



António Lobo Antunes: Production and Consumption of Subjectivity

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Abstract

António Lobo Antunes (1942-) is one of Portugal's leading contemporary authors, whose reputation as a world-class writer is confirmed by the number of publications, translations and dedicated readers. The present article is concerned with his latest novel, *O arquipélago da insónia*, or *The Archipelago of Insomnia*, if translated into English. The text represents a great challenge insofar as reading and understanding of contemporary literature is concerned. As in several of his earlier works, Lobo Antunes continues to explore the limits of narration and readability by experimenting on narrative structure and voice. The focus of my analysis is the organisation and structure of the work, which I regard as autopoietic, or self-generating. I intend to look at how the various voices, or subjectivities in the novel relate in a productive, but also consumptive fashion, in order to maintain the continuous process of making literature.

Keywords: António Lobo Antunes, Postmodernist fiction, Autopoiesis, Intersubjectivity, Interdisciplinarity, Production, Consumption, Food

1. What kind of book is this?

As in several of his earlier works, Portuguese author António Lobo Antunes continues to explore the topics of literature, intersubjectivity and family relations in the novel, *O arquipélago da insónia* (2008), or *The Archipelago of Insomnia* if translated into English. (Note 1) From the opening pages, the impression is that the narration occurs in a place of utter solitude and desolation; more specifically, it is set in the abandoned family home: “De onde me virá a impressão que na casa, apesar de igual, quase tudo lhe falta?” [“Where could I be getting the impression from that in the house, despite being the same, almost everything is missing?”] (Antunes 2008:13) Similar to the house itself, the text transmits a sense of an infinite emptiness on the one hand, and, on the other hand, insists on its overwhelming richness. Out of the void and silence of the dead, as if brought back to life by way of the imagination of the narrator, appears one voice after another or one voice of the other. Chained to each other like connected pieces in the construction of the literary work, a connected whole – the image of a family – emerges in the course of the narration of past events. The latter are being remembered from the multiple points of view of the narrator and his mute brother, the sole living beings left in the house. On the basis of these intermingling and combined perspectives, voices, times and sites the assumption can be made that the novel of Lobo Antunes exemplifies a particular mode, pattern or behaviour of contemporary fiction. In a time, which in the words of William R. Paulson could be called “post-literary,” it is imperative to insist on a continuous questioning of what literature is. As Paulson writes on the topic of “knowing literature”: “Trying to understand the place of literary texts in this [computerized] world may seem a perverse or self-defeating exercise, for it means speculating on the role of literature in a postliterary culture” (Paulson 1988:vii). Paulson's observation supports the idea of how literature should be seeking not so much to pronounce as to produce meaning in a new context: “It is a kind of meaning that can be legitimately discussed only if we are willing to move away from the dead center of the literary disciplines, namely, from the implicit assumption that literature is an object of knowledge” (ix-x). The emphasis of a contemporary inquiry into knowing literature, then, should be on *how* the text operates in order to know knowledge *as* literature and, furthermore, on what that kind of knowledge literature really *is*. What Paulson seems to indicate is that literature as we (think we) know it has been effaced by time and can now be seen to reinvent itself anytime, anywhere, constantly changing, circulating attuned, as it were, to its fast changing and increasingly more globalised surroundings.

Echoing these observations, towards the end of *O arquipélago da insónia* the narrator asks what kind of book this is that costs so much to write (Antunes 2008:172). The question is bracketed, inserted in the midst of an ongoing reflection on the nature of the dictating voices. And not only does the narrator "I" question the status of these appearances and the past events contained within them, but also is he intrigued by the present and of his own self: "(quem se lembra do que fui e de quem fui?)" ["who remembers what and from whom I was?"] (172).

In order to approach these questions concerned with what *kind* of book or construction this is, the following examination of Lobo Antunes' text will focus on the operative forces that are at work in a text which seems as exhilarating as it is frustrating, as singular as it is universal. Is it at all possible to speak of the text, or should we allow the work to speak for and of itself only? What behavioural patterns can be identified in the text, and how can we acknowledge them in a meaningful way?

2. From Modernism to Postmodernism

In comparison to his earlier phases, the novel *O arquipélago da insónia* demonstrates that Lobo Antunes' work has grown out of an era of modernity in order to find its place within the ambiguous confines of post-modernity. (Note 2) From a tendency to give "thematic" priority to historical events, the later phase of the author shows a change of interest invested in the literary work. As such, the change of concern corresponds to what Steven Connor, with reference to Brian McHale, suggests, namely that "there has been a shift in the dominant tendency of twentieth-century fiction" (Connor 1997:130): whilst the modernist novel is concerned with epistemological questions, postmodernist fiction is characterised by its ontological concern and, we may add, by the engagement with form. And to paraphrase McHale, the ontological aspect of postmodernism might be expressed in a number of questions, such as:

What is a world? What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured? And so on. (McHale: 1987:10).

The shift of emphasis, from the question of knowledge and understanding to the nature of being, existence and the making of autonomous worlds, could be seen as a reflection of the altered function of subjectivity and voice in literature. Indeed, if the work questions its own nature and status as well as that of the world in which it partakes and of which it is a projection, then that is a sign of a growing awareness of the particular relation between the work, the world and the voice that mediates between them. Furthermore, the literary work seems to exist on the basis of a relation between world, work and word. The text as a literary commodity is still invariably concerned with notions of identity, knowledge and understanding, but in a way which looks upon the role of literature in a new way. More specifically, as in the case of Lobo Antunes, there is a decisive shift of focus from essentiality to functionality, where, in light of the latter, the work demonstrates a will to communicate and to *construct* rather than deconstruct language and a literary world. Moreover, "knowledge" as a concept is re-appropriated by literature in a functional, operational "know how" sense, because "truth" in a traditional philosophical sense does not exist. McHale, therefore, emphasises the "construction" of postmodernist literature; a belief in the givenness of the category of literature, or the literary system and underlying systematicity of postmodernist literature (Connor 1997:131). In light of these considerations, it does not seem wrong to suggest that it is on the one hand the acknowledgement of the inexistence of "truth" and on the other hand the resulting sense of creative freedom that encourages early examples of postmodernist literature. Like in the case of Beckett, literature surfaces from the dark in the form of an entity and an event and from that moment onwards may develop into operational constructions. (Note 3)

In light of these considerations, literature as a construction underlines the aspect of order despite disorder, or the significance of order (structure, law) within a disorderly textual whole. For the "wholeness" of the textual event, order is the sign of the text's capacity to "totalise" and to behave as one. With reference to Derrida's "events-texts," Asja Szafraniec writes:

The event archived in a literary work has two faces. It is defined as 'what does not return, what is not repeated' – or, in other words, as 'nothing' (for otherwise it would fall prey to the principle of iterability and precisely be repeated) – and, significantly, as an excess of iterability, being repeated in everything else. It is this excess of iterability that allows the work 'to gather, by translating, all figures into one another, to totalize by formalizing'." (Szafraniec 2007:31-32)

Here, according to Derrida, the concept of literature is composed of two opposite forces, or desires: the singularity and the universal. If the first is the disorderly (unruly) "nothing" (31) and the latter the iterable order of the general (32), then the assumption could be made that a text like the novel by Lobo Antunes demonstrates an imperative to construct, to create and thereby to reintroduce a reflection on the nature of literature and textuality. One may speak of the apparent paradox of "essential artificiality," characteristic of literature, which can be elucidated through an examination of the relation between order and disorder, the numerous voices vs. the one, singular voice. Lobo Antunes' novel operates according to its meta-fictional, playful state, demonstrating its qualities as artificially real as they are unknowingly

knowable, or unnameably nameable, and the process of working through and working out this event as past and present, singular and universal is what makes it possible to speak of the several voices in one. In an interview from 2004, Lobo Antunes, quite significantly, denies the general impression of his novels being polyphonic; they are not, he says, insisting on the fact that it is always the same voice that speaks. Furthermore, it is the wish of the author that the voice may be that of the reader, or rather, the voice which does not speak, but which we hear (Arnaut 2008:454). Reflecting, thus, the idea of order within disorder, the one within the many and the self within selves, these voices in the singular pinpoint a contemporary experience of existential absurdity, nothingness, bewilderment and alienation, which, however, nourishes a creative process. The Antunian writing is no longer merely an echo of existential absurdity (trauma, loss, shock); rather, it is absurdity itself, which transmits an imperative and a necessity to narrate. Antunes' writing is, to speak with Connor, a work grown out of modernist tantrums, which combines a tough-minded knowledge of the worst of incoherence and alienation with a benignly well-adjusted tolerance towards them [...] (Connor 1997:122). As such, the order of literature which operates against a general tendency towards entropy transpires in the form of a structural organisation and a behavioural pattern of the text.

2.1 Law of the living

If Postmodernism could be seen as a kind of "Dionysiac virus within modernism" (Connor 1997:118), then the attention must be brought to how that virus has developed into an autonomous condition defining both life as well as art. Literature, in this regard, is an idiosyncratic entity that continues to grow and live according to its own laws. On the basis of Lobo Antunes' most recent text, where history is inscribed (as singularity) and re-inscribed (as generality) at the turn of every page, there is also a boundary or limit to how open to the world and to our interpretative scrutiny the literary work can be. Even in light of the absence of "truth," there is a definitory self-imposed, self-regulative limit to the textual entity which must be respected, should the questioning of literarity not dissolve. The difficulty resides in the fact that in order for literature to be identifiable, there is a law of its behaviour. However, this law, from the point of view of the observer, can only be clarified by looking at the functional aspects of the operation of the work itself. This is a highly problematic issue as the law of literature may be silent, wordless and defying observation to the extent that we are as if blind to it. Any tentative description (or critique) of it can strive to metaphorically and functionally *mirror* the processes taking place within the confines of the literary system. Szafraniec observes with respect to the topic of the law of literature: "The minimal observation we can make is that in order for the law to apply to the text's event, there must be a movement of communication between the text and its law that reflects on the relationship between this law and the literary institution in general" (39). What is permanent and decisive in this regard is the relation of the text to its law and also to the larger literary institution (39), which makes it possible for the textual construction to become identifiable. The desire of the critic or reader to identify and to know this peculiar relation is possibly as natural as the wish to look for the origin of life itself. If the contention here is that the law of literature is inscribed as a double communication in the operative doing or making of literature, then behavioural patterns can be examined according to their inherent dispositions and capacities for communication and transmission. Indeed, the view that laws characterise a certain activity of nature (Note 4) suggests that Lobo Antunes' literary construction could be examined as a "living system," a *kind* of self-generating, but also self-annulling entity of literature, whose form of communication and conversation is twofold: first, it is similar to a form of trade taking place within the system itself; secondly, its communication of that first communication occurs in the relating activity between entity (system) and reader (the latter a system in its own right). (Note 5)

3. Poiesis, praxis, autopoiesis, linguallaxis

The form of communication which occurs in the novel of Lobo Antunes demonstrates that the function of exchange plays a decisive role both on a functional as well as on a metaphorical level. In both cases, writing "happens" as a way of coupling and relating, producing and annihilating text by the text itself. In regards to this apparently inexhaustible practice, the behaviour of the literary work underlines the similarities between the literary system and procedures found in natural (biological) processes. As such, communication as a form of exchange functions like the *praxis* or activity of literature as event. Giorgio Agamben points to a double aspect of praxis as productive activity when he comments on the original difference between *poiesis* and *praxis* (Agamben 1999).

3.1 Communication and consumption

For Agamben, man's "doing" or productive activity is equated with a praxis which determines the very status of the self. Prior to this contemporary understanding of praxis, however, was the old Greek meaning of the term, according to which two aspects of "doing" were clearly distinct from each other: the first *poiesis* (to produce, as in bringing into being), the second *praxis* (to do, as in "acting"):

[C]entral to praxis was the idea of the will that finds its immediate expression in an act, while, by contrast, central to poiesis was the experience of pro-duction into presence, the fact that something passed from nonbeing to being, from concealment into the full light of the work. (1999:68-69)

Whilst praxis was associated with the living and the principle of motion, poiesis determined a mode of truth and of unveiling (69):

[W]hile poiesis constructs the space where man finds his certitude and where he ensures the freedom and duration of his action, the presupposition of work [praxis] is, on the contrary, bare biological existence, the cyclical processes of the human body, whose metabolism and whose energy depend on the basic products of labor. (69)

According to the modern meaning of praxis, the two aspects blur into one and become suggestive, first of an expression of the will and secondly, of how the object was produced. For the work of art, according to Agamben, it is possible to follow its development and crossing over “from the sphere of poiesis to that of praxis [where it] eventually finds its status in a metaphysics of the will, that is, of life and its creativity” (72). More specifically, in regard to the modern notion of praxis and its relevance for literary communication as a relational practice, two features seem to be central to its activity: appetite, or hunger (as will) and production (as procedure) of knowledge. In light of these observations, the intersecting narrative voices and perspectives in Antunes’ novel “couple” and relate by way of consumption and production. The capacity of literature to communicate meaning and knowledge by way of functionality is based on the fact that the narrative body relates the two original meanings of “doing” – producing and acting – in *auto-poiesis*. Moreover, when the literary body self-generates and brings itself into life through self-activation, it happens as a consequence of a certain structure and organisation of the will.

3.2 Autopoiesis and linguallaxis

Initially, Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela introduced the term autopoiesis as a way of understanding “the organization of living systems in relation to their unitary character” (Maturana/Varela 1980:75). (Note 6) Living systems, like machines, are defined according to their ability to self-generate and develop from simple cell to complex systems. They are, in more elaborate terms:

a network of processes of production, transformation and destruction of components [that] produces the components which: i) through their interactions and transformations regenerate and realize the network of processes (relations) that produced them; and ii) constitute it as a concrete unity in the space in which they exist by specifying the topological domain of its realization as such a network. (Maturana/Varela 1980:135)

The original concept of an autopoietic, unitary organisation and structure, suggestive of systemic autonomy has, in turn, been applied in disciplines as different as sociology, computer science, physics, psychotherapy, economy and law, to name a few. What seems to be the common denominator of these systems is the emphasis on transferability, or the organisation of how to get productive information across by way of communication. This is also a highly problematic aspect, since operational concepts must be “translated” from one system area to another. As Siegfried Schmidt notes, if the concept of autopoiesis is transferable to other areas of research other than biology, then there is always going to be a question of whether it is possible to speak of a “real” or only a metaphorical transfer (Schmidt 1989:53). For example, in the case of literature, as Schmidt writes, what are these systemic unities, or components involved in the literary system and how can we *exactly* determine the ways in which they relate? How do their systemic encounters or elementary couplings take place?

In spite of obvious difficulties, in the case of literature in general and of Lobo Antunes’ novel in particular, the question of whether the transfer of concepts from one system to another is regarded as real or metaphorical is based on the system’s appropriation or interpretation of the concepts. If the *real* of literature is equated with the fact that literature *is* per definition metaphorical, then the functional communication of the system can only be as real as it is metaphorical, and the system can, consequently, only operate according to this double nature. There is, thus, a case of communication between the functional operations (activity) and metaphorical “bringing into being.” In light of the latter, Lobo Antunes’ text demonstrates the capacities of production and consumption of components, voices or subjectivities within the system. Furthermore, the structural coupling and intersubjective relations in the text can be seen to construct, but also deconstruct the literary entity. What it is that makes this procedure a literary form of exchange is precisely the mode of transaction, or coupling between the functional and the metaphoric: the literary system – consisting, as it does, of language – is kept “alive,” first, by its generation of information, or communicative substances; secondly, by the systemic consumption and digestion of these substances. In the same way as a living body internalises and digests a nutritional substance as “information” – be it for the sake of its preservation or destruction – *language* passes through the literary body in order to secure its identity and maintenance. An explicit reference to these connections between literature, language, production and consumption can be found in Paul Bains’ brilliant book, *The Primacy of Semiosis, An Antology of Relations* (2006). In addressing how autopoiesis, languaging, relational interaction and coupling are formative of all human and animal systems, Bains writes:

Among most social insects, the mechanism of structural coupling occurs through a chemical coupling called trophallaxis, or “food sharing” (from the Greek ‘flow of foods’). There is a continuous flow of secretions between the

members of an ant colony through sharing of stomach contents each time they meet. (Bains 2006:101-102) (Maturana/Varela 1987:186).

The point here is, as Bain notes, “these couplings or interactions form a network of coordinations of actions, which generate phenomena that an isolated organism could not generate” (102). Bearing on the aspect of language as “communicative foods,” Maturana and Varela coined the term “linguallaxis,” referring to how human beings couple in a similar way as insects. Also, it must be specified that the distribution of substances throughout a whole population is responsible for the resulting differentiation as well as for the specification of roles and functions (Bains 2006:107). As Maturana and Varela observe:

Remove the queen from her location, and immediately the hormonal imbalance that her absence causes will result in a change in the feeding of the larvae which develop into queens. Indeed, all the ontogenies of the different members of an ant colony are bound together in a co-ontogenic structural drift as they arise in a network of continuously changing trophallactic interactions (Maturana/Varela 1987:186).

As Bains notes, “the queen is only a queen as long as she is fed in a certain way” (107), and her ontogeny, status and position rely on the circulation of language and of the transportation and production of food. In light of the above, let us turn our attention to the “social field” of *O arquipélago da insónia*, where these matters can be examined in closer detail. Here, the protocol of literature establishes its own boundaries of accepted behaviour of the system, according to a law of “coordinations of coordinations of consensual interactions” (Bains 2006:104). First, based on a definition of the components and basic relations involved in the coordination of the literary system, it will become clearer how various familial lineages are related by way of “food exchange” as forms of communication (consumption and production). Secondly, the attention will be brought to how the production of subjectivities or voices is founded on this *kind* of systemic self-consumption.

4. A devouring perspective: eye / mouth

The systemic components of the literary system can be regarded as textual entities, which, by being related to one another (as a “family”), contribute functionally to the formation and structuring of metaphorical subjectivity. However, according to an autopoietic organisation, whilst subjectivity is produced, it is also consumed, or annulled by the same system, in order to maintain a systemic production. Moreover, we may identify a circular organisation of productive consumption (or consumptive production) in the novel by Lobo Antunes. By looking at *how* family members and voices are related, description (“naming”) seems as functional as the functional (“doing”) is nameable and the point is that the “name” does not *mean* anything unless it has a functional signification, in other words, is capable of urging further production of text. One way of looking at this relational structure and its production of subjectivities in the novel is by examining the function and role observation and perspective.

4.1 Orders of observation

In connection with “perspective” and “observation,” Bains refers to Maturana and Varela, for whom “the self is generated as a fourth order recursive distinction” (Bains 2006:109). The preceding “orders” can be identified by way of their observational position. Bains writes:

Basic coordinations are a first-order linguistic domain (i.e., a domain of coordinations of actions). ‘Observing’ and ‘linguaging’ are constituted as a second-order recursion in consensual coordinations of action. The self (fourth-order recursion) arises through a coordination of a coordination of a coordination of a coordination of actions. The observer, (third-order) arises with the distinction of the operational realization of observing in a bodyhood. Thus, fourth-order recursion is ‘I am observing’ (Bains 2006:109).

In other words, for Maturana and Varela, as Bains notes, the systemic orders of coordinating instances are as follows: “basic coordinations (first order), observing (second order), observer (third order, observing observing), and self-consciousness (fourth order)” (109). (Note 7) Several points need to be made here, especially in regard to the aspect of observation as communication. As Siegfried Schmidt writes, the role of observation in connection with autopoiesis must be approached carefully and there has to be a clear distinction between the observer *of* the system and the observer *in* the system (Schmidt 1989:36). In the case of the text by Lobo Antunes the problem of observation can be worked around by emphasising the double metaphorical-functional status of language, hence observation as a language activity. This, in turn, defines a “communicative” relation between the *eye* that sees and the *mouth* that speaks; in other words, a form of observation that situates the observer instance inside as well as outside the system and whose double function is to consume as well as generate narration. A corresponding observation of these languaging orders can be found in what Szafraniec sees as Deleuze’s three stages of “exhaustion of the possible” in the work of Beckett (2007:102). Here, the first stage is that of nomination, of the language of words (“language I”), where language exhausts the possible with words, but, as Szafraniec writes, not the words themselves. For the latter, another meta-language is needed (“language II”), where words are seen as a mixing flow of voices that, in turn, exhaust the words by “drying up” and tracing the voices to their owners (104). If so far the correspondences between the first and second order and the Deleuzian

Language I and II can be made, it is more problematic in connection with the third and fourth order (“observing observing” and “self-consciousness”). For Deleuze, the third stage means “getting beyond,” or becoming external to the voices (without being a voice). A solution to this problem of limitation can be had in positing the possibility of an immanent limit, anywhere in the flow of voices (104). From the point of view of the orders of observation and co-ordination, this limit, or act of going beyond words (and voices) is found in the split or double function of the observer position. The latter is, as we have seen, both inside and outside the systemic operations and between the third and fourth order arises the split between self and other, subject and object, function and metaphor (“I am observing me”). This last stage, or order, is also the point where the system – by opening its eye and becoming self-aware – exhausts itself, consumes its communication from within and thereby reaches the limit of its exhaustion.

4.2 *I + me: going beyond subject and object*

The observations made so far can be exemplified in *O arquipélago da insónia* where the basic domain of action is, metaphorically speaking, the family home. Based on their oscillating position between the role of observing and observer in the domain, the generators of the narrative are the narrator (“I”) and his brother, figuring and functioning as mirror images of one another, as subject and object – (I + me) – where one is constantly facing the other, either in the present, observing: “continuamos na cozinha um diante do outro” (36) [“we are still in the kitchen, one in front of the other”]; or in the past, observing observer observed: “dei pelo meu irmão a observar-me consoante se observava a si mesmo no poço...” (37) [“I noticed my brother, observing me, as if he was observing himself in the well”].

The two are united in the production of the story: (“foi o meu irmão que escreveu estas páginas muito mais devagar do que se passou de facto, não fui eu quem o disse”) (104) [“it was my brother who wrote these pages more slowly than how it actually happened, I was not the one who told”], and the basic structuring “narrative behaviour” of observing and languaging “fills” the house with memories through the generation of recursive voices, hence of family constellations. The house, as such, becomes a space of memories, made up of, or inhabited by a collection of objects such as handkerchief, moustache, horse, perfume, teacup, etc, which, in turn, develop into larger, more complex substances, or “products” like smaller archipelagos or autonomous ontogenies. These resulting objectified subjectivities or “selves” behave and speak like grandfather, father, grandmother, mother, but also like sons and brothers. They do not *exist*, yet they are *operative*, so that virtual, systemically real beings may speak from their positions within the domain: “...somos personagens da moldura, sorrisos confundidos com os estalos do soalho, não existimos e portanto o que digo não existiu, que caçadeira, que sacho, que baús, que dedos escrevem isto...” (23) [“...we are framed characters, smiles that are mistaken for cracks of the floor, we do not exist, hence what I am saying did not exist, what hunting rifle, what pick axe, what trunks, which fingers are writing this...”].

From their position of “observing observers” the voices of the brothers united in a languaging entity generate subjectivities that are, paradoxically *and* literally, identical to themselves as others. Furthermore, we note that it is the productive recursive conduct that constitutes a boundary of the production. This is to say that the form of behaviour demonstrated by the literary system goes beyond the difference between “I” and “brother” to the extent where the subject-object constellation has been cancelled, or annulled (“consumed” through observation). Consequently, the system remains identical to itself (“I am observing me” = “I am consuming/producing me”) and the autopoietic organisation secures the controlled self-regulation and maintenance of its (self)-production and of its own space.

4.3 “Self-consumption”- “self-production”

In light of the circular pattern of autopoietic behaviour, we can now identify more precisely the literary system as a *kind* of self-regulating communication, or relation between production and consumption of objectified subjectivities. The point to be made, once again, is that the created subjectivities maintain the identity of the initial basic structure, in spite of differences in order within the system. The system, thus, remains identical to itself by the fact that the produced substances are being consumed by that which generated them. In regard to the various family constellations, it is obviously not a case of traditional self-reflection, or a subject-object dualism in the text; regardless of the apparent multi-voiced narrative, Lobo Antunes’s novel, by way of a devouring, yet productive activity is functionally a *singular* entity, identical to itself. According to the systemic logic or law, the grandfather *is* the father, like the father *is* the son, etc, and it may be assumed that the “familial” topic, which occupies the writing of Lobo Antunes can also be transferred to the literary production itself. From the way in which consumption is also a form of production, the relations between family members in the novel are maintained by what may be called “literary cannibalism.” To borrow a term from Cosima Lutz, we have to do with “literary eating-procedures”: “Inwieweit aber können literarische Eßvorgänge – als Metaphern für literarische Kommunikation – überhaupt als kannibalistisch gedeutet werden, wenn es sich dabei doch nie um echte, sondern nur um virtuelle Speisen handelt?” (Lutz 2007:206). [“To which extent can literary eating procedures – as metaphors for literary communication – be interpreted as cannibalistic, when it is not a case of real, but only virtual meals?”].

It now becomes clearer how the languaging activity in the novel is as metaphorical as it is functional; indeed, communication is upheld by the exchange between the two sides of the same story and it is the double aspect which

makes it a *literary* communication. On the basis of this duplicity, the notion of productive consumptive cannibalism can be transferred metaphorically and functionally to the production of *subjectivity*. By referring back to the orders of coordination and observation, the productive “cannibalism” in the case of Lobo Antunes can be identified by aligning the “orders of observation” (“eye”) with the “orders of consumption” (“mouth”) of the text. If “observation” is equated with “consuming,” there are numerous passages in the novel which can illustrate how “consumption” occurs in the form of address, hence as a devouring communication. In one scene, the narrator is convinced that the “incomprehensible” house could crush them all to pieces “between two tables, two angle-irons” (106). The same notion of a gaping mouth chewing and swallowing everything back into a basic circulation emerges quite literally *within* the system, or house, in a scene where the “mute” brother asks: “Qual a minha idade hoje em dia e quantos anos passaram desde aquilo que contei?” (163) [How old am I today and how many years have passed since what I told?] Here, his interrogations refer both to a the present situation in which he is situated in the house (observing observer) and to the observing activity, or observation of the selves as *others*, metaphorically functional, objectified and virtual appearances in the produced narrative (of the past). One of these subjectivities or appearances from the past is a certain blind machinist, who is remembered as being pulled out of a well in a bucket and who starts speaking to the boy (the observing observer in the observation):

-Onde fica o poço menino?

sem que lhe distinguisse a cara na aba do chapéu, percebia os olhos a boirarem não no lugar das sobreancelhas, na boca, mastigue-os que não lhe servem de nada [...]. (163)

[-Where is the well, boy?

without recognising the face under the brim of the hat, I saw the eyes floating, not in their usual place of the eyebrows, in the mouth, he chews them, as they are of no use [...].

Here, the situation is one in which the narrator is narrating an observation of his observation *within* the observation, where he (self) figures as self and other (“Menino”, “boy”). Hence, self-awareness of the observing instance (“I”) is related – metaphorically and functionally – to a self as *other-yet-identical*. There might even be the case of a presumed *fifth-order* of self-as-other(s) – in this case the machinist – and the recursive structure of the system can be identified from how the voice of the metaphorical fifth-order self is intersected in the produced/consumed narrative (“Onde fica o poço menino”). The text, by representing the machinist in the form of a fragment, illustrates the process in which the image has not yet become a definite subject-other, and rather is an entity that is still unclear, or in the making (“sem que lhe distinguisse a cara”) absurdly composed (“os olhos a boirarem...na boca”).

5. Reading Lobo Antunes: the voice we keep hearing

With reference to *O arquipélago da insónia*, it is now possible to return to the opening question: what kind of book is this that costs so much to write? As for the novel’s production of subjectivities, voices and family relations, the above considerations have tried to look at how the inserted ontogenies of a possible fifth-order in the text are generated, but also consumed as nutrition by the literary system in the course of narration. Here, it is a matter of co-ordinating the different orders of perspectives (“I,” “brother,” “father,” “mother,” “grandfather,” etc) for the purpose of maintaining the identity of the system or self. Communication becomes an act, or eating procedure, which is a way in which the system eats itself up from the inside, that is, from the point of view of the created subjectivities. In other words, these virtual figures operate as both the mouth and the “food” in the maintenance of their own production and communication, and the aspect of linguallaxis can be observed in the relation between “I” (consumer, narrator) and “me” as object (consumed, narrated). In the novel the “eye in the mouth” relation constitutes a form of self-observation, whose structure of recursive communication (“Come here”, “Menino”, “Idiot”) shows how the text is being swallowed up in and by itself in a process of continuous digestion and production. In metaphorical terms, the situation is illustrated in the scene where the blind machinist is swallowed by the well (166). In the same way as the “poço” can figure as a well, a dark hole, both a blind gaze and a gaping mouth, in a functional sense, it develops from a simple fragment into a subjectivity, a voice, a mouth (“machinist”) that, in turn, is consumed in order to circulate and reproduce in and by the system. The reading of the novel has sought to demonstrate that by moving from a narrative strategy based on essentiality to one of functionality, it becomes obvious that literature as a system in its own right is productive of its own laws, which, in turn, produce a virtual narrative, its objectified subjectivity, a functional metaphor. The system, thus, secures its maintenance and, most importantly, its identity and literarity. There is, obviously, no plot or meaning to speak of, only an order or a chain of events, of exchanges of communications that speaks by doing, or that knows by knowing “how to” produce and consume.

The fascination of Lobo Antunes’ writing originates in its capacity to challenge the readers, or literally, consumers of the text. It does not seem wrong to suggest that anyone engaging with the text becomes blindly related to the textual system as if from a *sixth* order position. As living systems in our own right, readers are active components in the maintenance of literature. When there is no longer a question of making sense, of understanding or knowing literature,

the interpretative strategy is based on an involvement that is similar to the operations at work in the text itself: it is a question of making. If metaphors have become as nonsensical as they are functionally significant, then the textual production as well as interpretation is based on a languaging activity that cannot be but blindly aware of itself. This kind of work is full of a will or appetite to simply carry on exploring new ways in which fiction can make sense (quite literally) or communicate its artificial essentiality.

Objections can certainly be made as to the question of observation, communication and the various orders involved in the system. However, to speak of “observation” in this case the reader is forced to look at it as a mode of “seeing” through a language activity. As such, observation (of self, of other) is not a matter of naming, but of feeding into, develop and ultimately consuming subjectivity and otherness. Consequently, the other is brought back to sameness, enclosed in and limited by the system. Literarity is communicated as this kind of language activity and is observable from our own engagement’s “blind” point of view, from where blindness transmits a sensation of engagement with the text. Could it be that the sound of literature – of the system that never sleeps – is that silent voice we keep hearing and coming back to in our own reading activity? Lobo Antunes would wish it to be so, and by constantly returning to it himself, his writing expresses nothing but that wish.

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Notes

Note 1. *O arquipélago da insónia* has not yet been translated into English. All present translations are mine.

Note 2. These remarks seem contrary to what Svend Erik Larsen writes with reference to Lobo Antunes and modernity: “Disintegration, liquid identities, amalgamation of history and imagination, intertextuality – these could be keywords to describe a series of postmodern novels, mixing haphazardly all value systems, playing freely with historical reality, discarding any importance of temporal order. But with his choice of reference, Antunes shows a much stronger affiliation to pre-WW II high modernism. [...] There is destruction of values but no relativism, there is imagination but abolition of material history, there is disintegration but no elimination of a sequential time structure for the sake of the ever present now as the only reality. The past and the future are basic temporal components in their own right.” (Cabral et al 2003:332). What will become clearer in the course of the present examination of Lobo Antunes’ writing is that so-called postmodernity, as postliterarity, is far from being a mix of value systems haphazardly thrown together, or as free playing as it may seem. Indeed, it would rather seem to be the opposite case, whereby literature as a system feeds

on historical reality and integrates an experience of that reality in its systemic process of digestion and production of literary discourse.

Note 3. As Catharina Wulf observes in relation to Beckett's prose, his novels "are characteristic of a gradual movement from the outside world into the internal sphere of the writer/narrator, attributing the principal role to the narrator's imagination." (Wulf 1997:57) Cf. Derrida's remark: "le concept de littérature est construit sur le principe du 'tout dire'." (Derrida 1999:24) According to Derrida, the "texts-events" are "texts which in their various ways were no longer simply, or no longer only, literary" (Szafraniec 2007:30).

Note 4. Cf. A. F. Chalmers' observation of laws and causality in science and nature. He observes that "[t]he view that laws characterise the dispositions, powers, capacities or tendencies of things has the merit that it acknowledges at the outset what is implicit in all scientific practice, namely that nature is active. It makes it clear what makes systems behave in accordance with laws, and it links laws with causation in a natural way" (220). However, as is further noted, "there are fundamental laws in physics that cannot be construed as causal laws, such as in the case of thermodynamics and conservation laws. In the case of the latter, these non-causal laws "just do" operate (Chalmers 1999:225).

Note 5. By emphasising the connection between procedures observed in life (natural systems) and literature, it is possible to refer to what Szafraniec notes on the difference between Derrida and Deleuze in relation to literature: "Whereas Derrida's 'grammatology' attempts to extrapolate the relevance of the notions traditionally associated with writing to other domains of life, Deleuze's project goes in the reverse direction: to show the manifestation of 'life' in literature. It is neither as writing nor as signature but as life, 'becoming,' that literature intervenes in life." (100)

Note 6. Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition. The Realization of the Living*, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Vol. 42, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht, Boston and London, 1980, 1st ed. 1972/3.

Note 7. The scope of this article does not allow for a more thorough examination of autopoiesis and self-consciousness in literature. I address the topic elsewhere.