Porque aquilo que escrevo pode ler-se no escuro: memory and narrative in Antonio Lobo Antunes

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RESUMO: O presente artigo procura explorar a relação entre memória e história tal como aparecem na literatura. Com referência ao romance *Ontem não te vi em Babilónia*, de António Lobo Antunes, a análise centra-se na questão de representação e de autentificação das vozes narrativas dentro do domínio literário. O foco principal é dado à literatura e narração literária como lugar de memória e, consequentemente, à possibilidade de tal lugar poder tornar acessível o passado.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: António Lobo Antunes, memória, representação, ficcionalidade, voz

ABSTRACT: The present article seeks to explore the relation between memory and history as it emerges in literature. With reference to the novel *Ontem não te vi em Babilónia* by António Lobo Antunes, the analysis questions the representation and authentication of voices of narration in the literary domain. The main focus is on literature and literary narration as a site of memory and, consequently, on the possibility of such a site to render the past accessible.

KEYWORDS: Antonio Lobo Antunes, memory, representation, fictionality, voice

In light of how chaos increasingly came to define life experiences, Samuel Beckett believed the task of the contemporary artist was "to find a form that accommodates the mess", which, as James Olney writes, would be to obey the modernist injunction of "making it new" (Olney, 2000, p. 12). And the idea of making experiences new in a context of historiography and literature seems to invite to a reflection on the *literary* relation between remembered past and lived present. Indeed, there is an urgency to

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reconsider what *form* memories of lived experience may take as narrated past, which, in turn forms the question of whether the past as such may at all be seen as accessible. As Beckett further notes:

> What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. The form and the chaos remain separate. The latter is not reduced to the former. That is why the form itself becomes a preoccupation, because it exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates […] (Driver, 1961, p. 23).

On the basis of these initial observations, the present essay seeks to examine how contemporary literature reflects these concerns with narrative form and lived experience. The main focus will take as its point of departure the questions "to what extent is the past accessible" and "how is it knowledgeable"? In other words, as a direct response to Beckett's observations, points will be made as to how memory relates to history in terms of formal (literary) depiction. It is obvious that such considerations will affect our ideas of authenticity and representation and in order to illustrate how this may be done, references will be made to the work of Portuguese author António Lobo Antunes. His recent novels seem to be the mediating force between the two instances past and present, history and literature.

Awakening

The novel *Ontem não te vi em Babilónia* (2006) could be said to illustrate the difficulty of separating, but also of merging lived experience and narrative form without obliterating or barring access to both; indeed, it seems as if the narration occurs in a moment caught in between past and present: in the course of five hours – from midnight to 5 am – a web of interweaving nocturnal voices emerges,

whose fragmented life stories intersect with observations of the present nightly hour. The narrative as representation takes on a form similar to a patchwork of past and present events in which the narrating voices negotiate their narration, signification and subjectivity. As they traverse across two temporal modalities, the act of remembering also becomes a matter of forgetting, and the narrative is the result of this interchange of information. By bringing the past into the present, a mirror is held up to each of the narrators, whose monologues become a dialogue between self and other, between what was and what is. For example, the fundamental difference between the past and present is made evident right at the beginning of the novel, which renders an impression of a kind of awakening, not to the clarity of the day, but to the all-embracing, distorting darkness of the night. The first voice "speaks" thus:

> estou aqui, quantas vezes ao acordar me surpreendia que os móveis fossem os mesmos da véspera e recebia-os com desconfiança, não acreditava neles, por ter dormido era outra e no entanto os móveis obrigavam-me às recordações de um corpo a que não queria voltar, que desilusão esta camilha, esta cadeira, eu, cochichar à madrinha da aluna cega o que me cochichava a mim, pedir desculpa sem que me liguem e a porta e as janelas abertas, a professora nas escadas, as primeiras crianças, pais […] (Antunes, 2006, p. 14).

Here, from the point of view of the nocturnal voice, we get an acute sensation of alienation in regards to the *other* diurnal self. The impression of being transported to a different realm is emphasised by the fact that simple objects, like furniture, is regarded with suspicion; objects have the capacity to force upon the narrator memories of a body to which she – explicitly – refuses to return. The overall sensation of nocturnal awakening is one of attraction and repulsion, similar to a state of sleepwalking, which allows for a form of communication that is different from the exchanges of gestures taking place during daytime. When meaningless gestures are laid to rest, there is, however,

room for another kind of communication to appear, which occurs as the exploration of self and other in an apparently inactive position; indeed, this form of nocturnal communication originates from a position in which the self wakes up to otherness and incomprehension. As another narrating insomniac of Antunes' novel writes:

> deve ser meia-noite porque os cachorros desistem, imóveis nos tufos dos canteiros e nos legumes mortos de tal modo que se confundem com pedras, são pedras, estou acordado entre pedras, se calhar uma pedra eu também, uma pedra minha mulher, uma pedra a que me espera em Lisboa […] (o que se passa comigo?) (Antunes, 2006, p. 32)

If it is possible to tell conventional time according to the sounds or silences of puppies, it would seem as if silence can be measured according to another kind of "clockwork": a waking narration is all there is in this Antunian night and the narrating bodies have all turned into objects, as if they were pieces being moved in a game. Moreover, what could be signalled in the opening pages of Antunes' novel is not far from what guided Paul Valéry's writing in his *Cahiers*. Spanning more than fifty years and 28 000 pages, Valéry relentlessly pursued an expression of his self by way of what he called "exercises" in awakening, or "daily scales" in the music of awakening, (Gifford; Stimpson, 1998, p. 41):

> Without object, that is, save perhaps the greatest: the analytical unfolding to conscious understanding of everything that is implied in "mind" – that is, in the human psyche as such, with its inevitable axes and unfailing Valéryan correlatives of body and world […] (Gifford; Stimpson, 1998, p. 41).

As for this kind of game, or exercise, awakening is also the beginning of a process of exhausting and regenerating the self in language and in play. One may assume that the act of consuming the self through narration may

equally be productive of a restoration of the past, and as Valéry remarks to the significance of memory, "[memory] is the gift of the return to the same, or of the same. Its great affair is not the past, but the re-present. This is why it returns from the 'past' and never *climbs back up* to it" (Heller-Roazen, 2007, p. 76). Most importantly for the following examination of historiography and literature, the Antunian awakening happens in or as literature both as a domain, or *lieu*, suggestive of a particular mode of being, in which, to speak in a game terminology, the game can last both five hours *as well as* a lifetime.

Sites of memory as relational space

Lobo Antunes' recent writing has a fascinating capacity to conjure up a sensation of how narrative voices interact while being enclosed in a claustrophobic domain. When, as a recurrent topic, communication between family members is dead, we have the impression that the remains of it is taken up as fuel for inner monologues, where each voice insists on the unbridgeable abyss between self and the other. Furthermore, the power that this site has on its inhabitants can be connected to its double nature: whilst it demonstrates an infinite emptiness, it also communicates an overwhelming fullness and richness, originating from the incessant activity of narration. It is, in short, a question of changing our spatial awareness according to how the domain of narration is being constructed as the narration unfolds. As such, it becomes a domain of memory; or, more specifically, a realm in which the past is communicated in the present, or, where the past *takes place*. With regards to the pertinence of these domains, or sites of memory, Pierre Nora writes:

Our interest in *lieux de mémoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that

memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory (Nora, 1989, p. 7).

For Nora, the emergence of a site of memory is a consequence of a particular loss, namely of what he calls "real environments" of memory: communities of collective memory are now replaced by new and "hopelessly forgetful modern societies" (Nora, 1989, p. 8) as carriers of meaning in a globalised world (Nora, 1989, p. 7). Furthermore, this loss of memory in archaic form, illustrates a split or fundamental difference between history and memory, a difference, which, as will be shown below, is decisive for our structure and organisation of narration of the past.

Forms of memory

According to Nora, the emergence of site in place of *milieu* of memory is intimately related to the conflict between different ways in which temporality is viewed and organised. On the one hand, he observes, there is "real memory," defined as "social and unviolated, exemplified in but also retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies" (Nora, 1989, p. 8). This is the case of an

> integrated, dictatorial memory – unself-conscious, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously actualizing, a memory without a past that ceaselessly reinvents tradition, linking the history of its ancestors to the undifferentiated time of heroes, origins, and myth.

On the other hand, there is history, or what he calls "our memory, nothing more in fact than sifted and sorted historical traces" (Nora, 1989, p. 8). From the way in which history has eradicated memory in the course of time, there is now a situation of imbalance, or a breach of the

previous idea of an equation of memory and history. We no longer live *within* memory, but in history, which is a mere representation of the past (Nora, 1989, p. 8). The latter, it must be added, is equated with a fragmented sense of historic reality and perception. *Lieux de mémoire* become visible, thus, in the moment of realisation that memory disappears "surviving only as a reconstituted object beneath the gaze of critical history" (Nora, 1989, p. 12). These sites – which for Nora are exemplified by archives, dictionaries, museums, but also by monuments, such as the Pantheon and the Arc de Triomphe – appear in a society that is "deeply absorbed in its own transformation and renewal" and where there is no room for spontaneous memory (Nora, 1989, p. 12). Most importantly, in view of history and its relation to literary form, Nora writes:

> We buttress our identities upon such bastions, but if what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need to build them. Conversely, if the memories that they enclosed were to be set free they would be useless; if history did not besiege memory, deforming and transforming it, penetrating and petrifying it, there would be no *lieux de mémoire*. Indeed, it is this very push and pull that produces *lieux de mémoire* – moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded (Nora, 1989, p. 12).

Several points need to be made here: first, there is an intimate relation between the creation of identity and the fact that certain sites embody the material that constitutes such an identity formation. Hence, there is the need to "see," protect and "name" these sites. Secondly, although these *lieux* emerge in order to return a sense of history, the fact is, as Nora points out, that what is being returned is of a very different *matter* – something "no longer quite life, not yet death," in other words, no longer true, not yet a lie. Thirdly, it must be noted that the relation between identity, sites, naming and matter is based on one funda-

mental factor, namely that our encounter with these sites of memory reveals how time operates on two levels, or as two modalities simultaneously. As a consequence, we could say that when sites of memory *return* the lived past to the present in the form of narration (in a broad sense) what is, in fact, being given (hence named) is essentially of an ambiguous nature. This makes it possible to assume that the "real" past is only accessible through narration as play and playing.

Return as play: destruction of the calendar and a different site of memory

In "Reflections on History and Play," with reference to Collodi's novel about *Pinocchio* (1883), Giorgio Agamben, observes what happens when life is invaded by play, the result of which is a "paralysis and destruction of the calendar" (Agamben, 2007, p. 76). In the same way as Nora would regard *lieux de mémoire* as marking the rituals of a society without ritual (Agamben, 2007, p. 12), Agamben refers to how certain ceremonies (here, New Year celebration) in "cold societies, or societies where history is frozen" have a double function: they regenerate time and ensure the fixity of the calendar (Agamben, 2007, p. 76). Now, in relation to play and rituals in these societies, the first changes and destroys the calendar, whilst the latter fixes and structures it (Agamben, 2007, p. 77). In regards to Nora's rituals without ritual meaning, play would, therefore, seem to occur without a real idea of its purpose or sense (Agamben, 2007, p. 79). Also, in so far as sites and signification are concerned, Agamben notes that play "pre-serves and profane objects and behaviour that have ceased to exist. Everything which is old, independent of its sacred origins, is liable to become a toy" (Agamben, 2007, p. 79). Toys, he writes, as objects have a very different function as carriers and communicators of the past than, say, archive documents, monuments, etc:

> What the toy preserves of its sacred or economic model, what survives after its dismemberment or miniaturization, is nothing other than the human temporality that was contained therein: its pure historical essence. The toy is a materialization of the historicity contained in objects, extracting it by means of a particular manipulation. While the value and meaning of the antique object and the document are functions of their age – that is, of their making present and rendering tangible a relatively remote past – the toy, dismembering and distorting the past or miniaturizing the present – playing as much on *diachrony* as on *synchrony* – makes present and renders tangible human temporality in itself, the pure differential margin between the "once" and the "no longer" (Agamben, 2007, p. 80).

According to these observations, it seems as if the difference between Agamben's toy and Nora's sites of memory resides in their relation, or rather, in *how* they relate to time. Furthermore, by differing in their relation to time, they also return a different kind of signification. Whilst for Nora's monuments, it was case of returning a distorted, changed, inauthentic matter; for Agamben's toy as site of memory, there still seems to be something "real" emanating from the object, a sense of its (and our) own authenticity. Paradoxically, the latter is based on our ludic mode or practice of encountering and naming the object. If monuments or archives are, arguably, "functions of their age," the toy, however, could seem to emerge as a site in which there is a negotiation between the tangible and intangible.[1] The toy is timeless, yet constituted by time only and by being a representation, or materialisation of "pure historical essence," it derives its signification from the relation between "essence" and "representation" (miniaturization), in short, from the question of the *making* of authenticity.[2] The toy is, thus, invested with meaning by its actualisation or participation in a game, or play, which occurs in between two temporal modes as well as between two instances of players. Within the ludic domain, in our

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[1] Here it is necessary to point out that no monument or site is simply "functions of their time." In studies of heritage it is becoming more and more evident that it is precisely the intangible qualities of the site that gives it its value. Sites are, thus, identified by cultural processes and social events, which give them meaning (Smith, 2006, p. 3).

[2] Cf. Agamben, "toys as signifiers of diachrony, featuring in that immutable world of synchrony" (Agamben, 2007, p. 90).

encounter with it, we *merge* with the site in a form of communication, which could be said to relate between history and memory. This can best be illustrated by looking at how narration and in particular literature "connects" past and present and, secondly, at how subjectivities, or voices within the literary realm are being created and remain in a process of authentication.

Subjectivities and voices: materialisation of historicity

To return to the novel by Lobo Antunes, it is clear that the narration, or confessions function as a relational force between past and the present, memory and history as if in a game. As such it displays a structure, or form, which accommodates the inherent temporal conflict "in a new way." If this form of temporal accommodation could be named "literature," then the novel is a site of memory, consisting exclusively of language, which can weave its historic pattern playfully across past, present and future. The question of what *returns* from as well as of what is invested in this particular site, becomes a matter of deciding its authenticity and essence. This is, obviously, an intriguing issue, given the temporal flexibility and signifying function of fiction as essentially artificial: when the "past" is returned to the present *within* the literary realm and as literature, there is a *play* taking place that accommodates the relentless production and consumption of history by memory and visa versa.[3]

Return of the ghost

In light of the above, the novel by Lobo Antunes may come across as an archive composed of intersecting lineages of past experiences. Simultaneously, in terms of form, it is a striking documentation of what happens when life is invaded by play, or rather, when play performs and distorts life

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[3] Cf. Nora's remark that "[h]istory has become…a realistic novel in a period in which there are no real novels. Memory has been promoted to the center of history: such is the spectacular bereavement of literature" (Nora, 1998, p. 24).

through narration and articulation. The stirring into the realm of the night is also an awakening to the fact that narration is an interaction between the past and the present, whose result is an ambiguity of temporality and of voice. Who are these voices, and where do they come from? The confessional activity seems to be one way of finding out, which is exemplified by how the voices repeatedly question their own narration as well as state of being:

> Não era nada do que escrevi até agora o que queria dizer ou seja a que me espera em Lisboa, a que dorme lá dentro, os cachorros, tudo isso, os meus colegas no quintal pela banda do pomar etc, não eram histórias do passado nem da minha vida hoje em dia nem histórias de pessoas, não dou importância às histórias, às pessoas, eram coisas minhas, secretas, que mal se notam, ninguém nota, a ninguém interessam e no entanto as únicas que sou realmente mas tão leves, tão ínfimas […] (Antunes, 2006, p. 315).

Despite emerging as "things" or "secrets" belonging neither to the past nor to the present, what is being written and what has been written is "all I am" and, as such, the novel is a document, or an archive of voices, which demonstrates an ongoing process of making its autonomy, hence, authenticity *qua* play. The voices, or subjectivities, which constitute the literary site of memory, are, as mentioned earlier, the embodiment of the archive (past) in dialogue with their own present ludic constitution. Illustrative of the "communicative" situation is the fact that the event which launches us into the story, or stirs us up to the "wake," is the death of a fifteen year old girl: her suicide initiates the narration of her mother and of the whole book: "já lá vamos à minha filha, antes da minha filha e pela última vez repito que o mar da Póvoa de Varzim tão sereno em agosto com uma paz de nuvens em cima e por falar na minha filha uma paz de nuvens em cima também, estiradas ou redondas…" (Antunes, 2006, p. 24). If the transitory function of the toy is that it plays as much on

diachrony as on synchrony (Agamben, 2007, p. 80) by being, or taking place at the moment in between life and death, then the death of the young girl exemplifies her transition from being a subject ("filha") to an object of memory, or a toy ("boneca"). The mother's confessional account of how she found her daughter dead can be both informative and neutrally descriptive:

> de início não vi a corda nem me passou pela cabeça que uma corda, para quê uma corda, vi a borboleta, a boneca no chão e o banco, a boneca por sinal não deitada, sentada, de braços afastados e cabelo preso na fita usando o vestidinho que lhe fiz, a boneca a quem eu – Desaparece (Antunes, 2006, p. 24).

While later, it becomes evident that the death of the girl has distorted the mother's idea of how the past can be contained or narrated in a meaningful way. The distortion of temporal continuity and sequences are exemplified in her narrative, which is similar to a vision or a dream, where the daughter and the doll figure and are interchangeable, and where the memories of her own childhood mingle with scenes with her daughter at the table. She writes:

> não no Pragal, no meu sono ou na Póvoa de Varzim em agosto, no que respeita ao horizonte tornava-se difícil distinguir o céu do mar, não um risco como de costume, o risco ausente de forma que impossível saber o sítio em que o céu se dobrava e começava a onda, em que a espuma a franzir-se, percebia-se a boneca, não a minha filha, na ponta da corda ou do fio de estendal que ia girando devagar, não de braços afastados, pegados ao corpo numa atitude de entrega, uma boneca de que as borboletas
> (dúzias de borboletas)
> de que dúzias de borboletas me impediam de notas as feições, notar a minha filha em casa a começar a comer empurrando para a borda do prato com a delicadeza do garfo
> (não é por ser minha filha mas sempre teve modos distintos)

os legumes de que não gostava, a minha filha a começar a
comer, acho que fui clara e peço que me não contrariem
neste ponto, a minha filha a começar a comer desculpan-
do-se
– Como nunca mais vinha fui começando a comer
a minha filha a começar a comer, a minha filha viva e de
uma vez por todas se não me levam a mal
(espero que não me levam a mal)
não se fala mais nisso (Antunes, 2006, p. 28-29).

In these two accounts "play" is everything, indeed, the
narration contains the *interplay* between the vision and voice
of the mother (past and present), the dead girl (past) and
the doll (present). First, there is a temporal interplay and
the narration is a relational force between diachrony and
synchrony, memory and history; the mother's account of
her daughter's death is repeatedly interrupted by memories
belonging to her own childhood, which indicates a
necessity to re-establish a sense of self after the loss of the
girl (the sea at Póvoa do Mar; of someone calling her name:
"Ana Emília"). Secondly, there is a case of an ongoing
substitution between the doll (pure temporality) and the
daughter (lost temporality) as signifiers, where the doll, as
the representational "ghost" of the daughter, to speak with
Agamben, "facilitates a bridge between the world of the
living and that of the dead, ensuring the passage from the
one to the other without, however, confusing the two"
(Agamben, 2007, p. 91). Death, as it were, is "overcome"
due to the function of the toy as site of signification from
where it can relate to life, to history and to memory and, in
fact, would provide the narrative of a form of signification,
which accommodates and, hence, returns a sense of
authenticity. As such, the return of the past by way of the
significance invested in the doll as site of memory,
demonstrates how narration as play "feeds into" a process
where memory relates to history through exhaustion or
consumption of the past in order to produce its signification
in the present (which, in turn, as we shall see, devours

it).[4] More precisely, in Lobo Antunes' work, *within fiction* as a site of memory and in the course of the night as play a rather paradoxical situation is conjured up in which the present (history) consumes the past (memory) in order to *produce* subjectivities, hence authenticity and a sense of purity returning from the site of memory.

[4] Agamben observes that "children and ghosts, as unstable signifiers, represent the discontinuity and difference between the two worlds" (Agamben, 2007, p. 92-93).

Procedures of authentication: consumption and production

Based on the interplay between consumption and production of signification and identity in the novel, we can now try to discern a literary practice of authentication of voices and of language (as pure temporality). Again, it is a matter of how language weaves its pattern between different temporalities and as such, oscillates between history and memory and between play and life. On the one hand, we have the insistence of naming and determining the age of each narrator, hence fixating, personifying and identifying the voice and moment, and, on the other hand, the explicit negation of the name (and time) as signification. For example, in the names of Alice, Lurdes and António we read as follows:

> francamente não sei o que se passa comigo ajudem-me, cinquenta e seis anos, quase cinquenta e sete, eu uma se-nhora, uma enfermeira, contem-me o que reclama o meu corpo, não o meu corpo, este corpo diferente do meu, o que reclama este corpo oiço os campos, o vento, a azinheira junto à casa da minha avó a cantar […]
> – Alice (Antunes, 2006, p. 50-51)
> […]
> tenho quarenta e quatro anos e o que significam quarenta e quatro anos contem-me, que relação entre quarenta e quatro e eu, entre Lurdes e eu, entre o meu corpo e eu, casas, cheiros, silêncio e eu no centro […] (Antunes, 2006, p. 138)
> […]

ficava a pensar no meu nome a equilibrar-me no tornozelo direito primeiro e no esquerdo depois, sentindo o peso das letras, não o do corpo, nas pernas, a pena quebrada foi-se embora de sapatos miúdos triturando as pedras depressa a esmagar o meu nome, desembaraçada de mim e eu livre, não me chamo Lurdes, chamo-me Eu, os meus pais recuaram insignificantes […] (Antunes, 2006, p. 150)

And finally, towards dawn:

O seu livro quase no fim visto que dia…você não imaginando que a morte uma pessoa real, sem mistério a defender-se do frio, o seu nome
– António
Não consegue ouvir nada a não ser o seu nome
– António (Antunes, 2006, p. 395-96)

Here, there is a split in language as there is one of voices (I – body – name) and time, and the narration is what belongs both to the game of the night (framed by five hours), and to the produced, "returned" self as remembered, or authenticated through the modality of fiction.

Language and death: naming and authenticity

The final point to be made in connection with memory, history and literature as a site of memory is concerned with the split in language between the act of naming and what is being named. Again, we turn to the voice as language – narration and narrator – in the novel, and see that without the split in language and in temporality, there would not be a site of producing subjectivities. Agamben observes in another essay on the topic of "language and death" that a silent and unspeakable voice "permits thought to experience the taking place of language and to ground, with it, the dimension of being in its difference with respect to the entity" (Agamben, 1991, p. 86). Moreover, if we return to the function of the toy as an object of both synchrony

and diachrony, whose *silent voice* guarantees the "taking place" of memory in literature as a site we see that it articulates a continuity as well as discontinuity. Furthermore, what becomes visible is the double structure of the narrative play and voice, whereby the playing voices are intimately related to "death" in order to perform life. As Agamben notes,

> To experience death as death signifies, in fact, to experience the removal of the voice and the appearance, *in its place*, of another Voice […] which constitutes the originary *negative* foundation of the human word. To experience Voice signifies, on the other hand, to become capable of another death – no longer simply a deceasing, but a person's ownmost and insuperable possibility of his *freedom* (Agamben, 2007, p. 86).

If, according to these observations, the voice of the silent doll is equated with the *taking place* of the voice of the daughter in the novel, we see that she speaks from a site of infinity, both in terms of temporality and signification, which, in turn, means that it is a site of *in*-significance, where language, is and is contained in, yet has ceased to signify and to name. As a subject, therefore, she – this Voice – has removed herself from the other voices and thereby disclosed herself as pure "taking place of language." (Agamben, 2007, p. 86) She has exhausted herself, thus, in order to produce others, that is, to on the one hand return as narrative and memory in the voices of others, and on the other hand, allow them to return to her.[5]

Escrevo em nome da minha filha

Towards the end of the novel, we learn that the Voice of the doll, or silence of the dead girl, narrates through the voice of her mother: "Escrevo o fim deste livro em nome da minha filha que não pode escrever" (Antunes, 2006, p. 459). Here we have an example of how silence is given Voice and articulation by our returning to it, which, in

[5] Interestingly, Agamben notes that only "not being born, not having a nature (*phusis*) can overcome language and permit man to free himself from the guilt that is built up in the link of destiny between *phusis* and *logos*, between life and language" (Agamben, 1991, p. 90). We could add to this that the same topic is illustrated in the novel by Lobo Antunes, by the fact that the points of reference of Ana Emília and Alice as narrators are the dead daughter and the unborn son, who both indicate how they – as logos, or history – relate to phusis, life, or "real" memory.

turn provides memory with historical signification and, consequently, a sense of authenticity. Also, from the point of view of the daughter, as Voice, it is the status of the mother ("Ana Emília") which is being questioned and played with – (Você um boneco mãe?) (Antunes, 2006, p. 462) – as she is aligned with the invention of other family members:

> tive um irmão que inventei e dormia comigo, guardava-o em segredo entre os livros de estudo, a minha mãe
> – Para quem é essa cadeira à mesa?
> sem notar o meu irmão ao lado, não na cadeira do meu pai, na outra com menos vincos dado que a não usávamos e o meu irmão levezinho, eu para a minha mãe
> – Não vê? (Antunes, 2006, p. 464-465)

From this ludic double point of view, in which the perspective, or voice of the mother as well as of the daughter merge, the narration is both blind and lucid to its own unfolding. Neither the story nor the voices are entirely true, or completely false, but can, by emerging from the play between history and memory, be invented and authenticated by way of their own process of constituting their narration as site of memory. The instance of *authorisation* of the text, thus, is playfully, alluded to in brackets, where the narrating Voice reveals, "(chamo-me António Lobo Antunes, nasci em São Sebastião da Pedreira e ando a escrever um livro)" (Antunes, 2006, p. 465), before returning to and merging with the narrated sequences again. Here, towards the very end of the novel, she, as voice – as memory – is fixated in an image, a photo in a book, "que não é um livro, é a vida" (Antunes, 2006, p. 473): "e na película eu, as minhas tranças e o vestido de ramagens feito de um vestido da minha mãe demasiado largo para mim e de que nunca gostei [...]" (Antunes, 2006, p. 473).

As image, as word different to language, the daughter *accommodates* herself (and the others) as memory and as such, the memory can be returned to history in the course

of the play. The memory has, to speak with Agamben, crossed over time and "the scission that reveals itself in the place of language." The voice can thereby return to itself and to "where it was in the beginning; that is, in the Voice." (Agamben, 1999, p. 93) Significantly, therefore, the very end of the novel can also be said to mark the return to the beginning, a return of the mother to the daughter as pure language. The voice of the mother no longer writes in the name of her daughter, but writes and narrates *as* her daughter, who has, to speak figuratively, devoured her, here by describing a desire to continue to play:

> e por um instante
> […]
> vontade que me prendesse os braços e girássemos ambas durante horas sem fim no recreio da escola, eu com medo e contente, insegura e feliz
> – Continue
> que girássemos conforme giro sozinha, o que me apetece
> […]
> o que eu gostava, o que eu queria, o que teria desejado se fosse capaz de desejar e não sou, era que a palma me continuasse na cara durante tanto tempo que eu cega, era que a minha palma continuasse na vossa cara durante tanto tempo que cegos
> […]
> e não fazia mal, não tem importância, não se preocupem com o livro
> (não estou a girar sozinha é com a minha mãe que eu giro)
> porque aquilo que escrevo pode ler-se no escuro (Antunes, 2006, p. 478-479).

Here, the Voice utters the wish or hypothetical will to cease to narrate and to become pure language, *no narration*. As only language she obliterates history, or rather, the split between memory and history, in order to become only pure memory, non-identifiable, yet pure self. Could it be that the only form of accommodation possible for our authentic

experience of time and history is a narrative which desires to merge with the other (language) in blindness, in pure movement?

Conclusion: authentication of history as play

Is it possible to wake up to anything but to the past? The examination of Lobo Antunes' novel has sought to demonstrate that the intricate relation between historicity and literature is maintained in literature by way of how *narration* and language merge in a practice or process of authentication of historical experience. First, we have seen that if life is invaded by play, it can facilitate an examination of the past from the present point of view; secondly, through the interplay of temporality and voices emerges the logic of the night and of the insomniac will and desire to remember, to recover and to lose its self out of sight in the depth, or infinity of the silence. "[O] que é a memória santo Deus," (Antunes, 2006, p. 477) asks the Voice at the end of the novel, and chances are that the answer is only given by the removal of voices, or by end of the book, in which its beginning takes place. Its final signifying moment of authentication lies – as it well knows – outside its own written scope, hence in blindness.

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