The Hypercontemporary Novel in Portugal

Fictional Aesthetics and Memory after Postmodernism

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Acknowledgements .

Introduction

Ana Paula Arnaut and Paulo de Medeiros

> *[period concepts]* will be combined with different traits, survivals from the past, anticipations of the future and quite individual peculiarities.
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> (Wellek 1963: 252)

> Il faut être absolument moderne.
>
> (Rimbaud 1979: 116)

The contemporary, as Giorgio Agamben among others suggests, is above all a temporal condition (Agamben 2009: 39–54). Yet, the very notion of what it means to be contemporary is far from reducible to a question of time and much less to one of chronological or linear time. Alain Badiou makes that clear when he enjoins us to become contemporaries of the great modernist Fernando Pessoa (Badiou 2005: 36–45). Similarly, the 'Hypercontemporary' only is a temporal condition on a primary level. As impossible as it may be to define without any precision the nature of the ever-shifting contemporary, so is it even more difficult to seize on any one version of the Hypercontemporary agreeable even to the relatively small group of those who, often unwittingly, engage in its practice or try to think it. For doing so, in a very real sense, would amount to a negation of the very urgency and flow of the Hypercontemporary. Yet, as urgent and fluid as the Hypercontemporary might be, it is not as fleeting as some would have it, nor is it simply an intensification of the temporal aspects of the contemporary. Rather, if the Hypercontemporary can be said to intensify the contemporary condition, then, we would suggest, what it intensifies is that capacity already diagnosed by Agamben of those who are contemporary to 'perceiv[e] the darkness of the present, [and] grasps a light that can never reach its destiny'. The contemporary 'is also the one who, dividing and interpolating time, is capable of transforming it and putting it in relation with other times' (Agamben 2009: 53).

In the dark times we traverse that capacity to see a light through the darkness of the present has neither been scarcer nor more necessary.

We then take the liberty of adding a double 'post' prefix to Rimbaud's formula in our epigraph, which thus reads that, at present times, *Il faut être absolument [post-post]moderne* (One must be absolutely post-postmodern), emphasizing the fact that this (not quite) new word is open to the possibility of a close relationship with another concept: that of the Hypercontemporary. For common to both the contemporary and the Hypercontemporary is the ability, the need even, to hold a broken mirror to the present and see the archaic in the modern as Walter Benjamin (2002: 462) and Giorgio Agamben (2009) already had alerted us to, but without any trace of nostalgia. This was adumbrated in the writing of the three of the most significant Portuguese novelists of the latter quarter of the twentieth century, José Saramago, Lídia Jorge, and António Lobo Antunes. In the last two decades this tendency has only become more accentuated in an expanding number of younger novelists whose work both inherits that of the three writers just named, continues it, and in some cases could be said to radically accelerate and intensify both the deep affection and the intense rage at the present condition of Portugal and the world. One feature in common that connects the different generations is the unabating confrontation with the violence that permeates the present as well as the intense dedication to form and its use as a registration of that same violence that also provides readers with some possibility for resistance.

Therefore, the concept of Hypercontemporary seems to stem from both the more systematic cultivation of this variant and from the need for a terminology shift which may correspond to the development of historic-social dynamics and, consequently, to the need to include new themes and new scenarios mirroring the (inter)individual and (inter)social behaviour changes resulting from a new, globalized world in constant transformation (the case of Mário Cláudio and Dulce Maria Cardoso), which is becoming increasingly violent.

Regarding the identifying traits of the new paradigm, it should be borne in mind that the concept of intertextuality is now fully rescued from the 1970s and 1980s, when it had caught the attention of many narratologists, but of few writers, and is revitalized and developed through practices that often make it visually present. The overt or covert use of inter-artistic practices may, therefore, justify the creation of a new genre (that of intermedial novels).

The articles included in the first part of this book clearly exemplify and illustrate this trend. Based on works by Patrícia Portela and Joana Bértholo,

Sofia Escourido both explores the significance of hybrid fictional narratives and their possibilities on the printed page and the combining, transforming, and subverting of the conventions of literary genre, thus illustrating the inter-artistic capacities of the Hypercontemporary novel. The subversion of literary genres and the important role of intermediality on the construction of meaning are also approached by Daniela Maduro, who describes *Gnaisse* by João Carmelo as a work capable of modifying and extending itself by recombining pieces of a shattered reality, as well as by taking the shape of an intermedial artefact. João Faustino follows a similar path on his reading of *Astronomia* by Mário Cláudio, seeking to understand the role which intermediality and intertextuality play in the processes of construction of individual and collective memory. Ana Isabel Martins also recognizes the importance of intertextuality and in her approach to Cláudia Andrade's work *Charon Waiting* she acknowledges that the act of weaving together ideas makes a text a rich tapestry of potential meanings that dialogues with various influences and has a host of resonances. Through the analysis of the novels by Ricardo Adolfo and Rui Zink, that question the uncertain borders between here and elsewhere, and at the same time the links between identity and otherness, Sílvia Amorim reflects on Hypercontemporary Portuguese society and portrays a globalized world inclined to precariousness, in which geography seems doomed to disappear, and violence becomes commonplace.

Following this line, it does not seem difficult to also include in this sort of neo-naturalist drive the books of Mafalda Ivo Cruz, Paulo Faria, Ana Margarida de Carvalho, Dulce Maria Cardoso, Rui Zink, Ricardo Adolfo, or Cláudia Andrade.

The second part of the volume then focuses on the role of violence as a key component of the Hypercontemporary novel, as we read in Isabel Cristina Rodrigues's text, that also displays the post-modernist literary inheritance of Ana Margarida de Carvalho's work and the link between Hypercontemporary practices and the ones of the epigonic generation of Realism-Naturalism. Felipe Cammaert and José Vieira take up again the topic of violence. The former analyses the narrative techniques used in its representation in the works of Paulo Faria, which he compares with war narratives such as Lobo Antunes's in order to show the increased awareness of postmemorial literature in reappropriating someone else's memory; the latter shows the tension between fiction and reality in a novel by Valter Hugo Mãe which portrays a time of violence against the slowness of critical thinking and the solidity of the ideas that find in writing a form of resistance and, at the same time, reflecting a celebratory manifestation of our liquid and fragmented times.

Paulo Kralik and Samla Borges Canilha pay particular attention to the inscriptions that overflow, break, and contradict the classical narrative paradigms, using as examples two novels by Mafalda Ivo Cruz, a novelist whose works are marked by deconstruction, fragmentation, and disruption, thus demanding new views, new approaches, and new responses. Emanuelle Santos reads Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida's sixth novel *As Telefones* against the wider backdrop of the relationship between technology and modernity that marks the Hypercontemporary novel, arguing for a view of the book that situates it in a tradition of the European semi-peripheral novel that sheds light on technology's entanglement with capitalism and international division of labour expressed in economic migration. Paulo de Medeiros on the other hand focuses on tracing and exploring the imbrications of violence and intimacy and their significance in six of Dulce Maria Cardoso's novels and briefly compares *The Return* with J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*.

In this day and age, when the novel genre is said to no longer be what it used to be (and it indeed is not, and could not be, although, obviously, books are still being published which comply with traditional narrative rules), some, or, in certain cases, all canonical narrative categories dissolve away. Narrator, plot, time, space, and character implode at different levels and in varying degrees, generating a text for fruition to the detriment of a traditionally appealing text for pleasure. As a result, and also definitively, because our 'poetic faith' is transformed, Coleridge's willing suspension of disbelief becomes a willing suspension of belief. And perhaps, together with Antunes's fictional work, one of the best examples of this dissolution-subversion at all possible levels may well be Luís Carmelo's novel *Gnaisse*, published in 2015. Simultaneously reviving the neo-naturalistic strand mentioned above, the protagonist (the teacher), as readers learn, or confirm, in the second part, is an apt illustration of pathological abnormalism (in his case, stemming from his somewhat defective capacity for thinking), which is very much evident in Abel Botelho's novels. As regards the subversion of form, in the last fourteen pages (corresponding to thirteen numbered blocks), a diegetically apparent metafictional practice, which may be described as dual or mirror-like because it provides an insight into the metafictionality of the first part (which is linguistically both overt and covert), elucidates (explains or justifies) the narrative that was initially told, again with some variants.

However, more important than the aspects mentioned, we believe that the protagonist in *Gnaisse* illustrates one of the most interesting characteristics of

this new tendency (certainly a reflection of the fluidity of the world we live in and the way how the *I* stages itself and how it stages the *other*). By this we mean the fact that its composition as a character no longer follows a canonical technique where the physical and psychological portrait of the beings that populate the fictional word is drawn in its entirety, that is, densely, with clear-cut outlines (through direct or indirect characterization processes). Sometimes, as it is the case of Patrícia Portela or Joana Bértholo, in order to fully know characters and environments the reader needs to activate his encyclopaedia and search for a relation between what is said and the image-drawing-painting-sculpture that is directly or indirectly inserted in the materiality of the words.

In sum, what are we readers to make of this newest fiction whose permanent relationship with other art forms may justify a new classification, that of intermedial novels? We do not think that the answer to this question entails claiming that the novel is dead, or taking a more general and fundamentalist approach, suggesting that it be excluded from the realm of literature. Maybe the solution is to calmly accept its 'vagabond morphology', as Luís Carmelo puts it in *Gnaisse*, and admit that overlapping imagination and fantasy do not invalidate its genially literary dimension. In order to achieve this, we must recognize that, in Carmelo's own words, 'fantasy is but a form of memory emancipated from the order of space and time which receives its material ready-made through the law of mental association', whereas imagination does indeed correspond to 'true creative power', the mother of all 'inspiration' and an exclusive quality of 'geniuses'.

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Sketching *Gnaisse*: The Process of Reading a Metamorphic Novel

Daniela Côrtes Maduro

Entering the Labyrinth

Gnaisse, a novel written by Luís Carmelo, is a sinister and complex book designed to prevent the reader from completely deciphering its content. This 17.8-centimetre high and 13-centimetre wide book, published in 2015, contains a rapidly shifting fictional world, much like the fast-paced world inhabited by its readers. Prior to purchasing this 124-page book, the reader is warned about the subversive tone of its narrative. On the website of the Portuguese publisher Abysmo, the work's blurb seems determined to erode the readers' interest in the narrative (or to discourage buyers from acquiring this object). This fragmented text, mostly comprised of short and straightforward sentences, describes *Gnaisse* as a superposition of events. As a matter of fact, the blurb itself resembles a geological sample which allows the reader to observe the narrative sedimentation of *Gnaisse*:[1]

> A professor is in love with a student that likes Nietzsche, bonsais, and butane canisters. The girl suddenly disappears. The Professor enters a religious temple, makes promises, is invaded by dreams that warn him about the dangers that he might be facing. One day, he starts smoking again and moves to another house. In this new house, there is a neighbour that screams at certain hours in the night. The professor misses the student.
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> (Carmelo 2015a)[2]

[1] *Gnaisse* (in English, *Gneiss*) is the name of a sedimentary rock that changes in response to physical and chemical conditions (metamorphism).

[2] All quotations from *Gnaisse* (2015) were translated by the author of this essay.

This self-undermining blurb also portrays Carmelo's book as a 'novel where each mystery bestows the responsibility onto the next mystery, as in the strata of metamorphic rocks' (Carmelo 2015a). *Gnaisse* is comprised of two parts and six sections (A–F) further divided into thirteen subsections. Each one of these subsections complements and recombines the previous one, which means that the narrative is being permanently reinscribed during the reading process. Even though an alternative perspective on the events is introduced in each subsection, and therefore new information is added, *Gnaisse* does not offer a stable and complete account of events. To understand the narrative, readers need to diligently collect and fit together pieces of an intricate jigsaw puzzle, whose intertextuality and constrained writing resemble George Perec's *La Vie mode d'emploi* (1978).

No other voice besides that of the omniscient narrator is heard. Therefore, only he can help the reader decipher the enigma of the text. Unfortunately for those readers seeking coherence and precision, this narrator (we are ultimately informed that his name is Leonel or LC) displays clear signs of unstable behaviour. Readers learn that there is someone missing in his life (a mysterious woman who used to attend his classes) and come to understand that the disappearance of this female character has sentenced this man to a dark journey into his mind, during which he will obsessively replay memories of the time he spent with her. Devastated by pain, and struggling to overcome his sense of loss, LC is trapped in his own mind, and becomes unable to keep a clear division between fact and fiction. Readers soon learn that the novel's sinister tone and disintegration into loosely connected parts are motivated by LC's meltdown. Besides the feeling of uncertainty propagated by the narrator's mental state, we are told that the mysterious woman enjoys lying (Carmelo 2015: 94). Therefore, the readers of *Gnaisse* are continuously presented with inaccurate information that they cannot verify.

Since the account of events is presented as the result of intoxication, depression, and lying, a connection between deception and fiction is repeatedly emphasized. LC's interpretation of events is untrustworthy, which means that readers face unchartered territory that they must explore on their own. *Gnaisse* is a 'text without lines that evolves along the thickness of space in the same way that the land unmarked by trails and paths creates its infinite marks and orientations' (Carmelo 2015: 119). *Gnaisse*'s protagonist often refers to Coleridge's theories of imagination and fantasy. He states that it is possible to fantasize about nearly everything. However, as imagination allows the creation of anything from

nothing, only imagination can reveal 'the disruptive side' of a human being (Carmelo 2015: 44). *Gnaisse* is therefore a novel about fiction's unlimited power to recombine and expand reality into alternate worlds.[3]

According to Matthias Stephan, postmodernism has been associated with 'intertextuality, metafiction, pastiche, playfulness, and the mixing of genres' (Stephan 2019: 6). The same author relates postmodernist thought with a 'rhizomatic labyrinth' that cannot be fully described (2019: 58). Due to the obsessive recapitulation of events, readers are continuously redirected to the same starting point: their ability to 'savour the fruit of slowness' (Carmelo 2015: 8) will be painstakingly tested in this meandering and cryptic novel based on 'rumours' (Carmelo 2015: 93). The following depiction of a bonsai (a multibranched and human-made plant that can last for a human lifetime) might well be an accurate description of this short, yet the size of a lifetime, novel: 'The Bonsai is a miniature that displays its roots developing from recurved trunks and a reduced number of branches' (Carmelo 2015: 7).

Ana Paula Arnaut claims that the first steps towards postmodernism in Portugal were taken in the pages of José Cardoso Pires's *Delfim* (1968). Thematically, Ana Paula Arnaut believes that there are two types of '(dis) orientation' in a postmodernist novel: a 'moderate' (dis)orientation that still fosters a connection with the real, despite the subversion of literary genres or narrative categories, and a 'celebratory' (dis)orientation which Arnaut relates to 'hypercontemporary fiction' created after 2000 (Arnaut 2018: 27). The term 'hypercontemporary' represents a new world order where technology and globalization (Arnaut 2018: 22) perform a central role. Though maintaining weak ties with reality, this second type of '(dis)orientation' overtly promotes multilinearity, evasiveness, and entropy, thus requiring the reader to act as an investigator (Arnaut 2018: 21). Carmelo's novel displays a 'vagrant morphology' (2015: 15), and, like the bougainvillea he often mentions, it can be equated with a 'labyrinth of branches' (Carmelo 2015: 15) that the reader must traverse. *Gnaisse*'s readers may try to disentangle the many links between events and, just like detectives, they may even try to gather information to unravel the mystery of the text. However, *Gnaisse* is an entropic narrative (Arnaut 2018, 42) that prevents readers from achieving their goals or reaching instantaneous

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[3]   In this essay, this term refers to the existence of distinct parallel worlds in *Gnaisse*. The term 'alternate' was extracted from the theory of possible worlds which contends that several distinct worlds may exist beyond the 'actual' or 'real' world. For more information on this subject, see Ryan n.d. and Ryan 1991.

gratification. Instead of reading the text to know more, readers are introduced to a plot that repeats the narration of the same events, recombining bits and pieces of reality, and relentlessly postponing a definite closure.

Citing Pareyson, Carmelo describes art as the process of 'creating radically new objects, i.e., pieces of reality added to the already existent reality ... with the same strength felt when initiating a new love affair' (2015: 21). According to *Gnaisse*'s narrator, Pareyson saw shapes as 'living organisms completely autonomous and independent' (Carmelo 2015: 22). As for works of arts, these are described by the same author as 'forms of life and references to themselves, that are meant to be read, interpreted, and even modified, in a dynamic manner' (Carmelo 2015: 22). In section F, he explains to his students that Pareyson, once Umberto Eco's teacher, defined art as a process that permanently opens possibilities 'without walking towards the end or without ever reaching a summit' (Carmelo 2015: 91). As he explains Pareyson's theory, he claims that he felt this theory as if it were part of his body. His disorientation and undecidability mirror *Gnaisse*'s rhizomatic structure and cryptic tone.

After coming to terms with the narrative's indeterminacy, the reader accepts this novel as an unsolvable puzzle and as an endless treasure hunt. As Arnaut rightly remarks, in some postmodernist novels 'the Coleridgean voluntary suspension of disbelief is turned into a voluntary suspension of belief' (Arnaut 2018: 34). The reader of *Gnaisse* soon discovers that this labyrinthine book, which is careless of its readers' expectations, thrives on uncertainty and speculation.

Recursive Memories[4]

As readers begin to engage with the different layers of *Gnaisse*, they plunge ever deeper into LC's mind. Carmelo describes memory as 'a chromatic game similar to a rainbow suspended on the brink of the ocean, from which everything, absolutely everything, can be explored' (Carmelo 2015: 8). LC obsessively reshuffles and reconstructs his own memories to tell an unfortunate love story. As a result, the reading process is turned into an archaeological venture during which objects or places trigger memories, and consequently new retellings of the

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[4] The term 'recursive' is used in different fields, namely computer science, biology, and literature. In this essay, this term is associated with works that, in order to evolve, repeatedly reconstruct previously narrated events, or that repeatedly describe the same events, though in an entirely different way. This is the case of *Gnaisse*.

same story. According to LC: 'When we lose someone important, some rituals and objects[5] emerge to supress that loss' (Carmelo 2015: 41). In the meantime, readers' expectations about a unifying closure are continuously frustrated.

The unfolding of events begins and ends when a point is drawn on a classroom's chalkboard. LC's first words are 'I had barely enough time to pull myself together, when', which indicates that the novel begins when he supposedly regained[6] his consciousness after becoming absentminded during an explanation of Kandinsky's circles and Pareyson's theories. However, instead of being back on track, the protagonist starts (or relapses into) his obsessive journey into the abyss: 'Nothing I said seemed clear … I felt I had become a runaway train' (Carmelo 2015: 9). Similar to a Möbius strip folding back on itself, the narrative is portrayed as nothing more than a series of reframed daydreams or a device scheduled to reboot at a certain point in time. The literary experiments created by Raymond Queneau in *Exercices de style* (1947), where the reader can read ninety-nine retellings of the same story, may come to mind while reading this novel. Indeed, the 'felt hat' around which Queneau's book gravitates is mentioned in *Gnaisse* more than once (page 68, 'felt beret', or page 75, 'felt hat'). In *Gnaisse*, the felt hat worn by the missing woman is described as the point 'around which reality revolved' (Carmelo 2015: 91–2).

The story that LC and the missing woman lived together is retold in each subsection. Even though some of these subsections may be transferred to other parts (for instance, in section F the name 'Nietzsche' is mentioned in Part 2, not in Part 3), they resurface in almost every section as described in Table 3.1:
Unpredictability and mutation pervade the structure of the novel, rendering readers' attempt to rigorously schematize this gneissic novel impossible, and allowing nothing more than a vague sketch. In the already cited blurb, it is claimed that '[A]ll of the sudden, everything changes, as if the reported reality was nothing but a prestidigitation trick after all' (Carmelo 2015a). LC speaks about a 'conjuror that rearranges fragments' (Carmelo 2015: 8), surreptitiously referring to the role of the author in this story. Its self-reflexivity and exploration of narrative possibilities remind us of the rhizomatic book written by Italo Calvino, *Il castello dei destini incrociati* (1969), where a pack of cards is reshuffled

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[5] Objects left behind by the vanishing woman are listed by L.C.: a pink lighter, a package with a rosemary bouquet that looked like marijuana and was always carried with her diligently wrapped with a ribbon (Carmelo 2015: 84).

[6] In section C, the protagonist will refer to this moment of awakening as the moment 'when he was still reasonably lucid' (Carmelo 2015: 43).

Table 3.1 *Gnaisse*'s subsections

Subsection	Elements
1.	LC is in a classroom teaching and drawing on the blackboard.
2.	Rape scene. Man with three hands. Blue tiles.
3.	Nietzsche. Coffee factory.
4.	Back to the classroom.
5.	Memories from the missing woman.
6.	Inability to describe the missing woman.
7.	Encounter with transsexuals in the tram or reference to a documentary.
8.	New house and screaming lady. Smoking in the balcony and reference to climbing plants.
9.	Pastry shop and glass door.
10.	Playground and description of the screaming lady.
11.	Train station. Waking from a dream.
12.	Encounter with a lady in the temple.
13.	Pastry lady falls.

to tell a story. However, in the final section of *Gnaisse*, the narrator declares that the entire story might not have been a product of an author but of LC's mind (Carmelo 2015: 114). Contrary to a conventional omniscient narrator who witnesses every action taking place, *Gnaisse*'s narrator is not omniscient in the sense that he sees, hears, or experiences everything, but because events are being obsessively reconstructed as fuzzy memories.

As the novel is mostly comprised of misleading clues that yield no concrete findings, together with possible paths that generally culminate in dead-ends, the process of filling in the gaps, as described by Wolfgang Iser (1980: 166), is taken to an extreme: those gaps that need to be filled in by the reader are deviously turned by Carmelo into bottomless black pits. An illustration of this vital part of the reading process is shared with the reader when LC refers to the empty spaces left by missing cobblestones in a Portuguese sidewalk (Carmelo 2015: 14).

LC claims that the work of art evolves from one point to the next in a manner that vastly exceeds its creator (Carmelo 2015: 6). This insubordination of the work of art is mirrored by LC's ineptitude at describing the mysterious female character around which the novel is built.[7] According to the overwhelmed narrator, she was supposed to be 'the first point of a set of points' he should have traversed (Carmelo 2015: 12) to reach 'the most desired of destinies' but, as much as he tries, she escapes 'the certainty of lines' (Carmelo 2015: 10). The narrator wishes he could tell a straightforward love story 'with no compass or rudder in his hand' (Carmelo 2015: 12), a story with a clear beginning, middle, and end, but all he can do is share a fragmented story that persistently alternates between unclear and conflicting impressions of reality.[8]

Like 'water running through his fingers' (Carmelo 2015: 10), the woman is portrayed as a fleeting and ungraspable moment.[9] LC names this character 'signal-woman' (Carmelo 2015: 16) and claims that she was a 'floating person' (Carmelo 2015: 11), reminding us of Lévi-Strauss's 'floating signifiers' (Lévi-Strauss 1980: 63). Devoid of meaning, these signifiers have the ability to disclose all possible (and even discordant) meanings.[10] Portrayed as the matrix of the fictional world, this woman's description is enmeshed within the novel's self-reference. In *Gnaisse*, people are described as 'labyrinths that go forward with two feet on the ground and two feet instigating the storm' (Carmelo 2015: 40), and therefore, they are also portrayed as volatile and undecipherable entities whose existence is determined by fate. Here is the information LC was able to recollect about the woman:

> Sometimes she was a brunette, at other times she was a blonde. Some days she would stutter, other days she would speak with the accent of sailors.[11] Her lips

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[7] LC claims that, even though he repeated her name to exhaustion for months, he was never able to pronounce it (Carmelo 2015: 11). The portrayal of the woman as a stutterer further emphasizes the repetitive character of the novel (Carmelo 2015: 5).

[8] At a certain point, LC starts missing classes and appears unable to take control of his life.

[9] Here, we may identify a close link between the woman and the novel as part of a self-reflexive transgression.

[10] Luís Carmelo is a professor of semiotics and published abundantly about this field of research. This partly explains why the processes of signification and interpretation seem to hold substantial weight in this enigmatic novel. *Gnaisse* may reveal further autobiographical data whose presence was not explored in this essay.

[11] Carmelo uses the word 'nautas', also used as a suffix in words such as 'astronauts', 'argonauts', and 'cybernauts'. As the novel often refers to 'sailors', we opted for this translation.

were sometimes wide like a bay, or they would sometimes allow themselves to take the shape of a dike … Some may find it strange, but I can assert that her name was always unpronounceable to me.

(Carmelo 2015: 10–11)[12]

According to Arnaut, postmodernist characters are no longer expected to have a name and are often identified by their attributes (Arnaut 2016: 16). These characters are introduced by sparse and limited (even cryptic or misleading) descriptions. As demonstrated before, this happens in *Gnaisse* due to the disintegrating state of the character. Arnaut claims that:

> [T]he broken soul, the crooked and agonizing lives, the pain caused by different types of violence but also the fear and internal lacerations, are not described in a precise and unquestionable way, but must be guessed, or better, decodified through transferring images and figures/icons into characters.

(Arnaut 2016: 19)

Unable to describe events and characters[13] accurately, the troubled narrator introduces a collapsing fictional world that needs to be thoroughly reconstructed by the reader. Since nothing is presented as definite, this fictional world is permanently (re)generated. As already observed, the shattering of reality is caused by LC's neurotic revisitation of memories, which is triggered by his reiterated attempts to cope with suffering. Fragmentation of the self, a theme frequently addressed in postmodernist novels, is also explored in *Gnaisse*. As LC reveals: 'there are several Is, some teaching in the classroom, some navigating over the amphitheatre, others traversing her skin' (Carmelo 2015: 91). Instead of characters that disseminate Enlightenment's notion of a unified self, *Gnaisse* introduces irrational, troubled and ill-defined characters that are unable to guide readers through the fictional world.

In the already mentioned blurb, this novel is described as a 'metaphor of repetition and a metaphor of the ephemeral that portrays life in progress' (Carmelo 2015a). Although printed on changeless pages, this book uses

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[12] Later, we are told that her father killed himself and that her mother lives in Angola. She worked in a bookstore that sold second-hand books, she took drugs and attended clubs *des bas-fonds*. The woman was also an obsessed reader, a kleptomaniac, a liar, and a wicked person (Carmelo 2015: 80–1). However, this information is shared by a character (her photographer friend) whom LC seems to distrust (Carmelo 2015: 62).

[13] LC is also unable to describe his own appearance and resorts to a comparison, made by the photographer, between himself and Matthew Brady's portrait of Edgar Allan Poe (Carmelo 2015: 46).

repetition to keep the narrative engine running. LC claims that he occasionally 'has the feeling that the time [he is] living is always the same' (Carmelo 2015a: 31). Besides LC's compulsive recollection of the time spent with the mysterious woman, the recursive movement of the novel is also created through the monotonous repetition of daily chores or, in LC's words, 'the day-to-day staging' (Carmelo 2015: 23). The pastry shop lady, the woman reading a magazine and Mr Correia are characters taken from everyday life. During the reading of *Gnaisse*, this group of characters seems to remain in an alternate universe, waiting until they are summoned to reinitiate the narrative once again.

The compulsive repetition of events (in LC's words, 'repetitions also have their own free forms that escape us', Carmelo 2015: 22) gives the work an open-ended character. In fact, the refusal to commit to a single ending, or to conclude the 'adventure of meaning' (Carmelo 2015: 34) is frequently highlighted by this novel. According to LC, the space he inhabits is made of letters and propagates an 'infinite curvature' (Carmelo 2015: 34). In Part B, he refers to a 'world that devours itself' and describes several self-cannibalistic processes that take place in the animal kingdom (Carmelo 2015: 27–8). Like the lemmings that feed on themselves and the scorpion that stings itself, Carmelo's novel consumes (or recombines) itself to ensure its survival. This multilayered and ouroboric[14] novel is the result of 'crossed alphabets' (Carmelo 2015: 119) that extend beyond the surface of paper sheets.

In one of the narrative's reconstructions, LC dreams he is climbing a bougainvillea and, as if gaining awareness of his own fictional existence, asks himself why he must climb all the way to the end of the journey, challenging the idea of a narrative as a path to closure (Carmelo 2015: 87–8). Characters that disrupt the barrier between fiction and reality, thus revealing the strings of their puppeteer, are common in postmodernist works and are part of a long tradition of metalepsis. An often-cited example of this metaleptic jump is Luigi Pirandello's *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1921), where a group of characters ask a director to finish their incomplete play. LC often declares that he feels lost and without purpose, like a sleepwalker (Carmelo 2015: 14). When he first meets the woman, he declares that 'it was like this moment was already inscribed on the mouth of some oracle' (Carmelo 2015: 23). However, contrary to Pirandello's characters, LC believes that his life is not ruled by an author, but, like all human beings,

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[14] Carmelo's novel permanently refers to itself and, just like the Ouroboros eating its own tail, *Gnaisse* consumes itself to survive.

by indeterminacy and chance. In *Gnaisse*, randomness and metamorphism are mobilized to represent life.

According to LC, in *The Open Work* cited right at the beginning of section F, Eco describes art as a 'process that reopens possibilities, without making a work move along towards the end or the top' (Carmelo 2015: 91). In *Gnaisse*, circularity and self-reflexivity are used to postpone closure and, just like the Phoenix often mentioned in *Gnaisse*, to ensure this novel's continual reconstruction.

Recursive Intermediations

According to Ana Paula Arnaut, postmodernist novels cultivate a 'mixture of genres' that is 'almost always subversive' (2016: 12). Arnaut also suggests the emergence of a new kind of novel, the 'intermedial novel', whose presence in Portugal becomes clearer after the year 2000 (Arnaut 2018: 23). The figure of the hermaphrodite, that 'intersects all potentialities and solutions' (Carmelo 2015: 47) is frequently invoked by Carmelo and expresses the hybridity and undecidability of this novel. Because it resorts to enigmatic illustrations and invokes several cinematic works, poems, seminal theoretical texts, paintings, and songs, *Gnaisse* can be described as an intermedial artefact that weaves together features associated with different media. Behaving like a living creature, *Gnaisse* exudes smells, makes noises, and breathes. *Gnaisse* also appeals, though metaphorically, to multiple senses, by painting pictures, talking, playing music, and immersing readers in an alternate world.

The four pictures created by Daniel Lima accentuate the surrealist and deranged nature of this novel. These illustrations, inserted at the beginning of the book, introduce the reader to the demanding narrative that follows. One of those pictures displays a naked woman inside a cocoon. Not only does this picture portray the metamorphic property of this novel, it also mirrors the inversion of order and logic promoted by LC's unbalanced psychological state. The straight plumb line located by the side of the cocoon proves that everything in this fictional world is coherent and symmetrical. Yet, if these pictures are read in the same order as the rest of the book, one may notice that North and East have been misplaced. Besides declaring the subversive nature of the novel, the shift of cardinal directions demonstrates that this fictional universe, like all fictional universes, will only obey its own rules.

A ripped graph sheet is added to the cover and drawings of this book. The disruption of this sheet's rigid and compartmentalized space visually epitomizes the disruptive nature of *Gnaisse*. Since LC is unable to explain what led to the deterioration of the relationship with his student, order and causality are dismissed as unessential to read the novel. As *Gnaisse*'s blurb suggests, the novel is not going to be offered in a 'literary package, wrapped up in a bow' (Carmelo 2015a). The action of connecting invisible dots mentioned right at beginning of the novel, and the desperate attempt to make sense of a crumbling world, mirrors the readers' effort to decipher a narrative based on fleeting memories. The reader is thus, at least initially, welcomed to the loop.

While unpacking in his new home, LC claimed that his life had remained 'inside the boxes and packages or covered by white sheets' (Carmelo 2015: 13). He tells the reader that he is storing his books on shelves in an orderly manner, as if he were trying to tie a 'lost thread'[15] (Carmelo 2015: 12–13). In the second part of *Gnaisse* we are told that, as a teenager, LC used to store his books in boxes and, in a similar way to the instructions added by Julio Cortázar to the book *Rayuela* (1963), he invented a method to read his library[16] made of 'crossed narratives' (Carmelo 2015: 119). Alberto Manguel, a well-known book lover and owner of a migrating library,[17] believes that libraries can contain our life story:

> I've often felt that my library explained who I was, gave me a shifting self that transformed itself constantly throughout the years … When I'm in a library, any library, I have the sense of being translated into a purely verbal dimension by a conjuring trick I've never quite understood. I know that my full, true story is there, somewhere on the shelves, and all I need is time and the chance to find it.
>
> (Manguel 2018: 5)

However, libraries are vast and expanding universes. Manguel describes libraries as ever-changing entities, connecting them with his 'shifting self' whose story can never be told. Much like LC's life story, Manguel knows that his story 'remains elusive because it is never the definitive story' (Manguel 2018: 5). Feeling alone and shattered, LC recalls the image of his old bookshelf, emptied of books and 'reduced to a skeleton', and refuses to accept a 'treacherous invitation to memory' (Carmelo 2015: 13). Memory is equated with pain, and thus, LC avoids tracing

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[15] The Portuguese word 'reatar' can be translated as 'to tie again'. However, it can also mean to 'recover', 'resume', or 'restart'.

[16] When he was twenty-two years old, besides numbers, he started adding rocks' names to his complex classification method. Work number 222 was named 'gneiss' (Carmelo 2015: 118).

[17] Manguel's library, comprising 40,000 books, is now located in Portugal.

back the steps to the moments he shared with the missing woman. The reader loses, once again, an opportunity to know more about LC.

Gnaisse persistently uses intertextuality[18] to challenge the reader at yet another level: readers' knowledge of the cited works and their ability to play literary games is persistently sought along the way. Kandinsky, a pioneering artist of abstract art frequently mentioned by Carmelo, believed that the circle was the expression of the fourth dimension (Rudenstine 1976: 310) located beyond our reality.[19] Challenging three-dimensionality, Carmelo frequently mixes myths, mundane scenes, and reveries. In one description of an encounter with the vanishing woman, he tells the reader that they sometimes inhaled butane gas to the point where they almost became unconscious (Carmelo 2015: 27). They would also take pink pills to numb themselves into oblivion (Carmelo 2015: 60). In fact, LC's recollections of the events are generally fuzzy, as if he were intoxicated or feverish, and trying to make sense of the world around him. The circular movement depicted in Kandinsky's paintings is transferred into the narrative and readers are enveloped in a whirlwind of memories and dreams from which, just like LC, they cannot escape. As observed by Carmelo (2015a), the unexpected arrival of the protagonist's sister (Carmelo 2015: 49) seems to be the way out of the continuous replay of memories that creep into LC's mind. However, the reader is redirected to the same classroom where it all began.

We are told that the woman was never enrolled in the university (Carmelo 2015: 79). In Portuguese, the word 'inscrita' means both 'inscribed' and 'enrolled'. This word's double-meaning seems to refer to both the deceitful and immaterial nature of this woman. As LC recalls, she considered matter as 'variable' and her verbal existence as a character is associated (let's not forget the affinity between the woman and *Gnaisse*) with an alphabet made of wind (Carmelo 2015: 58). The woman's illusory and shifting character is enabled by the inexhaustible language combinatoriality[20], which allows Carmelo (or LC) to describe her features and actions in a diverse number of ways.

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[18] In fact, intermediality and intertextuality are closely connected. Klaus Bruhn Jensen observes that the 'aesthetic and broadly discursive approach to the media is the legacy of the humanities' and 'the idea of intermediality was preceded by an idea of 'intertextuality' (2016: 1–2).

[19] Moreover, number four seems to have a particular meaning in this novel. The vanishing female character used to sit in the fourth row of the classroom. Since the novel adopts a self-reflexive and metafictional stance, as well as an intermedial character, the 'fourth wall' (a theatre-related expression) between the reader and the fictional world is consistently put at risk.

[20] Verbal language allows us to describe reality and create fictional events through the combination of syllables into words and words into sentences. Language's combinatoriality is at the basis of literary creation and is used in *Gnaisse* to introduce several perspectives over the same event, and therefore, to ensure this novel's expansion.

Besides repetition and narrative reconstruction, the novel also feeds on reference to several works that rely on different semiotic channels. For instance, Arnold Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* (1899), Don DeLillo's *Point Omega* (2010), Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Blue* (1993), and Alfredo Marceneiro's Fado music. In *Gnaisse*, several media are cited to weave the narrative, producing a text that appeals to different senses:[21] a BASF tape created to 'die together' (Carmelo 2015: 93), the instant photos taken in the subway in order to record his transformation into Poe (Carmelo 2015: 97), blue tiles depicted as an intimate cinematograph (59), and the tri-dimensional daguerreotype into which LC is transformed (Carmelo 2015: 46). In fact, vocabulary associated with photography, cinema, and painting is used to weave the narrative and, though imprecisely, describe some of the characters. For instance, Mathew B. Brady's photo of Edgar Alan Poe is invoked to portray LC.[22] In the final strata of this novel, LC describes the missing woman's appearance in a documentary by resorting to terms used in painting. LC claims that her 'contour' could be seen twice: the first moment is too quick to be grasped, and the second moment only allows a few 'strokes' to be perceived by the retina (Carmelo 2015: 83). When LC plays a music box, instead of music he hears her voice repeating the love song authored by the Galician-Portuguese troubadour Bernal de Bonaval (Carmelo 2015: 83–4). In Part E, life is compared to a loose film tape that, separated from its reel, is merely able to project disjointed images (Carmelo 2015: 79).

Leaving the Labyrinth

Close to the end of the first part of the novel, *Gnaisse*'s fictional universe expands: 'balcony's tiles were gradually cracking – slits were propagating as the result of some type of dilatation, creating a labyrinth that resembles the silk threads of a spider's web' (Carmelo 2015: 96). LC's body parts begin to vanish and, 'the moment when the message was about to stop being cryptic and become legible to everyone' (Carmelo 2015: 103), he finally disappears. As the novel nears its end, its different pieces become detached, as if the readers' anxiety to reach the end has sentenced the novel to its disintegration.

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[21] *Gnaisse* refers to pleasant smells like incense, lavender, violets, and coffee, as well as smells that indicate decay, for instance, urine, mold, sewage, and dead mice.

[22] Later, LC described himself as an imitation of a 'mortified Poe' whose several layers of make-up have started melting (Carmelo 2015: 82).

In the second part of this book, the reader enters a house where LC and his sister (Eleonora) live. The novel's construction process running in the background is crudely revealed: the gas canisters, the rubber ball, Kandinsky's paintings, a magazine containing a photo of Edgar Allan Poe, and all the items around which Carmelo has built his narrative are displayed in a single room (Carmelo 2015: 109–110). LC is not a professor, but a proofreader who rarely leaves his room. He is currently proofreading a book about Pareyson and Duchamp (Carmelo 2015: 111). The narrator (now using the third person) tells the reader that LC transformed the landscape into a globe divided into countries and cities fully imagined by him (Carmelo 2015: 114). We are also told that his sister wishes to sell the family house but, to LC, this would mean 'amputating the many lives that he lived and listened' (Carmelo 2015: 114) and, as a result, the end of the fictional world. However, once the mechanism of the novel is revealed, and the glitch in the machine is fixed, the narrative is set to automatically refocus on the relationship between the main character and the mysterious woman once again. To lovers, time has no beginning or end (Carmelo 2015: 60), and therefore, LC and the woman's relationship is compared to an ever-expanding narrative. In order to continue its rebirth, the novel constantly describes its own decadence, playing 'the game of life falling inside death' (Carmelo 2015: 60). As readers recall the many references to putrefaction and sewage right at the beginning of the book (for instance, in page 6), they realize that signs of decadence and entropy were there all along. This happens because *Gnaisse* seems to be designed as a metaleptic loop.

In *Gnaisse*, fate is described as an 'account of the unattainable' or something that humans pursue as if trying to reach an 'extremely violent light – a torch – that lives in several hands … in several versions, each one of them collecting the possible facts' (Carmelo 2015: 68). Therefore, Carmelo's novel is described as a prospective itinerary, an oracle that points to different directions and a game of chance that, like life itself, the reader will not be able to win. We cannot avoid the impression that LC is aware that readers' voracity, fuelled by the hope to tie up any loose ends before reaching a definite closure, dictate the termination of the story. He, and the third person narrator that explains everything in the second part of the book, also seems to know that characters outlive their creators and readers. As he describes the dismantlement of the fictional world in the last pages of Part 1, LC tells the reader that he could feel the woman breathing behind the wall: 'the bridge between inspiration and expiration had become wider. The cycle would reinitiate always with the

same cadence' (Carmelo 2015: 96). In fact, as soon as readers reach the end of the book, the narrative is ready to begin again without including them in the process. This time, only characters are given access to the world built around LC and the mysterious woman. The paper barrier imposed by the last page of the book prevents them from also 'taking a peek' at the fictional world running endlessly in some other dimension.

Gnaisse consciously (even sadistically) undermines readers' expectations, thus equating the process of reading this novel with an attempt to sketch an approximate map of its fictional world. By depicting 'life in progress' (Carmelo 2015a), *Gnaisse* mercilessly challenges the notion of narrative as a coherently organized and self-explanatory chain of events, as well as the notion of a book as a sealed container for a story. Carmelo's novel is a celebratory and complex exploration of the ability of fiction to create alternate worlds. Together with experimental and postmodernist literature, this Hypercontemporary novel exposes the mechanism of fiction and extrapolates its paper sheets by playing metaleptic and intermedial games with the reader. Subliminally, *Gnaisse* also tells readers about the fictional essence of memories, and about the stories we tell ourselves to survive. According to LC, 'the world is a blade that can, from one moment to the next, cause wreckages' (Carmelo 2015: 14).

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