

**Ethics, Poetics, and the Emergence of the Subject
in César Vallejo, Octavio Paz, and Juan Gelman**

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In this dissertation I explore the intersection between ethics and poetics, and attempt a reading where the enunciating voice that emerges from this intersection points towards what I will call a "po/ethical subject". In the first chapter I set up an initial theoretical departure point for the definition of this "po/ethical subject", starting with the notion of the "face-to-face" encounter with the Other as the primary element in the dynamics of subject-constitution elaborated by Emmanuel Levinas. To round off the discussion I look at the "constitutive factors on any speech act" defined by Roman Jakobson, the relationship between language and contingency elaborated by Giorgio Agamben, and the notion of textual pleasure and desire advanced by Roland Barthes. The second chapter is a reading of the poetic oeuvre of César Vallejo that traces the instances where the subject that emerge seems to ultimately take the form of a dismembered body. The third chapter is a reading of the earlier poems of Octavio Paz, where the constitution of the subject is marked by the relation of the subject himself with his body as a ruin and as a site of ruins. The fourth chapter is a reading of Juan Gelman, where the

emerging subject seems to grasp his fragmentary nature in order to reconstitute himself as a potentiated subject. The conclusion brings together the theoretical concepts as they have developed once confronted with the poem as praxis, so I can reach a more complete definition of what a po/ethical subject might be.

Following Argentine critic and novelist Ernesto Sabato, I finish the dissertation proposing the notion of *resistencia* —"resistance", "endurance"— as a way to respond to the summons of the Other, resisting the temptation of indifference and resignation, integrating contingency and poetry in an concluding call to "po/ethical resistance".

Biographical Sketch

Félix Vázquez Rivera was born July 16, 1976 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Son of Félix Vázquez Rivera and Laura Rivera Correa, brother to Nilma Vázquez Rivera, and husband to Limarí Rivera Ríos, he holds a Master's degree in Mechanical Engineering from the Universidad de Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus, and a Doctorate in Romance Studies from Cornell University.

A mi levinaseada, gelmaneada, y tarumbeada D. d. H.

A Limarí. A Mamá. A Papá.

... y a ti, que vienes,

chiquitito / chiquitita,

que espero,

que ya estás aquí y que no acabas de llegar:

por ti y para ti.

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Table of Contents

Biographical Sketch	i
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Towards a Po/Ethics of the Subject	22
Chapter 2 The Poetry of Vallejo: Man and his Ethical Foundation in Language, Pain, and Shadows	70
Chapter 3 Octavio Paz and the Creation of the I: the Ethics of the Body-to-Body	137
Chapter 4 Juan Gelman, or Ethics as First Poetics	215
Conclusions	274
Works Cited	296

Introduction

In the 20th century some of the most influential Latin American poets chose to enter the ranks of clandestine armed movements to fight against the repression of their countries' governments. Opting for this alternative, these poets chose to integrate their active political engagement and advocacy for concrete social change — “revolutionary” change most of the times— to their own literary proposals. In the ideal identity created in their poetry the subject is forged in "the struggle" for a better world. The sacrifice of the poet who gives his/her life for the "just cause" becomes the ultimate price of freedom, gladly paid by the combatant.

It is possible to trace this impetus of social poetry in Latin America at least to the writings of the late colonial/early independence movements; however, it seems to me that it is with the writings of José Martí and the early stages of *modernismo* that lyric poetry and social engagement began to reach a level of ethical inquiry centered in the individual rather than the Nation. That is, the individual still sacrificed himself¹ for his nation, but his sacrifice began to be more the result of the individual's relation with present reality than with destiny. From Latin American romanticism to *modernismo* there is, thus, an ethical shift of focus in poetry. The subject that emerges in this

¹ From this point forward I will use the masculine when referring to a general subject regardless of gender, although *indeed* constructions of nationality in Latin America posited the masculine as the primary trait of the honorable subject of the oftentimes feminine Homeland who required from her sons the defense of her honor. As it falls outside of the scope for this dissertation, I leave such a critique for further development elsewhere and at another time.

poetry asks himself about the ethical position of his “I” in the surrounding universe. Latin America in the XXth century is this surrounding universe, and it has a history that modulates the subjects who inhabit it.

Although the roots of this shift of focus lie earlier in time, I will begin my exploration of the intersection of ethics and poetics in Latin America in the 20th century with César Vallejo, perhaps the most influential of the century’s poets. Generations of poets initiated their poetic inquiries departing from the direct relation between language and contingency they found in Vallejo, who himself found in the Spanish Civil War the ethical imperative that would transform his poetry. After Vallejo and the experience of war, the “ivory tower” from where a strand of modernist poetry configured its relation with the world would be reduced to cinders.

To continue my exploration I turn to Mexico and to a poet who, as a public figure, is usually not immediately associated with a poetry of ethical import. If in his first writings Octavio Paz began constructing his identity in a similar tendency than Vallejo towards the integration of political inquiry into the poetic text, he did not wait long before distancing his poetics from the aesthetic appreciation and critique of social reality. This was a conscious distancing by Paz in order to seek the representation of other realities in his poems, and analysis of the modes in which these had congealed so as to become what is known as modernity. Moreover, despite the later Paz's disdain for modern revolutions —and the modern poetry usually associated with such political programs— and advocacy for a poetry exempt from

socio-political commitment beyond the poetic as an aesthetic value in itself, an ethical subject emerges, though certainly not a subject who shares Vallejian ethos.

To finish my exploration on Latin American poets, I turn my attention to the particular case of Argentina, where the takeover of power by the military junta in 1976 led several of the nation's most recognized literary figures to join the armed resistance, including Juan Gelman, the initiator and most relevant writer of Argentina's "generación del 60". It is notable how, when his individual circumstances might lead one to believe his poetry would turn to condemnation after the "disappearance" of his son, daughter-in-law, and unborn granddaughter, Gelman's poetry in fact moves away from the aesthetics of socialist realism, and from exile seeks the influence of the tradition of mystical poetry in an introspective turn.

The first presupposition that I make in the dissertation is, then, that there is in fact a subject that emerges from the poetic text. The text must then be prior than the subject that emerges from it. This will be a literary subject who will be crossed by an ethics and a poetics. The study of the ethical dimension of this subject had limited itself to, more times than not, making the immediate connection between political engagement and poetical thematics. This approach, if useful and necessary in its time, soon loses its innovative drive and ceases to shed light on the reading of literature. As Francine Masiello writes:

condicionados por el imperativo político (promovido especialmente por la conciencia social que emerge en la crítica literaria a partir de los años 60) esperamos encontrar detrás de cada verso una raíz que conduzca al corazón de lo ‘real’ [...] este tipo de lectura, transparente y simplista, que convirtió a la lírica casi en un fetiche de consumo [...] nos llevó a exigir, de alguna manera, que la poesía estuviera en diálogo directo con el pensamiento político [...] Estas lecturas siempre me parecieron profunda e irremediablemente equivocadas (Masiello 11).

Her approach posits the ethical instance of poetry based solely on the poem’s “fundamento compositivo” (12), that aims at creating in the reader a “primer movimiento hacia el despertar político” (13) with the “friction” of verbal elements constituting the poem’s form. The ethics in the poem for Masiello appears to have at its core a structure accessible, if not readily, to a formalist critique that would subtract from the work of art its historical contingency.

However, this claim about the ethics of the poem is formulated from the standpoint of a reader who, in *relating* to the poem, is transformed by the rhetorical armature of a text that becomes the site of confluence for ethical and epistemological discourses which become, in the end, political: “La política, quiero insistir, radica en esa fricción de formas dispares que *lleva al lector a una nueva manera de pensar, una toma de conciencia* con respecto tanto a la materia del arte verbal como a la ética de la escritura” (16, emphasis added). The emergence of the subject from the poetic text must imply

an ethics, as it results from the encounter between a self and an Other; and it must imply an epistemology, as the subject is endowed with cognizant potentiality.

Yet, I find somewhat troubling that the poetics of a text tacitly revolve around the epistemic manipulation of a subject that is led to think in a “new way”. If therein lies the motive of politics, then the political and the ethical in poetry would irrevocably confront each other, as the poem would function as merely another tool for a political program. In her articulation of the “fricción de formas dispares” Masiello would be looking for exactly the same thing she has found to be “transparente y simplista” in the readings she rejects. And, if politics are not themselves rooted in “the real” —the nature of which Masiello does not comment any further—, then they are not politics at all.

Masiello’s account is by no means singular. In the Academia of the 1990’s the concern with the ethical in literary critique —and the whole of the humanities at large— enjoyed a resurgence that for many risked, in the so-called “turn to ethics”, a “turning the back on politics”². Among the many who raised their concern were Judith Butler and John Guillory. Butler states: “I’ve worried that the return to ethics has constituted an escape from politics, and I’ve also worried that it has meant a

² For a historical background of this turn see Geoffrey Galt Harpham’s *Shadows of Ethics*, where he posits the ethical turn against what he calls the “Theoretical Era” which preceded: “For most of the Theoretical Era (c. 1968-87), ethics, the discourse of ‘respect for the law’ had no respect [...] For it was in the discourse of ethics —was it not?— that the subject, grossly flourishing in all its pretheoretical arrogance, claimed an undisturbed mastery over itself and indeed the entire world by claiming to base its judgements and actions on the dictates of a universal law” (18).

certain heightening of moralism” (Butler 15), while Guillory goes deeper in his assessment of the situation:

If there has even been a ‘turn to ethics’ in a number of disciplines, this event raises the question of what one turns *from* in order to arrive at the ethical. I would like to suggest that the inevitable answer to this question, at the present moment, is the *political*. The turn to ethics is a turn away from the political. Let us admit that to advocate such a turn risks abandoning politics itself to the forces of reaction (Guillory 29, emphasis in the original).

However, following Guillory’s logic, prior to this turn ethics as a field of critical inquiry would have itself been abandoned to similar forces that might have steered it toward a moralizing, normative enterprise. Ethics’ logocentric discourse, I believe, should demand our engagement with it in order to rethink and rearticulate ethics’ claims, not to forget ethics and let it be. In the same fashion, the turn to ethics could not allow itself to be non-political. I don’t think it has allowed itself that dangerous luxury, even if for Guillory “The reduction of politics to morality, to the spectacle of a morality play [here Guillory is making a generalization from the quite particular case of the Clinton-Lewinsky affair], is just what has occurred” (29). At any rate, despite his concern, Guillory ultimately recognizes the need for this turn: “I would nonetheless like to propose that something like a turn to ethics is desirable and even inevitable [...] Such a turn, in other words, need not be a turn away from the political”

(30). Whether good or bad, the fact is that from this turn ethics ceased being ancillary to politics and regained critical force in the approach to the literary work.

With this resurgence, critical engagement with poetry also resurfaced, even if to this day the study of narrative and other media far outweighs that of poetry.

According to Claire Cavanagh, this resistance to poetry, at least of the lyric type, had its source precisely in the perceived lack of political engagement of poetry:

to critics reared on poststructuralist theory, lyric poetry manifests a suspicious commitment to a slew of discredited values. It stubbornly buttresses the bourgeois myth of individual autonomy, or so the argument runs. It privileges personal voice over postmodern textuality; it seeks to circumvent history through attention to aesthetic form; it turns its back on the public realm in its quest for private truths; and it places transcendental timelessness over active engagement in the here and now (1-2).

As I will show in the dissertation, whether or not poetry manifests these “discredited values” —a moralist accusation in itself—, to claim poetry distances itself from contingent reality or politics is a mistake, just as it was a mistake for Adorno to state that poetry is “Released from the heaviness of things” and “should evoke images of a

life free of the impositions of the everyday world, of usefulness, of the dumb drive for self preservation” (Adorno, “Lyric Poetry and Society”, quoted by Cavanagh)³.

In any case, one risk of the “turn to ethics” is the misrepresentation of what ethics are or can be, mainly as formulations that in their ethical postulates fail to detach themselves from discourses that have tried to domesticate ethics and its keystone, the Other, to master tropes deriving from epistemology, aesthetics, or political philosophy. Such is the case of, among others, Derek Attridge, for whom

To be other is necessarily to be other to [...] If the other is always and only other *to me*, I am already in some kind of relation to it [...] the other as other to is always and constitutively on the point of turning from the unknown into the known, from the other into the same [...] Only in relating to me is the other other (22).

I don’t believe this to be the case even if one is to raise a claim for universality and sameness, as it would foreclose the possibility that the other is in fact just like me, even if otherwise and wholly unrecognizable. I disagree with Attridge’s notion that the

³ In his introductory essay to the PMLA special issue on Literature and Ethics, Lawrence Buell summarizes the positions of those in favor and against the “ethical turn”, as being on one hand, a “reactivation of scholarly and pedagogical conscience” (11), but on the other, can become a “copycat moral majoritarianism, or [...] a retreat from a politics of social transformation to privatism” (11-12). He goes on to conclude that “Perhaps the touchiest single issue for both exemplars and critics of the ethical turn is the issue of whether it boils down, whatever the nominal agenda, to a privatization of human relations that makes the social and the political secondary” (14). For my part, I believe ethics is never an ethics of an individual alone. There is always an Other in apposition with whom the subject enacts his ethical choice. There is no need, in my opinion — against Levinas’s—, of a “Third” in order for the social or a community to be found.

other is “other to”: the Other *is*, independently of the “I”, of “me” or “myself”, just as God, Language, or any other Other is independent of its subjects.

In one of Attridge’s formulations for the other, it is “the *hitherto* unthought and unthinkable” (23, emphasis added), which is to say that the Other is always the project of a subject who seeks to reduce the otherness of the Other to a known scheme. The Other and its attributes are thus removed from the realm of ethics and inscribed into the realm of ontology and epistemology. Attridge clings to the thinking “I” that would ultimately create and bring into existence the Other. If I can agree with the phenomenology of the writing act proposed by Attridge, I find his leap from this act to the concrete encounter with the Other in the contingency of the social and cultural realm highly unconvincing. The Other that Attridge deals with in his essay, moreover, “is other *because* it has not yet come into being” (23). That is, Attridge’s other is *exclusively* textual⁴.

One important point Attridge stresses, even if obliquely, is the tension between ethics and poetics in his phenomenological description of the writing act: “It is in the

⁴ It is interesting to note how in the next article of the cited PMLA number, following a Gadamerian approach David Haney reaches the opposite conclusion of Attridge: “A person or a text is present [...] to the degree that the person or text maintains its otherness and that he, she, or it has not been relegated to a clearly understood place in a system of conceptual or representational presence” (39). I believe this difference springs from Haney’s distancing from epistemology’s imperative to know: “the process by which the truth of a poem is revealed is instructively similar to the unconcealing that goes on in the ethical hermeneutics of being open to [...] the truth of another person. This is not epistemic truth but the truth of authentic relationship” (38). This “truth of authentic relationship” is, in my opinion, *the* realm of ethics. The Other for Haney is present inasmuch as it possesses as one of its attributes otherness, and inasmuch as it is not subsumed into the “I”. Where the Other to be reduced to the plane of sameness—which for the Other is always a reduction—it disappears.

acknowledgement of the other human being's uniqueness and therefore of the impossibility of finding general rules or schemata to account fully for him or her that one can be said to encounter the other [...] the experience is an encounter with the limits of one's powers to think and to judge" (24). However, his account departs from an ontological premise that can only reproduce the same argument in both discourses. And if both are crossed by the same ontology, for Attridge in poetry just as in ethics one would ultimately deal with the "I", not the Other; and in dealing with "I", the Other is then, of course, reduced to sameness: "The other [...] is once again a relation, or a relating, between me, as the same, and that which, in its uniqueness, is heterogeneous to me [...] the other is transformed from other to same, but the same is not the same as it was before the encounter" (24). The other for Attridge is more an other *for* —or an other *of*— ontology, not ethics as I define it in this dissertation, even if I agree with his believe in reading "as an attempt to respond to the otherness of the other" (25). My Other —the notion of the Other with which I work in this dissertation— is not within a subject who creates it, however, but in the world outside and to which the poem is a door.

As I noted, the turn to ethics encountered a healthy amount of disbelief. One last aspect I wish to return to from this opposition —the most obvious, and which could point to such a turn's most problematic aspect— is the possibility that it would devolve into a turn to moralism, as Judith Butler stressed. In a defense of the turn to

ethics, Geoffrey Harpham argues for the need of a morality that will make ethics “real” as it faces such real devolution:

Morality is the ‘rigor’ of ethical thought, where the rubber of a definite principle meets the road of reality. Ethics constitutes a general and categorical imperative to ‘act on principle’; morality constitutes a further imperative nestled within the ethical that commands us to act now and on the right principle, that is, the one we want to stand *as* principle (29).

It would appear that the turn to ethics for Harpham is a return and reaffirmation of the Kantian categorical imperative, where the subject’s actions would be based on the “Universal Law”. While it is evident that morality requires a law to differentiate the value of an action (to do X is right, to do Y is wrong), I contend that ethics require the *possibility* of choosing between X and Y as long as both are deemed possibilities that do not transgress the limit of the acceptable for the Other. As “possibilities”, they presuppose the liberty of the individual to choose between the two; and while “acceptable” certainly implies a morality, it implies the individual’s own determined proper conduct rather than a set of social *mores*. The foundation of ethics rests then in the choice of a freely elected course of action: I freely choose to do X, or I freely choose to do Y. Whatever the decision, it will be ethical as long as it responds to an *ethos* and not to a will alienated from the contingency that frames the situation and that posits the satisfaction of the desires of the individual above and beyond the liberties such desires might constrain. I chose X or Y because I must, given the

circumstances, freely choose one and not the other, given that neither X nor Y hold the Other prisoner of my desires. Where neither X nor Y is acceptable, there is no possible liberty and one is forced outside the realm of ethics.

For Harpham, though, morals seem to trump ethos: “The moral moment is necessary and inescapable [...] not just because decisions must be made, but also because mere choice has, by itself, no ethical value whatsoever; without decision, ethics would be condemned to dithering. It is morality that realizes ethics, making it ethical” (30). This “moment” would have to be foundational, the one when moral decision is inscribed as law. It would thus be the archaic, irrepetible instance of inscription into society’s mythical narrative. It would be far from the everyday moment when a subject makes a choice and *acts*, which is what I will call ethical in this dissertation. I believe Harpham is mistaken when he affirms that morality makes ethics real. On the contrary, such foundational morality would cancel ethics as a moment by taking the decision away from the subject, steering him towards a “right”, moral choice. Harpham’s “moral moment” is never experienced by the subject who never makes this moral decision, as he merely follows it and behaves accordingly, or else is amorally determined. The subject’s choice is ethical because ultimately ethics deals with the individual’s encounter with the Other, upon which he chooses his actions. I will argue throughout the dissertation that it is in this ethical moment when the subject is constituted as such by responding to the call of the Other, following the ideas put forth by Emmanuel Levinas.

In his philosophy, Levinas proposes an “ethics as first philosophy” as a way to overcome the primacy of ontology in Western philosophy in order to shift the focus of philosophy’s initial inquiry, from the nature of what exists to the nature of the encounter between self and Other, where the inquiring subject comes to exist. An ontology that has, in its supremacy of the “Being” over the “Entity” who the subject encounters in their “Proximity”, led to the marginalization of the Other in which genocide becomes a possibility. The ethical subject for Levinas, then, is the resultant of the “being-for-the-other” in which the subject liberates himself from his responsibility for the Other by answering the Other’s call.

Thus the discourses of ethics and aesthetics will surface, if not as organically hand-in-hand as they seem to be for Richard Miller, for whom “rational aesthetic practice will turn out to attain the same intellectual virtues as moral deliberation, in an unprincipled way. Both activities resemble scientific inquiry in providing rational access to appraiser- independent truth, but fall short of its epistemic universality” (28). This statement, in my opinion, would distance both axiological enterprises from scientific discourse and, in an important aspect that Miller fails to recognize, even surpass it: scientific discourse *claims* insightful epistemic universality, while axiology’s claim is put forth at the same time that it admits its blind spots. Regardless, in my opinion this is a claim ethics should not make. When I say ethics *should not* make this claim, I am trying not to make a value judgment, but rather arguing that it should not

because it cannot *achieve* an epistemic universality. By the same token, scientific discourse should not make this claim either. In any case, Miller's justification for the validity of an argument rests in a "rationality" that in some instances seem to conflate ethics and "morality", to the degree that at points they seem to be used indifferently.

If for Miller "Aesthetic appreciation is the enjoyment of a process of responding to an object that is not directed at learning but that is sufficiently like learning" (38), I would argue that aesthetics deals with the contemplated object and how this object *moves* the contemplating subject towards inquiry on the relation between the content and the form represented in the work. For Miller the ethical/aesthetic relation is that of living life in an aesthetic way, that is, "with the enjoyment of a learninglike process" (39 & 40); and, of course, "the cognitive helps to rationalize our aesthetic assessments" (40). In this humanistic version of a unified field theory, ethics, aesthetics, and epistemology would coincide in the creation of knowledge as their common denominator: "Any plausible rationale for taking aesthetic value to be a deeply important aspect of life must somehow connect with our striving for knowledge or virtue" (51). As will be seen in the dissertation, the proposed relation between ethics and poetry in fact questions their supposed congeniality and argues against the alleged primacy of the drive for knowledge that Miller takes to be connatural with being human.

As part of the “turn to ethics”, the neologism “poethics” and its derivative “poethical” began to circulate in an attempt to bring the component discourses of the term to a synthesis alleviated from the tension I take to exist between the two. The term is first used in depth in Richard Weisberg’s 1992 book *Poethics*, where he proceeds to apply it in order to advocate literary discussion and writing within the field of legal studies. As early as 1982, however, Jean Pierre Cauvin used it as the title of his introductory essay to the volume *Poems of André Breton*. For Weisberg, “Poethics [...] endeavors nothing less than to fill the ethical void in which legal thought and practice now exist” (4), as it takes exemplary cases from literature to yield a “poethical vision [...] which] is especially important today when law seems to be moving away from its humane roots and toward a variety of formalisms” (35). In the final analysis, with this notion Weisberg seeks to rescue the essaying subject from legal prose as an *essaying*, literary subject who engages with his theme in the first person. This had been a subject that, according to Weisberger, had disintegrated or dehumanized, in favor of the use of a language that presented itself as a subjectless enunciation that assumed the pose of a universal.

In her exploration of the neologism, Joan Retallack defines poethics initially as “a practice or form of life in which ethics and aesthetics come together” (Retallack, “Poethics as a complex realism” 243), uniting the ethical and the poetical beyond the domain of criticism and connecting the two to the subject’s concrete existence. Herein lies what I believe to be the most engaging character of her proposal, as it

brings poethics from theoretical abstraction to a performative space, even if it still flattens the tension between discourses into a homogeneous rhetorical entity.

In her critique of the specific text of the open-air performance of John Cage's *One*, Retallack argues that "If it [*One*] is to have transcendent meaning, *it is the poethical work of the audience to make that meaning*—the responsibility of imaginative collaboration that this kind of art requires. It is the work of the composer (or artist of any kind) only to create the occasion for the making of meaning" (245, emphasis added). The poethical is then a "work", where something is produced. Moreover, it is the audience who performs the work, who perform the poethical, and it is within the audience where "ethics and aesthetics come together". In this coming together, meaning is made, produced by the work of the audience. The poethical is then the mirror image of the poetical, as it is the reflection on the spectator of the work of the artist.

At bottom, then, Retallack's notion of "poethics" is, again, a conjunction of terms which lacks the tension between poetics and ethics, and from which the subject can reach a knowledge. Retallack's achievement is not the depth of the critique of her discourse as much as it is the courage to undertake the task of assuming a poetic mode in the discourse of critique. The content of the discourse might not directly touch on the ethical as a theme, but the flow of her discourse seeks to be a performance that in itself is less artistic than critical, yet less critical than "poethical". In any case, hers is a performance that admits its performativity: "I am writing an essay on John Cage [...] in order to enact, not just write about, poethics" (254). Any

tension in this poethics is not in the formulation of its theory, but in the frail, weak praxis of venturing into a discourse that does not yet exist.

Retallack's attempt falls short, however, of showing the object of criticism, which is reduced to the background of the performance of a subject that spreads over all of the discourse and calls all attention to her, and away from the text being criticized. As the performative enactment of a subject's being, "engagement with a text as a complex, active realization can be seen as a poethics of response for the reader/viewer/listener as well" (267); and furthermore, "The poethical engagement with a work [...] develops as we return to our senses and take chances in our interactions with its graphic and linguistic presence on the page" (268). It is *precisely* in between the poethics of the artist and the poethics of the audience —between text and reader— that there must be an ethics, since it is the space where the two encounter and where the audience must feel compelled to engage with the text. It is in this "in between" where the summons of the Other will occur in the dissertation that will soon follow.

Retallack will later return to the notion of poethics and pose the "poethics of the swerve" as the artist's work that would tacitly result in the audience's response:

How can one frame a poetic of the swerve, a constructive preoccupation with what are unpredictable forms of change? One might begin by stating this: what they all [ideas, mainly of the XXth century, that 'created productive cultural dislocations', which is to say past examples of

“poetics of the swerve”] have in common is an unsettling transfiguration of once-familiar terrain. They tend to produce disorientation, even estrangement, by radically altering geometries of attention. In today's world politics a geometry of straight lines in the sand ('we dare you to cross') is obsolete (Retallack, *Poethical Wager* 1).

The interest in the political is evident, as is the interest in engaging with the concrete beyond the individual's experience of it. Nonetheless, for Retallack the mode in which the text operates on the subject destabilizes an epistemic structure already present in the subject, and, again, manipulates the forms that this subject's thoughts attain. I can understand that such is the *modus operandi* of poetic texts, but I am not satisfied with having this characteristic repeatedly appear as an ingrained element in the intersection between ethics and poetry. I believe, in fact, that this might be the precise mode that a discourse that seeks to conjugate ethics and poetics aspires *not to take*.

The present dissertation will in this fashion propose the term po/ethics for such a discourse, slashing the notion of an unstressed communion between discourses, retaining the slash as a trace of the tension intrinsic in their occupying a same semantic space. In the final analysis, I propose an integration to critical discourse the instance of a po/ethical resistance, which will have to relate with a concrete present, with a moment when an Other specter seems to lurk, hovering over spaces that not long ago formed what was believed to be a monolithic construction of the Western World.

In my exploration of the intersection between ethics and poetics, I attempt a reading where the enunciating voice that emerges from this intersection points towards what I will call a "po/ethical subject". For the derivation of this subject, I depart in the first chapter from the dynamics of subject constitution presented by Emmanuel Levinas. In my reading, I modulate the scene of the "face-to-face" encounter with the Other that serves as basis for Levinas with the geometry inherent in every speech act as conceived by Roman Jakobson in his essay "Linguistics and Poetics", in order to problematize it later with the notions of the "fact of language" and contingency proposed by Giorgio Agamben, and later still with the willful appropriation by the subject of both its desire and the desire of the text itself proposed by Roland Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*. The enunciation of the po/ethical subject is finally linked to a "po/ethical saying" that, departing also from the infinite gap that exists between the "saying" and the "said" for Levinas, finds in the poem a venue for the subject to respond to the summons of the Other.

After setting the initial theoretical frame, I engage in a close reading of several poems of the three seminal Latin American artists and intellectuals already mentioned: Peruvian César Vallejo, Mexican Octavio Paz, and Argentine Juan Gelman. In the second chapter I propose a reading of the oeuvre of Vallejo—one of the most influential poets of the century in Latin America, and an archetype for the committed artist—where the subject that emerges from the poem discovers itself as a nucleus of

desires and "no-desires" caught in a web of forces over which it has no agency. The resulting subject might then find in poetry a vehicle for its liberation, but only to find itself again as a discourse dismembered by the tensions of the contingent world.

Remaining true to its origins as a myth-making entity, poetic language then becomes the energy the poet nurtures in order to transform reality into a poem that becomes alive.

To begin the third chapter I show how, late in his life, Octavio Paz attempts to rearticulate his whole oeuvre in order to cement himself as the seminal writer of his generation and generations to come, developing a critical apparatus with which to set the standards against which their literature should be measured. As the chapter evolves, I propose a reading of the earlier poems of Paz where the subject that emerges from the poem finds itself impotent as a poetic voice, foreclosing any possibility of returning to an original, primary state when the Adamic poet could create the world in actuality by its use of the word. As a result of this impotence, the subject's own subjectivity is marked by the inevitability of the relation with its own body as both a ruin and a site of ruins. The poem thus attempts to create a space for the only possible subject it can imagine by use of the stone as an original matter. In the long poem "Piedra de sol" I show how, using the figure of the Aztec artifact as its starting referent for poetic exploration, Paz sketches a subject emerging from a world brought into being from the same stone where subject and world are represented.

The fourth chapter is a reading of Juan Gelman, where the emerging subject seems to grasp the fragmentary nature of its own self and contingent reality in order to re-constitute itself. From the experience of reality, the desaparecidos of the military junta evolve as a category without a body, to become a ruin, a site of no-ruins. The poem's concern is then more than language, the poem itself, its genesis in chaos and horror. In this context, for Gelman poetics must depart first and foremost from an ethical stance. The new poetry after genocide must be ethical rather than political; the poem must create a "face" that serves as a mode for the hidden substance of poetry, which are the disappeared, who only through the ominous truth of pain can be manifested. It is then with tenderness that the poet tones down the emotion in order to attempt in the poem the recovery of a foundational origin where the father-son relationship, truncated in contingency, looks to perpetuate an unending encounter in which the self is responsible for the Other.

The conclusion brings together the theoretical concepts as they have developed once confronted with the poem as praxis, so I can reach a more complete definition of what a po/ethical subject might be. Following Argentine critic and novelist Ernesto Sabato, I finish the dissertation proposing the notion of "resistencia" — "resistance", "endurance"— as a way to respond to the summons of the Other, resisting the temptation of indifference and resignation, integrating contingency and poetry in an concluding call to "po/ethical resistance".

Towards a Po/Ethics of the Subject

The first intuition that gives way to the investigation that follows is that a bridge can be erected between ethics and poetry; a confluence that is made evident inasmuch as in both, as modes of knowledge⁵, there is a subject constituting himself in an encounter with an otherness beyond himself; that is, with an Other totally other. In this fashion, the scope of the field of "ethics" that will be of interest for this dissertation is delimited to the analysis of the mechanics of constitution of the subjectivity of the poetic subject as founded in the encounter with an Other in the poem. From this Other, I can only state that there is an otherness, as the Other's attribute, which differentiates him from himself and from the rest of the world. The otherness of this Other is proof of an essence that would, thus, lie beyond what of the Other the self can sense. The otherness of the Other reveals that the self can only have access to a *mode* of the Other, to his incarnation. By contrast, the knowledge of this otherness reveals the possibility that, between the self and its mode of existence in the world, there is an abysmal gap of selfhood which prevents the self to fully know itself. It is from this encounter with the Other, though, that an "I" can be reached

⁵ According to Rafael Núñez Ramos, "el conocimiento estético se diferencia del conocimiento teórico en que éste se realiza a través de un lenguaje preexistente, que el sujeto proyecta sobre el objeto con el fin de integrarlo en su sistema de categorías, clases y conceptos. El conocimiento estético, en cambio, consiste en una relación personal y directa con las cosas, no mediatizada por ningún apriorismo [...] así pues, el conocimiento y la relación estética habrán de inventar el lenguaje que las exprese" (Núñez 166). See also Alberto Pimienta: *O silêncio dos poetas*. A regra do jogo, Lisboa, 1978, p. 92-94.

differentially at the core of the subject that stands as his presence in the world. This affirmation—that I am a subject thanks to my encounter with the Other—leads to the realm of ethics.

The notion of the Other will be taken, then, as the initial hypothesis for the point of intersection between ethics and poetry. The questioning about this absolute otherness of the Other must start with a review of the philosophy of French-Lithuanian Emanuel Levinas, for whom ethics is "first philosophy", since it would predate the ontology that describes the resulting subject⁶. Thus, the contingency of the "face to face" encounter with the Other where the subject is made subject is prior to the language that can thematize it and derive an *episteme* from it. I will later argue, however, that this language must—at the very least—emerge at the same time as the self encounters the Other.

For Levinas, the Other is not within the self: it is absolutely other.

In the contingent encounter with this Other, the self finds a Face as precisely the *mode* of the Other which the self encounters: "The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face [La manière dont se présente l'Autre, dépassant *l'idée de l'Autre en moi*, nous l'appelons, en effet, visage.]" (Lévinas,

⁶ In his exposition regarding Levinas' "ethics as first philosophy", D. G. Myers states that "All human action, every effort to budge from the passivity of subjectivity, is a response to ethical challenge. Hence ethics are «first philosophy,» logically prior to any other mode of thought" (Myers, "Responsible for..." 273). According to Jeffrey Nealon, "it is ethics-answerability or responsibility—that is literally first philosophy: response to the concrete other comes first, before the thematics of abstract ontology" (Nealon, "The ethics of dialogue" 134). Ethics, in this fashion, deals both with the question of *being* and the question of knowledge as they pertain to the constitution of a concrete, contingent subject.

Totality and Infinity 50, emphasis in the original). A face that lies beyond the comprehension of the subject, a face whose otherness cannot be catalogued in the self's schemes: in "the same". This Other, however, summons the self and makes it a subject responsible for the Other: "It is only in *approaching the Other* that I attend to myself [C'est seulement *en abordant Autrui* que j'assiste à moi-même ...] in discourse I expose myself to the questioning of the Other, and this urgency of the response [cette urgence de la réponse] —acuteness of the present— engenders me for responsibility [m'engendre pour la responsabilité]; as responsible I am brought to my final reality" (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 178, emphasis added). This summons of the Other results then in an initial attempt by the summoned subject to *enter* into the other —*en abordant Autrui*— and in doing so gain command of him. The initial movement in this subjectivation process is thus a reaction where two concretes in opposition are affirmed: the Other is a space that the subject seeks initially to occupy.

However, as Levinas continues the course of his phenomenological exposition, he argues that it is only by answering the summons of the Other that the self can be called free, since with this response it frees itself from the command to be responsible for the Other. In this fashion, the self is responsible for the Other in a being-for-the-other that transcends the self in the closeness with the Other. It is because in this approach a trace of the universe can be seen that there is "forsakenness of the other, obsession by him, responsibility and a self" (Levinas, *Otherwise* 117). This summons is

an irrecusable interpellation, and makes the subject un-substitutable as an individual.

The ethical response to this call is then "here I am":

There is an assignation to an identity for the response of responsibility, where one cannot have oneself be replaced without fault [sans carence]. To this command continually put forth only a "here I am" (*me voici*) can answer, where the pronoun "I" is in the accusative, declined before any declension, possessed by the other, sick, identical. Here I am —is saying with inspiration, which is not a gift for fine words and songs. There is constraint to give full hands, and, thus a constraint to corporeality (Levinas, *Otherwise...* 142).

The scene Levinas recreates is one where the absence of "oneself" is a "fault" in a system that would be, in such a manner, even more than incomplete, ineptly constituted. That is, Levinas goes back to an origin in which responsibility is linked to a being that must be in the space it is if the space is to remain habitable: if it is not to regress to the original void. If in his description of the enunciating "I", Levinas cannot help but to use allegory and allusion⁷, his philosophical discourse tends in greater fashion to the poetical enunciation⁸ inasmuch as the response that avoids the "fault" is

⁷ In a footnote, Levinas makes clear the literary source of his "possessed by the other, sick, identical [*possédé par l'autre, malade, identique*]": «*Je suis malade d'amour*», *Cantique des Cantiques*, V, 8 .

⁸ This has been seen, mainly among others, by Derrida in "Violence and Metaphysics". In a short account of the critique on Levinas' position towards literature, David-Antoine Williams states that "Famously, in his early essay "Violence et métaphysique: Essai sur la pensée d'Emmanuel Levinas," Derrida (1967: 124n1) acknowledges Levinas's stated aversion to "Dionysian charm" and "poetic rapture" in *Totalité et infini* but observes that his writing itself displays highly poetic qualities: "The

an attempt to go beyond language: the *me voici* seeks to be a response that falls outside of a language that establishes an ontologically determined being. Instead, *me voici* points towards a presence, a subject that in his foundation is a being that is not a verb, but the occupying of a space. The ethical response is then an enunciation that strives to be pure contingency (*Here : I*), before enunciating itself as a being that *is* (*Here I am*).

For Levinas, "here I am" is a testimony of an uncontainable infinite that explodes in a Saying that attests its existence:

The ego [Le moi] stripped by the trauma of persecution of its scornful [hargneuse] and imperialist subjectivity, is reduced to the "here I am"⁹ as a witness [témoignage] of the Infinite, but a witness [témoignage] that does not thematize what it bears witness of [ce dont il témoigne], and whose truth is not the truth of representation, is not evidence. There is

use of metaphor, which is admirable and usually, if not always, above rhetorical abusiveness, houses in its pathos the most decisive movements of the discourse . . . return and repetition, again and again, of the same wave against the same shore, every return also a perpetual renewal and enrichment. Due to all these challenges to the commentator and the critic, *Totalité et infini* is an oeuvre and not a treatise." (26). Derrida thinks the philosophy must be approached as one approaches a work of art, not just because Levinas has moments of style but because it is within those moments that the "most decisive movements of the discourse" occur. Seán Hand has similarly argued that Levinas's frequent use of literary quotations (which include, prominently, Dostoevsky, Shakespeare, Dickens, and Nikolay Gogol), is more than merely illustrative. Faced with the intractable problem of attempting to overturn the primacy of the ontological within a discursive philosophical methodology that is itself grounded in ontology, Levinas's recourse to literature supply, Hand (1996: 63) argues, the "necessary dramatization of ethical being," forming "the ethical shadow within ontological language," a trace of the Saying within the Said." (Williams 225).

⁹ The 1981 translation of *Otherwise than Being* omits two phrases that should have appeared in the quoted text, the first of which — "dans la transparence sans opacité, sans zones sourdes propices à l'évasion"— qualifies the "here I am" as the transparent reduction of an "I" from the realm of verbal enunciation to an infiniteness it cannot evade;

witness [témoignage], a unique structure, an exception to the rule of being, irreducible to representation, only of the Infinite. The infinite does not appear to him that bears witness to it [à celui qui en témoigne]¹⁰. It is by the voice of the witness [la voix du témoin] that the glory of the Infinite is glorified (Levinas, *Otherwise...* 146).

The "I", thus, stripped of its angry, aggressive, violent subjectivity—which is to say, reduced to the core of the self, without the protective shell with which it is-in the world—, is revealed as *the testimony*—rather than as *a witness*— of the infinite: "here I am" is not a subject that bears witness, but is itself the testimony of the infinite itself.

There is testimony inasmuch as there is a witness whose "here I am" posits the self before a divine infinite¹¹. The infinite is then, as the proof of the divine that is not a piece of evidence, an excess that cannot be apprehended by the subject. Moreover, for Levinas the infinite is found in the encounter with the Other and is manifested as "the desirable, that which arouses Desire, that is, that which is approachable by a thought

¹⁰ the second omitted phrase —"C'est au contraire le témoignage qui appartient à la gloire de l'Infini"— proposes testimony as the property of an already glorious Infinite.

¹¹ Anya Topolski describes the relation between the "here I am" and Judaism as follows: "Levinas cultivates this notion of the "I" by referring to the term *hineni*, central to the Judaic tradition. It is a response that appears as a leitmotif in Biblical and Talmudic thought, the ethical response *par excellence*. The recurrence of the self, experienced as persecution, is summoned from without but answered from within and leads the self to its infinite responsibility for the other [...] The "I" of *hineni* is not yet an I; is not separate from the relation that makes it responsible for the other. *Hineni* is a response to a command, in the case of its Biblical usage, to a command from God, that has not yet been pronounced. It is consequently a response that arises from within a relation to the other, a relation marked by my radical passivity" (Topolski 127).

that at each instant *thinks more than it thinks*" (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 62, emphasis in the original).

In this notion¹² of the infinite, Levinas seems to propose a Judaic eschatology with which to replace the ontological stipulations that, as first philosophy, have been root and cause of a worldview that, with its "empire of the same" brought totalitarianism into the world: "the eschatology of messianic peace will have come to superpose itself upon the ontology of war [l'eschatologie de la paix messianique viendra se superposer à l'ontologie de la guerre]" (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 22). In other words, Levinas' philosophy is one that seeks to conjugate itself with Jewish tradition, but in a conjugation where philosophy absorbs Jewish thought to reformulate itself as "first philosophy", not just as "Jewish philosophy", a term with which Levinas would never have agreed with regards to his work¹³. This is not a return to an origin, but a restatement of ethics that departs from a different narrative

¹² In an analysis of Levinas' "radical critique of Hegelian Idealism as an Odyssean narrative of reason", Michael McDonald sketches another root for the infinite in Levinas: "The idea of «infinity» is the abusive figure or catachresis [*abusio*]—with which Lévinas breaks from the Hegelian Odyssey of Spirit and its «plot of Being» [*la trame de l'être*]. Drawn in part from the third of Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) («Concerning God, That he Exist»), the idea of infinity refers neither to the limitlessness of a numerical series, nor to the unboundedness of spatial extension, but to an idea that exceeds the capacities of the subject that thinks it. The idea of infinity signifies the «absolutely other» of Being: the infinite shares «no frontier with the same, is not exposed to the allergy that afflicts the same in a totality, upon which the Hegelian dialectic rests» (*Collected Philosophical Papers* 55). The infinite thus confronts reason with its most radical *aporia*: the same and the other will never share a frontier, never form a «system, a cosmos, a totality» (*Collected Philosophical Papers* 54)". (Michael McDonald, "Losing Spirit", 190-191).

¹³ In his "Introduction" to *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, Simon Critchley notes that "One of the prevailing and potentially misleading assumptions about Levinas's work is that he is a Jewish philosopher" (22), arguing in favor of Levinas' self-categorization: "He [Levinas] once said, 'I am not a Jewish thinker. I am just a thinker'." (Ibid).

of its origin. Levinasian ethics are founded in another representation of the original scene of the encounter with the Other, in order to illuminate the approaches to "ethics" that had been stated departing from the Western notion of the term, which might have led to a philosophy that made possible totalitarianism, but with which Levinas ultimately engages in conversation.

This mechanics of subject constitution implies an inherent communication between the self and the Other that takes place in the infinite that separates them. With what Levinas goes on to call the Saying, as the act that thus accepts the subject's responsibility, a proximity is created that finds its maximum in the unfathomable difference in which the self finds itself distinct as an individual. In proximity there is an infinite inasmuch as the responsibility grows evermore as the self gets closer to an Other whom, the more he is approached, the farther he remains:

A gaping open of an abyss in proximity, the infinite which blinks [*l'infini qui clignote*], refusing speculative audacities, is distinguishable from pure and simple nothingness by the committing of the neighbor to my responsibility [...] The more I answer the more I am responsible; the more I approach the neighbor with which I am encharged the further away I am. This debit which increases is infinity as an infinition of the infinite, as glory (Levinas, *Otherwise* 93, emphasis added).

Here, the "blink" of the infinite —its *clignoter*— seems to me to be more like a wink, an invitation that appeals to the desire of a subject that gazes at the infinite. In this

fashion, the infinite offers itself in order to seduce the self into bearing the load of the Other, to offer its body so that the body of the Other does not suffer. As Cathryn Vasseleu duly notes:

Desire is a rupture of solipsistic existence and exposure to infinity through the acknowledgment of an other whose alterity cannot be overcome [...] Levinas's account of eroticism is grounded in the presupposition of a subject whose incarnation is bound to a desire for the abyss (Vasseleu 147-148).

That is, before desire, there is already existence, and there is already an Other, already separated from the self by an infinite that desire seeks to resolve. Desire for Levinas is dual: the abyss is desired, but inasmuch as to delve into its depths is to approach the Other; but the invitation with which the abyss seduces the self is to enjoy the corporeal load that responsibility commands the subject to bear. It would seem that before the invitation itself there already was a desire¹⁴, if only a desire to feel the corporeity itself, to fill the body with sensible contingency. The "blink" of the infinite is a flirtatious wink directed at the self, inviting it to enjoy its body in the search for the Other.

¹⁴ For Crignon, "There is nothing prior to the erotic relation, not even a face. Or rather, the face only shines in proximity to an experience of desire" (Crignon. 117). If I am in disagreement with the remark that there is an erotic relation prior to the face, I will concede that there is a desire with priority, and that it shines forth in the proximity of the Other.

In this fashion, the infinite invites me to enjoy, taking advantage of my desire. That is, it manifests itself as desirable. If the closer the self is to the Other the more the self is summoned, it is because there is an enjoyment that throbs and that pushes the self to keep looking to satiate it with ever more force. It is precisely here that, for Leora Batnitzky, the ethical stand begins:

Ethics for Levinas is the movement beyond the visible. The face of the other, which would seem to imply viscosity, is in fact for Levinas not graspable by vision or thought. Desire for the invisible is, for him, desire for infinity [...] Simply put, the argument of *Totality and Infinity* is as follows. If we desire the invisible (which Levinas defines as the ethical stance), then we must recognize what is necessary to make this desire itself possible. (Batnitzky 9-10).

Then, the beginning of the ethical stand would be a paradox¹⁵: an attempt at making possible an encounter that is, in its pure contingency, pure corporeal enjoyment—that is, that roots the subject in a wholly concrete reality—, but through a relation with an invisible, purely conceptual face. It would seem that the face, as a mode of the Other,

¹⁵ For a clarification on "why this apparent paradox does not constitute a theoretically vicious contradiction", in reference to Levinas' use of the notion of "trace" as present in Plotinus, see Peter C. Blum's "Overcoming Relativism? Levinas's Return to Platonism": "Whereas there is normally a «correlation», or a «rectitude», between a sign and what it signifies, a trace signifies by introducing an «unrectitude» that cannot be forced into the existing order of experience. I obviously do not perceive what is absent, but it does not follow that I do not in any sense perceive the absence itself. The central point that must be extracted from this paradoxical discussion is that there is, according to Levinas, the possibility of an experience that signifies what lies wholly beyond experience" (101-102, and following pages).

is still sensible, holding the possibility to be sensed, still accessible to the subject that, through this face, intuits the essence of an Other that, in fact, the subject cannot see. Desire for the invisible is desire for the infinite, but not for the face. The face grants itself to a desire of the infinite that seeks gratification through it. The face to face encounter is an encounter of two contingent beings, between visible bodies. If the face is not immediately visible, it is because of the *persona* that masks it: the face might not be visible, but the contingent person is. And, it is through contingency that Levinas argues the self "sees" what lies "beyond essence": the face is invisible, but not the person where the face is hidden.

Saying as the answer to this "blink" that summons the self becomes a way to discharge desire, to let it loose, to have the subject disseminate himself aurally over the body of the Other, trying to impregnate him with the "I" of its discourse. In this fashion, saying is a mode in which desire becomes dialectic and seeks to replicate itself on an Other who, nonetheless, does not allow himself to be a replicate—or of whom the self cannot make a replica of itself, or its desire—. The complete alterity of the Other consists in that the desire of the "I" does not appear to thrust the Other to mimetically imitate it. Regarding this, Peter Blum also observes that Levinas

retrieves the idea of desire from Plato to clarify the response to the encounter with the Other. Because of the Other's stubborn refusal to be subsumed under one of my categories, his or her presence calls my being into question - not because I am shown to lack something which the

Other provides, but precisely because I lack nothing [...] I desire the Other, but because the Other is wholly outside my site, and because my desire is not based on need, it is a desire that is deepened rather than satisfied by its object. (Blum 110).

Desire, then, in the final analysis, would be desire for subjectivity, as A. T. Nuyen argues: "when the I with full subjectivity examines its own experiences, it becomes aware of the Other as possessing a radical alterity, an absolute otherness. For, only in such experience can I confirm my subjectivity. Only in such experience can the desire for subjectivity be fulfilled" (Nuyen 28). In this fashion, without being able to affect the desire of the Other, it can perhaps be understood how Saying results in an act of ultimate passivity: Saying opens the self to the Other in all its fragility:

The saying signifies this passivity; in the saying this passivity signifies, becomes signifyingness, exposure in response to... [Le dire signifie cette passivité; dans le dire cette passivité signifie, se fait signifiance; exposition en-réponse à...], being at the question before any interrogation, any problem, without clothing, without a shell to protect oneself, stripped to the core as in an inspiration of air, an ab-solution to the *one*, the one without a complexion. It is a denuding beyond the skin, to the wounds one dies from, denuding to death, being as a vulnerability (Levinas, *Otherwise* 49, emphasis in the original)

In the presence of the Other, the subject can only be present too: *here* it is. Unable to find a reciprocal desire of the Other, the subject then assumes a passivity that allows it to relate with an Other that otherwise would remain immutable. The violence of a discourse that seeks to swallow the Other in its flux is appeased in a Saying that pretends to be pre-rhetorical, looking not to move the Other, but to position the self before the Other. The Saying is passive inasmuch as the position assumed renounces all confrontation, waiting for a command. If there was a prior summons that was responded with the "here I am", this Saying before the word is uttered —this presenting of the self— agrees to remain in its place until it is called into action.

The Saying, then, as "denuding beyond the skin, to the wounds one dies from, denuding to death"¹⁶ is submission, a recognition of an essence in the Other over which the self is powerless. Saying is, thus, linked to a corporeal manifestation where the body, and not only the voice, is risked. The passive Saying of the "here I am" is the subject's way to risk entering into relation with an Other before whom the self is completely vulnerable: it is presenting the self before an Other who might be a "widow" or an "orphan", as Levinas unfortunately liked to use as examples of destitution¹⁷, but who might also be executioner. This is why passivity —understood as positioning without violence or menace— seems to be a requirement for Levinasian

¹⁶ Levinas takes the image from Plato's *Gorgias*, where, according to Levinas himself, the approach to the other is beyond experience and consciousness, "*comme un mourir*".

¹⁷ According to Wes Avram, "Levinas uses the biblical imagery of the 'stranger, widow and orphan' as a trope for the empirical verity of meontological 'ethics'." (Avram 276f); that being so, however, for a fierce critique of Levinas phallogocentric discourse and exclusion of the feminine in the development of his ethics, see Luce Irigaray, "What Other Are We Talking About".

ethics: it is a way to recognize an otherness from which the self can know nothing beforehand, not even if the self can survive its encounter with it. The drive towards the encounter, however, is propelled by a desire that affirms itself positively in the Saying, not as an *a priori* sacrificial intent.

After the initial "here I am", the Saying seeks a way to exteriorize itself to become verbal. If this attempt is previous to ontology and language, the notion of a Saying that attempts to say the unspeakable, the indescribable, makes sense as it lacks the words —the language— to say itself. Language would emerge under the sign of necessity¹⁸, as it would give the subject the words —or better yet, as a creation of the subject, as the latter's assignation of words to the objects it refers to— that make the Saying possible. This Saying, however, at the moment it is enacted, loses its performative nature to become a *fact*, something made from which only the Said remains as its trace. The Said —in the rigidity of its being an already given— is inserted in the recoverable past. By contrast, the proper time of the Saying is always the present progressive, whatever tense is used to enunciate it: the Saying is always

¹⁸ In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels state that: "From the start the 'spirit' is afflicted with the curse of being 'burdened' with matter, which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language [...] language, like consciousness, arises only from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men" (Marx & Engels 50-51). Thus, language would be the apparition in consciousness of a contingent matter with which the subject would have to deal by the very fact of the subject's concreteness. In this fashion, language would be the result of the subject's need to communicate with another, concrete subject, also immersed in contingency. The material relation Marx and Engels speak of is not, however, an ethical relation in which a subjectivity is constituted: the initial saying, in this perspective, does not point towards language itself nor towards the subject that enunciates, as would be my contention, but towards the object that is being referred to for its utility.

developing throughout its duration in its being enunciated. Ethics requires the thematization of the Saying prior to any and all Said, since the self's responsibility for the Other precedes all time, and since the subject already *is* responsible for the Other before there is a Said. The proximity of the Other summons the subject to a Saying, to an interruption in a self that then must *say*. Ethics, then, for Levinas, is to acknowledge the signification of the Saying and the Said:

To *stay* [*S'en tenir*] with the signification of the said, and of the saying that turns into apophrasis, forgetful of the proposition and exposure to the other in which they signify, is to stay with the consciousness-subject [...] Here the subject is origin, initiative, freedom, present (Levinas, *Otherwise...* 78, emphasis added).

The risk the subject assumes when he performs a Saying is that it might break his silence with an articulation that says nothing, with an articulation that ultimately is just a Said. A risk that is not differentiable from the risk of being a contingent subject. Not taking this risk, however, is to take distance from the relationship, it is unresponsibility, it is an attempt against ethics, inasmuch as it is an attempt against the humanity of the Other:

Proximity, immediacy, is to enjoy and to suffer by the other. But I can enjoy and suffer by the other only because I am-for-the-other [*je-suis-pour-l' autre*], am signification, because the *contact with skin is still proximity of a face, a responsibility, an obsession with the Other, being-one-for-the-other* [*être-l*

'un-pour-l'au tre], which is the very birth of *signification* beyond *being*
(Levinas, *Otherwise* 90, emphasis on the original in French).

There is, then, a correspondence between Saying and living in contingency, between the initial desire to capture the Other into a theme, and the final desire to be responsible for him. The self is made a subject by its relation with the Other, by a desire for integration that, if it makes the self responsible, its responsibility can be said to be the preservation of the proximity between self and Other which makes the relation possible, and thus makes enjoyment possible. Levinas' "being for the other" would then be a "desiring being for the desired other". The intrinsic utility of the *for* hides, thus, a libidinal dynamics that would make the subject a "being for enjoyment", who would derive enjoyment from the responsibility of the Other.

Language and the Ethical Encounter

In the "here I am" as Saying, as has been my contention, the manner in which the subject responds to the call of the Other is emerging. If this mechanics of subject constitution implies an Other whose face demands a response from the subject to the point of making him a subject, the possibility of an ethics that exists prior to the subject's ontology—that is, the possibility of ethics as first philosophy—can be questioned, if in order for the subject to receive from the face of the Other an interpellation there would evidently have to mediate between both, beforehand, a

common language¹⁹. That is, that the moment itself in which the subject encounters the Other, which is the moment the subject becomes a subject, is the birth of language. But this original, primary language would imply that between each subject and his Other a new language is founded, whose first desire would drive it to name those two original, primary entities in order to differentiate them as "I" and "You".

However, if there is no previous language that mediates between the subject and his Other, the interpellation that the "I" senses is being addressed towards it, can be nothing but the fiction that a consciousness creates at finding a new element outside itself. In order for an interpellation to occur there would have to exist a common language between subject and Other. When I say common language, I mean that the language that mediates between both self and other is an epistemological system in which both can participate. At this point, and in order to perhaps make

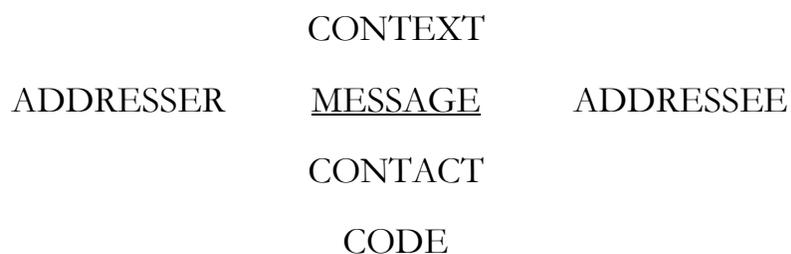
¹⁹ In *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, Gerald Bruns summarizes the different notions of language that have taken for their definitions the image of language as an epistemological separation, or medium between the self and its reality. Departing from Mallarmé's statements that "Poetry is not a form of mediation. It is, to put it plainly, not a species of discourse [...] Poetry bears witness to the resistance of language [...] to consciousness, intentionality, or the workings of a logical subject" (vii), Bruns takes poetry to be language's way of pointing towards itself in either of two variants: Orphic poetry—which prioritizes over the written form a speaking language that creates the world—and Hermetic poetry—which prioritizes writing over speaking, and is thus self-contained—the first of which is associated with a phenomenological approach to language, while the other is associated with structuralist/formalist methodologies. Not surprisingly, Bruns' own view is ultimately synthetic: "The poem must be understood both as structure and as event [...] The poem is both object and utterance, both a thing made and a thing spoken, which discloses itself [...] to account for [...] the very possibility of human speech itself" (262).

¹⁹ At any rate, and besides any agreement that I can have with Bruns' own view—and which I will later appropriate—the underlying question has to be precisely the mode of language's mediation *after* the subject is constituted, whether or not it is constituted prior to any ontology. Language need not exist before the subject, but once the subject does emerge, only through language can the subject relate with its world. I will turn to the nature of this language later in the dissertation.

clearer what I mean by epistemological system, it will prove worthwhile to briefly go over the linguistic concepts derived by Roman Jakobson, which in turn will finally bring the discussion to the question of poetry, and will reveal it as a mode of original Saying.

In his essay "Linguistics and Poetics", Jakobson surveys the "constitutive factors on any speech act" in the following manner:

The ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADDRESSEE. To be operative the message requires a CONTEXT referred to ("referent" in another, somewhat ambiguous, nomenclature), seizable by the addressee, and either verbal or capable of being verbalized; a CODE fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and addressee (or in other words, to the encoder and decoder of the message); and, finally, a CONTACT, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication. All these factors inalienably involved in verbal communication may be schematized as follows:



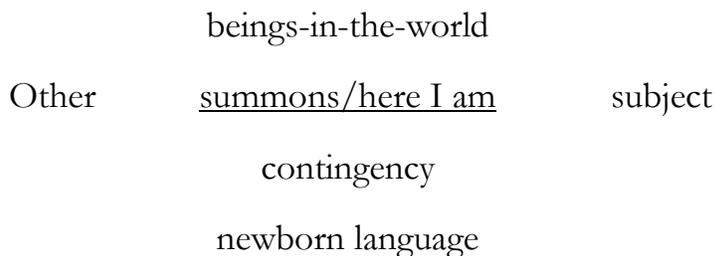
(Jakobson 66, emphasis on the original).

In the proposed schema, the place of the "Addresser" in the geometry of the ethical relation would be occupied by the Other, whose "Addressee" would be the Subject thus constituted in this relation. There would of course be a "Contact", inasmuch as the ethical encounter occurs between two concrete beings in their contingency. Now, if there is no language prior to the encounter, and no language emerges from the encounter, the only possible result for this relation is an optics empty of communicative content. That is, no message could be sent, no summons could be received, and no ethical relation would be possible. In order for an ethical relation to take place, there would have to be a language prior to—or emergent at the moment of—the relation itself; otherwise it would be impossible for a summons to be emitted or received. If this language is not a shared language, as it appears to be Levinas' contention, the resulting message would be left up in the air, since without a common code, the interpretation of the message by the addressee would ultimately fail.

Without a common code, there is only room for a hermeneutical interpretation of what would be taken as the first message: the Other can only be perceived as the mode of an unreachable essence, like the face for Levinas. It would be from the form of this face—the only accessible data for the subject—that a message would be derived. But how to deduce from the original encounter with the sensible configuration of the Other a message, besides the acknowledgment of his Saying, of the fact that from the face of the Other the subject can attest that there is a truth

—the existence of a true essence of the Other, beyond his face— that is not contained in the self, that is, from which the self can *know*?

Then, the only possible knowledge would be that there was an attempt at communication, from which the "Context" can be easily derived: two entities engaged in an exhausting attempt to communicate with each other. Hence, the minimum message received by the subject would be that there exists an Other that tries to reach me. The first hermeneutic interpretation of the subject is then that there is an Other that says "I exist". In this fashion, ethics is, in the beginning, the recognition of the existence of an Other whom I cannot understand. The resulting schematization for the dynamics of the Levinasian ethical encounter with the Other could be diagrammed in analogous fashion to Jakobson as follows:



But, again, there must be a language before the subject can make such a claim regarding the Other. That is, the Other must emit a message, otherwise he would be only an object of aesthetic contemplation... and the subject must receive a message, otherwise he would be a mere contemplating entity. If language occurs at the moment

of the encounter between self and Other —if the one is constitutive of the other—, then one could reach a definition of language as the awakening of consciousness.

Just as in Jakobson's schema each factor of any speech event has a corresponding function —emotive, cognitive, referential, metalingual, phatic and poetic for, respectively, the addresser, addressee, context, code, contact and message—, in the proposed schema each factor of the face-to-face encounter between self and Other has a corresponding discourse that tries to account for it²⁰.

The discourse that traverses the position of the subject, as was well known to Levinas, would be ontology, as it tries to determine the *being* of a subject via its ipseity. Consistent with the argumentation that has led to this point, ontological discourse speaks always only from the subject to the subject: the essence of the unknown, totally Other cannot be a subject matter for ontology, but rather metaphysical discourse, as it deals with what lies not within but beyond the boundaries of the physical, knowable attributes of the object in question. That the subject and the Other are traversed by different discourses speaks to the asymmetrical nature of their relation.

Regarding the contextual being-in-the-world of both a self and an Other exhausted in their attempt at communication, epistemology would be the discourse that tries to grasp the real of the relation in a system that would thematize it so as to

²⁰ A more thorough development of the following concepts is left for the concluding remarks of the dissertation. For the time being, only a brief exposition of each discourse and its corresponding factor is attempted.

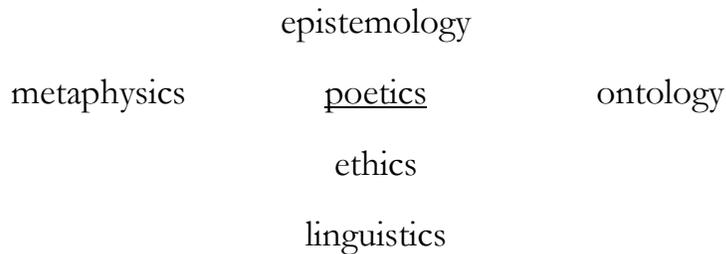
make of communication a cogent enterprise where knowledge can be derived.

Linguistics and semiotics would, on their part, attempt to impose a logic onto the newborn language that emerges in the relation in question, so as the communication can be domesticated into a discourse itself.

The discourse that traverses contingency, that tries to account for the relation between self and Other as it occurs in the space inhabited by both, and as has been my intention to make perhaps evident, would be ethics. If philosophy's ontological bias is the result of the recurrent positioning of the subject at the center of its discourse, the attempt at having ethics as first philosophy would try to re-center philosophy's master discourse in the contingent that has been taken as the first presupposition upon which all of the argumentation has been based.

The determination of the discourse that traverses the remaining factor, the "message" itself—the summons of the Other and the "here I am" of the self: the Saying of the relation—, is perhaps more problematic, as it would be dependent on the content of the message. Yet, a discourse that thus points towards itself as its own source for its problematization implies a poetics, as was well known to Jakobson: "The set towards the message as such, focus on the message for its own sake, is the POETIC function of language" (Jakobson 69). That is, it implies the construction of a discourse founded on its points of crisis in order to bring them to the "foreground" along with the language with which it is created, and which is created by discourse itself. The resulting schematization for the discourses that traverse the different

positions in the face-to-face encounter between self and Other could then be diagrammed as follows:



The initial intuition regarding the bridge, connection, or confluence between ethics and poetry thus finds its cornerstone in the "message" considered as Saying. The Saying as both the utterance of a subject that is constituted in the face to face encounter with the Other and as the poetic utterance of a subject immersed in his contingency, yields its position to be traversed by the ethical and the poetical discourse, without confusing the two. While the first alluded utterance bears witness to the infinite of the separation between subject and Other, the poetic utterance bears witness to the displacement of the subject with respect to its transcendental desire, exemplified in the critical point where the capacity of language's syntax to contain a univocal, transparent meaning is questioned in a poem that can never say what it aims at saying: its saying itself.

A brief summa of the notion of Saying, both ethical and poetic, that has been developed can now be attempted:

1. Contrary to poetry, ethics is not concerned with the representation of the encounter between the first two beings, nor with the mythical origin of language. It rather seeks to deal with concrete, flesh-and-blood beings in their daily lives, that have "a code fully, or at least partially, common", as was Jakobson's contention (66).

Poetry, on the other hand, seeks to recreate the original Saying that could not be understood.

2. The poetic Saying is a message to be deciphered, to be known. The poetic Saying is that which says the poem; it is a moment, an event. Poetry is the evanescent event in which the poem is said: becomes a Said of the Saying voice.

3. The ethical Saying, the "here I am", is a perpetuation of the contact: it is not a message, but rather makes a message possible. The ethical Saying does not create the world, does not represent it. The ethical Saying completes the world by making language and communication possible. "Here I am" is making the self present in the world as an addressee. The ethical Saying is a doing.

4. The poetic Saying, then, will seek to represent the original scene, but cannot help but to be the Saying of a subject that emerges in a world already erected by language. The impossibility of actually recreating the original scene is the impossibility of founding a language by representing the encounter with the Other with a language.

That is, the subject was originally founded *in* language, not *with* language as matter or tool. If language is *energeia*, if it re-con-forms itself with every utterance²¹, in the poem language is also re-con-formed and thus made new, but it cannot found a new-language that is in itself other —or otherwise— than language. If the language of the poem was to be a new language, the subject would become extricated from the world. More than falling into solipsism, the subject would be absorbed by Nothingness, the void, the black hole that his absence from the world would create.

As a matter of nomenclature, the poetical subject would then be the subject that says the poetical Saying, that says the poem. What can be referred to as the ethical subject, then, is that subject whose Saying is the ethical, whose "here I am" is its responsible presence in the thus completed world, and who thus makes possible communication. The point of coincidence between both subjects would be that original subject whose first Saying was a poem, whose first presence in the world was a poem.

Agamben: Ethics, Contingency, and Language

²¹ I take the notion of language as *energeia* from Humboldt, for whom "*Language*, regarded in its real nature, is an enduring thing, and at every moment a *transitory* one. Even its maintenance by writing is always just an incomplete, mummy-like preservation, only needed again in attempting thereby to picture the living utterance. In itself it is no product (*Ergon*), but an activity (*Energeia*)" (Humboldt 49, emphasis in the original).

The relation as derived between ethics and poetry departed from a shared notion of an otherness beyond the self that this self encountered when it was made into a subject. The development of the analysis arrived at a Saying as the moment and act where the subject enacts himself either ethically or poetically. In this fashion, the point of arrival has proven to be none other than language as the question at hand. If the very existence of language was not taken as a presupposition, it is because language was taken to be subordinated to the contingency where the subject emerged. The door has been left wide open, thus, for the possibility of questioning an argument that does not consider the relation between the self and the original contingency mediated by the subordinated language²². But would the acceptance of the immediacy of such contingency not be too quick a concession to Levinas' argument for eschatology? That is, would not the assumption of the transparency of this contingency, thus left un-obfuscated by language, negate beforehand the possibility that contingency might possess as one of its attributes an "itselfness" that would make immediacy impossible? Or stated in other terms, would the assumption of the transparency of contingency not be an oblique way to assume an "ontology of the same" that would take contingency to be a fully graspable, thematizable concept that would precondition the ethical encounter as derived? It appears necessary, then, to clarify what has been meant by "language", and to elucidate the mediation/immediacy of the subject with contingency. Here another necessary presupposition must arise:

²² See comment on Bruns, footnote no. 15

that the mediation/immediacy between subject and contingency is still in fact language; that it is only through language that the subject can relate with the reality of the contingency that surrounds him.

In *Potentialities*, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben notes how philosophy departs, due to its condition as philosophy, from the existence of language as a presupposition, inasmuch as, since it deals with the question of truth, it cannot leave out of its scope the *factum loquendi*: "whose sole content is the existence of language, the fact that there are speaking beings [...] If the object of linguistics is language [...] philosophy is instead concerned with the *factum loquendi*, which linguistics must simply presuppose. Philosophy is the attempt to *expose* this presupposition" (Agamben, *Potentialities* 66-67, emphasis in the original). If I agree that philosophy must take the existence of language as a given before making any statement on language—which is to say that the existence of language is a truth—the need for language to be an *a priori* that must be acknowledged in order for philosophy to be contemporarily philosophical seems somewhat of a stretch. In the case that concerns me here, a critique of the subject must account for the fact of the linguistic character of this subject, but the presupposition of language as prior to the subject need not immediately follow in the analysis.

But again, a bit more detail is needed on what is meant by “a language.” Quite astutely, Agamben qualifies the existence of this language: "[it is] from the *pure* existence of language, that philosophy must depart" (Agamben, *Potentialities* 68,

emphasis added). Then, it is not the existence of language that has to pre-condition philosophical argumentation, but the existence of a "pure language" that Agamben derives from his reading of Walter Benjamin: "[in] Benjamin's 'pure language' [...] what is at issue each time is not the phantom of a universal language (or grammar) but an experience whose object is the *factum loquendi*, the pure existence of language" (Agamben, *Potentialities* 74).

This "pure language" is not, however, what is usually referred to when one talks about language; that is, it does not have communication between subjects as its purpose. Rather, "The pure language of names, by contrast, appears as an example of a notion of language 'that knows no means, no object, and no addressee of communication' [...] The status of this Adamic language is therefore that of speech that does not communicate anything other than itself" (Agamben, *Potentialities* 51-52). Agamben will later qualify this "pure language" in an even more radical way: "the expressionless word [...] pure language is the only language that does not mean anything, but simply speaks" (Agamben, *Potentialities* 54). But as a language that "simply speaks", this "pure language" would not be much different than a Saying that fulfills itself in its performance, and that escapes thus being held to a meaning by a Said from which a content can be interpreted beyond its enunciation, and on which a grammar can be imposed. Moreover, this "Adamic language" surely implies the desire of a subject to thematize and control his exterior world by naming it, which Agamben fails to remark. It would appear that this "pure language" is, more than a verbal

enunciation, a making itself present in the world by recognizing its desire to *be* in the world. If Levinas' "here I am" is formulated as a response to a summons, Agamben's subject appears to demand recognition for his *being*.

If indeed some similarities can be found in Agamben's account of "pure language" and Levinas' "saying", while the former's arguments never go beyond the theoretical or even the meta-philosophical, the latter's have, as the agent of its Saying, a subject immersed in a contingency that can only be transcended through this response. And even if Agamben seems to be aware of the intrinsic relation between language and ethics (58-59), his notion of contingency seems to be rooted in more of a temporal rather than spatial dimension, and as such, seems to exceed language:

The disorder that contingency introduces into the world is nevertheless balanced by a principle that is more or less present in all knowledge and that was clearly formulated by Aristotle. This principle, which is usually called the "principle of conditioned necessity" states that if all potentiality of a thing and its contrary, and if every being could have been different, nevertheless, in the instant in which it actually is, it cannot be otherwise [...] contingency is contained in a barrier that always necessarily inscribes its expression in the form of a past: something *could have been* otherwise than it is (Agamben, *Potentialities* 75, emphasis in the original)

If the first assumption for this dissertation was the original existence of a spatial contingency from whose status as *given* the whole of the argumentation has followed, Agamben's temporal contingency can be inscribed into the formulation of the ethics in question, as the subjects who populate the world at hand are historical entities. Which is to say that, even if the temporality of the subject is not taken to be immediate with or prior to the space from which the subject emerges, the subject of ethics is neither Adam nor Eve: History had already begun when the subject emerged from contingency.

Be that as it may, both spatial and temporal contingencies share as one of their most important attributes transcendence, which is to say that the subject that lives it can exist beyond both space and time, mainly in "pure language" even if language is not taken as the first presupposition, inasmuch as the departure has been that which exceeds it.

The main concern for both Levinas and Agamben —and for the present analysis, to the degree that it might supply an intersection between ethics, language, and poetry—, and which serves as the point of departure for Levinas and as the point of arrival and future departure for Agamben, is the question of being otherwise and/or otherwise than being *in* contingency: "is it possible to grasp contingency otherwise than as 'something that could have been'? [...] Is it possible, in short, to attempt to say what seems impossible to say, that is: that something *is* otherwise than it is?". Agamben provides his answer immediately after: "This appears to be precisely

the task of coming philosophy" (Agamben, *Potentialities* 76); a task that was already initiated by Levinas years earlier.

Then, the future of philosophy for Agamben must begin by acknowledging the close relationship between philosophy and theology, the first being able to acquire a knowledge that can only be a revelation of language:

the content of revelation is not a truth that can be expressed in the form of linguistic propositions about a being (even about a supreme being) but is, instead, a truth that concerns language itself, the very fact that language (and therefore knowledge) exists. The meaning of revelation is that humans can reveal beings through language but cannot reveal language itself (Agamben, *Potentialities* 40).

To which he will later add that "The most original logical dimension at issue in revelation is therefore not that of meaningful speech but rather that of a voice that, without signifying anything, signifies signification itself [...] This gift of the voice by language is God, the divine word" (Agamben, *Potentialities* 42). As was the task of the translator for Benjamin, for Agamben the task of philosophy will be to end the chaos of Babel after the fall, to make human voices sing in one language.

Having traced a transcendent path for speculations on language, Agamben can then turn to poetry. In *The End of the Poem*, his definition of poetry is, surprisingly enough, exclusively formal in its initial articulation:

the possibility of enjambment constitutes the *only* criterion for distinguishing poetry from prose. For what is enjambment, if not the opposition of a metrical limit to a syntactical limit, of a prosodic pause to a semantic pause? "Poetry" will then be the name given to the discourse in which this opposition is, at least virtually, possible (Agamben, *The End of the Poem* 109, emphasis added).

From this formal definition, however, it appears that the main attribute of poetic discourse is not the geospatial positioning of its elements in enjambment, but the possibility that it opens for the questioning of a syntax that pretends to flatten linguistic enunciation in order to squeeze a meaning out of it. Poetry would then depart from language, but in order to point towards its crisis, which reaches its apex in the last verse of the poem that, as last verse, surrenders the possibility of enjambment, having as a final result of the poem a leap into a void that poetry turns into an epiphany (Agamben, *The End of the Poem* 115). The poem is, then, a testimony of language that is spoken through the voice of the poet —through the "gift of the voice by language", that "is God"—; but this leads one right back to Levinas' statement regarding the saying of the witness of the infinite: "The infinite does not appear to him that bears witness to it. It is by the voice of the witness that the glory of the Infinite is glorified" (Levinas, *Otherwise...* 146). The poem's transcendental engagement in language for Agamben turns out to be, much like Levinas' Saying, the utterance of a

non-communicative message, the reification of a presence whose being there in the poem is significant in itself, since it amounts to the testimony of an infinite/language.

In order to find a connection between contingency and language beyond the theoretical enterprise of *Potentialities* ("Bartelby, or On Contingency" pp. 243-274), Agamben turns to the limits of human experience, where being and being otherwise become for philosophy the speculation of what it might mean to be human and non-human, the definition of which used to be found in what used to be "Man".

In the "Preface"²³ to his *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben notes the aporia of the limit situation embodied in nazi *lagers*: "Facts so real that, by comparison, nothing is truer; a reality that necessarily exceeds its factual elements —such is the aporia of Auschwitz" (Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* 12). The limit situation of the *lager* is a truth so true that it is impossible, a truth so inaccessible that the self cannot but create a fiction to signify it. The impossibility of this truth clashes with testimony as a genre that would claim access to truth in its attempt at narrating it through fiction. Only through a survivor who bears witness is the fact known in a trial whose *mise en scene* is its own end. It is in this legal environment that Agamben understands responsibility, not before recognizing that responsibility is in fact too great to assume: "a responsibility that is infinitely greater than any we could ever assume. At the most, we can be faithful to it, that is, asserts its unassumability" (Agamben, *Remnants of*

²³ In the Italian original, the section is not referred to as a preface, but rather as an "Avvertenza", a "Warning".

Auschwitz 21). Here Agamben doesn't negate responsibility, but admits it is impossible to fully respond. The question of the need to respond for Agamben is, however, not one for ethics to decide: "ethics is the sphere that recognizes neither guilt nor responsibility; it is, as Spinoza knew, the doctrine of the happy life" (Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* 24).

Ethics, as *ethos*, is traversed by a historic frame of reference that questions the positioning of the subject with regards to life. With Nietzsche, however, the "happy life" has been left behind as foundational of ethics inasmuch as the determination on the "correctness" of an engagement has gone beyond the limit of the happiness of the individual in favor of the correctness itself of the historical system in which the subject is inserted as a goal:

The ethics of the twentieth century opens with Nietzsche's overcoming of resentment. Against the impotence of the will with respect to the past, against the spirit of revenge for what has irrevocably taken place and can no longer be willed, Zarathustra teaches men to will backward, to desire that everything repeat itself [...] The eternal return is above all victory over resentment, the possibility of willing what has taken place, transforming every 'it was' into a 'thus I wanted it to be' (Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* 99),

But, beyond any moral judgment on the possibility of desiring the eternal return of Auschwitz, it appears that the ethics of the twentieth century have taken a turn in

which it has become necessary to account for a history that refuses to become past tense regardless of what philosophy might think of its advantages or disadvantages for life.

It is in *Shame* that Agamben finds the model for the constitution of this new subject of the new ethical imperative brought on by the experience of Auschwitz: "Auschwitz also means this much: that man, dying, cannot find any other sense in his death than this flush, this shame [vergogna]" (Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* 104). He will later venture a "first, provisional definition of shame. It is nothing less than the fundamental sentiment of being *a subject*, in the two apparently opposed senses of this phrase: to be subjected and to be sovereign" (Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* 107, emphasis in the English translation). Shame would thus modulate the ethics of the mode of relating the subject with its Other, whatever the vertical direction with respect of the subject that this Other might have. This subject would be constituted with Shame as "the most proper emotive tonality of subjectivity " (*Remnants of Auschwitz* 110) and as "the hidden structure of all subjectivity and consciousness " (*Remnants of Auschwitz* 128), in the constant subjectivation and desubjectivation that modernity has made apparent for man. This sentiment of shame need not cancel the encounter with the face of the Other as constitutive for the subject, even if it substitutes for Agamben the place that the feeling of responsibility might had for Levinas. For shame to remain coherent in such an encounter as has been derived up to this point, the subject would not be instantaneously summoned into responsibility,

but would be “flushed” with shame as he would be *already* a subject, as he would have already undergone a prior subjectification. Such a feeling would be of shame at missing the summons, at being constituted as a subject outside of the relation with the Other. Such a shame would be a sentiment that, nonetheless, leaves open the possibility of a desubjectification before the face of the Other, after which the self can become a newly constituted subject. Such a subjectification/ desubjectification has in poetry its best example.

In a letter to John Woodhouse (October 27, 1818), John Keats writes that "the poetical Character [...] is not itself — it has no self — It is everything and nothing — It has no character" (Keats 336). Later on he will add that "A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no Identity [...] It is a wretched thing to confess; but it is a very fact, that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical Nature — how can it, when I have no Nature?" (Keats 337). It is from this letter that Agamben derives Keats' thesis on poetic experience as "*the shameful experience of desubjectification*" (Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* 113, emphasis in the original). According to Agamben, the impulse that makes Keats promise to continue writing poetry despite the “wretched” confession of his lack of “Identity” points towards a "shame and desubjectification implicit in the act of speech" that contains "a secret beauty that could only bring the poet incessantly to bear witness to his own alienation" (113). Keat's confession seems to me, on the contrary, to arise from the recognition of the fictitious nature of both the poem and

the poet as its author. That is, for Keats the poem would not bear witness to a desubjectification as much as that through the poem one can never with full certainty derive the existence of a concrete subject called “the poet”. Put another way, the “Character” of the poem —the subject that emerges from it— is a distinct subject, different from and never wholly coincident with the poet. Agamben seems to have forgotten for a moment to account for the fact that the voice that emerges from the letter is not Keats', but another poetic persona. I would agree with Agamben, however, when he states that as a verbal, discursive being, the subject cannot help itself but to be subjected to the impossibility to express himself (with)in language (116-117). “Wretched” or “shamefull”, Keats confession openly expresses the poem's tension at its being the enunciation of a subject that is latent even before the poem is articulated by its immediate Other: its reader.

Then, if shame is to remain as the main trait of the subject, the *fact of poetry* will have to bring it together with responsibility as the ethical imperatives that constitute a subject that has to bear witness of his own desubjectivation and of his constitutive deficiency:

It is therefore not surprising that in the face of this intimate extraneousness implicit in the act of speech, poets experience something like responsibility and shame [...] *the subject of testimony is the one who bears witness to a desubjectification* (117 & 120-121 emphasis in the original).

The new ethics that will have to account for a world in which Auschwitz is possible must deal, from its part, with a redefinition of the concept of "human", where the "non-human" is possible:

Let us then formulate the thesis that summarizes the lesson of
Auschwitz: *The human being is the one who can survive the human being [l'uomo è colui che può sopravvivere all'uomo...]* *the human being is the inhuman; the one whose humanity is completely destroyed is the one who is²⁴ truly human [l'uomo è il non-uomo, veramente umano è colui la cui umanità è stata integralmente distrutta]*
(Agamben 133, emphasis throughout in the original).

Which is the same as to say that Man is what transcends, *what remains*, as a truth that extermination camps were unable to reduce to ashes. Here again poetry, as the "possibility of enjambment", is empowered as the discourse with(in) which the remains of the human can be reconstituted so as to form with the detritus of history a subject. *This* would be the ethical task of poetry, which Agamben roots in the testimony of the subjectivation and desubjectivation of the human subject (135).

To respond—in life and in the poem—is to restore the dignity of an Other that has suffered an injury. One must, then, first see the uncanny face of the Gorgon that is the face of the non-human Other: "That at the 'bottom' of the human being there is nothing other than an impossibility of seeing—this is the Gorgon, whose vision

²⁴ Instead of "the one who is truly human", it should perhaps be read as "the one whose humanity is completely destroyed is one who truly is human".

transforms the human being into a non-human " (Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 54). There would be an ethical impasse at the moment the face of the Other is not seen. The moral imperative becomes, then, to *show* it: the subject who sees the face of the Other would be, thus, ethically obliged to bear witness of it. To give testimony of the face is to say "here I am, and here it is". The Saying of testimony is that *there is a face*.

Barthes: the Ethical Pleasure of the Text

Up until now, a parallel relation has been developed between ethics and poetics, where the Sayings of both point towards the emergence of a subject who must respond. Ethical and aesthetic relations have been linked by language, and differentiated by the way the subject is-*in*-the world. Now, before the poem as an object, one inevitably finds oneself, not before a Saying already petrified in a Said, as Levinas would have it, but before a text. If it might be true that the poet's attempt at transcendence is frustrated —the poem resulting thus from a needed failure—, the entrance into the poem cannot be already governed by a presupposition that annuls the poem as Saying. If poetry is a game²⁵, one enters the poem always for the first

²⁵ For an exposition of poetry as a game, see *La poesía* by Rafael Núñez Ramos, for whom "el objetivo del juego es la actividad misma de jugar, por tanto, hacer de la vida, siquiera por un momento, un juego, adoptar su sistema de referencias y relaciones" (Núñez 34). This being so, if "el lenguaje participa en el juego poético, habrá de hacerlo negando su funcionamiento habitual, transformando su estructura, rechazando sus fines más comunes" (Núñez 47). Hence, "El juego, precisamente, consiste en buscar sentido a través de la ficción, no en inventar ficciones sin rumbo" (Núñez 58). Although I don't necessarily share Núñez's prescriptive view —namely, that "inventar ficciones sin rumbo", although still possibly a game, is not poetry's... or cheating on the rules of this game—, the ludic approach to poetry can in fact bring it to more manageable —although always

time, and never *in media res*. Whatever the initial condition, the entrance into the poem marks the beginning of a new game. Entering the poem with the assumption that it will fail forfeits the game. So, before the textual object, there must be a prior *desire* to play, that is, to enter the poem, just as there was a desire that preceded the ethical relation. Herein seems to lie what at the core is the pleasure of the text for Barthes.

It can be argued that with his essay *The Pleasure of the Text* Roland Barthes changes critical discourse from being centered in logics, to a discourse centered in the erotic critique of the text as phenomenon. If "hyphology" takes the place of philology, erotics, as the poetics of eros substitutes for logic, if not for philosophy in general, taking as its object of knowledge the materiality of the body:

Text means *Tissue*; but whereas hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, a ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth), we are now emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue —this texture— the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web. Were we fond of neologism, we might define the theory of the text as an *hyphology* (*hyphos* is the tissue and the spider's web) (Barthes 64, emphasis in the original).

elusive— terms without reducing poetry to a mere inconsequent expenditure of time: poetry can be, in my opinion, a very serious game.

The analysis of textual pleasure prevents the return of criticism to a system centered on the philosophy of meaning, "it can embarrass the text's return to morality, to truth: to the morality of truth: it is an oblique, a drag anchor, so to speak, without which the theory of the text would revert to a centered system, a philosophy of meaning" (Barthes 65). This discourse seems already not to speak about systematizing linguistic structures that seek universals for generalization—as would be the structuralist proposal—, but looks to reach the particularity of the subject's experience that develops into pleasure. If linguistic vocabulary is not discarded, the concepts are relegated and substituted by a discourse that pays attention to the economies that operate in the experience of the world, that mediate between the subject and his world.

This new philology would seek not to decipher the truth that the signifying webs of the text hide, but to allow the manifestation of the pleasure displayed in, and by, the text. Pleasure would be displayed by the text, inasmuch as the writing-reading of it awakes in the writing-reading subject the desire of a continuous pleasure that transcends the instantaneity of *jouissance* and is consumed in the moment itself of *jouissance*, spending thus all of its possibilities.

If "The text is a fetish object, and *this fetish desires me*" (Barthes 27, emphasis on the original), pleasure would be displayed in the text, inasmuch as the text offers itself as a desiring subject beyond the mere object of a desire projected in it, and the pleasure of the text would then be both the pleasure felt by the text's spectator, and

the pleasure felt by a text that seeks to be desired and that seeks to satisfy the desire felt towards it.

The text would function, then, as the *locus* where a dialectics of desire takes place; in the text, pleasure would be equivalent to the synthesis in which the encountered desires, in tension the ones with the others, would find resolution: "A site of bliss is then created. It is not the reader's 'person' that is necessary to me, it is this site: the possibility of a dialectics of desire, of an *unpredictability* of bliss" (Barthes 4, emphasis in the original).

The possibility of an erotics of the text would go beyond the mere focalization in it of an individualism that would abstract from all relations with the contingent world, inasmuch as this place can be subtracted from the text. In the phenomenological emphasis of the pleasure of the text, for Barthes, an up-until-then-overlooked by Western thought aspect of the relation of the subject with the world is revealed:

To be with the one I love and to think of something else: this is how I have my best ideas, how I best invent what is necessary to my work
Likewise for the text: it produces, in me, the best pleasure if it manages to make itself heard indirectly; if, reading it, I am led to look up often, to listen to something else (Barthes 24).

In this fashion, the relation originated between the subject and the text is, in fact, an ethical relation in which the subjectivity itself of the subject is being founded.

When Barthes stipulates that the text must be that person who without inhibitions turns its back on the "Political Father" (Barthes 53), he is actually arguing, not for political inactivity, but quite the opposite. Taking sides against the Freudian parricide in which the father is irrevocably totemized²⁶, Barthes' proposal to "turn the back" is a proposal for a political positioning by assuming an ethical stand. In this stand dialectics are still possible, even if it would need alternate ways to deal with the resulting obliquity, since to turn the back is not a declination to enter in a relation, but a moment in which two otherness are affirmed. It is a moment when the possibility for the deferral of the face-to-face encounter is affirmed as an ethical choice.

What Barthes clearly admits is his questioning of the subversion of all ideology: "The social struggle cannot be reduced to the struggle between two rival ideologies: it is the subversion of all ideology which is in question" (Barthes 32-33). *This* seems to be his dispute, more than with any revolutionary movement from which, however, he would criticize its excessive impulse towards *jouissance*, that ultimately yields an out-of-focus pleasure. Ideology assumes the spirit as a battle ground. He would, however, seem to contradict himself when he stipulates that the shadow of the dominant ideology is what gives the text fecundity and productivity (ibid). But, the presence of ideology in the text must be shadow, not body; it must be the phantom, the remains, a

²⁶ The Freudian parricide is certainly political, but one that, nonetheless, consumes itself in an instantaneous *jouissance* and that would thus be, in the final analysis, sterile.

presence that is not explicitly manifested. It must allow space for eroticism: it must hint at the depth, not show the bottom.

In revolutionary violence²⁷, a tear is always created, behind which the "erotic body" is seen. It is in this frontier between body and fabric, between the erotic body and the text, that desire operates:

These two edges, *the compromise they bring about*, are necessary. Neither culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so. The pleasure of the text is like that untenable, impossible, purely *novelistic* instant so relished by Sade's libertine when he manages to be hanged and then to cut the rope at the very moment of his orgasm, his bliss [...] what pleasure wants is the site of loss, the seam the cut, the deflation, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss (Barthes 7, emphasis in the original).

The critique to the systems that suppress the desire of its conceptual components is then that these systems end —unconsciously or not, always in a structural fashion—, not in a tear but in a rupture that, spending all of its impulses in the already consumed *jouissance*, can only construct structures purged of a pleasure that is, in the final analysis, constitutive of the subject's ethics.

²⁷ Barthes never totally discards revolutionary violence in his essay —that is, violence *per se*—, even if he warns against the frigidity to which violence would be reduced, inasmuch as it would negate pleasure in favor of an excess that would look to be pure reproduction.

An ethics derived from this textual pleasure would find its just measure in the performance of the text, in the Saying that is the enunciation of the text, in the "presenting" that is the reading-writing of the text. As Saying and not as collection of said words is that an ethical relation that takes into account the pleasure of the experience of "what happens to language" (Barthes 13) —what is read— is possible. This Saying encircles the grammatical violence that the written word imposes on textual pleasure, which would then be the experience proper of the body.

This Saying, in order to avoid becoming petrified in a Said, must avoid nominalism. The text does not name, but rather is a fragmentation of practices, of words that are not proper Names. The text in itself, as an object, would not be a *saying*, but in its fragmentation, an *un-saying* with which the text approaches *jouissance*. The resulting text of the Saying, then, would be the blissful middle point, the pleasurable edge, the pleasurable border, between the Saying and Silence. Perhaps the ethics of pleasure can be formulated in this asymptotic approach to *jouissance*.

To "write out loud" is, then, the ethical performance of the text: to re-create it when reading it —and, why not, to re-create it when writing it— with a voice that gives it body and that makes patent the truth hidden in the erotic body itself. This "writing out loud" seeks the articulation of a body; that is, to make of the body an article of the substantive Other, and with whose substance it must agree. "Writing out loud" emblemizes the paradoxical nature of language —component of the pleasure of the text, inasmuch as it operates its ambiguity in the reader-writer— that the essaying

subject must assume, with which he must con-form, and with which he must conform his discourse. "I must allow the utterance of my text to proceed in contradiction" (Barthes 20). By writing out loud the text, the fundamental paradox—that the subject is a textual body that accumulates pleasure by offering its pleasure, and itself as object of pleasure— becomes a Saying that inscribes itself in the text, in the body, and that in this dialectics synthesizes and inserts itself in the world.

Po/Ethical Saying: an Introduction

To write out loud is already a direction towards a Saying that founds both the ethical and the poetical—to give an essence in writing, in the voice. The self from which the subject is a mode is given a new mode, a new height, and through one's own body, a new subject, that is, a new space through which that essence can be disseminated. Writing as Saying: to assume the paradox, to "*stay —s'en tenir—* with the signification of the saying", but out loud: to affirm the self as a subject that has freed himself from responsibility. To respond. To be free.

The title announced an attempt at reaching a formulation of the po/ethics of the subject, which would be nothing more than the excision of a subject in two discourses in tension with each other that, nonetheless, are integrated: an excision of the subject that is also its insertion in the poem. Through the dissertation, the Saying has been proposed as this instance of integration. A first attempt at defining the po/ethical Saying could be, then, a Saying that says a poem in which the voice of the

subject is dissolved to represent an original scene in which the self is made subject in its face to face encounter with its Other. A Saying that says "here I am: a poem", and "here I am in the poem", which is the world founded by the Saying, in order for the poem to perpetuate itself in the contact of contingent bodies in relation with each other. Only through this contact it is possible to grasp the Other in an embrace that does not thematize the Other into an already-made concept of the ontologically biased sameness of the self. The Other is totally Other, and is totally *there*. "Here I am" is a movement that brings the self closer to *there*: it is a giving of the self to be embraced. The poe/ethical Saying in the poem is its transcending into the text composed by the inter-meshing of relations that con-fuses self and Other as nodes interlocking into a community.

As primary Saying, the po/ethical founds the lyrical You as the addressee of its response. Here I am / You are there is recognizing that *we* are —yet not that we *are*, in one same ontological category—, that despite the self's incapacity to understand the other, *we* share the space we both inhabit. That here and there can coincide without the displacement of either I or You is the fundamental paradox of the po/ethical. In the face-to-face relation between the I and the You of the poem, the poem opens itself as a world for the habitation of both in, not a being-for-the- other, but already a being-for-you. The po/ethical Saying is then a "here I am for you": more than an offering of the self, it is a giving of it.

Up to this point, a possible path to follow has been traced in order to reach a formulation of a po/ethics of the subject. Having proposed the first sketches for a definition, it remains, before continuing with the development of what could be called a theory of the po/ethical, to seek in poetry itself the instances where the subject that emerges from the poem does so with its po/ethical Saying. Examples abound. I proceed, then, to look in the works of three seminal poets the instances where the already presented sketches are reflected, problematized, and contradicted so as to, from the resulting reading, return to the theoretical speculation regarding po/ethics, already with what I hope to be a more ample and less pre-conceived vision of the topic.

The Poetry of Vallejo: Man and his Ethical Foundation in Language, Pain, and Shadows

In the newspaper chronicle "Desde Lima. Con Manuel González Prada", Peruvian poet César Vallejo recreates a scene in which González Prada, "por una virtud hipnótica que en estado normal sólo es peculiar al genio, se impone, se adueña de nosotros, toma posesión de nuestro espíritu y acaba por sugestionarnos" (Vallejo, *Crónicas de poeta* 20). The main attribute of the "genio" is later said to be a "fervor sediento de verdad" (Vallejo, *Crónicas de poeta* 20). The words of González Prada in the chronicle are the value judgment of a genius on a literature whose audacity redeems any technical defect it might have²⁸; not that for González Prada the elements on which poetry should be found are formal acrobatics or linguistic pyrotechnics, but that the thrust from which poetry surges into existence, whatever form it finally takes in the poem impregnates it with the vitality that poetry bears witness to, inasmuch as the impulse looks actively to transcend in its concretion the models that have preceded it. The lauded poet, in the end, seems to be he who is capable of making with his public voice a *being* subjected to the will of an agent that casts its spell in the form of an enunciation assuming the shape of a truth.

²⁸ For González Prada "los defectos técnicos, las incongruencias en la manera, no tienen importancia" (Vallejo, *Crónicas de poeta* 21), while, on the contrary, "las audacias precisamente me gustan" (21).

The only response to this spell that the narrator Vallejo can come up with is a humble show of respect: "Yo bajo la frente" (Vallejo, *Crónicas de poeta* 21). The "audacia", then, not only seems to be the most important quality of a poet, but is seemingly parented with a labor of "incorruptible bronce inmortal" (Vallejo, *Crónicas de poeta* 22). At the very least three keywords emerge from this early article of Vallejo²⁹ that will remain in all of his poetry: "importancia", "audacia", "incorruptible".

In the reading that follows, I trace the concepts that arose in the previous chapter in the development of the po/ethics of the subject, and see how they appear in the work of Vallejo. I depart from the belief that despite the common impression that "in Vallejo's case the syntactical experiments of his poetry obeyed an ethics of solidarity [...] more than a (merely) vanguard aesthetic" (Niebylski 88), the ethics that can be derived from Vallejo's work have at their root a more complex foundation than the mere adoption of an already developed system, as an "ethics of solidarity" might imply. To claim without problematization that pain and suffering are linked to Vallejo's artistic creation, as Eugenio Chang-Rodríguez seems to do (55), might also be a commonplace, but to say that his thematic selection is indissolubly linked to the "esencia agónica" and "angustia existencial" of an individual is too easy a shortcut, and too quick an underestimation of the sensitivity of a poet who would not be able then to demarcate his particular condition as an individual from a condition of

²⁹ The article was first published March 9, 1918, probably a week before Vallejo's 26th birthday — although the date of his birth is not irrefutable—, and a year before the publication of his first poetry book, *Los heraldos negros*.

humankind explored in the poem. In short, Vallejo is no philosopher —neither he would have to be in order to question the philosophical nature of human pain and suffering—, but his poetry is a deeply philosophical reflection on pain and suffering³⁰.

Los heraldos negros

In "Los dados eternos", from Vallejo's first book of poetry *Los heraldos negros*, the influence of the "genio" —who died July 1918, not long after Vallejo had sent *Los heraldos* to print—, as well as Vallejo's evident desire to be an apt pupil of the genius turned "maestro", is again admitted in the dedication: "Para Manuel González Prada esta *emoción bravía y selecta*, una de las que, con más *entusiasmo*, me ha *aplaudido* el gran maestro" (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 122, emphasis added). What was for González Prada audacity becomes in Vallejo an attempt at —or, if his self assessment is deemed accurate, an accomplishment of— a fierce emotion, select among all others and deserving of the most enthusiastic praise. It is revealing to note that from the beginning line of the poem, this fierceness shows itself to be not far from a lament:

Dios mío, estoy llorando el ser que vivo;
me pesa haber tomádote tu pan;

³⁰ One does not need to wait much longer for scholarship to realize this: "La novedad de *Los Heraldos Negros* no residía en la forma, dúctil a influencias de Góngora, Rubén Darío, Francis Jammes, Luis Carlos López, José María Eguren y señaladamente Herrera y Reissig: estaba en la *intensidad filosófica*, en la *angustia*, en el patético doméstico, en la rebeldía alternada de resignación. Y en imponderables de acento: en cierta manera vigorosa, audaz, tierna, y sobre todo honda, de hondura no buceada — aún en la poesía peruana" (González-Prada, A. 324, emphasis added). The statement comes, interestingly enough, from Alfredo González-Prada, the son of the "genio" Manuel González-Prada.

pero este pobre barro pensativo

no es costra fermentada en tu costado (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 122).

If a lament, however, the enunciating subject here "cries" into existence the being that it "lives", potentiating its cry with genitive powers that go beyond the romantic overflow of emotions, and positing the "I" of the subject as prior than the "being" that is actually being given life by this "I". It is the subject who, instead of with a breath of air, gives life with a tear. If the living being results then in a "pobre barro pensativo" that is the effect of a lament directed towards God, the first attribute of the life created by this subject derives from an emotion that manifests its "bravía" with a cry of anger.

In his notion of God, who has clearly been replaced—or whose replacement has been clearly proposed—as the giver of life in the poem, Vallejo divides the Christian Trinity into its parts, and if he recognizes in God a Triune entity towards whom the subject's voice is emitted, it is not the Unity as a whole, but the Son who is to be emulated. Jesus as a Man, and not as a God, will be Vallejo's model. When the subject affirms

Dios mío, si tú hubieras sido hombre,

hoy supieras ser Dios;

pero tú, que estuviste siempre bien,

no sientes nada de tu creación.

Y el hombre sí te sufre: el Dios es él! (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 122),

it is not negating the humanity of Jesus, but rather is stating the failure of God, who might have succeeded in being Man as the Son, but never ceased to be divine, transcend itself and be Triune as a Man. It is in the figure of Jesus, on the contrary, that Vallejo will see the possibility for Man to reach divinity, even though he would have to reach this divinity through suffering. In order to be fulfilled as a God, the deity would have had to first fulfill itself as a Man.

The result of this deficiency on God's part has been that, in the poem, Earth has degraded to the extent that it is no longer fit for God's play:

Dios mío, y esta noche sorda, oscura,
ya no podrás jugar, porque la Tierra
es un dado roído y ya redondo
a fuerza de rodar a la aventura,
que no puede parar sino en un hueco,
en el hueco de inmensa sepultura (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 122).

This divine play seems to associate man's destiny with the result of a game of chance, but not to a random chance. If Man was a creature whose ultimate becoming had the hand of God as its causal agent, that God is "unable to play" implies Man's liberation from the ties of teleological predeterminism. It does not imply, however, liberation from destiny. As I will show, destiny might remain the stroke of chance of cosmic dice, but it will not be the hand of God that throws them: the *telos* of humanity might

be inescapable, but it will not be through theology that this *telos* will be known with anticipation.

That the dice with which Earth is equated are already rounded and worn-out, would have as its first implication that they can no longer yield a definite random result, and that the force that thrusts them would cause the dice to "eternally" tumble. A pair of rounded dice are themselves, as marbles, the impossibility of a destiny. If Mallarmé —whose *Coup de des* is the obvious allusion in the poem— wagers for a text that results from the random apposition of elements that cannot help but to follow from already posited figures in a medium, Vallejo's worn-out dice point towards the failure of this kind of text to be fulfilled. In the case of Vallejo, it is not in the form of the poem where the effect of the dice is seen, as in Mallarmé; and this is so because the effect of the dice is not the poetic intention of Vallejo, rather the text has been corrupted by this effect. In fact, this worn-out die is a condition —a sentence— that the poet must assume. The poet falls back to traditional poetic form to avoid having the poem become a rounded die, preventing the poem to tumble formless eternally, anchoring it in a poetic form. The poem is thus the final form that language takes, not worn-out and rounded by use, but carefully worked-out and finished by the poet's artistry. The word will not oscillate, floating among diverse signifiers, but will be put by the poet in its proper place. The poem is the exact number that a couple of trick dice yield from the throw of the expert hand of a "tahúr". In face of the failure of God, the poet shapes and structures the universe.

The "importance" rests here on the responsibility that the poet has in shaping the universe. The "audacity" rests precisely in the poet's opposition with the poem to the shape already given to the universe. If the *coup de des* is the way that language is to function according to Mallarme's thesis, it might be bold, "audaz" in the proposal, but it ultimately reduces the poem to a game that is fulfilled quite early, a game that ends at the moment that the rules under which the poem has been created are discovered. Randomness for Vallejo would be nothing more than another pattern, nothing more than another grammar.

Vallejo's poetry, then, emerges from a poetics that revolves around the subject's desire to transcend his humanity as a way to supplement the incapacity of God to transcend its own self. What is more, the figure of the poet assumes the role of the agent whose hands throw the dice with which the universe is organized.

In "Los anillos fatigados", Man is proposed as a conjunction of such conflicting desires,

Hay ganas de volver, de amar, de no ausentarse,
y hay ganas de morir, combatido por dos
aguas encontradas, que jamás han de istmarse (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 123).

Of these, the greatest desire seems to be, moreover, to leave desire behind: "Hay ganas de... no tener ganas, Señor" (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 123). Desires remain

separated, without the possibility of conjugating them, making it impossible for a totality to exist, or at the very least impossible for the poet to sense this totality. What is more, if desires are not desired it is because what is desired is to remain in the middle, in the frontier between desires: that no-isthmus which is formed by the lack of a proper totality. The poet's glance focuses in that lack of desire that Vallejo seems to see in the world, which then makes the subject desire that perceived no-desire with which Vallejo seems to see the world is aligned. That "there is a desire" need not be followed by the subject's affirmation that "I desire".

Then, the poem as the place of desire and no-desire becomes the privileged locus for the subject:

Cuando las sienes tocan su lúgubre tambor,
cuando me duele el sueño grabado en un puñal,
¡hay ganas de quedarse plantado en este verso! (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 123),

which is to say the subject desires to stay rooted in the poem so as to blossom from it. The verse appears to want to become a bridge between desires, an isthmus: "quedar plantado" is equated with "no tener ganas", which is precisely what is desired. The desire to remain in this isthmus is a desire to "plantarse" —to "llantarse", linked by the similarity of their Latin roots of *planto* and *plango*—, to emerge as a living being in a verse that cannot help but to become an exclamation. The poem becomes the place

for an enunciation that desires to be occupied by a living being. The desire of the text is to be inhabited by life.

That the desire of the subject in Vallejo is of no-desire implies a breakdown of the original structure within which it was founded. If violence, pain, and suffering are the themes that Vallejo will gravitate around in his later poetry—as, again, will be shown—, his proposal of desiring no-desire is, in the final analysis, one that pretends to maintain a desiring subject that is not held prisoner of desire. To say it another way, Vallejo's proposal is to wait for a final and redemptive unification of desires that conjugate Man in a final becoming that is a synthesis of all that Man had been up until this *telos*, no longer simply predicted in poetry, but created by it.

The body, as the frontier between the subject and the world, is then the place where emotions are experienced, and the first object subjected to the *telos* created by poetry. If desire is a primal force that drives an "I", then the "sensual placer" is an experience of the body that encapsulates the "I". The pleasures derived from the senses are the experiences that enter through the body and stay within it, while the "I" attempts to grasp them. Pain, on the other hand, will be the opposite of an experience also lived. It is between both poles that Vallejo's poetry will try to fix a point it can claim as truth. In "Amor" pleasure is disassociated from desire:

Amor, ven sin carne, de un icor que asombre;
y que yo, a manera de Dios, sea el hombre
que ama y engendra sin sensual placer! (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 126).

To desire without pleasure is to desire without having the satisfaction of desire as the desire's ultimate goal. It is also to desire without limits, without having all desire spent in an orgasmic sensation. That desire in Vallejo takes the shape of no-desire is an oblique manner to reaffirm desire as the primal force that drives man. Then, to desire no-desire, and to subtract from this no-desire the pleasure that could be gained from it, is to empty the subject of all content, from every impulse that might distinguish it from mere matter. In the final analysis, to empty the subject from desire and "sensual placer" is another way to write Rubén Darío's "Lo fatal", "*Dichoso el árbol que es apenas sensitivo, / y más la piedra dura, porque ésa ya no siente*" (Darío 197, emphasis added), and in this rewriting, to find in the Nicaraguan bard another "genio" to validate the self as a poet.

The vallejian subject seeks, in sum, to fulfill its desire with a suffering that does not fall into sadism—which would also imply pleasure—, but that sees pain in the Other and desires to appropriate this pain and feel it himself. Vallejo's no-desire takes in the subject the form of a desire to suffer pain, while not deriving pleasure from it. This desire for suffering that lies not-so-hidden in Vallejo's desire for no-desire seeks to take form and body in the poet. The poet seems to be, in Vallejo's poetic mythology, the prototype for man, closer to the primary essences from which the world came to be. It is the poet who *evolves* into Man. That is, it is the enunciating subject who, with his voice, poetry, and song, emerges from silence and shadows to face the contingent reality that surrounds Man.

In the beginning, Vallejo seems to have an intuition of the existence of essential, primary forces that reach the subject in the shape of the desires that move him. In "Desnudo en barro", the voice and the word are joined to earth and the basic elements.

Como horribles batracios a la atmósfera,
suben visajes lúgubres al labio.

Por el Sahara azul de la Substancia
camina un verso gris, un dromedario.

Fosforece un mohín de sueños crueles.

Y el cielo que murió lleno de voces
de nieve. Y madrugar, poeta, nómada,

al crudísimo día de ser hombre (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 113).

In this fashion, the gruel made from the "batracios", the "substancia", the "mohín" is followed by the emergence of Man from within: "Y madrugar, poeta, nómada,/ al crudísimo día de ser hombre". Man is, thus, the result of the evolution of a primal man, the poet, that travels from darkness to light, and enters into a different realm, a reality that is raw to its extreme ("crudísima") inasmuch as it is just the beginning of a process where a body reaches, through the heat of light and vice versa, a more complete state of "cooking"; inasmuch, also, as this awakening of the poet implies the renunciation of the oniric world where language offers itself as sole contingency, in

order to enter a world ruled by natural laws where man can end up as not much more than an animal.

After this emergence of Man from basalt and mud, Vallejo's central question is formulated, this time with amazement:

Las Horas van febriles, y en los ángulos

abortan rubios siglos de ventura.

¡Quién tira tanto el hilo; quién descuelga

sin piedad nuestros nervios,

cordeles ya gastados, a la tumba! (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 113).

If man has been the result of a natural evolution, the force behind this evolution does not seem to be natural at all. If control and mastery over language can give the poet agency over reality in a world that enters the light of day, that "madruga", man has lost its capacity to determine himself. Not only is the destiny that will in the end take man to his tomb out of man's control, but even man's own mobility seems delimited by a corporeality within which the nervous system has taken the form of a puppet whose puppeteer remains unknown. If in "Los dados eternos" the poet is proposed as the substitute of the "tahúr" that throws the cosmic dice, the metaphor is recognized by the poet as inoperative in contingency. If the threads that move the subject in the poem are language itself, the poet recognizes that in the case of man, the hand that moves it is not his own... neither man's nor the poet's. No-desire takes the place of the man who moves his own threads, which is to say that this is an empty, unoccupied

space. Faced with God's incapacity to play —either with dice or puppets—, poetry's *raison d'etre* will be to determine the identity of this puppeteer.

What Vallejo asks is then about the force that, invisible, always guides Man, always manipulates him. If there also exist certain earthly essential forms that serve as material for the construction of the world, prior to Man there seems to exist mainly the enunciating subject himself, his voice. The poet assumes the place of the Ur-Man that uses a preexisting language to construct reality with already given materials. Man, then, emerges from the essential forces and forms, from the desires that move the subject and lead him to evolve from the poet —the being linked directly with language—, to Man —the being linked directly with the reality constructed by language.

The search for this divine force is what liberates the *being* from its *fatum*, and it is through this search that it will be possible for the *being* to become a Man, as it ultimately moves the *being* closer to its voice:

Hay tendida hacia el fondo de los seres,
un eje ultranervioso, honda plomada.
¡La hebra del destino!
Amor desviará tal ley de vida,
hacia la voz del Hombre;
y nos dará la libertad suprema
en transustanciación azul, virtuosa,

contra lo ciego y lo fatal.

¡Que en cada cifra lata,

recluso en albas frágiles,

el Jesús aún mejor de otra gran Yema! (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 114).

What the poem seems to propose is that, at bottom, the self is nothing more than an axis that rotates as its nerves make it go round. The "hebra del destino", the master thread that moves the human being from life to death, is a "plomada", a probe that is thrown from above by a pseudo fisher, be it God, Desire, *tahúr*, Poet, that "Who" that the poem, in the end, seeks to identify. The poetic intuition, then, is that "Love" —desire purged from sensual pleasure— will redirect destiny's probe from the self, to the "voz del Hombre", to the saying of this subject created by (and thus liberated in) the poem. It is for love that the voice offers to occupy the place of the human being, to die in his place. The man that is created in *Los heraldos...* substitutes for contingent man; it is not his representation, it is not his "likeness and image". If the poet becomes a man, it is because he suffers pain, because in the poem it is not the human being that dies, but the voice of man that is silenced in order for his being not to die. The poem results in the last saying of a subject that knows the reason for his death, but whose lack of knowledge —whose not knowing *who* sacrifices him— condemns him.

It is through enunciation that Man is made; that is, enunciation makes Man, which distinguishes Man from the vital forces by giving him body. The first body of Man, his first limited extension perceptible by the senses, is in this fashion, his voice. I will later show how community and mass become the evolution of this individual, and how this mass is projected into the future as a unity, as a reached totality that will, hence, be the culmination of "isthmused" desires.

This love, however, is a "sin" on earth, and to say it is a blasphemy.

Amor, en el mundo tú eres un pecado!

Mi beso es la punta chispeante de un cuerno
del diablo; mi beso que es credo sagrado!

Espíritu es el horópter que pasa

¡puro en su blasfemia!

¡el corazón que engendra al cerebro!

que pasa hacia el tuyo, por mi barro triste (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 115).

The search of love is, from Vallejo's first book, in tension with the world. The violence of the subject that searches for himself in the world is no longer just epic, but divine. The subject posits himself in this fashion as that which "existe en el cáliz donde tu alma existe" (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 115); the subject might be blasphemous, but only because in the contingent world the powers that rule over him

have become inverted. The world and contingent reality find their analogies with Christian eschatology in the "vale of tears", in the place of suffering from which the Messiah will rescue Man. In the redemption of Man, the poet is to the poem as the Messiah is to the world.

Messianic salvation requires an apotheosis for the subject. The main characteristic of this "someone" that plays around with man as if he were a toy is excess; excess that leads it to make from the "plomada" a pendulum, from which the subject lies hanging, now projected over an "us". This apotheosis will be split between death and the discovery of that "someone", that "Quién" who is Vallejo's primary concern; the end of Man will have to be his liberation from the threads that move him:

Hasta cuándo este valle de lágrimas , a donde
yo nunca dije que me trajeran.

[...]

Hay alguien que ha bebido mucho, y se burla,
y acerca y aleja de nosotros, como negra cuchara
de amarga esencia humana, la tumba" (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 116).

Finding this to be impossible, time for Vallejo becomes a permanence in waiting. In "El tálamo eterno", this wait at last becomes for a redeeming *telos*:

[...] dulce es la tumba
donde todos al fin se compenetran

en un mismo fragor;

dulce es la sombra, donde todos se unen

en una cita universal de amor (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 118).

The love that liberated the self from his death is an invitation, in the other hand, to a sweet tomb. A tomb whose space is not signed, however, by death—that is, by the end of the existence of the individual—, but by shadows. Poetry's invitation is, in this fashion, to a unity—one only tomb, one only shadow—in the final convergence where everyone is headed, and where contingency is transcended. Love is thus opposed to the light of rational knowledge via the shadow of an Other knowledge that completes it without canceling it.

Trilce

So, for Vallejo man is tied down by threads that move him as if he were a marionette. In the examples shown above these threads take the shape of a probe and a pendulum, but are ultimately metaphors for language. The identity of the one who moves these threads is no longer the God of the Christian tradition in which Vallejo was raised and which greatly influenced him³¹, but desires, the forces that the subject feels and that exit the self through a poetry that looks to find an answer to the vital

³¹ According to Julio Ortega, "Allí [en *Trilce*] es donde se dirimen y deciden los dramas de la percepción que disuelve los órdenes dados y del lenguaje que busca cifrar en su hermetismo un transmundo de la escritura; o sea, una escritura marcada por su práctica de la ruptura. Era un proceso de cuestionamiento que había empezado en *Los heraldos negros* (1918), con la agonía de la ambigua validez de las nociones de la tradición humanista y cristiana ante los crudos reclamos de la experiencia del dolor (Ortega, "Vallejo: la poética de la subversión" 295).

question that initiates Vallejo in his speculation: "Who is it" that ultimately has agency over man. Vallejo's famous first statement in *Los heraldos...*, "Hay golpes en la vida tan fuertes... Yo no sé!" (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 53), is followed by the attempt to fill this indeterminable, unknowable contingency with poetic illumination, with a knowledge that will emerge from aesthetic experience and will substitute concrete experience of contingency itself.

R. Kelly Washbourne sees in this poem how the subject's admission already reveals revolutionary tendencies in early Vallejo:

César Vallejo uses silence or sputtering, mutating language where his narrator's own ineffable emotions cannot be expressed. He uses ellipses famously in "La cena miserable," [sic. Washbourne must have "Los heraldos negros" in mind] followed by "Yo no sé!"; in the accumulating silence of the ellipse some implosive force behind language, propelling and distorting it, is revealed. Outrage, misery, pessimism, solitude, emptiness, frustrated transcendence, thirst and hunger for pre-capitalist simplicity, all these condition his work with corrosive force (Washbourne 252).

From his part, Julio Ortega gives a more comprehensive explanation for Vallejo's use of language, claiming that the subject's question is ultimately on the word as a repository of a truth forgotten in its usage that the modern subject seeks to rescue:

Frente a las verdades generales que se asientan en los nombres dados (la vida, Dios, la muerte...), el hablante de *Heraldos* sólo puede responder con su propia interrogación, con la puesta en duda de su saber: "Yo no se!" es la respuesta de su desamparo. De ese modo se plantea, desde el primer poema, el drama de nombrar como la pregunta por el yo [...]. Así, la puesta en duda de los nombres genéricos empieza a revelarse como la orfandad del hablante, cuyo paradigma, "el hombre pobre," supone a un sujeto sin amparo en el lenguaje. Perdiendo paulatinamente el uso del habla ligada (de un logos suficiente) a partir de la invalidez de las explicaciones tradicionales, *Heraldos* traza la suerte de un naciente sujeto de la modernidad (Ortega, "Proceso de la nominación..." 13-14).

In both positions there would be an "I" already constituted and able to formulate a political question in Washbourne's case and a metaphysical question in Ortega's. However, this capacity to enunciate and thus announce himself as a revolutionary and/or modern subject would point in my opinion to a subject able to excise himself from the epistemological bindings against which he struggles throughout the text, beginning with the poem in question. In the enunciation there certainly is a truth implicit that the subject tries to find, but I am not sure that this subject *knows* that it is a forgotten truth that must be rescued. Rather I would say that the subject *senses* that *the need to express himself through* words implies a subjection to language against which

the subject feels the impulse to rebel; and to question the identity of who subjects me is, from the beginning, to question my subjection.

In this context, it is not surprising that Vallejo's second collection of poetry is centered in numerology as a manner of access to a knowledge otherwise hidden³², nor is it surprising that the first poem of the collection opens with a reformulation of his vital question:

¿Quién hace tanta bulla, y ni deja
testar las islas que van quedando? (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 143).

A close reading of the poem reveals a whole rhetorical montage where the eschatology that lies at the base of the discourse is one that assumes fecal matter as the primary essence of both the production of the subject and the poem itself as literary contingency. Departing from André Coyné's classification of the poem as "un poema de la defecación transpuesta en términos universales, cósmicos" (Coyné 82), Eduardo Neale-Silva focuses on the poet's indirect critique on literary critics themselves:

³² Even if I think that Federico Bravo's numerological reading is somewhat of a stretch in its argumentation, I have to agree with his conclusion regarding *Trilce's* "escritura sacralizada": "el valor matemático de *Trilce*, obtenido de la adición de sus seis letras, coincide de manera rigurosa con el número de poemas que contiene el poemario, es decir 77: (t= 24) + (r= 21) + (i= 10) + (l = 13) + (c=3) + (e=6)=77 [...] El valor guemátrico del título corresponde, en efecto, a ese número mágico nacido de la suma de los binomios invertidos 07 + 70, 16 + 61, 25 + 52 y 34 + 43, a la vez que aparece como producto de la expansión del 7, número sagrado empleado 77 veces en el Antiguo Testamento. Sometido a las leyes de esta singular cábala vallejana, el título sienta las bases de una *escritura que se quiere sagrada: no una escritura de lo sagrado, sino una escritura sacralizada por el trabajo poético*" (Bravo 339-340, emphasis added).

With an apparently senseless collection of references to pelicans, geographical formations and the ocean, Vallejo composed a surrealistic seascape with an ironic content: the critics are the pelicans whose droppings cover the new artist represented by the islands where the birds roost. "Trilce I" is a protest against those who muzzle the artist and condemn his work without understanding its meaning, and much less its implied message (Neale-Silva, "The Introductory Poem in Vallejo's *Trilce*" 2).

George Gordon Wing, on the other hand, centers his analysis on the humorist³³ aspect of the poem, which in the end is "a marvelous *jeu d'esprit*, an extended joke of Rabelaisian proportions in which Vallejo, adopting a tone of ironic self-mockery, resorts to punning, burlesque, and in general to the humor of the absurd" (Wing 271). As true as all of this might be, and notwithstanding the internal dispute between Neale-Silva and Wing, it is not possible, however, to discard the fact that the moving force behind the poem is none other than the desire to know the identity of that invisible agent that in *Los heraldos...* moved the threads of man in order to control him. In *Trilce*, this agent now makes impossible with its "bulla" for the subject to continue his concrete existence without having this existence modulated by the intervention of this invisible agent.

³³ For a detailed analysis on the humorist aspect of Vallejo, see "Aptitud humorística en *Poemas humanos*", by Saúl Yurkievich.

In *Trilce* the problem of knowledge is complemented by the problem of solitude. To "know", to gain knowledge through poetry about the truth of the human condition, the world, desire and no-desire... led the subject to question his place in a community that seems to be bent on the impossible, on reclusion. I might agree to a certain extent with those who affirm that Vallejo's prison experience marked him to the extent that it is reflected autobiographically in *Trilce*³⁴, but it also seems to me just as true that the feeling of reclusion that the subject suffers in *Trilce* —a subject now prisoner even of numbers— is projected beyond the poet's individual experience to comprehend the human condition, where the subject seeks to liberate himself from the bindings that direct him against his will to an uncertain destiny. In *Trilce* the bindings that in *Los heraldos...* seemed to make of the subject a marionette now seem to make of the subject a curled up self, extracted from society and held in the darkest of prison cells. The only alternative that the subject has an intuition of is then to turn the bindings into keys, to knot language to the extent that it can only be un-knotted with the help of a hermeneutics that are not ciphered only in the particulars of an individual experience, but in the universal of numbers.

³⁴ The least categorical of such remarks take a form similar to that of Gordon Brotherston —"As a highly concentrated, apparently impersonal volume, *Trilce* was undoubtedly affected by the three and a half months which the poet spent in jail in Trujillo" (Brotherston 107)—; the most extreme follow Juan Larrea's reading —see "Considerando a Vallejo, frente a las penurias y calamidades de la crítica.", in *Aula Vallejo* 5 (1967)—.

This "inversion" of language then corresponds with a contingency that the poet sees as likewise "inverted". In his exit, the poet goes from one reality to another where he finds an inverted world:

Esa manera de caminar por los trapecios.

[...]

Esas posaderas sentadas para arriba.

Ese no pudo ser, sido.

Absurdo.

Demencia.

Pero he venido de Trujillo a Lima.

Pero gano un sueldo de cinco soles (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 156).

The subject finds himself, thus, with a reality that might not be fully comprehensible, but that is definitely subordinated to a contingency bound by economy. The poetics of *Trilce* is one faced with the contingent impossible; and it is in *Trilce* where the problem of knowledge through poetry is faced in greatest tension with a "scientific" knowledge that is of the world "as it is", so it can only be an already "upside-down", "inverted" knowledge.

Poetry, in this fashion, seems to break down with the epistemology of the known and looks to reach a theory of no-knowledge that remains, nonetheless, as something perceived by the conscience of the concrete contingent. For Gustavo Geirola, the attempted rupture is with bourgeois epistemology: "A esta demanda del

cuerpo dará lugar más tarde la escritura de *Trilce* (1922). Este poemario marcará un hito en la producción de la otredad, en el advenimiento, por medio del trabajo poético, de una "otra" zona no exterior al lenguaje, pero sí exterior a la moral y a la epistemología burguesas del lenguaje” (Geirola 38). That ethics in Vallejo is a proposal that goes beyond “bourgeois moral” is perhaps too great a simplification of the discussion of this chapter, but a statement I am ready to accept, holding my reserves in positing this ethics as “exterior” to a “moral zone”. Whether or not the epistemology that is questioned in *Trilce* is bourgeois as opposed to strictly philosophical is not a debate I will follow, but the close connection between ethics and epistemology in Vallejo is at the root of all of my argumentation. Not only is the Other unknowable, but from him Vallejo will derive no-knowledge. This no-knowledge differs, however, from what Julio Ortega calls "el no-saber”, that implies “el no poder decir debido a la falta del nombre (Ortega, " Proceso de la nominación..." 16). In my opinion, Vallejo's no-knowledge is rather the complement of a saying that says despite its impossibility; of a saying that says despite lacking the name and despite its lack of knowledge. It is the Other who is the door that opens up to what is not known of the self.

En el rincón aquél, donde dormimos juntos
tantas noches, ahora me he sentado
a caminar [...]
Me he puesto a recordar los días

de verano idos, tu entrar y salir,
poca y harta y pálida por los cuartos.

En esta noche pluviosa,
ya lejos de ambos dos, salto de pronto...
Son dos puertas abriéndose cerrándose,
dos puertas que al viento van y vienen
sombra a sombra (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa*
157).

What, now, does a relation no longer face-to-face, but shadow-to-shadow imply? Shadow-to-shadow implies renouncing a mask of knowledge in order to approach an Other whose nature is uncertain. The shadow, if it is the absence of a knowledge, leaves open the possibility that any reality might be constructed in the encounter with an Other from whom only his shadow is certain. The shadow proves certain the concrete existence of a body towards which it is possible to approach, and, in the shadow, a body with which it is possible to occupy a same area. The poem as the space for a shadow-to-shadow encounter functions as a surface over which a contingency of a doubtful nature and of unknown properties is projected so as to be elucidated in it.

That the subject assumes the shadow-to-shadow encounter as a condition to derive an ethics —that is, to modulate his encounter with the Other— does not

necessarily imply entering into Plato's cave and voluntarily putting on chains so as to renounce the ideal world where the truth of which the shadow is only its appearance resides. It is rather to question the certainty that it is possible for the subject to distinguish between what is real and what is apparent, even when the real is not known. To assume the shadow-to-shadow encounter as constitutive is to admit that a system where all elements are coherent is lacking. And, in the final analysis, to assume the shadow as the representation of the Other in order to approach him, is to confess faith in a light, in a source of energy that illuminates the bodies and somehow, even if only visually, makes them accessible.

The poetical knowledge that Vallejo derives is "Other" in comparison with the phenomenal-contingent inasmuch as it is knowledge of a projection, of a reflection. A shadow-to-shadow encounter is still indicative of a relation with an Other, not a relation with a shadow; it is an encounter, nonetheless, that assumes the impossibility of knowing the Other.

This encounter with the Other takes place in such a fashion that the subject can only enter in relation in a casual manner, that is, without premeditation or plan. The Other is already *there* at the moment the subject finds him. That is how before the ethical encounter there is no complete knowledge that is possible, only the consciousness of there being or having being an encounter:

Caras no saben de la cara, ni de la
marcha a los encuentros,

y sin hacia cabecee el exergo.

Yerra la punta del afán (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 159).

The consciousness of the existence of an Other is what awakens a desire to know him, but that fails in its attempt to grasp him.

The only possible knowledge is, then, of an "I" that has existed, but whose genesis is not accessible. The form that this knowledge takes is a surprised exclamation where the subject recognizes himself as present:

Si pues siempre salimos al encuentro
de cuanto entra por otro lado,
ahora, chirapado eterno y todo,
heme, de quien yo penda,
estoy de filo todavía. *Heme!* (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 164, emphasis added).

The subject knows that there is something named—or that can be named—"himself"... "myself". But it does not seem to know of a space or a time where the "I" can pronounce itself; there is no "here" that the "I" can make "its own" by inhabiting it: the place of enunciation, the voice, is the only place that the "I" can assume. The subject knows that there is a *me*, but does not know of a *voici* where this *me* can be-at. The subject lives in contingency, but cannot comprehend it, cannot know it; the subject *is there* barely, "de filo todavía". The poem reveals itself again as the place where no-desire and no-knowledge can coexist in harmony:

Esta casa me da entero bien, entero

lugar para este no saber dónde estar (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 169).

The poem becomes the space of and for everything, where knowledge is elucidated in no-knowledge. A place of a no-knowledge that produces a no-language, with a violence capable of tearing and consuming itself until it explodes into a legion of replicas that are, however, as any replica of language, completely finite:

999 calorías

Rumbbbb... Trrrraprrr rrach... chaz

[...]

Aire, aire! Hielo!

Si al menos el calor (_____ Mejor

no digo nada.

Y hasta la misma pluma

con que escribo por último se troncha.

Treinta y tres trillones trescientos treinta

y tres calorías (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 174).

In this world of solitude, no-desire, and no-knowledge, there seems to emerge the moving force of a new vallejian subject: *now* he desires *to desire*, that is, his desire is not of no-desire, but is rather directed towards a particular desired object:

Nadie me busca ni me reconoce,

y hasta yo he olvidado

de quién seré [...]
quiero reconocer siquiera al 1,
quiero el punto de apoyo, quiero
saber de estar siquiera (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa*
191).

Vallejo's desire is, in sum, *to know*. The very act of questioning is in itself the subject's epistemic movement. To question is to know. The basic question that the vallejian subject problematizes is, then, the possibility itself of a knowledge; and of all the possibilities of knowledge, the possibility of knowing oneself. In this fashion poetry opens itself to the question of *who* pushes the subject to know: "Y sin embargo, quién *me empuja*" (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 199, emphasis added). Poetry will be, then, like dialectics, the place of desire / no-desire, of knowledge / no-knowledge, that take form in the poem. The poem is the incarnation of the dialectical form of poetry. In "LXIV" this dialectical form appears in parenthesis as the affirmation of another poetical voice where the affirmation itself of the subject is questioned:

[...] Mientras pasan, de mucho en mucho, gañanes de gran costado sabio,
detrás de las tres tardas dimensiones.

Hoy Mañana Ayer

(*No hombre!*) (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 206, emphasis added).

Nothing is certain; there remain only trials to know, trials that the poetic voice attempts sometimes in ways that escalate to the point of violence:

Cállate. Nadie sabe que estás en mí,
toda entera. Cállate. No respire. Nadie
sabe mi merienda succulenta de unidad:
legión de oscuridades, Amazonas de lloro (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa*
213).

Poetry in *Trilce* is, in the final analysis, (con)fusion of knowledge and testimony
of no-knowledge:

Los soles andan sin yantar? O hay quien
les da granos como a pajarillos? Francamente,
yo no sé de esto casi nada (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 212).

There is, in my opinion, less irony in the question and in the answer given than an
honest recognition of an incapacity that leads to an ominous fear:

Y temblamos avanzar el paso, que no sabemos si damos con el péndulo,
o ya lo hemos cruzado (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 212).

However, as *Trilce* has moved forward, the addressee of the poem seems to
shift; the impulse that adventures the poem into the world has found an Other that is
contingent, but at the same time is not already there: the dead, whose *being there/not*
being there makes of them the maximum reification of a duality that is affirmed along
with its negation:

Estáis muertos.

Qué extraña manera de estarse muertos. Quienquiera diría no lo estáis. Pero, en verdad, estáis muertos.

Flotáis nadamente detrás de aquea membrana que, péndula del zenit al nadir, viene y va de crepúsculo a crepúsculo, vibrando ante la sonora caja de una herida que a vosotros no os duele. Os digo, pues, que la vida está en el espejo, y que vosotros sois el original, la muerte [...]

Estáis muertos, no habiendo vivido jamás. Quienquiera diría que, no siendo ahora, en otro tiempo fuisteis. Pero, en verdad, vosotros sois los cadáveres de una vida que nunca fue. Triste destino. El no haber sido sino muertos siempre [...] Ellos murieron siempre de vida.

Estáis muertos (Vallejo, *Obra poética completa* 217).

If the poem was proposed as a possible liberation of the self in the sacrifice of the poetic subject, where the text, as a shared contingency between the phenomenal world and the world of the poem serves as oracle through which a future can be read, the subject in the poem remains trapped within it. It will be possible for the subject to glimpse an Other world, a reality external to the "I", but only outside of the poem, so the subject will not be able to access it.

The poem is presented, thus, as a two-way mirror through which the subject, imprisoned in the poem, can see the dead, who see themselves reflected in "life",

which becomes in this way a specular projection, the reflection of an Other reality where the shadow of death gains light. If the poem seeks to liberate man, it can only do so by immersing in the poem itself. Poetry will offer a vehicle for knowledge through the negative of reality, but the subject will not be able to transcend with poetry to the Other world, he will be able only to glance at it. The shadow-to-shadow encounter is the manner in which the subject can relate with an Other that is inaccessible, but that the poem seeks to illuminate. Faith in the light is faith in poetic knowledge, faith that language can function as a "transparent membrane" through which the Other is known. If this membrane is stained by pain and suffering, poetry will be the cleansing agent that will clear the image with language.

The poem liberates the self by exiting the world, but it cannot reach the dead, it can only remain in life. The sacrifice of the "voice of man" could found the poem, but not the original community. The poem always implies contingency, it can never reach the "nothingness" where the dead float freely, without bounds. On the contrary, the poem, by offering a surface for the shadow-to-shadow encounter, abstracts from the otherness of the dead an image, and by placing it in the mirror/poem gives the dead a "life" they had "never lived before"; this fictitious life in the poem is, however, precisely the life from which the dead "always died". The poem might be liberation from the self, but not transcendence to the origin: it rather is the degradation of the original by way of a movement that subtracts from its opacity. That the subject addresses the dead using the verbal form of "vosotros" points towards a liturgical

tone with which the poet posits himself as a minister of an Other gospel, and of an Other knowledge.

It is through the epistemological play that the subject knows himself, but as an entity prior to the game. The first knowledge for the subject in *Trilce* is of an ontology to be discovered. There exists an unknown contingency, whose existence is beyond doubt, and *that* is the only certainty. Without knowing this contingency, however, it is not felt as a reality. If there is nothing that accounts for the totality of what is perceived, the poem seeks to elucidate it, and through poetry make the necessary connections that consciousness lacks in order to comprehend it. *Trilce's* is not a po/ethics, the ancillary discourses that supplement poetic discourse are epistemology and ontology. Any ethics derived from the first collections of poetry by Vallejo will have to be squeezed from the moments in which an already conformed subject finds an Other, and even then one would have to deal with a thought that refuses to let go from its clenching of *thought* itself. It is only when the Others that the subject encounters are the dead that the reflection seems to overflow the "I"; that is, the "I" becomes for the subject too small for the whole of the truth sensed beyond the frontier of the body to fit. The face to face encounter with the dead is the exemplary reification of the shadow-to-shadow relation.

If Vallejo's first poetry deals with the work of the poet and the nature of the individual, by the end of *Trilce* the need for the subject to relate with the Other in

order to complete himself becomes evident. If it is true that the family—in particular the mother—is one of the main *topoi* in early Vallejo³⁵, as has been widely noted by critics, in my opinion neither "the family" nor "the mother" is ever presented as an Other to the vallejian subject, but rather as another manifestation of the "Same", only this time external and absent. In Vallejo nostalgia for the family and the mother are nostalgia for a lack in the subject that has little to do with the otherness of the absent, and everything to do with the sameness of the subject.

The question on "Who is it?" has still not found an answer in *Trilce*, but in its attempt the subject has found that the solitude of being with language is complemented with the living together in a shared world. As has been my contention, it is precisely at this point when beginning to speak of an ethics can be possible. If Vallejo's poetics are structured around the subject-thread relation between the poet and language, Vallejo's po/ethics would be modulated in the beginning by the no-knowledge of the Other. Vallejo's ethics, thus derived from epistemology, cannot be first philosophy, even if it is true that ethics will become an integral part of vallejian discourse when the poet engages in a criticism that will always be colored by politics, and when politics color a poem that will, nonetheless, always retain a critical posture.

Posthumous poems: *Poemas humanos* and *España...*

³⁵ For Phyllis White Rodríguez: "The dominant tone of the book [*Trilce*] is bitterness. The two blows recently dealt the poet, his mother's death and his imprisonment, figure constantly in the outpourings of his tormented thoughts" (White Rodríguez 198).

In *Poemas humanos* and *España, aparta de mí este cáliz*, Vallejo reflects in the poem the dialectics that will continue to serve as background for the poetic scene of the encounter with the Other. The Other will appear as the main figure in the scene represented, but his manifestation in the poem will be mediated by the intellectual processes of the subject that finds him, and whose voice will frame the scene so that the voice itself emerges as protagonist by making of its dialectic Saying a way to say-itself and thus gain concretion.

From the beginning, the first poem of *Poemas humanos*, "Altura y pelos", opens with a question that, if indeed similar to the questions that opened *Los heraldos...* and *Trilce*, is of a completely different nature:

¿Quién no tiene su vestido azul?

¿Quién no almuerza y no toma el tranvía,

con su cigarrillo contratado y su dolor de bolsillo?

[...]

¿Quién no se llama Carlos o cualquier otra cosa?

¿Quién al gato no dice gato gato?

¡Ay, yo que sólo he nacido solamente!

¡Ay! ¡yo que sólo he nacido solamente! (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...*

71).

The identity of the "Who" becomes, from the question that first invites poetic reflection, a rhetorical tool with which the subject stresses his identification with the

plurality of Others where he sees himself reflected. In this diversity a singularity composed of a shared contingency makes a first appearance: a community of people immersed in modern quotidian life. The "Who" that *was* the main question for Vallejo has found in the men that share contingency with him, not an answer to the original, but a more accessible reformulation of the question. If desires move the threads that in their turn move man, that the question now directly addresses man points towards a conclusive attempt at liberating man from his ties.

The subject's gaze follows man to see how he wanders around and reveals himself as a being of questionable moral qualities:

Un hombre está mirando a una mujer,
está mirándola inmediatamente,
con su mal de tierra suntuosa
y la mira a dos manos
y la tumba a dos pechos
y la mueve a dos hombres (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 73).

After the rape scene, the question that the subject formulates deals with the possibility of drawing a logical conclusion from the animal instinct that explains the ethics of man and woman:

Pregúntome entonces, oprimiéndome
la enorme, blanca, acérrima costilla:
Y este hombre

¿no tuvo a un niño por creciente padre?

¿Y esta mujer, a un niño

por constructor de su evidente sexo? (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...*

73).

If in the previous poem, "Yuntas," opposing poles are joined in an expansive totality where the elements complete the whole, without filling, exceeding, or limiting it — "Completamente. Además, ¡vida!/ Completamente. Además, ¡muerte! (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 71)"³⁶—, totality would have to be arranged by an ethics subtracted from this whole. The poem does not seek to change man or woman, but liberate them from the system of relations where they are inscribed.

Liberation must depart, then, from the unmasking of the process by which man is created. In the poem's reality, this process is none other than poetic creation itself. Man, thus conformed by the act of the poetic subject, will not be bound by contingent logic, as he neither was in *Trilce*. What is more, at the end of the poem a glimpse of *another* poetic voice emerges, as it parenthetically seems to add to the

³⁶ The poem goes on to add to the pair "¡vida!-¡muerte!", following the same "Completamente. Además," pattern, the also all-encompassing pairs "¡todo!-¡nada!", "¡mundo!-¡polvo!", "¡Dios!-¡nadie!", "¡nunca!-¡siempre!", "¡oro!-¡humo!", and "¡lágrimas!-¡risas!". According to Julio Ortega, this litany reveals that "las contradicciones (todo-nada, mundo-polvo, Dios-nadie, nunca-siempre, etc.) son connaturales a esa "totalidad" que es un drama del mundo material; porque de aquí se deduce no la suma de la parte y el todo, sino su discontinuidad. Lo que en *Trilce* había sido un cuestionamiento de las nociones de unidad ante su heterogénea ocurrencia, aquí evoluciona a una interrogación por lo discontinuo como revelación" (Ortega, "Vallejo: la poética de la subversión" 282). If I agree that the whole proposed in the poem is discontinuous, I argue that it is still a whole from where ethics are subtracted; and whose discontinuity makes the enterprise ever more problematic, since ethics cannot lay a claim on a logical derivation of its discourse.

"¡Salud, oh creadores de la profundidad!" (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 88) that would have ended the *laudatio*; a comment that, less grandiose, is at the same time a judgment on the formidable character of the poet, the miners, and a benevolent critique on the poem itself:

Craneados de labor [los mineros],
y calzados de cuero de vizcacha
calzados de senderos infinitos,
y los ojos de físico llorar,
creadores de la profundidad,
saben, a cielo intermitente de escalera,
bajar mirando para arriba,
saben subir mirando para abajo.

¡Llor al antiguo juego de la naturaleza,
a sus insomnes órganos, a su saliva rústica!
¡Temple, filo y punta, a sus pestañas!
¡Crezcan la yerba, el liquen y la rana en sus adverbios!

[...]

¡Llor a su naturaleza amarillenta,
a su linterna mágica [...]
y a sus hijos que juegan en la iglesia

y a sus tácitos padres infantiles!

¡Salud, oh creadores de la profundidad! ... (*Es formidable*) (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 88, emphasis added).

If Vallejo's poetry is dialectical, it is so not only within the poem, but beyond it: there is a dialectic movement from which the poem results, and a dialectic movement between the poem and the subject that enters in it. I have to disagree with Jean Franco when she states that

This is both a visual image of the miners underground with their lamps but also a metaphor of transformation and resurrection which make the miners agents of change (the magic lantern) and true intellectuals (creadores de la profundidad). The poet's voice is placed in parentheses "(Es formidable)" implying that he has no role in this transformation except as celebrant (Franco 47).

The subject celebrates the formidable nature —supra-nature— of the miners, but this nature is conceded via the mode that the poem takes in the *encomium*, that is, via the poet's enunciation. If "celebrant", the poet celebrates both as a witness of the miners and as the divinely invested priest that validates the ceremony and *makes* the miners formidable.

Throughout *Poemas humanos*, as in *Trilce*, there appear with increasing frequency comments like these, where from within the poem emerge the voices of a subject that questions himself, critiques himself, and in the end completes himself in a dialectics

with his own subjectivity. The apparition of the Other will make it necessary to develop an ethics, but it will not be with the Other with whom the subject enters in a dialectical relation. The Saying in the poems of Vallejo is always directed towards the concretion of an autonomous "I", that might be modified as it encounters the Other, but that is modified to the extent that it absorbs from the Other a knowledge: at the very least, that the Other exists, and that he suffers.

It is thus how, in the midst of a laudatory litany a voice interrupts the grandiose discourse of the subject in order to oppose precisely the tone of the previous voice:

¡Ángeles de corral,
aves por un descuido de la cresta!
¡Cuya o cuy para comerlos fritos
con el bravo rocoto de los templos!
(¿Cóndores? ¡Me friegan los cóndores!)
¡Leños cristianos en gracia
al tronco feliz y al tallo competente! (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...*
92, emphasis added).

It is also revealing that the question occurs just after the exalting mention of the "Cuya o cuy", and this because, if it is true that the cuy is an animal typical of the Andes and that is an integral part of the Peruvian autochthonous diet, the "cuya", besides being a vase used for cooking and indicating the female of the cuy, is a slang term referring to a "mujer fecunda" (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 92f). So, the

interrupting voice questions a regional tone to prevent it from falling into folklorism, and also comes to put a stop to a sexual impulse with which the subject attempted to ingest the Other.

The most important function of the rhetorical device, however, seems to me to be the critique of the poem itself as an object of language. When the subject states that

A juzgar por la forma, no obstante, voy de frente,
cojeando antiguamente,
y olvido por mis lágrimas mis ojos (*Muy interesante*) (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 109-110, énfasis añadido),

the most important aspect of the "human" in *Poemas humanos*, is apparently the possible relation between the subject himself and the form that it takes in the poem. The poem that reads itself judges itself, and finds itself "interesting" inasmuch as it is a *form*, and inasmuch as from this *form* it is possible to derive a spatiotemporal direction, progressive if only limping, where the subjectivity that enunciates the poem seems to dis-articulate itself through forgetfulness. If there is a voice that dis-articulates itself through the tear —thus *plancted* in the poem—, there is another voice that announces its permanence through an interest that moves it. The voice in parenthesis, in the poem's dialectics, functions as the thesis that is modulated as the adventure of the subject evolves in the poem. Throughout *Poemas humanos* the subject

essays himself, critiques himself, and assumes his critique in order to make of himself a subject.

Once again, the desire to desire from the subject's part comes to remedy a lack of desire outside of him:

Me viene, hay días, una gana ubérrima, política,
de querer, de besar al cariño en sus dos rostros,
y me viene de lejos un querer
demostrativo, otro querer amar, de grado o fuerza,
al que me odia, al que rasga su papel, al muchachito (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 117).

The desired desire then expands the resulting feeling into a totalizing, primal love:

¡Ah querer, éste, el mío, éste, el mundial,
interhumano y parroquial, proyecto! (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...*
118).

This desire to love even who commits violence against the self is an alternate way in which the subject short-circuits mimetic desire so that it does not devolve into the dynamics of vengeance. Desire to love is a first step needed for violence to concentrate in a martyr instead than in a victim. The ontology that operates in *Poemas humanos* could be stated, then, as one of *volo ergo sum*—where the self, however, is taken as the cause of a desire that need not arise from volition—, inasmuch as I am the locus where forces external to the body that occupies the space articulate me —

which is to say that I am occupied by my body—, modulating me to the point that I become the subject that I am. This would be an ontology crossed by ethics inasmuch as I *assume* my place —my desire, my body as locus for desire— conscious that this place is destined to a sacrifice where a future can be founded.

For his poetic construction, this individual is taken in the first place as an object outside of the poem which the poem then seeks to determine within the poem's internal logic. In "Considerando en frío, imparcialmente", the poem appropriates anthropological, scientific discourse systematically searching within this "man" in order to find bits of evidence with which to formulate a theory, a thesis, an answer to what man *is*. However, in the final analysis the subject cannot abstract himself from his feelings; any knowledge of Man derived from the poetic experience will be tainted by a subjectivity that will struggle to remain within the boundaries of the scientific discourse with which it tried to mask itself:

Comprendiendo

que él sabe que *le quiero*

que *le odio* con afecto y *me es*, en suma, *indiferente* (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y*

España... 122, emphasis added).

What the subject understands in the poem is then that the desires that the subject has with respect to the Other are in constant tension within his subjectivity; and moreover, that the Other is conscious of this internal struggle. This last conclusion

has an inescapable consequence. For Vallejo, even when ethics seem the primary question in the poem, the Other is subjected to the same ontology that the "I", and is thus thematizable in an epistemological system comprehensible for the subject that approaches him. Man is then reduced to a specimen that responds to the call of the poet, receiving an embrace whose feeling rests outside of an exclamation reserved for the surprise of the subject when it figures itself as overwhelmed by emotions:

le hago una seña,
viene,
y le doy un abrazo, emocionado.

*¡Qué más da! Emocionado... Emocionado... (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 122, emphasis added).*

It is an embrace, nonetheless; an opening where the subject might seem to be merely content with accepting the emotion caused by the Other, but an embrace where the hope that the fusion of subject and Other will synthesize a new human being free of pain, sorrow, and suffering . If the subject begins a totalizing enterprise where he looks to thematize the Other, it does not do so to impose his sameness over the otherness of the Other, but in order to erase a pain that he assumes is common to both.

This resignation to the emotions the subject feels for the Other —as the last manifestation of the primal desire— is complemented with the consciousness that the

subject constitutes a fragmentary persona. Despite this knowledge, however, the person as a whole seems unknown to the subject:

Sé que hay una persona compuesta de mis partes
a la que integro cuando va mi talle
cabalgando en su exacta piedrecilla.

[...]

¿Tan pequeña es, acaso, esa persona,
que hasta sus propios pies así la pisan?

Un gato es el lindero entre ella y yo,
al lado mismo de su tasa de agua.

La veo en las esquinas, se abre y cierra
su veste, antes palmera interrogante...

¿Qué podrá hacer sino cambiar de llanto?

Pero me busca y busca. ¡Es una historia! (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 135).

What is known, then, is the fact itself of the relation, without total or exact coincidence, between subject and person. This subjective constitution is disposed of by another voice as a "story", a confabulation that would be proved by the alienation of this other voice from a subjectivity where it does not seem to find a proper place to

occupy as a fragment: "Pero me busca y busca. ¡Es una historia!" (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 135). The instance of the "I", that moment where the whole ontological edifice seems to consume itself, is shaken by allowing for the possibility of a voice that rests outside of the place where it says itself.

If the "I" that emerges from its birth as verbal enunciation tends to excess matter, vallejian ethics will have its point of coincidence with Nietzsche's precisely in its point of departure: to direct this desire that thrusts it, to control it, and be thus master of *itself*, and thus desire what *will be*:

Por entre mis propios dientes salgo humeando,

dando voces, pujando,

bajándome los pantalones...

[...]

Ya no más he de ser lo que siempre he de ser,

pero dadme,

por favor, un pedazo de pan en que sentarme,

pero dadme

en español

algo, en fin, de beber, de comer, de vivir, de reposarse,

y después me iré...

Hallo una extraña forma, está muy rota

y sucia mi camisa

y ya no tengo nada, esto es horrendo (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 151).

The poetic act from which the subject emerges is, in this fashion, one of desubjectivation, where the "I" ("lo que siempre he de ser") is renounced so as to remain as enunciation. The "I" is replaced by its *saying-itself*. The ending of the poem "La rueda del hambriento", written by hand in an edition/addition to the typewritten original —and, thus, also a sort of recuperated excess—, synthesizes the feeling of this subject whose desubjectivation process that turns it into a poem reveals the multiplicity of voices that, all, seem to shout continually the pain that is perceived in the world: "esto es horrendo" (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 151). The truth that the poem ciphers —and in its cipher embodies— is the horror of the world.

In this fashion, the geometry of the relation between subject and Other becomes circular, where the "You" is the nucleus, the cross section of a "we" within a surrounding, multiple, polyphonic "I"; a time and a space separated by a we sectioned by a You that enters into an already existing relation:

Ahora, entre nosotros, aquí,
ven conmigo, trae por la mano a tu cuerpo (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 155).

"Here": in the poem... "Now": at the moment of enunciation... "We", conformed by and within the poem: the membrane that surrounds the subject and that is offered as

a protection for the "You", in order for it to remain safe within a poem besieged by pain.

When Vallejo later writes that "Hoy mismo [...] saldremos de nosotros, dos a dos" (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 156), he is again editing by hand the typewritten original which stated "saldremos, *por desgracia*, de nosotros" (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 156f, in a note by F. Martínez García, emphasis added). The exit from this protection that the poem offered appears in a first intuition as a "desgracia". The edition —the hand of the poet— erases this "desgracia" and substitutes it with "dos a dos". The final result of the poem —the intuition that is followed by the enhancement of the expert hand of the *tahúr* of language— is then the purification of the painful experience of suffering. This exit of the "I" and the "You" is not one by one, but two by two, which is to say that the poetic experience of the community in the poem, where the relation with the Other is mediated by a shadow-to-shadow encounter, results in a duality where the "You" and the "I" are absorbed in a same instance where and when both are liberated.

Reality might be negative, but its erasure is attempted. The "salida de nosotros" is the axis of tension, it implies a crisis inasmuch as there seem to be present two opposite forces, one that fills the subject with "gracia"-joy-grace, and one that fills him with "desgracia"-misery-disgrace. The "salida de nosotros" is an exit from the poem *to* the poem, where the "desgracia" can be erased. The poem is entered one by one, and exited two by two, in order to stay in the poem as a community. Thus, the

verse "y de tocar en tu alma, haciendo palmas" (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 156) remains in the final version without the extricated pain exclamation of the original, "y de tocar ¡ay! en tu alma" (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 156f in a note by F. Martínez García), which is substituted by an applause.

This "salida de nosotros" is followed, however, by its opposition. If the poem is a liberating exit, it is at the same time imprisonment in a form. In "¿Qué me da, que me azoto con la línea?", the classic meters of the seven and eleven-syllable verses become the prison bars that the poem assumes in order to close itself in its form, with which it might be possible to be liberated from contingent misery-disgrace, but with which the subject crashes, and which break the impulse of transcendence:

¿Qué me da, que me azoto con la línea
y creo que me sigue, al trote, el punto?

¿Qué me da, que me he puesto
en los hombros un huevo en vez de un manto?

¿Qué me ha da dado, que vivo?

¿Qué me ha dado, que muero?

¿Qué me da, que tengo ojos?

¿Qué me da, que tengo alma?

¿Qué me da, que *se acaba en mí mi prójimo*
y empieza en mi carrillo el rol del viento?

¿Qué me ha dado, que cuento mis dos lágrimas,
sollozo tierra y cuelgo el horizonte?

¿Qué me ha dado, que lloro de no poder llorar
y río de lo poco que he reído?

¿Qué me da, que ni vivo ni muero? (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...*
157, emphasis added).

The desire of the subject is still to remain "plantado en el verso", and this time to remain motionless, refusing even to join verse with verse beyond the couplet that forces the internal opposition. If the subject cannot escape the categories of language and poetic tradition, neither can he escape the ontological categories that encapsulate him. In this encapsulation, the Other cannot help but to become thematized in the sameness of the subject. For Dianna Niebylski, in the poem

the verse becomes a whip, and grammar a galloping executioner.

Although the whip, or the act of whipping, conveys the image of a medieval Christian penitent, the poem's sense of abjection suggests

another figure: a twentieth-century Kafkaesque victim-hero, clueless before the forces that threaten to silence him without granting him the benefit of an explanation (Niebylski 96).

Even if I fail to see how her metaphor of the whip and the image of the "medieval Christian penitent" operate in the poem, I have to agree with her final assessment on the subject as clueless regarding "the forces that threaten to silence him": the poem is, in fact, an attempt at having a clue. Here occurs, however, a key moment in Vallejo's poetry; and it is that the poem gives to the consciousness of this thematization the form of a question that challenges the thematization itself of the "I", which in turn serves to question the thematization of the Other. The desire to know is conjugated with the desire to liberate the self from suffering, and results in a question that, unanswered, is a first step towards the liberation of the subject from his imprisonment in *himself*. This is the manner in which Vallejo's poetry would be an opening towards the Other. One could now speak of a po/ethics, inasmuch as the poem has given way to a lyrical "You" as its recipient, whose thematization is put on trial.

It is only after the emergence of the tear that the form that the poem had assumed —of 7 and 11 syllable verses— can sublimate into an asymmetric alexandrine, followed by a hendecasyllable broken down by laughter, and this in turn followed by a ten-syllable verse where the resulting state of the subject remains indeterminate, except as outside of the certainty that an ontological category can give: "¿Qué me da, que ni vivo ni muero?". If there is a paradox, it is not in the

indeterminate nature of the limits between laughter and crying as it is in the estrangement between life, death, and subject; and, as major paradox, that poetic, or po/ethic liberation might lie in assuming the already given form of the poem, and with it to be a part of the tradition of poetry.

The invitation of poetry is, thus, to an inclination, to take a cosmic form, circular, spherical, like the geometry that was intuited between "us". Poetry invites "us":

rómpete, pero en círculos;

fórmate, pero en columnas combas. (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...*

158)

In the poem the invitation is, more than to transcend ontology, to reformulate ontology at will, and to create man and his life at will: "¿La vida? ¡Opónle parte de tu muerte!" (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 158). In this poetical reconfiguration, Man appears as a pure form, as a shrinking structure like the dwindling flicker of a cigarette, as its light is consumed in the smoke of a "Monday" that seems paused in time.

La punta del hombre,

el ludibrio pequeño de encogerse

tras de fumar su universal ceniza;

punta al darse en secretos caracoles,

punta donde se agarra uno con guantes,
punta en lunes sujeto por seis frenos,
punta saliendo de escuchar a su alma.

De otra manera,
fueran lluvia menuda los soldados
y ni cuadrada pólvora, al volver de los bravos desatinos (*Vallejo, Poemas humanos y España...* 170)

The feeling of desubjectivation for Vallejo, in the final analysis, is not Shame as it is for Agamben, but Rage; a rage that potentiates the "punta" as a weapon, and that in "La cólera que quiebra al hombre en niños" serves as foundation for an ethics, if not in principle, then in its praxis, as a catalytic for the actions of the "poor", who occupy the place *par excellence* of the Other for whom the subject responds:

La cólera que quiebra al bien en dudas,
a la duda, en tres arcos semejantes
y al arco, luego, en tumbas imprevistas;
la cólera del pobre
tiene un acero contra dos puñales (*Vallejo, Poemas humanos y España...*
197).

If the dead offered the best example for the phenomenal description of the tense relation between the poem and its external reality —and of the relation between the

subject with his totally-other Other—, throughout *Poemas humanos* there are the poor and the destitute of the Earth who offer the poet his link with suffering. The pain of being alive in the world resulted, contrary to Vallejo's first intuitions, worst than the pain of death. The appropriation of the biblical discourse of the martyr-messiah turns from the "blessings" to the condemnation, and as such it recognizes its fallibility:

"¡Desgracia al que edifica con tesoros su lecho de muerte! [...] *no me hagáis caso*"

(Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 206, emphasis added).

Recognizing its weak points as a fictitious construct, the poem seeks to validate itself in a historical contingency where the allegorical sacrifice of the poem finds an all too real correspondence in the world:

Pues de lo que hablo no es
sino de lo que pasa en esta época, y
de lo que ocurre en China y en España, y en el mundo (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 211).

If the poem speaks of what happens outside of the poem, the poet becomes a visionary alchemist, and the poem a vase, an "athanor" where language, as an ingredient, is stirred to create a new element, which will not be judged good to the extent that it is gold, but inasmuch as it is judged just:

Pero, volviendo a lo nuestro,
y al verso que decía, fuera entonces
que vi que el hombre es malnacido,

mal vivo, mal muerto, mal moribundo [...]

Todo esto

agítese , ahora mismo,

en mi vientre de macho extrañamente (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 212).

What is "ours" is the verse where the prophecy is said, where the vision transcends the physical and temporal limits of the poem in order to glimpse an Other that suffers—who has suffered his whole life—, and whose suffering the poem seeks to remedy through the alchemy of the word. If the "You" has been invited to be a part of a community with the "I" in a poem abstracted from contingency to liberate the selves from pain, the instance of "Us" cannot avoid leaving an Other outside. There is always someone who escapes the poem, always someone who suffers, and for whom the sacrifice of the "voz del Hombre" was not enough.

If in *Los heraldos...*, *Trilce*, and *Poemas humanos* the starting point of each initial poem was an admission of a lack of knowledge—in the form of a confession or a question—, the reality of the world, as was revealed little by little, distances Vallejo from his initial vital question: never was the identity of the "Who" that manipulates the threads that bound man and move him deciphered. In its place, with his late poetry Vallejo opted to propose a way to liberate man through the poem. The first result of this movement in *España, aparta de mí este cáliz* is the shift from the question

regarding this "Who" to the direct call to the "miliciano". The poem becomes the space for the unanimous convocation. The "You" to whom the poem is addressed in *España...* will cease to be a generic pronoun and gain a proper name. Doubt will still be present, but it will no longer be epistemological in its philosophical character, as much as it will be concrete: what the subject does not know is *what to do*, so he goes on to do everything that occurs to him:

Voluntario de España, miliciano
de huesos fidedignos, cuando marcha a morir tu corazón,
cuando marcha a matar con su agonía
mundial, no sé verdaderamente
qué hacer, dónde ponerme; corro, escribo, aplaudo,
lloro, atisbo, destrozo, apagan, digo
a mi pecho que acabe, al bien, que venga,
y quiero desgraciarme (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 221-222).

For Julio Ortega the subject's inability to know what to do is equated to the writers inability to know how to write: "No saber qué hacer es aquí también una pregunta por el cómo decir y, al mismo tiempo, supone asumir esa perspectiva del desamparo del hacer-decir como el nacimiento de este nuevo discurso" (Ortega, "Vallejo: la poética de la subversión" 268). As a result, the text surrenders its claim to a totality and its status as a discursive epic in favor of becoming a fragmentary epic, where "Escribo-digo constituye una incorporación del poeta y su discurso al acontecimiento, y se

establece así una suerte de acción textual, de accionar discontinuo, lo que confiere al texto el carácter de un ocurrir no resuelto, que rehúsa fijarse" (Ortega, "Vallejo: la poética de la subversión" 268). Contrary to the subject's doubt, the poet knows very well what to do from his part, and writes. The poet might not know *how* to write, but the poem itself is proof that he writes nonetheless. In a 1931 interview Vallejo will state his poetics as follows:

Si usted me pregunta cuál es mi mayor aspiración en estos momentos, no podría decirle más que esto: la eliminación de toda palabra de existencia accesorial, la expresión pura, que hoy mejor que nunca habría que buscarla en los sustantivos y en los verbos... ¡ya que no se puede renunciar a las palabras!... (Vallejo, *Crónicas de poeta* 195-6).

The apposition of the noun and its adjective —or the verb and its adverb— should, then, bring the noun —or the verb— to the fore. If the modifier seems incongruous with a given logic outside of the poem, within the poem its logical function is to return the reader to the modified element, where attention is then re-centered on the element *itself*. Thus, in the "miliciano de huesos fidedignos", by creating a syntactic loop where the relations between "huesos" and "fidedignos" is deciphered so as to make of the phrase a cogent pair, an equivalence is proposed between the nouns: the "miliciano" is "huesos", and from the two it is the "huesos" that reverberate. The adjective does not possess an accesorial, but a functional existence.

The bones —that is, the "miliciano"— are, however, above all, "fidedignos": it is their certainty what gives weight to a reality that seems too macabre a fabulation; and it is in them where the faith that the heart that "marcha a morir" is not annulled in its death is deposited, potentiating thus the "life" that the poem mirrors. The "miliciano" and his bones are warrantors that the dead that float "nadamente detrás de aquea membrana" are more than a mere rhetorical trope. If the foundation of the po/ethical subject has departed from his relation with shadows, pain, and language, the vertebrate nature of man serves to confirm this subject's subjection to a reality that goes through it and transcends it. Through a shadow-to-shadow encounter the subject finds an Other torn apart by pain, and whose pain tears apart the subject who, in order to subsist, takes refuge closing himself in a poem, in language.

If in *España...* the subject addresses a singular Other-You by his name, as the space for the convocation it is the collective that is invoked in the poem, taking again the circular shape that in *Poemas humanos* traced the geometry of an "Us" moved by Rage:

Un día prendió el pueblo su fósforo cautivo, oró de cólera
y soberanamente pleno, circular,
cerró su natalicio con manos electivas. (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...*
223)

This Rage potentiates a suffering that, man being far from divine forgiveness, takes it so as to make from the pain a "passion" where the sacrifice gains depth and fills man with hope.

¿Batallas? ¡No! Pasiones! Y pasionespreciadas
de dolores con rejas de esperanzas,
de dolores de pueblo con esperanzas de hombres!

[...]

Así tu criatura, miliciano, así tu exangüe criatura,
agitada por una piedra inmóvil,
se sacrifica (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 223-224)

The visionary poet writes his book of revelations where he announces an utopian future, where the poem seems to overflow over the world. The *telos* created by poetry is, in this fashion, the unfolding of the poem outside of the text until it unites two realities intuited outside of the self: the phenomenal of the contingent world, and the "Other" glimpsed beyond "aquesa membrana", where the dead inhabit.

estaba escrito
que vosotros haríais la luz, entornando,
con la muerte vuestros ojos

[...]

¡Entrelazándose hablarán los mudos, los tullidos andarán!
¡Verán, ya de regreso, los ciegos

y papitando escucharán los sordos!

¡Sabrán los ignorantes, ignorarán los sabios! (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 225-226).

In this fashion, the invitation to kill is nothing more than an invitation to accelerate the advent of a redemptive apocalypse³⁷:

en España, en Madrid, están llamando

a matar, voluntarios de la vida [...]

¡Voluntarios,

por la vida, por los buenos, matad

a la muerte, matad a los malos! (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 227).

The sacrifice is translated from the poem to the world, from the "voice of man" to the contingent, militant man. If the poem is the place and form of pain, Spain is the poem of the world.

The main thesis from Christian eschatology that reigns in the *telos* of the vallejian poem is the resurrection of man, who judged by its actions in life gains eternal life. In "Masa" the poem is presented as the narrative that survives the ending implicit in death, an ending that is, however, only temporary, as death is conceived as a process that continues after its first becoming:

³⁷ This apocalyptic character of *España...* has already been noted by, among others, Julio Ortega: "Por un lado, [*España...*] es un libro del fin de los tiempos, porque está escrito con la convicción de ser una imagen del apocalipsis histórico; pero, por otro, está escrito con la convicción de un discurso utópico, y es por ello un libro del comienzo de los tiempos" (Ortega, "Proceso de la nominación..." 13).

Al fin de la batalla,
y muerto el combatiente, vino hacia él un hombre
y le dijo: "No mueras, te amo tanto!"
Pero el cadáver ¡ay! siguió muriendo.

Se le acercaron dos y repitiéronle:
"No nos dejes! ¡Valor! ¡Vuelve a la vida!"
Pero el cadáver ¡ay! siguió muriendo.

Acudieron a él veinte, cien, mil, quinientos mil,
clamando: "¡Tánto amor y no poder nada contra la muerte!"
Pero el cadáver ¡ay! siguió muriendo.

Le rodearon millones de individuos,
con un ruego común: "¡Quédate, hermano!"
Pero el cadáver ¡ay! siguió muriendo.

Entonces, todos los hombres de la tierra
le rodearon; les vio el cadáver triste, emocionado;
incorporóse lentamente,

abrazó al primer hombre; echóse a andar... (Vallejo, *Poemas humanos y España...* 259).

If the subject is not the dead "combatant", he is at the same place as the dead: "*vino hacia él un hombre*"; it might be at the same place, but it seems to lack a body towards which man can approach —"*Se le acercaron dos*", "*Le rodearon*"—: in the poem the subject is pure omniscient voice. If the body of the Other is the mode he assumes in his phenomenal manifestation, the subject has already transcended it: as his mode, the voice is the aural body of a subject that is not a participant with "*todos los hombres de la tierra*". Man might now be granted a voice, but only as a functional characteristic gained after engaging in a battle where the Other escapes from the depth of silence and shadows. It is after the common plea of all men —of the "mass" unanimously composed— that the cadaver rises —if it does not return to life— and starts to walk. In the final analysis, the proposal of the poem is to constitute a mass where all of humanity is convened around a sacrificed body that ultimately resuscitates in the unity of mankind. If the voice of the subject loses corporeality and is dissolved in the community of men and the resuscitated cadaver, it is because it assumes a prophetic role that allows it to witness the "end of the battle" while speaking from a present anterior to this outcome. As Julio Ortega duly notes, "*El texto se deshace en la violencia de la historia y se reconstruye en las demandas del mito*" (Ortega, "*Vallejo: la poética de la subversión*" 277).

If Antonio Negri is right when he states that "the primary matter of the multitude is the flesh, i.e. that common living substance where the body and the intellect coincide and are indistinguishable", then the voice without body of the subject in "Masa" is the prophetic voice of the body of the multitude; a body created by the poem through a process where the Other is supplied a more resilient matter, a more lasting flesh than the face. If Negri is again right when he adds that

Like the flesh, the multitude is then pure potentiality, unformed life force and an element of being. Like the flesh, the multitude is oriented towards the fullness of life. The revolutionary monster that is named multitude and appears at the end of modernity continuously wants to transform our flesh into new forms of life (Negri),

he forgets to comment on the nature of a multitude convened by a subjectivity that, in the end, constitutes it. That the multitude is free of threads that bind it and lead it to its destiny is not a wager Vallejo would readily take. For Vallejo there is no such freedom inherent in man: it must be created, and it must come from sacrifice:

Me parece que hay la necesidad de una gran cólera y de un terrible impulso destructor de todo lo que existe es esos lugares [América]. Hay que destruir y destruirse a sí mismo. Eso no puede continuar; no debe continuar. Puesto que no hay hombres dirigentes con quienes contar, necesario es, por lo menos, unirse en un apretado haz de gentes heridas e indignadas, y reventar, haciendo trizas todo cuanto nos rodea o está a

nuestro alcance. Y, sobre todo, *hay que destruirse a sí mismo* y, después, lo demás. Sin el sacrificio previo de uno mismo, no hay salud posible [Letter to Pablo Abril, dated April 18] (Vallejo, *Correspondencia completa* 290, emphasis in the original).

There is something, however, on which I think both Vallejo and Negri would agree: the concept of capital (on one side the production of wealth, on the other the exploitation of the multitude) must always be realistically looked at also through the analysis of how far bodies are made to suffer, are usurped or mutilated and wounded, reduced to production matter (Negri).

For the poet, however, the ultimate liberation rests in the poem and the faith it implies with an illumination that is, more than political, metaphysical... and inasmuch as metaphysical, poetical. In *España...* man will become mass, and from this mass he will be born again, he will resuscitate and will bring about, creating it, the future. If the poem is an "athanor" that contains language so that from its alchemy a new form might emerge—a new subject—, Spain is the "athanor" of the world, which contain History, and from which's alchemy a new Man—a new world— will emerge.

Vallejo's poetry seeks to transcend metaphor in favor of an aesthetics of human sensibility; in order to do this he faced the need to entrench himself in a core with whose hyper-sensibility the mediation of language between the self and the world's

contingency is displaced. He will have no alternative but to assume a language in order to communicate; that is, the experimentation of *Trilce*, where the subject attempts to conjure a new expression through a new syntactic, semantic... linguistic alchemy, becomes an experimentation that seeks to conjure a new expression through a new corporeal alchemy. "Man" and "mass" become elements malleable to the pressures of the feeling that deform them to the extreme; that is why the image that emerged from the experience results grotesque: what were once *beings* whose life art could mirror become pure entities that suffer the violence of the artist's hand, just as, outside of the realm of the poem, the living flesh-and-bone beings suffer the violence of a cruel, sanguinary Other: an infinitely human Other. For Edmundo Bendezú, "Las invocaciones finales, hechas con furor, nos muestran una faz macabra de la muerte, volviendo así a la primera instancia de la visión con la diferencia importante de que la distancia que media entre el poeta y la muerte se ha acortado, y que ahora es ya bastante cercana su apariencia, que se nos muestra en imágenes monstruosas" (Bendezú 57). Language becomes, instead of the object to be alchemically transformed, the force, the energy from which the poet nurtures in order to transform the reality of a poem that becomes alive, if monstrous.

Vallejo might have had reserves to compromising as an artist with a political program, but in exile it seems that the tension between this artistic liberty and a life that was not supposed to be divorced from the work of art is resolved in an ethical compromise. In this fashion, the scene that crosses Vallejo's poems in exile —and

which in some way or another keeps repeating— is the encounter with an Other of whom only a shadowy image is sensed, but where the pain and suffering of this Other is still visible and lead the poet to make of the poem a place for a liberating encounter between self and Other.

Vallejo's poetry, then, at bottom questions the relation between artist and reality, between the world as conceived and as represented in a work of art made out of words, but that is linked —and thus, in one way or another, responds— to the contingent reality of the world. Vallejo's is a poetry that opts to derive from this shadow of reality a knowledge moved by the intuition of the shadow, that is thus added to the knowledge derived from the concrete experience of reality the subject has. In Vallejo the contingency of emotions —the deep feeling within the self that these emotions, inasmuch as real, are part of a determinate reality— cannot but result in a desire to possess them, to let the self be taken by the experience of the emotion, at the same time that the emotion is dominated by knowing it and understanding it.

Vallejo's is, then, an art compromised with a reality that needs to be changed through political action, but only modified by art in its margins. Artistic action, even when the images presented in the poem and the discourse that envelops them involve programmatic tones, will not allow itself to be manipulated by any dogma, nor will the poem be reduced by the false opposition between "compromised art" and "pure art". The reality that poetic action changes is the poem's reality, and the reality of the subject that emerges from the poem. From the reality of the poem and the shadow of

the poem the Man that will inhabit the world is born: redeemed through suffering and poetry.

Octavio Paz and the Creation of the I: the Ethics of the Body-to-Body

La actividad poética nace de la desesperación ante la impotencia de la palabra y culmina en el reconocimiento de la omnipotencia del silencio (Paz, *Corriente alterna* 74).

Few Mexican intellectuals have reached the stature of Octavio Paz in the world of Latin American letters. The bulk of his writings is exceeded only by its scope and depth. The compilation in 15 volumes of his complete works, *Obras completas*, is an attempt to take the whole of his publications, dismember it, and re-articulate it in order that the new resulting whole gain a thematic coherence that might sacrifice without hesitation the component parts³⁸. Some of what was in its time published as a unity is dispersed and distributed among several volumes of the *Obras completas*. What was in its time a text becomes a fiber in the final webbing that Paz wishes to leave as his legacy. The final text does not substitute for the original, but envelops it.

³⁸ As will be seen, there is indeed a hidden agenda to obliterate the past in order to create a *corpus* not from the original production, decontextualizing the texts, but rather from the standpoint of Paz's desire to be considered as *The* poet of the 20th century vis a vis Pablo Neruda and César Vallejo, recontextualizing said texts at will. According to Jacobo Machover "Paz hará y deshará sus libros, en una búsqueda de perfección que nunca alcanzará, como en el caso de las múltiples ediciones de *Libertad bajo palabra*, lo que contribuye también a borrar las pistas para el estudio y para un acercamiento lineal y cronológico a su vida y a su obra" (Machover 50); which for Anthony Stanton corresponds to a well thought strategy: "Lo que estoy señalando no es la inexactitud de estas interpretaciones de poetas anteriores sino algo más importante: la naturaleza estratégica de su lectura. [Paz] Tiende a no ver, a subestimar o a negar en los demás lo que él quiere hacer en sus escritos" (Stanton 75).

It is true that the result in *Obras completas* is a new text, different from the original, but in itself it *is* an original text: the text selected by Paz to remain in his final willed form. In this chapter I propose a reading of *La casa de la presencia*³⁹ as a whole in which it is possible to trace, perhaps not the historical progression of the thought of Paz the man but an essaying subject whose sequential coherence is indeed the construct of the latter Paz. The same can be said with respect to his poems, collected in two volumes of the *Obras completas*⁴⁰.

Paz and the essay

Ruth Needleman argues that as Paz re-edits his essays, he rewrites his texts to "erase his tracks" or "change" what were his original positions (Needleman 555). Despite the changes and erasures, what remains certain is the difficulty of tracing a sequence for his thought; and what is readily visible in the end is precisely the end result, which can be read as the oeuvre of a subject constituted from these erasures. Much of the criticism on Paz seems to agree that Paz's public persona is the consequence of the poet's intention to become the "creator" of a "tradition" where his poetry would be posited at center stage:

³⁹ *La casa de la presencia* is comprised of revised versions of *El arco y la lira*, *Los hijos del limo* and *La otra voz*. It is, thus, a summary of Paz's mayor works regarding the history of poetry and poetics.

⁴⁰ The comparative analysis of the subject that emerges from *Obras completas* and the subject that emerges from the texts as initially published is left for the future. José Quiroga has already, for that matter, pointed to the change in Paz's poems as they originally appeared and as collected in *Libertad bajo palabra*.

Paz ha sido un intérprete y un artífice de tradiciones. La influencia de sus lecturas ha sido enorme y, sin embargo, nunca se propuso escribir una historia de la poesía mexicana y hay poetas importantes sobre quienes no dejó ensayos autónomos. Al examinar sus textos críticos sobre poesía mexicana es fácil percibir ciertas preferencias y reticencias. Entre estas últimas, por ejemplo, hay que destacar su escaso interés en los poetas románticos y modernistas (Stanton 56).

This apparent lack of interest, Anthony Stanton will argue, responds to Paz's desire to blur his poetic influences so that his own poetry seems even more innovative. It would appear that as time passed the created subject had to evolve if it was to be the protagonist of Poetry's history as embodied in Latin America⁴¹. That is how the essayist seeks to ensure his position as the intellectual *par excellence* and official poet of Mexico's 20th century, maintaining nonetheless his autonomy, at least according to Ricardo Pozas:

El poeta plantea la participación de los intelectuales en el espacio del Estado, pero a condición de mantener la autonomía frente a "el príncipe". El intelectual es un ciudadano que ejerce su doble derecho de

⁴¹ I fail to see the need to fall to Ilan Stavans' posturing when he claims Paz "projects the kind of anxious exercise of power that recalls the Stalinist era: he requires loyalty and love from each of his free-spirited young followers, while his closeness to the Mexican government makes him an almost-forbidden target of criticism among his compatriots [...] He became a literary lion. And his vanity, his need for adulation, have certainly influenced his oeuvre. His later essays show a deep sense of intransigence toward other viewpoints. He has become a demigod-the orchestrator of history" (102 & 113). Stavans's statements are indicative, nonetheless, of the passionate discussions that the analysis of Paz the man incites among critics.

participar en el Estado, en la sociedad política como miembro de la sociedad civil, a condición de mantenerse como intelectual crítico del gobierno que no cumple con sus obligaciones sociales en el gobierno del Estado (Pozas 14).

The poet, the intellectual and the citizen would then fuse in a text that will find two poles with which it will find an opposition and a reflection, and with which the work of Paz will engage: Poetry, and its relation with the State⁴². It is because of this interest on the construction of his public persona that Paz will face the need to negotiate the tensions between his desire to remain at a proper distance of government, which would make criticism possible, and his refusal to remain at the margins of the country's political life.

There is a common approach with two main observations in the criticism on Paz, not necessarily related directly to the political left/right divide that a healthy number of critics have forced upon the writings of Paz. First, his primary interest was

⁴² In a less critical tone than Pozas, Fernando Vizcaíno sees in Paz's resignation from his post of ambassador to India after the Tlatelolco massacre of 1968 an example of the intellectual who strives to maintain his autonomy in relation to the State, which according to Diana Sorensen leads to "*Postdata* [that] is the most radical attempt" to regain "public reason" after the "revelation" of the ancestral roots of State violence (Sorensen 299). At any rate, as Yvon Grenier aptly puts it, "His [Paz] approach to independence certainly supposed a hearty disposition to criticize power, but not a predetermined obligation to oppose any government or policy at any time. Independence was, for him, an offspring of liberty itself" (Grenier, "Octavio Paz: An Intellectual and his Critics" 258). Of course, if to "Desenmascarar las fuerzas del poder, por constitución opuestas a la libertad, es la función permanente de la crítica" (Moreiras 253-4), then Paz's critique fulfills its permanent function only to the degree that the face of power is shown but not contested. Liberty would rest in knowing the Master proper, not being unleashed.

to be remembered in History as a great Poet⁴³. Secondly, the changes and rectification of his stances demonstrate a desire in Paz to erase the influence of other poets and intellectuals in order to announce the arrival of a “new” time, in his famous articulation of the “tradition of rupture”, that would require a “new” aesthetics whose origins would be found in Paz himself. At any rate, in both cases Paz's intention to build a niche in the pantheon of the great poets is manifest.

In this fashion, the fragments that remain after Paz's destruction of the original gain coherence *a posteriori* because of the organization with which the poet attempts to give sense to them:

the speaker's fragmentation has to be retained as a part of the message of the poem, but it must give way to organization if meaning is to be derived. The reader's final experience will depend upon individual choice, and the importance that each reader wishes to concede to fragmentation versus integration. Neither can be totally ignored; but balancing the two will be the reader's prerogative (Persin 159).

In the "speaker's fragmentation" and this manipulation of tradition —and to some degree, manipulation of the reader itself— there remains the question of this reader's

⁴³ Allen Phillips (567), Yvon Grenier (173), and Ricardo Pozas (3) all agree that in Paz's essays the perspective of the subject is always primarily poetical, “inseparable from poetic activity” according to Phillips. For Ricardo Gullón, “at times Paz tends to get caught up in his obsessions, for his argument can lead to a conclusion which does not at all follow from the exposition leading up to it [...] what we find in it [the essay] is a gathering of opinions, very vaguely supported in theory. And they-not the theory-are what count. Certainly a theory is interesting; but the validity of an opinion depends upon the sincerity with which it is expressed: sincerity makes it legitimate” (586-7).

position in poetry, as the enactment of the poem, and the true nature of this so called "individual choice".

Poet and essayist, Paz accrues cultural capital with this fundamental tension by which he ensures the *title* of Poet. Moreover, as an Adamic poet he modulates the epistemological system where the hegemonic critical discourse of the 20th century seeks legitimacy. For Medina, "Su autoridad es el resultado de los prestigios acumulados y el uso estratégico de sus ensayos críticos, en los que comúnmente denosta a otros autores (autorizando o desautorizando otras poéticas respecto a la suya); ambos disfrazan su autoritarismo político y cultural" (94). There should be no doubt that the "prestige" of Paz is well deserved as it pertains to his mastery on the use of language and his ability to, as a poet, create a noteworthy aesthetic oeuvre. His "authority", however, is the result of his own making, as he actively sought to create it beyond the recognition that his poetry merited. To go from "prestige" to "authority" he needed the legitimation of the State, on one hand, and Mexican *intelligentsia* on the other. In both cases his relation with these groups is not exempt of tensions. What remains certain is that in his essays Paz clearly shows his knowledge of the *art* of persuasion, leading discourse so to construct a whole poetic system in which his poems fit to perfection. One might even feel tempted to say that only his poems fit this system, while the rest of Mexican poetry was ancillary to the tradition Paz attempted to create in his critical writings.

El arco y la lira

In the introduction to *La casa de la presencia*, if taken as a “reading guide” for the reconstructed text which aims at an organic wholeness, Paz rapidly lets the reader know the necessity and relation between poetry and learning, in which one, in the end, learns to be human:

No hay aprendizaje —es decir: cultura, sociedad— sin un conjunto de reglas y preceptos. Los actos más elementales —encender fuego, cazar, pescar, recolectar frutos, sembrar— implican un mínimo aprendizaje, recogido y explicado en fórmulas y recetas [...] Si la poesía es una práctica social, requiere un aprendizaje y, por lo tanto, su transmisión se realiza a través de un conjunto de reglas y principios. Por todo esto, no es aventurado inferir que la retórica y la poética —reglas de composición y teorías sobre estas reglas— nacieron casi al mismo tiempo que los cantos y los poemas [...] La retórica incluye siempre una poética y ésta una filosofía. (Paz, *La casa...* 17).

For Paz the need for an "aprendizaje" and a set of rules for acquiring these knowledge is a categorical imperative. It seems that even more than culture and society themselves, the main concern are the processes through which these two are constituted. The reiteration of the need for rules in the various incarnations Paz gives to the term —"reglas", "preceptos", "fórmulas", "recetas", "principios"— has as a

common denominator a foundational characteristic. For the existence itself of culture and society it would be necessary, according to Paz, to learn what *must* be made, the instructions that *must* be followed if the final product, be it social or cultural, is to be considered fit according to the measure that will be used to judge this or that action or object as *right*. For the existence of culture and society one must *abide* to the governing principle of each and act according to the norms established in this principle.

In the concrete and specific case of poetry, if it is a "practice" that requires learning, as Paz suggest, the exercise of poetry would require the employment of certain rules, in contrast to a given theory, which would emerge along with said practice. Even if it is not clear in what sense rhetoric would be the "reglas de composición", and not the theory of composition as it should be by its own definition, it is evident that, at least here, for Paz the practice of poetry is not consubstantial with the determination of the rules that constitute this practice as poetry. Just as the work of the *maker* is not the work of the *thinker*, the work of the poet is not the work of the theorist. The first follows the instructions delineated by the second, and only thus can the poem be *right*. But, whoever makes the rules knows how to break them. Paz in fact seeks the title of both poet and theorist. As the latter, Paz pretends to derive a poetics from a phenomenological account that he traces to the origin itself of humanity, claiming thus a universal, unquestionable validity. As the former, he composes a poem whose images remit to this ancestral origin. His poems

serve, then, to prove the veracity of his theories. His poems abide, thus, to the "reglas y preceptos" that his poems generate.

So, poetry is learned and poetics is the group of precepts necessary for learning, for the assurance and conservation of the continuity of a history, a tradition, a set of customs. It is in this sense that the criticism on Paz that has cataloged him as a-historic is more valid⁴⁴, as Paz's lack of acknowledgment of other poetics as forerunner for his own deprives them of their historical precedence⁴⁵. Whatever the case might be, the concern with history in Paz seems clear. As Peter Earle duly notes, "El lector de *El arco y la lira* está en el mismo dilema que el autor: es decir, la poesía - o el arte aparentemente puro de la composición rítmica mediante palabras- es una operación que no se puede realizar ni analizar sin tomar en cuenta muchas cosas que no son poéticas; entre ellas, la que más nos importa por ahora: la historia" (Earle

⁴⁴ According to Francisco Álvarez, "Un recuento de aquellos elementos que conciernen al papel y evolución de la lírica en la época moderna demuestra que los escritos de Paz (con excepción de *El arco y la lira*, su teoría poética per se) rara vez abarcan un análisis riguroso y sistemático de los elementos de la lírica. Por lo general, la poética paciana se concentra en ciertos elementos de la producción (autores, movimientos) de un discurso poético que se concibe como esencialista y ahistórico" (Álvarez 21).

⁴⁵ For a more detailed account of Paz's failure to recognize in his essays the presence already in his precursors of several of the same themes and motifs Paz explored in his poetry —mainly eroticism in the group "Contemporáneos"—, see Anthony Stanton's "Octavio paz como lector crítico de la poesía mexicana moderna", where he concludes that "la lectura crítica que Paz hace de ciertas figuras de la tradición anterior funciona como una poderosa legitimación de su obra poética. No es, ni se propone ser, un lector objetivo, ecuánime o desinteresado: es un intérprete revisionista (en el sentido que Harold Bloom da a esta palabra) que constantemente busca apoyos en la tradición -tanto armónicos como antagonicos- para sus propuestas creadoras personales [...] esta obra se presenta con toda naturalidad como el paradigma central de la poesía mexicana del siglo xx: sintetiza y reformula a sus precursores a la vez que anticipa tendencias posteriores. El día de hoy el canon de la poesía mexicana moderna sigue dominado por las estrategias interpretativas del crítico y poeta Octavio Paz" (Stanton 78-79).

1102). The poem is dependent on history, and the act itself of writing is dependent on the poetics of the historical time when it is performed. As a distancing from reality, inasmuch as the poem is written in solitude vis-à-vis the societal nature of reality, the process of writing the poem cannot but awaken doubts:

Durante los años siguientes se desvanecieron poco a poco mis esperanzas en una poesía revolucionaria que tuviese la excelencia de la que escribían los «poetas puros». Nunca acepté el dogma del «realismo socialista»; al mismo tiempo, crecía mi insatisfacción ante la «poesía pura», en sus distintas manifestaciones (Paz, *La casa...* 21);

He will later ask if “[Escribir poemas] Frente a la vida, ¿no era una deserción? Y frente al derrumbe de todos los absolutos, ¿no era una consolación mentirosa y una magia culpable?” (Paz, *La casa...* 25). Looking back in history, Paz posits himself in tension with the two main literary trends of his youth, choosing no side unconditionally. This gaze at history is what makes possible the "aprendizaje". In the case of Paz, at a distance from both trends that allows him to look at the two without blind spots that prevent a comparative optic, his gaze assumes a privileged position that permits a better appreciation of the knowledge to be learned.

This doubt that arises in Paz because of his vantage viewpoint is, however, widespread among exponents of "pure poetry" and is the same question that the “revolutionary poets” so readily discarded by Paz asked themselves, even if all parties reached a different answer, and in the difference a different manner in which to

engage with both the poem and the world. That is, both pure and revolutionary poetry recognize the importance of the relation between poetics and politics in Latin America. The second directly, assuming political revolution as the main theme of its poetic discourse; the first indirectly, conceding that the voluntary omission of the political theme in the poem is both an aesthetic and political decision. Posited between the two trends, Paz shares with both their doubt and their awareness of the poetics/politics relation; his "aprendizaje", however, allows Paz to construct an alternate path for his poetics, which from a historical perspective he can claim his poems *in fact* followed, and from his "aprendizaje" of the rules of poetics he can claim were in fact *right*.

According to Paz in a statement that could not be more categorical, "Todo es lenguaje" (46). And if everything is language, everything is subjected to a grammar that must be learned, and that constrains everything on one hand, and on the other makes possible poetic liberation as poetic transformation: "La poesía convierte la piedra, el color, la palabra y el sonido en imágenes. Y esta segunda nota, el ser imágenes [...] vuelve poemas todas las obras de arte" (49); a transformation made possible by the poet's craftsmanship: "El poeta crea imágenes, poemas; y el poema hace del lector imagen, poesía" (51). Poetry is a force that transforms the materials with which it works into its product: into images, the representation of a referent through the similarity between the two. And since "everything is language", everything

can be transferred to the words of the poem. This force of poetry would seem to be the distilled force of language itself, that is, the essence of "everything". In the poetic image for Paz there would be, thus, a coincidence between the text threaded with words and the referent the image represents in a text that ultimately remits to itself. In this fashion, if the poem "hace del lector imagen, poesía", the reader lacks any creative agency in his reading act. When reading the poem, the reader does not make an image out of the text, it is the poet who creates the text using poetry to transform the material into the imagined. Nevertheless, according to Paz the creature of the poet *does* make an image out of the reader: the poem is then poetry that generates poetry. The poet creates poetry, the reader does not.

The phenomenology of the poetic act is, thus, the encounter of the reader with an image where the reader sees him/herself reflected as an image. In the otherness of the poetic image the reader sees his/her "I", mutated by the alchemical power of the word, modulated by the art of the poet; an art that is itself inscribed in the language of a community: "el poema se sustent[a] en un lenguaje común. No en un habla popular o coloquial, como se pretende ahora, sino en la lengua de una comunidad" (Paz, *La casa...* 65). The poem might be rooted in a "lenguaje común" —that is, in a system of communication admitted by all as *shared* in order to express what is thought or felt—, but it is not "habla popular", or common language —that is, the individual act of a *populus* that makes the language with which its tradition is constituted its own—.

There exists, then, a separation between the poet, who makes the poem in his

language —his "habla"—, and "the people". There is, however, a direct relation between the poem and community. Rooted thus in the language of a community, the poem reproduces the system through which the constituents of this community know the characteristics, the interests, the *rules* that link them. If the poem is the language of the poet, then it is the poet who, with his language, sets the interests common to the community.

Poetry for Paz is then nothing but the encounter of a subject with a language that makes communication between Addresser and Addressee possible. The voice of the subject that emerges from the poem manipulates the Addressee by the rhythmic manipulation of the word:

El ritmo provoca una expectación, suscita un anhelo [...] El ritmo engendra en nosotros una disposición de ánimo que sólo podrá calmarse cuando sobrevenga "algo". Nos coloca en actitud de espera. Sentimos que el ritmo es un ir hacia algo, aunque no sepamos qué pueda ser ese algo (Paz, *La casa...* 79).

Even if it is true that in that indefinite "something" there is manifested a power inherent to language, the question of the agency of the scriptural subject whose actions unleash the rhythmic measure of the poem still remains. In the end, the encounter in the poem is with an Other against whom the subject is thrown: “[El ritmo] es la manifestación más simple, permanente y antigua del hecho decisivo que nos hace ser hombres: ser temporales, ser mortales y lanzados siempre hacia "algo",

hacia lo "otro": la muerte, Dios, la amada, nuestros semejantes” (Paz, *La casa...* 82). If the posture of the spectator is of "expectación", "anhelar", and "espera", it is because rhythm implies the becoming of a sound after another sound has lapsed —of an occurrence after another has occurred—, and because the poetic text awakens in the spectator a desire whose satisfaction rhythm promises to achieve. In this fashion, rhythm causes a disposition by positioning the spectator in hold: rhythm orders the *animus* and prepares this soul for the advent of "lo otro". Contrary to messianic structure, the poem *always* keeps its promise, be it with a sound or with a silence. "Lo otro" always arrives in the poem's rhythm as its next enunciation. This “something else” represented in the poem is then the Other for the poem as well as for the spectator. Poetic occurrence is then a state through which the spectator passes, and in which the I of the reader delegates his will to the will of a scriptural subject who, by positioning the spectator in this or that manner modulates the reader's mode of being, and what is more, his mode of thinking:

Al enunciar la identidad de los contrarios, [el poeta] atenta contra los fundamentos de nuestro pensar. Por tanto, la realidad poética de la imagen no puede aspirar a la verdad. El poema no dice lo que es, sino lo que podría ser [...] el poema no sólo proclama la coexistencia dinámica y necesaria de los contrarios, sino su final identidad. Y esta reconciliación [...] sí es un muro que hasta ahora el pensamiento occidental se ha rehusado a saltar o perforar (Paz, *La casa...* 115-116)

What in the end is at stake according to Paz's own poetics is the solidity of the foundations where the subject recognizes itself as such. The subject "knows himself" to the degree that he is inserted in an epistemological system. In this epistemic recreation there lies at bottom, however, an ethics, inasmuch as there lies within it an encounter with an otherness and a transformation:

el hombre mismo, desgarrado desde el nacer, se reconcilia consigo cuando se hace imagen, cuando *se hace otro*. La poesía es metamorfosis, cambio, operación alquímica, y por eso colinda con la magia, la religión y otras tentativas para transformar al hombre y hacer de "éste" y de "aquél" ese "otro" que es él mismo (126).

In this manner, the poem assumes as its basic strategy the exploitation of the desire of a subject that enters into the poem: a desire to encounter said otherness, which is a desire to *be* founded as a subject. In this case, the roots of poetry seem to lie in an ethics where the Other remains as an object to be contemplated, that is, an ethics of the aesthetic relation with the Other:

Lo Otro nos repele: abismo, serpiente, delicia, monstruo bello y atroz. Y a esta repulsión sucede el movimiento contrario: no podemos quitar los ojos de la presencia, nos inclinamos hacia el fondo del precipicio. Repulsión y fascinación. Y luego, el vértigo: caer, perderse, ser uno con lo Otro. Vacarse. Ser nada: ser todo: ser (Paz, *La casa...* 144).

In this categorization the Other is an "abyss", a "precipice", a *locus* before whose presence the self is at risk of falling. Before this presence, the invitation of the Other seems to be precisely to enter into the depths of its otherness, where the self is to lose itself. The feeling of repulsion caused by the Other would then be to throw the self out of itself and "vaciarise", emptying all content so as to create a void within, subtracting all solidity and making of the self an abyss that replicates the Other. The irresistible attraction caused thus by the Other in the self would be towards imitation, and in the imitation to create the self into a new form. Before this depth whose void seems to resist signification and meaning for the I, the feeling of vertigo comes due to the lack of equilibrium and just measure between I and Other. Before the Other, the self empties itself and in this purge is freed.

If this is the case, as ethics originates precisely at the moment when I and Other face, that repulsion is the basis for the constitution of subjectivity implies at least three things. First, the self refuses to renounce its sameness, and its imitation of the Other as an abyss results from the self's incapacity to thematize the Other with an already digested concept, and from the self's need to appropriate the Other's form. Second, this mechanism is nothing if not an abject way of attempting to eliminate the Other using the vomitive "vaciarise" as a transference of a killing instinct. Third, this mechanism is also an abject way to re-semanticize the Other with the "vaciarise" functioning as a transference of a seminal expulsion. In any case, the self would do

nothing but unfold itself over the Other and attempt to fill the Other's void with the self's content.

Ethics, aesthetics, and ontology seem to confuse their discourses so that from the fusion a poetic discourse emerges that enchants the subject to the degree that it taps into its desires:

quizá el verdadero nombre del hombre, la cifra de su ser, sea el Deseo.

Pues ¿qué es la temporalidad de Heidegger o la "otredad" de Machado, qué es ese continuo proyectarse del hombre hacia lo que no es él mismo sino Deseo? (Paz, *La casa...* 147).

I agree that both Heidegger and Machado have desire —the key word that Paz uses to join them— underlining their ethics, but the concepts of temporality and "otredad" seem actually to separate them. On the one hand, temporality for Heidegger is what makes Dasein's acts important, as it makes possible the time interval where Dasein is-toward-death. The consciousness of death that Dasein has is what gives meaning to life in Dasein's facing his own mortality, if not experiencing his own death. In the end Dasein is an individual who finds his ethics in a temporality designated by *his* death as opposed to the death of the others.

On the other hand, for Machado "otredad" is a presence within an I that suffers "una incurable alteridad". Through this presence the subject knows the basic truth of his being, namely that he is not alone in the world. It is not, however, "un deseo de preservar en su propio ser, sino más bien de mejorarlo", which in fact ties

desire in Machado to Heidegger's being-towards-death, as both are desires that point to a more full existence within the boundaries of life. For Machado, nonetheless, the subject has access to the "otredad" not with "fe metafísica", but with "fe poética", which ultimately links knowledge for Machado to God as the totally-other Other⁴⁶. "Otredad" is for Machado the door towards the living in community of I and you, where ethics are founded precisely inasmuch as it is a community, and where political theory finds its *raison d'être* in the conjugation of community and God:

Un comunismo ateo —decía mi maestro— será siempre un fenómeno social muy de superficie. El ateísmo es una posición esencialmente individualista [...] Este hombre [ateo], o no cree en Dios, o se cree Dios, que viene a ser lo mismo. Tampoco este hombre cree en su prójimo, en la realidad absoluta de su vecino[...] A este *self-made-man* propiamente dicho a este hombre que no se casa con nadie, como decimos nosotros, a esta mónada autosuficiente no le hable usted de comunión, ni de comunidad ni aun de comunismo. ¿En qué y con quién va a comulgar este hombre? [...] Dios aparece como objeto de comunión cordial que hace posible la fraterna comunidad humana (Machado 160-161).

⁴⁶ It is not surprising that Paz begins *El laberinto de la soledad* with the following quote from Machado: "Lo otro no existe: tal es la fe racional, la incurable creencia de la razón humana. Identidad = realidad, como si, a fin de cuentas, todo hubiera de ser, absoluta y necesariamente, *uno y lo mismo*. Pero lo otro no se deja eliminar; subsiste, persiste; es el hueso duro de roer en que la razón se deja los dientes. Abel Martín, con fe poética, no menos humana que la fe racional, creía en *lo otro*, en "La esencial Heterogeneidad del ser", como si dijéramos en la incurable *otredad* que padece *lo uno*". (Paz, *El peregrino...* 45). Paz indeed seems to follow, in *El laberinto...* as elsewhere, a poetic rather than rational logic, if not necessarily faith.

Regarding this idea of community, Machado and Paz show significant differences. Machado wants to

Escribir para el pueblo [...] aprendí de él cuanto pude, mucho menos, claro está, de lo que él sabe. Escribir para el pueblo es escribir para el hombre de nuestra raza, de nuestra tierra, de nuestra habla, tres cosas inagotables que no acabamos nunca de conocer [...] yo no he pasado de folklorista, aprendiz, a mi modo, de saber popular. Siempre que advirtáis un tono seguro en mis palabras, pensad que os estoy enseñando algo que creo haber aprendido del pueblo (Machado 67-68).

For Machado poetic language seems to unite the poet and the "pueblo", where the former *learns* from the latter, and not the other way around. For Paz, poetic language is the fence that separates the two, that separates "la lengua de la comunidad" — defined by the poet— from the "habla popular" that lies outside of the poem: it is the poet who sets the ground rules for the "aprendizaje" of the members of a community.

This is how from the combination of discourses in the modern era poetry has looked to create its product, its images: "La poesía convierte la piedra, el color, la palabra y el sonido en imágenes". If the poem ends up in a signification that is an image —if it converts its structural components into an image—, the experience of modernity reveals that at the bottom of this image there lies nothing more than death, the absence of a meaning *beyond* the meaning itself of the image as an image: "La ausencia de significación procede de que el hombre, siendo el que da sentido a las

cosas y al mundo, de pronto se da cuenta de que no tiene otro sentido que morir” (Paz, *La casa...* 159). The image does not have a meaning beyond itself, just as life remits no further than death. The desire that the poem exploits is not so different, then, from a Freudian death drive where the impulse is to destroy a construct in order to allow for another to be constructed in its place:

La experiencia poética es una revelación de nuestra condición original. Y esa revelación se resuelve en una creación: la de nosotros mismos. La revelación no descubre algo externo, que estaba ahí, ajeno, sino que el acto de descubrir entraña la creación de lo que va a ser descubierto: nuestro propio ser. Y en ese sentido sí puede decirse, sin temor a incurrir en contradicción, que el poeta crea al ser. Porque el ser no es algo dado, sobre lo que se apoya nuestro existir, sino algo que se hace. En nada puede apoyarse el ser, porque la nada es su fundamento (Paz, *La casa...* 162).

It is not in *La casa...*, however, but in *El laberinto de la soledad*—included in *El peregrino en su patria*, volume 8 of the *Obras completas*— where Paz seems to give a comprehensive description of the mode in which "la nada" is the foundation of the self, in specific the "Mexican self", which is primarily "disimulo", a "concealment" of the self brought about by the diverse forms in which the Mexican hides its being behind "masks".

The first concealment is that of the self, who is mimetically lost in the surrounding space as another object. But, if the claim of this mimetism is "rehusarse a las apariencias" taking a "natural" image, it is "una manera de ser sólo Apariencia" (Paz, *El peregrino...* 71): a character, a mask with which the self is concealed. This trap of concealment where the self becomes phantasmal leads to the concealment of "la existencia de nuestros semejantes" in the operation Paz calls "ninguneo [...] que consiste en hacer de Alguien, Ninguno. La nada de pronto se individualiza, se hace cuerpo y ojos, se hace Ninguno" (72). The relation between subjects is reduced by the Mexican, according to Paz, to the rejection of the subjectivity of the Other by ascribing him a completely thematized identity, crossed by a "nothingness" that excludes the subject where it is embodied from social interaction.

The second concealment follows the relation between "Ninguno" and "Don Nadie" —the name Paz gives to the "disimulador" who conceals first himself and then "Alguien"—. This relation is characterized by the "vociñera presencia" of "Don Nadie" and the "muro de silencio" encountered by "Ninguno" when he attempts to regain his identity as "Alguien" every time he summons "Don Nadie" (72). The solitude of the Mexican is rooted, thus, in the "silencio, anterior a la Historia".

The self might have its foundation in "nothingness", but poetry builds the poem with images created with language. The apparent logical imperative of Paz's poetry is then that the poet create the being. The ethical imperative of Paz's poetry would seem to be, thus, to manifest the Other that would emerge in the poetical

encounter with the “I”. It could not be any clearer for Paz: the subject’s constitution is founded in the poetic encounter: “El acto mediante el cual el hombre se funda y revela a sí mismo es la poesía” (Paz, *La casa...* 164). Poetic discourse absorbs both the ethical and the poetical enunciation⁴⁷.

In this fashion, the duality of Paz essayist/poet is analogous—one of Paz’s favorite words—to the duality of poetry/politics; in both instances, there is a direct correspondence with the duality revolutionary/conservative where much of the criticism on Paz has tried to locate him: “la poesía, una vez más, ostenta una doble faz: es la más revolucionaria de las revoluciones y, simultáneamente, la más conservadora de las revelaciones, porque no consiste sino en restablecer la palabra original” (Paz, *La casa...* 236). If criticism has tried to locate Paz in this divide it is because he himself wanted to create a diffused space between one and the other stance in order to discursively place himself.

Following an early adherence to Marxist socialism, the still young Paz distances himself from this position after growing disillusioned with it, although apparently he

⁴⁷ It is commonplace to argue that Paz had a “preocupación ética, particularmente en los primeros años de su trayectoria crítica” (Pastén 72-73). While Pastén focuses primarily on Paz’s 1930’s essays—particularly “Ética del artista” (1931)—, regarding *¿Águila o sol?* (1949-1950) Rachel Galvin states that “the poet must sacrifice himself to create. Poetry is born when the poet relinquishes his memories, his notions about the limits of language and poetry, and releases the few burning words he holds in his hands [...] In contrast to Breton’s surrealism, which is free from reason and ‘outside of all esthetic or moral concern,’ Paz’s is decisively both aesthetic and ethical” (50). If I believe both statements to be true, I think they can extend to all of Paz’s poetry. This essay tries to account for the problematic duality of this perception and Paz’s polemical public persona, trying to avoid the pitfalls of a criticism focused on Paz’s personality.

continued to believe in a liberal strand of socialism —an “European-style” socialism according to Weinberger (124)— until late in his life⁴⁸. Much of the most severe criticism on Paz bases its judgment on an alleged change in political belief to more reactionary views⁴⁹. In the final analysis, and inasmuch as the present essay focuses on a possible ethics derivable from his poetry and poetics, for my argumentation matters the mode in which Paz assumes his public presence, dominating twentieth century Mexican cultural landscape, and how this presence fits into his literary work. On this issue, it is perhaps more prudent to say Paz was a conservative. Regarding this point, Yvon Grenier has stated the matter better than anyone: “In Mexico, the tendency has too often been to bracket Paz as either a right-winger or—more rarely—as a left-winger (the Left has been more eager to accept Paz in its ranks since his death in 1998), a frustrating exercise since much of Paz ’s political thought has little to do with the left versus right divide” (Grenier 172). I cannot attest to the vehemence with

⁴⁸ For Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, “His early departure from Marxist ideology and his adherence to a consistently critical, and sometimes contradictory, version of liberalism as a political alternative to both Stalinism and fascism have been described by most of his intellectual biographers” (Sánchez 53). According to Enrique Krauze, a polemic intellectual in his own right, “Even now [c1985] he [Paz] says he is a Socialist (and if he were Spanish he would have voted for the PSOE), but this does not contradict, but rather reaffirms his profound disillusionment with Marxist-Leninism and the regimes which, in his words, usurp the Socialist name” (Krauze 131). This political shift had an aesthetic correlate for Jacobo Machover: “[Paz] creía que era capaz de transformar el mundo con sus actos y sus palabras y que le hicieron, entonces, abrazar una forma primitiva de «realismo socialista». Pero Paz supo romper con ella, gracias a los surrealistas, y volcarse hacia su interior” (Machover 50).

⁴⁹ Of which Ricardo Gullón's is not the only example: “he [Paz] bogs down in considerations that recall those repeated with suspicious frequency in the texts of the cold war” (Gullón 588). On the other side of the spectrum, Jason Wilson seems set on discarding a critique that questions Paz's status, if not necessarily the content of his work: “Paz's prose is a witty and sharp-tongued invitation to an argument that has so far only been challenged by dismissive gestures. His stance as a moral critic of Mexican and then Western societies has always been independent; his integrity cannot be questioned, but over the last decade he has ceased to speak for the left” (Wilson 1348).

which a political left desires to include Paz's texts "in its ranks", nor am I sure of the reasons for this desire. What is evident is that the frustration of such an attempt is not only due to the unclear delineation of his thematic regarding the left/right divide, but to the fact that from his texts the emerging vision is not oriented horizontally, but vertically, and written from a point of view that looks down when entering into a dialogue. To "accept Paz in its ranks", the left would have to accept in its discourse the irreducible presence of an agent who determines its Other and the mechanics of the constitution of both their subjectivities. It is, however, a folly not to engage with texts so rich in their poetical speculations, and that have been without question capital in the evolution of Mexican and Latin American cultural landscape since the better half of the 20th century.

Be that as it may, Paz's own work will be, I would argue, a self-critique inasmuch as its main object is the discourse on the revolutionary character of modernity, not conservative desires to petrify modernity into an everlasting *status quo*⁵⁰. The essayist seeks to maintain a tradition that he himself attempts to build. In order to "build" this tradition, the poet enters the political realm as a visible subject in the *polis* who, nonetheless, finds in language its other rather than in the citizen: "La moral del escritor no está en sus temas ni en sus propósitos sino en su conducta frente al lenguaje [...] En poesía la técnica se llama moral: no es una manipulación sino

⁵⁰ One need only to recall his much-repeated phrase that the right does not have ideas, only interests.

una pasión y un ascetismo” (Paz, *La casa...* 294). Apparently, only for the non-writer layman is morality the science that concerns with the “common good” and that seeks to found a coexistence where respect for the humanity of the other serves as the chief determinant for an action to be considered “good”. For Paz, in the case of the writer's actions, it is not with respect to the other members of society, but with respect to language that the category of “good” is relevant. Morality is thus displaced from the treatment of humans to the treatment of words. To “act” in a “moral” way—that is, in order to determine whether or not the action is good—makes sense for Paz only inasmuch as this “acting” is a *techne*, or the ability and skill with which the scriptural subject masters the procedures and resources of his art: writing.

Freed thus from ordinary “moral duty” regarding his writing, following Paz the writer would have instead a “technical duty”: the writer must master the resources of language in order to produce a “good” text. That the morality of a writer is his *techne* implies then that the writing be centered around a poetics to be mastered. As has been my contention, the set of “rules” inherent in this poetics were to be determined by Paz himself.

Now, if this *techne*/morality is a “passion” and an “asceticism”, the act of writing retains a human character, but only insofar as the act is individual: the only subject that experiences this passion, the only “ascetic”, is the writer himself in an eminently individualistic and solitary act. The virtue and perfection sought by the poet—be it spiritual or otherwise, as the semantic root *askēsis* implies (training, exercise)—

is attainable only by the acting in question: by writing. There seems to be no correlation for Paz between writing and the subjects that go around the world, before whom, as a writer, the subject would not be responsible. It seems impossible to derive a po/ethics of Paz's essays, neither in their praxis nor in their theory, inasmuch as the poet steers clear from the essay as a space where the tension between the discourses of ethics and poetry is represented, in a contingency that exceeds the limits of the text.

Los hijos del limo

By analogy, then, as the Being is a subject who acts according to a given morality, the poet is a subject who writes according to a given *techne*. As a Being, the subject is marked by a temporality that limits him and by an otherness that constitutes him. Time is the topic where Paz ended *El arco y la lira*, which from an autonomous text becomes an extensive chapter in *La casa de la presencia*. Time is also where Paz begins *Los hijos del limo*, also repurposed as a chapter in *La casa...*, problematizing its thematization as a historical construct. The “tradition of rupture” is the name Paz gives poetic modernity, which is then erected in a paradox: a tradition that denies itself at the same time that it affirms itself: “Lo que distingue a nuestra modernidad de las de otras épocas no es la celebración de lo nuevo y sorprendente, aunque también eso cuenta, sino el ser una ruptura: crítica del pasado inmediato, interrupción de la continuidad” (Paz, *La casa...* 335). This interruption of continuity might imply a temporal paradox, but not the impossibility of a paradoxical time; it rather implies the

necessity of such a time to have a resolution. Beneath modernity there lies an ephemeral nature that Paz attempts to prove insufficient: if all modern discourse centers around the future, according to him the poem—or better yet, the poem as it should be—is a presence in the present that makes time collapse into a point where the totality of times(s) concentrate(s): “la época moderna es la de la aceleración del tiempo histórico” (Paz, *La casa...* 337), which ultimately results in time reaching an exhaustion point when it simply cannot go anymore. Paz will later expand his definition as:

La época moderna —ese período que se inicia en el siglo XVIII y que quizá llega ahora a su ocaso— es la primera que exalta el cambio y lo convierte en su fundamento. Diferencia, separación, heterogeneidad, pluralidad, novedad, evolución, desarrollo, revolución, historia: todos esos nombres se condensan en uno: futuro (345).

Paz had already commented on the imprecision of the term “moderno” to designate an era. That this era is reaching its dawn *now*, in opposition to that “future” where the driving forces behind this era are condensed, is the vision Paz presents as sign of modernity's imminent demise, but is still a repetition of modern discourse. If modernity “exalta el cambio”, that the dawn of the future is now is a substitution of the future in favor of the present as a foundation for the now “no-modern” era, shifting the focus of existence from *becoming* to *being*. But a temporal being is a being who is always becoming: he was born, he will die, and in between his life will be a

continuous distancing from the former moment and nearing the latter, and his actions will oscillate between yearning for the former and racing towards the latter moment, as his desires fluctuate. Paz's vision is still of change. To substitute the linear notion of time for a punctual notion is a change that, as changes go, has no equal: it would be perhaps the ultimate modern gesture. Paz seems to pretend it to be also the last. A present without change, where differences are thus not possible, and where the plural becomes thus the singular and the homogeneous is a gesture that seeks to posit existence as a compact totality, whose component parts fit without difficulty within the system they are inscribed. Independent of the horizontal pole one situates Paz, his is a conservative gesture, and more: a radically conservative gesture.

In his poems Paz would have to oppose this modern notion of poetry if he is to follow his own poetics. Through analogy poetry would fulfill its potential; future poetry would start by returning to its mythical origin, retaking from this origin language as potential. The strategy of the poet is revealed as a rhetorical strategy in his use of rhythm::

Si la analogía hace del universo un poema, un texto hecho de oposiciones que se resuelven en consonancias, también hace del poema un doble del universo. Doble consecuencia: podemos *leer* el universo, podemos *vivir* el poema. Por lo primero, la poesía es conocimiento; por lo segundo, acto. De una y otra manera colinda —pero sólo para

contradecirlas— con la filosofía y con la religión. La imagen poética configura una realidad rival de la visión del revolucionario y de la del religioso. La poesía es la *otra* coherencia, no hecha de razones, sino de ritmos (Paz, *La casa...* 380)

If the poem is a universe, all that exists *is* in the poem, or what would be the same: the poem is only interested in its content, and the reality external to the poem is irrelevant for it. The poem then would be the conjunction of enunciations organized one next to the other in order for the resulting tension to produce "consonancias": sound units that, given the analogical and equality relations between them, are agreeable according to certain aesthetics. "Consonancia" implies the need for an aesthetics to be anterior to the poem, since without it there would be no way to differentiate between agreeable and disagreeable sounds. The need for an aesthetics implies therefore the category of cacophony, which would not be poetry.

Only the reality configured by this "poetic image" is the poem's concern, in opposition to the "visión del revolucionario y de la del religioso". Untied from contingent reality —and in rivalry with "vision"—, the poem in its images will seek to represent its reality reproducing the "figure" of the object as if it were the object itself, to the degree that it will claim to be in opposition to the creation of a fantasy lacking reality, or to an imageless intellectual illumination. The poem might be composed of images from subtracted vision, but it will always have a sonorous materiality: the poem will always be sound, so it will always be organized by a rhythm that will

determine the mode of becoming of things. If the subject is a temporal being and if the poem is its universe, the movements of the subject, both physical and intellectual, will be rhythmic.

It seems that in the case of Paz, though, within the poem there always remains the voice of the authorial poet manipulating the subject: it is the *Poet* who speaks in the poem and who creates a poetic subject: “El poeta dice, y al decir, hace. Este hacer es sobre todo un hacerse a sí mismo: la poesía no sólo es autoconocimiento sino autocreación” (Paz, *La casa...* 386). The poet writes the poem. The “saying” of the poet is his writing, where the poem is produced by giving a specific form to thought. The knowledge in the poem is then knowledge of the form that thought takes, and is self-creation to the degree that the subject assumes this form. Now, it is through the rhythmic manipulation of words that the poet plies his trade, giving to the created form a cadence which modulates the aural expectation of a subject who no longer writes the poem, but emerges from it. If the poetic subject assumes the form of the poem, this form has been created to the likeness of the thought that originates the poem with its rhythmic movement from one mental image to the next. The command that the poet seems to give the reader is, then, to “be there”, as a presence before the poem, allowing for the poem to inflect its form on the reader. The poet says to the reader in the poem “*voici*”.

In this fashion, the dogmatism of which Paz accuses social poets certainly seems to have a parallel with his own poetics, inasmuch as in both cases an authorial subjectivity would be postulating an imperative positioning of the self with respect to the claims of this authorial subject. In opposition to a vanguard that was co-opted by revolutionary discourses that made of it propaganda⁵¹, the Latin American vanguard Paz claims as his was, in a sense,

un regreso a la vanguardia. Pero una vanguardia silenciosa, secreta, desengañada. Una vanguardia *otra*, crítica de sí misma y en rebelión solitaria contra la academia en que se había convertido la primera vanguardia. No se trataba, como en 1920, de inventar, sino de explorar [...] Su preocupación no era estética; para aquellos jóvenes el lenguaje era, simultánea y contradictoriamente, un destino y una elección. Algo dado y algo que hacemos. Algo que nos hace (461).

Even if one concedes that Paz's poetry is "desengañada", that it is "silent" is at the very least a false representation coming from such a public, visible poet as Paz, who by most accounts lost no opportunity to make himself heard⁵².

⁵¹ According to Paz, "Los poetas se adhirieron al "realismo socialista" y practicaron la poesía de propaganda social y política. Sacrificio de la búsqueda verbal y la aventura poética en aras de la claridad y a eficacia política" (Paz, *La casa...* 460)

⁵² See Pastén's account of the "Coloquio de Invierno de 1992": "Tras mover cielo y tierra, Paz logra ser invitado a ese encuentro literario para más tarde condenar al gobierno mexicano por organizar un evento claramente político (es decir, de izquierda), dando término definitivamente a su amistad de cuatro décadas con Fuentes y rompiendo los lazos que lo unían a José Emilio Pacheco y Elena Poniatowska" (Pastén 72).

For Paz what serves as boundary between the being and time is the body, what ties the subject that is there, manifested in and by the poem, with the universal:

el cuerpo no sólo es un manantial de sensaciones sino de imágenes [...] la rebelión del cuerpo es también la de la imaginación [...] La resurrección del cuerpo quizás es un anuncio de que el hombre recobrará alguna vez la sabiduría perdida. Porque el cuerpo no solamente niega el futuro: es un camino hacia el presente, hacia ese ahora donde vida y muerte son las dos mitades de una misma esfera (468).

The limited extension of the body allows the subject to experience space and time through sensations: Infinity, in a time that is lived and always will be lived as present, and Finitude, in the ever short reach that his body allows. A body that is "manantial de sensaciones [... e] imágenes" is the source from where the images of this experience emanate in order to fill the poem, which remains the universe where the poetical body will move. That the body rebels and resurrects, being thus reestablished in the poem as an image, is to ignore that the body never ceased to be a source of knowledge in poetry, from the most elemental of sensual poems to the engaged poetry Paz severely criticizes. At the very least, in the first case the subject knows through the body the *jouissance* of the force of life, and in the second the agony of the unjust privation of this same *jouissance*. If it is not clear how the body "negates/denies the future", by the same token that the body is "camino hacia el presente" it is also the vehicle in which the subject walks towards his point of arrival, and in which the travel is experienced.

It is evident that through the individual experience of the body, in its deterioration, the subject heads towards his future, which is nothing if not his own body, come to that.

Paz's poetics is reiterated as a subjectification process where the main trait for the subject is the subject's own corporeity; it is in this body of the subject that the duality of life and death gains concretion. In this intersection between the body and the present ethics would emerge, not as a discourse where the subject is constituted, but one that modulates the existence of the body and of the subject as a desiring subject that gains pleasure in its *being* in the present, destined towards death. If the "now" is the central object of the inquiry, what is needed according to Paz is, more than an ethics of the politics of said "now", an ethics and a politics of the *modes* by which poetry will engage with the present in its reification, as "ambos [pasado y presente] son presencias y están *presentes* en el ahora. De ahí que debemos edificar una Ética y una Política sobre la Poética del ahora" (Paz, *La casa...* 469). As such, the present is a construct of language, and in the poetics of the present what is at stake is the shape of the future, as the time that follows the present, despite what Paz might have one believe.

The poems of Paz

Having traced some primary characteristics from Paz's major essays on poetry in order to derive a poetics from them, I finally arrive at his poems, understanding

that I leave out of this chapter a close reading of eleven out of fourteen volumes of the *Obras completas*. Moreover, of the two volumes into which Paz compiles his poetry, I delve into his early poetry—or rather, into the poems that first make an appearance in *Obras completas*, which gives them the appearance of being early—without a proper engagement with his latter, more experimental poetry, such as *El mono gramático* and *Blanco*. The purpose is twofold: one, to focus on the emergence of the subject in a poetry which attempts to remit to an origin near the end of Vallejo’s literary production where the previous chapter of the dissertation ended, and see it through the beginning of the literary production of Juan Gelman, where the next chapter will begin; and two, to trace the development of this subject as I explore how Paz gradually builds a poetic universe that finds its acme in a concrete entity where all of time, space, and life concentrate: the “Piedra de sol”, where a desiring subject learns his poetic universe as the space reveals itself in its images. In this poem Paz uses the pre-columbian artifact to remit to the tradition of Aztec culture indigenous to Mexico at the same time that it takes the canonical shape of the hendecasyllable to remit to the Western tradition he imitates. The form of the stone is thus the form of the poem, and is a form that seeks legitimation in the two main traditions of Mexican culture. The circular geometry of the object and the structure of the poem also remit to a cyclical time, but one concentrated in a particular point in space: past, present, future, and *becoming* are condensed in the instant of the poem, whose circularity and repetition create the rhythmical cadence which suggests its aim at an hypnotic, enchanting spell.

The need for an ethics to be derived results then from the actions of the subject as it encounters a body that is made of stone, of words, and of the desirable flesh of the female Other. In this fashion, "Piedra de sol" can be read as an attempt to fill nothingness by the creation of a signifying system where the *telos* of life in death is annulled in the poem's repetition as a model for the universe. This construct-character of the poem made evident by the artifice of writing points towards the prior existence of a subject who writes the poem, cuts the stone, creates the universe, and modulates the reading subject with the rhythm of the word written into text.

That Paz left to volumes eleven and twelve (*Obra poética I & II*) of his *Obras completas* the collection⁵³ of his poems shows in my estimation a desire to build a whole theoretical and critical apparatus with which to read his poetry, framed in a "universal" context thanks to which his poetry would gain coherence not only in the Hispanic world for the *Hispanista*, but in the "great conversation" of world literature for the comparatist.

In the poems themselves, the first enunciation of the lyrical I that names itself in "Libertad bajo palabra" —the opening poem of *Obra poética I*, and the title Paz chose for the often re-edited version of his collected poetry— situates this self in forward motion within an empty space, from where the I is able to see the boundaries

⁵³ An incomplete collection at that. Paz recognizes this, claiming that what he left out were not really poems, but attempts he relegates to volume XIII of the *Obras completas* (Paz, *Obra poética I* 19). After the *Obra poética* only two volumes remain: *Miscelánea I (Primeros escritos)* and *Miscelánea 2 (Entrevistas y últimos escritos)*.

that limit this universe: “Allá, donde terminan las fronteras, los caminos se borran. Donde empieza el silencio. Avanzo lentamente y pueblo la noche de estrellas, de palabras, de la respiración de un agua remota que me espera donde comienza el alba” (Paz, *Obra poética* 23). The first motion of the I is forward, but his first action —his locution, his *saying*— situates the I in an empty text from where he observes the universe external to the text, characterized by "silence" and separated from the text by "caminos" and "fronteras" that never cease to mark the difference between text and its outside even if "camino" and "frontera" end or become blurred. The textual space is delimited by the reach of the I's sight, and the external universe is what remains beyond, in analogous fashion to spherical geometry, where the horizon always sets the limit of the visual plane and vice versa, and the horizon is the boundary between what is visible and the universe beyond sight.

This empty text where the I is situated is then populated by "words", and with these words, with an inventory of "images", invented by the I in order to create his universe —a universe of which I will shortly propose a more detailed reading—. After the invention of the Other-You, the I "breaks" the image of this universe, but is unable to return the text to its original void, leaving in the space "soledad" and "sequía, campo arrasado". Facing the desolate landscape the I uses the apostrophe to call on his "conciencia", which he determines as "presente puro" where "pasado y porvenir" coexist, and which is in the final analysis an "eternidad que no desemboca", where, nonetheless, "Todo desemboca". That is, "conciencia" is where all that leaves

the mouth ["des-emboca"], all *saying*, concentrates and accumulates, where all saying finds its "*arke*".

Setting the poem as an "*arke*" of a knowledge devastated by the actions of the poet-demiurge, the I then situates himself in the extra-textual universe, where he can still see that "los caminos se borran" in the frontier with the text, and "silence" no longer begins, but ends with the poem as a reservoir of *said*s left by the poet, who then invents the subject that reads the produced text, a subject characterized by "desesperación", by the "mente que *me* concibe", and the "mano que *me* dibuja", and the "ojo que *me* descubre": a subject that has two modes, the "amigo" that is created in the likeness of the I, and the "mujer" that is created as his "contrario" and who has to be ultimately dominated by the I. After the invention of both text and reader, the creation of the poet ends with "la Palabra", which is in itself "libertad que se inventa y me inventa".

In this fashion, if the I first postulates two empty universes, he fills them both with his *inventio*, creating both text and world —text and reader: text and *Other*— as poetic products. Populating both universes the poet creates also the difference between the two. From its origin as an empty space, the universe external to the text was determined by a silence that does not appear to break with the advent of the Other-reader who seems to remain silent. The textual universe, on the other hand, by the end of the poem is determined by the "bullicio" of the poet's inventory. It is *against* this "silencio y bullicio" that the poet then states "invento la Palabra", which

capitalized indicates the law that rules over both universes; the Word "que se inventa y me inventa", and which invents thus language.

The temporal progression in the poem as the I moves forward is slow, and because of this, the proceeding of the I creates a space slowly un-emptied, breaking with his voice silence and nothingness. As was shown in his essays, nothingness and silence are linked according to Paz to the origin of humankind. Nothingness is the foundation of a Being that takes the corporeal form of "Ninguno". To this "Ninguno" corresponds "silence", as he faces "Don Nadie" and his "vocinglera presencia" in the dialectics presented by Paz from where the Mexican Self emerges. The rupture of silence and nothingness proposed in the poem seeks to reconstitute a Being through the same elements from where it emerged. The poem does not go against the phenomenology developed in Paz's essays, but seeks to transcend it, departing from the same postulates the essay found.

In the universe created in the poem, the only pre-existent space is the night — and the night as a text—, populated with stars —and stars as words—. “Libertad bajo palabra”: freedom under the word that is then also freedom under the stars; both freedoms are created by the populating subject who by filling the blank space configures a space where it is possible to enter and live freely. It is, in the end, a space

full of liberty that must however be preceded by the liberty —or better yet: will— to write⁵⁴.

This first enunciation is also, as the word of the I, the "respiración de un agua remota que me espera donde comienza el alba" (23). The poet creates not only the universe but time and life by causing natural succession: "Invento la víspera, la noche, el día siguiente que se levanta en su lecho de piedra y recorre con ojos límpidos un mundo penosamente soñado" (23). If time is created, though, the matter that serves as base for the poetic creation of the universe is already there: the stone.

The first Other that the I encounters —“unos niños idiotas”— use precisely the stone to hurl at the I, who finds himself in the middle of “un pueblo rencoroso que me señala” (23). Even though his creations, the I has not been able to avoid in the Others their wills, which stand in conflict with the I's, who in turn immediately discards them as wills from “idiotas” and “rencoroso” subjects. The first adjective used to define the others follows immediately after naming them and immediately reduces them to a plane inferior to the I. Thus the enunciating subject presents himself as a supreme being run-down by the violent action of other beings who take possession of the original tool to dethrone him. This first Others bring with them the instantaneous dethroning of the I as a supreme being by the re-appropriation of the

⁵⁴ For a more detailed analysis of the title *Libertad bajo palabra*, including the relationship between Paz's book and Marinetti's *Parole en libertà* see José Quiroga pp. 12-14.

stone and by the rebellion of a word that refuses to be subjected to the will of the subject that imprints it unto the text.

This dethroned I recurs to the creation of the “base” as a way to oppose the world from which it has been cast out: "Invento la quemadura y el aullido, la masturbación en las letrinas, las visiones en el muladar, la prisión, el piojo y el chancro, la pelea por la sopa, la delación, los animales viscosos, los contactos innobles" (23). After the enumeration that mixes the grotesque with *vérité*, the poem takes an unusual turn, as the I invents "el juez, la víctima, el testigo. *Tú* eres esos tres" (23, emphasis added). Here the subject splits from his initial I in order to address him in the second person, distancing from the grotesque universe created. The “minuciosa realidad” represented in images that remit obliquely to this universe is then one of a primal sacrifice, whose consequence is the foundation of the subject to whom the message of the I is addressed: You. The poem has been the creation of a universe in which an imaginary community stones the I amidst a grotesque environment—the I is the victim—. The sacrifice of this victim occurs, however, under the authorship and authority of this I, who traces with his word the final sentence—the I is the judge—. The poem remaining as a “mirror” in which the I sees his image, the I is also the witness of his own trial. In this fashion, before dissolving the poem in the rupture of the mirror and the image —“Romperé los espejos”—, the poem is erected as the space where the I distances from his self and becomes the Other whom the I

addresses. The constitutive otherness for the I's subjectivity in the poem is *inside* the subject himself who creates the poem.

The uselessness of breaking the mirror and the image is quickly realized, as the sacrifice it attempts to abolish has in fact constituted the subject: "Inútil cerrar los ojos o volver entre los hombres: esta lucidez ya no me abandona" (23). The poet cannot but face in the poem a space and a time that, once initiated, cannot be bound. The universe might have been created by words, but they cannot by themselves destroy it; words —as yet still not the Word— can only fragment the universe already created by the poem. But even these fragments are absorbed by an inexorable, incomprehensible space-time coincidence: "Todo desemboca en esta eternidad que no desemboca", that is, it all leads towards a signification without meaning, a "saying" that no longer says. The subject is thus condemned to his only way out: to recreate himself as a text to be read by the Other outside of the text, and outside of himself: "[invento] la mente que me concibe, la mano que me dibuja, el ojo que me descubre" (23). The first subject, former emperor of the universe of his making, traces as its project the creation of an Other that will not dethrone him: "Invento al amigo que me inventa [...] a la mujer [...] ciudad devastada que renace lentamente bajo la dominación de mis ojos" (23). Outside of himself, the poetic I seems only set in creating two others who satisfy two of his desires: the "amigo" to satisfy his desire for a double that is merely a replica of the I, and the "mujer" to satisfy his libidinal desire for a contrary that can be re-erected under his domination, and thus also mastered under

the I's sameness. In this fashion, the first subject seeks his foundation in the Word: "Contra el silencio y el bullicio invento la Palabra, libertad que se inventa y me inventa cada día" (23). The "Word" becomes an invention that attempts to bring order to the already created universe. The existence of this *logos* might mark the necessary beginning prior to the origin, but this *logos* that invents the self is the creation of the I *from* words.

This invention of the Word requires, thus, the ritual invocation of a primordial language. Music and dance, the primary artistic expressions of humanity —its first attempts at a systematic language— function as frontiers, as points of reference that situate both the enunciating subject and his addressee. In "Raíz del hombre",

Más acá de la música y la danza,
aquí, en la inmovilidad,
sitio de la música tensa, bajo el gran árbol de mi sangre,
tú reposas. Yo estoy desnudo (Paz, *Obra poética* 31).

The response of the I to this situation is an apparition whose nudity might pretend to be pure, but that cannot avoid the tension of a libido that ends up annulling the Other: "Tú, muerta, bajo el gran árbol de mi sangre" (31). The central opposition of I and You is proposed as an encounter between unequal subjects, "Yo desnudo" vs. "Tú muerta". It is not, however, an encounter between the I and an otherness that resists thematization. On the contrary, this You is represented in a doubly absolute

immobility. Not only is the body of the Other "lying dead" ["reposas... muerta"], but it is actually "bajo el gran árbol de *mi* sangre". That is, You is only a lifeless body crushed under the forceful image of the "música tensa" and the blood of the I. Moreover, this body of the You is unable to prevent its motionless lending to the whims of the "Yo desnudo". Furthermore, if blood is a tree, fruits can grow from it and blood can reproduce itself; then not only does the subject holds life, but also holds a body through which life flows, and is also a will that can give life with its sacrifice.

The reiterated affirmation "todo calla" points to the existence of a name for the "You" that has in this name an "ardent voice". This indication is followed, however, by the negation of the name and the separation of the object-you from its nominative. It seems that death liberates the object-you from its bindings to the language that names it and thus dominates it. Liberation *from* language is freedom *in* language, but apparently for Paz, under the control of the naming I. The wordless night is a state in which the vestment of language has been taken off. Death is the privation of language from a being that remains elsewhere. Poetry, as re-vestment, will seek to give new life to the objects by bringing them to the foreground, questioning thus the immediacy of a perception and of a world that would be conformed by a language that manifests itself in an artistic object where language is no longer part of a "background", but

rather emerges to the fore in art's "foregrounding of language", as Victor Shklovský would have it⁵⁵.

In the poem "Noche de resurrecciones", the subject listens to a river where he recognizes an Other who flows in the river as a "despojo". The stones in this river are associated by the subject with his own body; the natural elements in the river then morph into a sensual couple equated in the attributes of its individuals: river and stone, I and You, are all "blanca y desnuda" (Paz, *Obra poética* 37). To be "sepultado en tus aguas desnudas" implies then to be buried under a You that becomes white night and "bestia pura" (38).

If in this "early" poetry Paz humanizes earth, as has been seen, the body earth takes on is distinctly female: "curva como caderas / henchida como pecho, como vientre preñado" (38). If in this early Paz the first and foremost difference between I and You is their sex, every encounter with the Other towards whom the poem is directed is always modulated at first by eroticism. This difference from the Other is recognized instantly and approached in the sexual plane: the difference from the Other awakens immediately the animal, primal instinct to possess her. The Other is, above anything else, a desirable body. The dream that frames the poem is nothing if

⁵⁵ For Shklovský the function of art is precisely to disarticulate the immediate perception of the object that daily life implies for the subject: "art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (Shklovský 12, emphasis in the original).

not an erotic dream: "yo sueño y en mí sueña mi polvo acumulado" (38); that is followed immediately by the phallic allusion that brings the dream to concreteness: "y con mi sueño crece la silenciosa espiga" (38). The enunciating subject reveals himself then as none other than Adam: "en mi costado latas y tu latir me anega" (38). God's intervention is no longer a necessity: the poem's primal man, with his own hand, has taken from its interior the seed from which reality will be born.

The relation between subjects in Octavio Paz is then primarily "body to body"; two intertwined bodies with wills that might have conflicting desires, crossed vectors despite the similarities they might share. This property common to the bodies modulates the space where the encounter takes place: thus, if in "Dos cuerpos" bodies are waves, "la noche es océano" (Paz, *Obra poética* 53); if bodies are stones, "la noche es desierto" (53). Even when abstracted from the represented relation in the poem, the I recognizes the violence of the sensual relation: "Dos cuerpos frente a frente / son a veces navajas / y la noche relámpago" (53). The encounter between bodies creates a rupture in space with the sacrifice of individuality, as two bodies occupy one same space that cannot be said to be occupied by either one alone.

In this fashion, Paz's poetry configures its subject by explicitly questioning the nature of the subject configured and the process through which the subject is subjectified. In "Pregunta" the poem begins, not with a question but with a command: "Déjame, sí, déjame, dios o ángel" (Paz, *Obra poética* 64). Before formulating the question *per se* the subject seeks to cast the inner subjects that

conform him as parts, to denude his voices to achieve a voice he can recognize as his I's, but cannot seem to untie himself from the subjects that are *like* his I, an otherness "que me odia porque yo soy él mismo" (64). Just as the Other that is a desirable body is always female for Paz, the I that desires this body is always male. It seems that in Paz's poems the appearance of another male Other awakens, instead than the desire for possession, the suspicion of confrontation. The likeness between I and Other appears to be the prelude of the struggle between the two to control the conscience of the text. Only one subject can *think* the poem and populate it with images, there is no room for a second conscience in the body of the poem.

The conformation of the subject, in the final analysis, cannot be reduced beyond the body/conscience pair: the poem directs from an I-conscience to a You-body that shares the vital space with the I. Ultimately, the question is about the space where the singular I and the plural You share their existence:

¿Quién sabe lo que es un cuerpo,
un alma,
y el sitio en que se juntan
y cómo el cuerpo se ilumina
y el alma se obscurece,
hasta fundirse, carne y alma,
en una sola y viva sombra? (64).

To denude is then to be ready for the question:

pregunto, ya desnudo:
me voy borrando todo,
me voy haciendo un vago signo sobre el agua,
espejo en un espejo (65).

The I denudes himself to leave behind the matter it is not, in a first purge of concealments that becomes the first honesty. In its denudement the subject states “I am *this*”, not what lends itself to be seen at first glance. Thus denuded, only two options are left: once nude, either the body is covered or the subject also strips himself from the body by sacrificing it. To denude before the Other is to be participant in the destruction of the I that is either covered or disintegrated. Poetry as denudement in Paz is the step that precedes the ultimate sacrifice where the enunciating I strips itself from its own enunciation and is left only with an otherworldly voice as the echo of a subject disappearing in front of our eyes.

Just as the subject is denuded and sacrificed in order to become a “ser puro”, the words have to be denuded by the poet. The work of the poet, even if it only deals with words, is still violent. If in “Las palabras” it is necessary to make the “putas” words squeal, it is because it is not enough to dilute all referents from them until the unique, or better yet, exact meaning intended by the artist is left:

Dales la vuelta,
cógelas por el rabo (chillen, putas),
azótalas [...]

cápalas,
písalas, gallo galante,
tuérceles el gaznate, cocinero[...]
hazlas, poeta,
haz que se traguen todas sus palabras (Paz, *Obra poética* 66-67).

In order for “words to swallow all their words”, the word must be violated: the word must be subjected to the will of an I that denudes them and hence creates them. The work of the poet is thus to make sense of the inconsistencies that the word might have as they are inserted in the discourse; to ensure that the paradoxes of language cease to lack logical sense, without them ceasing being paradoxes nor resigning the ambiguity inherent in them.

The poem as a space for the desubjectification of the I is an abyss where the subject risks falling into a null space. Through the poem, the I loses its solidity as language loses its formal structures in order for the poem’s poetic structure to emerge: the I that is founded in the grammar of a language cannot but collapse when faced with an alternate that puts it in check. This is how, in “La caída”, language implodes in the poem and leaves in its place the vortex through which the subject falls: "un caer en mí mismo inacabable / al horror de no ser me precipita" (Paz, *Obra poética* 69). In this fashion the poem is an experience analogous to death, where the being faces the reality of its non-being and the imminence of its end-of-being.

The space through which the subject in Paz moves will seemingly be, from this point forward, characterized by the stone and its relation with the word in a poem that becomes a verbal space. Even when the subject ventures through the city this space is delimited by the analogies with the open, “pedregosos” spaces where they remit the subject. In "Crepúsculo de la ciudad", this deserted night is an open space to the degree that it is inhabited, approaching thus a ruin. If man is what prevents space from becoming a ruin —preventing matter from following its natural course and deteriorating when in contact with the surrounding elements—, that man ceases to name, to sign, is the first symptom of the ruin. The stone in the ruin loses its potentiality: "la luz se atarda en la pared ruinosa; / polvo y salitre soplan sus desiertos" (Paz, *Obra poética* 69); and as the inhabited city runs the risk of becoming ruins, the subject emerges from them:

Todo lo que me nombra o que me evoca
yace, ciudad, en ti, signo vacío
en tu pecho de piedra sepultado (69).

The subject appears as a manifestation conjured by the ruin. He does not appear, however, from an outside, but from within, being already buried as a memory to be "evocada" in the city's "pecho de piedra". If the subject is manifested through what "names" it or what "evokes" it, he is manifested through a word that gives him a name. This name is, however, a "signo vacío". That is, a sign whose referent is not where the name points as its supposed location. In its constant invention, the poem

seeks to fill the sign with a meaning that remits to its referent —be it the subject or the rest of the universe comprised in the poetic invention— and makes of the ruin a *locus* that might be empty, but is not a *void*.

Nightfall might be the ruin of the city, bringing about the “destrozo” of its “muerte cotidiana” (70) as it prevents the light of meaning to shine on the object, but it will be followed by poetry’s daylight and proper naming. Poetry inhabits as it populates the spaces emptied by a historical becoming that has made of the void left in its wake an “abigarrado horror” that lead to “la nada, sola certidumbre” (71); which is to say that the result of History has been the ruin of a world where it is possible only to know the fact of its own existence *ex nihilo*, and of its eventual becoming something else. Only poetry for Paz would make possible that this eventuality, having departed from nothingness also, will be *significant*, even if the world remains a ruin. Poetry gives meaning to the future, or at least to the reality that is to become. Time then functions as a linear concatenation of events that can be reduced to a pure insistence in time itself.

Entre la piedra y la flor

In “Entre la piedra y la flor”, the poem represents the constant flow of the life of the subject that emerges from the poem's petrous self. The poem begins with a statement that posits man in the middle of a temporality that goes beyond it, that traverses it and in the middle of which it is transmuted: "Amanecemos piedras" (Paz,

Obra poética 86). That is, the moment that light is manifested the voice announces its existence as a stone, as a mineral fossil of time and earth. This stone, however, is the base over which earth is sustained as by a "palma de una mano de piedra" (86), made of the same matter that the mythical entity Atlas holds in his hands. This first verse of the poem makes its appearance, also, as a loose stone lying in a blank space. Poetry and poetic force seem to be made of the elements that occupy the white desert of the silenced language. The word is the stone created by the poetic naming.

Out of this uniformity in the desert the "henequen" stands out as an index that emerges from the ground pointing towards the sky:

Planicia enorme, sin arrugas.

El henequén, índice verde,

divide los espacios terrestres.

Cielo ya sin orillas (86).

As a violent product that grows from earth, the henequen is the result of the transformation of the elements which feed from earth itself. The plant is a mythical figure that hides in its origin a reality the poem will try to determine:

qué obstinación de fuego ya frío,

años y años como saliva que se acumula

y se endurece y se aguza en púas? (87).

It is thus how the henequen erects itself from the stone, with a flower at its apex with which the plant ultimately is sacrificed:

Viene de los reinos de abajo,
empuja hacia arriba y en pleno salto
su chorro se detiene [...]

Forma visible de la sed invisible (87).

The third part of the poem opens with a statement that illuminates the whole: "Entre la piedra y la flor, el hombre" (88). Man is what lies between the stone and the flower: therefore what lies in the poem. The poem is then the emergence of a subject that pretends to call himself *Man*, as a concept with universal traits whose voice assumes the posture of a cyclic temporality: "el nacimiento que nos lleva a la muerte, / la muerte que nos lleva al nacimiento" (88).

Between the stone and the flower according to the phenomenology proposed in the poem, is also the henequen, representing too man as a force that emanates from the ground. In the final analysis, the thesis that the poem formulates is that of man as a mythical figure; it is not, however, to this figure that the image of the henequen refers, but towards a human conceptualization that has come to control man's destiny:

El henequén,
verde lección de geometría
sobre la tierra blanca y ocre.
Agricultura, comercio, industria, lenguaje.
Es una planta vivaz y es una fibra,
es una acción en la Bolsa y es un signo.

Es tiempo humano,
tiempo que se acumula,
tiempo que se dilapida (88).

If behind the idea of henequen's mythical figure there is an analogy with man, the actual form that it takes as it becomes an image remits to money. Poetic inquiry moves then to elucidate this analogy between plant and money taking sides decidedly in favor of the former:

No el reloj del banquero no el del líder:
el sol es tu patrón, de sol a sol es tu jornada
y tu jornal es el sudor,
rocío de cada día (89).

By substituting the stone and the flower for money man has lost his destiny. This change the poet links to a change in the notion of a time that from linear becomes cyclical.

Paz critique on money is not only materialist. Rather he tries to understand the new mythological system where money is inscribed:

El dinero es una fastuosa geografía:
montañas de oro y cobre,
ríos de plata y níquel,
árboles de jade
y la hojarasca del papel moneda (90).

Linear time's infinite continuum deprives subjects of the possibility of a new birth, and makes of death a mere fact: "La muerte es un sueño que no sueña el dinero" (91). It is only after outlining the critique of the archetype that it is possible for the poet to make the materialist critique:

El trabajo hace las cosas:
el dinero chupa la sangre de las cosas.
El trabajo es el techo, la mesa, la cama:
el dinero no tiene cuerpo ni cara ni alma (92).

Ultimately, money lies outside of the poem, it is what the poem refuses to admit within. Unlike poetic images, which might have a body—and with this body blood, face, and soul—, money always remains a notion that merely points to a referent without identification between the two.

La poesía

In the poem "La poesía", poetry is a certainty that grows in the subject and awakens in it "los furores, los goces,/ y esta angustia" (Paz, *Obra poética* 97); that is, poetry spurs sensations into existence. To be attuned with poetry is to be cognizant of the sensory and emotional experiences internal to human psyche.

The experience of the world leaves the subject in ruins, but poetic experience reconstitutes him in opposition to this external violence.

Entre mis ruinas me levanto,
solo, desnudo, despojado, sobre la roca inmensa del silencio,
como un solitario combatiente
contra invisibles huestes (97).

This poetic experience is, nonetheless, a violent experience: "Verdad abrasadora, /¿a qué me empujas?/ No quiero tu verdad" (97). The subject's experience of poetry is an intimate encounter with the language with which it is constituted as a subject. Poetry's truth regarding man seems to be that man is a being made from sensations and desires that fail to fill him. The word that poetry puts in the mouth of man is "more", so the first instinct is to reject the "avidez que sólo en la ser se sacia" and the spirit that "hace arder todas las formas" (97).

Poetry's second truth makes it possible for the subject to restrain violence, for if poetry awakens thirst in the subject, it is a thirst that grows from within: "Subes desde lo más honde de mí,/ desde el centro innombrable de mi ser" (97); and as a violence from the depths of being, poetry irrevocably dominates it in the end: "Ya solo tú me habitas,/ tú, sin nombre, furiosa sunstancia,/ avidez subterránea, delirante" (97-98). Already inhabited by poetry the subject can then control this substance that at the same time liberates it. Through the experience of this poetic truth the subject *knows* itself: "te toco,/ substancia intocable,/ unidad de mi alma y de mi cuerpo" (98).

Poetry substitutes the Cartesian pineal gland with an amorphous form, substance instead of organ, that emanates and flows from the subject's dark interior. The

ontological postulate cannot be formulated as *cogito ergo sum*, but rather as "tan sólo existo porque existes" (98). The existence of the subject is marginalized and subordinated to the existence of another entity that brings the subject into existence and deprives it of its *cogitare*. By another entity, I mean the externalization of poet's own subjective voice, whose thought invents the poem and modulates the subject's. If Paz's poetry is definitely influenced by Mexican indigenous tradition, the poem's voice now attempts to reconcile this tradition with Western canonical poetry, perhaps losing mythical scope, but gaining greater theological depth.

Poetic experience is then a rapture where the subject allows himself to be taken away by the internal substance of his desires and emotions in order to know himself as a subject with a soul:

Llévame, solitaria, [...]
despiértame del todo,
hazme soñar tu sueño,
unta mis ojos con tu aceite,
para que al conocerte me conozca (99).

The subject anointed with poetry is in tune with its interior being, its desires and history. It is a product of poetry itself: a thinking self produced by the poet's own thinking.

The poetic subject then finds the Other as a body and approaches it in an attempt to satisfy his desire. This body of the Other, in "Cuerpo a la vista", is

presented as a geography that in its finitude concentrates a space that otherwise tends to infinity. The apparition of this body breaks the darkness of shadows in order to reveal itself as a source of light:

Y las sombras se abrieron otra vez y mostraron un cuerpo:
tu pelo, otoño espeso, caída de agua solar,
tu boca y la blanca disciplina de sus dientes caníbales,
[prisioneros en llamas,
tu piel de pan apenas dorado y tus ojos de azúcar quemada (Paz, *Obra poética* 116).

The description of the body falls outside of the possibilities of the regular verse, the poem opting for a greater length that breaks the continuity of the empty space and looks to fill the blank space with words that overflow the line, creating in its turn new blank spaces. In this effort the verse merely postpones without negating the imminence of the blank space and silence.

This body of the Other becomes for the subject an image of its own transcendence:

Patria de sangre,
única tierra que conozco y me conoce,
única patria en la que creo,
única puerta al infinito (117).

The Other is an object through which the subject traverses, and beyond which he finds infinitude. It is a body offered to sight, which gives access to infinity through an approach to the Other that must give himself to the violence of the inquisitive gaze of the poet who looks to dominate this Other with poetic enunciation. He seeks to apprehend it in a poetic *topos* that is fundamentally a representation of the subject's sameness. The otherness of the Other is subsumed in the subject's gaze. The transcendence of the Other lies outside any poetic speculation for Paz inasmuch as the Other is always absorbed into a unity with the I. Any separation into parts of the self is for the subject that emerges from Paz's poems a process that will eventually lead to reestablishing the central unity of an I coalesced in its sameness.

The emergence of the ethical subject in *Piedra de sol*

From the poetic subject's initial appearance in "Libertad bajo palabra" onwards, he manifested himself in the act of motion, configuring with his appearing a liberating space that required a previous will to write, and thus created a time and a universe with both the invented word and the stone as an already-there element that had to be appropriated. The invention of the word implied an invocation of language that could not avoid awakening the subject's primal desires. These desires took the shape of a libido, which led to a denudement that attempted to cast off from the self both word and language. In this attempt, the self aimed at manifesting not as a form, but as an essence. This essence sought to revest itself through poetry, and with this revestment,

the self assumed an aesthetic body which departed from the concrete rather than imaginary representation of his corporeity brought to the fore.

As a primary, given matter, the stone was still sensible for the poetic, always male subject who entered in an erotic relation with the female, stony body of Nature and Language: earth was for the poet a female body fertilized by his word. The central tension of the poem rests in its being a space where I and You share their existence. The poem is thus a space for the desubjectification of the I inasmuch as the referent body for this I cannot be the space's only inhabitant. The motion of this poetic subject through the space of the poem then has to deal with its petrous nature that is both feared and desired, as it is both erotic and dangerous.

In his inhabiting the poem, Man prevents it from becoming a ruin. It is in this dual nature that poetry makes possible the concentration of times into a single point. In this fashion, as the stone is eternal, so is the ruin eternal since it exists in the present, and in its present exists its past, projected towards the future in the subject's forward motion, in which, as the poetic experience of emergence from ruins, Man is created as a being traversed by the desires of a body that might be his, but is thematized by the gaze of the lyrical I.

In “Piedra de sol” —a poem which for José Quiroga “signals Paz's definitive move to another «phase»” (Quiroga 44)— Paz attempts a great summation of all of the main themes already mentioned, and from which the emerging subject is

constituted by his experience of a concrete matter that is at the same time stone, body, and poem with a poetic complexity unparalleled in Paz's previous work⁵⁶. Clara Román divides the diverse critical interpretations that the poem has had into five. The first of these interpretations was mainly the initial reception that read the poem in an eminently biographical tone that reflected the reading of “aquellos lectores ortodoxos para quienes *Piedra de sol* representó un intento de Paz de renunciar a la escuela "decadente" y "extranjerizante" del surrealismo” (Román 28). The second and third critiques of *Piedra de sol* followed readings that focused in the mythical⁵⁷ aspects of the poem, in both its astronomical and archetypal modes respectively. The fourth strand of interpretation focused in the dialectics between the temporal and the erotic, while the fifth mode of reading would correspond to a strict observance of Paz's own

⁵⁶ For Rachel Phillips “The diversity of style and content in the poetry of Octavio Paz from 1935 to the present is amazing to the reader and a problem for the critic. The simplicity of style and clarity of image of the earliest collections seem at first sight to have little in common with the complex transitions of 'Piedra de sol' or the tortured fragmentation of some of the poems in *La estacion violenta*” (Phillips 328).

⁵⁷ In this vein Rachel Phillips argues that “'mythic' best describes the mode of those poems in which external analogies and decorative elements are most apparent. The relationship is only too obvious between the mythological pattern of life, death and rebirth and the complementary (interpenetrating?) poles of Paz's poetic vision: the emergence of the poem at the cost of suffering and sacrifice on the part of the poet, and the experience of erotic love as a rite of passage to a higher consciousness which gives a vision of undifferentiated Being. This is the paradigm behind the Nahua traditions of Quetzalcoatl and his double Xolotl which underscore the poems 'Piedra de sol' and 'Salamandra' ” (Phillips 329). For Camilo Fernández, on the other hand, *Piedra de sol* is an “anthropological poem” like those that instead of remitting to a culture “construyen la cultura. A manera de radares, permiten la inserción de lo nuestro en el universo y posibilitan la internacionalización de las prácticas culturales: dialéctica del yo y del otro, diálogo antes que monólogo, fin del soliloquio autoritario y apertura de infinitas vías de interpretación” (Fernández 101).

interpretation of *Piedra de sol* (Román 28). In the final analysis, for Román the poem is a synthesis of all, as it

narra un viaje hacia la reconquista del Ser que se busca, no en el retorno a los orígenes sino, en un instante privilegiado, capaz de rescatarlo y entregarlo al autor / lector. El Ser rescatado en la memoria y la escritura del poema mismo está sujeto, sin embargo, al tiempo y a las apariencias. De modo que a cada instante de salvación sigue una caída que divide al hablante de sí mismo, escindiéndolo entre el recuerdo del encuentro erótico y la profecía poética (Román 33-34).

In this fashion, the poem is an invitation not to return to utopian Being, but to the reinvention of *Being* in a totalizing view of a world embodied in a primal word that reconciles life with language (Román 34). It is my contention that this experience of *Being* is primarily the experience of time and space in a universe configured by the manifestation of a subject constituted in its encounter with a space originally devoid of life⁵⁸.

The original “sun stone”, as is well known, is a calendar: a graphic representation of time. It is also a space. It is not however a mere surface over which

⁵⁸ For Anthony Stanton, “*Piedra de sol* aspira a ser una poesía de comunión que contiene en su interior, asimilada y sintetizada, la experiencia de la soledad” (Stanton 78). Indeed, solitude is one of the foundational feelings of mankind according to Paz. It is the genitive of the labyrinth where Paz searches for a Mexican identity. In Terry Hoy's estimation, “[solitude] is the deepest facet of the human condition, emerging with the break from the life of the maternal womb and a consciousness of loss and abandonment in a strange and hostile atmosphere” (Hoy 371).

numbers indicate a sequence that can be mechanically reconstituted; the Aztec sun stone is a space populated by signs that in order to be interpreted require the reconstruction of a narrative that departs from a mythology with which not only temporal course but the whole universe is explained. The sun stone is a map with which, by positioning within it, the subject guides its steps in time.

The geometry of this stone does not allow one to begin in a set origin; it is only possible to enter into a circularity that will follow, that will keep regenerating and that, in this mechanics, will regenerate the subject that enters in it. The poem, by entering into this cycle, cannot but begin *in media res* with a numberless enumeration already began prior to the beginning:

un sauce de cristal, un chopo de agua,
un alto surtidor que el viento arquea,
un árbol bien plantado mas danzante,
un caminar de río que se curva,
avanza, retrocede, da un rodeo
y llega siempre:

un caminar tranquilo (Paz, *Obra poética* 217).

The first experience in the poem is not that of time, even though the poem develops in a calendar, but that of a space revealed to the poet in the stone itself. Poetic enunciation becomes, in its Adamic-nominative function, the mode in which the poet marks his presence in a world that precedes both poet and enunciation. Within the

poem, this enunciation is that “caminar de río que se curva”, a concatenation of words that flow, and in whose flux creates the stone’s own flow, of both its matter and time and that "sostiene en vilo al mundo" (217) with the gaze of the poet. This flow of rocky matter is possible because of the stone’s genitive precedence: “piedra *de* sol”, stone *made* of sun, of light, a materiality already transcendent in itself, due to which "el mundo ya es visible por tu cuerpo" (218). As the origin of the world, it is the stone that gives the world its properties.

From the flow of the world and the fluid stone, the I makes a sudden appearance as the alchemical product of the transformation from magma to a solid that is transparent despite its solidity:

el mundo ya es visible por tu cuerpo,
es transparente por tu transparencia,
voy entre galerías de sonidos,
fluyo entre las presencias resonantes,
voy por las transparencias como un ciego,
un reflejo me borra, nazco en otro,
oh bosque de pilares encantados (218).

The subject makes here its first appearance in “Piedra de sol” showing its dynamic faculties much like the first subjective appearance in “Libertad bajo palabra”; in both scenarios the reiterated initial action of the manifested subject is movement: "voy entre galerías de sonidos"; but this is a flow through a world that seems to lack

materiality. To move thus through an immaterial region in a world of stone is to walk blindly, “como un ciego”, without being able to fully experience the world as a subject by the subject’s own self.

The sun stone then serves as a map with which the subject can guide his steps through the world this map represents. In this fashion, just as the pre-Columbian sun stone was a mythic-chemical map for the Aztec, the poem “Sun stone” —a stone made word— becomes a mythic-chemical map that, as the incarnation of the circularity of time, explains to the modern subject his existence in a world that has become a forest of concepts. If this forest is determined as made from “pilares encantados” it is because these pillars are fruit of a seed that in order to be planted must be, instead than thrown to the soil, sang to the air: the pillars are the words that are the seeds; words enchanted by poetry’s alchemy that makes of enunciation a manifest reality.

The fascination with the ancestral past in the poet seems to arise from the possibility it allows him to imagine a time when it was possible to think of an origin accessible to man without the prosthetic artifice of concepts. The body itself of the stone can thus be the whole world it looks to make into a symbol: “voy por tu cuerpo como por el mundo” (218). In this cartographic and sensual stone the subject enters in physical relation with the world, and in this stone man’s physicality is defined, and through this corporality, his libido. The stone gains “vientre y pechos” —chest and stomach—, thus becoming an object of flesh and blood. I will later return to the

primary meaning of “vientre y pechos” —womb and breasts— and the erotic relation of the subject with the world; for the moment, I am interested in noting that the stone is already a whole living body.

In this fashion, the first philology —man’s first attempt at making a coherent logical system to account for the world and human enunciation of its experience of this world even before ascribing mythological values to it— seems to have been for the poet the sensual-sensory relation with contingent matter, which constitutes his poetical relation with his reality. The phenomenal progression would be: 1) matter, 2) conscience, 3) poetry, and 4) mythology, which in its turn would be followed by the whole conceptual envelope in which the realities of both poet and reader are wrapped.

Having established the first solidity found by the subject as that of the stone/world through which the poetical subject is guided, the first physical experience of the world is poetical, and is in itself poetry. The apparition of the body of the I follows, but subordinated to its sacrifice:

abres mi pecho con tus dedos de agua,
cierras mis ojos con tu boca de agua,
sobre mis huesos llueves, en mi pecho
hunde raíces de agua un árbol líquido (219).

Only through the world offered by the stone can the subject have a body; at the limit of this world transgressed, the body disintegrates completely:

voy por tu cuerpo como por un bosque

como por un sendero en la montaña
que en un abismo brusco se termina,
voy por tus pensamientos afilados
y a la salida de tu blanca frente
mi sombra despeñada se destroza,
recojo mis fragmentos uno a uno
y prosigo sin cuerpo, busco a tientas (219).

Writing is then figured as the solitary process of the search for subjective integration in which both time and life are spent, but that can only repeat the original fragmentation in order to find itself in the end invisible between mirrors that can only repeat its invisibility. Writing is then not the process of subjective reconstitution, but an exploration on the fragmentation itself that would constitute the subject, a fragmentation that allows the subject to disconnect into separate parts of the self to the point that he can see himself as an object:

invisible camino sobre espejos
que repiten mi imagen destrozada (219).

Even more, the writing of the poem makes it possible for the subject to witness the construction of its subjective division in this excision that fractures time and experience:

yedra que avanza, envuelve y desarraiga
al alma y la divide de sí misma

escritura de fuego sobre el jade

[...]

escritura del mar sobre el basalto,

escritura del viento en el desierto,

testamento del sol, granada, espiga (220-221).

If time as represented in the sun stone is cyclical and the past always reformulates the passing of time in the present, temporal unity in writing has to remain always uniform. With the unending repetition of the structure of the hendecasyllable the present seems to always be repeating its form as in an enchantment in order for time to emerge not as a property intrinsic to neither the stone nor the subject, but as an ordering creation that, once created, becomes irrevocable. Time is then, paradoxically, the template used by the poet to shape his creation —the present is created in the shape of the past—, at the same time that it is the created form, as the poem seems to reconfigure time —the present is anterior to the past—. The writing of time is an inscription in the body of the stone and the body of the poem; it is also an inscription in the body of the subject who seeks integration:

años fantasmas, días circulares

que dan al mismo patio, al mismo muro,

arde el instante y son un solo rostro

los sucesivos rostros de la llama,

todos los nombres son un solo nombre,
todos los rostros son un solo rostro,
todos los siglos son un solo instante (221).

If totality is reducible to an element and centuries are reducible to a single instant, the sun stone functions as the finite representation of a totality that finds its limit in repetition; as the spherical geometry allows one to return to the point of departure without ever reaching the horizon, likewise with time. Life, to live life in the course of its becoming, would be like the constant and inexorable race to a horizon that is never reached, but that always leads back to its origin. In "Piedra de sol" poetry will be the attempt to get a bit closer to this horizon by delimiting the world with words.

In this process of integration, time penetrates the I and makes it a subject by inscribing him in time:

el instante translúcido se cierra
y madura hacia dentro, echa raíces,
crece dentro de mí, me ocupa todo,
me expulsa su follaje delirante,
mis pensamientos sólo son sus pájaros,
su mercurio circula por mis venas,
árbol mental, frutos sabor de tiempo (222).

At first, the "instant" is sealed so it can then mature and take roots within the body of the self, becoming a temporal tree that develops, but does not change its position with

respect to the point where it originates. This original soil is the poem, and the body itself of the self, which becomes the trunk where the I is born. Unlike the I and its mercurial, erratic passions which are still linked to the body, the thinking mind of the self is free to flutter around and thus transcend the temporality that gave it birth. It is with writing that both tree and bird, stasis and flight, are complete in a subject in time. And by inscribing him with the “roja escritura indescifrable” with which time “escribes en mi piel” (222), selfness is violently inscribed in the body of the subject with a death that paradoxically gives him the opportunity to repeat himself as an being of time:

¡caer, volver, soñarme y que me sueñen
otros ojos futuros, otra vida,
otras nubes, morirme de otra muerte!
—esta noche me basta, y este instante
que no acaba de abrirse y revelarme
dónde estuve, quién fui, cómo te llamas,
cómo me llamo yo (224).

Already inscribed by time, with time, in time, the "instant" is no longer "translucent" as it has gained the opacity of a solid body. If this instant was previously sealed into a kernel that was to become a tree, once subjectivity begins to flourish time remains as an "instante que no acaba de abrirse y revelarme". That is, identity still lacks a referent

the I can claim as its name beyond the pronominal. It is still a "signo vacío" that must continue to search in the poem its meaning.

Having gained a mortal body —and, as mortal, a transcendent body— the I then occupies a space in the world that it finds as shared. Without further ado —the poem leaves little doubt—, carnal solidarity becomes the foundation for the ethics of the subject. In physical contact the inhabited world is effectively birthed as an inviolable space to be defended with this relation:

porque las desnudeces enlazadas
saltan el tiempo y son invulnerables,
nada las toca, vuelven al principio
[...] oh ser total (225).

It is precisely in the moment of pure creation that is the coitus —as enabler of reproduction, and hence of the foundation of the world and life— when, naked, the subject finds himself face to face, body to body with the Other. Naked, self and Other face the truth of their bodies, the truth of their matter, the truth of their being alive; and faced with this fragility, the need for ethics. Thus, before the naked truth, love is ethics; honesty with the body, with the being that *is-here* becomes the ethics of the subject. The world is regenerated thanks to this love as ethics that preserves both time and space; thanks to this love as ethics the world can have a cyclical time:

[...] ¡espacio, espacio,
abre la mano, coge esta riqueza,

corta los frutos, come de la vida,
tiéndete al pie del árbol, bebe el agua!

todo se transfigura y es sagrado,
es el centro del mundo cada cuarto

[...]

el mundo nace cuando dos se besan (226).

It is precisely at the moment when the subject finds himself accompanied in the world
turned room that ethics are found because then

las máscaras podridas
que dividen al hombre de los hombres,
al hombre de sí mismo,
se derrumban
por un instante inmenso y vislumbramos
nuestra unidad perdida, el desamparo
que es ser hombres, la gloria que es ser hombres
y compartir el pan, el sol, la muerte,
el olvidado asombro de estar vivos;
amar es combatir, si dos se besan
el mundo cambia, encarnan los deseos (227).

A space that receives the "riqueza" with open hands implies that the distance that separates the bodies gives way to the desire of a subject that seeks to enjoy the abundance of the encounter between previously separated bodies. The encounter of the bodies is the fulfilling of space, which annuls the void of separation. The invitation of the subject, however, is for space to yield to his body, already transmuted into a tree. The subject is not conformed in coitus, but enters in a relation from which a new entity is produced. It is not a relation in which otherness is constitutive of the I, but where the I in union with otherness configures space and prepares it for a common living. This is a community, nonetheless, that is sacred only to the degree that it allows itself to be covered by the shadow of the subject-tree.

This is still a moment when ethics are founded, but not one where the total alterity of the Other configures space and subject. Rather, it is the subject who configures the other two. It is, nevertheless, a proposal to transcend the constitutive dialectics of Being described by Paz in *El laberinto...*, which found "la máscara" and "el disimulo" as the modes with which the subject embodies nothingness. The "máscara podrida" divides Man into "Don Nadie" and "Ninguno". Poetry denudes, takes off the rotten mask and shows the hidden face, eliminating the separation the subject imposes between self and an Other who he supposes harmful. Establishing the body to body relation as the "instante inmenso" when ethics emerge is to found ethics in the temporality of a body that will perish, and will thus "share death". But, to share

death is to deny that the death of the Other is his own, subsuming it in the notions of time and death found by the I in his moving forward in the poem.

Thus, ethics are constituted as the final act of integration between opposites that seeks to redeem totality in a harmonious way. If to love gives back the “real y tangible” (227) character to things, it also cancels any perception that obfuscates with its vestments what poetry makes visible. To love is to carve into the stone the crack through which the real can emerge and blossom from a flux which otherwise would subsume it. To love is to break time and space:

el mundo reverdece si sonríes
comiendo una naranja,
el mundo cambia
si dos, vertiginosos y enlazados,
caen sobre la yerba: el cielo baja,
los árboles ascienden, el espacio
sólo es luz y silencio, sólo espacio
abierto para el águila del ojo (228-229).

It is love, not time, that in the mechanics of “vertiginosos y entrelazados” bodies makes possible the reversal and disruption of space precisely by stopping time with a blink that, as an act of violent confrontation, turns the universe to flames:

son llamas

los ojos y son llamas lo que miran,
llama la oreja y el sonido llama,
brasa los labios y tizón la lengua,
el tacto y lo que toca, el pensamiento
y lo pensado, llama el que lo piensa,
todo se quema, el universo es llama (230).

It is also thanks to love that the fire of passion remits to the summoning of responsibility, and it is poetry that makes possible this relation with the ambiguity of the "llama" ["flame", and "calls/summons"].

If the ethics of the subject have their origin in intimacy, this does not limit them. On the contrary, an ethics born from a shared world is necessarily extensive to all that inhabit it:

nunca la vida es nuestra, es de los otros
la vida no es de nadie, todos somos
la vida [...]
no soy, no hay yo, siempre somos nosotros (231).

On the one hand, the temporal limit imposed by "nunca" is opposed to the limit imposed by "siempre", the first linked to life, the second to being. "Nunca" is furthermore associated to possession, never is life ours. We are always ourselves — "siempre somos nosotros"—, but we never have full ownership of life. The "we" implied in both instances, however, cannot be assumed *a priori* to be the same. The we

referred to by "nuestra" and linked to life is a concrete "we", conformed by a lyrical I and the lyrical You of the reader. Life is never the possession of the couple I / You—life is, in fact, "de nadie"—. The we referred to by "nosotros" and linked to being is an abstract "we", conformed by a lyrical I and an inclusive subject "todos". The being is always conformed by all in a poem that thus makes it claim to universality.

Now, if life is "de los otros", and is also "de nadie", then "los otros" are paralleled with "nadie". In addition, if the being is "todos", then this universal being comprises I, You, and the others. If the others are "nadie", being is always I and You: "siempre somos nosotros". But the poem is clear in its statement: "no hay yo". If there is no "I", "todos" and "nosotros" are You. The universe of the poem reduces itself through paradoxical negation until it reaches its minimum instance. It is precisely in this instance of negation when enunciation discredits the enunciated. It is a subject who affirms that "there is no I", but in doing so manifests the "I" of this subject as the *locus* of this enunciation. In the reduction of the universe of the poem to "You" the otherness of the You is reduced to the enunciation of an I that hides behind the void he presumes to come from. Moreover, the identity of the You is subordinated to the encounter between the body of an I that claims "is not", and the body of an Other reduced to "nobody". Even if it is true that the body to body encounter anchors ethics in a concrete contingency and reality that seeks unmasking, the I that uses paradox to configure its discourse cannot elude the rhetorical nature of his ethics. To claim that "no hay yo" is to say that there is no possible "You", inasmuch as You

cannot exist without the encounter with its Other. To claim "no hay yo" is then to say that ethics are not possible outside of the game of paradoxes that is the text. And, lastly, "nosotros" and "todos" would be nothing but another enunciative instance of the I.

If the Other is who constitutes the self as a subject in a community with the world, seemingly for Paz it is an Other which in the poem manifests through the saying of an I. The subject is constituted in a paradox. It is the Other with whom the self shares not only life and space, but death. Here, however, death does not operate as a *telos* that identifies the subject ontologically—which would thus limit it—, but as the shared capacity of the subject and the Other to regenerate themselves and remain. With love, the constitution of the subject *is* ethics to the degree that the space created with love in order to reconstitute the disintegrated subjectivity is created in order to inhabit in it *with* the Other. Love is ethics when with love a space is created where the Other is allowed to manifest as it is, without masquerades:

manantial que disuelve nuestros rostros
en el rostro sin nombre, el ser sin rostro,
indecible presencia de las presencias...

quiero seguir, ir más allá, y no puedo

[...]

desprendía mi ser de su desenvoltura,
me arrancaba de mí, me separaba
de mi bruto dormir siglos de piedra
y su magia de espejos revivía
un sauce de cristal, un chopo de agua,
un alto surtidor que el viento arquea [...] (232-233).

Dissolving "nuestros rostros" and making thus the plural into a singular homogeneous entity, the poem curtails name and face as attributable objects in order to determine face and being as substances via the exclusion of the nonessential elements that qualify them. From the poem then emerges a "rostro sin nombre" that seeks to fill the name without referent previously called "signo vacío". As a referent for this sign, the result of the dissolution is a "ser sin rostro", a pure presence that cannot be attributed an identity. In order to fill the "signo vacío" the poem invokes a referent without identity. To the empty sign Paz opposes Being, the *name* that substitutes the face. From the poem emerges a "rostro *con* nombre" and a "ser *con* nombre", and in this name —Being— the poem roots itself in an ontological discourse that modulates and ultimately determines its ethics.

The ethical subject that emerges from the stone cannot go beyond the body and the face. The face is the limit with which the subject clashes, the manifestation before which the fluid movement of time and space cease to be free in order *to free*.

Face to face, body to body with the Other, the subject can only return to the beginning and begin the poem again.

The "magia de espejos" of the "bruto dormir" of the subject "re-lives" the poem and re-initiates it. The list of images which began *in media res* the poem proves to be the reflection of the images themselves in the magical mirror of a coarse sleep, polished and rounded in the poem *as* the poem by the poet's craft. It is the poet who configures this oniric reality⁵⁹ in order to superimpose it over the contingency where the subject will face a body and an Other. It is only in the text, however, where the subject can delimit this reality, and it is the I of this subject, in the final analysis, who determines with its sameness the totality which comprises the universe.

⁵⁹ There are, indeed, multiple instances where an intertextual reading with Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz will inevitably structure any idea derived from Paz's poems. This, however, is not an enterprise I can at the moment venture on, other than noting how the oniric in Paz might remit to Sor Juana's *Primero sueño*, where the "yo despierto" with which the poem ends can be posited alongside the denuded, always male body of the mighty "yo" in all of Paz, and how it could be argued that this results as an attempt from Paz to sit besides the nun in the pantheon of Mexican poets.

Juan Gelman, or Ethics as First Poetics

Y si luego me mataran
aún quedaría todo mi dolor de ti
(Gelman, *El juego en que andamos* 61).

In an excellent article, widely recognized Argentinean poet and critic Saúl Yurkievich has noted in the poetry of Juan Gelman the appearance of the "shocking violence of the real", and the "revolutionary socialism" prominent of the time as the effect of a first movement, from the young poet to the revolutionary adult: "Después del solaz estético que Gelman disfruta y depara con sus sabrosas parodias que titula *Traducciones* [...] la violencia estremecedora de lo real impone su grávido predominio hasta en lo poético" (Yurkievich 103). He later adds: "No gruesamente pero en modo explícito, la poesía de Gelman es poesía adicta, de tesis. Está regida por un credo —el socialismo revolucionario— que determina tanto la lectura del mundo, la actitud de vida como la conducta poética" (110). On the other hand, for Nidia Burgos this first movement is followed by one that seems unexpected to her:

En estos primeros poemarios [up to and including *Relaciones*], Gelman aparece alentado por la utopía marxista de que se alcanzaría la justicia definitiva después de la lucha, posteriormente, le quedará sólo el amor, como fuerza inmanente al mundo, para sostenerlo en la esperanza, en medio de los angustiosos avatares históricos. [...] Contra lo esperable, que hubiese sido una poesía de denuestos y maldiciones, inició un

fecundo diálogo con los grandes místicos [...] Se inspira en todos ellos y elabora, a partir de aquellos, un *Comentario*, tal el título de cada uno de los poemas de este volumen, numerados en romano, que nos recuerda las Relaciones de Santa Teresa, también numeradas en romano, donde la Santa describía en prosa sus experiencias místicas (Burgos 199-200).

With the difference in Gelman's poetics that both critics have noted, the shift from the first to the second phase does not constitute in my opinion such a surprising change as it does for Burgos. Moreover, there is present in both poetics an important concordance between Gelman's "poesía adicta" and his "fecundo diálogo con los grandes místicos". As will be my contention, the ethics that could be derived from Gelman's first poetic texts —that is, the production Yurkievich alludes to— has a continuity that links to his later poetics —that is, the production Burgos alludes to—. The poetics that operate in both periods is differentiable; yet, the ethics in which they are founded is not. That is inasmuch as they both depart from the same presuppositions and the same vital impulse that thrusts the subject to take responsibility for the Other. In other words, the system of relations in which the subject conforms his community will be redefined, but it will not be redefined because of a renunciation of the presuppositions of this ethics, but because its enactment in the public space did not yield the desired finality. I will later show how "Revolution" becomes, from a poetical program —the incursion in the poem of the elements contingent to the poet so that the poem can have a greater communicative

capacity—, a political program —not the inversion of social power relations through which the oppressed class occupies the place previously held by the oppressor class, but the inversion of a vertical system of power relations to a horizontal one—.

According to Rodolfo Privitera, the main topics of Argentinean poetry in the 1960's —of which Gelman is one of its precursors⁶⁰— are: 1) a "marcada tendencia a la enunciación directa de hechos y situaciones" 2) the use of "Buenos Aires como ubicación geográfica preferencial" 3) the "preocupaciones socio-políticas" 4) the "preocupación por considerar a América Latina como un único país" 5) and a "carencia, en términos generales, de humor y elementos lúdicos"; so it could be said that "en los poetas de esos años prevalece la función referencial [... y] un fuerte sentido denotativo" (Privitera 210-211). From this assessment, it would be tempting to force a political reading on Gelman's poetry. As I would believe it to be both evident and not a particularly new contribution to scholarship on Gelman, such a reading is not pursued here except as a point of departure, and then only when the political might intersect with the ethical or the poetical proper⁶¹. These "tendencia"

⁶⁰ In Daniel Freidemberg's opinion, "hoy puede verse en *Violín y otras cuestiones* un acontecimiento fundacional que abrió paso a lo que luego se llamaría *la poesía argentina de los sesenta*". Susana Gutiérrez goes even further, considering Gelman the "más representativo de las letras rioplatenses contemporáneas".

⁶¹ The same words that Gelman used to categorize the participation and support of Francisco Urondo, Rodolfo Walsh and Haroldo Conti in the armed struggle in Argentina can be used to posit Gelman in the political: "cuando eran hombres maduros, pasados los 40, con hijos, mujeres, una obra importante detrás. No lo hicieron [participate and support armed struggle] atacados por alguna erisipela 'revolucionaria': sabían perfectamente lo que arriesgaban, la vida, y lo peor, todos los alrededores amados de esa vida. Los empujaba el *ansia de poner fin a la indignidad* [...] no tengo luces

and "preocupaciones" that Privitera notes though, can be related in my "ethical" reading of Gelman to his concern on the subject's experience of, and mode of contact with a contingent reality that is inserted in a totality of a larger scope than its immediate surroundings. Contingency for this subject, then, would be constituted by an immediacy that is experimented as mediating between the subject and a reality that encompass and exceeds the contingent. That is to say, contingency would be the point of contact between the subject and the totality of which het is a part. It is precisely within a space in this totality to which the subject has access through its contingent elements that the Other manifests himself, and where the encounter with the Other in which the subject is made subject takes place⁶². The poem will come to function as

para saber si lo que hicieron es correcto en otras partes, *es hoy correcto en la Argentina*" (Gelman, "Urondo..." 23, emphasis added). The ethical concern in Gelman as a moral imperative is evident from this statement, but this only so far as the poet is a citizen who must do what is deemed "correct" in order to "end indignity". In an interview with Felipe Pigna, Gelman will state: "Si yo entiendo tu pregunta [¿Qué hizo usted frente a la dictadura desde la poesía?], el tema es, ¿qué pasa con la poesía y la política? Creo que son *dos planos absolutamente diferentes*. La poesía son botellas tiradas al mar que, por ahí, alguien recoge. Hablabas del compromiso en la poesía... *Yo a la poesía comprometida prefiero la poesía casada, casada con la poesía*. El verdadero tema de la poesía es la poesía" (emphasis added). He will repeat the same idea to Verónica Chiaravalli: "yo odio ese término que inventaron los franceses, la poesía comprometida. Yo creo en la poesía casada: casada con la poesía".⁶¹ Even if, according to Noe Jitrik, Gelman "prefería, entonces, un lenguaje que se suponía ligado al compromiso político, considerado como *revolución*", this would be a formal preference rather than a programatic preference as far as revolution is inserted in the poem. The person who lives in the concrete world is for Gelman separated from the subject that would emerge from his poems. This question of separate subjectivities will be addressed from a reading of the poems themselves as the chapter develops.

⁶² The question of the constitution of a poetic subject in Gelman has been commented by Alicia Genovese: "Si se lo considera una convención o se lo recorta, se lo condena a la fijeza, a la exclusión de cualquier proceso, pero si se observan sus movimientos, este yo relacionado con un yo de origen, se vuelve una instancia dinámica de la construcción poética. Hay alguien allí, en el poema, pero su visibilidad es opaca, está mediatizada por el lenguaje que se descorre activo como esos paneles corredizos de papel llamados *shōji* en las antiguas casas japonesas" (Genovese 16). In her reading, Genovese tries to link the biographical subject to the poetic enunciating voice, in a sort of dialogical

this space. In his poems, Gelman's poetic enunciation is evidently direct, and in his socio-political worldview, the subject he portrays comes in direct contact with a reality that demands his engagement with it as a political and poetical whole.

The concern with the socio-political reality in Gelman's earliest poetry, and the manner in which he engages with it, finds its praxis in the subject's commitment to this socio-political aspect that needed to be changed, in line with the revolutionary movements of the decade. In the collection *Gotán* (1962), which consists of Gelman's first four poetry books, the concern of the poetic voice seems to be the search for the home as a space where the subject can abstract himself from the violence of the outside world:

De la violenta madrugada
un hombre entra a su casa y el olor de sus hijos
le golpea la cara, los olvidos, la furia,
ahora cierra la puerta con doble llave

encounter that finds in the historical Gelman a corroboration of the narrative. This approach might come closer to the intent of Gelman, as can be inferred from his essay on Judaism and Latin American literature: "En el tiempo se construye en la lengua lo que tal vez podría llamarse el inconsciente del discurso [...] La lengua es mucho más que una cosmovisión. Tiene un inconsciente, depósito de siglos. Sería además una matriz que aún nos contiene y contenemos, aún nos alimenta y alimentamos, después de ser expulsados del vientre materno. Pasamos del vientre materno a la lengua materna, de una matriz material a otra espiritual, que no nos abandonará hasta nuestra muerte" (Gelman, "Lo judío..." 83-84). My intention, however, is to trace the development of the subject that is derived from Gelman's poetry, trying to account for the ethical impulse that permeates throughout. Agreeing again with Freidemberg when he writes that "La cuestión es poner en juego en la escritura aquello que hace al sujeto que escribe ser lo que es", the starting hypothesis is then that the ethical encounter is what makes the subject be what it is.

y se saca la gente, la ropa con cuidado (Gelman *Gotán* 143).

In the space of the "casa" it is possible to find a refuge for the adversities of the outside world, not because it implies an alienation from the external by leaving it outside at the moment the door of the house is closed with double lock, but because within the house itself the subject is able to find in his children an Other with whom the relation is not defined by the struggles that the subject finds in his experience of the world. In fact, from the violent external reality "la gente", "the people" is able to transgress the limits established by the subject: once the house is closed, within it the subject remains in community with the same collective with whom he shared "la furia" and suffered "los olvidos", which in turn indicate the arduous nature of the struggle that characterizes the subject's being in the outside world.

Notice however how the subject "se saca la gente, la ropa con cuidado". The "gente" is admitted by the subject into his private space, but they are so admitted as if they were a vestment that covers the individual who outside, as a member of the people, represents himself in public in a different fashion than within the home, where he can be himself. Outside of the private domain, the person that the subject assumes then is —as a mode of the true self that is left unhindered in the home— the potential to be many, and in this many the subject seeks strength.

Furthermore, "la gente" is taken off "con cuidado". This care with which the subject treats this collective other seems to come as a result of the sublimated experience of the children, who would thus take precedence as an Other who comes

to signify the attributes that govern the relations of the subject. In the outside world, the subject is a person in the people, but this is possible through the existence of the children in the subject's interiority. I will return to the conception of the Other as "child" below; in the meantime it seems clear that in the opposition between the spaces of the public and the private the subject is not faced with the dilemma of choosing between the happiness of the home and the struggle associated with the revolution, since to experience the former is to extend it beyond its physical boundaries to the latter. The home provides shelter, but it is not a place for seclusion: the doors are closed to protect the subject, but the subject must exit the home in order to be whole. The subject is, in this fashion, conformed by two elements in tension, poetry and revolution, each of which occupy together the space of the other:

Por andar dividido en dos me ocurre
una lucha, una guerra extraordinaria,
yo saludo a mis partes combatientes,
allá se den, se coman, se destrocen,
van y vuelven de pronto sin permiso,
sus estruendos conmueven a mis conciudadanos
voy por la calle intervenido, absorto,
lleno de tiros, ayes, cicatrices,
mis pedazos flamean encendidos,
se odian mis mitades con fervor

no habrán de hallar la paz sino en su polvo

de manifestación ya por la sombra (Gelman, *Gotán* 157).

This self that affirms "yo saludo a mis partes combatientes" might be divided into two subjects, one poetical and one revolutionary, but remains integral as one consciousness that contemplates this division and even fosters it. The two subjects in question can be, as distinct modes of the self, distinct manifestations in their respective spaces, but they are manifestations of an already formed essence that recognizes the difference between its ipseity and the shape that as self it takes. This self, then, as separated in its subjectness⁶³, inhabits two spaces that remain nonetheless indistinguishable: that of contingency, and that of the poem. But, as was seen in the previous example, in Gelman the poem has borders with both the public and the private contingency, so the subject's enunciation, be it intimate or political, is always poetical, which is to say that the tension in the self is one that stretches it, but without this resulting in a tear. In fact, the "estruendos" of this "extraordinary war" between subjectness "conmueven a mis conciudadanos"; that is, they emotionally move what was before the collective "gente" into a community of citizens, in a single alexandrine verse among hendecasyllables, with hemistichs that, stressed with the repetition of the particle "con" ["with"], end in moving the citizen into a new form. In other words, it is due to this division that a community will be possible in the city, which is the space

⁶³ For an exposition on the evolution of the concepts of "Subject" and its "three main groups of meaning" —subjectness, subjectivity, and subjection—, see Etienne Balibar's article, "Subject".

that allows the subject to move, just as the poem is the space that allows for the subject to "say". If the subject salutes this war, it is because he believes, as a solution, in the "paz en el polvo", in an integration where both identities are consumed in their making themselves present as a brightness of such intensity that it expends all of its luminosity. Then the "manifestación ya por la sombra" would be the trace left by the subject that passes, now as a person, through the spaces that are to be illuminated by poetry.

This concern with the outside world⁶⁴ is a concern to the extent that it is the space occupied by the contingent Other, in particular the "infeliz" for whom revolution is the only answer, and in light of which the poet can assert that the "bisutería poética" is not enough:

Toda la bisutería poética subiendo la escalera,
el do de pecho, el dol de pecho, el dolorazo
patrón del pecho y sus adjuntos
no alcanzan, nada sobran
para el infeliz que regresa a casa a medianoche
y repite obsedido una palabra:

⁶⁴ This concern, according to Hugo Achgúar, leads the poet to an attempt to transform the world, not to found it: "Se venía a proponer un modo de ser, así en la poesía como en la vida social. Se trataba de transformar el mundo y no de fundar el mundo por la palabra. No alcanzaba con interpretar o expresar el mundo y la palabra sino, precisamente, era necesario transformar mundo y palabra" (Achúgar 95). Indeed the attempt was to change the concrete world, but through a word transformed itself from the experience of the contingent I will argue that the poem is an attempt to found a world.

revolución, revolución (Gelman, *Gotán* 145).

Thus, from the poetic voice's experience of the contingent, it is the witnessing of the suffering of the Other that impels the subject to action. Here, "action" does not refer to the proposal with which the poet intends to remedy the "bisutería poética". He passes judgment on it not inasmuch as it is poetry, but rather as "bisutería": a worthless ornament that does not change the reality it adorns, but only reproduces it in a poem where value is reduced to its consumption for an aesthetic pleasure that, leaving aside the suffering of the Other and his violent relation with the contingent, is but a false reproduction. Moreover, the poetic artifacts, or better yet the poetic trifles "no alcanzan, nada sobran", they fall short as poetry when they fail to express the force of the enunciation of the "infeliz": "revolución". Revolution then is not only the act of political engagement where the subject tries to subvert socio-political reality, but it is the poetical expression of the common man, and as unadorned poetry is granted authenticity by a poet who will, engaging in Revolution, assert his commitment to "true" poetry, which is to say poetry whose language is "near to the real language of men", as Wordsworth would have it⁶⁵.

⁶⁵ Ana María Porrúa has, among others, noted the colloquial character of Gelman's first poetry: "En estas primeras obras [from *Violín y otras cuestiones* to *Gotán*] se valoriza el 'coloquialismo' sobre el uso de la imagen (tal como lo entendían los grupos de vanguardia). El 'coloquialismo' puede ser entendido también como una forma de relacionar lenguaje poético y realidad, postulando una analogía entre ambos. La poesía, en este sentido, da cuenta de una realidad justamente *imitando* su lenguaje" (Porrúa 63, emphasis in the original). If, on one hand, Gabriel Jiménez Emán has noted the influence of the beatnik generation in Gelman's writing (51), on the other, Freidemberg sees Gelman's use of the local color of the language as one of his most important contributions to Argentinean poetry: "Con los muchos y muy justos reparos que se le puedan hacer a una afirmación

The poet's desire for and commitment to revolution lead naturally to an outspoken sympathy with the Cuban Revolution of 1959, to which Gelman turns his attention in the last series of poems in the book *Gotán*, with which he closes the collection of the same title. In the poem "Fidel" he says:

fidel montó sobre fidel un día
se lanzó de cabeza contra el dolor contra la muerte
pero más todavía contra el polvo del alma
la Historia hablará de sus hechos gloriosos
prefiero recordarlo en el rincón del día
en que miró su tierra y dijo soy la tierra
en que miró su pueblo y dijo soy el pueblo
y abolió sus dolores sus sombras sus olvidos [...]
yo lo vi con oleajes de rostros en su rostro (Gelman, *Gotán* 152).

Here, the figure of the victorious rebel is elevated to almost mythical status, but it is still a human figure and, by the capitalization of the words, subordinated to a History that, like Revolution, reaches beyond the contingent. What is more, despite its actions the hero himself is located at the same plane as the Other to whom he relates and with whom he identifies in a specular dynamics where, as a subject, the hero becomes a face overblown by the faces of the others. Without a doubt the poem is a

tan hiperbólica, el hecho es que nadie antes que Gelman parece haber sabido extraer tanta productividad poética del vocabulario o los sobrentendidos del habla porteña, entre desconfiada y reticente y un tanto irónica".

celebration of the person of Castro; nevertheless, it is far from political propaganda. Even in what is deemed a revolutionary victory in Cuba, it is clear that the heroic aspect of the revolution is the redemption of the subject inasmuch as he fights to end the pain of the Other. Victory thus defined —and not necessarily by the achievement of economic or class equality— fills the subject, more than with joy, with tenderness. Thus in "Final"

Ha muerto un hombre y están juntando su sangre en
cucharitas,
querido Juan, has muerto finalmente.
De nada valieron tus pedazos
mojados en ternura (Gelman, *Gotán* 161).

Revolution, then, is a program that enters Gelman's poetry as political insofar as it is the reification of the instant when the subject encounters the pain of the Other and responds to it by turning it into something other through the care for the Other. This encounter with the Other, as was explored in the first chapter, leads to the ethical realm⁶⁶. I now attempt from a close reading of some of Gelman's poems up until this

⁶⁶ Jaime Giordano has already seen the importance of the experience of pain for the poem: "La poesía de Juan Gelman impresiona desde un comienzo por su desfachatez, sus giros de bravata, su sensibilidad a los dolores ajenos [... Saca al verbo lírico] de sus espacios subjetivos, lo desprende de cualquier forma cerrada de mundo imaginario, lo abre a una realidad exterior que impresiona al hablante como fuente de dolor o rabia" (J. Giordano 169). However, he emphasizes in a supposed premonition of vanquishment towards which the poet thrusts himself not without a certain degree of erotic attraction for death: "El poeta parece haberse despeñado en un abismo sin fondo que lo llama como una salida, pero, a su vez, lo hunde en lo inescrutable. Y es evidente que de esta conflictividad sin solución emana una exaltación dionisiaca y el placer estético de la subversión

particular point to trace the development and evolution of this ethical subject. This subject can be seen in *Gotán* to be committed to Revolution and Poetry. And what is more, this subject's poetry, if it is revolutionary, it is not because it is committed to Revolution, but because its ethical imperative to take care and be responsible for the Other led it to make of the poem a space where revolution, as the necessary redemption of the Other in the contingent, was possible.

It is no accident that the opening series of poems in *Violín y otras cuestiones* — Gelman's first book (1956), included in *Gotán*— uses the figure of "the child" as one of its main components. This in itself is nothing new. On the use of the imagery of "children" in literature, Robin Purves has noted that "The recourse of the figure of 'the child' as artistic exemplar is, of course, commonplace, a staple of any polemic that claims to be witnessing or willing the final collapse of a derelict order and the simultaneous birth of the new" (Purves 230). Making the necessary assumptions for the extrapolation, following Purves it could be said that, by recurring to the figure of the child Gelman implicitly —if not overtly— would be calling on Rousseau's imagery of an original innocence that is to evolve into the "civilized", leaving behind the above-mentioned "derelict order" through engagement in the political sphere, provided that this innocence survives its corruption once it comes in contact with

suicida" (J. Giordano 174). I do not share this opinion on the forces that might drive Gelman to his particular brand of poetry, as will be seen. Regarding the "palabra que presiente la derrota" that Giordano affirms, I tend to lean towards Gelman's own assessment: "El problema de fondo, lo que yo no termino de aceptar, es que la escritura está de antemano condenada al fracaso [...] Tal vez la vocación consista en no aceptar esa imposibilidad, en no suponer que esa imposibilidad le tiene que cerrar a uno la boca" (quoted in Freidemberg).

society. The child, then, is what must be taken care for as he represents the promise of the infinite as potential, as what is to fulfill his promise, "a kind of *tabula rasa* which has yet to be stained by the acquisition of the enabling but complicating and dreadful historical knowledge: it is both unimpeded by history and impeded by its lack of history" (Purves 236). Revolution might be an attempt to force historical change into a contingent space, but this is not yet the choice of engagement of the poet for Gelman in the political. In the poem however, the poet would, providing a textual history to the child —inserting the child in a discourse—, complete him by being the *locus* of the child:

Niño, tus cuatro letras de ternura
viven en mí.

Niño, seguramente naces cuando
el mar dice que sí.

Niño, te digo, voy por las orillas
de un alegre violín.

Llevo tus cuatro letras de ternura.
Viven en mí (Gelman, *Gotán* 14).

The child is a figure that immediately refers to tenderness, an empathic emotion that the poet feels, nonetheless, compelled to accentuate in a reiterated fashion, but through this figure there is also an intuition of an otherness within the self that validates the self, as "the stable truth [—that is, childhood—] behind the unstable 'artistic' text or image, a 'reality' which serves to stabilize humanity through capturing the 'real' characteristics of children, and the 'real' emotional attachment of their parents to them" (Lesnik-Oberstein 14-15, quoted in Walsh 156). In other words, if "the child" appears as such an important figure in Gelman's poetry, it is because through him the poem seeks to ground itself in a "real" that goes beyond the materiality of the written language. If what lives in the self are the four letters that form the word "niño", they *are alive* in the self. And what is more, they form the word child, but they are "letras *de ternura*", letters which through the genitive are derived from the tenderness that precedes them. However, they are "*tus* cuatro letras", so if the letter is a derivative of tenderness, the latter is a derivation as the attribute of the child that possesses the sign, and as possessor of the sign possesses the signified object: the self that enunciates himself as the living other. The poet might be the parent of the poem, but it is the child who "owns" the letter, who has agency over what is said, who thrusts the poem into the page by manifesting himself.

The capacity to empathize thus appears as the necessary attribute in the self in order for it to relate to an Other in whom a manifest fragility is considered as his

fundamental attribute that is then shared in the poetic approach. In a later poem titled "Niños: Corea 1952" Gelman writes:

Esto que tengo de niño fundamental
se me rebela, quiere
llorar en los rincones, desgarrarse
la frente, la mejilla [...]
Pienso que te andan castigando el pájaro
en los ojos, machacándote
el hueso
y me dan ganas
urgentemente de cuidarte todo! (Gelman, *Gotán* 29).

It is possible to say that the initial use of the child in Gelman indicates a first attempt of the poet to portray a scene of such an overwhelming "pathos" that the spectator cannot help but to question his or her "ethos". The poem, thus, tries to portray an image that makes an icon of the pain of the Other, where its latency resides in its attempt to become a sort of snapshot where the reader feels compelled by his witnessing of an actual pain. In a reading of another iconic image of children and war—this time a photograph—, where a small Vietnamese girl is running nude, burned after a US napalm strike during a 1972 campaign of the Vietnam war, Maria Heloísa Martins Dias points towards the ultimate real that the image of the photo has as its referent, one that the poem is incapable of reproducing: "A criança da foto é uma

figura real, ser humano que representa metonimicamente toda uma população.

Portanto é preciso ver/ler além desse corpo milhares de outros, na medida em que essa imagem funciona literalmente como um sinal visível do terror" (Dias 171-172). What the poem can do, however—which is what Gelman aims at—is to have the reader see/read metaphorically in the "niños" and their suffering the trigger that leads the poet to a rare, urgent exclamation: "cuidarte todo!". As Dias affirms, "Olhar a imagem não pode levar ao prazer estético" (Dias 172); to see this image of children having their bones crushed or their body burned must then lead to an ethical positioning that is not, however, "uma negação de arte, e sim a sua dessacralização, o esvaziamento de um mito" (Dias 173). From this perspective, the child in Gelman's poetry is an Other that demands of the self, both poet and reader, to take care of him, even before as Other he articulates the demand. The response to this demand is a poem where the Other/child is released of its pain, which remains petrified as an icon in the poem and so liberates the child in the icon of its present, potentiating the future in the child that inhabits in the real.

Poetry is called upon in its capacity to produce in the reader an emotion that would move him, but it is the ethical demand to parentally care for the other what initiates poetry's drive. If the formal aspects of the poem are the concern of Poetics, as the reification of Poetry, then for Gelman prior to these there can be said to exist an ethics as first-Poetry: as the actual experience of the encounter with an Other, which precedes the poem where it is reified. The reification of this ethical experience

takes the form, nonetheless, of a strict if not systematic sequence of hendecasyllable and heptasyllabic verses that follow a longer first verse ("Esto que tengo de niño fundamental", 12+1 syllables) which is immediately rebelled against ("se me rebela"). The second violence to the form of the verse follows the physical, bone-crushing violence in which it is represented, but is taken care of by the intervention of the poet, whose will reestablishes the harmony which the form of the traditional poem brought: "en los ojos, machacándote" + "el hueso" yields the hendecasyllable (8 + 3), and "el hueso" + "y me dan ganas" yields the heptasyllable (3 + 5 - synalepha). The whole of the child that the poet feels compelled to urgently take care of is in actuality taken care of as a theme in the poem as a whole. The whole of the poem provides the child the experience of the world that he lacks by the production of a poem that, using the language of the common man, creates a world for the child as the common man-to-be. The poem does not intend to recuperate the experience of the child, but rather to make this experience of the world possible for an always already endangered child.

Having already proposed as the first movement in the mechanics of the constitution of the subject the ethical reaction to the tenderness felt for the child in the Other, the poetic subject can then consciously develop in a poem a poetics with which to articulate the pain seen as constitutive of the Other who experiences contingency, as he does in "Oficio":

Cuando al entrar al verso me disloco

o no cabe un adverbio y se me quiebra
toda la música, la forma mira
con su monstruoso rostro de abortado,
me duele el aire, sufro el sustantivo,
pienso qué bueno andar bajo los árboles
o ser picapedrero o ser gorrión
y preocuparse por el nido y la
gorriona y los pichones, sí, qué bueno,
quién me manda meterme, endecasílabo,
a cantar, quien me manda

[...]

cambio sueños y músicas y versos
por una pica, pala y carretilla.

Con una condición:

déjeme un poco

de este maldito gozo de cantar (Gelman, *Gotán* 35-36).

This entrance into the space of the poem implies a violence in the subject that enters and announces his dislocation at the experience of transporting his reality to language. In the act of writing, the word itself becomes the Other, so that the experience of the pain attempts a translation to the linguistic realm. The verse becomes the place of displacement, where the enunciation "me disloco" points towards an inflexion the

poem exerts on the subjective structure of the entering self, who would then exit transformed. As a space for transformation, the poem must imply a certain contingency within itself so as the resulting subject can enter into an ethical relation with what is encountered. Then, just as what was seen by the poet in his experience of the concrete was the pain suffered by the Other, so the contingency of the poem —its contiguousness, the internal relation between elements that share the space of the poem and from which a meaning can arise— must be imbued with pain in order for a new subject to emerge from the poem as a representation of the ethical experience. This, not for the sake of realism, but for the sake of redemption; as Jaime Giordano puts it: "Así como el dolor viene del mundo, la salvación debe también venir de allí" (J. Giordano 172).

"Oficio" presents nature as an alternative space, where "árboles", "gorrión", "nido", "pichones"... are linked to a given wealth. The subject does not choose this wealth in what would be a return to a Golden Era, but rather chooses the "endecasílabo", even as it implies a renunciation of wealth in favor of the "song" — and of the "sueños y músicas y versos"— that is admittedly in opposition to manual labor —"pica, pala y carretilla"— but from which, despite of and due to it being "maldito", is still "gozo". Therefore, the poem does not advocate for a return to a Golden Era, but for a reformulation in the actual world of the idyllic, utopian conditions of the past, as it might have been a search for the good life: which is to say, an ethical reformulation of the world.

The hendecasyllable is again used as the primary verse of the poem, which would then from the beginning accept a mode that is assumed by the poet's own volition, but only after an invitation that is more like a command that must be followed. As a verse with a particular set of rules, the hendecasyllable cannot substitute the "ethos" that jump started the poem, but instead is assumed by the subject as a praxis. It is a choice that the subject struggles with —"quién me manda meterme, endecasílabo"— because there is a "gozo" related to it. But this is a pleasure derived from the encounter with the poem itself as an Other with whom this subject relates. So, if at the moment he enters the verse the subject is dislocated, once he exits the "endecasílabo" he is re-located into the ethical realm where as subject he is constituted. The poem, as the instant when form and content coincide is thus the place for the communion between ethics and poetics, between commitment with the contingent-real and the linguistic form; the poem is the place where to labor in the world is the pleasure of the song.

As "oficio", the labor of the poet is for Gelman to remain subservient to the matter with which the poet works: love and pain. It is not an office, however, that one occupies by one's own election but by the election that an Other made at the moment he demanded a response once his pain was manifested. In a later poem called "Arte poética" Gelman will write:

Entre tantos oficios ejerzo éste que no es mío,

como un amo implacable
me obliga a trabajar de día, de noche,
con dolor, con amor [...]
todo me obliga a trabajar con las palabras, con la sangre.

Nunca fui dueño de mis cenizas, mis versos,
rostros oscuros los escriben como tirar contra la
muerte (Gelman, *Gotán* 97).

The agency over the poetic product is then forwarded and ascribed to these "obscure faces" that write the poem so as to strain against death, in a struggle that has as its burnt up residue precisely the poetic subject itself. In "Nacimiento de la poesía" this subject will end up stating that

la poesía pasará como un animal desconocido por la
ciudad llena de bruma
y sonarán los tiros de la palabra, Gelman (Gelman, *Gotán* 109).

The subject is conflating thus the "rostros oscuros" and poetry itself, where the first would be the mode of the second inasmuch as that face is what remains visible for the subject of the spirit-like entity that takes possession over the city, embodied in the suffering Other that populates it and calls the poet by his name. Poetry then is as an entity outside of the contingent but only accessible through the experience of the contingent. In the ethical relation with the Other where the subject is constituted,

hidden behind the "Face" that the subject encounters lies Poetry calling for the poet to make poetry itself manifest in the poem. In "Final" Gelman expresses this notion of poetry as the experience from which the poem feeds in order to represent poetry's reality in the space of the verse as the fine texture that is both content and form.

La poesía no es un pájaro.

Y es.

No es un plumón, el aire, mi camisa,
no, nada de eso. Y todo eso.

Sí.

[...]

La poesía es una manera de vivir.

Mira a la gente que hay a tu costado.

¿Ama? ¿Sufre? ¿Canta? ¿Llora?

Ayúdala a luchar por sus manos, sus ojos, su boca, por el beso para besar
y el beso para regalar, por su mesa, la cama, su pan, su letra a y su letra h,
por su pasado —¿acaso no fueron niños?— por su porvenir —¿acaso no
serán niños?— por su presente [...] La poesía es esto.

Y luego, escríbelo (Gelman, *Gotán* 46-47).

It is in this co-incident where form and content are inseparable that poetry comes to be in the poem, which in "Final" takes the paradox as its mode: poetry is what it is

not. As a "way to live", poetry is linked to ethics in its precedence over the subject that experiences both.

Poetry, in fact, assumes the voice of the ethical claim when it compels the subject to help "la gente" in their struggle for a body —"sus manos, sus ojos, su boca, por el beso para besar"— with which to experience the contingent —"su mesa, la cama, su pan, su letra a y su letra h"—. "La gente" as "niños", were the initial sense datum for the poem, but are now the finality, the ideatum that Poetry and Ethics speak. The Other/niño is the implied truth that cannot be pinned down by language in a theme nor in time: "la gente" were and will be "niños" as they are the ever-present Other who is always demanding the self to make itself responsible for him. Both ethics and poetry for Gelman seem to be stating the same claim for truth: that there is a contingent Other that constitutes the contingent subject at the moment they encounter each other, and who demands to be taken care of.

Again following mostly hendecasyllable and heptasyllabic verses struggling to fit into a single one, the odd alexandrine line "La poesía es una manera de vivir" (13 + 1) comes to break the tension between meter and content for good; in the final renunciation of its verse form, the poem shifts its voice from that of the poetical subject to that of the poem itself. If the verse is the form that the poet gives to the poem in its composition, by assuming the discourse of the prose it is as if in the poem the intention were to have poetry itself give a form without boundaries to the poem, that now becomes a harangue. As way to live, poetry's power lies not, thus, in the

tendency of the poem to maintain its form, but in the poem's capacity to contain the world in its creation of a space for the totality of "la gente", the collective Other who the poet encounters while experiencing contingency, and with whom the poet conforms community.

Poetry then is the practice of creating a totality in which the poetic subject is ethically constituted, as this subject lives as an individual in community with the others with whom it relates. Poetry would precede the poem not as a "techné", but as an "arete", as "ethos", as the experience of the contingent of which the poem is the impression in the subject that lives in the world. For Gelman, the Other, as the one to whom the poem is addressed, is not Poetry but a contingent entity that is nonetheless posited as the addressee of a prayer. Thus, when in "Oración" the subject says

Habítame, pénétrame.

Sea tu sangre una con mi sangre.

Tu boca entre a mi boca.

Tu corazón agrande el mío hasta estallar.

Desgárrame (Gelman, *Gotán* 60),

the poem is merely stating the ethical desire of the self to be a subject of/to the Other who completes it. By disintegrating the former self in a mechanics of the erotic, the poem posits the subject in the passive role of the receiver of his own subjectivity, inhabited by the Other. As we have already proposed, it is the ethical encounter that constitutes the subject. Likewise, it is in the *poetical* encounter where the subject's voice

is constituted as his "I". If ethics is first poetics, then poetry is the subject's first epistemology, as it is the instance when he gains self knowledge.

From an ontological point of view, in the experience of contingency the subject that lives in community with the Other does so in a horizontally determined social plane, in which the Other's experience of this same, shared contingency is assumed to be parallel to that of the self. In other words, the Other is assumed as a derivative of the same social matrix from which the self was derived. This hypothesis would, indeed, be stated in opposition to the levinasian mechanics of subject constitution, but it is from this ontological hypothesis that come two of the liberal maxims of the French Revolution, where the modern state finds its origin: equality and fraternity. The Other as equal to me is tantamount to the Other as my brother in a narrative of the national family⁶⁷, separated by more than a few degrees from Freud's "Family Romance". When the Other is my brother the ethical possibility of the face-to-face encounter might still be possible, but as derived it is subordinated to the apposition of the shoulder-with-shoulder common stance.

⁶⁷ Jorge Göttling has commented on Gelman's "national ethical reconstruction" agenda, prior to the coup of 1976: "Campeaba por la Argentina un aire denso y un horizonte laxo, donde podía contemplarse el crepúsculo del deber. La voluntad de servicio, la política, el entusiasmo cívico estaban en descrédito y Gelman retrató, en verso, esa crisis de esperanza. Se contacta mediante el periodismo con otros intelectuales de idéntica formación e inicia, con ellos, la vía pacífica de la reconstrucción ética de la Nación. Son ellos, entre otros, Haroldo Conti, Luis Guagnini, Francisco Urondo, futuras víctimas de la represión puesta en marcha por el aparato del Estado, a partir de los 70". I will later discuss how the recurrence of the "Name" serves Gelman to create the characters for a narrative of what the future world of the poem is to be.

In Gelman's poetry, however, the first Other, as was noted before, is the child, and if it is true that the possibility of the child as my brother is admitted, the relation that develops is, more than fraternal, developed under the sign of parenthood. And if in his subsequent poetry the Other evolves until becoming "gente" —without necessarily those people ceasing to be children—, the first concrete Other that the subject founded in tenderness encounters in the world, as an Other with a proper name, is not the brother, but, as child, the son. It is the son with whom the subject in Gelman's poetry first dialectically composes a poem in "Poema con el hijo", as a poem written in a manner of two voices mutually effecting their subjectivities:

DICE LA PALABRA POESÍA POR PRIMERA VEZ

¿Sabes el tiempo, todo el tiempo,
entre esa palabra y tu tiempo?

¿Sabes el aire, todo el aire,
entre esa palabra y tu aire?

[...]

PREGUNTA QUÉ ES EL AGUA

Olvido, olvido.

Un largo camino puro hacia el olvido.

[...]

SONRÍE

¿Y alguna vez he sonreído así?

¿Fui como tú de luz, candor que tiembla?

¿Supe dar la mañana, confundirla,

equivocar al mundo?

[...]

DIGO CÓMO LO QUIERO

Caminarás, caminarás.

Cielo, aire con nombre,

hijo a quien digo hijo sin saber,

sin comprender, y no,

cómo pudo ocurrirnos la pureza.

[...]

Mucho más que quererte:

suelo amarte con pena. (Gelman, *Gotán* 64-66).

An argument can be made where the poem in question does not really have a truly dialectical component in the exchange between parent and son, inasmuch as the otherness of the Other/son is being constituted as it comes in contact with an unwavering "I" of a parent that never lends a voice to the son. This mono-logical aspect would bring the poem closer to the platonic dialogue where the Socratic voice is the only voice that is manifest —muting into silence, and ultimate unquestioned agreement the voice of the Other—, than to the scene of the Lord and the Bondsman in the Hegelian allegory, where the two voices engage in a dialectical exchange where each is modulated by the discourse of the Other. However, this mono-logical aspect of the discourse would end up in nothing more than an attempt, inasmuch as in the poem's discourse the subject himself is being transformed by the implied enunciation of the Other. When the son "dice" and "pregunta", the subject responds with an answer that is not itself questioned nor problematized. But when the language of the enunciation is not verbal but contingent —that is, when the son "sonríe"— the subject can only question his own self and respond to the Other not with an answer, but with a saying that falls short of its intended meaning —"¿Y alguna vez he sonreído así?", "¿Supe dar la mañana, confundirla, equivocarme al mundo?"—. More than saying the ineffable, the poem tries to understand how is it that the impossible is possible —"cómo pudo ocurrirnos la pureza"—. The poem is then not a reflection that closes itself in the contingent, but a reflection that sees in the contingent the miracle of transcending contingency itself in the encounter with the Other that ends

in the perfect alexandrine, split into two verses, "Mucho más que quererte: suelo amarte con pena".

This relation with the Other, since, as an ethical relation, is previous to any subjective act, is decisively not the result of the subject's volition, but is willfully accepted even when the Addressee of the poem is not the son:

Si me dieran a elegir, yo elegiría
esta salud de saber que estamos muy enfermos,
esta dicha de andar infelices.

[...]

Aquí pasa, señores,
que me juego la muerte (Gelman, *Gotán* 67)

The "yo" of the first verse, grammatically unnecessary, is an irruption of the voice that needs to affirm the manifesto character of a poem that chooses paradox as a trope in order to make of the experience in the contingent world a totality that might escape logic, but not knowledge of the self as both cognizant interiority and vulnerable exteriority⁶⁸. It is in this exteriority that, after all, death is at stake; and in this wager, so is immortality as the continuation of the self in the poem. The subject chooses to engage in the ethical relation, convinced that the paradox makes possible the subject's transcendence, which is to say, convinced that poetry is a mode of knowledge. In this

⁶⁸ The use of this trope is for Giordano generational: "Oxímoron generacional, se repite en versos como 'esta dicha de andar tan infelices', donde la ilusión crea su espacio en el hueco del poema, y sólo en la escritura y la lectura puede alcanzar plena (pero no ilusoria) existencia" (J. Giordano 172).

wager on poetry as epistemology the poem must rebel against the limits with which logic would constrain any element related to another. Thus, in "Límites":

¿Quién dijo alguna vez: hasta aquí la sed,
hasta aquí el agua?

¿Quién dijo alguna vez: hasta aquí el aire,
hasta aquí el fuego?

¿Quién dijo alguna vez: hasta aquí el amor,
hasta aquí el odio?

¿Quién dijo alguna vez: hasta aquí el hombre,
hasta aquí no?

Sólo la esperanza tiene las rodillas nítidas.

Sangran (Gelman, *Gotán* 68).

Here, after the symmetrical arrangement of questions the contingent emerges as an irruption —again taking the form of the alexandrine "Sólo la esperanza tiene las rodillas nítidas"— that acknowledges suffering as an excess to its wager in the rare two-syllable "Sangran", and thus accepts it as a painful mark of the humanity with which poetry borders. The poem for Gelman is a space that borders between the

world of the contingent and the world of the lyric, and as such it must bear the mark of mortality that makes the subject human. Here again, the wager is that through this shared mortality with the Other, the self can be immortal, so that "En ustedes mi muerte termina de morir" (Gelman, *Gotán* 79).

The lack of answers in the poem seems to point to a mode of questioning that goes beyond what is asked: what are at stake in the questions are the limits of the act of limiting, in an exposition of the limits themselves of knowledge. But the questions are not merely stated as theoretical questions regarding epistemology; they are political questions, concerning the agency over and distribution of the elements that sustain life on Earth. As such, they would demand a political answer, but in the poem they take an ethical tone. That is, the concern of the poem is not who set the limits between water, air, or love and their consumption, but rather the fact that there can be a limit that restricts their free distribution or access.

From these elements, "man" emerges as that from which no opposite can be conceived, except as its negation: even if there is no opposite for man, man is still limited and annulled in the abyss of the "no" where man is-not. From the poem then arises, not an answer, but an affirmation. In "Sólo la esperanza tiene las rodillas nítidas" hope reveals itself as the antithesis of doubt and the possibility of knowledge. But this affirmation is centered in a paradox. The fact of the knees being "nítidas" — "clean", "smooth", "*pure*", in a clear reference to moral strength— is inexorably linked

to their bleeding, and through this blood, to the materiality that goes hand in hand with the fragility of the body of the subject that questions⁶⁹.

In the poem the border between de-linked elements is evident in the verse to verse break, but is revealed as artificial: it is only the imposition of a repeated formula, of an already-made-up phrase that simply substitutes after a colon what it looks to control and then separates it by a line. The poem as a way to reproduce sense and meaning would remain petrified in the question if it contents itself with its repetition. In the end, the way out of the poem is a "leap of faith" out of a stagnant circulation. The affirmation of the poem —the truth that is stated in a rotund, absolute statement— is that hope, even if unable to answer the "who" of the question, responds to the need to formulate the question by short-circuiting the artificial dynamics of the limit by imposing an unlimited contingency. The bleeding becomes a continuous flow of vitality that exceeds the limit of a poem that seems unable to control the blood with a final period.

Then, if the "who" becomes irrelevant it is because the emergence of contingency in the poem erases the main limit in question: that between poetry and contingent reality. The reality of the poem fractures the limit by dislocating the action of limiting: in the poem the limit is evident, but this limit, the separation between

⁶⁹ Regarding this nexus between the corporeity associated with blood and the spirituality associated with poetry, José Steinsleger has said: "Toda poesía auténtica guarda un cometido de honor: traducir la emoción que nos despierta la fisonomía alegre o serena de las cosas. En el polo opuesto de la tristeza, la poesía melancólica de Juan Gelman nos habla del parentesco de sangre y espíritu de todos nosotros y de la sagrada confianza en sí mismo".

elements, becomes their contiguity, and thus their link. If the poem exposes the impossibility of a limit intransgressible by language, between the self and the Other their separation would be nothing but the distancing from where an ethical approach can begin.

As in a community, the subject and the Other share the space of the poem, where they relate with each other. As contingent, mortal beings, their relation must be mediated by the concrete mode each respective being assumes in this relation. This concrete mode of the subject —closely related to the actual person that is manifested in the public sphere—, is what can be said to emerge from the poem and inhabit it. I will argue that this is precisely what Gelman calls "rostro". I quote the poem "Mi rostro" in its entirety:

Mi rostro cae como tu corazón
tu corazón que cae bajo la lluvia de este otoño,
una lluvia de pájaros grises que sube de mi rostro
como el otoño sube hasta tu corazón,
he recorrido calles, rostros, puertos,
antes de recorrer tu corazón de otoño
como un pájaro gris las calles de la lluvia,
tu corazón va solo como un puerto
del que todas las lluvias han partido

menos ese pájaro gris parecido al otoño

construyendo mi rostro para tu corazón (Gelman, *Gotán* 112).

The mutual constitution of the subject and the Other is played in the ever circular relatedness between the elements in a poem that cannot seem to settle in any particular meter, trying to reconstruct this elusive creation that is the "rostro" as the particular concrete with which the subject makes himself present in the daily encounter with the Other in the street, the harbor, and the like.

The mechanics of subject-constitution in Gelman's poetry is similar, or analogous to that of the Levinasian subject. At this point, though, an enormous difference arises: for Gelman the contingent Other is not completely out of reach, is not "totally Other". For Gelman the Other seems to remain completely graspable and enclosed in the ontological system of "the Same". If for Gelman ethics is first-poetics, it is still not first-philosophy. As first-poetics, it is from ethics —as the reflection regarding the encounter between the self and the contingent Other— from where the principles on which the theory that rules over the praxis of the construction of the poem derive. The poem must give an account of Poetry, of course, but this account must come from the poetry that is found in the encounter with the Other. As first-philosophy, however, ethics would imply that this Other is not enclosed in an ontology that would precede him: the Other would be totally Other; and it seems to me that the ethics as derived until now from Gelman assumes an ipseity of the Other

that begins in and does not transcend the ontological statements of the self constituted as subject.

To fully appreciate the Other in his total otherness, another movement was needed in Gelman's poetics. The subject needed to open himself. After recognizing that the relation between the subject and the Other was mediated by the "rostro", the encounter had to be "face to face", so the subject had to admit that the presumed otherness was not in fact the true essence of the Other, but a starting point in a series of iterations that —much as I have tried to emulate in the concatenation of arguments in this dissertation— tried to make of the poetic subject a derivable entity. I think this is not a movement that immediately followed in Gelman's poetic production, but one that took quite a while and that, as fate would have it, in fact followed the experience of genocide, if not in the poet's own body, definitely in the poet's own family.

Before the subject opened himself, he entered into the world to fully engage in the contingent reality that only the poet as a man could access. It is in this period of total immersion in contingent reality when Gelman's poetry turns to "Revolution" as the reification in the political sphere of the subject's ethics that had led his poetry. It is because of the empathy felt towards the suffering Other that the poem starts to take the form of the popular song —i.e. the tango— to fulfill its denouncing function in what Privitera considers an exiting from an individualist tone of *Violín y otras cuestiones*. The poem —in particular "Diez", which was discussed before— is, then, a

declaración de principios, es decir, como una toma definida de posición frente a la poesía y lo que ella implica como discurso directo. El hablante se pone enfrente del propio acto creador y desarma el instrumento lingüístico, es decir, elimina todo hermetismo o subjetividad que califica de "bisutería poética", para ponerlo al servicio del mensaje, claro, firme, simple. De esta manera Gelman rompe con el sesgo individualista de su primer libro *Violín y otras cuestiones* de 1956 para ir directamente a los problemas que son propios de un grupo o clase social determinado" (Privitera 211).

Although I am in agreement with the assertion that Gelman's poetry will become ever more a "declaración de principios" and a "toma definida de posición frente a la poesía", I don't think that the "bisutería poética" that he condemns are the hermetic or subjective qualities of the poem, even if it is true that Gelman himself has admitted his need to escape the individualism of his first poems⁷⁰. As a matter of fact—and as I have attempted to show—the poem maintained as one of its thematic axis the dynamics through which the subject is constituted as a hermetic instance of meaning, inasmuch as it would be only possible to scrutinize him from the concrete relation of the individual subject with the Other he encounters in contingent reality. The "sesgo individualista" that Gelman would be trying to break would be that of the

⁷⁰ In an interview with Mario Benedetti published in *Los poetas comunicantes*, Gelman says: "Esa poesía intimista iba a terminar por ahogar mi poesía, ya que no creo que ésa deba ser *la* poesía" (Benedetti 197, emphasis in the original).

manifestation in the poem of a subject too closely related to the biographical Gelman. In the poem there will still be a hermetic subject that therefore can be derived only through hermeneutics, but this will be a subject that will aspire to possess universal characteristics.

It is during this revolutionary period when Gelman assumes fully the function of the "poeta comunicante", as Benedetti proposes it⁷¹. In Gelman, what the poetic subject will try to communicate is the hope in a revolutionary victory to a listening public that will hear, as would be the poet's intention, the "day to day" reality where "lo sencillo, lo llano y lo humilde se erigen como valores centrales" in a lyrical style that will reject immediacy and any "distinction between pure and contaminated poetry":

Estética que toma lo marginal y anti-retórico, lo íntimo, lo cotidiano e "intrascendente" trasmutado en la retorta de la narratividad y del sentimentalismo de una nueva retórica donde lo sencillo, lo llano y lo humilde se erigen como valores centrales [...] La poesía de Gelman

⁷¹ In his assessment of the poetry of the time, the Uruguayan categorizes the contribution of the new generation of Latin American poets as: "Los nuevos poetas experimentan, vanguardizan, tienen osadía; pero eso también pudo y puede decirse de sus mayores. En todo caso, lo que cambió fue el lenguaje (cada vez más despojado) y la clave comunicativa (cada vez más abierta)" (Benedetti 15). The communicative element will be measured as the capacity to "reach" the reader and include him or her in the creative process. His judgment on Gelman's poetry could not be more laudatory: "Si Juan Gelman sólo hubiera escrito cierto poema incluido en *Gotán*, y que concluía: 'Ni irse ni a quedarse,/ a resistir,/ aunque es seguro/ que habrá más penas y olvido', ya tendría bien ganado su derecho a esa modesta pero infrecuente gloria que es lograr, las más de las veces sin quererlo, meter el corazón del lector en un puño, y luego abrirlo, despacito, para que el mundo vuelva a latir" (Benedetti 187).

asume la declaración de fe política o el motivo político sin temor; sin "olvidarse de toda metáfora sospechosa de *belleza*", como lamentaba [Ludovico] Silva, sino, por el contrario, erigiendo la consigna y el vocabulario político en lenguaje poético. Ajustando discurso y dicción poéticos en la apuesta de la connotación y de la polisemia. Sin rehuir el nombre propio, la mención de circunstancias político-sociales o las modulaciones coloquiales del lenguaje. Apostando a una lírica que desconoce la distinción entre poesía pura y poesía contaminada y que postula un sistema metafórico que rechaza la ingenuidad o la inmediatez anquilosante sin que por ello pretenda un discurso de puras realidades creadas o metáforas de segundo grado (Achúgar 100-101).

For Hugo Achúgar, the field of knowledge that is inescapably linked to Gelman's poetry, is politics. The main aim of this chapter has been to make clearer how the political commentary on Gelman has as its foundation an ethical concern that comes before the political positioning. Achúgar himself seems to hint at this, but falls short of acknowledging that the ethics in Gelman's poetry is not only an element in its aesthetics, but the main component in the systematic composition of the poem, which is to say its poetics:

Creemos que Gelman establece su lírica desde una ética-estética o estética-ética —tanto vale— que rehuye de lo lúdico, conociéndolo [...]
Y, sobre todo, desde una estética-ética que apoyándose en los "rostros

oscuros", en la angustiada voz de quien se sabe uno entre muchos; voz dividida, voz doble a sabiendas de que no hallará la "paz sino en su polvo/ de manifestaciones ya por la sombra". Voz angustiada y, a la vez, entusiasmada por los dolores y los éxitos de los pequeños seres (Achúgar 102).

This keen observation on the "obscure faces" as the foundation of the ethics in Gelman is probably the biggest insight in Achúgar's article, as it points towards the pain that the poet sees as a source for poetical construction at the same time that it is the image—but an image prior to the poem—that demands of the self an ethical response.

It is also in this period when the revolutionary poet became the revolutionary man—the "revolucionario", the "guerrillero"—that I think the direct interpellation of the reader first appears in Gelman's poetry. The poem takes the form of a public denunciation where the poetic subject calls for the reader's direct action. For the poet, the act of reading the poem would become ethically insufficient, just as it had become insufficient for the poet to write it. The relation between self and Other in the poem, more than appear as a representation, would become an imperative advocated for the poetic subject: the poem assumes the place of an Other to call for the exit from the space of the poem into the real-concrete:

según otoña en mi experiencia
me hago más joven de verdad

las hojas amarillan
mis asambleas de ternura

invito a todos, al gran rey
es decir al gran pájaro que vuela en mi lugar
mientras ando ocupado
en descubrir cómo se vuela

me arranqué la camisa las manos la mirada
para ver de volar
pero no puedo gente
ayúdenme les pido

ayudenme
la sangre pesa como pies
y los rostros que tiene
y los rostros que tiene

tus rostros gente como
plomo como dolor
como olvido también

como las ganas de volar

que se pudren abajo

de almohadas infinitas (Gelman, *Sidney West...* 32).

In the poem, the experience of the contingent becomes insufficient, as it has reached its autumn. The subject grows younger as time passes and experience falls short, not of course due to a natural evolution, but because it becomes the subject's willful act.

The materiality of the poem, in the yellowing of the "hojas" —as both the leaves of the experience in autumn, and the pages of the poem in its aging—, then becomes a substitute for the body of the subject that can then continue his attempts at flight.

The invitation thus placed at the beginning of the stanza is both an invitation to fly — that is also to become young— in the poet's occupation; which is to say that writing becomes a trip back to the kernel of a timeless self that, nonetheless, has to ask for the help of the "gente" in its quest. That is, the subject asks for the help of the Other —who made him a subject in the first place— in order to make the poem, in an invitation that takes the form of the imperative "ayudenme".

The procedure to make the poem out of the experience this time implies the violent separation of the self from its body, what covers it, and its function: "me arranqué la camisa las manos la mirada". Here, the self-impairment of sight, as that with which the subject sees and through which the subject experiences the world at first, implies a subjective disintegration that is apparently needed in order to experience contingency, and thus conceive it, but otherwise. To do this, the self posits

itself as Other and asks for the help of the "gente" who the self, as subject, took care for. Corporeity, however, proves to be an impassable gap. Blood, the ultimate connective tissue, ties the self to its body and its ipseity, inhibiting its flight.

Within this blood, faces flow, which is to say that the face of the Other in fact enters the self, as it is fed from the contingency where he is manifested. Then in "tus rostros gente como" the face and the people are conflated into a concept in order for them to be ingested in the duality of the "como" ["as"/"I eat"], but both remaining manifestations of a deeper truth that is still inaccessible, and which heavy as lead makes it impossible for the subject to fly. The poem then opens up the possibility of escaping pain by avoiding putrefaction in the "almohadas infinitas", that is, in an avoidance of the irresponsibility that would annul the face.

The "face", as the only element of the Other that is accessible to the self, remains the axis around which poetics revolve in its quest to ascertain a reality that is no longer the component of the world created by the poem, but is already found in the contingent world outside. In *Cólera buey*—included in the collection *Sidney West y otros poemas*—Gelman dedicates a series of poems he titles "Rostros" to the image of the Face. Of the faces in the series, the son as child reappears as the main Other of the poetic composition:

allá en la bella infancia
tu rostro era otro rostro
y su asombro

cuelga de ciertos árboles

¿los pajaritos cantan?

¿soy yo la tierra de esos árboles?

¿aquél que escucha lento

como sus dos maderos? (Gelman, *Sidney West...* 67).

From the present the subject sees the "bella infancia" of the Other, that *was* another face, but that is in the present a face whose amazement *is* hanging from a tree the subject has the intuition grows from the self. The Other as infant is represented in a temporal relation with the self where he never ceases to be dependent, and where he never ceases to grow. It is in infancy, however, where beauty is associated with the face, apparently precisely because it is in infancy when it can be related more closely with the tree as its fruit, as still part of the parent entity but one that holds the whole of the tree within. It then follows that the act of writing becomes the practice of constructing a Face for the self to have a relation with, since it is from writing from where the fruit of language can emerge:

escribo en el olvido

en cada fuego de la noche

cada rostro de ti

[...]

he fundado pueblos en tu dulzura (Gelman, *Sidney West...* 71)

The face then appears as the memory of an Other that is addressed directly, and whose grasping from the past so as to insert him in the present is the ultimate goal of the poem. The contingent Other is then seen as the temporal displacement of a child that, although grown, still remains the foundation of the world through language in "dulzura", in tenderness, in the attributes of the child. The poem as an attempt to recuperate a foundational origin in the child looks to perpetuate the relation where the self is responsible for an Other whose evolution escapes the subject that can only differentiate between perfect preterit and present. That is, a subject that cannot find a way to represent the Other in his becoming, in his passing time. Then the need for the poet to construct this face is apparent. If for Achgúar the poet does not seek to found the world, this is only the concrete world: the poem must create a world for the Face to appear. The face in the poem is the reification of a past that still *is*, and that through poetry seeks its new mode of being in the present.

¿cuantas madres habré

arriba abajo de tus hijos

haciéndolos

y deshaciéndolos haciéndolos? (Gelman, *Sidney West...* 72)

This notion of the Face as the foundational construction wherewith the present can enter in an ethical relation with the past requires the questioning of the poet as creator. If the Other is the son, the poetic subject posits himself in the figure of the mother, as the source of the fertile ground for the tree to grow and the fertile matrix

where from language the Face can emerge, in the present, as the continuous creation of an image. The face as the mode in the contingent of the Other has to be constructed as a concrete image so that the relation can transcend, not only the space of the poem, but its time. Even when the poem is not creating the world it still provides the space where the past can inhabit the present, and so it remains the only possible locus for the face of an Other that was.

In his long poem *Pensamientos octubre 1967* —also included in *Sidney West...*—, the type of heroism proposed by the poet is paralleled to the victory of a "guevarista" revolution, but against doctrine or dogma, the subject in the poem —faced with the absence of a concrete body that was used to be concretely *there*, in the world— is eminently a lonely one. Through the pain of the concrete Other the poet was able to create a contingent community, and now through the concrete death of an Other — through his absence in the space of shared living in the world— that not only constituted the subject but congealed community in society by concentrating in this figure the elements around which this community gravitates, the possibility itself of such a community, even as poetic community, is questioned:

soy de un país donde sucedieron o suceden
todas estas cosas y aún otras
como traiciones y maldades en excesiva cantidad
y el pueblo sufre y está ciego y naides
lo defiende y sólo

el Che se puso de pie para eso

[...]

pregunto yo

¿quién habrá de aguantarle la mirada?

¿ustedes momias del partido comunista argentino?

ustedes lo dejaron caer

¿ustedes izquierdistas que sí que no?

ustedes lo dejaron caer

¿ustedes dueños de la verdad revelada?

ustedes lo dejaron caer

[...]

soy de un país donde yo mismo

lo dejé caer

y quién pagará la cuenta

quién (Gelman, *Sidney West...* 180-185).

As a result of this loneliness, a sense of betrayal arrests the subject who comes to believe that the solidarity that made possible the co/habitation of the Other with the self was nothing more than a mere abstraction. In the development of his ethics, of the manner in which he enters in relation with the Other, the subject needed to take a step back. He needed to return to the poem from the concrete reality to which he completely gave himself. That is, the subject returns to the poem because it is the

space that allows contemplation of the world, distanced but not alienated from the world. It is from the poem that the poetic subject will relate with the Other who's construction as "Face" comes to supplement the absence that the concrete death of the Other signifies. The Face of the Other thus completes the world⁷². The poet, thus, would not cease to act —nor would he cease to be a "revolucionario"— by contemplating the world:

el poeta en realidad
se abstiene de llorar se abstiene
de escribir un poema sea
para Casa de la Américas sea
para lo que sea el poeta
apenas si lloró en realidad
sigue mirando el mundo (Gelman, *Sidney West...* 187).

The poet had written before —in the poem "Final" of *Violín y otras cuestiones*, discussed above— that poetry was outside of the poem. Then, to abstain from the poem is, "mirando el mundo", to remain in poetry while deferring the poem. To abstain from the poem is not to renounce it, but to pause before writing it. It is not the function of

⁷² For Alfredo Fressia, the poet apparently seeks to complete the world with the word: "Es como si Gelman, mucho más allá del fracaso o no de una militancia o de un proyecto de cambiar el mundo, tuviera que cubrirlo de palabras. O como si el silencio, que es en principio la irreemplazable parte en blanco donde la poesía se explica y cobra un significado nuevo, resultara intolerable en esta obra que tiende vocacionalmente al infinito". If the poet completes the world, he would do so inasmuch as it is the poet who makes possible the completion of the world with the Other. A better formulation might, then, be that the face of the Other completes the world *with* the subject.

the poet to simply reproduce an already made discourse, nor is it to be an institutional organ, be it or not a revolutionary institution. I am in full accordance with Alicia Genovese when she states that "Gelman se niega aquí⁷³ a hacer ese tipo de poesía política cercana al panfleto y a la propaganda, como si estuviese dando una respuesta textual a las discusiones sobre arte que surgen en la Argentina de esa época, entre los sectores intelectuales de izquierda" (Genovese 22).

By the same token, to abstain from crying is to repress it only inasmuch as it is to allow for it later. Fury, thus, is discarded as the force that moves poetry, as the experience of such a fury is not the experience of reality but an effect of it. In the poem there will be a space for tears, but this will neither be the dominant aspect of the poem, nor will it be the action of "el poeta en realidad". The subjective division that was seen in the poem before —"Por andar dividido en dos me ocurre una lucha, una guerra extraordinaria"— will now result in a complete separation of the poet and the person, each of which will be relegated to a distinct space. However, again, the poet will have through the poem an effect in concrete reality. The poet "se abstiene de escribir un poema", but he writes the poem. That is, the poet posits himself as having already experienced the world in its contemplation from the poem that represents the world. And what is more, as a poet, man can make from the remains of the dead a whole that can complete the life cycle, thus answering the question with which he

⁷³ Although Genovese is speaking about *Los poemas de Sidney West* in particular (included in the collection *Sidney West...*), I believe her assessment refers to Gelman's poetry of the time, that is, late 1960's.

ends the poem: "¿quién habrá de juntarte otra vez?" (Ibid). In the same way, man, as the "revolucionario", can take up arms to fight not only for the just cause, but for the "palabra justa" ["just/right word"]⁷⁴. The revolutionary poet is validated in the real world as a "revolucionario", but is vindicated in time as poet.

What forces the poetic subject to question his presuppositions is then the death of the Other with whom the subject had formed a community, inasmuch as the dead, abstracted from the contingent, left in the memory of the self their "face" as a trace that the poet translated to the contingent. The face of the Other was not the Other, and the Other's refusal to completely disappear after his death is taken by the subject as proof of the impossibility to enclose him within the subject's ontological system. *Now* the subject can open himself with generosity to allow the Other to enter into the self. Only after experiencing the traumatic violence of genocide does the subject in Gelman's poetry seem to completely discard his original project. The poem will always be political, but in his latter production of the poem Gelman uses the "Name" of the disappeared to raise them to mythical stature in order to construct a

⁷⁴ The phrase is a play on Flaubert's *mot juste*, which Gelman recuperates from a quote from Francisco Urondo: "hay mucho olvido ahora. ¿y quién va a recordar que dijiste: 'tomé las armas porque busco la palabra justa'? cada cual busca la palabra justa a su manera. algunos creen que la palabra es buey (es un buey) y la buscan con encendidos oros. otros piensan que llega por milagro (es un milagro). y están todos los demás, que sienten la palabra como pájaro, viga, desastre, pies, albura, dios violeta, caballo de esperar. de todas formas es la palabra que uno lleva, que nos necesita para decirnos" (Gelman, *Urondo...* 24). The "palabra justa" is then not exclusive for the poet, in a democratization of language that even avoids capitalization; however, it seems that it *is* the poet who can "recordar lo que dijiste".

subjectivity, no longer in a relationship with a "Face", but in a relationship with a divinity before whom the poetic subject is responsible.

After the disappearance of his son and pregnant daughter-in-law, not only does the tone in Gelman's poems become more somber, but violence was now exercised over the physical existence of the "compañero", whose main operating attribute is mortality and the ability to suffer bodily pain. Formally, the verse is sliced with diagonal slashes which obey not rules of syllabic or grammatical division, but follow the dismemberment of a subject who tries to take refuge in a reality that was in the past attempted to change with his revolutionary project.

The poem then becomes a sort of sutured body with which it is intended to remember a disperse whole, but that retains a link in all its parts: if the violence that mutilates the subject has indeed marked him indelibly, this same violence will now become constitutive in the resulting subject through an appropriation of its own violent byproduct by the poet. The diagonal slash remains as a distinctive mark, as a kind of scar in the body that, re-constructed, might still maintain the appearance of a continuum, but cannot escape the continuous, seemingly unstoppable recurrence of its forceful de-structuring by way of remitting back, every time it manifests itself, to the original violence which caused the subject to fracture into its minute components in the first place.

The function of the diagonal slash, as a grammatical element, cannot be pinned down as either a copulating or dividing entity. Its serving purpose is rather, by

violently interposing itself between the reader and the free-flow of the poem, to make it possible for the literary body to transcend the page of the book, and give it a form that is left attached to the reader's memory of the violent *interruption*. With this operation the depicted violence is also given a concrete body were to be posited. The poet inserts in the verse with the diagonal slash, not simply a pause, but a moment of thought; a moment when the epistemic structure of the reader is questioned by the reader himself; a moment when the reader is compelled to take, facing this sutured body, an ethical stance; a moment when the reader is held responsible to actively take part on the re-remembering of the subject and of the *compañero*.

In the case of a poetry so marked by trauma as that of Gelman, the “misery”, the “despair”, the “shadows” to which for George Bataille⁷⁵ the poet is condemned, are in fact the only currency that the poet has at hand, which he invests so to sustain with them a structure where trauma can, at the very least, be stabilized. If for Bataille poetic expenditure is unproductive, in Gelman’s case the expenditure *is* in my contention productive as long as it intends to surpass its limits, and inasmuch as it is a revolutionary act. Here, revolutionary, inasmuch as the poetic semantic contents try to displace those of an external structure, and replace within the collective mythology one referent for the other.

⁷⁵ According to Bataille, "The term poetry, applied to the least degraded and least intellectualized forms of the expression of a state of loss, can be considered synonymous with expenditure; it in fact signifies, in the most precise way, creation by means of loss. Its meaning is therefore close to that of sacrifice [...] poetic expenditure ceases to be symbolic in its consequences [...] It condemns him to the most disappointing forms of activity, to misery, to despair, to the pursuit of inconsistent shadows that provide nothing but vertigo or rage" (Bataille 120).

What one first notice in *Si dulcemente* (1980) —included in the collection *de palabra*—, besides the continued violence of the diagonal slash, is that to the cohesive intention is added the linking of a poem with the other, by way of having the last verse of a poem be the first verse of the next, with which the intention to construct a poem that has an *artificial unity* is repeated and intensified. Within this unity, the «Name» functions as an invocation; not as a “chant for the dead”, but rather as a giving of signification in an operation, a transaction in which the poetic subject constituted *a priori* in his fracture finds in his dead “compañero” an archetype with which to identify.

In this schema, the loss of the *compañero* is a given, it has to be the starting point for the poetic production, for due to its immensity the poetic subject is affirmed in relation to a void that cannot reflect back upon him an identity with which to construct his own, via the perceived difference with the Other. By considering it as an *a priori*, the subject can circumvent the trauma which truncates the natural development of the self. In the poem “Sola” the constitutive void of the subject is projected onto earth itself, which with its agency on the remaining corpse provides the always passing, decaying temporality that accompanies the subject. This is a subject founded in an already decomposing, ephemeral reality that, however, makes it possible for the *compañero*, in the future, to rise again like the “sun of justice”:

sola estás/tierra/de los compañeros
que ahora encerrás y deshacés/oís

cómo se desocupan lentamente
del amor que les queda/desaprietan

su vez de caer/sueñan soñados/quietos/
nunca verán los rostros donde crecen/
asoman/continuados/a este sol/
alguna vez al sol de la justicia (Gelman, *De palabra* 173).

The poem serves as a place where the *compañero* can, as memory, have agency on the subject who still feels a connection with what, by way of its loss in the poet's contingent reality, enters his mythical infinity. The *compañero*'s return to the earth is construed as a symbolic fertilization process, and the poetic subject, living and working on earth, can gain thus access to a system where, lyrically and onirically, the self can, if not possess, encounter the lost *compañero*. In "Matando la derrota", for example, the sacrificial nature of the dead is recognized, and with this, the possibility of an existence beyond death itself, whereby the sacrifice is, again, given the possibility of an agency in a contingent change:

matando la derrota general/compañeros
murieron/dieron una vida para que
nada siguiera como está/paco dura/
roque arde al final de la memoria/(Gelman, *De palabra* 180).

But, if the loss antecedes the subject, does that mean that the activity that follows has to be, necessarily "unproductive"? Are, in fact, "ritual sacrifice" and "artistic activity" modes of unproductive production? The poem, as a myth-edifying entity, implies a gain *only* if the subject is structured, at its point of origin, with an immanent loss; otherwise, the poem comes just as a rather late balancing of the accounts that never suffices to fully substitute the loss. The loss, in this interpretation, is not an expenditure but, as a murder, a theft; it is the trauma that has to be, and is, dealt with by the manifestation of the «Name» as an archetype. In "Todavía abrigando" the mythical archetype is again telluric, but entrusted with the possibility of transcending from the physical to the metaphysical study of "his unbeing", from "the mineral state" to the "higher waters of the soul":

todavía abrigando palabritas/haroldo
mira su desestar/rodolfo calla por primera vez
en su muerte ante la asamblea de compañeros
desolados/destierrados/les desfuegan

la aire/la vez de combatir/compañeritos
que riñonearon mucho/apagándose ya/
paco que pasa a mineral/o aguas
superiores del alma/donde brillan (Gelman, *De palabra* 178).

In a first reading, the Name seems to function as a type of currency, which while retaining its referent in the outside of the poem, circulates in an attempt to, like the faces of dead presidents in their monetary representation, create a mythical basis, alternative to the concrete political in which the dead were seen and portrayed by the regime that committed the murders as a defeated communist, non Christian, and non Western threat.

The Other, mirror in which the subject recognizes himself as such, ethically and thematically, continue as the main axis in Gelman's poetics. Nonetheless, the use does nothing but install the Other in a circulation out of which, in the end, the original import cannot help but to be spent: the primal signification of the myth is subjected to the projections of a reader, who imports to it new sets of values, which continue to add up geometrically until the myth stops resembling one by its representation as a «truth». In the poem, the «Name» takes the place of the «Face» and the relation between the subject and his Other goes from the ethical to the theological.

If, in a beginning, the face of the Other demanded that the subject be completely responsible for him; if in fact this responsibility is always assigned with anteriority, even to the subject's cognitive realization of his relation with the Other, by changing the focus of the poem to the Name, the Face is not actually erased. Rather, the position of the Face in the epistemic circuit is shifted. The subject, by standing in relation this time with the Name, inserts it as a divinity within his mythical realm; but,

it is a divinity whose Face resembles the face of Man, and not the other way around. The relation with the «Name» hides in it the subject's desire to reach the «Face» of God. The poet assumes the role of coiner of the «Name» in the imaginary, and of value-setter of the image in the political performance. In Gelman's earlier poetry the only word with a capital letter was Revolution. In *Si dulcemente*, however, the only word with a capital letter, is God:

[crece] en la mitad del pueblo/alzada el alma

como alta de Dios/transparente/ya suave

mano de unión en esta noche (Gelman, *De palabra* 165).

If there is a *giving* of the self, as I think there is, if there is poetry in *Si dulcemente*, it is due mostly to the poet's ethical expenditure; an expenditure that is ethical in that his poetic object is always an Other to whom the subject never ceases to respond face to face in the verse. This is an expenditure that is ethical for the poet's revolutionary search; and an expenditure that is productive in that the poetic subject intends to transcend the literariness of this ethics by engaging not only concretely, but poetically in the political.

If it is true that ever so gently the poet can feel the caress of the fallen compañero in his experiencing reality, the compañero, the Other, demands of the poet—and in extension, of the reader—a response. To respond, as the last verses of *Si dulcemente* reiterate, is to "begin *again*". Until such a demand is met with a direct

involvement in the struggle to reach a signification that establishes the «Name» within the cultural epistemic structure, the Other will, even if forever, keep on waiting.

Waiting on an eternal circulation, until the value proper of the sacrifice is recognized and inserted in the common economy of the reader's beliefs.

In Gelman there is indeed an irreparable loss, and there is creation. From this loss there is a product beyond the poem. A *relation* is produced, from which a subject emerges. This is not a product that circulates as a commodity, and from which the poet recuperates his investment in an immediate fashion, although it can certainly imply a cultural capital. What the poetic product implies, as an ethical expenditure, is a positive return, not because there *was* a loss, but because the value of the resulting product exceeds the value of its constituent parts, its prime matter. From absence the poem produces a presence.

In Gelman's poetry the emerging subject seems to grasp the fragmentary nature of his own self and contingent reality in order to reconstitute himself. For Gelman poetics must depart first and foremost from an ethical stance. The new poetry after genocide must be ethical rather than political; the poem must create a "face" that serves as a mode for the hidden substance of poetry, who are the disappeared, and who only through the ominous truth of pain can be manifested. It is then with tenderness that the poet tones down the emotion in order to attempt in the poem the recovery of a foundational origin where the father-son relationship, truncated in

contingency, looks to perpetuate an unending encounter in which the self is responsible for the Other.

Conclusions

At the beginning of the dissertation I stated that the desire to occupy a space with a body that serves as the *locus* of the I impels the self into concretion. The ethical posture must then start from this contingency and deal with the truth of the Other that is there, right in front of the self. And more, that it is there but cannot be thematized. In the same fashion, and inasmuch as this has been a dissertation on literature, the poem appears as an Other that the I desires to thematize and know, but can only experience. After the poetic experience, the I is a new subject: *I* am a new subject. Here I am before the poem, and it is the poem that modulates me. But, inasmuch as the dissertation has attempted to bridge the fields of literature and ethics, here I am before the Other who constitutes me. Before the Other I risk myself by admitting the vulnerability of my body; before the poem I risk myself by admitting the fragility of my being. Before the Other and the poem, my enunciation is the same: I enter into language, I admit it as the reality that connects me to the world. To enunciate is to integrate into the world. It is *I* who enunciate, and it is *I* who integrate into the world. The distance I assume between myself and the object of my criticism does not free me from *my* engagement with the world. I must cross the bridge I claim to have set up between literature and ethics.

The ethics I advocate in the dissertation is, thus, to find pleasure in the self's insertion into the world by way of its po/ethical enunciation. That is, to find pleasure in the self's insertion in a poem that sacrifices itself in order that a new subject emerges without his being thematized by discourse, which is to say without the poem proposing an epistemology that knows its object beyond the marvel of its encounter, and at the same time without having the poem impose the logics of a grammar that chains the subject to the signifying web of his enunciation. In a po/ethics there would occur a reduction in the system where the encounter between I and Other is mediated only by the contact between the two and the message that this contact transmits. Without linguistics to determine a code that deciphers the message, nor with an epistemology that derives knowledge from it, the message of the contact would be the contact itself, which opens the limit of both contact and message —of the poem— to infinity and eternity. An infinite message corresponds to two beings in an eternal contact that would make the transmittal of the message possible, as we are always in the universe, are always before the Other, and are thus always in a poem, and are always Saying.

The Turn to Ethics: an Afterword

In order to reach a po/ethics, again, one would have to first identify and deal with the tension between ethics and poetics. In a similar fashion, just as the “Turn to ethics” cannot turn its back to the political aspect of its critique, the type of reading I

have attempted cannot turn its back to the poetical aspect of the studied texts, nor can it disregard the formal character of the po/ethics proposed.

To derive from the poems of Vallejo and Gelman, for example, a world-vision in which the relation with the Other occupies a central position in said world's constitution it is not necessary to fall back to readings that, as Massiello suggested, limit themselves to mentioning the militancy of the writers in this or that political movement. This is nothing else but to say that the root which anchors the world is ethics, practiced by individuals between individuals within a society, which is to say practiced in a political world. The nexus between literature and politics needs not, in my opinion, greater proofs or explanations. To question deeper into the nexus between ethics and literature has been the core drive behind the "Turn to ethics", and to a much more modest degree, the drive behind this dissertation has been to also question the nexus between ethics and poetry. Here perhaps might lie the greatest potential of the "Turn to ethics": to scrutinize the relation between ethics and politics through the presence of both in the literary text.

The "Turn to ethics" must not, then, forget that every text is connected to its context, to the reality in which it is produced, reproduced, and performed. In one way or another, the poem points to its frontiers, where the text ends and the context in which the poem exists as it is enacted by the reader begins—a reader who is a part of both the text and the context. In one way or another, every poem points to me, without assuming the caricature of Uncle Sam inviting me to fulfill his martial wants.

The poem points to me, and as I am outside of the text even though I am part of the text, by reading the poem and seeing thus the way in which language struggles between its being the medium which makes communication between subjects possible and its being the amorphous material which an artistic consciousness works into producing with it an aesthetic object, I direct my sight to the conglomeration of forces that act on me. The action of these forces on me are certainly due to my political nature and the political nature of my circumstances, but these forces, precisely because they are forces—which is to say vectors—need to have a magnitude and a direction. Regardless of their magnitude, their direction is always towards me, coming always from a certain origin: from the Other in which they are originated. Every force which acts on me is the product of an Other who imprints his momentum on me. If the poem points to these forces—as is evident in Vallejo and Gelman—and to the political reality of the poem's and the reader's context, the poem cannot but point to the relation between me and my Other that underlies my political reality, and this is something that any critique to the "Turn to ethics" has to take into account before passing any premature sentence. To engage with the political and assume politics as the main target of critique is to implicate the relation between me and my Other in the critical act, and this is to implicate ethics in critique and its repercussions.

To differentiate between the ethical, the poetical, and the po/ethical might still remain as an enterprise not fully tackled, but I do not pretend to circumscribe neither

the “Turn to ethics” nor this dissertation to such nomenclature exercise. I do believe, however, that a critique that begins by recognizing this syntagmatic tension avoids, at least in its first step, turning its back to politics in the analysis of the literary text. What is more, if ethics is an act, it implies a performance, and has thus a poetics which precedes the form in which it is conceived. The nexus between ethics and poetry must then be found in both the text and its critique. If from the artist’s work a poetics can be derived, so can a po/ethics be derived from the reader’s act.

If, as I suggested in Chapter 1, the poetic Saying is a message to be deciphered, the po/ethical probes into the ocean of the unknown not to know its depths, but to experience its pressure. Po/ethical saying thrives in its incapacity to know the message of the poem. Moreover, if the ethical saying completes the world by making language and communication possible, po/ethical saying also preserves the contact and makes possible the message as a poem. The po/ethical saying preserves the poem inscribing it into a voice. In the final analysis, it is an act of faith in poetry and in the Other, of faith that through poetry I am in fact entering in a tactile relation with the Other, and that through the poem I am in fact being responsible before the world. Ultimately, the question of responsibility must be addressed by criticism, wherever it might turn.

I had previously stated how the two feelings on which the subject is founded are responsibility and shame. Both are interconnected. Shame would be the result of unresponsiveness, of remaining silent, of absenting from the world and leaving it thus unfinished. It is not shame for occupying a space that could have or should have been

occupied by another, but for not fulfilling the responsibility that goes with my occupying the space I occupy. A feeling of shame that suggests an infinite responsibility. I feel shame, thus, for my inability to fully respond. Ethics revolves around a *must* to the degree that it must be recognized that the world exists; and if the world exists, I must respond to the call for the continuation of the existence of the world. In a similar fashion, the poem too, as a text, calls us to respond through our desire. We desire because the world exists and it calls upon us to desire it. We feel shame not for our desire, but because we cannot fully satiate it. The pleasure of the poem is the pleasure of being a contiguous part of a continuous world. In po/ethics, through poetry the pleasure of entering into the world substitutes the martyr's will to sacrifice for the good of mankind in a "social poem". I respond because I must respond, but I must respond because I desire to do so, and because the pleasure of doing so that I foreshadow admits no substitution. The greatest *joissance* is not to give the self in sacrifice, but to respond. The po/ethical response can only be performative.

In the first chapter I stated that "the po/ethics of the subject" is the excision of the subject in two discourses in tension —the poetical and the ethical— that are integrated in the subject's insertion in the poem through his Saying, where the "po/ethical Saying" is a Saying in which the voice of the subject is dissolved as it says "here I am: a poem", and "here I am in the poem". Such a po/ethical saying has to be decisively compromised with reality, but with the reality it finds. It cannot be a mere

exercise of aesthetic creation in which the created reality remains abstracted from its contingent nature. That is, it cannot lose contact with the subject that contemplates it, it must question its own reality in order for the moment of aesthetic appreciation to actually occur, as the aesthetic contemplation of a saying is centered on the aural apprehension of a voice that is not there. Neither it can be an orgiastic account of Revolution where the subject sings the glories of courageous class warfare through the mediation of the muse of Marx. The message of the poem, the poetic experience itself, has to be the integration into subjectivity of the feeling of being-part of the coupling between I and poem, I and Other. The po/ethical subject is an erotic subject with a body, who finds *jouissance* within the coupling embrace. A po/ethical subject dissolves in the community founded by his saying: the I that says and the You that is said bring into existence the space they share, a space that exists in order to be there for the Other, and a space that without either I or You would not exist.

From this, a line of argument could be raised to answer the criticism against the “Turn to ethics”. The reality of the material contingency that I and You entail makes a dimensional extension where both can exist and manifest themselves as two entities who participate in a common quality—that is, the space itself—a necessity. This unavoidable reality cannot be disregarded by ethical inquiry, as it has in fact been recognized through this inquiry. Ethics must then recognize that such spatial relation can only entail a political relation between inhabiting subjects, since the space is parcelled by the corporeal difference between the two, making the question of the

ownership of space and being one. Why would political critique find it so hard to admit the ethical substrate of this spatial relation if ethical inquiry can only recognize the political imperative of the relation? How to turn to ethics be to turn the back to politics, if to turn to ethics is to reach the political at its kernel?

To seek a praxis that could correspond to the formulated theory, I explored the production of three Latin American poets, circumscribing thus in a geopolitical frame the focus of the dissertation. For César Vallejo, the no-desire in the poem serves as a null origin for the subject that can then find the silence and the shadow he feels he comes from. It is not without tension that in Vallejo poetry seeks to leave God behind in order to focus on Desire. There is, fundamentally, tension with language: the first verifiable truth the subject finds, and to which he is bound. The subject can only express himself with words.

The shadow to shadow relationship Vallejo seems to hint at for the constitution of the subject leaves open the possibility of constructing anew what is not known. Shadow to shadow implies the lack of a coherent system, of an epistemology sure of its grasp of reality. The representation of the Other as a shadow is an approach to the Other with faith in the Poetry that illuminates him.

However, for Vallejo poetry still distills language in order to know the Other better, if not totally know him. The poem is the surface space offered for the shadow to shadow relation in a movement that subtracts opacity to poetry. Vallejo's is a

poetry of an epistemological discourse that, nonetheless, finds itself faced with its insufficiency. Even when epistemology fails Vallejo he clings to it. For Vallejo the Other cannot be known, but from the Other the subject derives a no-knowledge that remains tied to an epistemological claim⁷⁶. Is there no way to relate with the shadow without bringing light into it, be it of a desired knowledge or of a no-desired no-knowledge? It seems necessary to resist the temptation to know, to believe the illusion that a discourse can domesticate truth and reveal it. We cannot know; we must, then, find out how to deal with this lack. And more, we must derive pleasure from our lack. We must question, not in order to know, but to explore.

To the question regarding whether or not there is a po/ethics in Vallejo, the following should be added: how would this po/ethics be any different to the poetics of “social poetry”? This might be the greatest of conundrums for my proposal, which might find an answer in the excision that the proposed term effects: po/ethics is not a poetics, it is not a set of rules or a system. It is not an ethics either: its product is neither a poem nor an *ethos*, but rather a poetry that seeks to make itself not with the poem as its object, as much as with the concrete relation with the Other as its purpose.

In Vallejo’s poetical saying, to the degree that it seeks to concretize an autonomous I, there is no po/ethics, as the latter will resist the autonomy of any of its

⁷⁶ That is, an epistemological claim of a justified true belief: in the encounter with the Other, the self believes the truth of the Other’s alterity to be a knowledge, and from the nature of this alterity, since it is not knowable, a no-knowledge is known to exist.

components. I and You is a discrete whole. There is indeed in Vallejo responsibility, giving of the self, and an ethics, centered in the body and the contingency of desire. If the poem seeks to liberate us from a system of relations, there is in it a po/ethical impulse as it seeks to create relations not systematically, but fluidly. More than connecting nodes in a web, subjects would be united as two drops of water that are but one. Or even better yet, as two molecules of air that, united, remain distinct yet indistinguishable.

One thing po/ethics would be well advised to appropriate from Vallejo is the aspiration of the embrace as a fusion between two originals without their melting together, that seeks nonetheless to create a new being where the I is outside of its *locus* of enunciation. This embrace is in itself a poem, a moment when I and You are here and now mutually protecting themselves from the pain of the world. Po/ethics must recognize that, for many, the world hurts, and must not remain indifferent to the fact that the world hurts others. Po/ethics must also recognize that this is primarily a question to be answered politically.

In the case of Octavio Paz, the fusion of the poet with the intellectual proved more problematic than useful for my project. The essaying intellectual aims at a definition for poetics that in the end determines poetry, inasmuch as, admittedly, this poetics can be nothing if it is not learned, and hence taught. And a poetry thus related to learning is linked with the reproduction of a discourse that seeks to remain

hegemonic by assuming the imposition of “knowledge”. If poetry is knowledge, if it is learning, it is because it hides within a “truth” it can transmit programmatically as a topic to be taught. The ethics in Paz’s value judgment are prescriptive and reductive, inasmuch as the product it judges must be in a *certain* way before its conception. In the space of the poem there would be no place for a product other than a poem from a given poetics.

I have argued that Paz exploits the subject’s desire to be a subject. I believe that the existence of this desire is an innate condition of the human being. One desires to be a subject as one desires to be a human, to continue being a human. *This* I think should be the fundamental desire of a po/ethical project: to invite the reader to engage in a relation with the proposed world because in doing so the desire to be a subject is satisfied, if not fulfilled.

However, in Paz’s impulse towards the emptying of the self, one would find the anathema of po/ethics. The emptying of the self is the negation of the fulfillment of the self in the embrace. The desire might remain always thriving, but in the completion of the embrace the self has filled the void of its absence. Already embracing the Other, the subject desires the continuation of the embrace, and the desire to thus become a subject. The po/ethical subject is not yet a subject as it keeps desiring to become a subject, but has fulfilled his self.

The theoretical attention to rhythm is perhaps the most salvageable element of Paz’s essays. The po/ethical poem should create a space in which the relation

between I and You is rhythmic. That is, the poem should announce in itself its impending becoming. The continuity of the embrace should be already present in the embrace/poem. A continuous embrace is a fulfilled embrace. And what rhythm is the po/ethical subject to follow? Must he renounce the poem's rhythm if he is not to follow a strict poetics? He cannot, his saying initiates a sonorous pattern that breaks the monotonic, monorhythmic pattern of silence. The rhythm of the po/ethical saying must seek to preserve the embrace, and in this embrace allow for two breasts to feel the cardiac rhythm of the Other. The poem gives its rhythm so the listener can embrace it, not to enchant him. Po/ethics must renounce the temptation of the poet magician who casts his spell in the poem, and of the Adamic poet who seeks to modulate poetry's epistemic system by its authorial nominative function.

If the subject always assumes the form of the poem, as Paz believes, then there would be no choice for po/ethics other than silence. Only silence would be po/ethical, as only silence would allow the whole of the space of the poem for the emergence of the voice of the Other. The po/ethical would be reduced to finding the rhythm of silence, which is to say to the technical aspect of writing. I, however, do not believe this to be the case. The subject always enters in a relation with the form of the poem, and from this encounter anOther results. Rhythm modulates the reader, but must not hypnotize him. Po/ethics must have faith, but not believe in poetry as a return to the original power of a universal, creating language.

Thematically, the greatest lesson for po/ethics from Paz is perhaps the intersection between body and present as the relation par excellence of the poem. In the poem the body is Now and Here. I do not believe Paz's poetics to be adequate for my po/ethical project, but in this project I can inscribe his thematics, as they pertain to a body-to-body relation that approaches the embrace I propose. I can only reject, however, the subjectivity that emerges from Paz, as it is modulated by the domination of the One over the Other. There is no po/ethics in Paz's poetry, as the Other is always absorbed by the I of the speaker. The ethics of carnal solidarity in *Piedra de sol* is indeed salvageable, but as ethics. That is, outside of the poem, the subject is to have solidarity with the Other inasmuch as both share the world and both are entities made out of flesh, bones, and blood; here again, however, the politics of the relation between the two bodies must be questioned. At any rate, a defense of universality finds no better postulate to defend itself than this: we are all beings made out of a flesh that will die.

I said before that man prevents ruins, that when man ceases to name the first symptom of the ruin appears. If po/ethics rejects an epistemological project, must it not reject the naming of that which is not known? Perhaps it would be appropriate to embrace the ruin, embrace the "signo vacío" as the ultimate reality of the human being. Epistemology will always fail because there never has been nor will there ever be anything to be known. If nothing can be known, then I might relate with the Other without me attempting to thematize him.

In Gelman's linking of ethics and poetics I see an attempt at a departure point for po/ethics. A departure point that must, however, go beyond the totality Gelman initially describes. I rather believe in his latter project of the poetic representation of the fragmentation of all that exists into elements united by the poem. I do believe in the whole composed of the poetical with the political, and with the ethical. I believe also that po/ethics should engage with the universe through a reality that departs from this whole in the poem. Po/ethics thematizes the poem as a space. The tension in a subject that feels this space as a *locus* for violence and as the place of a home might vary according to the driving force behind the poem, but the recognition of the corporeality of the subjects that live, suffer, and rejoice in the world is a must. I stated before that in Gelman both ethics and poetry make the same claim on the truth of the contingent Other that constitutes the subject. Po/ethics must make this same claim.

It certainly is problematic that the Other in Gelman is thematized as a "child", as it might lead to the reproduction of a paternalistic discourse that reduces the Other to an immature state, and to a level of dependence that makes of the subject the tutor of the Other. However, that the Other is immediately presented as a truth that the subject *must* protect is a movement I am willing to accept towards what I am calling po/ethics. Even further, it might be a necessary movement for the existence of something that might be called community. The subject in community *must* protect

the truth of the existence of the Other. The po/ethical praxis aims at making enunciation poetry as I take this ethical stand.

By the same token that there is no place for “bisutería poética” in a poetry that aspires to transcend and reach the realm of Poetry with capital “p”, po/ethics must resist the temptation to consume itself in its aspiration to the ethereal sphere of abstractions disconnected from the reality it creates, and avoid thus falling into “bisutería teórica”. When I say Other I am only enunciating a concept: I can never forget the abysmal gap between the noun and its referent, nor the even greater truth of the suffering of the Other. The concern of po/ethics, thus, are the formal (poetical) aspects of my encounter with the Other (in the world). Here, the world is the poem, the text my actions write as I respond to the summons of the Other. I am not sure that po/ethics should pretend any power beyond that of the subject’s being in the poem and respond. Yet, I cannot think of a greater power than this: I don’t know what it might be worth, but, for whatever it might be worth, I am here.

The one knowledge that po/ethics has to allow is that of the I, if it can be called a knowledge. I can know that I am, that I exist, and that I exist alongside the Other, but the nature of my existence in the universe is nothing more than the sum of my impressions, my experiences, my suppositions... Through poetry I seek to fill with meanings my experiences and give sense to my impressions. This would be, of course, a knowledge that makes no claim to truth, unlike Vallejo’s no-knowledge.

Turning briefly to Agamben, early in *Stanzas*, perhaps his most engaging work on aesthetics, he argues that “According to a conception that is only implicitly contained in the Platonic critique of poetry, but that has in modern times acquired a hegemonic character, the scission of the word is construed to mean that poetry possesses its object without knowing it while philosophy knows its object without possessing it” (Agamben, *Stanzas* xvi-xvii). That is, poetry attempts to grasp the object it attempts to know and philosophy has been unable to know, as the first claims a knowledge of the senses, and the second a knowledge of rationale. Poetry would attempt, then, to achieve this knowledge through subjective truth. Thus disillusionment in art has, according to Agamben’s genealogy, its connection with reality.

In the poetic modernity initiated by Baudelaire, however, a shift in paradigm seems to occur. According to Agamben, “in the poem that opens *Les fleurs du mal*, Baudelaire places his poetic work under the sign of sloth (here appearing as *ennui*). Baudelaire’s poetry in its totality may be understood, in this perspective, as a mortal struggle with sloth and, at the same time, as the attempt to transform it into something positive” (Agamben, *Stanzas* 8). This “something positive”, as poetry’s value, will be poetry’s own ungraspability, the impossibility of containing it in a closed circuit, trapped by the laws of the market. For Baudelaire, according to Agamben, poetry is saved in its objectivation and in the restitution of its truth to the object-poetry, acknowledging its complete alterity in the opposition vis-à-vis the subject who

observes it aesthetically, outside of the use and accumulation to which Marx limits the characteristics of a commodity.

The fashion in which the poet makes poetry become, as an object, a commodity that surpasses the limits assigned by Marx, is making poetry a fetish. To prove this argument, Agamben makes a reading of Freud in which the fetish is taken as a form of phantom that supplies the absence of the phallus. Poetry would thus escape being a *mere* commodity thanks to the “sensation created in an intelligent visitor by the spectacle of an exotic commodity”, in a movement that shows Baudelaire’s “awareness of the new kind of attention the commodity requires of the viewer” (Agamben, *Stanzas* 41). Modern poetry would be more than a mere exotic commodity thanks largely to the “intangible character of the aesthetic experience and his [Baudelaire] theorization of the beautiful as an instantaneous and impenetrable epiphany” (Agamben, *Stanzas* 42). Poetry as a phantom will fight against the disillusion of recognizing itself to be pure commodity and fetish, and analogously will fight against this disillusion by assuming it as a posture, leading to Baudelaire’s famous defense of dandyism, where the dandy embodies the disillusioned subject who refuses to renounce to the mask of the aesthete, even in the midst of the filth of the modern city.

But, a new disillusion overcomes the subject before the absence, before emptiness and before the recognition of the nullity of the “givens” he has been handed down by history; that is, before the recognition of the realm of the fiction

where the phantom operates. In this frame, it seems to me necessary to make of the po/ethical project one that is not postmodern in its aim at transcending modernity, but rather is otherwise than modern. It should renounce the attempt to know and the *ennui* that characterizes modernity. Let knowledge be substituted by the ethical encounter, and *ennui* by *jouissance*. The fetishization of the poetic product seems to me unnecessary, even if it implies what can be the fiercest critique against the project itself: the fetishization of the ethical encounter. In this negative fashion a formulation of the po/ethical project can be reached, as the performative act in which the saying of the subject *resists* yielding to the poetic avatar of modernity, without renouncing the critical vitality that said modernity has given the enunciation. Resistance must be critical and ethical, needless to say political.

As I said, this dissertation has as a geopolitical frame a concrete reality in which the poetical enunciation cannot disassociate itself from the political positioning it implies. Po/ethical resistance in Latin America is also political resistance. Here, resistance to the forces that from left and right seek to thematize the enunciation in one or the other pole of this opposition. But even more, resistance to the inertia that keeps a subject from acting, as he seeks refuge from the horror of the world in solipsism. As a project, po/ethical resistance can find a departure point in rethinking the postures of Ernesto Sabato and their close contact with horror.

Sabato believes, first and foremost, in human hope and courage. What is more, he considers that the tragedy of humankind lies in losing the dialogue with others, which would be a departure from the world in order to enclose the self in an individualistic I. His recommendation can be summed up in an early quote from *La resistencia*: "[...] hay una manera de contribuir a la protección de la humanidad, y es no resignarse" (Sabato 17). Here Sabato still refers to the experience of the concrete; by arguing for the protection of humanity he means primarily contingent humanity, who seems to require redemptive political action. Sabato's proposal is indeed political, as it calls to fight against a disillusion that has led man to his dehumanization. Sabato is less interested in searching for the roots of disillusion than in taking disillusion as a "given" and work onwards, departing from this crisis.

It is perhaps worthy to make explicit that for Sabato disillusion is not caused by the sole loss of a phantom, but that it has its basis in an objective economic lack. The phantom—and quite a phantom it is—Sabato would be preoccupied with is God, and this is indeed a phantom that man has lost for good. However, instead of proposing another construct in order to substitute the phantom, Sabato proposes philosophic consolation a la Boethius. In solitude we are always, for Sabato, left with two things, which are in essence the same: time, in the external plane, and memory in the subjective. In the external, thus, concreteness is lost as reality seems to be greater within the animated subject than outside of him (Sabato 61). In this fashion, Sabato resists not to think humankind in all of its complexity and contradictions, resists to

reduce humankind to, at the very least, the phenomenological manifestation, the economic object of liberalism, and to the void and nothingness championed by a postmodernity that fails to recognize that, at the very least, the being *is*.

This resistance to allowing oneself to be swept away by immobility is the fashion Sabato responds to the summons of the Other. If for Levinas this Other, despite his being completely alien to me—or precisely because of this— commands me with his summons, and with this summons subjects me, this summons is irrecusable and makes me unsubstitutable as an individual. The ethical response to this summons is, again, “here I am”. Only accepting this call I am free, as I free myself from the command. I am thus responsible for the Other, I am for the Other, and transcend myself in my approach. And, in my po/ethical proposal: in my embrace.

For Sabato, to resist is to say “here I am” without resignation. To respond to the call of the Other is to be responsible, and to be responsible is to resist the temptation of being indifferent before his pain. To the defeatist counterargument that pretends to convince us that there is nothing left to do, Sabato would answer that “millones de hombres y mujeres se sacrifican para cuidar a los más desventurados. Ellos encarnan la resistencia” (Sabato 107). In this fact the belief on human hope and courage Sabato uses as his fighting slogan is founded against a disillusion that, nonetheless, Sabato recognizes has for the moment most of the victories on its side. If it is more than ever imperative to resist today, it is because today more than ever a total defeat of an ethical humanity is possible

The difficulty of an ethics, and of an ethical and po/ethical resistance, is to differentiate between the self's own acts and the belief on how must the act of the Other be. In the face of injustice, *why* fight it? What determines that my actions against injustice have greater value —greater ethical import— that the actions of the Other whose acts are not against it, or so I believe? Resistance, however, is an acting that does not act, as it shows itself in saying “here I am”. It is a saying that passes no judgment on anyone's actions. To resist is nothing more and nothing less than manifesting as a resistant subject. To resist is to show the possibility of another reality. Before the Other, my responsible resistance says “here I am resisting for you”; not that the Other must act, or resist, nor even that my resistance is desired by the Other, but rather that my pointing towards injustice says “let it be not for the Other”. The pleasure I derive from this resistance is what makes of my actions exemplar: to resist is, thus, just, and desirable.

So, in the end, what is to come after the “Turn to ethics”? Once the relation between ethics, politics and the literary text is elucidated in greater depth, where is criticism to turn its focus? Certainly, this new “Turn to” cannot turn its back to ethics or politics. As is perhaps easy to guess, my belief is that from the conjugation of ethics and politics —which in a sense would be embodied in po/ethics— the more forceful turn would be to resistance, while another more rough turn would be to epistemology. From the former, the increasing emphasis in the study of space and various “occupy”

social movements seems to foreshadow a seed from which a relation between ethics, poetics and politics can germinate alleviated from the tension between the two, which is not to say free of tensions. From the latter, the recent critical interest in engaging with the natural sciences and technology applied to cognoscitive studies might perhaps shed light on the modes in which we construct our realities; that is, as long as the disciplinary bridge is not built solely for the survival of the humanities in academe, but in order to move forward critical discourse, which would be in its own way resisting.

Critique takes culture and approaches it as if it were a text to be interpreted, and from which a knowledge could be derived from critique's intervention. My proposal, in the final analysis, would be, in an analogous fashion, to look at culture not as a written text, but rather as a blank space to be filled with my intervention. I write the cultural text by relating with the world. Po/ethics makes of this intervention, of this making the self present, a poem. The po/ethical text is read, but not written: it is performed. There is no alternative: po/ethics must be critical. I believe poetry, po/ethical or not, is useless unless it invites one to reflect. I have attempted to be faithful to this belief in this dissertation, and have allowed poetry to invite me to reflect, which it has done. All that remains is to stand here and wait to see whether or not I succeeded.

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