

What About NOT: a Tertúlia Fenomenológica

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Abstract

This is a piece of experimental multi-perspectival writing in which four different personae adopt different methods and intellectual relationships to writing as a means of research, by using the topics of fiction, counterfactual history and not-being. The narrative line is provided by a novelist who retells Saramago's *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*. In Saramago's novel a wayward proof-reader mischievously adds the word "not" to the historical account, creating a fictional, counterfactual history. This "bringing into being" of a fiction – of what didn't actually happen – sets in train a series of perspectives or thought experiments by the four personae of the present text on the nature of "not-being". They deploy methods from fictional writing and phenomenological practice informed by Saramago and Sartre, and phenomenological theory informed by Husserl and Meinong, thereby investigating the topic from four different perspectives. As a result, it is proposed that the legitimacy gap suffered by fiction-as-research may be bridged by so-called Meinongian objects, and the problem of whether such inexistent objects are facts, is less important than deciding whether they are useful. The conclusion is that artistic research methods offer techniques and a space to discuss the agency of not-being, of what-if, and of omission, through the legitimate deployment of fiction and falsehoods; and the benefits of so doing outweigh the existential discomfort that such ideas usually induce in researchers.

Keywords: counterfactual, negative, fiction, knowledge, Meinong

Introduction

In established methods of academic research, words are the dominant medium. Not just words, but a certain subset of words such as affirmative statements, propositions, references to empirical evidence, etc. However, in applied fields and especially in business, alternative methods predominate owing to their focus on the future, such as what-if speculation and probability, scenario planning, counterfactuals, role-playing, game theory, etc. Closing the gap between rigorous but mainly hypothetico-deductive academic methods on the one hand, and applied pre-predicative, inductive, speculative methods on the other, is important for broadening the potential of research methodologies, strengthening our understanding of interpretative and arts-based methods, and identifying applications for artistic research methods. However, a form of cultural resistance is often encountered between these two methodological perspectives that has its roots in the discomfort of traditional academic research methods with fiction, i.e., the illegitimacy of anything that is not an actual fact.

The paper explores the potential of fiction from four different perspectives, each of which is expressed in its own voice. The Editor, who wrote this Introduction and the Conclusion, uses the traditional academic practices of literature review to find

correspondences between what is offered and what is already known. In contrast, The Writer engages with the lived experience of creating fiction, revealing the choices that are made in the practice of writing and that are manifested through the characters and their narrative. On this spectrum but towards traditional academic practices, The Novelist writes fiction that includes characters who reflect on the choices they make in the fictional space, and how this is impacted by narratives that are carried into that space from what we think is actuality. Conversely, taking a step towards more phenomenological practices, The Note-taker tries to write a non-fiction account of the tertulia and its multiple perspectives on the status of facts, fictions, what we think of as reality, and the implications of fictional objects on how we understand actuality.

A fictional technique always relates back to the novelist's metaphysics. The critic's task is to define the latter before evaluating the former (Sartre, 1955, p.79).

This paper is both a philosophical exploration of, and a creative experiment with, phenomenological practice. On the one hand, in the fictional space, a group of people have gathered in a traditional tertulia or discussion group in order to talk about some extracts from a new novel. The new novel is inspired by the actual novel by Portuguese Nobel Prize-winning author Jose Saramago entitled *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*. In this real novel, a fictional character called Raimundo Silva is proof-reading a history book which describes the events of the non-fictional siege of Lisbon in 1147. Raimundo Silva mischievously alters the "unequivocal words" by inserting the word NOT in a key passage of the established history so it read that "the crusaders will NOT help the Portuguese to conquer Lisbon" (Saramago, 2018, p. 40). This action problematizes fact and fiction because, as Raimundo subsequently reveals, the historical evidence can, in fact, just as easily be used to support this alternative narrative as the culturally received one.

On the other hand, in the supposed real space, the participants each attempt to interpret the fictional space from a phenomenological point of view, with particular interest in the use of the word NOT and the effect of negation on the existential status of being and non-being of real and fictional characters and events. But this non-fictional, real space, is only real in the context of the present narrative which begins in the first person as though it is an account of a real event, whereas the reader does NOT know whether these events did actually happen as they are reported and therefore where lies the boundary between the real and the fictional space.

A Tertúlia Fenomenológica

THE NOTE-TAKER

As was our custom, the group had arranged to meet in the café A Brasileira in Lisbon's Chiado district. We were all artists of various types, and each regarded themselves as a researcher. We had already exchanged notes about the extracts of her novel and were keen to talk about them. Everyone liked to talk but nobody liked to record the discussion, so it had fallen to me, once again, to try to capture the main ideas. It had seemed like a simple task, one I had done many times before, but now it was proving difficult to find the beginning of the thread. Indeed, the hastily

written notes I had made on my copies of the extracts were almost as extensive as the extracts themselves. As I transcribed the notes it became more and more difficult to maintain the distinction between what was source and what was commentary. The extracts were already complex in their reflexivity, and now there were also our comments on what we thought they were all about. Depending on whether her novel was regarded simply as a development of Saramago's *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*, or whether it was intended as a phenomenological essay that problematized fiction as some kind of intentional object – in the Husserlian sense of being the object of our attention – somewhere beyond being and non-being, homeless; would determine whether the extract explained the footnotes or whether the footnotes explained the extract.

The extracts seemed to imply the following *Dramatis Personae* (as the *tertúlia* thought Alexis Meinong would describe them):

Jose Saramago (formerly existent object) The now-deceased, Nobel Prize winning author of *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*.

Raimundo Silva (subsistent object) A proof-reader and fictional character in *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* (of indeterminate objective status).

Fernando Martins (subsistent object) A proof-reader and fictional character in the extracts we are reading, who is proof-reading Saramago's novel (probably in the realm of absence).

Jean-Paul Sartre (formerly existent object) The now-deceased, Nobel Prize winning author of *Nausea*.

Antoine Roquentin (subsistent object) A biographer and fictional character in *Nausea*.

Marquis of Rollebon (probably absent object) A character in the biography being written by Antoine Roquentin.

Fernando Pessoa (formerly existent object) A poet and writer who used various pseudonyms (subsistent objects).

Alexis Meinong (formerly existent object) A philosopher who believed fictional objects to have "in-existence".

Sherlock Holmes [example] (subsistent object) A fictional detective, or NOT-detective.

THE NOVELIST

These typescript excerpts were provided for the tertúlia

From: Editor <commissioning.editor@gmail.pt>

To: Martins <fernando.martins@gmail.pt>

Subject: deadline 15 February

Date: Thu, 29 Jan 2020 15:08:31 +0000

Message-ID: <393988BF-BE3E-49QD-8AD8-

191816F7D021@gmail.pt>

Caro Sr. Martins

We have decided to reissue Saramago's *HSL* (2018). The proofs are in the mail. Thank you for returning Sartre's *Nausea* before the deadline.

Cumprimentos

Miguel

Fernando Martins saw the irony of the situation: proof-reading *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* would be “reflexive” to say the least. He must ensure that everything is in order and no words are mistakenly included or deleted, in a novel in which a proof-reader deliberately inserts the word “NOT” into the established history, thereby changing everything. Fernando is worried that it is like the fish eating its own tail, in which he, the real proof-reader, is being asked to check the story of a fictional proof-reader who does NOT follow the ethical code of his profession.¹

Fernando's editor has made it clear that he should be extra vigilant that the word “NOT” should appear everywhere where it is required, and nowhere that it is NOT required. Fernando Martins reflected on what it would mean for the word to appear “nowhere that it is NOT required”: a kind of Meinongian inexistence, or was it simply a double negative that cancelled out?

As a proof-reader, Fernando receives a copy of every text that he must correct and, since the copy he gets to keep is the uncorrected version, once the job is done this copy gets to join his collection of incorrect texts on his bookshelf: each one read and re-read many times over. He casts his eye over the bookshelf containing these unauthorized texts from recent projects that have been completed: the Russell-Meinong Debate, previously unknown to him, seems now to be quite prescient. So too the alienation and exclusion felt by Roquentin in Sartre's *Nausea* which sits alongside it:

¹ It should be noted that Fernando Martins regards himself as a real proof-reader. — (Ed.)

things happen one way and we tell about them in opposite sense. You seem to start at the beginning: “it was a fine autumn evening in 1922. I was a notary's clerk in Marommes.” And in reality you have started at the end. It was there, invisible and present, it is the one which gives to words the pomp and value of a beginning. “I was out walking, I had left the town without realising it, I was thinking about my money troubles.” The sentence, taken simply for what it is, means that the man was absorbed, morose, a hundred leagues from an adventure, exactly in the mood to let things happen without noticing them. But the end is there, transforming everything. For us, the man is already the hero of the story. (Sartre, 2000, p. 62)

Now there is a new addition, Saramago's *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*, NOT yet on the bookshelf – a text whose fidelity or falsehood was yet to be revealed.² It lies on the table, an existential threat to any proof-reader. When Raimundo Silva, the hero and proof-reader in Saramago's novel, decided to break with the code of his profession and deliberately change a key sentence in the authorized version of history, he set up an intriguing chain of consequences. There one would expect to find the national creation myth, in which the inhabitants of the city of Lisbon requested the help of the passing Crusaders to rid the city of its Moorish occupants. The Crusaders accepted and the rest, as they used to say before Saramago got his hands on it, is history. Quite why he was moved to make this apparently career-destroying intervention, we are NOT told, but it leads him into experimental archaeology.³

² The world of Fernando Martins is populated by the uncorrected copies of published texts that have been sent to him for proof-reading and correction. As a result, none of these texts is a true or faithful copy of its intended contents. Fernando's library is counterfactual: unauthorized. Depending on what Fernando thought the author intended, so the published text differs from what the author actually wrote, even though the evidence for what the author actually intended was solely what the author wrote. —(Ed.)

³ Saramago's novel is the unpacking of the consequences of this action. It helps Raimundo Silva assemble a different account from the various textual sources and other forms of evidence that the hegemonic history had previously obscured. The counterfactual history, it turns out, can equally well be supported by the factual historical evidence. —(Ed.)

THE WRITER

What is it like to write fiction?

Some things are present, and some things are NOT and, strangely, I find myself mainly attending to those things that are NOT. How can that which is missing or absent make its presence felt? When I set out to write I follow a certain ritual, a ritual that brings certainty to my action as writing. At other times I may want to act in other ways, but now I want to write so I gather my things about me: my laptop, my notebook, a mug of tea. I know that I must also have to-mind if NOT-to-hand: a story, my characters, their lives, and I feel that this ritual brings a certainty that these things-initially-absent will become present. The actions that I take in the present, and how I attempt to focus my attention on this tipping-point, is the work of bringing into being, and which will be satisfied at the moment when the writing will have begun. At that moment it will still be fiction but the NOT-things it describes will have be-come things.

Often what is also absent is a clear idea of where the writing will lead, although having a story "to-hand" still doesn't necessarily mean that one has a grasp of it. It feels intimidating to attend too closely to the unimaginable openness of possibility of the fiction-space, where anything can happen. But in reality, my fiction-space has already been occupied: by Fernando in the fiction-present, and by Raimundo in the fiction-past. Their histories fill up the space, closing off possibilities, loosening the grasp I thought I had on the story.

At this tipping-point where the imagined history of the fiction meets the present of bringing-into-being through writing, I feel the nudge of the NOT-things pushing my hand to write a story that is different from the one I had in-mind when I sat down to write. To someone watching me, it would seem that the writing-space is empty except for the ritually present-things. But at the tipping-point all of the NOT-present things jostle and force themselves into the space of possibility. My uncertainty is burdened with these thoughts, burgeoning, bursting, broken by the no-things that are present and jostling to be-things.

THE NOTE-TAKER

According to my notes, we broke off from simply listening to the extracts with occasional interjections, and the discussion became more heated. What happens when we deploy the term “NOT” to define our core subject? What happens when we redefine our core subject by inserting the term “NOT” and negating what we thought was already defined?⁴ We each had confidence in our creative research methods but were all engaged in trying to legitimize these methods in the face of institutional resistance. This resistance was epitomized in the rejection of anything that that was not “factual” or verifiable. We had already noted that, over recent decades, practice-based artistic research had often been described more in terms of what it is NOT, than what it is, for example:

...Thus far I have claimed a number of things that practice-based research in art and design “is NOT”. I have claimed it is NOT the only research based in practice, that it is NOT synonymous with experimentation, or experiential feeling, or non-linguistic communication, it is NOT private, or ineffable, etc. (Biggs, 2004, p. 12)

...The problem with these formulations is that all of them are negative expressions: non-propositional, unconventional, non-traditional, non-academic. As if there is traditional research – that is, established, recognised, accepted, founded research – in opposition to non-traditional and, by implication, unfounded research. (Borgdorff, 2017)

We had to accommodate the discomfoting conclusion that stating what something is NOT may be just as informative as claiming what it is: that NOT-being and being are both present in the research activity.

⁴ The concepts being explored are “phenomenological intentionality” and its consequence: “inexistence”. Briefly, phenomenology holds that when one focuses one’s attention on something it becomes an object of one’s attention. Such phenomenological objects differ from everyday objects because some of them are imaginary though possible, e.g., unicorns, and some are impossible even though we have names for them, e.g., round squares. If, the argument goes, it is possible to make true statements about such as objects, e.g., that unicorns have only one horn, then they must exist [or subsist, or be existent] in some sense in order to act as the reference of the true statements.

The provocation of the controversial deployment of the term “NOT” where it is NOT expected, and the problematizing of any existing use of the term “NOT” in the description of these themes, is discussed as though it could be a method in creative research. What happens when we insert a negative, or we change a positive to a negative? Is artistic knowledge something that is NOT? Is experience, NOT-knowledge? Are artistic methods characterized by being NOT-scientific methods? Does phenomenological reduction serve the purpose of bracketing-out or negating some more analytical approaches to experience and sensation? —(Ed.)

THE NOVELIST

Fernando Martins, despite the Portuguese heritage of his name, had lived most of his life, like the present author⁵, in London. He had spent many years as an academic in search of a question: writing for art magazines, philosophical journals, taking up various short-term contracts for research in universities and archives, always busy but somehow lacking a unifying theme that would allow him to say on his website in just one sentence, instead of many, in what he was an expert. Although he had published two novels based on recompiling parts of Pessoa's *Book of Disquiet*, he couldn't quite find satisfaction in being a Portuguese writer of fiction. What he wanted was to voice new knowledge based on a creative process, but that seemed to imply an artistic research method that could encompass fact and fiction, assertion, and negation, the real and the imaginary.⁶ Wasn't this comparable in some way to making truth-claims about non-existent things such as Sherlock Holmes, unicorns or golden mountains? Did phenomenological inexistence offer a solution to the legitimacy of questions and answers in creative arts research?⁷ He felt a slippage between his interest in his fictional subjects and his interest in the rigorous research methods he employed when writing.

Curiously, phenomenology as it is normally applied in the field of philosophy, is NOT principally concerned with one's sensory responses to objects in the world. It had always seemed to Fernando Martins that the term implied a certain psychologism, perhaps owing to its resistance to differentiate between objects, thoughts, and feelings by referring instead to phenomena, whether "real" or "fictional". These resistances seemed to mark a boundary between the external world of objects and sense data, and the internal, reactive world of experience, memory and feeling. He found himself researching the word "phenomenology" and discovered it was principally concerned with meaning and about-ness. NOT that

⁵ Uncertain attribution —(Ed.)

⁶ There is a "NOT" in the call for papers for this special issue of *Phenomenology & Practice*. Indeed, the approaches that were preferred to both the topic of art and the topic of phenomenology were both described in terms of what they were NOT rather than what they were:

art is NOT approached as an object of research for phenomenologists and phenomenology should NOT be treated in this context as a theoretical reference for artists producing art works. —(Ed.)

⁷ Some philosophers object that fiction cannot lead to truth; a view summed up in the so-called Ontological Assumption – that one cannot make true statements about what does NOT exist. —(Ed.)

explanations of philosophical schools and concepts were immediately useful in Fernando's experience: phenomenologically, one had to internalize them without doing them too much damage before mobilizing them in a context that made them useful. It was more important that concepts were productive than true, he thought to himself.⁸

Where Fernando Martins felt he had become misled was in the issue of "about-ness". Already he was experiencing a slight sense of nausea, in anticipation as one might say, of further assaults on what the English and Portuguese languages, in contrast to German, can comfortably express and what commonsense tells us should and what should NOT be given agency.⁹ But in the literature on phenomenology the familiar kind of intention is replaced by the quite different concept of intentionality.¹⁰ It is NOT an act of volition but instead it is a focussing of our attention on something, reviving the Scholastic notion of "intentio": the object of a thought that one attends to.

What we are supposed to attend to is the mental "object" quite independently of our judgement about it, for example about whether it

⁸ Phenomenology, like artistic research, is frequently defined in terms of what it is NOT:

- "Phenomenology is NOT phenomenism, subjectivism, [or] empirical research." (Halak et al., 2014)
- "Phenomenology is NOT simply a form of essentialism" (Zahavi, 2010, p. 663)
- "Phenomenology is NOT a unified movement" (Wikipedia: Phenomenology)
- "Phenomenology is NOT armchair reflection" (Gutland, 2018)
- "Phenomenology as a philosophy and a method of inquiry is NOT limited to an approach to knowing." (Qutoshi, 2018) —(Ed.)

⁹ In phenomenology, Brentano and Husserl's students interpreted his term "inexistence" as signifying the existence of a no-thing. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* suggests a something-ness about nothingness. The crisis of existentialism is nonexistence, and the nausea that is felt by Sartre's character Roquentin, and occasionally by Fernando Martins, is caused by an awful awareness of an essential nothingness rather than a mere nothingness. —(Ed.)

¹⁰ Biggs (2006) claims that in order to act as a researcher one needs to exercise a certain type of intention. Merely "intending" to be a researcher, or indeed an artist, is NOT sufficient to be a researcher or an artist. What is sufficient is that one is received as being a researcher or an artist by one's audience. Thus, it is necessary to proceed in a certain way in order that one's outputs can reach the audience, and perhaps it is also necessary to position those outputs in a particular way that cues the appropriate reception, such as exhibiting in a gallery or publishing in a peer-reviewed journal. —(Ed.)

exists or is true. One is supposed to “bracket” all these additional questions, so they do NOT interfere with the central task of phenomenological reduction: of attending to what the object of one's experience is “about” (“in itself,” Fernando finds himself clarifying to himself before the nausea returns). So, if one is intentionally acting as a phenomenologist, one must both intend to be such an actor and deploy intentionality to describe the world using phenomenological reduction. And if one were to be acting as an artistic researcher schooled in phenomenology...?¹¹

Many of the so-called objects of experience seemed to Fernando to be problematic because they were NOT existing physical objects at all, or they were no longer. He could think of imaginary things like fictional personages, non-fictional personages who were no longer alive; or physical objects that were no longer present, imaginary objects like pink elephants, improbable objects like golden mountains, although hard as he might he could NOT imagine round squares. How does positing a NOT existing object, help anyone?¹²

¹¹ Husserl's project is a transcendental one: it seeks to identify the universal conditions under which experience is possible, NOT merely the particular conditions that pertain in my first-person experience of an object (etc.). This may offer a clue to the relevance of his form of phenomenology to the topic of artistic research. One of the issues that troubles researchers in the creative and performing arts is the question of transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 124). Unlike science, the creative arts treat of particulars, and our experience of those particulars, and it certainly does NOT attempt to make universal or generalizable claims that can be tested and verified. Indeed, Gadamer described art as a singularity and thought that arts and humanities revealed truths that were inaccessible using the scientific method. Husserlian intentionality emphasizes the relationship between a mental act and its object, and we can find a parallel in the specific “attitude” of artistic research in relation to knowledge production in the creative arts, i.e., of perceiving the actions or objects *as* research. This would accord with the claim above, that a work needs to be *taken-as* research in order for it to *function-as* research for a user or community of users. — (Ed.)

¹² A reference embodied as some kind of existent object seems to be necessary in order that we can make true or false statements about that “thing”. It doesn't even have to be a physical object “thing”; it could be a statement about tomorrow, such as “tomorrow will be Thursday”. One can check whether a statement is true or false by comparing the statement to reality. “Is tomorrow Thursday?” can be answered by checking whether today is Wednesday. “I have climbed a golden mountain” can be challenged by a demand for evidence about the existence any golden mountains, whereas a claim to draw a round square does NOT need evidence of any kind to be challenged because it is logically rather than empirically false, neither fact nor fiction. This leaves true statements about fictional objects in an empirical limbo, in which they do not seem to have a use. Artistic research offers a context in which they can be mobilized to provide insight through speculative reasoning. —(Ed.)

Fernando Martins sat in the bright pool of sunlight that found its way through the etched windows of the café. Two conclusions could be drawn, metaphorically rather than was the case with the round squares... he tried to focus. Two conclusions could be drawn: that saying something does NOT exist is a conversation-stopper that Meinong kept in play by claiming that they did exist, but in some non-existent way called phenomenological inexistence (the nausea nudged a little once again). The other conclusion is that Brentano and Chisolm and the others are making a rhetorical sleight-of-hand when they say one can easily imagine a round square.¹³ Fernando tried again, but really couldn't picture it because it lay "somewhere between being and non-being."¹⁴ It flashed back and forth between being round and being square, and a rounded-corner square didn't seem to fit the requirements either. It was like Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit: either a duck or a rabbit, but NOT both at the same time. He smiled as he remembered his philosophy teacher drawing Wittgenstein's figure on the whiteboard just to reinforce the point, but the drawing was so poor it seemed like neither a duck nor a rabbit, so the rhetorical force was lost. Neither a duck nor a rabbit, neither fact nor fiction, neither existent nor non-existent: homeless, as Meinong described them. Existentialism makes one feel nauseous, he thought.¹⁵

¹³ "a contradictory object, one that is plainly impossible, can be thought about easily enough" (Brentano cited in Chisolm, 1973, p. 39) —(Ed.)

¹⁴ (Meinong cited in Smith, 1985, p. 307) —(Ed.)

¹⁵ "I understood the nausea, I possessed it. To tell the truth, I did NOT formulate my discoveries to myself. But I think it would be easy for me to put them in words now. The essential point is contingency. I mean that by definition existence is NOT [logical] necessity. To exist is simply ... to be there; existences appear, let themselves be encountered, but you can never deduce them." (Sartre, 2000, p. 188)

THE WRITER

What is it like to write?

*The pencil leaves its grey trace on the white page,
and the words are created:
they become THE words as I write them:
they exist.*

*They emerge from a sea of inexistence
and until that very moment they are formless.
The formless words are in my mind
but the formed words – THE words –
appear as my hand moves across the page
leaving this grey trace.*

*Some words are hard to decipher
and return to their formless inexistence.
The dissatisfaction that I feel
does NOT come from THE words,
it comes from the other words,
the words that were NOT written,
the dizzying fullness of everything that could be said.*

*What is decided, written, existent,
is disappointing in comparison.
It is the "I" who decides,
who intervenes and dams the flood of possibility
into the trickle of expression.
"I" decide what is legitimate in this fiction,
and what can NOT be.*

*That is my central experience of writing:
NOT the act of putting pencil to paper
but the act of holding back the flood
so the merest trickle flows through my fingers
and onto the paper.
Everything that was NOT written
remains as a thought – a nothing –
whereas everything that is written
becomes a something.*

*The vast sea of inexistence is still pent up.
I want to start over again from a different point of view
in order to purge myself of more ideas,
but the new words just cause turbulence.*

*As soon as there is a trace there is also a stream,
a narrative, a channel that flows only here
and NOT there.*

THE NOTE-TAKER

In the early days of artistic research when nobody knew or could agree about what it was, it made sense, we thought, to say what it was NOT, in order to have something, some thing, to react against. But now that the field has achieved a certain maturity, wouldn't it be more desirable to say something about what it is rather than what it is NOT? We argued a lot over that in our tertulia and it was clearly still a contentious point, but continuing in a Meinongian manner, it seemed as though one could continue saying what it is NOT because what one says achieves a certain [in]existence from such statements. And if one were to continue in such a vein, perhaps it is no longer necessary to make the distinction between artistic research and studio practice by saying that practice is NOT research... But that thought offended against our experiences of research training because we knew that the methods employed by the researcher were different from the methods employed by the studio artist. Perhaps the outcomes might be the same but the methods leading to them might be different (my notes are unclear at this point)? Perhaps the distinction was really methodological?¹⁶ Research questions become answered when appropriate actions are taken that lead to outcomes which satisfy audiences that the questions have been resolved – doing the wrong thing leaves the question untouched. The difference, it seemed to us, was that questions in academic research are gradually resolved and the gap in knowledge is gradually closed, whereas questions in studio art remain open even after the production of the artwork. Artistic themes and issues can be returned to again and again. So, no matter how appropriate the method, the question is never answered? The right artwork is NOT the answer to a question, but it is the NOT-answer.

THE NOVELIST

Fernando Martins mulled over the idea that language and words, his stock in trade, were limited and sometimes obscured what they were intended to illuminate.¹⁷ Why was the word “NOT” so ubiquitous in these accounts? Surely if we take this procedure seriously, one should eschew words altogether rather than use them conditionally or with this indirect allusion to what they are NOT. It seemed to him that words were constantly dragging him back to the in-existent. Perhaps this whole problem of in-existence was caused by our feeble attempts to express in words what simply needed to be present[ed]?

¹⁶ cf. (Biggs & Büchler, 2007) in which the method was described as the connection between the answer and the original question. —(Ed.)

¹⁷ “If experience is NOT like a verbal scheme and we do NOT wish to say that it is, then how can we say anything at all about it without imposing a verbal scheme? and if we wish, in some way, to appeal beyond logical schemes to a sense of ‘experience’ NOT yet organized verbally, in what way do we have such ‘experience’ present and available for an appeal, and in what way does experience give ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers, so that some statements will be ‘based’ on it and some statements NOT?” (Gendlin, 1973, p. 282) —(Ed.)

He remembered how Sartre also seemed to be falling foul of that problem when he tried to grasp the absurd or the blackness of black. “I was thinking without words, about things, with things” (more negatives). “Absurdity was NOT an idea in my head, or the sound of a voice” (so many negatives when one tries to legitimise the non-linguistic and diminish the hegemony of words). Absurdity, Sartre wrote, was “irreducible, nothing”, and resistant to any attempt to summarize it, “the world of explanations and reasons is NOT the world of existence.”¹⁸ The fact that one can explain the concept of a circle does NOT ensure their existence, and NOT everything that exists can be explained, as witness the example of the tree root.¹⁹ The proof-reader spirit inside Fernando Martins reeled at the prospect, but the spirit of Meinong smiled.

“I can’t remember exactly just what it was that the stone refused to be. But I had NOT forgotten its passive resistance.”²⁰ Resistance, refusal, these were the terms against which Fernando was constantly colliding. Perhaps words only facilitated the discussion of ideas rather than things. Sartre certainly suffered his nausea when he, like Fernando, realized the poverty of the linguistic medium in which he had trusted and placed his life’s work. But Roquentin is now suffering from a kind of writers’ block born of being “bored to tears” by the object of his study – the Marquis de Rollebon; even Roquentin’s diary seems to suffer from a lack of attention to detail with missing dates so that the archivist in Fernando finds it difficult to establish on exactly which day in early February 1932 that Roquentin has his fateful encounter with the chestnut tree root, with absurdity and blackness. All these are encounters after 6 pm: wouldn’t it have been dark by then? Perhaps that is the explanation, the pervasive blackness, NOT just of the tree root, but of the spirit, the negation of the ability of language to describe, perhaps all this is a metaphor for the inability to see. “Seeing” is such a powerful metaphor in itself. We see with our eyes, but we also see when we understand: “suddenly, the veil is torn away, I have understood, I have seen.”²¹ But when I “see” but it is dark, is my seeing a form of inner realisation? Do I “see” the

¹⁸ (Sartre, 2000, p. 185) —(Ed.)

¹⁹ Sartre seems to accept the Russellian view that abstracts (circles) do NOT exist even though we can describe and specify them. “Black, like the circle, did NOT exist. I looked at the root: was it more than black or almost black” (Sartre, 2000, p. 186). The existence of black somehow brackets the word black: it both precedes and succeeds the black thing. Black is both pre-linguistic and post-linguistic. —(Ed.)

²⁰ (Sartre, 2000, p. 187) —(Ed.)

²¹ (Sartre, 2000, p. 181) —(Ed.)

phenomenologically inexistent? Were all of these visions and insights, forms of intuition on the part of Roquentin? Was the ubiquitous “black” that caused the nausea, the ultimate deletion, the deleatur of Saramago’s proof-reader that permanently removed a word or phrase from Fernando’s unauthorized proofs so that readers of the published edition would never know what had been there? And when something was completely absent, what did it mean to speak of its existence? Was there always a palimpsest, a trace of what there was NOT? Then every text was really littered with erasures, with words that had been removed, deleted, all the words (like Saramago’s *All the Names*) that were NOT there.

The deletion or the omission of words and names has such potential, such fecundity, there was so much more that was NOT written, that was NOT named, that had been deleted before it had even been written. And there was much that hung suspended between existence and inexistence: the fictional character of Roquentin thought about by the real character of Sartre, the Marquis de Rollebon thought about by the fictional character of Roquentin, the real Saramago and his fictional proof-reader Raimundo Silva, Fernando (me, the author, the commentator?) his (who’s?) imagined/real love affair with his editor Maria Sara²², who in his imaginings of the Lisbon siege becomes transformed into his own fictional character of Ouroana²³. Surely the subject – what this is “about” in the phenomenological sense of intentionality – is love and romance, something that is NOT fictional or imagined, but abstract; originating in Saramago and NOT imagined in the imaginary mind of the fictional Raimundo Silva? Roquentin also has a crisis of his fictional reality in the library: the books that were previously the containers of knowledge and certainty, now seemed to have “fixed nothing at all: it seemed that their very existence was subject to doubt... Nothing seemed true; I felt surrounded by cardboard scenery which could quickly be removed.”²⁴

²² The girlfriend of the fictional Raimundo Silva. —(Ed.)

²³ The alternative identity of Maria Sara during the siege in 1147 as imagined by the fictional Raimundo Silva. —(Ed.)

²⁴ (Sartre, 2000, p. 113) —(Ed.)

Conclusion: Doing Things with Words

This text is a piece of multi-perspectival writing, in which four different personae adopt different attitudes to, and intellectual relationships with, the narrative line. It owes a debt to previous uses of multi-vocal writing by Marquez and Woolf, and literary phenomenologists such as Sartre and Saramago. It is an experiment into the potential of fiction in research.²⁵ The perspectives are voiced by four characters at a tertulia – a literary gathering – at which an extract from a novel written by one of the participants is being considered. As a work of fiction, the novel is clearly imaginary and refers to inexistent phenomenological objects. However, when it refers to real persons, objects and events, the reader’s attention shifts from inexistence to existence. As the fiction-reality status becomes blurred, for example when fictional characters refer to non-fictional events, so too does the existential status on which research traditionally depends, i.e., the distinction between fact and fiction, and whether the focus is on external manifestations or inner experiences. The boundary between the real and the fictional is often encountered in research, for example when one is investigating future or what-if scenarios (e.g., in business), or one is reflexively obliged to adopt the very frame of reference that one is seeking to critique (e.g., so-called “wicked problems”). Through a process of writing as research, in which phenomenological intentionality frames the participant-researchers’ approaches in radically different ways, the text problematizes the real and the imaginary, being and non-being, and therefore reveals the potential of fiction and counterfactuals as a method of inquiry.

A narrative thread, and continuity, is provided by The Novelist’s (Nov.) retelling Saramago’s *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*. Four perspectives on this thread reveal different ways in which the counterfactual can facilitate insight into our experience of reality. In Saramago’s novel a wayward proof-reader mischievously adds the word “not” to the historical account, disturbing what we have been taught to accept as the true history. This “bringing into being” through fiction – of what did[n’t] actually happen – sets in train a series of perspectives and methodological approaches by the tertulia on the nature of not-being. For The Novelist this is simply the presentation to a tertulia of an extract from her new work of fiction in the form of counterfactual history; a “what-if” style. To The Note-Taker (Not.) of the literary meeting the Novelist’s work is problematic owing to its reflexivity, which plays with the shifting reality of her leading character as he struggles with his retelling of Saramago’s story whilst simultaneously being self-aware of the “wicked problem” posed by finding himself in the same position as the fictional character. For The Writer (Writ.) it provokes reflection on the felt experience of the transition from ideas to words and an attentiveness towards coming-into-being through writing.²⁶ For The Editor (Ed.), who comments on the thoughts of the personae, each voice reveals a

²⁵ “For many traditionalists, merely thinking about a project of social inquiry as, in any sense ‘fictional’ disqualifies it from consideration as legitimate research.” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 101).

²⁶ The phenomenological writer is “practising a specific form of phenomenology – literary phenomenology – in which literary writing has a central role in meeting the requirements of the phenomenological method” (Inkpin, 2017, p. 1f.).

distinct theoretical or literary relationship with the problem of fiction and voice, and of the agency of what is not, and of not-being.

Explicitly for Sartre, and implicitly for Husserl, words became a barrier to meaning and essence. In response, Husserl tried to shift our attention from words or thoughts to the things themselves. As a result, phenomenological intentionality focuses our attention on what words and thoughts are about, thereby substantiating them as incomplete or homeless “objects”. The world is therefore populated just as fully by these intentional NOT-objects as by the material objects that we are more accustomed to believe populate it.

This paper claims that the legitimacy gap suffered by fiction-as-research may be bridged by the substantiation of the inexistent offered by Meinongian “objects” within the fiction-space. Such objects provide a reference that enables a meaningful dialogue between rigorous but mainly hypothetico-deductive academic methods and applied pre-predicative creative methods, and whether such inexistent Meinongian “objects” are facts becomes less important than deciding whether they are useful. Our conclusion is therefore that artistic research methods offer a space and techniques to discuss the agency of NOT-being, of what-if, and of omission, through the legitimate deployment of fiction and falsehoods; and the benefits of so doing outweigh the incredulity of traditionalist researchers (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 120).

Let us turn to the apparent clarity of actions, which are translated thoughts, although in the passage from the latter to the former, certain things are always lost or added, which means that, in the final analysis, we know as a little about what we do as about what we think. (Saramago, 2018, p.259)

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