

Writing with Photos: Literature's Influence on Daniel Blaufuks

Sandra Camacho

Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal

ICNOVA

sandragcamacho@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-2775-0146

ABSTRACT:

In Daniel Blaufuks's prolific career the relationship between photography and the other arts emerges as a pervasive feature. The artist often draws from writers and musicians such as Georges Perec, W. G. Sebald, Jorge Luis Borges, or Lou Reed, amongst others, not only to inspire the titles of his works, and the development of his projects, but has also looked to formal aspects, such as the editorial shape of short stories collections, to construct his own photobooks. In this, a parallel between the puncture of a snapshot and an incisive moment in a short story may be made. Additionally, Blaufuks's projects have themselves inspired other artists and writers. The following article examines three works, two by Blaufuks, *Collected Short Stories* (2003) and *Attempting Exhaustion* (2016), and one prompted by him, Gonçalo M. Tavares's *Matteo Perdeu o Emprego* (2010), to consider the tenuous border between literature and photography and how the artist traverses them.

RESUMO:

Na prolífica carreira de Daniel Blaufuks, a relação entre a fotografia e as outras artes surge como uma característica predominante. O artista recorre frequentemente a escritores e músicos como Georges Perec, W. G. Sebald, Jorge Luis Borges ou Lou Reed, entre outros, não só para inspirar os títulos das suas obras e o desenvolvimento dos seus projetos, mas também para se inspirar em aspetos formais, como a estrutura editorial das coleções de contos na construção de um dos seus próprios fotolivros. Aqui, é possível poder estabelecer-se um paralelo entre o impacto de uma *snapshot* e um momento incisivo num conto. Adicionalmente, os projetos de Blaufuks têm inspirado também eles outros artistas e escritores. O seguinte artigo examina três obras, duas de Blaufuks, *Collected Short Stories* (2003) e *Tentativa de Esgotamento* (2016), e uma inspirada por ele, *Matteo Perdeu o Emprego* (2010), de Gonçalo M. Tavares, para considerar a ténue fronteira entre literatura e fotografia, bem como a forma como o artista a atravessa.

KEYWORDS:

Daniel Blaufuks; Georges Perec; Gonçalo M. Tavares; *Attempting Exhaustion*; *Collected Short Stories*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

Daniel Blaufuks; Georges Perec; Gonçalo M. Tavares; *Tentativa de Esgotamento*; *Collected Short Stories*

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THERE IS A STORYTELLER creeping out of Daniel Blaufuks, there is a love of books and writing that cannot be denied. Born in 1963, in Lisbon, Blaufuks is the grandson of German and Polish Jewish World War Two refugees. He often examines questions of memory – private and public –, exile, and the archive. Working mainly in photography and film, the artist often establishes links with literature, having borrowed not only genre conventions for some of his projects, but also the very titles of texts he admires, or wishes to question. A quick, and not exhaustive, survey may show, for instance, that the artist's photobook and film *Under Strange Skies* (2007) was borrowed from Ilse Losa's (1913-2006) *Sob Céus Estranhos* (1962); that Blaufuks's film *The Absence* (2009) — an appropriation of Jean-Luc Godard's (1930-2022) *A Bout de Souffle* (1960) in which the main character, played by Jean-Paul Belmondo, has been removed from the film — draws on *La Disparition* (1969) by Georges Perec (1936-1982); that the iPod project *Now remember* (2008) takes its title also from a work by Perec, *Je me souviens* (1978), which in turn was borrowed from Joe Brainard's (1942-1994) *I remember* (1975); whilst the exhibition / project *Utz* (2012) has the title of Bruce Chatwin's (1940-1989) *Utz* (1988); that the photobook and film *Terezín* (2007) drew from *Austerlitz* (2001) by W. G. Sebald (1944-2001), as did the five-hour film *As if...* (2014); and that the photobook *This Business of Living* (2015) was taken from Cesare Pavese's (1908-1950) *Il mestiere di vivere: Diario 1935–1950* (1961).

Taking this into consideration, in the following pages, I shall examine the relationship between literature and photography in Blaufuks's work. First as a source of inspiration for the artist, particularly in one of his works drawing from the writings of Georges Perec, *Attempting Exhaustion* (2016), and later as prompting literary texts by others, as is the case of Gonçalo M. Tavares's *Matteo Perdeu o Emprego* (2010). Yet, before turning to these works, I shall examine a photobook that, whilst referencing book titles by others, was modelled after the editorial standards given to literary 'Classic Authors' in its mimicking of a Penguin paperback: *Collected Short Stories* (2003) (Blaufuks & Coignet 2014, 199).¹

1. *Collected Short Stories*

Affairs, obsessions, ardours, fantasy, myth, legend and dream, fear, pity and violence – this magnificent collection of stories illuminates all corners of the human experience.

¹ In *Blaufuks, A14 Pocket Library* (2007) the artist similarly mimicked the *Abrams Art Paperbacks*, a series of monographs dedicated to artists such as Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Braque, Cézanne, amongst others: "my secret plan was to go to a second-hand bookseller with *Blaufuks, A14 Pocket Library*, place it among the other books of the collection and wait for customers to discover it" (Blaufuks & Coignet 2014, 198). Besides being 'published' by Penguin and Abrams, Blaufuks also inserted himself into Gallimard by using their famous collection of detective and mystery books, *Collection Série Noire*, as inspiration for *Works on Memory* (2012) and *All the Memory of the World, part one* (2014).

Previously unpublished these thirty-one stories reveal Daniel Blaufuks in a range of contrasting moods, sometimes cynical and witty, sometimes searching and philosophical.²

As any self-respecting Penguin Classic Paperback publicist will know, a book that is expected to do well in sales is in dire need of aggrandising back notes on the author. However, the ones quoted above are not of the publisher's doing, rather they have been written by the author himself. Starting with *The End of Something* the overarching themes of this collection are: beginnings and endings; arrivals and departures; loneliness and the unsatisfactory pursuit of the next country, of the next city, the pursuit of the *Dream of a Strange Land*.³ Some of the chosen titles for the 'stories' are humorous — in *Banal Story* a couple stares vacantly at books —, most are a cheeky reference to other authors — literary or musical.⁴ As Ana Quintais identified, *The Scene of a Stratagem*, *A Scientific and Literary Friendship* and *The Apartment Building (Project for a Novel)*, all share titles with texts included in Georges Perec's Penguin Short Story Collection *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (1997) (Quintais 2015, 136). However, these thirty-one stories are formed not by text in its most elementary conception, but by photographic diptychs headed by their title, they are "a kind of *snapshot prose*, a speech based on visual fragments that give indication of private stories on their way to become public" (Mah 2008, 140).

The comparison between the puncture of photography — Barthes's *punctum* — and that of the short story is something that has been previously put forth. Argentine-writer Julio Cortázar (1914-1984), for instance, argued that the short story writer's technique, much like that of the photographer, depends on "cutting a fragment of reality, setting certain boundaries, but in such a way that this cut acts as an explosion that opens wide a much broader reality, like a dynamic vision that spiritually transcends the field covered by the camera" (Cortázar *apud* Bell 2014, 442, my translation)⁵. The compression of the written story into a few pages — a few lines even — offers a snapshot of life much like what might be regarded as "one of the

² Blaufuks's commitment to the mimicking of Penguin Paperbacks led him not only to include a similar logo (an oval frame with an airplane, rather than a penguin), but also to add the recommended price in euros, pounds and dollars; a list of available titles by the same author divided into: Novels (Books), Stories (Catalogues), Fiction (Film), Essays (Video), Autobiography (Solo Shows), Letters (Group Shows), Plays (Set Designs), Travel (Unpublished Diaries); as well as a subverted version of the reproduction rights: *Except in Cuba, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.*

³ This mood of consistent travelling is particularly conveyed by the titles and their sequence: *The End Of Something*, *A Sense of Reality*, *New York*, *An Unfinished Story*, *In Another Country*, *Alexandra Leaving*, *You Said Something*, *Tonight We Fly*, *A Drive in the Country*, *The End of the Party*, *A Scientific and Literary Friendship*, *The Route to Leh*, *A Day Saved*, *Banal Story*, *The Blue Film*, *A Distant Episode*, *Travelling Light*, *September Story*, *You are not I*, *Dinner at the Motel*, *The Apartment Building (Project for a Novel)*, *One Day*, *A Mobile Home*, *Berlin*, *My Side of the Matter*, *The Scene of a Stratagem*, *One Sunday Afternoon*, *The Circle of Reason*, *The Spanish Waitress*, *It Will Happen*, *Dream of a Strange Land*.

⁴ Amongst others, Blaufuks includes the titles of works by Graham Greene, Ernest Hemingway, Georges Perec, O. Henry, Paul Bowles, and songs by Leonard Cohen, PJ Harvey, The Divine Comedy.

⁵ "recortar un fragmento de la realidad, fijándolo determinados límites, pero de manera tal que ese recorte actúe como una explosión que abre de par en par una realidad mucho más amplia, como una visión dinámica que trasciende espiritualmente el campo abarcado por la cámara."

more stimulating qualities of photography ... [the] ability to casually gather odd elements that trigger unforeseen experiences and senses" (Mah 2008, 140). This capacity to puncture similarly works like memories, that emerge like a flash to fade away or to haunt a little longer. One might examine the short writings of Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), with their unexpected turns and incongruities that come from the retelling of a tale that has been told before by another, as transmissions of memories and dreams.

Blaufuks briefly addresses Borges in his exhibition *Sobre o Infinito* (2004) in which he included a mirrored mechanism 'objecto para ver fotografias' ('object to see photographs') based on his reading of *The Aleph* (1949): "Similarly to the Aleph this is an object to see images that contains all images, continuously, infinitely"⁶ (Quintais 2015, 100, my translation). The *Aleph*, or *Alef* א, is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, yet Blaufuks also included a second Hebrew letter in this exhibition, the letter *Chai* ח, which stands for life. Perhaps such might be seen as a counterpoint to another tale by Borges, one included on his text on the *Kabbalah* (1980). Here, after creating a golem by inscribing the word *EMET* (truth) on its forehead, the rabbi becomes wary of the creature, asking it to bend over. As it does so, the rabbi "erases the aleph or first letter of *EMET*. This leaves *MET* (death). The golem turns to dust" (Borges 1984 [1980], 83). In this the aleph is the key to giving life (ח), in other uses, namely by another of Blaufuks's key authors, Georges Perec, it becomes enmeshed with a tale of death. In *La Disparition* (2016 [1969]), Perec looks to Borges, the very first reference appearing early on in the text with Anton Vowl and his sudden obsession with a spot on his rug: the Alpha.

2. Perec/Blaufuks

A prodigious list-maker, a crossword lover, an explorer of language and puns that bore a broken memory of childhood, Georges Perec has vastly influenced contemporary artists,⁷ not least Daniel Blaufuks. Born in Paris on 7 March 1936⁸, Perec was the son of Jewish Polish immigrants. His father, having enlisted in the French foreign legion in September 1939, just a few weeks after the invasion of Poland, died of battle wounds in June 1940, whilst his mother, Cécile, after placing young Perec on a French Red Cross convoy to join relatives in the French Alps in late-1941, was, in January 1943, arrested in a raid, taken to a holding camp in Drancy and from there sent to Auschwitz, where she disappeared. What was left to Perec of his parents was

⁶ "À semelhança do Aleph este é um objecto para ver imagem que conterà todas as imagens, continuamente, infinitamente."

⁷ In "Georges Perec's Enduring Presence in the Visual Arts" (2017), Mireille Ribière analyses a number of contemporary artists, from multiple nationalities, directly engaged with the French-author's writing. Among them are the Brazilian artist Daniel de Paula (b.1987), the Belgian Christl Lidl (b.1970), the Spanish Ignasi Aballí (b.1958) and the French Anne Deguelle (b. 1943), Christian Boltanski (1944-2021), and Sophie Calle (b.1953). See also Forsdick et al. (2019).

⁸ Georges Perec first became known as a writer with the publication of his first (published) novel *Les Choses: Une histoire des années soixante* (1965) for which he won the Prix Renaudot. In 1978, Perec also won the Prix Médicis for his 600-page novel *La vie mode d'emploi* (1978). Perec died of lung cancer in 1982.

two certificates — one of his father's death and the other his mother's *acte de disparition* (or 'certificate of disappearance') — and his name.

As both Perec and his biographer David Bellos explain, the name Peretz is of biblical origin. As members of the Peretz clan settled across various countries, the spelling of their name took on multiple shapes and meanings:

In Hebrew it means 'hole', in Russian it means 'pepper', in Hungarian (in Budapest, to be more precise) it is the word used for what in French we call 'pretzel' ('pretzel' or 'bretzel' is in fact merely a diminutive form (Beretzele) of Beretz, and Beretz, like Baruch or Barek, is formed from the same root as Peretz [...]. The Peretzes like to think they are descended from Spanish Jews exiled by the Inquisition (the Perez are thought to be Marranos, or converted Jews who stayed in Spain), whose migrations can be traced to Provence (Peiresc), then to the Papal States, and finally to central Europe, principally Poland and secondarily Romania and Bulgaria. (Perec 2011 [1975], 35)

As to the transformation of Peretz to Perec, the writer clarifies that “[a]n official hearing in Russian and writing in Polish, it has been explained to me, will hear Peretz and write Perec” (Perec 2011 [1975], 35). At times these changes in spelling were due to mishearing, poor writing and reading skills, or also purposeful alteration as part of discriminatory actions; other times they might stem from the request of the name holders themselves, as a way to establish a place outside of their Jewish origins, as Daniel Blaufuks encountered when searching for his own surname.

As is mentioned in a few of his works, particularly his 2019 book *Não Pai*, Blaufuks's relationship with his father, and thus the Blaufuks side of the family, was one grounded on absence and abandonment. Like Perec, Blaufuks was left with very little of his father other than his name. So he searched for other Blaufuks in the world, finding some in his travels, receiving letters from others, and finally looking them up in the archives:

I do not have objects from the Blaufuks nor photographs from the Blaufuks, and my father was untouchable and inaccessible [...]. In the end, he vanished, like so many Blaufuks before us, as several pages of testimony in the Yad Vashem⁹ demonstrate [...]. The list is long, even though I restricted it to the Warsaw Blaufuks with this exact spelling, because there are many variants of my surname, that served to, in a rather vain attempt, hide the Jewish origins of their bearers.

BLAUFUKS

BLAUFUCHS

BLAUFUX

BLAUFEUX

BLAUFUCKS

BLAUFÜCK and so on.

(Blaufuks 2019, my translation)¹⁰

⁹ Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, contains a vast database of over 4 million names and biographical details of Holocaust victims.

¹⁰ “Não tenho objectos dos Blaufuks nem fotografias dos Blaufuks, e o meu pai era intocável e inacessível [...]. No fim, esfumou-se, como tantos Blaufuks antes de nós, como várias páginas de testemunho do arquivo do Yad Vashem demonstram [...]. [A] lista é longa, mesmo se a restringi aos Blaufuks de Varsóvia com o nome escrito exactamente assim, porque existiam muitas variações do meu apelido, que serviam para, numa tentativa assaz vã, esconder as origens judaicas dos seus portadores.

Perhaps one might propose that, in the absence of fathers, the names both Perec and Blaufuks came to identify as those of their ancestors were the ones of the writers and artists whose work they collected, quoted and transformed.

3. *Attempting Exhaustion*

A soft warm light, coming in from the right-hand side, shines through the hammered glass windowpanes, it falls on a wood-top table, its side pushed against the short tiled wall. Rarely bare, a rotation of cloths, toys, bowls, fruit and flowers, cover this table. At times it is joined by empty chairs, seldom occupied by visitors. This is the space that Blaufuks photographed between 2009 and 2025, when the artist moved away from his flat.¹¹ In early 2013, the artist began sharing these views of his kitchen window on Instagram, a subject that he explored almost obsessively.

I was first attracted by its silence, later by how the objects received the light, and, finally, by their geometrical composition. I couldn't help noticing, more and more, how things repeated themselves without truly repeating themselves. Little changes, almost invisible transformations happened every day, according to weather and season. [...] Retreating from the outside world, I slowly transformed my kitchen into a refuge, a shelter, a place for introspection and solace. [...] Everything seemed to remain unchanged in this kitchen while the world outside transformed. A friend died, a government collapsed, a book came out, a war flared, a bomb exploded. One day the world attempted to break in: a constructor knocked on my door and told me the owner of the house wanted to replace the window; that I would feel much happier with a modern window with larger glass panes, more luminous and better insulated. He was still talking when I shut the door on his face. (Blaufuks 2016)

These are the words the artist has chosen to describe some of his early process in photographing his window. He was initially sheltering himself from the outside world, finding solace in the changing lights, but soon he was inspired by creative exercises such as those developed by Perec. Indeed, *Attempting Exhaustion* takes its name from Perec's three-day venture in Paris, *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* (1975).

Sitting in a number of cafés in Place Saint-Sulpice between 18 and 20 October 1974, Perec turned his attention to the life passing through the square. His intention was to describe "what happens when nothing happens other than the weather, people, cars, and clouds" (3). He catalogued the movement of people, what he drank, the

BLAUFUKS
BLAUFUCHS
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BLAUFÜCK e por aí fora."

¹¹ This move led to the site-specific exhibition *Attempting Exhaustion (depois do adeus)* between 15-29 March 2025, where the artist displayed some of the photographs related to his 16-year long project in the empty flat.

traffic, pigeons in flight, and buses, the endless passing of buses. He registered the passing of time, trying to discern whether a minuscule change might have an effect on the whole of the square. But whilst he obsessed over tiny details, Perec was nevertheless capable of stopping the exercise. He ended his text abruptly, as if suddenly standing up to leave for a scheduled appointment: “Four children. A dog. A little ray of sun. The 96. It is two o’clock” (47). In doing so, Perec’s over-description never crossed the threshold from a stabilising force to a sort of manic obsession. It is a boundary his friend, writer Italo Calvino (1923-1985), had the main character of his short story, *The Adventure of a Photographer* (1958), traverse, illustrating how a simple hobby might grow into something that alienates every other aspect of one’s life.

After becoming fascinated with photography, Antonino Paraggi, Calvino’s character, attempts to capture a fleeting look he had once encountered in his girlfriend, Bice. He does so by taking every possible image of her: “Photography has a meaning only if it exhausts all possible images” (Calvino 2014, 241). Growing tired of his fixation, Bice abandons him, leaving Paraggi no alternative but to photograph her absence instead:

He collected the photographs in an album: you could see ashtrays brimming with cigarette butts, an unmade bed, a damp stain on the wall. He got the idea of composing a catalogue of everything in the world that resists photography, that is systematically omitted from the visual field not only by the camera but also by human beings. On every subject he spent days, using up whole rolls at intervals of hours, so as to follow the changes of light and shadow. One day he became obsessed with a completely empty corner of the room, containing a radiator pipe and nothing else; he was tempted to go on photographing that spot and only that till the end of his days. (Calvino 2014, 241-243)

One could propose that, in this process of exhaustion, of reaching towards the impossible goal of an absolute photographic understanding of a subject, what Calvino’s character was after was the register of time. It was a sort of ‘photography with time’, that, whilst on the surface might be seen as recording only absence, was in fact capturing time through the minuscule shifts in light and space. When Blaufuks turns to photographing his kitchen window, in a kind of self-imposed constraint, he is operating in much the same manner. What one might argue, in the face of this impulse to obsessively describe or photograph the quotidian, be it by looking at micro-events, be it by capturing a space in every possible angle, is that this might work as a kind of stabilising force in the face of traumatic change. As Blaufuks found, in ‘describing’ a place methodically through his images he was counteracting a sense of drifting, of loss:

It is no accident that we are talking about displacement and exile and I have been photographing the same window for years. Maybe for me it is important, because it is going against all that sense of where my work comes from. So, I put

myself in a position where I say: 'maybe I'm exiled before this window'.¹²
(Blaufuks and Mendonça, my translation)

Thus, the artist placed himself in front of his kitchen window, growing the roots missing from an exiled family. And, in a twist of chance, the artist later uncovered within his family albums a picture of a window that one might be excused in believing is the window he had been photographing, in front of it were his great-grandparents, Elsa and Julius Leinung, as they found safety in Lisbon in 1940. Whilst it represents another space, it is a photograph that features much of the same light the artist finds in this series, almost creating a genealogy for *Attempting Exhaustion*.

There is another project by Blaufuks that seems to draw from Perec's stay in Saint-Sulpice, whilst at the same time similarly establishing a connection to disappearing Jewish surnames: *Memento Mori* (2011).

4. *Memento Mori* and *Matteo Perdeu o Emprego*

In the winter of 2006, for reasons which I do not care to explain, I walked into a telephone booth, near the church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris. Inside, next to the telephone directory, I found a brown envelope, containing these photographs. The envelope had neither sender nor addressee. (Blaufuks 2011, n.p.)

The photos inside the envelope Blaufuks found, so close to where Perec had developed his three-day experiment, were those of gravestones. But not just any gravestones. These images carried solely surnames traditionally associated with Central and Eastern European Jewish families. Names of the kind both Blaufuks and Perec themselves had seen shift and mutate. In addition, there were no extra details on the person buried beneath these headstones. No first names, no dates of birth or death, just the occasional decoration or Star of David. In their stripping down to surnames, one could argue that each of these headstones represented not only one person, but perhaps an entire family or community.

From these images, Blaufuks developed three separate versions of what he named *memento mori* (2008), two wall-mounted groups of photos and one photobook, *Cadernos Blaufuks 2: Memento Mori* (2011). *Version I*, was a set of five 3×4 grids formed by twelve individually framed photographs and was exhibited in *O Arquivo* (2008), in Lisbon, whilst *Version II* was composed of sixty images, distributed as a 10×6 grid, and was shown in the exhibition *Álbum* (2008) in Guimarães. In its grid arrangement, lack of colour – these photographs are mostly in black and white with very few faded colour images included in the set –, and systematic recording and presentation – same-sized photographs with the gravestones presented frontally and organized alphabetically, although not necessarily beginning with the letter A –, one may encounter not only associations to archival practices but also to the work of German-photographers Bernd (1931-2007) and Hilla Becher (1934-2015).

¹² “Não é por acaso que estamos a falar de deslocação e exílio e eu estou há anos a fotografar a mesma janela. Se calhar para mim é importante, porque é ir contra todo esse sentido de onde vem o meu trabalho. Portanto, coloco-me numa posição em que digo: ‘se calhar, eu estou exilado perante esta janela’.”

In the photographic series created by the Bechers of disappearing industrial buildings a sense of a deep need to record, to archive, comes through. To do so the Bechers employed a set of rules in their work: no matter the function of the building itself it was always photographed frontally. The artists would only photograph on cloudy days so as not to have sharp light contrasts and shadows, giving their work a uniform spectrum of grey. They used a large Plaubel Peco 13×18cm camera, which permitted large negatives and highly defined images. The building was always focused while the surrounding area and background were blurred, calling attention to the architecture. Human presence was avoided and the buildings occupied the same space within the frame. While exhibiting their work the photographs would generally be organized in series of 6 to 24 images, with each individual picture being either 30×40 cm or 50×60 cm (see Lange 2006). Classifying these buildings as “Anonymous Sculptures” the Bechers divided their work into two different strands: “Typology” and “Development”. The first consisted of a series of photographs of the same type of building, be it cooling towers, engine houses, blast furnaces, gasometers, coal silos, houses or water towers. The second focused on the same edifice photographed from progressively different angles, which allowed for a better comprehension of its architecture.

By using the same set of rules in taking and showing these vanishing structures the couple was able to transmit not only the similarities of such edifices but, more importantly, draw attention to what made them unique within the composition and illicit considerations on their statute as obsolete structures. They hold the traces of past epochs, reminding us of what once was, and, like the ruin in eighteenth-century Europe, they have the potential to become inducers of nostalgia. For, as Svetlana Boym points out:

the value of the ruin itself changes through history. In the baroque age the ruins of antiquity were often used didactically, conveying to the beholder ‘the contrast between ancient greatness and present degradation.’ Romantic ruins radiated melancholy, mirroring the shattered soul of the poet and longing for harmonic wholeness. As for the modern ruins, they are reminders of the war and the cities’ recent violent past, pointing at coexistence of different dimensions and historical times in the city. The ruin is not merely something that reminds us of the past; it is also a reminder of the future, when our present becomes history. (Boym 2001, 79)

Gravestones too, arguably, have the potential to elicit nostalgia, even when not in a ruinous condition. However, the longing felt, the traces left by the people embodied in each gravestone captured in Blaufuks’s *Memento Mori* is also influenced by the work’s title itself. For, not only does memento mori connect back to the artistic theme in painting, but it can also be seen to refer to Susan Sontag’s statement that “All photographs are *memento mori*” (Sontag 2008 [1977], 15). The instant that they capture is gone at the very moment of its taking, and yet proof of its existence and disappearance remains.

As mentioned above, in his compositions of gravestone photographs, one could draw parallels between Blaufuks’s work and the Bechers’s “Anonymous Sculptures”, in their Typology strand. Like the Bechers’s sets, Blaufuks’s gravestone lose part of their three-dimensional aspect in the way they are photographed, becoming almost

silhouetted shapes onto their grassy backgrounds. Such has the effect of drawing one's attention towards each of the names, imagining what may have become of them, much as Gonçalo M. Tavares was invited to do.

In his book work, *The Archive: An Album of Texts* (2008), that, one could argue, was not quite an exhibition catalogue nor a photobook but rather something in between, Blaufuks assembled several texts and images surveying part of his oeuvre. These were excerpts of texts that had inspired him, gatherings of academic pieces about his work by curators, black and white reproductions of his photographic and filmic work or exhibition views. But the artist also included creative texts inspired by his images, specifically Aaronson by Tavares¹³:

Aaronson had not always been dead.

In a certain epoch, prior to this photo, one might even say without exaggeration that Aaronson was a living being.

Between the ages of twenty-seven and thirty-one, Aaronson would circle a round-about, like an obsessed insect.

Every morning, between seven and seven thirty, a man was seen circling the city's main rotary, where sixty percent of traffic would run into.

At seven o'clock in the morning there was less exhaust fumes than late in the afternoon or at ten o'clock in the morning, but there was some nevertheless, together with the metal and also the speed of some cars. And there, in the middle of all this, endangering his own life, a man would circle the rotary again and again, hundreds of times. That is the man we can only see the name of: Aaronson. (Tavares 2008, 243)

From this text, Tavares then developed the 2010 book, *Matteo Perdeu o Emprego / Matteo Lost his Job*. Continuing to draw from *Memento Mori* in the naming of 24 of his characters (plus one, as we shall see below), he added another that seemed incongruous within the set. This was the story of:

Aaronson, Ashley, Baumann, Boiman, Camer, Cohen, Diamond, Einhorn, Glasser, Goldberg, Goldstein, Gottlieb, Greenberg, Greenfield, Helsel, Holzberg, Hornick, Horowitz, Indictor, Kashine, Kessier, Klein, Koen, Levy and Matteo. (Tavares 2010, 2)

Structured around the dissonant Matteo – a first rather than a family name, and arguably more associated to a Southern Catholic European tradition than Central and Eastern European Jews – the book strings together a series of very short snippets into the lives of each of the 24 characters. Beginning with Aaronson, and his death, and following an alphabetical order, each piece ends with the introduction of the following character, like links in a chain. Such constraints work to push the narrative forward, as Tavares explains, “In *Matteo Lost His Job* there are no hesitations in the narrative's itinerary because fortunately there is alphabetical order”¹⁴ (Tavares 2010, 162, my translation).

¹³ An excerpt from Tavares's *Learning to Pray in the Age of Technology / Aprender a Rezar na Era da Técnica* (2007), “The Names”, devoted to reflection on the trajectory of family names, is also included in the book facing a reproduction of *Memento Mori*.

¹⁴ “Em *Matteo Perdeu o Emprego* não há hesitações no itinerário da narrativa porque felizmente existe a ordem alfabética.”

In applying such connective constraints to these tales, there is arguably the expectation that a circular narrative may emerge. That Matteo may in the end be connected to Aaronson. This circularity exists, but rather than Matteo it is a 25th name taken from *Memento Mori* that works as the missing link: Nedermeyer. Differing from his initial text for Blaufuks's *The Archive: An Album of Texts*, Tavares adds here a final paragraph introducing a witness to Aaronson's death, Nedermeyer. At the same time, at the end of the tale of Matteo, the protagonist stands next to a man selling his old wedding photos at the Flea Market, the same Nedermeyer. However, in not developing Nedermeyer's story further, Tavares argues that the predicted circularity is thus distorted into something closer to an ellipse:

It's clear that the geometric shape of "Matteo..." is a circle. Starting at the roundabout and ending with the last character who is, after all, the second to last: the one who comes before what is not yet known, the one who comes before what does not yet exist.

The book does not end with **Matteo**. A new character is called forth – **Nedermeyer**, so then we're not facing a circle after all, but at most an ellipse. From Matteo we don't go back to Aaronson, from Matteo we move on to Nedermeyer, a character who will endure we still do not know what events. (Tavares 2010, 202, my translation)¹⁵

A sort of circularity may arise though in the association Tavares's text has with photography. Stemming from his initial inspiration in Blaufuks's work, Tavares collaborated with the Portuguese art collective, Os Espacialistas, in *Matteo* to weave photos through the book. Here, the collective photographed vintage mannequins, in black and white, as if they stood in for each of the characters. As a new story, and name, is introduced so is one of the mannequin photographs. First occupying the entirety of a front page, and then repeating as a passport photo in an accumulating grid. As Matteo's story is reached a 5x5 grid of the 25 mannequins is shown. And, as this tale ends, an extant photograph is given, isolated, never being added to the grid, presumably of Nedermeyer.

5. Conclusion

As this article has attempted to demonstrate, there is a connection to be found between literature and photography, particularly in the work of Daniel Blaufuks. The artist turns frequently to other arts as a source of inspiration in the development of his projects, often returning to authors like W. G. Sebald and Georges Perec, the latter of which being a longstanding presence in Blaufuks's work. Yet, Blaufuks is

¹⁵ "É evidente que a forma geométrica deste 'Matteo...' é a circunferência. Começando na rotunda e terminando na última personagem que é, afinal, a penúltima: a que vem antes do que não se sabe ainda o que é, a que vem antes do que ainda não existe.

O livro não termina em **Matteo**. Uma nova personagem é chamada – **Nedermeyer**, mas então não estamos afinal diante de uma circunferência, mas quando muito diante de uma elipse. De Matteo não voltamos a Aaronson, de Matteo avançaremos para **Nedermeyer**, personagem que suportará não sabemos ainda que acontecimentos."

also drawn to even formal editorial characteristics, placing himself in well known, and read, series and collections, such as Penguin Classics. In doing so with a book of 'short stories', as is *Collected Short Stories*, attention is drawn to the very parallels between the short story format and photography. This link can later be found in the work inspired by Blaufuks himself, *Matteo Lost His Job* by Gonalo M. Tavares. Although carrying at first sight the size of a novel of 216 pages, Matteo is a collection of short views into the lives of 25 separate characters. Their brief capture of a "fragment of reality" (Cort zar *apud* Bell 2014, 442) mimicking snapshot photography, drawing forth puncturing instants. By inspiring the works of others, Blaufuks enters a sort of two-way movement, where not only is he influenced by literature, but also his photographic work generates new literary forms in response.

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Sandra Camacho holds a PhD in Comparative Studies from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon. She is currently developing a postdoctoral project, *Artistic Explorations of Technological Limitations in 21st Century Portuguese Photography*, at ICNOVA, FCSH-Universidade Nova de Lisboa. Her main research areas include the archive as artistic practice, media archaeology, interarts and intermedia studies.

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