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A dual-perspective analysis of the literary object in *Necrológio*, by Victor Giudice /

Um recorte em dupla perspectiva do objeto literário em Necrológio, de Victor Giudice

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ABSTRACT
The study seeks to analyze the proposition the aesthetic proposition used by Victor Giudice in the composition of Necrológio (1972), his first book of short stories, in which he also worked as the cover designer. The most evident disruptive issues of the publication will be observed from a dual perspective: The first addresses the editorial standards the author subverts when he illustrates the book's cover and inserts the beginning of the first text within it; The second focuses on the interaction between different art forms in the construction of the book's aesthetic object, since the intersection between text and image creates a new meaning for the cover of Necrológio. Using a qualitative approach, this work will be based on Genette's (2009) studies on paratexts and the publishing market, Veneroso's (2002) studies on interart relations, especially when focused on the links between image and text, and it will also discuss the artistic question as an interrelation between producer and contemplator, based on the studies of Voloshinov and Bakhtin (1976). Regarding Giudice's work specifically, the considerations are based primarily on the works of Melo (2011), Coelho (2013), and Veloso (2018). Preliminary results demonstrate that the inter-art relationship proposed by Giudice, in conceiving the union of narrative and image, does indeed foster a re-signification of the book as an aesthetic object.
KEYWORDS: Victor Giudice; Cover; Necrológio; Experimentalism; Interart.

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RESUMO
O trabalho busca analisar a proposição estética utilizada por Victor Giudice na composição de Necrológio (1972), seu primeiro livro de contos, em que atuou também como capista. São observadas as questões disruptivas mais evidentes da publicação em duas perspectivas: a primeira voltada às padronizações editoriais subvertidas por ele quando ilustra a capa da obra e nela insere o início do primeiro conto; a segunda voltada à interação entre as diferentes formas de arte na construção do objeto estético do livro, uma vez que a intersecção entre texto e imagem cria uma nova significação à capa de Necrológio. Em abordagem qualitativa, o trabalho utiliza como base os estudos de Genette (2009) acerca dos paratextos e do mercado editorial, os estudos de Veneroso (2002) acerca das relações interartes, principalmente quando voltados aos elos entre imagem e texto, e discute, além disso, a questão artística enquanto interrelação entre produtor e contemplador, ancorada nos estudos de Voloshinov e Bakhtin (1976). Acerca da obra de Giudice, em específico, as considerações são baseadas sobretudo nos trabalhos de Melo (2011), Coelho (2013) e Veloso (2018). Os resultados prévios evidenciam que a relação interartes proposta por Giudice ao conceber a junção entre a narrativa e a imagem, de fato, promovem uma ressignificação do livro enquanto objeto estético.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Victor Giudice; Capa; Necrológio; Experimentalismo; Interartes.

1 Introduction

Victor Giudice was a writer from Rio de Janeiro whose work encompassed multiple fields during the second half of the twentieth century. A music critic, literary critic, musician, composer, editor, teacher, visual artist, and writer, he also worked as a bank clerk for many years. By the time he published *Necrológio* (1972), his first book, he was already an active intellectual and a well-known figure in the press in many parts of Brazil.

Although Giudice subsequently published three more collections of short stories and two novels, *Necrológio* remains his most widely recognized work. The book includes the short story “O arquivo”, in which the diminutive protagonist, joão, ends up turning into a metal filing cabinet. The story has appeared in numerous anthologies, both in Brazil and abroad (Giudice, 1989). Because of the experimental nature of some of his short stories, Giudice was regarded as an avant-garde writer. His work employs unconventional devices, such as the juxtaposition of words for sonic effect, which generates narrative rhythms that depart from traditional patterns. He even draws on sonata structures in the composition of his stories (Name, 1994). When his narratives do not follow this experimental approach, they are characterized by fluid, concise language that focuses exclusively on the elements essential to the development of the plot.

Necrológio, however, presents another distinctive feature. Published by *Edições O Cruzeiro*, the book has a cover designed by the writer himself. What initially drew readers’ attention was not simply that Giudice, also a visual artist, had designed the cover, but the inclusion of the opening sentences of “O arquivo” in the lower third of the cover. The text continues on page one and concludes on page four.

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Equally significant is the close relationship between image and text, evident not only in their immediate visual impact but also in the overall composition of the book as an integrated object.

This article aims to analyze Giudice's work as a book-cover designer in this publication, examining its most evident disruptive features from two complementary perspectives. The first concerns the editorial conventions that the book subverts; the second addresses the interaction between different art forms in the construction of the book as an aesthetic object, an interaction that acquires new meanings in *Necrológio*. Given the broad scope of graphic and editorial studies, as well as interarts studies, the discussion is necessarily a limited exploration of the possibilities these fields offer. Adopting a qualitative approach, the study draws on Genette's (2009) work on paratexts and the publishing market, and on Veneroso's (2002) studies of interart relations, particularly the connections between image and text. It also considers the artistic as an interaction between producer and beholder, following Voloshinov and Bakhtin (1976). Because the essay focuses on Giudice's unconventional approach within editorial and interart contexts, specific observations on his work are introduced where necessary, based on studies by Melo (2011), Coelho (2013), and Veloso (2018), among others. Finally, the article is structured as a continuous text, without subsections, in order to foster greater integration among the perspectives presented while preserving a degree of fluidity in the argument.

2 Editorial standards and the interart relationship in *Necrológio*: a glimpse

One of the arguments put forward by Voloshinov and Bakhtin in their essay "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art" is that "the artistic is a form of interrelationship between creator and contemplator fixed in a work of art" (1976, p. 5, our translation). Analyzing a work within this framework entails recognizing that artistic communication takes place in a distinctive and even peculiar manner. The authors also emphasize that "anything in the material of a work of art that cannot participate in the communication between creator and contemplator, that cannot become the 'medium' of their communication, cannot likewise be the bearer of artistic value" (Voloshinov and Bakhtin, 1976, p. 5).

From this perspective, a work of art takes shape through the combination of the abstract or physical properties of meaning embedded in it, whether or not these properties are immediately apparent in the interaction between the work and its beholder. In literature, then, a work of art comprises not only the narrative itself but also the entire construct that surrounds it in the material form through which it is made available. This includes the physical book as an object designed to support the narrative and to be

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handled by the reader during the act of reading. The editorial process thus becomes essential, since the literary text

> [...] rarely appears in a naked state, without the reinforcement and accompaniment of a certain number of verbal or nonverbal productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, and illustrations, which we cannot always determine whether or not to consider part of the text, but which, in any case, surround it and extend it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of the verb, but also in its stronger sense: to make it present, to ensure its presence in the world, its 'reception' and its consumption, in the form, at least today, of a book (GENETTE, 2009, p. 9. Our translation).

The features inherent in the production of a book, along with its editorial paratexts (Genette, 2009), whether required by legal and bureaucratic procedures or created specifically for each work, are part of the conception of an aesthetic object that circulates as a bearer of artistic value. These elements converge with their driving force, the literary text, in ways that are sometimes obvious and sometimes more elusive.

Nevertheless, some standardization practices must also be considered, as they arise from economic constraints or from the prior alignment of aesthetic values. Within a market-driven context of widespread circulation, the very production line to which a book belongs determines, through various means, the possibilities and limitations of its material form.

For some period in the history of literature, the format chosen for printing a book predetermined, to some extent, its artistic value as a work. Within the material context of folded-sheet formats, larger books, particularly those in quarto format, were regarded as suitable primarily for works considered more serious, especially religious and philosophical texts, and subsequently for editions intended to celebrate or confer prestige upon literary works (Genette, 2009). Although exceptions existed, the preliminary assessments and judgments of those involved in the editorial process, whether writers or publishers, played a fundamental role in classifying works within particular categories and assigning them value at the stages of editing and printing. In a sense, this process can be understood as a form of invisible criticism: there was no need to analyze, articulate, or explicitly demonstrate the reasons why a work possessed merit or lacked it in order to shape its critical reception. Choosing the book's format alone was enough.

> In the early nineteenth century, when large volumes had become less common, distinctions in status were drawn between octavo editions, intended for serious literature, and duodecimo editions and smaller formats, which were used for inexpensive editions aimed at popular readers.

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> Stendhal, for instance, is known to have spoken contemptuously of 'small duodecimo novels for chambermaids.' Serious works, however, could already be reissued in a 'small format' in response to their success, making them more suitable for casual reading and wider circulation (GENETTE, 2009, p. 23. Our translation).

Over time, perspectives on the format and size of books gradually changed, eventually leading to a complete reversal of preferences, with first editions favoring smaller, low-cost, pocket-sized formats (Genette, 2009). Broadly speaking, the book continues to be regarded, in Voloshinov and Bakhtin's words, as a "bearer of artistic value" (1976, p. 5). Nevertheless, it remains subject to a process of standardization that, even when it does not divert it from its artistic purpose, constrains or, in a sense, discourages experimentation, sometimes relegating proposals that fall outside prevailing conventions to isolation.

Returning to Voloshinov and Bakhtin's (1976) argument, an initial question arises as to whether the format, size, and printing of a work of art can determine a particular value judgment, even as these elements play a significant role in shaping the interrelationship between creator and contemplator. This hypothesis does not appear to hold, as is also suggested by Genette's (2009) historical analysis of the changing practices and conventions surrounding book printing and distribution. Furthermore, Voloshinov and Bakhtin themselves emphasize that the essence of art cannot be derived from prior definitions shaped by the influence of other factors (Voloshinov and Bakhtin, 1976).

Reception theory, which appears to have been prompted, in part, by the reflections of Voloshinov and Bakhtin (1976), introduced a new perspective on the act of reading and, in a sense, seems to support the rejection of this hypothesis. By placing the reader at the center of analysis and proposing a reassessment of literary history (Jauss, 1994), it advanced new theoretical conceptions of issues that had previously received little or no attention. The theorists of the Constance School, however, did not address the materiality of the physical book as an object.

In any case, the critical reassessment of literature allows certain works to acquire deeper or entirely new meanings long after their first editions, when they are no longer bound by pre-established classifications concerning value judgments or the supposedly "defining" size of publications.

Nevertheless, the issue of editorial standardization remains unresolved. Even if a book's physical form does not guarantee the literary quality of a work; even if the critical reassessment of literature serves to reposition and reconsider the place of individual works within historical and even canonical contexts, or at least suggests new perspectives; and even if the written text is accorded greater importance than

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the physical object, literature remains part of a market governed by standardized industrial processes and must be profitable in order to sustain itself.

> The dimensions of contemporary editions have become standardized around the medium-sized formats of the nineteenth century, with variations depending on publishers or series that have virtually no intrinsic significance anymore. The only remaining distinction is a practice that has prevailed for the past two or three decades: publishing presumed bestsellers in a relatively larger format (approximately 16 × 24 cm). These are the famous 'entertainment books,' which, as has been said countless times, must be large enough for their covers to have the impact of a poster when displayed in a shop window, and heavy enough to keep a bath towel on the floor without its being blown away by the wind (GENETTE, 2009, p. 23, our translation).

This perspective has persisted to some extent, since the prior evaluation and conceptual framing of literary works remain in place. In this context, standardization continues to be commonplace in the processes of book editing and marketing, arising both from literary assessments and from expectations regarding commercial potential. Editorial and publishing practices have endured through various means and have, to some extent, adapted to society, culture, and the diverse groups that consume literature. Even when a specific audience and a particular type of literature are the focus, the creative process cannot be dissociated from the editorial process, since the latter is what enables the former to become an artistic object that can circulate and reach a public audience through publication and reception, respectively. This process, however, raises numerous caveats, including those found in Voloshinov and Bakhtin's discussions of the sociological method and its applications to literature:

> Nothing is more dangerous than conceiving of this subtle social structure of verbal creativity as analogous to the conscious, theatrical calculations of the bourgeois publisher who 'calculates the expectations of the book market,' and applying categories such as 'supply and demand' to the characterization of the immanent structure of a work. Yet far too many 'sociologists' are inclined to identify the writer's creative work for society with the vocation of the publisher as entrepreneur (VOLOSHINOV AND BAKHTIN, 1976, p. 23, our translation).

Concerns about standardization and dependence on market demand reinforce the need to reassess literary history from different perspectives, not necessarily those associated with reception theory, discussed earlier, but also from any other standpoint within literary criticism. Bakhtin also

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acknowledges, in a different context, that the writer's work involves proposing a literature directed toward a particular group of people, which in turn gives rise to a form of standardization:

> Each period, each literary movement and artistic-literary style, and each literary genre within a given epoch and movement, is characterized by its own specific conception of the addressee of the literary work, as well as by a particular sensibility and understanding of its reader, listener, audience, or people (BAKHTIN, 2011, p. 305. Our translation).

It is therefore unsurprising that, when a specific target audience is envisioned for a work, certain standards are established to satisfy it (the society). Cover design, accordingly, is conditioned by conventions intended to appeal to that audience and by an aesthetic and market-driven context that directly influences the interaction with the reader. In Giudice's case, one might hypothesize an audience of readers familiar with the short-story genre: inquisitive, experienced, and reflective. The playful element of the cover of *Necrológio*, however, also makes the book appealing to the general reader and broadens its reach considerably. This hypothesis must be reconciled with the author's evident independence from market expectations, discussed below: his cover addresses a reader he imagines rather than one the market prescribes.

Here, one may identify a paradox. Although the book cover is a common mean of interaction between literary texts and the visual arts, as well as a point of "first impression" between literature and the reader, and despite the familiar saying that one should not judge a book by its cover, covers are also subject to preconceptions and conventions, including market-driven ones, that shape the publishing process (Genette, 2009). Literary works that depart from market standards gain relevance precisely by breaking with established conventions and suggesting new perspectives, thereby revisiting and reshaping previously accepted conceptions.

This departure from convention, when it comes to the image on the cover, can be observed in Victor Giudice's *Necrológio*. As mentioned, this was his first short-story collection, and its cover was designed by the writer himself. "O arquivo" begins on the cover and ends on page four; only after the narrative concludes do the remaining editorial and administrative elements conventionally associated with a literary book appear, in the standard order. For a more detailed analysis, it is necessary to examine the cover itself.

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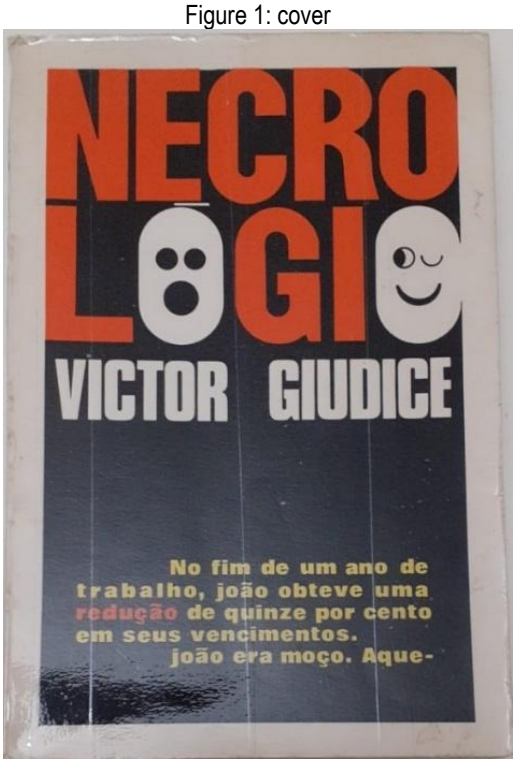
Figure 1: cover



Source: Writer's memorial website. Available at: http//victorgiudice.com/necrologio.html

The subversion of convention becomes noticeable upon the reader's first encounter with the book. The cover may provoke a sense of estrangement, as it incorporates attributes that are unusual in literary book design. Giudice seems to suggest his agreement with Voloshinov and Bakhtin (1976, p. 23), who argue that, under "the conditions of the bourgeois economy, the book market naturally 'regulates' writers, but this should in no way be identified with the regulatory work of the listener as a constant structural element in artistic creativity." The author and cover designer appears unwilling to be guided by market forces or to accept editorial conventions that might constrain his aesthetic proposition.

Drawing on Genette's (2009) studies, one can observe that the printed book cover, in its modern form, dates back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. In general, the material medium through which literature has been disseminated has changed over time in accordance with the materials and technologies available in each period. Literary transmission evolved from oral tradition to papyrus and subsequently to parchment. With the advent of the printing press, the first printed books emerged and gradually became commonplace, eventually giving rise to the book as we know it today, which now coexists with digital publications. Literature, once transmitted orally, came to be written down and copied, then produced by hand or typewriter and printed, and, more recently, typed and disseminated in either

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print or digital formats. Both the means of intellectual production and the physical production of the literary object have undergone changes over time.

With regard specifically to the book cover, it is important to note that "in the classical era, books were presented in plain leather bindings; apart from a brief indication of the title and, sometimes, the author's name, these appeared on the book spine" (Genette, 2009, p. 27). Only more recently have the possibilities of design, printing, dissemination, and reception expanded, and the cover is the element that gained the most freedom: as Genette (2009, p. 37) observes, "Once the possibilities of the cover had been discovered, it seems that they were explored very quickly." Although illustrations may also appear within narratives, the cover acquires a heightened significance because it stands out at the reader's first encounter with the work and can influence the initial reception of the book through purely aesthetic means. It thus becomes a key instrument in making the book viable, including in economic terms, while fulfilling an aesthetic function distinct from that of the text.

The possible approaches to cover design are therefore numerous. A cover can convey different ideas, interpretations, and propositions concerning the text. Mutually, a cover may establish no interaction with the text at all, presenting, for instance, an abstract composition that retains only the apparently obligatory elements: the author's name, the title, and the publisher's imprint (Genette, 2009).

Turning to the second perspective, the interaction between art forms, Giudice cannot be said to have pioneered the integration of text and image, since the practice was already common in other contexts. As early as the seventeenth century, the haiku of Matsuo Bashō established an interaction between painting and poetry, allowing the two art forms to complement one another and consistently suggesting an interconnected reading of both (Franchetti; Doi, 1991). Chinese art of the eighth to the eleventh centuries was grounded in the concept of the Three Perfections, which brought together calligraphy, painting, and poetry; the most accomplished artists were those who moved harmoniously among the three (Longui, 2002). Moreover, the historical context in which Giudice worked was marked by cultural ferment and experimentation, with the widespread circulation of visual poetry and concrete poetry. There is even evidence of a Concrete Poetry legacy in the composition of the cover of *Necrológio* (Melo, 2011).

Veneroso (2002) examined the interaction between the visual arts and the written word throughout the twentieth century, investigating artists who deconstructed, in various ways, the notion that artistic creation must be exclusively visual or written, giving rise to scriptural intertexts situated at the boundaries between art forms. Although she focuses primarily on poetry, her observations can be

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extended to Giudice's work as both writer and cover designer. Here, the letter itself is explored visually within the space of the cover, which is more commonly occupied by an image, a figure, a painting, or a drawing. Following Veneroso's perspective, Giudice's cover can be seen as promoting a "dissolution of the precise boundaries between artistic languages" (Veneroso, 2002, p. 87), though in a highly distinctive manner.

In most of the works Veneroso analyzes, the composition unfolds within a single, unified medium in which text, words, and poetry establish an aesthetic perspective. The result may be a poem that explores the page, a painting, a collage, or another form. Some of Bashō's haiku, for example, are incorporated into painted screens from which they could theoretically be separated, although this is generally not the case, since the reading of the poem is completed through the image. Word and image together constitute a single work. Apollinaire's calligrams, discussed by Veneroso (2002), likewise operate within a single medium, the pages of a book, as do many poetic works in which words and images interact. This is not a universal rule, but a relatively common feature of works of this nature:

> At the same time that visual artists emphasize the visual qualities and materiality of writing in their works, poets have also moved toward an awareness of the page as a constituent element of the poem, exploring the visual qualities and materiality of writing. In the twentieth century, words were reintegrated into visual artistic discourse, as they emerged within the pictorial space, while poets simultaneously acknowledged the visual qualities of linguistic signs and the space of the page (VENEROSO, 2002, p. 81, our translation).

Giudice's case is somewhat different. He clearly demonstrates an awareness of the page as an object for visual exploration through the materiality of writing. Words are integrated into visual artistic discourse: the author employs standardized elements of book covers, such as the title and the author's name (Genette, 2009), to create an image-based composition that also engages with the ending of the opening story through the arrangement of image and typography. However, Giudice does not "respect" the page in the same way as some of the poets Veneroso discusses, since he continues the text, whose opening sentences appear in the lower third of the cover, in the traditional manner.

It is true that the "subordination between image and text has been broken, with neither maintaining a hierarchy over the other" (Veneroso, 2002, p. 86). Giudice, by his turn, explores this relationship in a distinctive way: he gives visual significance only to the opening sentences of the story, while the analysis of the "complete" image of the cover extends throughout the narrative. The image

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alludes to the ending of the opening story and, broadly, to the endings of the other stories in the collection, since death is their common thread.

Form cannot be detached from content, and the protagonist's very name shows that, for Giudice, every detail matters. The spelling of joão with a lowercase initial suggests his "equally diminutive personality" (Scoville, 2004, p. 24) and opens up a new field of meaning, since these questions would not arise if the name were spelled conventionally, with an uppercase initial. On the cover, moreover, the lowercase initial is highly unlikely to go unnoticed. Voloshinov and Bakhtin (1976) observe that when a fundamental assumption is accepted in advance by society, a dogmatic belief also emerges, and that the "breaking" of this dogma occurs when it is separated from its referent, creating a need for verbalization and justification. With due consideration for the differences involved, this notion can be related to orthographic rules: spelling joão without an uppercase initial is a dogmatic "break" that subverts the rule and compels the reader, at the very least, to reflect on the choice and, in effect, to justify it. The lowercase initial can thus be considered a minimal thematic unit, in Tomachevski's (1976) terms, essential to the construction of the character, to the aesthetic construction of the narrative, and to the design of the cover. It also characterizes the protagonist in advance and conditions certain critical interpretations, much as the publishing conventions on physical dimensions discussed earlier condition the reception of a book. Here, same way, there is a prior conception and an interpretive "conditioning."

Giudice leaves little superfluous material in his narratives; he pares them down to the essentials, writing his stories with little beyond what is strictly necessary. He also produced brief literary forms such as flash fiction, demonstrating a meticulous attention to concision that is already evident in the short sentences on the cover. In "O arquivo," form, physical object, and narrative converge: the title announces death, the stacked blocks of the cover evoke the filing cabinet that joão becomes, and the opening of the story is printed on the cover itself. This interrelationship is present not only in the opening of the story incorporated into the cover, but also in its ending, which is worth examining:

> joão moved away. The withered lip stretched out. The skin stiffened and became smooth. His stature regressed. His head merged with his body. His features became dehumanized, flat, compact. On the sides, there were two edges. He turned gray. joão transformed into a metal filing cabinet (GIUDICE, 1972, p. 4. Our translation).

The cover's arrangement in blocks can be described in two ways. Structurally, the title is divided into two blocks of five letters each, forming the word *Necrológio*, and the author's name appears in a

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single block, slightly smaller yet equally prominent, at the center of the image, making three blocks in all. Adding a blank block of approximately the same size and, at the bottom, the opening of the short story brings the total to five. This structure supports the two most common interpretations of the cover. The first identifies the image as a representation of the drawers of a metal filing cabinet, a reading that connects directly to the transformation of the protagonist. The second sees funerary drawers, which connects to the title and to the theme of death. These readings are discussed primarily in the studies by Veloso (2018) and Melo (2011), among others. Both converge on the death of the protagonist, which the cover image and the title of the work foreshadow.

These elements, considered alongside the cover, show that the intertextual dialogue occurs in a distinctive manner. Giudice brings text and image together but subverts their fusion within a single platform by incorporating a short story that, although relatively brief, extends beyond the visual space of the cover. The narrative continues in a conventional manner, yet remains connected to the image, particularly through its ending. Coelho (2013, p. 927) adds a further reading, arguing that the cover's composition "employs a technique that clearly evokes cinema: the anticipation of the film before the opening credits." The title of the book, too, anticipates the content of the narrative: *necrológio* denotes an obituary, generally an appreciative account of someone who has recently died, so readers who see the word in large letters across the first two blocks of the cover are likely to expect stories about a recently deceased character.

In sum, the cover of *Necrológio* subverts editorial conventions in two ways. First, it refuses the standardized, market-oriented design of the literary book by placing the opening of a story where a title page or an image would be expected. Second, it merges visual arts and literary text in a way that neither dissolves the page, as in visual and concrete poetry, nor separates the two arts, but ties the image of the cover to the ending of the story that begins on it. This disruptive process shows a concern that extends beyond the "traditional" work of a writer who, according to the prevailing stereotype, would be concerned solely with the text. In *Necrológio*, Giudice undertakes an aesthetic reconsideration of the book as an object, placing a literary idea willing to insert itself in the area of experimental practices in different ways.

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Conclusions

The reflections developed in this study focused more on Giudice's disruptive conception of editorial contexts and interrelationships among different art forms than on the analysis of the narratives in *Necrológio* or of the short story "O arquivo" specifically. From the perspectives examined here, Giudice's literature promotes a reconfiguration of the book as an aesthetic object. This dual analytical approach, which subverts editorial conventions and reconsiders interart relations, made it possible to observe how the author's practice engages with several issues of significance to contemporary times and how, to a certain extent, it manages to transcend historically established conventions. In doing so, it reflects, both directly and indirectly, on the role of the artist; the place (or places) of art; the specific characteristics of the artistic object as a form of configuration; the influence of the highly competitive capitalist market and its underlying assumptions; conscious or dogmatic forms of standardization; and the very practice of artistic and literary creation.

More broadly, although understanding how art is conceptualized, standardized, and disseminated across its diverse forms and interrelationships constitutes an exceedingly complex undertaking, such an endeavor is both important and fundamental to literary studies and art studies in general. In this context, Giudice's work offers numerous opportunities for further reflection beyond those presented here.

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