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Reimag(in)ing Story & History, Documentary & Fiction: (Re)visionary Images in Contemporary Novels

The documentary image is central to many contemporary stories contending with complex histories, from Kundera's *Nesnesitelná lehkost bytí* (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*) to Makine's *Le Testament français* (*Dreams of My Russian Summers*), Jorge's *A Costa dos Murmúrios* (*The Murmuring Coast*) and *O Vale da Paixão* (*The Painter of Birds*) to Antunes's *As Naus* (*Return of the Caravels*) and Agualusa's *O Vendedor de Passados* (*The Book of Chameleons*), Michal Govrin's *Hevzekim* (*Snapshots*) to Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*. Whether literally present, as in Govrin's and Hemon's novels, or more typically only literarily represented in the text, the documentary photograph functions as a critical text within the text, context, subtext, and pretext for revisionary history and visionary storytelling. Framed by the fiction, the documentary image's non-fictional claims are subject to interrogation and sometimes subverted. Reviewed in the fiction, documentary photographs – actual images or imagined artifacts, found or fictional records – register multiple views of reality, multiple viewpoints. The image continues to develop in the text. Rather than fixed reflection, it becomes a prism for the refraction of history. The photograph not only affixes time and place within a frame, but is peculiarly subject to time in these texts, bearing and baring traces both in its material surface and through recursive readings, incisively exposing technique and tradition, tricks of the trade. The textual narrative re-inscribes the photograph in multiple times and places; it re-interprets the times and places inscribed in the photographic artifact. That is, through continual re-presentation, these post-modern novels compel us to contemplate the complex

chronotopic dimensions of visual as well as verbal representation. In these reflexive novels, photographs also become objects of artistic reflection. The photograph can stand in for the text, as a corresponding scope for re-envisioning the complex dimensions and dynamics of history and story. Visual images expose competing aesthetic and critical perspectives at play in the verbal imaginary. If documentary is recast as fiction, fiction is also recast as documentary. Cross-examining these diverse writers' polysemous photographs and photographers – as images and re-imaginings of fictions and writers – we can refocus on questions of authenticity, authorship, and authority. These post-modern, post-colonial texts reframe particular geo-cultural histories and reconstruct novelistic frameworks by reframing the photograph.

The visual image has long been integrated in verbal story and history, but its commentary on literary conventions or historiography and its correlation to individual and cultural imagination and ideology in those contexts is understudied. The image is typically read as indexical, illustrative, interpretive, as documentary instantiation or imaginative illumination. Not wanting to be left in the dark, we privilege sight as a means of insight. In the sketch, snapshot, or our mind's eye, we see the world of which the writer speaks. Yet the image, both “imagining” story and “documenting” history, is as multi-dimensional as the verbal text, as memoried, mediated by technique and tradition. The post-modern text makes clear how the image may be divided, doubled, digressive, disorienting, dialogic, reflective, refractive, and reflexive. The visual is engaged in dialogue with verbal discourse. Visual re-presentation of the verbal and verbal representation of the visual continually reframe our realization of text and context. Foregrounding figures of the writer and artist, the post-modern novel reprises the line long traced between creative arts, thickly drawn in modernist works through correlations between fugue and fiction, polyphonic and palimpsest compositions, novelist and composer or painter. But the interpolation of the documentary image and image-maker in post-modern fiction is innovative and incisive.

This literary focus on documentary photography is both timely and time bound. The cameras integrated in our phones, tablets, laptops, gaming systems, etc., transform contemporary ways of telling stories

and making history. The photographic image mediates modernity to the extent that we cannot be surprised to find it frequently represented and even reproduced in contemporary fictions set in the present and recent past. Yet photographs are not simply historicizing objects in the fiction. They function in literary texts in ways they do not function in other contexts. The photograph remains indexical. It figures evidentially like the photo physically pasted in an album or virtually posted online or published in newspaper or popular journal. It may advertise, representing a projected persona or potentiality. Or it registers a past reality. In historical fictions, the photograph, actual or imagined, may figure as one of those authenticating artifacts, reasserting the realist claim "all is true". Like the photograph preserved in the art museum and in the archive, reproduced as art print or historical document, the photograph in the novel is presented as autonomous fact and artifact. The found, unaltered photograph attests to what was physically present and to what could be illumined by then present light and lens. That is, the photograph frames a particular moment and place but also an unseen perspective: implicit in the framing, contingent on mechanical and human focus, corresponding or critically responding to artistic and cultural conventions. Doubly fixed on paper, printed image visually and/or verbally reproduced in the novel, this perspective is also developed in individual and/or cultural memory. The represented photograph always frames the past, through what it represents and how it represents. But the photograph also attests to what is present, including present perspectives on the past, on its prospects, on other perspectives. The photograph becomes a literary fact and artifact, participating in intersecting sign systems and chronotopes. Perspectives on and in the photograph multiply. That is, the photograph reflects more than the setting and subject within the image. It reflects an imaginary that is continually verbally and visually re-imagined, re-interpreted, re-framed. It offers up a peculiarly reflexive image, a double-take illumining text and context, history and historiography.

One of the stranger aspects of the photograph in the literary text lies in its double mode of representation: visual and verbal. The visual is the dominant dimension of the photograph. It registers reality in terms of light passing through a lens, its imprint determined by the manipulation

of time (duration of the shot) and space (aperture or lens opening, distance from the object, lens magnification, size and sensitivity of the sensor or film). But in literary representation, the visual aspect of the photograph may be only verbalized. The image is imprinted on the page in code as flexible as the digital code that replaces the negative. Or the visual reproduction and verbal representation may co-exist in the literary text, as it does in Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*, in which photographic images face the text.¹ Either way, the image is continually manipulated. We see the image in new light.

The Visible Image in the Novel

In *The Lazarus Project*, we confront a peculiarly visionary interdisciplinary work of contemporary literature. Not only is the visual image literally inscribed within the conventionally verbal literary genre of the novel, but the verbal is also inscribed within the visual through archival notations on and verbal signs registered within documentary photographs. The photographs continue to function as imaginative illustration, incontrovertible evidence, and informative context, but also figure as pretext for the story. We find this also in works such as Antoine Volodine and Olivier Aubert's *Macau* and Michal Govrin's *Snapshots*. Yet Hemon's novel interweaves two historical storylines and two corresponding series of documentary photographs. Hemon's imaginative rendering of both his contemporary fictional narrator Brik (whose story refracts Hemon's own history) and the historical Lazarus Averbuch (whose story and history Brik seeks to recuperate) is informed by found documentary images from the Chicago Historical Society, marred by the ravages of time and marked by prior readings. These old images of the New World are interspersed with Velibor Božović's new photographs of the Old World, contemporary photographs of Central and Eastern Europe taken while traveling with Hemon during a research foray retracing Averbuch's origins and returning to their own. Like the images and texts found in the archives, those fabricated for the novel reveal actuality and artifice. Božović's photographs, purportedly taken

¹ Aleksandar Hemon, *The Lazarus Project* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008).

by Brik's friend Rora (as Hemon's research is purportedly pursued and reported by Brik), show us sites revisited in real as well as fictional time and space. The abstraction of Božović's close-up images documents present rifts and ruins along with reflective, reflexive insight into the difficulty of seeing a recent past, still moving before our eyes even in the photographic still. Conversely, the clarity of the mid-distance shots taken in more distant past, in which the dead Averbuch and the authorities holding his corpse must hold still at length for enough light to register on the negative, documents clearly the documentary image's staging. The image captures not only its subjects, but their posturing and impotence, the positioning of and perspective behind the camera.

Consistently black-and-white photographic images as well as neo-documentary narrative stylization blur boundaries between past and present, story and history, necessity and choice. What seem at first a series of reflections shift into kaleidoscopic reconfigurations and continual refraction through consciousness. The fictional Brik's reflexive retrospective first-person narration critically and creatively (cor)responds to archival fragments (newspaper accounts and other official written as well as photographic records). Hemon fleshes out the biography of the historical Averbuch within the framework of fictional but historically viable autobiography. He connects causes and cover-up of socio-ethnic bias and violence in Chicago on 2 March 1908 to that a century later in Sarajevo and Chicago. Uncertainty and complicity, fictional consciousness and fragmented conscience in the present undermine any absolute claims about the past. While the verbal inscriptions (archival classifications, captions, confabulated explications) might seem to define fixed visual images, their fixity is destabilized by contradictions and oversights, re-readings within the text and the images' resistance to the text. Dialogic story contests any claims to monological history. In Hemon's work, both text and image are ambivalent, subject to ironic interpretation. At the same time, they are not irrelevant. Image and imagination, history and story are rather continually in play, complicating response and responsibility. Their mutual recall recalls our averted eyes, redirects our gaze.

Hemon exacerbates this flux in his further play with image and text beyond the printed edition of his novel, in *The Lazarus Project* on-line:

<http://aleksandarhemon.com/lazarus/>. On the homepage, we confront moving text and image, the outline of the Chicago skyline, bending while underwritten by title and author, expanding into blinking eyelids. We enter the site through the eye, gaining some insight as our cursor approaches its center, provoking in the pupil a piece of a documentary photo of the assassinated (purported assassin) Averbuch with his eyes closed. The blink of the screen opens onto a thumbnail map of images interrupted by pop-up introduction and instructions. Close the inserted summary and then click images to proceed. Close-up images open up, with verbal fragments from the text under the photographs, highlighted words offering one or more possible links to other images and captions. Verbal and visual are continually superimposed, shifting in size, redirecting vision, revising story. The narrative is broken up anew by the distribution of the images and by the possibility of redirections – we need not follow the narrative in the same order as the printed book suggests. Out of the corner our eyes, we see images and text beyond those in the center of the screen, inviting us to digress. We can digress as readers of a novel, of course, turn back to check an image or re-read part of the text or read fragments out of order. But here the viewer or reader’s collaboration and complicity in the making of story and history is made even clearer because we decide the direction in which to “turn” the page. The multi-dimensionality and multi-directionality of story and history are more evident. On screen, the greater authority of visual or verbal text is continually contested, inverted, then inverted again. Text is reduced. But text reduced to captions may also render the expanded images reductive. The images and text swell and shrink, move us and move as we move on.

In an additionally intriguing move, Hemon’s website links to Božović’s own website: <http://veliborbozovic.com/project/the-lazarus-project/>, including sixty-five of the more than twelve hundred images he took while traveling through Poland, western Ukraine, Moldova, and Bosnia with Hemon, tracing Brik and Rora’s fictional trip “back to where Lazarus came from, attempting to understand the places he left behind.” While working within the literary framework, “sometimes assuming the point of view of the fictional photographer” Rora, Božović notes that his perspective is also marked by his own literal return to his Bosnian

roots. The images are informed by other pretexts, subtexts, contexts. Yet the novel is a complex pretext and context for the images. Even on this website, images “are presented alongside quotes from the book,” their authority underwritten by the novel’s denoted nomination for national book awards. If the text authorizes the images, the images exceed the bounds of its collaborative authorship. Božović’s Lazarus project includes images beyond those published as part of Hemon’s printed and on-line projects. His (re)visionary images and imagination reach beyond the scope of the narrative. Story and history are re-presented, re-framed by Božović’s own reflexive, retrospective commentary:

[The photographs] are intimately and deeply connected with the book, but also speak to something that is beyond its limits. For what interests me is what is not in the photograph – the absence that the photograph signifies. If home is the place where somebody notices your absence, then the photographs are home for the worlds we have lost.

Božović’s use of the past tense suggests the preservative aspect of documentary photography, archiving “worlds we have lost”. But Božović redefines that trace. He re-maps the image as the locus of loss. The image, like language, is (de)constructed in terms of difference and deferral, and similarly reconstructed as housing in which homeless consciousness dwells. Representing in the image what is not present or seeing in the photograph what is not visible, Božović approximates Clarice Lispector’s claims about writing as “miraculous fishing,” casting lines using the “word as bait”, seeking “something beyond the word” and hauling in meaning “between the lines.” Once the catch is made, what the writer has dug up out of the dirt “can be discarded with relief”; or the story or sense netted by the writer “assimilates” the word.² Casting for other ways of understanding writing and visual art in her chronicles (similarly pushing the limits of this neo-documentary genre), Lispector paradoxically contends that “writing often means remembering what has never existed” and that the writer’s digression

² Clarice Lispector, “Miraculous Fishing,” *The Foreign Legion: Stories and Chronicles*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), p. 119.

and dissembling discover “brutal truth.”³ These multiple Lazarus projects bait story with history and history with story, documentary with fiction and fiction with documentary, visual image with verbal imagination and vice versa. Through this dialogic call and answer, they raise more than one Lazarus, reveal more than one brutal truth.

The Invisible Image in the Novel

Though more conventionally verbally imagining the visual image, other contemporary novels similarly revise story and history by reframing the documentary photograph. While cross-referencing Slavic, East/Central-European, and transnational works that intersect with Hemon’s project in their geo-political scope, within the context of these papers for the Portuguese Comparative Literature Association, this investigation focuses on three recent Lusophone novels that intersect both motivocally and methodologically with these works from the other edge of European and Atlantic rims. These works recover (or rediscover or dis-cover) a problematic Portuguese past through plural perspectives, through polyphonic discourse, through disorienting digressions, through intertextual resonance, through relocations (displacements, diaspora, returns), through re-casting, through pathological remembering. They have in common the indeterminacy of the stories they tell, their open-ended dialogism, their insistence on the writer (author, human agent) as dissembler, and their interest in historical and human truths. What follow then are suggestive snapshots from readings of *As Naus* by António Lobo Antunes, *O Vale da Paixão* by Lídia Jorge, and *O Vendedor de Passados* by Eduardo Aqualusa. While much has been and remains to be said about these discrete fictions’ “multiple deterritorializations of language” (to quote Deleuze and Guattari on minor literatures⁴), of their geo-historical, gendered, and generic reconfigurations, here we consider some of the ways in which they use the photographic image to these effects.

³ Clarice Lispector, “Without Any Warning,” *The Foreign Legion*, p. 121.

⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris, 1975) / *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis, 1982).

In *As Naus*⁵, Antunes continually reframes one of his ancient modern navigators (anonymous among the many debased/humanized heroes and *retornados* returning from 15th & 16th-century exploration/20th-century exploitation of Africa to post-colonial Lisbon) through the aging man's reflection in and reflections on a photograph taken on his wedding day. As his chapter opens, our first glimpse is framed through third-person description of a third person at his marriage in Guiné Bissau 53 years earlier by "a missionary priest, transported by a lost skiff and whom scurvy and malaria had made as thin as an Abyssinian without a place to hang his hat" (*Caravels* 33) ["um padre missionário transportado por um batel perdido e a quem o escorbuto e a malária emagreceram como um abissínio sem poiso" (*Naus* 41)]. Thus, displacement and disease, along with duration, frame the man and marriage. As do death and deferment, described in terms of desire deflated and coupling continually disrupted by the distracting stomping and swatting of mosquitoes by the widow downstairs from the couple now looking out their window. The couple watches immigrants, then soldiers disembarking, fatally sentenced to these shores. Contradiction and disintegration on literal and social landscapes is linked with literary language: constructions immediately ruins, workers in the "Gongorist sonnet factory" ["fábrica de sonetos gongóricos"], unemployed chroniclers "comb[ing] cedilhas" out of their hair, sodomy, poisoning, crossed rhymes all strung together (*Caravels* 34, 37; *Naus* 44). Now, in 1974, as the old man looks out his window at the landscape, he also sees himself reflected with unanticipated ravages of time. He recoils from himself (and then from the wife he barely recognizes) as he does from the landscape. Whereas his wife has admitted in light of their losses (including a daughter who died 38 years earlier), "I don't belong here anymore" ["Já não pertenço aqui"], he admits, "We don't even belong to ourselves" ["Já não pertencemos nem sequer a nós"] (*Caravels* 37; *Naus* 44-45). This divide, dissociation, dispossession, displacement is only made more evident through subsequent reflections in and on the photographic image.

⁵ António Lobo Antunes, *As Naus* (Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote, 1998).

We first find the wedding photograph in one of Antunes's many disjointed, defamiliarizing lists, covered by the polyps and tiny mushrooms that encroach on everything in the downpour through which the couple awaits their evacuation to Lisbon. The photograph, like the man, is covered-up by time and transformed. The man can barely see the indistinct bridal couple in suit and veil in a landscape of firs. But he can look through this blurred image into vivid memory to recall the pre-nuptial embarrassment felt while frozen in front of the camera's strange body and steady gaze (*Caravels* 37-38; *Naus* 45). That is, he recognizes what is absent in the photograph. It houses his lost sense of self, his lost worlds.

The photograph mediates self-reflection and a sense of a temporally divided self. But it also serves to demark place and displacement. The photograph travels, first preserved in paper, then placed in various apartments – on the ducal dresser in the Hotel Ritz, on the sideboard amidst the ruins of the boarding house in Colares and then the unoccupied house in Ericeira. With these displacements or replacements, the photograph continues to be subject to time and place and shifting perspectives: to increasing disassociation (his aging and his wife's regression to her childhood and digression to America), to disintegration and disregard, until it is discarded, thrown onto a trash heap along with the past. For Antunes's navigators and for his readers, navigating uncertain historical returns and revisions, then, the photograph serves as a navigational tool in time and space. A fishing line or hook such as those that the man finally watches, representing hope of reeling in a nymph or fortyish hooker.

We might compare António Lobo Antunes's re-presentation of subject, story, history through this one photograph to Tatiana Tolstaya's, through albums full of photographs, in her short story "Милая Шура" ("Sweet Shura")⁶. Here too, we review a life and view a subject through review of old photographs. We have layered narratives, plural perspectives – those of the narrator and of Aleksandra Ernestovna, looking through the albums together, telling different stories about

⁶ Tatiana Tolstaya, *Na Zolotom Kryl'tse Sideli* (Moscow: Moldaia Gvardiia, 1987) / *On the Golden Porch*, trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York: Vintage, Knopf, 1990).

them and about looking at them. The photos are framed, affixed in old albums, fixating memory and desire. But photos, album, memory age. Eventually, once Shura is dead and her apt cleaned out, they are viewed by strangers with indifference, as insignificant at best, clutter at worst – images tossed in the garbage heap, blowing around in the alley. In Tolstaya’s story, these traces of past reality and unrealized promise are discarded by others, not by Shura (whereas Antunes’ protagonist throws his own image of the past out the window). But in both cases, what is discarded is not disregarded; the image is recovered, verbally redeveloped and dialogically reframed in the literary text. The photograph serves as pretext for multiple stories and histories, for stories about story and history, for the realization of consciousness and conscience.

On a much larger photographic scale, involving an album as well as framed photos, Jorge’s *O Vale da Paixão*⁷ is ordered and disordered by the snapshots within it. There are “fixed images”, “documentary frames,” and a storyline linked with a more condensed twentieth-century linear history: the building of an empire and household in the 1930s and 40s, a prodigal son’s 1946 departure, his illegitimate daughter’s 1947 birth, his 1951 return registered in a photo where he and his daughter show their remarkable likeness, the daughter’s winter of 1956/7 navigating imaginary seas in her father’s buggy, his brothers’ departures 1953 to 1957 (a “domestic diaspora”), his eldest brother (and her surrogate father) Custódio’s “extravagant regime” by 1958, the prodigal’s final 1963 return, the patriarch gradually deposed and dispossessed of sense (like Lear raving on the heath), leaving his lame son as custodian, the daughter’s insurrections beginning with her 1964 sexual dalliance with Dalila, revolution in 1974 registered only in terms of Alexandrina and Blé’s independence, and finally in 1983 the daughter’s departure and disillusioning encounter with her father, then inheritance and recounting upon return. But there is no chronologically ordered narrative, rather a series of images and imaginings, moments reviewed and reframed. Many of Jorge’s narratives concern what is unspoken and unseen, what

⁷ Lídia Jorge, *O Vale da Paixão* (Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 1998) / *The Painter of Birds*, trans. Margaret Jull Costa (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2001).

we do with traces and murmurs, with wounds or scars in the landscape and in cultural and individual consciousness. Photographs are only one kind of trace we find in the old house in Valmares – but they are traces that have a lot to say in this novel.

The traces in Jorge's text include echoes (voices, footsteps whose cadence is as distinct as any voice), objects (uniform, gun, blanket/*cobertor*), sketches (sketches of birds, of course, but also sketched moments), letters (which arrive with those sketches and with photos), and photos. Eventually there is the literary trace, not just implicit and explicit intertextual recall, but the writing of literary texts within the text. All these things are subject to destruction and disintegration in the world, but in the text deconstruction preserves and proliferates sense. We see several of the objects buried – covered up. But this covering up has many functions: to deny (put away the soldier's uniform), to destroy (the same moth-ridden uniform that is infesting everything), and to preserve in secret (archive, for recovery). Even when "they had let time fade and wear away and transform all those things into bits of objects scattered on the ground, assimilated into it, until they had taken on the same color and substance of the earth" the daughter wants to explain that there are "some objects that [do] not disappear, that merely cease to be material or to have any weight and bec[o]me memory instead", imagined as "invisible fluid" "incorporated into the circulation of the blood and into the caverns of the memory" (*Painter* 31) ["eles tinham permitido que o tempo fosse desbotando, usando, transformando todos esses objectos em pedaços de coisas espalhadas pelo solo, assimiladas a ele, da mesma cor e substância. Mas ela queria dizer que havia objectos que não desapareciam, que apenas deixavam de ser matéria e de ter peso para passarem a ser lembrança. Passavam a ser fluido imaterial, a entrar e a sair do corpo imaterial da pessoa, a incorporar-se na circulação do sangue e nas cavernas da memória (*Vale* 39). Both the material (visible) traces and those rendered immaterial (invisible) bait memory and meaning; the assimilated image, still legible between the lines, reveals the shifting posture or even imposture of the subject.

Various of Jorge's characters are framed by photos – framed in the sense of being set up, accused, even sentenced – and then reframed or re-sentenced. Thus, the narrator describes photos sent back from

diasporic dispersion that fix her uncles as particular figures in her mind, Manuel as miner, for instance (chapter 33). She replays these images of her uncles in their first immigrant parts as stills, “frozen in her memory,” consciously set into motion in her mental films, as “lovely image” or “shocking” or revengeful image, though they have moved on to adopt other postures (chapters 67-68). Not only are the snapshots selective, but she views them selectively. She reorders and re-frames them. They are also reframed for her. The narrator frames her father through photographs such as those in the Chevrolet; but these images are reframed by the letters she receives from his brothers. The scandal of the vehicle shifts from Walter’s proximity to Maria Ema in that space to the fact of its financing by his brothers. Though the narrator contends that these “poisoned” letters burn themselves out, describes them as “shadows that fade” in consciousness (chapter 80), the images remain shadowed in the text; they only develop more contrast, more depth, like the image of Walter, though he also fades in his daughter’s mind’s eye (chapter 83).

Walter presents himself through his letters and sketches, as his siblings later present themselves through the letters and photos they also send back to Valmares. But most notably, he leaves photographic traces. Of the first photo taken in 1951 by the photographer Matos in Faro, the narrator asserts, then thinks it at least possible that she remembers, then admits that she can at least imagine her father lifting her up and their putting their heads together – authoring and authorizing the photograph in part. While there are other “photographs taken later on with a Kodak, next to the agaves, in which the images were so tiny and indistinct that the people in them resembled dead nestlings or crowds of ants” this is “the one true photograph, predating all others” (*Painter* 23) [“a “única, a verdadeira fotografia” (*Vale* 32)], which documents Walter and his daughter’s proximity, likeness, identity – she sees in the photograph how they are “identical” (*Painter* 22) [“iguais” (*Vale* 30)] as he later notes in their reflection in the mirror with his refrain “we’re so alike” (*Painter* 23, 24) [“como nos parecemos” (*Vale* 32)], without his being able to reflect on this as a repetition of the photographic likeness – “it was as if Walter had forgotten” (*Painter* 23 [“ele parecia não se lembrar” (*Vale* 32)]. From Walter’s vantage point, this is a forgotten,

discarded, disregarded snapshot. But it is present in her memory in 1963 as she recognizes their mirrored reflection as a kind of copy that again requires his drawing her near to fit with him inside an odd frame, this time that of a mismatched art nouveau mirror (*Vale* 31-32; *Painter* 23-24). They have the same curly hair. Others note the similarity of their eyes: “both of them looking at the camera perched on a tripod like the belly of a wading bird, both looking at the same fixed point with the same pale eyes. Those who loved them would say they were the eyes of angels, those who did not that they were like cats’ eyes. Later Adelina Dias would describe them as cheetahs’ eyes [...]” (*Painter* 25) [“a olharem para um ponto fixo com os mesmos olhos claros. Quem os amasse diria que eram olhos de anjo, a quem fossem hostis pareceriam de gato. Adelina Dias escreveria mais tarde que era um olhar de chita” (*Vale* 33)]. In the postcard sized, brown photograph, furtively wrapped in brown paper, hidden in the bottom of boxes and in the back of picture frames, among almanacs and pots, which Maria Ema shows her daughter in secret (*Vale* 32, 35; *Painter* 24, 27), Walter’s daughter imagines that they are both looking at

Maria Ema Baptista, colocada ao lado da máquina, e a cabeça da máquina coberta por um pano preto, atrás do qual o fotógrafo esperava de ambos uma proeza que não passaria numa imagem. Mas ela não sabia se guardava a lembrança do instante, se o próprio instante era uma invenção criada a partir da imagem. (*Vale* 34)

Maria Ema Baptista, standing next to the camera covered by a black cloth beneath which the photographer was hunched, and expecting from both of them some courageous act that would never be more than an image. But she did not know if she actually remembered that moment or if it was an invention based on the image. (*Painter* 26)

The problem with these documentary images lies in their capacity to lie and their openness to interpretation. Walter’s sketches of birds are continually re-cast (as insight, perversion, inheritance, etc.) Life belongs to the many who partake in recounting it, as family partakes in Walter like the host (see chapter 18). He observes the similarity of their

handwriting (they both sketch, as they also both author and authorize the novel). But who wrote or said what in this “empire of stones” is confused, continually misattributed (chapter 41).

Whereas the narrator looks at and reflects on a “real” photograph from 1951, in 1963 and at the time of narration, which might be 1983/84, Walter’s daughter re-imagines her father’s 1951 return from India as a “film” (more important than any actual film she has seen). Her description of this film as “the way in which she had preserved that return” [“forma como conservara esse regresso”] suggests documentary footage, the fixing of a moment in memory, in the mind’s eye. Yet her subsequent description and screenings of this film recast her as director of a historical fiction still in the making: this film is “an intangible inheritance, invisible to others, but real to her, a film in which no one came or left unless she chose” (*Painter* 17) [“uma herança imaterial, invisível para os demais, mas concreto para si, um filme onde ninguém entrava nem saía que não fosse por vontade dela” (*Vale* 25)]. There are a series of predetermined shots involving particular interactions, conversations, plots. The confrontation between Walter and his family at the table and other inherited images (in chapters 8, 19, 20, 52) include the “image of their love affair” [“imagem dum amor”] “that crosses the silence of many years, ten, twenty, thirty years, then the car, which still moves over that thin film, arrives and stops, wrapped in silence” [“essa imagem atravessa o silêncio de muitos anos, dez, vinte, trinta anos depois, o carro, que sempre se desloca sobre essa película fina, chega e pára, envolto em silêncio.”] Though improbabilities, “The Kodak snaps prove it” (*Painter* 127) [“Provam-no os retratos de Kodak” (*Vale* 135)]. However, these shots are not sequenced. There are multiple plots in play. There are abstract shots. Their rearrangement can be as murderous as that in Nolan’s *Memento*. She has “inherited” “the image of his figure pacing the tiled floors, from the front, from behind, by the table, sitting among the others, and, later, alone, in the buggy. She had inherited that movement, back and forth, standing, walking, with no actual narrative [...]” (*Painter* 18) [“Tinha ficado com a imagem da sua figura sobre os ladrilhos, de frente, de costas, junto à mesa, no meio deles e, depois, sozinho, unido à charette. Herdara esse movimento, por aqui, por ali, fixo, andando, sem narrativa própria, e no entanto

repetido e persistente” (*Vale* 26)]. This lack of narrative is key, as well as this persistent recursive revision. Walter’s daughter authors her own narratives to make sense of the shots; in writing her three stories near the end of this story and in authorizing or co-authoring this novel, she constructs multiple narratives, replayed like scenes in Bergman’s *Persona*, where personas merge – not only those of the pathological characters, but those of figures within the fiction and author of the fiction, directed and director. Walter’s image grows, eclipses all others (*Painter* 19), who, even present, are “blurred, silent, tense figures” (*Painter* 17) [“indistintos, calados, tensos” (*Vale* 26)]. But his image also fades, is always in flux.

The photograph represents a kind of capture (we capture an image, a moment; we are captured by an image, captivated by a view). But Jorge shows us how the capture occurs again and again. The image, moment, figure, perspective that seems fixed in the still frame is not. In the text, it is almost as if we confront one of those old film images still being processed in a darkroom, developing. Looking through the fluid text, we gradually see more and more of the image, details that change our reading entirely. More than that, we see the process whereby the image is made – the various eyes and cultural mechanisms, individual and cultural consciousnesses, that frame, develop, edit, reproduce, reframe, distribute, read and re-read. The thing/person within the frame recedes from view, though it corresponds in some sense to the image. What the image captured as well as we who are captivated by it can respond to the image. But the image lives a life of its own, continually renewed when buried in the text (like Walter’s blanket). As she double-handedly heaves her double edged hoe, lifting it like a man to bury that blanket, Walter’s daughter gives voice to inarticulate cries compared to those of a mother giving birth and also asks, who is whose father. She redefines gender and time as she imagines herself as her father’s mother disquieted by his roaming and at the same time as the daughter sitting beside him in the car and taking the place of her own mother watching her race down the road – superimposing actual images and an imaginary, story and history, in a series of doubletakes, compounded by the doubled first- and third-person narration of the text.

The Image Maker in the Novel

In Jorge's text, we see not only old images reinterpreted and retaining multiple meanings, but also new images being made. Jorge shows us Custódio's children taking pictures of their mother in which she barely recognizes herself; Maria Ema and Custódio Dias have become so picturesque in their old age that tourists try to capture them. These unseen photographs offer us a glimpse beyond the central scope of the narrative, of a socio-political terrain unrecognized by most of this story and history. But these snapshots also reposition the reader and the present within the narrative frame, again complicate our view, make us complicit in story and history. We might be those children or tourists looking in from the fringes of the novel, even as we also feel that we have held those photos taken during Walter's daughter's childhood in our own hands, sat through multiple screenings of her film in the dark room at the top of that house in Valmares, even participated in the film's continual re-editing, contributed with our own page turning to the wear and tear on that invisible album of sketches, maybe sensed those fluid images or at least that imaginary coursing in our own veins.

We barely get to know the men who took the photos in those novels by Antunes and Jorge. The wedding photo and the photo of Walter Dias and his daughter are staged photos – bearing directed documentary witness to an occasion. The photos of the brothers, too, seem more or less staged documents. The subjects sit or stand for the photographer. The subjects order the photograph (even if they don't exactly choreograph or frame it); these are documents on demand, for distribution. The subject and recipient/reader of the photograph matters, not the professional photographer, whose work is generic, stylized according to conventions. What is disconcerting about these photos to their readers is the disjuncture between subject and style/convention (as if family but not family) or the difference between subject past/represented and present. These are the gaps that give rise to meaning in the text.

Near the beginning of the novel, Jorge describes the “lie” on all of Walter's daughter's identity papers rather as “fertile” “ambiguity”, which together with other lies and “concealment” gives rise to

“wonderful, unforgettable moments”, “as if fertility and joy sprang up not along the straight banks of the true and the false, but in very different soil” (*Painter* 12) [“tinha conhecimento de que em todos os documentos de identificação havia uma mentira, mas ela colaborava com a mentira, porque da ambiguidade surgiam acontecimentos férteis e calorosos como se nascessem de verdades. Como se a fertilidade e a alegria despontassem em terrenos distintos das margens rectas do verdadeiro e do falso” (*Vale* 20)]. She uses that same organic language to describe the “irregular” growth of Walter’s daughter’s *Album of Birds* by Walter Dias, a collection of his discarded sketches (*Painter* 15; *Vale* 23). What she calls the “*Album of Birds* by Walter Dias” [O *Álbum dos Pássaros* de Walter Dias], his brothers call *Her Album of Birds* [O *Álbum dos Pássaros Dela*] (*Painter* 16; *Vale* 23-24). Thus, authorship is reattributed, the image of the author remade. Walter’s daughter glimpses, gathers, studies, copies, removes and finds safe havens for the sketches “only to replace them later in their rightful position” “until the album became such a familiar object that their being collected together seemed the natural fate for those drawings of birds” (*Painter* 16) [“Repondo-os, em seguida, no sítio devido, com descrição, para que ninguém visse. Recolocando-os na capa, folha sobre folha, até que o álbum se tinha transformado num objecto tão comum, que o facto de o ter arrecadado pareceu um destino inevitável para os desenhos dos pássaros” (*Vale* 24)]. This is a kind of editorializing and curating, authorship and authorizing, concomitantly invisible and noticed, made visible through retrospective narrative.

In José Eduardo Agualusa’s *O Vendedor de Passados*⁸, we confront not only archived and curated photographs, collated by Félix Ventura (the seller of pasts), but also other photographers with their different subjects and styles of photographs. Here the nature of document, history and story, is much more radically interrogated through the active use of photography, directly related to writing, while writing and photography are both correlated to the documentation and invention of identity. We

⁸ José Eduardo Agualusa, *O Vendedor de Passados* (Lisboa: Edições Dom Quixote, 2008) / *The Book of Chameleons: A Novel*, trans. Daniel Hahn (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

confront at least three different kinds of photographic curators and artists in Félix Ventura, Pedro Gouveia (a.k.a. José Buchmann), and Ângela Lúcia.

Félix Ventura, our protagonist and eventually narrator and fictional author of the text (once the gecko reincarnating Borges is dead), in some sense always authors and authorizes the narrative. He compares his work as “seller of pasts” – “a man who dealt in memories, a man who sold the past, clandestinely, the way other people deal in cocaine” (*Chameleons* 16) [“um homem que traficava memórias, que vendia o passado, secretamente, como outros contrabandeiam cocaína” (*Vendedor* 28)] – to that of the novelist. The novelist, as he imagines him then, is a Baudelarian trashpicker, rummaging and recycling through the past, a dissembling, digressive Dostoevskian clerk, whose creativity is contingent on deviant copying. Ventura not only falsifies but relies on real documents to compose his alternative histories. Ventura’s are found photographs, but he reframes them or uses them to re-make or reframe others. His house is an archive, a labyrinth of old photographs, newspaper articles, film and sound recordings, books.

Procurava-o, explicou [Félix Ventura], toda uma classe, a nova burguesia. Eram empresários, ministros, fazendeiros, camanguistas [diamond smugglers], gerais, gente, enfim, com o futuro assegurado. Falta a essas pessoas um bom passado, ancestrais ilustres, pergaminhos. Resumindo: um nome que ressoe a nobreza e a cultura. Ele vende-lhes um passado novo em folha. Traça-lhes a árvore genealógica. Dá-lhes as fotografias dos avôs e biasvôs, cavalheiros de fina estampa, senhoras do tempo antigo. Os empresários, os ministros, gostariam de ter como tias aquelas senhoras, prosseguiu, apontando os retratos nas paredes – velhas donas de panos, legítimas bessanganas – gostariam de ter um avô com o porte ilustre de um Machado de Assis, de um Cruz e Sousa, de um Alexandre Dumas, e ele vende-lhes esse sonho. (*Vendedor* 29)

There was a whole class, he explained, a whole new bourgeoisie, who sought him out. They were businessmen, ministers, landowners, diamond smugglers, generals – people, in other words, whose futures are secure. But what these people lack is a good past, a distinguished ancestry, diplomas. In sum, a name that resonates with nobility and culture. He sells them a brand new past. He draws

up their family tree. He provides them with photographs of their grandparents and great-grandparents, gentlemen of elegant bearing and old-fashioned ladies. The businessmen, the ministers, would like to have women like that as their aunts, he went on, pointing to the portraits on the walls – old ladies swathed in fabrics, authentic bourgeois *bessanganas* – they’d like to have a grandfather with the distinguished bearing of a Machado de Assis, of a Cruz e Souza, of an Alexandre Dumas. And he sells them this simple dremn. (*Chameleons* 16-17)

He casts himself to his clients as not forger but fabricator of dreams (*Chameleons* 17): “Fabrico sonhos, não sou um falsário...” (*Vendedor* 30). The photograph is prospectively retrospective. José Buchmann, later exposed as Pedro Gouveia, though he has already had many other names he wants to forget, wants to forget his own past (maybe for the reason he explains through an anecdote about a centenarian, ‘My soul hurts with too much past in it, and so much emptiness’), yet he describes himself to Ventura as a photojournalist who bears witness to trauma, whose life is devoted to memory and commemoration of “wars, of hunger and its ghosts, of natural disasters and terrible misfortunes” (*Chameleons* 17) [“Sou repórter fotográfico. Recolho imagens de guerras, da fome e dos seus fantasmas, de desastres naturais, de grandes desgraças. Pense em mim como testemunha” (*Vendedor* 30)]. His photographs are a locus of loss, both that of the subjects present within the frame and his own, which is absent or only present as a trace, in the finding and framing of the image. Ventura recasts him as José Buchmann by setting before him a series of photographic documents: id card, passport, drivers licence, family photos documenting mixed Boer and Madeiran immigrant settlement in São Pedro da Chibia (Cornélio Buchmann m. Marta Medeiros, son Mateus m. Am. artist Eva Miller, son José Buchmann) (*Vendedor* 55). Here we have recovery of a past that is literal re-covering or covering up. But there is this strangely authentic-seeming emotional response to the images on the part of José Buchmann, whose voice trembles as he “recognizes” his grandfather astride a gnu [boi-cavalo], his father and mother in an embrace, beside [the Chimpumpunhime] river, with a broad, endless horizon in the background, the man’s eyes lowered, the woman smiling at the camera [sorria para a objectiva] (56) – i.e., at her son, at him. Ventura,

or perhaps the nascent Buchmann himself, positions himself behind the camera: “It must have been José himself – then eleven years old – who’d captured that moment” (*Chameleons* 39) [“Devia ter sido ele próprio, José, então com onze anos, a fixar aquele instante” (*Vendedor* 57)]. With this ambivalent, double-voiced speculation, Agualusa and the Gecko Eulalio and Ventura and perhaps subject himself create the photographer José Buchmann becomes (though they will also (re) construct an alternative history of his development as photographer).

Buchmann is captivated by the photos and stories they tell. He insists, in fact, that Ventura tell him more and more of his own story. And Ventura, reluctantly, gives him snapshots (not literal snapshots, but literary glimpses, short stories, full of images, reflections). Our gecko relays one image of Eva Miller moving through New York like a little bird with a broken wing, and finds Ventura captivated by his own images (*Chameleon* 41; *Vendedor* 60). Ventura has also fashioned his own past and present using photographs/portraits/histories: mapping African history (European colonialism, Brazilian/American ramifications, including references to Frederick Douglass, etc.). Not only the Gecko, but also Ventura’s lover, the photographer Ângela Lúcia exposes his manipulation or reframing of the images through a kind of double-exposure (commensurate with her interest in light). In a first instance, she takes a photo of his portrait of Frederick Douglass (whom Ventura has appropriated as paternal great-grandfather, father to a slave-trader) and of Ventura in the wicker chair brought back to Angola from Rio de Janeiro by that grandfather “escravocrata” (*Vendedor* 70). But what her photos expose is a peculiarly lovely local light. Later her recognition of Frederick Douglass as such exposes Ventura’s capacity to illumine a (his)story (*Vendedor* 147-148). We learn at that later moment a little of her own history: that she has always been drawn to light and has made photographs since her (adoptive) father gave her a camera at age twelve. In the earlier instance, we learn that she collects and projects slides (her “splendorium”). Their projection is contingent on the presence of light (projector, person). Her photographs map the same world, many of the very the same cities and spaces, as mapped by Ventura’s (his)story and then Buchmann’s photojournalism in terms of light or abstraction. In her photos of Lisbon and Rio, Berlin, the Pantanal of Mato Grosso, Goa,

etc., light breaks through clouds like “great flashes of hope” [“largos clarões de esperança”] (*Chameleons* 50; *Vendedor* 69-70). This hope reflected in her photos reflects the hope reflected in Ventura’s writing. Ventura’s own double exposure (his literary recognition), exposes her description of Egypt’s light as citation of Eça de Queirós. She, like him, double-voices. Her work is creative copy. Nevertheless, her illumination transports and transforms (Cachoeira).

In Ângela Lúcia’s encounter with José Buchmann, he gives us more particulars of his professional photographic project (though we don’t know how much of this is true). He is engaged in another kind of revisionary historical mapping with his photographs of warzones and urban alienation (*Chameleons* 74-75; *Vendedor* 99-100). With this listing, Agualusa suggests how commonplace these conflicts and photos are. These photographs need no specific description, just as those taken by Teresa during the Prague Spring in Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. They are marked a similar kind of perverse pleasure, aesthetic consciousness, as well as conscience, and, as we look at them and avert our gaze we belie desensitivity. Ângela Lúcia, who halts the conversation as a kind of contamination of Ventura’s house, reads these images as blood and filth. With the revisiting of places that are part of her account of light, we are confronted by a kind of superimposition, a re-mapping of memory that is also a palimpsest, with still legible traces of other mappings in view.

Agualusa gives us a more vivid, specific if still shadowy image of trauma, in the confrontation at this kitchen table as Félix Ventura reads the ensuing silence, in which the two photographers, with their discrete aesthetics and ethics, face each other. This silence is “full of murmurings, of shadows, of things that run along in the distance, in some remote time, dark and furtive” (*Chameleons* 75) [“cheio de murmúrios, de sombras, de coisas que corriam ao longe, numa época distante, escuras e furtivas” (*Vendedor* 100)]. “Or perhaps not. Perhaps they just remained without speaking, sitting there opposite each other, because they simply had nothing to say, and I merely imagined the rest” (*Chameleons* 75). This narrative doubletake might also be an intertextual double-voicing, shadowed by Borges, by Lispector. Like Ventura’s novelistic writing, these photographers works are compared to dreams. The text is marked

by a constant play with light and dark, in the contrast of day and night, white and black, negatives and doubled exposures. The albino Ventura with his African features is a figure of that play, confronting us with both black and white traces, with a negative recast as a positive.

The Image of the Novel as (Re)Visionary Story and History

Is any image true? Between this last conversation and Ventura's initial framing of his new identity with an envelope photos and documents, José Buchmann shows up at Ventura's house with his own envelope of color photos of Chibia. Like Ventura's black and white photos and aged documents, Buchmann's current images appeal to conventions to establish authenticity. We are presented with one of several lists of photos in the text (documented (a), (b), (c)...) (*Chameleons* 56; *Vendedor* 76-77). Ventura recognizes Buchmann's artistry, the 'authenticity' of the work, with a smile that also admits its artifice, its peculiar authorial light and shadow. Buchmann enters into the project to the point that what he himself realizes becomes real, as his (imaginary) mother also seems within reach during his subsequent trip to NYC, glimpsed in yet another photo beside an old editor of *Vogue*, where her watercolors were published. He makes his dream, as Ventura and Agualusa make theirs, though there is "something dusky about all the photographs" ["*havia em todas as fotografias algo de crespular*"] (*Chameleons* 56; *Vendedor* 77). After having attested to the photograph's capacity to register what is (the turmoil everywhere), Buchmann also shows us how the image, like the text described by Lispector, can also and perhaps must always remember what has never existed:

To write often means remembering what has never existed. How shall I succeed in knowing what I do not even know? Like so: as if I were to remember. By an effort of "memory" as if I had never been born. I have never been born. I have never lived. But I remember, and that memory is in living flesh. (*Foreign Legion* 120)

The listing of Buchmann's unseen images of Chibia in Agualusa's novel represents the place and past of a man who was never born (twice over, never born in the novel or outside the novel). Framed by dialogue,

that list allows us to see what was there to be seen and what we can never see, as an “as if”, including lies to lies that arrive at brutal truths. Neither the photographer, nor the novelist is impartial. These images all represent partial truths and fictions, stories and histories, parts of speech in the sense of convention and utterance.

Is any image complete? We can consider the later list of Buchmann’s black and white photographs of the homeless man or ‘cão danado’ (later exposed as Edmundo Barata dos Reis, his past interrogator, his wife Marta Martinho’s murderer, his daughter’s torturer), photos sold to an American magazine to finance his trip to NYC in search of his mother (*Chameleon* 97-98; *Vendedor* 127-128). Agualusa fleshes out the aftermath of war through these imaginary snapshots of equally gaunt city and subjects: the city’s thin bones, the boy’s thin translucent bodies. Both site and subject act in this verbal reimagining of the visual image: the old man sleeps and stands and urinates, but the streets are disemboweled, the rust eats, and the ground swallows. The verbal re-presentation unfixes the visual: What does tender light look like? Or an unsubmitive God?

What else do these photos reveal? Sold to an American magazine to finance Buchmann’s trip to NYC in search of his mother, they suggest how the market may frame the documentary or fiction. Fixated on their subject, they also reveal the photographer as social scientist or stalker. The way they view their subject points to the perspective of the photographer. Are these photographic shots any more fixed or final than the double-voiced verbal exposure of identity and the murderous shot that kills the old man in the kitchen? These photographic shots do a similar kind of violence to their subject—the shot of the old man’s back as he advances along gutted streets is also a kind of shooting a man in the back. The photography, like the writer becomes complicit in the violence to which he bears witness. The blood on the artist’s and writer’s hands is part of what leaks out of the frame. Even as the frame illumines, offers insight.

A few final snapshots from Agualusa’s text: Ângela Lúcia’s polaroids, sent by post, posted next to a map demarking their point of origin by Felix Ventura, are arranged like a stained-glass window in shades of blue (*Vendedor* 210, 230); like the photographs in

Hernon's novel, they form another map reaching beyond the bounds of the fiction prospectively encompassed by its imaginary. These photos constitute, on the one hand, clues for Ventura's pursuit (actual and imaginary) of his lover, as photographs also constitute clues to stories and histories and modes of storytelling in Hernon's and Antunes's and Jorge's novels. Curated by Ventura, now diarist/narrator/novelist, they also provide a clue to the pursuit of these novels, with their global scope and shifting impressions of light.