The Form of the Improper: Clarice Lispector and the Rhetoric of Precarity

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Abstract

In her novel *The Hour of the Star*, from 1977, Brazilian author Clarice Lispector transformed the cultural figurations of poverty that shaped modern Brazilian cultures since the 1930s. In doing so, she opened the possibility for the emergence of a new figure: that of the precarious, thus anticipating aesthetic forms that will model Latin American cultural imaginaries in the decades to come. Two coordinates define this new figuration of precarity: proximity and non-anthropocentrism. Precarity thus emerges as a new organization of the sensible that, far from a mere rhetoric of expropriation, demarcates a terrain of contestation and ambivalence.

One of the most poignant consequences of the pregnancy of precarity in our shared discourses is not only its relentless critique of "possessive individualism" as a form of subjectivity that acquires new force under neoliberalism, but also the fact that it brings humanist and anthropocentric vocabularies—that shape, to a great degree, our political imagination—to a critical threshold.[1,2] This is, fundamentally, because precarity—"the condition of being vulnerable to others" (20), says Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing—affects the living body and the conditions of its persistence. In other words, it affects both human and non-human bodies, bringing them into a new shared condition. The notion of precarity, by bringing to the fore the question of bodily vulnerability, implicates the living body—instead of the "subject," the "person," or the "citizen"—as the protagonist of political knowledges and imaginaries. This centrality of the *living body* and its vulnerability pushes to the limit the assumption of a shared humanity as the measure for political relation. The precarious body casts the political as a focus on the living *as such*, poised at the very threshold between human and non-human.

Precarity, thus, sheds light on a threshold between the social and the biopolitical: between the fabric of intersubjective relations that compose the image of 'society' and the forces of the living body—the biological, the environmental, the *agencements* between human and non-human lives and forces—which, in the context of precarization, puncture the fabric of the social. *Precarity*, we might say, *constitutes us as humans, but it is not "proper" to man*: it complicates any humanist reappropriation of vulnerability at the same time that it sheds light on and mobilizes a terrain that is shared with other living beings and contains the very conditions that make life as such possible. It implies, consequently, a reordering of knowledges and discourses.

A new shared condition, a critique of normative forms of individuality, a relationality that cannot be contained under the rubrics of the "human": these displacements are at the core of the conceptual and material reconfigurations that come to the fore under the light of precarity. In this essay, I want to explore the ways in which Clarice Lispector's

1 See especially Butler and Athanasiu.

2 Together with the constellation of notions that gravitate around it: *precariat*, precarization, precarious life, precariousness, etc.

writing—especially her classic *A hora da estrela* (*The Hour of the Star*), from 1977—helps us think this reconfiguration, from an early onstage of life under neoliberalism such as Brazil in the 1970s, by articulating a *rhetoric of precarity* that signals a new terrain of relations between the aesthetic and the political. Lispector's rhetoric of precarity revolves around a new relevance of the theme of life and the living body under the light of the precarious, from which new images of the common are possible, and where the form of the individual and the proper, together with its correlates in the "human," are displaced towards new organizations of the sensible. Lispector, thus, offers an early *pedagogy of the sensible* in a universe already defined by precarity.

This essay is aimed at exploring this emerging rhetoric of precarity by looking at three aspects in Lispector's writing: firstly, a juxtaposition of the rhetoric of poverty and that of precarity; secondly, the reconfiguration of the figure of the worker and the very notion of "work"; and thirdly, a movement towards a vocabulary of life, of *bios*, and of the human-animal continuum as a marker of an *impropriety* of the living body. Macabéa, the protagonist of Lispector's *A hora da estrela*, illuminates these displacements, thus pointing to the fact that precarity is also a radical aesthetic transformation, not just because it imposes given conditions on artistic or literary production, but above all because it fundamentally reorders the very fabric of the sensible.

A Contagious Figure

A hora da estrela is without doubt the key entry point for thinking through the question of precarity in Lispector's work. It is a text that recuperates certain materials, figures, and questions that Lispector had already worked with (in *A paixão segundo G.H.*, in *Agua viva*, and also in her chronicles), but now situating them around the more politically dense figure, Macabéa, and on the emerging horizon of precarization. Lispector's text introduces another Latin American '70s: not those of the defeat of the revolutionary projects, nor those of the tensions accompanying authoritarian modernization under dictatorships in the region, nor those of the emerging *desbunde*—the new sexual freedoms—that will be

one of the markers of the Brazilian '80s. The '70s in Lispector's text quite certainly reflect, as Garramuño indicates, the "disenchantment" of the modern, but this disenchantment also takes the form of the new figure who will be the protagonist of the neoliberal society still gestating in the '70s: the figure of *the precarious*. *A hora da estrela* maps out that new terrain in which precarity becomes a tool for understanding the effects, the subjectivations, and the ambivalences that will be particular to the landscape of the neoliberal order (Garramuño).

If the narrative plot of *The Hour of the Star* is rather simple, its textual display is extremely ambivalent. The novel follows the brief story of Macabéa, a migrant worker from the Northeast in Rio de Janeiro, an itinerary of dispossessions and marginalization that signals her vulnerability and social abandonment and, at the same time, ironically reflects upon the stereotypical representation of the *nordestinos* in Brazilian culture. This ambivalence is replicated in the narrator, Rodrigo S.M., a middle-class intellectual who constantly shifts between empathy towards the character of Macabéa and violence and scorn against her, thus reflecting upon the impossibility of narrating this character's story without breaking up the existing set of cultural representations of gender, class, and racial "otherness." *The Hour of the Star*, in this sense, indicates—and it has been persistently read in this light—the failure of literature to give an account of, to represent, and to "translate"—and therefore to find a common cultural terrain with—*the others* of Latin American national modernities, always haunted by their incapacity to include the dispossessed in a common collective project.[3]

However, this failure is also, I would like to suggest, an opening to a different configuration that revolves around precarity. This reconfiguration takes place less around the portrayal of a new social landscape than around aesthetic explorations that redefine the very terrain of subjectivity and its relation with the common. In this sense, there is a formal mechanism at work in *A hora da estrela* that is indicative of the reconfiguration that accompanies this onset of precarity. It has to do with the contagious, contaminating, unraveling effect on all individual delimitation that comes with Macabéa's figure; that is, the way in which

[3] See for example: Italo Moriconi, and Lúcia Sá.

Macabéa never quite becomes a character in a strict sense, but operates instead as a sort of *formal mechanism* that suspends all solid demarcations of the individual, as a figure that never completely defines the contours of a *person*—in the theatrical and juridical sense of the word, as underscored by Roberto Esposito—but one that opens up to a register of forces that run through her. Macabéa is sticky, she adheres to her surroundings; she is made up of a substance that cannot be confined by a limit, a border, or a distance, a more or less stable distribution: she brings with her something uncontainable. The proliferation of expressions used by the narrator, Rodrigo S.M., to describe this condition, come to mind: "lama negra" ("contaminated mud"), "melado pegajoso" ("viscous glue"; 30), "material poroso" ("made of porous material"; 17), as though her very body were unable to confine itself to or respect its own limits, "pois a datilógrafa," writes Rodrigo, "não quer sair dos meus ombros" ("The typist doesn't want to get off my back"; 30).[4]

This becomes even more evident in the well-known scene in which Rodrigo and Macabéa cross paths, for an instant, on a street in Rio:

> E que numa rua do Rio de Janeiro peguei no ar de relance o sentimento de perdiçao no rosto de uma moça nordestina. Sem falar que eu em menino me criei no Nordeste. Tambem sei das cosas por estar vivendo. Quem vive sabe, mesmo sem saber que sabe. Assim é que os senhores sabem mais do que imaginam e estão fingindo de sonsos.
> (In a street of Rio de Janeiro I caught a glimpse of perdition on the face of a girl from the North-east. Whithout mentioning that I myself was raised as a child in the North-east. Besides, I know about certain things simply by living. Anyone who lives, knows, even without knowing that he or she knows. So, dear readers, you know more than you imagine, however much you may deny it.; 22)

[4] The English translations are taken from the 1986 translation (see Giovanni Pontiero). The page numbers refer to the original (see Lispector).

"[A]r de relance": in the moment, something that "pega," sticks, in the happenstance nature of the unexpected meeting on the street, something in the air—in the atmosphere, like an environmental force—that arrives anonymously, without origin, without apparent cause, in the chance encounter among the crowds on the street: the "sentimento de perdição" ("glimpse of perdition"). There is no language, no conversation, no story shared between the characters; *there is only an in-between bodies*. And there is a faint, obscure recognition: both characters are from the Northeast.[5] And yet, that shared origin is not restrictive, since what circulates in the scene is a knowledge, a knowledge possessed by virtue of being alive, of being a living body—a knowledge that manifests or actualizes itself in the meeting between Northeasterners in Rio, between those who are out of place, that spreads itself outwards: it infects everything around it. Which is why Rodrigo says, not without irony: "assim é que os senhores sabem mas do que imaginam" ("you know more than you imagine"; 22). The "ar de relance" cannot be contained by the narrated scene and it reaches the reader: no one can keep their distance from it. Everything in relation to Macabéa is un-containment, is a tow-line that "sticks" to Rodrigo but also to the reader—and is inextricable from that spectral figure in the text that is "CL," the initials of Clarice Lispector that are inscribed at the beginning of the novel. Macabéa is, therefore, primarily a distribution of forces and affects. I insist on "contagion" precisely because that which emerges and asserts itself in Macabéa does not so much have to do with a discursive relation, in the realm of language and signification, as it does with that in-between bodies, that space or distribution that is traced between living beings, as affective traffic, that Macabéa sheds a new light on.

Thus Macabéa appears *as a formal operator that distributes new shared matter*, a new "in-between." Something in common passes between Macabéa, the narrator, author, and reader: something that exerts pressure on all of these figures, a new center of gravity, *a new common*, that

[5] The cultural significance of this shared origin cannot be understated. In the making of Brazilian modern culture the Northeast has been systematically imagined as a backward, heavily racialized region that never fully formed a part of the emerging modern nation-state—thus recurrently defined by the stubborn persistence of features of a colonial society that contradicts modernizing projects. This political, economic, and cultural dislocation made the Northeast a point of gravitation in Brazilian cultural imaginaries.

is what Macabéa is about. That "between," that "in common" that she heralds—that constitutes the mandate, or duty, of Rodrigo's writing—does not coincide with previous discourses of community, such as the discourse of national identity, of racial identity, or even of a shared language and culture. Macabéa dismantles each one of those community markers. She barely embodies the 'national subject': she does not convey cultural traditions; she is racialized as a Northeasterner, but this racialization does not define a ground for racial identity here. Not even the common ground of a mother tongue functions here, since Macabéa is, as we will see, placed at the very limit of the speaking subject, as she fails at language in ways that connect her more with an infant than with the figure of a national or community subject identified with her mother tongue. Macabéa—far from being marked by these signs of community or the common—dwells instead on a terrain defined by precarity, which Lispector's writing renders as contagion, pressure, a center of gravity.

Poverty and Precarity: Two Cartographies

In this sense, the capacity for contagion and contamination that seems to characterize the figure of Macabéa has a direct impact on one of the key displacements that takes place in *A hora da estrela*, one connected to the ways in which the figure of the *poor* and the theme of *poverty* have been worked through in modern Latin American culture, at least since the 1930s. As has been amply indicated elsewhere, the character of Macabéa reinforces the commonplaces and violent stereotypes of the *nordestina* as a figuration or embodiment of poverty in modern Brazilian culture.[6] This stereotype of the *nordestina* operates through a racializing language in which class, regional culture, and gender are imprinted on the image of a sort of sub-race, a mere byproduct that, as the narrator says, "não tinha força de raça, era subproduto" (she "lacked substance like most inferior products"; 62) or "Nascera inteiramente raquítica, herança do sertão—os maus antecedentes de que falei" ("She was hopelessly rachitic at birth, the inheritance of the backwoods—the legacy of misfortune I mentioned earlier"; 35). When her parents die, her sanc-

[6] See, for instance, Lúcia Sá.

timonious aunt raises her. Her head is made up of "de ossos fracos por falta de cálcio" ("bones wich suffered from a calcium deficiency"; 36) and she has "seus pequenos óvulos tão murchos" (her "tiny ovules were all shrivelled"; 39). The cultural vocabularies that biologize and racialize economic and cultural antagonisms—vocabularies that inform many representations of poverty in Latin American cultures and that are paradigmatically conjugated in the figure of the Brazilian *nordestinos*—are explicitly dramatized or *performed* around Macabéa. These are the vocabularies that have systematically shaped representations of the poor not only in terms of a social "other" but also as a "biopolitical" other: a sub-race for whom poverty is a biological and racial legacy, the manifestation of pure alterity turned less-than-human bodily life, the resurgence of an animality unyielding to all civilizing forces. The poor as "biopolitical caesura," as Agamben would have it, embodying the nation's internal fracture, the fracture that the nation must "overcome" and that signals the place of poverty as a radical alterity that is not limited to social inequality but instead is racialized and "biologized"—pushed to the very limit of the human.

A hora da estrela does mobilize these discourses—and the narrator, in many ways, exacerbates these violent cultural stereotypes of poverty—but at the same time, it exceeds them, spins them around, bringing them to a point of saturation and exhaustion, as though the attempt at "othering" Macabéa with these biopolitical markers *had failed* and the distance that this discursive violence had wished to impose had collapsed into a dizzying proximity. As though the representation of the poor as biopolitical other, as the stuff of racial, cultural, and gendered antagonisms had, by the mid-1970s, *become incapable* of containing this new material and this new generalized or shared condition that is becoming more explicit and that we read under the sign of precarity: the precarious, as we saw in the quote above, "não quer sair dos meus ombros" ("doesn't want to get off my back"; 30). Macabéa thus channels a rhetoric of precarity that cannot be contained by the previous markers of biopolitical otherness—and that reshapes, consequently, the grammars of difference and antagonism, and the imaginaries of the common.

The distance that the rhetoric of poverty and the figure of the poor had distributed through the social landscape—through grammars of social, racial, and cultural alterity—begins to shift into a proximity that will define one of the most persistent aspects of precarity: that of its contagious, permeating force. *The poor have classically been the figuration of the "Other"; the precarious are, instead, the messengers of a new insecurity from which no one is (and will ever be) sufficiently protected***.** This tension, and this shift, is what *A hora da estrela* dramatizes with Macabéa and the figures that she brings together—all of them figures of "literature": "Rodrigo S.M.," "CL," the readers—as an inflection of the collective. Something that does not fit with the ways in which the poor had been inscribed by culture, and that threatens not with violence (the violence of antagonism), but with a new precarious condition that cannot be held at a distance, not even, as Rodrigo demonstrates, by resorting to rhetorical violence that fails before our eyes and whose failure reveals a new common condition that is bursting onto the scene, and that Macabéa inscribes in cultural imagination for the decades to come. This "contagious" condition at work in (or through) Macabéa impacts on two key configurations at the kernel of the rhetoric of precarity: the normative figure of the *worker*, and the limit between the human and the non-human.

Precarity and Work

The simultaneously proximate and affective nature of the precarious has another dimension that is key for thinking through its new configurations that find a line of formalization in Macabéa. This dimension has to do with the way in which precarious life suspends subjectivations arising from work and the figure of the worker. Let us return to Macabéa: the narrator, Rodrigo, makes it very clear that Macabéa is not exactly an exploited worker, nor part of an exhausted and uncompensated workforce. More than an exploited proletarian, Macabéa—and Rodrigo's violent stereotypes leave little doubt in this regard—is *unemployable*: she is a body at the limit of recognizable forms of economic productivity. Let us recall that Macabéa begins her story *unemployed*, when she is

fired. The figure of Macabéa is thus shaped around her ability—or lack thereof—to be *productive*.

"Mal tem corpo para vender" (she "scarcely has a body to sell"; 23) Rodrigo says; girls like Macabéa (and they are, in Rodrigo's view, a social type more than singular lives) "não notam sequer que são facilmente substituíveis e que tanto existiram como não existiram" ("They aren't even aware of the fact that they are superflous and that nobody cares a damn about their existence"; 23). Macabéa is superfluous, part of that surplus population that will emerge systematically as a figure of societies that have renounced full employment (which had been, as we know, the normative horizon of *desarrollismo*, or developmentalism—even when it was not reached, it functioned as a teleological goal of "development"). Her superfluity functions here as a *temporal* marker: it indicates her non-place in the narratives of collective futurity. By the end, when Macabéa dies after being hit by a car, her last words are "Quanto ao futuro" ("As for the future"; 58), punctuating that temporal indetermination which is one of the critical signs of the precarious condition. The narrator makes it clear that "girls" like Macabéa are no longer counted as part of a collective futurity, and this temporal frame, or this temporalization *as a frame*, constitutes a persistent mark of precarity.[7]

"Vou agora começar pelo médio dizendo que—que ela era incompetente. Incompetente para a vida" ("I am about to begin in the middle by telling you that—that she was inept. Inept for living"; 32), says Rodrigo about Macabéa. Her capacities, her faculties, her (non)productivity make her someone *who cannot compete*, who cannot even set out with some basic competence because she does not have the abilities for what capital requires of her: she is unfit for any imaginary of the "struggle for existence." "Mal tem corpo para vender": a body in stark opposition to the available universes of productivity, work, and production. In Rodrigo's writing, this unfitness is, on the one hand, unequivocally tied to the racialized and biologized "legacy of misfortunes" that marks Macabéa as near sub-human; but on the other hand, it is precisely this unfitness that revokes the normative subject positions that would make

[7] See Judith Butler's discussion on the notion of "frame" in *Frames of War*.

of Macabea a "normal," functional worker. Precarity here is defined by this political ambivalence.

This insistence on Macabéa's "unfitness" also has another consequence: here, precarious life is first off *unredeemable by work*. Work and worker are no longer a center of gravity around which subjectivities are produced as normative horizons and worlds in common. *Precarity = inoperativity*: the precarious as the *inoperosa* who suspends the available subjectivations through the various figures of work.[8] As if the figure of the precarious was not just the instance where the new logic of "flexible" labor was displayed, but also where the distance between one's potentialities and "recognizable," "formal" work comes to the fore—a distance between potentiality and employability that will become a persistent feature in the figure of the precarious.

This is where a key shift comes to the fore: work no longer functions as a normative horizon of "productions of subjectivity," as a site where a "world" can be constructed, affirmed, and shared. With this, *A hora da estrela* registers, we might say, a future that is opening up: a future of societies in which the precarization of labor will be the kernel of neoliberal management, and work will increasingly stop being an institution of strong subjectivations, of symbolic density, and of social belonging. Work and worker will stop being the embodiment of the "revolutionary" or an example of "national development": we are left with a new scenario marked by emerging rhetorics of "human capital" (whose reversal Macabéa embodies), and by the universe of unemployment and low-paying jobs, which is the scene of precarity that does unfold for future Macabéas and that will shape many cultural cartographies of the following decades. In any case, what I am interested in underlining here is that classic work—in the Fordist sense—and the figure of the worker, with its humanist and even "humanizing" resonances, stop being a nucleus of political and ethical density. The rhetoric of precarity will operate, from here, through the dismantling of modern figurations of work and worker, signaling the terrain of the precarious as one where the question of what is and what counts as "work" becomes central.

[8] For the notion of inoperativity, see Nancy.

Improper Life

At the kernel of Lispector's rhetoric of precarity is her thematization of the notion of *life* and the *living body* as both a critique of humanist and anthropocentric traditions and as a reflection on the *improper* as a central dimension of precarious life. In Lispector's writing, the theme of the living body is inseparable from her investigations of animality that date back to her first novel, *Perto do coraçao selvagem*, from 1943, becoming a central dimension in *A paixão segundo G.H.*, her monumental text from 1964, and reappearing in *A hora da estrela*. This inquiry into the human-animal continuum in Lispector's works points systematically towards a life and a living body that no longer coincide and that cannot be reconciled with the human: the animal keeps returning in Lispector's writing to shed light on the dislocation between the 'human' and the 'living'. The theme of "neutral life" in *A paixão…*, or that of *a vida oblícua* (the oblique life) in *Agua viva* (1973), are inseparable from the irruption of an animality that informs the living body and makes any return to a previous, already given sense of the human impossible. Through this interest in animality that shapes her work, Lispector constitutes the question of *life* as a horizon on which aesthetics and politics interface, shifting the focus—so insistent in modern Latin American cultures—from the cultural dimensions of the 'popular' and the 'national' to a new relevance of the living body as an assemblage of forces, from where it rearticulates figurations, relations, and temporalities of the political.

This gravitation towards a non-anthropocentric, non-humanist conception of life has a key consequence that resonates directly with the discussion of precarity: that of *improperty*. Improper life, life as *irreducible to property*: irreducible, we could say, to the conflation between the self with that of property, a conflation that has been a key mechanism for (neo)liberal individualism (or 'possessive individualism') to shape configurations of personhood and therefore the human, and which results in currently prevalent conceptions of the human as inseparable from the logic of property and the figure of the proprietor or owner. Roberto Esposito's discussion of the notion of personhood sheds light on this mechanism by which the existence of a recognizable person depends

to a great degree on her ability to declare her body as "own" and as a "property" that can be owned. Along similar lines, Timothy Campbell explores the notion of "improper life" precisely as a critique of this logic that determines one's degree of personhood in relation to "a person's capacity to increase her biopower" (74), then tying personhood to the rhetorics of human capital and the "entrepreneurship of the self" that so prevalently shape subjectivity under neoliberalism. From a different and yet comparable perspective, Isabell Lorey analyzes the emergence of liberal governmentality in relation to self-management of one's precarious nature, and therefore as an increasing awareness and shaping of subjectivity around the protection and maximization of one's "basic" capital: the living body, which becomes the terrain of a calculus carried out between the contradictory forces of precarity and value.[9]

This logic of biopolitical governmentality that underpins the notion of "person" or "individual" depends, then, on the ability to bound and isolate, at the level of material life itself, the contours of the body and the domain of one's life in relation to which we are positioned as "proprietors." It depends on a fundamental and constant tracing, at the level of the sensible, of the demarcations between our body, or life, and the other's, on making these boundaries visible, perceptible, and socially legible. It requires that we locate the terrains in which this limit will be significant, relevant, and productive, be it at the physical level—our movements, our "space"—or biological, be it our labor force, our social networks, our sexualities, etc.: the dispute between the proper and the improper takes place on multiple and shifting planes and is never fixed nor univocal. This sensible plane is where Lispector's writing achieves a poignant relevance for a reflection on "improper life": her thinking, once again, revolves around formal displacements that reorganize the domain of the sensible, and it brings to the fore the dimension of the non-human in what can barely be reappropriated as a "self."

In this sense, Macabéa's figuration of the precarious is inseparable from these displacements at the level of the "proper"—her "contagious" nature we analyzed before—and the "human." Her body, as the nar-

[9] For a discussion on "dispossession" as another perspective on the distinction between proper and improper, see Butler and Athanasiu.

rator tells us, is made of mineral lines and folds ("a pele do rosto entre as manchas tivesse um leve brilho de opala" or her "falta de cálcio") (she "had a subtle glow of opals"; 35), biological layers ("Era apenas fina matéria orgánica") ("Composed of fine organic matter"; 45), and even atmospheric forces, as in the scene of Macabéa's death ("Morrendo ela virou ar. Ar enérgico?") ("Dying, Macabéa became air. Vigorous air"; 58). And, as mentioned above, Macabéa's figuration is systematically tied to the animal: "Essa moça que não sabia que ela era o que era, assim como um cachorro não sabe que é cachorro […] A única coisa que queria era viver" ("This girl didn't know that she existed, just as a dog doesn't know that it's a dog […] The only thing she desired was to live"; 35). Macabéa's body is defined by an intense relationality with non-human forces that constitute it and that will not be transformed—as we saw before—into abilities that are functional and legible as economic forces: her inaptitude, her *inoperosità*, takes distance from the forms of "biopolitical ownership" that produce a readable "self" in the context of neoliberalization such as that of the Brazilian 1970s. The improper body: irreducible to the "I," to the person or the individual that cannot claim full ownership over the multiplicity of connections and forces that pass through it. But at the same time, the improper body is irreducible to the human, as it points towards a configuration of the living that cannot be declared nor recognized as "proper" to man, to humanity. This double shift is at the core of Lispector's interrogation of the improper. If this "improper life" indicates a body that cannot be molded nor fully controlled by the "I"—and therefore, that cannot be isolated from the relational field that shapes it—precarity emphasizes the fact that this improperty is inseparable from a vulnerable condition, as a condition that underscores networks of vital interdependence, the "in-between bodies" that emerges as the terrain of ethical and political affirmation. This critique of anthropocentrism defines not just Lispector's poetics but above all shapes the rhetorics of precarity that emerge in these formal investigations. This terrain defies our anthropocentric and humanist traditions, as it poses the living body and its relationality as the center of gravity of the political imagination.

Thus, in Lispector's work, an "in-between bodies" emerges that has already displaced the human as the point of affirmation and the presupposed given of the political. What changes in Lispector are the *rules of perception of bodies*: a new light and a new mode of localizing and distributing fragility, a path that senses a vulnerability that is always, also, an opening to forms of interdependence. This aesthetic pedagogy is, perhaps, the most decisive interpellation coming from her writing. From that formal tension her "literatura pensante" ("thinking literature")—as Evando Nascimento puts it—reworks the imagination of the political precisely because it moves towards a living body whose composition suspends the forms of subjectivation that have shaped, for decades, political and cultural interpellations, and which brings to the fore the threshold between the human and the non-human. Macabéa's living body points towards an understanding of *bios* radically reshaped by precarity, emerging as both a field of dispute—in the double sense that precarity becomes the instance of ambivalence and contestation (and not only the experience of dispossession and exposition to violence)—and as a production of subjectivity, since it rearticulates forms of organizing material life, temporalities, configurations of the self, and, decisively, the very threshold between human and non-human. A production of subjectivity in which the non-human reveals itself under a new relevance: this is, perhaps, one of the most defining features of the figure of the precarious that has taken shape during the last decades. From this horizon—that is, from a world that was being reshaped by precarity, and that was announced from, among many places, the Brazilian seventies—Lispector rehearsed a rhetoric of precarity that contains the most crucial images of the contemporary.

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Biography

Gabriel Giorgi is Full Professor of Latin American Literature at New York University. He has also taught at Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil, and at Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, in Argentina. He published *Sueños de exterminio. Homosexualidad y representación en la literatura argentina* (Dreams of Extermination. Homosexuality in Argentine Literature; 2004) and *Formas comunes. Animalidad, cultura, biopolítica* (Forms of the Common. Animality, Culture, Biopolitics; 2014). He is currently working on a project about non-human temporalities and rhetorics of the living body in contemporary culture.