. The regularities clustered around modernisation are '*acted out* in the everyday' by St Geraldo's residents,[120] especially middle-class women like Lucrécia who are deceived into willingly submitting to it, thereby reinforcing its power. This chapter will examine the location of the human subject enmeshed in the affective atmosphere of economic

[118] Lúcia Villares, 'Modernization and the Phantasmogoria of Commodities in Clarice Lispector's *A cidade sitiada*', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 87. 4 (2010), pp. 473-87 (p. 476-77).
[119] Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, p. 85.
[120] Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, p. 85, italics in original.

progress and explore how the subject mediates the everchanging milieu through mimetic gesture and attunement.

Employing Sara Ahmed's argument on the futurity of happiness and Lauren Berlant's study on the formalism and interrelation of desire, fantasy and optimism, this chapter pays analytical attention to the affective materiality generated by the propagation of ideology associated with the country's modernisation. By 'materiality', I refer to material objects and energy, which encompass impersonal and noncognitive forces. I use the expression 'affective materiality' to describe an assemblage of material conditions, such as the environment (the collective ambiance, geographical space, etc.), along with its constitutive interrelations, including unstable social groups and relational actions between human and nonhuman entities.

Claire Williams points out the notion of encounter, i.e. 'the interaction with one's environment by means of assimilation, annihilation or (re)production', as a productive moment for the formation of identity in Lispector's works[121] (Williams 2006: xvi). By attending to an individual's interactions with their surroundings that are organised according to a certain prospect, this chapter will address how the progressive ideology discloses itself and is perceived affectively by the subject alongside the material flow implicated by this experience of encounter. Given the novel's frequent use of political terms like 'citizen', 'society' and 'association', I read *A cidade sitiada* as a political novel, in which the ideology is connoted in individual's thinking patterns and micro-gestures that permeate the society as a whole.

The dynamism between the body, subjectivity and the urban space has long been studied. Elizabeth Grosz regards the city as 'an active force in constituting bodies' which 'always leaves its traces on the subject's corporeality'.[122] Indeed, with ongoing changes in both geographical space and social relations, the subject, who inscribes this transformative power

[121] Claire Williams, *The Encounter between Opposites in the Works of Clarice Lispector* (HiPlam, 2006).
[122] Elizabeth Grosz, 'Bodies-Cities', in *Sexuality & Space*, ed. by Beatriz Colomina, Jennifer Bloomer, et al. (Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), pp. 241-53 (pp. 250-51).

into its affective experience, can no longer occupy the role of the sole agent of its environment in the process of co-constitution. Given Lispector's depiction of an unpredictable future for the township and its inhabitants, it is befitting to examine the fusion between the urban space and its dwellers, often illustrated through Lucrécia's gesture of vigorously reigniting her hope and pretension while striving to synchronise herself with new circumstances. Drawing on Berlant's observation of the individual's optimistic gesture of constant adjustment as indicative of a precarious environment, this chapter also aims to offer a new reading of Lispector's representation of infrastructure and interpret the notion of suburbs as not only a peripheral setting of modern experience but also a transitional stage featured by uneven development and distribution.

## 1. The Environment of Progress

### 1.1 Women and the Association

The novel begins by charting the brief life of the 'Associação de Juventude Feminina de São Geraldo', a new establishment celebrating social progress. The *Associação* was founded at an indecisive moment where the still deserted township had yet to develop into a city and its residents were unsure about the way forward. It soon acquires its anthem of hope and vague objectives about progress and extolling beautiful things ('enobrecer as coisas belas').[123] The notion of progress, occasionally proposed by their leader Cristina, ignites ardour among young women in São Geraldo, who rally under the banner of the slogan, '[a] alma deve progredir' (CS 18). Characterised by its void passion and void aim [um fogo vazio e destinado ao vazio] (CS 18), the *Associação* serves as a socio-political device that indoctrinates its members with

[123] Clarice Lispector, *A cidade sitiada* (Rocco, 2019), pp. 17-18, hereafter CS. Subsequent references are given in parentheses in the main text.

a set of symbolic signs (flowers, beautiful objects, etc.) and ideological codes (notions of progress and happiness). It calls upon young female residents to do things in conformity, such as to sing in unison. Nevertheless, this ardour without reason [um ardor … sem causa] can be seen as an attempt to conquer the collective fear and uncertainty in the face of incipient signs of change in the suburb (CS 18). Lispector depicts the members of the *Associação* as a group of ignorant, unreflective young women who are easily deluded into a cult of personality and vainly celebrating an idealised way towards the goodness:

> Bastava sua presença para agitar o agrupamento e, em pouco, entre projetos de pureza e amor à alma, sem que na sombria sala de reunião uma palavra mais clara pudesse ser pronunciada, todas estavam excitadas para o caminho do bem: Cristina é a nossa vanguardista, diziam sorridentes. (CS 18-19)

Cristina is a young woman who sets vague principles for the *Associação* and goads its members. Members of the *Associação* attend meetings and singing sessions the meanings of which are confusing and obscure. In doing so, they create a sort of patterned happiness described as the 'alegria das flores' (CS 19). While they have no other engagements and even linger for a while before leaving the meeting room, unsure of what to do, the *Associação*, through slogans such as 'o ideal' and 'progredir', presents them a promise of a good life in the future tense. Even though the residents cannot truly experience the ideal as they sing it in the anthem, this future-oriented propaganda offers them a virtual image of happiness and beauty that exceeds the reality: they intuitively shape their perception of the collective ambience and its potential, modulating their own situations accordingly as if they would make themselves an effective ingredient to the event of progress. This gesture is like what Massumi calls affective attunement: the way in which members of the *Associação* perceive happiness is to make themselves become the flowers they sing of: 'De tanto se exteriorizar haviam terminado como as flores cantadas, tomando um sentido que ultrapassava a existência de cada uma,

agitando-se como as ruas já inquietas de S. Geraldo. Tinha enfim formado o tipo de pessoa *adequada* a viver naquele tempo num subúrbio' (CS 19, italics mine).

The happiness that women at the *Associação* manifest in singing the anthem exceeds their individual existence, and thus forms a unanimous happy atmosphere that overflows into the streets of São Geraldo. In this way, a kind of *adequate* people of the time appears. The adjective *adequada* suggests that they willingly enact their servitude to what Massumi calls 'abstract principle'.[124] This act also justifies their imposition of the vague principle on other people like Lucrécia, who is unfamiliar with 'the ideal' when she joins the *Associação*. Their complete advocacy for Cristina's domination fuels the power move.

Emily S. Apter defines milieu as 'an atmospheric halo that, instead of foregrounding the individual it surrounds, becomes the evidence of a parallel, semi-visible world existing alongside the subject'.[125] Akin to Apter's idea, Charles Altieri proposes the notion of mood as a vocabulary of affect, which 'absorbs agency rather than helping it orient its energies toward the practical world'.[126] In other words, mood unfolds through scenes and instances of manoeuvres that evoke a perceptible but loosely structured ambience, diffusely influencing society and rendering individual's decision-making ability insignificant. Altieri's emphasis on the independence of states of mind from one's intentionality can help explain Lucrécia's position of 'modulating between a sense of [her] own participation' in São Geraldo's urbanising process and 'a sense of being taken up into' the collective and transpersonal mood in which her auxiliary function is of no significance.[127]

Upon observing the prospect of change that optimism entails, Lauren Berlant posits that 'one of optimism's ordinary pleasures is to induce conventionality'.[128] In line with this

[124] Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, p. 107.
[125] Emily S. Apter, *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (Verso, 2018), p. 192.
[126] Charles Altieri, *The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of the Affects* (Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 64.
[127] Altieri, *The Particulars of Rapture*, p. 54.
[128] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011), p. 2.

claim, the *Associação*'s tenet of celebrating the hope for progress becomes an integral component of São Geraldo's citizenship and is thus exempt from rational explication or calculation. It provides reassurance for the present that is ground in the promises of the future. What sustains this loop is the collective immersion in optimism embodied by the 'happiness of the flowers', which can be seen as impersonal, distanced, describable only when applied to flowers as a correlative. The 'happiness of the flowers' exemplifies a new normative mode of shared expectation that unifies the individual's way of living. Through mythologisation that complicates the relation between the symbolic and the palpable, this political rhetoric encumbers an active individual undertaking and consequently organises around it an inert collectivity described in the novel as 'povo', 'raça' or 'cidadão'.

Flowers as a symbol of happiness may also connote the transience and vulnerability of promises. The *Associação* can be considered as a miniature of São Geraldo, offering the reader a glimpse into the participatory elements of its urbanisation. It seems that the shared fantasy within the local community fails to carry out any change with regards to the individual's self-realisation and is ultimately destined for futile zest: Lucrécia and the suburb are both 'animad[os] por um acontecimento que não se desencadeava' (CS 33). This ephemeral organisation adumbrates the banality of future that is in store for the protagonist.

Optimism as a collective structure, however, lives on and is embodied by residents of the town. Throughout her life, Lucrécia carries with her the tenets instilled by the *Associação* – learning to appreciate the beauty of things and experiencing her joy through flowers, the symbol that connects individual feeling with communal ideals. She becomes adept at rendering herself coherent within the collective atmosphere while maintaining a distance from the emotion she demonstrates: 'Experimentando alegria tão exterior que já era a alegria dos outros que ela sentia […] A alegria da moça era assim: As flores no jarro' (CS 100-101). As an impersonal and transpersonal feeling demonstrated through symbols, happiness external to her

engenders mimetic mode of feeling so that Lucrécia herself becomes a vehicle of its transmission.

The *Associação* seems to be a site of education that serves to occupy the leisure time of still unmarried women. The celebration of conformity and progress echoes the motto of 'ordem e progresso' that prevailed in the First Brazilian Republic, endorsed by Auguste Comte's notion of positivism that prioritises science over metaphysics and aims at harmonising order. In her analysis of early twentieth-century socio-economic conditions in Brazil, Maria Inez Turazzi accentuates the interdependency of positivism and liberalism as the most entrenched ideological trends. Positivism reinforces the social order by means of justifying the 'consolidação de determinadas relações sociais no país', while liberalism underscores the necessity of industrial growth for the burgeoning urban middle class.[129] The *Associação* delivers to its members precisely these ideas. Cristina, the authority figure, is worshiped by other members as the 'vanguard'. Considered alongside other military terms in the novel such as 'fortaleza', as well as its interwar setting, this depiction readily evokes the image of a trailblazer fighting in warfare. With its rigidity of discipline and conformity masked by the euphoria of progress, the *Associação* is not unlike a military unit. It unifies individuals through artificial codes such as happiness and beauty, and thus vividly exemplifies a transitional society in which the ungrounded, dogmatic notion of progress serves as a euphemism for the imposition of order. Moreover, considering the historical setting of the novel highlighted in the opening sequence, the reconstruction campaign in both physical and symbolic terms can be seen as a legacy of the *belle époque* period (1894-1914) which is characterised by massive transformations in public spaces,[130] whilst the explicit backwardness

[129] Maria Inez Turazzi, *A euforia do progresso e a imposição da ordem: a engenharia, a indústria e a organização do trabalho na virada do século XIX ao XX* (Editora Marco Zero, 1989), p. 25.
[130] Sophia Beal summarises the primary signs of Rio de Janeiro's urban reform during the *belle époque* as '[n]arrow, dark streets that had been traversed by horse-drawn carriages' being 'replaced by broad avenues, lined with electric streetlights, electric streetcars, and large advertisements' (Beal 2012: 6). See Sophia Beal,

of São Geraldo compared to large cities such as Rio de Janeiro is manifest in the coexistence of horses and automobiles and unstable electricity supply in 1920s. Given São Geraldo's lack of foundation necessary for a modern city, which will be discussed later, its projected progress is fuelled by a utopian prospect.

Reflecting upon positivism's impacts on education in Brazil, Jamil Isakandar and Maria Leal point out that '[a] superação da metafísica levaria o homem a fugir de especulações'.[131] In the novel, residents of São Geraldo often obscurely accept the mandates of the collective project that aims at progressing and enhancing order. Positivism is embodied by Perseu, who appears in 'O cidadão', the second chapter of the novel: 'Heroico e vazio o cidadão continuou de pé junto da janela aberta. [...] e mesmo que falasse não diria uma palavra que cedesse a polidez de sua aparência: sua extrema harmonia era apenas evidente' (CS 28). The narrative voice refers to Perseu as 'the citizen', implying that this figure is representative of São Geraldo's inhabitants. Perseu is portrayed as an adequate but hollow young man, whose only notable characteristic is the harmony he exhibits in his appearance. Furthermore, the adjective *heroico* ironically mirrors the unconquerable military atmosphere in the *Associação* where members are encouraged to struggle for a cause intelligible to them.

The chapter, 'O cidadão', narrates an episode in which Perseu is studying biology. As a male, the education he receives, which is centred on scientific knowledge, is very different from what the young women do at the *Associação*. Nevertheless, the way in which he acquires knowledge is not unlike the repetitive sessions of singing the same anthem at the *Associação*, given their similar fanaticism. Perseu learns about marine life by repeating the same sentences from the textbook:

---

'The Substance of Light: Literature and Public Space in "Belle Époque" Rio de Janeiro (1894-1914)', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 49.2 (2012), pp. 5-27 (p. 6).

[131] Jamil Ibrahim Iskandar and Maria Rute Leal, 'Sobre Positivismo e Educação', *Revista Diálogo Educacional*, 3.7 (2002), pp. 1-6 (p. 4).

> "Os animais pelágicos se reproduzem com profusão", disse com oca luminosidade. Cego e glorioso [...] "Os animais e vegetais marinhos com profusão", disse sem ímpeto mas sem freio porque este era o seu grau de luz. Não importa que na luz ele fosse tão cego como os outros na escuridão. A diferença é que ele estava na luz. […] Decorar era bonito. Enquanto se decorava não se refletia [...] "Os seres marinhos pelágicos, disse bastante alto com a boca cheia. (CS 28-30).

Perseu cheerfully reads aloud words from the book in order to memorise them, assimilating what is given to him without reflection as if engaging in a religious practice. This is a process he enjoys, even though he only vaguely understands the meaning of what he reads. The narrative voice contrasts his persistent ignorance with an envisioned enlightenment that scientific subjects are expected to foster. Perseu consecrates his apprenticeship as a kind of illumination, through which he feels enlightened and glorious despite his incomprehension. Lispector juxtaposes residents in São Geraldo, like Perseu, with marine animals which reproduce en masse, satirically pointing out how people are educated and moulded to confirm. This reflects how the so-called adequate citizens of the time are produced on a massive scale due to the suspension of critical thought and individuality, which is a consequence of the prevalent dogmatism.

In his reflection upon the notion of progress, Zygmunt Bauman aptly puts it that, in the process whereby a new order replaces the old, one has to relocate oneself in a set of seemingly 'new and improved' patterns which 'interlock individual choices in collective projects and actions', and these patterns to which one comes to confirm, can be 'as stiff and indomitable as ever'.[132] Aligned with Bauman's observation, Perseu and the seekers of happiness in the *Associação* are always prone to be reshaped by and temporarily resettled in a rather contingent configuration on the one hand, and burdened by the efforts of constantly coping with and weaving together new patterns of living on the other hand. While Perseu repeats the word *flutuantes* that describes the state of being of some marine animals in the

[132] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity, 2012), pp. 6-7.

book he reads, this description may also allude to a similar characteristic of the citizens of São Geraldo, who happen to have been born into this township at a particular period in its history. Their malleability is evident in the ways they alter their modes of existence as the township itself undergoes changes, feeling obliged to adhere to the ambiguous doctrine, as the commentary voice in the novel observes in the same chapter: 'Era essa a natureza de uma raça de homem' (CS 29). Their adaptability also mirrors the volatility of policy in this spacetime characterised by the celebration of modernity.

A similar gesture of obscure adaptation to the imposing atmosphere is evident in Lucrécia's engagement with the *Associação*. Drawn to the *Associação* solely by the prospect of attending the ball, Lucrécia soon leaves and makes no effort to participate in the initiative of progress. She is thus not directly motivated by the ideology per se but instead by the general promises of a good life. The third chapter of the novel, 'A caçada', depicts Lucrécia's preparation for the ball. She adorns herself with heavy ornaments that cloak the shape of her body[133], striving to become a discreet object that can fit seamlessly into what she envisions as the perfect layout:

> [...] disfarçando-se com uma futilidade que não procurava salientar o corpo mas os enfeites – sua figura se ocultaria sob emblemas e símbolos, e na sua graça intensa a moça pareceria um retrato ideal de si mesma [...] quando ela estivesse pronta pareceria um objeto, um objeto de S. Geraldo. Era isso que ela trabalhava ferozmente com calma. (CS 34)

While she appears as a portrait of herself, the characteristics of her humanity become less conspicuous. Her sense of belonging to São Geraldo constitutes her only emblem. Lucrécia's

[133] In 'Film and the Masquerade', Mary Ann Doane argues that masquerade can be seen as a practice of women to take 'control of [their] image' and to create distance in the dominating fetishistic and voyeuristic male gaze. This statement can offer a positive reading of Lucrécia's gesture of putting on excessive ornaments as a strategic self-display which offers her the protection necessary for her spectatorship in the suburb and the city alike. See Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator', *Screen*, 23 (1982), pp. 74-88 (p. 78).

inclination towards being represented by symbols reflects her allegiance to the doctrine of the *Associação*. She finds herself comfortably ensconced within an undifferentiated group with whom she identifies, safeguarded by anonymity, as the narrative voice describes her as someone who would say 'no meu país é assim! ela parecia protegida por uma raça de pessoas iguais' (CS 42). This cited sentence, 'protegida por uma raça de pessoas iguais', reappears in a later chapter, 'No jardim', where Lucrécia peers idly at a modern building and telegraph wires from her house in the town. The repetition stresses how Lucrécia counts on the sense of security provided by adhering to a patterned way of life and showcases the continuity in her self-cultivation: her gesture of self-annihilation gradually becomes her mode of being while conforming to others serves as the justification for her pretensions.

### 1.2 Other-than-human Characters

In the previous section, I discussed that the novel's atmospheric rendering of optimism, which, as a political force, manifests in the collective tendency. In this section, I will focus on the role of other-than-human characters foregrounded in this environment of progress. My contention is that *A cidade sitiada* represents Lucrécia's engagement with nonhuman elements to evoke our reconsideration of how human subjects think and interact with such a collective atmosphere.

By introducing the term 'envelopment' which names 'the condition of being immersed within an atmosphere' and the process through which an atmosphere exerts its forces upon an entity that is entangled with and participates in it, Derek P. McCormack emphasises the fact that an entity's sensing of such a condition can only be partial.[134] He further stresses the 'generative tension' in envelopment as a material event where fabrication and variation are

[134] Derek P. McCormack, *Atmospheric Things: On the Allure of Elemental Envelopment* (Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 4-5.

entailed due to the difference in an entity's 'capacity to sense and respond'.[135] He thus also proposes the aesthetic dimension of envelopment that is 'characterized by a degree of allure or enchantment', given that the atmosphere and the material forces within it remain 'withdrawn from apprehension or cognition' of the bodies exposed to them.[136] Based on these considerations, I will emphasise Lucrécia's half-knowability and curiosity vis-à-vis the shifting milieu, as well as the aesthetic and creative experience made possible by its lack of accessibility and dirigibility.

Numerous references to horses are noteworthy. As shown in the opening of the novel, the future-oriented mood associated with progress permeates the suburban space unnoticed and becomes the norm just like the local horses:

> Estes [cavalos], agora despercebidos pelo hábito, eram no entanto a força sorrateira sobre S. Geraldo. […] A moça e um cavalo representavam as duas raças de construtores que iniciaram a tradição da futura metrópole, ambos poderiam servir de armas para um seu escudo. A ínfima função da mocinha na sua época era uma função arcaica que renasce cada vez que se forma uma vila, sua história formou com esforço o espírito de uma cidade. Não se poderia saber que reinado ela representava junto à nova colônia pois que seu trabalho era curto demais, e quase inexplorável: tudo o que ela via era *alguma coisa*. Nela e num cavalo a impressão era a expressão. [...] "O que se vê" — era a sua única vida interior; e o que se via tornou-se a sua vaga história. (CS 20, italics in original)

The author uses the analogy between horses and young women to underscore how the suburban change is enacted through the town's most impressionable and unreflective inhabitants. These individuals, exemplified by female residents in the *Associação*, immediately assume the role of builders, carrying out the modernising project as though it were a spontaneous unfolding of the environment. The secret power of the masses, which is indistinguishable from that of the horses, constitutes the history of São Geraldo, just like that of other cities. Women in the town are presented as a *tabula rasa* that directly reflects external changes, given their susceptibility to inscribe what they see as their own interior characters.

[135] McCormack, *Atmospheric Things*, p. 5.
[136] McCormack, *Atmospheric Things*, p. 6.

Although horses represent an element of rural life resisting the collective attunement towards modernisation embodied by women in the *Associação*, horses and women are portrayed as two sides of the same coin, since both resistance and 'progress' are regarded by women in São Geraldo as a mere *alguma coisa* – an unnameable alternative condition upon which they arbitrarily improvise decisions that only possess insignificant and transient power. The author ironically lays bare that women and horses are inherently categorised as the other in the history of a city or reduced to serving as mere unnoticed backgrounds for major public events. This highlights how women, like horses, have long been manipulated and exploited through the denial of their agency.

Lucrécia's recognition of her relatedness to nonhuman entities, such as horses, flowers and city statues, is a recurrent theme in *A cidade sitiada*. In the chapter titled 'A estátua pública', the author depicts the township in the rain as a vibrating more-than-human world that actively unfolds itself around Lucrécia, in contrast to her modest role as an observer ('sua modesta função que era: olhar') (CS 74):

> As águas escorriam para os esgotos, líquidas, abundantes... Os bichos espalhados esperavam. Um instante em que ela se exprimisse e ter-se-ia colocado no mesmo plano da cidade. Um instante em que ela se demonstrasse, e teria a forma que lhe era necessária como instrumento. (CS 74)

Even though Lucrécia remains in her living room, the running water on a stormy night destabilises the boundaries between public and private spaces, concretising the unavoidable interaction between her and the reality of the township. She vacillates between different perceptions of her relation to São Geraldo. At one moment, she finds herself in a position equal to that of the town but in the next, she feels the need to be reduced to an instrument. Lucrécia's position as a humble spectator confused about her own place in the new setting is often contrasted with Geraldo's actively expanding cityscape, as revealed in the chapter, 'Esboço da cidade':

> Olhando agora, sem ânsia, o horizonte cortado de chaminés e telhados. [...] De cada parede com um cano nascia algo irredutível – uma parede com cano. Os canos: que insistência. Quando era um cano pesado seria: parede com cano pesado. Não havia erro possível – tudo o que existia era perfeito – as coisas só começavam a existir quando perfeitas. (CS 96)

From the balcony, Lucrécia calmly beholds the new skyline constituted by chimneys and roofs as well as the pipes that oddly appear on the wall as if they emerged from natural reproduction ('nascia'). She accepts them as steadfast, perfect existences that are meticulously melded with one another in a complex and complete structure. The depiction of drainpipes on walls is reiterated throughout the novel. With its persistent presence, the piping system not only discloses the developing infrastructure, which I will examine in more details in Section 3 of this chapter, but also embodies the material forces throbbing in the veins of São Geraldo.

The drainpipes also link the architecture plan of the township to the domesticity of a private house. In the same passage, Lucrécia then looks into the storeroom of her house, where she is attracted by a group of things forming with one another a contingent assembly. Things in the storeroom demonstrates a similar interconnected structure to that of the seemingly impenetrable drainpipe system in the public space, as she is only able to describe them as the materials from the city:

> Os materiais da cidade! Ela estava olhando as coisas que não se podem dizer. Certos arranjos de forma despertavam-lhe aquela atenção oca: […] um tubo de borracha ligado a uma torneira quebrada, o casaco pendurado atrás, o fio elétrico enrodilhando um ferro. (CS 97)

Notably, this rendering of a material cluster from Lucrécia's viewpoint is repeated within two consecutive paragraphs, which evinces her surprise at the fortuity of the arrangement of stuff and also her reluctance to parse or resolve this intractable meshwork. The broken faucet suggests the open-endedness of the grouping, with the energy of the running water resisting human control or intervention. In her study of the vibrancy of matter affecting human and

nonhuman bodies, Jane Bennett claims that the capacity of these nonhuman bodies arranged in a certain grouping is 'not restricted to a passive "intractability"' but also include[s] the ability […] to produce effects' on other bodies.[137] The assemblage of urban material objects, whilst appearing to Lucrécia as sublimely beautiful ('perfeito'), also elicits her fear of surpassing their surfaces ('Seu medo era o de ultrapassar o que via') and reminds her of her position as a discreet spy [espiã] (CS 97-98). While she fails to describe the kind of beauty she feels, she draws analogies to airplanes and glasses, both objects with symmetry, fabricated with precision: 'tinham a beleza de um aeroplano. Bonitos como óculos' (CS 98). They are also signs of progress and advancements in engineering and human technology. These analogies serve as an extension of the reality that bewilders Lucrécia and highlight her celebration of order and equilibrium.

While Lucrécia eagerly searches for her place in São Geraldo, how does she narrate her perception of selfhood? In his analysis of trans-species mode of narrative, David Herman attends to 'the scope and limits of selfhood' within an enlarged ecology.[138] This type of narrative focalisation is evident in *A cidade sitiada*, which hollows out the protagonist, Lucrécia, to undermine a humancentric structure. Lucrécia's understanding of herself can only be articulated through introducing another relationality within a wider scope of selves – the relationship between horses and houses in the city: 'Só que se via como um bicho veria uma casa: nenhum pensamento ultrapassando a casa. Era esta a intimidade sem contato dos cavalos; e apenas por eles os sobrados da cidade eram inteiramente vistos' (CS 79).

Similar to the way in which she tackles other objects – approaching them, as repeatedly emphasised in the novel, without piercing the surface ('turvar superfície') (CS 51), she is content with the distance from and unfamiliarity with her own self, which allow her to perceive

[137] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p. 5.
[138] David Herman, *Narratology Beyond the Human: Storytelling and Animal Life* (Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 34.

it as a whole. The fact that horses are claimed to be the only species capable of seeing the houses entirely highlights the restricted view of human inhabitants like Lucrécia, who are confined within the space rather than able to grasp the panorama from a detached vantage point. Another instance in which Lucrécia's perspective converges with that of the nonhuman world occurs when she becomes absorbed in washing up in the kitchen, unaware of an accident taking place just outside the window:

> Nada acontecia porém: uma criatura estava diante do que via, tomada pela qualidade do que via, com os olhos ofuscados pelo próprio modo calmo de olhar; a luz da cozinha era o seu modo de ver – as coisas às duas horas parecem feitas, mesmo na profundeza, do modo como se lhes vê a superfície. (CS 93)

Lucrécia's gaze merges with the light in the kitchen that steadily and calmly falls upon the surface of household objects without intruding into the space beyond its scope of illumination. This conjuncture suggests a recalibration of established human-nonhuman relationality: the objects in the kitchen occupy the illuminated foreground, while the receding human self serves as a mere lighting device. Lispector seems to construct a space devoid of human centrality, envisioning experience from a nonhuman viewpoint. While Lucrécia is portrayed as a 'creature' [criatura] among the dishes lacking human specificity, the encounter between her gaze and the flow of light in the kitchen concretises her enmeshment with the material world through the convergence of their perspectives.

While the imagined interspecies connection between Lucrécia and the horses articulates the failure of an existing system of signification to capture a form of relationality (Lucrécia and her selfhood), the boundary-crossing alignment between Lucrécia and the light, along with the use of the blurry word *criatura* may suggest her difficulty in delineating her role in the house where she lives together with her mother, as her reasoning falters at the same moment: 'Com o prato na mão, seu instrumento de trabalho, gostaria de exprimir talvez à mãe, por exemplo, como sua filha estava... estava...' (CS 93).

The author introduces a beyond-human perspective to compensate for the inefficiency of linguistic expression as the privileged mode of human communication and to reassess one's position within a wider web of selves and relationality. This practice facilitates an understanding of human selfhood as emerging from its imbrication with broader material conditions. In the same chapter, through Lucrécia's imitation of a Greek statue that she sees in a magazine, Lispector illustrates her strategy of foregrounding the nonhuman dimension of the subject to explore potential traits that constitute selfhood:

> Exprimindo pelo gesto da mão, sobre o único pé, entortados com graça em oferenda, o único rosto sacudindo-se em pantomima, eis, eis, toda ela, terrivelmente física, um dos objetos. [...] perdera enfim o dom da fala. [...] Tão humilde e irada que não saberia pensar; e assim dava o pensamento através de sua única forma precisa – não era isso o que sucedia às coisas? – inventando por impotência um sinal misterioso e inocente que exprimisse sua posição na cidade, escolhendo a própria imagem e através desta a dos objetos. (CS 75)

Lucrécia replaces language with gesture through which her thoughts about her place in São Geraldo are conveyed and registered. Between Lucrécia and São Geraldo is the affiliative tie analogous to that between a public statue and a city: 'uma estátua pertencia a uma cidade' (CS 76). In the ensuing chapter, 'No jardim', the reader is informed of more details about the statue that Lucrécia strives to imitate: 'Como a da revista […] a grega sem rosto' (CS 86). Lucrécia's bovarist identification with the faceless Greek statue can be interpreted as a sign of her aesthetic expression. The narrative voice comments that Lucrécia's art is of a popular and anonymous type ('Sua arte era popular e anônima') (CS 75), considering the dissolution of her individual features in the act of reducing her human frame to a motionless, physical object with only a hand outstretched ('Distraída, sem nenhuma individualidade') (CS 75). The indifference in her attitude denotes a diffused focus which permits the emancipation of her feeling – she experiences the milieu in the way as if it is left unobserved. In her effort to transform herself into a statue exposed to rain and sunshine in the public square, Lucrécia

envisions her particularity as a human being erased, so that she can be reintegrated into the surrounding environment to which the inhabitants of São Geraldo will not pay any attention:

> Na posição em que estava, Lucrécia Neves poderia mesmo ser transportada à praça pública. Faltavam-lhe apenas o sol e a chuva. Para que, coberta de limo, fosse enfim desapercebida pelos habitantes e enfim vista diariamente com inconsciência. (CS 76)

Lucrécia experiences her way of inhabiting the township through the imagination of a faceless statue embedded in a public square. From this non-anthropocentric perspective, where the protagonist navigates her relationship with the environment and other nonhuman agents, the author explores the potential of an emergent conception of ontological categories, especially with the fading of face as a surface coded with identity and hierarchy. Ann Banfield suggests that the metaphor of facelessness relates to the erasure of memory and identity and constitutes 'a link to the inhuman world'.[139] Referring to 'the Greek beauty of classical statues' that are often eyeless, Banfield celebrates their 'abstract, universal and unchanging quality' attached to the art of featurelessness.[140] Although the narrator seems to satirise Lucrécia's undifferentiated nature, the protagonist's gesture embraces the possibility of stretching beyond the restriction imposed by her identity as a female inhabitant of the town. Lucrécia's former selfhood is extinguished and she appears androgynous, given that the form and architecture of the sculpture as conventionally male values come to the fore. Remaining still and tempered by the physical reality ('o sol e a chuva'), the imagery of the public statue alludes to the state of eternity which is contrasted by the ephemerality of individual experience in the suburb: 'Grega numa cidade ainda não erguida, procurando designar cada coisa para que depois, através dos séculos, elas tivessem o sentido de seus nomes' (CS 86). Lucrécia's escapist daydreaming can be read as indicative of her longing to behold the mutating landscape in São

[139] Ann Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 210-11.
[140] Banfield, *The Phantom Table*, p. 210.

Geraldo from the perspective of an imperishable city statue. It also exposes her covert craving to heroically take up the public space and establish an authoritative power of naming the things in the evolving spatiality that are in fact beyond her knowability.

Building upon Jacques Rancière's study on Auguste Rodin's sculptural praxis as a transcription of individuals' physical movement in response to the tumultuous urban milieu without themselves being able to identify their definite goal, Apter reveals the body's role as 'a sensating interface of social space and cognitive plasticity'.[141] In *A cidade sitiada*, Lispector shows her interest in how urban milieu is generated through the individual's involuntary reaction. The animate Greek statue registers the signs of interchange between Lucrécia's body and the township, e.g. the fleeting impression that São Geraldo leaves on Lucrécia and her evolving perception of the ideal and perfection. I have argued in Chapter 1 of this thesis that Lispector perceives Spinozan affects, which denote contacts between and movements of bodies, as unappropriated – affects are not enveloped by or occupying space but space is always constituted by affects. Here, Lucrécia's affective body becoming a public statue also conveys the author's understanding of how an urban space is composed.

Additionally, the mimicking gesture showcases her attempt to recount her experience with the suburbia by integrating herself in a community of other entities constituting the process of urbanisation: entertaining her fantasy of a city planner, Lucrécia demonstrates her understanding of São Geraldo as a contingent, ungraspable existence, where her nonverbal engagement as an event unfolds and materialises spaces of new forms of relationality. This fantasy may also allude to the potential practice of social intervention by way of artistic design and imaginary construction, while at the same time unveiling women's marginal reception of the project and affective politics.

[141] Apter, *Unexceptional Politics* (Verso, 2018), p. 191.

## 2. The Formalism of Desire

In Section 1, I analysed the protagonist's embedded position within an environment of progress and highlighted the affective register as the medium through which individuals engage with collective intentionality and turn affectively to an impersonal and amorphous group. In this section, I will focus on how the author envisions the formalism of collectively produced desires through the parallel between personal relationships and social structures.

In the novel, Lispector exposes how national and regional identities operate as problematic attachments that link personal feelings with institutional pressures. Upon observing 'the physical and psychological necessity for the safety of domestic enclosure', Stacy Alaimo argues that 'this seemingly benign dream of protection has morphed into a national delusion'.[142] The ideas of enclosure and protection are well pronounced in *A cidade sitiada*. Lucrécia's tendency to align herself with her country and warm to the idea of a national border as a fortress of self-defence dovetails with her deep admiration for the army, as she longs to be bound to Felipe, the lieutenant:

> a moça aproveitava com sono brando a companhia de um tenente. Se o militar tivesse desejado, Lucrécia Neves se prenderia a ele, senão pelo amor, ao menos por uma admiração sem limites em que era capaz de cair, aprofundando-se o que nela havia de doçura e de escuta – pois esta era a sua natureza ... a moça nunca o olhara verdadeiramente, temendo turvar superfície tão nítida [...] (CS 50-51)

Lucrécia avoids looking too closely at Felipe for fear that his alluring exterior will be enfeebled – an affective quality bolstered by his military uniform, which serves as a synecdoche for the lieutenant, much like the ring [anel] later in the novel through which she glimpses Mateus for the first time. Lucrécia's perception of the armed forces and her country reflects the extent to

[142] Stacy Alaimo, *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), pp. 20-21.

which the ideology of positivism – the foundational doctrine of the Brazilian Army in the 1920s – circulates and gains acceptance across multiple sectors of society, evolving into nationalism.[143] With this ingrained bigotry, she would be willing to let herself be passively carried away by and sink into the current of sweet indulgence had the unfettered soldier desired her. Lispector thus gives an account of how individuals experience intimacy in ways that resonate with Berlant's notion of desire. Berlant suggests that desire visits individuals 'as an impact from the outside', which, by 'inducing an encounter with [their] affects', is felt 'as though it comes from within'.[144]

*A cidade sitiada* illustrates shared desires as products of group-identification and the subject's affective interaction with the environment. This formulation captures the complexity of what it means to feel and act as an individual within the experience of social participation. Lucrécia's ambition to achieve upward mobility through marriage, which would allow her to leave the township, is in fact a collective and normative desire inculcated in the inhabitants, as revealed in the passage where she prepares to marry Mateus: 'Lucrécia Neves desejava ser rica, possuir coisas e subir de ambiente. Como as ambiciosas moças de São Geraldo, esperando que o dia de núpcias as libertasse do subúrbio' (CS 113). Female residents internalise social expectations as their personal desires, unaware of the symbolic values of consolidating the patriarchal order and promoting the urbanisation that these desires implicate. Holding onto such expectations, they consciously position themselves in the condition of happiness. Urbanisation thus depends on the desire's structuring force that organises individual's aspiration around the promise of the city

[143] Adriana Iop Bellintani delineates the pervasive influence of positivism on Brazilian citizens that is concomitant with the spread of nationalism: 'a ideologia positivista é a doutrina militar existente e praticada em todos escalões de caserna no Brasil, até o início dos anos 20, embora, concomitante ao ideário positivista praticado pelos miliares comece a surgir, no País, uma forte tendência doutrinária nacionalista'. See Iop Bellintani, 'O Positivismo e o Exército Brasileiro', XXV Simpósio Nacional de História (2009), <https://anpuh.org.br/uploads/anais-simposios/pdf/2019-01/1548772006_b8fa46a2e19406385f0d3595452fd150.pdf>

[144] Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love* (Punctum Books, 2012), p. 6.

Lucrécia's fantasy of urban life is partly inherited from her mother, Ana, a widow who nostalgically and fondly recounts her early years living in a city before she met her husband:

> Abandonada a si mesma, aos poucos Ana Rocha Neves falava de sua juventude, com detalhes que a sufocariam se não os transmitisse com exatidão [...] E pensando falar sobre si mesma, descrevia apenas o lugar onde vivera quando saíra da fazenda até encontrar marido: – Aquilo sim, é que era cidade, menina, e não esse buraco: até cavalo tinha guizo, *e igreja era igreja, casa era casa, rua era rua* – não esse buraco com sobrados que a gente nem entende. (CS 61, italics mine)

Ana indulges in the memory of her youth, which, based on her tediously long yet hollow description, is likely half-invented and self-deceptive. Sara Ahmed points out that happiness often takes either nostalgic or promissory form, since individuals 'imagine happiness as somewhere other than where [they] are in the present'.[145] The intensity in the affirmation of the past or in the hope for the future reveals the sterility of the present. The parallel structure in Ana's expression, as emphasised in the quotation, seems to be an act of inculcation towards Lucrécia, which conveys only the message that a city is something different from São Geraldo – an impalpable 'something' [alguma coisa] – a deferred future to which the residents invest their hope. But how? Lucrécia is confused by this vague picture of a lost city portrayed by her mother, yet she still follows in Ana's footsteps. Such a lingering and void hope 'reproduce[s] the constraining mandate of futurism'.[146] Ana sees hope in Lucrécia's hypothesis of marrying Perseu, a young student in São Geraldo, for the reason that she will no longer need to buy clothes for her daughter:

> Ana agora quase sorria às esperanças que Lucrécia lhe dera; e com os olhos perturbados, já mergulhados no futuro, quase concordava.
> – E a senhora podia casar com o pai de Perseu..., prosseguiu dessa vez horrorizada em imaginar aquele homem sanguíneo desprezando sua mãezinha. Nunca ousara tanto e ambas se olharam surpreendidas. A mulher mexeu-se afinal na cadeira, ruborizada:
> – Ora menina!... disse com coqueteria. (CS 64)

[145] Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Duke University Press, 2010), p. 161.
[146] Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, p. 161.

Ana is intrigued by the idea of marrying Perseu's father – a notion randomly and mindlessly concocted by Lucrécia in order to console her mother, though it strikes even the daughter herself as nonsensical. Ana blushes at the fantasy of marriage and her way of speaking to her daughter already shows the same coquetry as Lucrécia displays with Perseu, which betrays Ana's satisfaction with this unrooted, imagined future and her easily manipulated nature. This pattern in the enactment of desire between mother and daughter manifests in the ritualistic scene [cena] in which they repeatedly perform their roles (CS 62). They swing between cheerful mood and negative feelings such as disappointment towards life while taking turns to console each other through the mindless, dramatic performance that constantly repairs their shaky fantasy, built on scarce resources: 'Se fossem despertadas, talvez se surpreendessem de que, usando meios tão precários, pudessem cair tão plenamente no jogo. Mas já não precisavam de grandes preparações para entrar nos dois personagens, e os inícios eram cada vez mais rápidos agora, quase impacientes' (CS 63).

The mother-daughter interaction reveals how the internalised social expectations shape the patterns of their daily lives through an affective cycle of mutual influence and persuasion. Berlant unravels the formalism of desire that compels individuals to recognise their aspiration through repetition, generating 'anxiety, fantasy, and discipline'.[147] Lucrécia and Ana become adept in gestures of feigning and faking (e.g., conversing as if reciting theatrical scripts) to maintain their intimate bond. Their performance serves to uphold their hope in resistance to an anxiety their desires provoke, which is described in the novel as 'medo que não era medo, apenas arrepiar o dorso diante de uma coisa' (CS 61). This anxiety emerges from the dissonance between aspiration and reality, yet it fuels the drive to sustain the intensity of desire, as depicted in the scene where Lucrécia meets Mateus.

[147] Berlant, *Desire/Love*, p. 20.

Despite Lucrécia's social spontaneity within São Geraldo, an ineffable fear surfaces during her encounter with Mateus. She stands in the state museum, discreetly clutching her wet umbrella, and her body stiffens at the sight of the diamond ring on Mateus's finger:

> Uma vez ela for a ao museu estadual e tivera medo de estar de guarda-chuva molhado num museu. Assim sucedera. Tinha medo de ver, num mesmo olhar, um trem e um passarinho. E de um homem com anel de brilhantes no dedo médio: Mateus. Seria imobilizada se esse dedo a apontasse. (CS 61)

Lispector portrays the affective impact of desire by highlighting Lucrécia's anxious reaction to the possibility ignited by the tension between the ring, a specific object, and the 'needs and promises projected onto it'.[148] Mateus, a man from the city who, when he first appears in the novel, is associated with a cluster of promises: 'Com ele, ela teria um futuro luxuoso e violento… A moça bem que ansiava por casar' (CS 57). While the tantalising ring suggests the intensity and assertion of Lucrécia's yearning, it stands as the only tangible clue about Mateus that Lucrécia and the reader have at this point in the novel. It thus seems to be a precarious anchor for her attachment to Mateus and her longing for marriage. Through the ring, this contrast is foregrounded, eliciting fear in the face of desire.

As Lucrécia anxiously awaits confirmation from Mateus that he will take her with him to the city, she finds herself guarded by her house, which grants her a sense of comfort and permission to indulge her fantasies: 'A sala estava íntima, fantástica, o interior sufocado de sonho… Por todo o aposento coisas inocentes se haviam espalhado em guarda' (CS 72). Within this space of comforting familiarity, she rekindles her hope by inventing the news that she expects.

[148] Berlant, *Desire/Love*, p. 6.

It is important to note that, notwithstanding the 'early spurt of urban expansion' in early twentieth-century Latin America, specifically Brazil,[149] suburbia remains inhabited by less advantaged groups and is therefore associated with marginalisation. This contrasts with the United States, where suburbs typically connote stability and privilege. The house in São Geraldo where Lucrécia and Ana live – as a physical bonding between the two – constitutes a space of performance and fantasy. On the one hand, the house is decorated in an exaggerated manner with the remnants of a metropolis [A casa parecia ornamentada com os despojos de uma cidade maior] (CS 59). On the other, electricity failures typical of a suburban area betray the lack of foundational material for this urban fantasy [A má eletricidade do subúrbio] (CS 59). Given this incongruity, their house appears as an enclave that, in line with Berlant's description of fantasy, offers them 'affective coherence to what is incoherent and contradictory', thereby providing Lucrécia with a sense of reliable continuity in her faith and optimism about her imagined future.[150] Unlike her usual discreet glances into the cityscape, she is able to gaze at things directly in her uninterrupted dream from within the safety fence of the house that is described in the novel as her 'fortress' [fortaleza]: 'a sonhadora moça examinava com prazer sua fortaleza, não a espreitando mas olhando-a diretamente' (CS 66). Adorned with her cherished household objects, Lucrécia's room creates a sense of stability, like a fortress, even as she contends with unmet desires. Yet this fantasy reaches its limit when she suddenly awakens from her daydream at the sight of a flower in a vase, a sight that can be interpreted not only as a literal, individual perception but also a metaphor emblematic of the group identity of women in São Geraldo. This image stands out in her oneiric enclave, marking the intrusion of reality: the recognition that she is in fact in the suburb:

[149] Alan Gilbert, 'Latin America: The Suburb Is the City', in *The Suburban Land Question: A Global Survey*, ed. by Richard Harris and Ute Lehrer (University of Toronto Press, 2018), pp. 214-39 (p. 215).
[150] Berlant, *Desire/Love*, p. 75.

> [...] a moça olhou esse mundo escuro repleto de bibelôs, da flor, da única flor no jarro: este era o subúrbio […] Eis a flor [...] Mas sobre o caule também ela era intocável, o mundo indireto. Inútil ser imóvel: a flor era intocável. Quando começasse a murchar, já se poderia olhá-la diretamente mas então seria tarde; e depois que morresse, se tornaria fácil: podia-se jogá-la fora tocando-a inteiramente – e a sala decresceria, andar-se-ia entre as coisas apequenadas com firmeza e desilusão. (CS 67)

The flower in Lucrécia's room serves as a reminder of the *Associação* and her attachment to the shared expectation of approaching the state of happiness attributed to flowers. Here, the flower seems untouchable as an index to an idealised world to which Lucrécia does not have direct access. Yet the perishable flower to which a hopeful future is anchored also indicates Lucrécia's awareness of the fragility of her fantasies, as she perceives the room that embodies stability and security to be shrinking. This interplay between the firmness of the promise and the constant disappointment by unfulfilled wishes underscores the structure and function of desire.

The mechanism of desire, evident in the homogenised *alegria das flores*, functions to 'stabilise the subject' and enable the protagonist to assume a disciplined group identity.[151] Lucrécia's longing, identical to that of other women, feels intimate and visceral to her through her contacts with specific objects and scenes laden with affects. These affective scenes compel her to visit them repeatedly so that her personal fantasy is sustained by collective desires. The general and normative desires prevailing in São Geraldo are, for instance, concretised and materialised in affective moments surrounding the ball. Lucrécia's fantasy of a good life manifests as an occasional desire to attend the ball. She imagines herself excelling against other women in winning the favour of social elites:

> Retirando afinal da gaveta como pérolas verdadeiras as joias falsas, alçando-as à altura do rosto, dando glória e esperança ao quarto. [...] Porque ela se vestia tentando recriar a força de antigas noites de festas, imaginando encontrar na suja rua do Mercado a elite de um baile, prestígios e maneiras extraordinárias – onde moças riam difíceis de se comportar; e onde ela diria alto, ameaçando com o dedo: você é mau, Joaquim! (CS 36)

[151] Berlant, *Desire/Love*, p. 76.

In contrast to the untidiness of the street which forms her daily setting, Lucrécia meticulously preens herself for the ball. She invests glory and hope in her much-valued possessions, such as fake pearls, by which her fantasy is reassured and prolonged in cheerful emotion. This fantasy intertwines with the legacies of marriage and beauty bequeathed from previous generations and local communities like the *Associação*.

Lispector consciously reveals how women become victims of fantasies. They are dominated by Cinderella-esque fairy tales that feed them with an idealised and unreal conception, as she discloses in her journalistic writing (*crônica*), 'Faz de conta' (1968): 'Faz de conta que ela era uma princesa azul pelo crepúsculo que viria, faz de conta que a infância era hoje e prateada de brinquedos [...] faz de conta que tudo o que tinha não era de faz-de-conta [...]'.[152] Writing about an anonymous female figure, the author underscores the cruelty of make-believe, which becomes a daily gesture and constant state for women.

Lispector's journalistic voice intertwines with her fiction, both showcasing her intervention in public life. Her feminist critique of how women are institutionalised through fantasies in 'Faz de conta' is already exemplified through Lucrécia in *A cidade sitiada*. Lucrécia dwells on the memory of the ball, which, despite its crude setting on a disappointingly rainy night and the fact that she has to leave the ball with her feet dusty, still fills her with passion that overrides her negative feelings such as nausea and the sudden reflection upon her own reason for festivity (CS 36). It seems that her positive feelings about the ball actually '*come from without and move inward*'.[153] In other words, she is drawn into and participates in a joyful social atmosphere that she experiences as her own. While she dances, São Geraldo is

[152] Clarice Lispector, *A descoberta do mundo* (Editora Nova Fronteira, 1984), p. 208.
[153] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 9, italics in original.

evolving into a city: 'chovia, as gotas escorrendo sob a luz, ela dançando, e a cidade erguida em torno' (CS 36-37).

This affective participation sutures the gap between Lucrécia's private yearning for a change in her monotonous quotidian routine and the conditions for realising the institutional promises of a good life. Lucrécia is thus brought into a collective life where, as described by Berlant, 'social conventions of power and value play themselves out' in the form of individual fulfilment.[154] This political dimension of desire reduces the disjunction between the collective and the personal, legacy and reality. The portrayal of private space and public space as projected onto each other alludes to this merging. The scene I have discussed where Lucrécia's living room is inundated by the rain not only highlights the cleavage between the imagined completeness of the modernised construction and the belatedness of development in reality, but also implies the encroachment of the public sphere upon the domestic space.

## 3. Infrastructure and the Liminal Experience

In the previous sections, I analysed Lispector's representation of the subject's position in relation to the pressures of urbanisation as a collective project. I examined how optimism operates as a form of regulation through the preindividual dimension of desires and social networks. In this section, I will focus on the novel's representation of infrastructure, which I will argue not only embodies a combination of material conditions and collective intentionality but also functions as a work of institutional polishing intertwined with optimism.

In Sophia Beal's reading of Lispector's delineation of Brasília's standardised, harmonic architectural design in her *crônica*, 'Brasília: cinco dias' (1962), which pressures its

[154] Berlant, *Desire/Love*, p. 14.

inhabitants to 'feel good' albeit resistantly,[155] Beal suggests that Lispector's unsettling text problematises the rhetoric of national progress as a 'utopian project' that 'push[es] out what was imperfect and marginal in the name of progress'.[156] This critical rendition of the ideological dynamics between public works and national project is explicitly echoed in *A cidade sitiada*. Following Beal's argument, engaging with references to infrastructure will be conducive to probing the peripheral modernity of suburbia and the protagonist's marginalised perception. The novel's notable portrayals of public works, such as the sewer system, cables, the railway and the viaduct, materialise the interconnectedness of the physical spaces and recalibrate the individual's place in tangible networks.

Beal advances the symbolic values in infrastructure construction projects: a sense of nationhood and collective hope is cultivated among Brazilian citizens provided that the previously disparate regions become integrated into 'a cohesive whole' by virtue of the 'facilitated communication' in the course of the twentieth century.[157] This observation is reflected in Lucrécia's allegiance to national identity. Alongside the material success in São Geraldo, propaganda celebrating beautification and cohesion emerges within social groups exemplified by the *Associação*. In her study on developmentalism in *A cidade sitiada*, Victoria Saramago explores 'the intersection between the agency of things and the social relations implicated' in the circulation of policies.[158] I argue that the two categories proposed by Saramago are fundamentally indivisible, in that the nonhuman bodies are represented as relational whilst the social networks material given their collectivity and impersonality. Alternatively, I use the notion of environment or materiality in order to avoid this

[155] Sophia Beal, *Brazil under Construction: Fiction and Public Works* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 89.
[156] Beal, *Brazil under Construction*, p. 83.
[157] Beal, *Brazil under Construction*, p. 1.
[158] Victoria Saramago, *Fictional Environment: Mimesis, Deforestation, and Development in Latin America* (Northwestern University Press, 2021), p. 125.

discrimination. The wire mesh and pipelines as nonhuman actors exhibit their active forces that reveal the country's modernising progression, bridging private life with the public sphere.

This concrete form of relationality converges with abstract networks socio-politically. Limited social occasions for women, such as the female association and the ball, emblemise the burgeoning sign of women's civic participation on the one hand and deliver the message of asserting individual's embeddedness in the collective project on the other, considering their embrace of shared values and promises. While major feminist readings of Lispector's fiction tend to focus on how the author depicts human relations and states of mind as well as on the role of body in relation to experience and narrative, as seen in the works of Hélène Cixous, Marta Peixoto and Earl E. Fitz. These studies emphasise insidious patriarchal oppression within a domestic context and often overlook *A cidade sitiada*. Considering the narrator's often satirical comments, I understand this novel as a platform through which Lispector articulates a vision of womanhood that encompasses women's public engagement in relation to their experiences of suburban modernities in Brazil.

Building upon Gilbert Simondon's notion of provisional unity, which reveals the 'transitional structure as a loose convergence that lets a collectivity stay bound to the ordinary even as some of its forms of life are fraying', Berlant redefines infrastructure as what binds individuals 'to the world in movement and keeps the world practically bound to itself'.[159] It is the collectivity that leaves the glitches in a transitional space unscrutinised. In the novel, the infrastructure that sustains the everyday life of São Geraldo's residents is foregrounded in the detailed depiction of the layout of drainpipes on the walls and the powerplant towers. Scenes of flooding and traffic failures during rain expose São Geraldo's liminal position between the rural and urban, the natural and modern landscape. However, the perfection and equilibrium

[159] Lauren Berlant, 'The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times', *Environment and Planning. D. Society & Space*, 34.3 (2016), pp. 393-419 (p. 394).

of the external features increasingly dominate the scenery of São Geraldo. Under this imposing façade, chaos, dysfunction and material scarcity in individual lives are concealed and pushed aside.

Lucrécia is often confined to the balcony[160], a doubly liminal space from which she observes the outside without setting her feet on the ground, avoiding direct exposure to the chaos of the town's daily scenes: 'A vida tumultuosa da rua do Mercado estava deslocada naquele ambiente onde um gosto passado reinava nas varandas de ferro forjado' (CS 14). From this deceptively comfortable position, she is content with an illusory view, distanced from the immediate happening in the public space.

The chapter, 'Esboço da cidade', delineates a dramatic episode in São Geraldo, when someone is struck by lightning while Lucrécia remains intact and unaware of the incident. Even though her house is trembling, from outside the premonition in the air cannot reach her, neither is the vibrating sound able to alert her. Her detached position and obtuseness seem almost a blessing:

> Foi assim que ela escapou de saber. A moça tinha sorte: por um segundo sempre escapava. Verdade era que, pela diferença deste segundo, outra pessoa de súbito compreenderia. Mas era verdade também que pelo mesmo segundo outra pessoa seria fulminada. S. Geraldo estava cheio de pessoas *fulguradas* que se sacolejavam plenas de alegria no carro de socorro do Hospício Pedro II. (CS 91-92, italics mine)

This farcical scene unfolds the hopeful sketch of the new São Geraldo, replete with residents who, despite being injured by the lightning and taken to the hospital by ambulances, still absurdly yield to a sort of incontestable happiness. The adjective *fulgurado* refers either to the state of being dazzled by intense light or being hit by a flash. Through this double-entendre

[160] In her analysis of the evolving structure of modern knowledge and women's role in cultural arena represented in female writings in 1940s Shanghai, Nicole Huang examines the concept of the 'aesthetics of liminality' concretised by the spatial form of the balcony, which offers the female city dwellers an 'unique vision of history' from the in-between position. See Nicole Huang, *Women, War, Domesticity: Shanghai Literature and Popular Culture of the 1940s* (Brill, 2005), p. 136. This idea that emphasises urban middle-class women's experiences of modernities is particularly germane here.

expression, the author satirises the link between the atmosphere of ecstasy and its perilous effects on individuals. The narrative voice ironically comments that incomprehension is the primary foundation of a sort of happiness that is itself incomprehensible [O principal era mesmo não compreender. Nem sequer a própria alegria] (CS 92). The hazards that expose the menacing flaws in the ongoing construction of the new city are thus neutralised and varnished by the surplus of happiness among the masses. This grim depiction of sufferings in ordinary lives, quickly effaced without trace, points to the violence that the alluring yet paralysing collective atmosphere exerts on individuals by promoting consensual promises.

It is interesting to notice the intruding presence of coal within the paragraphs in which Lucrécia is at home. Villares observes that Lucrécia cares nothing about coal and actually 'seems to be disturbed' by the image of a ship loaded with coal.[161] Indeed, Lucrécia firmly shuns a visitor's mentioning of this combustible rock that fuels the urbanisation of São Geraldo, as if its incursion into her house as a solipsistic space in the form of a word already makes her uncomfortable:

> – É carvão, repetiu alçando os ombros com ironia, é carvão...
> – Vá embora, ordenou com firmeza. (CS 72)

The fact that São Geraldo still relies on coal as the major source of productive energy [O subúrbio de carvão e ferro] constitutes a revelation of its belatedness in respect of industrial development in the 1920s (CS 16), given its inefficiency in providing a regular electricity supply. This reality, apparently disregarded by dwellers on balconies represented by Lucrécia, again attests to the yawning gap between the promise and presence. This gap is parallel to the chasm between the prospect of São Geraldo's changes and Lucrécia's perception.

[161] Lúcia Villares, 'Modernization and the Phantasmogoria of Commodities in Clarice Lispector's *A cidade sitiada*', p. 497.

Furthermore, as her privileged mode of accessing external reality, observing the cityscape from the balcony filters out signs of underdevelopment. For instance, the untidiness of the streets as a sudden revelation of urban chaos only occurs to her when she sets her foot in them. The unpleasant picture of waste piled up in cesspools or blown around by the wind frequently recurs in the novel, e.g. 'o lixo seco voava…' in which the active verb 'to fly' [voar] showcases the vital power of the waste free from human intervention (CS 40). Another moment in which the author narrates the unexpected change of state of the waste is when the personified, inert body of the trash heap is awakened and aided by the wind: 'tudo o que jazia em lixo nos esgotos foi despertado pelo vento; apesar da firmeza, como o subúrbio era reversível apenas pelo vento!' (CS 36).

In her analysis of the symbolic relevance of trash in modern, everyday aesthetics, Maurizia Boscagli regards garbage's fluidity and unruliness as indicative of 'a threat to be contained' as well as a revolting, 'disruptive power'.[162] Indeed, the nonhuman agency of the waste and the wind as conjoined, antagonistic forces seems to struggle against the steady human efforts in modernising São Geraldo. As a solid proof of the achievements of suburban reform, the image of a new, unconquerable cityscape is unexpectedly dispelled and reversed by a gust of wind. This moment reveals the recalcitrance of abandoned objects as a testament to the persistence of an underdeveloped past. The irony connotes Lispector's scepticism towards the celebration of the human feat: signs of progress and modernity, once perceived as firm and absolute, can be easily pulverised.

Lucrécia's liminal position, from which she leisurely observes and half-comprehends what is happening on the outside from the shelter of the inside, also implies her inability to directly experience the real changes taking place in São Geraldo. Instead, she apprehends them

[162] Maurizia Boscagli, *Stuff Theory: Everyday Objects, Radical Materialism* (Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 228.

only through intermediaries. Much like in the *Associação* where she learned to sense a sort of happiness framed by pattern through the 'flowers', it is through the bits and pieces of industrial construction that she perceives the modernity of a city that seems stirring and daunting with all the unnameable things that constitute it. For Lucrécia, São Geraldo grows silently like an organic being: 'As coisas cresciam com profunda tranquilidade. S. Geraldo se mostrava' (CS 52). It appears that no one decides to make the transformation in São Geraldo happen; rather, it unfolds seamlessly and spontaneously in a collective environment bloated with a longing for change.

Curiously, in the passage that first depicts the urban space expanding with dazzling vivacity, what catches Lucrécia's attention is an inanimate and innocuous object: a discarded screw on the ground:

> Coisas terríveis e delicadas jaziam no chão. O parafuso perfeito[163]. A moça respirava o odor de chumbo da claridade. E virando-se – lá estava S. Geraldo: anunciado, inexplicável, pousado com a dureza de um pé. Cada objeto hiperfísico. Os sinais. (CS 53)

In Lispector's later novel, *A hora da estrela* (1977), the narrator Rodrigo compares the character Macabéa to a dispensable screw in a technologically advanced society, where upward mobility can be achieved as easily as pushing a button, although this remains beyond Macabéa's control.[164] Apparently, a single screw[165] only appears as a redundant byproduct of

---

[163] In the *crônica*, 'A Perfeição' (1968), Lispector conveys her idea of perfection: 'O que me tranqüiliza é que tudo o que existe, existe com uma precisão absoluta. O que for do tamanho der uma cabeça de alfinete não transborda nem uma fração de milímetro além do tamanho de uma cabeça de alfinete'. See Lispector, *A descoberta do mundo*, p. 226. Lispector has such a fancy for tiny objects, in that their precision of their sizes offers her a reassuring feeling toward every existence in the world, the delicateness of which, as she argues, is often neglected by people. Lispector regards perfection not as a transcendental state beyond the existence of things but a way in which things are seamlessly pieced together. This idea is often expressed through Lucrécia's perspective throughout *A cidade sitiada*, e.g., 'as coisas só começavam a existir quando perfeitas' in previous discussion (CS 96). It thus provides an alternative reading for Lucrécia's engagement with the seemingly useless objects as an aesthetic vision other than a mere fetichism.

[164] See Clarice Lispector, *A hora da estrela* (Rocco, 2017), p. 62.

[165] The screw can easily remind us of the scene in *The House of Mirth* (1905) by Edith Wharton in which Lily Bart expresses her desperate feeling of being worthless and lack of autonomy: 'I can hardly be said to have an independent existence. I was just a screw or a cog in the great machine I called life, and when I dropped out of it I found I was of no use anywhere else'. See Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (Open Road Integrated Media, 2017), p. 227.

industrialisation. In *A cidade sitiada*, Lucrécia's appreciation of it as a perfect being may suggest her willingness to approach the state of a screw – to become an adequate and featureless part of a mechanical existence that contributes to 'progress' rather than pursuing an independent life.

With its irreducible and indivisible structure, the screw, as a synecdoche for city construction, serves as the key that she grasps to access the inconceivable world of modernity. She is able to get a flavour of this world through breathing its odour of lead. Provided its linkage to other objects that concretise the physical process of urbanisation, the screw is perceived as a sign emmeshed in the whole system of signification still alien to Lucrécia. The screw can also be regarded as an imagined leverage through which she gains a sense of agency to reach out and participate in city planning.

By depicting modernities as experienced in quotidian settings from the perspective of a suburban lower-middle-class woman, Lispector theorises her own version of modernism, one that exposes the belatedness and unevenness in development, as well as the doubly marginalised position of women, diverging from the mainstream Euro-American model. The screw figures as a symbol of the half-articulated urban space that, for Lucrécia, is fundamentally unknowable and ungraspable. Her interaction with the screw marks an attempt to negotiate the imposition of urban modernity. This limited space of expression and agency is also evident in her participation in the social group, which ultimately generates a form of unanimism among individuals.

Composed of incredibly delicate parts, the new cityscape of São Geraldo, as seen through the screw, strikes Lucrécia as 'uma fortaleza inconquistável' (CS 46). The same adjective, *inconquistável*, is also used to describe Lucrécia's room as a 'quarto inconquistável'

(CS 35). In both cases, the unconquerable fortress[166] can be interpreted as both protection and hindrance. For one thing, the city's seeming impregnability reflects Lucrécia's liminal position as a spectator and her tendency to only see the surface, selectively embracing the positive side of things as taught by her mother ('Ana tentasse ensiná-la a ver pelo lado da beleza') (CS 60). For another, as seen through the *Associação*, which illustrates the idealistic political environment, the pledge of progress and happiness for São Geraldo in the suburban construction campaign functions like a fortress besieged for residents like Lucrécia. This pledge is interwoven with the promises of institutions such as marriage and family, figured in Lucrécia's room, another form of fortification on the private level.

I have discussed how Lucrécia's room represents a secure and predictable future that is also delineated by Ana. Lucrécia is ensnared by this blueprint of an impermeable and 'perfect' system that arranges a fateful cycle – to become Mateus's wife, move to the city and lead a lavish life: 'Lucrécia mesmo fora apanhada por alguma roda do sistema perfeito' (CS 120). Lispector playfully repeats this expression when it comes to Lucrécia's attempt to approach a male dancer in the city theatre soon after her marriage, but this time it refers to the fact that she is physically and perfectly stuck in space in the theatre box, which prevents her from leaving her seat and illogically offers her the 'guarantee' [garantia] of this marriage:

> Se ele lhe despertava o compromisso antigo, ela estava agora sem tempo, as saias presas por *alguma roda do sistema perfeito*. Ao mesmo tempo ninguém a tiraria dali, tinha direito de estar num camarote: esta era a sua época. A extraordinária garantia. (CS 122, italics mine)

Here, the 'gear of the perfect system' stands out as squeezing and constraining but is taken by Lucrécia as reassurance. Berlant illustrates the workings of cruel optimism in which people

[166] An interesting parallel is Qian Zhongshu's *Fortress Besieged* (1947), a Chinese modernist novel that charts satirically the erosion of the good-life fantasy attached to marriage. The novel draws an analogy between marriage and fortress, emphasising not only the fantasy associated with marriage but also its constraining aspects.

remain attached to a promise even when it impedes their development. In line with this, although Lucrécia's marriage of convenience with Mateus is entirely devoid of affection, it remains 'profoundly confirming' so that she feels inclined to sustain it 'regardless of the content of the relation'.[167] Through her apprenticeship at the *Associação*, Lucrécia not only prompts herself to feel the happiness that she anticipates marriage[168] to offer but also transmits a performative surplus of happiness to her surroundings, as she expresses her satisfaction with married life in a letter to her mother: 'Alcancei o ideal de minha vida' (CS 125). Notwithstanding her frustration with the futile attempt to probe into her husband's life, she still holds faith in 'the predictable comforts' that the life promises to formulate[169]: 'Sim! mas tudo isso era mais alegre, os dias passavam, meses e meses passavam, perdiam-se horas – e no fundo de tudo aquele direito reconhecido, os jornais se publicando, uma geração garantindo [...]' (CS 126).

This temporal impasse that Lucrécia perceives stands in contrast to the signs of change visible not only in the suburban environment but also in other characters, who, despite being enveloped in the same atmosphere of happiness, comprehend it from different perspectives. Perseu, for example, experiences a shift in his life as he leaves São Geraldo and becomes a doctor in a city hospital. In his chance encounter with an anonymous woman in a bar, Perseu appears to be sceptical and critical of her future-oriented remark, assuring him that he will become a good doctor. Rather than indulging in the hopeful future-image, he finds this empty promise uncomfortable: 'Nunca falava da certeza já um pouco ansiada em tornar-se um bom médico. Dando-lhe a esperança de ser um bom médico, a mulher não lhe permitira nada mais...'

[167] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 2.
[168] The rendering of marriage as a futuristic object of happiness is echoed in *Perto do coração selvagem*. In the chapter, 'O Casamento', after marrying Otávio, Joana feels herself 'tristemente uma mulher feliz' (PCS 108). When she discovers Otávio's adultery, she agrees to leave him on the condition of having a child by him – an indication of her adherence to the logic of futurism and her submission to the institutional mandate of maternity: 'Mesmo continuar a querer o filho seria ligar-se ao futuro' (PCS 173).
[169] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 2.

(CS 181). Ambitious expectations strike him as suffocating, as he is disturbed by the anxiety tied to the certainty of a good future.

Furthermore, the author ruthlessly exposes the cruelty of being hooked on the future through Mateus's sudden death from a heart attack before he can carry out all his solid plans for progress. For Lucrécia, the perfect story of a good life is dismantled by her widowhood, which is followed by a fleeting moment of wakening. Casting a gaze on the rise of powerplants in São Geraldo, she realises that, apart from her own house, nothing is steadfast since the outside world is constantly changing, as she asks herself: 'Como se limitar à própria história se lá estava a torre da usina?' (CS 189).

Through her fractured view, she becomes aware that the whole reality is flimsy and ungraspable so that any reliance on a single version of a story seems unreasonable. Nevertheless, stricken by her sudden widowhood, Lucrécia still reminisces about the symbolic and ideological elements of the *Associação* charted in the first chapter and forces herself to be happy: 'Porque não o vira do modo mais belo de se ver? Fora bom como todo homem que terminaria morrendo, e ela o amara. [...] acusava-se a viúva: que aplicasse sua alegria sobre flores, como na Associação?' (CS 184). Even though the established connections between the symbolic codes and reality often fail to prove themselves, those who are weaned on and clustered around the same signification system may find it impossible to do away with them. Upon receiving a letter from Ana about another marriage prospect – a man who owns a farm has seen her portrait and likes it – Lucrécia feels heartened and any misgiving about her life is dispelled:

> É o segundo marido, espantava-se como se não tivesse direito a tanta sorte. […] Ah, a viúva, interrompia-se ela emocionada relendo mil vezes a carta. "Tem aqui um homem"…, cantava de cor. Olhava o retrato pendurado na parede do corredor para adivinhar o que a esperava, à viúva alegre. Terminava rindo de novo. (CS 191)

Lucrécia is refilled with expectation, her momentary wakefulness only serving as a foil to the inextricable wheel of promise and optimism that returns to function. While her city fantasy has already dissipated, she happily loops back to a farm, which seems to replicate her mother's life. Having regained her sense of security, she abandons everything in São Geraldo including her much treasured trinkets which she used to consider as '[s]eu sistema de defesa' (CS 191). They all become useless as she optimistically assumes that her second marriage will provide the most reliable protection against unpredicable changes: 'E afinal resolvendo vender o sobrado e ir reunir-se ao retrato. Suspirando de alegria' (CS 190). With delight, she resumes her role as a portrait, much like at the ball – a perfect and purchasable commodity. This abrupt adjustment to the present exemplifies the cruelty of optimism in that it makes the conventionality indubitably confirming. For women like Lucrécia, institutions such as marriage and property relations seem to be the only viable responses to the precarious environment. While the imaginary siege of São Geraldo is lifted, Lucrécia prepares herself to enter another fortress. The impasse on the individual level contrasts with the dominant ideology of progress and development, in which Lucrécia is half-knowingly informed and of which she attempts to keep track but ends up only playing the role as an outsider and spectator.

## Conclusion

*A cidade sitiada* portrays the 1920s Brazil dominated by the doctrine of positivism that celebrates order, unanimism and progress. In this chapter, I emphasised Lispector's political commitment in the novel and highlighted how her reflection on individuals' relationship with the public sphere enters into dialogue with contemporary activist theorists such as Berlant and Ahmed. Lispector exposes the ways in which optimism functions as a form of affective politics engendered by urbanisation, a spacetime exemplified by the ideology of development.

Individuals' desires and emotions are produced through their affective encounters with the collective notion of progress, which circulates via the evolving, dynamic relationality between the subject and its environment. In the portrayal of Lucrécia and her constant gestures of negotiation and adaptation to the overarching atmosphere of optimism, Lispector reveals the structure of desire in the ambience of hope and change, through which individuals are persuaded to uphold the legacies of institutions that paradoxically resist change.

By indicating Lucrécia's fractured perspective from a sheltered position, Lispector also brings to light uneven development and unequal distribution as the counterculture to development obscured by the tendentious unfolding of modernisation. Dovetailing the analysis of São Geraldo's peripheral location of modernity with Lucrécia's exemplary borderline experience of spectatorship – comfortably positioned on the half-open balcony yet confined to the household – this chapter stressed the layered liminality associated with the role of suburban women, whose hope mirrors their vulnerability.

Through the blending of the pledge of progress for the suburb and the promise of happiness ascribed to marriage, Lispector demonstrates how the individual's private life is interlocked within the broader narrative of order and progress during the First Brazilian Republic. In doing so, Lispector reveals these collectively assured promises as both beguiling and stifling, constitutive of an impasse in individual life. Furthermore, she underscores that individuals who seek protection by conforming to others, through the practices of attunement and adaptation to the collective atmosphere, will only reinforce an insidious conventionality. Through the juxtaposition of infrastructure with middle-class women's attunement to the idea of fulfilment within intertwined orders of patriarchy and the modernising state, Lispector exposes how individual subjects are fundamentally implicated in the Brazilian ideals of nationhood, thereby using fiction as a medium for political reflection and public critique.

# CHAPTER 4 – PATRIARCHY AND INTERSPECIES EXPERIENCES: APPREHENSION IN *A MAÇÃ NO ESCURO*

## Introduction

From the outset of *A maçã no escuro* (1961), Martim finds himself in the wild darkness where he attempts to recreate a world by replacing his previous existence. The novel explores Martim's journey of running away from a crime which opens for him a pathway of uncertainty to reassess his role and purposes in the world. Amidst the indeterminacy of an intricate environment, Martim is often caught in a state of apprehension which manifests an oscillation between a knowledge-seeking, boundary-forming urge and an inclination towards creaturely and mechanical conditions.

Published twelve years after *A cidade sitiada*, *A maçã no escuro* shows the author's evolving understanding of individuals' processes of interpreting their environment and the possibility of their own decision-making. Featuring the only male protagonist, Martim, amongst Lispector's novels, *A maçã no escuro* satirises the notion of heroism as overtly intertwined with the insidious impacts of anthropocentrism, patriarchy and hierarchical power structures on individuals, demonstrated by Martim's illusion of his exclusive access to knowledge and domination. The seemingly well-organised, teleological structure of the novel delineated by its first two subheadings, 'Como se faz um homem' and 'Nascimento do herói', parodies an anthropocentric framework premised on a human-centred sense of meaning. Martim consciously lapses into an impersonal state during his escape from a crime, only to later attempt reasserting his individual, masculine agency in dominating an environment teeming with natural forces. However, the third subheading, 'A maçã no escuro', given its religious allusion, underscores the problematic nature of the sole human realm, as Martim fails

to enact his simulation of the Book of Genesis. The apprehensive state, intimately associated with the loss of an object, keeps the loop turning: from an outlaw absorbed in nature and manual labour to a hero reinventing himself and the world and manipulating the interrelations in his surroundings. I recognise that *A maçã no escuro* constitutes another example of Lispector's front-loaded stylistic tendency. I focus my analysis on the first section of the book, as it is particularly rich in her representation of apprehension.

Carlos Mendes de Sousa reads *A maçã no escuro* as 'a reescrita da origem da linguagem e do mundo da literature',[170] and thus accentuates the novel's reflection upon and revision of the fundamental meanings of language and the institution of literature. In the recent decades, studies on *A maçã no escuro* are often drawing on poststructuralist theories on the unreliability of language and the instability of referential systems represented in the novel. By attending to Lispector's contemplation on 'the limits of knowledge and power', Kristin E. Pitt observes the link between 'Martim's struggles with language' and 'his spatial explorations and interpersonal interactions' and interprets this juncture as indicative of his imperialist understanding of Brazil.[171] Other scholars have also turned to the portrayal of masculinity in this novel. Antonio Ladeira argues that the masculine values 'shaped by Brazilian social and gender codes' are denounced as 'violent obligations' and exert destructive impacts on both Martim and Vitória.[172] Building upon these observations, in this chapter, I will read Lispector's renderings of language, knowledge and masculinity as inter-constitutive sites of anthropocentric humanism and demonstrate the individual's apprehension as a dilemma between relinquishing and adhering to this entrenched disposition. I understand the term apprehension in its multiple senses: as the cognitive process of comprehension and perception, and as a state of foreboding fear, one that,

[170] Carlos Mendes de Sousa, *Figuras da escrita*, p. 127.
[171] Kristin E. Pitt, 'Discovery and Conquest Through a Poststructural and Postcolonial Lens: Clarice Lispector's *A maçã no escuro*', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 50.1 (2013), pp. 184-200 (p. 187).
[172] António Ladeira, 'Patriarchal Violence and Brazilian Masculinities in Clarice Lispector's *A maçã no escuro*', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 86.5 (2009), pp. 697-706 (p. 691).

in the novel, is even linked to the act of capturing a criminal, a meaning rooted in the legal context.

As an overarching atmosphere of the novel, darkness marks 'the natural habitat of uncertainty' that is tied to ubiquitous anxiety as proposed by Zygmunt Bauman.[173] I will approach the novel's non-anthropocentric perspective that the author practices in her conception of an immersive aesthetics of the dark, a non-semantic realm resisting interpretation and disrupting the hierarchical and patriarchal structures of meaning. Interspecies interaction comes to the fore in the ambient experience that blurs the distinctive demarcations of entities and of the body's sensory organism. Scholars have addressed the issues of animality in this novel and associated it with regression to the primeval, prelinguistic state.[174] In this chapter, however, I will read the often-silent interspecies communion as a sign of distributed cognition[175] invoked in individuals' apprehension regarding the discursive world and the sole human realm, rather than an atavistic act. Juxtaposed with the effect of ambience, the portrayal of creatureliness represents individuals' heightened awareness of other-than-human relationality and expressions as well as their amplified potential for perception and action.

I aim to illustrate how Lispector constructs a formalism of apprehension through two pairs of competing forces: the erasure versus the re-emergence of Martim's individuality as a fugitive, and the imposing power of nature versus the subject's preoccupation with language and definition. Amidst the undecidedness of the female-dominated environment, Martim's quest for clear comprehension, which he regards as a sign of heroism or masculine agency, is

[173] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Fear* (Polity, 2006), p. 2.
[174] See Fabrício Lemos da Cosa and Mayara Ribeiro Guimarães, 'A experiência da animalidade em "A maçã no escuro", de Clarice Lispector, e em "Acenos e afagos", de João Gilberto Noll: um estudo comparativo', *Terra roxa e outras terras*, 42.1 (2022), pp. 83-95.
[175] The notion of distributed cognition accentuates the situatedness of the cognitive subject and describes cognitive processes as dispersed across or outsourced to the environment and intermingled interaction, functioning as a system or network. See N. Katherine Hayles, *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Non*conscious (The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

set against his fear of falling victim to linguistic certainty, which would lead to his conviction for a crime. His anxiety arises from both his confrontation with the loss of object in an unfamiliar environment and the process of individualisation. Drawing on Sianne Ngai's study on anxiety as an expectant feeling invoked in 'an outward propulsion or displacement',[176] I will analyse how futuristic affects in the novel generate a fantasy of projection that often involves othering and at the same time destabilise conventional ontological borders. I will therefore argue that Lispector speculates about an open future of humanity in which the animality and mechanicalness foregrounded in the novel are parts of the human subjectivity and that an individual's survival is premised on their recognition of the complex, rhizomatic connection with their environment.

## 1. Immersion and the Interspecies Dynamic

The epigraph of the novel, excerpted from *the Vedas* (the Upanishads) [177], highlights creation and becoming as two fundamental themes[178]: 'Criando todas as coisas, ele entrou em tudo. Entrando em todas as coisas, tornou-se o que tem forma e o que é informe [...]' (ME 7). Here, the idea of a creator as a bounded, stable entity is in crisis – creation is portrayed as a mutually constitutive process of participation and affiliation between the subject and objects of creation. By creating things, the subject enters the interrelation with them and thus becomes them. A subject thus takes multiple forms given that its borders with objects by which it is defined are

[176] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 210.
[177] The Upanishads is the 'collection of philosophical verses that conclude *the Vedas* and make up the main original philosophical commentary on Hindu scriptures'. See Simon Blackburn, Entry 'Upanishads', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (3 ed.) (Oxford University Press, 2016), n.d.<https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/display/10.1093/acref/9780198735304.001.0001/acref-9780198735304-e-3210>
[178] Signe Cohen notes the resonance of posthuman thoughts in Hinduism, where the foundational idea 'destabilizes the very idea of a permanent human identity and creates a particular affinity between humans and animals'. See Signe Cohen, 'A Posthuman Dharma: Enthiran 2.0', *Religion*, 13.10 (2022), p. 883.

no longer as steadfast or rigid as in the humanistic paradigm featuring self-contained, stable identity. This description exemplifies a posthuman vision of interdependence between human subject and other beings, and also instantiates Lispector's reflection upon the anthropocentric ontological system marked by the notion of an authoritative creator. Aligned with the epigraph, the protagonist of the novel, a creator and fugitive at the same time, cannot set himself apart from other beings in his fantasy of heroism but instead finds himself caught between the immersion into and emergence from his environment through which his subject is formed. I read Martim's attempt of creating a new form of existence as an act subjected to his enmeshment with the realities so that this creation can be seen as the processes of the subject's reconciliation with the environment.

Ulrik Schmidt defines ambience as 'the production of a distinctive *effect* characterized by an *intensification of the experience of being surrounded*'.[179] Configuring an 'undifferentiated, dehierarchized, and decentered' field,[180] the ambient effects accentuate different phenomenal qualities – the emphasis on the subject's embeddedness and interrelatedness in the surroundings on the one hand, the subject's exceptionality and location as the centre producing experience on the other hand. The notion of ambience sheds an interesting light on Lispector's formulation of Martim's ambivalent ontological disposition characterised by the state of apprehension. I will start my analysis of the subject's apprehension by probing the ambient experience of immersion foregrounded in the novel. This will involve a close reading of the first few pages, which are extremely rich in examples.

*A maçã no escuro* begins with a protracted unfolding of an affective intensity in the silent darkness. Martim is found in an ambiguous position as a subject: he is fast asleep in an

[179] Ulrik Schmidt, 'Ambience and Ubiquity', in *Throughout: Art and Culture Emerging with Ubiquitous Computing*, ed. by Ulrik Ekman (The MIT Press, 2013), pp. 175-87 (p. 176), italics in original.
[180] Schmidt, 'Ambience and Ubiquity', p. 177.

almost empty country hotel recovering from the exhaustion of his runaway, where the only other guests are a German man and his servant. The exuberant vegetation in the hotel garden merges with Martim's slumber in which he cannot be distinguished from a tree or a toad:

> Nada agora diferenciava o sono de Martim do lento jardim sem lua: quando um homem dormia tão no fundo passava a não ser mais do que aquela árvore de pé ou o pulo do sapo no escuro. Algumas árvores haviam ali crescido com enraizado vagar até atingir o alto das próprias copas e o limite de seu destino. Outras já haviam saído da terra em bruscos tufos. (ME 11)

This non-anthropocentric portrayal in the opening scene reveals what I understand as an apprehensive state of the individual: a tension between anxiety about the capacity for comprehension and the perception of impending danger tied to a specific individual identity. On the one hand, the proliferation of plants seems to form a fortress that envelops the fugitive in a peaceful, secluded space: the tangle of vegetation dissimulates the symmetry and order as signs of human intervention so that the garden becomes part of nature. Even the Ford car, the only mentioned machine, is entwined within the garden, blending into its environment as it has been parked there for an extended period. On the other hand, the subversive spatial expansion of plants may suggest the instability of Martim's temporary shelter as he is exposed to the wilderness that absorbs the traces of human activity. I argue that Lispector attempts to construct an elusive poetics of apprehension through creating an immersive, non-anthropocentric narrative form characterised by the profuse presence of natural elements.

Steeped in darkness, the whole environment surrounding the hotel is delineated through sensuous rather than topological descriptions: '[…] os grilos vibrando ocos e duros deixavam a extensão inteiramente aberta, sem uma sombra. Enquanto o cheiro era o seco cheiro de pedra exasperada que o dia tem no campo' (ME 12). Through the description of a sonic and olfactory ambiance in favour of the other-than-human elements, i.e. the sound of crickets and the smell

of stones, the author invites the reader to an immersive space that is no longer observed by an individual human-being. Martim finds his retreat in his attunement to the darkness where his sensual experience is distributed among the visually indiscernible entities. He is comfortably enveloped in an affective atmosphere of tranquillity produced by the assemblage of material agency. The nonhuman vital forces overshadowing traces of human engagement offer Martim a sense of safety: 'Mas apesar da indiferença aparente dos dois homens a obstinada procura de segurança de Martim se ancorara naquele carro sobre o qual também as aranhas, tranquilizadas pela imobilidade envernizada, haviam executado o aéreo trabalho ideal' (ME 14). The spider's web-weaving displays the immobility of the car – the only means of transportation that will potentially disrupt the space of isolation and containment.

Like what Jonathon Dovey and other scholars have stressed in their studies of the notion of ambience in literary representation, Lispector's portrayal of Martim's sensory immersion does not only produce a homogenising 'comforting wraparound environment[t]' or erase linguistic significance.[181] The ambient depiction of the dark rather accentuates a 'particular for[m] of attention' in response to an experience of 'enmeshed systems beyond [one's] understanding'.[182] Lispector further displays the complexity of Martim's mode of perceptibility in the dark by introducing the sound of the motor of the car that intrudes into the usual sonic environment. This human created noise intersects and merges with the soundscape of nature. Rather than being startled, Martim sinks into sleep again, accepting the sound of the motor as part of the ambiance of security: 'Foi nessa noite que, atingindo o hotel vazio e adormecido, o motor do carro se sacudiu. […] Em vez de acordar e diretamente ouvir, foi através de um sono ainda mais profundo que Martim passou para o outro lado da escuridão e ouviu o ruído que as

[181] Jonathan Dovey, Tom Abba and Kate Pullinger, 'Introduction', in *Ambient Literature: Towards a New Poetics of Situated Writing and Reading Practices*, ed. by Tom Abba, Jonathan Dovey and Kate Pulling (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 1-26 (p. 17).
[182] Dovey, Abba and Pullinger, 'Introduction', in *Ambient Literature*, p. 17.

rodas fizeram cuspindo areia seca' (ME 12). Sleep, darkness and the act of hearing seem to demonstrate an immersive exposure whereby an individual's communicative power with its environment is enhanced. Martim is comfortably echoing and recalibrated to his surrounding soundscape – he absorbs involuntarily the vibration of the motor and his name spoken by the German, who is later revealed to be a potential threat, as a pleasant collection of sounds rather than clear signs of alert:

> Depois seu nome foi pronunciado, destacado e limpo, de algum modo agradável de se ouvir. Era o alemão quem falara. No sono Martim fruiu o som do próprio nome. [...]Até que, sem nenhum sentido e livre do incômodo de precisar ser compreendido, o ruído do carro se refez na sua memória com as minúcias mais finamente discriminadas. [...] Continuou deitado, remotamente gozando. (ME 13)

Relying solely on his aural sense, Martim enjoys the unguarded recumbency and freedom from comprehension, both as signs of a scattered and diffused attention and erasure of the affirmative, distinctive human agential mode. These signs are contrasted with the wakefulness and rationality associated with the sense of sight. Marilia Librandi observes the explicit aural dimension in Lispector's novels and its 'relation to the non-human world'.[183] Building upon Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of listening as an 'extra-semantic' gesture that 'represents an escape from the dominance of language and signification', Librandi highlights the listening body as 'a resonant chamber' transcending 'the subject-object distinction' and the 'intentional line of sight'.[184] Though I am inclined to interpret Martim's attention to aural sense as a result of incomprehension, rather than an intentional escape, this reading of the act of listening helps illustrate Martim's placement in the sonic environment. As Nancy proposes the 'possibility of

[183] Marilia Librandi, *Writing by Ear: Clarice Lispector and the Aural Novel* (University of Toronto Press, 2019), p. 21.
[184] Librandi, *Writing by Ear*, pp. 13-14.

resonance' in listening that entails the 'transcendental condition of signification',[185] Martim is inadvertently in resonance with sounds, which suggests a mode of experience not entirely reducible to semantics. In lieu of a signified menace, the sound of the wheels indicative of the Ford's movement is reconstructed by him as an inexplicable source of pleasure: 'Largado de costas na cama, tentou num esforço de prazer gratuito reconstruir o ruído das rodas, pois enquanto não sentia dor era de um modo geral prazer que ele sentia' (ME 14). Here, the meaning produced by the sound of the wheels is enmeshed within a manifold of natural sounds unfamiliar to Martim, eluding his grasp. As he blends into mutually intersecting human and nonhuman created soundscapes, he continues to believe that silence remains intact.

Martim contentedly withdraws from his position as the visual focaliser on the hotel balcony, the only site from which the garden is 'contemplável', 'compreensível e simétrico' (ME 12). In this non-hierarchical, non-logocentric spatial rendering, voice and language conflate with the notion of sound as material affects, given that their functions in the semantic system are greatly diluted. Hence, the suspension of intentionality and loss of specific object in the act of hearing suggest that Martim no longer assumes the role of the interpreter of meaning. His perception of silence is linked to that of his boundaries as an individual subject: 'Martim percebeu o silêncio e dentro do silêncio a sua própria presença. Agora, através de uma incompreensão muito familiar, o homem começou enfim a ser indistintamente ele mesmo' (ME 15). Like what Marie-Laure Ryan points out as the 'semiotic blindness caused by immersion',[186] whilst becoming indistinguishable from what he perceives as complete silence, Martim is detached from the habitual semiotic system, a referential tool for intellectual grasp that constitutes his humanist identity, that is, a stable narrative structured by socio-cultural

[185] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. by Charlotte Mandell (Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 32.
[186] Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as virtual reality 2: Revisiting Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), p. 6.

convention. The intelligibility of Martim's individual identity only exists in the socio-linguistic relational web in which he is trapped.

I am exploring Lispector's idea of individuation, because she presents Martim's individuality as inherently unstable and evolving – he is continually caught in dynamic events of emerging from the ambience of the wilderness. Greg Ellermann summarises the notion of apprehension in the philosophy of romantic idealism as an 'appropriative consciousness' – a mental activity that grasps nature,[187] linking individual cognition with ecology. The unfinished, processual nature of Martim's subjectivity corresponds to his constant state of apprehension – his unceasing engagement with natural environment as he strives for absolute understanding of what he perceives as external realities. Martim's individuation unfolds through his shifting focus on different modes of sensory perception, which produce varied forms of interaction with his environment.

Lispector contrasts Martim's aural receptivity with his vision, through which his attentiveness and reasoning are regained: 'A cara enluarada do homem se dirigiu então para a alameda onde o Ford estaria imóvel. Mas o carro desaparecera. O corpo inteiro do homem subitamente despertou. Num relance astuto seus olhos percorreram a escuridão toda do jardim [...]' (ME 15). Martim's clear visual perception is juxtaposed with the scene of his face lit up by the moon which alludes to both his exposure and his momentary emergence of lucid reasoning – as the only human-being conspicuous in the darkness, he is now completely conscious of the signifying link between the disappearance of the car and the potential danger awaiting him: the German may have gone to turn him in. In order to ward off this fear, he shies away from reasoning and maintains his obscure positionality:

[187] Greg Ellermann, *Thought's Wilderness: Romanticism and the Apprehension of Nature* (Stanford University Press, 2023), p. 4.

> E findo o raciocínio, ao qual chegara com a maleabilidade com que um invertebrado se torna menor para deslizar, Martim mergulhou de novo na mesma ausência anterior de razões e na mesma obtusa imparcialidade, como se nada tivesse a ver consigo mesmo, e a espécie se encarregasse dele. (ME 16-17)

Martim spontaneously enters the shared physical condition of an invertebrate, with the agility and malleability of the body in contrast to a stiff and bounded one. This plasticity indicates that the bestiality belongs inherently to human-beings and constitutes a seamless extension beyond the limits of reasoning. Martim obtains the appealing obtuseness and neutrality and takes comfort in the bodily solidarity with nonhuman species. In this way, he embarks on another escape, navigating through the fleeting transition between light and shadow. The chiaroscuro underscored in the first chapter encapsulates the state of apprehension that propels Martim's fugitive journey and foreshadows the novel's whole trajectory.

As Martim flees the hotel and becomes further exposed to the dark and unfamiliar environment, he incorporates a more creaturely disposition. By portraying Martim's experience of coalescing into the wilderness, Lispector demonstrates her reflection upon animality as a confluence of an unconscious inclination and an acquired skill. Martim's abasement and identification with a rabbit's defencelessness seems to manifest animality as a negative, ambiguous capacity exercised by individuals, which contributes to undermining a self-contained, coherent human subject:

> Sabiamente levando em conta a própria limitação que o tornava mais indefeso que um coelho, ele então esperou de cabeça erguida como se uma atitude de isenção o tornasse invisível. […] Mas em duas semanas aprendera como é que um ser não pensa e não se mexe e no entanto está todo ali. (ME 21)

Similar to the previous analogy between Martim and an invertebrate, his feelings of anxiety and fear give way to a hollowness due to the absence of interest. In this way, he merges with the environment of the same emptiness that harbours him and thus recedes into invisibility.

While he realises the possibility of an inanimate, creaturely existence of himself, his intellectual collapse as a sign of self-estrangement questions the limits of humanism. Erica L. Johnson proposes that posthumanism in literature manifests an alternative to reading fictional character primarily through the lenses of 'agency, oppression, or resistance'.[188] These aspects hinge on the shaky assumption that 'individual subject *can* assert agency over others or have their own agency undermined by others'.[189] Here, Martim's condition of 'ser indistintamente ele mesmo' can be read as a process in which his 'status as an individual subject fades into a more rhizomatic mode of being in which [his] own consciousness often escapes [him]' – as in Johnson's depiction of a posthuman condition where the human subject is 'networked into' the environment.[190] Considering this on the consistent plane without ontological hierarchy that Martim inhabits, I regard his bestial condition not as indicative of a downgrade in or resistance of humanity but a site of resolution of fear and anxiety vis-à-vis the problematic belief in human dominion over nature. Martim's flight into the desert, or what is described as a deserted sea ('um mar deserto'), constitutes an act of deterritorialisation through which he enters 'a horizonless milieu that is a smooth space' (ATP 379). There he becomes an innocent child free from the conviction of crime, confronting the vast desert expanding beyond his sight in all directions that he cannot make much sense of: 'Estonteado, de boca aberta, aquele homem estava infantilmente sentado no meio de uma extensão deserta que se perdia de vista para todos os lados' (ME 21). He extends his bodily capacities that enhance his coexistence with the unfathomable environment.

Foregrounding Martim's sensual experience with the unfamiliar space while obscuring its topological details, Lispector's representation facilitates an imagination of a world where

[188] Erica L. Johnson, '"Upholstered Ghosts": Jean Rhys's Postman Imaginary', in *Jean Rhys: Twenty-First-Century Approaches*, ed. by Erica L. Johnson and Patricia Moran (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 209-27 (p. 224).
[189] Johnson, 'Upholstered Ghosts', p. 224, italics in original.
[190] Johnson, 'Upholstered Ghosts', p. 224.

the human character remains far from assuming an omniscient state, and thus enhances the readerly immersion into the setting. In his escape, Martim frequently abandons his vision, employing only olfactory and tactile senses – he makes his way towards the direction where he can vaguely smell the fine air while feeling his feet stepping on the earth. Derek Ryan reads the 'emphasis on vagueness' associated with the 'failure of sight' as a sign of 'awareness of epistemological and ontological uncertainty'.[191] This observation helps us interpret Martim's unstable positionality as he is permeated and shaped by the physical environment:

> À medida que caminhava o homem sentia nas narinas aquela aguda falta de cheiro que é peculiar a um ar muito puro e que se mantém distinta de qualquer outra fragrância que também se possa sentir – e isso o guiava como se seu único destino fosse encontrar-se com o mais fino do fundo do ar. Mas seus pés tinham a milenar desconfiança da possibilidade de pisar em alguma coisa que se mova – os pés apalpavam a moleza suspeita daquilo que aproveita a escuridão para existir. Pelos pés ele entrou em contato com esse modo de ceder e poder ser moldado que é por onde se entra no pior da noite: na sua permissão. (ME 18)

Martim is manipulated by the amorphous darkness which, with a spectre-like agency, destabilises the boundary between his body and the objects with which he interacts. The softness and precariousness of earth that his feet sense elicit his fear as if the solid ground as a definite anchor and orientation device is on the verge of vanishing. Surrendering to the uncertainty, Martim embraces the inclusiveness and permissiveness of the night in which his body extends and is moulded into the mutant ambience. In this way, he is able to sleep on the ground as a sign indicative of a temporary inhabitancy and liveability. In exhaustion and numbness, he soon returns to the state of recumbency and his alertness as well as the ability of reasoning are greatly undermined by the pressing darkness: 'Já não mais atiçado pelo perigo, desaparecera a sagacidade que lhe seria agora apenas um entrave' (ME 19). He loses the

[191] Derek Ryan, *Bloomsbury, Beasts and British Modernist Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), p. 135.

specific objective of the escape and the anticipation of an imminent danger is dissipated. Meanwhile, the constraints associated with visuality and with the angst for apprehending his condition are relinquished – he tenuously communicates with the powerful environment through limited haptic perception, immersed in an ungraspable affective network: 'Tomava um cuidado impessoal consigo mesmo como se fosse um embrulho' (ME 19).

Martim perceives himself as an 'embrulho', a noun that refers figuratively to complication and confusion – he ceases to be a clearly demarcated individual, becoming instead a vague bundle of nonhuman elements and entanglement in the atmosphere of uncertainty. As the darkness defamiliarises Martim's perception of his relationship with the environment, his sense of self-assurance and conviction crumbles. Attending to the nonhuman elements such as the wind and stones that reveal to him the incomprehensible law of nature, he recognises his defencelessness in the face of the eerie desert. By dismantling the organism of his human body and nullifying his senses as referential tools, he strives to meld with the immense harmony of the desert so that he appears to be pure and innocent: 'Aquele homem ali em pé não percebia que lei comandava o vento áspero e o faiscar silencioso das pedras. Mas ter deposto as armas de homem entregava-o sem defesa à harmonia imensa do descampado. Também ele puro, harmonioso, e também ele sem sentido' (ME 52). Martim's gesture of attuning himself to the environment reminds the reader of animal mimicry, an instinctual, adaptive posture shaped by evolutionary processes, which showcases his resemblance with the organism of other species.

Donna Haraway proposes that the 'eyes have been used to signify a perverse capacity […] to distance the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power'.[192] This idea relates vision to individuals' obsession with their domination

[192] Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14. 3 (1988), pp. 575–99 (p. 581).

and authority and an assumption of human rationality as the exceptional channel to objective knowledge. In the novel, the trope of abandoning vision helps to restore the subject's entanglement with the world they perceive and the situatedness of knowledge itself. While Martim gropes for the basic assurance as if in blindness, his haptic communication with the surroundings suggests the lack of intelligible motive: 'Mas numa desconfiança sem motivo inteligível ele aparentemente achou mais prudente comunicar-se com a situação através do tato' (ME 20). As a vaguely configured bundle, Martim is enmeshed in an extended network of other-than-human elements by means of touching, relying on a cluster of senses. In this portrayal, whether Martim can be regarded as an individual fully responsible for his action becomes questionable. Situated in a porous assemblage of actions, he denies his free will and regards his deed as an involuntary vital movement determined by an organism within which he recognises himself: 'Seu crime fora um movimento vital involuntário como o reflexo do joelho à pancada: todo o organismo se reunira para que a perna, de súbito incoercível, tivesse dado o pontapé' (ME 37). In agreement with Karen M. Barad's emphasis on the intra-constitution of existence, Martim perceives his crime as a consequence of a confederacy rather than of his individual agency – his action is intra-connected within other actions in an immense context like a bundle without his clear motivation. In this way, the narrative about his crime is deconstructed given that his behaviour is subjected to a set of unavoidable circumstances that unfolds itself before him: 'O que lhe escapou era se explicara desse modo seu crime porque assim realmente acontecera – ou se porque todo ele estava pronto para esse tipo de realidade' (ME 41). Martim's act of crime thus slips into the indiscernible gap between his involuntary involvement in and epistemic control over an ensemble of reality. Lispector conveys this idea of individuals' assembled actions through the plot of Martim's crime, which highlights his lack of control leading to violent acts and the constant fear of discovery, rather than representing emotions like guilt or regret over a specific consequence of his action. However, this

interpretation of the individual's entangled may also be considered as a way of denying one's responsibility, which shows the limitations of the non-anthropocentric perspective.

Two weeks after his escape, he reflects on his crime and refers to it as '[o] grande pulo' whereby 'ele se arriscara a não ter nenhuma garantia, e passara a não compreender' (ME 36). This juxtaposition of the sense of insecurity and the inability for comprehension indicates his anxiety over humiliation due to the lack of stability and certitude. The unmooring force of anxiety blurs Martim's motives so that he eschews the crime as the object of his fear: 'A verdade é que o homem com sabedoria abolira os motivos. E abolira o próprio crime' (ME 37). Martim's fear of criminal conviction is parallel to his daily dread of fully committing to the articulate truth of the real happening that imposes itself on him. While the horror related to the notion of crime is what the language expects of him ('o que a linguagem esperaria dele'), his incomprehension becomes a kind of creation ('criação') that generates the potential of disruptive forces (ME 36-37). Using the expressions 'crime' and 'o grande pulo' interchangeably, Martim understands his act as a subversive gesture in resistance to the established system of significance and the law of judgement representing the authority.

By giving up the sight which would offer him a more stable image of his surroundings as well as relinquishing the linguistic capacity as a means of resisting the precise verdict or assertion, Martim also refuses to consider his act to be a crime but rather he himself becomes the victim of words of certitude that constitute a prison: 'Em algum ponto não identificável, aquele homem ficara preso num círculo de palavras' (ME 47). Here, the author problematises the adequacy of language in articulating one's legal identity: 'Mas "crime?" A palavra ressoou vazio no descampado, e também a voz da palavra não era sua' (ME 36). The desert as a deterritorialised space devoid of language, motivation and direction seems to be exempted from the demand of significance in which the notion of crime can be recognised. Martim's escape is juxtaposed with the loss of linguistic capacity which suggests the suspension of the customary

moral sensibility and the legal judgement: 'Porque depois de duas semanas de silêncio, eis que ele muito naturalmente passara a chamar seu crime de "ato"' (ME 38).

Traversing this smooth milieu where '[q]ualquer direção era a mesma rota vazia e iluminada, e ele não sabia que caminho significaria avançar ou retroceder' (ME 23), Martim forsakes his identity as a suspect at large and cheerfully embraces an adventure: 'Nada o impedia de transformar a fuga numa grande viagem, e estava disposto a fruí-la' (ME 27). Deleuze and Guattari propose the concept of the nomadic existence which, in contrast to a migrant who 'leaves behind a milieu' out of necessity, refers to a state of displacement without implicating a sense of departure (ATP 381). This notion sheds light on Martim's wandering in the desert which continuously mobilises him without leading to a fixed destination, as he realises that 'tudo o que tivesse feito até agora na vida diária não tivesse sido senão ensaio indistinto para a ação' (ME 38). Every act of Martim constitutes a movement of deterritorialisation that destabilises the former referential system he is used to and produces curious forms of connection: 'Na verdade, nesse instante, sua única ligação direta com o crime concreto foi um pensamento de extrema curiosidade: '"como é que isso pôde acontecer a mim?" Sentia-se inferior aos acontecimentos que ele criara com o crime' (ME 42). New possibilities emerge in terms of interpreting Martim's association with the crime as a concrete event. His sense of danger is dispelled in the consistent extension of the desert sweeping up all the stratification: 'Então o homem desfez a tensão do corpo: não havia perigo. Tratava-se de uma extensão tranquila e leal, toda à superfície de si mesma. E sem nenhuma armadilha […]' (ME 22). Martim's bodily extension in the desert denotes that he no longer seeks to escape the fear that has an identifiable object – his crime – but instead finds himself in apprehension: the futuristic affect of anxiety dissolves the articulate and fully registered emotions, sustaining his hopeful state of invention fuelled by uncertainty.

In addition to Martim's resistance to categorisation and moral judgement of his act, his experience of non-visual and non-verbal immersion implies the fact that sight and language may hinder relational affects from flowing freely. Later in the novel, Martim works on the farm, doing his chores in the cowshed: 'A névoa evolava-se dos bichos e os envolvia lenta […] como se daquele enleio informe fosse aos poucos se aprontando concreta mais uma forma' (ME 105). Enveloped in the mist composed of animals' breath, Martim recognises that his own breath is indistinguishable from that from animals' snouts. His liminal position among the cows demonstrates his potential for an empathy towards animals that arises from the recognition of his own vulnerability. While he perceives the vague threshold ('vago liminar') between cows and himself marked by the disgusting filth in the cowshed which makes his contact with them challenging, another mode of his life emerges from this interspecies bonding. He takes a particular interest in cows' ability to detect him as a stranger without looking at him: 'com aquela falta de necessidade de ver para saber que os animais têm, como se já tivessem atravessado a infinita extensão da própria subjetividade a ponto de alcançarem o outro lado' (ME 107). He recognises cows' superiority in sensing through attending to the affective language among them. Martim explores the possibility of participating in the cows' community through an imitation by withdrawing his vision:

> Num suspiro resignado, pareceu ao homem lento que "não olhar" também seria o seu único modo de entrar em contato com os bichos. Imitando vacas, um mimetismo quase calculado, ele ali em pé não olhou para parte alguma, tentando ele também dispensar a visão direta. [...] Depois, por um altruísmo de identificação, foi que ele quase tomou a forma de um dos bichos. (ME 107)

Through his physical mimicry, Martim falls into an immersive attunement to the cows' society as well as their signifying system. He manages his communication with cows by modifying his acting and ways of perception:

> Sem que um olhar fosse trocado, aguentou de dentes apertados que as vacas o conhecessem intoleravelmente devagar como se mãos percorressem o seu segredo. Foi com mal-estar que sentiu as vacas escolhendo nele apenas a parte delas que havia nele; assim como um ladrão veria nele a parte que ele, Martim, tinha de avidez de roubo […] (ME 107)

Appreciating the part of cows' subjectivity that exceeds human faculty, Martim imitates their behaviours in order to be recognised by them. Nevertheless, the cows, recognising only this partial likeness, reject his admission to their herd in their own way that is also understood by Martim: 'seguido de um mugido longo de cabeça pesada erguida para o alto: repudiando-o' (ME 108). Here, the cows are depicted as sentient beings equipped with their own individual awareness. They are capable of interpreting confusing information and of subjective decision-making. Martim's tendency of becoming a cow, or better, of becoming a modified man, enables him to inhabit the differential threshold between himself and other beings. This interspecies interaction disrupts 'the settled categories of nature' through 'a mutual enactment of difference in motion'.[193] Martim does not cease to be a human but modifies his relationship with his surroundings – he perceives not only the potential relationality as a condition for his survival but also the impossibility of assuming a status of complete sovereignty considering the dysfunction of the pre-conceived categorical division of species.

Martim's momentary engagement with other-than-human communication alongside his acknowledgement of his vulnerability marks a significant shift in the novel's ambiguous representation of merging with otherness. His interaction with cows demonstrates an event of mutual othering in which cows take co-responsibility and implement codetermination. In this sense, Lispector portrays beastliness not as a state that Martim can achieve through his autonomous choice or by simply eradicating his personhood and differences from cows. From

[193] Brian Massumi, *Couplets: Travels in Speculative Pragmatism* (Duke University Press, 2021), p. 80.

his unsuccessful attempt to create alliances with domesticated animals, the protagonist learns that his abandonment of humancentric arrogance does not necessarily lead to acceptance from his animal others whose affective response expands beyond the scope of human beings as in their normative cultural definition.

While Martim's communication with cows manifests a constructive gesture that brings about a revelation of his self-centred misunderstanding of animals as passive beings, over whom he would either exert dominant power through violence or with whom he would forge a coalition simply by suspending his individual agency. The process of trying to become cow shows an interspecies empathy that figures a partial perception of the other's experience without getting a direct access to it or erasing the difference. This empathy is achieved not through Martim's subjective choice but an immersion as a condition that accentuates affective participation rather than individuals' clearly bounded intention. Nevertheless, Lispector does not offer the reader a consistent and hopeful picture of human-animal coexistence and harmony. Martim defers his anxiety through immersion which signals a posthuman openness to the other-than-human network, yet this posthuman subjectivity he momentarily manifests is far from stable. The author leaves us with concerns about Martim's confinement to a humancentric cultural power structure, which becomes salient at other key moments charting his manoeuvre of projection as another solution for his anxiety. I will discuss projection as a central issue in the following section.

## 2. Anxiety and Projection

So far, I have discussed the way in which Martim eschews language and senses while being situated in an unfamiliar nonhuman realm bereft of the conventional appraisal and moral judgement of his acts based on the system of significance. By employing sensuous faculties,

he immerses himself in a world of enchantment and perceives the unsettled boundary between himself and the surroundings as well as the limit of his cognitive comprehension. In the encompassing darkness that proffers a sense of vagueness, Martim wavers between the self-contentment of succumbing to the unknown and the inability to apprehend his condition. Navigating the desert without temporal or spatial signposting, Martim decides that he is on his first Sunday, with what is described as arrogance of a creator. Meanwhile, he is stirred by uneasiness confronting his impassive animal soul ('a vasta alma intocada de um animal') (ME 34). This section will further examine how the protagonist's state of apprehension is sustained by futuristic affects of anxiety and will explore the link between apprehension and the author's renderings of interspecies communion.

In order to better understand Martim's apprehensive state in the novel, I find it helpful to introduce here A. J. Nickerson's study on Thomas Hardy. Through her analysis of Hardy's notion of apprehension, Nickerson interprets it as an individual's preoccupation with 'the mind's work of perception'.[194] She emphasises 'the mind's processes of perception, its origin in sensuous encounter' and the 'wariness of articulating in spoken language the things that might be known or known of in poetry' as the 'dominant themes' associated with Hardy's 'enquiry into the nature of poetic apprehension'.[195] Nickerson's definition of apprehension emphasises the individual's cognitive effort in confronting the epistemological uncertainty and the challenges of linguistic articulation. In *A maçã no escuro*, however, Martim's apprehensive condition extends beyond an active poetic grasping as proposed by Nickerson. The ambivalence of apprehension is depicted through the tension between an anticipatory dread of his doom and an anguish surrounding the failure of articulating the sensuous and imaginative

[194] A.J. Nickerson, 'Hardy's Apprehensions', *Criticism* (67. 3), pp. 272-89 (p. 273).
[195] Nickerson, 'Hardy's Apprehensions', p. 275.

experience to which he is exposed. I read Martim's anxiety constituting apprehension as a future-oriented affect correlated with and contributing to the ambience of uncertainty.

In search for security and liberation from the legal identity as a suspect, Martim gradually blends into the nonhuman realm. The early twentieth-century biologist Jakob Johann von Uexküll proposes that every species is the subject of the environment it inhabits, and that this world is made up of 'subjective perception signs'.[196] He defines this subjective reality as Umwelt which accentuates his observation that there is 'no space independent of subjects'.[197] Aligned with von Uexküll's view, Martim comes to the realisation of the nonhuman subjectivity through a navigation of the wilderness. Rather than being able to stay detached from interaction and communication, Martim often finds his anxiety intensified in moments of impinging on other beings' Umwelten that are unintelligible to him. Jean-Christophe Bailly interprets von Uexküll's concept of Umwelt as 'the open network of possibilities around every body of behavior'.[198] This notion elucidates Martim's proximity to nonhuman entities that alters his mode of experience. He winds himself into such porous networks of actions so that his senses and behaviours intersect with those of other creatures: he is 'grosseira e esperta' like a rat (ME 38). his alertness is like that of a rabbit, etc. Martim's modes of being are thus made indistinguishable from the intricate assemblage of possibility in the smooth plane of the desert. In his nomadic rambling, the erosion of sovereignty converges with the loss of an articulate motive or objective.

Sianne Ngai examines the aesthetic constructs of what she names minor or negative feelings that, in contrast to grand passions in literary canon, lack 'a clearly defined object'.[199]

---

[196] Jakob Johann von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans: with, A Theory of Meaning,* trans. by Joseph D.O'Neill (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 70.
[197] von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, p. 70.
[198] Jean-Christophe Bailly, *The Animal Side*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Fordham University Press, 2011), p. 48.
[199] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, p. 13.

She reads minor feelings as 'anticathartic device of dilating the time in which any particular incident takes place'.[200] These unresolved feelings, often weaker in intensity, dampen the sense of suddenness in the plotline of a novel and 'promote a more ambient aesthetic' by accentuating 'uneventful moments'.[201] I have discussed the immersive narrative and the subject's confusing nonhuman bundle associated with the illegible agency and emotions in *A maçã no escuro*. In his deterritorialisation in the desert, Martim's socio-linguistically structured emotions, such as his guilt of crime and dread of punishment, are dissolved into diffuse, ambient affects. The ongoingness of Martim's anxiety constitutes a deferral of narrative progression and creates an unsettling futuristic aesthetics of indeterminacy that sits between the weakening of intentionality and the masculine quest for agency and knowability.

Søren Kierkegaard conceives of anxiety as a permanent condition of trying to understand one's possibility of freedom, which is a human ontological attribute 'not found in the beast'.[202] Humans would cease to bear the burden of their anxiety if they could become animals. Kierkegaard's description helps the reader interpret Martim's interactions with other human or nonhuman characters, over whom he assumes his advantage, as an attempt to unload his anguish. Rather than affirming Kierkegaard's characterisation of anxiety as rigidly confined to the realm of humans, Lispector delineates the unexpectedly sustained reproduction of anxiety as free-floating affects when Martim is confronted with the potential interrelation with the other-than-human environment. Drawing on Kierkegaard's idea that anxiety has no object in contrast to fear, Ngai regards anxiety as a form of minor feeling. Ngai observes the intersection between 'the issues of anxiety and projection' and highlights their 'future-orientedness'.[203] Inferring from the tradition of philosophy exemplified by Freud, Ngai also

[200] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, p. 13.
[201] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, p. 13.
[202] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, trans. by Reidar Thomte (Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 42.
[203] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, p. 209.

proposes that 'the privileging of anxiety as a key for interpreting the human condition is accompanied by its being secured as the distinctive – if not exclusive – emotional province of male intellectuals'.[204] Martim's anxiety figures in the first place a gender-specific affect which is often invoked in the sense of the void and indistinctiveness regarding his location amidst the other-than-human environment. Taking these contentions into account, I will examine how anxiety is projected onto a deterritorialised ambience and how this gesture of projection contributes to dispelling anxiety's cultural aura as being exclusive to masculine intellectual subjects.

I have analysed Martim's immersion in the nonhuman network, as seen in his perception of kinship with animals. This mode of immersion, however, does not lead to a stable position within the environment. The tension between immersion and emergence of his subjectivity suggests a rather nomadic existence. Rosi Braidotti reads philosophical nomadism as 'a spatial and temporal mode of enhancing a common life-space which the subject never masters nor possesses, but merely crosses, always in a pack, a group, or a cluster'[205]. Martim's entanglement within a more-than-human bundle signals his loss of mastery over the ambience: the immense, directionless desert enveloping Martim seems to be the spatial configuration of his lurking anxiety. In order to cancel out this space, he strives to regain a sense of clarity as a bounded subject through his interaction with the stones. Regarding the stones as inanimate objects that are intellectually inferior to him, Martim attempts to assert his human agency and supremacy by talking to them: 'Martim estava muito confiante porque, não sendo seu auditório mais inteligente que ele, ele se sentiu à vontade (ME 43)'. By externalising his anxious state, Martim converts his disoriented perplexity to the state of freedom, actively engaging with his chosen audience: 'Se agora falava é que não sabia para onde ia, nem sabia o que ia lhe acontecer,

[204] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, p. 213.
[205] Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, p. 123.

e isso o colocava no próprio coração da liberdade' (ME 44). He reclaims his moral authority by referring to his communion with the stones as a sermon: 'Com um ato de violência essa pessoa de quem estou falando matou um mundo abstrato e lhe deu sangue' (ME 43). His delivery of a sermon to the stones betrays his sanguinary ambition to establish his leadership through violence and to preside over a new world in which he feels absolved of his crime: '[…] mas também se livrara de uma certa piedade sufocadora pois ele agora já não era mais um culpado' (ME 43). By disassociating himself from the previous world that preserves the meanings of justice and moral obligations, he obtains freedom via projection, an act of displacing anxiety onto an external realm. Martim's sermon also shows an anxiety that takes the form of a knowledge-seeking urge: 'Sua própria falta de cultura sempre o encabulara, ele costumara fazer interminavelmente uma lista sempre renovada dos livros que pretendera ler mas sempre aparecia obra nova e isso o embaraçava [...]' (ME 44). The endless reading lists lay bare the male subject's encyclopaedic impulse. In the face of his audience that he considers less intelligent than him, Martim reveals his obsession with knowledge as a way of gaining intellectual authority and dominance.

Similar to his sermon to the stones, Martim's killing of a bird also serves as ritual to assert his subjectivity and mastery – another instance of anxiety-induced projection. Though he negates his crime and claims innocence, he replaces the previous act with another act of violence. This scene reminds the reader of Lispector's short story, 'O crime do professor de matemática' (1960), in which the male protagonist buries a dog as a substitute to pay for his crime of abandoning his own dog. Janine Tobeck reads this act as 'an effort to create an objective scene that redeems the damage done by [the protagonist's] crisis of subjectivity' and to atone by recovering his 'rational wholeness'.[206] For Martim, as he hollows out his

[206] Janine Tobeck, 'Crime and Commitment: Literary Engagement in Clarice Lispector's 'O crime do professor de matemática' and 'A quinta história'', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 49.1 (2012), pp. 187-207 (p. 191).

association with the crime he flees, he attempts to dispel his anxiety over the loss of reasoning and objective through a definitive gesture that affirms his agitated subjectivity: 'como se tivesse feito alguma coisa definitiva, o homem sóbrio e tranquilo ergueu-se da pedra' (ME 52). While in the short story, the math teacher's redemption is a calculated act, Martim's murder of the bird is driven by an involuntary somatic impulse, so that it fails to resolve the boundary confusion between a privileged status as a free, agential individual and that as surrendered to the affective projection of anxiety. His frenzied action of killing, described as a 'movimento frenético', akin to 'uma convulsão de cavalo' (ME 51), is reckless rather than controlled. Horses appear later in the novel where Martim perceives his state of affliction and instability through his interaction with them, accentuated in his loss of control on horseback as his sovereignty is threatened. Martim's beastly somatic reaction fails to prove his heroism, exposing his thwarted attempt to recuperate a stable masculine subjectivity through violence against nature and other-than-human beings.

When Martim arrives at the farm owned by Vitória, he introduces himself as an engineer, which there is a redundant role. Vitória agrees to hire him to work on her farm and lets him stay in the woodshed. In this new environment, Martim's profession as an engineer is free from its social and symbolic association with patriarchal power of knowledge, given that this title makes no difference to Vitória, his employer. Vitória comments: 'Mas o senhor é engenheiro, não me serve!' (ME 68). Martim exposes his body to his employer's observation: 'Vitória olhou-o como se examinasse profissionalmente um cavalo. O homem deixou-se impudicamente ser examinado. O que de repente chocou a mulher. Ela corou. Ali em pé, ele lhe pareceu indecentemente masculino como se esta fosse a sua única especialidade' (ME 67). Here, the alignment forged between beastliness of a horse and Martim's passivity under Vitória's inspection hinges on Vitória's perception of his body as homogenously masculine. This representation suggests that the characters are weaned on and inserted into the human-

fabricated symbolic set of references: Vitória's possession of power is bound up with violent homogenisation of the other, characterised by her arrogance of assuming her full understanding of Martim's specialty.

Peter Adkins observes in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* the portrayal of creatureliness as being 'framed in terms of relationality'.[207] Similarly, Lispector's draws an analogy between Vitória's gaze on Martim to that of a human to an animal, considering that Martim's meekness and obedience as a man constitute a striking sign of otherness to Vitória. Stemming from Hobbes's contention regarding 'the right of man over the beasts', Jacques Derrida stresses the systematic and hierarchical configuration in which 'the slave, the beast, the woman, the child' are inferior and subjected to their counterparts, i.e. 'master, king, husband, father' that are known as 'the sovereign'.[208] Vitória's blushed face of shame indicates her displaced desire arising from what she perceives as a forbidden erotic encounter regarding Martim's beastliness. Considering the Derridean intersection among patriarchy, anthropocentricism, as well as the master-and-slave hierarchy, Vitória's somatic experience displays the extent to which she is indoctrinated into this entrenched arrangement of relative structure and insinuates her uneasy relationship with the subjugated but more socially privileged hired hand that is caught between fascination and manipulation, as she blushed at his submission ('De novo ela corou com a submissão dele') (ME 69). Vitória's reaction, however, also shows her enjoyment of momentarily escaping this indoctrination of hierarchy.

Martim's subservience as well as his male body homogenised under Vitória's gaze cause confusion and discontinuity in the narrative regarding a human of masculine sex being

[207] Peter Adkins, *The Modernist Anthropocene: Nonhuman Life and Planetary Change in James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Djuna Barnes* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023), p. 100.
[208] Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume I*. trans. by Geoffrey Bennington (The University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 29-30.

representative of the sovereign. Martim's arrival and the consequential temporary inversion in gender and power dynamics impose a sense of uncertainty and incongruousness upon the otherwise unchanging, banal routine on the farm. Adkins interprets beastliness in literary representation 'as a mode that foregrounds an undecidability around the status of the human'.[209] Lispector's depiction of beastliness figures a set of relations characterised by their indeterminacy – Martim's unclear identity as an unruly criminal and the farm as his environment straddling both the domestic and the wild. Having provided these illustrations of the dynamic between creatureliness and anxiety in the novel, I will further examine the paradox of posthuman conditions in the following section.

## 3. The Human and the Anthropocene

Jack Halberstam defines wilderness as 'an affective space where temporality is uncertain, relation is improvised, and futurity is on hold'.[210] The farm, with its indeterminate temporal and spatial coordinates, operates as a system of contingent interrelations among human and nonhuman characters, exceeding Martim's comprehension or control, as he is only able to name things in his surrounding as a mere happening ('apenas acontecia'): 'É verdade que seus olhos custaram a entender aquela coisa que nada mais do que: acontecia. Que mal acontecia. Apenas acontecia' (ME 89). In this section, I will examine the individual's apprehensive state within the wilderness in relation to Lispector's anticipation of survival in the Anthropocene. The author's imagination of a non-anthropocentric perspective can be seen through Martim's fantasy about the Tertiary Period [era terciária], a term referring to a distant geological time,

[209] Adkins, *The Modernist Anthropocene*, p. 95.
[210] Jack Halberstam, *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* (Duke University Press, 2020), p. 126.

long before the appearance of humans, that involves significant evolutionary change across all forms of life:

> E num engano de que certamente precisou, um engano tão certo quanto a queda certa de uma maçã, ele teve um sentimento de encontro: pareceu-lhe que no grande silêncio ele estava sendo saudado por um terreno da era terciária, quando o mundo com suas madrugadas nada tinha a ver com uma pessoa; e quando, o que uma pessoa poderia fazer, era olhar. (ME 89)

Martim appropriates this geological term to denote the incomprehensible landscape as opposed to a historical, narrativisable context. By doing so, he equates his agential act of consciously conjuring up a vast spacetime devoid of humans or a locatable temporality with the certainty of an apple falling, which exemplifies the regularity of nature in the physical realm explored by humans. Both cases represent human beings' quest for interpretative agency while situating themselves in relation to the universe. Martim regards himself as the only human in the Tertiary Period whose role is reduced to a spectator. What he calls Tertiary territory is where the man-made order becomes intelligible and nature regains its ruling position: 'Certamente haviam alguma vez tentado estabelecer ali ordem inteligível. Até que a natureza, antes expulsa pelo plano de ordem, voltara sorrateiramente e lá se instalara. Mas em seus próprios termos' (ME 89-90). In this sense, he acknowledges the regulatory law of the wilderness in lieu of human manipulation. This idea contradicts his previous perception of the nearly abandoned plot of the farm that he called 'terreno terciário' as a territory of absolute freedom by which he enjoys his own dominance and exemption from ethical responsibilities. Carrie Rohman points out that the 'narcissistic framing of ethicality as embedded within human language capacities ignores the profound philosophical dynamics of the human relation to nonhuman others, especially to

nonhuman animals'.[211] Martim conceives of his relation to the wild as an outlaw's refusal of a world of legal and moral judgement. This idea indicates his embeddedness in the signifying system that associates the human with higher civilisation compared with the nonhuman other.

During the initial phase of Martim's flight, he regards the dispossession of human language as an efficient condition under which he is able to ward off his apprehension vis-à-vis both a foreboding of persecution and an urge for interpreting the new, unfamiliar circumstances. He considers wilderness, or the lack of human intervention, as the dominating feature of the farm and also a condition for his breaking away from moral convention and assuming the state of creatureliness, whereby he is 'enfim livre de todo um dever moral de ternura' (ME 103). Nonetheless, in his more or less successful communion with nonhuman elements in the desert and later on the farm, Martim obtains evolving and conflicted notions about freedom and agency. In the scene of killing a bird, he sees himself as an authoritative figure exerting his power upon the nonhuman other by his self-claimed legitimacy as a human being. As Halberstam restates Lisa Lowe's proposition that 'freedom is an ideological invention that ushers in new forms of exploitation',[212] Martim inflicts violence and oppression upon those he perceives as his subjugated others in his ambition to re-establish a systematic order of dominance. However, since he works and lives on the farm, there are moments when he conceives of freedom as an intelligible harmonious union with other species detached from finality ('não com uma finalidade mas harmoniosa'). He even gives up his manoeuvre of temporality and learns to 'contar com o amadurecimento do tempo' like cows: 'assim como as vacas disso vivem taticamente. Ele agora parecia entender que não se podia brutalizar o tempo' (ME 143).

[211] Carrie Rohman, *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 11.
[212] Halberstam, *Wild Things*, p. 140.

Halberstam's contention regarding the affective dimension of wilderness also intertwines the wild with anxiety, an expectant feeling devoid of a specific object. In light of what Ngai proposes as anxiety's 'dislocating and externalizing function',[213] the indecisiveness upon the farm can be read as a result of Martim's fantasy of an outward displacement of his anxiety onto the environment, especially through his subjective suspension or distortion of temporality in his conjuring of the Tertiary Period as well as his act of throwing off language in order to stay distanced from the discursive world.

Martim declares a new geological epoch in which he is the sole entity of agency. This symbolic gesture anticipates the notion of the Anthropocene, a period defined by the heightened impacts of human activities on the Earth system and humanity's further entangled condition within these changes. As Adkins proposes, the Anthropocene marks not the moment of 'humankind's predominance over the planet', but rather 'a turning point in how we think about the relationship between the human, the nonhuman and the planetary'.[214] In *A maçã no escuro*, Lispector depicts Martim's thwarted attempt to assert dominance over a seemingly inert natural environment, alongside indications of imposing droughts on the farm. The way she elicits ecological anxieties and prompts reflection upon the relationship between humans and nature aligns with the contemporary concerns about the humanity's crisis of survival.

Lispector, however, showcases her anticipation of the Anthropocene through a meandering revelation of affective tensions, highlighting the interplay between the human characters' projections onto and attunement to the environment. While working as a farmhand, Martim gets attuned to a new pattern of life. He surrenders to Vitória's mandates and engages in mechanical manual labours: 'Quando dormia, dormia. Quando trabalhava, trabalhava. Vitória mandava nele, ele mandava no próprio corpo' (ME 104). The nonverbal and thoughtless

[213] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, p. 222.
[214] Adkins, *The Modernist Anthropocene*, p. 2.

activity following a rigid, monotonous routine offers him a sense of stability that facilitates his resistance to the diffuse anxiety of disorientation that once paralysed him in the desert: 'Fizera-se um desgastamento de seus conhecimentos anteriores, e, quanto a palavras, ele meramente as conhecia como pessoa que tivesse uma vez adoecido delas. E se tivesse curado' (ME 120-21). With its healing and soothing effect as an antidote for anxiety, the self-contained mechanicalness displaces language's prominent role in Martim's knowledge formation. Disengaged from the semiotic system or the socio-cultural codification of mankind, Martim is all alone by the door of the woodshed, confronting the mystery of darkness:

> Martim estava muito surpreendido porque antigamente ele costumava saber de tudo. [...] Ele que havia crescido um homem claro, e ao redor dele tudo costumava ser visível. […] Mas agora, tirada das coisas a camada de palavras, agora que perdera a linguagem, estava enfim em pé na calma profundidade do mistério. Na porta do depósito, pois, revitalizado pela grande ignorância, permaneceu de pé no escuro. (ME 119-20).

While he ceases to be a linguistic being, he acquires an autonomous existence of other forms. Unshackled by his self-assertion endorsed by his past experience of grasping with clarity the world around him, Martim recognises his own ignorance that revitalises his curiosity about the obscured traces of reality in a broader network: 'Foi assim que a vida de Martim começou a ultrapassá-lo: os dias eram grandes, bonitos, e sua vida era muito maior que ele' (ME 120). Rather than striving to be a clear-minded interpreter, he is not constrained by any expectation or purpose of arriving at a conclusion but instead enjoys the freedom of observing and perceiving the surroundings. Similar to the moment of conjuring up the Tertiary Period, where he 'não antecipou nada: viu o que viu. Como se olhos não fossem feitos para concluir mas apenas para olhar' (ME 89), the future-oriented temporal structure of the expectation-induced anxiety is temporarily dispelled when Martim is engaged in manual labour. Here, Martim's optical capacity appears to differ from an active observation in search of an answer. Instead,

his vision, in this case, merges with other sensory organs, producing a rather passive ambient immersion.

Martim's appropriation of the non-anthropocentric wilderness as a means of resolving his anxiety as a human being displays his conviction of the separateness between human and nonhuman worlds. The ongoing interplay between blurring and reinstating his boundary as a subject converges with dynamics between dispensing with and reinforcing his anxiety exemplifying the mechanism of apprehension. The scene in the woodshed, an enclosed space Martim inhabits, illustrates how his apprehensive state lives on even when his existence is anchored in the farm. Gradually abdicating his linguistic clarity and physical agility that are no longer needed, he finds himself incapable of asserting his boundary with his ambience – 'Com um abrutamento que as vacilações do clarão nas paredes fazia gaguejar e tropeçar, respirou fundo o cheiro de couro molhado do depósito' (ME 87). Inhaling the odour of leather, he struggles against submergence into the woodshed ('sacudiu a cabeça com força lutando por não submergir') (ME 87). Martim's anxiety figuring a quest for interpretation and comprehension propels him to scrutinise everything around him with an extreme attention to details given his 'impressão ameaçadora de estar perdendo elos importantes' (ME 87). He notices a cardboard picture with the words 'S. Crispim and S. Crispiniano' written on it and soon observes the cultural reference of the two saints being tortured in the cauldron. This religious allusion to crime and persecution reminds him of the object from which he has been escaping and which gradually becomes clear throughout the novel, but in the end is less important than the personal transformation Martim has undergone. I have discussed the trope of vision as indicative of a subject's knowledge-pursuing interest. Here, putting on his glasses that strengthen his sight, Martim insistently examines the picture a trace of the world of the symbolic system which he is familiar with and now strives to reconnect himself with: 'Se aquele homem ainda se lembrava de como era o mundo – naquele quadro havia alguma coisa

a que ele certamente responderia se ainda fosse gente' (ME 88). Those arcane references have bothered him, haunting him with the menace of punishment, but he relies on his connection with the signifying system as a crucial evidence of his manhood.

By displacing his anxiety through externalisation, Martim projects his own anxiety onto the farm, affecting both Vitória and her cousin Ermelinda. As Martim's arrival at the farm disrupts the repetitiveness and steadiness of their habitual lives, and also brings about feelings of uncertainty, they become concerned about the future possibility and potential threats. Throughout the novel, Martim gets asked multiple times by both women about how long he will stay around, a question to which he refuses to give an explicit answer. For Vitória, a tacit bond is established between Martim and her which is 'já mecanizada e em pleno funcionamento' (ME 104). This relationship is strengthened by the reciprocity represented by Vitória's desire to command and Martim's acquiescence in obeyance in order to seek protection from her. Nevertheless, an atmosphere of anxiety begins to envelope Vitória, given that her satisfaction with power and possession brings to her an attachment to this seemingly routinised togetherness. Despite the fact that they appear to be at peace with each other, Martim is planning for his leave, while Vitória is inclined to preserve the pattern of their codependency. In light of her anticipation of Martim's imminent departure and her loss of control, Vitória becomes distressed without knowing the specific object of her intense yearning. Confronted with Martim, she becomes impatient, unaware of clear causes ('disse-lhe impaciente, com aquele piscar de olhos de quem já não sabia o que queria'), feeling that 'o tempo urgia' (ME 105). Vitória's anxiety is not contained in an object or a clear cause but attached to a potential dissolution of her 'happy severity' [a feliz severidade] as time passes. The nonarticulated tension haunting her is scattered around future time and expectation. Conscious of the indecisiveness he brings to the farm, Martim channels his anxiety into projection, which, according to Ngai, constitutes 'a way of recovering the subject's agency by propelling him up

and away from' the limbo of aimless oscillation.[215] Countervailing Vitória's dominance, Martim intentionally manipulates the 'temporal dynamics of deferral and anticipation' that Ngai highlights as a defining feature of anxiety[216]. Confronting Vitória's question of how much time he will remain on the farm, he utters 'Não sei' and carries on with his labour:

> Pareceu-lhe uma injúria aquele homem jogando com o tempo e trazendo dúvida ao correr mecânico dos dias, trazendo a estes uma liberdade assustadora como se a cada dia se pudesse de súbito dizer sim, ou não. Trazendo indecisão a ela que, se perguntada quanto tempo ficaria ali, responderia "não sei", significando tempo ilimitado fora de seu controle – e não, como para ele, tempo curto. (ME 113)

By deferring the resolution of Vitória's doubt, Martim directs her attention to an unconstrained future disposition. With an anticipation of time beyond her control, Vitória is not only propelled into but also suspended in an uneasy confusion and an insult of powerlessness contrasting the habitual mechanical precision of the routine she has presided over. Meanwhile, by destabilising Vitória's expectation of certainty and frustrating her conviction, Martim regains his reign over the disorientated space of impasse as his locus of anxiety. He reasserts his boundary from the mechanised symbiosis with Vitória as well as from the permeating ambience of stillness generated by his absorption in repetitive manual labours.

As for Ermelinda who falls in love with Martim, she asks him repetitively the same question as Vitória does ('Quanto tempo você fica?'), only to be tormented by a wrenching despair regarding the urgency of time itself: 'E quando ele disse que não sabia, de novo a pressa vazia e dolorosa a turbilhonou, o tempo era curto, o tempo era curto, ela não sabia para quê, só sabia que tinha que se apressar' (ME 116). Each time she asks him the question, she cherishes the hope to receive 'a resposta tranquilizadora', one that offers her the same sense of security

[215] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, p. 246.
[216] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, p. 210.

with which ‘uma mulher estabelece domínios para se instalar com filhos’ (ME 160). This analogy between Ermelinda’s obsessive love for Martim and a mother’s inclination to establish authority in the name of safeguarding her children suggests her problematic emotional dependency that is not unlike that between Vitória and Martim. Ermelinda’s ‘presença cada vez mais assediante’ around Martim implies her desire to actively possess him as her love object (ME 117). She disregards his autonomy provided that she only observes his passivity in doing farm work. However, by responding again with ‘Não sei’ almost like an automatic, mechanical reply without involving any emotion, Martim refuses to provide her with any promise of a future, leaving her in a chaos of inarticulate distress manifested in her involuntary bodily reaction: ‘De novo Ermelinda se assustou. E como se seu estremecimento se tivesse comunicado impalpável para Vitória, ambas mais ativas começaram a agir como se o tempo estivesse acabando’ (ME 160). Martim channels his anxiety and uncertainty into a perpetual suspense, transferring them onto the two women while continuing his engagement in farm work as a site of security and tranquillity. On the other hand, the unforeseeable future surfaces as a dread of loss for the cousins. Feeling that the time is pressing them forward, Vitória and Ermelinda both find themselves in active endeavours to shatter the interminable restless present that portends a diffuse form of agony. Vitória strengthens her surveillance over Martim’s trajectories and Ermelinda hastens her courtship. The author ironically juxtaposes the tension and disruption on the women’s side with Martim’s steadfast attitude and routine: ‘E Martim? Martim trabalhava – olhava e trabalhava, passando o mundo a limpo’ (ME 161). Martim feels safely secluded, refusing to acknowledge his entanglement with human bonds that for the cousins gradually stand out from the orderly daily pacing. In contrast to the openness and vulnerability he has demonstrated, the strategy of displacement and projection of anxiety converges with his attempt to consolidate his boundaries as an individual subject. While Martim acquires new qualities of subjectivity through his empathetic connection with

nonhuman beings, his inclination to avoid embracing these new registers, such as the ability to merge and evolve with unfamiliar otherness, highlights the constraining influence of the mutually validating codes of humancentric and patriarchal hierarchies. Lispector undoes the conceptual parameters of individual subjectivity by portraying the mode of sociality as an attunement in response to one's affective entanglement.

Taking anxiety as an example, Teresa Brennan posits in her study of affective transmission that the construction of a self-contained identity 'depends on projecting outside of [oneself] unwanted affects', a process that presupposes the subjugated other's acceptance of them.[217] This idea that links the transfer of anxiety to the constructed notion of a solid individual identity resonates with moments of interaction among Martim, Vitória and Ermelinda in the novel. Lispector creates a tension between anxiety as something instrumentalised by the subject and anxiety as a free-floating, general climate among human and nonhuman beings. This tension parallels the interplay between Martim's positions of immersion and emergence, which signals his shifting understanding of his relationship to the environment.

While still at Vitória's disposal, Martim is confident that he will overpower her since he believes that she has become a woman around him ('ela se tornara uma mulher') (ME 131); for Ermelinda, in spite of all her advances, Martim regards her as a complete outsider of the semantic system belonging to normal human beings, as he comments on her when she initiates conversations: 'É que você vive muito isolada e já não sabe mais o que se conta aos outros e o que não se conta' (ME 141). However, Lispector accentuates the similarity in their responses to uncertainty. Rather than sticking to her pattern of life, Vitória becomes sceptical and more alert to a sense of precariousness – she probes the real identity of Martim and becomes

[217] Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 12.

concerned about the drought due to a heightened awareness of the environmental change. After years of inhabiting the phantasmagorical space free from external social entanglement, she re-enters the realm of symbolic knowledge. She later exposes Martim, allying with a professor, a detective, and two policemen representative of the patriarchal, intellectual authorities in the discursive world. Vitória's alliance with the conventional social sphere disrupts the sense of security and predictability embodied by the life on the farm, exposing the fragility of the wilderness as an imagined refuge when confronted with the encroaching human-dominated world of established power structures that impose order, assert control and pass judgement. Martim regards the farm as both an idealised sub-human mode of inhabitancy that shields him from anxiety and as an environment of powerful autonomy and unknowability that expands his scope of communication and knowledge. However, Martim and Vitória's attachment to the humancentric world and values seems to undermine these two understandings, and this tension highlights the oxymoronic nature of the assumption of human-nonhuman division.

In his previous judgemental projections, Martim has not expected that the two women will pose any threat to his safety until he overhears Vitória talking to Francisco, another worker in the farm, about her plan to see a German man in the town, Vila Baixa. Martim immediately thinks of the German in the hotel and gets trapped in the dread as he anticipates himself being exposed by Vitória. He therefore resumes the state of uncertainty and insecurity over the loss of control and starts groping Vitória to comprehend her: 'ele não era capaz de prever. Por necessidade prática, então examinou-a pela primeira vez' (ME 149). His refilled anxiety prompts him to initiate a conversation with Vitória. As he asks Vitória when she is going to Vila, she replies with 'Não sei' mirroring Martim's previous response, which also leaves him in the contingency of immediate dangers. These similar conversations are enacted alternately among the three characters regarding the remaining time before the departure of one of them

as a marker of dissolution of a mechanised attachment. The convergence discloses a patterned affective organisation of anxiety across the three archetypical characters.

These anxiety-induced interactions signalled by the characters' oft-undifferentiated voices and reactions are protracted across the novel. Ermelinda, who embodies the symbolically feminine characteristics of being infantile and feebly sentimental, later assumes the state of agitation fuelled by the sudden influx of energy of anxiety. She helplessly surrenders herself to a malignant world, filled with risk and uneasiness, like taking an ultimate gamble ('última jogada') (ME 173). She shares a similar anxiety-induced existential condition to Martim as she is thrown into the situation 'que ela criara, sentindo-se sozinha e intensa' (ME 180). This analogy drawn to gambling constitutes a parallel to Martim's thrownness into projection as he regards his crime as the start of rebuilding his life after destruction: 'Pois olhou o vazio perfeito da claridade, e ocorreu-lhe a possibilidade estranha de jamais conseguir reconstruir. Mas se não conseguisse, não importava sequer. Ele tivera a coragem de jogar profundamente. Um homem um dia tinha que arriscar tudo' (ME 145).

Martim at times sees himself as distinct from the rest of the world, denying his situatedness in a relational web. Nevertheless, he is exposed and arrested at the end of the novel due to Vitória's suspicion and intervention – an outcome that confirms the symbolic fall suggested by the allegory of apple in third subheading. Ermelinda, however, realises that the love she longs for is interlocked in a relational dynamic propelled by a feverish insecurity as she anticipates that Martim will soon leave her: 'Assim, pois, Ermelinda só soube que o amava quando o homem deu um passo e ela pensou que ele estava indo embora' (ME 181). In her relationship with Martim, she manages to absorb 'a segurança do homem contra o campo' (ME 191), while Martim thinks of his own wife and his anxious attachment to the past. The webs of interdependencies among the characters and other elements are embodied by the forceful self-replenishment of anxiety that envelops them in one. In this sense, Lispector recasts anxiety not

as a marker of a subject's boundary or gender specificity, nor as an evidence of human exceptionality like in Kierkegaard's conception, but as a herd mentality featuring the trans-subjective process of becoming-with others. The male protagonist attempts to defer anxiety by engaging with otherness and assuming his superiority in power relations. Nevertheless, these processes of communion, embodied by affective contagion, situate anxiety as an all-encompassing mood of undecidability that serves as a reminder of creatureliness as integral to human subjects. Through such portrayal, Lispector collapses the distinctions among the archetypical figures that she formulates, and thus releases human subjectivity from exceptionality and authority. Lispector's representation of proliferating anxieties anticipates the prevailing mood of the Anthropocene, in which humans are compelled to dismantle patriarchal and anthropocentric power structures and to confront the threat of destruction brought about by their own violence rooted in these structures.

## Conclusion

This chapter proposed that Lispector portrays thwarted human drives for order, control and mastery as a site of apprehension, a foregrounded affective state throughout the novel. It examined how Lispector reveals through this state humans' ongoing questioning of their place in a world of referential knowledge and their entanglement with other beings in an amplified ecology. Through the ambient unfolding of the other-than-human environment, the author attempts to recuperate a non-anthropocentric perspective, from which the reader is able to imagine a posthuman subjectivity featuring less discernible boundaries of individuals and an impersonal free flowing of affects.

Martim's rejection of a definite, fixed legal identity and his need to grasp meaning and finality lead to a vacillation between immersion into and emergence from an environment of

material enmeshment driven by the futuristic affect of anxiety. By foregrounding Martim's situatedness in a porous assemblage of actions, Lispector suggests the inevitable implication for an individual's action and places one's moral responsibility in question. However, the author further complicates this contention by exhibiting Martim's inclination to reassert his authority and supremacy in the non-linguistic world which he conceives to be separated from the human realm. In this way, Lispector problematises Martim's conception of a heroic recreation of a world as an act of aestheticising his own violence and naturalising his manipulation over his sexual and nonhuman others through an appropriation of the undecisive ambience.

Lispector juxtaposes the aesthetics of apprehension with the representation of other-than-human realities. The way Martim creates sociality in the farm showcases the potential for understanding one's situatedness in a wider ambiance. Alongside the depiction of Martim's apprehension as contradicting, intertwined inclinations regarding his relative position in the environment, i.e. between the urge to assert oneself and pursue knowledge and clarity, and the tendency to negate one's boundaries and diffuse perspective, the author offers an unstable representation of natural environment and nonhuman beings. Animality as an ambivalent site challenges the ontology of a signified subject in a linguistically produced reality. For one thing, the depiction of Martim's interspecies encounter, often associated with negativity, self-debasement and the anxiety around the degree of agency, shows a pejorative view towards animals. At these moments, i.e. Martim retreats from his vulnerability by exerting cruelty towards others, the portrayal of animality reveals the human subject's tendency to deploy the other-than-human world as a background for validating their heroic narratives and affirming an exploitative relationship as prescribed by anthropocentric tradition.

For the other, despite Lispector's doubtful treatment of beastliness, the interspecies experience signals an encompassing process of immersive exposure in an extended material

and semiotic assemblage. Martim's recognition of animal subjectivity as not fully intelligible to him suggests the possibility of a posthuman condition of inhabiting the differential gap with mutual attunement. Perceiving the necessity to align their body to the environment, the posthuman subject is able to obtain an enhanced communicative power amidst the more-than-human world which reveals their undefined, unarticulated desires beyond the system of symbolic references.

Lispector constructs settings such as the desert and the farm, which are more deterritorialised in relation to social environments – spaces where the bonds with conventional referential system seem to be curtailed. Martim's attempt to seek shelter from these places with minimum signs of human intervention shows his fantasy of other-than-human domains as loci of harmony and stability for his own projection as a gesture of expelling his anxiety. While he avoids cultural designations to defer his legal judgement, he continues to weaponise religious and social systems to legitimise his supremacy and manipulation of his environment. His attachment to the anthropocentric power structure prevents him from sustaining his experiment of world-making from a posthuman perspective. In this respect, rather than celebrating a hopeful future of productive conviviality, Lispector conveys to the reader a disconcerting message about human-nonhuman relationship through the formulation of individuals' apprehension. While she represents the possibility of fostering a posthuman subject capable of perceiving its affectivity with other beings beyond a conventionally and rigidly defined human scope, this potential is disrupted by the human subject's adherence to patriarchal and anthropocentric values as practical knowledge to reconstruct a world of order.

# CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have explored the relationship between materiality and subjectivity that Clarice Lispector envisions and delineates in four of her early novels. I suggested in my introduction to this thesis that Lispector addresses subjectivity and materiality as two interlinked questions, articulated through the constant mediation of the liquid and the solid – a recurring pattern embedded in her representation of a range of individuals' capacities and experiences with their environment. I proposed that Lispector's grappling with this dynamism registers her deep concern with the human subject's relations to nonhuman beings and the physical realm. My main contention is that the intrinsic connection between matter, energy and affect highlighted in Lispector's fiction demonstrates her understanding of the human subject as an emergent phenomenon shared among material flows of intra-action that constitute the world.

I analysed these four novels in the light of contemporary theoretical debates regarding human-nonhuman relations. I suggested that bringing in theorists from the non-anthropocentric philosophical vein, such as Deleuze, Guattari and Massumi, is conducive to interpreting Lispector's strategies of decentring humans from the universe to highlight their contingent entanglement with other beings that shapes what humans are. I have proved that Lispector's awareness of interdependence of existences is embodied in the foregrounded presence of nonhuman elements and their assembled actions, through which she orients the reader to reconsider the notions of nature and ecology and to explore the potential modes of coexistence and survivable system during an era of significant change in environment and technologies.

Now I will summarise the main themes that governed my study over the four chapters, offering perspectives that address areas less explored in existing criticism. In the opening chapter on *Perto do coração selvagem*, I started my analysis of what Lispector understands as a human subject by comparing her philosophical scaffolding with the theorisation of the

ontology of the world and of the human by Spinoza and his readers such as Deleuze, Massumi and Barad. In doing so, I argued that Lispector portrays human subjects as bound to the unyielding order of nature, where their capacities for feeling, thinking and acting serve as modes of participation in world-constituting relational events governed by this regularity. Spinoza's notion that affects emerge from bodily interactions as modifications of a consistent substance plays a pivotal role in Lispector's conception of the material interconnectedness of the universe, where an entity's individuality consists in the relative states of affect. My proposition is that Lispector evokes this affective awareness of relationality throughout her early novels, challenging the tradition of human exceptionalism and prefiguring later theories of distributed, more-than-human agency. My interpretation thus facilitates an understanding of the continuities in philosophical texts regarding the concept of affect from the early modern to the contemporary period and offers an original intervention in this theoretical lineage: it diverges from the consensus of employing affect as a somatic experience contained within bodies, and highlights the space-constituting, unappropriated nature of affect.

Spinozan-Massumian affect, which underscores the preindividual phenomenon eluding subjectivity, is particularly instrumental in Chapters 2 and 3, where I questioned the extent to which human beings can be situated as individual agents vis-à-vis their affective tendency to pursue a sense of belonging. In Chapter 2 on *O lustre*, in order to highlight Lispector's understanding of the interplay between objects and energy, processes and entities, I examined how Lispector imagines the formation of the human subject through the incorporation of affects circulating within both human and nonhuman networks. Lispector focuses on the body to concretise how the subject organises forms of alliances and resistance, bringing to light the preconscious, potential dimension of its mediation with these networks. Through the analysis of bodily tensions, I emphasised that in *O lustre*, the subject emerges from its sensual participation in an atmosphere and this process also constitutes the production of the

atmosphere. I then turned to the question of how power operates and how community is formed, given the foregrounded preindividual aspect of experience and decision making.

In Chapter 3, I examined Lispector's preoccupation with the individual's condition of being implicated by the process of evolution of the suburban environment in *A cidade sitiada*. I used the term environment in an attempt to avoid the assumed dichotomy between natural and cultural worlds, between physical and social spaces, as the author represents these aspects involved in the suburban change as assembled systems of materiality – the pattern of infrastructure sustaining the expanding cityscape is intertwined with the structure of the circuitry of optimism among citizens. By emphasising the subject position in relation to a pressing atmosphere of collectivity, Lispector reveals the individual's aspiration as shared desire – an affective attachment to communities and social institutions that functions to stabilise the predominant order. I also argued that Lispector exposes public space as a site of disputes: for individuals, especially women, the limited occasions for their exercises of public engagement only constitute a force of attunement to the normativity and institutional tenets. Attending to the novel's sociopolitical specificity, particularly how Lispector represents local ecosystems, energy models, and responds to the legacies of positivism, my aim was to expand the canon of global modernism and the environmental humanities by introducing Brazilian voices, in contrast to the Eurocentric perspectives that often prioritise extreme consumerism over issues of underdevelopment, scarcity and inequality.

I drew attention to Lispector's understanding of ecology and interspecies dynamics in relation to her practice of nonhuman focalisation, particularly in *A maçã no escuro*. Carrying on with her tropes of webs and entanglements that prevailed in her previous novels, Lispector depicts the subject's apprehension to dramatise experiences of immersion in and emergence from the other-than-human environment. The collapse of the nature-culture dichotomy is also crucial in Chapter 4. By accentuating Martim's entangled conditions in the wilderness as his

survivable configuration, Lispector reveals the necessity to recognise creatureliness as a continuum of the human self. I highlighted how Lispector delineates the Anthropocene condition at the interface of knowledge, patriarchy and human-centrism, as Martim's recurring attempts of mastery and conquest of nature ultimately lead to self-destruction. I argued that Lispector critiques the notion of a heroic mode of individuality detached from the environment, which perpetuates hierarchical structure and naturalises the oppressions and exploitation of other beings. She exposes the anthropocentric reasoning of isolation and domination as a root cause for the converging stakes of sustainability in natural environment, social relations and human subjectivity.

Over the four novels, we often find Lispector's protagonists in their pursuit to belong, either to a group, a community or a broader environment. During these moments, they push the boundaries of the self and reflect on new category features that define their subjectivities. Lispector therefore highlights the entangled nature of individual actions within an interconnected system of material processes. She conceives of the human biological organism, including cognitive activities, as a series of relational events enmeshed in the fundamental patterns of the physical world. By inviting the reader to recognise a vaster spectrum of experience and affects – one that encompasses a collective realm of self-organising dynamics from which consciousness and agency are structured – Lispector envisions individual subjects as distributed through their imbrication with neighbouring entities. In doing so, we can read Lispector's restructuring of subjectivity as relevant to our contemporary Anthropocene condition, where humans increasingly lose control of the consequences of their own actions. My contention was that reading Lispector's fiction from the non-anthropocentric perspective can be conducive to exploring a new critical practice that engages with the present-day concerns regarding human centrality and the crises of sustainability.

I want to bring to light the possibility that Lispector's fiction shares fundamentally interconnected concerns with science through her distinctive speculation about the cosmic role of human beings. Her depiction of the interplays of material objects and energy and of entities and processes, within which human subjects are positioned, demonstrates her creative engagement with scientific advances of her time, particularly theories of quantum mechanics and relativity. Lispector's advocacy for the wave/particle duality is well pronounced in her conceptual framework of interactivity, through which she views an individual subject as relational events manifested through intra-action. In her writing, the human subject assumes discrete individual state but is also inherently entangled with other phenomena, spreading out in space and time. This framework evolves in her later works, such as *Água viva* (1973), where Lispector develops her epistemic framework to merge quantum theory with special relativity. The anonymous protagonist shows her fascination with the 'quarta dimensão', which she imagines to be a non-representational, fleeting experience occupied by what she calls 'instante-já'.[218] She describes instant as associated with coordinates of space and time. Instants are thus events that constitute realities located in the light-cone of spacetime. The protagonist conceives of her existence as pure vibration ('pura vibração') and views her participation in the world as determined by energetic actions arising from the exchange of elementary particles ('ação energética dos elétrons, protons, nêutrons').[219] In *A paixão segundo G.H.* (1964), Lispector revises the endorsement of Spinozist determinism that permeates her early novels. In *A paixão segundo G.H.*, the narrator finds herself in an open vibration, which she also describes as a laboratory of discoveries. She declares that she will substitute fate for probability [substituirei o destino pela probabilidade], while acknowledging the necessity of what she names the fabric of life.[220] In *A hora da estrela* (1977), the narrator-writer Rodrigo enacts in his fictional

[218] Clarice Lispector, *Água viva: ficção* (Editora Artenova, 1973), p. 9.
[219] Lispector, *Água viva*, p. 12.
[220] Lispector, *A paixão Segundo G.H.* (José Olympio, 1977), p. 8.

narrative Macabéa's transient being as an individual emerging out of the 'primary life' [vida primária] – collective behaviours of interaction of molecules and atoms, entangled with one another through their porous material foundation: 'Material poroso, um dia viverei aqui a vida de uma molécula com seu estrondo possível de átomos. O que é mais do que invenção, é minha obrigação contar sobre essa moça entre milhares delas'.[221] These moments urge the reader to move on thinking about how Lispector's conceptual framework of process and interactivity may form part of an emerging global literary landscape following the years of significant change in science and technologies. Given her underexplored philosophical argumentation in the novels around matter-energy continuum and the recognition of other-than-human subjectivities, she undertakes the challenge to contribute to an understanding of cosmic patterns explored by contemporary sciences, while extending them to the constellations in social fields. The reader may thereby reconsider disciplinary boundaries and Lispector's position in the intellectual history.

To restate my main argument, I would like to stress that Lispector understands mind and body, subjectivity and materiality as interconnected properties embedded in the world as an evolving organism. In her speculative universe composed of processes as fundamental features that define realities, we are often urged to consider how an environment, along with the models of connection among its constitutive processes, is experienced by an individual subject who arises in and evolves with these processes. Lispector therefore leaves her future readers to perform the task of practicing a non-anthropocentric perspective, with her fiction yielding insight into speculative futures of how the human being shifts their way of inhabiting the world.

[221] Lispector, *A hora da estrela*, p. 49.

# Bibliography

## 1. Primary Sources


Lispector, Clarice, *Perto do coração selvagem* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2019)

---. *O lustre* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2019)

---. *A cidade sitiada* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2019)

---. *A maçã no escuro* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2019)

---. *A paixão segundo G.H.* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1977).

---. *A hora da estrela* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2017).

---. *Água viva: ficção* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Artenova, 1973).

---. *A descoberta do mundo* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira, 1984).


## 2. Secondary Sources


Adkins, Peter, *The Modernist Anthropocene: Nonhuman Life and Planetary Change in James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Djuna Barnes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

Ahmed, Sara, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
---. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

Alaimo, Stacy, *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

Alonso, Mariângela, *A água e as pulsões em O lustre, de Clarice Lispector* (Curitiba: Appris Editora, 2019).

Altieri, Charles, *The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of the Affects* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004).

Anderson, Ben, *Encountering Affect: Capacities, Apparatuses, Conditions* (London: Routledge, 2016).

Apter, Emily S., *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (London: Verso, 2018).

Bailly, Jean-Christophe, *The Animal Side*, trans. by Catherine Porter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).

Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

Banfield, Anne, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Barad, Karen Michelle, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and entanglement matter and meaning* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

Bateman, Benjamin, *Queer Disappearance in Modern and Contemporary Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

Bauman, Zygmunt, *Liquid Fear* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).
---. *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

Beal, Sophia, 'The Substance of Light: Literature and Public Space in "Belle Époque" Rio de Janeiro (1894-1914)', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 49.2 (2012), pp. 5-27.
---. *Brazil under Construction: Fiction and Public Works* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Bellintani, Iop, 'O Positivismo e o Exército Brasileiro', XXV Simpósio Nacional de História (2009), <https://anpuh.org.br/uploads/anais-simposios/pdf/2019-01/1548772006_b8fa46a2e19406385f0d3595452fd150.pdf>

Bennett, Jane, 'The Force of Things: Steps toward an Ecology of Matter', *Political Theory*, 32. 3 (2004), pp. 347-72.
---. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

Berlant, Lauren Gail, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011).
---. *Desire/Love* (New York: Punctum Books, 2012).
---. 'The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times', *Environment and Planning. D. Society & Space*, 34.3 (2016), pp. 393-419.

Blackburn, Simon, Entry 'Upanishads', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (3 ed.) (Oxford University Press, 2016), n.d.<https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/display/10.1093/acref/9780198735304.001.0001/acref-9780198735304-e-3210>

Boscagli, Maurizia, *Stuff Theory: Everyday Objects, Radical Materialism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

Braidotti, Rosi, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).
---. *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002).

Brennan, Teresa, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

Brown, Bill, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28. 1 (2001), pp. 1-22.
---. *The Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Cândido, Antônio, *Vários escritos* (São Paulo: Livraria Duas Cidades, 1970).

Caruth, Cathy, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Carvalho, Bruno, 'The Future as a Necessity: Reading Clarice Lispector in the Anthropocene', in *Literature Beyond the Human: Post-anthropocentric Brazil*, ed. by Luca Bacchini and Victoria Saramago (New York and London: Routledge, 2023), pp. 181-94.

Cixous, Hélène, *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, trans. by Verena Andermatt Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

Cohen, Signe, 'A Posthuman Dharma: Enthiran 2.0', *Religion*, 13.10 (2022), p. 883.

da Costa, Fabrício Lemos, ''Amor', de Clarice Lispector: a política anticolonial, as mulheres, os vegetais e o diálogo com as outras artes', *Leitura*, 79 (2023), pp. 71-85 (p. 82).

da Cosa, Fabrício Lemos and Mayara Ribeiro Guimarães, 'A experiência da animalidade em "A maçã no escuro", de Clarice Lispector, e em "Acenos e afagos", de João Gilberto Noll: um estudo comparativo', *Terra roxa e outras terras*, 42.1 (2022), pp. 83-95.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

Derrida, Jacques, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume I*. trans. by Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

de Sousa, Carlos Mendes, *Clarice Lispector: Figuras da escrita* (Braga: Universidade do Minho, 2000).

Doane, Mary Ann, 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator', *Screen*, 23 (1982), pp. 74-88.

Dovey, Jonathan, Tom Abba and Kate Pullinger, 'Introduction', in *Ambient Literature: Towards a New Poetics of Situated Writing and Reading Practices*, ed. by Tom Abba, Jonathan Dovey and Kate Pulling (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 1-26.

Ellermann, Greg, *Thought's Wilderness: Romanticism and the Apprehension of Nature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023).

Figlerowicz, Marta, *Spaces of Feeling: Affect and Awareness in Modernist Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017).

Fitz, Earl E., *Clarice Lispector* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985).
---. *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist Universe of Clarice Lispector: the Différance of Desire* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2001).
---. *Clarice Lispector: From Brazil to the World* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2024).

Gilbert, Alan, 'Latin America: The Suburb Is the City', in *The Suburban Land Question: A Global Survey*, ed. by Richard Harris and Ute Lehrer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), pp. 214-39.

Goh, Irving, ‘Blindness and Animality, or Learning How to Live Finally in Clarice Lispector’s *The Passion according to G.H.*’, *Differences*, 23.2 (2012), pp. 113-35.
---. ‘Affective Consisting in Lispector’s An Apprenticeship or the Book of Pleasures’, *Angelaki*, 28.2 (2023), pp. 79-89.

Grosz, Elizabeth, ‘Bodies-Cities’, in *Sexuality & Space*, ed. by Beatriz Colomina, Jennifer Bloomer, et al. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), pp. 241-53.

Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth, ‘An Inventory of Shimmers’, in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1-25.

Grusin, Richard A., ‘Introduction’, in *The Nonhuman Turn*, ed. by Richard A. Grusin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), pp. vii-xxix (p. ix).

Guattari, Félix, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. by Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London: Athlone Press, 2000).

Halberstam, Jack and Ira Livingston, *Posthuman Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

Halberstam, Jack, *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

Haraway, Donna, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies*, 14. 3 (1988), pp. 575–99.

Hayles, N. Katherine, *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Non*conscious (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

Herman, David, *Narratology Beyond the Human: Storytelling and Animal Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Huang, Nicole, *Women, War, Domesticity: Shanghai Literature and Popular Culture of the 1940s* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005).

Iskandar, Jamil Ibrahim and Maria Rute Leal, ‘Sobre Positivismo e Educação’, *Revista Diálogo Educacional*, 3.7 (2002), pp. 1-6.

Jacobs, Adriana Ximena and Claire Williams, ‘Introduction: Afterthoughts and Afterwords’, in *After Clarice: Reading Lispector’s Legacy in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Adriana X. Jacobs and Claire Williams (Cambridge: Legenda, 2022), pp. 1-12.

Johnson, Erica L., ‘“Upholstered Ghosts”: Jean Rhys’s Postman Imaginary’, in *Jean Rhys: Twenty-First-Century Approaches*, ed. by Erica L. Johnson and Patricia Moran (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 209-27.

Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, trans. by Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 25.

Ladeira, António, 'Patriarchal Violence and Brazilian Masculinities in Clarice Lispector's *A maçã no escuro*', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 86.5 (2009), pp. 697-706.

Largier, Niklaus, *Figures of Possibility: Aesthetic Experience, Mysticism, and the Play of the Senses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022).

Lawtoo, Nidesh, 'Posthumanism and Mimesis: An Introduction', *Journal of Posthumanism*, 2.2 (2022), pp. 87-100.

Librandi, Marilia, *Writing by Ear: Clarice Lispector and the Aural Novel* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019).

Lübecker, Nikolaj d'Origny, *Twenty-First-Century Symbolism: Verlaine, Baudelaire, Mallarmé* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022).

Manning, Erin, 'Always More than One: The Collectivity of *a Life*', *Body & Society*,16.1 (2010), pp. 117-27.

Massumi, Brian, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).
---. 'Translator's Foreword: Pleasures of Philosophy', in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. ix-xv.
---. Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015).
---. Brian Massumi, *Couplets: Travels in Speculative Pragmatism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

McCormack, Derek P., *Atmospheric Things: On the Allure of Elemental Envelopment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

Morton, Timothy, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2013).

Moser, Benjamin, *Why This World: A Biography of Clarice Lispector* (London: Haus, 2009).

Nancy, Jean-Luc, *Listening*, trans. by Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

Negrete, Fernanda, 'Approaching Impersonal Life with Clarice Lispector', *Humanities*, 7.2 (2018), p. 55.

Ngai, Sianne, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

Nickerson, A.J., ‘Hardy’s Apprehensions’, *Criticism* (67. 3), pp. 272-89.

Peixoto, Marta, *Passionate Fictions: Gender, Narrative, and Violence in Clarice Lispector* (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press, 1994).
---. ‘‘Prender um inefável’: Affect in Clarice’s Fictions’, in *After Clarice: Reading Lispector’s Legacy in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Adriana X. Jacobs and Claire Williams (Cambridge: Legenda, 2022), pp. 127-38.

Pitt, Kristin E., ‘Discovery and Conquest Through a Poststructural and Postcolonial Lens: Clarice Lispector's *A maçã no escuro*’, *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 50.1 (2013), pp. 184-200.

Pouillaude, Frédéric, *Unworking Choreography: The Notion of the Work in Dance*, trans. by Anna Pakes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Robinson, Bradley and Mel Kutner, ‘Spinoza and the Affective Turn: A Return to the Philosophical Origins of Affect’’, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25 (2019), pp. 111-17.

Roelvink, Gerda and Magdalena Zolkos, ‘Posthumanist Perspectives on Affect: Framing the Field’, *Angelaki*, 20.3, pp. 1-20 (p. 1).

Rohman, Carrie, *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

Ryan, Derek, *Bloomsbury, Beasts and British Modernist Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

Ryan, Marie-Laure, *Narrative as virtual reality 2: Revisiting Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

Saramago, Victoria, *Fictional Environment: Mimesis, Deforestation, and Development in Latin America* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2021).

Schiess, Ami, ‘Reflections in the Porta-espelho: Clarice Lispector’s Literary Theory of the Object’, in *After Clarice: Reading Lispector’s Legacy in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Adriana X. Jacobs and Claire Williams (Cambridge: Legenda, 2022), pp. 255-72.

Seigworth, Gregory J. and Carolyn Pedwell, ‘Introduction: A Shimmer of Inventories’, in *The Affect Theory Reader. 2: Worldings, Tensions, Futures*, ed. by Gregory J. Seigworth and Carolyn Pedwell (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2023), pp. 1-59.

Sharp, Hasana, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
---. ‘“Nemo non videt”: Intuitive Knowledge and the Question of Spinoza’s Elitism’, in *The Rationalists: Between Tradition and Innovation*, ed. by Carlos Fraenkel and Dario Perinetti (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), pp. 101-22.

Spinoza, Benedictus de, *The Ethics*, 5 vols, trans. by R.H.M. Elwes (Project Gutenbert, 1999).
---. *The Ethics; Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect; Selected Letters*, trans. by Samuel Shirley, ed. by Seymour Feldman (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992).

Teixeira, Mona Lisa Bezerra, ‘A educação pela linguagem em Perto do coração selvagem e A maçã no escuro’, *Literatura e sociedade*, 23.27 (2018), pp. 146-57.

Thrailkill, Jane F., *Philosophical Siblings: Varieties of Playful Experience in Alice, William, and. Henry James* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021).
---. ‘Play Is the Thing: Affect and Affordances in Alice, James and Henry. James’, *The Henry James Review*, 4.3 (2019), pp. 212-25.

Tobeck, Janine, ‘Crime and Commitment: Literary Engagement in Clarice Lispector’s ‘O crime do professor de matemática’ and ‘A quinta história’’, *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 49.1 (2012), pp. 187-207.

Turazzi, Maria Inez, *A euforia do progresso e a imposição da ordem: a engenharia, a indústria e a organização do trabalho na virada do século XIX ao XX* (São Paulo: Editora Marco Zero, 1989).

van Elferen, Isabella, ‘Rethinking Affect’, in *Rethinking Bach*, ed. by Bettina Varwig (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 141-66.

Villares, Lúcia, *Examining Whiteness: Reading Clarice Lispector Through Bessie Head and Toni Morrison* (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2011).
---. ‘Modernization and the Phantasmogoria of Commodities in Clarice Lispector’s *A Cidade Sitiada*’, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 87. 4 (2010), pp. 473-87.

von Uexküll, Jakob Johann, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans: with, A Theory of Meaning*, trans. by Joseph D.O’Neill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

Wharton, Edith, *The House of Mirth* (Newburyport: Open Road Integrated Media, 2017).

Williams, Claire, *The Encounter between Opposites in the Works of Clarice Lispector* (Bristol: HiPlam, 2006).

Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway* (London: Penguin Classics, 2019).

Zaytoun, Kelli D., ‘Writing Life beyond the Humanist Subject in *The Hour of the Star* and *A Breath of Life*’, in *After Clarice: Reading Lispector’s Legacy in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Adriana X. Jacobs and Claire Williams (Cambridge: Legenda, 2022), pp. 239-54.