

For an Alternative School Writing: lessons from João Guimarães Rosa

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ABSTRACT – For an Alternative School Writing: lessons from João Guimarães Rosa. With the aim of formulating a reflective horizon capable of fostering alternative ideas on writing practices within the educational domain, this study examined some of João Guimarães Rosa's writing procedures. To this end, it first focused on the proposal recurrently in a set of educational journal articles that address writing as an ethical-aesthetic experience. It then analyzed the intricacies of the writing exercises contained in the author's *Cadernos de Estudos* (Study Notebooks). In the final considerations, based on Rosa's lessons, the study advocates for gestures that endorse an expansive way of carrying out the writing task in the pedagogical sphere.

Keywords: Writing. Education. Experience. João Guimarães Rosa.

RESUMO – Por uma Escrita Escolar Outra: lições de João Guimarães Rosa. Com vistas a formular um horizonte reflexivo capaz de potencializar ideias outras acerca das práticas de escrita no domínio educacional, o estudo debruçou-se sobre alguns dos procedimentos escritos de João Guimarães Rosa. Para tanto, focalizou-se, em um primeiro momento, a proposta constante de um conjunto de artigos de periódicos da área educacional sobre a escrita como experiência ético-estética. Em seguida, procedeu-se à análise dos meandros dos exercícios de escrita contidos nos *Cadernos de Estudos* do referido escritor. Nas considerações finais, tratou-se de advogar, com base nas lições rosianas, gestos partidários de um modo expansivo de levar a cabo a tarefa escritural no âmbito pedagógico.

Palavras-chave: Escrita. Educação. Experiência. João Guimarães Rosa.

Introduction

In an interview with literary critic Günter Lorenz, João Guimarães Rosa — hereafter JGR — confided: “On the day I turn one hundred years old, I will publish a book, my most important novel: a dictionary. Perhaps a little earlier. And this will serve as my autobiography” (Rosa apud Lorenz, 1973, p. 85, our translation).

The writer’s statement prompts us to recognize crucial aspects of the act of writing that concern less the outcomes materialized in works than the operational process it entails.

JGR undertook literary experiments anchored in a gaze at once delicate and persistent toward the events around him, resulting in an unmistakable style. In a letter dated February 9, 1965, addressed to the translator of his works into German, the writer described his labor in the following terms:

I am incorrigibly devoted to improvement and refinement, without rest, in repeated, painful, fierce action, unceasingly, until the very last moment, at all costs. I do this with my books. In them, there is *not a single* moment of inertia. No laziness! Everything is reworked, reconsidered, calculated, prayed over, refiltered, reheated, refrozen, defrosted, purged and thickened again, once more filtered. Now, for example, I am redoing, for the 23rd time, a romance. And each one of these times has been a tremendous adventure and an exhausting laboratory effort (Rosa, 2003, p. 234, author’s emphasis; our translation).

In order to describe and analyze some of JGR’s writing procedures, this study selected as its empirical source the author’s *Cadernos de Estudos*, a series of annotations produced during the last two decades of his life. These notebooks served as a laboratory of research, fabulations, and linguistic experiments of various kinds. In addition to highlighting JGR’s distinctive *modus operandi*, the material contained therein proves surprising, given that it is, presumably, little known to the reading public.

By delving into Rosa’s operational universe, the study sought to formulate a reflective horizon capable of fostering alternative ideas about writing practices in the educational field. More specifically, it aimed, first, to revisit Brazilian academic-educational production concerning the accumulated discussions on writing as an ethical-aesthetic experience, and then to examine the materiality of the exercises in JGR’s *Cadernos de Estudos*. As a concluding proposition, it invited us to envision gestures that support an expansive mode of engaging in the writing experience within the school context.

Writing from the Educational Perspective

Educational discourse on writing practices within the educational sphere encompasses a wide range of perspectives, shaping approaches that span from methodological aspects to those of a philosophical nature. In the latter case, these are studies that seek to conceptualize writing as an experience, viewing it as an ethical-aesthetic

practice that crosses and transcends the school sphere, in contrast to the pragmatist focus that dominates the discourse in question.

In line with this second perspective, a survey was conducted of articles whose keywords and abstracts included the terms *writing* and *experience*, published between 2001 and 2021 in 35 journals classified as A1, A2, or A3 in Qualis Periódicos, according to the 2017–2020 four-year evaluation.

The journals in which these articles appeared were: Atos de Pesquisa em Educação; Currículo Sem Fronteiras; Debates em Educação; Eccos; Em Aberto; Educação (PUCRS); Educação (UFSC); Educação & Realidade; Educação a Distância (UFSC); Educação e Cultura Contemporânea; Educação e Pesquisa; Educação em Foco (UFJF); Educação Temática Digital; Educação Unisinos; Interfaces da Educação; Inter-Ação; Linhas Críticas; Linguagens, Educação e Sociedade; Perspectiva; Práxis Educativa; Pro-posições; Revista Brasileira de Educação; Revista Cocar; Revista de Educação, Ciência e Cultura; Revista de Educação Pública; Revista Eletrônica de Educação; Revista Entreideias: Educação, Cultura e Sociedade; Revista Espaço Pedagógico; Revista Linhas; Revista Teias; Roteiro; Série-Estudos.

In the texts analyzed, the idea of writing as experience is tied to a list of characteristic verbs: weaving, deciphering, gathering, rehearsing, existing, fabulating, stylizing, surviving, fictionalizing, traversing, inventing, assembling, *criançar* (to act as a child), unfolding, equipping, etc. For example, writing can be conceived as the deciphering of traces and the gathering of remnants (Gagnebin, 2016), as rehearsal (Larrosa, 2003), as montage (Rodrigues; Schuler, 2019), as the production of flashes (Oliveira, 2015), as *ornitorrincação* [platypus-like hybridization] (Costa; Cunha, 2018), as *escrileitura* [writing-reading] (Souza; Monteiro, 2020), or as a way of life (Aquino, 2011). The most frequently cited author in these articles was Michel Foucault, followed by Gilles Deleuze, as well as Roland Barthes, Maurice Blanchot, Walter Benjamin, Georges Didi-Huberman, and Sandra Mara Corazza.

One branch of such studies concerns texts focused on the articulation between writing, experience, and the body, almost always in relation to theater. Sarrazac (2005), for instance, shared the experience of a writing workshop aimed at inducing an aesthetic perspective within the theatrical field. Using a similar approach, Farina and Albernaz (2009) explored the body as a field of inquiry and the articulation of aesthetic and conceptual experiences with writing practices. Mossi (2015), in turn, by addressing the idea of a polyphonic body, focused on the concept of *escrileitura* formulated by Sandra Mara Corazza (2008) to affirm the relevance of writing practices in reshaping the body–mind relationship.

A frequently employed notion is that of writing of the self, almost always derived from Foucauldian thought, sometimes combined with psychoanalytic insights to address the theme of death in schools — as in Mascia and Silva (2014) — or in research conducted within prison systems, such as Câmara (2011) and Stecanela and Craidy (2012).

Alcântara and Icicle (2014) also raised the question of writing's role in teacher education, drawing on actor and teacher diaries to establish an analogy between the process of artistic creation and the creation of existence itself.

A second grouping of articles concerns those that examined writing in the university context. Vallera and Paz (2014) reflected on the historical obstacles surrounding academic writing, which they argued stem from the notions of police and genius, displaced respectively into the notions of sage and apprentice in education, resulting in the fear and solitude that haunt writing practices in this context.

We then highlight a sample of articles that proposed alternative ways of conceiving and practicing writing, still within the university setting. The first is Jorge Ramos do Ó (2021), who focused on the practice of the seminar in daily university life, suggesting that writing occupies a central place among its tasks.

Another writing experience comes from the article by Rodrigues and Schuler (2019), in which the idea of montage is evoked. Drawing on Georges Didi-Huberman's work — including his studies of Aby Warburg's *Atlas Mnemosyne*, Walter Benjamin's reflections on collecting, and the cinematic imagery of Sergei Eisenstein and Jean-Luc Godard — the authors adopted montage as a philosophical procedure to think difference in opposition to any totalizing or universal perspective on the writing experience, framing it instead as aligned with creation and re-configuration.

The notion of *writing the self*, recurring among these studies, is generally juxtaposed with the idea of stylizing a way of existing. This appears, for example, in Saraiva and Fischer's (2020) article on cinema and educational research, in which writing is addressed through the filmic creations of Alfred Hitchcock, Abbas Kiarostami, and Agnès Varda.

In dialogue with Theodor Adorno and María Zambrano to support his defense of the essay form, Larrosa (2003, p. 107; our translation) asserted: "The essayist is a reader who writes and a writer who reads [...]. It also seems to me that one could say that the intellectual is someone who writes at a table full of books: a writer who reads." Similarly, Adó and Musseta (2020) emphasized the importance of the idea of fiction to foster a writing practice that enhances multiplicity and difference as practical effects of the writing gesture. Drawing on the works of Argentine authors Jorge Luis Borges and Ricardo Piglia, they affirmed: "I propose an academic writing that is demonstrated through experience, to become performatively experiential" (Adó; Musseta, 2020, p. 273).

Also among the studies devoted to writing in the university field is Costa and Cunha (2018). Their research is noteworthy for addressing writing practices within teacher education via the experimentation of a different mode of writing — canonical at first, but used in reverse. Inspired by the idea of the encyclopedia and by Enlightenment proce-

dures associated with Denis Diderot and Jean d'Alembert, though without adopting their rationalist and humanist premises, they proposed that education students at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul assemble a dictionary capable of capturing discursive shifts about the meaning of *being a teacher*.

Among the articles focused on writing in broader school contexts is that of Garcia and Aquino (2020), which defends the idea that treating writing pedagogically by invoking the so-called great writers' results in a kind of widespread awe among school actors. The authors concluded that "[...] we would all — whether linked to the educational universe or not — be riddled with the fear of writing. A reverential fear of writers, indeed, or of what has been made of them [...]. A fear of their erudition, their inventiveness, their innovative power" (Garcia; Aquino, 2020, p. 15; our translations).

In line with the reflections that informed the present study, we may also note the works of Schuler (2017) and Aquino (2011). In the first, the researcher studied how writing unfolds in schooling and the displacements of modes of existence implicated in this process. Drawing on Foucauldian thought to reflect on the ethics of the self—and thus viewing writing as a practice that transforms ways of life—the author mobilized ideas on fiction and techniques of the self developed by the French thinker, intertwining them with a conception of school writing as a gesture that speaks of the world without intending to represent it: "A writing as experience that could traverse microphysically modes of thought and existence. Writing not to tell about oneself, but to compose oneself. Writings as encounters, events that leave traces" (Schuler, 2017, p. 240; our translation).

The second article gains relevance for this discussion as it challenges three recurring arguments about writing practice in everyday schooling: "[...] its categorization according to genres, its examinatory function, and its subordination to reading" (Aquino, 2011, p. 641; our translation). Aquino proposes modes of writing concomitant with the act of creation: writing-combat, writing-burst, and writing-artist, the latter grounded in Corazza's (2006) propositions. This is a stance guided by a minimalism attuned to the contemplative and sculptural labor of the word, aiming not at accumulation nor saturation, but at its perpetual re-creation.

With the writing experience as our guiding thread, we now turn to the chosen empirical material.

Rosa's Notebooks

On the twelfth page of JGR's 18th *Caderno de Estudos*, there is a letterhead sheet from the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated November 2, 1940. The rust of a paper clip and the mold-stained texture of the trace accompany the act of writing performed there. It is a snapshot of everyday life captured by the author during a visit to the Hagenbeck Zoo in Germany, on a cold Saturday, when the writer noted

in blue ballpoint pen that he had stroked the forehead of a lady rhinoceros.

The sheet attached to the Notebook — a school model, whose green cover bears three handwritten pieces of information in graphite pencil: *student* – J. Guimarães Rosa; *school* – general; and the field “*class*,” erased — forms part of the 27 Notebooks held by the Institute of Brazilian Studies of the University of São Paulo (IEB-USP) since 1973. It is on these records that the present article will now focus.

Through short compositions, usually a single line and sometimes in alphabetical order, JGR noted and listed everything that appeared before him: words, phrases and expressions from dictionaries, passages from encyclopedias, catalogues, conversations, news, etc. This exercise, carried out line after line, resulted in hundreds of pages distributed across the 27 Notebooks of the writer. It amounts to a fabulous inventory that served as the basis for later literary constructions — when a composition was selected, JGR would highlight it, often in pencil (graphite or colored), and note beside it which short story or novel it would be destined for.

Also noteworthy is the archival labor of the Notebooks and Rosa’s obstinacy in documenting and researching what surrounded him, especially during trips, walks, and visits — from museums, to restaurants, gardens, and even zoos. Writing, in short, as witness and, at the same time, as expansion of the world.

JGR’s vast collection at the IEB was first organized in 1979. Currently, the material is arranged in ten series containing different documents¹. The series are: Professional Activities (232 documents); Correspondence (2,045 documents); Posthumous Documentation (623 documents); Education (5 documents); Photographs (183 documents); Civil Identity (9 documents); Literature (3,991 documents); Social Relationships (78 documents); Universe of Interests (2,426 documents); Domestic and Family Life (212 documents).

Most are divided into categories, and one is struck by the prevalence of the category “others,” which reveals the difficulty of systematizing what the author produced throughout his life. Researcher Frederico Antonio Camillo Camargo (2013) reports that, even before the IEB acquired the materials, the documents were stored in cardboard folders and, in most cases, identified by the writer himself.

It was while navigating the documents of this collection that we encountered JGR’s *Cadernos de Estudos*. Classified under the category “Studies for Works,” the documentary set covers a temporal arc that is difficult to delimit, given the rare appearance of dates on the pages. From what it was possible to observe and gather from the IEB, the Notebooks were written between 1950 and 1963, varying between bound or spiral notebooks and stapled paper pads. Due to the wear of time, some present tears, rusty staples, and loose pages, which forced IEB researchers to digitize them. On the pages of the Notebooks, in addition to lists and studies written in pencil and pen (of various colors), one finds pasted cut-outs and small illustrations.

Through contact with the Notebooks, it is possible to glimpse some procedures used by JGR during his note-taking, derived from the habit of accumulating lists, as well as the intertwining of other taxonomic practices ranging between the encyclopedia and the dictionary. If he were in Italy, for example, the writer would include a series of notes on Italian films, Italian female names, Italian proverbs, typical Italian vegetation, etc.

The initial approach to the empirical locus of this research began with a reading of the descriptions of each Notebook, prepared by the IEB research team and included in the institution's online catalogue. Subsequently, visits were made to the physical archive for the full reading of each item, as well as for mapping the themes and taxonomic resources most frequently employed by the writer. The 27 Notebooks were read page by page.

The vastness of the writer's vocabulary, stemming from his curiosity about the things of the world, is a striking feature of his books. The plunge into his Notebooks is dizzying. In her work *O léxico de Guimarães Rosa*, Nilce Sant'Anna Martins (2020) managed to gather about 8,000 words collected from the works of the author of *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, characterized by a particular expressiveness, totaling — according to her — 8.4% of the 100,000 words of the *Novo Dicionário Aurélio* (1st ed.). The words encompass

[...] neologisms, archaisms or archaizing words, borrowings, onomatopoeias, popular, regional, or erudite words [...]. As for botanical and zoological names, I first thought of listing them in an appendix, but later found it more convenient to include them in the body of the vocabulary, with their respective attestations, since many of them have a high poetic value" (Martins, 2020, p. 12; our translation).

Before delving into the material, it is important to note that the approach we adopted was anchored in the idea of the archive, from a Foucauldian perspective. In the *Vocabulário de Foucault*, organized by Edgardo Castro — in which around 300 entries were compiled to encompass the trajectory of Foucault's thought — we read that the archive describes the

[...] system of the historical conditions of possibility of statements. Indeed, statements, considered as discursive events, are neither the mere transcription of thought into discourse nor simply the play of circumstances. As events, statements possess a regularity of their own, which governs their formation and their transformations (Castro, 2009, p. 43; our translation).

Fragmentary in nature, the archive calls for procedures anchored in an archeological and genealogical perspective, one that targets diffuseness, instabilities, and gaps across diverse sources. To this end, maps are projected through the marks and noises observed on the surfaces of temporal inscriptions. From this perspective, it is indispensable to invoke the work of Arlette Farge (2009). According to her, it is out of the complex disorder and the difficulty of retaining what takes place therein that archival work is made.

We also drew inspiration from the idea of the atlas offered by Georges Didi-Huberman (2018) to hypothesize that, when worked in conjunction with the archive, writing shifts into a space of reinvention, demanding the companionship of materials already produced in other times.

Another crucial point must be highlighted in laying the theoretical groundwork of this study. In the preface to *The Order of Things* (Foucault, 1985), originally published in 1966, the author mobilized ideas pertinent to the classificatory practice by sharing the reading effects prompted by a text of Jorge Luis Borges. This provocation shaped Foucault's critical stance toward classification systems, given the arbitrariness of any attempt to draw totalizing boundaries around things — classified contingently or, at the limit, unclassifiable.

Considering the indeterminate aspect characteristic of writing, we were also struck by another gesture that accompanies it in the same direction, though even more inexhaustible: the taxonomic one. The intent behind bringing together the taxonomy–archive dyad is to unsettle a certain order, as everything that one seeks to classify tends toward the abyss and chaotic dispersion. Broadly speaking: to describe, classify, inventory, and so forth are exercises of inventive potential, involving a tension between exhaustiveness and perplexity.

Maria Ester Maciel, in *As ironias da ordem: coleções, inventários e enciclopédias ficcionais*, investigates questions surrounding “[...] the arbitrariness of organizational systems legitimated by Western rationality” (Maciel, 2010, p. 11; our translation). In dialogue with Foucault's preface to *The Order of Things*, the researcher emphasized the importance of difference and variation for the perpetual reformulation of taxonomic practices.

She turned to writers and artists to analyze the effects of such practices in their work. Let us mention a few names: Peter Greenaway, Italo Calvino, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Haroldo de Campos, Arthur Bispo do Rosário, and Jorge Luis Borges. Among the writing effects inherent to classification: lists, collections, encyclopedias, and inventories. We also highlight the theoretical relevance of Maciel's work in revisiting historical studies on encyclopedists and taxonomists. Her contributions include studies on medieval bestiaries, originating from the relation between medieval logic and nature and permeated by the imagination of the time. Added to this material corpus is the vast number of accounts of animal monstrosities from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries.

Let us also add to the theoretical discussion another reflection on the obstinate gesture of attempting to capture traces, remnants, and vestiges. Aquino and Val (2018) evoked the work of a translational re-composition when addressing the notion of the archive — contrary to the heritage-memory dyad and instead allied to imagination, much like taxonomic labor. The researchers wrote:

From a Foucauldian perspective, more than materiality, the cataloguing function, and the logic of selection of the chosen materials, what stands out in the archive are the concrete clashes of vital forces that reverberate beyond their confinement in documents; clashes that have the power to intercept us in infinite ways. The archive, therefore, as perpetual murmur (Aquino; Val, 2018, p. 51; our translation).

Finally, there are the propositions of Campesato, Rodrigues, and Schuler (2022) about other ways of assembling thought. In examining the writing practices observed by Foucault, the researcher and the scholar evoked the possibility of an aesthetic opening to the world through the expedients of gathering and collecting. The inexhaustible and incessant character of writing would evoke not only montage but also cutting, collage, and editing.

And lastly, when we think only of the arrangement of references that every textual composition carries: “[...] what is a bibliography if not the model of an autobiography, a scrapbook, a collection of memories, a train ticket, museum stubs, a theatre program, invitation cards, dried flowers: inventories of the author’s icons” (Compagnon, 2007, p. 113; our translation).

Imprecision, the inattentive gaze, murmurs, and gaps. Between taxonomic impulse and labyrinth, an ode to instability.

The Taxonomic Accent of the Rosian Procedure

In the literary estate of JGR organized by the IEB, there is a category filed under the series Literature and titled Studies for Works. It contains a set of 358 records, composed mostly of loose typewritten sheets. On these, it was possible to identify 46 types of lists, such as: words to avoid and to employ; hat colors; Portuguese dishes and sweets; names of flowers, trees, and shrubs; birds observed in April 1940; works awarded the Prix Goncourt; riddles; short stories; and questions for his cat’s veterinarian. The practice of listing, commonly pursued by JGR, reaches its peak in another grouping: the *Cadernos de Estudos*.

In the essay *As listas de palavras*, included in the book *Mínima mímica: ensaios sobre Guimarães Rosa*, researcher Walnice Nogueira Galvão (2008) analyzed a sample of the manuscript and typewritten files JGR gathered throughout his life, primarily in his Notebooks. Characterized by the writing of lists of words and varied expressions, this textual collection constitutes part of the working method adopted by JGR prior to the writing of his works, though not isolated from it.

Having dedicated her studies to Rosian production since the 1970s, Galvão examined the writer’s entire literary creation and confirmed that he consistently relied on lists to build a *stock* of words — almost always rare — through four types of procedures: 1) selection; 2) intervention through the summarizing of entries; 3) indication of the different possibilities of use of the entries; and 4) creation. Such operations, according to the researcher, would make JGR an author

[...] for whom there is the habit of perusing encyclopedias in spare moments. Or who delights in tongue twisters, riddles, nursery rhymes, and other verbal games. Or who collects old dictionaries alongside other extravagant ones, ranging from those of slang terms to those of Aztecisms, *argot*, or *lunfardo* (Galvão, 2006, pp. 146–147; our translation).

The strategy employed by the writer reveals his inventive productivity through, on the one hand, what unfolded in his everyday life and, on the other, a prolonged gaze at ongoing events. Such an investigative disposition would culminate in the Rosian practice of incessantly compiling lists of linguistic and literary elaborations, often in the form of dictionary entries, as well as in the construction of onomastic lists. It is also worth noting that the annotations were written and later revised with colored-pencil markings — alternating between blue, red, and green — or, at times, in graphite pencil and in blue and black ink.

Camargo (2013) highlighted the encyclopedic character of the Rosian archive, connecting it to a poetics of the unclassifiable, according to two tendencies: one horizontal, which “[...] would correspond to an attempt to obtain information on as many fields of knowledge as possible, if not all,” and another vertical, indicating “[...] a desire to know everything coupled with the ambition to know the maximum of everything” (Camargo, 2013, pp. 189–190; our translation).

One necessary note: all elaborations on words, expressions, vocabularies, and sentences present in the Notebooks are accompanied by the symbol *m%*, whose spelling varies from one record to another—appearing in uppercase in some cases, lowercase in others. At times, the symbol is accompanied by a dash (-), an equal sign (=), or even parentheses, bearing different practical meanings for the author. For our part, we have chosen not to transcribe all instances of *m%* in the citations in this article, as it is a general feature of the Notebooks.

JGR’s lists constituted usual compositional material. For example, in Notebook 1, alongside studies on mythology, Romani vocabulary, chemical elements, painting, colors, and architecture, there appears a kind of zoographic dictionary containing entries and their respective meanings referring to various animal species (oxen, birds, horses, jaguars, cats, butterflies), followed by the creation of related statements:

Quebrar-d’Asa: said of a bird that suddenly changes the direction of its flight (p. 7)

Butterfly is that which is beautiful and escapes the ground (p. 11)

In threat of heavy rain, the hawk does not want to be far from its mate (p. 17)

CAPELÃO = chief monkey of the troop? (p. 18)

In Notebook 4 lies one of the largest parts of Rosa’s linguistic inventory. Camargo (2013) confirmed that this notebook contains expressions later used in the books *Tutameia* and *Estas Estórias*. Here is a sample of JGR’s prolific writing:

the spasmodic serpent
I kept silent and came. (End of C.)
Souls also give off soot
the little donkey studied its step (or the man)
its ears, sequined
it is a never-beginning of joy
a couple of non-lovers.
the crickets, critics
the goldfinch star [...]
the verb creaked
the moon, excrescent
he lived by copying some caricature of his own
owing all the tithes [...]
of delicate myopia [...]
split into seven children
we cannot be tributaries of Nothing
died scarcely pale (end of C.)
April came on a ship; she inside [...] (JGR-Notebook 04, p. 27, our translation).

The arbitrary character of JGR's elaborations during his studies appears throughout the Notebooks. Unlike other taxonomic gestures employed by him, the lists of linguistic-literary compositions often lacked a specific theme. Camargo (2013) produced a brief survey of this investigative variety, based on Notebook 5, also found in Notebook 17:

listening to the blowing wind (p. 1)
in an auspicious lament (p. 12)
the earthly truths of war (p. 14)
and he wept, as if for lost money (p. 20)
a needle sharpens itself all the time (p. 25)
in the seven and seventy sighs (p. 36)
and put the shoemaker inside the shoe (p. 44)
he took employment in envy (p. 53) (JGR-Notebook 17, our translation).

The absence of specific themes in the composition of Rosa's inventory reinforces the writer's non-cumulative design. For JGR, collecting words, phrases, and images was a task intrinsic to writing. The inventory was his workspace, his storeroom of provisions, so to speak — indispensable for the practice of experimenting with language.

In the Notebooks, Rosa's experience of collecting approaches other taxonomic gestures. One can note the frequent appearance of lists and of the encyclopedic impulse (Maciel, 2010) that permeates his studies. Concerning the collection and the encyclopedia, both display affinities but diverge in their purposes: "If the encyclopedia opens itself to the uncontrollable and overflows the limits of its own order, the collection constitutes itself thanks to the limits of its circumscription" (Maciel, 2010, p. 26; our translation). Added to this is the attempt to

impose order on what presented itself in dispersed form, to bring together things that, in principle, were apart — a practice historically adopted, above all, during the height of the Cabinets of Curiosities.

In at least eight Notebooks (2, 3, 8, 14, 15, 16, 18, and 19), the encyclopedic resource was employed exhaustively. Some of the topics recorded include: Indigenous peoples; truck slogans; unusual names; animal species; uncommon professions; plants; Romani names; Arabic words; and popular expressions. Beyond lists, JGR took notes on proverbs; synonymy; catechism; mythology; onomatopoeia; chemical elements; species of roses; words formed from Sanskrit; clothing; bees; cowherds' expressions; trees; horse colors; swimming styles; churches; Hindu names; superstitions; physical and chemical phenomena; monkeys; bats; tapirs; climatic phenomena; Scottish fabrics; European kings; and cattle herds.

In one of his Notebooks, number 26, JGR compiled a list of newspaper reports about animals between July 12 and December 31 of the year it was written. This notebook is incomplete, with its first 61 pages cut out. The listing, organized in table format, records the date, location, newspaper, and title of each collected news item. In other Notebooks, the animal theme is repeated at times, accompanied by the exercise of small elaborations anticipated by the m%, such as “*yellow, the favourite colour of butterflies*”, “*the little birds excel in ingenuousness*,” or “*the moaning of the fish*” (JGR-Notebook 9, p. 12-13).

In other instances, the writer made brief annotations based on research in encyclopedias, magazines, and books specializing in species studies: “*Blackbird (Cassidix oryzivora): entirely black in color with lustrous streaked reflections – steel-blue, violet, and oily. The female is less shiny and much smaller in size. Found in large flocks. They spoil bunches of bananas*” (JGR-Notebook 9, p. 5).

In Notebook 24, JGR began a small inventory of birds of all types, with notes on their scientific names, plumage, nest types, and locations. Eight pages were filled with this information and elaborations on the following species: Cochicho, Araponguinha, Araponga, Rendeira, Gaturano, Bico-de-Ferro, Suiriri, Alegrinho, Fruxú, Galo-do-Campo, Sabiá-do-Brejo, Foguetinho, Bonito-do-Campo, and Melro-Pintado-do-Brejo. Prominent on the pages are the Joãos and Marias: João-de-Pau and João-Pobre, Maria-Branca, Maria-é-Dia, and Maria-Preta. This last category would later be revisited by Maria Ester Maciel (2021) in *Pequena enciclopédia de seres comuns*.

Another recurring element in this textual corpus is plants. In Notebook 12, JGR presented a list of herbs and their characteristics:

wormwood: a hardy plant, with a strong, penetrating scent and a bitter taste;
celery: food given to Juno's horses on Olympus;
rosemary: the sorcerers' plant that drives away evils;
lettuce: cultivated by Diocletian in his gardens;
aloe: a plant that grows in barren places;
amaranth: consecrated to the dead by the ancients;
rice: a symbol of life;

rue: rosemary's partner in counterspells;
balsam: the plant of jealousy;
clove: the one from the garden (JGR-Notebook 12, p. 23-26, our translation).

Subsequently came the flowers: "Azalea: joy of loving (emblem), Cineraria: language: sad longing, Lily... a stem crowned with a spike of radiant flowers" (JGR-Notebook 12, p. 28). Then the trees, sometimes with accompanying sketches: Jacarandá, Ipê Tabaco, Ipê Mandiva, Ipê-Amarelo, Ipê-Roxo, Ipê-Branco, Jequitibá, Sapucaia, Barriguda, Folha-larga, Jacarandá-Branco, Braúna, Sibipiruna, Pau-Ferro, Ingá. JGR's botanical studies in this Notebook conclude with a short list on scents: "That last a long time: rosemary, lavender, orange tree etc. A vanilla = smells stronger on hot days" (JGR-Notebook 12, p. 37).

In Notebook 13 we find another of the writer's common practices: "dictionary-making." There he arranged in alphabetical order the information he had gathered about Bahia's vegetation, followed by notes on flower names. The organization of entries in dictionary format plays a central role in the Notebooks, along with their respective meanings, as well as onomastic lists and studies of technical vocabularies.

Notebook 9 contains studies on Asian names and Sanskrit words. Notebook 11 includes a list of Peruvian words and another of words beginning with the letter x. In cases where he used his lists for literary purposes, JGR crossed out the item and wrote alongside it the title of the text in which that phrase or word had been employed. In the example below, from Notebook 20, four phrases are crossed out in graphite pencil with corresponding notes.

his political animality.
and the kings of whom history knew nothing.
but it erred through absence.
his power purifies his suffering.
the rest was faith and play, – WHAT, ME? [crossed out with a note added later]
his heart and head thought of undiverse things.
crying warm.
little fluttering girl. – "THE CANDLE AND THE DEVIL" [the last three crossed out with later notes]
how could I love more than one woman; if all are different?
wanting snow, nightingale, camels.
the rose is a faithful, faithful refinement.
it made a grey sea (JGR-Notebook 20, p. 92).

In another passage, in Notebook 21, the list of elaborations appears thematically, maintaining the transversal nature of Rosa's procedure:

(for) a poorly done favor
the abundance of favor
the bees give honey, as a favor
done with the favors...
in favor of no one
for another favor: will you lend me...? (JGR-Notebook 21, p. 5).

The arbitrary aspect of the use of taxonomic resources in Rosa's Notebooks once again comes to the fore, revealing the insufficiency of any classificatory endeavor and, for this reason, its creative and multiple drive. The unfeasibility of any attempt to exhaust things allows those willing to engage in it to expand and broaden a certain way of inhabiting the world, from which also derive the gaps that give rise to exercises of imagination. From this perspective, the archive of the world—composed of real traces—would in no way oppose fiction, but would depend on it in order to continue pulsing. In the Notebooks preserved at IEB, Rosa persists in emitting signs of life.

JGR interest in study, in reading, and in composing lists in dictionary form seems to have been directly influenced by two other writers he read assiduously: Machado de Assis and Monteiro Lobato.

Rosa's study of dictionaries, more than a natural and instinctive attitude of a writer interested in endowing language with greater vitality, may be linked to at least two stimuli. The first, already identified by some scholars—especially after wider circulation of excerpts from the unpublished *Diário de Guerra*—is Machado de Assis [...]. The second stimulus, perhaps not yet perceived, or at least not duly noted, is Monteiro Lobato. (Camargo, 2013, p. 174; our translation)

Concerning Machado de Assis, Rosa wrote the following in the *Diário de Guerra*:

I acquired an almost absolute certainty that he [Machado de Assis], even before composing his books, would jot down: thoughts, phrases, etc., in a book or in special notebooks, a kind of satchel or saddlebag, from which he would scoop up by the handful, or pick out one by one, the reserve elements that had withstood time and remained well preserved. (JGR-EO-21, p. 83).²

Regarding Monteiro Lobato, according to Camargo (2013), the book *A barca de Gleyre* — a collection of letters sent by Lobato to the writer Godofredo Rangel between 1903 and 1943 — was among Rosa's favorites. It was also the subject of an incomplete essay found in Rosa's archive, titled *O jaboti e a tartaruga*.

A collector of everyday scraps, Rosa even gathered foreign packaging labels to paste in his Notebooks. In Notebook 6, at the center of page 22, there appears a label depicting a woman stirring a cauldron with technical information below; above, the title: *Zapallo en Almibar*. In blue ink, JGR noted beside this the translation of the first word: pumpkin. The same gesture recurs in Notebook 10, but this time the labels of other sweets are tucked loosely between the last page and the inside back cover.

It is worth noting that the Notebooks contain no subjective notes with reflections about himself, but only experiences rooted in an encyclopedic kind of knowledge, so to speak. For instance, at the end of Notebook 6, the writer drafted notes on the characters of the Trojan War and their traits; in Notebook 7, he made numerous reading notes

on the works of Plotinus, in French, Portuguese, and Greek. In Notebook 12, notes appear on European kings, aspects of the Middle Ages, and the economy during the Age of Discovery.

JGR's practical and diffuse knowledge, it seems to us, was in no way canonical, being instead composed of scattered, fragmentary movements, fully aware of their limitations. At this point, the author comes to resemble other labyrinthine writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Georges Perec, Italo Calvino, and Gonalo M. Tavares, in their shared delight in handling inexhaustible sources.

The *modus operandi* of Rosa could be deemed unprecedented, were it not for another eminent collector: Santiago Badariotti Merlo—portrayed in Joo Moreira Salles' documentary *Santiago*.

Much like JGR, the Salles family's former butler nurtured a deep fascination with the world and its often-unusual events, having gathered over his lifetime more than 30,000 typed pages on dynasties, nobilities, saints, and reigns, as well as lists on the most diverse themes. The transcriptions, covering more than six millennia of history, were organized in chronological and alphabetical order and sometimes took decades to complete. An example appears in one scene of the documentary, showing a manuscript by Santiago containing 1,056 pages, under the title: *Pequena hist3ria de la nobreza romana – apuntes tomados en Buenos Aires (1936-1945). En M3xico (1945-1951). En Norte Am3rica en 1951 a 1956. En Rio de Janeiro D.F. desde 1956 hasta hoy, Junio de 1986 y... Dios dir3 m3s adelante*.

Santiago's devotion to ancient civilizations, while at the same time to the minutiae of daily life, amounted to a means of saving himself in a world increasingly bereft of experience. Sitting beside the volumes he had drafted, Santiago claimed that there were no dead there. According to him, they all conversed with him regularly, basked in the sun, and despite their various languages, understood him. They slept at the foot of his bed and awoke at the sound of the chimes from a century-old clock hanging above the shelf. Also inclined toward taxonomic practices, Santiago made lists on the most varied subjects, collected images of *Madonnas*, clipped newspapers, and attached them to his growing piles of papers.

The connection between Joo Guimares Rosa and Santiago describes not only a kind of shared collector's impulse, but also a peculiar form of archival labor, grounded in the coexistence with the dead—or with dead things. No transcendence is at stake, it must be stressed, but rather an attachment to the signs emitted by past events. To write them down would thus be a way of preserving them from the relentless corrosion of forgetting.

Remaining attentive to the murmurs of other times implies a willingness to transpose into the ordinary the singularity afforded by a type of experience imbued with fragments of other existences — an experience capable of interrupting the vertiginous, indifferent flow of days. One must, then, coexist with the dead and their ever-present signs in

the archive, taking on, through writing, the task of “[...] making heterogeneous, often contradictory ways of thinking and feeling communicate, and inscribing them in new relations. It is learning to make them coexist. It is to this difficult exercise that the signs call us.” (Despret, 2023, p. 84; our translation)

Here lies the point of convergence between the endeavors of Rosa and Santiago Badariotti Merlo: writing as the occasion for mutual affectation between the past and the future, with the archive as the ground for its realization.

Final Considerations

In *Variations on Writing*, Roland Barthes dissected writing in its details, from historical factors to the notions attributed to it in his time. It is important to highlight here his use of the term *gesture* of writing, which Barthes (2004, p. 176; our translation) described as contradictory, as it encompasses two postulates: “[...] on the one hand, it is a strictly mercantile object, an instrument of power and segregation, bound to the raw reality of societies; and, on the other, it is a practice of pleasure, connected to the instinctual depths of the body and to the most subtle and felicitous productions of art.”

In consonance with Barthes’s second proposition, Gilles Deleuze evoked the immanent inexactitude of writing, a gesture always unfinished, through which the writer becomes distinct from what they previously were: “[...] process, that is, a passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived” (Deleuze, 2019, p. 11). Deleuze relates this to a becoming, an unforeseen force opposed to any form of dominant expressivity.

This conception of writing in relation to a certain idea of infinitude approaches Maurice Blanchot’s (2018) notion of interminable writing. In dialogue with ideas from Barthes’s *Writing Degree Zero*, Blanchot presents the gestural dimension of writing from the perspective of the neutral, according to which the writer is detached from any unity of intention: “[...] to write is first of all to want to destroy the temple before building it” (Blanchot, 2018, p. 303; our translation).

For the thinkers evoked here, writing entails an utterly singular, unparalleled experience. On this point, Foucault (2010, p. 289; our translation), in an interview first published in 1980, stated: “An experience is something from which one emerges transformed.” A crucial aspect of his intellectual endeavor, this subjective transformation derived from the movement of displacement — averse to any totalizing purpose — that permeated his writing. Experience here presupposes a certain absence of self, in keeping with a desubjectivizing process culminating in the indistinction between fiction and truth. Moreover, this view of writing entails a categorical refusal of demonstration or teaching, considered antithetical to an inventive stance toward the labor of writing — a labor that operates as a propulsion toward more writing, toward other writings.

To conceive writing as experience thus implies treating it as a task through which one might untangle oneself from a continuous present, without any intent to restore it in this or that way. Hence the power of fiction as an intrinsic partner of truth, not as its adversary.

In this vein, engaging with Rosa's Notebooks requires relinquishing any presumed genius attributable to the writer. It is in this sense that we took for granted the fact that JGR, through his Notebooks, managed to assemble a vast and ingenious map-labyrinth. There, one can witness an unceasing endeavor driven by the will to write: a continuous labyrinth, entangled in words generating other words, indefinitely.

From the collection of stamps to the gathering of articles in different languages about cats, annotations on locomotives, and newspaper clippings on animals and botany, what stands out is the vertigo of a labor both feverish and perpetually unfinished. In this mode of writing we may discern a play of assembling and disassembling ideas — one that could perfectly well inhabit the pedagogical encounter, wherever it may exist.

A commitment to a perspective of writing invested more in what is yet to be done than in what is already completed would, we suppose, constitute a challenge to the pragmatist and inertial emphasis that seems to characterize much of the debate around Brazilian school writing practices, with the exception of those authors discussed at the beginning of this article for whom school writing could become a transfiguring experience of educational spaces, henceforth marked by contours as expansive as they are indeterminate. Thus, in place of demonstration, the arrangement of ideas in motion; in place of gloss, the dismantling of materials always in the process of remaking; in place of certification, the astonishment of things never before seen in this way.

Without confusing such an ethical-aesthetic horizon with *stricto sensu* literary precepts, the aim is to urge school protagonists — including teachers — to become committed writers, accompanied only, perhaps, by their study notebooks and, if possible, by some hospitality toward formless cognitive states not yet destined for any fixed end.

After all, what could be more scholastic than a notebook? What could be more prosaic than the task of writing without ceasing? And, at the same time, what could be more sublime than this writing torn from the world, from our common world, the only writing capable of offering a provisional shelter to forces that ask for nothing but companionship? This, indeed, is what JGR's lessons have invited us to imagine.

The handwritten pages of JGR's Notebooks attest to the diverse ways of performing the powers of life. Born of a curiosity resistant to any reiteration or invariance, the Notebooks leave us with an inescapable summons: that, in the pedagogical sphere, we have the courage to place ourselves before the abyssal archive of the world, ready to contemplate the minute magnitude of the things that, without fanfare, lie in wait for us, thereby giving way to a poetics of the hours that traverses us, rends us, and, finally, enables us to begin again — more attentive and stronger.

Writing as passage to other texts, to other lives. Lives certain of an end, yet searching for something not quite known.

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Notes

¹ Available from: http://200.144.255.59/catalogo_eletronico/consultaUnidadesLogicas.asp?Tipo_Unidade_Logica_Codigo=1&Setor_Codigo=1&Acervo_Codigo=1&Numero_Documentos=.

² *JGR-EO-21* refers to the code of the document in the Rosian collection of the Institute of Brazilian Studies at USP.

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