

LISTENING AND LEGIBILITY: URBAN SURFACES AGAINST 'OVERARCHING MEANINGS' IN LISPECTOR'S *THE BESIEGED CITY*

Călina PĂRĂU¹

Article history: Received 05 February 2024; Revised 04 April 2024; Accepted 10 April 2024;
Available online 25 June 2024; Available print 30 June 2024.

©2024 Studia UBB Philologia. Published by Babeş-Bolyai University.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

ABSTRACT. *Listening and Legibility: Urban Surfaces Against “Overarching Meanings” in Lispector’s The Besieged City.* This paper looks into the literary dismantlement of projections of *totality* and objectified knowledge in women’s modern writing, focusing on Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector’s novel *The Besieged City*. My central claim is that her writing opposes “geographies of reason,” indirectly arguing for an untranslatability of the self inside modernity’s model of legibility and communication. In this novel, Lispector’s alternative to the discoursing, male-dominant, rational public realm is not the introspective inner space of subjectivity, but an innovative world-making *poiesis* founded on the substitution of the individual self with “the wider life of the world” that remains always a-centric and anti-textual. I investigate the ways in which Lispector opposes *opaqueness* to *legibility*, seeking the uncharted territory outside the logic of historical time or the colonial gaze. Reading Lispector’s novel through the notion of “writing by ear” (bearing multiple meanings, mostly in relation to the re-negotiation of the voice-dominant Western perception about writing) will prove useful in understanding the intricate and tangled relation between Euro-American literature and the Global South in terms of complex forms of heritage hybridization and designs of global memory.

Keywords: *poiesis, totality, Global South, creolization, urban, listening, modernity*

1 Călina PĂRĂU is a teaching assistant in the Department of Languages for Specific Purposes at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University. She holds a PhD in Philology and her main interests include memory studies, critical heritage studies, post-structuralism, the social and cultural imaginary and ideology. Journals that have accepted her papers for publication include: *Philobiblon: Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities*, *Echinox Journal*, *Ekphrasis*, *Revista Transilvania*, *Diakrisis: Yearbook of Theology and Philosophy*, *Transylvanian Review* etc. Her PhD thesis, *Discursul uitat: memorie și rest* (The Oblivious Discourse: Memory and Rest), was published in 2020 at Tracus Arte. Email address: calina.parau@ubbcluj.ro.

REZUMAT. *Ascultare și lizibilitate: Suprafețe urbane împotriva „semnificațiilor globale” în The Besieged City de Lispector.* Acest articol investighează destructurarea proiecțiilor unei „totalități” și a cunoașterii obiective în scriitura modernistă feminină, cu focus pe romanul scriitoarei braziliene Clarice Lispector *The Besieged City* (Orașul asediat). Argumentul central se construiește pe ideea că scriitura sa se opune unor „geografii ale rațiunii,” demonstrând intraductibilitatea sinelui în interiorul modelului de lizibilitate și comunicare al modernității. În acest roman, alternativa scriitoarei la sfera publică raționalizată și discursivizantă nu este spațiul introspectiv al subiectivității, ci un poesis al construirii de lumi, clădit pe substituirea sinelui individual cu „viața mai cuprinzătoare a lumii” care este anti-textuală și acentrică. Mă interesează modurile prin care Lispector opune opacitatea lizibilului, căutând „ținutul” neexplorat dinafara logicii timpului istoric și a privirii coloniale. Citind romanul lui Lispector prin conceptul de „scriitura cu urechea” (noțiune ce negociază percepția vestică asupra scrisului, dominată de ideea de „voce”) vom înțelege relațiile complexe dintre literatura euro-americană și cea a Sudului Global, cu atenție față de formele de hibridizare a memoriei în designul global.

Cuvinte-cheie: *poiesis, totalitate, creolizare, urban, ascultare, modernitate, marginalitate*

A cidade sitiada, the third novel of Clarice Lispector, a Brazilian woman-writer born in Ukraine in 1920, was first published in 1948. It only came in English translation in 2019 as *The Besieged City*, translated by Johnny Lorenz. Lispector herself found it difficult to get her novel published after World War II, a time when literary audiences seemed to have different expectations regarding the potential responses of fiction (or writing in general) to historical reality. In 1948, the same year this novel about the mirroring relation between a girl lacking imagination (as the narrator describes her) and an industrialized city “mingling some progress with the smell of the stable” (Lispector 2019, 8) made its way to its readers, T. S. Eliot was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. As Anders Österling remarks in his Award ceremony speech, this particular choice meant “a departure from the type of writer that has most frequently gained that distinction.” Moreover, in the aftermath of the atomic bomb, the public acclamation of the writer “describing the aridity and impotence of modern civilization” was nothing short of remarkable. Beside this merely coincidental chronological correspondence (the year 1948), there is something else connecting the two writers that belonged to different cultural frames. Both Eliot and Lispector were interested in exploring the negotiated place of subjective perception inside urban landscapes. I will not look at the two writers comparatively, as that would

be a much more complex and difficult undertaking, but I find it relevant to situate the discussion about Lispector's *The Besieged City* under the umbrella of T. S. Eliot's lines in Preludes:

His soul stretched tight across the skies
That face behind a city block,
Or trampled by insistent feet
At four and five and six o'clock;
And short square fingers stuffing pipes,
And evening newspapers, and eyes
Assured of certain certainties,
The conscience of a blackened street
Impatient to assume the world. (Eliot, 1954, 14)

Clarice Lispector wrote *The Besieged City* in Europe, after marrying, whilst living with her husband in Switzerland. Her novel could have focused on the inner life of the protagonist in the light of emerging urban places and lifestyles in Brazil, illustrating forms of escapism or immersion in relation to confiscated realities of the present. On the contrary, the author chose a horizontal perspective on individual psychology as reflected by the disconnected, uninformative life of the city of São Geraldo. *The Besieged City* could be summarized as the "story" of the way in which urban surfaces come to consciousness inside the perspective of a woman "impatient to assume the world," not by scrutinizing, analyzing or possessing it, but by repeating or multiplying its façade realities as desire crawls besides or in-between these images. The city with its impossibility of mirroring individual life is central to Lispector's novel that seems to teach the reader a new form of attention: one that "would make an effort not to fly over" (Lispector 2019, 97) the elements of a city, but sit inside the town square and gaze at the unsystematic and unreadable spectacle of the world.

The relation between the urban space and literature has been thoroughly analyzed by Malcom Miles who asserted that "the metropolis emerges as the setting and the agent for a distinctly modern consciousness" because "the construct of subject and object become interchangeable." (Miles 2019, 66) This experience of the urban setting as a space of intersections and divisions was also analyzed by Georg Simmel in his essay *Metropolises and Mental Life*. More specifically, Simmel claimed that the metropolis made the citizen simultaneously experience inner, outer and social realities inside an intensified network of sensations and impressions that blur the line between the individual and the supra-individual (Miles 2019, 67) Lispector's novel sheds light on the idea that streets, squares and other transition spaces become "elements in a permanently impermanent reality." (Miles 2019, ix) My claim is that these elements become

formation-scapes of externalized consciousness as the protagonist builds, throughout the novel, the architecture of perception in relation to the visibility of an expanding city. The protagonist's impossible discursive-emancipatory becoming and the blocked "psychocultural development" (Fitz 2001, 24) of the main character are seen through the architecture of a city with an unfinished viaduct inside which the process of self-discovery is hampered by Lucrecia's difficulty in using an inner vocabulary to engage with the world. In a text which demonstrates that Lispector's works (produced between 1944 and 1978) epitomize poststructuralist theories, Earl E. Fritz takes a very close look at how her writing dis-invests "logocentrism" by questioning referentiality and the transparency of language. According to this perspective, Lispectorian style emphasizes "language both as a weblike trap and as the anarchically liberating force" (Fitz 2001, 25) which frees us from conventionality. In the case of *The Besieged City*, I will be interested in viewing language not only as an unstable force, but also as a 'colonial' mediator between the perception of visible urban reality and the inglorious experience of mediocrity as invisibility.

The underlying philosophical dimension of this novel relates to the question regarding an alternative to the possibility of assuming the world and addressing reality from beneath the possessive gaze of objectified knowledge. This issue requires the author to consider language a concealing and an expressive instrument at the same time, whilst providing the reader with no privileged position of introspection or a sense of cumulative narrative order. It comes as no surprise, thus, that the novel was not so well-received at the time and that it was criticized for being "restricted to a pure question of phraseology" (review published in *A MANHÃ*, October 23, 1949) (Lispector 2019, Appendix, 206) and for not having "the power to let us reach a more general conclusion." Temístocles Linhares gave his review the title "The Spell of the Phrase," concluding that *The Besieged City* was "a simulation of a novel," (208) because nothing is defined or complete in this work where "everything is worthwhile." This idea raises the following question: what forms of attention are expected from the reader, if Clarice Lispector writes about a non-hierarchical image of the world, where everything deserves our attention and nothing becomes central in its contours.

The a-centric, anarchetypal structure of the novel was not treated by the reviewer as part of the broader Modernism's defiance, because, in this case, Lispector did not give up 'plot' and narrative in favor of inner life/interior speech, but rather she tried to circumscribe a new 'domain of life' that was, paradoxically, both a projection of the visible life of the city and a construction of the "unimaginative" mind of the protagonist. The title of the review ("The Spell of the Phrase") reflects the construction of the novel, which does not focus on creating a cohesive, coherent image of neither the city nor Lucrecia Neves,

the main character. *The Besieged City* constantly reconstructs and dismantles the assumption that the subject is "the dominating counterpart of the world as a whole." (Habermas 1987, 297) Playing more with relations between objects, animals and landscapes, rather than focusing on the individuation of the character, Lispector seems to want to unravel "the absolute power of dream and desire concealed by the prose of bourgeois life" (Rancière 2009, 41) by focusing on the encounter between heterogeneous elements and perceptions. Lispector's prose highlights the relationship between arts and politics by insisting on the untranslatable and *opaque* dimension of individual life in an age of transparent industrial relations. In addition, given the non-hierarchical analysis of the city through the eyes of Lucrecia Neves, "the heterogeneity of the elements resists the homogeneity of meaning." (Rancière 2009, 42) In *The Besieged City*, language does not mediate between impression and expression (a Western conceptualization that has guided our perspective), but becomes a function of visibility as the proof of existence. "What is seen," with its "hard truth" (Lispector 2019, 198), has a separate logic of its own which insulates the vagueness of individual existence. Language does not serve the protagonist to tell her own "story," because only the proliferated images (not words or names) can bear witness to a mediocre life "lived day to day": "Because from real life, lived day to day, there had remained for her-if she didn't want to lie-just the possibility of saying, in a conversation between neighbor women, in a mixture of long experience and last-minute discovery: yes, yes, the soul is important too, don't you think?" (Lispector 2019, 198)

The Besieged City disrupts the distribution of witnessing positions, as the main character does not bear witness to the world, instead she reconstructs it, not through fantasy, but by displacing the borders of subjectivization and self-recognition. As Rancière puts it, "art does not do politics by reaching the real. It does it by inventing fictions that challenge the existing distribution of the real and the fictional." (Rancière 2009, 49) It could be argued that Clarice Lispector drives our attention towards the fabric of the real by creating this unique character whose psychological life mostly resides in extensions, proliferation, "arrangements of form" (Lispector 2019, 99) and "mute existence." (64) It would also seem that, Lispector does not want to make the invisible visible, but rather she wishes to isolate forms of visibility out of the colonized, 'meaningful' visible. The city, with its "horizon sliced by smokestacks and rooftops," (99) is Lucrecia's "ultimate reality" (100) with no complex conceptualizations or decipherable insights; just the images of an urban real appearing "without touching, without transforming." (101)

In *The Besieged City*, Clarice Lispector weaves in a persistent awareness of modernity's relation to time and space, as it manifested itself under the auspices of projections of "totality". Habermas analyzed the ways in which

modernity carried this “image of history as a uniform process” (Habermas 1987, 6) that justifies the idea of the present being a “transition” inside history’s narrative of redemption or realization. Lispector’s novel mocks this modern time consciousness by emphasizing the materialization of the sense of time in São Geraldo: “and the day in São Geraldo wasn’t the future, it was hard, finished streets.” (Lispector 2019, 35) Another example is the powerful image of the houses “strolling beneath telegraph wires” (37), which marks the frailty of a cartographic present that becomes the reflection of a construction of time as an inter-connected “whole”. Inside this construction, space also becomes wrapped inside lines of connection. For instance, the image of the pipe is recurrent: “from every wall with a pipe something irreducible was being born—a wall with pipe.” (99) The pressure of seizing the visible present inside this over-arching machinery of time is deemed to fail, as the narrator is aware that the memory of the city “would be just the history of what had been seen” (16) and not the history of her watchful gaze that refuses totalization, synthesis and reflection. Lucrécia cannot submit herself to that “bird’s-eye view” of historical time, nor to a scientific “frozen gaze” that conceals reality, because she remains outside a rationalized, commodified real, accepting the redundant, minuscule task of de-centered attention: “she who in order to try to learn about a town square would make an effort not to fly over it.” (97)

Jean-Michel Rabaté adds an interesting nuance to the idea that there is a specific modern time consciousness derived from projections of totality. Talking about masterpieces created after the First World War, Rabaté remarks that “writers and artists felt a heightened responsibility, a duty to be as relevant and as affirmative as possible.” (Rabaté 2023, 16) They also felt an urgent need “to give birth to something that would approach a totality of experience.” Of course, Rabaté concludes that this totality was always incomplete, making artists turn into the gatekeepers of an “unfinishable archive.” (Rabaté 2023, 24) Despite this being a male-dominated artistic response to an unsettling, uprooting historical context, Lispector also resonated with this aesthetics of totality. As she herself confesses in a letter she published as a response to Linhares’ criticism (Delayed Letter, published in *Jornal do Brasil*, February 21, 1970), her character “takes as her own life the wider life of the world.” (Lispector 2019, 210) The ways in which Lispector understands this artistic endeavor of alluding to “a total vision of things” is quite different, though. In *The Besieged City*, the “totality of experience” is not immersive, glorious or poetic, but rather alienating and unbearable: “that mute existence that was always above her, the room, the city, the high degree the things atop the china cabinet had reached, the small dry bird ready to fly [...], the height of the power plant, so much intolerable balance.” (64)

Lispector makes her readers realize that, in writing, this heterogeneous totality is a remaking of the world in a creolized, hybrid, unrecognizable fashion that renders it impersonal, indirect and anonymous. Remaking the world outside a colonized experience of the real provides the experience of dis-identification, untranslatability and the invisible individual life. Moreover, this totality of “mute existence” or “the machinery of things” separates, in Lispector’s writing, the gaze from the world, cross-cutting that relation of meaning and insight that we (the readers as Westerners) would normally expect. There are no contact points between the personal biography of Lucrecia and her impersonal story inside the city of São Geraldo. The protagonist’s way of looking at the world around is transformed, molded or dissolved by the city that imposes its material visible reality over the biographic reality. Individual life is engulfed by “a story much greater than her own” (Lispector 2019, 199) and the “siege” of the city is the protagonist’s failed attempt to belong to the realm of things and thus to the history of the city. The protagonist also experiences the anxiety associated with the projection of history as a material, spatial and unbreakable totality, the city of São Geraldo being compared with a fortress: “the hardness of things was the girl’s most clipped way of seeing. From the impossibility of overcoming that resistance was emerging, in green fruit, the tang of firm things over which was blowing with heroism that civic wind that makes flags flutter! The city was an unconquerable fortress.” (43) There is also a complex episode in which Lucrecia envisions building a city in the prairie, dismantling spatial totality and the linguistic annexation of reality. What she really envisions in this dream of rebuilding São Geraldo is “to recognize, beneath the sedimentation, the true name of things.” (161) Thus, the only way of escaping from that “fortress” is by re-inventing language as a site of construction in which every layer of meaning can be observed in its uprootedness. Lucrecia’s individual life, scattered inside an anarchetypal vision of things or an anti-biographical visuality of experience, cannot become a shared reality, because reality is, in fact, a totalizing image: “he was reality: a silent young man tucked into a raincoat.” (191)

Marilia Librandi interprets the indirectness of Lispector’s writing using the notion of “writing by ear,” which interestingly separates the Western voice-centered (and subject-centered) conception about writing from the idea of *listening* in writing. Listening becomes a keyword for different views that link Lispector’s writing to concepts like vibration, resonance or the ethical relation to marginality. Hearing as resonance is understood as “the foundation of all senses” (Librandi 2018, 14) and the subject becomes a “diapason-subject” (14) which, in Jean-Luc Nancy’s conceptualization, overturns the ideas of teleology or direct reference in favor of the notion of “echo” that best describes the subject’s relation to itself. “Writing by ear” in Brazilian literature also adds new

nuances in respect to the translatability or untranslatability of the self inside the broader “local-regional-world-planetary” system: “The notion of Writing by Ear aims, though, to contribute to «the existence of multiple affiliations», based specifically on listening, i.e., on a pre-language zone of murmurs and rumours, whispers and jokes, tricksters’ puns, witticism, translations and mistranslations populating the contact zone between local-regional-world-planetary, as well as animal-human-earth relationships.” (24) We could add that, by focusing on hearing rather than on seeing or speaking, this notion also reflects the anti-textuality of Lispector’s writing, which dismantles the symbolic structure of the modern public sphere, meaning “the ability to stand for, substitute for, speak in the people’s name.” (Landes 1998, 154) The act of writing, understood in light of “writing by ear”, becomes the counter-part of the public sphere as it distances itself from textuality and the power of reference. “Writing by ear” substitutes the possibility of ‘speaking in the name of’ with the ethical necessity of ‘listening to’ as a continuous, uninterrupted inherent logic of writing. The meaning-making process is no longer built only on the equation of representation, but also on the fragile ‘pillars’ of incomplete internalization, meaning the resonant production of listening/hearing. Clarice Lispector’s protagonist, Lucrecia, places herself “at the écoute of” the “resounding silence” (Librandi 2018, 68) of the city, with its oblivious gears and durations. The listening produced by her writing grants a special place to objects, things and to spaces of duration: “among the ruins she saw the lizard running off and kicking up dust!” (Lispector 2019, 101) As Librandi notices, Lispector’s writing seeks to remove names (instead of giving names or finding ‘the right words’) in order “to escape the system of amputation.” (87) We could argue that the appeal to silence, which also implies moving “beyond the system of interior speech” (91), might be regarded as a decolonial gesture that seeks a way of turning to the world through an unstable, floating listening center that creates another image of the world as a resounding, unfinished project of totality. It is worth noting that, through the term “writing by ear”, Librandi proposes a reconsideration of “the ideology and power attributed to literacy,” (6) by underlining creation/production as reception and vice-versa, in the context of “the robust oral and aural culture of Brazil.” (7) Maria Librandi’s “echopoetics” (9) is understood in relation to “a planetary sense of writing” (19) that sheds light on the “omnivorous and ever-attentive” (19) relation between the Global South and Europe.

We understand the “Global South” as a concept that cannot be narrowed down to a mere geographical distinction between developed countries and the developing world. As Russell West-Pavlov suggests, “the «Global South» does not give us access to «subalterns» who cannot speak, so much as it opens up spaces in which speech can be reinvented.” (West-Pavlov 2018, 8) I believe that

this term can be applied to conduct an interpretation of Lispector's novel from the vantage point of the *caesura* that this concept implies. On the one hand, we have a writer from the Latin-American cultural space with Ukrainian and Jewish roots who temporarily lived in Europe as well. The ways in which her writing indirectly depicts notions of belonging and errantry will help us uncover the hybridization of cultural identification and heritage as *poiesis*. On the other hand, we need to acknowledge the fracture related to the insular dimension of being a woman-writer in a male-dominant sphere of undertakings, not just because it suits a feminist interpretation, but also because it reflects the complex relation between language and the irreconciliation inherent in a feminine "sense of being." (Fitz 2001, 16) It is important to look at these distinctions not only from the dichotomous perspective they open up, but also from the angle of ambiguous relations and residual effects of interconnection and meaning they generate. As Dilip M. Menon suggests, "what ideas like the Global South do is to give pause to conceptions of untrammelled mobility and fluidity" by acknowledging the "multiple inheritances of colonialism, the Cold War, and the unipolar present." (Menon 2018, 34) This means that the notion of the Global South helps us resist the crystallization of connections, routes of exchange and "imagined affinities" (35) into determinate, already mapped spaces of history. The relation between Euro-America and the Global South could be regarded as an unsettled, dynamic and unfinished web of inter-determinations and indeterminacy that we can only bear witness to by paying attention to what Dilip M. Menon calls "maps of affinity" (39) and complex geographies of affect that could "reflect the simultaneity of affiliation with community, nation and the world, and also the fact that identities are conjunctural and oscillate between narrower and wider imaginings." (40) In order to understand how this multilayered sense of affiliation gets to be individually articulated, we might have to consider the role of imagination, understood as "a property of collectives." (Appadurai 1996, 8) Arjun Appadurai sees imagination as an underlying source of social change and as a repertoire of agency in an interconnected globalized world, inside which "communities of sentiment" are being formed. The "work of the imagination" (4) is not solely regarded in its emancipatory light, but also perceived as a "space of contestation in which individuals or groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern" (4) On the one hand, Menon's concept of "imagined affinities" could be understood in a vertical way, encompassing the idea of an intersectionality of heritages and unexplored cultural roots of meanings and symbolic configurations at the margins of historical centralities. On the other hand, Appadurai's conceptualization of "the work of the imagination" might be viewed horizontally, as a dynamic movement of cultural mediation at the level of the global stage on which "migratory audiences" (4) and locally bound identities coexist in a shared

space of projection and contextualization. Both of these conceptualizations draw on Édouard Glissant's "poetics of Relation" that captures the "fluctuating complexity of the world" in its confrontation between the particular and totality, on the grounds of an open relatedness that seizes "the reality of archipelagos" and the diffraction inside processes of *creolization*. (Glissant 1997, 34) As John E. Drabinski underlines in the *Preface* of the book he dedicates to Glissant, "creolization makes *créolité* possible," (Drabinski 2019, xi) understood as a creative world-making process that begins in the abyss of historical trauma, insularity or loss. This creative world-making process rests on a fecundity of loss and mixture, bearing witness to the global dynamics through the rhizomatic and productive vocabularies of marginality. "Thinking in ruins" or "thinking at the shoreline" (x) become expressions of a geography of the globe that seeks to encompass unity and disunity in the complex formulation and re-formulation of insularity and continuity. *Pensée archipelique* opposes the rationality, reification and precision of *pensée continentale*, drawing attention to the floating anxieties that keep theoretical thought ashore, in an attempt to articulate *place* as a site of breaks and compositions.

This tension between reification and *place* as a site of fractures and morphisms is at play in Clarice Lispector's writing, mostly in *The Besieged City*, which constructs "the story of an empty life" (Lispector 2019, 199) reflecting progress in its asynchronicity with the city. The condition of being "blind in the blind city" (191) and living "from a story much greater than her own" (199) contains the intuition of insularity that makes room for the practice of archipelagic thinking. Through a complex "work of the imagination," Lispector's main character in this novel tries to accommodate new visions of the global inside perceptions of newly aligned local urban landscapes: "Cars, with invisible drivers, were sliding in the water and suddenly changing direction, you couldn't say why. São Geraldo had lost any purpose and was now functioning all by itself. (...) In São Geraldo a daily life had been born that no outsider would notice. It was raining and times were bad, it was a full-on crisis." (136) The tension between the global and the local is seen in terms of a gaze or a way of looking that is implanted into a wider perspective that has no access to the opaque, autonomous life of the city that it contains. The act of observing and looking at the city is embedded inside a history of the visible that is underlined by the unregistered "poetics of Relation" inside which urban sediments relate to an indirectly revealed totality: "Individual life? The dangerous thing is that each person was dealing with centuries." (165) or "you couldn't be sure if a city had been made for the people or the people for the city." (49) These "imagined affinities" trying to seize correspondences between the local and the global or between the city and individual perception point towards an impossible sense

of legibility that burdens the subjective perception of Lucrecia. She cannot read into "the wider life of the world" through some underlying sense of solidarity or newly deciphered order. Lucrecia cannot find a space of emancipation in the translatability of the world around her as she does not hold any totalizing interpretations or opinions about inner or outer experiences. The meta-narratives of a "geography of reason" (Drabinski 1019, xiv) are replaced (in this novel) by a sense of *opaqueness*, which, according to Drabinski, characterizes "the unbridgeable difference at the heart of traumatized subjectivity." (29) Although seemingly wanting to tell a story from the perspective of a woman dwelling in "her own stupidity," (Lispector 2019, 103) Lispector is very much aware of the intricate forms of contact that scaffold thinking on the brink of catastrophe. In *The Besieged City*, Lispector indirectly problematizes late modernity's cultural transition by constructing the unreflective gaze of a woman that opposes to the stories of history the mere act of looking at things from an imaginary drawn shoreline of inadequacy.

In conclusion, the Western eagerness to assume the world, made possible by "the ideal of transparent universality," (Drabinski 2019, 13) is upended by the process of "thinking at the shoreline" which informs Lispector's novel about a woman who ostensibly cannot "think" because she just gazes at the world around. Lispector's "writing by ear" ultimately proves that *poesis* withstands discursive *thinking* and that opacity resists alongside discourses of progress, in an indirect "struggle that overcomes colonial repetition." (11) This unreflective geography of the feminine gaze as a construction that mirrors the non-subjectivized experience of the "wider world" is an attempt at short-circuiting the projection of the global inside the memory of a city. To some extent, Lucretia identifies with the city, becoming São Geraldo in the pursuit of registering the visible life of the city. Her perception of the urban life is the memory of the city with its houses "strolling beneath telegraph wires," (Lispector 2019, 37) its "hard, finished streets" (35) and its "plans for building a bridge." (16) In Clarice Lispector's novel, the memory of the city is made up from these traces of visibility and images that can only become visible and legible in the light of global dynamics, just as Lucrecia becomes visible to herself inside the view of the men's gaze: "At this opportune moment in which people were living, each time something was seen-new extensions would emerge, and one more meaning would be created: that was the hardly usable life of Lucrecia Neves. And this was São Geraldo, whose future History, as in the memory of a buried city, would be just the history of what had been seen." (16) Thus, *place* becomes a site of visibility bearing the hallmarks of urban landscapes, whilst the perception of the subject, as a consequence, floats around this 'continental', thinkable visible, becoming residual inside global dynamics. Lispector's main character in this

novel is an expression of archipelagic thinking from the margins of progress or from the reversed vantage point of a city that had left the 'unshaped', invisible inner world of Lucrecia behind. *Place* is the space inside which the female character experiences both a form of sedimentation and of self-break, as the industrialized city of São Geraldo expands into the projection of a world that does not need a witness, but a listener.

WORKS CITED

- Apparudai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Drabinski, J. E. 2019. *Glissant and the Middle Passage: Philosophy, Beginning, Abyss*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Eliot, T. S. 1954. *Selected Poems*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd Bloomsbury House.
- Fitz, Earl E. 2001. *Sexuality and Being in the Post-Structuralist Universe of Clarice Lispector: The Différance of Desire*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Glissant, Édouard. 1997. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Habermas, J. 1987. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Landes, J. B. (ed.) 1998. *Feminism, the Private and the Public*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Librandi, M. 2018. *Writing by Ear: Clarice Lispector and the Aural Novel*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Lispector, Clarice. 2019. *The Besieged City*. Translated by Johnny Lorenz. Edited by Benjamin Moser. London: Penguin Random House.
- Menon, Dilip M. 2018. "Thinking about the Global South: Affinity and Knowledge." In *The Global South and Literature*, edited by Russell West-Pavlov, 34-44. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Miles, Malcolm. 2019. *Cities and Literature*. New York: Routledge.
- Rabaté, J. M. 2023. "Modernism and Totality." *Comparative Studies in Modernism*, no. 22 (Spring): 15-26.
- Rancière, Jacques. 2009. "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics." In *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, edited by Beth Hinderliter, William Kaizen, Vered Maimon, Jaleh Mansoor, and Seth McCormick, 31-50. London: Duke University Press.
- West-Pavlov, Russell (ed.). 2018. *The Global South and Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.