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ISSN: 1523-1720
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TABLE OF CONTENTS - ÍNDICE

ESSAYS / ENSAYOS

INTERVIEW / ENTREVISTA

REVIEWS / RESEÑAS

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

Untitled 2 / Sin título 2

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

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OCEAN MATTERS: IMAGE AND ARTIFACT IN ADALBER SALAS HERNÁNDEZ'S *NUEVAS CARTAS NÁUTICAS* (2022)

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Columbia University

Resumen: *Nuevas cartas náu*ticas by the Venezuelan poet Adalber Salas Hernández (Pretextos, 2022) is a collection of prose poems related to the ocean. The author approaches this often-written-about topic experimentally, by blending fact and fiction, original and modified citations, languages, and registers. In this article, I focus on what I identify as an archaeological impulse that runs through *Nuevas cartas náuticas*. First, I analyze a selection of poems in which Salas draws the reader's attention to material artifacts, often displayed in specific sites of collection and exhibition. I then show how, parallel to these instances of display, Salas connects his museum objects to the marine oral traditions that also populate the book, and I contrast his treatment of antique documents and relics with his approach toward photographic images. Throughout, I argue that the presence of material objects throughout the book allows us to inscribe *Nuevas cartas náuticas* within the "blue humanities": an interdisciplinary field of inquiry into the cultural, social, and political dimensions of human interactions with the ocean.

Key Words:: Oceanic turn, archaeology, materiality, blue humanities, Venezuelan poetry

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

Nuevas cartas náuticas is a book of poetry by Venezuelan poet, translator, and scholar Adalber Salas Hernández, published in 2022 by Pre-Textos. As its title reveals, the book is a collection of prose poems related to the sea. This is perhaps one of the most written-about themes in history, yet *Nuevas cartas náuticas* approaches it experimentally, through an amalgamation of registers and languages. Salas appropriates and subtly (and at times boldly) modifies the words of Defoe, Coleridge, Ovid, Pliny the Elder, among other authors who, over millennia, have recorded the enchantment, fear, and perplexity that the ocean evokes. Salas's bibliographic flights co-exist with an oral dimension: he retells indigenous and classical myths about the ocean and recounts the superstitions of fishermen and sailors. And as he reaches outside of his own insight to borrow from the voices of others, he plays with the reader, tweaking, purposefully mistranslating, and sometimes outright inventing the texts that he attributes to certain authors or provenances. "Algunas supersticiones y creencias de los marineros fenicios," for instance, are completely fabricated despite being attributed to Pliny the Elder. The result is a book that straddles fact and fiction, as unpredictable as its subject matter.

In this essay, I address a third register in *Nuevas cartas náuticas* that is present in poems that describe particular objects, where the author draws the readers' attention to relics and artifacts, often displayed in specific sites of collection and exhibition. I will analyze how the distinction between poetic and archaeological discourses becomes blurry in these poems, as Salas abandons his bibliographic-citational experiments and focuses on minute descriptions of the materiality of his objects of choice: votives, reliefs, and documents. With Argentine critic Florencia Garramuño, I will argue that the "exhibition" of objects in the poems manifests a disciplinary porousness that expands literature to an "outside of itself," as it takes on discourses that exceed its own field (45). I will also show how Salas's engagement with submarine photographic imagery connects historical oceanic artifacts with contemporary technologies of vision.

Finally, I will read *Nuevas cartas náuticas* within the wider field of the "blue humanities." The abundance of citations and references throughout the text clearly evinces Salas's awareness of a global oceanic literary corpus in which he firmly inserts this work —seafaring narratives, maritime poetry, etc.—, but his historiographic and archaeological curiosity also situate this book within the corpus of oceanic critical studies in the humanities known as blue humanities. This turn toward the ocean has been linked to the emergence of diaspora and globalization studies in the 1970s, and to a subsequent shift to ways of thinking about capital and space as decoupled from the framework of nation-states. I will argue that *Nuevas cartas náuticas* follows this unbounded logic as it navigates from Greece to the shores of Venezuela, but that its archival impulse makes it depart from what has been described as the "liquid turn" (Blackmore and Gómez 4). I will then seek to answer how this differentiation intervenes in the blue humanities more broadly.

The first encounter with ancient artifacts in *Nuevas cartas náuticas* comes early, in poem XI, which situates readers in the Acropolis Museum in Athens. Salas describes a relief kept there that depicts a ship, the Πάραλος, Paralus:

> Uno de los fragmentos muestra las siluetas frágiles de los remeros, idénticos, en plena actividad. Otro fragmento, en la esquina superior derecha,
> contiene el rostro de Páralos, hijo de Poseidón, inventor de la marinería (25).

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

Straightforwardly describing the remaining fragments of the relief, this poem stands in for a photograph of the relief, or for the relief itself. Salas also provides key information about the object that we might encounter next to the piece in a museum context: "trirreme encargado de llevar ofrendas a templos, de transportar embajadores, de encabezar flotas" (25).

In poem XL, the author offers a similarly superficial —in the most literal sense, referring to surface— description of a relief inside a temple in the Medinet Habu archaeological site, near the Egyptian Theban hills:

> En él se halla representada una batalla marítima entre las fuerzas del faraón y los llamados Pueblos del Mar.
> Los egipcios portan escudos rectangulares; los invasores, redondos.
> Los egipcios se valen de arcos y flechas; los invasores, de lanzas.
> De arriba abajo, podemos ver la silueta elemental de los personajes contorsionarse en decenas de posturas. Algunas atravesadas por el metal escueto de las armas, otras amontonadas sobre cubierta. Cardúmenes apiñados, espinosos (72).

Though the use of an image like "cardúmenes apiñados" to emphasize the convoluted character of the battle scene and the clutter of bodies is much more ekphrastic than most museum texts would allow, the use of "podemos ver" situates Salas and the readers (us) in the exhibition space, with the poet serving as the guide and interpreter.

Poem LXIII revisits Egyptian archaeological objects, this time more ambiguously:

> Los egipcios del Imperio Medio dejaron numerosas naves a escala, pequeñas representaciones hechas de papiro o madera de las barcas que habrían de llevarlos al inframundo. Allí serían juzgados por sus virtudes, por su pericia como navegantes y por su destreza para flotar sobre las aguas como plumas.
> Eran pintadas con colores escuetos pero brillantes, como si quisieran recordarles a los muertos cómo se veía la vida. Las facciones de su tripulación, sin embargo, no son discernibles (113).

Here, again, Salas provides a description of the material aspects —papyrus and wood, painted in plain but bright colors— and the uses —as funerary implements— of the miniature boats, all information we might obtain by observing the artifact —an experience that could only take place in the context of the museum. However, in this poem Salas does not situate the reader in a particular institution, seemingly speaking about a broader class of objects. Yet, by alluding to the specific facial traits of the crew aboard a boat, which he describes as "no discernibles," worn out by the passage of time, the author directs our attention to a specific artifact, once again grounding us inside of an exhibition space, now indeterminate.

Poem LX finds Salas —who has translated other contemporary Caribbean poets from English, French, and Kreyol— sailing across the Atlantic from Greece for a visit to the National Museum and Art Gallery of Port of Spain, Trinidad. It begins with the display of a small plexiglass box, within which there is "un objeto rectangular, más bien negruzco, aparentemente compuesto de varias capas" (96). This mysterious object is revealed to be

> un libro recuperado de entre los restos de las naves españolas destinadas a la isla en 1797, ancladas en la bahía de Chaguaramas, quemadas por orden del contralmirante.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

> Apodaca para evitar su captura por las fuerzas inglesas.
>
> Un libro ahogado, como el que Próspero arroja al final de The Tempest, mientras exclama: I'll drown my book (96).

In this poem, the author dwells less upon the physical conditions of the item in question than in the previous poems I have parsed so far. Instead, he turns his attention to the object's historical context. The "blackened thing" in the box is a book, but its content is both inaccessible and irrelevant: it is the story of its ruination that matters to us. Similar to the Egyptian battle scene in poem XL, Salas's encounter with the drowned and charred book enables him to address a topic much larger than the book itself: the Caribbean Sea as the stage of political and economic power struggles. Finally, the inclusion of a line from *The Tempest* entangles *Nuevas cartas náuticas*' museographic and bibliographic citational threads.

In "De la memoria a la presencia," contained in her book of essays *Mundos en común*, Argentine critic Florencia Garramuño reflects on recent literary works that prominently feature archives and collections. She wonders, for instance, about the relationship between the material presence of the archival object and the practice of memorialization in works like Martín Kohan's *Museo de la revolución*. In her essay, Garramuño takes stock of the abundance of artistic products that increasingly mobilize archives since the turn of the century —the beginning of a trend in the humanities and social sciences referred to as the "archival turn." This turn has not only led to deeper "dives" into archives, but it has ignited an ongoing discussion about archives as subjects of analysis rather than only as source, allowing scholars to address the complex politics of archival work.

While there exists an abundance of cultural products that indeed mobilize archives to reconstruct repressed pasts, Florencia Garramuño is particularly interested in works of literature that choose to exhibit the pure presence of remains:

> [Estas obras] insisten en hacer presente, en exhibir, en mostrar la materialidad de esos restos, la obstinada conservación e insistencia conducen al surgimiento de otras historias, de otras realidades construidas con esos fragmentos del pasado e impulsadas por estos, pero que abandonan el pasado en favor de la presencia, la supervivencia de esos restos y el modo en que sus efectos perduran en el presente. (65)

The expository impulse that animates *Nuevas cartas náuticas* inscribes the book within such a framework of archival presence: the archaeological remains between its pages are objects displayed in each poem as if behind a glass, touched only by the poet's descriptive voice. Even the invocation of Prospero in poem LX ends the incantation of the past: as Prospero breaks his staff and discards his magic book, the spell upon the island comes to an end and so does the narrative. A temporal shift, a return to the present, necessarily follows.

Ocean Intimacy and Oceanic Objects

As I indicated, the variety of archaeological objects that I have identified so far in *Nuevas cartas náuticas* are not found in the ocean; the author encounters them in spaces designated for their display as historical artifacts. In these texts, the ocean is not quite a representational referent, as it is separated from the author —and from the reader— by multiple instances of mediation. While it is obvious that the poem can only represent, I have sought to emphasize the double distance in these poems: it is the interpretation of the object that leads to a realization of the sea's presence.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

Recent contributions to blue humanities scholarship would seem to favor a quite different approach to representing the ocean, even expressing the desire to think with rather than about water. A noteworthy example is *Liquid Ecologies in Latin American and Caribbean Art*, where editors Lisa Blackmore and Liliana Gómez compile essays that address literary, visual, performance, and filmic works that elaborate notions of liquidity and fluidity as "aesthetic signifiers, metaphors, and/or aesthetic theories" (4). The artistic practices that the book inscribes within the "liquid turn" in the blue humanities center non-linearity, relationality, and even the use of liquids as media; for instance, essays by Esther Moñivas, Adriana Michéle Campos Johnson, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, and Tatiana Flores question what new or alternative epistemologies emerge when one submerges the eye or the body in water. Steve Mentz, who has been credited with coining the term "blue humanities," also alludes to the generative power of fluidity in his recent *Introduction to the Blue Humanities*. In his text, Mentz compares Shakespeare's *Tempest* with the work of indigenous Chamorro poet Craig Santos Perez to show readers how blue humanities inquiry has evolved: from focusing mostly on the Early Modern Atlantic to the present-day Pacific, from canonical works to the art of contemporary indigenous authors. In his analysis, Mentz posits that the rhythm of Perez's poetry emulates the

> generative surges and flows" of the sea, oscillating between references to the "physical ocean, which dilutes everything that flows into it, and which is the fluid matrix from which planetary life emerged, and metaphorical capacities such as survival and endurance (26).

Here, we find that the ocean can be "brought closer" in an embodied sense by deploying the aesthetics of flow: reading Perez's words "returns" Mentz to his own "personal and physical engagement" with waters —though Atlantic rather than Pacific, Mentz's waters are the same "global fluid" as Perez's (26). In this sense, one of the keys aspects of current blue humanities scholarship is the ability to harness liquidity and flow, moving from land to sea in what Mentz deems the "offshore trajectory" that defines the field (29).

Other scholars have emphasized what fluidity enables between the human and the non- or more-than- human. In a co-authored article, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and Tatiana Flores analyze a corpus of works by Caribbean artists that not only represent the ocean, but bring the artist, the work, and the ocean into relation (139): installations of waste brought to the shore, maps featuring diffracted perspectives, immersive photographic assemblages, and experimental videos that superimpose moving seawater on aboveground footage —all constitute attempts to visually and symbolically merge the body and the ocean. DeLoughrey and Flores's analysis is inspired by "tidalectics," a notion introduced by Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite (and expanded upon in DeLoughrey's own scholarship) that refers to Caribbean "psychology" as "the movement of the ocean […] coming from one continent/continuum, touching another, and then receding from the island(s) into the perhaps creative chaos of the(ir) future" (Brathwaite and Mackey 32). This entails that DeLoughrey and Flores are attentive to the multiple scales and connectedness of the ocean —an ocean that is both particular and planetary, transformed and transformative.

After this brief overview of the methods and topics of recent blue humanities scholarship, we might ask: how do Salas's descriptions of archival objects fit into the "liquid turn"? I venture that, to the scholars and practitioners I have mentioned, an ocean implied by an object encased in a museum would be insufficient to activate the engagement that they seek between the human and the ocean. How is it possible, then, to reconcile "archival presence" with the mutability and ocean

intimacy that the blue humanities aspire to? A poem by Neo Zealand poet Ian Wedde, analyzed by Teresa Shewry in *Hope at Sea: Possible Ecologies in Oceanic Literature*, illustrates the tension between submersion and observation:

> From the scenic lookout
> I view from above
> What's best understood from below (Wedde in Shewry, p. 94)

In this stanza, Shewry explains, Wedde speaks about a forest expanse, yet its argument may also be made about the ocean: what is lost when viewing the ocean from outside or from afar, whether from the elevation of a scenic lookout or across the distance of an expository device, rather than from within? As I have shown so far, blue humanities or "hydrocriticism" scholars and arts practitioners tend to understand the ocean as fundamentally hybrid and polyvalent, moveable, with indeterminate frontiers and an "elusive materiality" (Moraña 7). Thus, a museum object would be difficult to interpret by means of what Steinberg and Peters call "wet ontologies" that "destabilize the static, bordered, and linear framings that typify human geographical studies of place, territory, and time" (247). On the contrary, the artifacts of Salas's poems appear to him already labelled, dated, and contextualized by an authoritative institution.

If body-to-body, fluid intimacy is not available in the museum space, what type of alternative critical engagement is possible? I offer as a tentative response that, despite the robust "archival presence" of Salas's objects, *Nuevas cartas náuticas* as a whole involves a characteristically tidalectical reading. If tidalectics constitute a regime of ebb and flow between territories and temporalities, then *Nuevas cartas náuticas* creates a tidalectical itinerary for the reader: every poem is tonally distinct, and we may be reading Ovid's (attributed) words as we envision the ancient Mediterranean only to sail to the Caribbean in the following page, exchanging a canonical voice for the retelling of an oral tradition.

In Poem V, for example, Salas details the beliefs of the indigenous Kariña, inhabitants of the Orinoco Delta, about the origins of the sea:

> En tiempos pretéritos, sólo había tierra, extensa llanura o selva, suelo sin costa azotado por una claridad rapaz.Un kaputano, ser divino, trajo el agua desde el cielo, pues el cielo era su represa, su odre transparente.
> Trajo sólo una pizca de mar. La trajo en una tapara (18).

Later on, in poem LXXIV, Salas describes funerary rites of other Deltan people, the indigenous Warao, combining poetic, anthropological, and mythographic discourse:

> Para los warao
> —cuyo nombre quiere decir gente de las curiaras—
> Bajo el mundo se encuentra Hahuba, inmensa serpiente cuya respiración regula las
> mareas. Sístole y dístole del agua.
> Las arenas y las piedras que sobresalen de las olas son su lomo, sus dientes. De ella
> dependía la navegación hasta el cerro Naparima, en Trinidad, donde cada tanto los warao iban en peregrinación.
> Los cuerpos de sus muertos eran depositados en canoas, escasos vientres sin techo (114).

These texts express Salas's interest in juxtaposing his erudite experimentation with canonical texts and his interest in compiling oral traditions related to the sea. For the most part, these oral repertoires remain separate from the author's treatment of archaeological objects;

the two merge only in the sequence of reading. Yet by alternating material, written, and oral sources of diverse provenance, *Nuevas cartas náuticas* espouses a "liquid" methodology that accounts for the "altered temporal and spatial scales, geographies, and agencies" that the maritime turn seeks to vindicate (Moraña, 7).

In poem LXXI, however, Salas is able to create a space of contact between oral tradition and artifact. The starting point here is the Broighter Hoard, a group of gold items from the Iron Age discovered in Northern Ireland in 1896. Salas begins by minutely describing a small boat that was found among the treasure:

> De unos diecinueve centímetros de largo, equipado con dos hileras de nueve remos flacos,
> con bancos para los remeros, un timón y un mástil fino como un hilo o una arteria.
> En su interior también había un ancla y una lanza minúscula. La forma del casco es almendrada, como un ojo hecho para estar cerrado.
> Es un modelo a escala de barcos usados durante la edad de hierro: osamentas curvas de madera cubiertas por cuero impermeable. Pesa casi cien gramos (109).

After providing this vivid image of the ship —allowing the reader to see its shapes—, the author proceeds to provide some mythographic information:

> Algunos especulan que se trataba de una ofrenda votiva, vinculada a Manannán mac Lir, viejo dios de los celtas irlandeses que velaba por los mares.
> Manannán atravesaba las olas en un barco que era una navaja, dicen. O en una yegua hecha de espuma. También poseía un manto
> que era pura niebla, como los días de invierno en el norte, y un yelmo que se encendía en
> llamas: faro, pupila distante (109).

Unlike in other pieces mentioned so far, here the archaeological object does not anchor the voice to the present; instead, it serves as vehicle for the author to dive into Irish mythological imagery, lyrically describing the attributes of Manannán as he displaces the reader toward the "misty past" of folklore (Conrad 326). With this movement, Salas demonstrates more didactically how his material archive indexes an oral archive, thus taking a step further toward merging modalities of oceanic inquiry.

Salas's book, then, does not purport to give a totalizing vision of the ocean; if in some poems the "sea" is amorphous or indeterminate, every artifact he describes confronts us with a fragment of a sea that is distinct. In this sense, *Nuevas cartas náuticas* establishes a balanced position that pushes against what Astrida Neimanis calls "the abstraction and interchangeability of water" produced by modernity; this paradigm absorbs hydric histories and problems into a "disembodied and displaced global water" (158-159). According to Neimanis, the impulse to render water isomorphic and exchangeable results necessarily in a simultaneous homogenization of the humans that affect it: a problematic assumption of equal responsibility for planetary destruction that glosses over power differentials (163). While he may not be concerned with climate impact in this book, Salas's archival impulses make it indeed impossible to de-historicize or de-humanize the sea, as the artifacts ground the reader firmly in sites and times inhabited by specific groups with embodied relationships —of ritual, sustenance, transportation, war— with water. We might think, then, that the attention given to discrete and often unrelated artifacts reclaims a water that is far from neutral, but teeming with artifacts and

their narratives.

Perhaps the most striking example of Salas's deployment of archival presence appears in poem XXXVI, in which he carefully describes the layout of the Marie Séraphique, an 18th-century French slave ship. The reader might imagine the author arched over the plan, relaying to the visitor the details that "grab his attention":

> los dos pisos de la bodega, donde birrales quietamente alineados servirán para transportar provisiones de todo tipo:
> bizcochos, cecina, agua potable, ron o aguardiente
> combustible para el fogón
> y mercancías varias
> la cubierta, también punteada de barriles y largos cofres, como corresponde a una nave mercante, donde el espacio vale oro y sangre (67).

Once more, like a museum interpreter, Salas describes the uses of the artifact, in this case not a miniature or a relief but a utilitarian re-presentation —or, rather, a pre-presentation— of a specific object. He continues:

> y la región en medio, el entre-pont, suerte de lámina
> donde se hallan pulcramente ordenados unos trescientos seres humanos
> acostados con precisión geométrica, desplegados,
> sin rostros visibles, piernas y brazos deshilvanados casi
> como garabatos, reducidos a ser el prójimo de los barriles (67).

Salas describes the depiction of the bodies of enslaved people being trafficked to America as neatly and geometrically ordered objects that are outlined in the plan as if they were simply elements of the ship itself: inert and faceless. To borrow from Garramuño, the object is not used here to reconstruct history or deploy a narrative, as there is nothing that the plan itself can contest or recover; the purpose of writing about it, or writing it, is none other than "el puro presente de su exposición" (60). This surface-level account, lingering upon the presence of these inhuman "garabatos," underlines the matter-of-fact, banal character of such atrocity —the Marie Séraphique completed six voyages from Nantes to the Saint-Domingue. The mere exhibition of the plan interrogates the reader in regard to the continuation of what it indexes, and it renders visible the Caribbean sea's distinguishing traumatic histories of crossing: following Mabel Moraña, we may argue that paying attention to the few existing representations of the Transatlantic journeys of enslaved people expands our understanding of the colonization and modernization of the Americas (Moraña 8).

Finally, we may turn to another class of objects that Salas includes in his maritime collection: technically-produced images, namely films and photographs. The way the author approaches these objects is considerably more whimsical, less distant and methodical, than his descriptions of ancient artifacts. Perhaps paradoxically, it is with these photographic captures —presumably the most "realistic" depictions of the ocean in his archive— that Salas plays the most with oneiric associations with the ocean.

Poem LVII is an ode to submarine photography:

> Evidencia de ese mundo ingrávido bajo el mundo, donde los cuerpos se desplazan en un dormir sin párpados, donde el sonido solo existe en tiempo pasado.
> (…) La fotografía submarina como otra forma de arqueología de los sueños.
> Los fotógrafos marinos son los sucesores directos de los pescadores de perlas (93).

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

In a book full of archaeological objects, the author only once mentions archaeology explicitly: the archaeology of dreams. Salas casts the discipline as both the operation of photographic technology and as a process possible in the psyche. Being able to capture scenes of the ocean is like being able to not only capture images of dreams, but to excavate them, to retrieve from them relics of the past; this association evokes the Jungian analogy between the ocean and the unconscious, with photography somehow comparable to insight or analysis. The comparison between underwater photography and pearl fishing reinforces this idea: in the two cases, diving into the sea —with all the risks and restrictions that it implies— yields treasure. Furthermore, to return to the importance of materiality on a purely aesthetic dimension, though Salas does not describe the photograph but the concept of submarine photography, his words evoke the affinity between the iridescence of pearls and the iridescence (or "pearlescence") of water-damaged photographic paper.

In poem LIV, Salas takes us from glass encasements to a screening room —more like a dark compartment inside a gallery or museum setting than in a commercial theater. The appearance of the cinematic image in this book is significant insofar as it was the submarine film —initially made possible by J. E. Williamson's submersible "photosphere", invented in 1912— that inaugurated a "new era of" consciousness and curiosity about the ocean in a public that had only visualized the ocean floor through the medium of aquaria (Cohen 6-7). In this way, Salas accounts for an eminently modern relationship with the ocean that differs from the experience of contemplation of archaeological artifacts.

Salas's choice of film is *Par 18 mètres de fond*, Jacques Cousteau's first documentary, made in 1942. The author first relays the material conditions of the film's production: "[…] filmado con una cámara protegida por una cubierta especial, diseñada para aguantar la presión de las profundidades" (88). Here, he is not only attentive to the materiality of the medium but indeed to the conditions of production of the artifact he describes: by alluding first to the technical advances that make possible underwater filming, he tethers his descriptions to the development of imaging technologies that have enabled human exploitation of the seas. The underwater moving image is not neutral, let alone natural: it is possible thanks to what film and media scholar Jonathan Crylen calls "machines of indirect vision" —strobe cameras, floodlights, sonar imaging— deployed to render an opaque, mostly lightless environment transparent, knowable, and useful for human ends (101). In this way, the submarine dreamscape Salas describes in the poem is in fact emblematic —as is Cousteau's output before his turn to conservationism— of the human desire to "conquer" the oceans (66).

The poem continues:

> Cazadores submarinos rodean la costa mediterránea. Los peces, en blanco y negro, parecen manchas remotas, seres de movimientos espasmódicos, adelgazados por el film. Las rocas parecen a punto de desmoronarse. El sol se empoza arriba, temeroso de sumergirse.
> Las medusas pasan como girasoles cabizbajos.
> Llevamos con nosotros el lenguaje de la superficie. Para Cousteau, un cardumen parece un enjambre de moscas; una colonia de anémonas, un campo de trigo (88).

In order to record underwater, in low light, the film used must be highly sensitive and therefore extremely grainy after processing. Thus, for Salas, the materiality of celluloid transforms the fish around Cousteau into remote blurs, their movements appearing discontinuous. We sense here, as literary scholar Margaret Cohen argues in *The Underwater Eye,*

that the medium fits the message, as the fraught proportions and hazy visibility of Cousteau's film reproduce the distinctive disorientation that characterizes submarine visibility due to the density of water. Cohen explains:

> When we look through water, we perceive a pervasive haze, because the atmosphere of water slows down light, absorbs it, and scatters it. The density of water also explains the different color spectrum underwater. This atmosphere absorbs light quickly, making colors with weaker, faster light waves imperceptible as the diver descends away from the sun […] Our depth perception is further confused because phenomena are magnified by about 33 percent, and stereoscopic vision does not work well (40).

Immersed vision, therefore, involves the distortion of one's "normal" perception —an experience we might associate with altered or dream states. Notably, scholars interested in undersea aesthetics have highlighted the surrealist avant-garde's inclination to compare the altered vision enabled by dreams or automatism —including practices like hypnosis, free association, and trance states— to a diver's underwater perception. According to Sean O' Hanlan, the poet, writer, and theorist of surrealism André Breton would describe both states —dream or automatism and water immersion— as forms of accessing the "never seen" (141). Margaret Cohen also makes reference to surrealist filmmaker Jean Cocteau's description of his experience filming *Le sang d'un poète* in 1930, where he draws a parallel between extracting images from the unconscious and capturing images underwater: "I try to make poetry like the Williamson brothers make films under the sea. It was a question of lowering in myself the bell that they lower into the sea, to great depths" (Cocteau in Cohen 61). Comparably, in Salas's previously mentioned poem LVII, underwater image-making is nothing less than the archaeology of dreams —the extraction of perhaps never-seen, perhaps long-forgotten artifacts.

Faced with the estranging vision of the seafloor in *Par 18 mètres de fond*, Salas resorts to the "language of the surface" in order to make sense of what he sees. In this sense, poem LIV manifests the insufficiency of the written word to describe the submarine —a lack that only the image can redress (Cohen 7). Similarly, Salas's poem cannot faithfully disseminate the sensorial experience of the film. As a result, the author opts for re-presenting his chosen submarine scene in the terms of an uncanny valley, similar but not quite equal to its above-sea counterparts (the "lenguaje de la superficie"): medusas that resemble sunflowers, fields of anemones like fields of wheat, and schools of fish that could be confused with swarms of flies. Thus, poems LIV and LVII signal the allure and otherworldliness of the submarine image while simultaneously evincing representational limits of both the submarine image and the "submarine" poem.

Conclusion

With its openness to other voices and other matters, *Nuevas cartas náuticas* constitutes what Florencia Garramuño calls a "fruto extraño": a difficult-to-categorize work of art that, by encompassing a variety of forms, creates for itself conditions of dis-belonging. On the one hand, the book constantly questions its own specificity as an original work, as it often conceals the true authorship of the text and misattributes poems to Ovid or Pliny, to name a few—in this way, it tentatively places itself in the public domain. On the other hand, as I have shown, it puts into question its own belonging to the category of "poetry," insofar as it frequently reaches beyond disciplinary boundaries and outside of itself, toward other books, films, antiques, moving and still photographic images, and oral traditions. The ebb and flow between the oral, the written, and the material, and the dream state and the "objective"

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

reality of archival presence, are representative of the overall structure of *Nuevas cartas náuticas*: Salas leads us across oceans, between fact and fiction, object and tale, direct quotes and relayed accounts.

Today, critical engagements with the ocean are virtually inseparable of humanistic and artistic perspectives that respond to ever-rising sea levels and a future for the Earth that looks increasingly oceanic —in spite of this, the ocean continues to be a "great unknown," less explored by humans than the surface of the moon. This unknowability has had geopolitical, biopolitical, and environmental effects: as Elizabeth DeLoughrey argues, the vastness and inaccessibility of the ocean render it an ever-expanding frontier for capital and simultaneously make it easy for the intersections of capital, colonialism, and environmental devastation to go unseen by most of us (245). In *Nuevas cartas náu*ticas, Adalber Salas pushes against the notion of an unknowable sea, and, through his treatment of an oceanic archive of objects, he tackles humanity's marine entanglement. Salas's engagement with material objects like gold statues, votives, plans, reliefs, and documents, make visible the flows of capital, the networks of power, and the circulation of ideas and bodies that constitute oceanic history. The ocean here is not merely the object of the poet's perplexity, but a space "choked" with history.[1] On the other hand, submarine photographic and cinematic imagery in *Nuevas cartas náuticas* bind together Salas's interest in historical artifacts with the technologies of visualization and dissemination that have shaped contemporary oceanic imaginaries, deploying what Margaret Cohen calls the "aquatic perspective as symbolic form": the aesthetics, knowledge, and emotions "prompted by the underwater realm's displacement of human mastery" (53). Salas's poems about these other artifacts —technically-produced images— posit the undersea landscape as a rich terrain for the intersection of history, technology, and human imagination.

1. From Derek Walcott's "The Schooner 'Flight'":
but this Caribbean so choke with the dead
that when I would melt in emerald water,
whose ceiling rippled like a silk tent,
I saw them corals: brain, fire, sea fans,
dead-men's-fingers, and then, the dead men.
I saw that the powdery sand was their bones
ground white from Senegal to San Salvador,
so, I panic third dive, and surface for a month
in the Seamen's Hostel.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

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ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

IMPACTO DE LA EXPERIENCIA URBANA EN LA VIDA MENTAL DE LOS CRONISTAS ESPAÑOLES DESDE LA ILUSTRACIÓN AL 98: CLAVIJO Y FAJARDO, LARRA, BÉCQUER, MESONERO ROMANOS, UNAMUNO Y AZORÍN

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Resumen: En el campo de la literatura española, los estudios cognitivos y urbanos aún no han abordado un examen que dé cuenta de la configuración paulatina de la "vida mental" del escritor y su modificación como consecuencia de la experiencia urbana. Este ensayo trata de describir la cronología de la transformación de la mente urbana en España presentando una serie de testimonios explícitos, en casi todos los casos no ficcionales, de autores que van desde el ilustrado José Clavijo y Fajardo hasta Unamuno o Azorín pasando por otros autores como Mesonero Romanos, Larra y Bécquer. La moda, el cosmopolitismo, el maquinismo y la vida ajetreada en el seno de la multitud son algunos de los agentes de una transformación en el modo perceptivo del escritor que repercute en su modo expresivo. Una transformación que, en España, por lo general, será vista con reticencia en tanto que muchas de estas novedades se asocian con la idea de la "invasión extranjera" y la liquidación de cierta idea proteica de "identidad nacional".

Key Words: experiencia urbana, literatura española, literatura y cognición, mente urbana, literatura y ciudad

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

1. Introducción

Ya explicaron los pioneros de los estudios urbanos, Georg Simmel y Walter Benjamin, cómo la gran ciudad industrial, indisociablemente unida a la idea de progreso, se convierte en un torbellino de estímulos bajo el signo del cambio constante. Los nuevos inventos, como el tranvía, reducen las distancias y hacen al ciudadano esclavo de la máquina; la multitud, en los nuevos sistemas de transporte y en las calles, despersonifica, convierte al viandante en un ser reservado que otriza a los demás pero, al mismo tiempo, otorga un refugio perfecto que genera una sensación paradójica de libertad en el tumulto; los edificios de los centros urbanos van elevándose según el hombre va dominando el acero; y la moda, nuevo oráculo, dicta la estética no ya de lo que se lleva en el presente, sino de lo que se llevará en el futuro. Se facilita la mezcla de clases: el burgués y el noble abominan de la "nivelación" citadina, la orteguiana "rebelión de las masas"; la miseria se hace visible y surge, también, el concepto de solidaridad y los servicios sociales. El socialismo y el marxismo proponen visiones utópicas o revolucionarias en un mundo en el que debe reinar la justicia; se dispara la lucha que promueve la movilidad social, la igualdad de oportunidades y los derechos. Este mundo no puede atravesar el ojo del escritor sin transformar su conciencia y, por lo tanto, su expresión. Sin embargo, estos fenómenos no han de esperar al desarrollo de las grandes metrópolis –como propone el Benjamin del París baudelairiano– para comenzar a mostrar sus primeros síntomas. La crítica más reciente en el campo de la experiencia urbana se ha dedicado a romper con la tradicional vinculación del mundo natural con el Romanticismo señalando a las grandes metrópolis industriales como modeladoras de la "vida mental" del escritor cuya obra estaría ligada cada vez más a una realidad ineludible, ya fuera para abrazarla o para reaccionar en su contra. Se ha hecho necesario, pues, ampliar los estudios sobre este periodo para considerar "new perceptual processes, mimetic modalities, and imaginative tendencies that urban experience inspired." (Watkins 559) Este ensayo estudia cómo y cuándo se puede hablar de un cambio perceptivo y expresivo en el escritor, cambio que aparezca como consecuencia de la experiencia urbana. En el ámbito de la literatura Española, por lo general, esta transformación será vista con reticencia en tanto que muchas de estas novedades se asocian, como se verá, con la idea de la "invasión extranjera" y la liquidación de cierta idea proteica de "identidad nacional."

Si es cierto que, como propone Marshall Berman, la sociedad moderna se distingue por su calidad fluida, con el arte y la literatura va a ocurrir exactamente lo mismo: "Fluidity and vaporousness will become primary qualities in the self-consciously modernist painting, architecture and design, music and literature." (Berman 144). La "solidez" poética de las estrofas y los metros clásicos se disuelve durante el Romanticismo en un torrente de constante experimentación. La libertad métrica evoluciona hasta dar en la paradoja del poema en prosa que impulsa Aloysius Bertrand y que consagra Baudelaire como género paradigmático de la gran ciudad.[1] La rima, de origen nemotécnico, ya no tiene sentido en un mundo incompatible con la perdurabilidad de la memoria. El poeta ha de aprender a ver a través de la ciudad, ha de aprender a transcender el caos de lo volátil para acercarse apenas a sugerir lo que esconde tal manto de Maia.

Pero, ¿cómo ocurre esta transformación? Walter Benjamin sugiere que el shock de la gran ciudad sustituye un tipo de experiencia tradicional, consciente, comunicable (*Erfahrung*) por otro tipo de experiencia inmediata (*Erlebnis*[2]) que, fruto del constante bombardeo multisensorial de estímulos, desborda la capacidad de la conciencia de procesar la realidad circundante, pasando esto a ser tarea del subconsciente. Este cambio perceptivo es el rasgo distintivo de la vida moderna y es el que deriva en las formas modernas de expresión. Se trata de una experiencia fragmentada y, en consecuencia, da lugar a

1. "Quel est celui de nous qui n'a pas, dans ses jours d'ambition, rêvé le miracle d'une prose poëtique, musicale sans rhythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour s'adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l'âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience?

C'est surtout de la fréquentation des villes énormes, c'est du croisement de leurs innombrables rapports que naît cet idéal obsédant. Vous-même, mon cher ami, n'avez-vous pas tenté de traduire en une chanson le cri strident du Vitrier, et d'exprimer dans une prose lyrique toutes les désolantes suggestions que ce cri envoie jusqu'aux mansardes, à travers les plus hautes brumes de la rue?" (Baudelaire, *Le Spleen* 24)

2. Es muy significativo a este respecto que esta palabra alemana no se usara, precisamente, hasta el surgimiento del Romanticismo en Alemania. Ver Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

técnicas como la fragmentación de la narrativa o el montaje de imágenes yuxtapuestas. Inventos como la fotografía y el cine, surgen precisamente de la obsesión por captar en un instante la realidad efímera y serán, como apunta el mismo crítico alemán, las herramientas perfectas para retratar el verdadero rostro de los centros urbanos.[3]

Ya ha apuntado José Escobar que la ciudad se convierte en protagonista de la literatura en el siglo XVIII, cuando el escritor abandona el mundo rural y cambia la poética basada en la mímesis de la naturaleza en general por una mímesis circunstancial que trata de congelar en un instante ese mundo cambiante que va dilapidando, para bien y para mal, la "solidez" del mundo antiguo (Escobar 109-10). El vehículo de esta nueva literatura ya no serán los lujosos volúmenes destinados a perdurar, sino la prensa periódica igual de efímera que las urbes vivas. De aquí deriva la primera de las dos limitaciones de las que ha de partir este estudio de corta extensión.

La primera limitación afecta al corpus de los textos analizados. Dado que este ensayo pretende estudiar el modo en que el impacto de la ciudad modela la percepción y la estética del escritor, se han elegido como textos paradigmáticos los de autores que, como apunta Edward Baker en torno a Larra, "sale[n] a la calle —y va[n] al café, a la fonda, a la ópera, al teatro, al baile de máscaras, a todas partes— a trabajar" (29). Dicho de otro modo, el interés por los estudios cognitivos que da origen a esta propuesta justifica una acotación que privilegia a los géneros periodísticos que nacen precisamente con el desarrollo de las ciudades y que están, por lo tanto, preocupados por la fijación de lo que se percibe como transitorio y cambiante. Sin desdeñar el interés que pudiera derivar de un estudio que incluyera producciones narrativas, poéticas o dramáticas, el campo de prospección textual elegido se circunscribe a los escritos como el artículo, el cuadro de costumbres y la crónica.[4]

La segunda limitación de este estudio es el protagonismo casi obligado de Madrid, en detrimento de otras urbes españolas como Barcelona, Valencia, Sevilla o Bilbao. En el rango de fechas que se abarca, la población de la capital pasa de unos 150000 a mediados del siglo XVIII a los 300000 de 1860 que volverán a duplicarse en 1910 para alcanzar el millón en 1940. Solo como referencia, cabe decir que Londres alcanza el millón de habitantes en 1801, llegando a los seis millones a final de siglo, mientras que París alcanza el millón hacia 1846 y triplica esa cantidad en 1885.

El proceso de modernización en España es más lento que el de los países del norte de Europa y tiene ciertas peculiaridades. Por ejemplo, la mayor extensión y la orografía del territorio, así como el aspecto incomunicable de la capital, sin un gran río navegable como el Támesis, el Rin o el Sena, hacen que las comunicaciones tarden más en desarrollarse y que crezca el desequilibrio entre las zonas rurales y los centros urbanos. A esto se une la gestión de unas clases gobernantes anticuadas y dominadas por un conservadurismo de corte nacionalista que se resisten a lidiar con las transformaciones del mundo moderno. La modernidad, deseada por los liberales desde la Ilustración, será vista desde ciertos sectores conservadores del Romanticismo como una amenaza que atenta no sólo contra una supuesta "esencia" pura de lo español (el "casticismo" unamuniano), sino contra el orden mental del escritor.[5] El escritor español, veremos, se resiste a transformar su consciencia en una "mente urbana". A pesar de que la realidad del crecimiento de los centros citadinos se va imponiendo, el escritor, ya desde finales del siglo XVIII, se posiciona a la defensiva. Este ensayo busca justamente establecer un bosquejo de la cronología de una transformación inexorable: el establecimiento de la mente urbana en la literatura española. Para ello, se han buscado testimonios lo más explícitos posible en autores que van desde el ilustrado José Clavijo y Fajardo hasta los autores de la generación de fin de siglo.

3. "[O]nly film commands optical approaches to the essence of the city" (Benjamin 8).

4. Esta tarea investigativa ya ha sido emprendida, en parte, y de manera destacada, por Edward Baker (*Materiales para escribir Madrid: literatura y espacio urbano de Moratín a Galdós*, 1991); Farris Anderson (*Espacio urbano y novela: Madrid en "Fortunata y Jacinta"*, 1985); Manuel Lacarta (*Madrid y sus literaturas. De la generación del 98 a la posguerra*, 1986); Michael Ugarte (*Madrid 1900: The Capital as Cradle of Literature and Culture*, 1996); y Cristián H. Ricci (*El espacio urbano en la narrativa del Madrid de la Edad de Plata* (1900-1938), 2008).

5. Como explica Jesús María Vicente Herrero, la visión de los románticos españoles conservadores, de espíritu católico, reaccionario y nacionalista se impuso sobre la de los liberales: "el empuje de los conservadores tradicionalistas, siempre presente, alejó la posibilidad de la regeneración al asignar como única virtud el valor originario de lo nacional" (368).

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

2. Ilustración: José Clavijo y Fajardo

El periodista canario José Clavijo y Fajardo (1726-1806) puede servir de punto de partida como representante de la época de consolidación de la prensa periódica en España. Siguiendo el ejemplo de *The Spectator*, de Addison y Steele, (Escobar 110) comienza a publicar en 1762 el semanario *El Pensador* en el que se critican las costumbres consideradas anacrónicas y retrógradas de los habitantes de la ciudad. En el prólogo o introducción al "Pensamiento I," en el primer número de su publicación, este autor describe puntualmente una forma de razonar ordenada que podemos situar en la tradición del *Erfahrung* bejaminiano anteriormente descrito:

> passo la mayor parte de mi vida, siempre pensativo, y casi siempre sin salir de mi Quarto. A los principios se volvian mis pensamientos por el mismo camino, que havian trahido: llegaban otros, que ocupaban el lugar de los primeros; y no despidiendose éstos, ni los que les seguian sin dejar succession, se iban borrando en mi memoria, al arrivo de los nuevos huespedes, las idéas, que havian excitado sus abuelos. No le pareciò bien este methodo à mi amor proprio, que en cada especie olvidada creìa haver perdìdo un thesoro. Mudè de systema: empecè à trasladar al papel todas las quimeras, y todas las necedades, que passaban por mi fantasìa; y, gracias à este cuidado, me hallo hoy con un registro general de quanto he pensado de algunos años à esta parte. (Clavijo y Fajardo 1)

Como puede verse, hay una sucesión ordenada de pensamientos totalmente conscientes que se suceden unos a otros. Este tipo de ejercicio, que tanto echarán de menos los pensadores de un siglo después, tiene lugar en el recogimiento de un cuarto. Sin embargo, cuando el pensador sale a la calle, las cosas cambian:

> las horas del dia, que tengo libres, las empléo en examinar toda classe de gentes. Tan presto me introduzco en una Assamblèa de Politicos, como en un Estrado de Damas. Ni en uno, ni en otro parage hago traycion à mi querido silencio, […] Visito los Theatros, los Passeos, y las Tiendas: entablo mis Dialogos con el Sastre, el Zapatero, y el Aguador: la Puerta del Sol me consume algunos ratos; y en estas escuelas aprendo mas en un dia, que pudiera en una Universidad en diez años. (Clavijo y Fajardo 2-3)

El Pensador abandona la esencia de su seudónimo y se convierte más bien en "espectador" silencioso de una vida cuya intensidad describe con una hipérbole –diez años de universidad comprimidos en un solo día– que, sin embargo, ya está sugiriendo preocupaciones modernísimas como el laberinto del tiempo psicológico. Más adelante, añade Clavijo y Fajardo que su intención no es la fama, sino "estár confundido entre la multitud, siendo un Pensador obscuro, y sin nombre" (Clavijo y Fajardo 3). Es esta, probablemente, una de las primeras apariciones en España de uno de los tópicos urbanos por excelencia: el anonimato en el seno de las grandes multitudes. Estas vendrán a posibilitar la tarea del espía, del ladrón, así como la del detective, pero también la del cronista. Estamos en los tiempos cercanos al motín de Esquilache (1766), uno de cuyos motivos fue la prohibición de la capa larga y del chambergo que permitía el embozo y, por lo tanto, el anonimato. Después de todo, la multitud ya se estaba convirtiendo en la nueva capa.

La vida en la multitud y el declarado interés por captar el estado de la sociedad madrileña del momento parece vulnerar la ordenación consecutiva de los pensamientos que se describían al principio del

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

prólogo. La avalancha de estímulos, de tipos y temas, da como resultado una publicación que promete ser desordenada y nada metódica: "Methodo, ni orden no hay que esperarlo en esta Obra. Assi como serán varios los assuntos, sirviendo de materia quanto se presente à mi imaginacion; assi tambien la colocacion será casual." (Clavijo y Fajardo, 2) Estamos ante una de las primeras evidencias del cambio perceptivo paradigmático. Se advierte junto con el aspecto desordenado de los materiales, una pérdida de voluntariedad de la conciencia, ya que se depende de lo que "se presente" a la imaginación del escritor. En suma, la experiencia tipo *Erlebnis* se va abriendo paso en la conciencia del escritor comprometido con el retrato de la sociedad moderna.

José Escobar ha estudiado cómo el objeto de la mímesis literaria da un giro paradigmático en el siglo XVIII:

> La transformación del concepto de imitación en la estética del XVIII corresponde históricamente a un determinado cambio social e ideológico. La filosofía sensualista pone en tela de juicio la estética racionalista del clasicismo cuyo principio fundamental, como es sabido, era la imitación de la Naturaleza concebida como idea abstracta y universal, no determinada circunstancialmente ni por el tiempo ni por el espacio. Ahora lo local y temporalmente limitado va a reconocerse como objeto de imitación poética. Esta transformación fundamental del principio de imitatio naturae lleva consigo la determinación social e histórica del mundo moral en los nuevos géneros literarios (235)

Puede dibujarse junto a esta transformación del concepto de imitación, una metamorfosis paralela de la mente y de la mentalidad del escritor. Queda atrás el carácter sólido y transcendente de la abstracción universal y se da paso al avance inexorable de un mundo camaleónico, huidizo, veloz y proteico que no se deja pensar, y en el que el pensador no se reconoce a sí mismo; un mundo que además cambia desigualmente en el campo y en la ciudad, que constantemente amenaza con eliminar la identidad de las naciones. El escritor costumbrista se convierte, desde la nueva tribuna de la plebe (la prensa periódica) en una especie de sacerdote que, desde su posición de "observador", de "inquisidor", de "espectador", desaloja con su mirada elevada a un dios crepuscular; el escritor adoctrina, censura, guía, y trata desesperadamente de encauzar los designios de un país en decadencia que va camino de la larga resaca de su etapa imperialista. El escritor moderno es, por ello, una criatura que roza lo fantástico y lo divino; es omnipresente y es omnisciente; es el hombre de la multitud incapaz del soliloquio y cuyo oficio tenderá a un collage espiritista confeccionado con los fragmentos recogidos por las calles.

3. Época romántica: Larra y Mesonero Romanos.

El artículo de costumbres, que inician autores como Clavijo y Fajardo, es el género que servirá de vehículo para la descripción de lo que Émile Durkheim denominara "conciencia colectiva."[6] Las dos figuras principales que consolidan este género en España –Mariano José de Larra (1809-1837) y Ramón de Mesonero Romanos (1803-1882)– entran en diálogo en una reseña del primero sobre la obra del segundo publicada en dos entregas en *El Español* bajo el mismo título: "«Panorama matritense»: Cuadros de costumbres de la capital observados y descritos por un Curioso Parlante".[7] En la primera entrega, Larra bosqueja un panorama del género costumbrista y revela sus claves insistiendo en la idea de que la tarea del escritor debe ser fijarse e intentar reflejar las características distintivas de cada una de las sociedades que inexorablemente se iban diferenciando. El objetivo es pintar "al hombre en combinación, en juego con las nuevas y especiales formas de la sociedad en que se observaban" (3). Larra

6. En La división del trabajo social el sociólogo francés define este término como "el conjunto de las creencias y de los sentimientos comunes al término medio de los miembros de una misma sociedad, [que] constituye un sistema determinado que tiene su vida propia" (104).

7. Número 232 (19 de junio de 1836) y número 233 (20 de junio), respectivamente.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

sugiere que el campo de acción del costumbrista deben ser las grandes capitales, ya que es en ellas donde se acumula ese "movimiento social" (3). El carácter inevitable que en adelante tendrá para el escritor la realidad urbana aflora, pues, de manera implícita en la obra de Larra.

El artículo continúa trazando el panorama del género costumbrista y, después de reconocer el carácter pionero de *El Espectador* londinense de Addison, se fija en su evolución en Francia dando con una clave fundamental para el propósito de este artículo, ya que pone en relación el carácter efímero, fluido y constantemente cambiante de la modernidad con el nacimiento de un nuevo tipo de escritor (el periodista de costumbres), de un nuevo estilo (el bosquejo) y de un nuevo soporte de publicación (el periódico):

> empezaron a fijarse las nuevas costumbres, y a suceder a la antigua Francia los modernos franceses, nacieron también escritores destinados a pintar las faces que empezaba la sociedad a presentar: pintores de la sociedad francesa. Pero cualquiera conoce que semejantes bosquejos parciales estriban más que en el fondo de las cosas en las formas que revisten, y en los matices que el punto de vista les presta, que son por tanto variables, pasajeros, y no de una verdad absoluta. No hubiera, pues, llegado nunca el género a entronizarse sino ayudado del gran movimiento literario que la perfección de las artes traía consigo: tales producciones no hubieran tenido oportunidad ni verdad, no contando con el auxilio de la rapidez de la publicación. Los periódicos fueron, pues, los que dieron la mano a los escritores de estos ligeros cuadros de costumbres, cuyo mérito principal debía de consistir en la gracia del estilo. (Larra 3)

Larra sabe que la expresión artística, así como también el soporte y la tecnología necesarios para materializarla, son fruto de una nueva mentalidad que, tal como se describe, parece adelantar el impresionismo con ese punto de vista "variable, pasajero y no de una verdad absoluta".[8]

En el segundo artículo, dedicado más específicamente a la obra de Mesonero Romanos –publicado sólo tres años después de la muerte de Fernando VI– Larra destaca aún con cierto temor a la censura cómo "España está hace algunos años en un momento de transición" (4), lo que supone una dificultad añadida de cara al retrato de una realidad "influida ya por el ejemplo extranjero, que ha rechazado por largo tiempo" pero que "ni ha dejado enteramente de ser la España de Moratín, ni es todavía la España inglesa y francesa que la fuerza de las cosas tiende a formar" (4).[9] Se observa aquí esa identificación, ya mencionada, de lo moderno con el miedo a la invasión de lo extranjero. Asimismo, el temor a la homogeneización de clases sociales y de tipos y modos mezclados con los que se suponen "originales" será la nota común no sólo para estos escritores de la época romántica, ya que esta tendencia se extiende a lo largo del resto del siglo XIX y llega al cambio de siglo.

"El castellano viejo", artículo publicado por Larra en *El Pobrecito Hablador* el 11 de diciembre de 1832, se inicia con una descripción que ilustra perfectamente el quehacer del escritor que aspira a abstraer de los estímulos citadinos una conciencia colectiva. El segundo párrafo arranca describiendo al autor saliendo a la calle en busca del material para su escritura: "Andábame días pasados por esas calles a buscar materiales para mis artículos," dice, para, a continuación, dar cuenta de su estado mental de la siguiente manera:

> embebido en mis pensamientos, me sorprendí varias veces a mí mismo riendo como un pobre hombre de mis propias ideas y moviendo maquinalmente los labios; algún tropezón me

8. Adelanta, también, las consideraciones que Baudelaire plasmaría para el arte pictórico en "El pintor de la vida moderna": "hay en la vida trivial, en la metamorfosis cotidiana de las cosas exteriores, un movimiento rápido que impone al artista la misma velocidad de ejecución" (*Salones* 353)

9. Edward Baker recuerda en su *Materiales para escribir Madrid* que "el periódico, en la España de 1834, está una vez más en la infancia debido a su casi desaparición durante la segunda década fernandina" (45).

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

> recordaba de cuando en cuando que para andar por el empedrado de Madrid no es la mejor circunstancia la de ser poeta ni filósofo (*Artículos* 94).

Tenemos, pues, un transeúnte cuyo pensamiento es interrumpido por los obstáculos que le impone la ciudad, como ese empedrado irregular o, como describe a continuación, los "no pocos encontrones que al volver las esquinas di con quien tan distraída y rápidamente como yo las doblada" (95). La ensoñación y el pensamiento ordenado en la ciudad son, por fin, aniquilados por el golpe brutal de Braulio que, como representante de la tosquedad castellana que Larra critica en el artículo, termina por desterrar al pobre Fígaro de su calidad de sujeto observador que imagina libremente para convertirse él en el objeto observado por la multitud.

La muerte de Fernando VII en septiembre de 1833 marca el inicio de un momento transicional que deja su impronta en el ambiente de la capital. Como apunta Edward Baker, "en los años inmediatamente posteriores a la muerte de Fernando VII, se había producido, como era de esperar, un crecimiento notable de los espectáculos y las diversiones" (50). La obra dilatada de Mesonero Romanos (1803-1882) sirve como barómetro privilegiado de esta transformación al tiempo que contiene reflexiones valiosísimas sobre el modo en que el escritor se enfrenta a los cambios que va experimentando la ciudad. En el prólogo a su *Manual de Madrid*, de 1831, el autor destaca cómo no sólo ha cambiado muchísimo la capital desde el siglo XVII convirtiendo las guías anteriores en obras inútiles por obsoletas, sino que también ha cambiado la perspectiva del escritor y su modo expresivo:

> todos o casi todos los autores llegaron a faltarme por pertenecer en lo general a los siglos XVII y XVIII, desde cuya época se ha variado infinito tanto en la forma de los objetos *como en el modo de verlos y caracterizarlos*. Las guerras y otros sucesos extraordinarios han alterado en pocos años el aspecto de la capital, en términos que se puede afirmar que apenas hay objeto que no haya sufrido alteración, y permanezca en el mismo estado que quedó cuando aquellos escribían. De suerte que, falto ya de un hilo conductor en este laberinto, tuve que entregarme a mis propias observaciones. (Mesonero Romanos Manual 3-4, mi énfasis)

Dos cosas son destacables en esta cita. Primero, la ya mencionada indisociabilidad de la mente moderna del escritor, de su expresión y del objeto que la provoca. En segundo lugar, que el vertiginoso fluir de los acontecimientos, la modificación constante no sólo de la fisonomía de la ciudad sino, además, de sus habitantes, llevan al Curioso Parlante a capitular ante la fuerza del cambio y a admitir la falta "de un hilo conductor," un concepto asociado con la mente tradicional, pre-urbana, fruto de una experiencia tipo *Erfahrung*. El carácter laberíntico de la ciudad hace no ya de la lectura, sino de la observación directa, la esencia del escritor moderno.

En las *Escenas Matritenses*, una obra que según Larra aborda el retrato moral de la Corte en contraste con el *Manual*, dedicado al retrato físico, se incluye un artículo titulado "1802 y 1832", uno de los más subversivos que salen de la pluma del autor antes de la muerte de Fernando VII[10] y cuyo tema y estructura giran precisamente en torno a la comparación de un pasado caracterizado insistentemente como "sólido" y un presente que se sugiere grosero en su desdeñosa deriva ambiciosa, superficial y materialista. El narrador entabla a la hora de la siesta –simbólica pausa de la agitación citadina– una conversación con su vecino, de nombre Plácido, que con un discurso equilibrado compara las costumbres y estado presentes de la capital con los de treinta años atrás. El hombre reconoce las virtudes de la ciudad del presente, que encuentra "mas decorada y brillante," con "mas actividad en nuestra

10. Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch firma el prólogo a la edición de las Escenas matritenses. Se refiere así a la censura: "Quien examine los artículos del primer año o primera serie, publicados con el título de Panorama matritense desde enero de 1832 hasta abril del año siguiente, verá con qué reserva se presentaba el autor delante de la censura para no excitar su suspicacia, para no incurrir en su tremenda ojeriza […] en el que lleva por título «1802 y 1832» ha dado ya el autor un paso grande […] Aquella pluma necesitaba volar: los acontecimientos políticos de nuestro país le dieron licencia para remontarse a cualquier altura, para descender a cualesquiera profundidades." (n.p.)

industria," "progresos de las artes," "adelantos en el buen gusto" (Mesonero Romanos, Escenas 55). Sin embargo, arguye,

> en cambio de aquellas ventajas, [uno que hubiera dejado nuestra capital en 1802], ¿no hallaría muy luego la ausencia de otras mas sólidas y duraderas? ¿no echaría de ver mui pronto la alteración que ha experimentado nuestro carácter? ¿Adónde encontraría ya aquella ingenua virtud, aquella probidad natural que eran el distintivo de nuestros mayores? ¿Dónde el sólido saber, que aun que patrimonio de pocos, ofrecia a la posteridad obras clásicas e inmortales? […] En lugar de esto, ¿qué hallaria? Desden de las virtudes pacificas y sólidas […] confusión grosera de todas las clases (*Escenas* 55-6)

El cambio perceptivo que supone el crecimiento de la capital queda descrito de un modo más explícito en otro artículo titulado "La calle de Toledo" (1832). Este autor describe así esta calle de entrada en la capital:

> Divertíamos así nuestro camino, contemplando la multitud de tiendas y comercios que prestan a aquella calle el aspecto de una feria; tantas tonelerías, caldererías, zapaterías y cofrerías; tantos barberos, tantas posadas, y, sobre todo, tantas tabernas. (*Escenas* 24)

Comienza esta cita con un verbo –"divertir"– que da cuenta de un cambio perceptivo si tenemos en cuenta la definición de esa palabra que hallamos en el *Diccionario de Autoridades*: "Apartar, distraher la atención de alguna persona para que no discurra ni piense en aquellas cosas a que la tenia aplicada, o para que no prosiga la obra que trahía entre manos." (V.A. 1732: iii, 317). Esta "diversión" ejercida por el shock del ajetreado Madrid decimonónico implica, como se ha visto, una pérdida de control de la consciencia típico del cambio paradigmático que venimos estudiando. Además, en el mismo texto puede advertirse cómo el shock citadino –con el que el autor, literalmente, "tropieza"– afecta a la estética ya que, ante la imposibilidad de describirlo todo de manera ordenada, el autor recurre a la yuxtaposición impresionista a modo de collage que será una marca distintiva de la literatura moderna:

> Engolfados en nuestra conversación tropezábamos, cuándo con un corro de mujeres cosiendo al sol, cuándo con un par de mozos durmiendo a la sombra; muchachos que corren; asturianos que retozan; carreteros que descargan a las puertas de las posadas; filas de mulas ensartadas unas a otras y cargadas de paja, que impiden la travesía; acá, una disputa de castañeras; allá, una prisión de rateros; por este lado, un relevo de guardia; por el otro, un entierro solemne...
>
> «Favor a la justicia.» «Agur, camaraá.» «Réquiem æternam.» «Pué ya... ¡El demonio del usía!»
>
> […]
>
> Con estas y otras voces, la continua confusión y demás […] le perdí [a mi primo] de vista (*Escenas* 24)

Puede verse claramente el collage no sólo de imágenes sino también de registros lingüísticos y dialectales que añaden la nota moderna de una especie de proto-cosmopolitismo a escala española en un Madrid que contaba en el censo de la policía de 1831 con 211.127 habitantes. Como ha estudiado M.ª de los Ángeles Ayala, la elección de esta arteria esencial en el plano madrileño desde tiempo inmemorial redunda en el conservadurismo del escritor español, siempre atento a los cambios que experimenta la urbe en el presente, pero con un ojo puesto en un

pasado irremediablemente mejor.

En 1862, Mesonero Romanos publica su *Tipos y caracteres. Bocetos de cuadros de costumbres*. Significativo título, por cuanto se presentan ya no cuadros de costumbres que, como se ha visto, no dejan de ser en sí bocetos, sino "bocetos de cuadros de costumbres," que vendrían a ser algo así como bocetos de bocetos. Y es que esa sociedad cambiante que retratara en su juventud ha ido evolucionando y adaptándose a tiempos aún más vertiginosos y, por lo tanto, más difíciles de retratar. Mesonero se despide en un significativo prólogo titulado "Adiós al lector," en el que se refiere a la sociedad de 1832 como "mucho más sencilla y reposada" en comparación con "la sociedad del siglo [que] se ha rejuvenecido y vigorizado, en términos de cambiar a cada paso y en cada día de colorido, de fisonomía, de intención." (*Tipos* ix) El escritor, que se define como un pintor, se rinde al rigor del paso del tiempo que no perdona, envejeciéndole a él a la par que rejuvenece la sociedad:

> En vano el pintor fatigado la persigue y estudia, espiando sus movimientos, sus actitudes, sus tendencias; -trabajo inútil; la sociedad se le escapa de la vista; el modelo se le deshace entre las manos; imposible sorprenderle en un momento de reposo (*Tipos* ix)

Y añade:

> sólo echando mano de los progresos velocíferos de la época, del vapor, de la fotografía y de la chispa eléctrica, puede acaso alcanzar a seguir su senda rápida e indecisa; puede fijar sus volubles facciones en el lienzo; puede entablar con ella instantánea y mental comunicación. (*Tipos* ix-x)

El Curioso Parlante capitula elegantemente ante una era en la que el escritor ha de asimilar las proyecciones de las capacidades humanas que provee la tecnología industrial. La fotografía captará lo que ya no capta el ojo; las piernas ya no darán de sí en un ámbito en el que poco a poco los sistemas de transporte irán definiendo la movilidad aportando con sus redes nuevas perspectivas de ciudades en las que en poco tiempo dejarán de verse las estrellas. La comunicación con la ciudad será, como apostilla de forma visionaria Mesonero, instantánea y mental. Es el dominio de la experiencia inmediata: el *Erlebnis*.

4. Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer

Autores como Joan Estruch Tobella o Miguel González Dengra han reclamado una reevaluación en el seno de la historiografía literaria para Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer que, según argumenta el primero, "ha dejado de ser cola del romanticismo para pasar a ser cabeza de la modernidad" (227). El conservadurismo de Bécquer hace que sus preocupaciones no sean muy distintas a las de Mesonero Romanos. Sólo dos años después de la publicación de la postrera colección de cuadros de costumbres de Mesonero Romanos, Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer (1836-1870) viaja al monasterio de Veruela, desde donde escribirá la mayoría de las epístolas conocidas como *Desde mi celda*. El poeta sevillano se lamenta del manto homogeneizador con que ésta va dilapidando el pasado legendario y las costumbres autóctonas apelando al Gobierno para que realice su inventario y conservación a través de las instituciones académicas:

> el prosaico rasero de la civilización va igualándolo todo. Un irresistible y misterioso impulso tiende a unificar los pueblos con los pueblos, las provincias con las provincias, las naciones con las naciones, y quién sabe si las razas con las razas. A medida que la palabra vuela por los hilos telegráficos, que el ferrocarril se extiende, la industria se acrecienta y el espíritu cosmopolita de la civilización invade nuestro país, van

> desapareciendo de él sus rasgos característicos, sus costumbres inmemoriales, sus trajes pintorescos y sus rancias ideas. (*Desde mi celda* 211)

Este "misterioso impulso" con que Bécquer se refiere al progreso afecta especialmente a las ciudades que "no cabiendo ya dentro de su antiguo perímetro, rompen el cinturón de fortalezas que las ciñe, y unas tras otras vienen al suelo las murallas fenicias, romanas, godas o árabes" (*Desde mi celda* 212). Contamos en la primera carta de esta colección con su experiencia traumática que experimenta el poeta en el primer embajador de la modernidad, el ferrocarril, al que compara negativamente con un "monstruo" o con una "culebra negra y monstruosa" cuya "locomotora arroja ardientes y ruidosos resoplidos, como un caballo de raza." (*Desde mi celda* 163) Este proceso de alteración cognitiva, aunque descrito en el ferrocarril y no en la ciudad, es igualmente indicativo de una mente urbana que en los tiempos de Bécquer vemos en un proceso más avanzado. A juicio de Jesús Rubio Giménez, este testimonio becqueriano es pionero en la representación del "impacto psicológico que suponía el nuevo medio de viaje." (*Desde mi celda* 163) El creador teme perder, como veremos, la voluntariedad y agencia de su imaginación:

> Aquel confuso rechinar de ejes, aquel crujir de vidrios estremecidos, aquel fragor de ferretería ambulante, … crispa los nervios, marea y aturde. […] [H]asta que pasan algunos minutos y la continuación de las impresiones embota la sensibilidad, no se puede decir que se pertenece uno a sí mismo por completo. (*Desde mi celda* 164)

Es este "pertenecerse a uno mismo" lo que el artista, incapaz de dar continuidad a su tren de pensamiento, tiene miedo de perder. Al mismo tiempo, el retrato del embotamiento típico de la mente moderna constituirá un reto expresivo sin precedentes. En el prólogo a sus *Rimas*, Bécquer describe el contenido fantasioso de su conciencia de forma muy distinta ya al modo en que lo hacían los autores ilustrados del siglo XVIII. El Romanticismo supone un giro de la atención del escritor que ya no privilegia el aspecto exterior de las cosas, sino el mundo interior del artista. Es por ello que este movimiento será rico en la descripción de los mecanismos mentales de procesamiento del mundo moderno, y más en el caso de Bécquer, que hace de la ensoñación una parte esencial de su poética: "El sentido común," dice, "que es la barrera de los sueños, comienza a flaquear, y las gentes de diversos campos se mezclan y confunden." (*Rimas* 41) En la misma "Introducción sinfónica", se describe la mente del escritor como "el misterioso santuario de la cabeza" donde los hijos de su fantasía moran "desnudos y deformes, revueltos y barajados en indescriptible confusión, [sintiéndolos] a veces agitarse y vivir con una vida oscura y extraña" (*Rimas* 39). Esta cita, que parece prefigurar el surrealismo, confirma que, si bien el romántico se evade del mundo moderno en una especie de conjuro espiritista, no deja de ser cierto que esa evasión es fruto de la amenaza del progreso y que su mente ya está conformada, de manera irreversible, por el mundo que aborrece. No hay duda de que las calles de un Madrid que en vida del poeta pasa de los 200.000 habitantes a casi el doble, fue una realidad mucho más cercana para él que el mar tempestuoso.

5. Grupo del 98

El cambio perceptivo y estético resultado del proceso de sustitución del *Erfahrung* por el *Erlebnis* resulta, en una España de modernización tardía y desequilibrada, en una crisis más lenta que en el resto de Europa. A pesar de los testimonios tempranos que se han visto, no puede hablarse de un proceso y de una preocupación generalizadas. hasta aproximadamente el año 1900, año en que la población de un Madrid cuya arquitectura en el centro empieza a verticalizarse, llega a

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

los 540.000 habitantes como consecuencia de los flujos migratorios que provocan asimismo el crecimiento a lo ancho de los suburbios donde empieza a proliferar la clase obrera.

Ahora veremos cómo el grupo del 98 será el responsable de ponderar el trágico desenlace de la modernidad en España. Estos escritores por lo general no reaccionarán de forma positiva a estos cambios. Como ha estudiado Cristián Ricci, los noventaiochistas se decantarán en sus obras de creación "por la representación de la miseria arrabalera" (35) en detrimento del centro urbano, del que huyen por temor a enfrentarse con las multitudes, el tráfico, los tranvías y, en definitiva, con la sinfonía urbana que amenaza su orden mental.

Esta negatividad ante lo urbano se cifra precisamente en la pérdida de un flujo de conciencia ordenado y Unamuno será quien lo exponga con mayor lucidez. Data de julio de 1902 –un año antes del famosísimo *The Metropolis and Mental Life* de Georg Simmel– su ensayo "Ciudad y campo (De mis impresiones de Madrid)". Con su estilo implacablemente punitivo, el autor vasco comienza recordando con desánimo y hasta con asco sus experiencias madrileñas para declarar a continuación que pretende contribuir "al punto sociológico de la influencia de los condensados centros de población sobre el espíritu de los pueblos y su proceso de cultura" (VIII, 444). Su intento sistematizador o, al menos, de diagnóstico, debe ser situado en la vanguardia europea en lo que respecta a escritos de esta índole. La noción de cambio perceptivo está ya claramente expuesta por Unamuno en este texto.

El autor bilbaíno achaca a la vida en la ciudad un ataque sobre todo a la capacidad de "reflexión" que requiere de una pausa de los estímulos, imposible en lugares como Madrid. Caminar por la capital es –explica el autor– una actividad repleta de constantes interrupciones del orden mental y el exceso de estímulos hace imposible que el viandante se "recupere" de cada uno de ellos, entrando en un estado de sobreexcitación primero y cuando es continuada, de "hipnosis" y "sonambulismo" (VIII, 447). El autor achaca al reporterismo, al telégrafo, al exceso de novedades editoriales y de revistas, –incluso a la moda– la consecuencia literaria de este "cerebralismo" (como lo llama) que deriva en el que denomina irónicamente "estilo brillante", que describe así: "«hacer frases», excitaciones rápidas, breves y fugitivas para el espíritu" (VIII, 448). El espíritu, que no alcanza el nivel del progreso, es precisamente la raíz de la preocupación unamuniana, y es asimilable al aura de Walter Benjamin, un aura, como en el famoso poema de Baudelaire, perdida por efecto del shock urbano.

En 1908, sintetiza Unamuno en otro ensayo titulado "Grandes y pequeñas ciudades":

> las grandes ciudades nos desindividualizan, o mejor dicho, nos despersonalizan […] Las grandes ciudades nivelan, levantan al bajo y rebajan al alto, realzan las medianías y deprimen las sumidades. […] por las calles de Madrid no cabe ir soñando, no tanto por temor a los coches, tranvías y automóviles, cuanto por la continua descarga de tantas caras desconocidas. Ese ajetreo de la gran ciudad, ajetreo de que tanto gustan los que necesitan llenar su fantasía con algo, sea lo que fuere, tiene que molestar a los que buscan que no se la vacíen. Para mi gusto nada hay más monótono que un bulevar de París. Las personas me parecen sombras. No resisto una muchedumbre de desconocidos.
>
> A Madrid le tengo miedo (Unamuno VIII, 100-101)

Este terror a la masa despersonalizada que culminará con el famoso ensayo de Ortega, y que da cuenta de la sustitución del *Erfahrung* por

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

el *Erlebnis*, es un terror ocasionado, como queda aquí ejemplificado, por la pérdida del control de la memoria, de su voluntariedad.

Por su parte, Azorín reflexiona en *Madrid (guía sentimental)* de 1918, sobre el cambio perceptivo y el impacto que la ciudad supone y su impacto en la literatura:

> Toda la civilización moderna se halla a esta hora del crepúsculo vespertino en esta atmósfera que respiramos en la calle populosa y ruidosa de la gran ciudad. ¿Cómo podrán percibir estos matices los hombres de dentro de trescientos años? Ni, ¿cómo ahora podríamos expresar estos matices de modernidad con un lenguaje castizo, enfático, calcado en los prosistas del siglo XVII?
>
> Saturémonos durante un momento de ruido, de luz, de idas y venidas, de afanes y de fatigas de la muchedumbre en las grandes calles, y huyamos luego hacia la apartada callecita en que hay una casa silenciosa y limpia. ¿Podríamos trabajar nosotros en medio del estruendo de una gran calle? ¿Cómo armonizar este estrépito con el recogimiento y el silencio de la reflexión? […] Huyamos hacia la silenciosa callejuela; ahora, lejos de la muchedumbre, estamos ya nosotros con nosotros mismos. Ahora, ya nos pertenecemos (Martínez Ruiz "Azorín" III, 1302-3)

Ese "recogimiento" y ese "silencio de la reflexión", asociados a la experiencia (y la escritura) tradicional, tipo *Erfahrung*, coherente y ordenada, y que ya aparecen aquí ligados a una maniobra de huida del tumulto, le resultan imprescindibles al autor para acometer el ejercicio de la escritura. Sólo once años más tarde, en 1929, ya se percibe un cambio en la expresión del mismo autor. En *Andando y pensando (Notas de un transeúnte)*, Azorín retrata en un estilo fragmentado el carácter rápido y tenso la vida urbana. Su tendencia al estilo impresionista y eventualmente la técnica del fundido reflejan la vida ajetreada de una capital que pronto llegará al millón de habitantes:

> Andando y pensando [...] Dejar correr, escurrir, explayar la vista por las fachadas de las casas, por los transeúntes, por la faz de una bella mujer, por el ancho cristal de un escaparate. No pensar en nada. Y de pronto, en la sobrehaz de la conciencia, una lucecita, un estremecimiento, una vibración: la idea, la continuación de la idea, la prosecución del trabajo mental que habíamos clausurado.
>
> No cesar en la marcha. Los ojos de esta hermosa transeúnte, ¡qué bonitos, luminosos, inteligentes son! Las letras fulgentes, multicolores, de un anuncio luminoso; el grito de un vendedor de periódicos; el rastro de penetrante perfume de una dama que pasa. Y la sensación olfativa que atrae otra vez a la conciencia, al plano de la reflexión, un paisaje, en febrero, allá en Levante, poblada la campiña de gráciles almendros. No acertamos a relacionar el perfume pasajero con las florecillas sin olor [...] Discontinuidad; incoordinación en la apariencia. Coordinación profunda. La vida cerebral que continúa, persistente, clandestina, sin quererlo nosotros. (Martínez Ruiz "Azorín" V, 113-114)

En este fragmento, vuelve la pugna entre el *Erlebnis* ("Dejar correr, escurrir, explayar la vista"; "Discontinuidad; incoordinación en la apariencia"; "La vida cerebral que continúa … sin quererlo nosotros") y el *Erfahrung* ("la idea, la continuación de la idea, la prosecución del trabajo mental que habíamos clausurado"). La sucesión caótica de imágenes, el flujo de conciencia que escapa al control del viandante era una marca ya distinguible en la España de principios del siglo XX.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

6. Conclusión

A pesar de los cambios de estilo a lo largo del periodo estudiado, se observa una consistente reticencia en el escritor a aceptar la pérdida de la solidez y el orden mental que caracteriza la experiencia del mundo antiguo. En contraste, el carácter líquido, vertiginoso e inaprensible de la experiencia de la modernidad crea, en primer lugar, una crisis en el sujeto, que siente dejar de pertenecerse a sí mismo. En segundo lugar, esta crisis de identidad se proyecta en el plano social poniéndose de relieve un temor a la desintegración de un pasado legendario que la modernidad va demoliendo con sus objetos que, desde la moda a los nuevos inventos de la técnica, provienen en su mayoría de los países del norte. El escritor español deberá negociar una difícil posición que basculará entre posturas a priori incompatibles: por un lado, el deseo de no perder el tren respecto las naciones más avanzadas de Europa y, por otro lado, el rechazo a las influencias extranjerizantes; por un lado, la admiración de los milagros de la técnica y, por el otro, el miedo a la pérdida de contacto con el terruño. No será hasta la irrupción del grupo del 27, con su genial fusión de vanguardia y tradición, que la sensibilidad moderna del artista halle su punto de madurez.

Justo en el año en que el texto de Azorín analizado arriba veía la luz, Federico García Lorca atestigua en Nueva York el crack de la bolsa en Wall Street. La ciudad americana, que ya iba sustituyendo en su prestigio artístico al "romanticismo podrido renovado de París"[11] se estaba convirtiendo desde la publicación de *Diario de un poeta reciéncasado*, de Juan Ramón Jiménez (1917), en un locus casi ineludible de la literatura española del siglo XX. De esta manera, y con obras del calibre de *Poeta en Nueva York*, nuestra tradición literaria sale de su ensimismamiento y halla su madurez en el seno de una modernidad que a lo largo de dos siglos –como se ha podido ver– le resultó indigesta y que no deja de serle dolorosa por cuanto implica dejar atrás un orden mental impreso, a su vez, en la tradición literaria. El verso libre y el poema en prosa que consolidan estas obras serán algunos de los vehículos en los que un nuevo modo de ver el mundo se abriría camino en nuestras letras dejando, precisamente, de ser ya tan "nuestras" para pasar a inscribirse en un ámbito más universal.

11. Carta de Lorca a Dalí, del verano de 1930, recién llegado de América (García Lorca 693).

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

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ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

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ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

A COLLAPSE OF CYBER-UTOPIANISM IN CONTEMPORARY MEXICO: THE FISSURES OF ONLINE CITIZEN JOURNALISM AND POWER'S PERVERSE USE OF THE NET

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Abstract: This article considers a new media scenario in contemporary Mexico, which has propelled and transformed the notion of citizen journalism. Especially in the last years of the Felipe Calderón administration and the first ones of Enrique Peña Nieto's, citizen journalism acquired a significant relevance. Ordinary citizens, in order to mitigate the information vacuum and misinformation regarding the wave of death and destruction unleashed during the so-called War on Drugs, decided to report episodes of violence that were occurring across the country. While some information shared by citizen journalists on blogs and microblogs were valuable for their fellow citizens, a darker side of this type of reporting is equally noteworthy as, in some occasions, it has contributed to the circulation of narco-propaganda. However, this is not the only way in which failures of the notion of cyber-utopianism have been exposed. For instance, criminal networks, as well as local and national political forces and authorities, have taken advantage of digital technologies to put into practice effective strategies of surveillance against dissenting voices and of control of the flows of information.

Key Words: Mexico, Citizen journalism, Sousveillance, Bot Farms, Cyber dystopia.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

Citizens have been able to avail themselves of communication technologies of the Internet era to perform citizenship in new political ways and actively participate in the flow of information. The Internet has become a highly prolific medium through which civilians have been able to produce and spread their own narratives and, in this way, to publicly counter hegemonic narratives on issues that affect them. In other words, the possibilities of increasingly affordable digital gadgets and the massive dissemination potential of the net in general and social media networks have transformed the user from a mere passive consumer into a potential producer of all types of content that can be shared immediately and on a global scale.

The Zapatistas, the indigenous rebel group in the highlands of the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, were pioneers in adapting the Internet as an essential political tool in their struggle against the Mexican state beginning New Year's Eve of 1993, just a few hours before the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the United States, Mexico, and Canada took effect. Juanita Darling contends that the Zapatistas succeeded at evading the Mexican state's attempts for limiting press coverage of the uprising by offering interviews to independent Mexican and foreign journalists as well as by releasing *communiqués*, both in Spanish and English, through fax and email. The Internet, in particular, would not only allow the Zapatistas to reach but also to maintain a permanent communication with a large audience of sympathizers and people who were engaged in similar political struggles, both in Mexico and all over the world, with the hope of creating "national and transnational advocacy networks" (Darling 121, 127): "Through their own media, the Zapatistas actively participated in redefining the public debate …. [The] readers of Internet messages unabridged by gatekeepers formed an imagined community that challenged the dominant view of the revolution and the government, redefining the nation contested in the rebellion" (125-26).[1]

According to Zeynep Tufekci, the Zapatistas' "global visibility, outreach, and organizing efforts arguably mark the beginning of the […] wave of post-internet networked protests" which have taken place all over the world, especially since the last days of 2010 (109). Subsequently, about one year after Facebook rolled out the Arabic version of its platform, the massive protests in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia in support of the 26-year-old street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi marked the beginning of the so-called Tunisian Revolution. This popular protest not only soon unleashed the popular uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa in what is known as the Arab Spring, but also inspired other major social movements elsewhere, such as the *Indignados* in Spain, Occupy Wall Street in New York's Zuccotti Park, and the democratic protests in Hong Kong.[2] The main grievances of citizens all over the world were economic justice and anti-austerity measures, failure of political representation and political systems, global justice, and rights of people. As Rosana Reguillo emphasizes, all the protest movements, despite the particularities of each, shared a feeling of "dissatisfaction over the order of the things that they perceive[d] as intolerable" (*Paisajes* 53).

Almost two decades after the Zapatistas' uprising, Mexico was part of this global trend. The movement #YoSoy132 (I am 132) originated on May 11, 2012 on the campus of the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, where Enrique Peña Nieto —at that time, the PRI candidate for the upcoming general elections— was scheduled to speak. The insensitive justification that Peña Nieto gave to the brutal police repression in the nearby city of San Salvador de Atenco in 2006 when he was the governor of the State of Mexico provoked an irate reaction on the part of dozens of students who attended the event.[3] Many of them recorded their protest against the candidate with their cell phones and uploaded the videos onto social media, while several

1. Darling adopts Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined community, in which Anderson conceives that the members of a nation "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the images of their communion" (qtd. in Darling 6). Similarly, Darling underscores that the Zapatistas, and all those across Mexico and in other countries who decidedly supported their cause, shaped an imaginary community, as if they inhabited "different neighborhoods of the same community of resistance" (122).

2. Bouazizi self-immolated in response to the confiscation of his wares and the harassment and humiliation that some municipal officials inflicted on him. The massive protests began in the aftermath of Bouazizi's incident, while he was interned in a hospital, and intensified starting on January 4, 2011, when he finally died. Ten days later, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who had been in power for 23 years, stepped down as the president of Tunisia. The success of the protests in Tunisia triggered similar anti-government movements in many other Arab countries: Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, Morocco, Iraq, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Sudan, or Iranian Khuzestan. In Libya (Muammar Gaddafi), Egypt (Hosni Mubarak), and Yemen (Ali Abdullah Saleh), rulers were also deposed.

3. This operation, authorized by Peña Nieto, resulted in the death of two high school students, 200 people arrested, and almost thirty young women raped.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

Mexican mainstream media outlets echoed the reaction of Pedro Joaquín Coldwell, the PRI national president, who stated that the protesters were not students of that university but people interested in disrupting the campaign event. The students' reaction against Coldwell's misleading comments resulted in 131 students appearing in a video in which they individually identified themselves and showed their University ID cards ("Cómo nace"). The video was published on YouTube and quickly went viral. Right away, college students from other Mexican universities and civilians in general used the hashtag #YoSoy132 to join that protest. Mainly on Twitter, they wanted to state that, symbolically, they were the 132nd student. In turn, spontaneous action by students was the catalyst for a protest movement through which, in the following months, many Mexicans objected, both online and in the streets, against three primary dynamics that permeated Mexican politics: the manipulation and the lack of democratization of the mainstream media; the possible return of the PRI to power with Peña Nieto as candidate; and the systemic corruption in the functioning of the country (Reguillo, *Paisajes* 54).[4] On the one hand, social media became an invaluable organizational tool that allowed the protesters to maintain contact with each other and inform the bulk of society of the activities and the events that they organized. On the other hand, those outlets enabled civilians to counter the authorities' media control through the undertaking of diverse practices of citizen journalism, such as live streaming or the massive dissemination of their recorded meetings, acts of protest, and even police repression; the facilitation of the exchange of ideas and the creation of discussion forums where any individual could participate; and the sharing of blog entries, posts, and articles that challenged power's attempts of misinformation.

The practice of citizen journalism in 21stcentury Mexico has gone far beyond #YoSoy132. There have been many other situations and contexts in which ordinary civilians have spontaneously become reporters and often, using their own smartphones, have photographed or recorded events which, due to their public interest, have been shared on diverse social media outlets. In this regard, I view ordinary people's efforts to mitigate the information vacuum that prevailed during the first years of the War on Drugs to represent the most remarkable exercise of citizen journalism in contemporary Mexico. In the first part of this article, I examine the so-called *narcoblogs* and warning networks, which have been the main two practices of citizen journalism that flourished as a response to the lack of reliable information in traditional media about the wave of violence unleashed since the end of 2006, when the Felipe Calderón administration initiated an alleged crusade against the main criminal organizations that have operated in the country for decades.[5] However, in the second part of the article, I argue that the euphoria initially surrounding this case of sousveillance —a concept that I describe in more detail below— has abated over time. While laudatory, popular initiatives in citizen journalism have not always solved the persisting deficit of information about the War on Drugs. Besides the fissures that seem to accompany this kind of counter-narrative, I also focus on the capacity of power from above to collapse the cyber-utopianism that online citizen journalism embodies. In other words, I argue that different events have shown that the Internet and social media have also turned into indispensable tools for the state apparatus and organized crime. They have engaged in different practices of digital surveillance to curtail and eliminate dissenting voices, as well as to fashion their own propaganda to maximize control over the flows of information and, therefore, impose their influence on public opinion. Thus, cyberspace has become a critical site for the dissemination of competing narratives as well as for the implementation of practices of scrutiny between citizens and the authorities and organized crime.

4. Two of the most iconic acts of protest carried out by the movement #YoSoy132 took place in the Televisa headquarters and the Estela de Luz, which, in the eyes of the protesters, symbolized the systemic corruption of the political power in the country. On June 13, 2012, hundreds of people gathered in the proximities of Mexico's main TV channel and made use of projected images and a horn to display a five-minute video on the walls of the building. The video began with the rhetoric question "What do they manipulate behind these walls?" and had as one of its slogans the subversive sentence "Now we are those who tell the news" (Reguillo, *Paisajes* 81). Similarly, the very controversial Estela de Luz, which was commissioned by the former president Felipe Calderón to commemorate the bicentenary of Mexico's independence and the centenary of the Mexican Revolution, was also the scenario chosen to hold meetings, discussions, and speeches.

5. The militarization of Mexico intensified during the administration of Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018) and continued under the administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2018-). The War on Drugs has been a resounding failure. While the undertaking of a questionable kingpin strategy resulted in some well-known Mexican drug traffickers being captured (Pérez Ricart), organized crime groups, far from being extinguished, still operate. In fact, the crime groups have expanded geographically and have infiltrated other parts of the country sowing immense levels of spectacular violence.

Citizen Journalism against the Information Vacuum

The dramatic transformations in the dispersal of information occurred following the arrival of the Internet ushered in profound changes in the news ecosystem, which C. W. Anderson defines as "the entire ensemble of individuals, organizations, and technologies within a particular geographic community or around a particular issue, engaged in journalistic production and, indeed, in journalistic consumption" (412). Irremediably, journalism is no longer what it had been conceived until the end of the 20th century. Put another way, current times have given rise to new concepts of journalism. Mark Deuze, for instance, adopts Zygmunt Bauman's notion of liquid modernity and coins the term "liquid journalism" to refer to a kind of journalism which has entered into a spiral fixated of immediacy and celerity, and which is both cause and effect of the contemporary liquid modern society.[6] To Anu Kantola, liquid journalism is also characterized by not being exclusively limited to professional reporters and the newsrooms of conventional media outlets, but rather for being open to new actors, namely citizens, who, disinterestedly or not, can avail themselves of the enormous possibilities of the new communication technologies at their disposal to somehow get involved in the processes of the public circulation of information: "Journalism, as a profession, cannot control the public sphere in the way it used to in the age of mass media and mass audiences. Journalists are losing their monopoly on public voice, and many other people claim their right to use their voice in public life" (434).

An abundant academic output has resulted in a wide variety of approaches to the phenomenon of citizen journalism, which has not ceased to evolve and which, instead of being clearly defined, remains somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, definitions by the likes of Jay Rosen are broad: "When the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another, that's citizen journalism" (Rosen).[7] On the contrary, some critics, such as Ansgard Heinrich, take a much narrower approach by making a distinction between who they consider to be citizen journalists and other kinds of news-deliverers. According to Heinrich, the term citizen journalism exclusively refers to a particular type of information node in the contemporary sphere of networked journalism. To her, the key factor is the intentionality on the part of the individual: a citizen journalist is not an ordinary person who happens to witness a newsworthy event and makes it public by themselves, but someone who is "concerned with a *continuing* coverage of issues they are interested in and they choose various methods to provide such coverage" (138, *italics* in original). In this regard, Heinrich stresses that people who become citizen journalists do so because they often disagree with the coverage provided by traditional media organizations. Such discontent encourages them to take action and demonstrate that they "are capable of delivering different perspectives —or another layer of information— to stories" (Heinrich 141).

Clearly, the Internet has empowered dissenting individuals as they no longer depend entirely on the mainstream media outlets and their filters to reach a large audience, a dynamic that poses significant repercussions on public opinion. At present, individuals are able to exercise absolute control over the process of production and diffusion of their own messages through their websites and their personal or collective accounts in different social media outlets. These citizens are paradigmatic examples of the new subjectivities that, according to Jodi Dean, have resulted from the network society. Dean's argument essentially reproduces the view of Hardt and Negri, who point out that current times have witnessed the crisis of the mediating social institutions —the nuclear family, the prison, the school, the union, and the local church— and, therefore, the inevitable passage from the disciplinary society to the society of control:

6. As Bauman emphasizes, "journalists today are confronted by a readership of 'zappers,' picking a sentence apart in bits and pieces, consuming not so much ideas, interpretations, arguments and analyses, as (in the currently fashionable terms) 'sound bites' [….] They will be in fact eliminated at the earliest stage of their message's travel if what they produce were not 'headline-worthy' stuff" (Deuze 676).

7. Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis take a similar tact but are among those scholars who alternatively use terms such as "participatory journalism" or "user-generated content" instead of citizen journalism to refer to this reality: "The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires" (9). This definition encompasses remarkably diverse practices by ordinary citizens, which range from the sharing of a video recording that shows a supposed newsworthy event to a blog entry commenting on a topical subject or an opinion given in the course of a live television debate which is open to the participation of the audience.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

> Hardt and Negri argue that the old political subject —the citizen-subject of an autonomous political sphere, the disciplined subject of civil society, the liberal subject willing to vote in public and then return home to his private domesticity — can no longer serve as a presupposition of theory or action […] In their place, we find fluid, hybrid, and mobile subjectivities who are undisciplined, who have not internalized specific norms and constraints, and who can now only be controlled. (76)

The remarkable emergence in Mexico of ordinary civilians acting as amateur journalists in the context of the War on Drugs lends credence to the idea that these actors do not come onto the scene by chance, but instead frequently as a result of an adverse situation. The shock experienced by many Mexicans to the deluge of violence in select cities and towns became even more disconcerting due to the lack of information regarding these events in traditional media outlets. Insufficient coverage was especially apparent at the local level, since civilians could barely find explanations or even references in the press to the crimes that had occurred where they lived. This lack of informative transparency has been due to the actions of criminals and corrupt authorities who have exerted meticulous and comprehensive control over information by combining media blackouts with misinformation. Thus, while reporters were silenced or forced to collaborate with criminal networks, ordinary people committed themselves to replacing professional journalists in order to inform others about what was actually happening.[8] These generally anonymous citizen journalists embody what Stephen Cooper calls the Fifth Estate, "a watcher of the watchdog" (14):

> [Whereas] the metaphor of watchdog has long been popular as shorthand for the structural role of the free press in a representative democracy (13) […] bloggers do have the power to identify factual inaccuracies in mainstream reporting, second-guess the news judgment of mainstream editors, argue for different interpretations of fact than those offered in mainstream stories, or draw attention to stories they feel have been insufficiently covered. (14)

This work of monitoring the content published by mainstream media outlets illustrates the essence of sousveillance. Coined by Steve Mann, sousveillance refers to a spatial and directional dynamic that opposes surveillance. Surveillance, as suggested by the French prefix sur-, means to watch from above in a figurative scale of power relations and is conducted by those who possess the greater political power. Sousveillance, with the French prefix sous-, means the opposite: a "watchful experience from below" (Mann and Ferenbok 22) that is practiced by those at the margins of power. Therefore, sousveillance acts as "a balancing force" (26), which suggests that Foucault's interpretation of the Panopticon devised by Jeremy Bentham "is no longer sufficient" (26) to describe contemporary power relationships mediated by networked, wearable gadgets capable of broadcasting what we see (24). Within the Panopticon, the watcher sees the body of the prisoner, but the latter cannot see the former because they are even unable to see a shadow. Unlike the asymmetrical gazing between guards and prisoners in the Panopticon, which results in an institutionally disciplined or docile body, the power politics of sousveillance underscores that ordinary people "can and will not only look back, but in doing so potentially drive social and political change" (24).

Despite citizen journalism did not originate when ordinary people began to have access to the Internet but some time before, current media technology makes the exercise of sousveillance "more effective" (Mann and Ferenbok 31).[9] Citizen journalists have mostly employed blogs and,

8. More than 150 media professionals were killed in Mexico between 2000 and 2022 possibly due to their profession ("Periodistas asesinados"). However, the assassinations of journalists is just the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. In 2020, for instance, at least one reporter was somehow attacked every thirteen hours in Mexico (*Distorsión* 41). Such statistics explain why Mexico is considered as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists. In fact, Mexico was ranked 128 in the 2023 World Press Freedom Index created by Reporters Without Borders. The following excerpt from the Index report concisely reiterates dynamics of violence against journalists: "Journalists who cover sensitive political stories or crime, especially at the local level, are warned, threatened and then often gunned down in cold blood. Others are abducted and never seen again, or they flee to other parts of the country or abroad as the only way to ensure their survival" ("Mexico").

9. As Jessica Roberts puts it, the case often identified as the earliest example of citizen journalism is George Holliday's recording of Los Angeles police officers beating Rodney King in 1991 (3). Roberts describes how this citizen "recorded the video with his home video camera and gave the tape to local news station KTLA, which aired an edited version of the tape" (3). Unlike citizen journalists in current times, by submitting his recording to a professional news organization, Holliday allowed it to maintain its "gatekeeping role, deciding when and how to broadcast the video, in what context, and even what parts of it were shown" (3).

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

more recently, microblogs, such as Twitter and Facebook. Mary Garden affirms that the conceptualization of the notion of blog in general has also become "more complicated and less clear" as long as this communicative tool has evolved and has been used for different purposes over time (484). In the specific case of the blogs which are created and edited by citizen journalists, she underscores that they, although they may not strictly follow traditional journalistic routines and conventions, "perform the very same social function" usually associated with institutionalized media since they have "a clear intention to collect, analyze, interpret or comment on current events to wide audiences" (Garden 492). Since diverse sousveillance practices may result in different forms of citizen journalism and blogging, it is remarkable that the constant episodes of violence associated with the War on Drugs, as well as the insufficient coverage that local and national mainstream media outlets gave to them in the first years of this security crisis, caused ordinary Mexican civilians to engage in two different but complementary types of online reporting: *narcoblogs* and the warning networks.

Citizens Reporting Violence

According to Andrés Monroy-Hernández and Luis Daniel Palacios, the first blogs highlighting the activities of organized crime groups in Mexico were published in the years prior to the beginning of the War on Drugs (83). Such sites would become widespread after 2008 with 33 blogs focusing on the criminal networks during the early 2010s (83). While Dean points out that blogs, in general and not specific to Mexico, had reached a saturation point by then and had already turned into "displaced mediators" (29), Monroy-Hernández and Palacios observe that "the surge in violence since 2006, combined with the silencing of journalists and increased Internet penetration in Mexico, created the perfect trifecta for the popularization" (84) of *narcoblogs*. These websites published analytical or opinionated discussions about the conflict and became especially popular with the postings of articles featuring original video recordings and photographs of arrests and explicit violence or consequences of violence, such as interrogations, shootings, beheadings, dismembered bodies, torture sessions, murders, military operations, and mass graves. The publication or posting of these videos and images, which revealed the extreme violence that has involved members of criminal organizations, the military, law enforcement officers, politicians, and innocent civilians, transformed the blogs into a kind of a digital surrogate of the sensationalistic *nota roja* (red page), a very popular and firmly established journalistic genre in Mexico that depicts stories of crime and accidents in a spectacular way.[10]

Most of the images and videos published in the blogs would have never been disseminated by conventional media due to their harshness. Of all the websites, *Blog del Narco* attained extraordinary notoriety to the point that it was the most emblematic of the *narcoblog* phenomenon during its period of activity from March 2, 2010 to April 30, 2013. The blog's supposed editor was a woman known as Lucy, who would eventually introduce herself as a journalist in her late twenties from an undisclosed city in northern Mexico and who collaborated with a friend who specialized in informatics. Her anonymity, akin to the hidden identities of most of the citizen journalists in the War on Drugs, illustrates the ghostly existence of actual people who are forced to use fictitious names to protect themselves. Despite Lucy's alleged background as a reporter, her circumstances were not typical for a journalist who edits a personal blog as a supplement to their professional activity. Rather, in *Blog del Narco*, Lucy acted as a citizen, or better, as an ordinary civilian who deviated from journalism's conventions and made use of her knowledge on reporting to shape an online news site which published what, on many occasions, was not

10. Amalendu Misra tells that, within Mexican society, there is both an "appetite for gruesome images of death" and the "public's obsession in following death closely" (25). His view reminds us of a famous quotation by the Mexican poet Carlos Pellicer, which is cited by Carlos Monsiváis in the chronicle he writes about the *nota roja* in *Los mil y un velorios* ("The Thousand and One Visitations"): "The Mexican people have two obsessions: the taste for death and the love for flowers" (192). John Dickie's documentary *El diablo y la nota roja* ("The Devil and the Red Page") features eloquent testimonies that evidence the demand for this kind of journalism by large sections of the Mexican population. Despite its popularity, Monsiváis considers that the *nota roja* has become a declining genre due to the violence caused by the War on Drugs: "[Drug trafficking] radically modifies the meaning of the '*nota roja*' and, almost daily, expands the '*nota roja*' to eight columns. The singularity of the criminals and the crimes has disappeared, and the massification of the murder also results in massive dehumanization" (13).

disseminated by traditional media sources. In 2012, Lucy published the bilingual book *Dying for the Truth*. *Undercover Inside the Mexican Drug War*, where she reviews some of the most shocking episodes of violence covered in the blog during its first year of existence. In the book's introduction, Lucy stresses that her life, as well as that of her friend's, changed the day they decided to leave behind their "indifference" (3) and, secretly, run their blog in order to rectify information blackouts and mitigate the generalized silence among a large swath of the Mexican press:

> We just wanted to post unfiltered, uncensored news about the government's war with the *narcogangsters*, about the shootouts, decapitations, and other bloody acts taking place on a daily basis. These were events that print journalists and TV news anchors in Mexico should have been reporting to citizens, but their voices had largely been silenced. Unable to manage the cartels, politicians were finding it much easier to manage the local and national media. Because of censorship, threats, and assassinations, publishers, editors, writers, journalists, cameramen, news anchors, and anyone involved in mainstream media were downplaying the crisis engulfing the nation. As a journalist, you couldn't say that two children — eight and ten years old — had been executed and found in a box, because it wasn't allowed. (3)

Monroy-Hernández and Palacios counted an average of 216 posts per month in the blog (86). This signals the high degree of Lucy's commitment to the cause of publicizing information. In this regard, Monroy-Hernández and Palacios underscore that *Blog del Narco* "quickly acquired a reputation for providing exclusive content, most notably gruesome execution videos," and that "the site's popularity skyrocketed" as those videos went viral (87).[11] The site's popularity also contributed to the consistent mentions of the blog across social media and the focused media coverage by mainstream media that Lucy received from the outset of the site's publication.[12] Despite Lucy being the key figure of *Blog del Narco*, she availed herself of collaborations with other anonymous source providers, who, with varying frequency and sometimes motivated by obscured reasons, provided Lucy with relevant information and images to publish on her website:

> The promise of anonymity spurred people from all walks of life to send us eyewitness accounts of atrocities, as well as pictures snapped on their mobile phones, so that we could circulate material unavailable elsewhere. We received information from soldiers, police officers, mothers, businessmen, students, workers, journalists, even cartel gunmen (3).

Lucy ensures that she published everything that came into her possession, regardless of the explicit brutality of the images, and the fact that, in many cases, she suspected that members of criminal groups had sent them for propaganda purposes, as discussed later in this article. Indeed, Lucy defends her website from criticism of sensationalism and unnecessary gore by arguing that she never published such dreadful images for "the shock value" but in order to show the undistorted reality of the wave of violence in Mexico and to facilitate the victims' identification and location by their kin (5). Though violence has not ceased in Mexico and the number of homicides and forced disappearances is currently even higher than it was at the beginning of the War on Drugs,[13] the phenomenon of the *narcoblogs* has lost momentum in recent years. The origin of these blogs, the identities, the intentions of the administrators, and even the possible links between them remain unclear.[14] In turn, distrust towards this form of citizen journalism has been sown among critics over time. For instance, whereas Monroy-Hernández and Palacios, in 2014, stressed

11. As an indication of the site's spike in popularity, in 2012, the blog recorded an average of 25 million monthly hits and was ranked among the 100 most-visited websites in Mexico by Alexa's search rankings (Dying 5).

12. For example, on April 9, 2013, a few days after the publication of the blog's last posts, the television channel *Al Jazeera* broadcasted excerpts of an interview that they had previously held by phone and where her voice was intentionally distorted ("Rise").

13. Although it is impossible to ascertain completely accurate figures in a war-like scenario, more than 350,000 people have been killed and more than 100,000 people remain disappeared so far coinciding with the military action against the cartels (Pardo Veiras and Arredondo, Nochebuena).

14. El Blog del Narco (www.elblogdelnarco.com) garnered more attention with the sudden cessation of Blog del Narco. There are some striking coincidences between El Blog del Narco, which is also edited anonymously, and Lucy's Blog del Narco: they not only share the same alleged informative endeavor and impartiality, the blogs' names are nearly identical, they both have the same banner at the top of their respective sites, and they began to report almost simultaneously. In its origin, El Blog del Narco operated through several web domains, which were administered by an individual who used the pseudonym "Historiador." Monroy-Hernández and Palacios emphasize that Lucy and Historiador, at the beginning of the 2010s, "frequently reference[d] one another in their posts and interact[ed] in the comments sections of other sites" (85). Monroy-Hernández and Palacios mention that Historiador even claimed that Blog del Narco had plagiarized the name of his blog (85).

that Lucy's *Blog del Narco* had served as "an invaluable outlet for disseminating information" (81) in a context where reliable information was difficult to obtain and even considered that this blog "helps us understand a shift in what constitutes a news organization" (86), more recent criticism of *narcoblogs*, such as that of Emily Hind in 2018, makes a less favorable analysis of this phenomenon in general.

Hind focuses on the ambiguous essence of *Blog del Narc*o and does so by figuratively describing some of this blog's most defining characteristics as tactics of contestatory piracy and complacent tourism. Regarding its pirate-like dimension, Hind points out that, despite *Blog del Narco* "claims to give the information that other media will not transmit" (114), it actually "copied a significant portion of its stories from mainstream sources" (114). That is, while Lucy's action might appear noble at first, she is inevitably presented by Hind as a polemical figure that takes advantage of professional journalists' work. In fact, some Mexican journalists waged a smear campaign against Lucy and, in addition to claiming that her blog was secretly controlled by criminal groups, they publicly accused her of deliberately plagiarizing pieces of information previously published by mainstream media outlets.[15] Besides practices of piracy, Hind denies placing citizen journalists at the same level as professional journalists, so that she sees the former's reporting as a kind of tourism which, under no circumstances, can be compared to the job that professional reporters normally do. She points out that Lucy's "[h]ome blogging ducks the dangerous reporting from the field that professional journalists undertake" (119). This argument, which insinuates that Lucy reported without taking the risks of professional reporters on the front lines, is dubious. In reality, even though many professional journalists have been especially exposed to violence due to their coverage of violence related to the War on Drugs, it is also true that some bloggers and Lucy herself have also been victimized for publishing what some criminal networks wanted to keep hidden. In other words, risks have more to do with the content of the information that a reporter, whether professional or amateur, publishes than with the fact of reporting on the streets where events occur.

Parallel to the rise of *narcoblogs* since 2010, the distinctive features of microblogs fostered the emergence of another form of citizen journalism which likewise sought to mitigate the near-complete news blackout related to the War on Drugs. The inherent immediacy of Facebook and Twitter allowed for the formation of warning networks through which civilians themselves reported in real time the incidents that were occurring in their municipalities. The objective of these alerts was to prevent citizens from transiting through a specific area where a shooting or any other act of violence was taking place at that moment. The preferential option of Twitter for both informing and being informed of a violent event can be explained by the fact that this platform does not limit the interactions to the users' list of contacts or friends but rather facilitates the communication among people who, despite not necessarily knowing each other, have common interests. In order to make this system of alerts more efficient and ensure that the targeted public of those alerts did not miss critical information, the civilians who somehow got involved in the warning networks normally made use of determined hashtags. Examples of the hashtags employed in diverse Mexican cities are #mtyfollow in Monterrey, #reynosafollow in Reynosa, #saltillo in Saltillo, and #verafollow in Veracruz. The analysis of a large number of tweets published with these hashtags led researchers to conclude that this phenomenon was mostly driven by what they call "social media curators" (Monroy-Hernández et al. 1443). That is, these citizens, unlike Lucy, positioned themselves as intermediaries by simply passing on or adding comments, interpretations, and updates to alerts and information previously posted by others (1444). These social media curators were actually a small group of generally anonymous individuals who, due to their constant dedication to this information sharing practice, had a large audience and

15. The unknown editor(s) of *El Blog del Narco* acknowledges their status as "pirates." Nevertheless, when they compared themselves with the professional reporters who work for Mexican media, they praise their own independence: "We may be pirates, but never pawns or slaves. We are free and we express ourselves as such. We do not serve any kind of external interest nor are we at the feet of anyone. No one pays us for publishing or not publishing anything. We do not work under pressure or threat, and we do not sell our services to the highest bidder" ("Acerca").

contributed a sizable amount of content related to incredibly violent events in their municipalities (1443).

However, the apparent good that emerges from the phenomenon of the warning networks can also be called into question. For instance, Monroy-Hernández and others point out that, "[a]lthough there is certainly a fair amount of altruism in these people's participation," they had the impression that the curators were, "in a way, competing with each other for attention" (1449). Some curators openly told these researchers about the issue of "tweet theft" (1449), which evinces "the lack of trust and cooperation among curators" (1449). Along with a competition for notoriety, Twitter penetration in Mexico is another factor to consider. Only 2.2% of Mexicans used Twitter regularly by 2010 (Islas). Such a low percentage would suggest that the effect of the alerts was actually low, although two factors must be taken into account: first, the adoption of Twitter would presumably be higher in those cities with an active warning network; second, the Twitter users who usually became informed by following their city's most popular curators and hashtag would also spread the alerts among their social media circles by means of other social media networks, such as Facebook and WhatsApp. Finally, it is noteworthy that the employment of hashtags soon became distorted and, thus, their usefulness was considerably diminished. Such a misuse of hashtags was largely due to their deliberate addition in tweets that were not related to violence but to other events in those cities.

Social Media and Ethics

As noted above, the practices of citizen journalism exerted by means of the *narcoblogs* and the warning networks have sparked an ethical debate. However, the discussion around the flows of information during this period cannot be limited to the analysis of the rightfulness of those who were somehow committed to telling what was happening. Indeed, the focus must also be put on how political actors and the criminal networks have perversely made use of the Internet to weaken the efficiency of, or directly block, the informative endeavor of the professional and citizen journalists; an effort that has been insufficient to curtail the deluge of death and destruction in which the country has been immersed since the moment in which the Mexican state allegedly decided to eradicate the so-called cartels. Put another way, the adversities that professional and amateur reporters have faced during the War on Drugs prove that any glib and uncritical celebration of the democratic potential of the Internet is unrealistic.

In this regard, whereas theorists such as Manuel Castells, Jan van Dijk, and Scott Lash praise the communicational possibilities of the network society, others are highly skeptical about the actual democratic impact of the new scenario. For instance, Bauman openly criticizes those who conceive of "World Wide Web surfing as a new and more effective form of political engagement, and of the accelerated connection to the Internet and rising speed of surfing as advances in democracy" (Deuze 674). Indeed, Bauman underlines that "[the] powerful flow of information is not a confluent of the river of democracy, but an insatiable intake intercepting its contents and channeling them away into magnificently huge, yet stale and stagnant artificial lakes" (674). "The more powerful that flow is," Bauman concludes, "the greater the threat of the riverbed drying up" (674). To Evgeny Morozov, cyber-utopianism, as he coins the "naïve belief" that endows the Internet with "nearly magical qualities" to favor the oppressed rather than the oppressor (xiii), actually stems from a "selective and, at times, incorrect readings of history" (xii):

> Failing to anticipate how authoritarian governments would respond to the Internet, cyber-utopians did not predict how useful it would prove for propaganda purposes, how tearfully

> dictators would learn to use it for surveillance, and how sophisticated modern systems of Internet censorship would become. Instead, most cyber-utopians stuck to a populist account of how technology empowers the people, who, oppressed by years of authoritarian rule, will inevitably rebel, mobilizing themselves through text messages, Facebook, Twitter, and whatever new tool comes along next year. (The *people*, it must be noted, really liked to hear such theories.) Paradoxically, in their refusal to see the downside of the new digital environment, cyber-utopians ended up belittling the role of the Internet, refusing to see that it penetrates and reshapes all walks of political life, not just the ones conducive to democratization. (xiv, *italics* in original)

States' employment of digital technology to surveille has effectively resulted in a new epoch, what Bauman deems a post-panopticon era of liquid surveillance. The new forms of control have no obvious connection with imprisonment and the traditional architecture of walls and windows has turned virtual. In 2017, a joint investigation conducted by The Citizen Lab of the University of Toronto and the non-governmental organizations Article 19, R3D, and Social TIC would reveal that since 2011, during the Felipe Calderón and Enrique Peña Nieto administrations, several agencies of the Mexican government, such as The Attorney General of the Republic and various governmental intelligence services, had employed the spyware Pegasus to surveille some of Mexico's most prominent human rights lawyers, journalists, and anti-corruption activists.[16] This software, sold by the Israeli cyberarms manufacturer NSO Group to the Mexican government to, in theory, investigate organized crime groups and terrorists, infiltrates the smartphones of the targets right after they unknowingly click on a link included in an apparently harmless text message.[17]

Needless to say, surveillance during the War on Drugs has hardly been limited to the Mexican government's illicit use of Pegasus against professionals who, due to different reasons, were on the frontline of the national political agenda and were inconvenient actors in the eyes of the federal authorities. Indeed, surveillance by not so sophisticated but equally effective means has been a fundamental pillar in the strategies of control that, at a local level, corrupt governments, public officials, and organized crime groups have carried out against the dissenting voices of reporters, environmental and human rights activists, community leaders, and citizen journalists. These undisciplined spies, exercisers of sousveillance, have suffered digital insecurity since they have been constantly monitored to know who they are, what they do, what information they have, and who their contacts are. That is, surveillance against them has not been necessarily a preventive practice undertaken to discipline them but, rather, power's response to counter a previous sousveillance. At a local level, this surveillance is unlikely to be as silent and invisible as the one put into practice by the Mexican government through Pegasus, which was intended to get as much information as possible from the monitored subjects without leaving any trace. On the contrary, in local scenarios different types of traces are purposely left as a general rule to, somehow, let the undisciplined subject know that they are being surveilled. Such a strategy aims to instill fear in the monitored individual, who, at that point, must opt for self-censorship or for continuing to publicly act as a dissenting voice even though they assume that such a rebellious attitude would likely turn them into victims of violence. On some occasions, there are no such warnings, and digital surveillance is just the prelude of the exercise of actual violence, which may take the form of threats, intimidations, cyberattacks, physical attacks, material thefts, tortures, or even assassinations.

16. The investigators detected the sending of up to 88 text messages with the malicious link to a large number of individuals, such as the influential journalists Carlos Loret de Mola and Carmen Aristegui; two colleagues and the widow of the assassinated reporter Javier Valdez Cárdenas; the members of the GIEI, the interdisciplinary group of independent investigators of the Ayotzinapa case; Claudio X. González, the director of the non-profit civil organization Mexicanos contra la Corrupción y la Impunidad (Mexicans Against Corruption and Impunity); and the human rights defenders Karla Michael Salas and David Peña, who were the legal representatives of the victims of the Narvarte case.

17. The use of this kind of software did not cease following the change in the federal government, since it has been disclosed that the Attorney General of Mexico (FGR, Fiscalía General de la República) signed at least four contracts in 2019 and 2020, during the López Obrador administration, with a total value of 5,6 million US dollars with the Mexican firm Neolinx to acquire a series of programs that allow for the geolocation of cell phones and data analysis on a massive-scale (Gallegos). Research conducted by Citizen Lab concluded that the phones of two journalists and a human rights activist were infected between 2019 and 2021 with Pegasus (Solomon).

The case of Lucy, by her own account, exemplifies the diverse forms through which violence has been systematically exercised against citizen journalists as well as community leaders and activists. In *Dying for the Truth*, Lucy reveals that, shortly before the completion of her book, two of her collaborators, young people who used to provide her with information about violent acts committed by criminal groups, were disemboweled and hung off a bridge in the northern state of Tamaulipas: "Large handwritten signs, known as *narcobanners*, next to their bodies mentioned our blog, and stated that this was what happened to Internet snitches. The message concluded with a warning that we were next" (1). Lucy also tells the case of an executed journalist who regularly shared information with *Blog del Narco*: "The assassins left keyboards, a mouse, and other computer parts strewn across her body, as well as a sign that mentioned our blog again" (1). In fact, despite the extreme security measures that they took to escape the digital surveillance to which they were subjected —she claims that her blog suffered "hundreds of cyberattacks" (3)—, Lucy would feel compelled to flee and disappear, to the point that her whereabouts have remained unknown since mid-2013.

In addition to the surveillance measures undertaken to obtain critical information and/or silence dissenting individuals, some political actors and organized crime groups have also taken advantage of social media to carry out ethically objectionable propaganda practices of a different nature. Whereas the former, as shall be shown later, has tried to control the public opinion regarding political issues even through dishonest communication strategies, the latter's appropriation of social media has tended to exhibit power to multiple audiences. As Howard Campbell notes, those audiences include rival cartels, opponents and allies within law enforcement, the military and the government, potentially disloyal cartel members, the general public, and even the U.S. government (64). According to Campbell, the so-called narco-propaganda is "a political or quasi-political discourse;" "a form of psychological warfare and terrorism" which is "designed to intimidate, dehumanize, and dominate" (64). In this regard, Robert Gómez stresses that, in this "new dimension of warfare," where digital videos have become critical "instruments of war" (190) and the social media are "a platform for the display of power" (200), the spectacles of violence created and publicized by criminal groups have become "a means of social control in Mexico" (190).

On the one hand, some criminal groups have tended to make use of social media to show off their lifestyle by sharing videos of shootings and posing with impressive military equipment and eye-catching luxury goods, such as jewelry and high-powered cars. This kind of practice illustrates that, as Sarah Womer and Robert Bunker put it, "cartels advertise themselves as a culture, a religion, and a way of life" (86). Even though usually they hide their faces to make it difficult to identify them, this clear exercise of self-representation contributes to the mythification of the criminal groups. Similar to their traditional representations in fictional works and even some journalistic publications, the criminal groups portray themselves in social media as organizations formed by determined, fearless, and successful individuals.

On the other hand, the criminal groups have taken advantage of the lack of censorship on some digital media, such as the *narcoblogs* and YouTube, to provide the widest dissemination possible of both explicit and implicit messages. The video recording of spoken statements by masked individuals is a common practice among the explicit messages. As Campbell points out, in a kind of communication he refers to as narco-videos, "the drug-trafficking groups announce themselves as the new power, the emerging quasi-state body to be respected and feared" (68) in a determined region. Many times, these declarations are preceded or followed by sessions of interrogations and torture which

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

culminate with the prisoners being strangled, shot in the head, stabbed in the heart, or beheaded.[18] In addition to these low-quality recordings with a degraded aesthetic, the criminal groups have also circulated digitally other types of explicit messages which are not digital in their original form. For instance, as the brief statements that Lucy mentioned above, sicarios have written on poster boards beside the corpses of the people they have just assassinated in order to justify their killings and/or threaten other individuals who could be related to them. On some occasions, those messages have been written on the victims' t-shirts or even on their own skin. Similarly, the so-called *narco-mantas* (narco-banners), painted signs placed in public and visible spaces such as bridges, have become a recurring medium to transmit explicit messages containing criticisms or threats against the authorities, law enforcement, journalists, or rival groups.

Social media have also become criminals' preferred way to transmit implicit messages. Indeed, one of the most distinctive features of the episodes of violence and terror is that, frequently, the victims' bodies, which have been subjected to extreme brutality and inhumanity, have become messages themselves. An abundant expressive violence has produced encrypted but, at the same time, unequivocal messages that have made the addition of any explicit statement by the perpetrators unnecessary. As Reguillo explains, the expressive violence, unlike utilitarian violence, is an intended "exhibition of a total and unquestionable power which makes use of the most brutal and at the same time sophisticated forms of violence over a body, which is already deprived of its humanity" ("La narcomáquina"). Examples of expressive violence are massive killings, amputations, dismembered bodies thrown on avenues, severed heads left in public places or displaying a degraded representation, and bodies hung by ropes from bridges. These spectacles of violence, Campbell adds, are not "just brutal and excessive but stylized," since they are "calculated for maximum propagandistic impact in struggles over territory, drug markets, and control of particular cartels" (66).

As was the case with the surveillance measures, the more sophisticated propaganda practices carried out by the political elites in social media do not resemble the ones undertaken by criminal groups that generally operate at a local level. The case of the so-called *peñabots* is, without doubt, the clearest and most striking example regarding political power's use of the cyberspace to try to decisively influence Mexican public opinion through morally reprehensible strategies. The term *peñabot* began to circulate at the beginning of the 2012 Mexican presidential campaign, when a large number of suspicious Twitter accounts were detected for exponentially increasing the list of followers of the official account of the then-candidate Enrique Peña Nieto overnight and, additionally, were dedicated to continuously praising him and his candidacy for the presidency of Mexico. Far from being a stand-alone event, there is evidence that the *peñabots* were deployed several times during the Peña Nieto administration (2012-2018). In those moments, the *peñabots* did not simply limit themselves to massively liking or retweeting tweets previously posted on the official Twitter accounts of the president and other government officials, but also shared favorable news and messages about Peña Nieto and, more importantly, actively countered oppositional tweets and hashtags that had become trending topics in Mexico and, therefore, damaged his public image.

The emergence of the peñabots decisively contributed to the popularization of the social bots, which are fully, or semi-automated, user-accounts designed to imitate human online-behavior and which, for some time, have been recurrently but not exclusively used for political manipulation and disinformation in many countries (Assenmacher et al. 1). This specific role explains that, in cases such as the peñabots, some critics opt for employing the term political bots

18. Campbell emphasizes that, in the course of interrogations and torture sessions, the prisoners "provide self-incriminating answers about their drug-trafficking activities, murders they have committed, or other acts deemed negative by those who have captured them" (69). "They reveal information," Campbell adds, "about the cartel they supposedly work for and divulge the names of police-men, politicians, and military officials supposedly on cartel payrolls" (69).

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

instead of the more generic term social bots. In 2016, while serving ten years in prison for charges related to hacking during Colombia's 2014 presidential election, the Colombian hacker Andrés Sepúlveda would acknowledge that he led a team of hackers who worked for the Peña Nieto presidential campaign in 2012, which he considers as "one of the dirtiest Latin American campaigns in recent memory" (Robertson et al.).[19] Sepúlveda confesses that, besides installing spyware in opposition offices to access critical information and steal campaign strategies, he "manipulated social media to create false waves of enthusiasm and derision." That is, he coordinated what is popularly known as a *granja de bots* (a bot farm), where, for instance, an army of 30,000 automatic posters were able to create trends on Twitter. The automated bots simply completed the "less nuanced work," whereas he also managed thousands of fake social media profiles that he used to "shape discussions around topics such as Peña Nieto's plan to end drug violence, priming the social media pump with views that real users would mimic." Behind those political trolls (humans who use fake accounts) there were generally young students who needed extra income, with each of them in charge of dozens of Twitter and Facebook accounts (Peinado et al.).

However, as Luis Daniel puts it, the notion of *peñabots* not only applied to an automated software that required no human intervention or to low-wage workers paid to operate multiple social media accounts. It also referred to genuine supporters who mindlessly supported the PRI leader by putting their personal accounts at his service (Daniel). This was confirmed by Aurelio Nuño, a marketing director of the Peña Nieto presidential campaign, just a few hours after a video that went viral showed how dozens of people, gathered in a large room and carrying their laptops and cell phones, were being directed by some coordinators of the Peña Nieto campaign to "tweet in coordination with the explicit goal of drowning out" anti-EPN[20] hashtags that had posed major repercussions on Twitter right before the beginning of a decisive electoral debate on the verge of the general elections that Peña Nieto would finally win (Daniel). The video shows how one of the coordinators of Peña Nieto's active supporters warned them that they were going through "a time of crisis" because there were two negative hashtags that they had to "overturn immediately:" "Please, follow your coordinators' instructions. You all have to start tweeting, all together, the hashtag #EsMomentoDeMexico and retweeting the candidate's tweet" ("Lárgate").

The *peñabots* were simply the starting point of a practice that, despite the parties' denial, has become widespread in Mexican politics. Digital experts detected that the candidates who were running for the presidency in the 2018 general election also followed similar strategies to seek votes in a country where social media use is ubiquitous. According to the consulting firm Metrics Mexico, over 18% of Twitter content in Mexico over the previous weeks to that general election was created by bots and influencers (Peinado et al.). However, bots and trolls were not the only available tools to influence public opinion. The parties realized that generating fake news and advertising features on websites allegedly devoted to news were even more effective manipulation techniques. Be that as it may, it definitively became difficult to tell the difference between authentic and fake political discourse on social media.[21]

To what extent such information pollution is effective and can be crucial to determine the outcome of an election? Certainly, the resounding triumph of López Obrador, the clear favorite in the surveys prior to the 2018 election, evinces that the impact of manipulation practices through social media on public opinion is limited. Actually, according to the National Electoral Institute, López Obrador only devoted 4% of his campaign budget to propaganda on the Internet,

19. Sepúlveda, who told his story to a group of reporters of *Bloomberg's Businessweek* to convince the public that he is rehabilitated and to gather support for a reduced sentence, led a transnational team of hackers who worked on presidential elections in several Latin American countries, such as Nicaragua, Panama, Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia, Mexico, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Venezuela (Robertson et al.).

20. EPN is the acronym of Enrique Peña Nieto.

21. In response, more than sixty Mexican media outlets, universities, and ONGs carried out the initiative Verificado 2018 — #QuieroQueVerifiquen (We want you to verify) —, which basically consisted on these organizations encouraging citizens to send them news or stories that were on social media for their verification.

whereas his rivals at least spent a quarter of their budgets on this purpose ("Luna de miel"). To Gabriela Warkentin de la Mora, López Obrador's successful monopolization of the political debate on social media during the electoral campaign was due to the fact that his supporters put into practice "very efficient strategies" that went beyond "the overwhelming of bots and trolls" (Warkentin de la Mora):

> López Obrador's followers and advocates inhabit the digital spaces more organically than the other candidates'. This is due to the fact that, in general, they (López Obrador´s) have been part of these spaces of expression for more time given their condition of opposers to previous regimes, but also because many of them have used the conversation networks beyond the electoral contest. They are well-known neighbors: scholars, activists, artists, etc. (and their communities), whereas the PRI tribe has never been able to transcend its own sphere of conversation in an environment that looks suspiciously horizontal for them. (Warkentin de la Mora)

Aware of this factor, which worked in favor of his interests, López Obrador expressed his "gratitude to the blessed social media" during his first public speech right after winning that general election. In fact, López Obrador made of *"las benditas redes sociales"* one of the mottos of his administration: "Our people are more politized than ever before. They are very intelligent, so sharp that they do not allow to be manipulated. They have the capacity of discerning, they have their own criteria, and these virtues have relied on the blessed social media" ("#ConferenciaPresidente"). López Obrador´s initial glorification of social media was not only intended to highlight the triumph of his legion of committed supporters over armies of bots and trolls that mechanically disseminated fake news or systematically praised his political opponents and attacked his public image. He also presented the social media outlets as a powerful tool to counter the most influential conventional media outlets, which, in his view, openly support his political enemies. While López Obrador has brought front-and-center dozens of alleged independent *youtuberos* who are actually aligned with him, some national radio stations, television channels, and journals have been targeted by the president, who, during *las mañaneras*, the daily press conference he offers early in the mornings of the weekdays, has accused the dissenting media companies and journalists of being "conservative," "misbehaved," "conceited," "deceitful," and "journalism's underworld" (Turati and Garza).

This crusade has made López Obrador double his bet on social media. A report by the data analyst company StreamCharts shows that his official YouTube channel, which broadcasted more than 208 hours of audiovisual content in the first trimester of 2023, had the sixth largest audience among streamers in Spanish. López Obrador´s preference for YouTube is not only a matter of reaching a larger audience but rather of completely controlling the messages he disseminates, since the content he produces is free from the interference of the different types of filters that conventional media impose. However, López Obrador's relationship with Facebook and Twitter has not been so idyllic. At least, this is what can be deduced from his own public statements over the years. López Obrador, who was very critical when Twitter suspended Donald Trump's account, has publicly demanded Elon Musk to "clean up" a platform that, in his view, "is taken by those who manage bot farms:" "[Twitter] is a fundamental, very important information tool, but has been under the control of conservative forces and mafia's economic power" ("Disputa"). Similarly, in his first post on Threads, the social media site created by Mark Zuckerberg in mid 2023 to compete with X (Twitter), López Obrador wished that this new social media "does not opt for profit nor allow the use of bots" ("AMLO"). "It would be great to have a mechanism, a filter that prevents information

manipulation and makes authenticity come true in communication," he added. López Obrador's demand would be completely laudable if it were not for the fact that his administration has also been denounced for making use of bots. Some reports by Signa Lab, the Laboratory of Technological Innovation and Interdisciplinary Applied Studies of the Universidad Jesuita of Guadalajara, Mexico, concluded that the network of social media accounts that supports López Obrador has taken advantage of bot farms to boost his popularity as well as to inhibit and drown his political adversaries (Chávez, Reza). In fact, in December 2021, Twitter announced the elimination of a total of 276 non-verified accounts which worked as masked propaganda tools in favor of the administration of López Obrador (Ruiz-Healy).

A Digital Dystopia

In conclusion, the perverse use that Mexican authorities and criminal groups, whether jointly or separately, have made of the newest communication technologies and media throughout the War on Drugs reinforce a widespread view which demystifies the alleged democratic essence of cyberspace, since it has instead turned into a medium that has enabled innovative and very effective practices of surveillance and manipulation either against the bulk of the society or specific dissenting voices. Regardless, such a negative outlook runs parallel to the diverse practices of citizen journalism, which anonymous civilians have carried out to report episodes of violence that many times have gone unnoticed in conventional media outlets. These two types of practices, the dystopian and the utopian, have coexisted like two sides of a coin. They do not necessarily nullify each other. Instead, they are the outcomes of different actors and their opposed interests. Whereas a relatively minimum number of civilians have decided to combat the informative vacuum by themselves and let people know what was actually happening in their communities and in other parts of the country, local and national authorities, as well as groups of organized crime, have basically put into practice new strategies to consolidate their power.

It is complicated to measure the effectiveness and consequences of the apparently selfless labor undertaken by the citizen journalists. A very simplistic approach to this phenomenon would conclude that the real strength of citizen journalism has been minimum and unimportant, since such a laudable civil response against uncontrolled violence has proved to be ultimately ineffective in curbing the death and destruction that unfolds in many parts of the country since the end of 2006. However, it is undoubted that the endeavor of a small number of people provided their fellow citizens with relevant and helpful information and raised awareness of the extreme seriousness of the events among a population which has historically consumed cultural objects and even journalistic articles that have systematically banalized the illicit activities of organized crime groups and the authorities' direct implications in those activities. In fact, the great popularity achieved by Lucy's *Blog del Narco* proves that, at least at the beginning of the 2010s, citizen journalism had momentum and enough social clout to somehow obstruct the criminal networks all over Mexico, as evidenced by the fact that many citizen journalists were victimized for publishing what those groups intended to keep silent.

Many cases have shown that, in addition to the proverbial big fish eating the small ones, the substantial power that digital gadgets and social media potentially give to ordinary civilians practicing citizen journalism is not unlimited but conditioned by the will of those more powerful actors that those civilians want to expose. Authorities and organized crime have not only made constant use of technology to surveille and silence citizen and professional journalists but have also taken advantage of the same or even more sophisticated tools to

disseminate their own propaganda and, subsequently, consolidate their authority. That is to say, contemporary Mexico has been a kind of digital dystopia where the weak have been empowered on an illusory level, but only insofar as actual power has allowed it.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

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NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

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ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

VOYEURISM, LITERARINESS, AND THE LUST OF SEEING: SYLVIA MOLLOY READS FELISBERTO HERNANDEZ BEFORE QUEER THEORY

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Resumen: Sylvia Molloy was doing queer theory "before queer theory," finding inconvenient and unruly impulses in the authors that she studied before 1991. Whether researching, reading, or remembering, she finds an erotic component in the act of seeing, and her 1981 novel *En breve cárcel* often echoes the tactic of occupying the hollowed-out or phantom male bodies of patriarchal institutions. The "disembodied" Borges that she found in French readings of Borges is countered in her own later treatment of him as a voracious, greedy reader; but it is only in her readings of Felisberto Hernández that she can fully turn the "básica extrañeza" of voyeurism into insights about the autobiographical project. Although she sidelined him due to her commitment to feminism and queer theory, Felisberto remains in Molloy's early oeuvre as a figure for the selfish small pleasures of uncommitted literature for its own sake.

Key Words: anxiety of influence, impersonality, Blanchot, memory, lo entreabierto, unethical criticism

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

> Hay dos maneras de establecer antepasados. Una de ellas poco tiene que ver con nuestra voluntad. Cada texto que escribimos dicta, entre líneas, sus propios precursores, refleja para el lector los meandros de nuestras lecturas previas. Quizá tengamos conciencia de esos precursores, quizá no; quizá lo que hemos escrito despierte en un lector ecos de un nombre que quiera atribuirnos. Así alguien una vez me propuso como precursor a Felisberto Hernández. Yo no lo sospechaba; tampoco lo veía como hecho del todo evidente. Sin embargo, como he leído mucho a Felisberto y es uno de los escritores que más quiero, me dejé convencer. Los dos compartimos después de todo la "lujuria de ver". (Molloy, "Sentido de ausencias", 485)

Once upon a time I wanted to write a book about the Uruguayan author of uncanny fictions and odd memoirs Felisberto Hernández (1902-1962), and about literary influence. It struck me as odd, but fitting, that although much of his literary reputation was preserved by some important male critics and authors, notably Angel Rama and Julio Cortázar, he came to the attention of and was indeed championed by four women writer-critics, all of the same generation, Rosario Ferré, Alicia Borinsky, Cristina Peri Rossi, and Sylvia Molloy, although each of those writers would invoke and support Felisberto's oeuvre only temporarily, as part of projects that needed to do battle with more substantial literary precursors (the vocabulary I use I borrow consciously from Harold Bloom's prestigious though heavily sexist ideas about the anxiety of influence). Knowing his biography, I could make it into a joke: Felisberto was married four times, and thanks to the liberal divorce laws of Uruguay in almost all of the cases it was the wife who initiated the divorce proceedings. These women writer-critics, then, would be "Felisberto's ex-wives," attracted to his seductive oeuvre – especially in its idiosyncratic use of voyeurism and fetishism– but eventually seeing through him and moving on from their contact with him with lessons learned.

They didn't relate to Felisberto's oeuvre in the same way, as it turned out, and especially not in the fictions that they wrote while simultaneously being critics. Male characters who display a Felisbertian dynamic of voyeurism and fetishism appear in the early fiction of Rosario Ferré and the novels of Alicia Borinsky, and they are presented as attractive alternatives to the bombastic machismo of stereotypical males at first; still, for both authors these dynamics are heavily criticized, either because of the way they, too, objectify women (Ferré) or because they paralyze the man in positions of impotence (Borinsky). And in their academic criticism, neither Ferré nor Borinsky decides to make Felisberto a permanent touchstone for their criticism (for Ferré that was Julio Cortázar; for Borinsky it was Macedonio Fernández). Invested neither with the power of the books and popular culture we imbibe in our childhood, nor with the weight of canonical respectability, nor with the power to make that claim of literary paternity which is so necessary to inaugurate the dynamics of Bloomian literary history, Felisberto is not your tutor; he is not your required reading; he is not, in the end, your father. It is true that, in a cultural and literary environment full of macho fools, Felisberto's foolishness seems (and is) less threatening: but Ferré's analysis of his unreliable narrators suggests that in the end he is a man who cannot be trusted; and Borinsky's analysis of his private spectacular theaters suggests that in the end he is a man who cannot be reached. Felisberto, then, is not good husband material either.

For that reason, perhaps, the two women author-critics who have absorbed Felisberto in the most positive way, Sylvia Molloy and Cristina Peri Rossi, are the ones who are not looking for husbands. Like Ferré and Borinsky, these two authors use Felisberto to correct the course of their writings from falling under the sway of more powerful precursors (Borges and the French nouveau roman for Molloy; Cortázar and committed leftist fiction for Peri Rossi); unlike them, however, Molloy and Peri Rossi (perhaps because of their lesbianism, perhaps not) are

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

not afraid of the perversions we associate with Felisberto. Ferré and Borinsky, each from their very different position in the feminisms of the '70s and '80s, criticized Felisberto's world of male voyeurs and female exhibitions, and each rejected the thematics of fetishism which are so clearly part of that world. Molloy and Peri Rossi entertained far more fully the positions of the voyeur and the fetishist –indeed, Molloy seemed intent on vindicating the position of the voyeur, and Peri Rossi of the fetishist. As they do so we are often made aware of phantom male bodies lingering at the edges of Molloy's critical text, occupying the center of Peri Rossi's fictional texts more fully, into and out of which these two authors step almost at will; irrecuperable to the crasser Oedipal dynamics of Bloomian literary history, this shadow man never needs to be banished as fully as Ferré and Borinsky must banish Felisberto. In Molloy's critical writing in particular he is a position to be inhabited which offers a window into the past without yielding to patriarchal guilt; in Peri Rossi he is a sign for the inevitable melancholy of obsessive desire. (We might say that Molloy wants the right not to be trusted; Peri Rossi wants the right not to be reached.) Finally, even in an era in which both acknowledge to a certain extent the notion that the distinction between the political and the personal, or between the public and the private, cannot strictly be maintained, for these two authors Felisberto's insistent, half-comic desires represent a resistance to the political and the public, a synecdoche for the literary itself.[1]

In the early works of Sylvia Molloy, the threat to the literary will be similar to the threats to the continued influence of Felisberto, and the defense of the literary will also involve the roundabout rescue of the ambivalent privileges of the voyeur. The quote above, from her essay "Sentido de ausencias" (1985), already encapsulates much of Molloy's entanglement with Felisberto and with ambivalences. Written as a reflection upon influences, the essay for *Revista Iberoamericana* begins with a wish to disavow acknowledging influences altogether, and ends with a long description of her relation to a specifically Latin American women's tradition; between them, the only Latin American authors to have "marked" her are (without comment how) Silvina Ocampo and (with the comment quoted above) Felisberto. Yet that train of thought is so redolent of Borges's famous essay "Kafka and his Precursors" that one feels that the "sense of an absence" in the essay's title refers not just to the meaning of the absence of female precursors but also to a felt absence of a precursor, Borges. As we will see, the privilege of seeing as Borges does will be conjugated with the costs of feeling as Felisberto does about what she sees.

Of course, I write this essay in the wake of Sylvia's death. She had been my dissertation advisor, with all that that entails, and we remained good friends for the twenty-five years after that. More relevantly to this essay, the Sylvia Molloy who defends Felisberto in a 1985 essay in which she redoubles her feminist commitment to women writers for ethical reasons, and who would soon join in enthusiastically to the cause of queer theory and queer literary studies for ethical and political reasons, is not the Molloy whose work I am commenting on in this essay. This is Molloy wielding Felisberto before feminism, before (some kinds of) queer theory, to a certain extent before the ethical or the political. Molloy's Felisberto is a figure for literariness itself, but a literariness that partakes in the flickering desires that would eventually constitute the subject of much of the earliest, and my opinion best, queer theory.

Sylvia the Spy: Phantom Male Bodies and the Hunger of Intellectual Curiosity

> [...] así fue su infancia: nada mágica, tampoco atroz, un mero lugar provisorio. [...V]e su infancia poblada de disfraces –el que arma con ropa de su padre, grotesco y divertido– y de largas contemplaciones, disfrazada o no, entre espejos enfrentados. Manía de desdoblamiento y de orden, según series interminables. (*En breve carcel*,14)

1. For more on Peri Rossi's strategic use of Felisberto, see O'Connor 2019.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

The unnamed protagonist of Molloy's 1981 novel *En breve cárc*el reflects back on her childhood, and sums much of it up in this vignette (there will be a few more), of long contemplations in the mirror between facing mirrors, sometimes dressed in her father's clothes, sometimes not. Although "grotesque and amusing," the practice shows a *manía*, an obsession with or fixation on, both doubling and order.[2]

Let's begin with order. Of Felisberto's four "ex-wives," Molloy is the one who hewed most closely to impersonal academic protocols and, for the first twenty-five years of her career, invoked the most impersonal of those literary styles available to her within the literary field. Her first book was published in French and obeys the starchiest and most positivist of Sorbonne dissertation procedures as it traces the diffusion of Latin American literature in France from *modernismo* to Borges's Parisian triumph of 1961; her 1978 chef d'oeuvre, *Las letras de Borges*, while often called "poststructuralist," avoids the quirky playfulness of a Derrida or Barthes. Were we tempted to read a personal pursuit into her 1991 treatment of Spanish American autobiography *At Face Value*, we face a friendly but daunting warning in the second paragraph of the book's introduction:

> I am not tempted [...] to suggest that writing about autobiography is itself a form of autobiography, nor to posit that the organization of this book mirrors a personal itinerary. If I choose to write about [...] Spanish American autobiography, the choice is due to sheer critical inquisitiveness" (1).

While such a statement, and the book which it introduces, does disimplicate Molloy from certain kinds of biographical readings, it also lays open her work to an examination of the pleasures of "sheer critical inquisitiveness," especially in three forms –researching, reading, and remembering–, each of them oddly assimilable to the concept of spying as well as to the pleasure of voyeurism.

Remembering, the third of these variations on "the lust of seeing," will be thematized through her reading of Felisberto; but it may not be out of place to examine the first two as well, since an examination of the role of "research" and "reading" as a sort of spying will help us place Molloy's understanding of Felisberto in a better perspective.[3] Molloy has no difficulty in attributing almost physical pleasure to certain intellectual activities; and the energy directed to accumulating the many thousands of tiny facts which constitute the book on the diffusion of Latin American literature in France bears some resemblance to the marbles which the protagonist of *En breve cárcel* used to take pleasure in taking from the neighborhood boys, on whom she used to spy:

> Manía de desdoblamiento y de orden, según series interminables. Recogía las bolitas que se les escapaban a los chicos del colegio de al lado (a quienes espiaba) y que caían en su jardín: las atesoraba, con ellas pasaba horas organizándolas en fila. Marcaba siempre del mismo modo el comienzo de la serie: con una ágata, mucho más linda que las otras. No olvida ese rito... (14)

In the context of that novel (paired with the image of staring at herself in facing mirrors, whether disguised in her father's clothing or not), the image of the girl stealing marbles is an image of the autobiographical novelist as gatherer of discarded fragments of language and of her surroundings; for my purposes, however, it can also stand as an allegory for the girl child as a future academic, forming "interminable series" of pretty facts in a row, picking up on the material which escaped the schoolboys next door.

In later books, the schoolboys who do not make good enough use of the marbles they play with will be the authoritative figures of Latin

2. The concept of *manía* appears in Molloy's analysis of Norah Lange, as we will see; it's also a term used frequently by Felisberto to describe his driven and often hapless protagonists.

3. Molloy permits herself no anecdotes in her 1991 book on autobiography as a person, but she does recount an anecdote of herself as researcher, correcting the secretary of the Museo Nacional Sarmiento about the existence of Sarmiento's younger brother, who died when he was eleven and about whom Sarmiento "'asserted, no less, that his brother was more intelligent than he was'"(qtd. in *At Face Value*, 244). Stretching the point, one might claim that Honorio Sarmiento is another one of those phantom male masks or positions towards which Molloy throws her energies, even when female positions (in this case, Sarmiento's revered mother and sisters) are profusely available.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

American history and their hagiographers; in her first book, Molloy's pleasure will derive from spying on an entire nation.[4] *La diffusion...* is a book which examines how the male Latin American writers from *modernismo* to the mid-1960's set out to conquer France, and does so not by chronicling what these authors said about the task, but by finding out what the French themselves thought of it all. An odd love triangle, like a daughter rummaging through the diary of her father's mistress to see what she really thinks of him; yet the text is hardly salacious in that way. The energy of the text arises first from its thoroughness, the satisfaction felt in correcting France's poor judgment of Latin America's cultural past.

Second, by focusing on three authors in particular, Rubén Darío, Ricardo Güiraldes, and Borges, Molloy succeeds in tracing an itinerary from Latin American author as flamboyant voyager (Darío), to Latin American author as cosmopolitan performer of his difference (Güiraldes), to Latin American author as *el hacedor*, the maker of texts with no human presence behind them to distract from those texts. (This phantom Borges is far preferable to the Borges of earlier French responses, who was awkwardly assimilated to the existentialist reading of Kafka and Beckett.) But while this gradual correction of the image of Borges in the eyes of the French is persuasive, Molloy also presses it into service to offer a sort of teleology in which the Latin American author no longer needs to conform to stereotype in order to be taken seriously. Indeed, Borges is said to herald a time when the Latin American author will be imitated in France rather than vice versa, and Borges's works are assimilated into a French literary tradition: his great success comes when the massive 1964 collection of essays about him places him as the original contributor to a line of French writers that begins with Mallarmé and Valéry and continues through Blanchot.

It would be nice if Borges had inspired France to dispense with stereotypical judgments about Latin Americanness; elsewhere in her book, however, Molloy acknowledges that this may very well not be the case, either due to the Surrealists' insistence on Latin America's thrilling violence, or to the continuing presence of Latin American authors in France, a group of whom will imminently generate the Boom, and whose present male bodies extend a tradition of sophisticated machismo against which Borges's absent body really offers little opposition.[5] Molloy's research shows that Borges is an exception who has not yet been able to budge the rule; his phantom male body is a position which, impersonally set forth by Molloy's research, defends impersonality, a position which Molloy wills for herself as much as she actually finds it for Latin Americans in the Parisian landscape.

Borges's impersonality can be used by Molloy as a strategy not merely to defend against the personality of previous Latin Americans such as Victoria Ocampo, but also against the impersonality of otherwise formidably attractive French models in criticism and fiction, especially the nouveaux romanciers and nouveaux critiques Nathalie Sarraute and Maurice Blanchot. In her next book of criticism Molloy moves from the practice of researching to the practice of reading; and yet while the Borges of *Las letras de Borges* (*Signs of Borges*) seems to adhere to the doctrines of Blanchot's high-modernist questionings of the self (summed up by the title of Borges's early essay "La nadería de la personalidad," the nothingness, triviality, of personality, which Molloy cites often), and while Blanchot figures prominently in the series of epigraphs, mostly French, which mark like agate marbles the beginning of each chapter, the Borges which Molloy constructs swerves from Blanchot, ending up far from the mystical *eminence grise* who read the futility of the work of literature only in a tragic, agonistic key. Molloy cites (albeit sparingly) Blanchot and Sarraute, but neither of them would employ the vocabulary which she does when describing the physicality of Borges's acts of reading.

4. A gratifying amount of attention is paid to this first book of Molloy's in the new anthology of work dedicated to her, part posthumous Festchrift, part analysis of her place in Latin American literary studies, in the magazine *Chuy* from 2021; see especially Valentín Díaz and Graciela Montaldo.

5. Her book acknowledges Breton, Artaud, Leiris only in footnotes and asides; more curious is a total absence of an assessment of the Cuban Revolution's effect on the rhetoric of "Latin Americanness" since 1959 in France. Her introduction does acknowledge the right-wing coups of recent Argentine history.

6. On this element of Las letras de Borges, Balderston in Link et al. is invaluable.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

Molloy's Borges is a fomenter of disquiet: verbs of upsetting and disequilibrating, adjectives of the uncanny and the off-balance, are used throughout the text.[6] The good reader of Borges finds tension everywhere and experiences that tension without prematurely resolving it. The bad reader of Borges reads as if he or she is eating, digesting, even shitting: "To read Borges [is] to consume a predictable Borges […] Borges is consumed voraciously […] The physical metaphor is not entirely impertinent, underscoring a voracity that no longer recognizes its true appetite" (1). The good reader also eats the text, but does so slowly, to catch the text's contradictions, the moments where Borges cannot be reduced to the stereotype "Borgesian," where he is different from himself. Yet Molloy insists in the text not on a language of the gourmet but of the gourmand. Borges himself is tempted to resolve the tension of his self-contradictions, and does so coded in the language of appetite: when Molloy analyzes his habits of reading, she finds that the "nothingness of personality" produces in Borges-as-reader violent desires: the early Borges displays "vicarious voraciousness" as a "flaneur-voyeur" both while wandering Buenos Aires and while grazing through texts; he is a "coveter of souls" (10) whether reading Hudson or "greedily" (12) remaking Evaristo Carriego's Palermo for himself. The mature Borges of the *ficciones* retreats in his demands, but his creation of the minimal units of narrative desire in his doubles who so much resemble each other does not fool Molloy: "Covetousness and greed abound in Borges's characters"(48); "[w]hile difference, then, is a narrative necessity, what matters is the way in which it manifests itself in the illusory exchange between doubles, and the desire, the craving, that difference awakens" (47); the protagonist of "Ibn Hakkan al-Bokari, Dead in his Labyrinth" is "an emptiness hungering for a script" (57). It seems particularly sly for Molloy to cite approvingly Blanchot's allusions to Borges, as an author of texts in which reason outwits itself, in a chapter in which the reader is defined almost animalistically, a voyeur constantly on the move in an orality that (rather like voyeurism itself) cannot be mapped firmly onto the axis of active versus passive.

Molloy's Borges first takes his pleasure in a voracious reading; however, as a writer he is portrayed in terms of temptation and fear, a man who, incorporating everything, is forbidden from excreting or ejaculating anything since everything has already been written.[7] Having granted Borges the full pleasures of the voyeur, Molloy is much more diffident about attributing to him the pleasure of the fetishist: those multiple small objects, the *hrönir* of Tlön, the Zahir in Borges's palm, the Aleph, cannot be avowed directly as objects of pleasure in Borges but instead may only be used strategically by the author to disrupt our confidence in the solidity of the conventional world. The materiality of these objects generates anguish for the Borgesian character; on the verbal and rhetorical levels, however, Molloy acknowledges what she calls Borges's "pleasure in interpolation," in disrupting pre-established sequences by adding seemingly innocuous terms that call attention to gaps inherent in the sequences. Without citing Derrida once, Molloy gives Borges a desire for and a satisfaction in "the pleasure of delaying closure" (101), leaving Western metaphysics where he found it but "resigned to the 'treacherous swerving' built into [syntax], which seldom reflects the true will to swerve, to dissent, which drives the text" (134). Borges demands the right not to be trusted, occupying a constantly moving position on the margins of the West from which he can greedily see, protected from punishment by a taboo on originality and on loquacity: Molloy compares the space he inhabits to the hotel rooms of which Proust writes, dangerously full of objects until habit (Proust) or forgetfulness and distraction (Borges) clear space for these self-limiting, distrustful philosophical idealists –hotel rooms that echo the rooms which *En breve cárcel*'s protagonist returns to and which she must inventory in order to reclaim their space from its past owners.[8]

Borges's constant injunction to keep reading, and to keep moving as one reads ("Inattention to texts equals death" for Borges, says Molloy (35)),

6. On this element of Las letras de Borges, Balderston in Link et al. is invaluable.

7. There are metaphors of economy and transactions in Molloy's Borges too, but according to her methodology the characters' positions are too fungible for stories or knowledge to be useful as coins between agents; rather, in Borges economy is seen as husbandry or hoarding, a reluctance to emit (or a taboo against emitting) unnecessary signs. Always absorbing, never emitting: no wonder the importance of forgetting in Borges; the "economy of memory," memory as a sort of invested capital, is one of the recurrent minor themes in her later book *At Face Value*.

8. Francine Masiello 1985 compares the hotel rooms of *En breve cárcel* to those of Onetti, a novelist Molloy overtly recognizes in her criticism and in interviews (see García Pinto 138 and Speranza 142). Onetti, a Uruguayan contemporary of Felisberto's who was professional and successful where Felisberto was neither, also thematized voyeurism in such a way that Molloy can use it (his "codicia de relatos" (Speranza 142) can be compared to the greed we have seen that Molloy sees in Borges); but Onetti spies not for its own sake, but to achieve a mixture of fact and imagination that can be exchanged for what he truly desires.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

is balanced in his later texts by his equal desire to achieve a monumentality, however futile he reminds himself this monumentality is; and this tension between the desire to monumentalize oneself and the desire to celebrate one's mobility as reader and writer is the axis along which Molloy's subjects arrange themselves in *At Face Value*. The book, in its search for recurring units of autobiographical tropes in the memoirs of statesmen and the recollections of artists, divides into three sections, "the scene of reading," "childhood and family tales," and "memory, lineage, and representation". The tension between mobility and monumentalism appears in almost every one of her principal subjects, and could well be said to be the real conducting thread which links all these chapters together. Those authors who court monumentalism without much interest in a mobile self (Picón Salas, Cané) are treated less warmly than those who happily perform their mobile, rather privileged, marginality (Mansilla, the Condesa de Merlín) or who see to their monumentality in so lavish a manner that the mobile self clearly exceeds the monument in the very act of monumentalizing (Sarmiento, Ocampo, Vasconcelos).

The most heroic of her autobiographers is the nineteenth-century Cuban poet and freed slave Juan Francisco Manzano, who engages in a desperate attempt to establish his self-portrait as an artist and wrest it from the well-meaning attempts of various politicians and publishers to rewrite his self-portrait as merely a victim of slavery; the autobiographer most relevant to my project here is the only Argentine woman novelist in the book, Norah Lange. Lange, wife of the ultraísta poet Oliverio Girondo, is more famous for her 1938 autobiography *Cuadernos de infancia* than for her novels or poetry, and perhaps more famous in her day for her flamboyant public demeanor than for her writings.[9] As with Manzano, Molloy rescues Lange's autobiographical portrait from a naive or ideological reading in favor of its status as a deliberate work of art: "[while] it has often been asserted that women's autobiographies tend per se to be fragmentary [...] I would argue that Cuaderno's disjunctive composition is especially marked by the literary conventions – *ultraísmo* and surrealism– within which Lange chooses to write" (132). But if Lange's *vanguardista* attitude towards words is different from Molloy's own, she nevertheless shares the notion that childhood is an era of satisfied spying, which forces the adult reader, somewhat uncomfortably, to spy upon the child in his or her turn.[10] Perhaps Lange's double gesture, both voyeur and exhibitionist, is in the end why she is an alluring figure to Molloy, who defends "sheer intellectual curiosity" (voyeurism) whereas the protocols of impersonality deny her the corresponding temptations of exhibitionism.

I have remarked that in many of Molloy's critical texts there operates a placeholder of a male body such as the missing physical body of Borges, a position into and out of which her critical voice can move. Like the schoolboys whose marbles the narrator of *En breve cárcel* snatches, the Argentines Cané and Mansilla have both perfected tones of voice which she can borrow wholesale for her own use, one as the spokesman for his class and generation's childhood and the other as a genial conversationalist writing his mobile self from exile. In another chapter on childhood and exile, Molloy segues away from the Cuban Condesa de Merlín's Paris salon to insert an analysis not of an autobiography but of a novel, Jorge Isaacs's *María* (1867), whose paternalistic recounting of a paradise lost which lays bare the defects of that paternalism exemplifies even better than the Condesa's does Molloy's apologetic yet critical stance within patriarchal criticism: competent to annotate a learned lady such as Victoria Ocampo's critique of sexism (and eager to unmask its hidden class pretensions), Molloy would nevertheless prefer to give herself the pleasure of interpolating a male perspective which is either itself already ironic (Borges, Mansilla) or which can be ironized further. The male author who is interpolated into the chapter on Norah Lange is, of course, Felisberto Hernández.

9. Certainly Lange was more famous for her flamboyance to the mother of young Sylvia, who once pointed her out in the street to Sylvia when they were together: "Es una extravagante [...] Mirala bien". Molloy would never use an anecdote like this in her 1991 chapter about Lange, but she told it in her 2005 prologue to Norah Lange's *Obra Completa* and it is used to great effect by the delightfully surnamed Adriana Amante in Link et al. (27).

10. Molloy courts a similarity in order to heighten the difference. The Lange chapter is entitled "A Game of Cutouts" and highlights a scene in which little Norah cuts polyglot words whose meanings she does not bother to learn out of the newspapers, "'looking for the difficult resonance of unusual words'" (qtd. in Molloy 132); conversely, in an autobiographical fragment introducing the Speranza interview, Molloy describes her method of learning to write academic English, which until then had been pragmatic and "uno de los lenguajes del recuerdo, el recuerdo de mi padre. La elección del inglés, para ese libro, fue deliberada [...] Anotaba en papelitos palabras, expresiones, cláusulas adverbiales (por lo general adversativas) que me gustaban y que quería usar, como quien plagia" (Speranza 136).

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

By 1991 Felisberto can be cited as something like a philosopher of memory, the one who offers both some examples of autobiography and a theory of autobiography which supposedly coincides with Lange's example. Both of them looked back at the past, not to compose a self, but to inventory its fragments, further fragmenting it. Neither of them, writing in the era of the avant-garde, will fall prey to the temptation of monumentalizing themselves: "Vested in the seductive garb of the quaint and the outmoded, sheltered from the intrusions of history and defying all change, childhood stories become, in this instance, ideological credos. It takes a special kind of "eccentric" writer –I choose to consider Norah Lange here, but Felisberto Hernández would do equally well– to liberate childhood from such ideological constraints" (7). Molloy remarks that Lange once met Felisberto (239), as if to make Felisberto retrospectively part of that charmed circle of ultraist *señoritos* or a childhood playmate of little Norah's; this hardly confers innocence upon them since "[i]n recounting her childhood, Lange (again, like Felisberto Hernández) has the ability to hit at the uncanny by repeatedly undermining the *regard familier*" (131). The voyeurism which Molloy admits to while reading Norah's voyeuristic recollections and exhibition of her own past is a theme of Felisberto's *El caballo perdido*, quoted to begin *At Face Value*'s section on childhood. Molloy even tries to claim that Lange alternates pleasure with anxiety in her memoir, a theme which would align her with Molloy's Borges, and would have aligned her with Molloy's Felisberto: "the quotidian is a constant source of anxiety: it suffices to catch it at the right moment (or, as Felisberto would have said, to catch it unawares)" (131), although later on that page she admits that "*Cuadernos* refuses to elaborate on the potential for disquiet that the child sees."

The researcher is a spy, the reader is a spy, the rememberer is a spy: all crouch in a protected, hollowed-out male position, observing the exhibitionistic woman or the transactions within the workings of their own minds in an alternation of hunger and anxiety. Felisberto is Molloy's playmate and co-conspirator in the lands of memory.

The Basic Pleasure of Perverse Reading

> Siempre me han atraído escritores que de algún modo han planeado la marginalidad, la autorreflexión, la ambigüedad, la perversidad. Supongo que resulta difícil a estas alturas verlo a Borges como marginal, pero creo que lo es ....Felisberto por su básica extrañeza, por su perversidad. No sé qué elemento en común reúne a todos estos escritores, salvo mi placer al leerlos. (Speranza 142-3)

If Ferré and Borinsky write about Felisberto in our specialist journals in the years before Peri Rossi and Cortázar's publicity bring him to a general attention, Molloy waits until after the small first outburst of criticism in 1977 before she publishes her own essay on his generally unstudied, posthumously published autobiography, *Tierras de la memoria*, in 1982.[11] She will also direct the readers of the 1991 *At Face Value* to Felisberto's autobiographical writings. Since 1981 is the year of the publication of *En breve cárcel*, Molloy is marking clear signals that Felisberto is a figure for her in almost exactly the opposite direction that he is for Borinsky: while the latter suspects the glance towards the past in its paralyzing, melancholy form, Molloy wants us all to see the glance backward in its energy, even in its violence.

We can see how Molloy related the project of her Borges book to *En breve cárcel*. Borges is reconstructed as a phantom male body whose reading is a hunger and whose writing is an anxiety, both of which are dedicated to demonstrating the incoherence of the self; Molloy constructs a Blanchot-like Borges respected in a Parisian center which he does not himself much respect. *En breve cárcel* is, paradoxically, full of such phantom male bodies, even as it highlights female bodies: the novel recounts a lesbian love triangle between an unnamed protagonist, an earlier older lover named Vera, and a younger lover Renata who had

11. A somewhat shortened version of the same essay appears in a 1985 collection *El Cono Sur*, the last four of whose essays include two pieces on *En breve cárcel* (one by Roberto Echavarren, who published an entire book on Felisberto in 1981) and two essays on Felisberto, one by Molloy.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

also previously been Vera's lover, but the protagonist deliberately cuts between the love triangle scenes and scenes recounting her dreams and childhood memories, and the most frequent figure to appear in her dreams is her father.

Molloy sets out the protagonist's family configuration deftly: a warm father and a distant mother, an aunt named Sara who offered maternal care without parental authoritativeness, and a younger sister named Clara whose body fascinated the narrator. Besides the typical Oedipalized triangle of parents and child, the narrator reflects that much of her childhood energy was devoted to resenting her father's neglect of her younger sister, who was so unsuccessful at winning their father's affection. (One is tempted to read this triangle, too, as an allegory for Molloy's critical project of the '80s and '90s: secure in the approval of a basically benign patriarchal institution, she sets out to vindicate women writers under-read or misread by that institution.) The two events which have spurred the narrator to sit and write her story are that she has inadvertently rented in Paris the room in which years ago she met Vera and began their affair, and the news of the death of her father and aunt in an accident: unlike her mother, who offers her daughter very little access, the father is actually quite a co-conspirator with the daughter, both in real life (although he is partly shadowed by madness and death, and although she resents his access to her body in the form of the door he leaves half open when he kisses her good-night while she is asleep) and in her dreams. The novel's dramatic "first-act curtain" is a violent scene between the narrator and Renata, who responds to the narrator's Proustian jealousy in a scene of cold, deliberately loveless sex, leaving her standing naked in the hotel room; but the novel's actual halfway point comes when, after a rest cure away from Paris, the protagonist has a dream in which her father tells her over the phone to seek out the statue of Ephesus. In the dream she conceals this call from her mother, just as in other dreams she eats her father's disembodied hand so that her mother is not frightened by it and, in the novel's final dream, her father does battle with a large decapitated woman, blocking the protagonist's way to the mother. The novel resolves its plot as, somewhat to her own surprise (the novel begins with, "quiere fijar la historia para vengarse" (13)), the protagonist finds a way to make peace with both Vera and Renata; the symbolic quest of the novel is resolved when she chooses to reinterpret her father's dream telephone call by replacing Diana of Ephesus, goddess of fecundity, with Diana the solitary hunter, a decision understandably emphasized by feminist readings of the novel (Masiello, García Pinto, Montero). The protagonist never worries that she might be punished by her father for swerving from the more obvious meaning of this dream's message; indeed, in her further interpretation, she recalls the gifts that Diana/Artemis asked for as an infant in the lap of Zeus.[12]

The tone of this chapter, so much more essayistic than the rest of the novel, recalls Molloy the researcher and reader (allusions to the statue of Ephesus, to the literary tradition) and not the protagonist-rememberer, lover, daughter, sister; the voice of confident authority that brushes aside the novel's more common self-correcting, self-criticizing tentativeness. The tone suggests a sort of impunity, rare in a novel in which the narrator's love affairs are full of small vengeances and an awareness of the exposed position she herself is in vis-à-vis Vera and Renata, where words wound, and the protagonist catalogues the scars one of her lovers inflicted on her and recalls the childhood scene in which she whipped her sister. If the tone feels a bit out of place here towards the end of the novel, it may be for the same reasons that the novel's "happy ending" seems mildly out of place. First, from the very beginning of the text, to *fijar*, to pin down or fix, has been seen as a violence one practices upon recalcitrant lovers or the past, so that any closure would seem violent or arbitrary. Second, the novel is about the unpredictable way writing affects a writer's life, and we are self-protectively prone to believe that writing makes our lives worse, not

12. Conversely, he may fear that she will punish him: the dream's first word was "Egeo," and the narrator recalls that Theseus's father Aegeus committed suicide when Theseus forgot to change the color of the sails of the ship which returned from the Minotaur: "le recuerda la muerte de un padre desesperanzado, víctima de un olvido del hijo"(77). That sort of second-guessing, in which we wonder if a character's solicitous fear for her father may really be a veiled threat, is common to our interpretive habits, whether for an autobiographical fiction or not; but how would it be legitimate, under these circumstances, to note that Aegeus is also the name of the complaisant king to whose realm Euripides's Medea escapes after murdering her children?

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

better. We –even we, especially we– do not trust writing to free us. Molloy has one strategy in her novel to break down her own skepticism towards the power of language: in a direct contrast to the self-imposed agoraphobia of her isolated room, the narrator learns to "put down her weapons" with Vera through a recollection of the way language can also envelop one like the sea or wash one and carry one down, like rain or a river. (Of course, sometimes having weapons means you don't have to use them: Renata returns to the protagonist and behaves better, once she has heard through the grapevine that the protagonist is writing an autobiographical novel.) But Molloy herself seems to have reconciled herself to the power of recollection, the gathering of the past in language, through a reading of Felisberto's *Tierras de la memoria*.

The choice is apt: although on the one hand Molloy begins her essay claiming that "acaso ... todos los textos" (69) of Felisberto's equally show the nothingness of personality, the "desconcierto y la inconsecuencia del yo felisbertiano –tómense los dos términos en su sentido más estrictamente literal" (69) are particularly evident in *Tierras*, with its double flashback structure of unexpected, unrequited sexual urges, with an almost unrelated payoff at the end. Felisberto recalls a trip taken into the interior of Argentina touring with an equally shabby fellow-musician Mandolión; interspersed with memories of attractions to a pair of music teachers when he was a child, he recalls while on the train a trip he took into the interior as a Uruguayan boy scout. There he unsuccessfully tried to impress some women at the house that hosted the troop, fondled the panties of one of the women which he found in a hamper in one of the shared bathrooms there, and then fantasized about her while she recited a poem for the people assembled, followed by a great disillusionment about her when he overheard her later conversation, about money, about deliberately skinning a cat, about being a butcher's daughter. The mix of desire and frustration of that day produced an anxious dream about the closed doors of the bedroom wardrobe, which may serve as the basis of a fantastic story he would like to write; and the narration ends with a return to the scout trip with a temporary relief from his anxieties or desires and then a return to the second trip equally free from pressing anxieties, partly because it was on that very second trip that "no sólo volví a reconocer esa angustia, sino que me di cuenta que la tendría conmigo para toda la vida" (*Tierras*, 58); he resolves to reread the diaries he kept from that earlier journey. All in all, this text, which foregrounds the occasion of remembering as *En breve cárcel* foregrounded the site of writing, is as much about composing a past self while also preserving the parts which do not fit that past self-image as *En breve cárcel* itself is.

Molloy focuses on Felisberto's desire. While other analysts have emphasized in their writings the figure of the fat woman and the tension between coldness and warmth in these desirable bodies, for Molloy the pattern Felisberto sets out in *Tierras* is based on the "entreabierto," the tantalizing half-open space that offers a glimpse that that leads the eyes of Felisberto further into the body of the desirable object.[13] Willing to use psychoanalytic vocabulary as long as it does not entail any one psychoanalytic system, Molloy approvingly quotes Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text*:

> Is not the most erotic portion of a body *where the garment gapes*? In perversion (which is the realm of textual pleasure) there are no "erogenous zones" (a foolish expression, besides); it is *intermittence*, as psychoanalysis has so rightly stated, which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing [...] between two edges; it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance. (10, italics in the original)

What "Molloy avec Felisberto" adds to this definition of the erotic, as in

13. And not just objects, but words as objects: Molloy's analysis points out the frequent occurrence in Felisberto in which words and phrases are half-opened, mysterious objects which themselves dissolve into fragments or are animated into objects, where a prepositional phrase can seem like a dog with a tail or the first vowel in a two-syllable word can have a meaning which contradicts the second vowel: Las letras de Felisberto and his game of cutouts....

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

Leo Bersani's similar post-Freudian reflections, is that an increase of arousal is as likely to produce pain as pleasure. Poorly buttoned dresses, half-opened lips, glimpses caught from half-opened doorways, bathroom hampers that don't close all the way, are all objects that arouse the younger Felisberto; but other half-opened objects upset him or invade a personal space he cannot fully close.

Like the White Queen in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, who would be happy if only she could remember the rule, Molloy tries to figure out the rule by which the half-open does or does not produce pleasure in Felisberto. All of the sites of the half-open in the childhood scenes of the text end happily, as a music teacher rescues him from a false accusation or an aunt forgives his hiding in the folds of her skirt; a threat of punishment appears, only to be banished by the benevolent woman. The boy scout trip is the moment when he learns that the site of the *entreabierto* can be an occasion for punishment as well as anxiety. Throughout the memoir when Mandolión's accordion half-opens and closes or his gut spills out of his vest, when as an adolescent he is trapped in the chair by his dentist-scoutmaster or silenced by the chubby pretty reciter, the half-open body of others who also immobilize him threaten the voyeur into a sort of impotence. (Perhaps not surprisingly, this pattern appears, although as a very minor theme, in *En breve cárcel*: on the one hand, Renata's half-closed eyes lure the protagonist further onto Renata's body; on the other hand, awakening to find her bedroom door half-open, the protagonist as a young girl is irritated that her father has come in while she was asleep to kiss her goodnight.)

According to Molloy, the only way that Felisberto's text can resolve the tension between the *entreabierto* of voyeuristic jouissance and the *entreabierto* of anguish is through a third *entreabierto*, after a dream which "abre un espacio de un orden distinto donde se da la angustia en grado máximo y también su resolución" (90). The dream itself is the feeling of a grim horror facing the fully closed doors of the bedroom armoire, and the horror forces a complete opening of Felisberto's throat and eyes as he wakes up to feel "las paredes de mi sueño," the walls of his dream, fully knocked down. It is after this dream that he sinks into a half-asleep state, in which his self splits so that he can have a "deliberado (re)conocimiento de esa angustia" (Molloy, 90) while his "curiosidad de persona despierta" (qtd in Molloy 90) remains outside and vigilant, and it invents a tale about a cannibal butcher hiding behind doors like the armoire's. Inventing the story (he uses the verb "discovering" it) resolves the anguish for the adolescent Felisberto.[14]

Molloy concurs with Echavarren that it is the ability to tell the story of how he came up with the story that truly calms the author's anguish, not the story itself; analogously, we might conclude that an interpretation, any interpretation, of the dream of the father's call to Ephesus will purge the protagonist of *En breve cárcel* from the fear of punishment for disobedience. Such an interpretation becomes even more likely when we realize that Felisberto has consciously employed the language of divinity to describe his reciter: "Hacía poco tiempo yo había tenido que estudiar historia Antigua [...] me habían quedado flotando lejanamente las figuras de algunas diosas y los ritos de algunas religiones" (*Tierras* 57-58). It is this fantastic but reverential thought in particular which Felisberto tries to communicate to the woman after her recital (62), and it is this speech which she interrupts, silencing him with chatter about making money in Buenos Aires and her vain pride in her stage presence.

Molloy is committed, then, to a writing practice which fragments the self even as it claims to wish to compose the self-in-memory. Suspicious of closure, even "earned" closures, her novel offers one closure through the unexpected reformation of one of the protagonist's rivals (Vera) and through a sort of unexpected blackmail brought about in the act of

14. Molloy excises the economism in Felisberto's treatment of the theme of the split self. For Felisberto, the present self splits off a socio or ally-business partner, which safely repackages the memories so that one can make a living off them. Instead, Lange's exhibition of her memories is seen as anti-economic, and sexy: "This ritual performance [of screaming from the housetops], running counter to a type of narrative that usually opts for economy and mindful husbandry [...] has a wasteful elegance to it, a kind of devil-may-care dandyism that is infinitely seductive" (135-6).

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

writing itself (Renata's fear that she will look bad in a roman-à-clef, although the narrator notes that Renata does not even read Spanish). The other closure that it offers, the dream interpretation of the father's telephone call, seems most attractive to those readers with a feminist commitment to the independent woman, the huntress Diana not the matron of Ephesus. Commenting upon the text of Felisberto, Molloy can direct her readers' –in some sense, her own– attention to the need for demystifying any readers who might incorrectly prefer a goddess to the state of "curiosidad de una persona despierta" which allows you to transform the attributes of a goddess, albeit a bit spitefully, into self-reflexive, self-critical fiction.

Conclusion: The Perversity of Literariness

In an essay published in 1985 on *En breve cárcel* entitled "La literariedad,"[15] Roberto Echavarren departs from his usual Lacanian protocols (ones which he will use when he again treats the novel in his 1992 collection *Margen de ficción*) to argue that by foregrounding the act of writing in her autobiographical novel Molloy has also purified her writing of any intentionality, of achieving any desired effect upon specific individuals. That definition of literariness, relatively common in our field in 1985 and perhaps still today, was certainly part of Paul de Man's presuppositions when in 1971 in *Blindness and Insight* he included a chapter called "The Impersonality of Blanchot," and Blanchot is cited by Echavarren in his 1992 reading of *En breve cárcel*. The sort of impersonality which Echavarren looks for in literariness may sit less well with the destabilized self that Molloy's Borges, and Molloy's protagonist, and Molloy's Felisberto all take for the ground of their being, not just feeling ill at ease in their skin but roving outwards with a voyeuristic gaze upon ever-shifting objects of desire, as likely to provoke anxiety as satisfaction, settling for a knowledge of the inner workings of one's own desires. Yet Molloy's Borges does give in to the monumentalized self, in his later texts which she refuses to cite in her book about him. Molloy's protagonist does resolve her feelings towards Vera and Renata: she does put down her words as weapons against other women; she does explicate the dream of the wrong Diana to her own (and to her academic feminist readers') satisfaction.[16] So too in her 1985 essay "Sentido de ausencias" Molloy dedicates herself to a committed academic feminism (and, after 1990, a committed queer theory).[17] This commitment, however, might indeed threaten that literariness, just as the well-meaning anti-slavers of Juan Francisco Manzano's day threatened his self-understanding as a poet rather than as a victim.

In 1985 literariness was only just then beginning to be attacked anew in Molloy's, in our, North American academy, first with the declarations of New Historicism, then with the different powers of feminism and Foucault, all occurring at the same time as the sudden death and posthumous dishonor of Paul de Man in the middle to late '80s. Molloy's 1990 book effects a compromise with the death of the literary. *At Face Value* claims that it is seeking the ideologically and historically constructed units of Spanish American autobiographies; it also says, however, that it does so out of "sheer critical inquisitiveness." Poor Felisberto, the indigent suitor whom women married but whom they eventually threw out of their houses, bows out of this autobiography book to make room for his playmate Norah Lange, partly to reinforce Molloy's ethical commitment to women writers; but Lange also appears as the alluring exhibitionist, whose "devil-may-care dandyism is infinitely seductive." Echavarren must play down the various ways in which writing figures as seduction or persuasion in order to argue that *En breve cárce*l displays literariness. Molloy, just a little cannier than her readers on this issue, knows that a pedagogic desire is at work in her fiction and an erotic desire is at work in her criticism; this threatens her disinterestedness as a critic. Yet as long as Felisberto remains a failure in *Tierras de la memoria*, a desiring pattern that is so similar to Molloy's own is not perceived as a threat to that literariness. *Tierras* tells the tale

15. The essay is mistitled "La literalidad" in the MLA Bibliography.

16. Again: of what use is it to second-guess the protagonist about the interpretation of her dreams? Molloy says in interviews that they were all real dreams, but she does not say that they came in the order in which the novel places them. Just before deciphering her dream of Ephesus, the protagonist endures a final dream, in which she and her father are studying together in her nook at home watched over by a woman not her mother. Perhaps nudged by her father, she touches her genitals and experiences an amazing pleasure; she runs downstairs and is pursued by her father, now dead, and the woman, now decapitated; their struggle blocks her access to her mother. The decapitated woman is "para ella, la locura" (149). Why could it not be the body of the lesbian that the father struggles to defeat by means of injunctions to obey a fertility goddess? Or, since she did not find this now headless body attractive at first, might we let the battle serve allegorically as the anguish of the woman critic having to choose between the corpus/corpse of the father and the still under-read "headless" tradition of women's literature?

17. Nora Dominguez (Link et al.) implicitly agrees with my approach by beginning her search for Molloy's "encuentros afectivos" with women writers by using the same essay, "Sentido de ausencias," that I have chosen to use roughly as my endpoint, and quotes with satisfaction its final lines: "Es hora -o por lo menos lo es para mí- de reconocerme en una tradición que, sin que yo lo supiera del todo, me ha estado respaldando. No solo eso; es hora de contribuir a convocarla en cada letra que escribo'" (75).

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

of a man who discovered his literary vocation while a boy scout, after an anxiety dream put him into a half-conscious state which split off into a "curiosidad de una persona despierta," like Molloy's sheer critical inquisitiveness. If such a curiosity brings down a figure –a feminist ethics of reading– which had been falsely elevated into a goddess, so much the better.

In a place without ethics, in which reading amorally guarantees distance from others and remembering permits one closure (but a false closure, one that will not fool those readers who know that perception, knowledge, and desire require the constantly half-open), Molloy has found in Felisberto a "básica extrañeza" and perversity which, like literariness, can be preserved from the academic protocols that insert our favorite authors into the dangerously teleological sequences of "influences." To cast her as one of Felisberto's four literary ex-wives is my own eccentric method of honoring her promise to that voyeur's voyeur.

My project of detailing Sylvia's critical and novelistic itinerary roughly until 1990 (I studied with her beginning in 1987) has always seemed to me to be, well, creepy. When I completed most of it in 2004 I fancied I was imitating Sylvia's French dissertation, her search for the pre-history of her own arrival in Paris in the late '50s; by stepping into Borges's impersonality, she resisted admitting that the macho swagger of Fuentes, Vargas Llosa, García Márquez *et cie.* would always impress the Parisian and global bourse more than Borges could. Analogously, "my" Sylvia before 1985 would defend a literariness and a perversity that would become harder to maintain, even as feminism evolved into queer theory, insofar as it depended on the privileges of patriarchy, albeit a hollowed-out, non-macho form of it. But Sylvia did not know Borges personally the way that I knew Sylvia, so it seemed unseemly to have written all this, and as far as I recall I never sent a draft of this to her; we certainly never spoke about it. Was I afraid that she would think it completely incorrect?[18] Rather, I think it would in equal parts flatter her and annoy her that a student of hers would rummage through the first twenty-five years of her work without reference to the equally important body of scholarship, and the much greater institutional prominence, of the next twenty-five years, to say nothing of her second novel *El común olvido* (2002) –which narrates the story of a gay academic who makes a journey back to Argentina to find out the truth of the desires of his recently deceased mother.

But if I think that it's borderline unethical –not unethical! creepy, a little sneaky– to finish and publish this essay now, it's because I think I am making an argument about the amorality of literariness, an amorality which the early days of queer theory and literary studies seemed to embrace with enthusiasm before we had second thoughts about privilege and third thoughts about patriarchy. I'm sure I know that "Felisberto" would scoff at subordinating the pursuit of pleasure to a respectful consideration of the needs of others (as all those soon-exasperated wives of his would also discover): he wrote for pleasure, and to please himself. To link his project with Sylvia Molloy's along this angle can sometimes seem to me to be to accuse her of irresponsibility, when what I really hope to do is to praise her for irresponsibility. All I can say in my defense is that she stayed very much alive for me while I was re-reading my earlier text and completing it, and that this made me very happy.

18. As her graduate student (at least after the first few terrified years), I was serenely confident that Sylvia would always think highly of the content of what I had to say, limiting herself to extremely accurate criticisms of my fondness for convoluted arguments. I even remember her criticisms as compliments: "The introduction of this chapter didn't tell your readers that this is where they were going to end up; why are you always being so sneaky?" Creepy *and* sneaky: not for nothing did I write a book on the narratives of the perverse.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

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Enero/January 2024

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ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

MARTÍ AND HIS PLACE IN TIME: A DISCOURSE ON METHOD AND POLEMICS IN MARTÍ STUDIES

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Abstract: This article builds on Ottmar Ette's groundbreaking study on the historical reception of Cuban patriot and poet José Martí. Ette's work covers Martí's reception from the early days of the first Cuban Republic until the early 1990s. His final chapter discusses a critical impasse in Martí studies and recommends the desacralization of the Cuban patriot's image to move research forward. Soon after the publication of Ette's work, there was a plethora of research on the Cuban poet's legacy, both in traditional university presses and in web-based journals. This expansion in the dialogue brought renewed debates about the uses (and abuses) of Martí's image. In contrast to Ette's call for desacralization, this article focuses on the methodological differences that emerged in the interdisciplinary debates that pitted historians against literary humanists. This article contends that what can move research on Martí forward are the contextual readings of his work that frame him as one of the most significant Latin American writers of the late 19th century.

Key Words: Debate, Martí Studies, Literary Methodology, Contextualized Readings, History

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

Medardo Vitier's *La filosofía en Cuba* (1948) traces Cuba's academic and philosophic transition from Old World Scholasticism through Positivism. His work focuses on the major figures in Cuban philosophy that contributed to the emerging tendencies that prioritized the observation of Nature over the passive assimilation of logical and rhetorical structures from ancient Classicism. The academics that sought to modernize Cuban philosophy include José Agustín Caballero, Father Felix Varela, the González del Valle brothers, José de la Luz y Caballero, José Manuel Mestre, and Enrique José Varona. The author also dedicates a chapter to the polemics of the day and writes

> desde la reforma efectuada por el P. Varela en el segundo decenio del siglo XIX hasta la muerte de José de la Luz en 1862, hubo considerable actividad filosófica en la Habana, así en la enseñanza como en la publicación de trabajos polémicos. Estos interesan por los asuntos en sí, y porque reflejan la cultura del ambiente (115).

What is significant about Vitier's characterization of the polemics is not just that ideas transform themselves in a dynamic that pits the new against the old, but also that philosophy encompasses a discursive field that is demarcated by the parameters of culture. His view is not only concerned with discerning an exclusive notion of right or wrong, but rather with understanding what these philosophers thought, how they arrived at their conclusions, and to what extent their ideas were in dialogue with political, social, economic, and philosophical currents surrounding them. In this respect, my interest in this essay is in examining some of the polemics over the last decade regarding José Martí. I contend that each debate not only proposes a vivid clash of perspectives but also a fascinating consideration of methodology and an attempt to bring new elements of Martí's work to light and his placement in time.

The bulk of the historical debate over Martí's reception has been covered in Ottmar Ette's important study *José Martí Apóstol, Poeta, Revolucionario: una historia de su recepción*. One of the richest bibliographic reviews available, this work indicates where scholarship has been and, above all, how Martí's image as the Martyr-Saint-Apostol has been used by every Cuban government and political movement since the foundation of the Republic. While many approaches examine the place of writing, which is the specific historical context in which the text emerges, Ette's work focuses on the place of reception. He contends that in the one hundred years following Martí's death, the Apostle has been the figure of political legitimation for numerous and contrasting political movements. Nonetheless, Mart's work has often been interpreted outside of its original context and placed at the service of political and ideological ends. In these cases, more than to the text itself, critics appeal to the image of Martí, his sacrifice, and his calls for political unity (24). Ette's overall argument is that these interpretations derive from their desire to achieve political and historical utility. As a result, he reveals the social conditions that participate in the construction of meaning (25). Published in 1995, the study does not deal with much of the reception of Martí during the 1990s onward. Nonetheless, his final observation describes an academic deadlock in Martí Studies on the island and posits desacralization as a way out of the impasse (409).[1]

From the onset, it is my impression that desacralization would not diminish Martí's stature in Cuban history and culture because, both sacralizing and desacralizing, augment, often vehemently, and continue to disseminate Martí's image. Moreover, desacralization is perhaps better seen as one of two poles along a spectrum that ranges from a quasi-religious or teleological approach to his life and work to a focus on humanizing him. In this sense, the shifting is not new, and what is

1. Jorge Camacho's "José Martí, el giro desacralizador" also locates its critical perspective in this critical impasse on the island, which is due to the constraints on Martí scholarship imposed on the island by the Cuban government. He concludes, "podemos decir que las interpretaciones de Martí en los últimos 30 años tanto en la academia norteamericana, en el arte y la ficción, se han caracterizado por su 'giro desacralizador'. En estas representaciones e investigaciones del héroe se pone el acento en zonas oscuras, antes invisiblizadas de su obra (invisibilizadas por el poder y la crítica) como son la representación de género, las drogas, el psicoanálisis, su visión patriarcal o sus interpretaciones racistas o etnocéntricas de negros e indígenas. Son lecturas que van en contra de su imagen sagrada impuesta por la propaganda política o los mismos críticos tradicionales y que algunos consideran estigmatizadoras y, por esto, son censuradas o criticadas" (15).

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

emblematic of these two extremes are often the so-called mysteries: (e.g., the missing pages of his diary and the circumstances of his death at Dos Ríos), on one side, and his intimate life (e.g., his troubled marriage and his relationship with Carmen Miyares de Mantilla). This movement toward a type of humanization emerged among the Minoristas in the 1930s and later during the 1953 celebration of the centenary of Martí's birth. Among those that were associated with this group were Felix Lisazo, a coeditor of the *Revista de Avance*, and Jorge Mañach, both of whom sought to humanize Martí (Ette 108-110). This period also corresponded with an attempt to revitalize Martí Studies not only by proposing more research and the publication of his *Complete Works*, but also by presenting aspects of Martí's personal, private, and intimate life.

Since the publication of Ette's work, there has been a veritable plethora of publications about Martí. While it would be difficult to mention them all, some of the noteworthy contributions include Carlos Ripoll's *La vida íntima y secreta de José Martí* (1995), Enrico Mario Santí's *Pensar a José Martí* (1996), Luis Toledo Sandé's *Cesto de llamas* (1996), Rafael Rojas's *José Martí: la invención de Cuba* (2001), and Angel Esteban's *Becquer en Martí* (2004). This period also gave rise to publishing in English ranging from new translations of Martí's *Versos sencillos* (1997) and *Selected Writing*s (1999 and 2002) to more erudite collections of essays, like Jeffery Belnap and Raul Fernandez's *José Martí's "Our America"* (1999), Julio Rodríguez Luis's *Re-Reading José Martí* (1999), and Óscar Montero's *José Martí: An Introduction* (2004). Likewise, there have been a series of publications dealing with the construction of Cuban nationalism that have also shown how the island's racial diversity was subsumed in and obviated by the concept of national identity (Perez, Ferrer, De la Fuente, and Helg). Far from reaching a point of critical fatigue, the more that is written, the more interesting Martí becomes.

One of Ette's principal contentions is that political circumstances in Cuba shape the uses of his iconography (e.g., the construction of statues and naming of public parks and plazas), the selection of texts to be published, and the readings of the same. The Special Period was no exception. In the wake of the economic chaos that came with this crisis, young intellectuals on the island took an opportunity to re-examine cultural politics. Marta Hernández Salván, in *Minima Cuba: Heretical Poetics and Power in Post-Soviet Cuba*, frames the crisis in terms of psychoanalysis and suggests that the collapse of the economy was analogous to a psychotic episode in which the subject lacks a primordial signifier, or law of the father. The result, at the level of the symbolic economy, was a type of cultural schizophrenia in which the accepted or recognized ideology had lost its ability to signify. This rift manifested itself between the exercise of power by the regime and its ostensible ideology. (172).

In this atmosphere, young intellectuals associated with the group that met informally at poet Reina María Rodríguez's azotea emerged to form Paideia and later a second group called Diáspora. Among these individuals, there was some expectation that movements like Perestroika and Glasnost would take hold on the island and provide a type of cultural opening in which they could remain loyal to the Revolution and its historical goals, and at the same time, carry out their critical and cultural projects independently (177). These groups were linked to prominent young Cuban intellectuals like Rodríguez, Víctor Fowler, Rolando Prats Paéz, Ernesto Hernández Busto, Emilio Ichikawa, Rafael Rojas, Radamés Molina, among others (178-179).[2] At the center of their thoughts were new methodologies and critical approaches. Ichikawa and Rojas, for example, lectured on post-Marxism and structuralist thought.

At its core, Paideia was a Greco-Roman humanist project that pondered what it meant to be ethical and how to achieve this notion of ethics

2. For more background into the Proyecto Paideia, see *Revista Cubista* Dossier: Proyecto Paideia-Tercera Opción, Verano 2006; http://cubistamagazine.com/dossier.html. Other notable intellectuals were: Iván de la Nuez, Jorge Ferrer, Omar Pérez, Armando Suárez Cobián, Atilio Caballero, Rafael López-Ramos, Alberto Garrandés, Bertrand Rosenthal, Ricardo Alberto Pérez, and Antonio José Ponte.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

through education and culture (183). Among its tenets was the idea that the Revolution should be a process of constant evolution. The group also demanded that the state recognize the importance of intellectuals and called for understanding culture in terms of its multiplicity. In the final points, it criticized the reductive use of the notion of the popular, the ideological fiction of the New Man, and the teleological understanding of history (179-180). Although the foundational documents only give a scant reference to José Martí, the debates over the last decade or so are informed by the experience of this younger generation of scholars rethinking the revolution in the wake of the Special Period.

Amid this resurgence of publications about Martí, young Cuban writers and intellectuals were occupied with rethinking Martí, not in light of US-centered multiculturalism or postcoloniality, but rather in terms of classicism and democratic idealism. Jorge Camacho describes a series of art exhibitions at the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s in which artists like Tomás Esson and Alejandro Aguilera added an element of irony to the heroic vision of Martí as a means of criticizing the official governmental teleology that posited self-sacrifice as one of its core tenets.[3] This is not to say these reformulations came exclusively through the work of the members of Paideia. Others outside the island were seeking new ways of approaching Martí: these contributions range from critiques that demonstrate that the official uses of Martí are often based on partial readings (Morán), speculation over what Martí would or wouldn't have done (Alfred López), and denunciations of the outright falsifications and distortions of Martí's work (Saumell and Ripoll). Enrico Mario Santí sought to "think through Martí," an approach that entails a focused contextual reading and the placement of his work in the social dialogue of the period (Santí 68); Emilio Bejel examined the cult of Martí as a form of unresolved mourning (Bejel), and many others have sought to broaden the discussion of Martí's work to questions of gender, class, performance, iconography, relics, ethnicity and immigration (Santí, Bejel, Morán and Camacho).[4]

Even though many of these are poignant critiques of the ideological uses of Martí's image, it would be wrong, however, to assume that ideology no longer plays a role in these new approaches. As Slajov Zizek observes

> If our concept of ideology remains the classic one in which the illusion is in knowledge, then today's society must appear post-ideological: the prevailing ideology is that of cynicism; people no longer believe in ideological truth; they do not take ideological propositions seriously. The fundamental level of ideology, however, is not of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself. (The Sublime Object of Ideology 33).

To some extent, this notion of not taking ideological truths too seriously emanates from Antonio José Ponte's essay, entitled "El abrigo de aire." A text in which the author contemplates a "lighter than air" notion of Martí, one that includes the humor and irreverence that served as a mechanism of defense from the excess of revolutionary slogans and moral imperatives that saturate official Cuban political culture. Regarding the differences between the most recent critical discourse and that of previous years, the difference is that contextual readings have replaced the hermeneutic of creating an ethical and moral background to justify political action. This is not to say that Martí is no longer the center of impassioned debate. On the contrary, the question of how academic disciplines produce knowledge occupies the crux of my interest. At the heart of our contentions about Martí's work are the methods by which our disciplines lay claim to knowledge.

3. Jorge Camacho, "Los Herejes en el Convento: La recepción de José Martí en la plástica y la crítica cubana de los años 80 y 90" *Revista Espéculo*. Universidad Complutense de Madrid. 24 (2003). Web.

4. There have also been attempts, some more successful than others, to place Martí within a broader notion of American studies (Lomas, López, and Montero). Also, it should be noted that not all critics have embraced humanization. Emilio Ichikawa advised against it, and Miguel Cabrera Peña's book, entitled *¿Fue José Martí racista? Perspectiva sobre los negros en Cuba y Estados Unidos* overtly advocates for the use of Martí's image to promote a political project of racial equality in Cuba.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

My focus on polemics should not be construed as an attempt to revive (or relive) heated discussions, but rather to suggest that many of these debates are variations on the same fault lines that have always been present within Martí Studies. In terms of scholarship within the revolution, there was a clear privileging of Marti's political writing over his work as a creative writer or poet. The chronicles, letters, and speeches occupied a higher position in this hierarchy while his drama, fiction, and translations were considered as marginal productions. As Ette indicates, lyric poetry was almost completely left aside (Ette 194). The notable exception was the work of Cintio Vitier and Fina García Marruz who tend to arrive at Martí's politics through his poetics (198). This tendency to privilege the political readings also had an interesting effect on Martí in time: those who privilege the political texts see his work developing in phases or stages, culminating in Cuban separatism and political action. Ette adds that Marti as a creative writer was better covered by critics outside of Cuba. Manuel Pedro González and Ivan A. Schulman worked extensively on Martí's work as a stylistic precursor or initiator of Latin American *modernismo* through his journalistic prose and poetry. This is not to say that Schulman's work was less historical. On the contrary, he saw that the poetic tendencies that began with Martí likewise culminated in the poetic prose of novelists like Miguel Ángel Asturias, Manuel Mejía Vallejo, Alejo Carpentier, and Mario Vargas Llosa (*Martí, Darío y el modernismo* 54-59). So, while one side saw Martí's political culmination in separatism and the Revolution of 1959, the other saw his cultural culmination in *modernismo* and the Boom. In both cases, Martí belonged to the ages through his ability to influence the future.

Although the debates unfolded in the electronic journals *Cubaencuentro* and *La Habana Elegante* and the blogosphere, the tensions surrounding the debate share the parameters that Ette noted in his study: the privileging of Martí's essays and speeches among political/historical critics, on one hand, and the privileging of Martí's poetry and literary work on the other. The differences will be drawn along the disciplines that mark the distinction between poetic and prosaic discourse, public and intimate, and Martí's place in time between Latin America's neo-classicism and *modernista* periods. The specific controversy I am referring to emerged on *Cubaencuentro*.com between May 20 and June 19, 2008.[5] The participants in the debate were Duanel Díaz, Miguel Cabrera Peña, Jorge Camacho, and Francisco Moran. The debate began when Díaz published a text around the 106th commemoration of the foundation of the Cuban Republic that urged a reconsideration of the writers of the early republican period. The title of the opinion piece, "Los factores del país," borrows a line from Martí's "Nuestra América" in which the Apostol argued that self-governance was premised on a deep study of the characteristics of the nation. Díaz reminds readers that Martí himself did not undertake such a study and suggests that such a task would fall on writers like Francisco Figueras and Fernando Ortiz.

Díaz wrote about post-independence frustration. For many, the Cuban Republic was stillborn: the US military occupation and the Platt Amendment were blatant reminders that national sovereignty had not been achieved. As Díaz observes, negative insularity, a critical perspective that emerged in this period, saw the struggle as an economic, social, and political disaster for the island, and considered that the internal factors of the nation were poorly suited for independence. Díaz's reading is largely historical in the sense that he contrasts Martí's lyric optimism and the prosaic scientific-like skepticism of Francisco Figueras. These factors of the nation were not only questions of theme, but also form: Marti's literary style created a poetic and highly idealized vision of what the nation could be, and Figueras' direct style had scientific pretensions that appealed to sociological authorities (See "Los factores del país II").

5. Although this researcher is not privy to the specific reasons, several of these posts were removed from *Cubanencuentro* not long after they were published. Fortunately, the author of this text has printed copies.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

The central question of Díaz's meditation on negative insularity, an important topic for scholars of Cuban and Puerto Rican culture, was largely lost in the ensuing discussion. The remainder had little to do with Figueras or the broader point of literary vs. scientific writing. The bone of contention was the degree to which nineteenth-century scientific writing was also present in Martí's writing and whether "Nuestra América" inverts Argentine Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's notion of civilization and barbarism. In this respect, Díaz offers Martí's own words to suggest that he opposed Sarmiento's concept of civilization: "No hay batalla entre la civilización y la barbarie, sino entre la falsa erudición y la naturaleza" (OC, vol VI, 17). To some extent, this position aligns with the canonical reading of Martí against Sarmiento, which is featured prominently in Roberto Fernández Retamar's essay "Calibán" (44-45).[6]

Jorge Camacho's response was entitled "Vigilar, temer y reformar: la biopolítica y el 'sueño' martiano. Una historia de exclusiones irresueltas". The central focus of his response was not the language of republican frustration or negative insularity, but rather a demonstration that scientific discourse also appears in Martí. Camacho's method can be described as an analysis of "discursive practices," which according to Foucault can be "characterized by the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories" (Foucault 199). These practices are "embedded in technical processes, in institutions, in patterns of general behavior, in forms for transmission and diffusion, and in pedagogical forms which, at once, impose and maintain them" (200). Through Camacho's reading of Martí as a participant in the institutional discourses of the late 19th century, he argues convincingly that his views on the Other were not opposed to those of Sarmiento. In short, the crux of the debate is related to where Martí was located in history and in relation to Sarmiento. Camacho frames Martí's views in the broader cultural and scientific discourse of the late 19th century. This, of course, includes the discourses that were known as positivism, Darwinism, evolutionism, and eugenics.

Suffice it to say that Camacho's reading is based on the broader conception of discourse that all the parties shared due to their participation in the intellectual culture of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. To support his argument, Camacho cites Martí's notebooks, indicating that he saw atavistic traits among Afro-Cubans (*OC* XVIII, 284). These observations suggest that he may not have foreseen radical changes in the social structure in postcolonial Cuba and that he viewed Cuban cultural, economic, and political development in terms of evolutionism, reform, and education, tendencies that, along with increasing European immigration, were credos of positivism and liberalism of the period. In his subsequent responses, Camacho adds further support for his broader view of Martí by citing the work of Cuban Studies scholar Aline Helg, specialists on the scientific discourse of the 19th century (George Stocking, Bernard Seeman, John Jackson, and Nadine Weidman), and additional references from Martí's *Complete Works* ("Los caminos trillados" 10 May 2008).

Miguel Cabrera Peña likewise joins in the discussion. In "El discurso de la raza," he is critical of Camacho's broadened view of Martí's discourse and admonishes him for not having paid stricter attention to the critical works of Julio Ramos (*Desencuentros de la modernidad en América Latina*, 2003), Susana Rotker (*The American Chronicles of José Martí: Journalism and Modernity in Spanish America*, 2000), and Rafael Rojas (*La invención de Cuba*, 2000). Regarding the references to the so-called African savagery in Martí's notebooks, Cabrera Peña suggests that, at the time when the text was written in the summer of 1880 or 1881, Martí may have held eugenic ideas, but that by the time he fully dedicated himself to Cuban separatism, he distanced himself from those same ideas (6 June 2008).

6. See Roberto Fernández Retamar's *Todo Calibán*. It should be noted that Retamar supports his view of Martí in stark contrast to Sarmiento by citing the following segment from Martí's Miscelánea: "el pretexto de que la civilización, que es el nombre vulgar con que corre el estado actual del hombre europeo, tiene derecho natural de apoderarse de la tierra ajena perteneciente a la barbarie, que es el nombre que los que desean la tierra ajena dan al estado actual de todo hombre que no es de Europa o de la América europea" (Retamar, OC VIII, 442).

What emerges in Cabrera Peña and Díaz is a hermeneutic in reading Martí: a specific method that contextualizes Martí's writing in the political immediacy of the tensions between autonomism, annexationism, and separatism. By separating Martí's work into historical phases, he creates a space to privilege some texts and designate others as insignificant. This view also looks to the language of the revolution of 1895 to understand that of 1959 and one that is skeptical of the use of Foucault to understand the inherent romanticism that is evoked by both movements ("Foucault y el debate cubano", 6 June 2008). Cabrera Peña's caveat regarding the broader view of 19th-century discourse is founded on the notion that Foucault saw modern societies as fundamentally repressive and this view doesn't make a distinction between republican and totalitarian Cuba. This hermeneutic also imposes a temporal fragmentation on Martí: either there is a presumption that there was a marked difference between Martí's public and private expression, as well as his poetic and prose writing, or Martí's work is divided into historical phases in which his sense of ethics reaches its pinnacle in the separatist movement (and his martyrdom). To some extent, these constraints on reading are related to Díaz's point of departure and research concerns: the worrisome linearity between the revolutions of 1895 in 1959. For him, this link is not to be found in the repressive mechanisms of the republican state nor in the concepts that Martí shared with cultural discourses the discourses of 19th-century liberalism, but rather in Martí's thinking that resisted the liberal processing and representation of the specific flaws in Cuban character.

Francisco Morán's intervention, several days later, brought the debate to a close. At this point, the meditation on negative insularity and the project of studying the factors of the nation, the topics that initiated the discussion, had been largely forgotten. Morán's intervention, nonetheless, was both eloquent and insightful. Like Camacho, he aimed at the canonical notion of describing Martí in contrast to Sarmiento. In the post entitled "Civilización y barbarie" he writes: "Más a menudo que no, en el centro mismo de los discursos emancipadores en cualquiera de ellos y dónde quieres que se produce, no resulta difícil encontrar en su interior aquello a lo que con más firmeza se oponen" (18 June 2008). Reading with microscopic precision, he unpacks a hidden ambivalence in Martí's apparent celebration to the demographic diversity in the continent and his allusions to the "indio mudo," the "negro oteado" and the "masa inculta." To conclude, Morán returns to the original paragraph from "Nuestra América," in which the phrase "No hay batalla entre la civilización y la barbarie, sino entre la falsa erudición y la naturaleza" appears, and he emphasizes its original context. Although Martí distances himself from the notion of the criollo exótico, he states that the "hombre natural" (read: uncultured, indigenous and mixed-race underclass) rewards the superior intelligence of the politician/teacher that knows the elements that comprise the nation and more precisely knows how to bring education and reform to them even those this "masa inculta" is, as Martí describes it, "perezosa, y tímida en las cosas de la inteligencia, y quiere que la gobiernen bien" (*OC* VI, 17). In this respect, the phrase, "No hay batalla entre la civilización y la barbarie, sino entre la falsa erudición y la naturaleza" is not an outright rejection of Sarmiento's binary, but rather a variation on the same theme. Still in place is the elitism of the politician/teacher's superior intelligence, over the other who is driven by instincts. While the other for Martí is not irretrievable, nor is he an equal partner in governance.

After this encounter, both Camacho and Morán published their more extensive readings of Martí's relationship with the philosophies of the late 19th century. Camacho's book, entitled *Etnografía, política y poder a finales del siglo XIX* (2013) focuses on the representation of Native Americans in the context of Marti's ideas regarding progress, the capitalist market, and the educational reforms carried out by liberals in

Mexico, Guatemala, Argentina and the United States in the late 19th century. What makes this topic germane is that it covers a period of Latin American history that frequently receives short shrift. The 19th century marks Latin America's integration into the world economy and the implementation of liberal nation-building projects. This period also saw perhaps one of the largest appropriations of land in modern history: the Batalla del desierto in Argentina, the Guerra del Pacífico in Chile, Perú and Bolivia, the territorial expansion of the United States into Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California and of the American North West, the appropriations of land for coffee production in Guatemala, and the land politics of the Reforma in Mexico. These takeovers invariably led politicians and intellectuals to regard the indigenous population as a problem and obstacle to the construction of the modern nation-state.

Regarding Camacho's research method, his approach is thoroughly literary. Unlike Ette, his focus is writing, and he treats Martí's chronicles as allegories, metaphors, and analogies through which the Cuban writer conveyed his beliefs, value judgments, and ideological positions. Camacho's ostensible purpose is to consider the theoretical suppositions of anthropology and ethnography and examine how these influenced the assimilation of the indigenous populations into the nation-building projects. In doing so, he makes a strong case that Martí expected Native Americans to assimilate the ideas of Western civilization, break with their nomadic and tribal ways of life, adopt farming and private property, and individualism (111-116).

What is most polemical about this study is the possible relationship between ethnocentrism, criminal anthropology, and scientific racism. Although these lines of thought corresponded in time and space with Martí, they differed in significant ways. Camacho uses discourse and comparative analysis to suggest that scientific racism and ethnography share many of the same value judgments about indigenous cultures. At the same time, he maintains a clear distinction: scientific racism or eugenics saw human potential as codified in the biological properties of individuals. Ethnography, in contrast, saw human potential as their ability to adapt and adopt new cultural practices. At no point does Camacho argue that Martí was a major proponent of the precepts of biological racism; he does, however, find that his discourse occasionally shares common ground with biological racism.

Regarding ideas like evolution, Camacho makes a cogent argument for an ethnographic notion in Martí's work in which historical development follows a narrative of maturation. In the early stages of this notion of history cultures that occupy lower levels of development act like children (23; 72). To support this contention, Camacho cites Martí's depictions of how Indians in the American West responded with child-like fascination to the introduction of mechanization in agriculture. Camacho concludes that Martí was a "type of evolutionist" in the sense that all humans can achieve perfection (i.e., maturity) through assimilation (29). Camacho does not argue that Marti adhered to extreme biological notions of race, but he does state that Martí's view of the modern nation-state in the Americas was ethnocentric and presumed that the benevolent assimilation of native populations was a necessity. Camacho also demonstrates that Martí virulently criticized the US Indian agents that failed to carry out their duties. This notion of Martí places him in dialogue with other intellectuals who saw communal landholdings as obstacles to the basic premises of economic liberalism (42) and suggests that Martí and Sarmiento were not at opposite extremes of Latin American cultural and political discourse (87-88).

Francisco Morán's *Martí, la justicia infinita* also employs the close-contextual reading method to the texts that Martí wrote between 1875 and 1894. Like Camacho's approach, he provides a materialness to

Martí by contextualizing him—not as belonging to the future—but very much a part of the late 19th century. True to his method, he argues that despite Martí's inclusion in most anthologies of Latin American literature, many critics base their conclusions on aphorisms that reify their own ideological or critical position. The metaphor for this type of reading harks back to Gabriela Mistral's comment that Martí's oeuvre was a goldmine whose wealth had no limit.[7] In contrast, Morán, whose own prose at times is highly ornate and complex, confronts Martí's style. In doing so, he perhaps inadvertently recovers a Martí who, at times, favors economic liberalism, forms alliances with wealthy benefactors, sees a danger in the uncultured energy of organized labor and working classes, and whose rhetoric was crafted to bring his readers and listeners under his sway.

Although Morán doesn't provide a specific term for what he describes, he depicts what I call discursive drift, an overlap between ethnography and eugenics. There are many examples. In the first chapter, Morán draws an analogy between Martí's desire to be known as a "poeta en actos," as an audacious creator, as an individual with the nostalgia for the age of great feats with the semantic charge of 19th-century anarchism. In effect, Morán suggests that Martí shares this imperative to act with a political movement that he doesn't identify with. As a result, the violence implicit in the direct action of the anarchists becomes largely discursive: moral and ethical imperatives are converted into rhetorical bombast.

Morán's study also addresses Martí as an observer of life in the United States in a period in which millions of immigrants entered the country. He shows that Martí's writing reflected a high degree of social anxiety and ambivalence regarding this flood of immigrants. He notes that Martí depicted the Germans and Swiss as industrious, and the Scandinavians as physically beautiful, industrious, well-built, and honest (384). However, Italian and Irish immigrants were presented in less than favorable terms. While Martí saw the Irish as hardworking, he also characterized them as having a "rostro áspero y huesoso, nariz corta y empinada, ojos malignos y breves, maxilares breves, labios belfudos y apretados, y barbilla ruin que les cerca como un halo el rostro" (385). This physio-characterological description of Irish working-class immigrants coincides to some extent with the depictions used by criminal anthropologists to describe delinquents. At no point does Morán argue that Martí was directly influenced by or sympathized with the ideas of writers like Cesare Lombroso, but rather that this perspective was common during that period. Further, concerning Martí's ambivalent references to Herbert Spenser, Morán suggests that this terminology reveals both a strong sense of paternalism as well as an occasional drift toward the framework of Social Darwinism and eugenics (568-575).

Despite the well-conceived contextual (i.e., literary) readings that Camacho and Morán have offered, it should come as no surprise that their conclusions have been met with some skepticism by those who are grounded in historical approaches. One that has articulated some reservations is historian Rafael Rojas, author of the ground-breaking study, entitled *Isla sin fin*. Suffice it to say that a historical method differs from literary close readings in the sense that it consists of tracing motifs, images, philosophical currents, and influences from one period to another, uncovering affinities in the expression of civic values over longer periods. Rojas' analyses can often be characterized by a lengthy chain of affiliations that link historical figures in a timeline that can range from Classical Antiquity to the contemporary era. This approach in *Isla sin fin* highlighted two long-standing tendencies in Cuban culture, insularity and instrumentality, and provided a template to read much of the island's history.

This is not to say that the historical methodology should be privileged

7. See also Gastón Baquero's *La fuente inagotable* (1995).

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

over literary approaches or vice versa. My point is to celebrate the differences, observe the consensus when it is apparent, and note how each of these disciplines locates Martí at different places in time. For a historian, ideas are not bound by the immediacy of context because they are effects of the past and can influence events in the future. This affiliation can link people and events that are separated by hundreds of years. For example, in *José Martí: la invención de Cuba*, Rojas observes that there is a tendency in Martí to sacralize his homeland, which, he adds, is part of the "esa tradición cívico-republicana---tan difundida en Hispanoamérica---que se extiende de Cicerón a Maquiavelo y de Montaigne a Rousseau" (72). Likewise, Rojas' reading of a poem like "Sueño con claustros de mármol" or "En torno al mármol rojo" are indicative of Martí's inherent classicism: "una arquitectura marmórea, monumental, cívica, neoclásica, republicana" (90). The crux of Rojas' view is that Martí was a "classical republican." He borrows from Agnes Heller's work on the five values of the civic republican model (i.e., tolerance, bravery, justice, solidarity, and prudence) (87), and from David Brading's study of criollo patriotism and classical republicanism in Simón Bolívar and Friar Servando Teresa de Mier to suggest that he finds Martí much closer to these tendencies than to the liberalism expressed by Sarmiento (87). This affiliation placed Martí alongside other Latin American *próceres* at the beginning of the 19th century.

Given that the curriculum in the schools Martí attended as a young man contained classical works and that he translated works by J. P. Mahaffy and Agustus S. Wilkins, it should be of no surprise to find abundant references to classical ideas.[8] So, while classicism is present, Brading's study of both criollo patriotism and classical republicanism place these two tendencies in the early 19th century, –almost half a century before the bulk of Martí's work–. In terms of literary history, we usually place neoclassicism in Latin America between the middle of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the 19th century. The Cuban writers that we consider most representative of this tendency are Manuela de Zenquiera y Arango (1764-1846), Manuel Justo Rubalcalva (1769-1805), Manuela María Pérez y Ramírez (1781-1853). This is the period of the formation of the Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País, José Agustín Caballero, and Félix Varela (Henríquez Ureña 78-100). It makes one wonder if there is an underlying teleology that either presumes that Latin American independence was concomitant with classicism, as if each Republic had to pass through the same historical stage; or that Latin American cultural history moves like a pendulum, moving back and forth between classical rationalism and romantic passion.

What is especially fascinating is that Rojas' ostensible purpose in *José Martí: la invención de Cuba* addresses the historical and literary division among critics. Rojas aims at coming to terms with two marked traditions within Martí Studies: the first, represented by biographers like Félix Lizaso, Luis Rodríguez Embil, Jorge Mañach, Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, Carlos Ripoll, and John Kirk, who focus on the "cuerpo del héroe e imaginan que la superación de la ambivalencia se da por medio del sacrificio de la poesía en aras de la política" (83); and, the second, formed by literary critics like Cintio Vitier, Manuel Pedro González, Iván Schulman, Enrico Mario Santí, Emilio de Armas, and Julio Ramos, who comprehend Martí's work as the creation of a poetic image of the world that participates in history (84). Rojas proposes an approach to this dualism that both distances itself from the myth of synthesis and resists the supposed absolute incommunicability of the discourses of poetry and politics (85). He refers to these as two textual worlds in which Martí moves from the traditional to the modern. What links these two, for Rojas, is the formation of civic republicanism (e.g., focus on virtue) in both poetry and politics. In this sense, Rojas focuses on classical references and allusions in poetic texts that are thought to stem from the political. His critical intent is to find the politician (el actor republicano) in the poetic text.

8. For background on Martí´s classical education, see Elina Miranda Cancela's "Greece and José Martí."

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

At the same time, Rojas follows the tendency among the biographers that suggests that Martí sacrifices both personal interests and poetic creativity. To substantiate this, he describes a pattern in Martí's life and writing: poetry is a refuge for his disenchantment with the political world. His approach is both biographical and historical. He uses the dates of publication to argue that the act of writing poetry was a flight from the political, away from the modernity that appears in Martí's chronicles, his oratory, and his essays (read: prose). What may be at work here is the traditional view of the poet as withdrawn, marginalized, working alone by candlelight, and lamenting his frustrations with the world around him. Rojas writes, "Es cierto que el estado de renuncia a la poesía se intensifica justo cuando el sujeto se distancia de la esfera pública política" (91). He adds that *Ismaelillo* was written in Venezuela while he taught in two schools and directed the *Revista Venezolana*; *Versos libres*, a text that Rojas dates principally to 1882, was composed when Martí began to affiliate himself with separatist groups; and, *Versos sencillos*, were written while he recovered from an illness in the Catskill mountains. He concludes that "la escritura poética es para Martí un ejercicio solitario que reconstruye la intimidad afectiva del poeta después de una participación intensa en lo público" (91).

Although several of Martí's poems and comments lend some credibility to this reading, these so-called flights can also be considered as contrived performances designed to engage the public and the political through personalism. In terms of bibliography, it may be hard to separate Martí's creative and political work into neat piles. He likely cultivated both genres at the same time. He wrote politicized editorials in the *Revista Venezonala* around the same time that he penned the works that comprised *Ismaelillo*. Aside from issues related to when the texts were written, my principle caveat regards how historians and biographers have viewed Martí's poetry. Invariably, they place it in the realm of the intimate or private. However, this is not the only way to read it. It is also possible that Martí's use of poetic intimacy functioned as a staged demonstration of vulnerability, a sign of courage and disclosure in the face of spiteful public discussions of his personal life. In short, these may have been carefully crafted for public consumption. What makes poetry seem to be a flight from the public/political stems from how this genre stages the experience of the self. Its appeal is different from that of the essay or the speech because it engages the audience, not through the appeal to the collective self via ideology and history, but rather through disclosing individual experience as a sign of courage. This notion of staging vulnerability coincides with the performativity that Emilio Bejel has discussed in Martí's very intentional uses of his public image (28). One can also question the degree of his rejection of modernity. While Martí expressed some reservations about some aspects of modernity, he also took advantage of the possibilities afforded by telegraph, photography, and newsprint. Poetry was just one more tool in his arsenal of expression. One should ask how poetry could be considered intimate if the poems were carefully crafted, repeatedly edited, published, circulated, and read publicly.[9]

One such example of how the intimate can be staged in modern poetry can be found by comparing a historical and literary reading of Martí's "Amor de ciudad grande." Many frame the poem in terms of a flight from modernity, a rejection of the city, and an appeal to the rustic simplicity of nature to recover both physical and spiritual health, like what is seen in the prologue of *Versos sencillos*. A close reading yields different, and no less valuable, insights into the poet's view of urban space, a space where he lived and worked for most of his adult life. The difference is that the close reading places the poetic self in the moment, in its context, like a snapshot of an instance. However, to contextualize the poem in its internal meaning, one must remember that the theme is love. The central premise of the poem is that the velocity of urban life, –the mentality of instant gratification–, is

9. See Ivan A. Schulman's critical edition of *Ismaelillo*, *Versos libres*, *Versos sencillos*. Although *Versos libres* was not published during his lifetime, the annotations documented by Schulman in his critical edition indicate that the manuscript was being prepared for eventual publication.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

ill-suited for lasting and mature relationships. For this reason, Martí uses the metaphor of toxic wine throughout the poem. Quality cannot be rushed. The images present the young virgin who, in earlier times, would have died before giving her hand to a young man she didn't know. It is the speed of the city that ruins the fruits of love, conjugal relations, and family, which are treated like fruits that are squeezed to ripen them before their time. Further, the disregard for the quality that comes through maturation is what allows the poor souls of the city to fall prey to sexual predators that consume them like cheap wines. The "copas por vaciar" is an image not an all-encompassing view of modernity, but of how the speed of the city life has turned love (read: courtship and sexuality) into an object of consumption, which, is something that an honest man should fear.

In any case, these methodological and disciplinary differences re-emerge in a series of back-and-forth debates in cyberspace after Rojas reviewed Camacho and Morán's books. The first comments appear in Rojas' blog, entitled *Libros del crepúsculo* in two of his book reviews, and the responses are later presented in one of the final issues of *La Habana Elegante* as separate comments by both Rojas and Camacho. My point is not to rehash the discussion point by point but rather to posit that Martí's place in time and the academic tools that each party employs play a large role in the formulation of their positions. Despite some praiseworthy initial comments, his first objection regards Martí's placement in time. With respect to Morán's study, he writes, "me sigue pareciendo anacrónica o forzada la percepción de acentos 'lombrosianos' o 'eugenésicos' en Martí" (*Libros del crepúsculo* 5-25-2014).

In a second review published in *La Habana Elegante*, the historian makes a similar assessment of Camacho's approach and writes, "Camacho cae en varios anacronismos, como identificar las ideas raciales del cubano con autores y obras posteriores a Martí mismo…" (*LHE*). Rojas supports his reservation in three ways: first, he argues that Martí's notion of liberalism was based on the historical currents that originated in the early years of Latin American independence. Thus, he rejects the idea of Martí in dialogue with contemporary liberals who had adopted positivism as a state philosophy in several Latin American republics. For Rojas, Martí's notion of liberalism was derived from an earlier manifestation of "liberalismo romántico, matizado por un fuerte republicanismo neoclásico." He adds that the ideas that influenced Martí were Spanish Krausism and North American Transcendentalism, which belong to the first several decades of the 19th century ("Un libro inevitable").

A second objection appears to be based on how Rojas sees historic agency. His notion of discourse is synonymous with the articulation of a belief system that served as Martí's guidelines for action. The operant concepts here are "direct influence" and "philosophical adhesion." To some extent, it is a search for sources. His phrasing is particularly relevant to comprehending this methodological approach. In the blog entry, entitled "Martí, Lombroso y el derecho penal," he writes, "no parece haber rastros de que Martí *haya leído* a Lombroso o *simpatizado* con sus tesis…" and in "Martí, la eugenesia y los migrantes" he poses the question, "¿Hay evidencias de que Martí *leyó* a [Francis] Galton, [Joseph Arthur de] Gobineau, [George Vacher de] Lapouge o [Houston Stewart] Chamberlain o que *simpatizara* explícitamente con sus ideas?" (Emphasis added). The key terms refer to first-hand knowledge of the texts and total adherence to the theories. In another section of this same entry, he uses the phrase "Martí no llegó a conocer plenamente" to describe the probable or improbable influences of sociology, anthropology, and ethnography.

The third objection hinges strictly on his definition of scientific racism. He elaborates this last point in "Martí, Lombroso y el derecho penal"

(*Libros del crepúsculo,* January 31, 2015) and "Martí, la eugenesia y los migrantes" (February 4, 2015). In both, he reiterates his position that attributing scientific racism to Martí misplaces him in time. The diffusion of Lombroso's ideas, he argues, didn't coincide with Martí's work and because of his studies in Spain Martí would have been influenced by criminologists who rejected a biological basis for criminality (Jan 31). The strength of Rojas' argument is found within these strict disciplinary constraints. He paints historical tendencies with broad strokes in his search for signs of direct influence and card-carrying affiliation.

Understanding the difference between these critics may boil down to how each discipline approaches the notion of discourse. Neither Camacho nor Morán was arguing that Martí was a standard bearer of pseudoscientific racism. Nonetheless, some of these concepts appear in his work. For literary humanists, the term "discourse" derives from the Latin word *discursus*, which implies a movement "to and fro" (White 3), which identifies the parameters of the entire field of meaning and space of representation. In this sense, the discourse of the late 19th century was saturated with discussions of race. Hence, it should not come as a surprise that some of these ideas find their way into Martí's writing and thinking. This implies that Martí could use language from evolution and anthropology without adopting all the precepts and without taking positions as extreme as the notable eugenicists.

One of the characteristics that is particularly interesting (and at times frustrating) about reading Morán's study is that his footnotes often become labyrinths. It seems that Morán anticipated the kind of evidence historians would want to see and provides the answer to the question long before it was asked. He shows that Martí, in fact, was familiar with one of the works of Francis Galton. He writes,

> En el índice onomástico de las [*Obras Completas*] no aparece Galton por la sencilla razón de que Martí había escrito mal el nombre del autor: «Francis Salten». Pero el folleto a que se refiere Martí –Record of Family Faculties (Londres, 1884)– y cuyo título traduce como Registro de las facultades de la familia, no deja lugar a dudas. Martí, que publicó su comentario en mayo de 1884 en *La América*, nos dice que se trata de 'un libro nuevo, inglés, que acaba de reimprimir un editor norteamericano' (*OC* 15, 396) con lo cual vemos, en primer lugar, la rapidez con que circulaban internacionalmente las teorías de la época sobre la herencia; y en segundo, la no menos rapidez con que Martí las leía y comentaba. Aquí no quiero sino llamar la atención sobre dos aspectos del comentario martiano. Por un lado, afirma categóricamente que la teoría de Galton, de que el sujeto hereda las cualidades de la familia, es 'errónea.' Pero casi inmediatamente antes afirma que Galton 'cree demasiado en aquello en que hay que creer bastante: en la heredación de las cualidades de familia.' Se trata, pues, más bien, de una cuestión de *grado*" (emphasis is Morán's 435).

What is unfortunate is that a footnote can easily be overlooked. Nevertheless, it is in one of these notes that Morán shows how Martí assimilates scientific terms like *especies*, *germen*, and *contagio* into binary relationships that privilege male over female and the spiritual over the material. What is left for exploration is Martí's ambivalence. What does it mean for him to state that Galton's theory was in error, while he also seems to believe in it? For this one must return to the text in question. The answer is found throughout the text in the rhetorical questions that Martí posits at the beginning of his essay, and in the specific questions he raises over Galton's methodology.

As always, part of the challenge of reading Martí resides in untying his

twisted syntax, framing the subordinate clauses that distance the subject and verb from the predicate, and deciphering how he characterized scientific/biological concepts in spiritual terms. For example, in the first lines of the review of Galton's book, he writes, "la filosofía materialista, si extremar sus sistemas, viene a establecer la indispensabilidad de estudiar las leyes del espíritu" (395). He later adds, "el espíritu está sujeto a leyes y se mueve por ellas, aceleradas o detenidas en su cumplimiento por las causas mecánicas y circunstancias rodeantes que influyen en la existencia y suelen ser tan poderosas que la tuercen o determinan" (395). What does he mean by "laws of the spirit"? We would normally consider the spiritual as apart from the material world, and distinct from the field of science. However, this doesn't seem to be the meaning he ascribes when he discusses how it plays a role in heredity. Martí adds, "Las cualidades de los padres quedan en el espíritu de los hijos, como quedan los dedos del niño en las alas de la fugitiva mariposa" (396). This metaphor suggests that the spirit of the parents (i.e., biological inheritance) is as delicate as the hand of a child that holds a fragile butterfly. It may seem odd that a text about biological inheritance will use terms like "germen paterno" and "entrañas maternales" and will eschew a direct reference to human sexuality, but this is part and parcel of how Martí sublimated biological reproduction (i.e., sex) as the emergence of spirits that shine like diamonds in the darkness of the Platonic cavern. For him, human reproduction is a transfer from the realm of the creative/spiritual to the realm of the material. This may seem confusing to modern readers, but the role that DNA plays in genetics was not clear until the 1940s. Hence, Martí's use of the term spirit can also be read as related to biological sex.

Aware that some of his readers may have understand biology as distinct from spirit, Martí outright denies that there is a contradiction in recognizing the general laws that are deduced from observing humans (i.e., the material conditions), and the "hermosa majestad, originalidad fructífera y fuerza propia y personal que hace interesante, novadora y sorprendente la persona humana" (395). Martí's excessive prudishness makes human sexuality disappear into spiritualized creativity that hides a transfer of biological material from one body to another. What he rejects in Galton's theory is the idea of destiny. If the theories of biological determinism were accurate, he asks, how was it possible that sublime and heroic acts emerge from individuals whose ancestors were less than virtuous (397)? It is not until near the end that Martí spells out his caveat about determinism. He writes, "Francis Salten [sic] quiere que su libro sea una especie de prontuario de profecías, merced al cual, dados los caracteres de nuestros abuelos y los nuestros propios, podemos predecir cómo serán nuestros hijos" (397).

Suffice to conclude by reiterating that my purpose has not been to enflame overly impassioned debates, but rather to suggest that these discussions may occur on the same fault line in Martí Studies that eschews the politics of vulnerability and relegates poetry to the intimate when Martí resisted shame by laying bear aspects of his private life. It is also important to review how our disciplines shape our readings and place Martí in time. The question of Martí's place in time is not a new issue. As Duanel Díaz pointed out, much of the revolutionary action of 1953 and 1959 was premised on the idea that Martí was not bound by the specificity of time and circumstance. His thoughts and words seemed enough to ascribe authorship of social change long after the place of writing was gone. Despite being at odds in this debate, Diaz, Rojas, Morán, and Camacho come closer, nonetheless, in framing Martí in the 19th century either through his affiliations to criollo patriotism and classical republicanism, on one side, and his discursive slippages in Latin American modernism on the other. Reflecting on Ette's suggestion of desacralization to break the critical impasse, perhaps the moves toward humanization, some of which emerged with Lisazo and Mañach, was just one more go around the

same fault line that divides the public and private, and political and poetic. In any case, the methodological approaches that focus on contextualized readings remind us of how interesting Martí Studies continues to be.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

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ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

UNLOCKING THE DOOR TO SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE: NONA FERNÁNDEZ'S *LA DIMENSIÓN DESCONOCIDA*

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Abstract: This paper critically examines Nona Fernández's *La dimensión desconocida* (2016), within the broader context of Chilean literature and memory narratives, offering a unique exploration of silence, memory, and the interplay between reality and imagination. Fernández's narrative is deeply rooted in her engagement with *The Twilight Zone* television series, using it as a symbolic lens to navigate the liminal spaces between sound and silence, memory and forgetting. The sustained vacillation between the narrator and implied author's work as an investigative reporter and her childhood memories, firmly scaffolded to the dystopian imagination of parallel worlds presented through its interface with *The Twilight Zone* series, provides a compelling exposé of the present moment. The article analyzes the structural intricacies of the novel, divided into four sections corresponding to different 'zones', drawing parallels between the narrative structure and the episodes of the show. Through this, Fernández skillfully addresses the complexities of memory work, intertwining personal recollections with journalistic investigations into the crimes of the Pinochet era. The significance of Fernández's work lies not solely in its recording of a traumatic past but in its exploration of the temporal indeterminacy inherent in all exercises in memory that recall violent events. Through her intricate narrative and thematic choices, Fernández contributes significantly to the ongoing discourse on memory narratives and the ethical responsibilities associated with remembering historical trauma.

Key Words: Memory narratives; Temporal distortions; reality and imagination; Liminal spaces; Nona Fernandez; Argentine literature

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

Mary McNeal, who set out on a voyage of discovery
that brought her home again by a most curious route.
Now, appointed guardian of doors best kept sealed,
in the mirror, mirror world...of the Twilight Zone.
— "Memories," *The Twilight Zone*

Inspired by John Cage's groundbreaking composition, *4'33"* (1952), which instructed performers to refrain from playing their instruments throughout the duration of the near five-minute piece, the composer and music theorist challenged his audience to contemplate the concepts of sound and silence. Cage's deliberate absence of sound aimed not only to draw attention to the "unpredictable background noise in the performing space and to thereby suggest that these background noises are themselves music," but also to challenge the conventional notion of silence as 'the absence of sound' (*Cline* 95). While Cage's experiment unfolded in the postwar American music scene of the twentieth century, the way individuals and society grapple with and respond to silence remains a subject of artistic exploration. In contemporary Chilean literature, writers from the generation of "los hijos" take particular issue with the lingering silence first imposed in the 1970s by Pinochet's military regime, and the whitewashing of the nation's trauma facilitated by the neoliberal policies and the national reconciliation project initiated during the 1990s redemocratization process. Among these authors, Nona Fernández (born Patricia Paola Fernández Silanes in 1971) has risen as one of the generation's most prolific and highly acclaimed voices, gaining increasing recognition from readers and critics since her debut novel *Mapocho* in 2002.[1] Her body of literary work can be seen as intricate memory narratives that resist generational amnesia and collective forgetfulness. In her latest novel, *La dimensión desconocida* (2016), Fernández provides a striking example of her approach by connecting personal memories with political issues and themes. Through compelling and sustained intertextuality with *The Twilight Zone* television series, the novel travels into the liminal space between silence and memory, the past and the present, delving into the realm between reality and imagination.

Fernández's sixth novel, *La dimensión desconocida*, earned the prestigious Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Prize in 2017 and solidified her status, initially established with her critically acclaimed debut novel *Mapocho* (2002), as one of Latin America's foremost authors.[2] Alongside Alejandra Costamagna, Rafael Gumucio, Andrea Jeftanovic, Andrea Maturana, Lina Meruane, and Alejandro Zambra, Fernández is routinely associated with the generation "los hijos de la dictadura"; a term coined to distinguish a group of writers whose members came of age during the dictatorship but made their authorial debut after the return to democracy.[3] In stark defiance of the culture of silence imposed by the regime and tacitly accepted by the transitional governments,[4] many Chilean artists –particularly among 'los hijos'– turned their creative focus inwards, giving rise to a proliferation of memory narratives produced at the close of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century. The increase in Chilean memory narratives coincided with pivotal historical events: Pinochet's detention in London in 1998, the 30th anniversary of the military coup in 2003, and the dictator's eventual demise in 2006. However, these narratives transcended mere individual reactions to traumatic events or commemorations of anniversaries and historical milestones. As articulated by Andrea Pagini in *Memoria, duelo y narración*, the 'ola de recuerdo' phenomenon evolved into a broader imperative associated with communal memory, effectively serving as pillars in the collective endeavor:

> No se trata de ese recuerdo individual que cada uno lleva guardado, y hasta oculto en su corazón o en su cabeza; se trata de un imperativo más amplio, algo que tiene que ver con la memoria de una comunidad, con la memoria colectiva –es decir, algo que existe en la medida en que se lo comunica y comparte […] La memoria colectiva se configura en el acto de

1. Ana Rodríguez Valentín observes that scholarly examinations of Fernández's work can be classified into three primary domains: the construction of memory, the formation of history, and the exploration of space as a mediator bridging these two processes (239).

2. Fernández's other novels include *Av. 10 de Julio Huamachuco* (2007), *Fuenzalida* (2012), *Space Invaders* (2013), and *Chilean Electric* (2015). In 2019, Fernández published the book-length autobiographical essay *Voyager*. She has also written numerous short stories, plays, television and film scripts, and acted in several theatrical works.

3. Alternate labels for this generation include: 'generación X o la generación perdida de los 90' (Blanco 162), 'los niños de la represión' (De Querol), and 'generación del milenio' (Simonetti).

4. 'No estar ni ahí' and the 'compulsión al olvido' endorsed by the nation's political machinery and procured through the commodification and financialization of everything was, according to Chilean sociologist Tomás Moulian, the price to pay to rebrand and "resituar a Chile, constriuirlo como país confiable y válido, el Modelo, la Transición Perfecta'' (*Chile actual*, 33).

> narrar, que es un modo de volver público el recuerdo individual y ponerlo a dialogar con otros recuerdos en una elaboración colectiva del duelo por una experiencia colectiva de pérdida. (9-10)

A decade into the new millennium, when the center-left coalition that had governed for two decades yielded power to the conservative Renovación Nacional's candidate, Sebastián Piñera, and an 8.8 magnitude earthquake and the ensuing tsunami struck the southern regions, claiming hundreds of lives and devastating towns and local economies, the role played by memory narratives in fostering (re)building efforts and a sense of community became even more crucial.

The impulse to transform individual memories into public narratives as a response to generational trauma extends beyond the borders of Chile and Fernández's contemporaries. In a broader context, the Western world witnessed a heightened emphasis on memory, notably coinciding with the 50th anniversary of Hitler's ascent to power, leading to the establishment of museums and monuments dedicated to the victims and survivors of World War II. In her influential work *The Generation of Postmemory*, Marianne Hirsch argues that the proliferation of this memory culture can be seen as a manifestation of a deep-seated need for both individual and collective inclusion within a shared framework. This framework is shaped by a collective inheritance of multiple traumatic histories, prompting a sense of individual and social responsibility towards an enduring and traumatic past (33-34). Within the Chilean context, Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory,' examining how traumatic experiences are transmitted, and the 'generation after,' providing a framework for understanding how trauma and memory permeate successive generations, remain pertinent. Nevertheless, the significance of Fernández's work, particularly evident in her latest novel, extends beyond the mere documentation of a traumatic past and the ethical responsibilities linked to remembering and recounting historical trauma. Instead, the significance of Fernández work lies in the exploration of the inherent temporal indeterminacy present in all exercises in memory that recall violent events. As demonstrated by Cathay Caruth in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory, the historical power of trauma* lies not solely in its repetition after initial forgetting, but, crucially, in the fact that it is only through this inherent act of forgetting that it is experienced at all (8). In *La dimensión desconocida*, Fernández adeptly employs the sustained metaphor of "twilight," that fleeting moment in the day that anticipates nightfall, to explore the threshold between conscious awareness and the subconscious, examining the liminal spaces and intricate dynamics among different levels of memory associated with political violence.

La dimensión desconocida functions as a palimpsest of the first-person narrator's childhood memories from the Pinochet era. Within this narrative framework, recollections of Rod Serling's iconic sci-fi television series emerge as one of the novel's dominate reference codes, along with extratextual references to chronicles and testimonies on human rights abuses committed during the regime, adding depth to the narrator's present-day examination of these records in her role as a journalist. In concordance with the novel's paratextual alignment with *The Twilight Zone*, evident through its title, front cover and epigraph, the narrative unfolds in four sections, each named for the paranormal experiences that occur within their realms: "Zona de ingreso"; "Zona de contacto"; "Zona de fantasmas"; and "Zona de escape." Embracing the notion of parallel universes from Serling's series, and drawing specific references from episodes where characters navigate unfamiliar realities, the intermedial dialogue with the show becomes a narrative device, allowing exploration into philosophical, moral, and societal themes. By combining memory work with the supernatural and fantastical elements found in the speculative and allegorical storytelling

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

of the television series, frequently showing the darker aspects of human behavior and the potential consequences when taken to extremes, Fernandez's novel presents a critical commentary that invites readers to contemplate the repercussions of individual actions and societal norms that took place under Pinochet and as part of the post dictatorial peacemaking project.[5] The narrative begins in "Zona de ingreso," where the first-person narrator introduces the focalized subject, former Air Force intelligence officer Andrés Antonio Valenzuela, recounting his pivotal visit to the *Cauce* magazine office to confess to crimes of torture and disappearances.[6] While examining the *Cauce* issue in her present-day role as a journalist, echoing the implied author's experiences, the narrator reflects on childhood memories of reading the issue and seeing Valenzuela's image published under the title "Yo torturé." Within this section, the narrator candidly acknowledges that her presentation of the historical facts surrounding Valenzuela's recorded confession to the *Cauce* journalist also involves elements of fabrication. Articulating her imaginative process, she envisions Valenzuela walking through the city center, creating a vivid mental image based on her readings:

> Lo imagino caminando por una calle del centro. Un hombre alto, delgado, de pelo negro, con unos bigotes gruesos y oscuros […] Lo imagino apurado, fumando un cigarrillo, mirando de un lado a otro . . . Lo imagino entrando a un edificio en la calle Huérfanos al llegar a Bandera. Se trata de las oficinas de redacción de la revista *Cauce*, pero eso no lo imagino, eso lo leí. (15)

The recurrent use of words like "imagino" and "no imagino," "supongo" and "o quizá" throughout the section underscores the narrator's awareness of the unreliable nature of her recollections from an event four decades ago. The tension between "imagino" and "eso lo leí" merges into a hybrid combination. As Luna Carrasquer observes, this tension between the referential and the fictional, and the ambiguity between them, are foundational characteristics of autobiographical fiction, often utilized by Fernández to create an effect of authenticity. "Así, la novela indaga, por un lado, en la memoria individual de la narradora y, por otro, en la memoria colectiva que ella explora para completar su propia memoria y para entender esta "dimensión desconocida" que es para ella la dictadura chilena" (24). By intertwining memories and archival work with imaginative elements, the narrator unleashes the latent potentialities concealed within the actual past –embracing both "the potentialities of the 'real' past and the 'unreal' possibilities of pure fiction" (Ricoeur 192).

The use of fictionalizing techniques in narrating the intertwined stories of the narrator and Valenzuela becomes more evident as the narrator emphasizes that her exposure to the perplexing words associated with Pinochet's rule took place during her formative and bewildering adolescence:

> Era una revista *Cauce*, de esas que leía sin entender quiénes eran los protagonistas de todos esos titulares que informaban atentados, secuestros, operativos, crímenes, estafas, querellas, denuncias y otros escabrosos sucesos de la época […] Mi lectura del mundo a los trece años era delineada por las páginas de esas revistas que no eran mías, que eran de todos, y que circulaban de mano en mano entre mis compañeros del liceo. Las imágenes que aparecían en cada ejemplar iban armando un panorama confuso donde nunca lograba hacerme el mapa de la totalidad, pero en el que cada detalle oscuro me quedaba rondando en algún sueño. (17)

While acknowledging that the unreliability in her recollections of the event is compounded by age, the ambiguity is also amplified by the violence and political uncertainties of the time. To this end, the narrator employs her memories and the documents she collects in her work to

5. Claudia Gatzemeier characterizes the agreements made in order to avoid violent confrontations in postdictatorship Chile in her article "Hacer memoria en el Chile actual." She states: "El afán de minimizar fricciones y polarizaciones se impuso ya en el proyecto político principal de la Transición chilena el trabajo de la Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación […] Así Aylwin, por una parte, subrayó la continuidad entre el régimen anterior y el Estado de la Concertación y el carácter reformativo de la Transición y, por otra parte, le confirió la responsabilidad de los crímenes cometidos por el régimen militar al global de la sociedad. En fin, se trató de entablar una memoria consensual como pacificador social" (111).

6. *Cauce* was one of a few pro-democracy magazines authorized for limited circulation between 1983-1989. Issue number 32 from July 23rd -29th, 1985 features Andrés Antonio Valenzuela's image under the title "Yo torturé" and excerpts from his recorded testimony with journalist Mónica Gónzalez ("Cauce'' np).

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

"conformar una especie de panorama de la represión" (22). As noted by Cecilia Olivares Koyck, in *Mapocho* and *La dimensión desconocida,* the act of constructing a panorama depicting the repression during Pinochet's regime –despite the unfinished, unreliable, and perpetually open nature of the work– reflects the urgency felt by Fernández and her generation to narrate the untold spaces of the social imaginary, particularly those related to political violence. Olivares emphasizes the writer's endeavor:

> La tarea a la cual se enfrenta la develación de hechos de violencia sería entonces, el ofrecer un espacio narrativo a sabiendas que toda restitución de los hechos es imposible, pero que la construcción como signo de la vivencia en su posibilidad en tanto que, amplía su espectro mediando vivencia, recuerdo y a su vez traduce lo que permanece oculto. (24)

At this juncture, the novel establishes its structural framework for expressing, naming, and observing forgotten or silenced discourses. Navigating through distinct temporal planes and narrative levels, it seamlessly alternates between episodic and semantic memories recounted in the past tense, and the present-day narrator's interior monologue, presented as a compilation of incomplete thoughts and ideas.[7] As the narrator's interior monologue continues to oscillate between processing and preserving information gathered in her role as a journalist and transforming the same facts triggered by her fragmentary remembrances and feelings of uncertainty towards any claim of truth, echoes of incidents and silenced discourses originating from the traumatic events rise to the surface during her visit to the Museo de la Memoria. These echoes are portrayed as involuntary memory traces –traumatic memories and histories that exist in a state neither fully illuminated nor entirely shrouded in darkness.[8] The narrator reflects on this internal struggle, stating:

> ¿De quiénes son las imágenes que rondan mi cabeza? ¿De quién son esos gritos? ¿Los leí en el testimonio que usted entregó a la periodista o los escuché yo misma alguna vez? ¿Son parte de una escena suya o de una escena mía? ¿Hay algún delgado límite que separe los sueños colectivos? (26-7)

This oscillation underscores the unfinished and unreliable nature of memory work, perpetually open to reconfiguration, as the narrator grapples with the haunting uncertainties surrounding the origin and ownership of the vivid images and cries that permeate her consciousness.

The exploration of memory traces in *La dimensión desconocida* resonates with a broader discourse on echoes or residue evident in Fernández's body of work. As articulated by Luis Valenzuela Prado, the concept of remnants or residue serves not only as a material critique but also functions as a political instrument, echoing Nelly Richard's examination of post-dictatorship Chilean tensions. Valenzuela Prado highlights how Fernández's challenges established discursive hierarchies through lateral positions and hybrid decenterings, effectively questioning entrenched social and cultural hierarchies (184). By harnessing echoes and residue, the novel transcends its role as a mere literary exploration of memory, transforming into a potent instrument for addressing and redressing the historical injustices of the dictatorship. The intertwining of personal narratives with broader socio-political critique vividly illustrates the intricate relationship between memory, literature, and the ongoing process of reckoning with the traumatic past. This dynamic interplay reveals Fernández's intention in shaping a collective understanding and confronting the complexities of historical memory.

For the remainder of the section, Fernández explores the dichotomy

7. While modern cognitive architecture allows for different types of memory, autobiographical memory is determined by two main parts: episodic and semantic. Claudia Hammond explains that episodic memory "consists of specific personal experiences, for example arriving on your first day at a new school; and semantic memory, which consists of the knowledge we have about our lives and the world, and would include the facts about the school you went to —the town it was in and how many pupils attended" (151).

8. Walter Benjamin revisits Freud's theory on memory traces in *Illuminations*, stating that involuntary remembrances that never fully entered consciousness are often the most powerful and enduring (160).

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

between actual historical events and invented counterfactual scenarios introduced by the narrator's visit to the Museo de la Memoria, a theme recognized by Catherine Gallagher in all narratives involving any historical speculation. For Gallagher, the exploration between fact and fiction enhances the significance of specific facts, which hold importance due to the possibility that they might have been different, and broadens the scope of the generalizations that fiction can convey (1131). The imperfections and incompleteness inherent in both "the real" and "the potentialities of the real," along with the splitting and doubling of the autobiographical "yo" in both the narrator's recollections and in Valenzuela's testimony, accentuates the unreliability of the narrators of the novel. It is important to note that, unlike Walter Booth's characterization of an unreliable narrator, defined as one expressing values and perceptions differing from the implied author, aiming to avoid issues related to biographical interpretations or functioning as irony, as outlined in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), the unreliability depicted in *La dimensión desconocida* emphasizes the temporal indeterminacy and inherent incompleteness in all exercises in memory, particularly those recalling violent events.

At the end of the section, the narrator once again finds herself gazing into Valenzuela's eyes while conducting research for a television docuseries in 2009 on the Vicaría de la Solidaridad's role in recording human rights violations. This encounter repeats in 2015 when she works on a documentary on the same topic.[9] No longer confined to a static image under the title "Yo torture" from *Cauce* magazine's cover, she becomes entranced by his movements during a television interview given upon his return from exile to testify in court. A bond forged by trauma connects them –the direct experiences of an intelligence officer who betrayed his orders and publicly revealed state crimes, and hers as a witness, both as a teenager who was too young to fully grasp the regime's horrors and as a middle-aged journalist who recalls those experiences. She describes: "Mi rostro se refleja en la pantalla del televisor y mi cara se funde con la suya. Me veo detrás de él, o delante de él, no lo sé. Parezco un fantasma en la imagen, una sombra rondándolo, como un espía que lo vigila sin que se dé cuenta" (24-5). As she becomes mesmerized by their superimposed images on the video screen in front of her, the narrator begins to believe that the forces responsible for Valenzuela's repeated appearance in her life through her ongoing work to uncover the country's dark past and subconscious memories are transmission sent from a parallel university –from a dimension that has not succumbed to silence and oblivion. She questions: "¿Aló? ¿Control en Tierra? ¿Hay alguien ahí? ¿Alguien me escucha?" (52).

The entangled structural pattern established in the first section, which unveils the entwined life stories of the narrator and "el hombre que torturaba," reveals a paranormal connection that blurs the boundaries between the past and present, reality and imagination. This thematic complexity gains further depth in the second section aptly labeled "Zona de contacto." During the screening for the documentary on the Vicaría, which the narrator attends with her mother, time seems to pause within the confines of the empty cinema, creating a temporal and spatial capsule: "El tiempo hace un paréntesis en esta sala de cine vacío, que es no es más que una cápsula espaciotemporal, una nave en la que mi madre y yo viajamos pauteadas por un reloj a destiempo'' (74). While the documentary aims to lend significance to the names displayed at the Museo de la Memoria and in Valenzuela's testimony, "para que nada salga disparado al espacio y se pierda" (74), the narrator comes to a profound realization. She acknowledges that her unintentional adherence to an exclusionary framework, characterized by the repetition of curated lists and aged images, prompts her to question the genuine impact of her efforts. Reflecting the dystopian aspects of Chilean's reality, the narrator recalls *The Twilight Zone* episode featuring Barbara Jean Trenton, where everything circulated as usual but with an

9. Nona Fernández worked on both Josefina Fernández's docuseries, *Los archivos del Cardenal* (Televisión Nacional de Chile, 2011-2014), and on the film *Habeas Corpus: La contrainteligencia de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad* (directed by Claudia Barril and Sebastián Moreno, COFRO, 2015.)

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

unsettling modification.[10] Similar to Barbara, an aging former movie star immersed in celluloid memories, the narrator realizes she has crossed a threshold into a disorientating dimension at the midpoint between light and shadow. The narrator becomes aware that the archives and testimonies she has grown familiar with are stagnant and unreliable. Instead, the dark theater becomes a portal that opens up a realm of dreams and ideas reminiscent of those depicted in *The Twilight Zone* –a universe that pushes the boundaries of what one is accustomed to seeing. Within this portal, subjective and fragmentary counternarratives from other dimensions emerge, resembling postcards sent "desde otro tiempo […] una señal de auxilio que pide a gritos ser reconocida" (79). In the closing moments of the second section, the narrator receives a signal that transmits a consideration of Valenzuela as one of the regime's victims:

> Sin pensarlo, el hombre que torturaba se lanza al mar, se sumerge por fin en las aguas de ese planeta perdido del que sólo quedan las huellas que figuran desordenadas sobre la mesa del salón parroquial. Desde ahí escucho que me grita. Recuerda quién soy, dice. Recuerda dónde estuve, recuerda lo que me hicieron. (118-9)

In line with Fernández's creative interest to reveal the limitations of official discourse and memory processes by blending-in different narrative modalities, a technique used to confront silence as well as critique modern society's complicity in perpetuating silence from an ethically reflective stance, Fernández employs the metaphor of twilight and parallel dimensions to explore alternate routes towards accessing and interpreting reverberations from the past.

In the third section, titled "Zona de fantasmas," the narrator further develops the lasting impact of the dictatorship within a broader social and ethical context, presenting a sustained counter-narrative that challenges established notions of recording and erasure. Specifically, the narrator delves into exploring the imagined possibilities of Valenzuela's experience during his flight into exile after providing his testimony to *Cauce* and the Vicaría –depicting him not solely as a repentant torturer but as a complex individual. Similar to the previous two sections, where the narrator reengaged her childhood memories with present information and used her imagination to fill in the voids, she shifts the focalized object to view it from another angle. This isn't an attempt to arrive at a definitive conclusion of the facts but rather a reconsideration of his circumstances in a different light –an additional dimension missing from this physical and temporal plane. Fabián Leal and Carolina Navarrete's argument about Fernández's ethical political stance, aiming to bring discourses lacking proper closure or consideration into the public view as alternate versions of official history, becomes more pronounced. According to Leal and Navarrete:

> Así, la labor del escritor sería dar cuenta de todas aquellas historias que han sido silenciadas principalmente desde la memoria oficial, reconstruyendo mediante diversas estrategias la memoria acallada y realizando un "trabajo de memoria" sobre ellas. (73)

The third section of the novel shifts focus to highlight the narrator's cosmic, if not somewhat ghostly connection with Valenzuela, portraying their bond as equally creative, intellectual, as it is moral. Leal and Navarrete's argument aligns here with Mary Lusky Friedman's observation regarding Fernández's work, as well as that of her contemporaries. They strive to contextualize memories of the dictatorship's legacy within a broader social and ethical framework, underscoring the idea that acknowledging "past political wrongs form a necessary undergirding for intimate life in current Chilean society" (614). Despite their inherent fragility, imagination and memories serve

10. "The Sixteen-Millimeter Shrine." *The Twilight Zone*, season 1, episode 4, CBS Television Network, 1959.

as the basis for ethical constructs. The third section of the novel moves from a focused interplay between the narrator's childhood memories, chronicles, and testimonies to include a counter-narrative that posits Valenzuela as an additional victim of the terrors of the regime. As the narrator traces and imagines Valenzuela's possible final actions that drove him to report the crimes to *Cauce*, she recognizes that these were "cosas que no se podrían contar, que formaban parte de una realidad secreta e inconfesable, una dimensión oculta en la que sólo ellos y nadie más que ellos podrían habitar" (147).

Drawing on a childhood fascination with ghost stories featuring characters like Dicken's Ebenezer Scrooge, Irving's Ichabod Crane, Brontë's Catherine, Bombal's Ana María, the narrator envisions Valenzuela as a haunted spirit caught in limbo, torn between his guilt as a horrific employee and a repentant military officer himself victimized by the dictatorship. "Imagino al hombre que torturaba así, como uno de los personajes de aquellos libros que leí de niña. Un hombre acosado por fantasmas, por el olor a muerto. Huyendo del jinete que quiere descabezalo o del cuervo que lleva instalado en el hombro" (162). As the narrative progresses in this section, the liminality of the space-time portal created in the theater becomes an opportunity to engage with the voices and stories hidden beneath the acts of reconciliation and forgetting. Imagining the situations and feelings Valenzuela may have experienced as a man fleeing into exile, the narrator places emphasis on the opportunity that memory work provides: exploring flawed memories and histories contaminated with incomplete information and partial truths.

Scaffolded to the framework of parallel worlds and dystopian imaginings presented through the novel's medial interface with a television show that uses strangeness as a defamiliarizing device to provide insights into social concerns, Fernández's narrator assumes at the end of the third section the role of Mary McNeal from *The Twilight Zone* episode "Memories."[11] A dealer of dreams and memories, Mary McNeal embodies the idea that the discovery of former past lives and viewpoints "is the greatest good she can render to a forgetful humanity (3:58-4:07).[12]

In the fourth section titled 'Zona de escape,' the narrator's exploration of memory extends beyond the personal to the societal, as she confronts the challenges of constructing a collective memory in the face of political upheaval and social precarity. Here, the narrator turns to childhood photographs and reminisces about her classmate Estrella González, the daughter of a regime participant involved in the gruesome acts of cutting throats and disposing of the bodies on the road to the Pudahuel airport. With Estrella's introduction here, the narrator broadens her exploration of the unwritten and unofficial names of the regime's victims by including González alongside Valenzuela's, stating:

> Aquí debiera hacer un nexo con el hombre que torturaba. Seguir la regla que yo misma he establecido y develar el extraño y torcido vínculo que existe entre él y González, eslabones lejanos o cercanos de una larga y pesada cadena, como esa que arrastran las ánimas de Dickens o los prisioneros de una cárcel clandestine. (182-3)

Engaging with memories that resist generational amnesia and challenge the whitewashing of national trauma, reconsidering who gets remembered and written into history, the narrator proposes a broader discourse on the ethical responsibility of remembering.

In the novel's concluding pages, the narrator makes explicit references to her generation's inheritance, drawing inspiration from Billy Joel's song "We Didn't Start the Fire," a rapid enumeration of historical events and figures spanning 1949 to 1989. This additional intertextuality with a

11. In *Strange TV*, M. Keith Brooker claims that Serling's television series was an effective interrogation of the line between normality and abnormality, and that, although formulaic in its structure, the unusual and far-fetched scenarios "always retained a clear sense of relevance to contemporary reality, their strangeness merely serving as a defamiliarizing device that helped to provide insights into and perspectives on a number of concerns of the late 1950s and early 1960s" (53).

12. "Memories." *The Twilight Zone*, season 3, episode 6, CBS Television Network, 1985.

culturally recognized icon from the era serves to underscore that the events of the 70s and 80s were not choices made by those who were children during that tumultuous period. The narrator articulates this sentiment with Joel's translated lyrics: "Nosotros no empezamos el fuego. No lo encendimos, pero intentamos apagarlo" (198). Positioned as inheritors of this historical narrative, the narrator conveys the frustration and disillusionment echoed in Joel's song, framing his lyrics within a Chilean contest. Commencing in 1973, she recites the events initiated with the *coup d'etat*, concluding her rendition of the song with Pinochet's death in 2006. While the song emphasizes the enduring impact of the past on her and her nation's present, the broader imperative inherited by her generation –to reconstruct a communal memory for the benefit of future generations– becomes apparent on the final page: "Soplamos e intentamos apagar, de una vez y para siempre, con la fuerza de quien escupe un ataúd, el fuego de todas las velas de esta torta de mierda" (227). In this process, the narrator recognizes that her efforts to confront her memories and comprehend her cosmic connection to Valenzuela have been guided by transmissions from a parallel plane, also intended for her child.

Through intricate intertextuality with *The Twilight Zone*, Fernández crafts a narrative that moves beyond the conventional boundaries of time and space, delving into the liminal realm between shadow and substance. By employing the metaphor 'twilight' as a symbol for the ambivalent dynamics between memory and forgetfulness, the narrator presents life not as an unadulterated reflection of reality but as a disorientating and anachronistic rendition of life "tal como ha sido olvidada," as Idelber Avelar aptly puts it (26). The sustained vacillation between the narrator and implied author's work as an investigative reporter and her childhood memories, firmly scaffolded to the dystopian imagination of parallel worlds presented through its interface with *The Twilight Zone* series, provides a compelling exposé of the present moment in a country void of a coherent socio-political dimension.

The thematic complexity of the novel heightened through its narrative structure mirrors the fragmented nature of memory and its temporal effects, where "[t]odo es como ayer o anteayer o mañana" (Fernández 29). As stated by Andreas Huyssen in *Twilight Memories*, the textual representations of memories always reveal the elastic properties of time: "[A]ny act of memory is always the present and not, as some naive epistemology might have it, the past itself, even though all memory in some ineradicable sense is dependent on some past event or experience" (3). In this way, Fernández's novel *La dimensión desconocida* stands as a powerful and complex exploration of memory, silence, and the interplay between reality and imagination in the context of post-dictatorship Chile. Through the doubling and splitting of universes, much like the doubling of the autobiographical 'yo' established at the beginning, the narrator ends by emphasizing a call for the reestablishment of a collective memory that acknowledges what is revealed in history and what silence hides. In this exploration, Fernández guides her readers on a journey into a dimension of both shadow and substance, highlighting her belief that the past is not a fixed entity, but rather an unsettling dimension of the present.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

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ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

TECHNOLOGICAL LANDSCAPES: ANTHROPOCENE AND TECHNICS IN LUCRECIA MARTEL'S *ZAMA*

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Abstract:

This article examines the relationship between the Anthropocene and colonialism in Lucrecia Martel's 2017 film *Zama*. Building from diverse critiques of technology and the colonial underpinnings of the Anthropocene, such as Kathryn Yusoff and Martin Heidegger, this article examines how this film is a meditation on the colonial origins of the Anthropocene that takes humanity's purported mastery over nature to its limit and how this process is dependent on aesthetic representations and of processes of racialization. By examining the film's color, compositions, sound schemes, and the representation of natural elements, this article shows how the Anthropocene is not exclusively a product of the industrial revolution or the nuclear age, but an event that began during European colonial expansion. Furthermore, this article shows that the Anthropocene and its ensuing racialization have their roots in the ontological relation that renders every being as an object, including living beings, then racialized subjects, and eventually humanity, as always ready for consumption.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Lucrecia Martel, Zama, Argentinian cinema, technology

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

Lucrecia Martel's long-awaited *Zama* (2017), inspired by Antonio di Benedetto's 1956 novel, premiered nine years after her previous movie.[1] Personal issues delayed the film's completion, as Martel was forced to abandon the production of an adaptation of Hector Oesterheld's science-fiction graphic novel *El eternauta*.[2] Despite the fact that the two films seem to be oppositional – *El eternauta* portrays an alien invasion of Buenos Aires, and *Zama* depicts the margins of the Spanish Empire at the end of the 18th century –, compelling similarities between the two narratives arise. First, the tropes of heroism and discovery point towards an easily recognizable convergence between these two works that ostensibly belong to different genres. However, *Zama*'s anti-heroic perspective of the Spanish presence in the Americas signals a critical parallel between science-fiction as a critique of colonialism rather than a celebration of modernity in which the role of ruthless invaders is displaced from other-worldly creatures onto European expansion. John Rieder has highlighted science-fiction's capacity to portray colonialism as visions of catastrophe that

> appear in large part to be the symmetrical opposites of colonial ideology's fantasies of appropriation, so much so that the lexicon of science-fictional catastrophes might be considered profitably as the obverse of the celebratory narratives of exploration and discovery (123).[3]

In light of Rieder's assertion, Zama also rehearses a fundamental premise of science-fiction in which the origins of modern Latin American nations were based on the destruction of the forms of life of native and African populations through the use of superior technologies. Another point of convergence between representations of colonialism and science-fiction narratives about hyper-technification concerns the question of temporal perspectives. If science-fiction envisions a future extension of present technological advancements and reflects on how these tendencies have shaped our world, colonial narratives of the likes of *Zama* meditate on how past events project into the present and future.

Setting aside the parallels between *El eternauta* and *Zama*, I focus on the latter's capacity to represent how the reinvention of Latin America's past during colonial expansion allows to question the current trajectory of modernity beyond the frame of national identity. If science-fiction helps us think about the current impacts of technology and the history of colonization allows us to grasp present-day ethnic exclusion, then *Zama*'s portrayal of what European settlers saw as 'untamed nature' sheds light on modernity's relation towards an endangered natural world. In this regard, my intention is to step away from an interpretation of this film exclusively as a critic of colonialism. Instead, I will focus on how color, sound schemes, and natural elements such as natural landscapes, vegetation, animals, and eventually the racialized subjects historically associated with nature also illuminate how the othering of nature is dependent upon an aesthetic procedure and how this film presents a cinematic decentering of the modern subject that illuminates a link relationship between the Anthropocene and the experience of colonialism.

The term Anthropocene was first proposed to define a new geological era in which the transformation of the Earth is mostly caused by anthropogenic interventions (Crutzen and Stoermer). Contrary to the Holocene, the geological epoch that allowed human life to prosper, the intensity of our activities has, for the first time in natural history, caused more alterations to the environment than all-natural processes combined. While the first periodization of the Anthropocene located its origins in the second half of the 18th century and the rise of the industrial revolution, more recently, the beginning of this geological era is set in the decades following 1945 (McNeil and Engelke, 213).[4] As

1. While an analysis of the similarities and differences between Martel's and Di Benedetto's *Zama* could be interesting, this article focuses exclusively on the film. One of Martel's statements in an interview with Marchini Camia sheds light on this decision: "For me, it was important to stay true to what I perceived in the novel. I don't know if that's the actual novel, but it's what the novel provoked in me, and to that I was absolutely faithful. It's not interpretation, it's not adaptation, it's not translation [but] infection (45). As Gert Gemünden shows while this "literary infection" comments and expands on Di Benedetto's novel, is a stand-alone project that was inspired by the novel to comment on different topics more than a faithful adaptation.

2. Although Martel dedicated two years to the script of *El eternauta*, the production was slowed down because of her struggle with cancer. Ultimately, the production was cancelled as Martel could not secure the funding for the project nor the graphic novel's copyright.

3. Rieder comments on science-fiction as a genre that reflects the anxieties related to colonialism: "Environmental devastation, species extinction, enslavement, plague, and genocide following in the wake of invasion by an alien civilization with vastly superior technology; all of these are not merely nightmares morbidly fixed upon by science fiction writers and readers, but are rather the bare historical record of what happened to non-European people and lands after being "discovered" by Europeans and integrated into Europe's economic and political arrangements from the fifteenth century to the present" (123-124.)

4. 1945 marks the beginning of the "Great Acceleration," a period of unprecedented growth in human population, use of resources, and environmental degradation. Other scientists have argued that this date also coincides with the beginning of the nuclear era, which forecasts the possibility of another event: "the Great Decoupling" (Steffen, et, al. 2015). This refers to the possibility of a collapse of natural systems that have supported economic and human development.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

Kathryn Yusoff has noted, periodization, which relies on empirical data, is uncritical of the historical processes of colonization that forefront the Anthropocene. These ahistorical approaches present an undifferentiated Anthropos, an abstract idea of humanity, as the culprit of environmental degradation. In this regard, a movie like *Zama,* produced from Latin America's peripheral position, can destabilize abstract claims about humanity's undifferentiated responsibility for ecological degradation. Instead, this film points to how colonialist, patriarchal, and capitalist structures underpin the Anthropocene. However, by seeking to question these elisions regarding colonial history, Latin American cultural studies risk turning to oppressed indigenous and African cosmologies as a reserve of idealized practices and subjectivities to counter the destructive effects of this geological process. As pointed out by Carolyn Fornoff and Gisella Heffes, Latin Americanism faces the challenge of bringing together the "entwined history of the species and the planet at the same time that we do not abandon critical theories of race, gender, sexuality, colonialism, imperialism"(5). For these critics, the Anthropocene demands a return to cultural archives without being oblivious to natural history but by bearing in mind that these two histories are deeply interconnected. As both critics put it, it is not enough to raise a critique of capitalism—undoubtedly one of the main motors of environmental degradation—but to question 'ontologies, epistemologies, and praxis' (6) that underpin the systematic exploitation of life. By engaging with Martin Heidegger's and Yusoff's assessments of modern technique, I show that Latin American cultural productions such as *Zama* can destabilize the narratives of the origins of the Anthropocene. In addition to this, I will show that as much as the Anthropocene is a threat to our existence on the planet, this process also brings with it the anthropocentric notion that humans have mastery over nature to its limit.

A Colonial Anthropocene

Zama describes the story of Diego de Zama, a functionary of the Spanish crown assigned to a remote outpost while he stoically awaits for a labyrinthine bureaucracy to allow him to relocate to Lerma with his family. Like many of the *criollos* and Spaniards in the movie, Zama derides the boredom of living in a place of little interest and disparages the African and indigenous with whom he inhabits the space –even as he fathers a son with a local woman in one of his many ways to game the administration.[5] Unlike narratives that denounce colonialism or try to grapple with its excesses from the vantage point of heroism, resistance, empathy, and adventure stories, life at the empire's margins seems as disconcerting as the legal structures of the Spanish empire.[6] As such, the interior spaces are far from sumptuous, cholera has come from the ships that are the only link with European civilization, and the new governor seems more interested in finding a way to exploit '*cocos*,' rocks that hold precious metals on their inside. In addition to this, non-sensical rumors abound that a bandit, Vicuña Porto, will continue to terrorize the town.[7]

The last part of the movie shows how, as governors and bureaucrats are replaced, the protagonist joins an expedition to capture Vicuña Porto and gain the favor of the new governor. As the men are captured and released by an indigenous tribe and eventually find themselves lost in the South American hinterlands, Zama discovers that Vicuña is not lurking in the wilderness but that he is hiding in plain sight by pretending to be one of the soldiers commissioned to join the excursion and is trying to find the *cocos*. Towards the end, Vicuña Porto amputates Zama's arms to later spare his life, which an indigenous child ultimately saves.

This film effaces the temporal and spatial referents of the Spanish empire in the Americas to suggest an alternative temporality to colonialism's actual history and to the periodization that situates the Anthropocene until the dawn of the industrial revolution. Nonetheless,

5. I use the terms *americanos* or *criollos*, which lend themselves to confusion due to the plurality of meanings associated with them. I use *criollos* to refer to the children of Spaniards that were born on the American continent. I use *americanos* to refer to the new identities that encompassed different ethnic groups in the Americas that shaped the content after its independence.

6. Among the films that touch on European settlers venturing into the unexplored natural spaces of the Americas, we can mention Werner Herzog's *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972), and *Fitzcarraldo* (1982); Roland Joffé's *The Mission* (1986); and Ciro Guerra's *The Embrace of the Serpent* (2015). Gemünden (2019) argues that Martel defies Herzog's male gaze that celebrates his protagonists as 'tragic heroes' (101) by exposing its protagonist to transformative and humbling experiences (101). Another feature of *Zama* is the distinct relationship of Europeans to nature. In many of these movies, Anglo/European protagonists, whether fighting against the elements for the sake of their own prowess or engaging with them to save them from exploitation, usually encounter natural spaces and humans still outside modern rationality.

7. The rumors regarding Vicuña Porto vacillate between a placeholder of barbarism for colonial administrators to ridiculous accounts of wrongdoings underscore the inconsistency of the movie's chronology. The bandit is the subject of all kinds of hearsay, from raping and looting, to having supposedly died at the hands of Zama, o that he has been killed 'over a thousand times.'

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

this erasure operates within a reflection about a historical referent of Spanish domination: the *encomienda*. This infamous colonial institution disguised slavery by forcing natives to work for Spaniards in exchange for protection and evangelization. This institution was progressively dismantled during the 16th century, even as it remained in some remote corners of the empire. Beyond the specificity of historical dates, Martel's *Zama* touches on the modernizing effects on the colonial administration of the *Reformas Borbónicas*.

Even as these liberal reforms and their continuation by the nascent Latin American republics did not do away with colonialism but rather reinforced it, Zama seems to resist any changes to the hierarchies of colonial power. A scene in which Zama serves as the *asesor letrado* makes evident his position regarding any alterations in the hierarchies within the colonial system. In this sequence, a couple of *colonos* claims an *encomienda* since there are no more natives to put to work. Without hesitating, Zama gives the *colonos* 50 natives to work and bids farewell to the couple, whose granddaughter, a *mestiza* sitting across the room petting two dogs and who is framed in a medium long shot, appears to judge his decision stoically and avoids any physical or visual contact with the functionary. Although Zama's decision leads to a physical altercation with his assistant Ventura Prieto, who confronts him for enslaving his fellow americanos, this scene makes evident one of the axes of the film: the growing subterranean tension between imperial power and the racialized subjects and natural life.

As Gonzalo Aguilar and Jens Andermann have argued, New Argentine Cinema, of which Martel is one of its leading directors, marks a departure from the moralizing national allegories produced during the 1980s. These films attempted to reckon with this country's dictatorial past to construct a culture of memory that underpins a newly re-established democracy. Both critics note that neoliberalism and the 2001 crisis influenced film production in this country. If the melodramas that emerged after the democratic transition saw themselves as aiding the foundation of Argentina's national democracy, novel directors thoroughly questioned these certainties at the turn of the century. They often thought of cinema as a tool for inquiring about social practices and common sense produced during neoliberalism.[8] In this regard, Martel's films dissect the country's socio-economic and political pasts in often subtle and original ways. If *The Swamp* (2001), *The Holy Girl* (2004), and *The Headless Woman* (2008) engage with economic decay and racial differences, environmental degradation, patriarchy, and neoliberalism at the turn of the 20th century, *Zama* tenders a profound mode of understanding of colonialism and its relation to the Anthropocene that engages, at once, with the current exclusion of indigenous people in Argentina and reflects on this problem beyond the nation-state. In other words, unlike Martel's previous work, *Zama* abandons a concrete reference to Argentina's contemporary history to engage with many of same topics such as patriarchy and racism albeit in their historical origins.[9] By the same token, Martel does so in an anti-historicist way by creating a fictional world that refers, but ultimately does not attempt, to accurately represent our contemporary world. On the contrary, *Zama* examines distinct logics of domination such as colonialism and anthropocentrism beyond the constraints of historicism.

In this regard, the fictional world of *Zama* not only speculates on how the past could have been different – a world in which the *criollos* accept their destiny as *americanos* – but ultimately how the future could have become a heterogeneous place instead of one completely constrained and homogenized by the forces of modernity. Martel's film poses an ethical question on whether those historically silenced can speak for themselves. As Gerd Gemünden reminds us, subalterns appear not entirely subjected to colonial power. Still, we constantly get "the

8. By engaging with *mise-en-scène*, a neorealist style, performances by non-professional actors instead of the theatrical style of the 80s, accidents, and chance instead of fully parse narratives, New Argentinian Cinema embraced the uncertainty and the complexity of contemporary political topographies instead of presenting a self-contained Argentinian nation.

9. While not directly addressing contemporary politics, the presence of Qom and Guaraní actors and language in *Zama* resonates with current forms of exclusion in this country. In line with Martel's shorts *Nueva Argirópolis* (2010) and *Legua* (2017), which portray the dispossession of land and the exploitation of rivers for agrobusiness and the impacts on indigenous communities, *Zama* makes evident that the continuities between colonial forms of exploitation with contemporary extractivism. For example, the demands of the Qom people with regards to access to territorial disputes, were disregarded and repressed by both the local Peronist allies of progressive government of Cristina Fernández and ignored by the conservative rule of Mauricio Macri.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

impression that the servants and slaves know more than the masters they serve" (123).[10] Zama does not speak for the colonized subjects but instead only hints at the possibility that these other languages that do not abide by our technological compulsion and the destruction of nature might emerge within a colonial milieu. Nevertheless, the perspective of engaging with other voices raises the question of how and when these new relations to nature could arrive, and more importantly, whether Zama and those invested in modernity, understood as human domain over natural landscape, could even listen to them.

Interpreting this piece as a film about waiting would point to a reading that problematizes Zama's *espera* – in the sense of hoping and waiting – for the recognition granted by imperial power but also to the emergence of a new subject. As Gemünden points out, the movie's aesthetic compositions, which include autochthonous animals and racialized others in unruly and saturated interior spaces, contribute to the feeling of disorientation experienced by the protagonist and configures a "struggle over the space" (111). The gradual dissolution of the administrator's grip over the space and the silent signs of defiance by the servants are part of a gradual upheaval against colonial rule that dislocates the centrality of the *criollo* and the hierarchies of power (123-134). For Gemünden, we witness the conclusion of a progressive upheaval against colonial rule. The indigenous take control of the final part of the narrative, and Zama learns because of Vicuña Porto "a no esperar nada" (123) (not to expect/hope for anything).

This rejection of la *espera* would point to many of Martel's insights about the dismissal of hoping and waiting as it belongs to a patriarchal and Catholic order. For Martel, men learn from a young age to expect great things, like the glories of European adventurers, while women learn to wait, cope, and adapt to failure and subordination (interviewed by Gemünden and Spitta 143).[11] As Martel comments, the Christian promise of salvation works as a moralizing and repressive force and a blind belief in progress, which could be extended to technological development. The movie's denouement would allow for an ending in which Zama finally listens to the indigenous child in the raft and confronts his destiny as an americano rather than as a European-aspiring criollo perpetually waiting for recognition from the colonial authorities.[12]

Gemünden's allegorical interpretation hopes for and expects the emergence of a feminine non-white subject. However, even if it is more desirable for our sensibilities, this subject remains within the scope of modernity. A reading of the film that focuses on the missing arrival of a particular subject nevertheless runs the risk of making the various landscapes as well as living and non-living beings that inhabit the film wholly subservient to the narrative of Zama's personal redemption. The film's ultimate meaning would revolve around embracing and fostering native and *mestizo* culture that cancels out a Eurocentric perspective. The presence of living beings that grab our attention or the Paraná River would only be 'raw materials' necessary for giving birth to a national subject and its distinctive local identity within the larger conception of modernity.

Moreover, nature in *Zama* would play an analogous role to that which Martin Lefebvre sees for natural landscapes in commercial narrative cinema as being constrained to plot developments. For Lefebvre, landscapes in film have served as a subservient aesthetic element that helps develop narratives and characters.[13] As such, nature and the

10. In a comment that Luciana (Lola Dueñas) directs to Zama as she tries to secure permission for her mute and soon-to-be freed slave Malemba (Mariana Nunes) to marry, she asks, "Can a mute give her consent?" Luciana's question is a rhetorical one, since the various gazes and ironic responses of indigenous and African characters remind us that despite their subaltern position, servants are hiding their true intentions and thoughts. Luciana would later make evident in a comment referring to her maid's wit and ability to communicate beyond language impairment: "she is not mute, she has her tongue." A comment that can be understood as Malemba's and the slaves' language ability to transcend their colonial erasure.

11. Martel's cinema is notorious for its feminist perspective. As Ana Forcinito explains, the Salta trilogy, which only features female protagonists, is a cinematic inquiry on patriarchal and colonial aspects of Argentinian society. According to Forcinito, Martel's cinema shows how women are produced by the dominant male gaze and different discourses (colonial, religious, medical power.) Martel's emphasis is not so much on the total dominance of the patriarchy or the projection of an alternate women's subjectivity but on the erasure and the traces of female discourse and how women mimic and subvert the patriarchal voice.

12. It is possible that Martel's Zama survives and confronts his destiny as an *americano*. Another interpretation of the final scene is that it is only at this point that Zama contemplates his own mortality, that it is his finitude as another mortal being-towards-death, regardless of his ethnic identity or place within the colonial administration.

13. Lefebvre borrows from Freeburg's *The Art of Photoplay Making* a taxonomy that explains the degree to which film settings are subordinated to the narrative demands of film plots: neutral, informative, sympathetic, participating, and formative (64). This classification explains the degree to which landscapes are subsumed by character and plot development. A neutral setting is indifferent to the characters; the informative and sympathetic ones provide some sort of information or mood regarding the film, while the participating and formative play an active role in the plot or at shaping the interior dimension of characters.

subalterns in *Zama* would serve for the protagonist's personal development or the film's moral lesson that departs from Eurocentrism only to become a Latin American nationalist allegory. This aesthetic use of natural elements would also be part of the larger narrative of the modern subject that renders nature graspable as landscape. Such a transformation into an aesthetic product not only reduces the complexity of nature into a legible space but is part of a larger process of disciplining and homogenization that readies the eventual consumption and destruction of nature by a subject that subtracts himself from the world he inhabits.

Along with the plot of Zama's attempts to move through an administrative maze, it is possible to see the story of the protagonist as that of a subject that does not see himself as inhabiting the world where he lives in. Zama sees himself as a total stranger; even as an observer of life at the empire's margins. Zama's look, filmed in a long shot that places him against the backdrop of the natural landscape and natives, conveys that he is bored and expectant as when he peers upon the river and other natural landscapes. However, Zama's gaze is hardly neutral but instead one of domination. This is exemplified in the scene at a party where he is offered newly arrived *mulatillas* for his enjoyment; Zama refuses the offer because he prefers white women. In turn, we realize Zama is not only an outsider to the American space he inhabits; as a representative and bearer of imperial power, he is bestowed with the right to appropriate or dispose of every resource, human or natural, that he encounters.

Zama's first scene contains various shots in which the protagonist's gaze fixates on the waters of the Paraná and on the fish that are expelled to the river's banks as they swim about. Relying on Lefebvre's perspective of narrative and landscapes, such images would analogize and reflect the narrative of Zama's personal and professional life as being trapped by the waters of the river. Yet, Lefebvre moves beyond Freeburg's ideas about landscape being subservient to narrative by claiming that landscapes in cinema are at times 'indifferent' to plot or character development owing to spectatorship. Film spectators have the ability to arrest the landscape from the narrative flow in order to consider its broader relationship to the film. If we are to extract the landscape and natural elements in *Zama* beyond the protagonist's personal development, this film enables a meditation on colonialism, modernity, and the Anthropocene.

While landscapes help construct *Zama*'s narrative as a critique of colonial history, certaint moments in which the landscape is indifferent to the narrative point to something related to, although simultaneously independent from, the problems of the national allegory. Even if landscapes have never been tantamount to nature but only a way to render it legible —whether this is through painting, film, or photography— the current strain on the environment produced by human activities reframes the question of the subordinate place that modernity has assigned to nature. In this regard, the notion of the Anthropocene signals towards the limit of a clear distinction between human existence and a natural autonomous world.

As Jennifer Fay has argued, cinema maintains a privileged relationship to the Anthropocene as an industrial artistic medium as well as for its relation to landscapes. Fay argues that cinema embodies the paradoxical relationship of humans to the natural world. In the case of studio-produced cinema, the human tendency to control the natural world becomes readily evident in crafting an artificial human-made environments. Yet by mid-century, when moviemakers became more interested in filming on location, the distinction between a human or a natural-constructed world collapsed. Though Fay focuses primarily on US films, the following claim seems to hold true in *Zama*: "Even leaving the studio confines, there are simply no locations on Earth that are not

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

in some way already a product of or contaminated by human design" (8). In *Zama* we see a progression from interior spaces towards exterior locations. The former establishes a sense of normalcy and dominion that contrasts with the distortion and loss of control over nature shown as the narrative shifts to increasingly vaster exterior spaces. Such a spatial dynamic is underscored when Zama has his personal belongings and furniture thrown onto a patio by the governor. Fay's notion of "vernacular Anthropocene" (203), which she borrows from Miriam Hansen's idea of vernacular modernism, is also instrumental for analyzing *Zama*. Fay contends that, much like classical cinema was incorporated and adapted to local contexts, the global dimension of the Anthropocene must be grounded in local scenarios.

A "vernacular Anthropocene" opens a space for reflecting on landscape and nature from the fictive margins of the Spanish American periphery about the Anthropocene's temporal and spatial coordinates. Despite its origin in the hard sciences, we must question the assumptions of the concept of the Anthropocene. While its prefix "Anthropos" refers to the human element disrupting natural systems, we must not lose sight that the prefix offers a totalizing and homogeneous understanding of our species. Such a universalizing dimension ignores that modern social structures, like colonialism and capitalist economy, have triggered most of the transformations on Earth.

To add another layer of complexity to a global process that deeply alters local contexts, Yusoff argues that the concept of the Anthropocene subsumes the plurality of human experiences into one subject, namely, the modern Western man. Contrary to the narrative that it was not until the last century in which effects of human activity came to irreversibly define and affect Earth, Yusoff argues that since the European occupation of the Americas, this process was already underway. Not only did colonization initiated an unprecedented traffic of animal and plant species and forced migrations, but most fundamentally, the destruction of other forms of relating to nature became globally imposed during the process of colonization.

From a European perspective, Carl Schmitt's *Nomos of the Earth* narrates modernity's birth as a political construction dependent on colonial expansion. Schmitt argues that against the threat of total war in Europe, the world was divided between this continent and colonial space. In Europe warfare was lawfully regulated whereas in the colonial space the rules of just warfare were legally ignored to allow for the colonial appropriation of land. This spatialization of the world rationalized violence and contained it from tearing apart European society at the expense of people at the margins (we can think of *Zama* granting rights of encomienda to the *colonos*). On the contrary, beginning with the 19th century, the era whose emergence Zama is witnessing, liberalism and the equality of all men to become independent economic agents and modern citizens became the driving force of the homogenization of the globe.

Within this broader historical and geographical framework, *Zama* operates as a commentary on the underpinnings of racial stratification in Latin America and the colonial origins of the Anthropocene. However, even if it is right to expose the colonial and capitalist orientation of the concept, we should be wary of being complacent with only correcting or making precise the history of the Anthropocene. In what follows, I will point out how the Anthropocene, as a concept centered and limited by the notion of the human, ultimately relates to something not entirely human nor natural (understood as an abstract concept that is the other of humankind or culture), but to technology as a limit between these two realms. Departing from Heidegger's "Question Concerning Technology", I do not refer to technology as the incremental developments in our capacity to manipulate things in the world nor to advancements in scientific knowledge, but rather as a

particular relationship of humanity towards beings and nature. Heidegger's critique of technology is directed towards a historically specific way of approaching the world that orders and renders being, that is, everything that appears on Earth, from inanimate objects to the human itself, always "at hand," available, for circulation and consumption. For Heidegger, technology is grounded in our capacity for "revealing" and "un-concealing" how we come to understand our world and the beings that inhabit it. Even if modern technology and science present themselves as transhistorical truths, whose axioms are verifiable for all times and places, for Heidegger, they are not the only way of revealing being, but only one mode among many possible modes determined by its own historicity (i.e., the Greeks for him, but we could also add the indigenous).

Modern technology is driven by the will to make everything appear only as being, that is, as an objectifiable totality that is fully quantifiable and measurable for a subject, man, that can fully order being according to logical criteria. In this regard, we can think of Zama's disinterest in the specific differences between natives, slaves, or natural life. As a colonial administrator, these different things and persons are, for the protagonist, interchangeable pieces in the colonial machinery that he attempts to game. Heidegger's reflections paint a dire landscape that is particularly germane to our concerns about current ecological devastation. Modern technology as a way of revealing puts a demand, "a challenge", by which everything is secured (*gestellt* often translated as "enframed"), always ready and disposed, to be extracted, much like the minerals that lie in the subsoil. As Heidegger writes, "The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit" (14). While Heidegger's claims are broader than ecological concerns, the critique of coloniality, and even technics themselves, it is possible to see the Anthropocene as the ecological manifestation of the conclusion of modern metaphysics. If this is the ending of the metaphysical era, then humans cannot keep encountering the world as an infinite stockpile of beings that are fully objectifiable, thus ready for their extraction, circulation, and consumption.

The crux of Heidegger's reflections on technology is that while he disdains a world impoverished by its hubris, the technological encompassing of the world allows for unmasking the metaphysical illusions that posit the human as the ultimate ground by which beings must be ordered and dominated. In turn, the delusion that the human is the ultimate master of technology and nature breaks down as we become one amongst many fungible resources. In the case of Martel's film, Zama becomes yet another cog within a machinery that simply ignores him. Heidegger realizes that, much like our ecological concerns, the breaking of the mirage that supposes infinite dominion of nature comes with a great risk that, in turn, opens the possibility for something new to arise.

Sediments of Modernity

Although departing from different perspectives, both Yusoff and Heidegger question the developmentalist history of natural sciences by showing that the profound alterations to the planet began much earlier than the current geological accounts. For Yusoff, colonialism already foregrounds an extractive relation in which enslaved populations are dehumanized and turned into objects that, like modern fuels and minerals, are constructed as costless sources of energy that are extracted by a nascent capitalist economy. In this regard, I will now show how *Zama* traces this mode of revealing beyond its historiographic limits, yet this extractive imaginary also illuminates paths for thinking humanity otherwise during the Anthropocene. While Gemünden is right to point out that there is a progression in *Zama* by which the veneer of civilization gradually is eroded and that culminates in the film's last part in which natural landscapes and the indigenous

become central, it is also true that there are many fissures within the film that allow for a different understanding of this erosion.

Gemünden's interpretation of *Zama* coincides with a distinction within the film regarding the construction of spaces. As mentioned above, most of the interior spaces that appear during the first part of the movie are depicted as an imitation of European courtly society, even if the temporal and spatial distance between this forgotten colonial outpost and the centers of power makes any attempt to recreate this continent ludicrous. Conversely, those exterior spaces in which nature abounds and natives are not under the yoke of colonial extraction appear to resist the imperial power that attempts their domination. Foreshadowing Zama's encounter with nature towards the end of the movie, the supposedly controlled interior spaces start to become disturbed not only by the settlers' own incompetence but also by natural forces. As the story progresses, it becomes evident that the illusion of civilization recedes and the Europeanness fades away. As Luciana's teeth appear blackened, the governors and their aides increasingly behave as demagogues concerned with drinking, finding *cocos*, and playing cards. Concomitantly, supposedly civilized interior spaces appear more distorted, and nature gradually penetrates and degrades the last remainders of civilization. The llama that looks directly at the camera during Zama's conversation with the governor, as well as the vermin that destroy the walls of the protagonist's room, is a reminder of the fictitious dominance of civilization over nature.

While the narrative poses civilization against nature and reflects prevailing historical and cultural accounts of colonialism and histories of the Anthropocene, different instances of the film complicate this opposition. As Fay argues, following environmentalist Bill McKibben, the recognition of Earth as a hospitable place, a *Heimat* or home, for human development has been upended by our impact on the environment. Fay argues that our misrecognition of Earth as our home ceases and instead becomes a space that is profoundly disorienting. For these reasons, Fay proposes that the neologism *Eaarth* reflects such a transformation. *Eaarth* better captures the uncanniness or *Unheimlichlkeit* of a nature that has been thoroughly subdued yet falls increasingly out of our control. Zama not only shows the uncanniness of *Eaarth* as produced by the colonial Anthropocene but that the total domination over nature eventually turns against civilization.

An instructive example of the uncanniness surrounding civilization manifests itself in the film's soundtrack. The smooth ambient noises and the repetitive sounds, such as those made by the slaves while operating a mechanical fan and musical instruments, shape a tragic narrative: Zama's entrapment in the Spanish garrison and his descent from a position of power to becoming captive. As Eleonora Rapan points out, *Zama* is the first of Martel's films that uses the Shepard effect. This effect consists of the overlapping sine waves separated by octaves. When played in ascending or descending scale, the Shepard effect tricks the listener into perceiving the tones as perpetually rising or falling.

Building from Michel Chion's work, Rapan argues that sound is a way to temporalize or vectorize "any landscape or still image" (140). One way to propel a static image into a dynamic is by including diegetic sounds, such as chipping birds in a landscape or an ambulance in an urban setting. Rapan's description of the temporalization of landscape could be interpreted as the other side of the arresting of cinematographic landscape as described by Lefebvre. In as much as cinema is a medium composed predominantly of moving images and sounds, by bringing together these two critics, it is evident that the mobilization of landscapes is achieved in film by an intertwinement of sound and image.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

In *Zama*, the Shepard effect appears when the protagonist is having conversations that remind him of his shortcomings. For example, when the protagonist discusses his much-desired transfer to Lerma or his purportedly heroic actions. In these scenes shot in medium close-up, the effect gives the illusion of descent until the speech of Zama's interlocutors breaks down, and dialogues and images no longer coincide. By presenting us with a sound that produces the impression of eternity in a brief span of time, the film reinforces the feelings of entrapment. This motif points to settings that reflect both their remoteness from centers of power as well as Zama's failure as a patriarchal figure. Rapan argues against the idea that the Shepard tone simply metaphorizes the main character's "descent" (138).

By pointing out that the Shepard effect is part of the film's "disturbances by non-diegetic intruders" (139), the effect and tilted shots of *Zama* come as a projection on the protagonist's conscience. This leads Rapan to argue that Martel is not simply temporalizing her film but meditating about time. Although Rapan does not develop how *Zama* thinks time anew, many of the elements she offers about the use of Shepard tones allow us to reflect on the relationship between (historical and anthropocenic) time and cinematic landscapes. While Rapan correctly points out that Shepard tones coincide with shots of Zama's troubled conscience and loss of control, an excessive focus on human conscience vis-à-vis nature would situate this film as another iteration of modern philosophical idealism (likes of many representations of the Anthropocene already do.) Rapan's distinction between the sounds that vectorize moving images between intradiegetic (landscape and animals sounds) and extradiegetic sounds (music by *Los Indios Tabajaras* and the Shepard effect,) although more critical than just an allegory of Zama's downfall, still reproduces a distinction between natural and historical time, thus between nature and civilization. Without truly problematizing the use of the Shepard tone, Rapan briefly meditates on the presence of "electronically manipulated" (39) sound of cicadas hornets and flies, ambient sound, and domestic objects like glass and cutlery. The purported distinction between civilization and nature, between man-made and natural elements that traverse the film, is blurred, thus raising the question of the validity of such distinction.

Breaking this opposition between nature and civilization opens another interpretative possibility for this film: the protagonist has, like the racialized subjects before him, entered a process that transforms him into an object. Though the indigenous and African characters always seem to know more than what they express, it remains an enigma to what extent they know that they are being produced as objects. In a scene that exploits the ambiguity of subaltern knowledge and the colonial and modern incapacity to listen and completely rule their subjects the protagonist enters, while looking for the town's doctor, into what seems to be a religious rite that is taking place in an enclosed space (Figure 1).

Fig.1 Zama witnesses a ritual

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

The combination of silence and rattling sounds that alternate between the doctor fainting onto the ground and a mute child (perhaps Zama's own child) are part of the construction of a colonial space that is never in complete control, as well as a foresight of Zama's flight into the wilderness.

The sequence that follows the opening credits encapsulates the protagonist's complex relationship towards the landscape: Zama contemplates the scenery while standing on the riverbanks as a group of native children, at which he only quickly glances, playfully walk away. This scene foretells the narrative of constant and pointless waiting for news from the river while overlooking the native population. Yet, the length of the shot and the lack of dialogue and minimal ambient sound allow the spectator to engage with what Lefebvre sees as a landscape indifferent to narrative. Along with the characters, the spectator's eyes may wander around the strips of vegetation that appear in the background, the mirroring of the sky and the river, and the different crags facing the river. The path of the water gently transits into wet and then dry sand and eventually into the rock formations that frame the scene, which in turn contrast with reddish boulders lying on the shore.

Such a portrayal of the landscape allows for a larger association between history and geology. Like human archives, sediments contain recordings of different geological periods that will most likely reflect our presence on earth long after the human species disappear. Recalling Heidegger's critique of the humanity turning also into a "resource," the film presents images of indigenous children at the banks of the river and the crags surrounding it as closer to the landscape than to an observant Zama (Figure 2) as well as the images of the women covering their bodies with mud (Figure 3). Following Yusoff's analysis, the film's association of mineral extraction with racialized and feminine subjects shows that humanity's subsumption by modern technological forces first took place with colonial extractivism.[14]

Fig.2 Zama on the banks of the river

Fig.3 Women bath at the shore

14. Although Heidegger is not interested in writing a historiography of technology but rather in its first principles, Yusoff's and Martel's points complement his arguments: the preeminence of colonialism for turning entire swaths of humans into resources. The centrality of colonialism allows for a reading of Heidegger that displaces it from its European vantage point to shed light on the internal relationships between technology, extractivism, and colonial practices.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

As Zama continues to wander around the river, he is seen exploring the crags following what appears to be female laughter. This sound leads him to lurk over a group of naked women, including Malemba and Luciana, taking a mud bath while translating words from Guaraní into Spanish. After being yelled at by the women "¡*Mirón*!" Zama leaves the scene followed by Malemba, sent by her owner to see who the voyeur was, only to be slapped by Luciana once she catches up to him. While it is a sequence that points to the gender dynamics in the film, particularly Zama's failed masculine gaze and the solidarity among women, what remains striking is how the hues of the minerals impinge upon the skin of the women. This scene suggests a desire for a natural element, mud, to function as an erasure of culturally produced differences, such as skin tonalities, which structured colonial society. Alternatively, this scene not only reminds us that even if Zama remains a failed patriarch, women and racialized bodies become a kind of a standing reserve (Heidegger, 2013) for his consumption.

Technological Landscapes

In aesthetical terms, the cinematic use of natural imagery in *Zama* is part of a larger critique of the landscape as an art form that has historically partaken in the exploitation of nature. Landscape is not nature per se but a form of representation of nature and, in turn, a form of control. As Andermann explains about the history of landscape in Latin America, this art form is an "artifice complicit with a violence that has not ceased to tear off flesh from the earth" (*Tierras en trance* 16).[15] A bodily metaphor for the exploitation of Earth that is also a gendered trope comes with "rape, of which every landscape is a sublimated image" (16).[16] As the Heideggerian terminology reminds us, the technological mode of revealing has at its center the rendering of being into a measurable entity at the mercy of a knowing subject. By the same token, Andermann argues that every landscape deploys simultaneously a "sensorial and affective apprehension (*aprehensión*) of earth" (10). Much like Lefebvre argues that natural settings are subsumed to narrative demands, landscape's "aprehensión/apprehension" of beings is performed by the aesthetic representation of every "natural object" that inscribes them as images always ready to be read and interpreted. As Andermann explains with regards to painting:

> Painting aspires to become a neutral and invisible window towards artificial time-space in which it projects its "matter," for doing so it must erase every mark and trace of the painting's work of production, of the physical encounter between body, light, medium, and color" (20).[17]

This aesthetic appropriation ultimately lies in fiction, the pretense of the artist and the observer as being outside representation, not only in the sense of observing a piece of art but more radically as being that who "orders" the world rather than part of those being "ordered."

As Heidegger already signaled, the purported exteriority of the subject expressed in Andermann's account of artistic representation –much like Zama gazing at the women, is historically situated but not exclusive to a European male – that renders all other beings legible has run its course. The idea of nature as a readable image, for example, is exhausted. As such, the limit of humanist discourse is that it ultimately does not question its own representation of humanity's mastery for ordering every being, but only strives for a more equalitarian distribution of the dominion over nature. Gemünden's reading of *Zama* as an ethnic revolt against European domination as the fulfillment of modernity's ethical promise of equality exemplifies this idea. *Zama*'s critique not only makes evident how colonial exploitation was grounded in aesthetic procedures such as the landscape, which represents and makes legible beings. This film is part of a larger reflection on how the Anthropocene's blurring of the historically constructed distinction between man-made and natural

15. Unless otherwise noted, translations are mine.

16. Landscapes are the performative repetition of appropriation over the land historically represented as feminine. As Schmitt's gendered understanding of territorial expansion reminds us, "In mythical language, the earth became known as the mother of law [...] First, the fertile earth contains within herself, within the womb of her fecundity, an inner measure, because human toil and trouble, human planting and cultivation of the fruitful earth is rewarded justly by her with growth and harvest." (42).

17. Andermann argues that landscapes hold a memory of nature destroyed by capitalist primitive accumulation. This repressed memory of a lost relationship to nature is the raw material for a utopian practice that takes the form of the landscape to its limit. Andermann reflects on the possibility of a different relationship towards a natural representation that combines the critique of landscape with one that enables the landscape to overcome natural exploitation.

worlds has thrown the regime of natural representation into a terminal crisis. Zama also confronts the role of aesthetics and colonial exploitation. After the opening scene, the coloration of many of the characters' bodies becomes more common. Before examining this logic in *Zama*, it is worth reflecting on what color entails in cinematic theory and aesthetics. Although color is subjective and, above all, a contextual element—blue is, for instance, a staple of *Modernismo* and depression—there are different ways in which art has conceptualized color. Paul Coates and David Batchelor have pointed out how Western aesthetics has constructed color –as opposed to the absence of it— beyond its specific cultural or stylistic contexts. As such, the Western imaginary shaped a dichotomy between color and colorlessness. This distinction places color, particularly its excess, as sensuous, bodily, artificial, and intoxicating compared to the universal (and body-less) realms of form and meaning associated with the lack of color and eventually with whiteness. Whiteness mirrors the racial subtexts of colonialism's "white" intellectual and artistic gaze over colored bodies of exploitation. Because of its condition as accessory and accidental and not essential to art and aesthetics, Coates (2010) associates color with a supplement (in line with the idea of a "drug") that enhances, yet always brings indeterminacy to artistic production. As such, even if certain critical currents in aesthetics have attempted to disregard color, its presence always upsets the stability of meaning; thus, it must be something that must be dominated by art rather than letting it run indeterminately free.

Returning to the distinction between interior and exterior spaces, while the hinterlands in which Vicuña Porto supposedly roams are depicted through high contrast and intense tonalities of green, interior spaces tend towards more discreet shades of ochre and dark tones. Likewise, while the clothes of the Spaniards and criollos are shown in neutral tones and fewer bright clothes, African and indigenous characters are more often shot by contrasting their skin tones against the highly intense blues of certain walls and garments. Elsewhere, slaves who work as messengers wear blue European-style jackets with grey-haired wigs, but no pants seem to mock the alleged seriousness of bureaucratic practices (Figure 4). Similarly, indigenous women (and even Luciana at times and her ambiguous solidarity with these characters) also appear related to blue tonalities as they are dyeing textiles, thus effectively partaking in the nascent chains of production (Figure 5).

Fig.2 Zama on the banks of the river

Fig.4 Zama and a slave

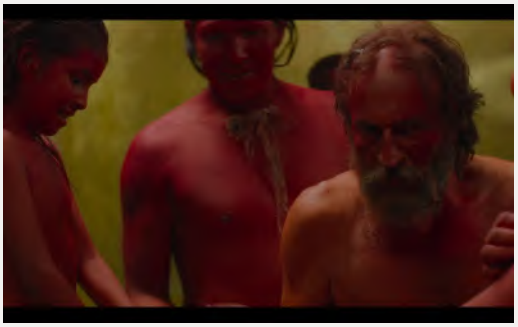

Fig.5 Women dye pieces of cloth.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

However, much like the image in which the women are covered with mud at the beginning of the film, this artificial coloring spreads onto their bodies. It is not only that women and slaves participate as virtually costless and exploited labor producing commodities, extracting resources, or providing sustenance for the settlers, but that this process has already transformed these populations into human resources. While such a term usually refers to corporate and intellectual labor, following Heidegger's lead, we can say that the racialized others attain a category of human resources by occupying a paradoxical place as vehicles for the exploitation of nature and as raw materials themselves. The rise of human resources jettisons the idea of a subject that has mastery over the world and instead shows that once technology as a mode of revealing comes to full force, even the human becomes objectifiable and fungible. In turn, like the rest of beings, humans must always be ready for circulation and consumption. Similarly, the portrayal of the indigenous and African subjects associated with the artificiality of color (what is more openly deceitful than pigments for hiding the true looks of something?) marks a radical break with the idea that these populations offer a return to originary forms of production – that is, before capitalism and modern technique. This is not to say that we must conform to modern technics as the only possible way for relating to nature. If anything, the Anthropocene's heinous consequences are a reminder of its unfeasibility. Nevertheless, any relationship with nature that is worth rethinking must thoroughly question the purported mastery of humans over other beings and the dichotomy of culture regarding nature.

Coloring the Anthropocene

The opposition between color associated with racialized and feminized bodies and nature vis-à-vis the modern subject that embodies whiteness, patriarchy, and mastery over beings, reaches its limit towards the end of the film. The flight into the wilderness presents a new space where a high-contrast and intense tone of green prevails. As Coates has pointed out by citing the examples such as *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), the dichotomies mentioned above have been used in the film to represent colorful cinematic worlds as representing intoxicating and dream-like scenarios. *Zama* could be read as partaking of this imagery. As the explorers stray further away from civilization, situations become increasingly oneiric: the group runs into warriors with bird-like costumes, and, in the scene where Zama discovers the identity of Vicuña Porto, the explorers must pretend they are asleep as a group of blind elders traverses their camp. The first impression of this natural space is that these dream-like scenarios and their natural and human diversity escape from the modern homogenization of resources and the colonial grip. By the same token, we could think that, unlike Zama, Vicuña Porto truly symbolizes the future of *americanos* with his Portuguese-inflected Spanish and his willingness to communicate with the locals. Yet, akin to how Zama granted rights of encomienda, the indigenous' and Vicuña's rogue sovereignty disposes of other men and lust for the *cocos* make us realize that the hinterlands are not a space of resistance but only the other side of colonial exploitation.

In another enigmatic sequence, the travelers are taken prisoners by a group of indigenous people who have painted their bodies red (Figure 6).

Fig.6 Zama held captive

Their captivity resembles the scene I referred to previously in which Zama runs into a native ceremony spoken in Guaraní. Like the previous ritual episode, without any knowledge of the Qom language, this scene throws Zama and the audience into a moment of radical uncommunication. Shot in closed quarters, this sequence is notorious for its increasing rhythm constructed by the repetition of sounds and visuals featuring the natives beating their captives and dialogues in Qom. The velocity increases as the shots of bodes painted with red ink that mixes with the blood spilling out of their wounds alternate with the screeching noises from the constant opening and closing metallic door of the room in which the captives are thrown into (we briefly glimpse a knocked-down explorer lying in the floor).

Afterward, the captives are rounded up by the tribe's members and interpellated by one of their leaders. Through the intervention of Vicuña, who is serving as a translator, the travelers realize that it is their names that the community leaders are asking. After the initial introduction, the explorers are shoved into what seems to be the door the spectators had heard and seen in the previous moments. The scene comes to a halt as we see the explorers back again in the wild, still with residues of the red paint. This passage, which resembles a violent baptism or ritual of initiation, resists interpretation and insertion in the movie's larger narrative arc. However, this fragment takes on another significance as the movie closes with Vicuña asking Zama to tell him where he can find the *cocos* filled with precious stones. The protagonist responds that those stones are 'worthless,' which triggers the bandits' wrath, who then amputate Zama's arms. In this broader context of the search for the *cocos*, it is possible to see the ritual as something other than an example of misunderstanding between cultures or a feverish dream. By pondering the critique of the landscape as part of a more extensive process of marking colonial subjects as resources, this scene takes on a different meaning. This fragment echoes an industrial workshop –with its metallic noises and the natives working– that are "producing" Zama and explorers as no longer representatives of the Spanish crown but just as another human resource available for consumption.

Inverting the idea that Zama learns to accept his destiny as an *americano* rather than a European, he, like the racialized subjects he commanded over in the colonial outpost, has now been marked with artificial colorants. The blurring of these hierarchies also troubles spatializations such as Schmitt's divide between the center and the periphery and whose de-colonial inversion would argue that there is a clear distinction between spaces penetrated by capitalism and those that are not. *Zama* shows, much like Heidegger, that the core and advancement of technology is not the product of the incremental increase of science or technics. On the contrary, even as the Anthropocene has become a central term for understanding our planet's current transformations, its core lies beyond geological processes but in the relentless global homogenization of beings as fully measurable and disposable.

Even before it became evident that human activities had not left space on Earth untouched –much like the natives, bandits, and colonial administrators of *Zama*–, the key relation underpinning the Anthropocene is how modernity has shaped and constituted a global extractivist system. This system moves beyond distinctions such as center and periphery by incorporating these boundaries; everything works, knowingly or not, for turning beings into objects always ready and available for exploitation. Against a reading of this movie as a narrative in which Zama realizes that he must confront his destiny as an *americano*, this film makes evident to the audience that the protagonist, like his colonial subjects before, has been entirely subsumed into a total process of accumulation. Perhaps more radically, Zama is already part of a process by which humans are becoming yet

another sediment that records the human presence on Earth's surface. In the face of the Anthropocene's complete uprooting of modernity's illusory distinction between human and nature, if a new way of understanding is to emerge, it must not be concerned with solely giving voice to the subaltern others, but it must fully confront the concept of the human as a master of being and all the perils that such purported mastery entails.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

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NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

Untitled 3 / Sin título 3

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

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INTERVIEWS / ENTREVISTAS

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ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

"EL HORIZONTE ES UN PLAN DE 'DESGOBIERNO' FEMINISTA" ENTREVISTA CON MARÍA GALINDO, ANARCOFEMINISTA, LESBIANA, ACTIVISTA Y TEÓRICA BOLIVIANA.

Magela Baudoin
University of Oregon

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NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

El currículum de María Galindo (Bolivia, 1964) es una suerte de prontuario feminista, documentado en la prensa nacional e internacional. En él ha quedado constancia de las tantas veces que ha sido procesada por el Estado boliviano ya sea por cometer "actos obscenos"[1] al pintar de colores penes de hombres en plena plaza pública (2003); por "ocasionar daños a los bienes del Estado", tras escribir en una construcción gubernamental el grafiti: "Fiscalía rima con porquería" y denunciar con ello la retardación de justicia en 600 casos de feminicidio (2013); o por "allanar las instalaciones de la autoridad" forestal, en protesta por la quema del bosque chiquitano (2018). En esta hoja de vida abierta también se da cuenta de las incontables veces en que ha sido censurada por instituciones culturales, bienales de arte o grupos católicos conservadores, como cuando su *Milagroso altar blasfemo*[2], cuya virgen abortera ocupaba el centro del mural, fue borrado de las paredes del Museo Nacional de Arte de La Paz (2016); o cuando la instalación "Espacio para abortar" fue suspendida en la Bienal de Arte de Saõ Paulo (2017). Galindo ha sido expulsada de periódicos y universidades y declarada persona no grata por alcaldías y prefecturas; ha profanado muros de su país con sus grafitis; enfrentado autoridades y ha sido arrastrada, detenida y golpeada por la policía. La calle es su territorio predilecto para el arte y para la política. Y sus acciones o performances se vuelven virales con frecuencia, con miles de vistas y reproducciones. El video y la foto "Colón y la chola globalizada", que muestra la estatua de la reina Isabel la Católica vestida con polleras, manta y sombrero de chola (La Paz), está en todas las redes y ha dado la vuelta al mundo, en el aniversario de la llegada de Cristóbal Colón a América (2022).

Pero el activismo no ocurre solo, viene acompañado de reflexión y escritura. Su último libro, *Feminismo bastardo* (2022), ha sido publicado en ocho países en menos de un año y reimpreso en varios de ellos. En cada presentación, invariablemente, la siguen multitudes porque su acción política que es tan épica como efectiva. No hay en la historia contemporánea de Bolivia ninguna conquista feminista que no se relacione con su pensamiento y el activismo de Mujeres Creando, el grupo del que es fundadora. Controversial, pendenciera, incisiva, combativa, odiada, temida y admirada, estamos ante un personaje que agita los vientos a su paso. Paul Preciado se salta la consabida parquedad de la academia y abre el prólogo del libro, con total entusiasmo: "Como casi cualquier cantante sueña con ser el telonero de Rosalía o de Rihanna, yo, prefiero confesarlo desde el principio, siempre he soñado con ser el telonero de María Galindo" (11).

No es gratuito, se trata de un libro tan desestabilizante como singular. Dialogando con Gloria Anzaldúa, Galindo reivindica lo espurio, lo torcido, lo cutre como espacio para el arte, la agitación política y el pensamiento; solo que no considera como sujeto de su planteamiento a la mestiza sino a la bastarda. Rechaza cualquier esencialismo identitario y viene a tirarnos arena en los ojos para que entendamos que no podemos hablar de mestizaje/blanqueamiento sino de violación porque «la "mezcla" no fue libre» ni menos «horizontal» sino la imposición violenta sobre el cuerpo de la mujer: de la india (20). De este y otros temas va este diálogo que transcribo a continuación:

Magela Baudoin: María, qué gusto volver a entrevistarte y poder conversar esta vez de *Feminismo bastardo*, un libro que no solo es un suceso editorial por su gran llegada a los sectores populares sino porque —aunque el libro no puede estar más lejos de la academia en su concepción— ya es una referencia ineludible en las aulas universitarias, en los campos del feminismo, de los estudios de género, de la performance, de los estudios decoloniales, de la literatura, de la filosofía, de las humanidades, en general. Esta misma entrevista es un reflejo de este interés creciente. Me parece importante este movimiento contracorriente de *Feminismo bastardo* y que la circulación del conocimiento venga del sur hacia el norte y no en forma

1. El entrecomillado corresponde exactamente con los cargos imputados.

2. Obra creada en coautoría entre Esther Argollo, Danitza Luna y María Galindo. Fue llevada a cabo en tres ocasiones, en las ciudades de La Paz, Quito y Santiago de Chile.

de “extractivismo intelectual” (algo que tu misma denuncias en el libro). ¿Qué significa para ti que tu voz penetre los muros de museos, universidades, bienales, ferias, etc., con este libro?

María Galindo: Yo creo que este libro tiene suerte. La presentación en Buenos Aires por ejemplo, aunque fue en el centro de la ciudad, fue “invadida” por la comunidad boliviana proletaria, que llego en buses al evento como si se tratara de una convocatoria al alzamiento revolucionario y no a la presentación de un libro. Dediqué decenas de libros a mujeres costureras sabiendo que mi libro no tendrá la compañía de otros libros en una gran repisa, sino que será el único que merodeara cocinas, talleres y mesas con tijeras e hilos. Es más difícil llegar a esos universos que a los museos o las universidades y en realidad si llego a universidades o museos es porque estoy en la mesa de trabajo de la costurera y no al revés.

MB: Uno de los aportes sustanciales del libro, me parece, es que el feminismo no es uno solo (monolítico, irrefutable) sino los feminismos (es decir que su alianza es “ética y no ideológica”, como dices); y que hay un saber popular, sedimentado en el tiempo, un *feminismo intuitivo*, que es el que está cambiando las estructuras patriarcales. ¿Puedes desarrollar el concepto?, primero; y segundo, ¿no crees que, debido a los cambios indiscutibles que ha logrado ese feminismo, se avecina una época de grandes restricciones, una arremetida dura contra las disidencias? Pensemos en el fenómeno Milei en Argentina, sin ir más lejos, que amenaza con revertir una serie conquistas sociales, tras haber sido elegido presidente.

MG: El concepto de *feminismo intuitivo* es un concepto que me ha dado grandes alegrías, tengo que decir que el nombre no me gusta y, como escribí muchas veces, podría llamarse de mil otras maneras, el nombre es lo de menos. Yo lo que hago es darle nombre a algo que no está oculto, sino que es visible pero no se quiere ver. Pensé muchas veces que era una reivindicación bien local pero ese concepto me ha hecho viajar a muchos sitios del mundo y hace sentido en muchos contextos, no solo de este “continente sin nombre” que es el nuestro, sino de otros lugares del mundo también. El feminismo intuitivo es estar donde no hay que estar y al mismo tiempo estar en el único lugar donde vale la pena estar. Arriesgarlo todo, colocarte al borde, huir, desenmarcarte, eso es el feminismo intuitivo. Ser capaces de cerrar puertas para siempre. Cambiar de rumbo. Ser ilegales, alegales, abortar a riesgo de muerte pero hacerlo. Salir corriendo con tu *wawa* en brazos para salvarte. Subsistir y además reclamar fiesta en un mundo en el que ni tú, ni tus sueños, ni tus capacidades cuentan. Es un feminismo que la mayor parte de las veces no se llama a sí mismo feminismo. Con ese feminismo yo trabajo y dialogo todos los días, desde mi programa de radio que es hoy uno de los programas más masivos y quizás el de mayor impacto social en Bolivia. ¿Tú te imaginas un programa masivo que se llama: “Mi garganta es un órgano sexual”, que lleva, por lo tanto, un título que se podría decir post-porno y que es masivamente escuchado?

Como boliviana y amiga, tú sabes que no estoy mintiendo pero si lo cuento en París o Berlín creen que me lo invento. En cuanto a Milei y los derechos, yo proclamo la necesidad urgente de salir de la lectura de derechos como código emancipatorio; en un mundo neoliberal ecocida y colonial, los derechos son poco más que *souvenir*. Milei aprovecha y es producto de un “progresismo” hipócrita que ha usado las banderas populares para beneficiarse grotescamente. Esta montado sobre la pobreza y la indignación que la corrupción produce.

MB: El 2022 organizaste un Diplomado Feminista que se llamó “De quienes luchan, para quienes luchan”. Fue una alianza entre Mujeres Creando, la Universidad Autónoma de México y la Universidad Mayor

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NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

de San Andrés en La paz (ambas universidades públicas). Tuviste invitadas e invitados tanto bolivianos como internacionales (entre ellos Rita Segato, Gladys Tzul Tzul, Susy Shock). Cuéntanos de esta experiencia.

MG: Bueno, mira, hermana, una cosa que yo quiero decir es que, Mujeres creando y yo misma, no somos antiteoría. La teoría es un instrumento fundamental, porque es una especie de andamio político-filosófico con el que construir una serie de estructuras de cambio social. El problema con la academia es que la academia no tiene el monopolio del conocimiento y presume tenerlo. El segundo problema con la academia es que, en general, está total y absolutamente absorbida, al menos en el sur, por el pensamiento eurocentrado. Si tú no dialogas con Foucault, si tú no dialogas, incluso en términos del feminismo, con Judith Butler, con Paul Preciado y demás, no estás autorizada/autorizade a producir conocimiento. Y tercero, que obviamente la relación de la academia con los movimientos sociales, con las actoras y actores sociales, es una relación de succión, de extractivismo, es una relación vertical, es una relación como "informantes", pero no como "pensantes". Entonces, hacer este diplomado a mí me ha parecido una manera súper divertida de destituir esos tres poderes, organizándolo dentro de la academia, porque por otra parte, la universidad pública en Bolivia es fruto de las luchas proletarias más importantes del siglo XX. Fue un diplomado intensísimo de un mes, nosotras hemos invitado con comida y techo. De esta manera, cualquier profesora rural que postuló ha entrado, cualquier integrante de un movimiento social ha entrado, cualquier compañera, compañere, cualquier persona trans que se ha postulado ha entrado (asistieron 85 personas). Y nosotras hemos mezclado a la gente. Por decirte, la misma semana estaban Gladys Tzul Tzul y Susy Shock. Entonces tú tenías una indígena guatemalteca que vino a plantear teoría, no testimonio, porque Gladys está construyendo también un andamiaje teórico. Y también tenías una poeta trans, ícono del norte argentino, Susy Shock, que desde mi punto de vista, aunque ella misma no lo reconoce así, está planteando teoría del arte. Cuando nosotras cuestionamos no estamos planteando cerrarnos al diálogo con autores y autoras que provengan desde el norte; sino, abrir las voces y tener una conversación, pero desde una ubicación no eurocentrada.

MB: El lenguaje es un arma contundente, tiene el poder de "nombrar", por lo tanto, de visibilizar o de invisibilizar, de transformar la realidad. Tú resemantizas la palabra "bastarda", que ha sido usada históricamente para señalar lo "impuro", aquello "fuera del matrimonio", lo "torcido", lo "ilegítimo", lo "humilde"; y la cargas de un nuevo sentido, lleno de fuerza y de desobediencia. Háblanos de la génesis de este concepto, en un país como Bolivia.

MG: Resulta para mí un concepto, un lugar social imprescindible. Bolivia, como todos los países de la región, vive la tensión irresuelta de mestizaje versus originarismo. Mestizaje como blanqueamiento, y no en el sentido en el que lo usa Gloria Anzaldúa. Entiendo y respeto profundamente el originarismo indianista que surge como respuesta visceral que da lugar a esa reivindicación masiva de autoidentificación "india" que hay en Bolivia, pero no me sumo. Podría, en medio de ese fervor, declararme *weemhayek*[2] justo por tratarse de un pueblo en genocidio silencioso. Pero sería una forma de apropiarme de un lugar "utilitariamente", como lo hacen much@s con la autoidentificación indígena. Yo prefiero explorar y abrir otro espacio más conflictivo y más honesto. Un espacio que se salva de la mitificación romántica identitaria para reconocerse como producto de la violencia, un espacio de reconocimiento de la violación como origen. Esto también propone entender las violencias machistas y las violaciones cotidianas en Bolivia en clave colonial y como producto de un castigo corporal histórico al que le damos continuidad y renovación una y otra vez, como

1. Pueblo mataco o wichís, que habita en el Gran Chaco boliviano y en parte de Argentina.

atrapad@s en un círculo del que no podemos salir. Nuestro origen es la violencia que necesitamos negar, tapar, maquillar, disimular y al mismo tiempo perpetuar. Si lo asumimos así, nos vemos frente a la necesidad de darle un giro casi imposible a todo, para no repetir el mismo círculo.

Hace poco estuve con cuatro mujeres: una era la tía, que venía con la sobrina discapacitada, con cinco meses de embarazo, para que buscáramos un aborto urgente en La Paz; la otra, era la madre de la joven; y la otra, la abuela. Por supuesto que buscamos el aborto y lo logramos en un hospital público. Pero en ese proceso de diálogo, le pregunté a la tía porque quería abrir un proceso contra el violador que era otro sobrino. Me dijo: por ponerle un alto a todo esto. Le pregunte a la madre por qué no estaba de acuerdo y a la abuela también, ambas me dijeron: yo también fui violada, con esta *wawa* (refiriéndose a la joven violada). No podía ser de otra manera, no hay por qué enemistarse con la familia del violador que es un vecino y un pariente.

MB: La calle es tu territorio de lucha y también tu laboratorio creativo hace una treintena de años. Durante la pandemia reclamaste el derecho a ocuparla. En *Feminismo bastar*do también teorizas sobre este espacio tan nutricio para las luchas feministas y que para tantas es el espacio laboral, de juego, de combate, doméstico, en fin. Puedes relacionar el tema de la calle con el concepto de "performance", ya que – al menos en tu caso – ética, estética, política, no son cosas separadas.

MG: La performance es un concepto sumamente amplio, podría traducirse en mis términos como provocación, como expresión de lo prohibido, como visibilización no de lo oculto, sino de lo que no se quiere ver, como grito urgente que destapa la voz, como ruptura, relámpago de las convenciones visuales, sonoras, térmicas o cromáticas. En fin, he hecho tantas performances que ya no puedo ni enumerarlas, al punto que buena parte de mi puesta en escena es teatral de forma casi cotidiana. He hecho performances individuales, grupales y masivas. Cuando el año 2000 tomamos la Superintendencia de Bancos con collares de dinamita, que estaban hechas de miga de pan, y con la amenaza de volarnos todas, hacíamos una performance no violenta con la que logramos abrir una mesa de dialogo. Cuando me metí disfrazada en un almuerzo de la Cámara de Comercio y me quite el disfraz en el postre para interpelar al Superintendente de Bancos, durante su discurso (el hombre se atragantó), yo estaba haciendo una performance.

Tengo un curso muy requerido sobre performance, que dictaré esta vez en Saõ Paulo para el Festival de Teatro (MIT), que es sumamente prestigioso. Lo menciono porque resulta irónico que esto esté pasando con este método prestado de las ambulantes, las comerciantes, las contrabandistas, las trabajadoras sexuales, las mendigas y otras ocupantes de las calles de La Paz y El Alto. Extraigo todas las dinámicas que propongo de mi observación de la calle, de los métodos de ocupación de la calle de las mujeres, de sus mecanismos de relacionamiento, de su conversión artesanal en un espacio de convivencia y complicidad. Yo en ese caso soy una observadora, una alumna, una admiradora. Todos esos mecanismos son manejos extraordinarios de energías personales y colectivas que son simplemente SAGRADAS.

Al mismo tiempo, soy muy crítica respecto a la cierta banalización de la performance, que veo en la escena del arte contemporáneo, donde este formato ya satura. No me gusta ni me interesa envolver la performance en un celofán y entregarla como un espectáculo; su carácter de ruptura es básico para mí; y sin este mecanismo de "ruptura del orden," pierde su explosividad y, por lo tanto, nace sin fuerza expresiva. Eso pasa con la mayor parte de performance que he visto.

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 50
Enero/January 2024

MB: Me gusta esta cita de Gloria Anzaldúa, con quien evidentemente dialogas en tu libro:

> Mis historias son actos encapsulados en el tiempo, "representados" cada vez que se leen en voz alta o en silencio. Me gusta pensar en ellos como performances y no como objetos "muertos" e inertes (como la estética de la cultura occidental considera las obras artísticas). Por el contrario, la obra posee una identidad; es un "quién" o un "qué" y contiene las presencias de personas, es decir, las encarnaciones de dioses o ancestros o poderes naturales y cósmicos.

¿Quiénes son las diosas y ancentras de María Galindo? ¿A quién lees, de quiénes te nutres?

MG: Yo soy una huérfana profunda, en el sentido en el que mi camino está hecho de un proceso más bien iconoclasta. Yo estudié en el Vaticano inscrita allí como monja sin serlo, así que toda mi vida intelectual construida desde aquellos años consistía en fabricarme una balanza artesanal con que pesar las mentiras y guardar mis datos como secreto. Tengo un altar hecho de un cráneo de calavera (ñatita) que me acompaña ya 30 años y una serie interminable de objetos pequeños sacralizados por las circunstancias, como cuando un niño recoge una piedra y le da un significado que solo él puede reconocer. Leo muchísimo, menos narrativa. Si tengo que hablar de nutrirme, la poesía es mi religión pero sin preferid@s. Paul Preciado y sus textos me fascinan como pocos textos han logrado hacerlo. Yo leo los cuerpos, los ojos, las bocas, los gestos y las posturas de piernas, brazos y hombros; por eso me desadapto muy pronto en cualquier sitio del norte capitalista donde está prohibido mirarse como yo miro.

MB: Acabas de presentar *Revolución puta*, un película totalmente bastarda que ha roto taquilla en todas las funciones que has presentado en Bolivia. ¿A qué atribuyes esta respuesta? Y, por otra parte, háblanos de tu hermandad con las mujeres en situación de prostitución, sus saberes, su poder de disidencia, que es algo de lo que reflexionas en el libro.

MG: Se ha desatado una relación entre los sectores populares y yo muy fuerte y muy sólida, yo creo que el desencadenante ha sido venir a verme y compartir conmigo, pero una vez que la película tomaba la pantalla, la película ha logrado mediar ese encuentro y realmente instalar un debate masivo. La presencia contundente de las protagonistas ha sido un requisito fundamental para que esto pasara […] Tuve el cuidado de proyectar la película por fuera de las élites culturales por lo que mi público estaba hecho de gente o que no había asistido jamás a las salas o que nunca había visto una película boliviana. Esto ha sido un auténtico fenómeno cultural y artístico.

En España, México y Brasil la película funciona también, pero en esos escenarios cobra más cuerpo su lenguaje poético y el peso del debate político en torno del trabajo sexual que la película provoca. Mi complicidad con las trabajadoras sexuales/putas/mujeres en situación de prostitución lleva 20 años; hemos hecho juntas muchas cosas antes de hacer la película. Redactar leyes, audiencias con ministros, liberaciones de la cárcel, marchas, ollas comunes y más cosas. En ese caminar somos muy amigas y muy cómplices, es una relación fluida donde yo he aprendido mucho y ellas me han usado de escudo de protección muchas veces. Estoy regresando de haber viajado por tierra a la Argentina, con dos de las protagonistas. Nuestro viaje ha sido una *road movie*: ellas tienen una astucia para manejar situaciones de peligro que no termino de aprender y una destreza para leer los cuerpos masculinos que, además de ser de trabajadoras sexuales, deberían ser profesoras de secundaria de sexualidad y libertad.

MB: Eres un personaje controversial en la sociedad boliviana y también fuera de ella. No hay puntos medios en el país: hay gente que te odia o que te quiere de la misma forma apasionada. No conozco un solo político que en los últimos años haya desbordado la plaza San Francisco de la ciudad La Paz, como lo has hecho tú, y al que espontáneamente se le haya compuesto una cumbia reivindicando su lucha. ¿Cómo te sientes en este lugar bisagra? Muchos te animan a ingresar a la política de las urnas. ¿Es compatible tu feminismo con ese ejercicio del poder?

MG: Ese día en la plaza San Francisco, que conste, mi coreógrafa fue una bailarina trans que preparó una coreografía que incluía segmentos con las piernas arriba y el calzón al aire. Además, yo la presenté públicamente varios días antes como coreógrafa trans. La gente disfrutó de un espacio que no fue una concentración política, no fue un show, sino lo que yo llamo una sesión masiva de "contrahipnosis". Una especie de despertar colectivo al ritmo de cumbia. Cuando me retiré de la plaza apenas podía moverme por la forma cómo me gasté ese día, con los abrazos y ese encuentro tan singular.

Si eso de ser presidenta o candidata fuera una performance lúdica, con la que jugar un juego peligroso pero iconoclasta, lo jugaría. No creo que me dejen el espacio para hacerlo porque justamente saben que si se trata de lanzarme al vacío, lo he hecho muchas veces y lo haría una vez más. No creo en el poder estatal, el Estado es una herramienta defectuosa. Es como querer escribir con un palo y no con un lápiz, por eso sólo puede ser un juego.

El amor o el odio hacia mí no me interesan, ni me afectan; recibo el cariño cuando lo hay, cuando no lo hay no me preocupa y el odio lo revierto como bruja que soy. He sido repudiada por mi familia cuando era muy joven, ese repudio me hizo emocionalmente muy fuerte.

MB: Las paredes de las ciudades de Bolivia están llenas de grafitis de Mujeres Creando, que son como pequeñas bombas de ingenio y que quedan como cicatrices rabiosas, desafiantes, hilarantes, contando el lado B de nuestra vida política. Acá algunos de ellos: "Pensar es altamente femenino"; "¡Mujer! No me gusta cuando callas"; "Ni la tierra ni las mujeres somos territorio de conquista"; "El patrón del MAS arriba mío nunca más"; "Entre machos y fachos el país se va al tacho"; "Soberanía en mi país y en mi cuerpo". En *Feminismo bastardo* hablas un poco de ello, ¿cuéntanos qué significa para Mujeres Creando "grafitear"?

MG: Te cuento que de tanto grafitear tengo una lesión crónica en el brazo derecho que ha perdido fuerza. Grafitear nos encanta, escribir las ciudades es algo bello y nuestro estilo es hacerlo como si de un cuaderno se tratara. Para las más viejas como yo, grafitear es una terquedad, muchas de las de mi tanda ya no lo hacen; para las más jóvenes, es una especie de bautismo, aunque respetamos cuando alguna no quiere grafitear. Grafitear es dialogar con la sociedad desde la desobediencia. Es tomar el espacio público, es trasnocharse y acariciar las calles a la madrugada. Recuerdo que cuando Pedro Lemebel llegó muy enfermo a La Paz, bajamos por la tarde desde El Alto grafiteando sus versos, que quedaban perfectos, y le emocionaba tanto verlos escritos en las paredes; yo creo que eso fue lo que le dio las fuerzas para resistir la altura.

MB: Acabas de grafitear las paredes de la embajada de Estados Unidos en La Paz, con el mensaje: "No es una guerra. Es un genocidio".

MG: Yo estoy absolutamente convencida, de que lo que está pasando en Gaza no solamente que es un horror extremo, sino que tiene la potencia de reconfigurar el orden mundial. Reconfigurar y resetear el mundo en términos de un régimen de crueldad mayor. Ya no existe ningún límite ético. Y el chantaje que está haciendo, digamos, un cierto lobby sionista

de decir si tú te manifiestas contra el genocidio, vas a ser acusada de antisionista, vas a ser acusada de terrorista, ya no es censura, sino una amenaza contra la libertad de expresión. Y te digo otra cosa más, en nombre de la civilización están destruyendo un pueblo. Esto ya se hizo en 1492 contra todo un continente. En este sentido coincido plenamente con Rita Segato, destruir al otro a nombre de tu superioridad civilizatoria, o lo que fuera, es un hecho que está absolutamente vigente en el siglo XXI. No es una forma de relacionamiento superado, caduco. Esto es algo que está aconteciendo permanentemente en el mundo […] Quiero dejar claro que [la grafiteada] fue no violenta, fue desde la reivindicación de la debilidad, no fue a favor de Hamas. Nosotras estamos contra el genocidio, pero no a favor de Hamas. Y eso es posible, eso es posible y no vamos a pedirle permiso a nadie para ocupar ese lugar porque ese lugar existe, más allá del binarismo.

MB: ¿Qué estás escribiendo ahora?

MG: Estoy escribiendo tres libros que están funcionando de forma paralela. Uno, en el que voy sumando ahí poemitas. Yo creo que cualquiera de nosotras tiene un libro de poemas inacabado, por ahí perdido. Y yo continúo y voy sumándole las cosas que salen en forma poética. Luego estoy con otro libro que es muy interesante, que es esta cuestión del "pluralismo sexogenérico". Es una visión de las categorías sexogenéricas desde el universo andino […] El tema es muy importante porque alrededor de las categorías sexogenéricas hay varias posiciones que hay que discutir y yo no me adscribo a ninguna. Por último, estoy construyendo un libro que no sé si va a ser individual o colectivo. Mi mayor tendencia es a que sea colectivo, que es un plan de "desgobierno" feminista […] Creo, con todo cariño, que en relación al fenómeno del fascismo (en Argentina, en España o en otros sitios), algunos feminismos tienen un discurso equivocado. ¿En qué sentido? En el sentido de que entran al discurso fascista. Es decir, quien introduce la temática es la visión fascista y tú solamente replicas: ellos rayan la cancha. Y la discusión se reduce a: "nos van a quitar derechos". En Bolivia nos pueden quitar los derechos que les dé la gana, porque todos son retóricos. No sé quién puede decir que los tengamos […] Creo que la cuestión aquí es formular en los términos más profundos y complejos que podamos el horizonte de una sociedad, desde el feminismo. Y esto es un plan de "desgobierno" feminista.

MB: Finalmente, María, en un ejercicio autocrítico desde feminismo qué hay que repensar, corregir, cambiar, profundizar de cara a los desafíos futuros.

MG: La arrogancia de las feministas para con las mujeres que "no son feministas o no se llaman feministas". Los feminismos son una herramienta fabulosa eso no significa, de ninguna manera, que la tarea está hecha. Hay que ir más allá de la igualdad que es puro liberalismo y que se traga buena parte del feminismo. Hay que ir más allá de las luchas identitarias que se tragan otra tremenda porción de nuestras energías; hay que salir del diálogo clientelista con los Estados nacionales porque es un diálogo que idiotiza.

Hay que ponerse a trabajar todo, esta todo por hacer, esta todo pendiente, estamos como diría Silvia Federici, en "punto cero" y con un genocidio televisado y reacomodamiento del orden colonial imperial que es un proceso de REPATRIARCALIZACION, como diría Judith Butler.

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RESEÑA

Taking Form, Making Worlds: Cartonera Publishers in Latin America by Lucy Bell, Alex Ungprateeb Flynn and Patrick O'Hare. University of Texas Press, 2022

John Burns
Bard College

Cartoneras or cardboard publishing houses have been a presence in Latin America for twenty years, using discarded cardboard to make books in a variety of ways that fall outside of mainstream publishing efforts. At the end of *Taking Form, Making Worlds: Cartonera Publishers in Latin America*, the authors settle on a very convincing explanation of what makes these cardboard publishers special that distills years of cartonera practice and critical responses to it:

> What makes cartoneras unique is the particular way in which they act, work, and live through forms, modes and gestures that cannot be extricated from the day-to-day gesture of artistic practice, a practice that is stubbornly community based, joyfully collective, and irreverently autonomous (266).

This book does an admirable job of looking back at the last two decades and, more importantly, of thinking carefully through the ways in which the cartonera phenomenon has evolved. Beyond that, the authors make a solid case for the fact that the ways in which we theorize the phenomenon must evolve as well. They repeatedly stress the centrality of collaboration to cartoneras, with examples ranging from the work done by both inmates and editors in a book-making workshop in the Puente Grande Prison in Jalisco, Mexico, to formal academic conferences attended by numerous cartonera publishers from several corners of Latin America. This emphasis on collaboration would seem to be a necessary characteristic of a work that aims to theorize the multiple practices of cartonera publishers. Furthermore, it is a potential outgrowth of the fact that the book itself was penned by three authors working together. Namely, they are Lucy Bell, a scholar with a background in literary studies, Alex Ungprateeb Flynn, whose training is in anthropology and contemporary art, and Patrick O'Hare, who researches the anthropology of waste. All three authors make great use of their disciplinary expertise and personal experience interacting with cartonera publishers throughout the book. At every turn, the text performs a delicate and thought-provoking balancing act between the practical and the theoretical, and between the personal and the historical, which synthesizes the considerable body of work on cartoneras written up until now. More importantly, this book also offers up its own grounded and original reading of this important and widespread publishing phenomenon.

As they move through their careful interpretations of the cartonera phenomenon, the authors discuss their theoretical framework at length, always with an evident care and devotion for the topic they study. They point out the ways in which the phenomenon resists reduction to a simple definition or point of comparison. For example, while they consider the merits and limits of anthropological, ethnographic, literary and aesthetic theoretical frameworks, they comment on the ways in which cartoneras have unsettled the critical landscape in a fashion that invites comparison to the eruption of the Latin American testimonio in the literary landscape in years past. They write, "the overwhelming diversity of publications dislocates and resituates our notion of literature" (124) and present a very well-constructed argument demonstrating that it is precisely through this diversity of material and aesthetic approaches that the cartonera phenomenon is markedly distinct from the disruptive nature of the testimonio in earlier decades.

While much of the theoretical consideration presented in the book is very effective, occasionally it might have benefited from more concision and a greater integration with the matters of the cartonera publishing itself. A central idea that is brought up frequently in the book is the idea of the "double fold" between the aesthetic and the social, the inseparability of art and politics, buttressed by the ideas of Jacques Rancière, Caroline Levine and Néstor García Canclini, particularly the latter's idea of post-autonomy in the art world. When the authors cleave to close to an engagement with these ideas, their writing is most effective and allows them to come to powerful moments of insight about the tension between the marginality of the cartonera publishers to mainstream culture and the

surprising power of their communal endeavors. When they move farther afield from the material reality their theorizations are meant to help illuminate, one gets the impression that they want to make certain that no potentially useful theoretical approach goes untouched and, as a consequence of this, at a few moments their writing becomes somewhat less effective. This is relatively infrequent and seems to be a result of the authors' desire to produce a work that does theoretical justice to the complex and nuanced cultural phenomenon of cartonera publishing. In fact, they go so far as to acknowledge a moment in 2016 when a member of a cartonera directly called out a member of this research team by name on social media to question the adequacy of their theoretical approach as academics from the Global North engaging with work produced in the Global South. This led the research team to be acutely aware of "the notion of power through position" (172), in other words, to consider the nature of their privilege as institutionally embedded academics. For the most part, their thoroughness in terms of considerations of their theoretical approach reads as an earnest attempt to make sure that they treat their object of study with the greatest care possible.

In addition to the well executed and thoroughly supported analysis, the book is very well organized. It begins with an introduction that situates the researchers and their theoretical approaches, informed by Walter Mignolo, Aníbal Quijano and Jean-Francois Lyotard, among several others, in relation to the cartonera publishers themselves, making note of the multiple points of contact the researchers themselves have had with cartonera publishers on numerous occasions, often even remarking on the food and drink that they associate with those meetings, be it coffee, mezcal, empanadas or tacos. They effectively explain their choice to primarily focus on a limited number of cartoneras from only Mexico and Brazil as a means of producing a narrower case study from which to draw sturdier conclusions, and it seems that this was a wise decision. While cartoneras can be estimated to number in the hundreds, focusing primarily on four cartoneras that have been around for several years, namely, Dulcineia Catadora and Catapoesía from Brazil, and La Rueda Cartonera and La Cartonera from Mexico, allows them to look at distinct approaches to the material and aesthetic realities of these projects.

Chapter 1 pulls the camera back from these four cartonera projects and outlines the history of the cartoneras from their inception. The well-paced historical overview starts with the work of Washington Cucurto and Javier Barilaro in Buenos Aires as founders of what would come to be known as Eloísa Cartonera in 2003, before moving on to the quickly ensuing work of Sarita Cartonera, Animita Cartonera and Yerba Mala in Peru, Chile and Bolivia respectively. It considers some of the first cartoneras' early encounters with the academic world, including the founding of the cartonera collection and the first cartonera conference at University of Wisconsin in 2009 and the annual encounters of cartonera practitioners held every year at the Biblioteca de Santiago in Chile. The chapter sets the table for subsequent theoretical interventions about the idea of cartonera publishing as resistance, an idea the text continually grapples with and approaches from multiple directions in different chapters. Here, the authors nuance and complicate the idea of resistance in the work of cartoneras, cautioning against characterizing them as a social movement since they do not constitute an "organized body with a predetermined aim" (65).

In chapter 2, titled "Methods: Trans-Formal Research for Transformational Practice," the authors explore the tension between anthropological, literary and cultural studies approaches to their object of study. Grounded in the work of La Rueda Cartonera with inmates in Puente Grande Prison, the chapter is effective at cutting through the potentially over-romanticizing rhetoric of resistance with reference to cartonera publishing while looking at how these publishing practices lead the researchers toward finding the most appropriate theoretical approach to the topic. The ethnographic account of the prison workshop gets into the gritty details of process, materiality, collaboration, and the real-world

consequences that can arise from the intentionally limited sphere of influence of cartonera projects (in this case, it included the potential for reduced sentences for inmates who successfully participated in the workshop).

Given that there have been hundreds of cartonera publishers in virtually every corner of the Spanish-speaking world and beyond, the idea of trying to account for the content of their publications would seem to be a nearly impossible challenge. After acknowledging the work of scholars who have attempted to do so, particularly that of Latin American literature scholar Marcy Schwartz in her book *Public Voices*, the third chapter of the book aims to set up some broad parameters around the question of what these publishers have actually been publishing. After looking at the way that cartoneras resist definition (this is the chapter that has a compelling account of cartoneras as distinct from testimonios), the authors look at some of the actual work that the four cartoneras they selected have published in recent years, including work by famous writers and emerging authors on the very margins of Brazilian society, bilingual Nahuatl-Spanish poetry collections and the countercultural fictional stylings of Sergio Fong set in Guadalajara that aim to resist state repression. The commonality that the authors locate across these heterogenous texts and contexts is the idea of inclusivity in action, and the analysis of these texts is detailed, convincing and very insightful.

Chapter 4 uses the concept of the encounter as its launching point. At the outset of the chapter, it seems the word "encounter" is so open that, like the word "cartonera" itself, it resists an easy definition, but the authors quickly find their footing with the term. They look at ways at which cartoneras facilitate many types of encounters, ranging from readings to conferences and numerous possibilities in between, often in unpredictable fashion "in public spaces and on the street" (154). It is in this chapter that authors most painstakingly look at their own encounters with cartoneras, including one in particular that was mentioned earlier in this review with someone who questioned their motives and techniques. The authors' reflection on this encounter is extremely thoughtful and useful for all Latin Americanist scholars working from positions of institutional privilege to think about. In this same chapter, the book also makes its timeliness apparent as it looks at the plight of cultural workers in the context of populist regimes by providing a detailed account of how Dulcineia Catadora reconsidered how to carry out one of their events in the wake Jair Bolsonaro's election and his record of "openly homophobic and racist posturing" (178).

Chapter 5 is dedicated to a sort of encounter that is so important to cartonera endeavors that it deserves its own treatment: the workshop. While the authors note how the work and structure of "cartonera workshops are fluid, not fixed" (205), they detail the material and social considerations of several workshops in which they themselves were promptly put to work cutting cardboard for book covers. Among these workshops they give an account of the francachela, a party-like book making event held as part of La Otra FIL, the cartonera alternative book fair run during the Feria Internacional del Libro in Guadalajara in late November every year. Established by La Rueda Cartonera as a space for countercultural activities that had been squeezed out of the increasingly corporate-oriented massive Guadalajara book fair, the authors make an important observation about this activity that would not have been so easily articulated even a few years ago. They write:

> There is not, then, a strictly oppositional model between the FIL and the francachela; some cartoneras are present at the FIL alongside other independent publishers, and, over the years, many writers and publishers have presented at both the FIL and its alternative (210).

In this chapter, the authors help bring clarity to the cartonera activities as not merely a reaction to the dominance of mainstream publishing paradigms in the neoliberal. moment, but as a complex cultural

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phenomenon that has branched off in ways that may have seemed inconceivable when the first libros cartoneros were put together in 2003.

The concluding chapter looks at exhibitions and the ways in which cartoneras open up the possibilities of what an exhibition can be, inviting participation of both publishers and public, encouraging what the authors call "artistic practice with social connotations" (225). The chapter affords the authors an opportunity to bring some of their narratives full circle, looking at the way the exhibitions can function as a protest against Bolsonaro or incorporate the work of the inmates from Puente Grande Prison.

In the end, *Taking Form, Making Worlds* provides a careful reading of a surprisingly complex cultural phenomenon which is passing through a prolonged moment of expansion and diversification. They do so by looking in detail and in a collaborative spirit at four instances of cartoneras within the context of two decades of day-to-day irreverent, autonomous and artistic gestures. They pose and answer complex questions about matters of resistance, modernity and coloniality all the while insistently coming back to the material realities of exhibitions, book-making workshops, and, most importantly, cardboard itself. As such, this is a book that can be highly recommended to experts in as well as newcomers to the topic as well as scholars of Latin American culture or print culture more broadly.

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