

MAROONING THE CARIBBEAN: VITALISTIC IMAGINARIES IN VIRGILIO PIÑERA,
HÉCTOR ROJAS HERAZO AND ALEJO CARPENTIER

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In this dissertation I argue that the historical lived experience of the maroon allows us to read twentieth-century Hispanic Caribbean narrative outside the two traditional variants of imagining and studying its literature and culture: as an anthropologically-based picture of mixtures and blends (transculturation, creolization, hybridity, etc.), and as a representation of the convoluted processes of founding nations and building identities. Instead, through an understanding of the cunning and the craft of the maroon, of the way they made sense of the world and a place for themselves in it, works of fiction that were usually left behind in name of traditional ways of reading can reveal to us a new image of the Caribbean by showing us different understandings of space and the subject's relation to it. In the first chapter I argue that Virgilio Piñera's *La carne de René* is the clearest example of this strategy. What appears to be a pessimistic and hermetic novel with absurdist flourishes is indeed an attempt to give flesh-like and extensive qualities to concepts, thus turning the physical body into a place where ideological beliefs and oppositions play out their tensions in a constricted field. In the second chapter, dedicated to Héctor Rojas Herazo's *En noviembre llega el arzobispo*, I show how a vitalistic logic manages to portray a Caribbean where the images of memories—and not the word or the Law—ground a community. In the third chapter I focus on Alejo Carpentier's *El recurso del método*. Generally considered a

coda to his principal work, I argue instead that it is a critical intervention in the Caribbean and European imaginaries: by focusing on nuclei of peripheral lived experience within the cosmopolitan center, and as a result of a change in the author's definition of the "marvelous real" into an organismic, baroque movement, the novel is able to disrupt the global cultural valences of center and periphery.

I first read Esteban Montejo and Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un cimarrón* as an example of maroon imagination, and then use it to recast Antonio Benítez Rojo's *The Repeating Island* as a text suffused by this type of imagination of the world. Then the dissertation studies three novels not commonly regarded as representative works of the Caribbean: Virgilio Piñera's *La carne de René*, Héctor Rojas Herazo's *En noviembre llega el arzobispo*, and Alejo Carpentier's *El recurso del método*. Like the settlements founded by runaway slaves all throughout the Caribbean, these novels reject being immersed in nation-building projects because they do not grow out of an oppositional consciousness but out of an image of a community sharing a lived experience. They flow between and under the oppositional poles of tradition and modernity, status quo and revolutionary change, center and periphery. They are able to do this thanks to, first, their attachment to various forms of vitalism—a preference for becoming over being, for seeing reality as a live organism and in terms of virtuality and actualization—which results in ontological plasticity. Second, thanks to their attempts to trace precarious maps of their surroundings through an exercise of *haptic* discovery, unveiling and disclosure: in a world of uncertainty, a sense of touch is what gives them bit by bit a series of impressions of their immediacy that their imagination carries on, composing a precarious map of their surroundings. If the traditional Caribbean image was constructed by historical narratives based on various comings and goings of

oppositional consciousness, and conceived in order to conquer, possess, name and make use of that territory, these novels were indifferent to this impulse because they wanted to know the world, to *dis*-cover it, to get rid of the cloak of uncertainty that surrounded it.

Virgilio Piñera's *La carne de René*, the focus of my first chapter, is the clearest example of how maroon texts step away from oppositional logics by looking at space and the subject. The novel ascribes flesh-like characteristics to dialectical categories. By turning into flesh abstract ideologies, the novel assigns extensive qualities to them, particularly a finite extension in space, thus precluding both René—its main character—and readers from being able to imagine transcendental horizons beyond that limited space. This makes ideas turn into hurtful objects that have painful effects on the physical body. I argue Piñera is able to do this thanks to two critical readings he makes and then combines in the novel. First, he critiques the Republican Cuban literary and cultural milieu's belief that they will construct a historical image by means of poetry for the new Cuba, showing they are fooling themselves into thinking they found a transcendental option for what in reality is a closed circuit. Second, he overlays this enclosed and bounded topology onto Witold Gombrowicz's disruptive critique of bourgeois society that appears in *Ferdydurke*. By combining these two critiques he is able to portray a narrative universe in which ideology affects the body directly and painfully because in the name of its Cause, or in the name of those against it, the flesh is churned out in the hope of producing ethereal ideals. By vitalizing ideals the novel steps away from an oppositional logic, making it difficult for critics to assign it to any category of literary history or of the political spectrum.

The second chapter focuses on the vitalistic logic underlying the novel penned by Colombian writer and painter Héctor Rojas Herazo, *En noviembre llega el arzobispo*. This logic blurs creative genres, words and images, memories and space, in order to build a grounds-up, inclusion-

based community that discards the hegemonic, exclusionary and *Letrado*-based national institutions of Colombia's capital. By reviewing his journalism from the 1950s and early 1960s I find a thorough attempt at portraying Caribbean society and culture as radically different from the established historical image in which Bogotá's enlightened men of letters created the Nation. This disavowal of nation-building intellectuals is construed by recurring to painting instead of writing; by blurring borders between language and image he also blurs the difference humans trace themselves against animals and nature, transforming the traditional dichotomy of nature versus culture into an organismic image of reality as a live (and lived) continuum. The iconoclastic effort against the intellectual class, however, drives him into a blind alley with problematic consequences because, as the novel's form attests, there is a teleological residue of hope for spiritual progression towards an immutable, organismic totality.

In the third chapter I argue that Alejo Carpentier's *El recurso del método*, typically read as part of the "Dictator Novel" genre and as a coda to his principal work, is in fact a crucial rereading of his previous definition of the Baroque that updates it for a post-colonial and more globalized moment. He emphasizes the organismic, lived-experience aspects of it, but in such a way that he eludes the problems of stasis that Piñera affronts at the level of the subject, and Rojas Herazo at the level of the community. He does this by going beyond the Caribbean and positing an organismic world cartography in which Cartesian-like Europe is contaminated by proliferating nuclei of disorder coming from Latin America. The novel does this by turning itself into a supplement of Marcel Proust's fictional world, thus disrupting the ideological valences of the world order and stepping away from oppositional descriptions like center and periphery, high and popular culture, establishment and antagonism. He portrays pre-First-War Paris not as the apex of cosmopolitanism but as one more place in the global cultural system, allowing him to suggest that

the ontology that comes from acknowledging a becoming within life itself is a cosmopolitan answer to the new world cartography. Thus, the novel is a crucial reflection on the then-recent postcolonial and globalized consciousness, coming out of his previous reflection on the marvelous real and on the Latin American Baroque.

The conclusion develops the principal consequences these maroon texts have on reimagining Latin American history and the idea of the Caribbean itself. On a first level, novels and authors are recovered from historical oblivion. But furthermore, by leaving behind accounts of intellectual and narrative processes exclusively based on agonistic templates, maroon texts are able to portray the dynamics of circulation and blockage, processes that occur throughout the global sphere of intellectual exchange, silencing, intervention and mis-translation. In advance of further research, I succinctly show how a cartography of the Caribbean can be traced out as the play of oppositional movement of nation-building and its critique on the one hand, and the ephemeral sprouting of maroon consciousness and foundations on the other.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Juan Manuel Espinosa was born in Bogotá, Colombia. He did his B.A. in Literature at the Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá. After teaching at the high-school level he completed a M.A. in Comparative Literature and Literary Theory at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Catalunya, Spain. While writing a master thesis on the role Seix Barral publishing house played in the acquisition of prestige of Latin American Boom writers, he worked as an editorial assistant for various publishing companies in Barcelona. Before starting his Ph.D. at Cornell he worked as a translator for Editorial Norma, Bogotá.

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Professor Gonzalo Pontón-Gijón, at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, back in 2001, was responsible for my first attempts of thinking across national imaginaries and academic disciplines. He showed me how theoretical critique and empirical, hands-on approaches to literature can go hand in hand.

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INTRODUCTION: MAROON IMAGINATION AND THE HAPTIC MAPPING OF THE WORLD

I started to work on these texts because I knew they were relegated to secondary status in literary history and I wanted to know why. I quickly detected the historical, sociological, political and economic reasons why they were in the back room, but this detective-like conclusion, this solving of an enigma by a detailed description of the context, even if valuable, ended up not being enough of a result.

I was looking for something else. I have always been interested in the crosshatches between imaginaries, for example where the Caribbean blends with other regions. I realized I was looking for a new image, a new picture of the Caribbean, one that was more than the sum of its Antilles. I realized that such Caribbean crosshatch was the reason why it caught my eye in the first place. No matter how different they are between them, all three novels think and imagine space in unusual ways; the traditional, Cartesian representation of space as a grid, the image of the Caribbean as seen from the cartographic, god-like point of view, where the subject occupied a position in the grid was simply not quite right, or not quite enough.

Only after finishing the chapters and starting to think about the introduction I realized that a common link in the traditional way of imagining and picturing the Caribbean throughout time was structural antagonism: oppositional consciousness seemed to be not only the engine of change in historical narratives, but also the necessary condition to imagine the traditional picture of the Caribbean, always having a god-like point of view, a precise location within a greater space already known, traced and measured. In the battle for the construction of an image of the world as a whole, by opposing and antagonizing diverse world views, oppositional consciousness

seemed to relegate to the back room a different kind of thought process by which we could imagine surrounding space and trace our maps of what is known and what is not.

I realized these novels were not as interested in the traditional tropes of opposition as in the act of freeing themselves from what they saw as restrictions: Virgilio Piñera was interested in dispensing with the mind/body duality, Héctor Rojas Herazo with the supposedly unbreakable difference between nature and culture, and Alejo Carpentier with the valorization of a center in a grid-like scenario. While their characters seemed to be pursuing freedom—albeit unsuccessfully—from death, order, decay, transcendental ideals or the hopes of having them, the novels were somewhat attempting at the same time to trace precarious maps of their physical surroundings. It was precarious not because they were of bad quality, but because they were not assimilating preconceived notions of the totalized image of the world that came from the traditional god-like cartographic tradition. They seemed to want to consolidate precarious knowledges of their surroundings and of their conditions. Instead of antagonism, they wanted to understand what was around them in an easy—but not simple—exercise of *haptic* discovery, unveiling and disclosure.

Very much like someone who is in the dark and cannot see, a sense of touch is what gives them bit by bit a series of impressions of their immediate exteriority. Then their imagination carries on and composes a map of their surroundings from the manifold of impressions. This map is not a map of the entire world. This map is of basic dimensions, of blocks and paths, of dangerous sharp edges and of the ground upon one may stand.

If there were some kind of structural opposition in these novels, it then was between the conditions of the unknown surroundings and the liberating process of discovery. Liberating from the angst of the unknown, the same way one may find relief when, in the dark, one is able to tell

that the ground is solid and there are no sharp edges around. Discovery not in the sense of conquering a territory in order to possess it, name it and seize control over it, but a discovery in the sense of knowing it, of *dis*-covering, getting rid of the cloak of uncertainty that surrounded it.

If the traditional, cartographic-like image of the Caribbean—the image constructed by historical narratives based on various comings and goings of oppositional consciousness—was conceived in order to conquer, possess, name and make use of that territory, these novels were indifferent to this impulse. They attempted to free themselves from restrictions by developing new images of the Caribbean thanks to a more haptic-style of knowledge. They ended up, in different ways and with different problems, bracketing structural antagonism as the traditional way of making sense of the Caribbean territory and of the history that runs through it.

I decided to name this set of interests that drive the novels a *maroon imagination*. Despite their differences, all three novels share a set of common traits. The first one is the initial reason why I started working on these novels which I have mentioned above: the need to portray surroundings from the inside out and from the most immediate to the most external, without the use of a god-like perspective, and thus, without aspiring to a totalizing vision of the world. Out of this need of uncovering and imagining surroundings, followed a second trait: a distinctive lack of interest toward structural antagonism toward the way historical discourse and cartographical imagination are commonly assembled and portrayed. This indifference toward structural antagonism is the third trait, *vitalism*, the tenuous ontology that sustains and nurtures this maroon imagination.

Whereas structural antagonism could be sketched out as two discrete elements coming into conflict and where one must overcome the other, vitalism permits an image of the world where a haptic-type of knowledge may come into fruition by bypassing discreteness. Emergence

and unrestriction from the unknown, and not antagonism against a discrete entity, are the driving force behind this image of the world.

I believe this set of interests—and disinterests—can be traced to the maroon imagination. Originating from the lived experience of the fugue, of the escape, of the fear of being caught, maroon imagination attempts—ultimately in vain, as we will see—to forgo antagonism and be left alone. It is ultimately unsuccessful, but in the meantime it is able to create a community of those who do not rely on foundational myths or fictions about the triumph over some Other, or over themselves, but on the emergence of themselves out of whatever they are escaping. They are living and creating communities by, in a manner of speaking, pulling themselves out of the virtual by their own bootstraps. The narratives developed while having this set of interests in mind fall under what I call the maroon imagination.

I will soon delve into the consequences of this form of imagination. But before I go any further in the analysis of the novels I need to explain what I understand by Maroon, then by maroon imagination, and then by vitalism. I will first give a contextual view of the maroon in the Caribbean and a tentative maroon-centered view of what Caribbean and Latin American might look like if it were to be imagined in a *maroon-like key*. Then, I will do a close-reading of the first page of Miguel Barnett and Esteban Montejo's book, *Biografía de un cimarrón (Biography of a Maroon Slave, 1966)*. This reading will allow me to show in practical terms how this maroon imagination constructs the world by narrating its own experiences, and while doing so, creates concepts and develops discursive practices that ground it and propel it into action. I will show how this world-image is permeated by vitalism, by a colloquial/informal approach to space, theology and power, and by a non-argumentative approach to discourse.

Maroons

Maroons, or *cimarrones* in Spanish, were slaves who decided to run away from plantations or *encomiendas*. In some cases they founded settlements—*palenques* in Spanish, *quilombos* in Portuguese—which turned into communities that still exist today.

With few exceptions, these settlements were ephemeral and contingent, appearing both on the islands and the mainland without any expectations of permanence, any initial foundation based on rule of law, or recourse to any transcendental authority to support them. They arose out of an initial drive for survival. Along with *rochelas*—emerging communities not exclusively composed by runaway slaves but also by indigenous people, European outlaws (travelers without authorization to go into Spanish colonies), and criminals from any race and provenance—maroon settlements are communities that do not easily fit into the consolidated narrative of Spanish American colonization and nation-building. The traces of that lack of congruence with those national projects are reflected in the contemporary uses of the terms: in Argentina and Bolivia, *quilombo* means both a brothel and disorder, chaos, just as *rochela* does in Colombia—with the added nuance of debauchery. As for *palenque*, in Colombia and in the Caribbean the original definition of a fortified construction has been left aside and now means an unstable foundation where poverty-stricken persons—generally blacks—still live.

It is true that the existence of these settlements and of the maroon subject has been continuously used by historians, anthropologists and literary critics since the early 1960s to represent the liminal Other (Price; Barnett) and in its most naïve interpretation they have been used as surrogates for arcadian visions of native-community creation. This was then surpassed by the use of these historical figures and form of socialization as the menacing other in the logic of and movements toward nation building. Building on the dichotomy of *Civilización y Barbarie*,

Ángel Rama posited the “Lettered City” and then Doris Sommer the foundational fictions that controlled and organized that city and thus its nation. After that, criminals (Ludmer), bandits (Dabove), pirates (Gerassi-Navarro), and slave rebellions (Fischer) were shown as the monstrous menaces, the nemeses against which men of letters mobilized their intellectual and political powers and capital to establish their respective orders, and in the process attempted to silence, ban, disavow or simply extinguish that menacing Other.

This narrative is based structural antagonism and an oppositional consciousness. As necessary as it is for our understanding of the past and present of nation-building processes around the world, this narrative precludes us from shining light to a different image of the Caribbean.

I am not arguing that maroon settlements are outside of the nation-building process. Irrevocably they have fallen into the horizon of the oppositional logic, and there are abundant cases that show how these *palenques* and *rochelas* were ideologically mobilized. (Yanga, Veracruz, 1608; San Basilio, Colombia, 1691; Coro, Venezuela 1795; Jamaica’s maroon insurrections and peace treaties, 1739 [The Maroon War, Cudjoe, Nanny]). Either as a menace of revolution, or simply as disorder that had to be cleared out so sovereignty could continue unblemished, these maroon settlements were co-opted by institutional order, or simply fell under a scorched-earth policy.

However, out of these tenuous communities a way of thinking about and inhabiting a place that is mobilized in the moment it is being thought, a way of thinking that works as a self-effacing bedrock for these ephemeral communities. This way of thinking and approximation to experience, I believe, evolves into a system of perception of reality and into a structural form in

the narratives that I study. Or to use less evolutive terms, it is a ghost of the past that haunts the present that distorts traditional ways of conceiving nation-building histories and processes.

Due to the fact that palenque's founders and inhabitants knew these settlements were always ephemeral by nature, they valued movement more than being as tools for their foundations. Those values were invested on becoming, in process, and not in being. Thus, by grabbing on to multiple facets of vitalism—understood for now as a panoply of narratives, discourses and creation myths that emphasized fluidity, transformation and in many cases an organismic take on reality in order to be vital, to preserve life—these communities and the subjects who lived there developed a way of imagining life and existence that was not entirely interested in thinking in terms of opposition or antagonism.

I am not suggesting a form of antifoundationalism and/or relativism. It is a way of describing and founding communities that did not have the opportunity—or better said, the luxury pertaining to hegemonic centers—of resorting to narratives of Being in order to found and inhabit the space that surrounded them. This could be easily forgotten, but the fact is that today many towns and provincial cities all across the Caribbean began as *palenques* and as *rochelas*, as unplanned emergent communities whose inhabitants felt more identified with their immediate surroundings and with the shared lived experience of their neighbors, than with regional or national identities. This is partly to blame for the typical fragmentation that has trumped several nation-building programs throughout the last two hundred years. I believe the initial act of escaping, of fleeing and of avoiding imposing orders—from the most benevolent to the harshest—marks the trajectory of communities all across the region.

A continual process of cutting ties with past existence, of shedding away memories and links to other places and orderings, created multiple, composite communities of isolated

corpuscles. Consequently, these original ruptures, breaks, displacements from another order are foundational traits and traces in the literature of the region because they were steeped in the haptic-style of knowledge that created tenuous world-images. Traits and traces that were soon blurred, crossed out and buried, and then turned into specters that haunt narratives even today by emphasizing physicality, becoming, and lived experience.

What would happen then if we read novels traditionally seen as foundational fictions of a nation, in a maroon-like key? What would happen if the fictional towns of Santa Mónica de los Venados (Alejo Carpentier), Santa María (Juan Carlos Onetti), Comala (Juan Rulfo), or Macondo (Gabriel García Márquez), were to be read as maroon settlements and not as allegories of nation building? After all, if there is anything in common between all of these towns or cities is that none of them are the capital or center of any territorial order.¹ In order to do this, the first thing would be to dissolve the stark antagonism between this type of bourgeois, Modernist-inspired and *Modernista*-infused novels on the one hand, and maroon narratives on the other. In the Hispanic Caribbean the text that serves as paradigm of the latter is Esteban Montejo's and Miguel Barnet's *Diario de un cimarrón*. The founding text of the *Testimonio* genre, it could be said to represent the first nail in the coffin of the possibility of representing the Other. The text also marks the birth of the panoply of critical exegeses and political hopes coming from academia. The reading practices and interests developed with texts like this gave way to a

¹ While revising this introduction I stumbled on a work that might share a resemblance with this maroon imagination in the Caribbean: Shannon Lee Dawdy's excellent *Building the Devil's Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (2008). Coming from the field of historical archeology, Dawdy sees a play between order and disorder in the first years of New Orleans' existence. Against the Enlightened rules, projects and planning experiments coming out of Paris, she retrieves for us the traces of what she calls "rogue colonialism," a multitude of self-interested colonists who start creating a sense of independence from the Metropolis by following their own immediate interests. By doing as they want, and by saying to everybody who wants to hear them that everybody does what they want, the image of New Orleans of the seedy Babylon starts as early as it is founded.

multitude of voices of different races, genders and national provenances that attempted to be included into a hegemony that did nothing to help them do so. This tradition has served to make us aware of the dangers of taking the transcription of an oral discourse at face value without taking into account the conditions of its production—in this case, the editor’s political and ideological investments. I will be replying to the common readings coming from these representations of the Other while I read the first page. However, my hope is that the following close reading may allow a burst of fresh air to ventilate this heavily used text.² In other words, I would like to see the relation between Testimonio and Boom novels less as a structural opposition, and more in a maroon-like key.

Mapping the Maroon Mind—Esteban Montejo

Hay cosas que yo no me explico de la vida. Todo eso que tiene que ver con la Naturaleza para mí está muy oscuro, y lo de los dioses más. Ellos son los llamados a originar todos esos fenómenos que uno ve, que yo vide y que es positivo que han existido. Los dioses son caprichosos e inconformes. Por eso aquí han pasado tantas cosas raras. Yo me acuerdo que antes, en la esclavitud, yo me pasaba la vida mirando para arriba, porque el cielo siempre me ha gustado mucho por lo pintado que es. Una vez el cielo se puso como una brasa de candela y había una seca furiosa. Otro día se formó un eclipse de sol. Empezó a las cuatro de la tarde y fue en toda la isla. La luna parecía que estaba peleando con el sol. Yo me fui dando cuenta que todo marchaba al revés. Fue obscureciendo y

² If *Diario de un cimarrón* was the first, the last nails of the coffin could be said to come from, in academia, Alberto Moreiras’ *The Exhaustion of Difference*, and in fiction, from the performance and self-consciousness of the genre that gives way to a fatigue in the work of Diamela Eltit.

obscurciendo y después fue aclarando y aclarando. Las gallinas se encaramaron en los palos. La gente no hablaba del susto. Hubo quien se murió del corazón y quien se quedó mudo.

Eso mismo yo lo vide otras veces, pero en otros sitios.

Y por nada del mundo preguntaba por qué ocurría. Total, yo sé que todo eso depende de la Naturaleza. La Naturaleza es todo. Hasta lo que no se ve. Y los hombres no podemos hacer esas cosas porque estamos sujetos a un Dios: a Jesucristo, que es del que más se habla. Jesucristo no nació en África, ése vino de la misma Naturaleza porque la Virgen María era señorita.

Los dioses más fuertes son los de África. Yo digo que es positivo que volaban. Y hacían lo que les daba la gana con las hechicerías. No sé cómo permitieron la esclavitud. La verdad es que yo me pongo a pensar y no doy pie con bola. Para mí que todo empezó cuando los pañuelos punzó. El día que cruzaron la muralla. La muralla era vieja en África, en toda la orilla. Era una muralla hecha de yaguas y bichos brujos que picaban como diablo. Espantaron por muchos años a los blancos que intentaban meterse en África. Pero el punzó los hundió a todos. Y los reyes y todos los demás, se entregaron facilito. Cuando los reyes veían que los blancos, yo creo que los portugueses fueron los primeros, sacaban los pañuelos punzó como saludando, les decían a los negros: “Anda, ve a buscar pañuelo punzó, anda”. Y los negros embullados con el punzó, corrían como ovejitas para los barcos y ahí mismo los cogían. Al negro siempre le ha gustado mucho el punzó. Por culpa de ese color les pusieron las cadenas y los mandaron para Cuba.

Y después no pudieron volver a su tierra. Esa es la razón de la esclavitud en Cuba. Cuando los ingleses descubrieron ese asunto no dejaron traer más negros y entonces se acabó la esclavitud y empezó la otra parte: la libre. Fue por los años ochenta y pico.

A mí nada de eso se me borra. Lo tengo todo vivido.

Biografía de un cimarrón begins with Esteban Montejo stating “Hay cosas que no me explico en la vida” (There are things in life I cannot explain.) This sentence and the couple of paragraphs that follow it may probably bring forth to the reader a series of common tropes of what the Caribbean way of life and the Caribbean subject are supposed to be like, in contrast to the European Modern subject. First, there might appear a surrendering to the fact that no new knowledge may be acquired: things are going to be left unexplained in this narrative, maybe because our narrator is not a very inquisitive person. If we were then to contrast it to a more inquisitive character—the one that pertains to the common colonial explorer, the nineteenth-century scientist or the twentieth-century anthropologist—we could easily trace a distinction between this narrative, where Nature and the gods are surrounded by mystery—“La Naturaleza para mí está muy oscuro, y lo de los dioses más”—and the narratives of those who produce images of the world out of their own drive to know (and, of course, out of and thanks to their amazingly complex and vast discourses of knowledge and power.) Second, the reader may find, in contrast with the inquisitive nature of the European, a certain *laissez-faire* attitude in Montejo’s take on nature. He tells us he does not know a lot about Nature and the gods, but also, he does not seem troubled by this lack of knowledge. Against the inquisitive drive for knowledge of sustained by Capitalism’s grand arc of projects that is Modernity, there is an almost relaxed perspective, a “chill-out” take on Nature and the universe.

The entangled trope of the Caribbean inhabitant emerges in front of the reader: that person who lives harmoniously, maybe even peacefully, with a mysterious and omnipresent but capricious and unsatisfied Nature, and amidst colonial and capitalist forces. That person who does not have the drive to know or to investigate the mysteries of the gods and of what surrounds him, but who nevertheless seems to be at peace with them. We are here in the grasp of the conundrums of representation and recognition (The problems of Montejó's agency as a subject, of the transparency of his voice and message as an author, of the (im)possibility of the reader to understand completely what Montejó is saying to them, and the illusion that he may be the one that crystal clearly represents the many).

But when dealing with the troubles of representation a more tacit displacement regarding the means and the ends of the narrative itself also takes place. Because when the reader makes the distinction between the narrative of this former maroon slave, and the narratives of those immersed in standardized and technological discourses and knowledges, he tacitly precludes the maroon narrative from the possibility that it could very well be an epistemological exercise: that it could be a discourse imagining a world, an exercise of knowing the world instead of representing or describing what is already known about it. That is, that it very well be an inquisition into the nature of the World, and not a testimony of how the world seems to be to this subject.

The assumption that such epistemological exercise is not being carried out may be due to the lack of argument, of debate, or to a lack of an antagonizing drive within the character or the narrator. In this first page and all across the text, Esteban Montejó's tone is not one of debate; he seems not to be conscious of an antagonizing or argumentative discourse against his own opinion. The tone of his discourse is more narrational than argumentative. It could be said that

this is the nature of a testimony, to tell the facts without caring much if there are diverging opinions regarding those facts. But this is a circular argument. Let us go in between the categories of discourse and see the ontology that grounds them. There is no arguing here because arguing itself depends on a belief on discreteness, on being able to tell and categorize one thing from another, to be able to make distinctions with words. Cartographical accounts—like traveler’s journals—scientific categorizations and anthropological research are all based on an ontology where distinction permanently exists and it is always possible and easy to achieve.

The mysterious Nature that Esteban Montejo describes to us is quite different. “Todo eso que tiene que ver con la Naturaleza para mí está muy oscuro, y lo de los dioses más. Ellos son los llamados a originar todos esos fenómenos que uno ve, que yo vide y que es positivo que han existido” (Everything that has to do with Nature is very dark for me, and even more about the gods. They are the ones called to originate all those phenomena that one sees, that I saw and that it is positive they have existed.) Everything in nature is dark, but exists. “Los dioses son caprichosos e inconformes. Por eso aquí han pasado tantas cosas raras.” Gods are humanlike. There is not a single, omnipotent God. They are capricious and unsatisfied and that is why so many weird things—droughts, eclipses, and animals’ and men reactions to them—have happened here. He has seen this many times but he never asked why they happened. “Y por nada del mundo preguntaba por qué ocurría.” There is no explanation to be given. Everything depends on Nature. There is no intent on explaining or investigating them. (“Pre-scientific thinking,” expertly naive voices would call this. “A typical characteristic of the Subaltern testimonial genre.”)

Everything is part of a mysterious and capricious nature. A vitalist ontology starts to emerge here—in the sense that there is an absence of discreteness, of separation between

objects—and with it, the impossibility of mechanistic accounts of Nature, as well as the difficulty of arguments for or against particular, discrete positions. If we were now to try a responsible, rigorous analysis of postulates underlying this narrative it would soon prove itself impossible to do. A critical reader would maybe even jump to the conclusion and say that Montejo's discourse has no rational or critical relevance. It even seems contradictory, it could be said. If at the beginning everything in nature was dark, the critical reader would argue, how come now there are things in nature that are not dark? The reader would throw away this book and pursue more sophisticated, better-argued discourses, or else attempt to defend this type of thinking from the cruel forces of Modernity.

But what we find here is the groundwork of the haptic imagination. The cunningness and craft of the runaway are at play here, no matter how many decades have passed since this person stopped living as a maroon. What we are witnesses here is of the process of imagining a world that corresponds to the maroon world, and where the laws of it are ever-present in the discourse. There is a picturing of the world and not an arguing for a version of what the world is supposed to be. It could be said that both strategies are one and the same—that there is only a rhetorical nuance at play here between picturing a world and arguing for a version of it.

The text now moves from the vitalist ontology to the theism that lies in between it. But this approach to the gods is not a reverential one, like the one we may find in Monotheistic religions, in Western Culture's continuation of the search for a firm grasp of reality or in philosophy's deep respect for truth—truth is the objective of the argument, a well-done argument leads us to the truth or at least dispels false ones. Montejo does not have this approach to the gods or to truth. There is not a skeptical or cynical approach to truth either. It is instead a colloquial and accepting relationship to gods and the truth. “La Naturaleza es todo. Hasta lo que

no se ve. Y los hombres no podemos hacer esas cosas porque estamos sujetos a un Dios: a Jesucristo, que es del que más se habla. Jesucristo no nació en África, ése vino de la misma Naturaleza porque la Virgen María era señorita.” Humans cannot produce all those phenomena—nature—because we are subject to a God: to Jesus Christ, “que es del que más se habla.” There are multiple, well-analyzed interpretations and categories that can be deployed in order to understand this extract. The first one could be religious syncretism, only a step away from transculturation, the Cuban brethren of creolization and hybridity, all beliefs grounded on pure, discrete containers that are then mixed in those lands far away from the metropolis. The second one could be a more critical reading of the term “subject”—“sujeto a un Dios”—as in we mankind are subjected to a God, we are slaves to this Lord. And third, it could be argued that a religious/political emancipation is here at play since that particular God is Jesus Christ: mankind is slave to this popular God who comes not from Africa, as he says next, but, we assume, from Europe. A return-to-Africa tale of hope might be underlying this sentence. There could also be an anti-religious editing decision on behalf of the non-religious Cuban Revolution.

But in order to continue mapping the vitalist ontology and the non-argumentative nature of this discourse, let us take syncretism seriously, let us imagine it seriously. By this I mean without hoping that mixtures are curious cultural formations that need to be handled with care, explaining and limiting the crossbreedings between religions, races and faiths. To take syncretism seriously means to extrapolate the consequences it has on the mind of the syncretist, instead of imagining it exclusively from anthropological or sociological points of view—which perfectly overlap with supposedly omniscient cartographic interests.

“We are subjects of a God: Subjects of Jesus Christ, who is the one everybody talks about.” There is no monotheism here. There are African Gods also in the picture; gods who are the strongest of them all (see below) but humans for some reason are subjects to the other god.

The moment a mind has more than one element in a set to consider, the possibility of choice appears immediately. By this I do not mean the mirage of freedom to walk down supermarket corridors and rationally chose from many brands, but the capacity to have two concepts of the same valence in the mind at the same time. When this happens, the Absolute valence of the monotheistic God decreases, and the possibility of choice may allow these two, three, or more options to lose the holding power they have on the subject. This is not exclusive to Caribbean or syncretic modes of thought; it is a trait shared with any critical enterprise. This possibility of choice was examined, analyzed, and then taken on by Luther. It is this possibility of choice that allowed Kant to entertain empiricism and idealism at the same time, giving way to his Copernican Turn.

It could then be argued that the difference between Luther and Kant on the one hand and Montejó on the other is that the first two are part of European Modernity and the third is an example of the pre-critical, pre-modern magical thinking belonging to the Tropics. But let us imagine for a moment that the difference between them is that the first two argue: Luther and Kant do it logically, consequentially, systematically, with cause and effect always in their minds and with the hope of reaching an image of total truth. In order to do this they need to be in favor of discreteness—the capacity to distinguish one element from another and consider them as absolutely discrete.

Esteban does not argue. He does not discuss points nor goes into analytic mode. He sees these different gods but instead of categorizing them in order to approach the matter of which one is the real one or the correct one, he instead brings down the powerful Jesus Christ from his position of Lord by colloquializing his relation to him, by saying, “ése vino de la misma Naturaleza porque la Virgen María era señorita.” “*That* guy came out of Nature because Virgin Mary was a lady.” This could just be mockery, “choteo,” as Mañach and Ortiz would say from Cuba, or “mamadera de gallo,” as García Márquez would say from Colombia. Or a pejorative take on Jesus Christ by using the pronoun aspect of the demonstrative article “ése”: “that.” This would also be confirmed by reading the sentence in a sarcastic manner, “yes, *sure*, Virgin Mary was a lady, *right*.” This, however, would only make sense if Esteban were not only an Atheist, but a blasphemous one. But the following sentence tells us the opposite (“The strongest gods are the ones from Africa”). What we have here is a socialized and almost horizontal relation with Jesus Christ. He is seeing Jesus and Mary as persons who might live across the street: Jesus is a guy, “*that* guy,” who came from Nature, because Virgin Mary was a lady, as if saying that that is the gossip surrounding them. He does not use the concept of virginity to explain the miraculous conception. “Virgin Mary” is a name in itself, as “Esteban Montejo” is. Maybe he did not know what the word meant, but that does not take away the informal aspect of his relationship with them. Jesus seems instead to be *that* guy who lives down the road, and to whom, it seems, we are subject to and subjected by. Just like any plantation owner.

“Los dioses más fuertes son los de África. Yo digo que es positivo que volaban. Y hacían lo que les daba la gana con las hechicerías.” “The strongest Gods are from Africa. I say it’s positive they flew. And they did whatever the hell they wanted to do with their spells.” Here again syncretism appears, so let us again thoroughly imagine its consequences. He assures us that

it was true that they flew. These *guys*, who he also treats colloquially, seem to be able to fly. If we take away Miguel Barnet's introduction, and turn Montejo into a non-black writer who has read European Modernist authors and Greek tragedies, we would be in García Márquez's Magical Realism territory. The absence of Magical Realism in this maroon narrative is in the eyes of the beholder: if we place the text under anthropology, or non-fiction, there is no magic, only ignorance and absence of modernity; but if we were to place it in fiction, then no more ignorance, just Magical Realism. But let us bracket those two categories altogether for a moment: instead of thinking about this text as magical realist or magical thinking according to the race or social status of the author, let us see it as an exercise of imagination, as a piece of theoretical thinking—but not theoretical argument.

“No sé cómo permitieron la esclavitud. La verdad es que yo me pongo a pensar y no doy pie con bola.” “I don't know how [the African gods] allowed slavery to happen. I think about it and I have no clue.” Here we have the transition from myth to history, from the gods to the humans. A parallel could be traced with Hesiod's *The Ages of Man*, but that would be a bad parallel to trace: in Hesiod there are ages, clearly separate and distinct from one another, mainly because of victories and defeats of particular deities. Here we need to see a smoother transition, since there is co-habitation. There is a smooth transition that we can only make sense of if the universe is seen as a plantation—or a maroon community, or an island—where the Gods live near us, if not beside us.

“In my opinion, everything started with the crimson kerchiefs.” The mythological answer for slavery is a punctual episode, who knows if it's historically accurate or not. Only the expert cares. But the episode is steeped in materiality, not in symbolism.

“El día que cruzaron la muralla. La muralla era vieja en África, en toda la *orilla*. Era una muralla hecha de *yaguas* y bichos brujos que picaban como diablo. Espantaron por muchos años a los blancos que intentaban meterse en África” (The day when they crossed the wall. The wall was old in Africa, all around the *shore*. It was a wall made out of *royal palm* and magical bugs that stung like hell. For many years they scared away the whites that wanted to get into Africa [My emphasis]). Africa has no border or limits; it has a shore, all surrounded by a wall made out of royal palm (*yagua*), a plant indigenous to the Caribbean, not to Africa. Africa, in Esteban’s imagination, seems to be an island. The wall was also made out of magical bugs. This would register as plain old myth to the expert, clearly distinctive as a mythological discourse, clearly categorized as different from history or philosophy or theology—if it were not for the physical and colloquial comment about the insects: they are “*bugs*,” not “insects,” that “stung like hell.” The expert would like to hear mythology’s tone of voice, as in Hesiod or Ovid, who would never say “como el diablo” (“like hell”). Furthermore, the physical reaction to the bugs makes us think now not of myth but of a tactile, physical reality. Again there is no symbolism here.

There are no human-made weapons keeping the whites away either. There is only an island nature—not an African nature—that defends Africans from whites, that preserves the difference between territories. The last trace of magic is the bugs. And then the gods disappear, or maybe they blend into humans in the next sentence—there is no discreteness that would help us tell what in fact happened.

“Pero el punzó los hundió a todos. Y los reyes y todos los demás, se entregaron facilito. Cuando los reyes veían que los blancos, yo creo que los portugueses fueron los primeros, sacaban los pañuelos punzó como saludando, les decían a los negros: ‘Anda, ve a buscar

pañuelo punzó, anda.’ Y los negros embullados con el punzó, corrían como ovejitas para los barcos y ahí mismo los cogían. Al negro siempre le ha gustado mucho el punzó. Por culpa de ese color les pusieron las cadenas y los mandaron para Cuba” (But the bright crimson kerchiefs buried everyone/drove everybody under. And the kings and everybody else surrendered easily. When the kings saw that the whites, I believe the Portuguese were the first, took out the bright red kerchiefs like saying hello, they told the blacks: ‘shoo, go and take a crimson kerchief,’ and the rattled-up blacks because of the kerchief ran like little sheep to the boats and there they caught them. Blacks have always liked crimson. Because of that color they were chained and sent to Cuba.)

Esteban does not talk about gods anymore, but of humans. Myth is turning into history. And again, a colloquial tone of narration blends together another tale of origins—this time it is not a cosmogony, but the commonplace anecdote on how Columbus tricked the natives he first encountered—with an enclosed geographical space: Africa is seen as an island surrounded and defended by Caribbean Nature. Africa is an enclosed space that could also be a plantation, a maroon community, or just a place where a maroon slave would live by themselves.

In this anecdote/mythology/history/geography lesson, the reader realizes that the downfall is the crimson kerchief. The bait. The colorful bait that trapped blacks like hunted animals, just like maroon slaves.

“Y después no pudieron volver a su tierra. Esa es la razón de la esclavitud en Cuba. Cuando los ingleses descubrieron ese asunto no dejaron traer más negros y entonces se acabó la esclavitud y empezó la otra parte: la libre. Fue por los años ochenta y pico” (And then they could not go back to their land. That is the reason of slavery in Cuba. When the English discovered

what was going on they didn't let bring any more blacks, and then slavery ended and the other part started: the free [part]. That was during the eighty-something). The persnickety critical reader would say there is another contradiction here, since he does know—or believe he knows—how slavery came upon. This lack of rigor, he would say, is precisely the reason why this is a narrative of the subaltern, it is not thought itself. I would say instead that yes, it may not be philosophy, but it is thought in action to be sure.

Now we are in full history mode. We have certain dates, somewhat of a historical accuracy according to what we know about the Hispanic slave trade and the English abolition efforts. There are no more gods and no more myths. But by now we are able to see that history, theology, geography, political theorization and personal narrative are immersed and blended in a continuum of thought that corresponds to the continuum that reality is supposed to be.

This blend is the maroon imagination. An imagination that, as I will show in the next chapters, is continually present in what organized knowledge has named “mid-twentieth-century Hispanic Caribbean narrative.” This imagination, this continuum of thought underlies the efforts of the three writers that I study. It is an imagination driven by the desire of fleeing and escape, and which sees space as constricted, as mostly covered and thus in constant need of unveiling. It is constituted by a vitalist ontology and a blend of interests that sprout and seem absolutely disorganized, without argument and with no apparent finality.

This imagination is present in the patchwork of maroon communities throughout the caribbean, communities that live with the specter of the maroon origins, with the underlying threat of vanishment, with the mirage of insurmountable psychic, geographical, temporal, economic, and political distance, even if they today have become cities, region capitals, and/or

important ports at a national and international level. The literature coming from these places of the patchwork arises from the haptic-type of knowledge of their immediate surroundings, tracing their own maps of the world.

It could be argued that this is just another way of reaching the beaten path of mixtures as panaceas of whatever the current crisis may be. But let us remember that hybridity, Édouard Glissant's relation, *mestizaje*, transculturation and creolization are all terms that have functioned as oppositional terms against Metropolitan hegemonies, helping discourses of Independence, Nation-building and postcolonialism to raise powerful questions and not very longstanding answers to the Colonial problem. Due to that entanglement within the dichotomic tension between metropolis and colony, however, all rely on a view of social formations, cultures and identities based on primal and pure containers that get mixed and contaminated amid colonial processes. Furthermore, it is now a trite point to make—but an important one to remember—that these concepts underscore the violence, rape, injustice and disavowal that colonization produced by replacing them with exoticism, tropicity and sensual exuberance. It could then be said that maroon imagination is simply a rehashing of these concepts in order to claim a new identity trait for the Caribbean and forgetting the material circumstances of the past. This is not so.

If I were forced to pick one of those terms, I would go back to the Greek origin of the word *mestizaje*. Before *mixticius* meant “mixture” in Latin, the word *mētis* meant a particular combination of knowledge and cunningness. Maroon imagination is profusely permeated by a type of *mētis*, by the necessity of survival and of understanding immediate space, its dangers, its sharp edges, non-trustworthy surroundings, and its possible paths. This imagination and the works that subscribe to this type of thinking are not interested in allegorical foundations, in imagining communities by means of Law, urban planning or gaining independence or a discrete

identity from a faraway power. They are interested in surveying, unveiling the world according to the rules and problems they encounter, and not according to prescribed notions of systematic thought that attempts to encompass totality by using truth as its guiding light.

The Maroon Imagination in the Novels

Traces of this maroon imagination—haptic-style of knowledge, indifference towards the picture of the world as a totality and thus an image of space as one of constrained dimensions, informal relation to truth, and a prevalence of narration of lived experience and not as much a discrete discussion of differences—are present in the novels I will study: *La carne de René* (1952) by Virgilio Piñera (Cárdenas, Cuba, 1912—Havana, 1979), *En noviembre llega el Arzobispo* (1967) by Héctor Rojas Herazo (Tolú, Colombia, 1921—Bogotá, 2002), *El recurso del método* (1974) by Alejo Carpentier (Havana/Lausanne, 1904—Paris, 1980). But they are present in peculiar and not always blatant ways. None of the characters are maroon slaves. The word “maroon” is never once mentioned in any of them. That is because the maroon imagination haunts them and permeates the way these novels think and produce an image of the world. They escape not from masters or imposing figures, but from an image of a totalizing order, from unpersonalized and intangible forms of restriction and constriction. All three novels share a particular way of dealing with how characters choose to imagine a world they feel as restrictive, and with the way they choose to perceive and organize reality. They do this, just like Esteban, by resorting to vitalist ontologies, to informal or colloquial treatments of power, or by not directly arguing against oppositional forces.

This is why the maroon imagination is able to guide us through these three novels. Because what these novels do is portray a lived experience and relate more to the contemporary

circumstance of constant movement across nations and cultures, uncovering reality and its surroundings in the process. Furthermore, it is my hope that the maroon both as a historical figure and as a trace in today's imagination, will help shed some light on how since a long time ago there has been an impulse towards living, and narrating the experience of living, outside the contours of the nation-state. I will pursue these objectives in future research. For now, I wish to use the figure of the maroon, and that of the maroon settlement, as tropes that connect the aforementioned novels in a common thread: they are embedded in a process of fleeing away from established and constrictive paths, trying to imagine a world from within their own constricted surroundings.

This aspect of imagination is not exclusive to the Caribbean. I believe this has been present always and everywhere. However I will dare to say that in the Caribbean, thanks to the historical appearance of the maroon and of the maroon settlements, there has been a more than usual resort to ephemeral foundations of subjectivity and of communities, based on shared lived experience transmitted by narrating stories and not arguing directly against official ones.

The reason why this is difficult to perceive and to take into account is because we see only relativism, skepticism, or nihilism when there is no faith, belief or certitude on a transcendent ideal. These novels in fact have all been read along these lines of thought, blaming existentialism or postmodern malaise for their nihilism, skepticism or non-commitment. I believe instead that these novels work in the pragmatic terrain of a lack of transcendence, which makes them value lived experience and physicality as a set of contingent, ephemeral solutions to the problem of how to confront intangible constrictive orderings and regulations. This is the cunning knowledge, this is *mētis*.

Traditional notions and articulations of transcendence on the one hand, and the valuation of lived experience, of becoming, of physicality and immanence on the other are not mutually exclusive. They do, however, belong to different orders. Or better yet, to misuse a metaphor used by Martin Jay when talking about the various notions of experience, these two orders are two different songs each tuned to different keys: playing them at the same time would not only bring dissonance, but worse yet, we would not be able to appreciate either of them (Songs 1-8). They can, however, be articulated, and this does not have to happen in the land of transculturation or hybridity or miscegenation.

I am not as interested in naming the reasons why and the mechanisms through which these novels were rejected and discarded—although this will become clear throughout the chapters—as in showing the various ways they prompt, mobilize and engender actualizations of virtual potentials, along with their ensuing problems. I believe this is what flabbergasted readers at the time and what still today precludes the appreciation of these works.

These novels made out of maroon imagination are not cynical or skeptical. They have, however, a stoic component: they recognize the limits of their surroundings, of their own possibilities of self-realization. In different ways they use the malleable definitions of a diffuse reality to try to escape from constraints. If at the end they do so, that is another matter.

By forgoing statements of identity and possession they subtly but pervasively turn to lived experience, be that in the form of physical sensations, of pictorial memories, or of a combination of both. This allows them to reach for tools and materials for their projects in the most diverse places but without identifying with those particular places and with their specific political, social, racial valences: high-brow European culture, African and Indigenous (in Rojas

Herazo's case) folktales and myths of creation, popular culture be it urban or rural, and the materiality of the flesh.

This makes them seem somewhat irrelevant to an oppositional perspective, making them opaque pieces to readers positioned on and invested in such an axis. And even more, readers whose axis of interest is the creation, strengthening or critique of a national imaginary based on a homogenized culture, race, regional or political perspective, would also perceive these novels as irrelevant, misguided or out of touch. Negritude, Caribbean, Cuban or Colombian, Ultramontane Catholic or Revolutionary, all these axes of investment would look upon these novels with suspicion. Not because they directly antagonize them, but because they seem to reach a point, sooner or later depending on the novel, when the plot makes readers realize that there simply is no interest in the projects of building national, regional, ideological and/or racial identities through the writing itself.

This vitalist-based articulation could be called a "to each his own" approach, it could almost be called "libertarian" if such a political stance did not already imply a belief on the existence and power of a government to which is calling for restriction, and on a stable individual subject to be protected from government excesses. But since self and existence are perceived as a continuum, these novels can be seen as experiments of thought attempting to mutate and ply the conditions of possibility of both subjects and reality. What is the objective? The Goal? The direction? There is none. It is a survival mechanism, a floating device amidst the flow of lived experience.

Another critique, this time coming from Caribbean Studies, Postcolonial Theory or Subaltern Studies, would point out that this emphasis on retreating from oppositional consciousness is precisely a subterfuge, a weapon of the weak. I have no qualms about this; it

could certainly be seen in such a way. The problem that I find with this approach is that by naming these strategies as subterfuges, as mimetic dislocations, as carnivals or subversive parodies, a trace of the oppositional conflict is still there, and so the discussion is again framed in terms of oppositional consciousness and does not emphasize the aspect of a grounding of community through lived experience. In other words, the problem is one of emphasis, not of discrete distinction between approaches.

To ground a community on lived experience is not an easy task. In fact all three novels have problems when they attempt to do this. I do not believe it is an intrinsic problem exclusively, however, because *Letrado*, top-down style projects affect these narratives and their projects.³ Confronted with the fluidity of becoming, and menaced by the impositions of the hegemonic centers which demand taking positions grounded on rational, epistemological, or socially and/or historically constructed categories, these novels decide to ground their constitutions on lived experience. By doing so they create their own pockets of tenuous freedom amidst hegemonic forces: their own emergent communities against the discourse of nation (Rojas Herazo), of “Cause” (Piñera), or of center and periphery (Carpentier). These novels portray and try to activate in varied ways the ephemeral grounding of the maroon imagination, while undergoing the flow of becoming amidst the contingencies of the State, of hegemonic centers and of restrictive ideologies coming from outside their own senses of self and place.

³ ³ As I will attempt to show in my next project, it is not just that literary discourses get into trouble when clamping down literature of the becoming, but because Nation-building processes themselves have needed to disavow the Caribbean parts of their countries to proclaim themselves successful. Bogotá had to disavow a Cartagena-based notion of nationhood. The same with Caracas and Maracaibo, Mexico with Veracruz, Tegucigalpa with the Garifuna, San José de Costa Rica with Limón, U.S. with New Orleans and Puerto Rico. (Cuba and Santo Domingo distinctly create their nation-image as Caribbean, so it is a different matter of what they disavow). The Caribbean could then be described not as a chaotic iteration of performances of a “certain way” that sublimates violence (Benítez-Rojo), but as a zone made out of discarded patches and regions that did not fit into clear foundational fictions. I will explore gothic narratives as well as narratives of captivity, sea-exploring, piracy, and horror in order to understand how these narratives consolidate and subvert structuralizing conditions of being, and ground themselves in lived experiences in the hope of reaching a conception of life as process.

They do this by resorting to vitalism. But vitalism is a troublesome concept in itself, and much more if it is to be the ontological underpinning of this type of world imagination.

Vitalism: The Ghost that Haunts the Machine

Vitalism is a double-edged sword. As Montejo has shown us, it is a condition for the maroon imagination: without its ontology of diffused and never-quite-discrete objects there can be no syncretism, since there would not be any contamination between categories of knowledge—in his case, between mythology, philosophy, and political critique.

Vitalism is affectively charged towards life, but this valence is what makes it very problematic for its use on a conceptual level. Vitalism, a belief pointed toward life and survival by blurring discreteness and differences, sustains hopes and dreams of transcendence in this bootstrapping imagination. But it does not sustain useful concepts because, if vitalism is against something it is against systematic argumentation, debate and discrete conceptualization of arguments. But if it is, how to describe it since description is the process of representing discreteness?

Recently vitalism has taken a new role in the study of Caribbean literature and thought. This is in part due to a regained relevance of Life as an object of inquiry across the humanities. Donna Jones has recently shown its importance for the Negritude movements, and Michael Wiedorn showed how vitalism runs throughout Édouard Glissant's work. Although they have different notions of vitalism, as we will see below, they still have too restricted a notion of it.

First, there is a need to separate naïve vitalism from a more critical one. Naïve vitalism—nowadays a completely discarded scientific hypothesis—arose as a response to Cartesian mechanism. It was interested on an organismic approach to science and philosophy and used by

those who wished to combine implications of science without leaving their religious faith. It helped to transcend the body-mind dualism, and “allowed for spiritual animation amidst the workings of physical law.” In the end, as Burwick and Douglas have suggested, this is the “dogma of the ghost in the machine” (1). As its central tenet, a vital fluid was hypothesized in all organic compounds, until it was discredited in 1828 when Friedrich Wohler was able to synthesize Urea, an organic compound, from ammonium and cyanic acid, both inorganic compounds.

After this severe blow a more critical vitalism emerged, at the time when a matter-based notion of physics was changing into an energy-based physics. There is no vital fluid like in naïve vitalism; it instead focused on process and dynamic impulse “in the context of an ontology of energy and idea” (ibid.). This was a reaction to a new kind of mechanism, that of nineteenth-century positivism (Nietzsche, Dilthey, Driesch, Bergson). By emphasizing the “irreducible phenomenon of life” vitalism was transformed into a recourse to mechanistic determinism.

This more recent definition of vitalism is not a scientific hypothesis completely thrown away—particularly in Physics (Čapek, Olma)—but it still has its problems as a term for describing intellectual projects that wanted to emphasize life and change. Because of its pliability, it was grasped by both Pre-War Right and Left positions. As Sanford Schwartz succinctly phrases it, vitalists from both Left and Right, “in defiance of a tradition that privileged Being over Becoming, unity over multiplicity, and essence over existence, [...] often affirmed the creative and multiform power of “life” which spontaneously gives rise to new forms of expression and ceaselessly strives to overcome the obstacles that impede the full realization of its potentials” (278).

In the Right, Vitalism was quickly modified back into a form of spiritualism (again, the ghost in the machine), and also into voluntarism (a force, a will more important than the intellect) and into a tool for affirming the moral freedom of the individual.⁴ In a religious camp, this would later develop into the orthogenesis of Teilhard de Chardin, and into the integral humanism of Jacques Maritain. These names are not familiar to us right now as public intellectuals, but they are nevertheless important not only because they would later become the legitimating discourses in the revamping of League of Nations—of which Bergson was somewhat of an intellectual ambassador—into the United Nations, but also they were crucial figures in the initial moments of the Latin American Liberation Theology, and as Senghor acknowledges in the case of Chardin, for the development of an African Politics.

On the Left, vitalism was quickly dropped as a viable path since it was seen as a continuation of *Lebensphilosophie* which, like in the case of Martin Buber, magnified the notion of *Erlebnis* into a mystical experience at the noumenal level which united subject and object, which gave way to the valorization of “völkisch” terms like “blood,” later developing with nefastuous consequences (Jay, *Songs*, 315-317).

Vitalism, as we have just seen, is mainly understood as a reaction to various forms of mechanism. Jones shows how vitalism became quite important, albeit quite problematic, for Negritude projects in their attempt to trump Spengler’s notion of the end of history and the demise of civilization. Later on, as Michael Wiedorn has showed it for Glissant’s case, Vitalism has turned into “not a school of thought, but a form of negative critique: it is defined by what is blamed for, its emptiness, and it is also defined by the words it uses to explain its alternatives:

⁴ In the case of liberal humanist Ortega y Gasset, his concept of vital reason may results from his absorption of Heidegger’s work, but with a very strong foundation, typical of turn-of-the-century Spain, on theologian Karl Christian Freidrich Krause’s *panentheism*.

“life, force, becoming, change” (30). This definition is much more general than the one Jones uses and critiques, which is basically the post-Bergsonian vitalism that was thrown away after World War Two. It helps Wiedorn make sense of the subtle but crucial variations that appear in Glissant’s work in regards to vitalism, and allows him to bridge Glissant with Deleuze and Guattari, an obvious connection that has not been sufficiently developed.

However, I believe that vitalism as a concept can still withstand one more expansion of its reach: not at the level of its definition of content but at the level of its form, or better said, at the level of the image of reality that it invokes. By this I mean that vitalism is a contentless form that thanks to its generic topology of virtuality/potentiality and actualization is carried from culture to culture, not only by a trained literary critic in the mode of a conceptual apparatus, but by anyone who cares to believe that there is an enveloping Nature indifferent to oppositions and direct antagonism, a Nature that grounds and protects them from danger and uncertainty. When vitalism brings forth the words used to explain it, it also brings with it a non-oppositional framework, a contentless system that differs from scientific, analytic and dialectical topologies.

Let us then imagine another way of understanding vitalism. Let us imagine it not as a theoretical or philosophical school or current of thought in which there is a ghost inside the machine. Let us imagine vitalism instead, this condition for the maroon imagination, as a ghost that haunts the machine, a spirit that comes and goes, that flashes its presence for a moment and then disappears. If we were to understand it as a consolidated school of thought, then it would be a permanent being, a parallel path that has constantly been in thought itself. Vitalism and discreet critical thinking would then be constant antagonists. This is the image of thought that Modernity has had for hundreds of years, the image that allows us to trace the border between philosophy, reason and science on the one hand, and fiction, magic and myth on the other. But what if we

were to understand this relation according to maroon imagination? Could we imagine vitalism as a specter that haunts thought, that appears in order to sustain those evanescent communities, that bootstrapping of one's own thoughts and images of the world into actuality?

This is what I will try to show in the following chapters. The novels do this in different ways. In Piñera's case, he does not bracket the process at all. Instead, he does two things: he grounds ideas and concepts to an immanent realm where there is only flesh, and then saturates the space in which the process moves until a point is reached when there is no possible movement anymore. Rojas Herazo resorts to understanding reality not in terms of opposition, but in terms of a somewhat worldwide organism that moves from virtuality to actualization and back again. And Carpentier combines these strategies by showing an enclosed world in constant disruption by the actualization of "pockets of disorder" within the cosmopolitan center.

Vitalism's formal specter is a continuum of virtuality from which actualization occurs in diffuse moments, without any possibility of having discrete, clear-cut separations between subjects and objects. It makes it impossible to eliminate its equivocality—therefore its non-scientific lack of rigor in European histories of science and philosophy. But as a contentless topology, vitalism turns into a form that allows merges of differing notions of reality: folk tales, creation myths, European modernism, the European notion of vitalism itself, and various definitions of culture and of artistic practices. They are blended not like elements in a melting pot, but elements that no matter their provenance have vitalistic forms where virtuality and actualization are put into movement in a saturated medium.

I am not arguing for the truth-value of vitalism. I am arguing that vitalism is valuable, despite it has no truth-value. If we are to understand how non-national communities have been born, how they have sustained themselves conceptually, and how they imagine their

surroundings in order to sustain themselves, then we have to take into consideration a non-quite-rational drive to be together that sidesteps the need to build a nation out of a contrast with an Other.

Vitalism then, for the writers that I will study, is not the antagonist of the varied projects of rationalism, empiricism or the Enlightenment, or better said, it is not only that. It is a recourse, a resort to the antagonist machine that sidesteps it by summoning a ghost that can haunt that machine. Because of its topology, of the way concepts form and move in its space of depth and surface—virtuality and actualization—vitalism allows an imagination that can easily and slipperily adjust to world views that have animistic underpinnings (humanization of nature), exceptions to nature/culture dichotomies by means of its contrary (naturalization of humans), and modernist writing techniques (Hemingway’s “Iceberg theory” of composition, in which one-eighth of the meaning is on the surface of the text and the rest is immersed in the subtext), and of course, the traditional view of vitalism itself, mobilized by Negritude writers studied by Jones, and by Glissant, studied by Wiedorn.

The Caribbean as a Geographical and as an Academic Area: the Case of Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s *The Repeating Island*.

When thinking about the Caribbean and invoking vitalism, lived experience, and non-oppositional structures, one obligatorily thinks of Antonio Benítez Rojo’s *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodernist Perspective* (1986). Deeply indebted in its theoretical approach to Jean François Lyotard’s *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (1979) and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure* (1975), Benítez-Rojo’s book is an attempt to map the entire Caribbean—both as a field of academic knowledge and as a

geographical area—after the so-called “end of meta-narratives.” Many of those meta-narratives are of course of oppositional nature, and thus Benítez-Rojo’s resort to the Spinoza-Bergson-Nietzsche-inspired ontology that underpins Deleuze and Guattari’s vitalistic expressionism in *Kafka*. The Caribbean is a “soup of signs,” says Benítez-Rojo, full of messages and codes so dense that are almost impenetrable, pushing him to describe the semiotic nature of the area as a *polyrhythm*.

This approach, however, has several problems. I will try to show them right ahead, but I will also try to show what can be rescued from his reading. I will do this not only to show how an approach from a maroon imagination is different from Benítez-Rojo’s—and Deleuze and Guattari’s, for that matter—but also to develop more thoroughly a maroon-like way of reading, which basically is an epistemological position that does not see reality in antagonistic terms. But that does not mean it sees reality in vitalistic or in minor terms—as in Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of Kafka’s work. Becoming minor is seen in the light of the liberation from Judaic and National-sovereign transcendental Law that surrounded Kafka at the time of writing, and from the exclusionary dichotomic pairs of Structuralism that surrounded Deleuze and Guattari at the time of reading. But the key term here is “liberation,” it is an escape away from constrictive circumstances. As we will see in the following chapters, although this component is absolutely present in the books here studied it is not the main issue. What we want to emphasize is not the fact of escape from structural antagonism, but the fact that the world is being viewed and read without such antagonism in mind. Deleuze and Guattari reach for an ontological alternative—as Rojas Herazo will do with less success—while the main thrust of this project is an epistemological one: how to read when no discrete categories are in play, or when such categories are being placed into doubt. Therefore, as interesting as Deleuze and Guattari’s

proposition of becoming minor is, the emphasis these projects is not on becoming, but in imagining.

In the acknowledgements to the second edition of his trend-setting book, Benítez Rojo inscribes his work into the canon of Caribbeanist thinkers. While doing so we are able to glimpse on his understanding of the Caribbean as an academic field, in terms of space and extension.

“I owe to my predecessors—from Fernando Ortiz to C. L. R. James, from Aime Cesaire to Kamau Brathwaite, from Wilson Harris to Edouard Glissant—a great lesson, and it is that every intellectual venture directed toward investigating Caribbeanness is destined to become an unending search. It doesn’t matter where you’ve left from, it doesn’t matter how far you’ve gone, it doesn’t matter which ideology you profess, Caribbeanness will always remain beyond the horizon. (xi)

The academic field is vast, he says. The object of its inquiry, “Caribbeanness,” will always remain beyond its reach, just as it has always been for his predecessors. But then, right at the beginning of the introduction, something peculiar happens: the vastness of the academic field that he acknowledges fuses into the geographical area in which this inquiry is centered. It is not only the academic field that is vast now: the geographical field pertaining to its inquiry is equally infinite.

What happens is that postindustrial society—to use a newfangled term—navigates the Caribbean with judgments and intentions that are like those of Columbus; that is, it lands scientists, investors, and technologists—the new (dis)coverers—who come to apply the

dogmas and methods that had served them well where they came from, and who can't see that these refer only to realities back home. So they get into the habit of defining the Caribbean in terms of its resistance to the different methodologies summoned to investigate it. (1-2)

This is a first reading of the Caribbean, he calls it, and citing Roland Barthes he says that in this first reading one unavoidably reads oneself. Benítez Rojo pursues then a second reading of the area that is the Caribbean, a second reading thanks to “which every text begins to reveal its own textuality” (2). This reading according to him is absolutely postmodernist:

This second reading is not going to be easy at all. The Caribbean space, remember, is saturated with messages—“language games,” Lyotard would call them—sent out in five European languages (Spanish, English, French, Dutch, and Portuguese), not counting aboriginal languages which, together with the different local dialects (Surinamtongo, Papiamentu, Creole) etc.), complicate enormously any communication from one extreme of the ambit to another. Further, the spectrum of Caribbean codes is so varied and dense that it holds the region suspended in a soup of signs. It has been said many times that the Caribbean is the union of the diverse, and maybe that is true. In any case, my own rereading has taken me along different paths, and I can no longer arrive at such admirably precise reductions. (2).

Benítez Rojo simply understands these “language games” as language codes. Codes that interfere variedly and densely with each other creating a “soup of signs.” Benítez Rojo is steeped here in a structuralist- and semiotically-charged imagination while reading Lyotard, and through him the Caribbean. Here it is simultaneously a geographical area and an academic field of

inquiry (codes, messages and signs are how he puts the island's repetition in motion). His answer to this confusion, to this soup of signs, is to attempt to begin from a "concrete and easily demonstrated, geographical fact: that the Antilles are an island bridge connecting, in 'another way,' North and South America" (2) [compared to the usual way via Central America]. This translational archipelago includes phenomena that go from "turbulences," "whirlpools" and "sunken galleons" to "uncertain voyages of signification." All of this, he argues, is "a field of observation quite in tune with the objectives of Chaos." And by doing so, the proliferation of readings multiply, turning the Caribbean into the tropical resort for any theory: no matter what you need or expect to find, you will find it there, because it is basically an area where Chaos has always ruled.

I believe that the confusion between the two meanings of the word "area" brings a lot more confusion than needed. Let us separate the two threads, the Caribbean as a geographical area, and the Caribbean as an area of inquiry. If we do so we will see that this postmodernist-ridden picture of the Caribbean where all languages produce flows and interruptions that make everything soon turn into complex systems, is a consequence of seeing the Caribbean as an always-already polyphonic geographical space, only because the "first readings" produce distortion when they bump into each other in unexpected ways. In other words, Benítez Rojo turns an epistemological problem—*how to understand* such a weird social formation that is the Caribbean geographical area—into an ontological solution—the Caribbean *is* a geographical/academic area that *has always been* chaotic, so we can only understand it by turning to Chaos theory.

Furthermore, his version of chaos theory is one of absolute uncertainty. But we need to remember something about chaotic and extremely complex systems. As any engineer would

point out, a system is complex when it is impossible to prognosticate the precise position in space of a particle within a determinate moment in time. We cannot be absolutely sure where a molecule of water will be in a creek at a certain moment. We can only make educated guesses—calculations in probability—on whether that molecule of water will be in point A or point B. That does not mean that there is no possibility of knowing anything or that knowledge plain and simple is just impossible. This is, however, what Benítez Rojo assumes that the Caribbean is:

If someone needed a visual explanation, a graphic picture of what the Caribbean is, I would refer him to the spiral chaos of the Milky Way, the unpredictable flux of transformative plasma that spins calmly in our globe's firmament, that sketches in an 'other' shape that keeps changing, with some objects born to light while others disappear into the womb of darkness; change, transit, return, fluxes of sidereal matter. (4)

It is altogether clear that conceptually this take on the Caribbean is neither useful nor practical. As any inattentive use of hybridity and its kin, when taken to the extreme, it makes the whole world, and the whole universe in this case, become hybrid. A celebration of difference, yes, to be sure. But not conceptually useful.

Scientifically, we already know there is not much of value in this theory that is so general that could be equated to an horoscope. The enlightened reader who would have thrown out Esteban Montejo's narration would also have thrown out Benítez Rojo's. Furthermore, this "second reading" of the Caribbean seems to believe it will arrive to a knowledge of the Caribbean *in itself*. And as the critical downpour that came after *Testimonio* has shown, this is not altogether possible no matter how native the voices of the experts are.

But this does not mean that Benítez Rojo’s work has nothing to tell us. Instead of disposing his readings as bad science, what if we read this book not as a theorization of the Caribbean, but as a product of the Maroon imagination? Not as its predecessor, or its antagonist, but as an example of this type of thought in action?

Tools of the Shuffle

If there is any mixture, any “soup of signs” to be preserved in the maroon imagination, it would be the mixture of thoughts, ideas and planes of knowledge born out of its survival-driven, haptic way knowledge. It is a shuffle. Not a syncretism of deities—this would only be a blend happening within the plane of religion—but two or more ideas placed together that form a field in tension, ideas that attract and repel each other with equal force, creating combinations not of races or religions but of ways of seeing, understanding and picturing the world. A combination that we saw in Montejo—an island-like image of space blended into the historical explanation of the slave trade, and a blend between everyday plantation society, affective relationships, and a theological or political belief.

Maroon imagination is not an act of critique: it does not dissect or apply forensics to an argument, to reality or to knowledge itself—this does not mean that it cannot be propelled by this spirit. The maroon imagination is somewhat the opposite. The tentative imagination turns knowledge into a convoluted shuffle where the connections are not always the same as they have been before: it puts into disarray arguments, knowledge, and thus reality. Its purpose is to let things breath. After the shuffle, critique may begin if one so choses.

As Esteban Montejo showed us, there are various steps that produce this shuffled image of the world. These steps are not obligatory. They are rules of a game, but not rules of the world. The same as Montejo, Benítez-Rojo deploys this shuffle in his book.

First rule: Enclose the space in which the shuffle will happen. Give it borders against which elements will collide. Montejo enclosed Africa with royal palms, bugs and shores, and Benítez Rojo did it by folding the Caribbean geographical area onto the academic one. But what is a problem of distinction in a critical train of thought—confusing an epistemological problem with an ontological one—it is also a mapping drive, a need to imagine the area and by doing so, the world (in a sense, he does what any founder of any discipline does when they found it but without the hubris of thinking they are seeing the whole picture at once). He goes all the way to enclose it. He spreads out the Caribbean toward Bombay, Manhattan, Gambia, Portugal and Cantonese taverns. The quote above assimilating the Caribbean to the Milky Way gives the world the chaotic ontology of the Caribbean, and thus it encloses the entire universe into its logic, making this a useless critical effort. But also, it gives it limits, borders, shores against which the flows and waves and codes and messages will break.⁵ We can see this more clearly when he starts to describe the Caribbean as a set of somewhat Deleuzian machines:

Generally the name *flota* (fleet) is given to the convoys that twice a year entered the Caribbean to come back to Seville with the great riches of America. But this is not entirely correct. The fleet system was itself a machine of ports, anchorages, sea walls, lookouts, fortresses, garrisons, militias, shipyards, storehouses, depots, offices, workshops, hospitals, inns, taverns, plazas, churches, palaces, streets, and roads that led

⁵ We will see this same logic of Universe enclosure in Chapter one, with Piñera's reply to Gombrowicz.

to the mining ports of the Pacific along a sleeve of mule trains laid out over the Isthmus of Panama. It was a powerful machine of machines knowingly articulated to suit the Caribbean's geography, and its machines were geared to be able to take greatest advantage of the energy of the Gulf Stream and the region's trade winds. The fleet system created all of the cities of the Spanish Caribbean and it made them, for better or for worse, what they are today, Havana in particular. (8)

Machines here are to be understood, Benitez Rojo asks us to do so, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms. But the critical reader will say that this is not a rigorous definition of Deleuze and Guattari's machines since, first, these machines (Columbus' precarious "vacuum cleaner" that sucks Nature and transports it to Seville, the *Fleet* machine and the later mine machine and plantation machine) are all circumscribed to the realm of human culture and technology, and therefore they are leaving the subject and nature both untouched. The critical reader would be absolutely right. But even if this is not a rigorous use of Deleuze and Guattari's non-dualistic machine, what Benítez Rojo is doing is tracing a common space. He is jumping from one level of knowledge to another, from time periods to regional and national histories, in order to create a picture of this big system that is the Atlantic. He is tracing a map that has no traditional categorical or disciplinary rigors, but because they do not have them they can be seen all at once. He is shuffling elements in order to produce this image of the world.

In short, how do we establish that the Caribbean as an important historic-economic sea and, further, a cultural meta-archipelago without center and without limits, a chaos within which there is an island that proliferates endlessly, each copy a different one, founding and refounding ethnological materials like a cloud will do with its vapor? If this is now

understood, then there is no need to keep on depending on the old history books. Let's talk then of the Caribbean that we can see, touch, smell, hear, taste; the Caribbean of the senses, the Caribbean of sentiment and pre-sentiment. (9-10)

It could be argued that he is doing exactly the opposite than what the maroon imagination does in terms of imagining space. After all, he is picturing the world as a whole. But what he is doing is to start from the most immediate—the geographical Caribbean—to the most external. He is moving from the inside out, as it were, and not from the top down.

It could also be said that there is no rigor in his inscription of categories. This lack of rigor brings us to the second rule: Do not take categories seriously. We are dealing here not with old history books but with senses and sentiment, the stuff of lived experience. That is, do not take categorized notions of order as permanent, eternal, grave, solemn and immutable. But also, do not take them seriously as in mock them because by doing so one lets them slide and slip as if they were not transcendent—that is after all the nature of a joke, to disarm transcendence. They are sense experiences that will all come together to produce lived experiences. This of course is a direct contradiction in regards to the tone of the critical process. Everything has to be taken seriously and one always has to be serious about it.⁶ This is the “other way” that, Benítez Rojo assures us, identifies the Caribbean approach to reality. In order to explain and describe this “other way” Benítez Rojo does not postulate a principle, he does not construct a schema, but instead, just like Montejo, proceeds to *narrate* how that way of understanding the world came to happen. He remembers how he came upon this way. In a sidestepping of the end-of-the-world fears brought about by the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis—what better example for structural

⁶ I would be willing to bet that in Immanuel Kant's entire writings, the father of the critical enterprise did not include one single joke. After all, the pietist impulse to organize the limits of what we can know is a most serious task

antagonism—he sees in the way two women walk such precise lack of rigor: there is no determination of going right ahead until getting to the last consequences. This is not sexually charged imaged, as many have understood it—there is a lot in Benítez Rojo that points to an exotization of women, but not in this case. This is not a lustful or voluptuous gaze deep in carnal pleasures—a common stereotype of the Caribbean.⁷ Amidst the fear, when he saw them walking “in a certain kind of way,” he realized there was a survival principle at play here.

I knew then at once that there would be no apocalypse. The swords and the archangels and the beasts and the trumpets and the breaking of the last seal were not going to come, for the simple reason that the Caribbean is not an apocalyptic world; it is not a phallic world in pursuit of the vertical desires of ejaculation and castration. The notion of the apocalypse is not important within the culture of the Caribbean. The choices of all or nothing, for or against, honor or blood have little to do with the culture of the Caribbean. These are ideological propositions articulated in Europe which the Caribbean shares only in declamatory terms, or, better, in terms of a first reading. In Chicago a beaten soul says: “I can’t take it any more,” and gives himself up to drugs or to the most desperate violence. In Havana, he would say: ‘The thing to do is not die,’ or perhaps: ‘Here I am, fucked but happy.’ (10)

This is not a clean solution for the missile crisis. Seeing how these women walk or walking like them will not solve it. The structural antagonism in the North still stands. A stoic but at the same time informal and colloquial take of *carpe diem*, however, lets the young Benítez

⁷ This is how Reinaldo Arenas and Pedro Juan Gutiérrez are read in Europe.

Rojo prevail. Just like Montejo calls Jesus Christ the plantation boss “that guy,” Benítez-Rojo is dealing with the utmost structural crisis—terror and apocalypse—in an almost warm-hearted manner. Interest in the higher echelons where decisions were being taken is almost slashed away with a simple phrase: it reveals to us a very different affective relation to Truth and reality than the one we are accustomed to in Western thought—even if Truth was secularized and rationalized, there is still a profoundly sober respect and reverence toward it, an after-image of a monotheistic-type of thinking assumed as having been left behind. And with this change of affective relation, a disregard to the reasons and causes of an event is put in place. There is no anxious search of meaning in that moment, because there is a momentary, tenuous-but-still-strong-enough grounding of oneself thanks to lived experience: “I’m fucked but happy.”

The disregarding of a powerful and vertical type of Truth, of transcendent meaning—and in less abstract terms, of everyday politics, of conspiracies, the stuff of any traditional nation-building allegorical novel (the other being romantic relationships)—brings us to a central question. If a search for truth, for intrinsic and hidden meaning is not what drives the maroon imagination, then what does? What is it looking for?

Let us return to the notion of non-argumentative disposition—we have never left it, since the emphasis on flows and processes occurring within the “chaotic” image of the Caribbean area and Caribbean field is precisely a way of avoiding argument and confrontation. If there is no confrontation, it would follow there could be no clear-cut outline of a succession of events, or of a thematically organized interpretation of them in time. There is no counterpoint here—in Ortiz’s sense, but also in narratological and musical terms. Instead of the counterpointual, structured aspects of European music, Benítez Rojo resorts to the notion of improvisation, at first

circumscribed to Caribbean music—the blues and jazz are included in this area’s organization—but then extrapolated to all realms of everyday life. When he explains how a jazz recording does not help us understand improvisation, he brings the notion of improvisation and of rhythm together, allowing us to understand that their importance relies on the dismantling of confrontation, not on the definition of these terms in themselves.

The deception [of understanding improvisation through a jazz recording] lies in giving out that “listening” is the only sense touched by improvisation. In fact, improvisation, if it has reached a level that I’ve been calling “a certain kind of way,” has penetrated all of the percipient spaces of those present, and it is precisely this shifting “totality” that leads them to perceive the impossible unity, the absent locus, the center that has taken off and yet is still there, dominating and dominated by the soloist’s performance. It is this “totality” that leads those present to another “totality”: that of rhythm-flux, but not that of rhythms and fluxes that belong to industrial production, to computers, to psychoanalysis, to synchronicity and diachronicity. The only useful thing about dancing or playing an instrument “in a certain kind of way” lies in the attempt to move an audience into a realm where the tensions that lead to confrontation are inoperative. (20)

To make any confrontational realm inoperative by means of allowing participants to perceive the impossible unity: that is the role of improvisation. But let us not understand “impossible unity,” “absent locus” or “the center that has taken off and yet is still here” as a Derridian *différance*, or as an always-pursued-but-never-quite-reached signified. It could be very well read this way, but this is not the case I am trying to make. What if we were to read it instead as that tenuous moment when the bootstrapping of the self and of community occurs by way of

lived experience? Yes, it is a moment that it is immediately deferred and put into movement. But the distinction here between infinite deferral of differences is that there was no search for truth or meaning in an improvisation session to begin with, or in living “in another way.” It is bootstrapping oneself into existence and acquiring a position in the world without a previous and discrete antagonism, but by saying “‘The thing to do is not die,’ or perhaps: ‘Here I am, fucked but happy.’”

Non-argumentative tension. This is how Benítez-Rojo’s book was written. “Chaos” then is a perfect and authorized way of avoiding arguments and allowing improvisation and rhythm into the image of the area and the field because everything is flow—and *not* confrontation. The book is written in this key, attempting to improvise and connect one moment to another and one object to another. Precisely because of this, and despite the academic presses that published this book (Duke University Press, Ediciones del Norte, Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana) and despite a superficial academic tone that does not stand close scrutiny, this is not an academic book. If it is to be considered as one then it is a *bad* one, since it does not play the rules of the academic game: discretion, rigor, critique, and seriousness. It instead plays the rules of the shuffle of reality and of our categories of knowledge, the rules of the maroon imagination.

We have already seen a third rule of this shuffle. Instead of applying forensic strategies to an argument, to a narrative or to a piece of music, this third rule of non-distinction allows the flow to come into the picture by letting the distinctions glide from one moment to the next and from one point to another. It lets the ghost of vitalism enter into the enclosed space and allows it to run amok. This, together with the non-argumentative disposition makes the Caribbean turn into a feedback machine. Not only in terms of something “going back” to the place where it

came from at some point or another, but more importantly, feedback in terms of distortion. Something not only is fed back, but in the process it distorts the machine and itself. This distortion is what produced the problematic contamination between academic imaginaries that allowed for the use of the Chaos theory in the first place.

Benítez Rojo continues his explanation of rhythm and polyrhythm in terms of complexity, uncertainty, process without resolution: he is still immersed in structuralist-derived terms and horizon of interests, and in the confusing—but now understandable—blend of the Caribbean as a field and as an area. From this point of view he pursues a “chaotic” interpretation of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre in order to answer the question of what is all of this for: if there is no reverent search for truth and deep meaning, then what is this field, this area and this type of imagination looking for?

Before Benítez Rojo, syncretism had been deployed in Cuba in order to mitigate religious readings, first with the rise of the national-building discourses and then with the Cuban Revolution. The case in point was the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, which if seen in syncretic terms would cancel out its reading as a Cuban continuation of the Spanish Virgen de Illescas. A syncretic reading of this image would bring to the front an incarnation of the Taino or Atabey deity of Orehu—the goddess of water who rules over rivers, seas and lakes—along with the Yoruba deity Elegua. By multiplying the strata beneath the most external surface, Cuban Republicanism argued that syncretism was able to deactivate Catholicism and play into nationalistic pursues according to the postulates of transculturation.

Benítez Rojo goes beyond this national-based reading of the Virgin figure, and beyond the notion of syncretism as a religiously based phenomenon. Just as he did when he expanded the notions of machines (the fleet, the plantation, the mine) and just like he did when he expanded

the contours of the Caribbean, he uses the tropes of chaos to blend myths, concepts, and experiences by reading them stratigraphically: he does not stop at the first degree of combination, the one that states that the Cuban virgin comes from the Spanish Virgen de Illescas. He shows how this Spanish virgin is already a hybrid since it itself comes from Byzantium via the Occitan culture of courteous love. He gives us examples as he traces strata that show the strong similarities between Orehu and Aphrodite, and between Hermes and Elegua. This stratigraphic reading allows him to connect disparate and separate places of the world, allowing him in turn to produce the view of the world as a whole as Caribbean.

In the same way, Africa and Aphrodite have more in common than the Greek root that unites their names; there is a flow of marine foam that connects two civilizations “in another way,” from within the turbulence of chaos. . . . The cult of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre can be read as a Cuban cult, but it can also be reread—one reading does not negate the other—as a meta-archipelagic text, a meeting or confluence of marine flowings that connects the Niger with the Mississippi, the China Sea with the Orinoco, the Parthenon with a fried food stand in an alley in Paramaribo. The peoples of the sea, or better, the Peoples of the Sea proliferate incessantly while differentiating themselves from one another, traveling together toward the infinite. (16)

Here vitalism and the non-argumentative tension between elements are put into play within space, thus sidestepping the nationalistic and social-science readings of syncretism. It does so, however, by resorting to chaos, complexity and rhythms, which as we have seen has troublesome elements when it comes to talk about the Caribbean in itself (if the whole world is like the Caribbean, then the definition of the Caribbean that brought us to this conclusion is

empty of meaning in the first place). However, what if we read this paragraph not as steeped in post-modernist/chaos lingo, but as a description of what happens to a maroon community that sprouts out of lived experience?

Certain dynamics of their culture also repeat and sail through the seas of time without reaching anywhere. If I were to put this in two words, they would be: performance and rhythm. And nonetheless, I would have to add something more: the notion that we have called “in a certain kind of way,” something remote that reproduces itself and that carries the desire to sublimate apocalypse and violence; something obscure that comes from the performance and that one makes his own in a very special way; concretely, it takes away the space that separates the onlooker from the participant.” (16).

The non-argumentative tension, the horizontal/informal affective relation to Truth and transcendent meaning, the vitalistic ontology within an enclosed imaginary space that allows blends to happen between various fields and conditions of knowledge that sustain themselves on narrations of lived experience, all this are put into play here in order to sublimate apocalypse and violence. That is the point of the “another way.” Instead of the monotone kind of reading that begins in an apparent clean kernel of a community and ends with the *grand finale* that is supposed to be the nation, he finds that “the cultural discourse of the Peoples of the Sea attempts, through real or symbolic sacrifice, to neutralize violence and to refer society to the transhistorical codes of Nature” (17). In the space in which this sublimation of violence happens, a peculiar thing occurs:

In this paradoxical space, in which one has the illusion of experiencing a totality, there appears to be no repressions or contradictions; there is no desire other than that of maintaining oneself within the limits of this zone for the longest possible time, in free orbit, beyond imprisonment or liberty. (17)

This sublimation of violence is the purpose of this exercise of maroon imagination. It is a resort to standing adamant—but not too stiff—when structural antagonism is a menace. It is a freedom combined with an almost epicurean search for *aponia* (absence of pain), a freedom that comes out of an absence of anxiety produced by confrontation.

But this stasis has a lot of problems. However those are not problems of the imagination proper, but the consequences this type of imagination suffers when it comes into contact with others. We need to remember that the aim as of now is to trace the image of the world, but not to show how to move within that realm. The consequences of such a movement will be analyzed in the chapters that follow.

This is why Benítez Rojo, and Esteban Montejo, and any other person driven by the maroon imagination do not respond to confrontation: they do not answer to it, but also, they do not quite understand it. They do not pursue the imagination of their world through confrontation, but through narration of lived experiences. This connects in a single arc of intention the folktales of Anansi (Br'er Rabbit)—present all throughout the Caribbean—with any high-modernist novel, or surrealism-inspired work of art from the area. The performance of telling a story, of narrating past events in such a way that an image of the world can be conceived in which there is no direct confrontation but flow and contamination of causes and reasons until everything is a mess, but a mess that does not necessarily demands to be cleaned up.

We cannot understand Benítez Rojo's book, or the maroon imagination in general, as a critical enterprise looking for a revered truth or as a melancholic but voluptuous reading of the ruins of the world that has realized it has none. The maroon imagination does not seem to be concerned with this. Instead, it approaches knowledge through attempts to narrate travels, to make cartographic efforts by narrating the lived experience of someone who traverses a space that is unknown and that has no previously known cartographic representation.

All three authors search for an image of their world without placing their hopes in a search for the revered meaning. Instead of the resolution of an enigma, there is a portrayal of the image of their world by narrating a lived experience, using the tools of the shuffle and thus bootstrapping themselves into existence. In doing this they create new maps, but not from the point of view of the cartographic god, but according to an almost haptic, tactile style of relaxed knowledge. A knowledge that has usually been relegated to primitives, to children and to animals. But if I have made myself clear, there is nothing simple, primitive, child-like or non-rational about this imagination of the world.

1. A MAROONED FERDYDURKE: THE SUBJECT'S CONSTRICTED SPACE IN VIRGILIO PIÑERA

After decades of silence, Latin American and Cuban literary history have recently redeemed Virgilio Piñera as a writer and intellectual. Validations and new interpretations about his work have come from multiple disciplines, each of them with diverse political and academic interests.¹ As usually happens in historiographical rescues, it is always necessary to explain why Piñera's work was left out of the mainstream of literary history, and only then, following previously chosen criteria, the validation is permitted to proceed. And the main reason why he was left out, the story usually goes, is that he contradicted everyone and everything that stood before him.

These stockpiling of validations—which generally limit themselves to only one of Piñera's texts and thus circumscribe his relevance to the history of one genre—have produced an image of Piñera as an instigator and a naysayer with multiple personalities. Such taxonomical impulses of diverse aspects of his character and work have prevented the consolidation of an image of Piñera as that of a congruent writer and intellectual who was consistent in his positions and in his projects throughout his long career, notwithstanding the different genres he delved into or the vicissitudes he endured.

However, I believe there is a structural cohesion throughout his creative output that relies on assuming that language and the subject—and their relation to their surroundings—are branded by a constant and structural remembrance of their own limits. This happens because language is

¹ Piñera has become an important frame of reference when reevaluating Republican Cuban literature (García Chichester), the role of homosexuality (Quiroga), and existentialism and the theater of the absurd (Anderson, Jerez-Farrán). Piñera has also become a key figure when revisiting texts written by dissidents of the Cuban Revolution who stayed on the island while remaining silent (Rojas, *Tumbas*).

seen as constrained by its own, unavoidable obsolescence, and the subject as constrained by its own physicality. By positioning this assumption as the main undercurrent beneath Piñera's project, we will be able to see him as an innovator and not simply as a controversial instigator or as a systematical naysayer. I will attempt to do this by showing how Piñera answers in *La carne de René* (1952) Witold Gombrowicz's proposals regarding individual freedom and creativity amidst a falseness-ridden society, as they appear in his novel *Ferdydurke* (1937), the novel Piñera helped translate while in Buenos Aires. I sustain that his reply to Gombrowicz comes from his critical thinking about poetry that took place around 1941-1942, when he wrote the two editorials on his poetry journal *Poeta*, and when he also wrote his most famous poem, "La isla en peso." These reflections arose because, contrary to his Cuban contemporaries, Piñera was able to think through the consequences that definitions of truncated freedom, future, and emancipation have on poetic language and on their place within the construction of the Cuban Republican imaginary. I hope that when connecting these three works that span more than ten years, Piñera's literary project will acquire a better consistency. When connecting the opaque and slippery *La carne de René* with *Ferdydurke* and Piñera's critical reflections on poetry, I believe a possible interpretation of the novel that does not recur to nihilism and the absurd will also come to light.

Contrary to the case of José Lezama Lima, with whom Piñera has always been compared—and who was quickly assimilated as a major poet, novelist and essayist by Cuban and Latin American literary history—Piñera has been regarded as an author who contingently reacted to circumstances, and thus produced texts that went against the grain of social, literary, and cultural hegemony.² The following is Antonio José Ponte's introduction to his essay on Piñera: "He wrote by negating. His was a reactive writing, like certain chemical preparations. He

² See Jambrina for the impact Cintio Vitier's 1944 criticism had on the subsequent interpretations of Piñera's work.

was so conscious of other voices he arrived to complete them. He wrote in order to provide for literature something that it lacked and that he felt it was missing” (“Escribía negando. Escritura reactiva como ciertos preparados químicos. Tuvo tan clara conciencia de otras voces que vino a completar. Escribió para dotar a la literatura de algo que le estaba faltando y él echaba de menos”; *Lengua* 103).³ The nature of this negation implies that someone else has a previous, stable, affirmative position, and so Piñera turns out to be a reactive agent who destabilizes other authors’ proposals, who completes something previously started, and who neither needs nor has any type of consistent line of thought.

In order to neutralize the idea of Piñera as some kind of reactive preparation in a history of literary elements, we need to zoom in on his relation with Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz, one author with whom he apparently does not enter into conflict, a writer that Piñera never refutes or contradicts, and with whom he even works. Does this mean the naysayer *par excellence* indeed found his master? On a first look this may appear to be true: after all, Piñera declared “*Ferdydurke* clears the path to independence and spiritual sovereignty from major cultures that turn us into eternal disciples. My literary work pursues the same end and I believe it is here where we meet—Poland, Argentina and Cuba—united by the same spiritual need” (“*Ferdydurke* nos abre el camino para conseguir la independencia, la soberanía espiritual, frente a las culturas mayores que nos convierten en eternos alumnos. Mi trabajo literario persigue el mismo fin y creo que aquí nos encontramos –Polonia, la Argentina y Cuba- unidos por la misma necesidad del espíritu”; *Poesía* 255-256)

I believe Gombrowicz was one of Piñera’s kindred spirits. Both search for independence of the “spiritual sovereignty” with regard to major cultures, be they European national cultures,

³ For other readings of Piñera as a reactive writer and as a naysayer, see the dossier on Piñera published by *Revista Unión* in 1990 (Nº 10), Molinero, Ruíz Barrionuevo, and Martín. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

or groups of poets behind journals who seem to be in control of the culture in which they are immersed. But there is a difference. Piñera adapted the ideas of the “Ferdidurkist Cause” to the experiences he lived on the island before going to Buenos Aires, and by doing so, he criticized Gombrowicz’s proposal.

His answer to such proposal was *La carne de René*. A novel that shows how the fleeing subject feels constrained by its own body, by its pain, and how the fact that language turns obsolete forces the subject to realize its own limitations regarding the impossibility of gaining any type of transcendence, of being able to escape. Just like Ti Noël realizes at the end of his life that his only inheritance was “a body of flesh to which things had happened” (Kingdom 178-179), René realizes that the hopes of the Cause, of those against it and of those who do not want to participate on either side—like himself—are structurally constricted. But unlike Ti Noël, René will not die fighting; he will arrive to a problematic stasis.

In order to understand Piñera’s project and what his novel intends to say, it is necessary to tell three stories. The first one will be Gombrowicz and *Ferdydurke*’s story, which began in Poland and ended in Argentina. In Buenos Aires this story meets Piñera’s, which began with the literary disputes of the 1940s in Havana’s poetry journals, at a time when the goal seemed to be the search for Cubanness in poetry (Rojas, *Orígenes*). In Buenos Aires, Piñera would then articulate *Ferdydurke*’s proposal with his experience of negating and refuting the poetic projects of the soon-to-be *Origenistas*. That will be the third story, the one dealing with *La carne de René*.

Ferdydurke

Gombrowicz set sail from Poland to Buenos Aires on what would be the last ship out before the German invasion, and what was the route's inaugural voyage resulted for him in a fortuitous exile more than two decades long. In 1939 Gombrowicz was a young writer who had already published one book of short stories and one novel, *Ferdydurke*. Becoming an exile in a place he had not planned to stay and whose language he did not understand pushed him to live during the first seven years without writing, observing from the outside the city's literary movements with a mixture of attraction and repulsion that such circuits always produced in him. At the time, the principal literary group revolved around Victoria Ocampo's journal *Sur*, and its principal figure was, of course, Jorge Luis Borges. With the hopes of engaging in a discussion with these cultural groups and the ideas they defended, Gombrowicz started to see the translation of his novel into Spanish as an imperative; he felt that his book, a histrionic criticism of the problems that cultural and social institutions have when trying to preserve the order they so much desire, would be a good letter of presentation and a very-needed key to gain access to such institutions. (Time would prove otherwise). In 1946, a year after Piñera arrived in Buenos Aires, a group of young followers started to meet at a café in order to translate the Polish novel into Spanish. Piñera would soon join the translation group, and in a typical act of farcical protocol, Gombrowicz would name him "President of the Ferdydurkist Cause."

Ferdydurke tells the story of Kowalski, a thirty year-old man who just finished writing his first novel and who, in general terms, is very happy about everything. Suddenly, his old Professor Pimko arrives and drags him back to high school. He is required to attend class and he is treated like an infant; he is constantly humiliated so that he might turn back into a child and lose his maturity. Throughout the novel we see how different people "drag" Kowalski into

several surreal and grotesque situations, in which he is forced to adjust to strange surroundings. Suddenly, before he has a chance to rebel against them, he is dragged into a different social situation. This succession of surroundings shows us the central point of the novel: a critique of the social and cultural institutions that forcefully apply order and at the same time repress their own desire to run amok. School, the progressive urban family, the rural aristocracy, and the proletariat are some of those spheres of order into and out of which Kowalski is dragged in the most derisory of manners. In the end, Kowalski and a woman who is his momentary infatuation manage to escape from his family's rural villa before a farmers' rebellion explodes. Kowalski and the woman walk toward the city, and while she thinks they will live together as a couple, he is in fact waiting for someone who may drag him out of this situation and place him in a new one. It seems he has no problem with entering another problematic situation. His only concern is to get out of what he is living at the time. When the novel ends, Kowalski is still waiting.

As Pablo Gasparini has argued, the plot describes a dialectic movement between social spheres, and the characters behave as if they were in a Master-and-Slave dialectic with a constant tension between both realms. Kowalski moves on from one sphere to the next one, either by actively participating or by just observing these dialectic interactions between social classes, family members, students and professors, man and woman. "This series of displacements and 'draggings' from sphere to sphere in a certain way imitates the typical movement of the Hegelian dialectic" ("[E]sta serie de desplazamientos o 'arrastramientos' de una esfera a otra, remedan de alguna manera el típico movimiento de la dialéctica hegeliana"; Gasparini 93) But in contrast to Hegel's version—if we follow the interpretation Gombrowicz gives of the dialectic (*Curso*)—*Ferdydurke's* dialectic resolution of the opposition does not bring progress. A change in the situation comes from "the escape with a third term that is alien to the opposition" ("el escape con

un tercer término ajeno a la oposición”; 94). There is always a third one, an alien element to the oppositional dynamic in the plot, who rescues Kowalski from one sphere and pushes him into a new one. At the novel’s end, Kowalski cries for it to arrive: “Come, Third Man, to the two of us. Come, Salvation, show yourself, let me grab onto you, save me!” (“Ven, tercer hombre, a nosotros dos, ven, salvación, aparece, que me agarre a ti, sálvame”; *Ferdydurke* 313).

I differ from Gasparini’s interpretation because of the novel’s second preface: Between the third and fourth chapter, in a preface to a short story included in the book but that does not make up part of the main plot line, Gombrowicz stops reading the dialectic as a battle to death between consciousnesses and sees society as an incorporeal but all-pervading force that puts pressure on the subject, molding it to its wishes. There is no essential human nature to externalize; instead, there is a battle against form—just as the novel is battling against the form of the novel, by having a preface to a story in the middle of it, a story that does not belong in the novel’s plot.:

But the real situation is this: a human being does not externalize himself directly and immediately in conformity with his own nature; he invariably does so by way of some definite form; and that form, style, way of speaking and responding, do not derive solely from him, but are imposed on him from without—and the same man can express himself sometimes wisely, sometimes foolishly, bloodthirstily or angelically, maturely or immaturely, according to the form, the style presented to him by the outside world, the pressure put on him by other men. (Gombrowicz and Mosbacher 81)

In order to escape—or to trick—this dialectic but consciousnessless force that pushes and separates the subject’s “face”—the surface that separates him from the exterior—Gombrowicz argues for a specific way of making art. Art—that is, bourgeois art and its derivatives, along with its panoply of methods that provide it with prestige and authority—cannot help the subject escape from this prison—because it is not prison, it is everywhere. This is because the Art surrounded with Authority is the fabricated expression and the tweaked product of the needs of whatever is external to the subject, namely society and culture. More specifically, Art is the expression of the postulates according to which something is proper and socially acceptable in a certain sphere (of course, the repressed attraction to the “underworld” closely lurks in the shadow of those postulates). That is why whoever wishes to write, paint or compose, cannot be driven anymore by the desire of being a famous artist, and of showing the entire artistic world what a genius he is: that would mean the exteriority has (de)formed the subject’s interiority by pressuring his “facha,” his face, the surface between interiority and exteriority. The truly valuable art would appear when the individual wants “to express his own personality and draw a clear picture of himself in the eyes of others; or to organize himself, bring order within himself, and by confession to cure any complexes or immaturities; and also, perhaps, to make his contact with others deeper, more intimate, more creative, more sharply outlined; [...] or again, he might write simply to earn a living” (82-83). Since this new art is not worried anymore with the deformation of the “facha” but with its own interiority, there will then be a more sincere connection with the forces coming from “beneath”:

But, if you were less preoccupied with art and more with yourselves, you would not keep silent in face of this terrible violation of yourselves; and the poet, instead of writing for

other poets, would feel himself penetrated and fertilized from below, by forces which he had hitherto neglected. He would recognize that the only way of freeing himself from the pressure was to recognize it; and in his style, his attitude, his tone, his form—that of his art as well as of his everyday life—he would set himself to displaying this link with a lower level. (84-85)

The individuals develop a new alternative identity when following this type of recognition. It is a process of identity construction not ruled by a reaction against external forces—and thus there is no preoccupation for the “facha.” The individuals must not try anymore to be solid against external pressures; instead they have to allow those pressures to flow against them and around them, and by doing so forge the message they want to send to other people, no matter whether those people are in the underworld or on the high pinnacles of certain dialectic processes. The individual will not be a static subject that follows orders or abstains from transgressing rules; the individual will be the ductile and malleable accumulation of the forces that come from above and below. These forces will talk through the subject, producing true art.

We shall soon begin to be afraid of ourselves and our personalities, because we shall discover that they do not completely belong to us. And instead of bellowing and shouting: I believe this, I feel that, I am this, I stand for that, we shall say more humbly: In me there is a belief, a feeling, a thought, I am the vehicle for such-and-such an action, production, or whatever it may be. (86)

In other words, subjects have to become conscious of the dialectical force that surrounds them, crosses through them and (de)forms them, and their art must also be conscious of how provisional this is. If not, subjects would be tricking others as well as themselves with a mirage of pure expression and geniality. Subjects must not consider themselves as something fixed but slippery, since their place in different moments of the opposition will surely vary, as well as the extremes of the oppositions themselves. Because of this, Gombrowicz “(...)will look for the diversity of adventure, and by attempting to stay away from extremes that require him to gravitate toward tormenting crises of despair, he will proclaim the moment and the sensation (...) as the true human conditions against the hardness and the rigidity of the most diverse churning” (“Gombrowicz (...) buscará la diversidad de la aventura, e, intentando alejarse de los extremos que lo obligan a gravitar entre tormentosas crisis de desesperación, hará del instante y la sensación (...) la verdadera condición humana frente a lo duro y fijo de las más diversas malaxaciones”; Gasparini 118).

Since there are no teleological alternatives such as progress, transcendence, or canonization, Gombrowicz’s dialectical take on the subject forces his literary texts to recur to histrionics, to the theatricality and self-consciousness of the characters’ behaviors, to confessional narratives, and to irony. In sum, to the typical traits of the “post-modern” novel, of which Gombrowicz has been called one of the most important forefathers. More than in *Ferdydurke*, these traits will appear very clearly in his *Diaries* and in his novels *Pornografia* and *Cosmos*.

We do not need to agree with Gombrowicz’s proposal, but we have to keep it in mind in order to understand what Piñera wants to say. Let us take the novel’s ending: Kowalski waits for the “third man,” the force that will drag him from one dialectic movement into another. The

malleability the subject needs in order simply to adapt to circumstances has the prerequisite of considering as possible and absolutely natural the existence of an escaping movement: the subject has to be able to move from one place to another, and thus have a space in social reality to which to move. That is, Gombrowicz takes for granted that the subject can always escape, and if not, waiting is a peaceful provisional solution. As we will soon see, Piñera will give another turn of the screw to this sociocultural analysis of art and its institutions, and will take into consideration the effects these movements have on the subject and on the space in which they happen. If Gombrowicz tends to see the formation of subjectivity—and the passing of time for a subject—as a dialectical movement with no progress whatsoever, or as a product of the released tension of its opposites, such movement occurs in a space that seems to be infinite, unlimited. There will always be an opportunity for escaping from one sphere and peacefully and malleably going into another. This is not true for Piñera: for him the space is limited. And the consequences of this limitation will come to life in *La carne de René*.

Insular Space

Gombrowicz uses the Hegelian dialectic as a structural motif to organize his novel's plot, as well as to explain the process of subjectivization vis-a-vis social forces and cultural institutions. How does Piñera come to visualize these processes as constricted in space? I hope this second story will show how this view of constricted space in Piñera came from dealing with the Cuban poetry circuit and its controversies during the early 1940s.

Virgilio Piñera arrived to Havana from Camagüey to study Philosophy and Literature in 1937. He soon got involved with the group of poets who would later be known as the *Orígenes* group, with José Lezama Lima as its principal figure. Piñera's relationship with Lezama was

never an easy one, and throughout his life Piñera got close to and then distanced himself from Lezama and his group. It is in this going back and forth that Piñera was able to develop a criticism of what the *Orígenes* poets and their previous generation considered was the function of poetry in the Post-Machado Republic. This criticism entailed imagining a structural limitation of language and poetry, as well as imagining the consequences this could bring forth for a subject living on the island.

Before Piñera arrived in Havana, Machado's dictatorship had caused the *Minorista* Group and Cuban Republicans to enter into a stage of pessimism regarding the attempt to produce a national Cuban identity. Even though Nicolás Guillén had helped to disseminate the *Negrista* discourse, Jorge Mañach had reflected about Cuban speech as a form of identity cohesion (*Indagación sobre el choteo*), and Fernando Ortiz had coined "transculturation" as a result of a critical reflection on social and cultural essences on the island, beneath their proposals lay a historical narrative in which the nineteenth century resembled a Golden Age for the Island. As Rafael Rojas succinctly phrases it, "while attesting to the cultural crisis of the first Republic, [Mañach and Ortiz] were in a certain way dealing with Oswald Spengler's metahistory: the splendor of the colonial period was exceeded by the decadence of the Republic" (*Orígenes*, 154).

Lezama and his cohort did not quite have the same pessimistic take of their older peers. They proclaimed instead a nihilism as a starting point for the creation of national history. Out of this initial "tabula rasa," the production of the historical image could take place. Against the convoluted and melancholic accumulation of images of a past that did not produce the present previously desired, the *Orígenes* group saw the island as an empty space to be filled with

memories. These memories, of course, were not any type of memories; they would be produced by the poetic act—Lezama's *Imago*.⁴

When Piñera got involved with the soon-to-be *Orígenes* group, they had already published several poetry journals—*Verbum*, *Espuela de Plata*, *Clavileño*—all of them with similar national and historical assumptions and concerns. On a literary level, the main concern was the search for the Cuban essence in poetry, a search that would later crystallize itself in Cintio Vitier's conferences *Lo cubano en la poesía*, which was the first time Piñera was portrayed as a naysayer (Jambrina). Surely such a take on Piñera was not fortuitous: since 1942 he had been stating his disagreement with both the *Origenistas* and the *Minoristas*. In that year he published “La isla en peso” and the two issues of his *Poeta* journal. In the first issue he clearly opposed the then-prevailing definitions and preconceptions of what poetry was and what it meant.

Let us forget about turns of phrase, mottoes, *ex-libris*, prefaces, and manifestos... They are made of what is already done, finished, embossed and chiseled; of what fits in them or what is forced upon them. An elephant's kick is greatly needed against this crystal made for the gasps of angels. After the kick, the reconstruction of the crystal will ensue, bit by bit; then it will be proclaimed that the only possible sanity is that of dementia, and the only possible addition is through division.

⁴ “The Orígenes group believed that only through a nihilist view of the past could they penetrate being and produce an historical image. Instead of sublimating itself in the nostalgia of a vanished time, the absence of tradition occupied the present by means of a poetic act, and turned itself into a potential memory of the future. [...] Lezama and the Orígenes group were not interested in introducing the testimony of a present as a sign of identity that could have been and never was; their preoccupation was finding potential forms to fill the existing void, overcoming that which is with the incarnation of that which can be. Underwriting this imperative lay the desire to occupy the emptied body of the Republic, and to generate meaning within its interior” (158)

Dejémonos ya de frases, de lemas, de *ex-libris*, de prólogos, de manifiestos... Están hechos de lo hecho, de lo acabado, repujado o cincelado; de lo que se encaja u obliga. Gran necesidad de la patada de elefante, a ese cristal hecho para el anhélito de los ángeles. Después de la patada, la reconstrucción del cristal, gránulo a gránulo, proclamar que sólo es posible la cordura por demencia o la suma por división. (Piñera, *Poesía*, 171)

In what seems to be an avant-garde tantrum decades overdue, Piñera seeks the destruction of language's institutionality in order to rescue something truly productive from its remains.⁵ If the Origenistas had reacted to the Minoristas' and Republicans' pessimism with a desire to start from scratch and fill the tradition with poetically-constructed historical images, Piñera states that such an act had by then already become solidified and fossilized; they were filling the empty space with non-innovative language and poetry.

It would then seem logical to assume that all of Piñera's hopes were on whatever would arise from the ruins. But at the end of his editorial comment he positions himself as part of that solidified element filling the empty national space. "That is why *Poeta* dissents, turns against and contradicts the [Elephant's] kick, and at the same time, it waits for its baptism of fire. *Poeta* necessarily awaits the discovery of its fake part" ("Por eso *Poeta* disiente, se enemista, contradice de la patada y, a su vez, aguarda el bautismo de fuego. [...] *Poeta* espera, necesariamente el descubrimiento de su parte falsa"; 171). Piñera does not place any hope on the future, he does not assume that his re-articulation of the historical problem is the next step to take, or that some kind of orientation would arise from the remaining bits and pieces. Following Vitier, the typical portrayal of Piñera will understand these statements as the birth pangs of his

⁵ If we take into account that Lezama was asthmatic, those gasps of angels could very well be a personal attack on Piñera's part, something entirely possible according to his renowned acerbic and sometimes cruel wit.

sarcastic and anti-authoritarian voice (Rojas, *Orígenes*, 166-167), which regards destruction and the absurd as the only things that remain. I do not think this is the case.

These instigating postures no doubt belong to Piñera's voice. However, what we also see in this extract is how he chooses to visualize the mechanism underpinning the rules and transformations of poetic language. Piñera's point of view would not be that of an author who had made a commitment with a certain idea about the future, but rather the point of view of an external observer of the articulations of the system in which the committed poets were immersed. In other words, if the *Orígenes* poets relied more on the idea of being the messianic voice of cultural or national identity, Piñera relied on a more mechanistic take on poetic language and its consequences. He does not want to fill an empty space; he limits himself to describing the movements and circulations that occur within its confines.

In his journal's second and last issue, Piñera shows with greater detail how the mechanism works, which is already affecting the publication itself. "The discovery of the fake part [or the journal's attempt] was possible thanks to the true part. We needed to have in front of us, outlined and known backwards and inside out, the axiomatic principle: 'Every true situation may turn, by its own inertia, into a fake one.' As always, the danger of any conquest is the conquest itself" ("El descubrimiento de la parte falsa fue posible gracias a la parte verdadera. Era preciso tener ante sí, bien delineado y sabido, el axiomático principio: 'Toda situación verdadera puede, por inercia, convertirse en falsa'. Como siempre, el peligro de toda conquista es la conquista misma"; *Poesía*, 171). In a use of the Master-and-Slave dialectic similar to the one we found in Gombrowicz's case—both describing the change mechanism and revealing an intrinsic fakeness—Piñera directly addresses the fossilization of language occurring in Lezama's poetry book *Enemigo rumor*: "It is not then paradoxical that a liberation movement engenders its

opponent out of vassalage; a vassalage that turns against those who came together around Lezama and also against him” (“No es, pues, paradójico que un movimiento de liberación engendre su contrario del vasallaje; vasallaje que se vuelve contra los que se agrupaban alrededor de Lezama y también contra él mismo”; 173). Piñera then admits that those same limits imposed by the normalization of poetry affect his own work and his own publication, even if his intent was to take down the atrophied institutions of poetry.

And we, of course, are in the same frame of mind [regarding the problem of the fossilization of poetic language. We knew by then within which limits we could move so that we would not lose our footing; we knew by then how to make poetry. We operated safely and it seemed our poetic destiny was confirming itself; at last it seemed our oeuvre was starting up. But in fact nothing seemed, because every horseman had already dismounted. ¿Would any of them dare to take root once again?

Y nosotros, claro está, en su misma tesitura. Conocíamos ya entre qué límites movernos, a fin de no perder pie; sabíamos ya hacer la poesía. Operábamos con seguridades y parecía que nuestro destino poético se confirmaba; parecía, por fin, que la obra se iba a poner en marcha. Pero, en verdad, nada parecía, pues todos los jinetes habían desmontado. ¿Se atrevería, acaso, alguno a tomar pie de nuevo? (174)

When we take into account the absence of any assertive proposal in Piñera’s editorial, it is quite understandable that Lezama’s followers would criticize him. Far from any intention of using poetry to consolidate images that would fill Cuba’s empty historical space, Piñera’s visualization of how poetry functions and changes cannot work with Lezama’s poetic-

teleological project. However, it is crucial that we rescue out of this difference the fact that negating is not an isolated impulse for Piñera, nor is it an end in itself. It is in fact an inbuilt component of his visualization of poetry as an ever-changing mechanism: it is absolutely necessary for him to show how these mechanisms are closed, limited, and circumscribed, in order to appreciate the movement of their pieces and how they themselves are articulated.⁶

This Baudelarian take on poetic language as a mechanism that unavoidably passes from innovation to obsolescence also appears in Piñera's poem "La isla en peso," also published in 1942. In it we can also appreciate how conscious Piñera is about the finiteness of causes and of the poetic capability of language—in the sense that language is able to say something in a whole new manner, creating new concepts and new images along the way. Here the limitations of the poetic mechanism permeate other areas of national culture and society: *Negrismo*, Cubanness, transculturation, all these trends and avenues of thought sooner or later are affected by the hardening-up of language, when poetic language is no more. Lezama's idea of *insular teleology*—the image of the island as the crystallization of a poetic, artistic, or national essence—also becomes affected. Instead of the image of the island as future, in Piñera's poem we are confronted with an immediate and corporeal, lived experience, one that does not contain any reference to teleologies, but instead is full of excruciating limitations: "The damned circumstance of having water all around me" ("La maldita circunstancia del agua por todas partes"); "water surrounds me like cancer" ("el agua me rodea como un cancer"). Piñera blocks any possibility of escape: against the search for a past for the island by means of memory, he proclaims "The eternal misery that is the act of remembering" ("La eterna miseria que es el acto de recordar"; *La isla*, 37); against the possibility of announcing an idyllic origin for identity by

⁶ Several critics have recently started to pay attention to the circulatory movements in Piñera's works. For a Marxist perspective see Fernández del Alba. For a focus on the circulation of desire see Austin, and Cabrera Fonte.

means of transculturation, he reminds us that “certainly I must push myself to make clear the first carnal contact in this country, and the first death” (“ciertamente debo esforzarme a fin de poner en claro el primer contacto carnal en este país, y el primer muerto”; 38). Piñera painstakingly describes how limitations produce a U-turn, a backlash, feedback, a crash between subjects and the island’s borders, abrupt moments of recognition of the existence of those limitations:

Every man eating fragments of the island,
every man devouring the fruit, the rocks, the nutritious excrement.
Every man biting the place his shadow has just left,
every man ripping with his teeth the void where the sun usually is, ...
every man in the rancorous work of clipping
the edges of the world’s most beautiful island,
every man trying to shoo the wild animal with fireflies all across its back.

Cada hombre comiendo fragmentos de la isla,
cada hombre devorando los frutos, las piedras y el excremento nutritor.
Cada hombre mordiendo el sitio dejado por su sombra,
cada hombre lanzando dentelladas en el vacío donde el sol se acostumbra, (...)
cada hombre en el rencoroso trabajo de recortar
los bordes de la isla más bella del mundo,
cada hombre tratando de echar a andar a la bestia cruzada de cocuyos. (43)

The island is no longer a crystallization of an essence; it is a beast, a wild animal with fireflies across its back that needs to be moved along by people who live on it and who have a corporeal and embodied experience of this isolated and self-circulating mechanism. This wild animal has no essence, only a skin, and a limited one. The following is what the island does at noon.

The skin, at this time, extends itself like a reef,
and bites its own limitation,
the skin shouts like crazy, like a stuffed pig,
the skin tries to shade its clarity with palm leaves,
with hemp the wind carelessly brought.

La piel, en esta hora, se extiende como un arrecife
y muerde su propia limitación,
la piel se pone a gritar como una loca, como una puerca cebada,
la piel trata de tapar su claridad con pencas de palma,
con yaguas traídas distraídamente por el viento, ... (45)

Light is not a purveyor of truth anymore, bearer of reason or of any sign that may indicate a better future. It is something from which one must hide. Even the fact of being “enlightened,” having light shone upon the island, is also left behind.

Take cover! Take cover!

But the progressing clarity, invades
perversely, obliquely, perpendicularly,
clarity is an enormous sucker absorbing the shadow
and hands slowly reach the eyes, ...
A whole people may die of light, like dying of the plague.

¡Hay que tapar! ¡Hay que tapar!
Pero la claridad avanzada, invade
Perversamente, oblicuamente, perpendicularmente,
la claridad es una enorme ventosa que chupa la sombra,
y las manos van lentamente hacia los ojos, (...)
Todo un pueblo puede morir de luz como morir de peste. (45-6)

As García Chichester and O'Neill have argued, Piñera criticizes and negates themes such as insularism, negrismo, and Cubanness, all present in the *Minoristas* and the *Origenistas*. But again, his negation is only part of a diagnostic description of the mechanism of a change that lacks any type of transcendence. In "La isla en peso," Piñera transforms into a beast both Lezama's crystallized island and the *Minoristas*' exotic territory that were supposed to produce transcultural and criollo identities; it is instead a sun-stroked caiman in the water with people living on its skin, people living and dying and moving around under the lethal light. It is an immanent mechanism in apparently perpetual movement. This immanence, we have to point out, by no means indicates any hedonist predilection for sensuous and pleasurable experiences.⁷

⁷ This is also a common take on Piñera. "The characters in [Piñera's] writings 'enjoy their own selves' in the moment when and in the place where they are able to conceive themselves as incomplete sums of dispersed parts,

Against the transcendent vision of the island coming from his predecessors and contemporaries, Piñera points out the limits and sustains that reality is a corporeal experience—without grounding any principal in bodily pleasure specifically. As in his editorial, there is no hedonist manifesto, but a call to contemporary writers “to lead the way out of paralysis: to delve into ‘[...] the clash of passions, the contradiction of being.’ If Nothingness results from such exercise, so be it” (García Chichester 237)⁸

René’s Flesh

Piñera sees the limited hopes for Cuban poetic projects and the predictable clash against such ideas from his distanced analysis of poetry circles and their proposals. When he arrives in Buenos Aires on the first of his three trips he meets Gombrowicz, who had also been thinking about cultural circles and proclamations. Gombrowicz had also been seeing such phenomena from afar, first as a Polack who watched European metropolises, and then as an exile without the language spoken in a country in which even Cracow was seen as Europe. Piñera and Gombrowicz work together several times, not only around *Ferdydurke*’s translation but also on two single-issue literary journals: *Aurora—Revista de la Resistencia*, and *Victrola—Revista de la Insistencia*. The purpose of both was to shake up the literary establishments—the second journal’s title is a tongue-in-cheek reference to *Sur* journal’s founder Victoria Ocampo—from how dependent such establishments were to British and Parisian tastes and authorities.

surfaces or skins exposed to currents of influence, as accumulations that break up, as subjectivities that liberate themselves towards a radical passivity, and in that way they find their satisfaction in ‘low’ pleasures [placeres bajos” (Laddaga, 16)

⁸ I do not agree with García Chichester’s take of Piñera’s intentions as a call “for a moment of pause and self-reflection” (236) First, because this would be too Catholic for Piñera’s liking, and second, because the mechanism of change he envisions does not permit such pauses. As we will see ahead, an immanent contradiction in the system, something that does not appear in the poem but does in *La carne de René*, will be the place where Piñera’s position will establish itself from then on.

According to Gombrowicz, these inferiorities had to be attacked through distancing, reversal, and degradation (Epps). Piñera, however, is not so interested in the inferiority complex of establishments or institutions that look for transcendent ideals in the metropolis. He is not interested in the search for superiority or stability, but instead in what happens to the subject when it realizes that those ideals can never be reached, that the space where the movement toward such dreams of transcendence occur is always already limited, thus that the system is closed, and that the game is lost from the beginning because the goals are impossible to reach. The subject is contained in a closed form.

That is the reason why Piñera is seen as a pessimist, as an automatic antagonist, as a systematic naysayer, and as someone with a very difficult personality. But what is important to make clear is that the imagined space in which the movement of ideals and realities happen is different for Piñera than for Gombrowicz. For the latter the space where the dialectics of life and society happen is unlimited, or at the very least is left unquestioned. This movement allows change, if by change we understand a relaxation of the dialectic tension and renewal of its poles. There is an apparently unending space that frames the fluidity of the subject. One can *get out of* the sphere and go to *some other place*. For Piñera, on the other hand, the dialectic movement of innovation and obsolescence is inside a limited space, as we have seen in his editorials and in “La isla en peso.” As a result, the impulses of transcendence of a subject’s transformative process are also inside that space. *They are part of such space*. If there are some instances of escape in Gombrowicz’s dialectical plot, for Piñera the conflict arising from the impossibility of escaping is an inbuilt characteristic of social and psychic space, and the same goes for the drives towards transcendence. That is why Piñera is not negating them, he is simply pointing out they are there, that they are in fact an unavoidable part of the space where the subject circulates and interacts.

We need to read Piñera's work, then, as submerged in a limited and constricted space and permanently conscious of that fact. Only by permitting the possibility of escape—even the notion of escape itself—will we see Piñera's work as a systemic negation, an exacerbated pessimism and a futureless nihilism. But when doing so, one is assuming a bigger totality that includes yet surpasses the limited space where Piñera's characters function. In contrast, if we understand totality itself as limited, we will see how the characters' dramas consist in the conflicts with and hopes for various types of transcendence, and how those hopes are cut off when the limits of totality are reached. Therefore we must read *La carne de René* as the "Bildungsroman" of a subject immersed in a constricted space, and not in the space that underpins Gombrowicz's absurdist Bildungsroman. A subject immersed in that limited space is not a romantic type of subject—there is no sublime, no infinity—; instead, its very own existence comes from this conflict with limitation. But this does not mean everything has ended.

Even though the following quotation is a later text that appears in a 1956 issue of *Ciclón*—the literary journal that comes after *Orígenes*—it shows how Piñera by then regards limitations and borders as something built into the subject. This is what he has to say about Freud:

Freud is a great artist insofar as he is an interpreter of the obscure psychic life of man. His powerful fantasy, which situates him among the great artists of all times, leads him, with the power of a wizard, to the construction of a world that is just as implacably logical as it is implacably illogical. As if Freud had seen himself constrained by the psychic material with which he operated to recover his findings with the fabulous powder extracted from this very material. (Piñera and Gingerich 117)

Piñera finds the same constraints Freud found.⁹ And like Freud, he too was a powerful wizard able to extract the fabulous powder from that same material, constructing powerful fantasies—although not very pleasant ones. And of course, one of his most powerful fantasies, which lies between his editorials and his poem on the one hand, and his comments of Freud on the other, is *La carne de René*.

In general terms, if there is a final anagnorisis for Piñera's characters, it is precisely realizing there is nothing else beyond what lies in front of them, and that even that is not infinite. These conclusions, and the fight against them, are not dramatized at the level of ideas or ideological clashes. Instead, we see the drama in what is most immediate, on the body itself. The body turns into the synecdoche of the limited space. When the hopes of transcendence vanish the body turns into the field where change and feedback happen. And of course, those changes are neither fluid nor temperate. That is why all throughout Piñera's work we find episodes of cannibalism, self-mutilation, of torture, of extreme pain, of churning of the flesh and of subjectivity itself. A limitation of space forces the subject to crash against the borders of the possible and to renounce the space of the ideal, of the movement of ideas and concepts away from the body. Since the only space that remains is the space of the body, the consequences of that crash produce suffering and the consumption of the subject itself.

Piñera's novel begins on René's twentieth birthday, when his father reveals to him the great family secret: He will be the heir of the Cause, and thus he will need to learn the path of the flesh.¹⁰ The Cause is the Cause for Chocolate, a selected few who want to swamp society with chocolate, and battle in an extemporal worldwide struggle with those who want to prohibit

⁹ See Cabrera Fonte for a short interpretation of Piñera in terms of Freud, Lacan and Butler.

¹⁰ In Spanish *Carne* means both "flesh" and "meat." Piñera plays with this ambivalence constantly, blending the economic, religious, moral and corporal aspects of *Carne*. In part it is precisely these complex convolutions that make a possible meaning of the novel so hard to pin down.

chocolate consumption. In order to pursue the fight, the heir of the Cause—as well as any important member both of the Cause and of the society of the parallel reality where this story happens—must follow the Ministry of the flesh: a fight, a constant resistance with the flesh and against it. René asks what the fight’s end is, its meaning and its purpose. His father does not tell him, since he answers with a rhetorical question that reveals how absurd such a line of questioning is for him: “What does that mean, your body whole? So, if you don’t want it damaged, what are you keeping it for?” (Piñera and Schafer, 16). (“¿Qué significa el cuerpo intacto? Si no lo quieres vulnerado, ¿a qué lo destinamos?”; *La carne*, 21). The purpose of the Cause for Chocolate is not clear either, since it is a fighting ideal that even the same leaders of the Cause do not believe in. The only thing they—and we—know is that a long time ago the clash required people of both sides of the fight to pursue and flee from each other. But now, for René, it will only entail a constant flight.

In contrast to any traditional narrative, there is no transcendent value, there is no horizon or objective René should reach or achieve, except for the Cause and the cult of the flesh. That is why René constantly escapes, but always ends up returning to them, even if he profoundly despises them. If Kowalski was dragged by a third element foreign to the dialectic, René has no such luck. He does not want to be heir of the Cause, much less to go to the school for pain—in charge of educating those who will serve the movement—nor does he want to be the sexual object for Mrs. Dalia, René’s middle-aged neighbor. However, he must live through all those experiences even if he never wants to do so. Time and time again, in almost every single chapter, René is vanquished by the Cause and the Path of the Flesh.

Predictably, readers can identify with René even without having any transcendent goals to share with him, because readers are also constantly vanquished in their attempts to make sense

of what the Cause and the Path of the Flesh mean for René or for the world he lives in: the text quickly precludes every attempt of finding meaning. Every chapter is full of contradictions between what was said before and what is later affirmed about the flesh. Equivalences quickly reveal themselves as wrong; analogies only prevail for a short time, and the reader is confronted with the idea that maybe nothing can be extrapolated from the idea of flesh itself.

As an example, let us look at the possibility of understanding the Path of the Flesh and the School of Pain as some kind of preparation against the torture René would endure if he were caught by the opposite side.¹¹ First we will see that the members of the Cause are never tortured by their enemies, they are only persecuted in order to be shot or blown to pieces. There is no need for a torture school. Second, Swyne, the Priest of the school of pain and advocate of the Ministry of the Flesh, clearly denies this as the school's purpose: "We aren't fakirs who master pain; it is pain that masters us...pain is our star and it will guide us over this tempestuous sea" (73-74) ("Nosotros no somos fakirs que dominamos el dolor. Es el dolor quien nos domina.... el dolor es nuestra estrella y nos guiará en este mar tempestuoso"; 76) For Swyne the important thing is to be sensitive to pain, and when René seems to toughen up and "cool down" his flesh/meat, the reader arrives to the most graphic scene in the novel: the orgy and communal licking of René's body in order to tenderize him down. In another interpretation (Laddaga), it does not seem possible either that René would just want to simply escape pain and look instead for pleasure, because after sleeping with Mrs. Dalia he feels the same as he felt after the orgy:

By two paths as antithetical as pain and pleasure one arrived at a single devastating truth; that flesh was the driving force of life ... Without flesh, the game was over. Play ball! In

¹¹ This is Fernandez del Alba's interpretation.

the end, what was the difference between Swyne's horrible flesh licking the hardened flesh of René and Dalia's perfumed flesh...? (148-149)

Por dos vías antitéticas como dolor y placer, se arribaba a una desoladora verdad única: que la carne era el motor de la vida... Sin la carne no había vida posible. Ninguna diferencia había entre la horrible carne de Cochón (...) y la perfumada de Dalia. (141)

What René basically wishes for is to be left alone. He does not want any more teachers. In one of the few moments when René attempts to plan his life—instead of fleeing—he seems to want to simply be a good citizen, a good and efficient worker able to earn some money—the bourgeois subject. But the Cause and the flesh/meat does not permit him to do so.

It seemed that the only way one could pass through life with flying colors was by avoiding the flesh of one's fellow men and women. But how? Was some people's flesh so dependent on the flesh of others that at a certain stage in life (yes, life) it caused one flesh to collide with another, or one flesh with two pieces of flesh, or four, or ten, a hundred, a thousand, a million? ... He saw his poor flesh running into an army of millions of pieces of flesh; he saw his flesh embedded in those pieces of flesh ... (139)

Le parecía que el modo de salir airoso en la carrera de la vida, consistía en evitar la carne de sus semejantes. Pero ¿cómo hacerlo? Tan dependiente era una carne de la otra que se imponía, a cierta altura de la vida, el choque de una con otra, o de una carne con cuatro o con diez, con mil o con un millón... Vio su pobre carne chocando contra un ejército de millones de carnes; vio su carne incrustada en otras carnes. (134)

The flesh/meat and the Cause do not let him follow his plans, but they do not give him the option of understanding why he has to do what they order either. With no transcendent objective, the space of the flesh is limited, and inside it there is only the clash of one piece of meat with another. Even the ideas of victory and of failure, which would seem logical the Cause would enforce, are replaced by the ideas of persecution and escape. The following dialogue between René and his double—someone who has been transformed in order to resemble René, losing his own identity in the process—clearly reveals this limitation of spaces and finalities.

“You have a nearly one hundred percent probability of perishing on the run”. . . .

“Imagine that even now the teeth are approaching your flesh, that the distance is shortening, that you, without violating the norms and precepts of flight, are losing ground, and that in the end you fall to the sharpened fangs, just like your father. Oh, what a beautiful day! How beautiful! How beautiful!”

“You said something about norms and precept,” René noted, thinking he had found a saving loophole.

“That's right,” explained the old man. “All flesh, while desiring to be ripped to pieces, must defend its ground tooth and nail.”

“To what point, sir?” René yelled, beside himself.

“Ah! There's the hitch. To what point . . . Why, until there isn't an inch of ground on which to stand (. . .] the Cause orders one to run until an insurmountable obstacle obliges the flesh to abandon the race.”

“And then?” René asked longingly.

“Then the flesh sings its swan song. It's the moment of truth.”

“I see,” and René let out a sigh. “But tell me: Don't you take justice into account?”

“There's no such thing as justice, chief. There is only flesh” (234-235)

-Tiene tantas probabilidades de perecer en la carrera—confirmó con inenarrable energía.

-Piense que los dientes casi alcanzan su carne, que la distancia se acorta, que sin violar las normas y preceptos de la huida, va perdiendo terreno, y que, al fin, cae bajo los afilados colmillos, lo mismo que su padre. ¡Oh, qué hermoso día, qué hermoso!

-Ha dicho usted algo de normas y preceptos—apuntó René creyendo encontrar un resquicio salvador.

-Así es—explicó. Toda carne, al mismo tiempo que anhela ser despedazada, debe defender el terreno palmo a palmo.

-¿Hasta dónde, señor?—vociferó René fuera de sí.

-He ahí el problema. Hasta dónde... Pues hasta que no exista un palmo de tierra en que posar la planta. (...) la Causa manda que se corra hasta que un obstáculo infranqueable obligue a la carne a detener su carrera.

-¿Y entonces...?—preguntó René anhelante.

-Entonces la carne entona su canto de cisne. Es el momento supremo.

-Pero dígame: ¿no se toma en cuenta la justicia?

-No hay justicia, jefe, sólo hay carne—concluyó. Salirse de los límites de la carne significa caer en el vacío y en la anfibología. No se haga ilusiones. Sólo hay el choque de una carne con otra carne. (207-8)

We find negation and absurdity, common descriptors for Piñera. We also find the limitation of space and the entailing suffering of the subject that confronts such a reality. “La isla en peso” is latent in the novel’s topography: if the Cause is a worldwide phenomenon and there is no such thing as victory or any transcendent ideal, the world is then an island; the world is that wild animal where humans live and die. Consider the mechanism of poetic change, where there is no such thing as a constantly-innovating and image-producing language able to fill the empty space of the island’s past. The falseness of such hopes, pointed out by Piñera in *Poeta*, we see literally become flesh. The students listening to Swyne’s sermon do so “with beaming faces. Softened, mashed, ground down, squashed, but... modern, always modern” (95) (“con cara de felicidad; ablandados, machacados, molidos, comprimidos, pero modernos, siempre modernos”; 95). This is the same way Piñera described years before the decay of the expressive possibilities of poetic language. If for Piñera in *Poeta* language was “already done, finished, embossed and chiseled,” for Piñera in *La carne de René*, years later, this problem has reached the flesh: students have been carved and deformed, and even modernity is a byproduct of this churning, a product that hides obsolescence with a mirage of innovation.

This has happened thanks to Piñera’s contact with Gombrowicz. Before going to Buenos Aires, Piñera claimed that poetry suffered from a stagnation hidden by an apparent creative mechanism of production of a national past. A false sense of avant-garde turned into a foundational fiction what in reality was language’s immobility. After translating Kowalski’s struggles into Spanish, this stagnation jumps from poetry and space to the level of life itself. Furthermore, if the problem was before on the level of the island’s poetry, after *Ferdydurke* it appears in the entire world, in the sociality of the subject, in its search for meaning, and in the search for the sense of history.

But here ends the coupling between Kowalski's fight with society and Piñera's mechanism of poetic change. If Kowalski escapes because there is always one more dialectic to move into, the imagining of space found in "La isla en peso" does not permit such a thing. At the end of Piñera's novel, after talking to his double and coming to terms with the ever-present flight from the Cause and from the flesh, René meets with Polawski, a character who at the beginning of the novel was to be murdered by the antagonists of the Cause. Polawski the jeweler—do we need to point out that Gombrowicz the *Polack* is who creates *Kowalski*?—tells René:

Now you are truly made of flesh. A few months ago, you were made of a collection of inanities that need not be enumerated....Give up your false convictions, which even you don't believe. Don't act like a fool as far as your flesh is concerned. (253)

Al presente es usted de carne. Meses atrás estaba hecho de unas cuantas idioteces que no tengo por qué enumerar. (...) Déjese de falsas creencias (...) Falsas creencias, en las que ni usted mismo cree. No se haga el bobo a propósito de la carne. (224)

We could interpret this as Piñera seeking protection under and an answer from Gombrowicz's authority, but only until we remember that René does not want any more teachers. *Ferdydurke*'s ending leaves Kowalski staring at the sky begging for the Third Man to come. The novel ends with that expectancy, as if the subject's patience and fluidity were the solutions to a life amidst constant dialectical tensions lacking any final objectives. But not even this hope exists for René.

For a moment, René contemplated Dalia. He appealed to the heavens for some saving grace but the heavens remained sparkling bright. Its bulge didn't burst to let the miracle through. Then René appealed to himself. He contemplated his body in the vain hope of being able to offer it to Dalia, but his imploring gaze found nothing but flesh for torture. (255)

Por un instante, René contempló a Dalia y se alejó después. Clamó al cielo por un socorro salvador, y el cielo permaneció destellante. Su comba no se abrió para dar paso al milagro. Entonces, recurrió a sí mismo. Contempló su cuerpo en el espejo de una tienda, en la vana esperanza de ofrecérselo a Dalia. Sólo carne de tortura halló su mirada implorante. (226)

Heaven, the sign of transcendence if there is one, does not open itself. After crying for salvation and receiving no answer, Piñera leaves Gombrowicz's solution behind. Dalia, who previously treated René as a sexual object and who was his teacher with regard to pleasure, seems to be the next logical solution for René: turn himself into a pleasure object. But again, not even this works, because when looking in the mirror he only finds meat/flesh for torture.

It is tempting to see here Piñera the absurdist and the pessimist. But Piñera is neither preacher nor desperate messiah, but someone who describes processes of circulation within the closed container that is reality. Piñera is imagining a subject in a world where the progressive accumulation of moments of conflict produces the elements that construct him; where pain and the feedback that run through both space and the body construct an immanent meaning of life for René and for the subjects who live in that parallel world. That is the same way that the island's

identity was constructed in “La isla en peso.” And like Ti Noël, he is “a body of flesh to which things had happened” (“un cuerpo de carne transcurrida”).

In Piñera, Cartesian subjects that begin with a methodical doubt about comprehending reality—and which have a clear-cut difference between mind and body—not only because the attributes of extension are themselves present in mental processes within subjects, but also because the subjects themselves do not begin their exploration of reality with security and plenitude. Subjects have a conflict in their core, a radical pain from which the only possible understanding of the world comes alive.

If Gombrowicz trusts the subjects’ malleability to wait for the Third Man who will release them from the dialectic and put them in another one, Piñera soon realizes that such malleability, as happened in the case of poetic language, hides a process of fossilization left unquestioned by Gombrowicz given his faith in the unlimited space where dialectics occur. For Piñera, the islander, space does have limits, and the strategies Gombrowicz uses to deal with the dialectic—histrionics, theatricality, confession, self-awareness, irony—do not work. When the space is limited the surroundings soon turn against the subject, and the body will be the one that receives the shocks of tensions and backlashes of the constrictive movement. If we are to see Piñera’s novel as a Bildungsroman, the final anagnorisis that gives René his adulthood is the realization that there is nothing else than flesh/meat and what one may do with it, on it, or against it.

This carnal monism in which meat, flesh and mind are one, portrays the subject as moving in a contained and saturated space where the division between subject and reality is eerily diffuse. In an attempt to escape from culture, where vaporous ideas had brought only hypocrisy, Gombrowicz depicted reality as a space where ideas, customs and concepts had a

tactile presence that pushed and deformed the “face,” the surface of the subject, the membrane that separates the subject from the world. When Piñera extrapolates this somewhat tactile imaginary into the Island’s circulation of ideas about poetry, he arrives to a point where everything is saturated, so much so that he unavoidably reaches a painful stasis because of the carnal monism he invokes. Gombrowicz rehashes the dialectic: from the idealism’s opposites into a battle against a liquid force—the subject does not enter a battle against a consolidated opposite or antagonist, but a ductile and malleable blob that surrounds it and deforms it. Piñera limits and encloses this battle against the blob. In contrast to Kowalski, and in contrast to Ti Noël, both of whom have still space to move and reactivate the dialectic, René cannot do this anymore. Just like what happens to solipsist accounts, René’s story is solipsism turned flesh.

2. HÉCTOR ROJAS HERAZO: PAINTING AN UNLETTERED CARIBBEAN

The constricted space of the subject in Virgilio Piñera seems not to be a problem in Héctor Rojas Herazo's case. The constraints he finds are at the level of artistic genres and the social and cultural repercussions they have when trying to become part of a community or a nation. His initial impulse then will be to thin down the difference between genres, which will take him to imagine a world without strict divisions and categorizations. This envisioning will in turn become not a carnal monism, as in Piñera's case, but a portrayal of the world as a living organism. In it, the living subject is marooned from his place in the nation, and instead survives and lives its life by seeing the world as a composition of images, of memories that build a community from the ground up.

The Origins of the Unlettered Caribbean

It is difficult to say when the thinning down of artistic genres begins in Rojas Herazo's work. He never articulated formally his position with respect to the preceding arts or to his contemporaries, he did not write programmatic essays, manifestos, or "theoretical" chapters or sections in his novels. We must then start by recovering scattered images from his newspaper chronicles, which never were more than two pages long. We need to jump from one piece to another and attempt to tell a story that seems it was never intended to be told in a lineal, rigorous and formalized argument. So, as we will see below, I am betraying Rojas Herazo's proposal by formalizing a continuous attempt against formality.

Héctor Rojas Herazo was born in Tolú, a small coastal town in the Caribbean. When he was nineteen years old and without finishing high-school, he left for Cartagena, where he started to write for some of the city's newspapers. Soon he did so for papers in other cities (Barranquilla,

Cali, Bogotá), while publishing his first book of poetry in 1952. During the 1950s and early 1960s he was an assiduous literary, film, art, and music critic, as well as a reporter of social and cultural events in the Colombian Caribbean, no matter if they were art exhibitions, high-society balls or popular carnivals. He published his first novel in 1962 (*Respirando el verano*, Breathing in the Summer), which takes place in Cedrón, a fictional coastal town where the events of his second novel will also take place. With that novel, *En noviembre llega el arzobispo*, Rojas Herazo won the Esso Novel Prize of 1967, and for a few months was the record-breaking bestseller in Colombian literary history (a couple of months later his friend and colleague Gabriel García Márquez published *Cien años de soledad* in Buenos Aires). Until that time he had balanced his work as a journalist with his work as a poet, novelist and painter, but after 1968 he stopped writing for newspapers and magazines, his poems stopped appearing in poetry journals and he turned to painting. After Spanish dictator Francisco Franco died he went to live in Madrid, where he published in 1986 his third and last novel, the nine-hundred-page *Celia se pudre*, (*Celia Goes Rotten*). The novel did not receive the attention he hoped for from the public nor from the critics, and Rojas Herazo returned to painting until his death in Bogotá in 2002.

Most of the critics who try to explain Rojas Herazo's work begin with his poetry. After all he made his name first as a poet, and his newspaper articles were only published in a collected form in 2003. But this approach leads us to a blind alley because Colombian poetry is the most consolidated, scrutinized, and institutionalized of all of its artistic practices. Poets have always been their own critics, and Colombian poetic history and criticism limit their discussions to intra-generic forms and influences.¹ Approaching him from the fields of visual arts or narrative is equally frustrating because he is also read according to intra-generic influences: in the histories

¹ See Romero; Carranza. In the latter, all the critics and historians who collaborate in the book are poets mentioned in other sections, except for Romero himself.

of the novel and of the arts, Rojas Herazo is at most a secondary figure, and he is only included in one of the anthologies of Colombian journalism.²

Several reasons can account for such a minimal presence of Rojas Herazo in these histories. The first one is that all of these histories assume crisp separations between the arts, and thus concordances with their respective objectives. This happens both because of their approach to their field of study and because of the set of parameters they use to grant value: the Colombian poetic tradition concedes value to the poets, usually thanks to the way these same poets read their tradition, that is, themselves. And the same goes for painting and for fiction. This entails that the works that do not fit into such fields of study are not taken into account. This is the case of Rojas Herazo.

A second reason is because Rojas Herazo's journalism has not been considered as part of his oeuvre. As we will see, precisely this facet will allow us to understand the relation between all the artistic genres Rojas Herazo practices, the underlying organicist conception of reality he assumes in order to do so, and the intellectual background that will guide his own project into failure. Furthermore, his journalism will also allow us to perceive a third possible and crucial explanation for his dismissal as a writer and artist: while fusing genres prescribed by modern narrative practices, he rebels against the longed-for unified national imaginary that is present in all those historical accounts. Due to their need to portray a unified nation, these narratives leave aside the deep gap that exists between the Colombian Caribbean and Colombia's political and national center, Bogotá. As I will show, it is precisely that difference, and the search for a marked contrast between the region and the Capital—along with all the political order and history that

² Fiction: Menton (*Novela*), who describes him as a minor “satellite” in the García Márquez—the Sun’s—orbit. Arbeláez Pinto reads him as a cynic and a nihilist because he does not produce clear interpretations of the country’s problems. Painting: Medina, Márceles Daconte. Journalism: Samper Pizano. Vallejo Mejía is the one who includes Rojas Herazo in an anthology. Gonzalo España writes a short report on Rojas Herazo's journalism.

this implies—what pushes forward the intellectual and artistic production of Caribbean writers and artists at the time, writers and artists who, like Rojas Herazo, come from the rural Colombian Caribbean.³ For Rojas Herazo, the image of the Caribbean will be a rural place from where rural-based arts grow. This contrast between the region and the capital will be one of the very few contrasts he will concede in his organicist worldview. A contrast that he needs for positioning himself as a rural Caribbean writer, but which in the end will bring his project's failure.

The Capital's Formality and Caribbean Ductility

In the early 1950s what was most immediate for Rojas Herazo was his place as a rural, Caribbean poet in Colombia. In 1955, and again in 1969, he published an article titled *Nuestro "lindo" país* (Our "Cute" Country). In it he complained that Colombia was a country for "people who write 'nicely'." The prose of those who owned the country was "all about footlights. It was a matter of knowing by memory the make-up tricks and the tiny proscenium light bulbs. It was a matter, in sum, of good style and better spelling" ("es cuestión de candilejas. Cuestión de saberse de memoria los trucos de maquillaje y las bombillitas de proscenio. Cuestión, en suma, de buena redacción y mejor ortografía"; *Vigilia* 386). Since the Thirties, Rojas Herazo continues, the Spanish language has been getting "in shape," "in tune with a swell of events that, almost abruptly, have forced it to a calisthenics of intention and plasticity, for which its antique pride and antique skeleton is not useful anymore" ("a tono con un oleaje de acontecimientos que, casi de golpe, lo han obligado a una calistenia, de intención y plasticidad, para la cual casi no le sirve

³ It is this same drive for difference which underlies the efforts to rescue and publish Rojas Herazo's journalism, carried out by Jorge García Usta. Along with him, a major part of the academic efforts in the region have focused on this search for identity as radically different from Bogotá. See the journal *Huellas*, and the publications of *Observatorio del Caribe Colombiano*, whose investigative award is called the "Héctor Rojas Herazo" Prize. It is revealing—in a troubling way—that one of the prerequisites to participate in the prize is to be "from the Colombian Caribbean region, or be able to attest a continuous presence of five years in it, by a notarized affidavit" ("oriund[o] de la región Caribe colombiana, o quienes acrediten una permanencia continua de 5 años en ella, a través de declaración juramentada ante notario.") (http://www.ocaribe.org/descargar_archivo.php?id=5. June 28, 2010)

su antiguo orgullo y orgulloso esqueleto”; 386-7). Spanish has had to “peek out and see what is going on, what is really happening in the immense urban garages, in those concentration camps, in those ten-story bedrooms, in those horrible bureaucratic universes where the anonymous, common man is less relevant than a rock or a larva” (“asomarse a ver qué ocurre, qué es lo que realmente está sucediendo en esos grandes garajes urbanos, en esos campos de concentración, en esas alcobas de décimo piso, en esos terribles universos burocráticos, en los cuales al hombre corriente, el anónimo, se le tiene menos en cuenta que un pedrusco o una larva”; 387).

In an international and panoramic literary context, Rojas Herazo was referring to the contact with “Anglo-American literature which has opened huge holes, windows of wonder” in the Spanish language (“literatura anglo-americana [que] le ha abierto unos huecotes, unos ventanales de asombro”). It would be easy then to see Rojas Herazo as the typical peripheral writer who watched the developed North in the hopes of modernizing Colombian literature, no matter that such a modernization would bring the same problems these literatures and cultures have had to deal with after the end of the Enlightenment project.⁴ But seeing him under such a light would be a mistake. In order to understand Rojas Herazo’s position we need to imagine him as a somewhat untimely journalist; someone who did not share the normative aesthetics of modernity, not because he may have been critical of it, but because he had not lived through it in the same way as the North. Of course, he knew that exceptions always abound in generic categorizations. But in contrast to the European or North American common narrative, the dissolution of categories was not an effect of the ongoing crisis of humanity and of the sense of

⁴ This is precisely how he is seen by narrative (Fajardo, Sarmiento) and poetry (García Maffla y Arévalo) critics and historians. Sarmiento and Cárdenas consider him a second-degree member of the group around the journal *Mito*, people who, in contrast to the archaic formalizers of the *Piedra y Cielo* group, retreat to the daily experiences of the simple man. Menton describes his novels as a previous—though unsuccessful—attempt to do what *Cien años de soledad* achieved: the crafting of a mythical region that churns out the continent's history into a narrative. (*Respirando; Novela*)

history due to the two world wars. It was precisely the opposite: just when outside Colombia the dilution of genres became patent and was seen as a symptom of a crisis, inside Colombia the conservative and catholic structures of power were starting to crack. These structures have always been centralized in the Capital and envisioned as means of achieving a national imaginary. Thus, with the cracking of the restrictive, conservative, catholic and centralized forms and orders, a hope of freedom was perceived. If on an international level there was restlessness due to the crisis of categories in the arts and reality itself—how to hang on to the volatile world “where everything solid turns into air”—, in the Colombian Caribbean this dilution was felt as a breath of fresh air amidst which arts and genres seek to lose their norms, formalities and restrictions. And along with that feeling of liberation in the arts, an exaltation of freedom and mobility in life itself also arrived.

Rojas Herazo used journalism to exalt this sense of freedom, and it quickly became the substrate and foundation of his art—and not the accessory that usually facilitates the artist’s or the work of art’s positioning within an established artistic field. Journalism, characterized by its need to blend a pluralized and heterogeneous reality into a narrative, allowed Rojas Herazo to see and understand the world’s complexities that had recently started to enter Colombia. It gave him both the tools to evaluate different artistic and literary traditions, as well as an *ethos* to help him differentiate himself from intellectuals from inner Colombia and from their normalizing practices, and lastly and mostly, a reason to live in a world flooded by death—on a national and on an international level.

In fact, the commonality in his 550-plus articles written between his beginnings as a poet and journalist in 1944 until the publication of *En noviembre llega el arzobispo* in 1967 is a constant search for a language that portrays his worldview as an expansive continuum. This is

because the dichotomy that matters most for Rojas Herazo is not *modernity* versus *tradition*, but instead what I will call *restrictive formalization* versus *expansive mobility*. According to this dichotomy, which works as a pervasive cognitive metaphor aligning all of Rojas Herazo's interests, form is a burdensome and menacing constriction of reality, while mobility is characterized by its fluidity and vitality, a freedom to approach the continuum that is existence. And this dichotomy, not always easily superimposed to the one of modernity and tradition, is born from a set of immediate and very particular imperatives.

Let us continue with the article about his “cute” country. Against a literature by the country's owners, one made out of footlights, make-up tricks, out of good style and proper spelling, Rojas Herazo states that Spanish has had to get into shape in order to confront the swell of events it was not previously prepared to handle. He does not explain what he really means by that. His observation of a language of footlights is not very clear either, and it is difficult to understand what he means by a language doing exercise. This is because language is not the real problem in the article. Rojas Herazo talks about language in order to *portray* what he really wants to show: a scene from Bogotá's closed society, full of mannerisms, of “apocryphal Victorianism,” of “backroom Versailles-ism” (“victorianismo apócrifo”; “versallismo de trastienda”; 386). He is showing a portrait of a society that places its values of formality and hyper-correction on manners and protocol above everything else, and because of it the archaic language they esteem is just a whiplash of this stagnation. The condemnation of the normality of life is the real topic, and language's hyper-formality is one of its consequences.

Even more, if we look at this nice-writing character, we will see he “uses adjectives and direct objects as if they were tailoring gadgets ... he writes little, deceitful greeting articles and sews rhetorical shavings as if he were sewing delicacies” (“usa los adjetivos y los complementos

directos como si fuesen adminículos de sastrería...escribe articulitos saludadores y teje virutería retórica como si fuesen primores de costurero”; *ibid.*). He is the writer of “good morning,” “please grace us with your presence,” “this is what people say, but please do not believe me” (*ibid.*). What starts as a description of a language that is to be abolished, transforms itself into scenes of spaces where socialization occurs. These oral expressions, typical of 1950’s Bogotá, are used to portray writers who precisely because of their hyper-formality would never dare to use them in their writings. Against these “niceties” Rojas Herazo concludes that writers should attempt “the essential. Let us forget the sewing-room talk, chocolate-drinking gossip in order to peek through the large windows of language into real human beings, in their stubborn efforts of enjoyment, poverty and agony” (“...en lo esencial. Olvidarnos del costurero, de la chismografía de chocolate, para asomarnos, por los grandes ventanales del idioma, a ver al hombre verdadero en su terca tarea de gozo, de pobredumbre [sic] y agonía” 387).

It is indeed a flawed piece of writing: Rojas Herazo seems to oppose form to essence, but essence is left undefined.⁵ In contrast, there is a vigorous language, in shape and ready to deal with world events and allowing us to see “real human beings, in their stubborn efforts of enjoyment, poverty and agony.” Without this last sentence in which a placid future of transcendence is undercut, the article would seem to repeat what Baudelaire or Rimbaud denounced almost a hundred years earlier about Romanticism, or what the Avant-gardes criticized about Hispanic American *Modernismo*: their attempt to return to essence and vitality, but producing in fact classicisms, each of them restrictive, hyper-formal and degraded in

⁵ Furthermore, a macho specter seems to haunt it, because spaces like the sewing-room and the custom of drinking hot chocolate are all stereotypically feminine spaces in which said gossip is cultivated—another stereotype. But Rojas Herazo criticizes Bogotá’s feminine spaces not because they are feminine, but because they are from Bogotá, seeing them as closed and non-vital. As we will soon see, the human ideal—men and women—is one of vitality, constant creation, freedom from forms. For articles relating to women creators, see “La pintura de Cecilia Porras” (*Vigilia*, 437-438), “Meira del Mar” (*Vigilia*, 94-95), “Una escultora de América para el mundo: Marina Núñez de Prado” (*Vigilia*, 511-513).

different but precise ways.

In the same vein as the ideological crises happening in the Northern Hemisphere, the article would appear to be a simple critical reaction to a decadent bourgeoisie. But if we first emphasize the inter-regional context, and only afterwards we contrast it with the general trends of Twentieth-Century literature, we will be able to perceive traces of an effort to imagine the vitalist, organism-like Caribbean reality in which human beings and nature are immanently interconnected with one another—like organs in an organism—, in a very different way than the one ruled by the tradition-versus-modernity dichotomy coming from Bogotá. By connecting his Caribbean imaginary with the drive toward form liberation, Rojas Herazo pursued an alternative path from the Romantic return to essence. But this begs the question: If Romanticism is not his antagonist, against what is Rojas Herazo fighting?

As Erna von der Walde synthesizes it (*Limpia; Macondismo*), *La Regeneración*—an elite group of grammarians and poets who governed the country from Bogotá, guided by Miguel Antonio Caro during the second half of the Nineteenth-Century—constructed an idea of a conservative, Catholic nation which traced its origins and authority to Spanish imperial past. Worried about a possible degeneration of Spanish language hegemony in the continent that would parallel what happened to Latin in Europe, the *Letrado* project used grammar, and the study and “proper” use of Spanish as a nation-building mechanism that should stand against liberal and positivist ideas by then traveling throughout the area, and from which they wanted to *regenerate* the country. However, it very quickly turned into a system of social, political, and regional exclusion.

Language turns into the predominance with which a social class governs and excludes, and it is far from being the unifying character of all Colombians, no matter how was

citizenship understood at the time. Idiomatic correction becomes a social norm, the place of access to a political power which in many cases goes hand in hand with a radical profession of ultramontane Catholicism and absolute rejection of modern ideas.

Grammarians, in alliance with prelates, construe a lettered city that is a fortified city, accessible only through the paths of grammatical regime and construction. A city in which the Letter is used to talk about the Letter in order to regulate it and normalize it. Beyond this city is the real country. The Regime of the Letter excludes what is said outside of the lettered city, because it is not said correctly. (Walde *Macondismo*, 229. My trans.)

Only after the 1930s did Colombia grant full access to the Liberal modernization project—which precisely entered through the Caribbean coast into the capital. The Regime of the Letter, however, continued during the time, and arguably the infamous *Violencia* was in part born from this systematic exclusion of regions and communities framed as an exclusion of incorrect grammar and speech. Rojas Herazo and his peers in Barranquilla and Cartagena were acutely conscious of the difficulties they needed to overcome in order to gain access to the lettered city, not only because they were *costeños*—from the Coast—and hence linguistically suspect in the eyes of writers in Bogotá, but because they were from the Caribbean countryside in the eyes of urban *costeño* intellectuals.

It has been said that the main ideological drives for the new generations of intellectuals since the literary nineteenth-century in Hispanic America were liberalism, positivism, hopes for modernization and *Modernismo's* opening to and versatility of themes and styles. It has also been said that the attempts made by these new generations to break down the Lettered City's doors—

or at least gain access to it—(Rama), were motivated by the desire of being welcomed into and becoming part of it, because these generations considered themselves the guarantors of change and modernization. However, what happens when poets like Rojas Herazo want to enter the decadent city but are not infused by the spirit of modernization or by hopes of a better future, but rather with tools and aspirations forged amidst the disenchantment of a previous decadence? What happens if a poet who comes from a tradition which had already lived throughout decadence wants to go into a city that has not realized it is living in another one?

Cartagena de Indias was the stronghold of the Spanish Crown in Continental South America. Gold and silver coming from the Andean region was stored there to be loaded into galleons that would later stop in Havana to gather New Spain's silver and carry it to Cádiz. Thus, the more Spain lost its imperial power the more Cartagena lost its relevance. The fortified city during the Independence period almost became a ghost town, enclosed within itself, with a traditionalist high class of emergent landowners of large estates who looked toward Bogotá only as a last instance, obviously preferring commercial contacts with Kingston, Havana and New Orleans (Posada-Carbó). By the 1940s, when Rojas Herazo arrived in Cartagena from Tolú, the old-fashioned city and its literary and intellectual groups were loaded with values and precepts ironically similar to the ones from Bogotá, although theirs arose in colonial times.

The stark difference was one poet, Luis Carlos “One-eyed” López (1879-1950), a circumspect city figure, son of middle-class merchants, and always conscious of how irrelevant Cartagena was for the rest of the country. With his poems he made constant mockery of city characters, no matter what social class they belonged to or how “well-spoken” they were. His most famous poem, “A mi ciudad nativa,” describes a decayed city: once a witness of splendidous days, he says, the city today only lives of past glories. Regardless, the poet loves it

in a comfortable manner, the same way one may love “old shoes.” But this poem is not a good example of the rest of López’s work: situated within Hispanic American *Postmodernismo*, it is an irreverent and caustic critique of the ideals and statutes of both *Modernismo* and Romanticism, of the falseness, vanities and shallowness of social behavior and literary styles. He strongly criticizes the cadaverous rigidity of social forms and behaviors—his own always included. By portraying characters as animals—a typical technique in López and also typical in satirical cartoons of the time—high-class attitudes such as great attention to detail and social formalities are ridiculed. In the same tone, the close relationship between intellectuals and political power is also mocked.⁶

A poet who lived in a city that always looked inward, López limited himself to critiquing his own city, he never hoped or attempted the panoramic views that the Modernistas were accustomed to, nor a change or renewal of the city’s or the Caribbean situation. However, for the generation of *costeños* who, like Rojas Herazo, read him during the 1940s and 1950s, López’s self-positioning in relation to political powers and cultural and intellectual institutions served as an inspiration, not because he produced far-reaching alternatives, but because he shed a light onto what before was kept in shadows due to excessive formality: the possibility of regarding their own region—and existence itself—as a place where forms and formality would lose their exclusionary powers and give way to a liberated form of being that prized above everything else fluidity and harmony without the need to believe in or hope for progress. For Rojas Herazo, this will be his attempt to conceive an idea of what a *costeño* is like, but it will also be the fact that

⁶ When the Mexican National Library wanted to compose an anthology of Hispanic American poetry, it asked López to write an autobiographical sketch. In it he lied from beginning to end, stating he was a critic, poet, a catholic and romantic novelist, a collaborator in non-existing journals, with a M.D., a J.D., and a Ph.D. in physics awarded to him by false institutes and academies; professor of anatomy, chemistry, literature; and senator, house representative, deputy and minister. (Bazik, 44) Although everything is a joke, this is in fact the paradigm of the Colombian *letrado* since the times of the *Regeneracion*.

would turn his novel into a failed exercise.

Poetry as Scene-Making

This conception of a fluid and organic Caribbean is possible because, according to Rojas Herazo, López is not a simple *Postmodernista*, if by this we imply the common definition of going against excessive formalization and against the detachment from the world, or as Mexican poet Enrique González Martínez described the movement's imperative: "to wring the swan's neck" ("torcerle el cuello al cisne"; *Vigilia* 135). López, argues Rojas Herazo, does something much more graphic. And let us understand "graphic" both as the ability of visually naming and representing reality, as well as an emphasis in corporeality and "viscerality." López is not interested in "making music" with words as were Rubén Darío and *Modernistas* and Symbolists; instead he was more interested in "the line, the gesture, and the scheme of our surroundings. Thus his sonnets: true capsules of tropical psychology" ("la línea, el gesto, el esquema de lo circundante. De allí sus sonetos: verdaderos comprimidos de psicología tropical"). Second, because López "not only twisted the swan's neck; he instead meticulously plucked the bird, gutted it, and then used the plain and simple bones of the very illustrious bird to knock on the doors of the new and daring conception of the lyrical word" ("no sólo le torció el cuello (al cisne] sino que lo desplumó minuciosamente, le sacó los entresijos y luego aprovechó el hueso, mondo y lirondo, del ave perillustre para golpear las puertas de una nueva y atrevida concepción de la palabra lírica").

When Rojas Herazo sees López's poetry not only as more visual than the *Modernistas'* but also more visceral and animal-like, it allows him first to find a common and close spirit who has perceived reality as something corporal and organic—thus escaping formalism and humanist literary genres—and second, to emphasize the pictorial ability of words. Language is no longer

an eternal and unchanging code to be respected, but something like an animal full of guts that may die but may be also reborn by means of the creative act. And with this “guturalization” of language Rojas Herazo finds in the animal-like caricatures of López’s poetry a way of emphasizing language’s capacity for visualization, of freezing time in an image and not just a mechanism of telling stories. This “freezing up” is what permits images to be not only simple signs transmitting information but more importantly, maps of psychological profundity: the “image” of a character’s personality. Starting at this point, language will allow Rojas Herazo to draw and paint images, or better said, to create portraits with poetry.⁷ These portraits will in turn emphasize the corporal, visceral and animal levels of existence, since the image is less a representation or a particular and instant abstraction of reality, but a product of life itself, plucked out of universe’s disorder.⁸

This transformation of the function of language—from transmitting messages into producing images—happens because Rojas Herazo vastly expands the definition of poetry from the one the *Modernistas* and López had in their time. It is not only an artistic genre, but “the most ambitious machine of knowledge”:

Nothing is banned to the poet. His appetite has the right to be insatiable. He overcame in form and in appearance all of the canons. Poetical language is the big net. Everything in it may be *aprehendido* [grabbed, but also learned] and elevated onto the verbal surface. Starting with what is most impure and from within the most

⁷ Without arguing for influence, this attempt could be compared to Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century English Pictorialism, and its denunciation of poetic rhetoric and prescriptions as a falseness-ridden use of language. (Mitchell 21-24)

⁸ That is why the writer—any type of creator, really, including the reader—is described as a fisherman (*Vigilia* 181), as someone who plucks out of the sea of reality something that is alive. As we will immediately see, poetry is “the big net”; in his article on Edgar Lee Masters’ poetry, the poem is a fruit that waits to be harvested (115); and in other one, any creator is like a small god who brings ideas out of the sea of chaos (250-251).

unprecedented depths of conscience, the poet has the right to bring forth the materials he needs for his agonizing labor. His privative duty is precisely that: to develop until its last consequences his testimonial labor... The battle today is fought against being and the horror, the joy or the misfortune of what surrounds us. Poetry has liberated itself, once and for all, from the rhetorical corset that gets in the way of its internal gymnastics.

Nada le es vedado al poeta. Su apetito tiene derecho a ser insaciable. Ha rebasado, en forma y apariencia, todos los cánones. El idioma poético es la gran red. Todo en ella puede ser aprehendido y elevado a la superficie verbal. Desde lo más impuro, desde las más inauditas profundidades de la conciencia, el poeta tiene derecho a acarrear materiales para su agónica faena. Su deber privativo es ese precisamente: llevar hasta sus últimas consecuencias, su faena testimonial... La batalla se libra hoy entre el ser y el terror, la alegría o la desdicha de lo circundante. La poesía se ha emancipado, de una vez por todas, del corselete retórico que entrababa su gimnasia interior. (*Vigilia* 382)

These liberated words will battle for the testimonial, and with this emancipation comes the ability of visualizing, of producing the scene of visceral conflict that is reality.⁹ But in order to better understand the transformation of the visualizing words, let us continue with the pictorial/psychological reading Rojas Herazo does of López. In a tellingly-titled article, *Luis Carlos López's Goyesque* (*Goyesca de Luis Carlos López*, 1955), Rojas Herazo describes him as a

⁹ The article continues by comparing this almost omnipotent poetry with a restricted and formalized one that a powerful minority requires young poets to use. This minority uses the influence of the great poets—Perse, Neruda, Eliot—“as a subsidy” young poets have to pay (383). Later we will see the appearance of other economic metaphors, always connected to the restricting minority.

...verbal etcher. I see Luis Carlos López—whenever I’m impelled to imagine him—tracing lines with a pencil on paper. Tiny lines on top of others, because this man knew a lot about planes and lines. He wants to see and paint his characters just like they are: just as this voracious tropic gave birth to them, as race modeled them, as the epithelial chlorophyll baptized them, just as instinct made them. That is why López’s language is invertebrate; bones right and left; no suture; hard bones that do not want a spinal cord. López beats one bone with another.

...aguafuertista verbal. A Luis Carlos López lo veo—siempre que se me da por imaginármelo—con un lápiz y un cartón haciendo rayitas. Una rayita sobre otra rayita. Porque este hombre sabía mucho de planos y de líneas. (... A estos personajes los] quiere ver y pintar tal y como ellos son. Como los ha parido este trópico voraz, como los ha modelado la raza, como los ha bautizado la clorofila epitelial, como los ha hecho el instinto. Por eso el idioma de López es invertebrado. Huesos a derecha e izquierda. Sin sutura. Huesos duros que no quieren columna. López golpea un hueso contra otro hueso. (*Vigilia* 210)

López’s characters, made by instinct and by the tropic, and not—we assume—by formalisms and social hyper-correction, are drawn in charcoal, and each impulsive trace helps create works that will only be etchings and bones. The reality of instinct and the tropic are the critical forces in López’s work: these early but strong and primordial statements and etchings hurt and irritate people, in order to wake up a “country where people begin by being afraid of themselves, of their glands, of their existence, of their small biological fire” (“país donde la gente comienza por tenerse miedo a sí misma, miedo a sus glándulas, a su existir, a su parvo fuego

biológico” 211). Thus López allows Rojas Herazo to understand visuality—the projection of images—as a critical exercise against formality, and also as immersed in an organic-like logic. The effort of making something visible, of producing a visual scene, is for him denunciation and critique.¹⁰ Just like Francisco de Goya painted the disasters of the Napoleonic Wars and *Saturn Devouring his Sons* (1819-1823), López’s characterizations are “all eyes.” They are visualizations of something never before seen, a documentation of something never before registered.

López permits Rojas Herazo to understand language not as a formalizing tool for hegemonic purposes, but one for sketching out the personality of those who live in the tropics—so different from those inhabiting the highlands, he seems to believe—and for critically illuminating what formalizations had been kept in the dark. Along with such a contrast this diffusion between images and words will also help to create the organic-like perspective that Rojas Herazo sees in the Caribbean, since it will explain how humans live within a fluid reality. Images will not only be pictures of what a person is: they will also be memories, and remembering and sharing them will be the way humans remain stable in a world of flux. Rojas Herazo will show how this works by recurring to a way of seeing art and art production as a rural-based craft, away from modernity’s technification or hopes of permanence. From this perspective he will connect his project to Symbolism, Modernism, and Avant-garde concerns. He will be able to do so because he will disregard the typical epistemological and ontological categories of subject and object, and extrapolate vitalism as a contentless form, a virtual/actual

¹⁰ “‘One-Eyed’ López was thus a great find and remedy. I was attracted to his seeming disdain and to his pitiless vacuity. Try yourself to picture such a thing: Out of so many poets boring the hell out of the dawn, this demystifying character appears, showing no shame. He teaches us to really see and to really love. But in his very own style, putting a sturdy tenderness in action. That was who ‘One-Eyed’ López was. I devoted myself, with all the energy of youth, to assaulting him and rendering him into pieces in multiple ways at once. I was interested in exhausting him as a lesson. While I enjoyed him as a critic of bourgeois drowsiness, I tried to decipher him as reflective tolerance” (Rojas Herazo and García Usta)

worldview in which he can leapfrog the faith in and hope for modernization.

The Artist, an *Imaginero*

Rojas Herazo fuses his rural Caribbean art form with contemporary tendencies and produces his vitalist, organic-like world view by expanding and diffusing the definition of *imagery*. For him it is not only a set of literary images but it also relates to its religious sense of sculpting, carving or painting sacred images, a very common craft throughout Catholic Colombia. For Rojas Herazo, an *imaginero* (“image-maker”) is at first an artisan who carves images in wood. But as we have seen above definitions soon break loose: “In literature, as in sculpture, there are *imageros*: people who spend their lives carving passions, polishing and coloring them, in order to offer them to God in the altarpieces of the sentence, the novel, the poem or the eulogy.” Saint Theresa was an *imagera* of unpolished images, Quevedo was an otherworldly carpenter who made everyday altarpieces to burn, and Góngora was the greatest Spanish *imaginero* (*Vigilia*, 241). Today Faulkner is also one because “his characters look like trees.” These motionless characters see time go by and perceive the world-changing continuum.

The characters

...are there—sundried, dramatically sown in dust—watching the great feudal houses go rotten, hearing the bellowing of the vast flood, eaten up by the tragic moth of their loneliness.... But imagery as a literary phenomenon is still in its infancy. A moment will arrive when such a form will transcend words, and then only the wood will be left, the pure and simple documentary wood, with its exact plant-like words; without amends or oozes. As if the artifice would have not needed to carve them. As if they had existed—dust, stone or trees—since the beginning of the world.

...están allí—resecos, dramáticamente sembrados en el polvo—mirando podrirse las grandes casas feudales, oyendo el bramido de las vastas inundaciones, carcomidos por la polilla trágica de su soledad.... Pero la imaginaria como fenómeno literario, está todavía en su infancia. Llegará un momento en que habrá superado en tal forma las palabras, que solamente quedará la madera, la pura y simple madera documental, con sus exactos vocablos vegetales. Sin enmiendas ni rezumos. Como si el artífice no hubiera necesitado tallarlos. Como si hubiesen existido—polvo o piedra o árboles—desde el principio del mundo. (241)

We may consider Faulkner the result of Symbolism and High Modernism, but Rojas Herazo sees him as someone who practices a rural and primordial craft. He is an etcher like López but in his very own Mississippi. He is the beginning of an art that has no industrialization behind it, no canvas, no special oils or machines to produce it. An image is carved in wood, and the goal of that image is not to be an original, pure and unique object; it is instead carved in such a way that the human trace—in both senses of the word—will soon be lost and it will seem as if the wood always existed in that form.

For Rojas Herazo then, the writer does not come from the same place as the Western Humanist, member of the constellation of the philosopher, the intellectual, the erudite, the sage and the priest, and of course the *Letrado*. The writer/*imaginero* is an artisan who creates an image in a natural and living material, and whose motive for producing such images is not the creation of something new, extracted out of the materiality of nature, or the transcendental connection with some other plane of existence distinct from the earthly one, and much less is the artisan worried by questions of originality or reproducibility. The purpose of the creative

exercise is to affect nature in such a way that the trace imposed by the *imaginero* will turn into nature itself. Extrapolating this onto a more abstract level, to “carve” an image of reality with poetry, painting or narrative is not a transformation of the canvas of nature according to human agency: the goal is to *affect* nature, not to categorize it nor define it. It is not a production coming out of a nothingness, nor the creation of an auratic object, but the extraction of concepts and ideas out of the continuum or, as he calls it in “Short Theory Regarding the Writer” (“Breve teoría sobre el escritor”) (1956), chaos:

It is then chaos. The multitude of concepts is all tossed convulsively like in the horror of a sinking ship. Every concept is a live creature, organic in their entire rigor, in all their hopes. Every single one knows...that there is only one hope of salvation. Everything else is collapse and death. A Shipwreck... Onto the surface of the multitude only the chosen ones will ascend... And the writer... has to assume with painful energy his role as a God of that heaven and hell that is his creation. He has to save and condemn... life's vigor, the urgency of the senses, of intelligence, of the blood that strikes his indefensible temples.

Es entonces el caos. La muchedumbre de conceptos se agita convulsivamente como en el horror de un naufragio. Cada concepto es una criatura viva. En todo su rigor, en toda su esperanza orgánicos. Cada uno de ellos sabe... que ésa, y únicamente ésa, es su oportunidad de salvación. Lo demás es el hundimiento y la muerte. El naufragio.... A la superficie del tumulto han de subir únicamente los escogidos... Y el escritor...tiene que asumir, con dolorosa energía, su papel de Dios de ese cielo y ese infierno de su creación. Tiene que salvar o condenar... a ese ímpetu de vida, a esa urgencia de los sentidos, de la inteligencia, de la sangre que golpea sus sienes indefensas. (*Magnitud* 250-251)

This extraction of concepts from virtuality into actuality is the creative exercise. Besides considering the sea as the chaotic, multiple and virtual space from which actuality arises, this worldview sees creation of concepts and art not as the construction of objects per se to be exchanged in the artistic or literary world's economies, but of life itself, the means through which humans keep themselves alive amidst the sea of chaos. By thinning down artistic divisions he expanded the critique of Bogotá's customs and hegemony into a more general take on what art and art creation might mean.

This alternative economy is not a Romantic one, in which the Self is in isolated contact with nature. Artistic creation, no matter what genre it is, is a momentary projection to be shared with others, but outside of an economy of money, value, or prestige. As we will see below, it is just like what Rojas Herazo understands as vital journalism, a momentary image of an experience.

This process of fishing, of saving live concepts from sinking, of carving images on a living canvas, is what produces memory, and this in turn is what moves the artist to continue affecting nature/reality because:

Memory is the only active form of wrestling death. To remember is to tighten oneself with life, to go inwards, to feed oneself with the energetic music that fills and enriches conscience... We are now this, because of it we are possible: because of a memory that, each time more, expands us, magnifies us, turns us into creatures that have a personal eternity, with multiple lives that push and illuminate a present. It is not this thorn, or this rose, or this wall, or this road, or this sorrow, it is not this smile that burns in front of us.

It is all these thorns and walls and roses which make our actuality come magically alive as a confluent experience, as a passion that stubbornly looks for its antique words.

El recuerdo es la única forma activa de combatir a la muerte. Recordar es apretarse de vida, irse hacia adentro, nutrirse de una música enérgica que afiebra y enriquece la conciencia.... Ahora somos esto, por esto somos posibles: por un recuerdo que, cada vez más, nos amplía, nos magnifica, nos hace criaturas que contamos con una eternidad personal, con múltiples vidas que empujan o iluminan un presente. No es esta espina, ni esta rosa, ni este muro, ni este camino, ni esta congoja o esta sonrisa que arden frente a nosotros. Son todas estas espinas y esos muros y esas rosas que avivan nuestra mágica actualidad. Todo ello como confluente experiencia, como pasión que busca tercamente sus antiguas palabras. (*Magnitud 88*)

The function of the writer/journalist/*imaginero* is to actualize an image by squeezing life out of the multiple virtuality of existence. This is done to turn images into memories, because memories construct us amidst the continuum. The sum of all memories is what makes us exist in a fluid reality, and it is within that reality where humans fight to slow down our presence in this movement. Because, although reality is a harmonious force in constant motion with an organic logic underlying it, remembrance is our constant fight against it: if we do not remember we sink. Just as concepts, we are erased from the living canvas of existence just as a carved image on a tree is turned in time into a trace on its trunk.

Furthermore, if memories are what allow us to exist, to be temporarily permanent amidst the fluctuating reality, they also allow us to filter, order and paint our own private picture of the world:

Every memory is power. With it—with that agitated multitude of images—we plant ourselves as beings... Every meditation—and memory is an eminent form of it—is a radiant conquest. We vanquish the present. We turn the reality of our now into a province of our memory. It is due to memories that we expand ourselves, we make the empire of our consciousness grow. If suddenly we lose all of these piles of successive pasts, we would be left defenseless against the world. Earth would turn into such a gigantic enemy, so full of vigorous hallucination, that we would not be able to resist the crash.... That tree or that voice, seen or heard without memory, would have no object, it would be a part of a never-ending nightmare.

Todo recuerdo es poder. Con él—con esa agitada muchedumbre de imágenes—nos plantamos ante los seres. ... Toda meditación—y el recuerdo lo es en forma eminente—es una radiosa conquista. Sometemos el presente. Convertimos nuestra realidad de ahora en provincia de nuestra memoria. Por el recuerdo nos expandimos, hacemos crecer el imperio de nuestra conciencia. Si súbitamente perdiéramos todo ese cúmulo de sucesivos pretéritos, quedaríamos inermes ante el mundo. La tierra se nos convertiría en un enemigo tan gigantesco, tan lleno de vigorosa alucinación, que no podríamos resistir el impacto.... Ese árbol o esa voz visto o escuchado sin memoria, no tendrán objeto, serán los componentes de una pesadilla interminable. (*Magnitud 89*)

Memories become the raw material of our consciousness and also our epistemological tools by helping us comprehend continuum's complexity. And the creative act, understood as a fluctuating and transitory action upon the continuum, is the effort of producing memories. Therefore creating and transmitting images is to create ourselves and others. That is why the sharing of images of experiences is such a valued activity for Rojas Herazo, an activity that in the case of journalism exceeds the limited notion of communication of new events. It does not matter that those images are not permanent, because memory and artistic creation are what permit us to create ourselves and to continue being. Creating and sharing our creations—be they news, artistic objects or plain memories—this is what allows us to continue existing and being conscious—and sane—while doing so.

However, this is neither easy nor ordinary. If it were, reality would be a very happy flow of things. The battle between humans against the all-destroying reality is a bloody one, and when there is no community to hang onto, drama, tragedy and despair ensue. This is precisely what we will find in *En noviembre llega el arzobispo*. Therefore we need to understand how the alternative economy of values Rojas Herazo perceives as existing in the Caribbean differs from the one in Bogotá. We can do this by understanding the role of an expanded definition of journalism as a connector between experiences.

Journalism and the Image of Experience

The imperative in poetry for Rojas Herazo was to leave aside *Modernistas'* formalism in favor of what is “essential,” and to abandon social and cultural protocols and hyper-formalities coming from Bogotá. Words then join forces with images in favor of a higher-degree imperative: the search for a portrayal of reality as a rapid continuum not circumscribed to orders or

systematizations, to protocols or formulas—be they grammatical, stylistic or social. Since this un-systematizable force overcomes and makes the division between arts and other discursive practices irrelevant, the best way to describe reality would then be to sketch out the flux, to narrate it/portray it in such a way that classifications are avoided with a narrative that is part of this milieu where categories are overridden and that would only try to fix certain instants of fluid world.

Journalism is such a narrative. Rojas Herazo does not propose any type of journalism, however, but rather a vital style out of which energy oozes, showing the emulsion of life amidst wars and death. That is why for him History's great journalists are Goya, Dürer, Spanish Golden Age and baroque poets and playwrights, and novelists like John Dos Passos, Thomas Mann, Thomas Wolfe, and William Faulkner. But the most important figures for Rojas Herazo were Ernest Hemingway and Azorín.¹¹

Before we focus on journalism as practice, a word about the world in perpetual movement is needed. It would be easy to assume that such a world is the industrialized, accelerated one that opposes itself to the agrarian, rural or traditional one of the Colombian Caribbean Coast or of any other undeveloped country or region. However, Rojas Herazo is not immersed in the dichotomy of modernity versus tradition but in the one between a *restrictive form* versus *an expansive mobility*, which is not attempting to preserve clear differences between what is modern and traditional, industrial and agrarian, urban and rural. Journalism as a practice

¹¹ Rojas Herazo believes López is similar to Goya because both draw portraits of life. The same happens with Mann's prose, where he finds "the minute, biting, corporal and psychological sketch of the Merovingian craftsmanship and the azure-like pulse of Albrecht Dürer"; *Vigilia* 225-226); Lope de Vega's theater "is a colossal journalistic piece of the Sixteen Hundreds. "It is exactly what John Dos Passos, Camus and William Faulkner" are developing today in novels of splendid cinematographic movement (*Vigilia* 344). For an emphasis on how vital are the portrayals of human beings in Faulkner and Colombian poet Leon de Greiff—both portray their respective worlds and natures—see *Vigilia* 171-172. For an image of Thomas Wolfe as the journalist of "time as frenzy" and as the "novelist of disintegration," see *Vigilia* 265-266.

born in modern institutional spaces like news rooms is not what Rojas Herazo is signaling. Instead, for him, journalism is a narrative practice that prolongs and organically extrapolates other creative practices in order to pursue a temporary permanence in the flux and to battle against death with memories. It is due to this perspective that Rojas Herazo is able to extract innovative visions and tools out of cynical writers like López, or conservative ones like Azorín.

José Martínez Ruíz, “Azorín” (1873-1967) was one of the members of Spain’s *Generación del 98*. A conservative novelist, essayist and playwright—except during his anarchist youth—he developed a narrative style made out of succinct phrases from which he attempted to build “impressions” of Spanish reality, usually emphasizing the countryside and rural traditions. This emphasis on “impression” by means of the written word is what Rojas Herazo understands as—and turns into—journalism, the writing of images in order to communicate them to others:

Azorín considers—and he is absolutely right to do so—that the transcendental end of the art of writing is to tell the news. The simple fact that someone sits down to transmit their ideas, to turn their fellowmen into participants of their vision of what life is, implies a social expansion, a vehement desire to exceed one’s own solitude. That is what journalism is, because it is an eminent act of communication. But what happens is that life is so saturated with this activity that we only want to find journalism in the newspapers.

Azorín considera—con entera razón—que la finalidad trascendental del arte de escribir es dar la noticia. El solo hecho de que un hombre se siente a transmitir sus ideas, a convertir

a sus semejantes en copartícipes de su visión de la vida, implica una expansión social, un vehemente deseo de rebasar la propia soledad. Y eso es periodismo. Porque es un acto de comunicación eminente. Lo que pasa es que la vida se encuentra tan saturada de esta actividad que sólo queremos ver el periodismo en los periódicos. (*Vigilia*, 198)

Rojas Herazo considers that Azorín—an essayist, not a journalist per se—allows him to expand the definition of journalism from a writing linked to newspapers into a communicative imperative between people and communities. Rojas Herazo continues by stating that what Azorín has done is to rescue from the classical tradition literature’s ability of news-reporting; he has “dug up the Golden Age,” not to recover a lost literary tradition—this is the common intra-generic valuation of what the Generations of 1898 and 1927 did for Spanish literature—but instead to recover the ability of showing what is new in the world, a newness which is much more than a message transmitted between source and receptor. A piece of news is an image of experience:

(...) the secret lies in the wisdom of the news... For Azorín, to see and to tell are one single thing... That is why there exists an abysmal separation between a simple erudite and an acting writer. The first one only has the pleasure of the finding, of intellectual loansharking, of squeezing out of the cultural fact its interests for their own use and abuse. But the authentic writer is absolutely the opposite. Because of the simple fact that he is a journalist... he has to go out with his hands full of events, landscapes and faces, and share them with his friends the readers. That is why Azorín was able to describe...the sleepy message of the small Spanish towns.

(...) el secreto está en su sabiduría de la noticia... Para Azorín, ver y narrar son una misma cosa.... De allí que haya una abismante separación entre un simple erudito y un escritor actuante. El primero sólo tiene el placer en el hallazgo, del agiotismo intelectual de sacarle, para su uso y abuso, los intereses al dato cultural. Pero el auténtico escritor es todo lo contrario. Por la simple razón de que es periodista.... Tiene que salir, con las manos llenas de acontecimientos, de paisajes y de rostros, a compartirlos con sus amigos lectores. Por eso Azorín pudo describir...el dormido mensaje de los pueblitos españoles. (198-199)

The event and the cultural fact are the currency in the comparison Rojas Herazo is doing. While the erudites only keep facts to themselves in order to squeeze out interests and speculate with them, journalists share the information allowing them to portray the life of small towns. The solitary absorption of knowledge is opposed to the experience of sharing, and that is the difference between these two types of writers—the first is clearly from Bogotá, the second one from the new rural, Caribbean writer Rojas Herazo is projecting.¹² For such a writer, to see and to tell not only are one single imperative but one single act. There is no impression and then expression or better said, this separation is not sketched out. To see and to tell is just one act that happens at once: the affective experience of sharing. This is also another way of looking at the *form* versus *mobility* dichotomy: on the one hand, writers who keep cultural facts to themselves, seeing them as valuable objects in order to speculate with them in the form of discourses of citizenship, belonging, or inclusion in a national or professional community by means of

¹² There is also a regional stereotype in play here, since *bogotanos* are usually characterized as misers and *costeños* as spendthrifts.

normative and exclusionary rhetoric; on the other, writers who tell stories, who travel from one place to another picking stories up and telling them somewhere else.¹³ If knowledge in Bogotá was used as regulated and controlled cultural capital, for this new generation of Caribbean writers of rural origin what prevails and appears to be more valuable is the live disclosure and exchange of experiences/memories. Conceiving perception and expression as one experience to be shared is not only one more tool that disassembles the normative partitions of artistic genres and categories of reality, but it is also a step further into clarifying the divergent economy of the process of experiencing the world.

A day after publishing the article on Azorín, Rojas Herazo published one about Hemingway, celebrating his Nobel Prize. Hemingway is also a figure who helps Rojas Herazo with his generic dispersal. However, in this article there is no defense of the rural as in Azorín, but of life over death: “Literature is overflowing. It is bringing down, with an impetuous torrent, the valleys that have tried to trace its edges, to limit its flux into a precise normative bed. And this is due, first and foremost, to journalism” (“La literatura se está saliendo de madre. Está abatiendo, como un torrente impetuoso, los valles que han pretendido alinderarla, delimitar su fluencia en un preciso cauce normativo. Y esto se debe, en primera y en última instancia, al periodismo”; *Vigilia*, 196). By soaking through its own limits, literature forces readers to see that the great novelists “are nothing other than master journalists...who feel, observe and meditate in a journalistic mode... They pan the camera across faces, cities, roads, the sea and the air. And there they rest, such impressive documents, with the smell of wars, of joys and sorrows. But

¹³ Such a contrast explains not only Rojas Herazo’s position in relation to Colombian literary milieu, but it also sheds light onto his fellow peer and friend Gabriel García Márquez’s own positioning. Also from a small town in the Caribbean, when asked about his literary credo he has always answered by saying he is first and foremost a journalist. (García Márquez) In a similar vein, he has said that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a three hundred-page long *vallenato*, and we must point out the *vallenato* is a musical genre that until well into the twentieth century served as an oral and musical mode of transmission of current events, since minstrels improvised around news and stories while singing from town to town. It is then both a musical and a journalistic genre.

everything is first-hand; living and pulsating” (“...no son otra cosa que maestros del reportaje...que sienten, observan y meditan, en función noticiosa.... Pasan la cámara por rostros, por ciudades, por caminos, por el mar y por el aire. Y allí quedan esos documentos impresionantes, ese olor a guerras, a alegrías y desdichas. Pero todo de primera mano. Viviente y palpitante”; 196). Language is film-making, in the sense of producing a visual document, extracting a film out of reality’s living surface. Although similar to Stendhal’s take on the novel as a mirror of nature, this is not only an aesthetic definition but a moral and social one: perceiving and narrating experience is not to be done only by a few, but by everyone in order to survive amidst the fluent force. Journalism not only unleashes the normative reigns that literature had before—the level of journalism as a narrative—but it also allows another type of relation between humans and reality—journalism as an *ethos* of observing in order to share with others. If the writer/grammarian/academic is a normative and regulating loan-shark, the writer/journalist perceives and experiences a plural reality in the same way he writes, paints or films: viscerally and throbbingly, with agility, sharing those feelings with others like the camera that fuses in our memory not only the landscapes of the First World War that appear in *For Whom the Bells Toll*, but also the Second War landscapes we may find in Fellini and the Neo-realists, and the Colombian *Violencia* landscapes, which by the time Rojas Herazo is writing continue to claim their dead: “We see broken hamlets, sections of bars with quiet men who wait for a barmaid, little kids skipping stones, at random, throughout the shelled avenues. We also see sorrowful slopes where human animals nurture themselves with roots” (“Vemos aldeas rotas, tramos de bares con hombres silenciosos que esperan a una empleada, chicuelos que empujan pedrezuelas, al azar, por las avenidas ametralladas. Vemos, también, laderas amargas donde hay animales humanos que se nutren de raíces”; 196). This sharing of experiences, not a loan-sharking of

knowledge or information, is what means to be creative in Rojas Herazo's organicist Caribbean. And as we will see in *En noviembre llega el Arzobispo*, not sharing personal experiences and memories in a liberated way is what produces the sorrowful and solitary ambiance in the novel's tone.

“Journalism is everything in our time. It is the Big Witness. Nothing passes in front of it that does not turn into news material; a remote link between men and communities, between sighs, from window to lintel, from blue cloud to galloping horse” (“El periodismo lo es todo en nuestro tiempo. El gran testigo. Nada pasa ante sus ojos que no sea material noticioso. Enlace remoto de hombres con hombres, de pueblos con pueblos, de suspiros con suspiros, de ventana a dintel, de nube azul a caballo galopante”; 196). Journalism not only is the witness of our epoch because it is a ductile and plastic genre compatible to a brutal reality, but because it is a remote link between affective human worlds drawn separate due to circumstances. By grasping reality's multiplicities, vital journalism is able to strengthen human communities floating in the organicist continuum of reality. And that is why Hemingway has won the Nobel, Rojas Herazo says, because “he has done nothing less but to tell, snippet by snippet, what he has seen and felt...He has been an extraordinary reporter of defeat, and his adventurous energy, his surmounting of destiny thanks to the impulse of the human person, settles the emotional balance of a universe located between two monstrous hecatombs” (“no ha hecho otra cosa que ponerse a contar, a retazos, lo que ha visto y sentido... ha sido un extraordinario reportero de esa derrota, y su energía aventurera, [su] superación del destino por el impulso de la persona humana, representa el saldo emocional de un universo emplazado por dos hecatombes monstruosas”; *Vigilia*, 197).

The importance of reporters as witnesses and documentary-makers of their time is not only in regards to the post-World War context, but also a first-hand experience for Rojas Herazo.

The Caribbean journalist of the time, much like the *vallenato* minstrel, was someone who traveled across the region to carry out a testimonial and informative function by writing. As independent professionals thanks to their writing in newspapers (although the papers were soapboxes for political parties and the high-class hegemony), journalists did not need to be accountable to any powerful figure in a particular town or city. Although the newspapers could censor them, their names quickly became public and their opinions circulated more freely than those from urban literary circles. Unbound to any specific place, they instead traveled throughout the region—and sometimes, like García Márquez and Álvaro Cepeda Samudio, became foreign correspondents. The difference between them and the sedentary writer in Bogotá or Cartagena, who were dependent of the approval of the high class or the lettered elite could not be in this sense more radical. Rojas Herazo, García Márquez and Cepeda Samudio—who lived during his childhood and adolescence in Ciénaga, another Caribbean small town—were journalists and writers who were conscious of their rural and Caribbean provenance, and this profession of freedom and this *ethos* in terms of relating (to) reality would turn out to be their principal strategy for positioning themselves in various artistic fields within the Colombian and international literary milieu. This will not be an overt positioning. There is no such thing as a rural or agrarian perspective in these writers. However, this is a condition of possibility for their positionings.

Democracy, an Animal

How to translate these epistemological claims into more social and political ones? After all, the first-hand experience of exclusion from the national community is the source of Rojas Herazo's restructuring of genres and view of reality. The answer lies in the organist, visceral perspective of reality responsible for thinning down the borders. The dichotomy of restrictive

form versus expansive mobility allows Rojas Herazo to comprehend reality as a fluid and organic-like continuum. He finds that journalism is *the* tool for the production of images of lived experiences that need to be shared in order to produce and fortify the affective perception of reality. This in turn allows him to imagine a national-political order that does not oppose itself to nature, an order made by inclusion, and not by exclusion. He does this through the appropriation of Walt Whitman's work.¹⁴

Whitman is the journalist *par excellence*—in Rojas Herazo's definition, of course—but he also is a prophet of the nation, or at least the type of community that Rojas Herazo wishes for, a community that does not draw lines between what is urban and what is rural, what is agrarian or industrialized, what is nature and what is culture. According to him, this is what Whitman tells to North Americans: “You have vanquished iron, fatigue and bread. Your barns are inexhaustible and every night foreigners raise their tents only to realize by the morning that they are already part of you. There is space here where all may live, rejoice and prove fruitful” (“Habéis domeñado el hierro, la fatiga y el pan. Vuestros graneros son inagotables y cada noche se alzan tiendas de extranjeros que al día siguiente ya son de los nuestros. Aquí hay espacio para que todos vivan, gocen y se fructifiquen”; *Vigilia*, 147).

This is not the first Hispanic American interpretation of Whitman. Previous commentaries generally consist in, as Enrico Mario Santí has suggested, “the story of a dependent discourse whose production shows both the heterogeneity of its origins and the denial of a synthetic product. What purports to be the result of simple, direct influence is actually a rhapsodic production of contradictory, often erratic effects” (1990, 174). This is true, but in

¹⁴ Whitman is the writer to whom Rojas Herazo dedicates the most articles during his journalistic career. “Perennidad de Whitman” (1950), “Sueño y realidad de Walt Whitman” (1952), “Whitman” (1955) y “A la sombra del patriarca” (1967). He also uses Whitman as the matrix that gives meaning to his readings of other writers, see “Lee Master [sic]: un poeta al aire libre” (*Vigilia* 117-118), “Thomas Wolfe, *Del tiempo y del río*” (265-266), “*Anabasis*” (145-146) and “Claudel” (213).

Rojas Herazo's case the appropriation is not designed to be a "revealing instance of an alienated colonial discourse" by means of a "pious Pan-American chorus" (162), or the portrayal of Whitman as an ideological dispositive of the North American empire on the continent (as seen in Darío's "Walt Whitman"). It is neither an appropriation of his oeuvre in order to produce a totalizing ambition as in Neruda (165-168), nor an appropriation of the personal figure of Whitman as in Borges' *El Aleph* (168-174). Rojas Herazo does not want to produce a total image of Hispanic America, nor does he want to be the character who is no one because he is many—"I contain multitudes" (Whitman, 88).

What interests Rojas Herazo is the community's organicity, the possibility of absorbing what is foreign, an organ that turns what is extraneous into part of itself. Whitman is "the first figure of the contemporary epic" ("la primera figura de la épica contemporánea"; *Vigilia*, 206) because his work is "an organic prolongation of himself. A panting glandular joint. A poetry with epidermis, with entrails, with senses, with breath and soul" ("Una poesía con epidermis, con vísceras, con sentidos, con resuello y con alma"; *ibid.*). His poetry walks toward us "like a huge animal...stuck to the ground... and knows nothing about heaven" ("como un grande animal... adherid[o] a la tierra...no sabe del cielo"; *ibid.*). Democracy for Whitman is an invitation to "coexist within a harmonious force" ("coexistir dentro de una fuerza armoniosa"; *ibid.*). ("All of contemporary poetry throughout the continent is full of Whitman's presence. Breathing with his lungs" ("Toda la poesía contemporánea está llena de la presencia de Whitman. Respirando con sus mismos pulmones"; 207). Poetry is an animal, is a live image, the fruit of the continuous reality.

Rojas Herazo's take on Whitman's United States is quite uncritical. It is true that what interests him is not modernization or industrialization but coexistence, and so he appears quite

naïve by not taking into account racism, the genocide of Native North Americans, or the Civil War itself. But Whitman is not being analyzed for his political positions—at least not in the traditional sense of politics. Rojas Herazo reads him from the axis of his form-versus-mobility dichotomy, from a Colombia where *La Violencia* is still very much alive—along with the memories of the neverending civil wars of the nineteenth century—and from a time when the Cuban Revolution has not yet arrived. “Song of Myself” grants Rojas Herazo an image of a community that is able to leave death and Civil War behind in order to build harmony—community is the network of experiences shared between persons by means of images. But this is not a static, Catholic, traditional harmony, not an image of paradise, which is the image that the *Regeneración* elite proposes for Colombia and that produced such an extreme and systematic exclusion that *La Violencia* was an effect. This force is instead a big animal who knows nothing about Heaven, who changes day by day because it is constantly absorbing what is foreign. In the same way Whitman absorbs and puts into movement the multiple images/experiences of the United States, his poetry is the organic extension of himself, an invitation to be part of the harmonious force. Within such a force, death and destruction are included. López and Hemingway showed Rojas Herazo how unavoidable both of them are, and the rural landscape taught him to accept them.¹⁵

Here is where the main crack in Rojas Herazo’s project appears. A continuous harmonious force is what lies on the background of Rojas Herazo’s work. This blob-like, peaceful animal is the ultimate horizon since there is no concern for a material or materialist

¹⁵ “In the city Death is an intrusion. [There one] cannot tolerate it as a common thing... In the countryside it is different. The soil shows us with its inexorable hourly rhythm that Death is necessary and fecund. That there can be no harvest if there has been no previous sowing of the remaining stubble. The farmer accepts death with a resigned fatalism” (“En la ciudad la muerte es una intrusa. [Allí no se] puede tolerar como cosa corriente, el paso de su fuerza tremenda.... En el campo es diferente. La tierra nos enseña con su ritmo inexorable de todas las horas que la muerte es necesaria y fecunda. Que no puede haber cosecha si no han sido segados, de antemano, los rastros sobrantes. El campesino acepta la muerte con resignado fatalismo.” *Magnitud* 27-28)

struggle or conflict. The harmonious blob—originally a B-movie allegory of the Cold War U. S. red panic—is a providential type of force that swallows everything in its path. If it not were for the tacit exclusion of a currency-based society with different social classes, we could dare say this blob is indeed a wished-for capitalism. This would be true if Rojas Herazo followed the common path of seeing the arrival of modernity by means of the liberal project. But we need to remember that Bogotá's hegemony is his antagonist, and not tradition or underdevelopment.

The creature that is democracy rose for Rojas Herazo out of the ashes of Second World War. It is his vision of a group of world-recognized intellectuals who would produce an earth-size organism in perfect health and harmony that would end up including everybody in its realm. As is the case with Whitman, this would be possible because their oeuvres would be projections of themselves. This is nothing else but the short-lived dream—in the sense of its capacity to reach its goals—of a world organized by the new United Nations, managed and mediated by the international, enlightened public artist/diplomats. This was not an imaginary concept: Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell, Henri Bergson—and in the Hispanic world, Jose Ortega y Gasset—had all played this role in increasingly international arenas, and Octavio Paz would try to be such a figure later on. But the most influential figure for Rojas Herazo, at multiple levels, was French diplomat Alexis Leger, better known as the Guadeloupe-born poet and Nobel laureate Saint-John Perse (1887-1975), about whom Rojas Herazo wrote multiple journalist pieces and who constantly inspired his poetry (*Vigilia* 145-146, 287, 303, 383).

He was influential to Rojas Herazo because as a poet he attempted to show the sea as the poetic image that contained totality—as Édouard Glissant has continually suggested (*Caribbean* 225-231; *Poetics* 37-42). This sea, (Glissant's *tout-monde*) for Perse has no problems of material struggles or conflicts, because what Perse wants to call attention to is the connectedness of all the

points in the world by means of generalized sceneries (the desert, the ocean) and natural phenomena (the wind, the waves, the soil, the rain) all affecting an abstract human being—multivocal to be sure, and full of contradicions, opaque even, but an almost bodiless human nevertheless. In other words, Perse signified for Rojas Herazo what he signified to the Sweedish Academy in 1960 when they granted him the Nobel Prize: the last true Symbolist, he was the person in charge of giving Symbolism a true global, totalizing status outside of the French milieu, relying on a worldly humanism that connected all nations and all landscapes in the world. In Symbolism's teleological history, he was the owl of Minerva spreading his wings at dusk, producing the image of totality that would save the Post-World War world.¹⁶

Rojas Herazo's faith in that upcoming utopia was not just a conceptual possibility; it was truly real and strong. One reason for this was historical naivety: since there barely was an incipient avant-garde in Colombia, its crisis was also incipient, that is, the consequences of the crises of the avant-gardes that lashed the rest of the world did not feel as threatening because the bets were not layed on their emancipatory possibilities. Furthermore, Ramon Vinyes, the famous Catalan sage of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and arguably *the* craftsmen of that feeble avant-garde through the journal *Voces*, was never a vanguardist per se. If anything he was an armchair intellectual with no progressive pretensions, a bourgeois reader more interested in entertainment and conversation-fodder in books than in real political or philosophical venues for a better world.¹⁷ This would not have been problematic if Vinyes had not been the gatekeeper that granted access and value to international literature in Caribbean Colombia at the time. He allowed North American novels to enter because he enjoyed reading them and was able to take

¹⁶ This also mapped comfortably on to López pictorialization, although without the transcendence.

¹⁷ What he finds more interesting when reading Borges short-story "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" is that "as smart and Latin American entertainment, it passes" ("como entretenimiento inteligente y Americano, pasa"; Vinyes, 2; 344).

out of them topics for conversation and for lecturing in cafes and in his bookstore. But when it came time to read books like Aimé Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (1939), he thought there was “no aesthetic perfection...he wants to be the black man Rimbaud evokes” (“...nada de perfección estética...quiere ser el negro evocado por Rimbaud”; vol. 2; 262-263). And although we do not know whether he read any other francophone writers we may imagine his replies to them by his reaction toward existentialism: “its pulse will never arrive to Colombia. The existentialists’ characters smell like an unended war, like a neverending war” (“su vibrancia [sic] no llegará hasta Colombia. Los personajes de los existencialistas huelen a guerra no acabada todavía, a guerra inacabable”; vol. 2; 432). In fact, the smell of war was not the only thing to go hand in hand with existentialism: “existencialismo y marihuana van de la mano” Even if this was not a moralistic take on marihuana consumption,¹⁸ Vinyes’s opinion about existentialism and Sartre does not allow us to hold any hopes for a possible good review of *Orphée noir*, which served as a preface for Senghor’s 1948 anthology *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*, nor of any other act by Sartre, the paradigm of the *engagé* intellectual in the twentieth century.

Vinyes’s perspective on literature as entertainment—non-European literature, that is—without drives of emancipation in it, blocked the possibility for the Colombian Caribbean to connect to literature written by blacks in the Caribbean.¹⁹ However, in Rojas Herazo’s case there was still faith in a certain kind of Utopia. As we have seen, it was not a liberal view of progress based on industrialization and modernization, nor a claim for justice and emancipation from the

¹⁸ This could easily be, but to be precise, in Colombian poetry the smell of marihuana was linked at the time to Porfirio Barba Jacob’s decadent and nihilistic excesses (see Fernando Vallejo).

¹⁹ To be fair, he sees black Colombian poets in high regard: See Vinyes’ judgements of authors Jorge Artel—who he says is a jazz poet—(264), and of Candelario Obeso, who he feels is a precursor of U.S. African American poetry (278-280). But none of these poets were properly concerned with slave, racial or social emancipation. The utmost contemporary case, Manuel Zapata Olivella, is not mentioned at all by Vinyes.

“wretched of the earth.” His own utopian hope instead consisted in a spiritual emancipation based on the first sprouts of liberation theology that at the time were coming to the surface, mainly due to the vitalism-inspired works of Jacques Maritain (his *Integral Humanism* shares many ideas with Perse, although the former renounced his youthful Bergsonism), Teilhard de Chardin’s orthogenic evolution toward an *Omega Point*, (cf. Chardin; Senghor), and Ortega y Gasset’s vital reason in *History as System* (first published in English in 1935) (*Historia como sistema*, 1941).

This would help produce in Rojas Herazo a faith in the constant and ordered spiritual progress of mankind, without materialistic struggles, toward the Omega Point of human evolution/history. Thus, the place of the poet, and the reason for being a poet, was that of being a brother, a companion to other fellow humans on their path across life, helping them to liberate themselves from constrictive forms towards a more expansive mobility. Such mobility was not some kind of freedom amidst a void, but ingrained in the ordered process of human evolution.

Even though Rojas Herazo’s Caribbean is not a region immersed in the lineal and teleological assumptions of modernity’s history (industrialization, secularization, development of the individualized subject), there still exists a lineal and ascendant progression in the world—the living beast chained by formalization coming from a restrictive hegemonic center. The purpose of his art, then, and the one he accepts and motivates in his peers, is the emancipation of the living organism from formal constrictions and categories. But as in Piñera’s case, this project became untenable and the novel, written while realizing the limits of his conception, will attest to that.

1968 is then a symptomatic date for his silence as a journalist and public intellectual. If we assume he had placed his hopes in being *the* Colombian novelist in this new age of

internationalized intelligentsia, García Márquez's 1967 novel gave a powerful blow to this aspiration. But his project had cracks well before this event. His organicist world view that contradicted Bogotá's intellectual hegemony by diffusing the differences between the loansharking intellectual and the journalist and Caribbean one was paradoxically based on the sustenance of a healthy world in perfect homeostasis by international, world-recognized public intellectuals. This wish could only exist for a few years: it could only fit between the end of the Second World War and the first claims of colonial independence; right after a period of hope in a vitalized United Nations and the birth and rise of peripheral discourses with their own capacity of making visible what had not been before. Within the Hispanic Caribbean, the Cuban events of January 1, 1959 would bring the first hard blow to Rojas Herazo's project, and the world events of 1968 would drive the last nail into its casket.²⁰

Within such a context we can extrapolate Rojas Herazo's original intentions. He wanted to come up with a novel that preserved the form of the European tradition of late modernity and Symbolism, but with a Colombian Caribbean content. But how to conceive a novel in terms of an organismic existence, one that rejects the position of authority of the Capital's intellectuals, and shares images of experiences with fellow humans in order to build an organismic community?

The Novel as an Organ

Rojas Herazo traces a break in the form of the novel and sees High Modernism's formal innovations as effects of arriving to a vitalist world view: he conceives the nineteenth-century

²⁰ Forty-three year-old Rojas Herazo published "El nadaismo frente a la desesperanza burguesa" ("Nadaism against Bourgeois Hopelessness"; *Vigilia* 311-317) in 1964, maybe the longest article he ever wrote, and what could very well be his last opinion piece as a public intellectual. Published by the CIA-financed *Cuadernos del congreso para la libertad de la cultura*, the article is an analysis of the then-prevalent *nadaistas* group, a late Colombian literary and cultural avant-garde that combined elements of US "flower power" aesthetics with existentialism. What is more striking is Rojas Herazo's tone: he portrays himself as an old person past his prime, and he positions himself outside the public arena, as if he were only capable of giving moral support to a younger generation from afar.

novel as a bourgeois mechanism of encompassing totality by representing it as a narrated whole from an outside perspective, and the modern novel as an organ of the organic continuum of existence: it reacts to its impulses, it is an “active evisceration” (“una visceración activa”; 275). In contrast to bourgeois novels, planned as stereotypical character elaborations and developed by an authorial conscience, “the contemporary novel...has placed itself right in the middle of existence’s nervous center” (“se ha situado en el puro centro nervioso del existir”, 273-274). It wishes to understand human beings “as complexities, as non-fulfillment and as ignorance... The novel has come to participate, as a verbal construction, with the palpitation and randomness proper of living organisms.... It is alive, alive and suffering, as an organ inside a living body” (“como complejidad, como irrealización y desconocimiento.... La novela ha entrado a participar, como construcción verbal, de la palpitación y el azar de los organismos vivientes....Está viva, viva y sufriendo, como un órgano dentro de un cuerpo viviente”; 274). Because of its organ-like qualities “the novel ...is not fiction. It is a reply, bounded by its own rules that both explain and make possible the amorphous spectacle, swollen with absurdity and overloaded with questions, that is the life of any human being” (“la novela...no es ficción. Es una réplica, repetimos, con leyes que la explican, al mismo tiempo que la hacen posible, al espectáculo amorfo, henchido de absurdo, sobrecargado de interrogantes, que es la vida de cualquier hombre” (275). The “hallucinations and the discomfort” that the novel’s “modern narrative instruments” (“alucinación y desconcierto de los modernos instrumentos narratorios”) produce in us are due to the fact it no longer separates itself from reality in order to study characters or ideas, instead, it places itself in the middle of the organic continuum so difficult to divide and classify. Since readers do not have an external point of view—or characters, the narrator, even the author himself for that matter—“in its orbit we feed ourselves with hues of meaning. With lights and

shadows in fluctuating battle.... We do not know where a man ends and a wall begins, neither if that movement is a product of an animal or of a leaf... The narration is the event in its pure being... to penetrate a novel is like penetrating an active evisceration” (“En su órbita nos alimentamos de matices. De luces y sombras en fluctuante batalla.... No sabemos dónde termina un hombre y comienza un muro, ni si aquel movimiento es fruto de un animal o una hoja... el relato es el acontecer en estado puro. En que penetrar a una novella es como penetrar a una visceración activa”; 274). If López sketched clear and quick pencil strokes, the novel is a painting full of nuances and shades—color and meaning-wise. The novel is not a tool allowing human beings to understand concise characters or ideas, or even to perceive the continuum itself as a totality: it is an organ of the visceral continuum, with its sketchy and diffused edges and limits.²¹

Even if he does not explicitly say so, we may assume that this amorphous spectacle of an organismic existence had been kept hidden by the restrictive formalities that divided regional communities from Colombia’s capital and the rural from the urban Caribbean; formalities both in the way of talking as well as of habits and ideas of how to regionally and politically prescribe and administer order. But what is more important for our purposes is that these formalizations have hidden the true nature of time and space. Time is not the lineal or homogeneous time of clocks anymore, and space is not clearly ordered and administered. Time is seen as disorder and frenzy (*frenesí*), a furious delirium, a violent exaltation of mood (DRAE, July 19, 2010), constantly expelling the actual and reabsorbing it into the virtual. This expulsion and re-

²¹ “In its pages, existence ceases to flow as improvisation in order to condense into strategy and rhythm.... Every event is foreseen... as a member of a vast, homogenous organism that is in turn possible because of the experiential hotbed of creatures.... Life is there, codified and, nevertheless, burning and full” (“En sus páginas la existencia deja de fluir como improvisación para condensarse como estrategia y como ritmo. ... Todo suceso es previsto... como integrante de un vasto, de un homogéneo organismo que, a su turno, es posible por el hervidero vivencial de muchas criaturas.... La vida está allí, codificada y sin embargo, hirviendo y plena.” 273).

absorption is what is narrated in the novel: a non-restrictive, in-between form that while being a part of the continuum attempts to describe reality from within the continuum itself. An organ that transforms the virtual into the actual for readers and then the actual back into the virtual; it produces the visualization of reality and of human beings as they truly are—that is, without restrictive forms.²²

This is done by pictorializing narration: the novel is an organ that transforms images of frozen time—the successive scenes of the characters remembering their past—into tactile images of space. Just as knowledge is subtracted from the elite’s hands because of their intellectual and cultural speculation and loan-sharking, the past is also subtracted from the regulatory mechanisms managed by them. Because of them history has been an archive to be respected, a sample pattern of proper conduct to be used as options for contemporary life. The novel will render this useless since the past is part of frenetic time, and history will be its pictorial narration from within such a continuous and expanding universe. History, understood as a pictorial description of the past, is then seen as a

...tactile phenomenon. It is necessary that what is preterit and abstract—the event—become immediate, familiar and graspable... While traveling throughout the rooms, [the event’s rooms], we examine its relics or we breathe its silence... the historicized building ends up going beyond the anecdote. Living itself, emanating itself. As an element that is

²² The novel’s central role will become more pressing in the 1970’s, when Rojas Herazo writes his nine-hundred page novel *Celia se pudre* (1986). In a 1975 interview, Rojas Herazo states that the novel is able to save humanity: “I will say it bluntly: the novel hungrily seeks to destroy all theologies so it can erect itself into a new one. It proposes the discovery of God in men through its purification. It proposes freedom of intention, of understanding and of action in order to vanquish the aggression of anguish” (“Lo diremos a secas: la novela busca hambrientamente destruir todas las teologías para erigirse en una nueva teología. Propone el descubrimiento de Dios en el hombre a través de su purificación. Propone la libertad de intención, de comprensión y de ejecución para derrotar la agresión de la angustia”; Aguirre y Rojas Herazo 13).

breathed in, that is touched, that is defined. What is vaporous in the epic, the fable or the legend stops being so in order to transform itself into a bedroom, a window, furniture, a whitewashed wall, sunlight or night diluted over wood or stone.

(un fenómeno táctil. Es necesario que ese algo pretérito y abstracto—el acontecimiento—se torne inmediato, familiar, manoseable. ... A medida que recorremos sus estancias [las estancias del suceso], examinamos sus reliquias o respiramos en su silencio,... el edificio historiado termina rebasando una anécdota. Viviéndose, emanándose. Como elemento que se aspira, que se toca, que se define. Lo gaseoso de la epopeya, de la conseja o de la leyenda deja de serlo para convertirse en alcoba, en ventana, en mueble, en pared encalada, en lumbre solar o en noche diluida sobre la madera o la piedra. (*Vigilia*, 505-506)

History is produced by pictorializing narrative. This is not a memory palace, mental images of a space used to memorize events or data, but instead these events are turned into immanently tactile and visual images—on a mental level, but also as created, painted or narrated objects. These are what I will call “houses of memory.” The narration of past events turns into a live and tactile *ekphrasis* of reality. It is not only a literary description of an artistic image, but an affective production of images with words: images carved on a live surface that sooner or later will disappear—the combination of his view of journalism as a sharing of images of an experience, and of creation as wood carving on a live trunk. These images then tell us about the affective reaction human beings have when seeing, feeling or smelling frenetic time and convulsive reality as they pass by. The joining of these affective ekphrases—lived and produced

both by the narrator as well as by the characters they portray and by the readers who read such ekphrases—is *En noviembre llega el Arzobispo*.

En noviembre llega el arzobispo: *Houses made out of Memory*

Alongside the articles I selected above to try to produce a coherent description of what was Rojas Herazo's intention, a vast part of his journalism—by far the major part—can be seen to sustain the claim that the novel is an organ converting images of time into images of space by means of ekphrasis. Practicing what he appreciates from Azorín and Hemingway, this part of his journalism consisted in continuous attempts to describe moments frozen in time, mostly referring to small towns or characters that live in the rural Caribbean. Many such descriptions in fact have titles that seem more appropriate for paintings than for chronicles or for reviews.²³

Furthermore, it could even be said that the novel is just like these picture-like articles, a succession of static ekphrases with no clear plot or causality, the only difference between them being the novel's tight focus on events and images of one town, Cedrón, and on a handful of characters connected by kinship or by past experiences. The novel is then a "Cedrón's Collected Stories," or better yet, an art exhibit where readers/viewers need to look for the totalizing view in an organicity that has no plan and no strategy, only a pulsating need to absorb and expel images of past experiences through a pictorial-based language.

The novel shows very little action or dialogue, or indeed any type of movement—if portrayed, it is surrounded by the description of nature and of spaces through which movement is

²³ "Two Scenes with Sea as Background," "Noon with Horses," "Evening near the Almendros," "Town during Noon" ("Dos escenas con fondo de mar," "Mediodía con caballos," "Tarde sobre los almendros," "Pueblo al mediodía"; *Magnitud*)

happening. Mostly there are only immobile characters looking at an object, a landscape, and while looking they remember something. Readers are then shown the memory, and within that memory sometimes dialogue, action, or mobility appear. It is only possible to reconstruct the novel's plot in very shallow terms: several characters inhabit a coastal town called Cedrón. Each of them looks at something in their house or in the town's landscape, and when doing so they remember something important for them. Beyond this, there is no secret explanation, no central idea that will produce a totalizing understanding of the novel at the level of plot or character development. Furthermore, we are advised from the very beginning not to hope for any kind of satisfaction with an explanation, no epiphany, certainty, or reason why all of this has happened: the epigraph from Federico Fellini tells us that "We suffer the consequences and we cannot even trace their origin; thus the error continues in darkness..." ("... Sufrimos las consecuencias y ni siquiera podemos trazar su origen; así que el error continúa en la oscuridad..."; Rojas Herazo, *En noviembre* 7).

If we are then to interpret the novel we have to precisely comprehend what does it entail that the images of the past are to be transformed into tactile, plastic spaces—both in the sense of "plastic arts," and of "plasticity"—, and thus the hidden message or value, the spark of a totalizing meaning, turn themselves into "a bedroom, a window, furniture, a whitewashed wall, sunlight or night diluted over wood or stone" ("en alcoba, en ventana, en mueble, en pared encalada, en lumber solar o en noche diluida sobre la madera o la piedra"; *Vigilia* 505). Readers cannot connect the successive images into a story because there are very few actions to help them organize what is being told. With a few exceptions—some moments of rage or violence—there are only narrations of these remembrances where readers are able to see certain actions

occur: the death of a farmer at the hands of another one, the entrance of a horse to the living room of several houses.

So what is the point of these ekphrases? Even if these remembrances are important for Rojas Herazo's overall conception, why are they important for the characters themselves, for readers and the world at large, unconcerned with Rojas Herazo's novelistic musings? Without the teleological horizon of nation-building as a project immersed in formalities and codes coming from a remote place, these ekphrastic episodes build houses and then communities of memories. And each house agglutinates into ever more complex units, producing the blob-like appearance of a from-the-ground-up, organismic democracy that we saw above in Rojas Herazo's particular reading of Whitman.

Houses made out of memory are an abstraction of one of Herazo's personal memories. As he says in his 1975 conference he spent his youth in his grandmother's house in front of the sea. Once beautiful, the house was by then only ruins and his grandmother, who was ninety-eight years old when she died and the inspiration for the character of Celia that appears in all his novels, never agreed to leave the house, no matter how dangerous was to live in it. According to him, she replied to her sons' attempts to move her somewhere else by declaring "This house is myself; that is why it will never hurt me. It has exactly the same age I have, and it will continue to exist as long as I do. ("Esta casa soy yo misma; por eso no puede hacerme daño. Tiene exactamente mi misma edad y durará lo mismo que yo dure"; *Garabatos* 244). On the next page he connects this memory with writing fiction: "I always return to my house in Tolú. It does not exist anymore. But every night I rebuild it with hallucinating precision in my multiple dreams. In one way or another my grandmother always appears there, confused with (sometimes turned into) the many hydra-shaped dragons who make her company in her later life" ("Siempre regreso

a mi casa de Tolú. Ya no existe. Pero todas las noches la reconstruyo con alucinadora precisión, en mis múltiples sueños. En una u otra forma siempre aparece en ella la abuela, [confundida a veces convertida] con los múltiples endriagos que la acompañan en su vida posterior” (245).

What we will see now is how those houses are made, and what they entail for both the novel’s form and the form of existence according to Rojas Herazo. By doing so, we will be able to see the main issue of Rojas Herazo’s entire project: individual agency in a world in perfect equilibrium. Even if these remembrances produce houses of memory that mash up into a community, contributing to Rojas Herazo’s creative reasoning, characters do not gain anything by building their own houses out of memories. Marcel Proust’s famous involuntary memory was able to reintegrate his dispersed experiences in a “cathedral” of memory, giving him a restoring transcendence. The same goes for James Joyce’s epiphany, which transfigured the “prose of the world” (Hegel’s curt description of the novel) into a transcendent and artistic level of meaning. In Rojas Herazo we cannot find a secret, a hidden key, a fulcrum from where to push the characters’ freedom into action. In Rojas Herazo’s world view the events that memories reveal to characters and to readers do not help explain causally and concretely characters’ actions, their will to act—or not—or the violent acts they cause or of which they are victims.²⁴

This occlusion of freedom is the by-product of intermingling nature and culture as an attempt to contradict the Capital’s hegemony based on the powers of the Lettered City. If the traditional decisive definition of the human in contrast to the animal is the former’s free will, the difference is tacitly diffused in the novel when humans are described and compared to animals,

²⁴ I am thinking here of William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* At the end readers come to realize that the main character, Charles Bon, is half-black, thus explaining the problems that the enigmatic Sutpen had throughout his life due to his racism, and the violence he exerted on everybody and everything around him. By revealing this secret/taboo, the novel acquires a totalizing whole. In Rojas Herazo’s novel, a secret is revealed toward the end, but it does not help us to understand the reason for the characters’ actions. In fact, what one deduces from their reactions to the secret is that they already knew all about it.

shown to have animal characteristics, or their actions are narrated with verbs exclusively used for animals. This type of description sometimes works as a critique or takes on a derogatory tone, but its most important function is to reveal how these characters treat time and memories. Delfina is described as an ostrich; Coronel Demetrio, her husband, as a tortoise; Leocadio Mendieta, Cedrón's local tyrant, is described as a vulture and his sons as wild horses. Finol, a violent dandy who arrives to town, "neighs" after he gets into a fight in a dance. He falls in love with the vulture's daughter who describes herself as a hare, and when she marries another man she states the main reason for picking him was because he was a loyal dog. Vitelia decides not to be a rabbit or a *guartinaja* (a tropical rodent), but a carnivorous fox. However, by directly mapping the creation of images—static and devoid of action, opposed here to the temporal qualities of discursive action—to memories and then to animals in order to protect his organismic worldview, free will and its capacity to produce change is stripped away from all characters, even from those who are not described as animals, as in the case of Father Escardó and Leocadio's wife Etelvina.

At the beginning of the novel we meet Delfina, an old woman who looks at her backyard while taking a break from sweeping the floor. We are confronted from the start with how nature and culture are intermingled, how both are embedded in a frenetic and destructive time.

Once again an old and brokenhearted queen is observing the confines of her empire. Her glare raised the dust, the veil, the punishment of yellow counties; of temples erected on the walls by the drawings made by leaves and by the rain's whim, solely so rusted nyctalopes could sleep in the twilight of their niches; of flowers whose design and perfume had complicated so much with time that nature, aroused by their gradual

sumptuousness turned them into epicene and monstrous beings; of corners, sheltered from any strange curiosity where hundreds of millions of ants, cockroaches and lizards had died—in foul-smelling, silent and horrible wars—in order to maintain the delight of amorphous and antique dynasties.

Otra vez una reina vieja y despechada observando los confines de su imperio. Su mirada levantó el polvo, el velo, el castigo, de amarillas comarcas; de templos erigidos por el dibujo de las hojas y el capricho de la lluvia en las paredes únicamente para que en ellos, en la penumbra de sus nichos, durmieran nictálopes oxidados; de flores cuyo diseño y perfume se fue complicando en tal forma que la naturaleza, estimulada por su progresiva suntuosidad, había terminado por convertirlas en seres epicenos y monstruosos; de rincones, amparados de toda extraña curiosidad, donde centenares de millones de hormigas, cucarachas y lagartos habían sucumbido—en guerras hediondas, silenciosas y horribles—para mantener el deleite de amorfas y antiquísimas dinastías. (21-22)

A woman looks out over her backyard, her kingdom. If we follow a common Latin American, Baroque-inspired reading, we would see an ever-dispersing and effusing nature, the one described in Alejo Carpentier's 1949 prologue; the three-pronged, subordinated structure of the sentence would seem to confirm this. As the woman gazes nature it seems to start to overflow in the patio. But if we take a closer look, we see that it is Delfina's gaze that uncovers reality, raising the dust, the veil and the punishment hiding the landscape from plain sight. And what appears is the blend between nature and culture: the topography of temples, the mention of insect and reptile dynasties in eternal wars and nature's conscious decision to turn flowers into common

and monstrous beings because of their intricate forms and perfumes. Nature is punishing them for their elaborated forms though they were stimulated by tropical nature itself; insect and lizard wars have come and gone while their dynasties enjoy the entertainment; and nocturnal animals look like objects with their rusty appearance while they sleep within the temples made by the rain and by the leaves. The natural and cultural realms are intermingled, temples are made from natural phenomena and animals have either a historical progressive narrative—dynasties—or object-like status.

In a world like this, what does Delfina do? Hide. Delfina, the ostrich, and her husband Demetrio, the tortoise, are characters who bury their heads in the sand or retreat to their own shells, turning their house of memories into a negation of the outside world. Both have perturbing and traumatic memories, but they are not capable to see beyond them. But not because they are not willing to do so; in fact the problem is not theirs to begin with. It is Rojas Herazo's problem. The concept of free will is missing in Rojas Herazo's conception of existence, but not because of a direct, discursive, rationalistic confrontation with the ideas of will or freedom, but as an unavoidable consequence of his view of the world as a living organism and the place images have in it: the emphasis he needs to put on mnemonic ekphrasis as a way of building the characters' places in the world, and his disregard for dialogue, diegesis and action, preclude the reader from perceiving any possibilities of change within the character's lives. In other words, the form of the novel reveals the limits of Rojas Herazo's organismic worldview.

Delfina's and Demetrio's memories are a good case to study how her construction of her own place precludes her from any action. Delfina's memory is about her son's death years before. After a quarrel with him he yelled out loud for the entire town to hear that he was conceived out of wedlock. The narrator tells us that "she felt her son, when freeing the calumny

in its entire splendor, bit her like a beast, threw mud into her entrails and scratched all her bones with an iron file” (Ella sintió que el hijo, al liberar la calumnia en todo su esplendor, la mordía como una bestia, le echaba fango en las entrañas y rastrillaba una lija de hierro contra todos sus huesos (75). She then gave a revolver to her husband and he shot their son dead. And just when she sees this, we jump years ahead, for we realize that she was remembering this event while watching her husband who, on the same spot from which he shot their son, asks her whether the prune jam will not spoil before Sunday. She has hidden her head in the ground because she is not entirely able to see how guilty she is for her son’s death: what her son said was not a lie, it was only a secret. However she says it is a “calumny,” a false statement used to give a negative image of her. Furthermore, she never says whether her troublesome memory is because her son’s death is hers and Demetrio’s fault, or because the truth is out in the open. Just as we have seen with Bogotá’s role in social and ideological control of the Caribbean region, a formality like illegitimacy is the cause of the tragedy and of the troublesome and persistent memory.

As horrible as this memory may be, his son’s death is not what most troubles Demetrio. Instead, his particular memory comes from his life as a Coronel during the Thousand Days War (1899-1902) when, due to hubris and against recommendations, he guided four hundred men into a swamp where they were ambushed. He lost three hundred of them and one of his eyes (164-165). Ever since, that memory has made him turn inwards, hiding himself like the tortoise, never leaving his nightmarish shell to live in the present.

However, both of them have found consolation through other, happier memories. Whenever Delfina sees Demetrio sinking back into the trauma of losing his men, she makes him remember the time when, after arriving in the Mississippi Delta in order to buy goods to sell in his shop at Cedrón, he was confused with the French Ambassador due to his lack of an eye. “She

was there again, facing the origin of his anguish. And it was not that she could appease him. It was that she really could get him out of that mix of torture and dream that the incident had eventually turned into, excessively corrected and purified due to repentance (“Ella volvía a estar allí, frente al origen de su angustia. Y no era que lo apaciguase. Era que lo sacaba en realidad de aquella mezcla de tortura y ensueño en que había terminado de convertirse un incidente, excesivamente corregido y purificado por la contrición”; 165).

Their son’s “calumny” produced Delfina’s suffering, and it is troublesome to say the least that—notwithstanding the regret he must feel that his hubris cost three hundred men their lives—Demetrio seems not to feel bad for killing their son. No matter what came first, his son’s or his men’s deaths—it is impossible to tell due to the lack of consistent plot—, it is hard to imagine that one person could commit one of these acts after doing the other. But it is possible if they believe they live only with themselves and their memories, without any social order that could make them pay for what they did: a military or a civil criminal court, for example. But that does not exist in Cedrón. The Mayor himself lives in his own house of memories and ideals, or should we say, in his own pigsty.

The novel has a clear intent of criticizing formalities and platonic views of society that can be traced to the Lettered City and to the Conservative *Regeneración*. Mayor Idumeo Iriarte, a hog-like politician who believes that stating the Law is enough for it to be respected, is the best case in point. Before we ever meet him his office is always described as spectral and as constantly surfing the waves that hit the town’s beach. We finally understand what this description means when we meet this overweight man who gorges on immense quantities of food only to fall asleep every afternoon in his office. He always assumes that everything is in perpetual harmony from the start and that is the way it should be, so in fact everything disrupts

his idea of harmony; no matter how small, everything ends up being a nuisance, and whoever is the culprit of such annoyances is immediately disrespecting the rule of law, because he is the Law. During his afternoon lunches he ruminates on “the biological reassurance, which forms part of his own digestion, that peace will reign over all creatures, all over the earth and forever” (“el convencimiento biológico, formando parte de su propia digestión, de que la paz reinaría entre todas las criaturas, en toda la tierra y para siempre”; 227). His secretary, however, who knows about the Mayor’s self-portrayal as the prophet who instills order, believes he is too fat to be a Moses (Ibid.).

Thus when a heated discussion between farmers over their property borders wakes up the Mayor, he yells: “No, damn it! It’s not fair! This is a peaceful town, nothing ever happens” (“¡No, carajo, no hay derecho! Este es un pueblo pacífico, aquí nunca pasa nada” (226). He then instructs his secretary to solve the problem, and by that he means to file a report of the discussion. When he does so, the Mayor orders the farmers to leave, and he feels pleasantly that he has done his job, that “everything has been mended” (“Todo, todo en absoluto, debe ser arreglado”; 227). He goes back to sleep, only to be woken up by shouting. In front of the Mayor’s office, one of the farmers has used his machete to cut off the other’s head. The Mayor’s response is to exclaim: “You people cannot even smell the peace!” (“¡Ni siquiera pueden oler la paz, carajo!” (229). With an authority figure like this, Delfina’s and Demetrio’s choice of keeping to themselves seems almost understandable.

As much as readers would like to see justice being served to these characters, there is no such thing. The narrator simply states the facts, shows us the picture and then leaves the characters be, passing on to another scene where another character starts to remember and construct his or her own house of memories. In this book of collected

stories/memories/pictures/houses, there are no denouements. There is no release of anxiety of the reader, no sense of catharsis. There is no return to normality because nothing is coming back from some other place. Everything has been always already normal, and it always will be. There has never been any change, nor will there ever be.

For Rojas Herazo's overall purposes this is enough. It consolidates the novel's form as an organ transforming words into images while leaving the whole intact, that is, an image of a world in perfect homeostasis. If we were to state it in evolutionary terms, Rojas Herazo strips away the organism's capacity of mutation in order to preserve the fluidity and health of the system. In other words, Rojas Herazo does the same Idumeo Iriarte does—as well as Capital's elites—create an idealized world order, map it onto their immediacy, and expect it to be eternal and immutable.

This is, to say the least, problematic. In his 1975 public manifestation of his credo as a novelist, he abruptly adds right at the end of it that there is no idea that should merit a corpse. But he never develops this (*Garabatos* 256). In fact, his oeuvre seems constructed between the silence of the natural order he wants and the consequent lack of justice or possibility of radical change he is not able—or willing—to conceive. This impossibility of change transforms into a plea for compassion for characters that are always innocent. In other words, Rojas Herazo asks readers to be some kind of immanent saints who do not judge or desire any justice or vengeance in this world, not because there will be a punishment or reward, but because the world is just like that. And by doing so he blocks all possibilities of transformation.

Everybody is always innocent and will continue being so in this animalized community (*Garabatos* 253). There is no original sin, no Fall since humans have never left nature. There is only compassion towards the fellow human being, no matter how evil they may seem. It is this

compassion—in the sense of sharing the suffering (*cum-padecere*) that helps us understand this cryptic sentence that is almost a distillation of Rojas Herazo’s project: “The poet is the tide, the breathing, the rhythm that enlaza y perfila, in its tense drawing, the living task of its earth-bound brother” (“El poeta es la marea, la respiración, el ritmo que enlaza y perfila, en su tenso dibujo, la viviente faena de su hermano terrestre”; *Vigilia*, 352).

Vitelia, the sociopath fox who lives immersed in the uselessness of forms and rules, will help us to problematize this point even further. At first glance one would say she is simply another character who lives restrained by codes and formalisms: she despises Father Escardó because he plays chess, and she considers games to be sins. And during Leocadio’s wake, just before she reveals to everybody that she is the mother who gave birth to him while married to someone who was not his father—this is the big secret that all the characters already know and readers by then have already deduced—she shouts that it is inconceivable there is a doctor’s bag on the bed of the deceased (347). The problem is not that these rule-abiding moments are due to a respect for the spirit of the Lord or for Leocadio’s soul; she has used God as an excuse to punish and torture kids she is supposed to be teaching civility and urbanism, and when Leocadio tells her he forgave her for abandoning him after giving birth, she spits at his face and yells at him that he should instead forgive himself, “you damned graft!” (“injerto maldito!”; 174). However, she wears an amethyst ring, typically used by Catholic high-clergy as symbols of divine knowledge, chastity and renunciation of earthly things, and this is what she is looking at when she starts to remember her life (167-180). We soon learn that the ring and other jewels were given to her by her first husband’s enemies in exchange for information on his whereabouts, and thanks to that information he was thrown into a crocodile-infested lake. And worse yet, the truth is she did not sell out her husband for jewels; instead, she wanted to see what

happened, just like when she was a child and wanted to see what happened if she stabbed small animals.

She soon stops gazing at the ring and looks at a picture of herself, years before, already with the ring on her hand. She remembers that the velvet and the embroideries she used for making the dress she is wearing in the picture were bought from a Jamaican ship. There she met a New Zealand sailor who looked like a mastiff. She was in her second marriage by then, and while her husband negotiated the price of the fabrics she decided that if the sailor was a mastiff, she would then be a fox (174). She arranges to meet him afterward, in private, and Leocadio Mendieta is conceived.

What are readers supposed to do with such a character? Rojas Herazo would say feel compassion for her. Because if that is not the case the tidy and healthy world view along with the system of fusing and thinning down species, creative genres and social alternatives would start to crumble. But even if readers are able to feel compassion for these characters—after all, one could say, they are in fact animals within the circle of life—what to do when the status of the animal is seen not as something to feel compassion about, but a passive tragic ideal to aspire to?

Leocadio, Vitelia's son, is the king of the town; however, he is not a lion in this Animal Kingdom but a vulture. Thus there is neither royalty nor status, he is instead someone who feeds off the destruction of others and that is why he is king. He is interested in power. He arrives in Cedrón and starts buying properties. Soon after with the help of a lawyer he manages to expropriate several houses, businesses and farms around town, until one of his farms is the

biggest one in the entire region and the rest of Cedrón's inhabitants owe money to or are being blackmailed by him.²⁵

What is particular about Leocadio is that he does not want money for distinction or for social climbing. He lives in the same house he bought when he first arrived, and he does not marry into high society. He instead picks Etelvina, a young girl he buys from a midwife who describes her as a "good child-bearing Indian" (*una india paridora*) (53), and they have four sons. Three of them, Leocadio concludes early on, are wild colts never to be tamed, and so they live on the farms and behave as a band of wild horses. The younger one goes to Cartagena and becomes a lawyer, and only returns to town for his father's death. Leocadio also raises a daughter he had with a cousin of his, and Etelvina treats her as her own. We soon realize that she is impregnated by him, forced to abort, and the stillborn child is thrown to the dogs who, according to Leocadio, are the only ones who really love him. His daughter falls in love with Finol, the neighing dandy. When Leocadio learns about this, he quickly sends her out of the country to study, and makes Finol disappear. In his hubris he truly believes he can control everyone and everything, even death. Time of course will hit him hard, but even as he grows older and has a major stroke that leaves him quadriplegic—he is then not described as a vulture anymore, but as a clumsy albatross—he will not want to pass on his properties to his children. He just wants power for power's sake. Before dying he confesses to Etelvina that he is innocent, that everybody always is.

Etelvina, Leocadio's wife, is in contrast the tragic figure in the novel. Leocadio treats her as an animal—he whips her while having sex and when he wants anything done—but the narrator never describes her as such. She only grows attached to Leocadio's bastard daughter and

²⁵ If we go back to the terms we used before, Leocadio is the loan shark and the extortionist, in purely economic terms. His mother functions like Bogotá, she is the one who uses the rules of etiquette and formality to hurt and extort favors and status from other town inhabitants.

to *Muchacho* the pig, which defends her from Leocadio's dogs. When Leocadio tells her that Muchacho is too old, meaning he will soon kill the pig so they can eat it, Etelvina reveals how she sees herself and what is her function in this, for lack of a better word, family:

It was always like that. They let her knead an affection... with the same indifference with which they let her whisk the eggs in the kitchen or make balls of grinded corn for the breakfast buns. Then they wolfed down that affection with the same peacefulness, with the same cruelty used in the dining room, at noon, to guzzle the patties and the meatballs. "I'm the cook, I'm the cook."

Siempre fue así. La dejaban amasar un cariño... con la misma indiferencia con que la dejaban batir los huevos crudos en la cocina o apelonar el maíz molido para hacer los bollos del desayuno. Después engullían aquel cariño con la misma tranquilidad, con la misma sevicia, con que en el comedor, al medio día, engullían las empanadas y las albóndigas. "Soy la cocinera, soy la cocinera" (216)

In a family that consists of a vulture, three sons who are wild horses, a daughter who sees herself as a hare, three ferocious dogs and one pig, she is the cook, the only human-like person. But she is a human treated savagely by animals who believe they are all innocent.

Rojas Herazo gives a possibility of acquiring some kind of peace, but one that is basically the comprehension and acceptance of the way the world's closed system works. Through the figure of Father Escardó characters and readers are supposed to find an example of that type of prodigal intellectual who, although does not find happiness, finds his own individual *ataraxia*,

that state of lucid and robust tranquility. This would not be any different than the private and almost solipsistic solutions other characters find to deal with the past that constructs them if it were not for the fact that, by finding meaning in the search itself, Escardó feels aspired to shepherd the rest of his herd—and in this animal-like world readers do not have to be Catholic to see themselves as constituents of a herd. He will do so by forcing his senses into the now, and then show others how they can construct their own place—their own private community—with the images of time. Escardó reaches a state that Rojas Herazo assigned to image-carvers and journalists. However, and this is telling, readers are not shown how Escardó acts on the world, only reaching the state in which it would be possible to do so.

Escardó fought with words, against the scab they build on reality—Bogotá's scab to be sure. Father Escardó glimpses what he has to do with other people, and that is what the narrator permits readers to see as his intention. Escardó is, much like Rojas Herazo's idealized version of Whitman and the rest of world intellectuals, the shepherd into the immanent kingdom, the blob-like order that is the community created from the ground up, without dreams of transcendence or hopes placed in progress.

Father Escardó has been in Cedrón for many years, all the while suffering from asthma. At the beginning of the scene that concerns us, he is having an attack that makes his surroundings come and go depending on his breathing, showing us how permeated consciousness and external contours are with each other:

That sort of diastole and systole of the contours had started all over again. He raised his nose searching for oxygen, and the chairs and the blanket hanging on the hanger and the window's balusters advanced toward him threatening to kill him. He released the air and

the objects returned to their place leaving behind an obsessive hangover. He soon picked up the habit and the more he inhaled the faster the advance and the imaginary mob. The faster the exhalation, the quicker it was the retreat of cloths and wood blocks and windows. The World against Man, he thought with an inconvenient and ill-fated pleasure.

Empezó nuevamente aquella especie de diástole y sístole del contorno. Alzaba la nariz buscando el oxígeno y las sillas, la sábana que colgaba de la percha y los balaustres de la ventana, avanzaban hacia él amenazando aniquilarlo. Aflojaba el aire y los objetos regresaban a su sitio dejando, entre ellos y él, una resaca obsesiva. Le cogió gusto a la cosa. Más rápida la inhalación, más rápido el avance y la imaginaria tropelía. Más rápida la expulsión y más precipitada la retirada de trapos, maderas y ventanas. El mundo contra el hombre, se complació con humor inconveniente y desdichado. (125)

Bedridden and suffering from the asthma attack that turns into a battle against his surroundings, Father Escardó remembers how his search for a purpose in life has turned up nothing yet: “And he breathed in the old, cloudy time, the slow, scorching days without a plan, without hope, yearning for an order, a mission, any task that would justify him or his herd” (“Y aspiró el turbio, el viejo tiempo, los días lentos, abrasadores, sin plan, sin esperanza, anhelando un orden, una misión, una labor cualquiera para justificarse y justificar a su rebaño”; 126). He remembers how naïve he was when he tried to “drill through that coat that covers all reality” (“perforar la costra que cubre toda la realidad”; 133) with words, concepts, and reflection. But “with words he also had his battle. They refused to accompany him beyond their common, equivocal and, in the end, very poor meanings. Heaven had finally acquired...a candid,

professional and unconvincing atmosphere of a religious card for farmers and little kids who wanted their First Communion” (“Pero también con las palabras tuvo su batalla. Se negaban a acompañarlo más allá de sus corrientes, equívocos y, al final, paupérrimos significados. El cielo había terminado por adquirir para él... una cándida, profesional y nada convincente atmósfera de estampita para campesinos o chiquillos en trance de primera comunión” (133). As for something like Grace, it was “another way of thinking about a prince charming, just like any maiden who wants to get married, he told himself several times, not ironically but with the desolate conviction of someone who—right after conquering the top of mountain defended by hirsute hillsides and ferocious winds—discovers that what he believed was the end of his ascent is only the tiniest wart of an exhausting geology” (“Otra forma de pensar en el príncipe azul, como cualquier doncellita casadera, se dijo muchas veces, no con ironía sino con la desoladora convicción de quien—después de conquistar una cumbre, defendida por híspidas laderas y vientos feroces—descubre que lo que creyó el término del ascenso no es cosa distinta a la más pequeña verruga de una agobiadora geología” (136).

These are wishful dreams and hopes of transcendence and happy endings. Father Escardó resembles Rojas Herazo’s way of searching for answers after realizing words are also against him because they impose a restrictive order, and that which he thought was an ending in itself, and the reason and justification of reality and social order, is only a temporary mirage that disperses as soon as he approaches it. What he realized he had in front of him was “the slowness, the leaves sparkling in the dusty time, the stubborn pious ladies chewing up Trinity hymns, Credo and Hail Marys in the half-light of dawn or dusk, the cough... Rainy season, dry season, rain, no rain, dust on the train of donkeys, the morose, thick and slithering heat squishing everybody into the earth, eating their flesh, their clothes, the wood, their wills, the hinges” (“En

cambio de aquello la lentitud, las hojas brillando en el tiempo polvoriento, las tozudas beatas masticando trisagios, credos y avemarías en la penumbra de la madrugada o del crepúsculo, la tos, el abandono sufriente con las piernas.... Lluvias, veranos, lluvias, veranos, polvo sobre las recuas, calor moroso, espeso, reptante, aplastándolos a todos contra la tierra, comiéndose la carne, las ropas, la madera, las intenciones, las bisagras” (137).

This is the same murderous time and nature we saw before, frenetically devouring everything in its path and clamping down any possibilities of change. The empty gestures of pious women, the coming and going of rain and dust, and the heat that just as easily can destroy flesh, spirits or objects, all of this is the true reality that Father Escardó once thought as the “coat” he needed to drill through with words and reflection. This nihilist conclusion seems to be the underlying mentality that supports the attack of things against him every time he breathes in.

But all is not lost. With time he has found another conviction that consisted in “discovering he has matured throughout the conviction itself. That it was the search, the voyage in itself, and not its arrival place, what could justify the initial joy” (“descubre que ha madurado en la propia búsqueda. Que era la búsqueda, el viaje en sí mismo y no el término, lo que podría justificar la inicial alegría”; 137). That is, the true goal lies in experiencing the moments of searching. And this answer does not come as a break, as a jump or leap in the level of conscience or consciousness; it is not an epiphany, not a sudden unbinding of limits. The answer arrived slowly, “without roar or glory, without chants or angels flapping their wings in apotheoses like in religious cards” (“sin estruendo, sin gloria, sin cánticos ni aleteos de ángeles en apoteosis de estampita milagrera”; 137).

With a Neoplatonic residue in his description of his discovery, Father Escardó describes what he is able to see, now that the asthma attack starts to recede.

He was starting to see, to orient himself with a halting clarity, as if a stubborn gust were trying to put out his tiny but unique and untransferable light of human being that allowed him to advance through his own darkness. And again everything that was common, the boredom of coughing and of his feet covered with striped socks on a stool, and the beige or blue cigarettes instead of the pink ones... Maybe it was not even necessary for God to exist, he tenderly concluded.

Empezaba a ver, empezaba a orientarse con titubeante claridad, como si una terca ráfaga tratara de apagarle la minúscula luz, pero su única, su intransferible luz de hombre, que le permitía avanzar en sus propias tinieblas. Y otra vez lo corriente, lo aburridor de la tos y los pies cubiertos con las medias listadas sobre el taburete y los cigarrillos crema o azul en vez de rosados... Tal vez ni siquiera sea necesario que Dios exista, concluyó tiernamente. (138)

The reach of Escardo's thought is to be able to think an immanence in which the existence of God is not necessary for him to continue to be the town's priest and guide its inhabitants to the same place he has found, the comfort and the knowledge that everything is like it is, and that it will never change.

This episode could be also conceived as a form of critique, but only until one realizes the exact same *ataraxia* he finds is also the prerequisite for readers to appreciate the novel's idiosyncratic form and preference for the static image of a memory. It is only by assuming an ataraxic position that readers may come to perceive within the multiple memories represented in the novel the theoretical positioning that Rojas Herazo prescribed in his journalism years

before.²⁶ Only by accepting ataraxia as the grounds on which the novel may be understood is that all the memories and retellings may come close to construct a community in the eyes of the reader. But we do not have to read Adorno and Horkheimer's appreciation of ataraxia as an internalized domination of affective life in order to understand how passive this positioning is. However, it is the limit of what a person can do in a reality as clamped down as the one Rojas Herazo envisions.

The novel does not produce an alternative for the current state of affairs of the world. It is based on a dream of international intelligentsia in order to undermine the capital's hegemony. Instead of a lettered city, the author proposed a pictorialized town made out of houses of memories. Bogotá's letrados would then be undermined by these animal-like subjects who share experiences through descriptions of static images. By doing so the hierarchical rule of the letrados would then be replaced by mnemonic-made figures that are added continuously to the organismic blob that is democracy. But in order to do so the enclosure of totality into a formalized, ekphrastic whole that is the novel—or a theology, as he called it—has to be preserved as never-changing.

At least, that is the theory. In practice, the novel turns into an unavoidable failure as a form. Success would be to find the underlying logic, the internal cause of existence, in formal terms, it would mean to find the plot. But the quote by Fellini tells us there is no cause, no ending, no plot. That is why there is only compassion, even for the most evil characters in the novel. The narrator walks along with its characters and shows how they remember, how they

²⁶ Again, it could also be interpreted as a regional stereotype, in which caribbeans are said to prefer harmony and are comfortable with ambivalence, while other cultures are more resolute. In Colombia, Bogotanos tend to think of this as a defect, while Costeños, as an attribute.

build their own houses of memory out of their experiences of time. And that is enough, because the topology of existence is a closed one, an organism in perfect health and without the capacity for mutation. This is a world that has reached the end of history, imagined—in both senses of the word—by Rojas Herazo as the consolidation of the worldly intellectuals that would create a perfect form of a United Nations. No matter how liberating it attempts to be, it still falls into a conservative logic due to the immutability at the base of its worldview.

Alejo Carpentier's late take on the universalized world, on the other hand, has movement as a structural foundation. A movement developed from a rereading of the marvelous real and of the baroque.

3. UNIVERSALIZING THE MARVELOUS REAL: ALEJO CARPENTIER'S *EL RECURSO DEL MÉTODO*

We have seen by now two static approaches to a vitalist imaginary—one by reducing all categories to a physical and constrained state, and the other one by portraying the world as an organism in perfect and perpetual homeostasis, with no need to change. In this chapter we will see how the vitalist imaginary is put into motion, how can change be thought within such an imaginary. This will happen by reading Alejo Carpentier's 1974 novel, *El recurso del método* not as a Dictator Novel—the way it has always been read—but as a practice run of a Later Carpentier, one who has not been studied as such, one who rehashes his notion of the “Marvelous Real” in function of a world in movement, and who activates his new Marvelous Real by rereading the Baroque as a vitalist human constant: the baroque will be nutritive agar from which disruption will sprout. The Dictator Novel then turns into a “Novel of Disruption” not in the sense of a revolution, but in the sense of contamination.

Since its publication in 1974, Alejo Carpentier's *El recurso del método* (*Reasons of State*, 1976) has been read as part of the Dictator Novel genre. At first glance it is a sound classification. The novel in fact deals with the life of *El Primer Magistrado*, a fictional Latin American dictator living in early twentieth-century Paris. Besides, Miguel Ángel Asturias *Señor Presidente* (1933, published in 1946) Augusto Roa Bastos' *Yo, el supremo* (1974), and Gabriel García Márquez's *El otoño del patriarca* (1975), three novels also dealing with the figure of the Spanish American dictator, were part of the contemporary publishing panorama at the time of *El recurso*'s publication. It was not absurd then to see such a series of texts as a compact and

comfortable category to describe another cluster of works in Spanish American Literature's history; a next step—beyond whatever the *Boom* cluster was—that would not only interest literary historians, but also convince various publishers to translate them and to bid on other novels on the same topic by upcoming authors—and thus make North American, Spanish American and European academics delve deeper into the new genre, constructing it and establishing it by discovering it, in one of those performative acts that abound in literary scholarship. Furthermore, Chile's *coup d'état* in 1973 helped turn the genre from an introspective reflection of Spanish America's political history—maybe interesting solely to Spanish Americans and historians—into what could be a series of very up-to-date accounts of the reality of the subcontinent, and thus interesting to a much bigger audience, the Western reading public.

More than thirty years later the economic and publishing reasons for this descriptor have disappeared, as well as the urgency European and North American publics had for understanding what was happening in Spanish America at the time. However, the academic nuance of this descriptor continues to close off a different reading of Carpentier's novel, one in which a critique of the centrality of Europe and Western culture could be developed, and a new notion of place and subjectivity could be produced. In this chapter I would therefore like to suspend the prevalence of this in order to illuminate the place this novel has in the development of a concise line of thought throughout Carpentier's work. I want to argue that Carpentier's 1974 novel can be seen as an attempt to map out a world system in which the Center-Periphery model is dismissed in favor of a Universal Baroque map, one emerging out of "pockets of disorder" that, coming from Latin America, had been sprouting within Europe for a long time. Carpentier was able to do this by putting into motion, since the mid-1960's, his previous notion of the

“marvelous real” and turning it from a point of comparison between Europe and Latin America into a force of disruption of prestablished orders. Before the “network” metaphor took hold—the visual abstraction of global capitalism (Buck-Morss)—Carpentier resorted to vitalist tropes and figures for portraying the mobile transatlantic space. These vitalist themes, the natural marvelous real in the American continent, turns then into a portrayal of a fluid type of subjectivity in *El recurso*, a novel that disrupts two major figures in the pantheon of Western subjectivity and space organization: René Descartes and Marcel Proust.

In other words, I will argue that by 1974 Carpentier was already a globalized author with multiple ties to different regions, and his novel was an attempt to think from that position. Unfortunately for us, at that moment an image of such a type of author, and consequently the position from which his work was being enounced, fell through the cracks that exist between regional, national, historical, literary and political categories within the academic imagination. Just after emancipative hopes were in their peak, and just before the limits of those hopes were systematically explored by subaltern studies, Carpentier was able to conceive a novel where the focus was the circulation—and the absence of it—of European and Spanish American epistemologies from one side of the Atlantic and the abrupt sprouts of Latin America within Europe.

In order to do this I will first need to disassemble the received notions we might have of what Carpentier’s literary project in fact was, and the place *El recurso del método* is supposed to occupy in it. That will be the first part of this chapter. In the second part, I will argue for an interpretation of Carpentier’s project as one that continuously expands and at the same time distorts the ideas he articulated in his 1949 prologue to *El reino de este mundo*. He was able to do so thanks to his resort to vitalist strategies that take exception of a Cartesian partition between

subject and object. Then, in the third part of the chapter, I will closely read *El recurso* in order to show how his previous efforts to theorize a vitalist-based world system came to fruition and to show how it affects the subject immersed in it.

A National Carpentier

In 1974, after almost twelve years of literary silence, Carpentier published a new book, the first one to be completely written after the success of the Cuban Revolution.¹ Along with *Concierto Barroco*, a shorter novel published on the same year, *El recurso del método* was expected to be Carpentier's return to the public forum as a writer. Before that he had been the executive director of the Editorial Nacional de Cuba, while reading essays in conferences throughout the continent. An entire issue of *Casa de las Américas* journal was dedicated to the event, and the translations came out in their respective markets within a year after the original publication date.

But because of a complex junction of chronological suppositions, categorical assumptions and disciplinary currents, the novel has only been seen as a coda to his greater work and as his contribution to the Dictator novel genre. I will try to untangle this reception knot by showing how the two moments, 1962 and 1974, were very different in terms of what public and critics were assuming of Carpentier and expecting of his novels. This will help us understand *El recurso*'s unique position and relevance for Carpentier.

¹ *El siglo de las luces* was finished in Caracas in 1958. See González Echevarría's argument on how it was impossible for Carpentier to have written the novel after Batista's demise (*Peregrino* 274-277).

While his work had been published in Mexico and Cuba for a long time, it was only in 1965 that *El siglo de las luces* appeared in Spain, finally reaching a broader international audience. This allowed the media to project Carpentier as part of the *Boom* wave, when he actually pertained to an older generation. In fact, that younger generation (Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, José Donoso) regarded Carpentier as their original master and frequently acknowledged their debt to his work. Regardless of these remarks, however, Carpentier was branded as a Boom writer, with all the expectations and categories the term carries.

The Boom brand turned Carpentier into *the* Cuban international intellectual. This was due to his previous trajectory which granted him prestige among his peers, but also, on a broader level, to an eerie sense of timing regarding the publication of *El siglo de las luces*. A novel finished just before Batista's regime was toppled down, it portrays the complex comings and goings of political, social, cultural and historical revolutions, how it translated into the Caribbean and how, when it arrived there, revolutionary processes seemed to distort themselves but also continue as strange mutations. The novel's 1962 publication in Mexico City and Havana turned it into a post-revolutionary novel, even though it was written before the 1959 events, and thus it seemed to imply that Cuba—and Spanish America in general—would now be the territories in charge of the revolutionary processes started in Europe centuries before. It is within the expectations of social and political revolution that his readers in Spanish America—and in Europe and the U.S. although for differing reasons—seemed to query *El siglo*, and seemed to ask Carpentier—the author and soon-to-be ambassador in Paris—how would this revolutionary process develop in Spanish America.

If we peruse his essays and conferences written during the 1960's, we would arrive to the

conclusion that for the next twelve years after *El siglo* was published Carpentier would try to answer that question, although he was not able to answer it clearly. Nevertheless, his rebranding of the previously-used concept “lo real maravilloso” and his effort to connect it to the concept of the “baroque” reveals a pattern that would repeat itself and develop into a complex concern in his 1974 novel.

However, since Carpentier was framed by now as a Boom writer and the voice of the continent, his voice paradoxically became stagnant to the critics, and his essays “De lo real maravilloso Americano” (1964) and “Problemática de la actual novela latinoamericana” (1975) were since then seen as all-powerful judgments, as authoritative conclusions and answers to what had happened to the marvelous real and to the Latin American novel. In contrast, what we will see later on is that these essays were not conclusions coming from the top down—official pronouncements of Revolutionary Cuba or retrospective explanations of what the Boom writers were doing. These were truly essays in the original sense of the word, tentative attempts to find answers from within a post-revolutionary position to crucial questions: What was happening after the revolution? What will happen to an increasingly globalized world immersed in such revolutions? In other words Carpentier, soon after the arrival of the Cuban Revolution, had started to think through the Boom categories of novels as national allegories (Jameson) in order to reach a greater, universal breadth. Almost to the date that Jameson gives as the rise of late capitalism, Carpentier published a novel that delved into these topics from a delocalized, fluid position, and into the consequences these phenomena had on the subject and on the narrative form.

The expansion Carpentier’s reach is not entirely surprising: after all, as González Echevarría has argued (*Celestina’s Brood*), there is a clear and constant progression from the

particular to the universal in Carpentier's fiction. If *Ecué Yamba Oh!* (1933) was a novel about a slave's insurrection in a Cuban plantation, *El reino de este mundo* (1949) encompassed the whole of Saint-Domingue. *Los pasos perdidos* (1953) focused not on a country but on an entire region, the Amazon jungle. And then, leaving behind the Amazon as an extemporal symbol of the Spanish American world, he returned to the historical novel with *El siglo de las luces* (1962) a novel focused on the repercussions world events had in the Caribbean. But presupposed historical categories, shaped by regional or national interests did not allow Carpentier's work to be read as an intervention that surpassed those categories after the 1959 events.

For the 1960's generation of U.S. academics, the interest in these novels and countries arose from the particular decolonizing process that was occurring at the time. As Neil Larsen recalls, "reading the boom was not only reading Spanish America but "reading" [that is, a recognition the South existed and was closely entangled with the North] the decolonized world itself. And perhaps one could specify even further and say that by 1968, in North America, reading the boom was also a way of "reading" Vietnam" (4). If we add the increase in the use of structuralism across the humanities (and post-structuralism by the time the novel was published), we can see how dense and complex works such as Carpentier's had multiple purposes: they not only granted prestige to Spanish American literature throughout the rest of the Humanities; they allowed North American readers not only to acknowledge a neglected area of the world that was producing surprisingly sophisticated texts in close dialogue with the most avant-garde theoretical positions coming from Europe, but also to combine that acknowledgement with a sense of political urgency that few literary texts were providing at the time. But that urgency was partitioned between geopolitical areas which rarely if ever merged in meaningful communication.

For Spanish America and the Caribbean, the Boom became a cultural token for the decantation of their identities as nations and region. Since the 1930's, when Oswald Spengler's work on the decay of the West arrived to different areas of Spanish America via José Ortega y Gasset's *Revista de occidente*, and later, when World War II made even clearer the limits of the modern project, Caribbean writers saw in the region's search for identity amidst multiple ethnic, cultural and historical backgrounds a possible answer to the problems afflicting the metropolis. This was consolidated in diverse figures that can be traced to Fernando Ortiz's male transculturalized subject—the central subject of the Cuban and Caribbean literary traditions—who was able to take advantage of the hegemonic tools of discourse to create his own hybrid culture (the black subject in Nicolás Guillén's poetry, the origin of José Lezama Lima's *Señor Barroco*, and the American narrator of Carpentier's prologue to *El reino de este mundo* (González Echevarría, *Peregrino* Chapter 2; Jones, *Ambiguous Promise* 39-67).

For Spain, its publishing industry in the 1960's was devoted to consolidating its expansion across Spanish America, turning Spain into the door through which Spanish American literature entered the European literary and cultural imaginary—as well as its book market.² And in a similar sense to U.S. academics, the European readers found this group of novels as a compact cluster charged with emancipatory affects.

It is therefore no surprise that *El recurso* was expected to be the continuation of the historical revision Carpentier had started with *El siglo de las luces*, a next step in the consolidation of a distinctive Latin American voice and consciousness, a text on par with the

² The economic and political consequences regarding the Spanish publishing industry have been studied by Santana (2000) and Herrero-Olaizola (2007). The impact the Spanish project of appropriation of the literary markets by the book industry—mainly in Chile—was studied by Cárcamo (2007). Although scarcely cited on this chapter, without these works an approach to the phenomenon of Carpentier's reception would have been impossible.

groundbreaking interpretative techniques coming out of Paris, and another marketable hit—if not a best-seller, then at least a “long-seller,” or in non-publishing jargon, a *classic*. All this, of course, while preserving long-held imaginary geopolitical and economic partitions and their subsequent roles in the arena.

But by 1974 the hopes of this type of change coming from the geopolitical and economic periphery had vanished or become seriously questioned. This made it quite difficult for this novel to be read in its own terms. Public and critics were aware the conditions of 1962 did not exist anymore, but the tools to interpret the novel were, and still are to a certain degree, based on that image of the author as the intellectual and voice of the revolution in the continent. This conflicting desires are evident in how *Casa de las Américas* journal, on its issue dedicated to Carpentier’s new novel, projected what *El siglo de las luces* had affectively meant in 1962 and what they aspired *El recurso* would in turn mean. The issue only contains a short book review and a four-page interview with the author that make any reference to *El recurso* itself, while the other articles deal with Carpentier’s take on history from the point of view of orthodox dialectical materialism (*Casa de las Américas* 89). But what is more telling is the set of illustrations accompanying the articles: galleons, Aztec codices, tropical beaches with galleons anchored near them, etc. None of this appears in *El recurso*. For the journal, the novel that deals with a twentieth-century dictator living in Paris recalls the temporalities of Carpentier’s earlier novels. But in reality, what it recalled was the emancipative hopes that had years ago dissipated.

This happened, also, for multiple reasons. The Spanish American attempt of portraying the demise of Europe hid an old agony of differentiating Spanish America from the metropolis. When the 1959 events arrived, Cuba became an intensified synecdoche of the political problems and hopes overwhelming Spanish America at the moment, but also of the aspirations to differ

from Europe, an expectation to break completely from their patterns of civilization. This break soon became unviable. Fidel Castro's *Palabras a los intelectuales* started to close these hopes in 1961 when, in the name of the revolution, he assigned the role of the soldier to the intellectual and the role of the avant-garde to the Party. Years later, Poet Heberto Padilla was made to confess and retract his anti-revolutionary sentiments, which forced many European and Spanish American intellectuals to retract their support for the Revolution. And in 1971, with its strict guidelines, the *Quinquenio gris* ("The Gray Five-Year Period") began, a period when the repressive elements of the Revolution took control of intellectual and social public life. Social realism was then prescribed as the literary genre to be cultivated by the faithful writers to the Cause.

So a response to the novel's critical possibilities and trans-Atlantic scope could not have come from Cuba at the time. It could not come from Spain either: by 1974 Franco was gravely ill, and for the majority of Spaniards his long-foretold death was coming at last. Spanish readers and critics quickly read the novel with what is by now a common pattern: as a cultural product, as an export of magical realism and exoticism. With *el destape* (the "uncovering"), a cultural trend in which long-lasting moral inhibitions were countered by a return—with a vengeance—of the repressed, the public would not read in code anymore what they were desperately seeking in their own surroundings.

Furthermore, if we take into account the deep hopelessness that the 1973 Pinochet coup left on European, North American and Spanish American progressives, we can assume the humorous tone in *El recurso* was not entirely appreciated. In this case, Carpentier's eerie sense of timing that had propelled him into the novelistic theorist of the revolution in 1962 completely backfired in 1974. It was seen as the last ditch effort against frustrated hopes of dictatorial

regimes based on mockery.

As we will see later, it is not startling then that the role of Marxism and Communism in the novel is quite ambivalent. Both are barely mentioned, and when they are it is only in order to portray them as small abstractions and spectral menaces that nobody can completely grasp.³ Whenever there was no clear explanation for a problem in the country, the menace of communism was named as the reason for it. Furthermore, contrary to Castro's announcement, the novel portrays certain key intellectual figures that carry the seed of change. The contingent conditions of reception subsided, but not before turning the novel into a coda of Carpentier's "more important" work.

By subtracting the political hopes his authorial image once incarnated, he could then be placed in the liberal-humanist canon of Spanish American literature. The regional partitions and categories were kept in place, but disarmed in order to make him a transcendental figure. This has been the task of his foremost critic and curator of his image, Roberto González Echevarría, by arguing that he is the cornerstone of the development of the Boom novel in all Latin American literature.⁴

Years later González Echevarría wrote *Myth and Archive: a theory of Spanish American narrative* (1990), where he proposed an ambitious system for understanding the Spanish

³ When the PM orders the confiscation of all "Red literature," his minions seize all the pornography they can find (259). Then, when the PM somewhat explains to them what he means by "Red literature," their next step is to seize all books with the word "red" in the title—including *Little Red Riding Hood*, Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*, and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (261). Finally, when his assistant shows him Marx's *Das Kapital*—which of course was not seized—he reads: "C-M-C, M-C-M... no equation can throw me down" ("...D-M-D, M-D-M. A mí no se me tumba con ecuaciones"; 268, my trans.).

⁴ Beginning with his 1977 monograph on Carpentier, Echevarría positioned him as a constant ground-breaker of literary paradigms, always ahead of his time. According to Echevarría, due to Carpentier's particular take on intellectual and literary history as systems—or baroque *conceits*, that is, figurative representations of philosophical systems that could be put in movement through metaphors—he was always able to break from the social and epistemic conditions of the time: surrealism, regionalism and historical fiction.

American novel, one that encompassed both sides of the Atlantic and paid its dues to the picaresque genre—left aside by European historians of the novel but a very clear and important predecessor of Spanish American narrative. His previous reading of Carpentier (*Peregrino*) was then transported onto the level of literary history. Structurally, it functions in the same way his interpretation of Carpentier’s work does: it is not an imitation of the European histories of the novel, but a kind of parasite—or conceit—on the various hegemonic discourses that have existed throughout Spanish American history: for the colonial period the hegemonic discourse was the law, during the nineteenth century it was science, and after the crisis of scientific knowledge in the beginning of the twentieth century, anthropology. During every period the novel attached itself to those discourses and not only established a dialogue with them but also mined their structures of power. This happened until a point was reached that Echevarría called “the archival fiction”: a series of novels that appeared thanks to Carpentier’s *Los pasos perdidos*, which suggested or clearly used the notion of an archive, an “archeology of narrative forms, an architectural place, (...) a repository of knowledge” (Zamora, *Review* 519), to put into question the notion of a new beginning in Spanish American fiction. The forbearers of these archival fictions were novels that dealt with these hegemonic discourses and which, in time, would become part of the archive. In a sense, Echevarría took from Jacques Derrida’s *De la grammatologie* the notion of supplement and transformed it into a mechanism of diachronic discursive change, first to explain how Carpentier’s novels worked, and then how Spanish American literary and intellectual history developed.⁵

⁵ A supplement is a text which completes a bigger one; however, if the former one is subtracted from it, the latter is still considered complete (See Derrida 141-164).

This way of understanding Carpentier has become extremely influential, along with his Carpentierian narrative of Spanish American literary history. But as any narrative, it leaves certain aspects hidden from view and assumes particular structural underpinnings. First, it is structurally teleological—which makes the archival fiction look like the end and culmination of literary history in Latin America. And more importantly for the purpose of this chapter, even though Echevarría states a clear expansion in Carpentier's thematic scope, he does not recognize *Concierto barroco* and *El recurso* as part of this progressive amplitude in geography and subject matter.⁶

I believe this is due to a tacit presumption on Echevarría's part: European events have consequences in Spanish America, but not vice versa. Spanish America is turned into the archive of European events, and it can only contribute to retrospective archival fictions that put the past into fictional motion, but not into actual motion. We can interpret Carpentier's early novels as doing such a thing: until *El siglo de las luces*, the Caribbean was the focal area where the European ideas were transported to and soon after transformed by Latin America—this would be the reading of the revolution according to his 1949 prologue about the marvelous real.

However, the 1974 and later novels do not work in such a way. Instead, they deal with the interrelation between Europe and the New World, with the distance, the contrasts and the impasses between them, and with how the incursion of the New World into European versions of world history and its own imaginary of what the global means, produces transformations until then disavowed by the Metropolis. In other words, if in the 1962 novel the Caribbean was the

⁶ In *Pilgrim at Home*, Echevarría sees all of Carpentier's work done after 1959 as a coda to his most important books, and still holds this opinion in the revised second edition, published in Spanish in 2002. In *Myth and Archive*, Carpentier's second half of his work is barely treated, and in *Celestina's Brood*, a compilation of his articles on the Latin American baroque, none of these novels are mentioned.

center stage of all plot developments, in 1974 the plots would require readers to travel from Spanish America to Europe and back again. This movement and inclusion of what is not Latin American in the narrative scope is obstructed in Echevarría's approach.

A response to this unidirectional take on history came from subaltern studies, but this approach could not interpret what Carpentier was attempting to do either. His image as a great author, intellectual, and part of the political establishment did not help him to be seen kindly by this new approach. Furthermore, the initial hope for the voice of the Other—to could talk face to face to the Imperial institutions—also impeded an interpretation of what Carpentier in fact did in his novels: he was not as much interested in talking face to face with the Imperial center, as of showing to everybody else that, first, it was no center at all, and second, that the empire was contaminated from within by pockets of “the marvelous real” or as we will see below, what he would later call “proliferating nuclei” within the organized Cartesian European (*Lo barroco* 72).

But before doing so we need to see one last attempt of reading Carpentier according to pre-established theoretical conceptions so we can be more precise about what these “proliferating nuclei” actually mean. After reading Carpentier as a canonical author, and then as the paradigm of the author that needs to be dismissed in order for the subalternist subject to appear an attempt to understand his Post-revolution novels also surfaced, triggered by the notion of Bakhtinian carnival. But this approach focused on his other 1974 novel, *Concierto barroco*, and then tried to extrapolate the resulting template onto *El recurso*.⁷

Concierto Barroco appears to fit squarely in a Bakhtinian account. It is a tale of an unnamed Mexican landlord and of Filomeno, his Cuban bondsman, who in the eighteenth

⁷ Some years before, Mikhail Bakhtin's work on Rabelais and the carnival had been published in Paris (Bakhtin 1965), and his work on parody had been translated and introduced into the French-speaking literary and philosophical circles by Julia Kristeva in the journal *Critique*.

century travel to the Venice carnival. There they meet Antonio Vivaldi and George F. Händel, with whom they have an under-the-influence jam session with the help of an orchestra of nuns at *Il hospitale de la Pietà*. At the end of the short novel, the Landlord acquires a sense of *criollo* identity by renouncing European notions of authority, after seeing how obtuse the opera creator was when adapting Mexico's conquest story into an opera. Meanwhile Filomeno jumps into the future and takes a train to Paris, where he soon starts playing jazz with Louis Armstrong. The final sentence clearly sums up the upbeat tone and the humorous approach to the past the novel has: "The future is entirely fabulous."

The novel was able to gain academic attention. What in the early impressionistic reviews was called a new, humorous relief in Carpentier's usual dense and convoluted style was soon converted into much more than just simple humor in the narrator's tone when the first academic articles appeared. In an attempt to repeat the fruitful correlation between literary theory coming from Europe and fiction coming from Spanish America, the U.S. produced multiple readings of the text, all of them around parody and the subversive possibilities of Carnival. Later on, after the academic field of Spanish American Studies started to expand its areas of inquiry from literary texts into performance, visuality, music, theater and opera, the novel's thematic richness allowed it to enjoy the status of a key text to discuss these aspects in the Spanish American tradition.

El recurso did not share the same fate. *El recurso* deals with the *Primer Magistrado*, a nameless generic dictator of a nameless, generic Spanish American country, which is a mélange of Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico and Cuba. At the beginning of the novel he is living in Paris in 1913, only going back to his country to squash revolutions. A paradigm of the fin-de-siècle Parisian bourgeois, he cannot understand nor much less appreciate the avant-garde

paintings his daughter buys in Paris, and his social circle judges talking politics as of bad taste. The narrative voice is split between a first person and a third person, making readers jump from an historical account of the Primer Magistrado's actions to a personal account of his solitary life. We are witnesses in this way to the crushing of several rebellions and revolutions, but also to the immediate repercussions that global events have on the country (both World Wars, the 1930's economic crises and downturns, the birth of financial forms of colonialism, etc.). No revolution succeeds in getting him out of power. It is only when the international political and economic circumstances crash around him that the Magistrado is forced out by the commercial, U.S.-backed class, turning him into a political exile in Paris where he would later die in complete disavowal by his Parisian friends—most of them characters from Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. It is there, in the remembrance of his country, where he slowly accepts he is someone from "allá," by means of food, daily customs, and through a nostalgia induced by three-week old newspapers. In the end, a small hope for the country is envisioned when the *Estudiante*, the slippery nemesis of the Primer Magistrado, is seen by the latter in the Nôtre Dame church on his way to the First World Conference against Colonial and Imperial Politics, held in Brussels in 1927. The Student does not recognize him.

The tongue-in-cheek references to multiple dictators throughout Spanish American history, Carpentier's sardonic tone when describing the character of the Primer Magistrado, the impetuous behavior on the dictator's part when dealing with geopolitical situations, a somewhat cartoon-like portrayal of the vicissitudes of the country, all these themes allowed an almost automatic use of then-in-vogue Bakhtinian theory to interpret the novel as a humorous parody of the figure of the dictator, an interpretation that has continued well into the 1980's and beyond (Zavala; Maesneer; Ryan). But Carnival is a temporal moment, restricted in time and space; the

system it subverts is always still in place and always still in power. So, even though *Concierto barroco* may be seen as a celebration of the carnivalesque, where History and Myth fuse with each other and put themselves into question (Castillo), this could not easily be argued for *El recurso*. The simple fact that a despotic figure stays in power for multiple decades is somewhat a counterargument to seeing this novel as a parody, since that would mean a crass take on the history of the continent. What is behind that impetuous behavior of the dictator, and a cartoon-like portrayal of the city, is a death count of terrible proportions that even though not clearly stated, is easily apprehended by the readers. Yes, just like in *Concierto*, in *El recurso* a Master also goes to Europe, but now we know exactly what he does when he returns to his homeland—again and again. If we assume celebration was the biggest purpose of the baroque concert scene in the short novel, in this novel the future is not fabulous at all.

The imposition of a fashionable theoretical framework onto a novel's content forced critics to see in the narrator's tone proof that the novel itself belonged to the parody genre. But by doing so, critics pushed forward a formalistic point, leaving behind the historical consequences of a dictatorial regime. This implied that Carpentier, an ambassador for Cuba and an engaged intellectual all throughout his life, had left aside his questioning of geopolitical conditions and the role of literature in its search for political, economic and historical alternatives from Western templates, for concerns with novelistic formalism.

This was not done by a simple, cynical and convenient forgetting of political concerns, but because of the particular mixture of truncated hopes with interpretative tools developed at another time, when hopes were still in full blossom. That is why the emphasis on parody by literary critics when studying the novel during the seventies and eighties could only reach a textual and stylistic level: the criticism was not only following (post) structuralist methods of

analysis or a Bakhtinian template, but it was a way of tacitly leaving behind certain ideological problems that a regional-based, political, post-Cuban-Revolution reading of the novel brought to the fore. In other words, if critics did not restrain themselves to a formalistic level, or catalogue the novel as part of the “dictator novel genre,” the immediate political context of the Cuban and world moment could come in through the back door.

Against this formalistic effort, Subaltern Studies were searching for an emancipative politics away from González Echevarría’s canonical account of literature and from Bakhtinian carnival templates. But as the place of these politics moved from Castro’s Cuba to Central American revolutions, academic imaginary paradigms were also left behind, and with them templates of what the Spanish American subject and literature were supposed to be. Ortiz’s transculturalized subject, the central subject of the Cuban and Caribbean literary traditions, who was able to take advantage of the hegemonic tools of discourse to create his own hybrid culture, started to lose ground to the subaltern subject, the one who had Rigoberta Menchú’s “I” as its focus and its central point of diffusion of meaning.⁸ If the 1973 Chilean coup and the military dictatorships that followed throughout the Southern Cone summarily killed the emancipative aura that had charged the Boom novels, *testimonio* revived those hopes up to a certain degree (Avelar, Intro).

However, this surge in interest for the genre would tacitly preclude the attention to the high-brow, modernist-style novels such as the ones that continued to come from the Boom writers, especially when critics began to realize the powerful grasp neo-liberalism had managed

⁸ The increase in interest in *Testimonio*, beginning with Montejo and Barnet’s *Biografía de un Cimarrón* in Cuba in 1966, and the genre’s consecration with its *Casa de las Américas* Prize in 1970, achieved in the 1980’s status in the North American academy with John Beverley’s work which was able to translate the subversive possibilities of baroque literature into the emancipative hopes for the subaltern (*Lazarillo; Modernidad obsoleta*).

to acquire of them—no matter the author’s personal political inclinations—turning them into cultural products that sold exoticism and magic realism to European and North American literary markets. In other words, the immediate equating of *testimonio* with an indigenous subaltern subject, the displacing of the horizon of political emancipation from the Caribbean to continental Spanish America, and the loss of interest in the study of certain styles and topics like the examination of Europe from a Spanish American point of view and an appropriation of high-modernist techniques, all these ended up relegating *El recurso* to a nowhere land.

The Vitalist, Expansive Carpentier

Against this clamping down of imagination by academic discourses, Carpentier resorted to his own version of expansive fluidity as a movement in history. Let us return to *Concierto Barroco*’s ending for a moment. The Bakhtinian interpretation of the last sentence is the most common, even hegemonic: by saying “the future is entirely fabulous” a celebratory mood may come to mind. But it may also mean “fabulous” in terms of unexpected, miraculous, or to use a word cherished by Carpentier, “marvelous.” Just like Hegel’s silence after the bondsman acquires self-consciousness, we are left not as much with possible amazement, as with a *fabulation* of the future: “The future is entirely fabulous.” That is: in the future there will always be the possibility for something uncertain, something that escapes the domain of rules and orders and categories. I believe this was the train of thought that drove Carpentier since the moment he finished *El siglo de las luces* until 1974—and possibly until the end of his life—: the specification of what he meant by “marvelous,” and how it transcended the geographical frontiers of Latin America and the demise of Cartesian and Modern certainty. *Concierto barroco*

and *El recurso del método* were texts that tried to say this. But *Concierto barroco* was misread due to a Bakhtinian undercurrent of interpretation, and *El recurso* was forgotten because it could not be misread in the same way.

This re-elaboration of “marvelous” can be traced to 1964. It is difficult to imagine what it might have been like for Carpentier then. He was the paradigmatic image of the intellectual, but this role was being revoked by the same government he worked for and respected. Plain social realism had never been a genre he cared for and much less cultivated and *testimonio*, the genre to which the Revolution would soon start to commit itself in aims of producing a different approach to subjectivity, meant leaving behind the bourgeois techniques of the novel on which he relied.

Carpentier renewed himself while moving within such horizons by first, doing what he had always done: expanding his frame and his reach. That is not new. But what is new is that he also started to question the Cartesian, universalizing and ever-present narrator from some of his texts. The clearest example of this double process can be found by comparing his essay “De lo real maravilloso latinoamericano” (1964) to his now-famous prologue to *El reino de este mundo* (1949), or better said, by seeing how he turns the latter into the former.

Re-Placing the “Marvelous Real”

When published, the prologue was a straight-forward authorial comment—a Spanish American-authorial comment—to Parisian surrealism: how artificial and arbitrary was what Europeans considered to be “marvelous,” i.e. an umbrella and a sewing machine on an autopsy table, compared to the luscious nature of the American continent. In that venue, the novel was an exemplification of what he meant in the prologue, it was the case study of the “marvelous real” thesis. But by 1964 the prologue had gained a life of its own: it had been turned almost into

something as a manifesto for the marvelous real, which in turn had been named the forefather of magical realism. So if the prologue had been rebranded by others, Carpentier would rebrand it once again: he removed it from further printings of *El reino* (none of the Seix Barral's editions include it), but not so he could publish it as a stand-alone piece. Instead, he turned it into the conclusion of a longer essay, "De lo real maravilloso latinoamericano," published in 1964.

Both as a prologue and as the later essay's conclusion, the dichotomy between what is a marvel and what is marvelous real does not change: Surrealism's definition of a marvel is depicted as artificial. (Much in the same line as Rojas Herazo would depict Bogotá's literary culture). It is "sought in old clichés, it is poorly suggested by characters in carnival fairs, it is obtained with sleight-of-hand tricks and with English novel's props (ghosts, walled-in priests, lycanthropes, hands nailed on Castle's doors"; *De lo real*, 38). In contrast to this, the American marvelous does not have to be fabricated because it is real. It does not need to be suggested but found, because it is all over nature, cities and history. It happens; it sprouts outside any rules and categorizations.

...many forget, while dressing up as cheap magicians, that the marvelous begins to be in a equivocal manner, when it sprouts out of an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), out of a privileged revelation of reality, out of an unusual or particularly favoring illumination or the unacknowledged riches of reality, out of an expansion of the scales and categories of reality, perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an upheaval of spirit that drives it towards a mode of "border state."⁹

⁹ The translated quotations of the essays "De lo real maravilloso americano," and "Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso" are my own.

...muchos se olvidan, con disfrazarse de magos a poco costo, que lo maravilloso comienza a serlo de manera inequívoca cuando surge de una inesperada alteración de la realidad (el milagro), de una revelación privilegiada de la realidad, de una iluminación inhabitual o singularmente favorecedora de las inadvertidas riquezas de la realidad, de una ampliación de las escalas y categorías de la realidad, percibidas con particular intensidad en virtud de una exaltación del espíritu que lo conduce a un modo de “estado límite.” 39

After this, Carpentier concludes that the history of the continent is an open-ended one, a chronicle of these unusual sprouts of the marvelous real (40). Then the novel would begin, turning it into a case study of Carpentier’s position. This would then be tracing sides, an elucidation of an almost cultural difference between Europe and America—the land of the unusual events on one side, and the land of the organized and fabricated marvels on the other. But the 1964 “prologue to the prologue” changes everything. It turns it from a problem of cultural differentiation into a problem of epistemology.

The 1964 essay starts with Baudelaire’s refrain of “Invitation au voyage”: “*Là-bas tout n'est luxe, calme et volupté*. Invitation to the voyage. The remote. The distant. *The distinct*. ...I come from the People’s Republic of China” (“*La invitación al viaje*. Lo remoto. Lo distante. *Lo distinto*. ... Vengo de la República Popular China”; 29 emphasis orig.) The 1949 narrator was a from-the-top-down voice, capable of viewing and tracing the difference between Europe and America. He has the point of view of a Mapamundi cartographer; it is the Cartesian subject

looking at its grid. But now the narrator is immersed in the world, traveling back and forth: he had by then accepted Baudelaire's invitation to travel and see the physicality of the world, an invitation also accepted by Rimbaud, Lautréamont, the Avant-Gardes, and of course, the Surrealists. The invitation, by departing from the origin, unavoidably produced exoticism, orientalism and all the panoply of *otherings*. But now, Carpentier seems to tell us, after the travel invitation he is coming home, and not with much to show for: "...I return to the West with some kind of melancholy. I have seen so deeply interesting things. But I am not sure I have understood them.... I need, in order to do so, an *understanding of the texts*" ("...regreso hacia el poniente con una cierta melancolía. He visto cosas profundamente interesantes. Pero no estoy seguro de haberlas entendido....Me falta, para ello, un *entendimiento de los textos*"; 30; emphasis orig.). He returns from China and there is only a realization of not having understood what he saw and the impossibility of reading. Both the narrator and the readers are far away of the omniscient voice who knew how to trace the crisp line differentiating continents.

It is not only China's opacity the cause for melancholia, or the realization of a hubristic man in front of his own limits. In the essay's second section he "comes from Islam." He is not coming from a place in particular, but from a religion and a culture and a completely different way of organizing the world. Coming home, "I was taken ahold by the deep melancholy of those who wish to understand but understood only half of it took hold of me" ("me invadió la gran melancolía de quien quiso entender y entendió a medias"; 31). Again we find regret for not being able to understand. But the melancholia's true reason is because he felt a revelation, a miracle of how great that culture was, but he did not have the tools to communicate it to his peers.

I felt as if shrunk by the certain vastness of that what had been revealed to me, but that vastness was not handing me its exact dimensions, its authentic volitions. It was not giving me the way to show to my own people, when arriving from such a prolonged adventures, that which was universal in its current roots, presence and transformations.

Me sentía minimizado por la grandeza cierta de lo que se me había revelado pero esa grandeza no me entregaba sus medidas exactas, sus voliciones auténticas. No me daba los medios de expresar a los míos, al regresar de tan dilatadas andanzas, lo que había de universal en sus raíces, presencia y transformaciones actuales. (32)

In the third section he tells us he arrives to the Soviet Union and “my feeling of being unable to understand was relieved in an utmost level, even though I did not know the language....In Leningrad, in Moscow I found again, in their architecture, in their literature, in their theater, a *perfectly comprehensible* universe” (“sensación de *incapacidad de entendimiento* se me alivió en grado sumo, a pesar de desconocer el idioma.... En Leningrado, en Moscú, volvía a encontrar, en la arquitectura, en la literatura, en el teatro, un universo *perfectamente inteligible*”; 32-33, emphasis orig.). He is again able to understand the universe surrounding him. And by understanding that universe he means that the past is talking to him through the city’s architecture, through its bricks and stones. Exactly like what it happens to him in the fourth section, when he goes to Prague: “No stone keeps quiet in Prague for whoever manages to understand even a little. And for the one who understand the soft, flurry silhouette of Franz Kafka, the shadowless silhouette, just like Chamisso’s character, springs out of each corner, out of each entrance” (“No hay piedra muda en Praga para el entendedor a medias palabras. Y, para ese entendedor surge, de cada esquina, de cada bocacalle, la silueta queda, afelpada, sin sombra

como el personaje de Chamisso,... de Franz Kafka"; 35). The stones speak to Carpentier, Kafka's silhouette arises from them—a shadowless one, like Chamisso's *Peter Schlemiel's* silhouette. From Prague he jumps to Leipzig, where he links Bach with Brazil through Heitor Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas*. And from there he goes to Goethe's Weimar, from where statues without any sense of proportion travel to Cuba and are taller than the Cuban Parliament, resulting in an unexpected Kafkian effect stronger than what Kafka could imagine (36). These statues will make an appearance in *El recurso*.

In the fifth and final section the narrator finally arrives home, and here is where Carpentier rebrands the prologue: "The Latin American returns home and begins to understand many things. He discovers that, since *Don Quixote* fully belongs to him, he learned through "The Discours to the Goatherds" words about the different ages that come to him from *Works and Days*" ("Vuelve el latinoamericano a lo suyo y empieza a entender muchas cosas. Descubre que, si el Quijote le pertenece de hecho y derecho, a través del *Discurso a los cabreros* aprendió palabras, en recuento de edades, que le vienen de *Los trabajos y los días*"; 36). After returning from his world-wide trip, the Latin American narrator is able to link—by means of one of *Don Quixote* episodes—his own immediate reality to Hesiod's description of the ages of Man (*Works and Days*). Five ages of Mankind, five essay sections, starting from afar—the result of accepting Baudelaire's invitation to see what is foreign—and each one coming closer to the narrator's home. Each of these sections is not about an age lost in time, but areas that are progressively less and less opaque to the viewer who comes from Latin America. Much like in his short-story "El viaje a la semilla," the closer to the origin, the greater the capacity for understanding. The absolute understanding coming from Descartes, the Encyclopedists and from the Enlightenment

is left aside for a retrospective type of understanding that depends not on a incorporeal mind, but on a contingent and spatialized one that moves from *voyage to*, to *voyage from*.

This could be a melancholic lament for the lost hope of absolute comprehension if it were not for the inclusion, right after the enumeration of unusual historical episodes of Latin American history, of the 1949 prologue. Thanks to his 1943 encounter with Pauline Bonaparte in Haiti, so far from Corsica, Carpentier sees

...the possibility of understanding certain possible synchronisms—American, recurring synchronisms that are present above time and that relate this and that, yesterday with the present. I saw the possibility of bringing certain European truths to our latitudes, acting against the grain of those who, traveling against the sun's trajectory, wanted to take our truths where, just thirty years ago, there was no capacity for understanding nor for appreciating them in their just dimension.

la posibilidad de establecer ciertos sincronismos posibles, americanos, recurrentes, por encima del tiempo, relacionando esto con aquello, el ayer con el presente. Vi la posibilidad de traer ciertas verdades europeas a las latitudes que son nuestras actuando a contrapelo de quienes, viajando contra la trayectoria del sol, quisieron llevar verdades nuestras a donde, hace todavía treinta años, no había capacidad de entendimiento ni de medida para verlas en su justa dimensión. (37)

In this new, final age, or place, of utmost understanding—but not *absolute* understanding—certain synchronisms are established and transported back and forth to Europe and Latin America, so the capacity of understanding can be developed. And this capacity of

understanding is nothing else—and nothing less—than showing the unusual moments that are the “marvelous real.”

Now we can see in a new light what the marvelous real means for Carpentier in 1964. It is not a comparison with Surrealism anymore, but a new way of knowing when the absolute and omniscient place from which thought once arose has dissolved forever. I will quote this section again:

...many forget, while dressing up as cheap magicians, that the marvelous begins to be in a equivocal manner, when it sprouts out of an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), out of a privileged revelation of reality, out of an unusual or particularly favoring illumination or the unacknowledged riches of reality, out of an expansion of the scales and categories of reality, perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an upheaval of spirit that drives it towards a mode of “border state.” To begin with, the feeling of the marvelous presupposes a faith. Those who do not believe in saints cannot be cured by them.

...es que muchos se olvidan, con disfrazarse de magos a poco costo, que lo maravilloso comienza a serlo de manera inequívoca cuando surge de una inesperada alteración de la realidad (el milagro) de una revelación privilegiada de la realidad, de una iluminación inhabitual o singularmente favorecedora de las inadvertidas riquezas de la realidad, de una ampliación de las escalas y categorías de la realidad, percibidas con particular intensidad en virtud de una exaltación del espíritu que lo conduce a un modo de “estado

límite.” Para empezar, la sensación de lo maravilloso presupone una fe. Los que no creen en santos no pueden curarse con milagros de santos. (39)

The 1964 essay is a symptom of shifts in the reading public who were to be Carpentier’s primary audience. He, like his readers, does not understand all cultures. What he does understand, however, is the need to inscribe his work—and his readers—within an expanded global forum. This is the forum in which Carpentier places the updated concept of the marvelous real. It is now not a contrast between the artificial “marvelous” of the Surrealists and the marvel intrinsically found in Spanish American nature and peoples: it is instead the initial response of a writer who acknowledges the inscription of America into Europe (Pauline Bonaparte).

After the unidirectional voice coming from liberation attempts—a periphery that addresses the metropolis and reclaims its independence and/or triggers a revolution—a new way of speaking has to appear, one which takes into account the fact that multiple addresses from the periphery towards the metropolis have already happened. It is by assuming this more global and diachronic scope that Carpentier refashions himself as a global writer, not just as a Latin American one, and also refashions his key and most-cherished concept for a new epoch. This is partly done thanks to a change of emphasis from the anthropological/categorical to the epistemological. If in 1943 Carpentier was an external, anthropologist-like observer of the ruins of La Ferrière in Haiti who would show others the brute, marvelous reality with the story of Ti Noël, in 1964 he is a global, Latin American-based author, traveling back and forth, showing how that brute and marvelous reality is no *Other*, but it is ingrained in European space itself. If he wanted to tell a closed and compact story about the Haitian Revolution and its aftermath in

1949, in 1964 he wants to show the encounter with wonder—that is, with what is out of rules and orders. Even if Carpentier does not mention the Haitian Revolution as a moment of Universal Emancipation (as seen by Nesbitt and other recent critics) he does turn it from a difference between Europe and Latin America into a real, marvelous moment of disruption *that can happen anywhere*, as long as there is a minimum degree of understanding.

This would be reflected in *El recurso* ten years later. However, there is a piece still missing in order to understand his new reach. The 1964 exposition of the “marvelous real” is not a show-and-tell of unusual aspects of Latin American history to European readers so they can see the difference between one continent and another, and thus reaffirm the difference between origin and copy, order and disorder. It is an elaboration of how to tell a story without a Cartesian narrator, and without a teleological structure of History. In the following years, Carpentier’s Latin American marvelous real will expand its reach once again, crossing the Atlantic Ocean and reaching Paris. The novel will be an attempt to show how the marvelous, the miracle, the “estado límite” appears in European society. The fact that Latin America is the trigger of such a state is only because Latin America is the region this particular author understands the most. But the trigger of disorder can come from anywhere else, even from within.

His reinterpretation of the ages of man as “places” of man (farthest, far, there, near, here) in regards to the ability to comprehend the place—that is, the ability to show to others the out-of-the-ordinary events that have happened there—shows why in *El recurso del método* and *Concierto barroco*, his two following novels, he would not be as interested in History—like he was in *El siglo de las luces*—as in space. The choice of a *mélange* of a dictator is not due to possible censorship—although it may have had certainly a role to play—but more importantly because *El recurso del método* is not an historical novel to begin with, but a *spatial novel*.

However, in order to emphasize space and to show how Latin America is inscribed within Europe itself, a different topology than the one inherited from rationalism was needed. The topology of center-periphery needed to be replaced, or at least subverted. Carpentier does not do this frontally. Instead, what he attacks is the emptiness of space between one point and another. He does this by rereading the baroque.

An Expanded Baroque

His 1975 essay “Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso” shows us how Carpentier reread the baroque and how does this structural motif works in the novel. Even though he has been named as a baroque or neo-baroque writer, the truth is that he had little patience with the term. He does not turn it into his own, like Lezama Lima and Sarduy did. In fact, one could interpret the above-mentioned essay as an attempt to clear out the conceptual entanglement between “baroque,” “magical realism” and “marvelous real.” Only the last one is a cherished term for Carpentier, for reasons which we just saw, but the “baroque” was a concept that only very late in his life would prove strategic for his expansive effort.

The title itself shows that Carpentier sensed there was a problematic relation between the two concepts. “Marvelous real” was a term he had coined, rebranded and updated eleven years before. But “baroque” seems slippery, showing how foreign it is for him: he resorts to dictionaries and definitions to try to pinpoint what baroque really means, but none of the terms satisfy him.¹⁰ He resorts then to Eugeni D’Ors definition as “a sort of creative impulse that

¹⁰ He denies any of these terms are acceptable: “churruigueresco,” “extravagante,” “profusión de volutas,” “roleos,” “adornos,” “líneas curvas,” “recargado,” “amanerado,” “gongorino,” “culterano,” “conceptista.” As for “decadente,” he claims there is nothing decadent in so-called decadents, because they are not symptoms of cultural decay but “apexes of a culture” (“marcan las cumbres de una cultura”; 69).

cyclically returns throughout the whole of history of artistic manifestations, both literary and plastic, architectural as well as musical” (“una suerte de pulsión creadora, que vuelve cíclicamente a través de toda la historia en las manifestaciones del arte, tanto literarias como plásticas, arquitectónicas como musicales.... Existe un espíritu barroco, como existe un espíritu imperial”; 69). It is no historical category, but as D’Ors would call it, “*a human constant*... That is why there is a fundamental error we need to overcome in our minds: ... that the baroque is a creation of the eighteenth century” (“*una constante humana*... Por ello hay un error fundamental que debemos borrar de nuestras mentes: ... el barroco es una creación del siglo XVII”; emphasis orig. 70).

Against the argument of the Baroque as a reaction to Classicism, he replies that Classicism is also an opposition to other schools or styles. Furthermore, “I would say that if every *imitation* is academic [like all classicism is when it imitates Greece or Rome], all academia is reined by rules, norms and laws. Therefore whatever is classical is academical, and everything academic is conservative, observant, law-abiding; thus it is an enemy of all innovation, of whatever breaks rules and norms” (“yo diría que si toda *imitación* es académica, toda academia se rige por reglas, normas, leyes. Luego lo clásico es lo académico, y todo lo académico es conservador, observante, obediente de reglas; luego enemigo de toda innovación, de todo lo que rompe con las reglas y normas”; emphasis orig. 71). We start to see where his argument is going: as in the previous essay when referring to Europe, the classical is what is rule-bound and organized. Again, he drops the definitions and resorts to examples and cases. He says the Parthenon, the Escorial and Versailles are classical buildings. And here is where his argument turns from linguistic definition into spatial exploration, from academic into non-academic, from

“classical” to “baroque.” In such classical buildings, there is a very important presence of empty and naked/nude spaces. They are as important as the ornamented ones:

The vast nude surfaces, limited by the columns, have a proportional value, they create a sort of geometric harmony where the filled spaces have the same importance as the empty ones... the construction is complemented/completed by the empty space, by the space without ornament, which beauty resides precisely in being circumscribed.

...los grandes planos desnudos, delimitados por las columnas, tienen un valor proporcional, crean una suerte de armonía geométrica donde los espacios llenos tienen tanta importancia como los espacios vacíos. ... la construcción se complementa con el espacio vacío, con el espacio sin ornamentación, cuya belleza reside precisamente en estar circunscrito. (71-72)

The baroque is in contrast characterized by a horror of linear and proportional harmony with respect to central axes. If such axes exist, proliferating nuclei (“núcleos proliferantes”) start to multiply around them; these are decorative elements that completely fill the space occupied by the building “with motifs endowed with their own expansion which launch, project the forms with an expansive force towards the outside” (“con motivos que están dotados de una expansión propia y lanzan, proyectan las formas con una fuerza expansiva hacia afuera”; 72). Against these examples he suggests Saint Theresa and Saint Peter’s Cathedral by Bernini, Toledo’s Cathedral posterior sculpture, and all Indostanic sculpture. As for literary examples, he basically suggests

that everything that is not Classical and Neo-classical is Baroque.¹¹ Romanticism is also baroque because, against the stereotype, the Romantic poet was always “action and he was pulse, he was movement and will, he was manifestation and violence” (“acción y fue pulsión y fue movimiento y fue voluntad y fue manifiesto y fue violencia”; 75-76).

Such an overreaching definition of baroque is plausible because it is contrasted to classical mechanistic rationalism, to academia (in the sense of a rule-bound practice) and to science (in the sense of a methodical practice of foreseeing expected results.) “Academicism is characteristic of deeply rooted epochs which are full of themselves. The baroque, on the other hand, manifests itself wherever there is transformation, mutation, innovation” (“El academismo [sic] es característico de las épocas asentadas, plenas de sí mismas, seguras de sí mismas. El barroco, en cambio, se manifiesta donde hay transformación, mutación, innovación.”). The baroque is so fluid and polysemic because it is defined by the absences of ordering and rule-bounding. This is because the baroque is a human constant that “goes forward and usually appears precisely on the peak of a civilization or whenever a new social order is about to be born. It can be a culmination, and also a premonition” (“siempre está proyectado hacia adelante y suele presentarse precisamente en expansión en el momento culminante de una civilización o cuando va a nacer un orden nuevo en la sociedad. Puede ser la culminación, como puede ser una premonición”; 77). Forward-moving and always expansive, the baroque is present at the pinnacle of a civilization or at the birth of a new order; it may be a culmination or a premonition. If we also take into account its reactive quality against rationalist mechanism, then it is easy to

¹¹ Non-Baroque: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Plato, Cicero, Racine, Voltaire, Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*. Baroque: Hindi, Iranian and Spanish literature (74); Rabelais, Shakespeare, (75) Novalis, Goethe, Rimbaud, Lautréamont, and Schönberg *Variations* (76).

understand the baroque as a vitalist strategy towards a fluid foundation of Latin American identity. Against the ordering and rule-bound foundation of the city in empty space that will need to be tamed—the idea of the Lettered City—what we have is the eruption of multiple proliferating nuclei creating mixtures that fill space until there is no emptiness:

And why is Latin America the land the baroque chose? Because every simbiosis, every miscegenation engenders barroquism. The American barroquism grows with creolization, with the meaning of “criollo” with the conscioussness that the American man is able to achieve... the consciousness of being something else, of being a new thing, a simbiosis.

¿Y por qué es América Latina la tierra de elección del barroco? Porque toda simbiosis, todo mestizaje, engendra un barroquismo. El barroquismo Americano se acrece con la criollidad, con el sentido del criollo, con la conciencia que cobra el hombre Americano [...] la conciencia de ser otra cosa, de ser una cosa nueva, de ser una simbiosis. (79)

Each of these mixtures produces in turn more proliferating nuclei at the level of race description at the time of Independence. He quotes Simón Rodríguez, who in a baroque enumeration—a narrative technique particularly cherished by Carpentier since it easily enables the portrayal of these ever-expanding nuclei—describes the Latin American caste system

“we have hicks, Chinese and Barbars, gauchos [Argentina], cholos [Peru], guachinangos [Mexico], blacks, browns, gentiles, people from the mountains, from the coast, indians, people of color and of ruana, morenos, mulattoes, zambos, people who asume they are whites, “yellow feet” and a whole spectrum of mixtures: Tercerones [child of a White and a Mulatto], Quarterones [a White and a Terceron], Quinterones [a White and a

Quarteron] and the step-backward.” With such elements present, each one of them contributing their own barroquism, we directly merge with what I have called the “marvelous real.”

“tenemos huasos, chinos y bárbaros, gauchos, cholos y guachinangos, negros, prietos y gentiles, serranos, calentanos, indígenas, gentes de color y de ruana, morenos, mulatos y zambos, blancos porfiados y patas amarillas y un mundo de cruzados: tercerones, cuarterones, quinterones, y saltatrás.” Con tales elementos en presencia aportándole cada cual su barroquismo, entroncamos directamente con lo que yo he llamado lo “real maravilloso” (80)

Here Carpentier is not defining the baroque as a defined and clear-cut identity for Latin America. He left definitions behind at the beginning of the essay. Much like what Rojas Herazo had been doing around the same time, Carpentier resorts to ekphrasis: he uses architectural examples that require the reader to envision the building and to see the contrast between axis and empty space in them, and then the profusion of space-filling nuclei in the baroque. Then he displaces this spatial exemplification onto a level of historical and literary structures. He does not give a definition of Romanticism, but instead he portrays it as moving and transgressing a previous and static order. He resorts to a fluid-like status proper of vitalism in his definition of the baroque to portray the configuration of Latin America as a continuous irruption of the unusual, of what escapes from organizing principles and rules, and Simón Rodríguez' example of the proliferation in the caste system is the example. The baroque is the structural form and the organizing motion of the marvelous real.

He then disregards magical realism, surrealism and the marvelous as beautiful as conceptual confusions. Magical realism is a form of expressionism alien to problems of a political nature (80). A magical realist painting is “an implausible, impossible image, but in a last instance, detained there” (“una imagen inverosímil, imposible, pero en fin, detenida allí” 81). Surrealism is also static.¹² And lastly, he clarifies that neither the marvelous nor the baroque have to be beautiful. “The ugly, the deformed, the terrible, can also be marvelous. Whatever is unusual is marvelous” (“Lo feo, lo deforme, lo terrible, también puede ser maravilloso. Todo lo insólito es maravilloso”; 81).

Carpentier posited the New World baroque as a Universal baroque, a constant multiplication of disruptions. This is not the baroque argued by Echevarría—a seventeenth-century cultural and intellectual movement that helped to develop a proto-national criollo identity (*Celestina’s Brood*). It also escapes from Beverley’s take on the concept, and thus it trumps a subalternist effort to disregard his late novels.¹³ In Carpentier’s hands, this universal baroque will not be a critical tool that could talk back to Empire either. It would not localize itself at the center nor at the periphery; instead, it develops from and directs itself to multiple places at once. It will be like waves of proliferating nuclei, filling all empty space, coming and going, back and forth, contaminating and flooding institutions that declare order and rules.

¹² “Surrealism was in pursue of what was marvelous, [but] Surrealism rarely searched for it wholeheartedly....A Surrealist painting...is one in which everything is premeditated and calculated to produce a feeling of singularity [Dali’s toffee clocks]” (“el surrealismo perseguía lo maravilloso, [pero] el surrealismo muy rara vez lo buscaba en la realidad. ... La pintura surrealista ...[es una] pintura donde está todo premeditado y calculado para producir una sensación de singularidad [relojes de melcocha de Dalí]”;82).

¹³ For Beverley the Baroque is a forced imposition on Spanish America from the outside; it is used to control non-hegemonical groups by disguising itself as the transmutation of a European literary style into the form of expression of the new criollo subject: a transculturated discourse for a supposedly transculturated subject. That is why for Beverley, the baroque is a “violent repression and impersonation of the Indigenous by the European, a form of superstructural genocide, if you may. In this sense, the appropriate model for the colonial baroque would be more the South-African apartheid culture than the benevolent process of ‘mestizaje cultural’ surmised by Henríquez Ureña” (*Modernidad obsoleta* 13. My trans.).

This notion of the baroque as fluid, transgressing and ever-expanding process of bursting nuclei of the marvelous is what allows Carpentier to uproot the concept of the “marvelous real” from the Latin American context and transport it to Europe itself. This is what is going to happen with *El recurso del método*. It will be a spatial, baroque novel, but not in the sense given by Wöfflin of the baroque as the art of the Counterreformation, but as a human constant of ever-expanding and ever-present mobility and transgression, and in perpetual horror to emptiness.

Monika Kaup has recently suggested a similar interpretation of Carpentier’s baroque (*Future; Becoming Baroque*) as a productive niche from which new ideas and possibilities arise. She reads Carpentier in a Deleuze-and-Guattari key, so the “New World Baroque” is a strategy of becoming minor. As much as I acknowledge the influence her articles have had on this reading and as much as I agree with her on regards to the circumlocution of identity and essentialist centers through becoming minor, I depart from her take due to her disregard of Carpentier’s own coming to terms with the concept of the Baroque, and with her subsequent elusion of his own universalizing impulse.

Kaup reads Carpentier’s Baroque with Deleuze and Guattari’s help. This reading is, as I said, productive, but it repeats the pattern followed by Carpentier’s reception: an all-encompassing and general theory explains the specificity and exceptionality of the Old World Baroque and the New World Baroque; in other words, it is reading Carpentier as how he read the Latin American continent in his 1949 prologue, in which he is able to trace a difference from the top down. This happens because the life-long drive of Carpentier to always expand his geographical reach is not taken into account, and instead he is taken as a New World Baroque writer from the start. In an attempt to read him through a Deleuze-and-Guattari lens, Carpentier becomes regionalized and specified. That is, his universalizing disruption of organized space is

cut away from his oeuvre.

What the 1975 essay shows us is that the Baroque is a term and concept that first, Carpentier accepts late in life, and second, uses strategically to uproot his Latin American-based notion of the marvelous real and develop it amidst Europe itself. The baroque is a rebranding and universalizing of the “marvelous real,” and the possibility of putting the “marvelous real” in motion. Disruption as a fluid movement of proliferating nuclei is not a constant in Carpentier’s take.¹⁴ Neither in the 1949 prologue nor in the 1964 annexation of it to the traveling motif do we find disruptive movement as a characteristic of the marvelous real. Movement and becoming only appear later in his work, probably by reading Sarduy’s take on the Baroque, or by reading Deleuze himself—I cannot sustain this claim, but by now nothing regarding Carpentier surprises me anymore; besides, not allowing that possibility is to start clamping again a re-universalized imagination of disruption.

Carpentier is able to universalize the marvelous real by *portraying* it—not *defining* it—as a disruptive movement that emerges from ordered spaces throughout time and space. His lack of understanding of texts from faraway lands, along with its subsequent melancholia is ebbed away by the pictorializing dislocation of the concept, allowing it to become image and not word. By doing this the definitions of the concepts enter into the vitalistic level of movement that Carpentier needs in order to sprout the marvelous nuclei of disruption right in the center of Cartesian order: Paris.

¹⁴ It is telling that in the volume edited by Kaup and Parkinson-Zamora about New World Baroques, the 1975 essay, the only one penned by Carpentier with the word “baroque” in its title, is not included. Meanwhile, two of his more regionalized essays are included: one deals with Cuban architecture (“The City of Columns”), and the other one with issues of the contemporary Latin American novel (“Questions Concerning the Contemporary Latin American Novel”).

El Recurso del Método: Flooding Proust's and Descartes' Space

Carpentier's transformation of his 1949 prologue into the conclusion of his 1964 essay depicts the changes occurring to the grounding of subjectivity and to its capacity of forming a total picture of the world. Or to state it in the form of an urgent question: How to relate on the same level with a world that has no single central point from where ideological, state and cultural power emanates? (Cartesian perspectivism, Jay) This easily translates into narrative, in which the question turns into how to tell a story without sounding as an impersonal authority—the third-person narrator of nineteenth-century realism—or as a personal, subjective authority—the first-person narrator and creator of a totality from its own subjectivity, an authority that has in Proust its totalizing master. Carpentier, as we have seen, will not confront directly either strategy, because by doing so he would leave in place the conditions on which the confrontation is based on—the playing field stays the same. Unlike the subalternist or early postcolonialist critic who wanted to win the game by talking back, Carpentier does not want to win the game: he wants to disorganize, to flood the field. That field is the Cartesian space, its players the Cartesian subjectivities who create totalizing versions of the field and believe there is nothing outside of it—after all, it is a *totalized* version. Everyone is expected to play that game because everyone is assumed to be that type of Cartesian subject. The disorganizing of the field in the hopes of getting the rules of the game changed, is done by Carpentier by planting an anomalous subject right in the center of the field—Paris—that disorganizes and expands the playing field.¹⁵ This subject, the PM, will be a proliferating nucleus of disorganization for the organized space: he uses the rules of the game—civilization, progress, taste, culture—, rules which are supposed to

¹⁵ What better occasion than this one to use the original definition of barroco: in Portuguese, it is an anomalous, “defective” pearl which is not circular. It is the ugly, freaky pearl that becomes...what? Something else. Always something else. (See Sarduy *Obras Completas*, vol. 2, 1199-1203)

make everybody good sports in the playing field, to instead play a bullying game of monstrous proportions. And at the end, when he is not the PM anymore, shows how by not respecting the rules anymore, and instead recurring to an ekphrastic appropriation of lived experience, he is able to continue living without the Cartesian rules of representation and subjectivity in the organized space. Much like the 1964 traveling narrator, the PM becomes a voyager, finding meaning in his own appreciation of lived experience and of the pictures of the world he is able to portray for himself while at it. By disassembling the props and sceneries of the playing field—the rules of behavior, or better said, the ideological underpinnings—Carpentier's PM, a baroque allegorical figure of the modern subject, is able to think beyond being a consubstantial element of the State and, in simple terms, continue being. He does this thanks to Carpentier's *recourse* around the original *Discourse of Method*, around its assumed certainties, and thus leaving behind a messier, more disorganized, but always-transforming and fluid space: what I like to call a “dis-rationalist” baroque space. In order to understand this baroque, monstrous new subject, we need to delve deep into the novel.

We can comfortably say that the PM is a type of subject who lives through processes of migration and hybridity. But this type of subject is not the one subaltern studies focused on. The PM belongs to the Spanish American high class, persons with diplomatic connections and/or at least comfortable amounts of money, who live in European or North American cities and rarely—if ever—return to their original countries. This subject cuts all ties with their countries—or at least tries to do so.

The PM and his children are typical exponents of this. All of them have names taken from Shakespeare plays or Verdi operas, and they are caricatures of cosmopolitanism: Ofelia does constant “pilgrimages” to Bayreuth and Stratford-upon-Avon to sharpen her knowledge and to

refresh her acquaintances in the scenic arts. Ariel, the PM's ambassador in the United States, described as "a born diplomat, [...] answered questions with other questions, lied when he wanted to [...] and (when under pressure to explain an awkward incident) had instant recourse to a manual of ambiguities" (62) ("parido para diplomático [...] respondía preguntas con preguntas, mentía que era un gusto, [...] recurriendo—cuando se le apremiaba en el esclarecimiento de un sucedido molesto— al inmediato manejo de un prontuario de ambigüedades" 140-141)¹⁶; Marco Antonio believes he is a descendant of the Byzantine emperor buried in Bahamas, and with his father's money—the country's money—buys a noble title. Radamés is a playboy who dies in a car accident in Indianapolis, just as Ramfis, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo's son did. All of them represent a type of subject who was for a long time the only migrant subject Europe had a chance to meet, the only one who lived something similar—although in a much more comfortable manner—to the nowadays common condition of cultural clashes due to migration. Although the spaces surrounding this type of subjects are of an elite character, they still are ambivalent spaces, periphery pockets right in the center of the Metropolis. It will be from one of these that the baroque disruption of the until-then totalized world will begin.¹⁷

These spaces are not inhabited by persons who would return to and transform their original country: the PM dies and is buried in Paris, and we can be sure none of his children will ever return. The point made by Carpentier then is not so much a narrative of actual change, but

¹⁶ For someone who is an ambassador at the moment of writing this, it is striking the deprecating tone the narrator has for the diplomatic position. This is not the only time this disregard appears in the novel. (For the English quotations of the novel, I have used Francis Patridge translation. (Carpentier *Reasons*).

¹⁷ Carpentier is not the only one who focuses his attention to high-class pockets of disruption in Paris. In 1972, the ambassador in Paris for the fictional República de Miranda is one of the main characters of Luis Buñuel's *Le charme discret de la bourgeoisie*. A year later Chris Marker would film *L'Ambassade*, which portrays what happened inside the Chilean embassy in Paris after Allende's murder by resorting to the "film-found-after-the-event" narrative strategy.

the reinterpretation of the subject's attempt to deal with its attempts of totalization of a world that cannot be seen as a whole anymore. In revisionist terms it is then to state that these pockets existed in Paris but European literary history has never taken care of portraying them. More than showing the sufferings that the PM has to bear—his greatest woe is when his French acquaintances start to ignore him—Carpentier shows an aspect of Paris that had not been shown before but that in fact existed. The consequences this space produces—or not—will be Carpentier's object of critique. That is why he revisited the great chronicler of the period, Marcel Proust, and would reveal the absence of this important aspect in Proust's portrayals of French society. The encyclopedic author of Parisian society *par excellence*, the one who remembered everything, who “used his subjectivity as the basis for his totalization” of reality (Craig 115), Carpentier seems to tell us, has forgotten something which he did not include in his totalization.¹⁸

Sally Harvey has stated that many of Proust's narrative tools are used by Carpentier, first as crutches and then in an agonic battle—in Harold Bloom's sense (1-11). According to her, it is in *El recurso* where Carpentier achieves literary independence from Proust, and thus Spanish America achieves a greater milestone in its process of literary and intellectual independence from Europe. But as always happens with monographs on Carpentier, *El recurso* is left aside, and it is just barely mentioned as the result of processes that appear more clearly in *El reino de este mundo*, *Los pasos perdidos* and *El siglo de las luces*, the novels which receive the real focus of attention. But this argument relies on the assumption that Carpentier considered himself absolutely and totally Cuban. Not only has this recently been questioned (Pérez-Firmat), but simply by glancing at his life this becomes a problem: born to European parents, lives during his

¹⁸ For a treatment of the PM's authenticity and its relation to Proustian memory, see Craig 282-294.

childhood in Cuba but soon leaves for Paris—the same Paris he would later depict in *El recurso*—where he stays for more than a decade. He comes back to Cuba but only to leave again for Caracas until 1959, when he comes to live to Havana. But not even then he would live there for long, since he would go back to Paris in order to be Cuba's ambassador to Unesco. I am not arguing that Carpentier was a proto-Cosmopolitan intellectual with huge amount of flyer miles: what I want to show is there might be a more complicated notion of nationality, more in tune to the comfortable expat that the PM is than what could be seen as the *Cuban National Writer*.

If this happens, Harvey's argument of anxiety of influence and of peripheral dependence to the center also gets complicated. The relationship between Carpentier and his literary forefathers would not center on acquiring independence, as much as fusing elements and apprehending them; of making them his own and not rebelling against them manicheanly in the name on the literature of a continent. Only by forgetting or putting aside the importance Carpentier gives to baroque mixtures and fusions we could use Bloom's model of agonist battle. Proust has a central importance in the novel and this relationship is crucial to understanding Carpentier's Universal Baroque. But Proust is not the antagonist, he and Descartes are the prestablished ordered spaces amidst where the proliferating nuclei of disorder sprouts.

Ariel Dorfman has pointed out that the PM lives inside Proust's literary universe. Even though the French author is never mentioned in the book, many of the PM's acquaintances are characters created by Proust in *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Other characters, real people, were in fact close friends of Proust, like Venezuelan painter Reynaldo Hahn. The same happens with geographical places, non-existent in real Paris, but which nevertheless appear in both works. The fact that the PM's country is a generic one, a sum of many but not an exact representation of a single one—and the same goes for the PM himself—reveals the Proustian construction of

Carpentier's novel. The dates on which the novel starts and finishes—the days of the drag races in 1913 and 1927—are in fact the days the first and last books of *À la recherche du temps perdu* came out (128). All these Proustian points of construction, Dorfman argues subtly, indicate that the world the PM aspires so much to belong to, the world of tearooms and salons, is a world in steep decline, a world Proust sees with so much distance and disdain. Against the desire of belonging, Dorfman shows how the PM is an unimportant character for Proust, because he does not appear in any of his chronicles. If Proust does not appear in Carpentier's book because the book is part of the Proustian universe, the PM does not appear in Proust's work because he is so minuscule and secondary that does not merit Proust's attention. Thus, Carpentier would have a disdainful view of the PM, and an implicit superiority of Proust over Carpentier due to the accesorial aspect of his work.

As shrewd as Dorfman is, his comments are founded on the carnival-parodic template of reception, reading the novel as a mockery and critique of dictatorial excesses, but leaving French authoritative status untouched. However, thanks to the universalizing baroque positioning, Carpentier also sees French worldview as a target of critique, as a worldview that lacks the universality and totalizing reach that readers—Dorfman included—assume Proust's fiction has. In fact, it is the object of critique precisely because it claims to be totalizing but instead is merely suppressing what cannot organize with prestablished patterns. If Dorfman sees Carpentier treating the PM as a provincial character, Carpentier in fact regards French society as provincial and Latin Americans as more universal, in the sense that the baroque proliferating nuclei allows them to see and ride the flux of disruption. In the essay "Problemática actual de la novela Latinoamericana," where Carpentier updates the European novel form into the epic form that the Latin American novel is supposed to turn into according to Sartrean "contexts", Carpentier

remembers the years during which the European novel entered a decline, which are precisely the same years during which *El recurso* is situated:

Those were the days when decent persons distanced themselves from politics and saw it as something nauseous; when the mistresses of literary and mundane scenes did not permit their guests to talk about politics, soon after D'Annunzio spoke, in one of his novels, about “the socialist mud that pervaded everything” (My trans.)

Eran los días en que las personas decentes se apartaban de la política como algo nauseabundo; en que las animadoras de salones literarios o mundanos prohibían las conversaciones acerca de política a sus invitados, no mucho después de que D'Annunzio hablara, en una de sus novelas, “del lodo socialista que todo lo invade.” (*Problemática* 127)

This bourgeois world that the PM yearns for is a world closed on itself and slowly withering away. It may be the center, it may be the bourgeois metropolis, but it is a provincial metropolis nonetheless. Knut Hamsun, Ladislao Reymont, Panait Istrati, René Maran and other exotic authors were in fashion at the time, authors who brought

...mountains, vegetation, colors, armed bandits to the world of a *littérature parisienne*, written for Parisians who were starting to get bored of a Paris that looked so much like Paris that was becoming provincial in a world of people who did not exclaim, as Montesquieu's character: “But...can anybody ever be Persian?” (My trans.)

...montañas, vegetaciones, colores, bandidos de pistola al cinto, al mundo de una *littérature parisienne*, escrita para parisienses que empezaban a aburrirse de un París que de tanto parecerse a París se estaba haciendo provinciano frente al vasto mundo de quienes no exclamaban, como el personaje de Montesquieu: “Pero... ¿acaso alguien puede ser persa?” (122)

Marcel does not devote any attention to the PM because Paris is provincial, and not just because the PM was so irrelevant in the tearooms—although he probably was. *El recurso* is then a remembrance of an aspect of the Parisian world that Proust never had the time to portray; a proof that Proust’s world was not that complete, and that both depictions of Paris—Proust’s and the real one which has based its metropolitan stature on literary prestige of figures like him—were not entirely the center of the world. In those two Paris, there is a series of spaces that do not respect the ordering patterns and laws of inclusion and circumscription of the Other—museums, world fairs, the categories of “magical realism,” or “dictator novel.” Those who inhabit these spaces are the ones Carpentier portrays. That is why the novel is not only a critique of the dictator figure but also of the practices that Parisian society has used in order to include such a figure in itself. He is portraying the subject who comes out and lives in the pockets of disruption which in turn are increasingly sprouting in the ordered, classical city.

To follow Dorfman’s characterization of the novel would indeed be comfortable, but ultimately we arrive at a regionalization dichotomy. Furthermore, it does not help us see the transformation the PM undergoes as the novel progresses, a transformation that comes based on his change of view of what French culture means to him. At the beginning, to appreciate French

culture and its tradition is mainly a question of good taste and proper manners, although it reveals the underpinnings of the Cartesian clarity in those judgments:

And in spite of so many novelties, Paris was still the Holy of Holies of good taste, moderation, order and proportion, and dictated the rules of polite behaviour, elegance and savoir vivre to the whole world. And, as for cosmopolitanism, which was also a feature of Athens, it in no way harmed the authentic French genius. “Ce qui n’est pas clair n’est pas français.” (22-23)

Y, pese a tantas novelerías, París seguiría siendo el Santo Lugar del buen gusto, del sentido de la medida, del orden, de la proporción, dictando normas de urbanidad, elegancia y saber vivir, al mundo entero. Y, en cuanto al cosmopolitismo [al cual para bien o mal él hace parte], que también había conocido Atenas, en nada dañaba el auténtico genio francés. “Ce qui n’est pas clair n’est pas français.” (94-95)

Paris’ cultural domination is clearly stated here, apparently irradiating towards the outside, and the pilgrim to the Holy of Holies must accept submissively its mandate. The PM does so without hesitation. But further ahead in the novel, just before World War I begins, photos appear in the French press that document massacres and abuses the PM’s soldiers committed in his country. His acquaintances ignore him and thus the PM sees World War I as the chance to claim vengeance against Parisians. “When he uttered the names of Bismark or Nietzsche, he was aiming the mental batteries of his resentment at Brichot the Sorbonne professor, the insolent Couvoisier, the Forchevilles and the Comte d’Argencourt” (“Cuando

pronunciaba los nombres de Bismarck o Nietzsche, enfilaba sus rencorosas baterías mentales contra el sorbonagro Brichot, los insolentes Courvoisier, los Forcheville y el Conde de Argencourt”; 99/185). All these Proustian characters have stopped speaking to him, and rancor drives him to take some distance from French society: “...France was beginning to pay for the grave sin of proudly underestimating, in this multiform century, what lay outside her frontiers” (“...empezaba Francia a pagar el grave pecado que era, en este siglo multiforme, una orgullosa sobrestimación de lo situado más allá de sus fronteras”; 98/184). This detachment, however, is not complete. The ambivalence between distancing and yearning is showed when the PM imagines an attempt of vengeance.

...but now they would see who was best, when Generals Moltke, Kluck, Bülow and Falkenhayn paraded through the Arc de Triomphe (he would be watching the spectacle, standing stiffly erect at his windows, although perhaps moved by what others might be suffering, but resolved in the Cartesian manner to take as proved everything whose truth was evident to him... (101)

...ahora verían lo que era bueno, cuando, bajo el Arco de Triunfo (él asistiría al espectáculo desde su ventana, firme y rígido, aunque acaso emocionado por lo que pudiese hacer sufrir a otros, pero resuelto, por cartesiana costumbre, a tener por cierto todo aquello cuya verdad le fuese evidente), desfilaran los generales Moltke, Kluck, Bulow y Falkenhayn... (188)

If the image of Paris as the Holy of Holies starts to wear off, the PM does not separate himself from his “Cartesian customs,” although we start seeing certain violence towards them with the ironic gesture he has when he relishes on the idea of making his acquaintances remember their attachment to what is always evident. This satisfaction will not linger much longer, since he is then informed that General Hoffmann, his most reliable military, has taken charge of several battalions and is trying to take power.

The PM decides to use World War I in his favor and not simply an opportunity of revenge. He knows French immigrants are usually more easily accepted in the country’s society because they blend in and become part of it quickly, while the Germans found isolated towns and do not generally mix with others. By using the General’s German ascendancy he polarizes German and French culture, turning them into two antagonistic powers that not only battle because of political or economic reasons, but also represent the struggle between two spiritual impulses:

Olympus against Valhalla. Apollo against Hagen. Versailles against Potsdam. Pascal’s Essential wisdom against Hegel’s philosophical gigantism—expressed in that obscure Heidelberg jargon which our minds, addicted to lucidity and transparency in argument, have instinctively rejected. The battle of the marshes of Saint-Gond had been a victory for Descartes, rather than for the ’75 cannon. (112)

El Olimpo contra el Walhalla. Apolo contra Hagen. Versailles contra Potsdam. La esencial sabiduría de Pascal contra el gigantismo filosófico de Hegel—expresado en aquella obscura jerga de Heidelberg que, por instinto, rechazaban nuestras mentes adictas

a la claridad y la transparencia en el discurso. La batalla de los pantanos de Saint-Gond, más que victoria del cañón de 75 había sido la victoria de Descartes. (200-201)

Hoffmann comes from a German family, but has a black grandmother who he hides from all public events. His pride of his German ascendancy and disavowal of his African heritage make him the ideal icon for the menace of the Germanization of the country, with its consequent segregation if society gave free rein to the change. The PM then will erect himself as the monument and institution of Latinity and by doing so would expand the German-French territory, on a rhetorical and discursive level, to a world scale.¹⁹ He will do this by redefining “Latinity” and turning it into “mestizaje.”

After all, being a Spanish did not mean having “pure blood” or “clean blood”—as the out-of-date phraseology of the Inquisition used to put it. All races of the ancient world had been mixed together in the great Mediterranean basin, mother of our culture. [...] To say Latinity was to say mixed blood, and in Latin America we are all mestizos; all of us have some negro or Indian, Phoenician, Moorish, Celtiberian blood, or the blood of Cádiz—and there’s always Walker lotion, or something of the sort, to smooth our hair, hidden in the family medicine Chest. (114)

Al fin y al cabo, “Latinidad” no significaba “pureza de sangre” ni “limpieza de sangre”—como solía decirse en desusados términos de Santo Oficio. Todas las razas del mundo

¹⁹ It is interesting to signal out that thanks to the cynical pragmatism of historical figures like the PM, the 1914 war turns into what history books see as “World War I.”

antiguo se habían malaxado en la prodigiosa cuenca mediterránea, madre de nuestra cultura. [...] Decir Latinidad era decir mestizaje, y todos éramos mestizos en América Latina; todos teníamos de negro o de indio, de fenicio o de moro, de gaditano o celtíbero—con alguna Loción Walker, para alisarnos el pelo, puesta en el secreto de arcones familiares. (202-203)

From a rancor to his immediate acquaintances, the PM goes on to support the Germans, and later finds a strategic advantage in defending French values. This pragmatic and cynical opportunism that helps him translate his country's tensions into the discourse of European ideological currents will be useful for him for a while. But social and political particularities in his own country will not allow him to continue on such a path. All the definitions of Paris the PM has will cease to function for him. Paris will not be the compass of good manners, good taste and civilization anymore. It will not be either the spatial incarnation of Latinity. It will not be the empty space he could fill in with any object of desire. All of these Parises will, literally, blow up in his face.

After picking up all “Red literature” (cf. Note 3 above) a mythical figure, a menacing specter appears in the PM's country. “The Student,” a figure as anonymous and generic as the PM himself, starts to incarnate the possibility of an end to the PM's mandate. The Secret Police is unable to find him and the only thing the search for him produces is more social repression. This of course brings the oft-repeated consequences for the regime's stability. Finally, after labor strikes that halt the country, and the possible US intervention if the strikes do not end, the Student goes to the PM's office to have a chat. The theatricality that characterizes the dictator goes in full drive in order to prepare “his scene very carefully” (207), which consists mainly in

an office full of objects and details that imply power. Obviously, many of these objects—a gold fountain pen, an inkwell with a Napoleonic eagle on it, a souvenir paperweight of Waterloo, etc.—reflect the translation of French aura into his own image. More than in any other moment in the novel, when these two characters meet we are not seeing realistically-based characters; they are images who look one another, allegorical characters of a play.

So they both looked at each other, the Master, the Invested, Immovable Ruler, and the Weak, Invisible Utopian, across the trench dividing the generations, seeing each other in flesh and blood for the first time. Their mutual contemplation produced a lamentable effect on both. To the Inferior his Superior was an archetype, an exhibit in a historical museum, a figure created to take the center of one of those posters (the products of very recent folklore) that illustrate the triad situated in a single body, of Power, Capitalism and the Boss, an image [...] invariably printed on the retina [...] To the Superior, his Inferior was a character from folklore, who he was measuring, weighing up and analyzing [...] The man in front of him was something like a Spanish American version of the classical student in Russian novels, full of dreams and theories, more of a nihilist than a politician, proletarian out of sense of duty, who lived in a garret, under-nourished, badly dressed, falling asleep among his books, roused to bitterness by the mediocrity of his existence. (209)

Y se contemplan ambos, el Amo, el Investido, el Inamovible, y el Débil, el Soterrado, el Utopista, por sobre el foso de dos generaciones, viéndose las carnes por primera vez. Lamentables se resultaban ambos, en su mutua contemplación. Era el de Arriba, para el

de Abajo, un arquetipo, un ejemplar de histórica muestra, figura hecha para centrar algunos de esos carteles, producto de un folklore de muy reciente creación, que había fijado, para la tríada fundida en cuerpo único, del Poderoso, del Capitalista, del Patrón, una estampa [...] invariable y metida en las retinas. [...] Y era el de Abajo, para el de Arriba, otro personaje folklórico, a quien medía, pesaba, dividía, [...] Ése, que tenía delante, era algo así—en versión nuestra—como el clásico estudiante de novela rusa, soñador y doctrinario, más nihilista que político, proletario por deber, habitante de buhardillas, mal comido, mal vestido, durmiendo entre libros, de rencores atizados por las frustraciones de una existencia mediocre. (317-18)

The dialogue's theatricality is evident within the conversation. "Like an actor very much in command of his gestures [...] he addressed the boy in front of him as if he were a character in a tragedy, about to be overwhelmed by the inscrutable designs of Fate: 'Why do you detest me so much?'" (211/320) The Student explains to him he in fact does not detest him: he needs him, as an image, in order for a popular uprising to ensue and pave the way to socialism. Because the Student does not aspire to power for power's sake—and for the PM this desire is the only relevant reason for anybody wanting him out of power—the PM offers the Student exile in Paris, the panoramic Paris where every desire may be satisfied.

"I'm not offering you the Paris of women and Maxim's Restaurant, as I would one of our social climbers. I'm offering you the Paris of the Sorbonne, of Bergson, of Paul Rivet. [...] Or if you want to make your Prayer on the Acropolis in the Bolshevik manner,

you've got the Mur des Fédérés at Père-Lachaise... There's something for all tastes...
you can choose" (216)

No te ofrezco el París de las hembras y del Restaurant Maxim's, como haría con cualquier rastacuero nuestro. Te propongo el París de la Sorbona, de Bergson, de Paul Rivet [... O, si quieres hacer tu Plegaria sobre el Acrópolis al estilo bolchevique, tienes, en el Père-Lachaise, el Muro de los Federados. Hay para todos los gustos... Tú escoges.
(324)

It is revealed to us what the dictator really thinks of Paris. In a reversal of European patterns of commoditization of Latin America, the dictator finds Paris to be a cultural product, a World Fair of the size of a whole city where any type of lifestyle may be found. This is not only the capital of good taste or the cradle of Latinity but the place of representation of appearances: just as his capital, Paris is also a stage where he can perform. For the dictator, as for any typical baroque character, the city is the set where everybody is a character, just as he is, and where everybody plays the role they have chosen. It is precisely here where the PM's most underlying theatricality is exposed to us. Even though we had already seen his predilection for theater and the performance arts—as well as his preference for performing in his speeches and as a general, as a train driver, etc.—we begin to see his own subjectivity as a staging, as the product of dress-up. And just as when we see it most clearly, this image explodes to smithereens.

The Head of State's reflection vanished in an avalanche of broken glass. The mirror, the shelves, Pictures and fireplace had come crashing down in a confusion of plaster, broken laths, gilt woodwork, splinters and paper, with a thunderous, ear-splitting noise. (217)

La imagen del Primer Magistrado desapareció en un alud de cristales rotos. El espejo que la reflejaba, las estanterías, los cuadros, la chimenea, se habían desplomado en una turbamulta de cales, listones rotos, maderas doradas, astillas, papeles, tras de un estruendo de los que, poniendo a gemir los oídos. (325)

Amidst the disaster, and as a last chance to gain the approval from his antagonist, the PM asks him: “To you I must seem a sort of Caligula, don't I?” ‘More like Caligula's horse,’ replied the other” (218). With this insult, the image of the PM as a powerful being starts to dissipate. After this scene a chapter ensues, one where there is no theatricality, where social control and repression are described in an almost documentary fashion and where we do not find the PM able to manipulate discourses nor dress up violent events. Just when his condition of allegorical character is thrown out, when he has no more useful gimmicks, both readers and the country's inhabitants see the backdrop fall and reveals the stage machinery behind the PM's power. There is no make-up or possible reinterpretation that would help the PM manipulate again the national and international situations for his benefit.

Finally the popular uprising starts, petards blow near the PM's window destroying his office once again, and the army soon deserts him when they see the risk they run if they continue supporting him. He has to go into exile, to the scenery of tumultuous proportions that Paris is, and where he will be harbored.

But before reaching Paris, the PM—now the “Ex”—will confront the need to change his own way of relating to the world, to leave behind the theatricality that had been so useful as a civilized curtain for abuses of power, in the same way civilization and French culture myths had worked for French society to hide their own crimes and atrocities (this point appears various times throughout the novel, especially when the PM talks to his French friend the Illustrious Academic.)

A strange formal turn has now occurred. Since the novel’s beginning the narration has been done either in first person—when the PM is a “private citizen,” generally in Paris—and a third person—when he is the representation of power—generally, but not always, while he is in his country. Now we only find a first-person narration. Within the plot it makes a lot of sense, since after all he is not the figure of power anymore. However two more things have to be taken into consideration: the first one is that along with his demise from power he has also left his role as an allegorical character—or better said, the conditions of being such a character have been taken away from him. Second, we need to remember the transformation of his 1949 prologue—almost a discourse on continental differences—into a first-person account of his travels in 1964—a *recourse* of his initial discourse.

In first person then, the PM confesses to the reader, the same day he is thrown out of power, how his surrounding world is transforming, how the theater is crumbling down. When he remembers the day, after mentioning the chaos and the constant social mutations, he acknowledges his country was a theater where he was the main character, and leaving power is nothing more than stopping from being the center of attention:

...and faces that have stopped looping, and receding backs, and a decor suddenly changed by the scene-shifters of tragedies hatched in secret, grown in shadow, born by proximity, although, deafened as I was by other choirs, I would not have heard the sound of real choirs. (239)

...esas caras que dejan de mirar, y esas espaldas que se alejan, y esas decoraciones cambiadas, de repente, por los tramoyistas de tragedias secretamente germinadas, crecidas en la sombra, nacidas en torno mío, sin que, ensordecido por otros coros, hubiese oído el sonido de los coros verdaderos. (349)

We arrive now to the central chapter in the novel. Here we find the Ex in a town by the seaside, on the border of his country and looking someplace else never to come back, where the United States Consul offers him asylum while he waits for a ship to take him to Paris. Several people know he is there and demand his surrender, but North American soldiers calm them down. Meanwhile the Ex observes the situation: “‘The strike is over,’ I announced, deepening my voice without noticing it. ‘The situation has been normalized.’ ‘There is order throughout the country,’ said the Consul, imitating me in a comic manner. And regaining his good humour: ‘Come to Captain’s Nemo’s cabin’” (“‘Ha terminado la huelga—declaré, engolando la voz, sin percatarme de ello—: Normalizada la situación.’ ‘Reina el orden en el país—dijo el [cónsul], remedándome de cómica manera. Y, volviendo a su buen humor—; Venga al Camarote del Capitán Nemo’”; 255-256/365). It is one more joke that ridicules and strips him of his power, and the Consul takes the Ex to his “private office.”

If General Hoffmann hid his black roots, the Consul is the opposite case. Although white enough to access the diplomatic career in his country, his constant goings to Parisian bars where

blues and jazz was played destined him to a secondary placement, at a seaside town of a country with little relevance for North American interests. “Nemo’s cabin” is then the place where the Consul preserves and cultivates his obsessions and tastes: he listens to jazz, plays on the piano a tune that makes the Ex observe that “...it’s a sort of dialogue—sometimes a battle—opposition and agreement between the female hand (the right) and the male hand (the left) which combine, complement one another, respond, but in a synchronization that is situated both within and outside the rhythm” (“es una suerte de diálogo—lucha a veces—, oposición y concierto, de una mano hembra—la derecha—y una mano macho—la izquierda—, que se combinan, se completan, se responden, pero en una sincronía situada, a la vez, dentro y fuera del ritmo”); 261/371). The *Mayoralá*, the woman who has long-served as bodyguard and mistress to the Ex and the only one who accompanies him into exile, starts to dance with the Consul. It is amidst this scenery where the Ex’s transformation gives a major step forward: he goes from being a typical, Cartesian-based character—his Parisian “private citizen” category who wants to be part of the Proustian world—and also from being a baroque-style allegory—his representation in a third-person narration resembling official History—and turns into this new, universal baroque human being.

The way he relates to the world changes and the answer that Carpentier gives to Proust becomes clearer. The cabin was once a shed where canoes were kept, but now humidity and saltpeter have taken over; it now seems to be somewhat an illustration of Verne’s *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*:

...the smelling of the green slime of winkles, clams in shadow, stranded jellyfish and rotting seaweed: with penetrating odour of fermenting sourness, of sex and moss, dried

fish-scales, amber and saturated wood which is the smell of the sea at its work of destruction [...] I am surprised by the value certain elements in my surroundings have suddenly acquired, by the new significance objects now possess, and by the way time is lengthened and expanded by immediate danger of death. (256)

verdores de bigarro, almejas en sombra, medusas encalladas, algas mohosas: su olor penetrante, de fermentos y agraces, sexo y musgo, escama yerta, ámbar y madera embebida, que es el del mar en sus propias destrucciones [...] me sorprende ante el valor cobrado, de repente, por ciertos elementos de lo circundante, el nuevo sentido que cobran los objetos, el alargamiento, la dilatación, que al tiempo impone un inmediato peligro de muerte. (366)

From this point on there is a new relation between the PM and the space that surrounds him and the time that passes. Instead of the paraphernalia of power his office once possessed, what we find here is a portrait, an ekpharstic description of time distributed in space. It is movement, decay, and destruction all around him, but by seeing life go by for those natural objects he also finds a regained valorization of life and time by a life that seems to be reaching its end. If Marcel always tried to recover time after that initial moment when a man-made object—the madeleine—triggered the infinite power of remembrance, the Ex in contrast is seeing time all around him. He is not a character in a play anymore; the brush with death has made him leave behind that way of living and has allowed him to perceive reality not as an effect of props and scenery, but as the spatial distribution of time in nature's objects.

This new capacity surprises him acutely. Since he is not a character anymore, he does not have to represent something else, but more importantly, he does not have to elucubrate, reflect on what he is and project what he is not. This realization is the founding stone of his new subjectivity because, unlike Descartes, he does not need to reflect on “I think, therefore I am.” Instead he sustains himself on paying attention to the outer and ever-changing world:

‘I see, therefore I am.’ And since ‘I see’ will have greater significance when I do see more, I am establishing the permanence of existence both within and outside myself (257).

esa prodigiosa capacidad de prestar una atención sostenida, acuciosa, excesiva, a cosas que aparecen, que se descubren, que se agrandan sin mudar de forma, como si su contemplación equivaliera a agarrarse de algo, a decir: ‘Veo, luego soy.’ Y puesto que veo, existiré más cuanto más vea, afincándome en permanencia, dentro y fuera de mí mismo; 367)

He has not only left behind his old Cartesian customs, but also the main reason for continuing in power: he does not have to act anymore for Parisian society; he can see and thus be. And what he in fact sees is the collection of roots the Consul has managed to create with the years. Before this moment language was an instrument for communication—and thus a tool for manipulating information, for lying, and for theatricality. Now it turns into much more:

...a rare collection of root-sculptures, sculpture-roots, root-forms, root-objects—baroque roots or roots that are austere in their smoothness; complicated, intricate, or nobly

geometrical [...] And it was enough to mention the name of a port to the collector for him to pass from the root found there to the invocation, evocation, presentation of images brought to life by the syllables making up its name, or the proliferative activity of the letters—so he said—a process such as was foreshadowed in the Hebrew Cabbala. (257-258)

Una rara colección de raíces-esculturas, de esculturas-raíces, de raíces-formas, de raíces-objetos—raíces barrocas o severas en su lisura; enrevesadas, intrincadas, o notablemente geométricas. [...] Y bastábale citar el nombre de un puerto, al coleccionista, para que, de la raíz mostrada, pasara su verbo a la invocación, la evocación, la presentación de imágenes que las sílabas sumadas en nombre de lugar creaban, por una proliferante operación de las letras—decía—que había sido prevista por la Kábala hebraica. (368)

If the tea-dipped Madeleine is the trigger for involuntary memory in Proust's case, for the Consul will be his roots, both in a literal and figurative sense, in this "wretched shed made of rotten planks" (372, 261). The Cartesian break between subject and reality thanks to the methodical doubt, or better said, a recourse has been traced around the discourse of methodical doubt. For the language that names that nature, recreates it by being pronounced. The Consul resorts to the Kaballah to explain this, but as we have seen before in the essay on the baroque, this can also be described as a dismissal of language at the level of definitions, and a reappropriation of its ekphrastic properties. And what is truly important here is that the Ex sees, therefore he is.

He will start a journey onto a new type of existence by means of his memory and the senses, and we readers, right after this happens, find a quote from Descartes absolutely taken out of context: “And deciding not to seek more knowledge than what I could find in myself...” (“Y resolviéndome a no buscar más ciencia que la que pudiese hallarse en mí mismo...”; 377/267). The quote comes from the first part of *Le discours de la méthode*, where Descartes prepares the ground to elucidate his analytical way of approaching reality. But the discourse has by now been reframed. Or in other words, we do not find here the discourse of Method, but the recourse, the remedy, a possible way of approaching subjectivity in relation to memory and to the ekphrastic possibilities of language.

If Proust uses involuntary memory to portray an epoch, the Consul apparently uses it to live more fully. The Apex of the figure of the writer—someone who almost stopped living in order to write about living—is then also casted aside, and the dictator, the one who dictates—and in a certain sense the same authorial voice that has created the text—are both left aside too.

The last chapter focuses then on the reestablishment of the senses and time, decanted both into ekphrastic memory, as a bridge to a fuller existence for the Ex, up to the point where he declares “I feel therefore I am” (393/280). It is here when an authentic life is achieved, free of theatricality or spectacle, a life based on the senses, on the contemplation of time, in sum, on lived experience. On a corporeal lived experience: The statement quoted above, the Ex’s experiential epiphany, appears during what may be his last visit to a brothel. At the beginning of the novel, he had demanded his consorts to disguise themselves and act in multiple representations, in a series of scenes that were only a small part of the representations that abounded in his life. But this time representation is left aside, and flesh and corporality are placed in close-up.

Here, [...] I found the only permanence that had always existed [...] here as over there; I found presence and uniqueness, dialectic of irreplaceable forms, a common language of universal understanding. In the irreversible Time of the flesh [...] aesthetic fashions, variants and fluctuations of taste all passed [...] yet never altering the fundamental reality of a nude. Here, looping at what I am looping at, I feel I am witnessing the Arrest of Time, somewhere outside the present epoch [...] and therefore liberated from everything that binds me to the dates of my own history. [...] less of an exiled ruler, or actor in decline, and more identified with my own ego, still possessing eyes for looking [...] something worth looking at—riches definitely preferable (I feel therefore I am) to those of a fictitious existence in the stupid ubiquity of a hundred statues in municipal parks, patios and town halls” (279-280)

Aquí [...] me encontraba con lo único permanente que, desde siempre [...] era, aquí como allá, presencia y unicidad, dialéctica de formas irremplazables, común idioma de universal entendimiento. En el irreversible tiempo de la carne [...] pasaban las modas estéticas, las variantes, las fluctuaciones del gusto que [...] no acababan nunca [...] de alterar la fundamental verdad del desnudo. Aquí, mirando lo que miro, me encuentro en el gran Detenimiento de las Horas, fuera de época [...] y, por ello, librado de cuanto me ata a las fechas de mi propia historia, [...] menos monarca desterrado, menos actor en descenso, más identificado con mi yo profundo, con ojos aún hechos para mirar, con pálpitos que me vienen [...] ante algo que merezca ser mirado—riqueza bastante

preferible (siento, luego soy) a la de un fingido vivir en la tonta ubicuidad de cien estatuas paradas en parques municipales y patios de ayuntamientos. (392-393)

When he realizes where he is having these thoughts, he starts laughing and says: “Anything but ‘To be or not to be’ in a whorehouse” (393/280). After this there is little reflection that is not cemented on the flesh and the body, until when the Ex is about to die and proclaims, in one last act of representation, “Fabula acta est.” He wished these would be his famous last words, but sadly no one understands what he says, and the comedy ends with him being forgotten in one of many tombs in Montparnasse.

We could interpret the Ex’s last words as proof of his unchanged mind, a return to representation and theatrical paraphernalia—only the order to applaud is missing in his quote. This is also Cesar Augustus’s last words, so we may think he wanted a one-to-one comparison to be traced. But let us return to *Concierto barroco*’s last words: “The future is entirely fabulous.” The celebratory conclusion about the future and the end of the farce meet in the word “fabulous:” Yes, the story is over, but also the life is over, the life that was a proliferating nucleus of disruption. The Ex’s life, just like the story itself, is a disruptive marvel that is now ending.

This is Carpentier’s proposal: against the Cartesian-like memory in Proust’s remembrance of French society, the Consul gives the Ex the opportunity to exist without representation, through a fleshly memory that eliminates the need of acting in front of others. This “nature-style empiricism” seems to be close to what Kaup has recently seen in Carpentier as a baroque unfolding: an ever-continuing process of birth and decay of small pockets of innovation. This, of course, does not last for long. As we have seen in the novel, the innovation

produced by the Ex's contact with Paris dies with him, and only by leaving aside concerns about social justice can we respect Carpentier's character.

But we also need to remember the critical drive of the novel: its target is European society and how the subject they welcome—or so it seems—into their embrace is nothing less than a mass murderer; it is only when politics affect their isolated circles that they stop talking to him. The hypocrisy of their provincial version of cosmopolitanism is what Carpentier is challenging not by denouncing it, by calling foul play in the game of subjectivity creation and organizing of totality according to its rules. Instead, he places a disruptive nucleus of proliferation that necessarily tenses the borders of that organized space, a character that infuses disorder into what was rationalistically organized before. The plot of the novel, then, is not as much the telling of the demise of a Latin American dictator while mocking him and denouncing his excesses, but the telling of how a baroque subjectivity emerges from within order. It does not disrupt or transgress the order; that is not Carpentier's intent. It is instead to subvert the rules of the order so that the order can be put in question, it is to tense the borders of the playing field so the rules are not seen as permanent and unchangeable anymore; it is to show—instead of trying to define—a subjectivity that emerges amidst those processes. It is to say that it is in fact possible to live in a world in flux, and only by accepting those fluid underpinnings of the world the subject can escape from turning into the monstrous and murdering subject that the Discourse on Method ended up producing.

CONCLUSIONS: THE SUBJECT AS MAROON

I hope I have shown that the novels previously read and analyzed attempt to haptically apprehend knowledge. Traditionally relegated to children or animals, this type of knowledge is the product of dealing first with what is nearer and then with what is farther away, without relying on the assumption that there is a systematic walkthrough that can help us conceive a total image of the world. I will make a short summary of each of the author's exploratory exercises, and then I will show how this way of reading may be able to help us transcend the limits of imaginary borders of knowledge and of world images that we are so accustomed when dealing with the Caribbean and what is conceived as outside of it.

Virgilio Piñera wants to show how he arrives to the borders of reality, how the outside is not only unknown but also impossible to know. He is very First-Wittgenstein in this sense: "the limits of my island are the limits of my world." Piñera's worldview is one of a saturated, immanent and contained space in which life is teeming. He adopts Witold Gombrowicz's version of the subject's battle against the external world towards recognition, and extrapolates it to the realm of poetic development within an island. This forces him to paradoxically postulate a "carnal" monism—no differentiation between mind, body and exteriority, however not towards a reduction into consciousness, but into flesh, into "carne transcurrida"—which throws him into a troublesome stasis. Besides the exploration of the novel itself, this chapter helps us trace the contours and dimensions of this way of portraying space and how does the subject react when he reaches the limits of this conceptual topology.

The pathos of Piñera's novel relies in the fact that the space from which René is trying to escape—the space on which the Dialectic plays itself out—is limited and constricted. Since his

only desire is to escape desire itself, he mistrusts and deems impossible any conception of transcendence; therefore, he is moved from one place to another by the powerful but obtuse forces in favor or against the “Cause,” the pivotal, global desire of making the whole world eat chocolate, a sweeping but not entirely represented—maybe because of its unrepresentability—account of the world as a whole. But since his own subjectivity relies only on flesh and nothing beyond it, the movement toward his self-realization is a path paved with physical pain. Even when he considers he has fled, René still feels the pain due to the constriction of the space within which he lives, the space on which the physically painful dialectic is put into play.

For Rojas Herazo an ontology of the virtual comes into play. There are no limits in the world—unlike Piñera’s world—but there are no changes either. Rojas Herazo is almost animistic. He tries to delude the discreteness that stands between being and nothing, the categorical difference between one and the multiple, and between self and other. For Rojas Herazo reality itself is much more expanded than in Piñera’s case, but there still is a carnal monism in play in his worldview because reality works as an organism. His work is the clearest case of a vitalist account of a world in which there is no oppositional consciousness—although there is an original opposition he tries to get rid of, that of the Andean center and the Colombian periphery. In his account there is no post-colonial struggle or anguish. He seems to live inside a world where there is no such difference between empire and colony. He comes instead from a world where desolation takes the place of virtuality, and hope is the actualization that for him is going on at the moment. There is no plea of the dispossessed, because humans are all equally sons of nature/democracy.

For Rojas Herazo, subjectivity has to be separated from the Word, from the restrictions that the lettered society impose on humans: he therefore turns his language into an ekphrastic tool for portraying experience and, by means of an ekphrastic memory, communities are supposed to grow and sustain the attack of the lettered order. These communities are maroon-like: they are founded as attempts to flee from order and restriction, unlike historical descriptions of cities' foundations, which in contrast emphasize the ordering of nature and of space in general.

Late-Carpentier's topology is one of continuous eruption of difference. His impulse is to create pockets of disruption from within the still state of things. Compared to the constricted world of Piñera, and the static and vitalist world of Rojas Herazo, Carpentier does not want to imagine a completely different ontology or world dimensions: he does not want to show the non-transcendental limits of the world, nor to show that there are no limits whatsoever. He only seems to be interested in degrees of distinctiveness. In this sense, Carpentier is the most conservative of all three writers. It would be equally correct to state that Carpentier combines Piñera's and Rojas Herazo's takes and puts them into motion. Whereas Piñera focused on subjectivity and Rojas Herazo on a picture of an organismic world, Carpentier interrelates both realms: by rebranding his vision of the marvelous real for a world that is fluid and continuous, and by turning the Baroque into a disruptive mode of emerging disorders all throughout the fluid-like world, Carpentier is able to produce an adjacent, remora-like contamination of Eurocentrism, and along with it a supplement to Cartesian grounding of subjectivity, one based on lived experience. Carpentier's *Primer Magistrado*, a Dictator, possibly the figure farthest away from the maroon as a historical category, nevertheless is haunted by a maroon-type logic,

just like Piñera's and Rojas Herazo's characters and proposals. In order to survive and exist in a world that does not exactly know what to do with him and where to place him, he resorts to a maroon-like status when founding his own subjective place in his own home—a politically sovereign, interstitial place within Paris—and attempts to find a way to divert from the Cartesian and Proustian subjectivity by resorting to a fluid, lived experience. He does not question the discrete ontology underpinning cartesian subjectivity. He adapts to it because he is adjacent to it. His own narrative and epistemological position is more of a remora, or better yet, that of the ferocious kraken of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, which disrupts the calm and easy flow of transoceanic commerce.

Jules Verne's book and images are not casual references here, because the change the Primer Magistrado suffers, the one that takes him from being a person who assumes he can dictate orders to reality to someone who understands reality through lived experience happens precisely when the American Consul makes an appearance in the second half of the book. As the strange reincarnation of Captain Nemo from Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* (1870), he gives protection to the Dictator when he is thrown out of office by allowing him entrance to the consulate. Inside the Consul invites him to "Nemos' Cabin": he shows him his collection of roots—not of books, as the original Nemo—in his own private office, inside a private and sovereign place (Carpentier 255-256/365). This character, what it means for the First Magistrate and to the act of imagining surrounding space by means of language will allow us some concluding remarks regarding the maroon imagination and the ways of reading that such an imagination suggests. It will also allow us expand the borders of what "maroon" means and what Caribbean represents.

In a well-beaten path in the intellectual history of Latin America, in *El recurso del método* Carpentier still holds on to being an intellectual, in the sense of assuming he is the voice and clear representation of a region. We may also extrapolate this assumption and say that Carpentier's Caribbean can also be seen as somewhat of a kraken: it seems not to exist at all in the eyes of transoceanic transportation and industry—it is just abstract, empty space distanced from the metropolis—but when bothered it disrupts the flow of goods and capital. Just like the Kraken, the Prime Minister—and the Caribbean—is an underscored presence in Parisian salons, but when disturbed he comes out to the surface and wreaks havoc on the cosmopolitan center's way of picturing the world.

At the time Jules Verne wrote the novel, there were no submarines quite like the *Nautilus*. Even today there is no glass strong enough that would allow the panoramic underwater vistas of Captain Nemo's living room, vistas that covered all the underwater world allowing Professor Aronnax, Nemo's guest and the novel's narrator, to taxonomically—and boringly—organize this wholly undiscovered world. Similarly, there are still no characters yet like Nemo. This “No-Man” does not have a place of birth, a distinctive race nor a known native language that Aronnax could use to pinpoint his origin—although he tries to do so several times. He and his *Nautilus* are wildcards that do not belong to the classification being made by Aronnax the polymath throughout the novel. Just like René, just like Rojas Herazo's animal-like humans/artists, and just like the Prime Magistrate, they are all elements that seem not to fit into any sets. The Professor travels twenty thousand leagues under the sea, classifying the flora, fauna and geological compositions of the territory, while living inside a machine that cannot be classified in the categories of the time: the site from which the classification is deployed and the person who makes this voyage possible are impossible to classify.

Unlike Verne's later tales, the adventure here begins in the middle of the sea, in an indeterminate place, and it does not end with the return to that place of origin. It ends, instead, in the middle of a maelstrom, in a disorienting convulsion of space in which the organization of reality cannot be pursued. Aronnax and the readers are left at the end without knowing where does Nemo come from and why his hatred towards land and its inhabitants makes him live entirely in and from the sea in self-imposed exile. The mystery that is the *Nautilus*, how it was constructed, where does all its wonderful engineering achievements come from and how were they all developed, all this is cloaked in uncertainty. In a later novel, "The Mysterious Island," readers are informed that Nemo is a former Indian Prince in search of revenge against the English, turning him both into a chivalrous postcolonial hero—and also into the forefather of all the cruel, sovereign and extremely rich nemeses of the James Bond movies. But in this novel, he literally is *Nemo*, no-man.

But whereas all his Bond-ish evil descendants have a reason to live thanks to rage, vengeance, greed, and the dream to destroy Imperial, Cold-War superpowers, or humanity at large so a new order may ensue—and who plan this and attempt to do so from the comfort of their own private and sovereign islands, ships, submarines, moon stations, etc.—Nemo's intent is simply to live apart. He is also full of rage and he does not tremble when it comes to attacking ships making people assume there is a Kraken at large, but he does so because he wants to be left alone with his crew. Just like a maroon, Nemo lives a completely independent life from organized land. All his food and needs are fulfilled by the sea. Even a piece of underwater land is clearly separated and turned into a cemetery so the dead members of his crew may have a proper burial site. Nemo for all intents and purposes got rid of all links to national, racial, religious origin, and lives in his own space that is the *Nautilus*.

This level of detachment, of course, is not plausible. But the point Verne makes with *Nemo* is not that of a dictum to be followed by everybody in order to completely shed the old ways of the subject and into a new way of being in the world. Nemo and Carpentier's Consul and his Prime Magistrate, Piñera's René and Rojas Herazo's animalistic human/artists are portrayals of the possibility of seeing the world in such terms, of suspending—at least for a moment—the lines that anchor our way of thinking to circumscribed and exclusionist paradigms. It is a way of seeing and doing things so such imaginary limits are blurred and new constellations of ideas come to the fore.

If the *Nautilus* was an impossible object that could only exist in the imagination of what would become a new literary genre—Science Fiction—Verne's *Nemo* and the characters studied in previous chapters are impossible subjects that only exist in another literary genre—the Caribbean/Oceanic fiction we have focused on in this work. In other words, just as Submarines now exist and *to a certain degree* resemble the *Nautilus* as conceived by Verne, so too certain subjects resemble *Nemo* and our marooned characters: subjects that come up with versions of themselves out of the actualization of their own surroundings, pragmatically putting into use what is near them in order to bootstrap into existence new versions of themselves and new images of possible futures. Subjects who deal not with arguments in favor or against positions that correspond to established images of the world, but who are constantly tinkering with the sense of themselves—like in Piñera—or with their surroundings—like in Rojas Herazo—in order to produce new conceptualizations of both—like in Carpentier's case.

For all their explorations of new paths toward new forms and new images of subjectivity, these characters are traditional characters: for all their paradoxes and non-traditional subjectivities, all three novels follow the idealistic tension of the genre since the *Iliad* or since

the Anansi or Br'er Rabbit tales (*Tío Conejo* in Spanish): the springing out of the surroundings into a new condition or sense of life by way of stories, by way of the use of language in order to transform reality and transform themselves.

This is the result of the haunting of the maroon imagination: an impulse in narrative that, unlike traditional takes until the avant-garde, placed reality before the narrative representation of that reality. This maroon imagination, just like the experimentation of the avant-gardes but without the vocabulary and the imaginaries developed within technological modernization, was and is always interested in creating world-images with words, and letting the new meanings of those words coming out of the world-images affect in turn how we understand those world-images.

Reading in a Maroon-like Key

Captain Nemo has are no clear origins, no clear reasons for his actions except the most immediate, and no clear destinations or goals. The moving world just happens to be there, and Nemo just seems to navigate it.

We could easily say that the existential stasis that Nemo suffers, along with René and Rojas Herazo's characters is a product of the lack of goals and clear objectives. But let us remember the Nemo-like Consul, who is able to produce a version of himself in his own private chamber thanks to music, dance, or to his amazing collection not of books but of roots. By mapping their surroundings, by *haptically imagining* their surroundings, they are producing newer versions of themselves and new orderings for long-standing categories of the world. In the process of bootstrapping themselves continuously they are threading time and time again the web

that sustains their own understanding of the world. There is a process of reading in place here that depends in but also deploys the bootstrapping: the act of reading Nature is not a semiotic process of decoding or an exegetical process of finding a meaning—The Meaning of the text, of nature, of existence. Reading for them is a lived experience that recycles categories, churns them and deploys them again in new combinations.

This is what I believe is reading in a maroon-like key. This is why I place at the same level Esteban Montejo, Captain Nemo, fin-de-siècle dandies and decadents, René, Rojas Herazo's animal-like artists and Carpentier's Prime Magistrate. If we strip away the exceptionalist entanglement of meanings carried by technology and modernization in Nemo's case, and by the concept of "sophistication" in traditional accounts of European and Eurocentrist accounts of literature, culture and thought, there is in all cases the crucial process of bootstrapping, churning, and exploring new senses of the self. And by following this survival technique, by allowing themselves to be haunted by the ghost of the maroon imagination, we may be able to create a tenuous place of stasis but also renewal, through the lived experience of reading and rereading the world that has just been read and that has just transformed the self that reads it.

This is my next project. To assume such a way of reading—a lived experience that changes the world and the self in the process—when studying various types of Caribbean/Oceanic literary and cultural production. Instead of following the beaten path of reading as representation that produces comfortable moments of recognition, I would like to read these text as ekphrastic deployments of this bootstrapping imaginary. This entails remembering that the texts, no matter how factual and grounded to reality they may seem, can also be protocols of self-production which work by picturing a world somewhat different from what is

established as proper and true. And picturing such a world—the *experience of doing so*, not particularly the final product—refuels the drive that started such process in the first place.

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