

A Poetics of Globalism: Fernando Vallejo, the Colombian Urban Novel, and the  
Generation of '72

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of  
Romance Studies in the Graduate School  
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2011

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the confluence and clashes between local and global cultural flows in Latin America through the multiple literary movements and tendencies for which the Colombian author, Fernando Vallejo, acts as a unifying agent. My analysis pulls from Decolonial, Aesthetic and World Literary theories, in order to analyze how cosmopolitanism and globalization resonate in contemporary Latin American letters through a survey of three geocultural categories: the Colombian local, the Latin American regional, and the literary global. My analysis of the local tracks the formal evolution of the Colombian *Novela de la Violencia* into the contemporary *Novela Urbana* and the parallel political challenge to the conventional *Lettered City* in Colombia after the *Violencia*. In terms of the regional, I critique the idea of a positive and universally stabilizing cosmopolitanism through a collective analysis of a generation of Latin American writers that were forced to travel to the cosmopolitan center through exile rather than as an act of freewill, a generation that I refer to in this project as the Generation of '72. And my evaluation of the global considers how a singular World Literary aesthetics and political economy of prestige weighs negatively on contemporary Latin American authors. Through a survey of the roughly fifty novels and short stories that fall under the purview of both the Colombian Urban Novel and the Generation of '72, I conclude that aesthetic borders – the places where multiple forms of perception

converge– open up spaces and forums of critique of rigid cultural models and century  
old aesthetic formulae, a tendency that I refer to as a poetics of globalism.

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## Acknowledgements

According to Ricardo Piglia, literary criticism is a way of writing one's own story: a means to the end of conveying how literature weighs on one's own existence and experiences. This work, one that pulls largely from cosmopolitan and globalization theories, supports Piglia's supposition. It is the product of the many conversations had in both cultural capitals, that until recently were considered part of the periphery, and old centers that now find their cultural schema in a precarious position in an increasingly and excitingly pluriversal world.

The voices of so many friends and mentors present themselves in this dissertation, and the list of people I would like to thank is long enough to fill not one page but many. I owe the most profound gratitude, however, to my thesis supervisors and committee. I consider myself very fortunate to have been part of the Romance Studies Department at Duke for the past four years and to have had two exceptional supervisors, without whom my early, rough, and vague ideas would never have matured. I thank Ariel Dorfman for his great generosity, care, and willingness to bring a young graduate student into the fold of the contemporary Latin American literary world. The time he has dedicated to this project and his attention to detail have been both remarkable and flattering, and his understanding of the multiple layers of

consciousness imbedded in both the Latin American and global literary archive has been an incredible asset, as has his unflagging enthusiasm. I, similarly, thank Walter Mignolo for his willingness to help me develop what began as early notions into complex ideas, starting as early my first day at Duke. It is a telling testament to his teaching and mentorship that I took four classes with him in four semesters of coursework at Duke. His insistence on exploring the side of global cultural projects that is typically pushed to the wayside has been inspiring. And his energy and spirit have lent themselves to the drive necessary to complete a project as long and taxing as a doctoral thesis. I thank José María Rodríguez-García, whose exceptional understanding of literary, political, and historical nuance in a wide range of material but especially Colombia has helped me come to grips with the breadth and precedent to the social problems that present themselves in the work of Fernando Vallejo and other Colombian urban novelists. I thank Antonio Viego, who, through a particularly inspiring seminar in 2008, helped me understand the relationship between the body and language and whose work encourages us, as scholars, to ask tough questions of political discourses rather than settle for lip service and easy answers. And I thank Patrick Dove, whose seminar on the poetics of naming in 2006 at Indiana University planted questions and interests that are clearly very much alive in this project. His acumen for asking the right question at the right time has been invaluable, as has his encouragement to explore exactly what we talk about when we talk about Latin America.

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Lastly, no part of the doctoral process would have been possible without the tireless emotional support of my parents, Garrett H. Nicholson III and Pamela J. Nicholson, and my fiancée, Helen Victoria Anthony.

## Chapter One. Introduction

### A Poetics of Globalism: Fernando Vallejo, the Colombian Urban Novel, and the Generation of '72

At the heart of Fernando Vallejo's (1942-) biography of his literary hero José Asunción Silva, *Chapolas Negras* (1995), is a shipwreck that on January 28 1895, just under a year before his eventual suicide, would lose Silva the only existing copies of his entire life's work. In the Bocas de Ceniza, not far from Colombia's coast, as Vallejo tells us, Silva's boat capsized during a return from Paris to Bogotá, where he had fulfilled the aesthetic rite of his generation in a trip to the City of Lights. Colombia was in the midst of the third of four consecutive civil wars and a series of presidencies filled by high literary idealists that shared the belief that grammatical precision and aesthetic modernism would serve as sufficient philosophical and political models for nascent American nation-states. And when his boat upended, Silva, in the truly *modernista* sense, was in the process of taking the civilizing map at its word. He had traveled to the cosmopolitan center in order to learn the aesthetic form of the day and to be near institutions of cultural and political capital, only to become caught in the suspended *in between* of early transatlantic travel.

Vallejo's insistence on returning to arguably the most tragic event in Silva's not otherwise serene life is telling. He leads readers and admirers as fascinated with this exemplary Colombian *modernista* as he is to wonder in what way Silva's wreck might stand in as a marker, or even a literary inscription, itself, for a moment in which Latin American writers attempted to find a language of their own and to negotiate the tension between a local lived experience and a high literary register based largely in Paris. Indeed, Vallejo stops just short of speculating that the shipwreck speaks louder than

Silva's entire life's work when he ventures, "¡Qué lástima que Silva naufragó, pero qué bueno que por lo menos nos quedó su naufragio!"<sup>1</sup>

Vallejo's obsession with the tragic moments in Silva's life introduces what I view as quintessential to his own literary form, a style that I define in this project as a *poetics of globalism*. In Silva, Vallejo finds a persona and poetics that he magnifies and bends to fit contemporary Colombia on the local level and Latin American on the regional level. He is drawn to overblown tragedy, pregnant dramatic moments, and a tension that arises from a high aesthetic register, part and parcel of advanced globalization, and its limits in representing locally lived experiences. Vallejo's alter-ego, Fernando, whom we meet over the course of his collective works, is both a champion of the mythologized and largely universal grammatical purity of the Caro and Cuervo and the apparent irony that arises when it is placed in contrast with violent post-drug cartel Colombian cityscapes.<sup>2</sup> In the bold image of Silva's ship sinking in the Caribbean along with what would have gone on to be deemed "classic," "canonical," and "foundational" cultural production, Vallejo finds a precedent to his own concern with literature, the form of the novel, and its limited capability of exporting testimony to trauma and systemic violence to a large international audience, while trying to faithfully work through local social issues through literature.

In the chapters that follow, I analyze how Vallejo acts as a link between two Latin American literary tendencies and generations: the *novela urbana Colombiana* and the

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from page 170 of: Vallejo, Fernando. *Chapolas Negras*. Santafe de Bogota: Editorial Santillana, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> The Caro and Cuervo (Instituto Caro y Cuervo) is a philological institute in Bogotá that is known for its conservative approach to literature and its emphasis on universal grammatical purity. In an interview that I conducted with Vallejo in June of 2011, Vallejo told me that he is especially fascinated by the relationship between one of the institute's founders, Rufino José Cuervo (1844-1911), and Colombian popular culture and speech. Vallejo is currently in the process of writing a biography on Cuervo.

Generation of '72. Through these two movements, I examine how a singular cosmopolitanism and advanced globalization resonate in contemporary Latin American literature, how flows of global, cultural, and economic capital register in generational and regional aesthetics, and how traditional theoretical and philological models bend aesthetic borders – the place where multiple forms of perception converge – increase in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century Latin America.<sup>3</sup> The scope of my project begins with the local aesthetic economy and zooms out to the purview of global cultural systems: on the local level, through an analysis of the contemporary Colombian Urban novel; on the regional level, in a reading of the Generation of '72; and on the global level, in an appraisal of how authors from both of these groups struggle to gain purchase in world literary systems and the political economy of prestige.

Chapter 1, "The Local: The Colombian Urban Novel and the Decolonization of the Lettered City", focuses on contemporary Colombia and the movement away from literary treatments of the *lettered city* to that of the *mediated city* alongside the formal evolution of the *novela de la Violencia* into the *novela urbana*. One may argue that Colombia stands out, even within the context of Latin America, in presenting an inordinately complex relationship between culture, globalization, and failed institutions. Since Independence, Colombia has experienced sprawling overlap between cultural idealism – largely through the commingling of politics and poetic and grammatical transcendentalists–, social anomie, and violence. And along with the post-Nafta Mexico - U.S. border, Colombia, perhaps, still presents Latin America's most controversial social

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<sup>3</sup> Vallejo and the movements and generations that he represents, of course, are not the first Latin Americans to occupy and write from the space of economic, aesthetic, and cultural borders. The point of this project is not to claim that the symbolic dissonance at such borders is novel in the late twentieth century but to address the way that such borders have developed in times of advanced globalization and how they resonate in contemporary literature.

settings. In terms of globalization, Colombia offers many intrinsic contradictions to both global developmentalist projects and the aesthetic infrastructure that accompany them at the end of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Jean Franco's claims about Latin America at large resonate strongly in regard to Colombian sociocultural stasis, for instance, when she writes

The contemporary narrative of globalization as purveyed by the World Bank and by official circles in Europe and the United States is a narrative of development fantasized as a journey into prosperity. Seen from Latin America, the outcome is not so certain and the pauperization of those left behind hardly makes for a heartening "story." The stigmatized bodies of those marked for death in the drug wars and in urban violence reveal the other side of the globalization narrative.<sup>5</sup>

Though his work has not fully received the critical attention necessary to unpack the weighty material that he addresses, Fernando Vallejo stands at the center of both the Colombian Urban Novel and the Generation of '72 and highlights the unlettered body that is lost in the overlap of local and global institutional frameworks. In his treatment of the underbelly of neoliberal developmentalist rhetoric, he uses the extreme metaphors of pederasty, waveringly authoritarian opinions, and harsh violence to make visible the marginalized experience of the peripheral body within the framework of multiple forms of globalized discourses prevalent in his home city of Medellín. In Chapter 1, I offer a reading of Vallejo's poetic rendering of a Medellín that attempts to memorialize a form of violence inherited from centuries of civil war, ongoing in the renovated form of urban violence in his most acclaimed and commented on work, *La virgen de los sicarios*. The city

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<sup>4</sup> By aesthetic infrastructure, I mean that sociopolitical apparatuses used to letter and unletter, value and devalue bodies within the framework of the early nation state and later liberal marketplace in Colombia. There is a tendency, ranging from the poet-presidents of the nineteenth century Regeneración to present day beauty pageants that allows the economic elite to dominate political and social exchange through the use of aesthetic idylls. I expand on these ideas on Chapter 1 and the Conclusion.

<sup>5</sup> From page 16 of: Franco (Ibid)

that for so long in Latin American literature and its theoretical appendages has been treated as an outpost of civilization falls to pieces before Vallejo when he returns from an extended stay in Europe and the United States. Vallejo may not have experienced Silva's shipwreck, but his *vuelta* is hardly less traumatic. His return to urban Colombia offers just as stark a contrast between the cultural and mythologized urban idyll and the Medellín that he experiences. In documenting his return, Vallejo offers a firm juxtaposition between the poetic idealism of his *modernista* predecessors and the violent peripheral border in what Franco refers to as "the decline and fall of the lettered city," all the while maintaining a deep nostalgia for his personal memory buried somewhere beneath the rubble of the city he now occupies. Perhaps in no city in the Americas do aesthetics, cultural idealism, and violence coexist as uncomfortably as in Medellín, and Vallejo gives testimony to precisely the tension and poetic cacophony that arises from their coexistence.

Chapter 1 spans the work of Vallejo and other Colombian Urban Novelists, both from earlier movements such as Gustavo Alvarez Gardeazábal (1945), Luis Fayad (1945), and Miguel Torres (1942), and younger writers of the same genre, such as Mario Mendoza (1964), Andrés Caicedo (1951-1977), Antonio Caballero (1945), Laura Restrepo (1950) and Alonso Salazar (1960), in an analysis of how literature reflects the context of the debased standing of the conventional symbolic pillar in the Lettered City. With a *Ulysses* like air, these narrators meander through Colombian cityscapes and offer an ad hoc elegy that attempts to symbolically resuscitate the urban space through narrative and take on a philosophical problem that looms large in the Pan-Latin American intellectual and literary tradition – one need not strain too hard to come up with the numerous examples in twentieth century Latin American literature alone, in which the writer attempts to forge an identity based on the geographical shift between multiple



spaces, though largely Northern Europe and Latin America, and readers of Latin American letters cannot help but be struck by the parallels, despite markedly varied cultural contexts, between Vallejo's return to Medellín in *La virgen de los sicarios* and Jorge Luis Borges's *vuelta* in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923). The question has long been, and continues to be, with whose language, aesthetic registers, and symbolic systems can a writer adequately address Latin American experiences?

Chapter 2, "The Regional: The Generation of '72 and the forced Latin American Cosmopolitan", continues this questioning of aesthetic registers and civilizing state models at the regional level, where I analyze a collective response to Latin America's first forced global citizens in what I refer to as the Generation of '72. The Generation of '72 comprises a group of Latin American authors that wrote the bulk of their work while in exile and in the unwieldy wake of the famed *Boom* icons and falls at the end of Cedomil Goic's temporal-formal framework from *Mitos degradados* (1992), where he argues that, under the sign of the *Novela Contemporánea*, critics can parse Latin American authors into generational categories separated by monikers set in 15-year intervals. For Goic, a generation's name comes from the thirty-seventh year after the first year of their given interval. Members of the Generation of 1927, for example, were born between 1890 and 1904; the Generation of 1942 between 1905 and 1919; the Generation of 1957 between 1920 and 1934; and the Generation of 1972, Goic's last and least explored generation, between 1935 and 1949. Since Goic created his philological model, critics such as Donald Shaw, Jean Franco, and Idelber Avelar have offered much more in depth readings of the Generation of '72, and subsequent post-*Boom* generations have flourished into global phenomena, accompanied by theoretical and academic apparatuses in their own right –*Visceral and Dirty Realism*, *El Crack*, and *McOndo*, to

name the most prominent.<sup>6</sup> But Goic's formal reading offers a guide to understanding Latin American authors as members of generations that experience socioeconomic, political, and publishing pressures en masse and provide literary responses that must be read as much as collective as individual efforts.

In Chapter 2, I read Vallejo as a strong example of the Generation of '72, whose writers range from Southern Cone intellectuals dealing with a mixture of forced political exile and a practically unbearable lack of artistic and symbolic freedom under Operation Condor authoritarian regimes, such as Ariel Dorfman (1942), Luisa Valenzuela (1938), Cristina Peri Rossi (1941), Ricardo Piglia (1941), Tomás Eloy Martínez (1934) and Osvaldo Soriano (1943) to early Colombian Urban novelists such as Vallejo. My analysis both uses and largely breaks with Goic's theory and, at least it is my intent, offers a fresher analysis of this not entirely academically explored generation. With some exception, namely that of Piglia, Eloy Martínez, and Dorfman, very little has been commented on about this group that now finds itself bookended by two publishing darlings, in the *Boom* and Roberto Bolaño.

The Generation of '72 and Colombian Urban Novelists meditate on and crucially analyze the limits of literature. And the depiction of high culture in their work tends to accompany violence, disjuncture, and caveats that announce artistic bounds and limitations. Both groups approach literature with the confines of discursive global

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<sup>6</sup> For more early theories on the generation immediately following the *Boom* see the following works: Avelar, Idelber. The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999; Franco, Jean. The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002; and Shaw, Donald. The Post-Boom in Spanish American Fiction. Saratoga Springs, NY: SUNY Press, 1998.

totalities and even basic representation in mind, and, in one way or another, deal with the fallout of universal promises. Piglia asks questions of literary potency in *La ciudad ausente* (1992); Osvaldo Soriano imagines what a popular national iconography may look like after years of authoritarian rule in *Una sombra ya pronto serás* (1994); Cristina Peri Rossi uses her short stories to address the existential tension between forced exile, acquiesced global citizenship, and the representability of both; and Ariel Dorfman forces us to question if literature, though possibly our best hope, is capable of capturing years of colonization and trauma throughout his entire oeuvre. Though she writes with Dorfman in mind, Sophia McClennen's assessment of contemporary Latin American literature stands in as the Generation of '72 and Colombian Urban Novelists' zeitgeist:

Contemporary storytellers must simultaneously confront the crisis in representation, the globalization of mass media, and the ideology of neoliberalism. They must provide hope without totalizing, they must expose social dilemmas without preaching, and they must inspire despite their very limited ability to reach the public. One of the most complicated features of Dorfman's aesthetic vision is his combined faith in literature and a skepticism of it.<sup>7</sup>

The leitmotif of the Generation of '72 and the Colombian Urban Novel points to the uncomfortable relationship between an aesthetic form and its sociocultural history. And my theoretical reading places this aesthetic discomfort in an analysis of global and cosmopolitan flows, when I question what the collective literary output of these two generations reveals about aesthetic, global, and local citizenship. In Chapter 3, "The Global: Fernando Vallejo, Aesthetic Citizenship, and the Closure of World Literature", I argue that Vallejo exemplifies the loss of both constituted, or legislative, and constitutive, or aesthetic and symbolic, citizenship, placing him in line with his fellow

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<sup>7</sup> From page 58 of: McClennen, Sophia A. *Ariel Dorfman: An Aesthetics of Hope*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

Generation of '72 and Colombian Urban novelists that faced an aesthetic and physical violence in tandem.

Chapter 3 moves away from the more philologically inclined analysis of Vallejo's recurring narrator to address the formal pressures that have haunted the two groups for which Vallejo acts as a link and offers a more sociological reading of the way that Latin American literature is marketed on the global scale in a publishing culture that in the twentieth century cultivated oversimplified tastes that left authors that did not fit into the global narrative by the wayside. Both Colombian Urban Novelists and the Generation of '72, whose writers had to deal with a global taste for magical marginality cultivated by a handful of Spanish publishing houses during the Franco regime, help to open up current debate over the capacities of the novel to act as a universal political facilitator. According to my analysis, with these generations we explore the limits to Pascale Casanova's theorization of a world literary system and an example of James English's negative externalities of the political economy of prestige.

Casanova's theory creates a fascinating and in many ways empowering framework that applies a world systems economic analysis, in the vein of Immanuel Wallerstein and Fernand Braudel, to the aesthetic analysis of the novel carried out in Franco Moretti's *Distance Reading*.<sup>8</sup> But the theory does not always account for the literary fallout that takes place in spaces such as Latin America alongside the success of figures such as the *Boom* writers, whom Casanova uses as quintessential examples of the revolutionary capacities embedded in the novel, a group that, at least according to her nomenclature, effectively "shifted the Greenwich Meridian of Literature". In Chapter 3, I highlight the other side of the novel, the side of its limiting capabilities and the failure

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<sup>8</sup> Casanova theorizes the World Literary System in her book: Casanova, Pascale. The World Republic of Letters. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004.

of major publishing houses, traditionally located on separate continents entirely, to fully capture the literary production of a socio-cultural space as complex as Latin America.

Some criticism has been made of these writers, the publishing culture that surrounds them, and the negative externalities that have followed their success. Maria Helena Rueda, for one, speaks of a “commercialization of marginality,” while others discuss the voyeuristic relationship created between the cosmopolitan reader and the peripheral writer, when their work is pulled out of context through the machinery of World Literature.<sup>9</sup> I hope to add to this growing debate through my exploration of Vallejo and the two generational tendencies of which he forms part, in addition to providing commentary on examples of publishing cultures that break with a singular literary economy, such as the Eloisa Cartonera movement based in Buenos Aires.

In my survey of the Colombian urban narrative and post-globalization Latin American literary aesthetics, I analyze the relationship between economic and cultural globalization, for which two theoretical premises are fundamental: Walter Mignolo’s Modernity/Coloniality binary and Aníbal Quijano’s Colonial Matrix of Power.

As critics and scholars, the Modernity/Coloniality binary forces us to reassess political and cultural totalities that are many times argued to be self-evident and a priori. In positing that Modernity necessarily coincides with coloniality, both physically, in

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<sup>9</sup> Rueda, Maria Helena. "Dislocaciones Y Otras Violencias En El Circuito Transnacional De La Literatura Latinoamericana." Revista de Critica Literaria Latinoamericana.69 (2009): 69-91.

spatial and corporeal terms, and symbolically, in subjective terms, Mignolo argues that the formation of a modern ethos and mass identity follows the entrance of the New World Other into the cosmopolitan psyche, just as the formation of the infrastructure of the modern nation-state goes hand in hand with forced labor and the exploitation of raw materials on the periphery during cosmopolitan industrialization. In aesthetic terms, this external referent provides the altern example of a human that, as it was argued in the eighteenth century, was not capable of the aesthetic heights of the European.<sup>10</sup>

Mignolo refers to the aesthetic implications of early globalization in the semantic shift from *aesthesis* to *aesthetics* when he writes:<sup>11</sup>

A partir del siglo XVIII, el concepto *aesthesis* se restringe, y de ahí en adelante pasará a significar “sensación de lo bello”. Nace así la estética como teoría, y el concepto de arte como práctica. Mucho se ha escrito sobre Immanuel Kant y la importancia fundamental de su pensamiento en la reorientación de la *aesthesis* y su transformación en estética. A partir de ahí, y en retrospectiva, se comenzó a escribir la historia de la estética, y se encontraron sus orígenes no sólo en Grecia, sino en la prehistoria. Esta operación cognitiva constituyó, nada más y nada menos, la colonización de la *aesthesis* por la estética, puesto que si *aesthesis* es un fenómeno común a todos los organismo vivientes con

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<sup>10</sup> By altern example of a human, I refer to the negative example used by Europeans during philosophical modernization. This spans ontology through racial classification, and epistemology through the hierarchical ordering of visual and literary practices. In the context of post-globalization, epistemological models are, of course, not as rigid. In this thesis, however, I point out that many of Latin America’s most prominent institutions still show an indebtedness to this privileging of the cosmopolitan center, which plays out in a collective “working through” of the authors reviewed.

<sup>11</sup> Mignolo writes “La palabra *aesthesis*, que se origina en el griego antiguo, es aceptada sin modificaciones en las lenguas modernas europeas. Los significados de la palabra giran en torno a vocablos como “sensación”, “proceso de percepción”, “sensación visual”, “sensación gustativa” o “sensación auditiva”. De ahí que el vocablo *synaesthesia* se refiera al entrecruzamiento de sentidos y sensaciones, y que fuera aprovechado como figura retórica en el modernism poético/literario”. From page 13 in: Mignolo, Walter. “Aiesthesis Decolonial.” *Calle 14* 4 (2010).

sistema nervioso, la *estética* es una versión o teoría particular de tales sensaciones relacionadas con la belleza.<sup>12</sup>

Mignolo points out the simultaneous totalization of an aesthetic epistemology and the reduction of an idea of an “evolution of perception” to a singular telos. The formation of the modern citizen occurs in aesthetic terms as much as sociopolitical terms: just as Montesquieu lays out the modern nation-state, Kant – and he is really a stand in for many other theoreticians that took part in the positing of the modern aesthetic citizen, with Alexander Baumgarten as a forebear and Freidrich Schiller as a pupil – lays out an ordering of the world according to a hierarchy of perceptive capability with the Europeans, or those capable of interpreting beauty to the highest degree, at the vanguard.<sup>13</sup>

Aesthetic and political systems in Latin American spaces that are sites of ongoing social alienation always situate local writers and artists in a position of loss. The Latin American *ciudad letrada* that for Angel Rama acted as an outpost of high perception, ordered government, and lettered citizens, does not cover the breach between the Modernity/Coloniality binary.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, in the *ciudad letrada*, intellectuals write from the space of the wound caused by the gap between the civilized elsewhere that

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> For more on the predecessor to Kant’s aesthetic theory see: Baumgarten, Alexander. *Aesthetica*. Frankfurt: Hildesheim, 1961.

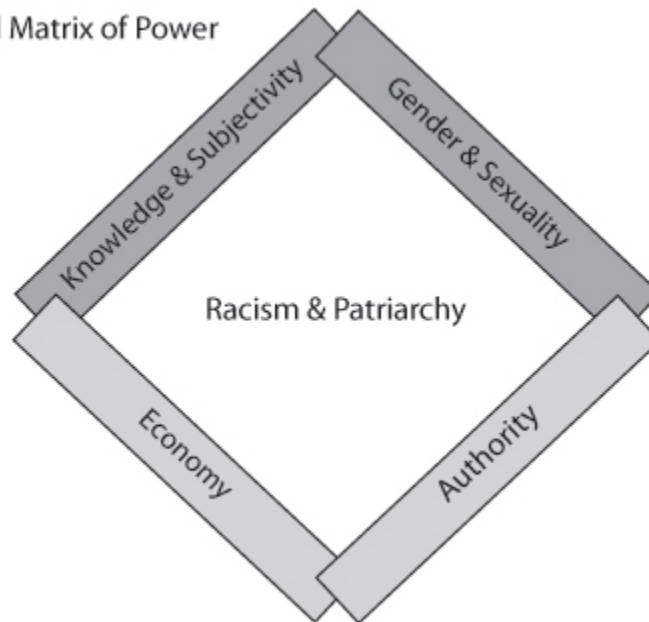
<sup>14</sup> Rama, Angel. *La Ciudad Letrada*. Hanover, N.H.: Ediciones del Norte, 1984.

creates knowledge, literary aesthetic framework, and ideal perception, and the local space of incongruous experience. Even within the context of post-globalization Latin America, literature addresses this breach, where novelists deal with a double violence: the first, and most obvious, the physical violence that, in Colombia, is born out of the post-colonial civil wars, la Violencia, and a narcocartel dominated urban infrastructure – in short, a bodypolitics of underdevelopment at its most extreme – and the second, an epistemic violence that, in taking the Modernity/Coloniality binary at its word, shows that cognitive, literary, and aesthetic frameworks that intellectuals and writers would use to address and memorialize physical violence also undergoes trauma, in that it uses a language that is not only not entirely its own, but that has been underprivileged and colonized for hundreds of years.

Aníbal Quijano's theorization of a Colonial Matrix of Power, a concept that complicates ideas of colonized systems of being (ontology) and perceiving (aesthetics), exposes the aesthetic and poetic limits of writing within the context of cultural and political trauma.



### The Colonial Matrix of Power



**Figure 1: Aníbel Quijano's *Colonial Matrix of Power*.**

For Quijano, systems of economic dominance, organizations of biopower, gender and sexual normalization, and evocations of an ideal citizen – in the universalizing sense – do not take place in isolation, but are based in a global privileging of the cosmopolitan center. It is easy to imagine Vallejo's lumpen characters resonating among the under-privileging dominance of the Colonial Matrix of Power, characters that are normalized sexually, politically, and economically through heteronormative, neoliberal, and authoritarian pressures and are largely unaware of political alternatives.<sup>15</sup> It is equally

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<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that Vallejo's recurring narrator Fernando, who oscillates between a humanizing passion and a face value authoritarian disdain for the bodies that resonate in matrixes of power, requires a lot of unpacking to reach this conclusion (more in Chapter 1). In short, however, Fernando as conceit draws

easy to imagine the early Colombian Urban Novelist, Luis Fayed's characters that are kept at bay by systems of class and racial hierarchy in Bogotá as they struggle for economic survival within the context of the Colombian Violencia. And just as interesting are the authors that self-referentially question what it means to create literature and culture within this context, such as the Generation of '72.

In my interpretation of Quijano's theory, I locate aesthetics as an offshoot of the knowledge/subjectivity side of the Colonial Matrix of Power and argue that a *poetics of globalism* is a tendency that reflects the borders and points of tension in global flows that are key to the literary production of the Generation of '72 and Colombian Urban Novelists. The questioning in which these authors engage leads to a further dissection of aesthetic idealism, or the belief in a purity in aesthetics that can lead to social order. This faith in beauty, when viewed through the looking glass of interpretations of the evocation of national and urban citizens, sits uncomfortably with authors that write from exile and roundly lament decaying urban infrastructure.

Vallejo's contribution to the Urban Novel and the philosophical problems of the *ciudad letrada* bends the rules to the social model. A latecomer to the genre of the Urban Novel, Vallejo blends his urban narrative with the more contemporary form of the

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attention to both Colombian bare life and the institutions that promise inclusivity while practicing exclusivity.

*narconovela*. While many Urban Novels come out of the sixties and seventies and are set during the Violencia, Vallejo publishes *La virgen de los sicarios* in 1994 and uses narcocartel dominated Medellín as his setting. His recurring narrator, Fernando, takes the rants of “enfant terrible” writers, such as Céline (1894-1961) and Charles Bukowski (1920-1994), and adds a scathing-no-critiques-barred element to the Colombian based form.<sup>16</sup> Vallejo’s unrelenting rants give him a style not wholly equaled in Latin America. In *La virgen de los sicarios*, for instance, Vallejo, and more specifically the narrator, Fernando, gives all political formations – Conservatives, Liberals, Marxists, and drug cartels – the same dressing down, all the while humanizing characters that resonate within their discourses in a way that shows faith in humanity, despite the fallout over centuries of civil unrest. Jean Franco reads Vallejo’s curmudgeonly narrator as an ironic representation of failed political discourses, writing, “It is as if the novel in exaggerated fashion places before us the ultimate absurdity – the disassociation of the female reproduction machine and the male death machine, both of which function blindly, the one to reproduce and the other to exterminate” (225). And Franco also questions such an unfiltered approach when she theorizes the limits of Vallejo’s depiction of an exposed id in Medellín, claiming:

...we can read the denunciations ironically as a reflection on the narrator; but by our doing so, he becomes the most obscene character of the novel,

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<sup>16</sup> Barbet Schroeder, the director of the film adaptation of *La virgen de los sicarios*, for example, claims that the first time he read Vallejo, he was struck by the same sensations and emotions as the first time he came across the work of Bukowski *La Desazon Suprema: Retrato De Fernando Vallejo*. 2003. Luis Espinosa, 2001. Minutes 25-29

the “invisible man,” the one who gets an erotic charge and vicarious pleasure out of his killer-lovers, whilst absolving himself and those readers who fall into the same position of irresponsibility. As a *letrado*, he is “our” ally, “Monsemblable, mon frere.” The question is whether he is deliberately forcing us to face the “fascist within” or whether he expects our complicity.<sup>17</sup>

Falling more in line with Franco’s first claim, I argue in the chapters that follow that Vallejo encourages us to confront the limits of Colombian political infrastructure and to take a closer look at the human victims of Colombian social discourses and international developmentalist projects. While as Franco points out, Fernando is a narrator that guides us, as readers, through Medellín, we do not associate with him so much as we are repulsed by him. And yet, we are curious about the possibilities of an outside, or an otherwise, to which he constantly alludes.

In my appraisal of Vallejo’s *La virgen de los sicarios*, its theoretical treatment of the *lettered city*, and the evolution of the *novela de la Violencia* into the *novela urbana* in Chapter 1, my reading of his five novel series, *El río del tiempo* (1985-1993), and its place within the philological framework of the Generation of ’72 in Chapter 2, and my reading of the two generations of which Vallejo forms part in Chapter 3, I hope to facilitate an exploration of the poetic maneuvering undertaken by writers that have weathered rather than benefited from globalization and its cosmopolitan discourses.<sup>18</sup> With Vallejo

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<sup>17</sup> From page 225 of Franco (Ibid)

<sup>18</sup> In Chapter 3, I also analyze the ways in which these writers have benefited from globalization and the political economy of prestige. This is not a success that sits comfortably, I argue.

standing at the center of both both the Colombian Urban Novel and the Generation of '72, I argue, the writers surveyed, though wholly skeptical of culture and its political limits, continue to produce literature all the same – a group, one might venture, that finds inspiration in its aesthetic burden.

## Chapter Two

### The Local: The Colombian Urban Novel and the Decolonization of the Lettered City

The opening shot sequence of Victor Gaviria's 1990s social-realist film, *La vendedora de rosas* (1998), pans a squalid river and scene-setting Medellín skyline that is interrupted by the sound of sporadic gunfire. Luis Fayad's novella about a family's repeated failure at social ascension, *Los parientes de Ester* (1978), depicts a systemically inhumane Bogotá where governmental infrastructure is arguably worse than total chaos. Gonzalo Alvarez Gardeazábal offers a Colombian microcosm in which supposed civic and spiritual leaders are serially assassinated by a local hero-cum-sniper in *Condores no entierran todos los días* (1971). Mario Mendoza's *Scorpio City* (1995), Laura Restrepo's *Delirio* (2004), and Santiago Gamboa's *Perder es cuestión de método* (1997) revolve around the attention-grabbing and uncanny appearance of a mutilated body. Alonso Salazar treats Medellín as a source of trauma that needs to be worked through rather than a stabilizing symbolic pillar in *No nacimos pa' semilla* (1990). Antonio Caballero's Bogotá consists of an undecipherable labyrinth with a low-glass ceiling rather than a clear civilizing map in *Sin remedio* (1984). Andrés Caicedo's young characters take a cultural tour of Cali in an urban road trip that ends in a bloodbath in *Que viva la música* (1977). And Fernando Vallejo gives a lament to a Medellín whose only civic code is immediate gratification and conspicuous consumption in *La Virgen de los sicarios* (1994).

If late 20<sup>th</sup>-century Colombian narrative is any indicator, the *lettered city*, long taken to be a civilizing outpost supposed to comprise logical, Cartesian urban design in the New World, leaving behind the illegible disorder of Southern Europe's baroque infrastructure, has never looked so bad.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I argue that through the Colombian Urban Novel, or *novela urbana* as I will refer to it, we witness a darkening of Colombia's traditional high cultural registers and signs of an aesthetic decolonization of the Latin American *lettered city*. Literature is the perfect medium to work through the *lettered city's* shortcomings. It was literature, after all, that led to the mythological foundation and psychogeographical weighting of Latin America's urban spaces in the first place. Always attempting to breach the chasm between colonial Latin America's many binaries, literature and travel writing, typically ending in distortion and foundational misnomers rather than the successful application of a rational language to a novel space, were the forms that paradoxically distanced Latin American political reality from the symbolic register of the literary archive: some of Gonzalo de Oviedo's first written words of the New World sent a flawed account to the Spanish Court when he mislabeled an "ochi" a "tigre", and Christopher Columbus's early writings of the New World include wildly fantastical tales that pander to the expectation of his royal readership with a vested interest in the

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<sup>1</sup> This is a summary of the lettered city as is understood by its foundational author, Angel Rama. For more on the lettered city, see: Rama, Angel. La Ciudad Letrada. Hanover, N.H.: Ediciones del Norte, 1984.

unknown. And in his *Cartas de Jamaica*, Simón de Bolívar is, perhaps, more pioneering when he discusses a novel subject through his “pequeño género humano” that would require new forms of literature and symbolic systems. But with contemporary Colombian urban literature in mind, we wonder if the lettering of space and archival representation of lived experience in Latin America is not flawed from the outset.<sup>2</sup>

The questioning of the *lettered city* presents a series of aesthetic and largely Decolonial questions. When Angel Rama claims in his influential text, *La ciudad letrada*, for example, “Aunque aisladas dentro de la inmensidad especial y cultural, ajena y hostil, a las ciudades competía dominar y civilizar su contorno, lo que se llamó primero ‘evangelizar’ y después ‘educar’, he draws a parallel between spiritual and aesthetic coloniality (17). The closing of the aesthetic world follows the closing of the spiritual world, and Rama highlights that the civilized citizen follows a set of aesthetic principles. In Colombia, literature and lettering are intertwined with nation building and the foundations of a highly exclusive bureaucratic government that bases itself on the distancing of the governing class from daily Colombian reality through arcane symbolic knowledges. Colombian philological conservatives often used the translation of Latin and Greek texts to lend themselves credibility and to create distance between themselves

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<sup>2</sup> Contemporary Colombian authors are clearly not the first authors to address the breach between form and experience. Some of Colombia’s most canonical works address precisely this unwieldy relationship between the maps and affects of elsewhere and the American landscape, namely Jorge Isaacs’ *María* (1867) and José Eustasio Rivera’s *La vorágine* (1924).



and the Latin American lived reality, where they would be untouched by a populace that could not address them in their esoteric discourse.

In a period of high Latin American modernism, the Colombian presidency of Miguel Antonio Caro emphasizes to what extent global aesthetic epistemology and politics had become intertwined in Colombia. Caro's late-nineteenth century government laid out maps of the evocation of the citizen by way of aesthetics through a political framework that operated under a paradoxically inclusive and exclusive paradigm. For Caro, and indeed the governmental framework under which he operated, a government steeped in *modernismo* would create a unified and cosmopolitan lettered citizen while at the same time using the consolidation of cosmopolitan knowledge among the governing elite to create a state of exception. For José María Rodríguez García this is a self-perpetuating aesthetic government that uses an aesthetic, linguistic, and religious rhetoric of inclusivity at the same time they keep mass subjectivities outside of the operations of day to day politicking:

Caro articulates a definition just as narrow of Colombia as a nominally democratic nation, in which there is no longer room for the daily plebiscite fostered by the de-essentialized liberal state. Rather, identity orthodoxies are enforced, including the need for even the large indigenous population to identify with the Spanish language, the Catholic religion, and the institutions of paternalist, semi-feudal domination administered by the educated creole elite (148).

The theoretical implications that surround the exclusive *lettered city* in modern and contemporary Colombia share an interesting history with the origins of the Colombian Urban Novel, which, following current critical trends trace the form back to the *Novela de la Violencia*.<sup>3</sup> In the Colombian Urban Novel, I argue, we witness an aesthetic alternative to the turn of the century modernist writers that embraced the logic behind the *lettered city*. To a large extent, the Urban Novel un-letters and then re-letters the city, taking literary aesthetics out of the hands of the governing elite and placing it in the context of the streets, where its writers seek to capture the failing infrastructure and many times extreme political reality of cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, and Calí. Unlike the modernist writers that tie politics in with an aesthetics that causes dissonance when applied to the Latin American space, Urban Novelists work toward a literary form that deals with the Colombian urban experience both inclusively and meaningfully. Many times its writers depict the violent scenes of post-Bogotazo and current drug-cartel run city life in a way that pervades the lives of their protagonists. In other moments, they focus on the cultural polemics instigated by the *lettered city*, depicting the actual urban mapping of aesthetic distance through contrasts of the upper-class space where citizens have a great deal of symbolic capital with areas where popular culture threatens the “pure” standard. Through these contrasts and in addition to my focus on the Urban Novel, I offer a reading of the two cinematic styles that gain traction in Colombia in the 70s, 80s, and 90s: the social realist-aesthetic of the Medellín school and the cosmopolitan and philosophically brooding *Caliwood*, two-styles that compliment the literary

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<sup>3</sup> As I show later in this chapter, the term *Novela de la Violencia* spans literary production in Colombian urban centers following the *Bogotazo* of 1948, roughly through the early eighties, when the urban landscape begins to change, due in large part to the development and entrance of drug-cartels into the sociopolitical sphere.

evolution of the Urban Novel and offer contrasting philosophical approaches to a similar genre.

Among the Urban Novels that I explore, Fernando Vallejo's *La Virgen de los sicarios* presents the most provocative case, as I show, with open allusions to both the undermining of the *lettered city* and the poet-presidents of the late nineteenth century. Vallejo's insistence on exploring the nation's history through Medellín, leads to a national lament that, at least through the narrator's eyes, is on its last legs. Fernando makes direct references to the Colombian lettered tradition when he claims to be the "último gramático de Colombia" and leads the reader through a tale, in which a metonymic extension of Caro, himself, dwells in the streets of drug-cartel infused Medellín, mixing with popular sights, sounds, and rhythms. Arguably the Colombian Urban Novel at its most distilled, *La Virgen de los sicarios* presents a contrast between high literary modernism and novel approaches to Colombian realism that present the aesthetic State in a harsh light. In this chapter, I use contemporary criticism of Vallejo's best-known novel to situate him within the tradition that debunks high grammarians, in favor of a rounder aesthetic representation of Colombia's institutional shortcomings, leading to an exploration of what Jean Franco has recently referred to as the "decline and fall of the *lettered city*".

Through allusions to Colombia's canonical modernists and the many times ironic insistence on portraying "purity" in popular urban Colombia, authors of the *novela urbana* expose the exclusivity in universalizing aesthetic registers, set to the key of European modernism. In what follows, I explore the theoretical implications and background behind such an aesthetic epistemology and to what extent current writers are forced to engage with the specter of modern cosmopolitan registers.

## 2.2 From the Lettered to the Mediated City

To the extent that sheer dynamism is enough to destabilize even the most conservative of social infrastructures, the Colombian (lettered) city is challenged throughout the twentieth century by prolonged periods of internal migration and mass urbanization. Between the period of 1938 and 1951 Medellín alone increased in population by 77 percent.<sup>4</sup> And while the period of 1930 to 1950 saw improvements in urban design and public transportation in Bogotá, the wave of urban migrants between 1950 and 1970, both through daily use and violent eruptions, would undo any collective urban progress made over the previous fifty years.<sup>5</sup> Bringing to the urban space a novel set of visual and literary signifiers, the presence of new collective subjectivities upended the already arcane literary systems put in place by the Colombian ruling classes. Almost instantaneously, new cultural forms began to spring up that challenged the urban cultural hegemony, and popular culture, mixed with until then unknown forms, gained increasing importance to the collective urban experience. Still, old institutions had reason to reinstate their control over novel affect. The lettered elite and their freshly

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<sup>4</sup> "While the province's number of urban inhabitants grew 77 percent between 1938 and 1951, the number of rural residents increased by only 13 percent during the same period. As Medellín grew, so did the number of potential voters and provincial migrants in search of education and a chance to break into regional politics" (49). Taken from: Roldan, Mary. Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia, Colombia, 1946-1953. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Details taken from: Palacios, Marco. Entre La Legitimidad Y La Violencia: Colombia 1878-1994. Bogota, Colombia: Editorial Norma, 1995.

urban unlettered counterparts began to rub against one another, causing both symbolic and real political tension.

Functionaries of the *lettered city* took a notable hit during the *Bogotazo* of April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1948, one of Colombia's most collectively traumatic moments. Just over fifty years after Caro would modify the *Constitución de 1886* and would use his knowledge of Latin and Greek authors to project his political exceptionality, the politics and aesthetics that the state excluded would come back to haunt its governing bodies. In a moment of political and affective groundswell, following the assassination of the populist leader, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, the lack of state-representation of new subjectivities and urban infrastructure to account for the presence of new massive publics led to a prolonged period of violence. In just one day, a third of Bogotá was demolished by angry mobs that:

left the nation's capital a smoldering ruins; churches and public buildings were transformed into heaps of rubble; trolley cars were derailed and burned; stores looted; the city's sidewalks overflowed with the debris of broken glass and ruined merchandise. Meanwhile, decomposing corpses hurriedly thrown in piles in Bogotá's central cemetery seemed to give material testimony to the existence of an anonymous, dangerous crowd that had captured the elite imagination and provoked increasing anxiety of an impending attack upon elite privilege by a ragged, bloodthirsty army of the nation's excluded (20).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Roldan, Mary. *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia, Colombia, 1946-1953*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002.

The rural “barbarian” that had propped up nineteenth century Latin America’s most influential political treatises had finally come to the Colombian city. And the group of migrants challenged the aesthetic model embedded in the Civilization and Barbarism paradigm, latently at first and manifestly through unruly rioting later. If Caro’s exceptionalism that fostered a singular aesthetic and epistemic order proved to be a failure, he had not acted in a vacuum. He had taken the Latin American political map at its word: the city establishes a cultural elite with its aesthetic weight based in a Europe, and the government applies its interpretation of the singular, universalized standard to the unlettered body. And Colombia, more than most Latin American nations, had the tendency to tie aesthetic registers in with geography; it is a nation that has always contrasted a small urban stretch – Calí, Bogotá, and Medellín – with the larger countryside, using the literary discourses of the barbarian jungle to affirm the suspicions and fears of the urban elite. There is a running narrative, ranging from the early writings of Francisco José de Caldas through José Eustasio Rivera’s *La vorágine* (1924) and to Ingrid Betancourt’s testimonial account of the FARC-laden jungle, *No hay silencio que no termine* (2010), that openly draws on an imagistic contrast between the disorder of the rugged, chaotic countryside and the civility of the ordered city.

Allusions to the *lettered city* as a civilizing project are clear in Colombian history, and arguably more so than in most Latin American nations, the governing bodies of Colombia use aesthetics as a colonizing tool. Turning to Angel Rama, we see a

prescription to civilize Latin America that is emphatically singular: “Esta es obra de la *ciudad letrada*. Sólo ella es capaz de concebir, como pura especulación, la ciudad ideal, proyectarla antes de su existencia, conservarla más allá de su ejecución material, hacerla pervivir aun en pugna con las modificaciones sensibles que introduce sin cesar el hombre común” (38).<sup>7</sup> Though inline with Rama’s description of the “ciudad ideal”, his formula, both in material and subjective terms, never leads to a politically functioning and inclusive Colombia; and his “hombre común” never makes it off the ground. Quite to the contrary, the map of the civilizing, lettered elite fails to account for real aesthetic subjectivities in Colombia: the excluded and colonized indigenous communities, the untestimonialized African populations that underwent hundreds of years of slavery, the migrant lumpen, and the hybrid and syncretic subjectivities born out of migratory tumult.

When Rama gives full authorial weight to the written word – “Esta palabra escrita viviría en América Latina como la única valedera, en oposición a la palabra hablada que pertenecía al reino de lo inseguro y lo precario” – he places a singular literary aesthetics at the heart of the civilizing map (8). Yet a look at the persistent failure of the Colombian State, both in aesthetic and political terms, shows another side to the story. Those that arguably tended toward a culture of orality, or that were kept at bay by the carefully controlled literary archive, would take exception to such a limiting

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid

approach to civil modernity. Rama's aesthetic state, exemplified *avant la lettre* by Caro, would not save the nation from streaming civil war, acute moments of violence, and a continuation of disorder and displacement. In the period between 1980 and 2000 the century-long displacements continued, and four million citizens not factoring into the logic of the *lettered city*, were forced to migrate.<sup>8</sup> And the problems surrounding the failure of the State continue to be largely representational; Flor Edilma Osorio Perez claims, for example: "Millions of women and men have suffered the pain and terror of war, which has left them sunk in poverty and total uncertainty to face their immediate future, amidst a society that ignores them when it is not looking at them with disdain and distrust" (27).<sup>9</sup> One of the most visible failures in representation in post-Violencia Colombia consists of urban anomie and *pandilla* violence, and a branch of the Urban Novel, the *Narconovela*, a form that *La Virgen de los sicarios* alongside other popular renditions such as Jorge Franco's (1953) *Rosario Tijeras* (1999) helped to consolidate, has gone to great lengths to represent the street youths that make up Colombia's *pandillas*. The importance of representation could hardly be overestimated according to sociologists. It is visibility that *pandilleros* seek out when they join rivaling groups, alongside a *sicariato* that forms part of an economic infrastructure based in a liberalism

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<sup>8</sup> For more see: Perez, Flor Edilma Osorio. "Armed Conflict and Forced Displacement in Colombia: Data, Facts and Tendencies as of the Year 2000." *Internationally Displaced People in Colombia, Victims in Permanent Transition*. Ed. Sandro Jimenez Ocampo. Bogota: Ediciones Antropos, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*



gone awry. Through urban anomie and the *sicariato*, we witness a paralleling economic and aesthetic underrepresentation according to Maria Guadalupe Pacheco, who writes:

El sicariato no es sólo la condensación de las violencias sociales, económicas, políticas, históricas y estructurales de Colombia. Medellín es apenas un escenario de lo que se anuncia para muchos otros lugares del planeta en tiempos de globalización: el vaciamiento de sentidos, el cierre de horizontes, el desencanto de un mundo que predica el consumo como única forma de pertenencia ciudadana. Medellín es la consecuencia inevitable de un capitalismo tardío, donde su inserción en la economía globalizada a través del narcotráfico ha producido una parodia grotesca de éxito económico que puede únicamente ser sostenido mediante la violencia con alta tecnología (94).

The lack of state and aesthetic representation that lead to anomie and social exclusion operates on three interworking levels. The first hinges on the fact that the long duration of unsuccessfully testimonialized violence leads to what social historian Daniel Pécaut has referred to as the “banalization of violence” in Colombian history. As history repeats and reiterates situations of violence in Colombia, it produces a normalizing frame around the politically violent setting, creating a need for an alternative perspective to aid collective memory. For Pécaut, an altern narrative is necessary to process cultural memory and testimonialize traumatic experiences under a logic that escapes the tremendous frame of Colombian history, itself.<sup>10</sup> This approach exacerbates

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<sup>10</sup> Two texts that deal heavily with the framing of trauma in narrative in the Colombian context are: Pécaut, Daniel. Orden Y La Violencia: Evolucion Socio-Politica De Colombia Entre 1930 Y 1953. Bogota: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2001. and O'Bryen, Rory. Literature, Testimony and Cinema in Contemporary Colombian Culture: Spectres of La Violencia. Rochester NY: Tamesis, 2008.

the problems of the appropriation of literary aesthetics by the conservative government, which, until recently, has largely been used to justify the ongoing processes of violence, rather than to work through them.

On another level, physical and institutional infrastructure built up around the Colombian city have failed to evoke and govern a functioning citizenry throughout the twentieth century. Despite investment in urban design, many times employing Europe's foremost mid-century modernist designers, such as representatives of the Bauhaus and L'esprit, the urban collective has not responded as planned. Marco Palacios puts the distortion between utopian, Continental design and Colombian cityscapes succinctly when he writes:

Si desde una perspectiva latinoamericana Colombia es notable por la armonía relativa de la distribución geográfica de su población urbana, las ciudades por dentro revelan, mejor que en ningún otro plano de la realidad social, el fracaso del ideal urbano de modernización occidental. En unos 20 años, c. 1950-70, las avalanchas de inmigrantes arrasaron con la exquisita racionalidad cartesiana de los planos que entre c.1930-50, trazaron urbanistas europeos como H. Bartholomew, Carlo Brunner y Le Corbousier en Bogotá, José Luis Sert en Cali, Wiener y Sert en Medellín" (310).

Interestingly, architectural modernists parallel Caro's aesthetic state, though from an opposing perspective. While for Caro aesthetic distance is used to create a

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chasm between the government and the Colombian body politic, for these utopian architects and engineers, modern urban design should lead to embracing inclusivity. Both approaches are met with a similar destructive response, however. When the excluded, unlettered migrant comes to the Colombian city, idealistic infrastructure collapses under the weight of a subjectivity that is not accounted for in the aesthetic nation, which is where the third level of underrepresentation arises. The unlettered status of the majority of Colombian citizens creates a political atmosphere, in which the populace does not have the ability to leave an inscription on the literary archive that lends the *lettered city* its authorial weight. At no point during the foundation of the Colombian nation-state does the cultural foundation of nationhood act as a dialogue, or diatopical hermeneutic, with its citizens. On the contrary, Colombia's literary and aesthetic epistemologies are undergirded by a politics of exception that letters the Colombian body based on an incongruous modernism that finds its ultimate referents in a European, and largely Kantian and Baumgartean, order.<sup>11</sup> An unrepresentative literary modernism props up an exclusionist state, beginning with the transcendental political-poets of the end of the nineteenth century and coming back to haunt the government through the unquiet of the mid to late twentieth century –one could point to the absence of a stable constitution throughout the nineteenth century to the tendency to

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<sup>11</sup> For a good summary of the role that aesthetics played in the formation of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Colombian state of exception see: Garcia, Jose Maria Rodriguez. "Like the Fragments of a Broken Vessel: Guillermo Valencia, Walter Benjamin, and John Keats." *A Review of Contemporary Criticism* (2005).

use a literary archive to lend governmental credibility, a *modus operandi* that would have been at the forefront of Caro's mind, since he, himself, altered the constitution in 1886. When the excluded subject makes his (and her) presence felt through migration to the city, he (and she) challenges the government, its self-referential aesthetic regime, and the infrastructural projects that only account for small portions of the Colombian populace. The Colombian aesthetic state does not lend stability so much as it creates, according to the discourse of the State, bare lives, and these bare lives eventually demand to be taken into account when they move to the urban context.

The *lettered city* in Latin America operates according to a singular and totalizing logic, whose root we could trace back to the closing of the aesthetic world during the Enlightenment. The Colombian modernists that set up a government of exclusion base their state of exception in a singular modernity and, by appealing to a logic of transcendentalism with a referential anchor in a distant Europe, they grant their authoritative practices a self-justifying credibility that continues to play off of the Civilization and Barbarism paradigm. A Decolonial reading of Colombia's representational exclusivity reveals that the problem is in aesthetics, itself. While for many contemporary aesthetic theorists, such as Jacques Rancière for example, a Kantian aesthetics marks the democratic end to a telos of development, according to Decolonial schools of thought, Kant's theorization of a universal, moral logic, based in aesthetic

experiences and disinterested concepts of beauty, is just as colonizing as it is liberating.<sup>12</sup>

A look at the way in which aesthetics play out in the foundation of the Colombian *lettered city* supports a critique of a singular concept of beauty. According to a Decolonial reading, the problem with the presence of a totalized, Kantian aesthetics in Colombia is that Kant problematically uses the ability to perceive pure beauty to prop up his argument of an innate totalized set of ethics, simultaneously leveling the ethical and aesthetic world – in his *Third Critique*, Kant distinguishes between the partial “agreeable” and “good”, which are subject to the whimsy of opinion, and “beauty”, which is innate, universal, and impartial; taste, through which we arrive at beauty, “must be combined with the claim to subjective universality”, he writes (97).<sup>13</sup> The problem is that Kant denies non-Northern European subjects the same affective capabilities, using the rest of the world’s subjects as the Barbarian Other necessary to consolidate his new cosmopolitan subject.<sup>14</sup> Since the non-Northern European is not inherently capable of the impartial, aesthetic recognition, for Kant, his (or her) ethical compass is also flawed.

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<sup>12</sup> See Ranciere, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. New York: Continuum, 2004. and Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant writes: “Taste is the faculty for judging an object or a kind of representation through a satisfaction or dissatisfaction without an interest. The object of such a satisfaction is called beautiful” (96). And then, “Consequently there must be attached to the judgment of taste, with the consciousness of an abstraction from all interest, a claim to validity for everyone without the universality that pertains to objects, i.e., *it must be combined with the claim to subjective universality*” (97, my emphasis).

<sup>14</sup> For a concise summary of the “othering” terms of Kant’s aesthetic world see: Eze, Emmanuel Chukwudi, ed. *The Color of Reason: The Idea of ‘Race’ in Kant’s Anthropology*. Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press., 1995.

Kant's ethics and the foundation of the aesthetic order are grounded in the privileged place of Enlightenment Europe, following the economic, authoritarian, and religious privilege that the incipient Global North maintained over Latin America and other colonial spaces at the time; and this moment of aesthetic privilege is important to nineteenth and twentieth century Colombia, given that the *lettered city* plays off of a universalizing set of innate and transcendental aesthetics and ethics.<sup>15</sup> It is what gives aesthetic systems, responsible for centuries of underrepresentation, their political foothold and is a process that is tied into the political configuration of many Latin American nation-states. Julio Ramos refers to the aesthetic foundation of the skewed nation when he writes:

En ese periodo anterior a la consolidación y autonomización de los Estados nacionales, las letras *eran* la política. Las letras proveían el "código" que permitía distinguir la "civilización" de la "barbarie", la "modernidad" de la "tradición", marcando así los límites de la deseada *res pública* en oposición a la "anarquía" y el "caos" americano. (91, his emphasis).

In the case of Colombia, governing bodies continue to feed off of the literary-political privilege well into the twentieth century with disastrous results. As popular cultures and new urban subjectivities arise, the elite moves into mediums traditionally

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<sup>15</sup> See Mignolo, Walter. The Idea of Latin America. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005.

associated with empowering aesthetics.<sup>16</sup> Newspapers, radio shows, and magazines also feel the weight of the archive, in a globalized, post-*Violencia* context. Yet, authority and its aesthetic registers are also increasingly challenged by Colombia's urban populations, as the century progresses, and the extreme lived experiences of Colombia's populations are not displaced by the literary archive so much as they increasingly become represented, giving birth to new literary genres: *la novela de la Violencia* and the *novela urbana*. The birth of these genres reflects a rippling in the aesthetic map, the increasing mediation between an aesthetically distant state infrastructure, and the intervention of mass publics in old symbolic systems. For Jesús Martín Barbero, we begin to see a mixture of media and subjectivity that challenges the foundational archive. He discusses the dynamics of the late-twentieth century urban cultural map when he writes:

“It is a map with many populations halfway between peasant village and urban neighborhood, with *villages* where social relations no longer have the stability or elemental nature of the rural and with *neighborhoods* in which feudal authoritarianisms survive alongside the horizontality woven into urban illegality and informality. These are villages that remain centered on religion while at the same time experiencing changes that affect not only the world of labor and housing but also the world of subjectivity, affectivity, and sensuality” (33).

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<sup>16</sup> Jesús Martín Barbero writes about the media in a post-*Violencia* context: “A su lado accede al poder una élite que difícilmente puede ser asimilada a una “nueva capa” y que cuenta con miembros que disfrutaban en su propio provecho de la fortuna y la influencia, Como Eduardo Santos y su hermano que reinan en *El Tiempo*; con hombres ilustres, como los dos primos Carlos Lleras Restrepo y Alberto Lleras Camargo que, a falta de fortuna, ocupan de manera permanente durante cincuenta años los más altos cargos y asumiendo las más altas responsabilidades; o con integrantes del medio cooptado de la *inteligencia* de Bogotá, como Felipe Lleras Camargo, Gabriel Rubay, José Mar, Jorge Zalamea y Darío Echandía, quien profesaba el socialismo antes de adherirse en 1930 al liberalismo y de vincularse con el poder. Estos últimos no tenían necesariamente vínculos con el mundo de los negocios, no son los representantes “orgánicos” de una burguesía pero definen el campo cultural e institucional en el cual se afirma el capitalismo colombiano (158).

As new urban subjectivities challenge old cultural institutions in Colombia, the traditional *lettered city* undertakes a double affront. On one hand, the politics of the Cold War exacerbate the distance between Latin American *modernismo* and the institutionalized North American modernism.<sup>17</sup> And, at the same time, the very *modernismo* that proponents of the *lettered city* had celebrated, is, itself, radicalized. Popular culture and media and new literary aesthetics challenge the content of *modernismo* in Latin America, which, according to Jean Franco, “succeed in breaching the walls of what Angel Rama termed “the *lettered city*”; through this breach, indigenous languages and cultures [enter] into productive contact with lettered culture” (10). In Colombia, more specifically, the literary archive is radically altered when *la novela de la Violencia* and the *novela urbana* take aesthetics out of the hands of the elite and place them in the context of urban cityscapes. While both forms continue to resist a singular interpretation of cosmopolitanism that, in the Cold War context, follow North American cultural encroachment and the domination of international publishing houses and critical cultures in Latin America (see chapter 3), they challenge the *lettered city* from a local perspective; they explore precisely the urban tension to which the transcendental

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<sup>17</sup> While Jean Franco claims, “In the United States, modernism became institutionalized in the Cold War years, when the focus was on the “spiritual critique” of literature. In Latin America it was a time of acerbic polemics and debate as writers’ hitherto untested claims of commitment were challenged by publics whose imaginations were fired by armed struggle and revolution. All kinds of aesthetic and political projects now appeared possible – the aesthetic utopias of modernism and the historical avant-garde, the notion of pure art and pure literature, participatory theater, liberation from capitalism”, this distancing is arguably most poignant during Caro’s era through writers such as Jorge Enrique Rodó, José Martí, and Rubén Darío.



*lettered city* had led and offer an intervention and mediation that transmodernizes Caro's literary ideal and takes literature to the streets.

### 2.3 Violent and Urban Letters

With migration increasingly flowing and a stable social ecology perilously buckling, the populist leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitán sensed the rise of a new urban subjectivity earlier than most. Entrenching himself in a politics that would challenge the transcendentalist Catholic arch of his Conservative rival Laureno Gomez, Gaitán confronted the existing order by appealing to the unrepresented masses in mid-twentieth century Bogotá: "El pueblo urbano, que sentía día a día los azares de la reproducción de sus condiciones de vida, y aspiraba a mejorarlas, captó al instante los registros morales del discurso gaitanista que castigaba los excesos del capitalismo salvaje y el apareamiento de los grandes negocios con las cúpulas del Estado" (197, Palacios). But for all of his political fervor, Gaitán knew that the entrance of a new urban subjectivity into the national order would not go unchallenged, especially by groups that had dominated cultural life in Colombia for centuries. With his eyes firmly fixed on the writing on the wall, he offered apocalyptic premonitions. "¡Si me matan, vengadme!", he was regularly known to instruct his growing swaths of followers.<sup>18</sup>

On April 9<sup>th</sup> of 1948 Gaitán's foreshadowing proved not to be in vain, and his supporters would retaliate according to plan. Gaitán's followers, now known as the *nueveabrileros*, would decimate the city, destroying as much as one third of the *centro* and causing 3,000 deaths in a matter of days. Unruly masses, sensing a power vacuum, attacked the presidential palace, set free prisoners en masse, and burned down civic and

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<sup>18</sup> Taken from page 298 of Marc Palacios's *Entre la legitimidad y la Violencia: Colombia 1875 – 1994*.

religious buildings, both of which they, perhaps correctly, considered symbols of a conservative government that had done little to represent them for well over a century. And while the panic and absence of State was quickly replaced by the oppressive presidency of Gaitan's rival, Laureano Gomez, the *Bogotazo* did not consist of an acute and isolated rebellion. The rioting of April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1948 would go on to cause similar uprisings to ripple throughout the countryside and would spill over into other cities, leading to one of the most violent eras in Colombia's history: *la Violencia* – a period that would eventually see more than 200,000 deaths and little governmental representation beyond heavy handed authoritarian measures.

The *lettered city* had been strongly challenged and was now in a state of mediation. And the challenges to governing bodies brought along with them challenges to the literary archive. It would be hasty to argue in favor of the *nueveabrileros*, a group that led to destruction and disorder to the extent that the *Bogotazo* caused, but it would also be difficult not to consider that the rioters of the *Bogotazo* were not simultaneously reacting to an on-going social symptom in a way that breached the conservative symbolic and political order. The literature that until then had propped up an oppressive government, followed suit, and Colombian letters experienced a pronounced tonal and thematic shift, increasingly representing the problems surrounding urban Colombia in these moments of political and migratory flux. Literature in mid-twentieth century Colombia increasingly became a tool with which to work through the failure of political systems and national infrastructure rather than a distancing governmental platform that propped up a state of exception that superficially filled a national cultural archive. While there is no shortage of Colombian cultural fragments that explore representational problematics prior to the mid-twentieth century – some canonical examples would include the works of José Asunción Silva, the poetry

of Porfirio Barba Jacob, and José Eustasio Rivera's anti-national classic, national classic, *La vorágine* – for the first time in the history of Colombian literature entire genres began to address the distortion between aesthetic orders and lived experiences, many times calling into question the livability of the Colombian city, post-migration, post-lettered credibility, and post-*Bogotazo*.

As the political State continued to roundly underrepresent Colombian masses and heterogeneous cosmologies after the *Violencia* – the authoritarian regime of Laureano Gomez, governing between 1950 and 1953, and the power sharing between Liberals and Conservatives during the National Front – challengers to national discourses found a representational outlet in alternative aesthetic forms, where we witness the birth *novela de la Violencia* as a genre, a form that, as I argue, will evolve into the *novela urbana*, which also finds a branch in the social realist cinema of the Medellín School.

The first person to refer to the *novela de la Violencia* as such is a writer that would go on to write one of the genre's classics. In his 1971 doctoral thesis, Gustavo Alvarez Gardezabal, discusses the rich literary output in Colombia between 1950 and 1970, over thirty novels that challenged preconceptions of the nation and its relation to culture. He found that the genre was scarcely celebrated on either the National or pan-Latin American scale, however, due in large part to its tendency to deal with difficult themes that challenged preconceptions about the relationship between the government, literature, and violence frontally. Despite its lack of international and local recognition, Gardezabal found that it was a highly necessary literary form, whose poetics was part of a larger political project that addressed crises in subjectivity and representative systems in *Violencia* Colombia in a way that lent itself to a framing and working through of lived tumult. Rory O'Bryen summarizes Gardezabal's thesis and the genre that he

coined when he writes, “it refers as much to a constative process of producing memory and recording history as to a performative process of burial, and an attempt to give closure to the past *as* past. Thus, at a ‘constative’ level, the novel can be read as an attempt, not only to counter censorship and amnesia, but also to narrativize and make sense of *la Violencia*” (25, O’Byren’s emphasis).

For Gardezabal, the genre tended toward representations of violence and tremendous experiences many times in urban Colombia. Tones hardened and, in contrast to the literature of magical exceptionality with which mid to late-twentieth century Colombia is readily associated, realism prevails as a medium. To understand the lasting legacy of the *novela de la Violencia* it is best to turn to Gardezabal’s most famous work, *Condores no entierran todos los días*, a novel that he published in the same year as he finished his doctoral thesis. Written during the National Front, the novel acts as a stark contrast to both García Márquez’s treatment of a cyclical governmental underrepresentation and lived political violence and the regime of letters that had previously dominated Colombian symbolic systems. While García Márquez frames violence through overblown hyperbole and the exceptionality of the Buendía family, Gardezabal’s poetics forces the reader to confront the systemic problems of Colombia’s major institutions head on. Gardezabal’s Colombia presents no refuge, no rural backwater, and no meta reading of history to distract his public from the weight of the Colombian experience. By the same token, it is no surprise that he did not enjoy the same international prestige as the *Boom* writers, be it from the perspective of North American reading publics, European prize committees, or the Casa de las Americas (I go into more detail about this in Chapter 3). It is also of little surprise that Colombia’s major institutions do not come out of *Condores no entierran todos los días* unscathed.

*Condorez no entierran todos los días* drops the reader in at medias res, in a moment in which the members of the town of Tuluá are forced to come to terms with the political reality of post-Violencia Colombia. The Civil War between Conservatives and Liberals, exacerbated by the recent assassination of Gaitán in the 1949 of the novel, demands that the inhabitants of Tuluá take sides in a battle that to them makes little immediate sense. The first line of the work foreshadows its larger thematics and announces a hallmark rupture with the already not peaceful past: “Tuluá jamás ha podido darles cuenta de cuándo comenzó todo, y aunque ha tenido durante años la extraña sensación de que su martirio va a terminar por fin mañana en la mañana...” (1). Yet, the novel does not simply lament the death of the populist leader, nor does it tell the tale from the perspective of a liberal uprising. Conversely, Gardeazábal follows, and to a large extent deconstructs, the psyche of a conservative and prominent businessman of Tuluá. He forces the reader to examine the social fabric and institutional makeup of the Colombian nation through the micro example of the seemingly innocuous cheese shop owner, Leon María Lozano, whose relationship with the nation in miniature presents a distillation of the ongoing Civil War and the bodies that resonate in its competing political discourses. With the assassination of Gaitán, something is born in Lozano, something that turns him irrevocably violent –Gardeazábal employs the metaphor of a “cóndor” that is sparked inside Lozano and takes over his rational political drive. While Lozano had conservative tendencies, before the politically divisive *Bogotazo* he was functional within the symbolic community. Though most readers would not agree with his politics, his right-wing affectations are hardly extreme: “León Maria como buen godo nunca dejó de asistir a misa y ser un católico reconcentrado y un conservador fanático que como dice el dicho “El que peca y reza empata.” No leía sino *el Siglo* y escuchaba *la Voz Católica* que solo hablaban del partido conservador...” (50). Yet with the birth of the “cóndor”,

Lozano takes a radical turn, quickly descending into psychopathy. As the novel progresses, we witness Lozano alternately increase his stake in the local community – purchasing land, forging political connections, usually through the collective referent of Catholicism and social posturing– and become a mass murderer.

There is something darkly quixotic about Lozano’s rapid descent into madness. As the novel’s body count rises, so does Lozano’s level of self-assurance. More and more, we gather that Lozano feels that he is engaging with a universal project, one that spans ages. His determination and insistence on winning *tierras* and instating authority many times approaches an uncanny resituating of chivalric literature, and we wonder if Lozano is what *El Cid* would have looked like in the twentieth century: more serial-killer than foundationally mythic hero. And if we want to distance ourselves from the violence that Lozano represents, we struggle to do so. At the end of the novel, we hardly blanch when a rivaling sniper kills Lozano. While we never quite lose perspective of the extremities of violence in Gardeazabal’s Tuluá, we remember Pecaut’s *banalization of violence* as the bodies pile up. We may refuse to take sides, but we are also confronted with a philosophical dilemma when Lozano is killed: Is it not for the better? If so, where does the cyclical violence stop? Gardeazabal places us in the frame of the overwhelming decision-making process of *Violencia* Colombia, depicting the violence that challenges the limits of representation, and at the same time forces us to address the “cóndor” within.

The “cóndor” metaphor, and the narrative in the larger sense, explores the unease that saturates the *novela de la Violencia*. Gardeazabal ventures that, with the intensification of violence that would follow the assassination of Gaitán, we observe a hardening of the literary form that would radically break with the high governmental letters of fifty years prior. And he presents his subject matter in a way that does not

readily lend itself to the taking of sides. Gardeazábal's presentation of violence roundly accuses all political institutions as a collective culprit that has led to precisely the political violence that is born from April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1948. He does not depict Lozano as a natural psychopath so much as a figure with political leanings and religious practices that is psychologically derailed by the sociopolitical flux of the *Violencia*. The narrative resists any progressive reading of violence, regardless of whose side the reader favors. The use of the "cóndor" stands in contrast to a Nietzschean phoenix that would rise from the ashes of destruction, in this case, of the Civil War. On the contrary, Gardeazábal's Tuluá and Lozano's "cóndor" present a Dionysian embrace of the death drive with no Apollonian return on the other end. It is a death that is senseless and escapes the frame of philosophical and political discourses. And the situating of Lozano as a subject turned psychopath blurs the positive edges of the civilizing discourses and aesthetic registers that would accompany violence in Colombia, and arguably in the larger framework of Latin America. O'Bryen asserts, "Along these lines 'El Cóndor' would represent another figure such as Rosas in Sarmiento's *Facundo* (1845), and *la Violencia* – like the cycles of civil war and violence recounted in said text – an anachronistic continuity in the present of a 'deep' cultural past that had consistently exceeded the 'civilizing' process of nation-formation" (33).

In hollowing out the City and State, Gardeazábal leaves a ruin of bare lives and un-testimonialized trauma. He skirts social realism and presents a dark shadow of civilization that makes the reader feel implicated in the ongoing saga that frames violence through a poetics that is clearly influenced by the texts he surveyed for his doctoral dissertation. The formal structure of the work, in the words of Harold Alvarado Tenorio, makes for, "una dualidad de planos narrativos donde el silencio de un pueblo se expresa en los chismes que van y vienen entre sollozos y los gritos de las

viudas y los huérfanos. El *Verfremdung* brechtiano que produce en la novela es un alejamiento de la mimesis prodigando otra realidad, otro estado, que denota una postura ética ante la crueldad de la existencia” (10). With Alvarado Tenorio’s quote in mind, the natural inclination is to read shades of Rulfo’s *Comala* in Gardezabal’s *Tuluá*, a reading that gains credibility when considering Gardezabal’s self-reflective impetus to create a genre that would mediate the relationship between mass publics, collective trauma, and political systems. As early as his dissertation, Gardezabal encircles a founding question: Why had Colombia not developed a formal equivalent to the Mexican *novela de la revolución*? An exploration of another example of the *novela de la Violencia*, Luis Fayad’s *Los parientes de Ester*, highlights to what extent Gardezabal was successful in answering his own questions and doing just that.

While Alvarado Tenorio reads resonances of Brecht in *Condores no entierran todos los días*, it is easy to speculate that he would see more Lukács in Fayad’s *Los parientes de Ester*, a novel that, like *Condores*, escapes the bounds of standard-issue social realism. Still, all the ingredients are there. In Fayad’s Bogotá, society is presented as a totality; all levels of the sociopolitical order – governing, colonized, fledgling, aspiring, bureaucratic, bare, lettered, and unlettered – are depicted as an intertwined system, where authoritative capital coercively maintains the status quo. Perhaps nowhere else in the Colombian canon is Aníbal Quijano’s Colonial Matrix of Power more clearly represented.<sup>19</sup> *Los parientes de Ester* presents a Colombian infrastructure in which social ascension, or even basic survival, is for all intents and purposes impossible. Social norms rigidly maintain economic, subjective, gender, and authoritarian orders, in a counter-foundational national story in which bodies that attempt to enter into the

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<sup>19</sup> For more on Quijano’s Colonial Matrix of Power, see figure 1 of my introduction.



lettered system, or to achieve the promise of lettered civilization, are routinely denied entrance into the exclusive order.

*Los parientes de Ester* follows the personal trajectory of Angel Callejas, also known as Tío Angel in the novel, and Gregorio Camero. Having been left out of work for years, along with almost everyone he knows, Gregorio looks for room for maneuver in the economic system – on one occasion, Gregorio says to Angel, “Tú por lo menos tienes un trabajo y eso en este país es como ganarse la lotería”, to which Angel ripostes, “Cuando te entregan el premio la única sensación que te queda es la de que te han estafado” – when he buys and manages a café. (206). Far from an example of venture capitalism, and even the subtler undertaking of Lozano’s cheese shop in *Condores no entierran todos los días*, in Angel and Camero’s café, we witness a humble attempt at day-to-day survival. The choice of a café is not incidental; it is a space tied into the national psyche, both for the tradition of the public spectacle of café life and the weight that coffee holds in promises of economic progress and the marketing of a national image. While Gardezabal offers a representation of the lives that get lost in the competing political discourses of the incipient *Violencia*, Fayad points to the failure of the National Front and its peace and prosperity promising power-share to lead to any form of progress. Coffee acts as a paradoxical marker. While coffee prices steadily grow as multinational companies come into Colombia under the National Front, no meaningful socio-economic structure builds up around the commodity.<sup>20</sup> Fayad ties coffee, the public sphere, the continued low glass-ceiling for the majority of Colombia’s citizens, and post-multinational investment into a narrative in which the four are inextricably linked.

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<sup>20</sup> In his book, *Violence in Colombia*, Charles Bergquist discusses the paradoxes that accompany the influx of capital, the rise of coffee prices, and the lack of collective social benefit in Colombia during the 1960s and 1970s.

*Los parientes de Ester* is set up in a cyclical structure with opening and closing scenes that at once point to a lack of historical teleology and allude to the dialectics of the National Front. In both scenes, Camero and Angel sit pensively, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes, trying to find a way out of the Bogotá that, despite promises of collective progress, feels more like a disordered maze than a logical social map. By the closing scene, as readers, we are sick of coffee. Along with the characters, we have practically drowned in it. It is the only thing that is of abundance and readily on offer in the novel. Everything else of substance, even the most basic necessities such as food, lead to political squabbles among Bogotá's underbelly and remind us of Camero and Angel's failing business venture. The State is notably more hindrance than help. One bureaucratic functionary, from the comfort of a state-position, muses disdainfully to the new café owners:

“Casi todos van a pedir que les fíe [...] En estos negocios los únicos que ganan son los clientes. Aparte de que no pagan, se roban las cosas. Mire –el hombre le mostró una cucharita agujereada –, hay que hacer esto para que no se las roben, y sin embargo se las roban. Y mire –le indicó a Angel Callejas para que observara al otro lado del mostrador –, este cajón está lleno de vales que con seguridad no van a cancelar nunca” (121).

In the scene, lettered and unlettered citizens stand face to face, with Camero and Angel in the middle, acting as potential representatives of a socially mobile middle-class that would shift from one to the other. At this point in the novel, however, we realize that it is unlikely that their café is going to do anything to help their social standing or personal independence. And Fayad gives an ironic treatment to both state workers and the lumpen. Like Gardeazábal, and notably Fernando Vallejo whose first novel will follow *Los parientes de Ester* seven years later, Fayad subtly derides the systemic social problems of Colombia, pointing to its largely underprivileged placed in modernity – coloniality binaries as a source of ongoing problems. Far from the idyll imagined in the *lettered city*,

Fayad renders the Colombian capital a failed project where, for Alvarado Tenorio, the city “acompaña a sus personajes por la vida misma, siguiéndoles en sus vicisitudes y desgracias, haciendo de los protagonistas el lector, con sus miserias, hambres, imposibles sueños, odios, carencias, humillaciones, maquinaciones, mezquindad, maledicencia y arribismo” (13).

Fayad’s *Los parientes de Ester* is not thematically or aesthetically far from the modern day *novela urbana*, especially the branch of the *narconovela*. Fayad’s broad implication of all levels of society in on-going cultural polemics has a clear influence on Jorge Franco’s celebrated *Rosario Tijeras*, and his refusal to let the novel veer into the waters of maudlin or exotic renderings of Bogotá’s lumpen neighborhoods still feels fresh largely due to Fernando Vallejo’s recently revamped approach to a similar style.<sup>21</sup> Fayad depicts unlettered lives as part and parcel of larger geopolitical problems in the personal suffering of the novel. We approach his characters with sympathy, because we witness the decision-making process that they go through, searching for tactics of survival at the level of the day-to-day. When their projects fail and the characters run up against the low glass-ceiling of National Front Colombian society, we blame the economic and representational system and demand answers rather than take agency away from the urban characters by thinking “they need our help”; nor do we feel emotions evoked by a poetics of poverty porn. As in Gardezabal’s *Condores no entierran todos los días* we feel implicated and alienated when the political system is laid out explicitly before us, and when, in *Los parientes de Ester*, Camero and Angel follow the social guide espoused by the political discourses of the time to the letter, making earnest

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<sup>21</sup> Beyond the thematic thread in the depiction of social anomie and urban violence that connects Gardezabal and Fayad’s post-*Violencia* National Front and Franco and Vallejo’s narco-infused cityscapes, all of these authors have enjoyed large local readerships and wide debate in popular media. *Condores no entierran todos los días*, *La virgen de los sicarios*, and *Rosario Tijeras*, for instance, were all turned into major films with no lack of fanfare revolving around their debuts (more on this in Chapter 3).

attempts to become functioning political, economic, and aesthetic citizens, we cannot help but wonder what more they could do to meet with the State's symbolic and political standards. The breach between the messages that the State sends and the lived reality of the mass public is made flagrant, and it is clear that Colombia's urban populace has no infrastructural outlet under *Violencia* and National Front governments.

Considering Gardezabal's depiction of a society, in which rational political citizens are derailed by the intense trauma of the *Violencia*, and Fayad's illustration of the ongoing underrepresentation and lack of opportunity for the Colombian masses during the National Front, it is retrospectively of little surprise that an alternative socioeconomic order was about to take hold in both rural and urban Colombia, one that the government would be able to do little to control or suppress. Colombia was entering into a phase of globalization mediated by the otherwise anomic groups that were kept at bay both economically and symbolically for almost two centuries. And the power vacuum, left by the *Bogotazo*, was about to evolve into an alternative economic order that would restructure Colombian economies, urban aesthetic registers, and literary representation permanently.

By the last quarter of the twentieth century – around the time Colombian letters enter into a stage of mediation – groups that were until then neglected by the *lettered city* and its national regime of letters come back to haunt the government on a more lasting scale than was experienced during the *Violencia*. Anomie slowly becomes a social norm, and having been denied opportunity on every representational level for generations, huge swaths of the population turn to guerilla groups for governance and to the drug-trade for economic support. An alternative social order, parallel to the state, develops that will challenge the symbolic primacy of the lettered ideal. Alfredo Molano describes the alternative socioeconomic orders that replace the state when he writes:

In the so-called Independent Republics of the 1960s, the colonists were on the brink of ruin because of poor market conditions and the absence of government aid. They did not lose their land, however, because the guerrillas helped them, and to an extent, this helped prevent large landowners from acquiring and concentrating the land into large tracts. Insofar as the guerrillas were able to create defenses for the colonists they tended to control the roles of the merchant and the intermediaries and to provide for or attend to the population's most basic needs, such as education, health and justice. Economically, the guerrillas' power was based on contributions or taxes from the colonists paid either in cash or commodities or with labor. The colonists' obligations usually were fulfilled through collective work, either "organization farms" or on the private property of others (205).

The alternative social orders set up around guerilla groups, their paramilitary alternative, and the drug trade makes for a dense story with little clarity in regards to right and wrong, positive and negative. And the national government increasingly begins to weave in and out of the history of these alternative groups, many times illicitly – several members of the locally beatified government of Alvaro Uribe still have pending investigations regarding economic ties to the drug trade, and under the *Ley de justicia y paz* (2005), Uribe effectively co-opts paramilitary groups, paradoxically causing the government to enter into warfare parallel to the State. But in aesthetic terms, unarguably, we witness the simultaneous rise of new forms that debase the high poetic registers of the *lettered city* and sociopolitical orders that challenge the State's primacy. New genres and reading publics emerge that, for the first time in Colombian history, mediate the lived experience of large portions of the Colombian population and the literary archive, giving literary representation to the watershed *Bogotazo*, the subsequent birth of the narco-industry, and the urban experiences that accompany both. New experiences and new literary and visual consumers demanded a new poetics, and the *novela de la violencia* continues to evolve into the *novela urbana*.

## 2.4 The Contemporary Colombian Urban Novel

By the 1980s, urban Colombia would be entirely unrecognizable to the vision held by idealists that viewed the city as a beacon of universal civilization roughly a century earlier. The eighties bears witness to the taking up of arms by more than 1/3 of young men in Colombian urban spaces and the birth of the *sicariato* as a profession – by the nineties, 190 separate branches of gangs and *pandillas* will be identified in Medellín alone.<sup>22</sup> And battling paramilitary and guerilla groups also fail to lend prolonged stability to urban subjectivities. So called “death squads” or “escuadrones de la muerte” continue to operate in Calí and Medellín, in Palacios’s terms, working to “extirpar los llamados *desechables*: “gamines”, pordioseros, prostitutas, homosexuales y pícaros callejones” (328). Along with massive challenges to the primacy of the civilized idyll, the regime of letters slowly evolves into a regime of arms, and the violence implicit in the exclusionist lettered state hardens when, after the *Violencia*, the government and its “social cleansers” begin to call their non-citizens by name. Marginality becomes manifest around the time that it becomes clear that the state of exception has failed, and in the name of ongoing war, figures considered “desechables” become the new enemies of the state.

It is at this time that literary representation in Colombia evolves to capture the updated terms of violence, urban experiences, and clashes between the mass body politic bodies and the government. The *novela urbana* distills as a genre and branches into subcategories. Varying film aesthetics in two cities, Medellín and Calí, consolidate

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<sup>22</sup> For more on this see Palacios’s *Entre la legitimidad y la Violencia*, page 327 and the introduction to the English translation of Alonso Salazar’s *No nacimos pa’ semilla*.

to form a poetics of Colombian social realism. The Colombian *noir* novel takes off, beginning with Gonzalo España (1945), who explores the *novela policiaca* as a way to situate violence in urban Colombia, and matures into the *noirish* aesthetics of Mario Mendoza and Santiago Gamboa, who use the hardboiled detective novel to represent the Colombian citizen's search for the root cause of ongoing violence. And authors of the *narconovela* attempt to capture the affect and cultural registers of urban Colombia's unofficial economic systems by focusing on youth, popular culture, and the ideology (and lack thereof) built up around the drug trade; it is an atmosphere that, for Palacios, challenges old-institutions, rethinks the conditions of the lettered citizen, and updates the relationship between subjects and official representational registers: "... las cohortes de niños y adolescentes parecieron más dúctiles a los lenguajes y símbolos de la radionovela, la telenovela, el cine, el deporte y las música. Allí se fraguaron nuevos significados culturales, creencias y modos de expresar los afectos, que rompieron con la estrechez y rigidez del catolicismo entonces prevaleciente, como se vio, por ejemplo, en el campo de la sexualidad y de la formación de la vida de pareja" (321).

The most lasting examples of the Colombian film industry come in two directors: Victor Gaviria of the Medellín School, whose *Rodrigo D no futuro* and *La vendora de rosas* have gained attention, praise, and criticism on both the national and international scale, and Luis Ospina, a representative of the socially minded half of the politically bipolar *Caliwood* – Ospina, in contrast to Andrés Caicedo, with whom he founded the first

Colombian cinema journal, *Ojo al cine*, is notably more concerned with the tumultuous existence of marginalized figures, falling in line with the literary aesthetics of Luis Fayad, than Caicedo, who pushes for a philosophical exploration of the semi-cosmopolitan upper-middle classes. Both Gaviria and Ospina work toward an imagery and cinema that captures the novel subjectivities of eighties and nineties urban Colombia and the marginal and underdeveloped situation that many of the youth experience. They hinge their films on a poetics that gives agency to the coloniality side of the modernity/coloniality binary while grappling with the ethical dilemmas of exporting an aesthetics of poverty to a global intelligentsia. The cinema of both directors works to capture a subjectivity that is somewhere between Enrique Dussel's *potentia* and marginalized bare life, a double political movement that is caught between an empowering challenge to under-representing institutions and the risk of being continuously left out of social systems. Juana Suarez and Carlos Jáuregui describe the cultural tension that Ospina and Gaviria's generation attempt to represent when they write:

Entre los discursos cotidianos sobre la marginalidad y la criminalidad urbana emergió con renovadas fuerzas una imagen: la de la ciudad como un lugar contaminado no por los ruidos y la polución industrial de la modernización periférica, ni por los residuos petroquímicos de los motores que la cruzan, sino por una "polución humana". Para la *ciudad letrada* de las últimas décadas del siglo pasado, el malestar por la ciudad fue frecuentemente un malestar de lo nacional frente a las muchedumbres democráticas, la plebe, los inmigrantes, y la abigarrada heterogeneidad lingüística, étnica y política de la multitud. En las últimas décadas del siglo XX, ese imaginario se renueva con las constantes referencias a una



ciudad *sucia de humanidad*, asediada, infectada e infestada de “elementos indeseables”. (368).

While a wide-scale challenge to the primacy of the lettered idyll successfully debases the preeminence of high-literary modernism in Colombia, we witness a shift from the semantics of the “unlettered” to the “disposable” body; and airs of order over chaos and universal aesthetic civilization over the perceived squalor of the lived urban experiences of the Colombian masses undergird both political discourses. The need of novel urban subjects to work through their experiences through literature and film, however, increasingly becomes a tool that mediates cultural problems, rather than a cultural anchor that lends governing bodies a credible aesthetic distance. In the films of Gaviria and Ospina, we witness a poetics that works through social problems on the popular scale. The violence already perceptible in the work of Gardeazábal’s and the attention to the socioeconomic vulnerability of the urban masses in Fayad’s complex renderings are taken to the screen and projected alongside images of Colombian urban youth that attempt to piece together a meaningful existence, figures that are almost always left to the social alternatives of the drug trade and *pandilla* violence.

Urban film and literature in Colombia take on a mediating role. And though the Latin American urban novel finds its inspiration in Roberto Arlt’s Southern Cone, the cultural problems that spring from Colombian cities makes for some of the genre’s more poignant expressions.<sup>23</sup> It is in Colombia that the author’s desire to rethink, reorder, and re-letter the city is set against the backdrop of a socioeconomic order not officially recognized by the Colombian government. And it is also in Colombia where the rise of a popular culture and “mediated” literature contrasts most starkly with the idyll

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<sup>23</sup> For more on the philosophical problems addressed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Latin American Urban Novel, see Amanda Holmes’s text, *City Fictions: Language, Body, and Spanish American Urban Spaces*.

espoused by the regime of letters from a century prior.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, in a state as precariously on the brink of collapse as eighties and nineties Colombia, the importance of literary intervention in urban spaces could hardly be overstated.

We can read the literary intervention of the Colombian *novela urbana* in its broadest context – the division into the subgenres of the *noir* novel and social realist cinema notwithstanding – as exhibiting three tendencies. 1) The exploration of violence through somatic metaphors; 2) The reordering of the city by representations of walking and dwelling in urban spaces; and 3) the depiction of affective registers not otherwise represented in the literary archive.

The Colombian hardboiled detective novel has lent itself most readily to the use of soma as a metaphor for violence. And the tendency to open a novel with a crime scene alongside the shocking exposure of a dead body plays most prominently in the works of the current renovators of Colombian *noir*, Santiago Gamboa and Mario Mendoza. Both authors narrate from the perspective of a down and out figure, a detective and a journalist, respectively, with literary tendencies. A post-authoritarian governmental functionary and a post-high aesthetics writer, the protagonists offer examples of Fayad's state representatives and Caro's aesthetes in an updated, eighties and nineties "mediated" Colombia. In Mario Mendoza's *Scorpio City* (1995), we explore the day-to-day street life of Bogotá and the role that violence plays in relation to the psyche of the average citizen. Mendoza examines the ways in which the appearance of a dead body weighs on one of the government's "desechables". Not unlike the Catholic-come-off-the-rails in Gardezabal's *Condores no entierran todos los días*, Mendoza's serial

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<sup>24</sup> While failing social infrastructure and urban anomie are just as pronounced in cities such as Mexico City and Ciudad Juarez, the contrast between the poet-presidents of the late nineteenth century and the lived reality of the present day contrasts most strongly in Colombia.

killer, *The Apóstol*, has a deep religious bent. *The Apóstol* is a ritualistic killer that only goes after society's underbelly. In clear coordination with the "death squads", we uncomfortably read the relationship between religious fervor, social order, and violence along with our detective protagonist who tries to piece together the crime scene.

Mendoza writes:

“...te fijas en los rostros de las prostitutas y travestías que caminan por los andenes esperando la caída de un cliente. Te parece increíble que haya un grupo de fanáticos religiosos encargado de exterminarlos. Y otros, como *El Apóstol*, pensando en exterminar a los exterminadores. Así es el país, piensas con tristeza, ésa es nuestra forma de sentirnos colombianos, negando y aniquilando al que está a nuestro lado (65).

Mendoza calls the state of the nation into question by representing its competing political discourses in microcosm and transposing them into an urban crime narrative. On the one hand, the detective, Sinisterra, grapples with the flagrantly unacceptable death squad discourse. Yet on the other hand – and here the philosophical dilemmas of *Condorez no entierran todos los días* come back to us – he cannot accept the ritualistic killing of the killers themselves. Sinisterra attempts to come to grips with the cognitive dissonance that the competing political discourses, his job as a detective, and his own intuition imply. Along with Sinisterra, we examine the nuance and micro-psychological problems that blunt institutional responses cause for Colombians – the “desechables” in the eyes of paramilitary and governmental groups, the police force, the average urban citizen – and end up questioning all obvious answers. Sinisterra touches on the failure of Colombia's political discourses to represent lived reality when he rants, “Entonces, desde los esquemas tradicionales, un homosexual ecologista, ¿es conservador o liberal? Una lesbiana mística, ¿es liberal o de izquierda? Regina 11, la hechicera espiritista con

gran respaldo popular que llegó hasta el Senado de la República, ¿es de izquierda o de derecha? (119). He continúes:

“Entonces, un travestí místico con cuenta en Miami, ¿es un burgués opresor o un proletario oprimido? Un abogado con apartamento en el norte de Bogotá, en el mejor sector, que sin embargo tres días a la semana amanece en los expendios de bazuco del sur de la ciudad, en el peor sector, en medio de sus propios excrementos después de fumar hasta la saciedad papelas de bazuco, ¿es un arribista despreciable que vive en la riqueza y la comodidad, o un drogadicto miserable víctima del sistema? (120).

Mendoza uses Sinisterra to connect to the reader. Through him, we feel implicated in the social problems that, by way of Sinisterra's rants, we come to realize has, as much as anything, to do with the application of awkward political discourses to the political body. He depicts the day-to-day citizens that are caught between social anomie and a political inclusion that implies its own violent terms. And through the crime novel, he explores the causes and meanings of mass violence. The appearance of cadavers and the mutilated body stand in for the disfigured nation, and like a sleuth, along with Mendoza and Sinisterra, we consider the implications that this trauma has on Colombia as a collective subjectivity.

In a second instance of the use of soma to metaphorize the crises of a nation, the raw image of a dead body drives the narrative of Laura Restrepo's *Delirio*. The primary theme of *Delirio* is not simply death, however, though it is the presence of a cadaver that causes the protagonist, Agustina, to re-imagine her childhood and to induce the titular delirium. Agustina's mental collapse along with the visit she pays to her past opens up the larger theme of decline in the novel and paints Colombian violence in entropic hues. While in *La vorágine*, whose frenetic, visceral tones come to mind when reading *Delirio*, a

harsh reality breaks through a fragile imaginary and is metaphorized through images of heat and fire, political confrontations in *Delirio* focus on images of impotence set in contrast to themes of libidinal drive. Impotence reminds of us the failings of a State that has spent a long twentieth century attempting to come to grips with its populace. The most overt representation of impotence arises through the character, El Araña, and his desire to prove to his friends that he can become sexually aroused despite his physical handicap, which has made it tacitly impossible for him get an erection. El Araña's sexual decline is more subtly paralleled by the German immigrant, Nicolás, and his intellectual and existential impotence as he is faced with the inability to make a living out of music; the theme is even further complicated by another character, Agustina's, mental deterioration. And in the thematic layers of *Delirio*, we witness grotesque and mentally violent clashes between two projected realities – decline and health, destrudo and libido – as the crude reality that has been set aside as aberration returns to haunt the characters' respective ideological and social imaginaries.

The narrative dedicated to El Araña and his desire to prove his sexual potency is cast as a brutishly virile bet amongst a group of upper-class, middle-aged men who have made a game out of one of the principle tenants of superficial masculine honor. As El Araña moves away from the sexual and masculine norm, he slowly strays from socially acceptable fetish into the waters of squalid fantasy. In the scenes that ensue in the backroom of The Aerobics, their social club, the reader witnesses a gradual veering into

the sinister, resulting in the eventual death of the aptly named Dolores. El Araña stages a scene in which he almost reaches arousal as a woman is violently bludgeoned, in a moment in which pain and pleasure come together, erasing the social boundary, even in the macho sense, that separates the two. And the spatial representation of Dolores' death accentuates this point. The Aerobics offers a space of masculine bourgeois fantasy, a privatized space of leisure and superficial appearances of health. But just as El Araña's sexual desire quickly delves into the sinister, Midas and El Araña use the backroom, or the space not readily visible, to set up perverse sexual shows.

Restrepo's installment to the national saga adds a psychoanalytical element to the complexities surrounding the mixed messages sent by the state and its subsidiaries. It layers Freudian drives over the violent power struggles waged in eighties and nineties urban Colombia and uses a single body to help us, as readers, quantify the violence; it helps us resist Pecaut's banalization of violence and the remote distancing of large, unfathomable numbers. And the tension between a small junta-like elite and the larger public continues to be a prevalent theme. Restrepo accentuates the disposability of the peripheral body in the minds of a select group, as they play with Dolores's body as if it were a rag doll. And she further explores the breach established between the lettered government and its evolution into the political paradigm of the meaningful and disposable citizen. Instead of the late nineteenth century's regime of letters, operated by a select group of functionaries with lettered weight, we witness its late-twentieth

century update through a group of men in a private club that manipulate social reality to fit their designs. The scene change and time shift make the relationship between a governing elite and a mass public appear even more drastic when layered over the harmful virile drive, and the presence of the mutilated body in the club takes the dead body out of the rundown *barrios*, countryside, and “feral” mountains and places it at the feet of the party responsible for its mutilation. While Restrepo’s work and the genre of the *novela urbana* use popular registers to challenge the primacy of the literary archive, the exposure of the raw body remind us of what is at stake in political discourses that subtly espouse concepts such as the trumping of order over disorder through “social cleansing”.

Offering a similar relationship between the unlettered body and the city, a prototype of the Colombian “dwelling” and “walking novel” that will be an important contribution to the *novela urbana* comes in the form of Andrés Caicedo’s *Que viva la música*. As early as the first page of his only completed novel, the Cali-based Caicedo forces his protagonist, María del Carmen Huerta, to confront the existential problem that will both haunt and drive her throughout a drug-induced flâneuring that frames the work. María discusses how her “whiteness” and hair color lead other *caleños* to associate her with cultural icons from a freshly available international and cosmopolitan register, when she energetically claims:

“Pero me decían: “Pelada, voy a ser conciso: ¡es fantástico tu pelo! Y un raro, calvo, prematuro: “Lillian Gish tenía tu mismo pelo”, y yo: “Quién

será ésta", me preguntaba, "¿Una cantante famosa?" Recién me he venido a desayunar que era estrella del cine mudo. Todo este tiempo me la he venido imaginando con miles de collares, cantando, rubia total, a una audiencia enloquecida. Nadie sabe lo que son los huecos de la cultura" (11).

*Que viva la música* is about speed, youthful energy, and the inevitable comedown from earnestness experienced in the context of a young group of friends from Cali, with whom we spend a week in the life under the haze of a sex, drugs, and rock and roll frenzy. Caicedo takes us along for a ride in his 1970s Cali, a time and place in which multi-national corporations begin to make great headway in urban Colombia, largely resignifying the urban symbolic order and bringing a string of cultural problems along with them.<sup>25</sup> And through María and her friends, (another) María and a practically unending flow of gringos and libido driven twenty-somethings, Caicedo, a cinephile, invites the reader to experience, arguably for the first time, Colombia at twenty-four frames per second.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> According to Charles Bergquist: "With advent of National Front traditional political violence ends. Its sequel of political banditry is repressed by 1966. After 1960, Cuban-inspired guerrilla groups (FARC, ELN, EPL), with some linked to previous Liberal resistance, proliferate. Governments continually resort to state-of-siege powers to contain internal dissent and social unrest. Under orthodox liberal policies adequate coffee prices, economy continues to grow and diversify, and multinational corporations enter Colombia in force" (xiii).

<sup>26</sup> The magazine *Ojo al cine* was the "official" publication of the *Cine Club de Cali*, and had only four editions between 1974 and 1976. The three directors of the *Cine club* and a mutual cinephile friend formed the initial editorial team of the magazine: Andrés Caicedo, Luís Ospina, Ramiro Arbelaez, and Carlos Mayolo. Only Andrés Caicedo and Patricia Restrepo, who had joined the magazine since the third edition, formed the editorial team of the last number. For a history of the *Cine Club de Cali* and Andres Caicedo's lasting love with cinema, see the book-length compilation of his critical work, *Ojo al cine*. Particularly informing are the introduction and the notes for each section by Sandro Romero Rey and Luís Ospina.



More than speed, however, the novel is about the “holes in culture” (“los huecos de la cultura”) that María alludes to in her opening exclamations. Along with the new wave of cultural referents that life in Cali brings in the 1970s, a new cosmopolitan border opens up for a young generation that grows up with access to international popular culture on a scale until then unprecedented, causing a clash between a local, many times folkloric, sense of nationality and a new cosmopolitan cultural register. Caicedo uses music and urban dwelling to explore this cultural problem, even including a discography, or sound track, at the end of the work. Music is the impulse that keeps his characters riding a high whose comedown is threatened cyclically, giving way to a largely standard *Bildungsroman* pattern. The protagonist leaves home, on the micro-spatial scale of an outing and several day bender, experiences a new cultural form that would symbolically kill her parents – in this case through the international narrative of rock music, and more specifically through the Rolling Stones – considers, though refuses, a return home – represented by salsa within the musical metaphor– and then seeks out a third place, in this case without grounding in the city.

As is the case in many of Latin America’s coming of age novels, in *Que viva la música* the *Bildungsroman* does not occur seamlessly, at least to the extent that the protagonist does not grow, mature, and successfully carve out a place of her own, but is trapped by the need to continue to move, or is caught in an errancy that parallels her

and her peers' growing dependency on drugs.<sup>27</sup> Through María's constant motion, we witness signs of both an attempt to re-order the city by walking and dwelling in the urban space and resonances of Franco's "decline and fall of the *lettered city*". We watch as a protagonist attempts to mediate and reorder the city according to her new cultural register but bumps her head against the city's structure repeatedly until she gets lost in the urban space.

An updated version of María makes for one of the genre's most interesting urban dwellers in Antonio Caballero's protagonist, Ignacio Escobar Urdaneta, from Caballero's best-known and locally very popular work, *Sin remedio*. In fact, Ignacio falls in line with many of Latin America's most intriguing, existential urbanites. In him we read shades of Horacio Oliveira (Cortázar's *Rayuela*) and José Fernandez (Silva's *De sobremesa*). And part of the cult that has built up around the character stems from his resistance to clear readings. As Ignacio spends his time searching for the meaning of literature and political reality through a combination of high and low cultural mediums, we ask ourselves if he is a naval-gazing *pícaro* that uses literature as a way to keep meaningful relationships at arms-length or a virtuosic neo-*philosophe* whose insight and resistance to social norms inspires soft revolution. Is he a mediated urban subject, in whom we view the clashes between an elite governing body and lived urban reality condensed into one character, or is he, in fact, an updated version of late nineteenth century modernists without a purpose in late twentieth century Bogotá? Regardless of how we read him, Caballero uses Ignacio to challenge the city's social ordering, which, if we take Fredric Jameson's understanding of the literary implications as a guide – the city creates "a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to the vaster and properly

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<sup>27</sup> Alberto Fuguet's *Mala onda* (1996) shares a remarkably similar narrative arc, story structure, and protagonist to *Que viva la música*, though it is set in the context of the 1989 Chilean plebiscite, for instance.

unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole" – we must read him as politically involved (51). Ignacio's trajectory as a walker and dweller reveals the social stratification that would occur in major Colombian cities as the dust of the National-Front settles. He uses literature and cultural artifacts as motivation and guides as he brings the asymmetrical distribution of cultural capital among Colombia's urban citizens to the surface.

In an inversion of the spatial exploration in Caicedo's Cali in *Que viva la música*, Ignacio, moves from the iconic and folkloric, yet downtrodden city center, to the upper-middle-class North of the city. All the while, he is in search of a "truth" or "deep meaning" in art and literature, creating a double representation of literature and culture: as an inspiring guide, a tool with which to explore the cultural problems of the moment, and as a sociopolitical mechanism that has contributed to the very stratification that Ignacio examines.

By the 1990s, the drug trade begins to appear in urban narrative, and arguably nowhere in the genre of the *novela urbana* is the use of popular registers more broadly prevalent than in the *narconovela*, a form that deals with weighty subject matter revolving around groups of urban, largely *pandilla*, subjects that, themselves, use popular cultural consumption as a social measuring stick. They are problems in agency and form that call for a poetics that must use a popular medium to represent the consumption of popular forms, themselves, all set against the ethical dilemmas of representing a hyperviolent social milieu for an external audience. How does the writer capture the socioeconomic tension in a popular way without glossing the tremendous political situation of the urban subject? Two varying responses in the nineties come out of Medellín that deal with these dilemmas and narrate the narco-city and its

infrastructure: *Rosario Tijeras* by Jorge Franco and *No nacimos pa' semilla* by the current mayor of Medellín, Alonso Salazar.

Jorge Franco's *Rosario Tijeras* interestingly straddles literary tendencies in a way that allows the author to give an innovative narrative voice to a violent socioeconomic ambience in post-Globalization Medellín without losing the interest of readers that expect a fast paced, cinematic novel. In a sense, the world that Franco creates in *Rosario Tijeras* accomplishes as much as would a neo-realist, almost Gramscian, account of the difficult existence in a drug based infrastructure with a rigid class differential, but he does so in a way that would be appealing to a youthful audience, giving a grittier spin on the most prominent efforts coming out of the McOndo and Crack movements.

Franco's most notable indebtedness to popular mediums lies in the cinematic quality of *Rosario Tijeras*: the story is framed by a series of flashbacks, as the narrator sits in the hospital awaiting news about Rosario's medical standing, and offering a sort of voice over to the cinematic scenes that push the novel.

As critics, we approach Franco with skepticism, given his exportation of violent subject matter and his ringing endorsement from García Marquez who claims that he is, in fact, "the next García Marquez", a combination that does as much to sully Franco's reputation as it does to lend him credibility. But *Rosario Tijeras* is notable for the complexity and difficult to place nature of the eponymous character, Rosario, who at once exhibits tendencies of a femme fatal, an elusive muse, a dominating strategist, a diabolical schemer, a saint, and most interestingly a narcotic. In contrast to Restrepo's

representation of the elite governing body in *Delirio*, in *Rosario Tijeras*, Franco offers a complex reading of the many faces of urban political alternatives, while always reminding us of the underprivileged status of those caught up in the narco-industries. There is a clear line between those who produce and those who consume drugs, followed by the moral division between those who take part in the narco-industry for recreation and those who are forced into it for survival.

While Rosario's multifaceted existence portrays the nebulous lines of identity in a society based on contradictory social discourses, the theme of Rosario as a drug opens itself to more precise themes of class and the unequal distribution of symbolic resources in Medellín. And with class in mind, Franco eroticizes Rosario without ever taking away her agency or place of power. Franco does not simply portray Rosario as the rich kids' muse, but on the contrary, he temporarily inverts the class dynamic by portraying Rosario as having a dominating sway over both Emilio and the narrator, two upper-middle-class consumers of the narcotic cultural industry. Throughout the work, one class does not dominate the other wholly, but both are depicted in an inter-dependent relationship of co-musing. This class relationship plays out spatially in the novel in the emphasis put on the way that the city is laid out with the economically dominant class occupying the *cerro* overlooking the city, as is noted by Rosario when she visits Emilio's house. But in terms of social life, this dynamic is inverted. In the *discotecas*, Rosario's old friends, or the *narcotraficantes*, have the best seats and are afforded the primacy of the

VIP rooms that overlook the dance floor. They control the terms of popular culture but not of cultural capital. And this dominance is also personified in Rosario's early desire, and subsequent failure, to meet with Emilio's family standard on one hand, and Emilio's failure to acquire Rosario's fidelity on the other.

But while Franco does not portray one social class as entirely dominating another, as he easily could have by denying Rosario any agency and simply depicting her as an exotic muse for rich kids that are slumming it, he also avoids the pitfalls of romanticizing Medellín's drug culture. To portray both subjectivities as unweighted differences, in the post-modern sense, would also do an injustice to an underprivileged class. Franco, instead, uses the metaphor of Rosario as a narcotic and representative of the social infrastructure that facilitates a narcotics industry to show that, despite the fact that all classes are implicated by its existence, for some people it is easier to distance themselves from violence than others. Rosario's death, which frames the novel, reminds us that while urban Colombia is in a state of mediation, and the drug culture offers economic alternatives to total social anomie, it is still easier for the narco industries consumers to disengage than its producers.

If Franco's novel shows an indebtedness to popular cinema and imitates the popular voices of Medellín, Alonso Salazar's *No nacimos pa' semilla* (1990) clearly pulls from the politically engaged documentary for inspiration. Salazar, the sitting mayor of Medellín (2008-), parallels the social realism of the Medellín School with his collection of

first person narrations of *pandilla* and street life. In *No nacimos pa' semilla*, Salazar transcribes multiple accounts from anonymous *sicarios* and gang members, interspersing third person narrations of the places in which gang members will dwell throughout their lives, narrating their home space, the streets, and also prison blocks. Salazar is skillfully absent from the collection. He resists the ethical dilemmas surrounding the giving and taking of agency and the depiction of an urban poor – a problem that has haunted the film of Victor Gaviria, for instance – and lets experience speak for itself. Salazar does not condemn the individual perpetrators of violence, but at the same time, the violent experiences that the young boys describe do not lack salience. Salazar simultaneously resists the banal depiction of violence and the privileged moral distancing of the reader. The anonymous introduction to the collection written by a member of CINEP (Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular), the group that funded the project, puts the social problems at the heart of *No nacimos pa' semilla* bluntly:

Cuando lo más importante se ha banalizado, puesto en el mercado, destruido, la tarea de colaborar en la construcción comienza por hacer el diagnóstico. Para esto hay que adentrarse en las motivaciones y la lógica de los jóvenes que pasan matando. Leer su racionalidad y su moral como una legitimación de la enfermedad es ser incapaz de darse cuenta que el problema hay que plantearlo desde dentro para poder superarlo (9).

There is a tension in *No nacimos pa' semilla* that points to the representational and aesthetic problems at the heart of Colombia's askew symbolic economy. After years of

underrepresentation, when large groups of the population seek out economic and symbolic infrastructure parallel to the State, can anyone actually condemn them for it? The problem, for Salazar, is how we talk about Colombian anomie, where the only constant is violence. We must recognize the moral and ethical code and the causes for Colombian gangs and *sicariatos* without romanticizing them or turning them into cultural artifacts for public consumption. The essential question is how to understand without justifying the groups. Salazar does so by spanning the psychological particularities of the experience of killing – in one episode, the *sicario* describes the first time he killed someone when he claims, “Estuve quince días que no podía comer porque veía el muerto hasta en la sopa...pero después fue fácil. Uno aprende a matar sin que eso le moleste el sueño” (26); the ritual and moral code that builds up within the groups – the same *sicario* describes his quasi-religious process of killing, stating, “En esos casos, tengo una costumbre que me ha resultado muy buena: cojo una bala, le saco la munición y le echo la pólvora a un tinto caliente, me lo tomo y eso me tranquiliza”, which is contrasted by the testimony of a Catholic priest that respects, if not venerates, the passion with which *sicarios* and gang members mourn their own dead, “En el cementerio, lo sacaron del ataúd y lo cargaron en hombros, le gritaron cosas delirantes, y le hicieron disparos al aire, hasta que por fin lo sepultaron. En esta vida me ha tocado ver cosas muy extrañas, pero este ha sido el entierro más raro de todos” (32, 170); and the cultural syncretism with which these otherwise anomic figures engage – Salazar



argues that in the *sicario*, we observe the cultural crossroads of Colombia's globalized, socioeconomic flows: the *sicario* is where *paisa* culture, social modernization, and popular registers converge.

In the *sicario*, we witness symbolic anomie and subsequent alternative social formation, the entrance into economic globalization through an officially, though thoroughly globally consumed, illicit product, a rise of popular mediums to combat the transcendental aesthetics of Colombian modernism, and the shift in official political discourse from the unlettered to the disposable body. Indeed, in the *sicario*, we read an essentially Colombian story distilled in one social movement, a group whose complexities present their own dilemmas of representation and whose representational poetics, given its inherent paradoxes, will challenge Colombian, Latin American, and international standards of comfort and acceptability.

## **2.5 Fernando Vallejo's Urban Novel: *La virgen de los sicarios***

Sixteen years after its publication, few critics, both at the local and international level, agree on how to approach Fernando Vallejo's best-known work, *La virgen de los sicarios*, arguably the most controversial and densely packed of the Colombian Urban Novels. And in a publishing culture in which ethical debates revolve around the representation of a highly marginalized subjectivity for a privileged and international audience, *La virgen de los sicarios*, draws our attention to more immediate issues. In *La*

*virgen de los sicarios*, we follow the eponymous narrator, Fernando, as he experiences a disheartening return to Medellín after several years in absentia. Anyone familiar with the chronicles of the character's (and author's) years abroad leading up to the return from *El río del tiempo* expect harsh criticism. They will know that Fernando tends to superficially buy into the idealism espoused by major institutions, to place himself in a position of belief, only to go on to give scathing critiques of their paradoxes, letdowns, and fallacies. Yet even familiarity with Vallejo's literary persona does not prepare the reader for the extent to which Fernando's love and hate for his home city are about to exceed their bounds. There is something novel in this heavy handed first person approach: Vallejo creates a sense of insider and outsidership that he uses to guide the reader through his hometown but with enough distance to act just as appalled as the reader at the state of his city. He uses this tactic of double agency –as if his voice were caught off the coast of Colombia in the Boca de Ceniza (see introduction) – to provide himself enough poetic space to wage harsh critique of a sociopolitical system of which he forms a part; yet the role as guide on his way home creates enough critical distance, we presume, to allow Fernando to critique major Colombian institutions both cerebrally and viscerally. Everyone is to blame, for Fernando, except of course, himself and interestingly the marginal figures on whom, by the '90s, the State had declared unofficial war. In a sense, Fernando pits himself and the "desechables" (and himself *as* "desechable") against the rest of Colombian society.

Fernando's tactics are flagrantly troubling. At the surface, at least, it is easy to read him as an unrepentant authoritarian. Many of his prolonged rants target the impoverished for not pulling themselves up by their bootstraps, women, on whom he blames the perpetuation of the "absurd tragedy of life", and on popular dialects and cultural registers for which he blames the bastardization of his beloved grammatical and cultural models. And critical cultures have tended to read him through an "and/or" lens: Fernando is either ironic or uncomfortably right-wing, his rants are either deeply Catholic or anti-clerical, Vallejo either loves or loathes Colombia. But more interesting is the way in which Fernando sifts through superficial political claims and institutional discourses to highlight the actual human lives that get lost, the bodies that are considered, depending on the political discourse, either disposable or good only as a political tool. In an interesting reading of Fernando as a post-globalization *costumbrista*, Jean Franco claims that regardless of the way in which we approach Fernando, the text acts as a sort of x-ray for Colombian urban life in the '80s and '90s. It brings to the surface governmental claims about the disposable citizen: "In this regime all values other than exchange value melt into air. Does the *desechable* (the garbage) simply extend the logic of globalization until it reaches the end of human history?" (225). Fernando, as polemicist, crystallizes the cultural problems of his times and makes them readily visible. The fact that we are repulsed by his views does not surprise, but, through Fernando, Vallejo does little more than alter the context of the sociopolitical discourses

espoused by the government, the day to day practices of the Catholic church, and the opening of the economic border's reification of human experiences; he condenses the rhetoric that weighs on the Colombian psyche into a single, scarcely palatable, human voice in a comedown from an international experience and lets loose on a Medellín in one of its most vulnerable historical moments.

If we think that Fernando is excessively harsh on his home country, we are right. If we think that his hate is too visible and his diatribes too at the ready, we are right. If we think that Fernando's libido is intemperately uncurbed, we are right. But if we think that his motives are easily quantifiable and that his moral compass neatly follows political models, then we are off the mark.

Fernando is a multifaceted character whose ideology shifts with the given moment. He straddles the tendency to disengage politically and the propensity to reproduce both left and right wing discourses. His distaste for some popular registers mimes both his high modernist predecessors' aesthetic distancing from the masses and turgid Marxist claims about the perversion of culture in times of globalization. And if that does not make us squirm, the pederasty will. The opening of the novel sets the tone and the scene when it begins with a fairytale structure, "Había en las afueras de Medellín un pueblo silencioso y apacible que se llamaba Sabaneta" (7). As we zoom in, the sweeping tone quickly capsizes; three pages later, Fernando continues to set the scene, "Y para entonces Sabaneta había dejado de ser un pueblo y se había convertido en

un barrio más de Medellín, la ciudad la había alcanzado, se la había tragado; y Colombia, entre tanto, se nos había ido de las manos. Éramos, y de lejos, el país más criminal de la tierra, y Medellín la capital del odio” (10).

Fernando makes his appearance in a makeshift whorehouse, where men contract young *sicarios* not as hit men for hire, but for sex. Within the space of the first five pages, we travel from an idealized introduction to the author’s childhood neighborhood to a close up on the sicario, albeit in a more extreme context than we are used to. Fernando’s *sicarios* are not just products of pop cultural syncretism, extended economic borders, or the failure of the Colombian State, as Salazar’s work suggests, but, in *La virgen de los sicarios*, they are also highly eroticized. This is where the text usually loses critics. What do we make of a novel that not only addresses the difficult to place urban subject of the *sicario* but also adds sexual perversion to the scenario?

Maria Helena Rueda argues that one way to read Fernando’s relationship to his young sicario lovers, at first Alexis and then Wilmar, is through the lens of narcissism. Fernando eroticizes the *sicario*, using sexualization as a means to take control of a social situation, in which he feels politically impotent. And Fernando’s libido, having run up against its bounds, turns in on itself, converting him into an oversexed curmudgeon, in what, for Rueda, may be the beginning of a new tendency within the contemporary Colombian Urban Novel: “Se puede decir que *La virgen de los sicarios* inaugura una tendencia a la erotización de nuevas formas de violencia, que aparecen aquí centradas

en personajes marginales, y que son abordadas desde una posición ansiosa por el intelectual, que a la vez las asume y las rechaza, mientras se adentra en ellas por la vía de una pasión que no lleva a nada distinto a sí misma” (79). There is something to this argument, not least in the way that Fernando clings to a dominant position in the face of social instability; he role plays the Colombian governing bodies in historic times of upheaval and claims to be the “último gramático de Colombia” while his *sicario* lovers favor what for him is the hissing white noise of popular music, mediated political opinion, and idle chatter.

But more than a narcissistic insistence on dominating micro-relationships in the face of social impotence, Fernando complicates notions of visibility and agency. He at once pantomimes the treatment of marginal figures by Colombian aesthetic modernists, the Conservative government, and the Catholic church. Vallejo’s own canonization of himself and his self-placement in national and international literary schema does not err on the side of subtlety. His first professionally published text, *Logoi: una gramática del lenguaje literario* (1983), is a highly “lettered” manual that attaches reason to grammatical precision, as well as establishes an intertextual connection to the Greek philosopher concerned with metaphysics and epistemology, Heraclitus (circa 500 BC), whose most famous work revolves around the concepts of universal reason and its points of conflict based in the *Logos*, in addition to other pieces that revolve around the theme of death

and the river of time.<sup>28</sup> In rapid succession, from 1983 to 1985, Vallejo publishes an updated version of Heraclitus's philosophy, *Logoi*, an autobiography on Barba Jacob, *Barba Jacob el mensajero* (1984), and the first novel of the collection, *El río del tiempo, Los días azules* (1984). In the foundation of the voice of Fernando, we read as much performance of both Barba Jacob, who acts as a distorted version of the literary modernists of the end of the nineteenth century, and Heraclitus, as anything altogether new. Vallejo writes himself into the Colombian literary canon with a philosophical twist that adds the theoretical problems established by Heraclitus 2,500 years earlier. And he couples Heraclitus' concerns for endless change and finite individual experience with the currents of global culture with local explorations of the same issues.

Vallejo's detailed biography of Barba Jacob focuses largely on the reasons that Barba Jacob left Colombia for Mexico. He discusses the ways in which his modernism had run aground and to what extent his lifestyle clashed with local social pressures. When framed by Vallejo and the performative prism of Fernando, Barba Jacob, himself, shows resonances of Heraclitus. In his poem "Estrella errante", the final two stanzas address epistemological normalization, form, and the resistant subject: "¿Quién sabe en la noche que incuba las formas/ de adusto silencio cubiertas,/ qué brazo nos mueve, qué estrella nos guía?/ ¡Oh sed insaciable del alma que busca las normas!/ ¿Seremos tan sólo

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<sup>28</sup> For more on the intertextual resonances between Heraclitus and Vallejo, see O'Bryen. For information on Heraclitus's theorizations of time and universal reason, see Kahn, C. H., 1979, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Dilcher, R., 1995, *Studies in Heraclitus*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms.

ventanas abiertas/ el hombre, los lirios, el valle y el día?”, and the final stanza, “Espíritu errante, sin fuerzas, incierto, que trémulo escuchas la noche callada: inquiera en los himnos que fluyen del huerto, de todas las cosas la esencia sagrada” (61, Barba Jacob).

Vallejo rolls out the literary persona of Fernando with the precision of a performance artist. He sets the stage for a clash between the local and the global when he bases his first text on philosophical problems explored by a Greek philosopher millennia earlier. He then takes a literary icon that suffers the tensions explored in both his and Heraclitus’s text from the local context, and follows with a persona that will embody traits of both writers. He, in a sense, attempts to find the *logos* alluded to by Heraclitus that transcends all partialities. This is not an uncommon literary ploy. Dante employs a similar tactic in the *Divine Comedy*; he develops his poem with an eponymous narrator guided by an established literary master, Virgil, implying from the outset that he is the next step in a succession of masters. But there is no paradise on the other side of Fernando’s journey. And his interest in the clash between the local *sicario* and universal aesthetic reason – Barba Jacob’s “himnos que fluyen del huerto” – are crisis and conflict driven. When Fernando returns to Medellín, with his grammatical precision in tow, he acts as an agent that flows from the zero point of universal reason. He takes on the persona of Caro, darkened by Barba Jacob, and forces them to confront the consequence of their extended logic. Universal and particular epistemologies clash precisely at the point in which Fernando and the sicario come into contact: the sicario as



a transmodern, mediated, product of urban architecture, and Fernando the representative of the *logos* and the superficially ideal aesthetic citizen. If Fernando continuously attempts to dominate the *sicario*, unsuccessful as he is, it is because he represents the extension of Heraclitus's theory; he applies universal standards to the local body, be it cultural, political, or ethical, and the *sicario* always slips out from under Fernando's schema. It is Fernando that seeks out the *sicario* rather than vice versa; and it is Fernando that is fascinated by the *sicario* as urban subject. For the *sicario*, Fernando is many things, but dynamic sociocultural model is not one of them.

There is a series of scenes in the novel, in which Fernando's anxiety over his inability to dominate mediated culture play out. In every instance, he attempts to reestablish a privileged position in relation to the *sicario* and his cultural order – according to the logic of the text, the *sicario* stands in for dynamic mediums and Fernando the rigid standard. The first time Alexis, Fernando's first *sicario* lover, visits Fernando's house, their tastes clash explicitly. Alexis, whose cultural register grates on the high grammarian, is shocked by the lack of music in Fernando's house. Fernando explains:

Le compré una casetera y él se compró unos casetes. ¿Y tu te llamas a esta mierda música? Desconecté la casetera, la tomé, fui a un balcón y la tiré por el balcón: al pavimento fue a dar a cinco pisos abajo a estrellarse, a callarse. A Alexis le pareció tan inmenso el crimen que se rió y dijo que yo estaba loco. Que no se podía vivir sin música, y yo que sí, y que además eso no era música. Para él era música "romántica", y yo pensé: a este paso, si eso es romántico, nos va a resultar romántico Schönberg (19).

The exchange is a piece in a thematic thread that runs throughout the interactions between Fernando and Alexis. In their first sexual encounter, Fernando carves out a place of cultural privilege for himself, taking the philosophical and aesthetic high-ground, when he explains to Alexis, “Mira Alexis, tú tienes una ventaja sobre mí y es que eres joven y yo ya me voy a morir, pero desgraciadamente para ti nunca vivirás la felicidad que yo he vivido. La felicidad no puede existir en este mundo tuyo de televisores y casetes y punkeros y rockeros y partidos de fútbol” (15). Any tension that Fernando feels in the presence of a cultural order that he cannot quantify, or that challenges his utility as an aesthetic modernist, the *logos* in Medellín, is quickly explained away with sweeping disdain. And when really pushed, Fernando explodes the mediated order, in the first scene, actually physically destroying the cassette player. As the aesthetic distance between the two registers, high and low, transcendental and mediated, grammarian and *sicario*, closes, the grammatical master can only respond with violence.

Yet there are two moments in the novel that complicate the relationship between the aesthetic registers that Fernando and Alexis represent. The aesthetic border between the two becomes blurred, yet no less violent, when in one scene Fernando threatens to kill himself, and in another, a conflict with a taxi driver leads to an impromptu assassination. In the first instance, Fernando claims that he is going to attempt suicide

and asks Alexis for his revolver. Fernando describes Alexis's response, "Alexis sabe que no bromeo, su perspicacia lo siente. Corrió al revólver y para que no me quedara una sola bala se las vació al televisor, lo único que encontró..." (42). The scene is quickly followed by an altercation, in which Alexis kills a taxi driver who refuses to turn down his radio, presumably, though not specified, on Fernando's behalf. Fernando, who has simply insisted on getting out of the taxi, describes his shock at Alexis's response:

Y [el taxista] arrancó: arrancó casi sin que tocáramos el piso, haciendo rechinar las llantas. De los mencionados hijueputas, yo me bajé humildemente por la derecha y Alexis por la izquierda: por la izquierda, por su occipital o huesito posterior, trasero, le entró el certero tiro al ofuscado, al cerebro, y le apagó la ofuscación. Ya no tuvo que ver más con pasajeros impertinentes el taxista, se licenció de trabajar, lo licenció la Muerte: la Muerte, la justiciera, la mejor patrona, lo jubiló (56).

As the aesthetic distance between the two registers that Fernando and Alexis represent narrows, the level of violence in which the scenes result escalates. In what comes close to a role reversal, Fernando is shocked by the level at which Alexis responds to situations involving popular culture. In the first example, he unloads a revolver on a television, dramatically topping Fernando's earlier insistence on throwing Alexis's cassette player from his balcony, and in the second case, he actually takes a fellow citizen's life, when the taxi driver insists on not turning down his radio. The technological artifacts are the constant in the three scenes: the cassette player, the television, and the radio represent the media that stand between Alexis and Fernando. Yet as Fernando attempts to letter Alexis, to bring him into his world of high registers

and waspish responses to the background noise of mediated culture, Alexis does not become a functioning lettered citizen, himself, but is derailed affectively and responds with increasing violence. In the scenes, we read the failed application of the letter, or the universal *logos*, to the particular body in miniature. Fernando as representative of the lettered idyll watches on as the *lettered city* fails before his eyes, even going so far as to question to what extent he is implicated in the murder of the taxi driver. How did Alexis get it so wrong, he wonders? Fernando is bewildered as he is forced to watch on as Alexis reproduces his own violence. Alexis takes the epistemic violence implied in the application of the universal *logos* to the Colombian body and reproduces it physically. He follows the logic purported by Fernando as representative of the aesthetic idyll, and plays it out literally. And as it is reproduced in front of him, even Fernando is shocked, confessing, shortly after Alexis unceremoniously murders the taxi driver, “Tenemos los ojos cansados de tanto ver, y los oídos de tanto oír, y el corazón de tanto odiar” (61).

If the logic of the Colombian regime of letters looks bad in the *La virgen de los sicarios*, the relationship between Fernando and Alexis does just as much to highlight the discourse of the disposable body. Through Fernando’s dalliances with the sicarios, we observe the reproduction of both stages of governmental responses, at first the failure of the *lettered city* to successfully evoke a functioning urban citizen and, post-decline and fall of the *lettered city*, the discourses of the “desechable” urban subject. Life among the

marginal classes in the novel is virtually valued at null. The systemic governmental and economic problems that lead to the foundation of the *sicario* and hitman for hire trade come to the surface. And both Alexis and Wilmar reproduce the logic with a natural air, reminiscent of the interviewees of *No nacimos pa' semilla*. We witness the natural political economy of the *sicario* subjectivity and the sociocultural affects of marginality in eighties and nineties Colombia. And the *sicario* is not without a code, perverse as it may seem. Nor does he (or she) lack a symbolic hierarchy – conspicuous consumption plays largely in the way that the *sicario* places himself (or herself) in the visual urban order. It is here that Vallejo alludes to the market's influence on popular culture. While, the genre of the *novela urbana* tends to challenge the primacy of the high aesthetic registers that lend the *lettered city* its primacy, the *sicario's* high regard for free market goods also casts the mediated culture, in the light of a neoliberal order, in a negative light. As the novel progresses, and most noticeably after Wilmar replaces Alexis as Fernando's lover, the thematic tendencies move away from the relationship between the high grammarian and the mediated citizen and toward the shifting valuations of human life and the body as commodity, underpinned by the *sicario* who, according to the logic of the text, is both human being and commodity, himself – assigned only temporary value, the *sicario* is hired and valued within the logic of the free market and then, once used, goes back to being considered disposable in the eyes of the government and the majority of Colombian society.

There are two very telling moments in the novel that reveal to what extent the sicario internalizes a combination of market and governmentally endorsed “marginal equates disposable” discourses. One comes when Fernando and Alexis find a fatally injured street dog, and the other when Alexis informs Fernando that he has killed someone simply for his tennis shoes – doubly implicating Fernando, Alexis’s killer, Wilmar, is later murdered because it is alleged that he has stolen someone’s tennis shoes. In the last moment that Fernando and Alexis spend together – in a dramatic accentuation of this pivotal moment, a fellow sicario kills Alexis from the back of a *moto* directly following the street dog tableaux – Fernando and Alexis are confronted with a philosophical problem that exposes their ideological differences. Fernando describes the wounded dog they find, “No va a poder volver a caminar – le dije a Alexis -. Si lo sacamos es para que sufra más. Hay que matarlo” (90). The scene hinges on the irony of Alexis’s response:

¿Cómo? – Disparándole. El perro me miraba implorante de esos ojos dulces, inocentes, me acompañará mientras viva, hasta el supremo instante en que la Muerte, compasiva, decida borrarla. – Yo no soy capaz de matarlo – me dijo Alexis. – Tienes que ser – le dije. – No soy – repitió. Entonces le saqué el revólver del cinto, puse el cañón contra el pecho del perro y jalé el gatillo. La detonación sonó sorda, amortiguada por el cuerpo del animal, cuya almita limpia y pura se fue elevando, elevando rumbo al cielo de los perros que es al que no entraré yo porque soy parte de la porquería humana (90).

The scene is central to the depiction of the relationship between the aesthetic government and the disposable body. It is a scene in which the exclusionist grammarian

and the disposable body have to look in the mirror and to a large extent reverse roles. Both come to terms with the fact that they value the life of a dog more than members the “porquería humana”. Alexis, who at this point has killed without hesitation or regret, knows instantly that he is not capable of bringing himself to kill a dog. The street dog falls out of the governments lettering and developmentalist projects and therefore falls out of both character’s cognitive schema. The dog is not so much unlettered as it is unweighted by the State. It is not assigned a positive or negative value; it is neither lettered nor unlettered, neither of social import nor disposable. Alexis values the dog more than his peers, because that is the discursive tendency that he has internalized. He treats the dog with real human sentiment, with pre-governmentally coded affect. He sees the dog, simply, as an object in nature that resists any symbolic doctrine. Yet he views himself, fellow sicarios, and the taxi driver that he kills just pages earlier through the prism of governmental discourses that mark the unlettered body as disposable. Following the scene, Fernando, himself, concludes “...el Estado en Colombia es el primer delincuente” (98).

The market and Colombia’s entrance into economic globalization is not spared Fernando’s ire, and through Alexis we witness a foundational problem for the average urban citizen in eighties and nineties Colombia: on one side there is a free market system to which subjects like the *sicario* gain access through illicit infrastructure built up around the narco industry, leading to its own devaluation of human life and the overvaluation

of commodities, and on the other there is a State that has, since its inception, used the negative example of unlettered and disposable body to grant itself authority and primacy. Fernando addresses the reader, “¿Cómo puede matar uno o hacerse matar por unos tenis? preguntará usted que es extranjero. Mon cher ami, no es por los tenis. Es por un principio de Justicia en el que todos creemos” (68). Fernando’s statement sardonically alludes to the justice of the market and the State, while at the same time pointing to the tension between the local and the global. He addresses the reader, presumably a foreigner according to the way he structures his statement, as if he is our guide, there to highlight how wrong our own forms of justice have gone in his home country. He points to the skewed value system at play among Colombia’s urban populations and implies that at the edge of economic and aesthetic modernity, universal systems, be they rooted in a Kantian aesthetic logos that will develop into civilized lettered polis or in a liberal economic model that will lead to wildly destabilized economy and a global narcotics industry not recognized by universal institutions despite its remarkable sophistication as a global industry, need to be rethought. And as much as Fernando makes off the cuff remarks about the fault of Colombia’s impoverished subjectivities, he is appalled by both the market and the government’s failure to treat their subjects more humanely. He comes to the conclusion along with the reader that if the urban subject is not a consumer (economic citizen) or a lettered, productive subject (political citizen), then, according to the dominating symbolic orders of urban Colombia,



they are as valuable as cadavers as they are as living humans. And, Fernando, for all of his superficial anger, is just as shocked about this as anyone.

While Fernando's relationship with the *sicario* places him in a position of privilege, he never gains a sense of stability or social potency through time spent with Alexis and Wilmar. While he values their love in a perverse way, every time he attempts to assert his authority or control over the *sicario*, he is surprised by either the way that they culturally slip out of his control or the extremes of their alternative social order. And beyond the allusions to the pederastic tradition in the Catholic Church, Fernando's amorous connection to the *sicario* is more complex than the visceral reaction it evokes. For Hermann Herlinghuas, Fernando's relation to the *sicario* has five facets, and only one of them shows signs of erotic tendencies. For Herlinghaus, in Fernando we read resonances of the paternal figure, of the agent that marks the tension between the global and the local, of Fernando as a witness to the violence that surrounds the *sicario*, of the grammatical standard that clashes with colloquial, mediated culture and of the contrast between stable male and female gender roles.<sup>29</sup> But only when Fernando stands in as the paternal figure of the *sicario* do we read any erotic tension, in the vein of Fernando as simultaneous totem and taboo, that is of both archetype and one that undermines connotatively accepted norms. Fernando attempts to assert his authority as

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<sup>29</sup> This is an extrapolation on Hermann Herlinghaus's reading from his article: Herlinghaus, Hermann. "La Construcción Del Nexo De Violencia Y Culpa En La Novela La Virgen De Los Sicarios." *Nomadas* 25 (2006).

the new order, that which replaces the absence of State and market, and he draws the *sicario's* libidinal drive, which at once adheres to Fernando's order and constantly challenges it. This paternal eros has religious undercurrents that play off the double "padre" as father – any stabilizing "padres" are noticeably absent from the sicarios' lives in the novel, with Fernando even going so far as to try to track down Alexis's father after he is killed, with no success: a moment that accentuates the absence of other citizen-evoking institutional frameworks – and "padre" as priest.<sup>30</sup> For Herlinghaus, there is something eerily shepherd-like and self affirming in Fernando's preoccupation with giving form to the social relations of Alexis and Wilmar: "Mientras Vallejo esconde la historia de vida del sujeto autobiográfico, releva la autoría auto-consciente, capaz de conocer y, por lo tanto, de dar forma en el discurso, al más alto resultado del sí mismo. Una misión superior es más importante que una memoria imperfecta. Fernando ha decidido actuar como un misionero..." (189). Fernando is the only paternal entity that assigns the *sicario* anything more than temporary value; yet he does so under the terms of perversion. He attempts to stabilize memory and to act as a witness, a meaningful listener, yet he cannot show the necessary dispassion to be an external barer of justice. And he attempts to give order to the sicarios' shifting symbolic world but only realizes that the *logos* that he represents does not gain traction in the *sicario's* world.

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<sup>30</sup> In all of Vallejo's work, Fernando also constantly looks beyond his actual father and only truly values the familial matriarch of his "abuela".

Fernando brings to the surface the failure of the Colombian market, State, and church to evoke a functioning urban citizenry. And as he stands in for the regime of letters, neoliberal economic policies, and a shepherding, yet pederastic, “padre”, he turns the critique in on himself. He is not so much a right-wing, post-globalized *costumbrista* as he is a failed shepherd in need of a change of tack. *La virgen de los sicarios* shifts away from the tendency in the Colombian urban novel to use the somatic metaphor of an already mutilated body, and in Vallejo’s rendering, we actually watch the body atrophy before our eyes. If there is a shocking cadaver at the start of the novel, it comes in the form of the scar tissue of failed institutions. The metaphor of society as soma is complicated when the body acts out the crime scene that leads to Fernando’s social surroundings. When he is shocked by the state of his home city after a sojourn abroad, he takes on all of the characteristics of Colombia’s governing bodies and reenacts their social relations with the *sicario*, a transmodern subjectivity born out of the overlapping and largely conflicting sociopolitical discourses in twentieth century Colombia. Fernando’s attempt to assign the *sicario* value, to socially save him, to use the religious terminology that acts as an undercurrent throughout the novel, or to meaningfully letter his body, unsurprisingly fails. Fernando as much as anyone realizes by the end of the novel that the *sicario* is a subject that only resonates temporarily, that he is only of value when he is assigned a place in the political economy of narcocartel-run urban Colombia. Like in Salazar’s *No nacimos pa’ semilla*, *La virgen de los sicarios* does

not lead us to question why the young boys have turned to the *sicariato* in the first place; that, if anything, is clear. We realize that they are institutionally orphaned. They are unlettered and disposable according to the discourses of market and state and only find temporary stability and meaningful intersocial relations through the anomic culture that they find in an appendage of the drug trade. And as Fernando acts out the double movements of the social bodies that have historically excluded them as much as embraced them, we look on as the soma of both *sicario* and citizen tragically come apart.

Always playing on the tension between global and local epistemologies, Vallejo uses at once nationally resonant and universally poignant philosophies to frame *La virgen de los sicarios*. He uses a double time to compare ideas of progress and cyclical stagnation. When Fernando unknowingly replaces Alexis with his killer, Wilmar, we read an obvious metaphor of cyclical violence that, whether Vallejo would admit it or not, resonates in the key of (García Marquez's) Buendía. Yet the cyclical nature of two competing bodies is stripped of its ideological pretense and is depicted simply as two young subjects that act out of basic survival. When Wilmar kills Alexis and is eventually killed himself, Vallejo carries the subject of the *sicario*, and Colombia in microform, to its logical end. But Vallejo also alludes to a linear time. He uses the metaphor of the river to both undergird the theme of Heraclitus's *logos* and to allude to the importance of the river in the Colombian archive. The river, through which time flows, in which cadavers memorialize the extremities of the *Violencia*, where Eustasio Rivera's party travels before

being swallowed by wilderness, returns to the polis in *La virgen de los sicarios*, where it overflows and reminds us of the failure of the *lettered city* to conquer the feral wilderness used as the barbaric negative in the evocation of the lettered citizen. The river of time and the progressive path of a singular stream do not flow from the European “huerta” into Colombia, nor do they represent a path of development. On the contrary, Vallejo’s treatment of this very Colombian and international theme approaches the river as a poetic symbol of abandonment. Vallejo may allude to an end to a symbolic stream of violence when he refuses to avenge both Alex and Wilmar’s respective deaths, but he also wants the reader to witness the ways in which aesthetic, religious, and market flows do not end in a rational, idyllic tributary but overflow into excess, unquiet, and violence, as the river of time is replaced by a vexed Fernando pleading with an unknown interlocutor to stem the flow of Colombian violence:

Mientras en las comunas seguía lloviendo y sus calles, ríos de sangre, seguían bajando con sus aguas de diluvio a teñir de rojo el resumidero de todo nuestros males, la laguna azul, en mi desierto apartamento sin muebles y sin alma, solo me estaba muriendo, rogándoles a los de la policlínica que le cosieran, como pudieran, aunque fuera con hilo corriente, a mi pobre Colombia el corazón (104).

## 2.6 Conclusion

When the Colombian state of exception based in an aesthetic modernism that is rooted in European affective registers at the end of the nineteenth century evolves into a

mediated polis where new literary tendencies challenge the primacy of the lettered idyll, the *lettered city* begins to reveal its inherent theoretical flaws. In the roughly sixty years that separate the Colombian regime of letters, in its most potent form under the presidency of Antonio Caro, and the birth of the *Novela de la Violencia* as a genre, we observe a shift away from a literary aesthetics that bolsters the authority of a privileged Colombian class into a form that gives archival representation to the novel subjectivities that follow mass migration to the city during the first half of the twentieth century and works through the collective trauma that failing urban, political, and physical infrastructure cause during the same period. As the “barbarian” other, used to prop up civilization and barbarism paradigms, moves to the city, urban aesthetic systems are forced to come to terms with a morphing urban visual economy that undoes the fabric of an aesthetics of privileged distancing.

The *Novela de la Violencia* evolves into the multiple resonances of the contemporary Colombian Urban Novel (the *novela urbana*), with subcategories in the Colombian *noir* novel, the *narconovela* and a gritty urban realism that comes in the form of both cinema and prose. And as aesthetic registers shift and the *lettered city* matures into what I have referred to as the “mediated city”, governmental discourses move away from a semantics of the “lettered” and “unlettered” citizen to that of the “meaningful” and “disposable” body. The change in dominant discourses signals a movement from an idyll based in an aesthetic state to that of a globalized economy, displacing subjects

that do not fit into either schema at first as “unlettered”, non-aesthetic citizens, and then as “useless”, non-consuming citizens. While the *Novela de la Violencia* works through the sociopolitical issues surrounding the crises of the urban and unlettered body, the *novela urbana* works toward a representation of the “cuerpo desechable”.

The most interesting subjectivity born out of the political economy of contemporary Colombia is the *sicario*, a telling icon that, as Salazar argues, is a concise representative of the conflicting social political discourses of the Colombian State, the Catholic Church, and liberal economic flows. Yet, the *sicario* has also proved to be a difficult and highly controversial subject to represent in literary terms, with the two most ambitious attempts coming in Salazar’s *No nacimos pa’ semilla* and Vallejo’s *La virgen de los sicarios*. While both texts come together in many ways and blur the boundaries between testimony, political treatise, and novel, the two treatments of the *sicario* pull from wildly differing approaches, one based in a documentary-style realism and the other in a hyperrealist poetics that almost fantastically attempts to collapse Colombia’s entire history into the relationship between its narrator, Fernando, and his two sicario lovers, Alexia and Wilmar. The intertextual resonances and the specters of Colombia’s aesthetic past that come together in Fernando’s relationship with the *sicario* and the late twentieth century Medellín that acts as their stage make *La virgen de los sicarios* the most poignant representation of the crises of the aesthetic and economic Colombian state and their relationship to the unlettered and disposable body. And

through the relationship between Fernando and the *sicario*, together representatives of the failure of the civilized polis to conquer the feral Latin American landscape, civilization and barbarism standing face to face, Vallejo invites us to watch on, as the *lettered city* comes apart on the page.



## Chapter Three

### The Regional: The Generation of '72 and the Forced Latin American Cosmopolitan

“Al decir “internacionalización” no me refiero a la nueva avidez de las editoriales; ni a los diversos premios millonarios; ni a la cantidad de traducciones por casas importantes de París, Milán y Nueva York; ni al gusto por el potin literario que ahora interesa a un público de proporciones insospechadas hace una década; ni a las revistas y películas y agentes literarios de todas las capitales que no esconden su interés; ni a las innumerables tesis de doctorado en cientos de universidades yanquis de que están siendo objeto los narradores de Hispanoamérica, cuando antes era necesario ser por lo menos nombre de calle antes de que esto sucediera. Aunque nadie sabe qué vino primero, el huevo o la gallina, a mí me parece que todas estas cosas positivas y estimulantes en un sentido más bien superficial – y siempre de dimensiones muchísimo menores a las creadas por la leyenda paranoica –, han sido consecuencia de, y no causa de, la internacionalización de la novela hispanoamericana” (José Donoso taken from *Historia personal del Boom*, 17).

“Qué tienen en común, entonces? Quizás una relación con el Boom nada traumática, casi diríamos natural: todos admiran a García Marquez y a Cortázar y, en bandos antagónicos, a Vargas Llosa o a Fuentes, pero del mismo modo en que se rinden ante escritores de otras lenguas, Sebald o McEwan, Lobo Antunes o Tabucchi; ninguno siente la obligación de medirse con sus padres y abuelos latinoamericanos, o al menos no sólo con ellos; ninguno se asume ligado a una literatura nacional – Fresán define: mi patria es mi biblioteca – y ninguno cree que un escritor latinoamericano debe parecer, ya, latinoamericano” (Jorge Volpi on “los escritores jóvenes” taken from page 156 of *El insomnio de Bolívar*).

The two quotes above are taken from personal accounts of what are typically viewed, according to standard canon narration, as peaks in Latin American narrative's international history. In their testimonies at large, both Donoso and Volpi gravitate between cynicism and sincerity. Both critique the idea of Latin American generational literature and the framework's absurdity when placed under the microscope of an in-depth study, and both, also, acknowledge their vested interest in precisely those

formations. Due largely to international reading trends and geopolitics, both Donoso and Volpi are members of generations that are part and parcel with literary cosmopolitanism and socioeconomic globalization. And both represent the tension between a regional intellectual corpus and the larger cultural world.

In a striking parallel, given the roughly forty years that separate the two generational testimonies - Donoso's *Historia personal del boom* was published in 1972 and Volpi's *El insomnio de Bolívar* in 2010 - both writers can pin point the exact moment in which their generations took shape. Neither Donoso nor Volpi stop questioning the validity or the blurred borders of their movements, yet Donoso clearly marks a meeting among Latin American "regional authors" at the Universidad de Concepción, Chile in 1962 as the hallmark moment in which the *Boom* became self-aware and intent on "la internacionalización de la novela hispanoamericana" (24). Donoso recalls that the impetus among the then young authors had as much to do with the desire to read one another, to find each others' novels on the shelves of their local bookshops, as it did with the marketing of themselves in Europe or North America.

But other international forces were at play. In Madrid and Barcelona, editors dreamt up prizes that would help market a Latin American literature in order to fill a cultural void left in Spain during the Franco regime (more on this in Chapter 3), and, in the midst of the Cold War, North American philanthropic institutions, namely the Rockefeller Federation, the Center for Inter-American Relations, and the American

Association of University Presses, would begin a soft-power campaign in a battle for hearts and minds: a showing of “cultural good will”, in Deborah Cohn’s terms, that would facilitate the inter-American exchange of literary icons and the opening of new reader markets to Latin American authors. Latin American literature, as a regional collective, was in the process of going global.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to triage the overwhelming amount of criticism and interpretation that has been dedicated to the writers associated with the *Boom*. Persuasive arguments have been made alternately that the *Boom* fortified national and regional identities – Roberto Gonzalez Echevarría’s *Myth and Archive*, for instance – and/or that it helped usher in aesthetic globalization; occasionally, it is paradoxically argued that both of these arguments are true at once –Brett Levinson claims, for example, “specifically Boom narratives played a more important role both in state formation and in the globalization processes that go hand and hand with the state’s fall into the private sphere, that is, with neoliberalism” (3). The prevailing thesis, agreed upon by all critics, however, is that the *Boom* consolidated an unprecedented regional literary identity in Latin America that paralleled and, in the light of recent criticism, appears to have piggybacked off of globalizing trends. It benefited from Cold War politics and early globalizing economic projects as much as the cultural revolutions of the time, in a climate in which the majority of canonical writers traveled abroad willingly – Cortázar, Fuentes, Vargas Llosa – rather than out of political exile.

In terms of post-*Boom* literature, the parallels between these writers’ experiences and those of the generation of “young writers” that Volpi represents – writers born after

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<sup>1</sup> In her article, “A Tale of Two Translation Programs: Politics, the Market, and Rockefeller Funding for Latin American Literature in the United States During the 1960s and 1970s.” *Latin American Research Review* 41.2 (2006): 139-64, Deborah Cohn goes into detail about the rise of Area Studies and its philanthropic outposts in the United States and the implications that this had for *Boom* literature.

1960 – pile up. Similar to Donoso’s clear description of gatherings, occasionally in Spain occasionally in Latin America, that acted as beginning, turning, and end points for the *Boom*, Volpi discusses three events that consolidated an identity of “la nueva literatura Latinoamericana”. These events, that took place over the course a decade, caused a group of writers and their formal tendencies to begin to come into focus; in particular: a meeting at the Casa de América in Madrid in 1999 – by Volpi’s own admission a roundly unfruitful meeting –, a Seix-Barral sponsored congregation of ten young writers plus Roberto Bolaño and Guillermo Cabrera Infante in Sevilla in 2003, whose correspondence was later published as a rough guide to “new Latin American Literature”, entitled *Palabra de América* in 2004, and *Bogotá 39* in 2007, an event co-sponsored by the Hay Festival and the Colombian embassy that brought together thirty-nine writers under the age of forty, all three of which, in Volpi’s terms were designed to allow these writers to “...reflexionar sobre las características propias de la nueva literatura latinoamericana, aquellas que la separan del *Boom* y sus epígonos y de los escritores de cualquier otra región” (153).

The similarities continue. Both Donoso and Volpi attest to the lack of literary parents their generations experience, which Donoso claims, “Me parece que nada ha enriquecido tanto a mi generación como esta falta de padres literarios propios. Nos dio una gran libertad, y en muchos sentidos el vacío [...] fue lo que permitió la internacionalización de la novela hispanoamericana”, is a positive and liberating characteristic, and for Volpi, according to this chapter’s epigraph, is a globalized given in which he and his fellow generation-X writers revel (24). Politically speaking, the *Boom* carved out a niche during a three-fold cultural investment produced during the Cold War: the soft-power policies of North American institutions, similar tactics by Cuba through the Casa de las Américas, and the burgeoning interest in Latin American

writers by Spanish publishing houses, while Volpi's "young writers" navigated the late development of Washington Consensus Latin America without the responsibility of witnessing the trauma that its incipient phases caused intellectual communities in the Americas. As was the case with the *Boom* writers, if the young generation of writers lives abroad today, it is to be close to publishing houses in Barcelona, not due to political or economic exile, even by the loosest of definitions. The *McOndo* and *Crack* writers in particular boast their interest in writing about *global* matters and gravitate away from Latin American themes. *Boom* writers had already made their name by the time a wave of dictatorships took hold in Latin America, and the C.I.A. became complicit with the *Operación Condor*, and younger writers were teenagers, hardly politically conscious, when the same dictatorships came to an end. With the exception of the *novelas de la dictadura* that form part of the late-*Boom* corpus in texts such as Augusto Roa Bastos' *Yo el supremo* (1974), Elvira Orphée's *La última conquista de El Ángel* (1977), or Gabriel García Márquez's *El otoño del patriarca* (1975) and the occasional use of the dictatorships on the wane as a backdrop to Bildungsroman or cyberpunk novels, such as in Alberto Fuguet's *Mala onda* (1991) or Edmundo Paz Soldán's *El delirio de Turing* (2003), a realist rendering of globalization's dark side in the last third of the twentieth century is notably absent from either group. A realist version of life in times of terror, shock economics, and forced-exile is simply not accounted for by either generation. Lived experience obviously has a lot to do with this. When Julio Cortázar moves to Europe during the *Rayuela* years, it is under strikingly different terms than when, two decades later, Cristina Peri Rossi will follow suit. When José Donoso and Mario Vargas Llosa go to Princeton it is with a different degree of necessity than when Ricardo Piglia does the same. And when Ariel Dorfman writes *Konfidenz* (2002), a novel set in World War II Paris, fragility and darkness fill the narrative in a way that does not convey in Volpi's

attempt at the same genre and setting in *En busca de Klingsor* (1999). There is a sharp contrast between the literature produced in times of globalization and that which stems from the duress of acquiesced global citizenship experienced by a group that deals with the same socioeconomic forces from a contrasting perspective.

In this chapter I explore a generation of writers that falls between the *Boom* and “la nueva narrativa”, a group that is bookended by the publishing darlings brought to life in Donoso and Volpi’s respective testimonies. This group, which I refer to as the Generation of ‘72 consists of writers and intellectuals that offer a markedly different relationship between the Latin American sociocultural regional and globalization than that represented by the generations on either side of them.

The term “Generation of ‘72” is an extrapolation from the framework that Cedomil Goic created in his structuralist reading of the Latin American novel in his sweeping analysis of the evolution of Hispanic letters, *Mitos degradados* (1992).<sup>2</sup> In his formal reading, Goic analyzes literary trends and peaks in Latin American narrative by dividing writers and intellectuals into groups based on the year in which they were born. A group, for Goic, spans fifteen years, and their name is based on the year twenty-three years after the youngest member of a generation was born, presumably around the time that the generation’s writers would become intellectually and artistically conscious. Within the “Novela Contemporánea” of the twentieth century, for example, the “Generación de 1927” consists of writers born between 1890 and 1904, such as the *Boom* predecessors in which, “Eduardo Mallea, Miguel Angel Asturias, Leopoldo Marechal, Roberto Arlt, Borges, Augustín Yáñez, Carpentier, Manuel Rojas, Enrique Amorín son

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<sup>2</sup> While Goic originally lays out this framework in *Historia de la novela Hispanoamericana* (1972), he updates the categories for *Mitos degradados* (1992).

los destacados representantes..." (231). Following are the two generational tiers of the *Boom*, the first, the "Generación de 1942", born between 1905 and 1919 consisting of Cortázar, Onetti, Droguett, Bombal, Arguedas, Roa Bastos, and Rulfo, and the second, "Generación de 1957" whose members include, García Márquez, Donoso, Fuentes, and Julio Ramón Ribeyro". While unarguably rigid, Goic's framework is useful in exploring grouped Latin American literary trends through the collective response to institutional and historical pressures that effect intellectuals as they mature. Goic, for example, separates Cortázar, Onetti, and Bombal from García Marquez and Fuentes, a rare critical division. He considers the urban narratives and "neorealista" tendencies that exhibit a "realismo tradicional" and a "polémico nacionalismo literario" of the former to contrast with the "irrealismo" of the latter that "se distingue por su renovada conciencia de la autonomía de la obra literaria y de la especificidad de la literatura", and whose "mundo destaca por la radicalización de esa autonomía por el distanciamiento que lo extraño, fantástico o grotesco, proporciona al mundo narrativo" (236).

Goic's last generation is the "Generación de 1972", whose writers were born between 1935 and 1949. While he offers early candidates for his "Novissimi Narradores" – Vargas Llosa, Severo Sarduy, Reinaldo Arenas and Alfredo Bryce Echenique –judging by the one brief paragraph that he dedicates to this generation, it was too early to give the group a fleshed out reading or to successfully indicate what authors would leave their mark on the region or the world, when Goic wrote *Mitos degradados*. And the formal characteristics that he uses to classify are not as developed as they could be. Neither entirely off the mark, nor fully descriptive of the "Generación de 1972", he writes that their "disposición narrativa envuelve dos términos contrapuestos: uno de rígida y simétrica construcción, con otro de fluidez y movilidad en el montaje de

tiempos y espacios diversos”, and that they, “ilustran sectores sociales y humanos en su variedad y complejidad con ambiciosa contemplación de totalidad” (238).

Goic’s preliminary understanding of post-*Boom* literature seems to affirm Donald Shaw’s in depth theorization of a similar generation and their return to a realism that ponders socio political totalities. For Shaw, whose post-*Boom* writers are typified by Antonio Skarmeta, Rosario Ferré, and Gustavo Sainz, there is a formal breach between Goic’s “irrealistas” and the “Generación de 1972” that has as much to do with the political reality of the time as any attempt to formally rebel against their predecessors. The “*Pinochetazo* in Chile”, as he puts it, along with the *Guerra Sucia* around the River Plate, the insurrections in Central America, the massacre at Tlateloco in 1968, and rising feminist discourses in Europe and the Americas, induced a break with both the glossy social distancing that had come to exemplify *Boom* literature and the stereotypical and voiceless female characters that had filled their pages.<sup>3</sup>

Idelber Avelar gets more specific about post-*Boom* writers, a generation that he covers in his texts *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999), when he describes a group confronted with the doubly arduous task of finding a formal voice in an editorial economy steeped in the style of the *Boom* giants on one front and that is faced with the political realities of the wave of dictatorships and

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<sup>3</sup> Two works serve for a thorough understanding of Donald Shaw’s theorization of post-*Boom* literature: Shaw, Donald. *The Post-Boom in Spanish American Fiction*. Saratoga Springs, NY: SUNY Press, 1998., and Shaw, Donald. *The Post-Boom and Spanish American Fiction*. Saratoga Springs, NY: SUNY Press, 1998.



economic shock treatment amidst which they come of age on the other. It is a generation that, for the first time in twentieth-century Latin America, experiences the roundly negative aspects of globalization and whose writers make less voluntary trips to the cosmopolitan center than enter into acquiesced global citizenship through political exile. The battles of writers that for Avelar include Ricardo Piglia, Diamela Eltit, Silviano Santiago, and Tununa Mercado are both formal and political. They seek a voice that will capture the violence experienced in the seventies and eighties and to find an “authentic listener”, as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub would put it, through literature. Though they refer to the Holocaust in particular, Felman and Laub’s analysis speaks to the artistic reality of this generation in the difficulty of locating memory and political experience in literature at a time in which cultural artifacts, themselves, are framed by sociocultural frame of violence, or when, “precisely, the phenomenon of violence and the phenomenon of culture come to clash – and yet to mingle...” (xiii).

More than a return to realism, the Generation of '72, as I will refer to them from now on, addresses a writing style that is caught between utopia, mourning, and melancholy. To abandon either mourning or melancholy too quickly would be to fail to achieve what Laub and Felman discuss in terms of “testimonial resolution”, or, as Avelar argues, to weigh the fact that the authoritarian regimes that act as the Generation of '72's political backdrop would also win out under the terms of a quick catharsis. On the one hand, the hapless voicelessness of mere melancholy fails to account for symbolic

restitution of the atrocities associated with the time – the Tlateloco massacre, the coup in Chile, and the *Guerra Sucia* in Argentina and Uruguay – and on the other hand, a quick cultural resolution would play into the logic of the substitutive market. Avelar argues:

Unlike the replacement of old by new commodities, the substitution proper to the work of mourning always includes the persistence of an unmoored, unresolved remainder, which is the very index of the interminability of mourning. [...] If the mourner does not achieve true introjection of the lost object, no healing of the loss will ever take effect without leaving behind an unassimilable residue, and mourning work will always preserve a dimension irreducible to the metaphorical operation proper to the market (7).

To write with allegory based in the sustained residue of melancholy marks a break from the *novela de la dictadura* that is more narrowly concerned with the apparatuses of power and the textual characterization of the cult of dictators on one generational side and the benefit of the literary navigation of the cosmopolitan marketplace from home on the other. The Generation of '72 stands between writers that fell into line with incipient Cold War programs and cultural globalization in a way that allowed them to benefit from the weight lent to them by cultural centers such as Paris. Subsequent generations, such as the *McOndo* and *Crack* who came of age after the return to democracy are unconcerned with the effect that neoliberal globalization has on memory, because the same market forces that erode the memory of authoritarian atrocities allow them, for the first time in Latin American history, to be cosmopolitan in the singular, universal sense, *from home*. Both fail to fully come to grips with the

traumatic and violent history that globalization's darker side implies. Generationally speaking, the responsibility of working through the coloniality side of the modernity/coloniality binary rests solely on the shoulders of the Generation of '72 who receive less subsidized translations, international literary prizes, and effortless international communication and travel, and more of the fulfillment of a Hesmiperic paranoia that views ideas and intellectualism as an enemy of democracy and liberty. It is not for nothing that John Beverley marks September 11, 1973 as the de facto end of the *Boom*.

Indeed, the Generation of '72 experiences a stark contrast in political realities with their predecessors: less the cultural good will associated with soft-power and more the harsh reality associated with global civil war. By the seventies, the international circulation of knowledge did not so much favor intellectuals and left-leaning writers and artists in Latin America as it did a technocratic elite with authoritarian tendencies. What went global was not literature and cultural artifacts so much as strategies associated with widespread oppression. Myriad quotes have come to light from Henry Kissinger that attest to the disposability of Latin American leftists, their inability to govern themselves, the C.I.A.'s waging of a "campaign of terror" in the sixties in Chile, half a decade before Allende was even elected, along with the clear contradictions of promoting stabilizing democracy through dictatorships. The United States Government's shift away from the attempt to win hearts and minds through cultural

exchange in Latin America can, perhaps, best be summed up by the point-blank vote of confidence that Kissinger gives Pinochet when he meets him at the Organization of American States General Assembly in 1976: "My evaluation is that you are a victim of all left-wing groups around the world and that your greatest sin was that you overthrew a government which was going communist" (56).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, contemporary scholarship on the Cold War in Latin America examines the transnational and globalized properties associated with authoritarian networks such as Operation Condor rather than on the basis of cultural exchange.<sup>5</sup> In the edited volume, *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (2008) Daniela Spenser discusses how globalization played to the favor of oligarchies and autocrats more than democracy promoting cultural institutions, writing in particular about the Argentine Junta's ability to export their tactics to outposts of leftist and right-wing conflict in the rest of Latin America:

In its crusade to transnationalize the dirty war, the Argentine military exported arms, counterinsurgency doctrine, and expertise in the practice of state terror. To advance its goals, the military counted on a well-constructed network of like-minded Latin American, North American and Asian anti-Communists, and also on conservative domestic civil society. In the process, the military established a wide international network, which included the sharing of logistical information and the ideas and techniques of counterinsurgency war, as well as an illegal trade in arms, drugs, and money laundering independent of the United States (385).

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<sup>4</sup> This exchange is taken from Gilbert Joseph and Daniela Spenser's *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (2008).

<sup>5</sup> Lois Hecht Oppenheim's *Politics in Chile: Democracy, Authoritarianism and the Search for Development* (1993) serves as a good source for details on the Chilean "campaign of terror" in the seventies.

With the River Plate area no longer serving as an exporter of an iconography of Latin American cosmopolitanism but as a source of tactics of oppression, and with Chile taking a rapid shift from being a country associated with internationally lauded idealist poets and committed writers to being a puppet government of the C.I.A., writers that come of age in the seventies in the Southern Cone, especially, offer a darkening of global and cosmopolitan themes in their work. It is no surprise, then, that the list of writers that I understand as the Generation of '72 is Southern Cone-heavy. The list includes, Ricardo Piglia, Tomás Eloy Martínez, Luisa Valenzuela, Ariel Dorfman, Osvaldo Soriano, Cristina Peri Rossi, and Fernando Vallejo. There are many other authors that I could include, of course, and one always runs a risk of leaving out integral members of any cultural movement or literary theme when creating such lists. More important than beginning or ending the Generation of '72 with these precise authors, however, is the way that I consider that they, in particular, treat the themes that I associate with a generation that marks a clear contrast in the relationship between Latin America as a regional imaginary and its place within global socioeconomic and aesthetic orders. Fernando Vallejo offers similar treatments of globalization and cosmopolitanism despite Colombia's geographical and political distance from the Southern Cone. In a sense, Vallejo's collection *El río del tiempo* embodies the characteristics of an uneasy cosmopolitanism that these authors collectively examine. It is worth noting that I

considered including Marta Traba, who would act as a link between the Southern Cone and Colombia, a writer whose work, as Geoffrey Kantaris argues, goes to great lengths to draw attention to the double vulnerability experienced by women in the public sphere under a dictatorship and in exile.<sup>6</sup> Yet, I found that these themes are already present in the works of Luisa Valenzuela and Cristina Peri Rossi, who also further extrapolate on global themes. I also failed to include Mario Vargas Llosa, who, having been born in 1936, would technically qualify, according to Goic's math. For the sake of this thesis, however, I have decided to treat Vargas Llosa as a late member of the *Boom* rather than a post-*Boom* writer, and find that his treatment of political themes would place him closer to the *novela de la dictadura*, an appendage of late *Boom* production, than the characteristics that I associate with the Generation of '72. I, also, include Tomás Eloy Martínez who was born five months before 1935. The point of this chapter is not to tie up a neat philological group but to examine the way that sociopolitical discourses and pressures that are part and parcel of late twentieth century globalism collectively impacted a group of writers that the seven authors I have chosen represent. My list is not meant to comprise a rigid grouping that follows a mathematical code but to examine common themes among the writers examined that will, I hope, both complicate and add

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<sup>6</sup> This is an argument that Geoffrey Kantaris develops, borrowing heavily from a Lacanian reading of the public sphere under dictatorships as the dominant symbolic order, in his book *The Subversive Psyche: Contemporary Women's Narrative from Argentina and Uruguay* (1996).

to current discussions of post-*Boom* literature and authors that are occasionally, and perhaps wrongly, associated with the *novela de la dictadura* and late-*Boom* writings.

Though I begin this chapter discussing the lack of international support and easily traceable philological framework that the Generation of '72 collectively experiences in comparison to the groups on either side of them, this is not to say that they have not experienced broad success. Ricardo Piglia's *Plata quemada* (1997) won the Premio Planeta de Novela in 1997 and was turned into an internationally lauded (Premio Goya) film by Marcelo Piñeyro in 2000. Fernando Vallejo won the Rómulo Gallegos Prize in 2003, and his *La virgen de los sicarios* (1994) was turned into a widely distributed film by Barbet Schroeder in 2000. And Ariel Dorfman's *Para leer al Pato Donald* (1972) sold over a million copies internationally, while *La muerte y la doncella* (1991), the most performed play in the world in 1992 and 1993, was turned into a film by Roman Polanski in 1994. Yet a look at the ways in which cosmopolitanism and international cultural flows are self-reflectively treated in the collective works of the Generation of '72 shows that success and globalism operate under different terms than they do for *Boom*, *McOndo*, and *Crack* writers. Culture, seen in the long view, itself, is approached warily and as an appendage of the flows of global capital and is cast in a harsh light that reflects a generation more scarred than celebrated by sociocultural globalization.

The Generation of '72 stands out from their predecessors and followers in many ways. They mark the first Latin American generation to experience widespread post-war economic globalization that will lead to a darkening of the hemispheric cultural good will that the *Boom* enjoys. They are the first generation to, en masse, consider popular culture to be a viable aesthetic register that can be used for the sake of resistance as much as a tool of coloniality. More so than any other generation they experience a rapid ideological ascension, following the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and the election of Salvador Allende in 1970, and collapse, following the coup in Chile in 1973 and the spread of dictatorships that will follow (and had already begun in Bolivia, Guatemala, and Brazil). They are presented with the task of mourning while questioning the very limits of a literature that undergoes a double affront through the strict control of symbolic systems by authoritarian regimes and by the influx of new cultural referents that the abrupt liberalization of Latin American economies causes. They struggle to find and maintain a literary identity in the wake of the *Boom* writers and publishing houses' expectation of them to reproduce *realismo mágico*, on one hand, and to maintain regional and national identities while in exile, or to perform the regional while increasingly becoming global citizens, on the other. And beyond Latin American precedent, they are forced to express the exposure and fragility of a life in exile while their literary vocabulary experiences the turbulence of exile itself. In short, the Generation of '72



collectively negotiates tension between the regional and the global in a way that no other twentieth century cultural movement is forced to do so in Latin America.

In what follows, I analyze the ways in which these points of tension play out in the works of the writers that make up the Generation of '72. While no author alone embodies the characteristics that I associate with the Generation of '72, I have chosen to break the group down into pairs, in order to analyze their characteristics through close readings of each member's seminal works. In the first section, I look at how national and regional iconographies, affectations, and performative gestures are reevaluated as the *Guerra Sucia* simultaneously breaks down the borders of the State and attempts to reconstitute the history of the Nation in Uruguay and Argentina. In particular, I analyze how Osvaldo Soriano resituates the market-based logic of the governing oligarchy in the Argentine eighties in terms of a heist – interestingly a theme that reappears in Piglia's *Plata quemada* (2000) and Fabián Bielinsky's film, *Nueve reinas* (2000)– and, in the process, dislocates an Argentine national iconography by placing it in an *unheimlich* void that resonate as absurd more than stabilizing in *Una sombra ya pronto serás*. Complementing Soriano's local treatment of a shifting affective national and regional register, I examine how Cristina Peri Rossi plays off of a similar resituating of local affect in the global economy, when she takes her characters to Europe, where they lose their sense of selves and are forced to reimagine their own identity and relationship to others under the terms of the logic of globalization and their host countries expectations of them as Latin

Americans in her short stories “Una pasión prohibida” and “El viaje”. In the second section, I give a close reading to Ariel Dorfman and Luisa Valenzuela’s depiction of the feeling out of the new rules to history, remembering, and the role the literature will play in both during and after dictatorships. I examine, in particular, Dorfman’s *La muerte y la doncella* and Luisa Valenzuela’s short stories “Aquí pasan cosas raras” and “Los censores”. In the third section, I analyze the literary attempt to come to terms with the rapid decline of leftist idealism and the muddled plurality of discourses in Latin America in the seventies and eighties in the works of Ricardo Piglia and Tomás Eloy Martínez. Both authors notably tend toward an urban narrative that weighs lived urban experience, largely in Buenos Aires, and local historical narratives against an influx of global capital and the sociocultural expectations that come with it. In particular I look at Piglia’s celebrated *La ciudad ausente* and Tomás Eloy Martínez’s *El cantor de tango* to show how both writers comment on the task of the writing intellectual to wade through a multitude of perspectives in order to reconstitute broken cultural and historical threads. And in the fourth section, I analyze how all of these themes appear in Fernando Vallejo’s five novel collection *El río del tiempo*, a collection in which the narrator travels to European and North American centers of cultural and economic capital in order to allegorically deconstruct the clashes between the local and the global in his home country, Colombia, by going to the source of the dominant institutional discourses that clash with his urban settings when he travels to Rome, Paris, and New York City. By

hitting the road, so to speak, Vallejo, at once, simulates the peripatetic nature of his generation and retraces the discourses that dominate globalized Colombia and Latin America to their point of enunciation in an obsessive and exhaustive study of what it means to be an intentionally paradoxical global, Latin American citizen.

The Generation of '72, I argue, challenges notions of the idyllic, modern citizen. It is a generation that witnesses a rapid situational shift away from a harmonious relationship between aesthetics and politics and equates universal aesthetic modernism and political modernity not with a harmonious convergence in which the citizen is forged but with the torture, exile and death. These political regimes have their own aesthetic and political implications. In Chile, it is the *aesthetic* implication that Allende's government will careen toward chaos, breaking with the order that a technocratic elite will discursively use to prop up its neoliberal policies.<sup>7</sup> Colombian governing elites use similar tactics, beginning as early as the nineteenth century and developing into a contemporary semantics of cleanliness versus squalor. And in Argentina aesthetics have always been invoked in order to philosophically frame violent political projects, including Sarmiento's use of a civilizing hierarchy in which French and English affectations anchor his arguments.

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<sup>7</sup> In Chile, the Catholic Church's tendency to side with progressive and socially inclusive governmental policies in the second half of the twentieth century caused liberal economists and the technocratic elite to use the discourse of chaos and order as a way to frame their policies for a popular audience. For more, see Hojman, David E. *Neoliberalism with a Human Face?* Liverpool, England: University of Liverpool Press, 1995.

The Generation of '72's dissatisfaction with the relationship between aesthetics and political projects leads to a literature that calls into question Friedrich Schiller's notion of the aesthetic citizen. For Schiller, a fundamental theorist of universal modernism, political modernity consists of a sociopolitical framework in which artistic expression and aesthetic experience evokes an ideal self in each individual, leading to a collective harmony:

Every individual man, it may be said, carries in disposition and determination a pure ideal man within himself, with whose unalterable unity it is the great task of his existence, throughout all his vicissitudes, to harmonize. This pure human being, who may be recognized more or less distinctly in every person, is represented by the *State*, the objective and, so to say, canonical for in which the diversity of persons endeavours to unite itself. But two different ways can be thought of, in which Man in time can be made to coincide with Man in idea, and consequently as many in which the State can affirm itself in individuals: either by the pure man suppressing the empirical – the State abrogating the individual – or by the individual *becoming* State—temporal Man being raised to the dignity of ideal Man (31).<sup>8</sup>

Far from fostering a collective will in the State, aesthetics, for the Generation of '72, is a double-edged medium. Literature, for its writers, does not make up a tool in nation, or even region, building, nor does it offer a clear path to collective catharsis, in a regional literature that has long used its literary archive to work through philosophical problems. By contrast, literature, for the first time as a regional medium, becomes comprised of, on one hand, what Nelly Richard refers to as “signos que guardarán en su interior una memoria lingüística de los choques nacido de tantas desarmaduras de

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<sup>8</sup> This quote is taken from Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794).

sentidos”, and on the other, a literature that seeks a poetics based around novel cultural affect in global popular culture, the depiction and influences of exile, and a second look at global political projects (17).<sup>9</sup>

The Generation of '72 offers a poetics of new Latin American citizenship, one that is trapped between the codified regionalism of the *Boom* and the privileged navigation of the global market of the *Crack* and *McOndo*, et al. Caught in multiple cultural and economic flows of globalization, they offer a literature that resonates well beyond regional boundaries. The Generation of '72 speaks to the pushing and pulling, masking and unmasking, lettering and unlettering of globalism, a problem that from the cosmopolitan perspective Robert Pippin claims has caused many to grow “dissatisfied because modernity seemed to promise what it finally could not deliver – an individually and collectively self-determining life” (3). This loss of faith, as we will see in the analysis that follows, leads to a new faith, and in turn a new poetics, through a literature that is at times unexpectedly hopeful and at others critically poignant. It ties together a literary response from a group of writers that turned to a socially committed literature precisely at a time in which the Latin American aesthetic and political citizen appear to die a simultaneous death. Neither indicative of a swan song nor fresh naiveté, the Generation

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<sup>9</sup> Nelly Richard goes into depth about the crisis of the arts and the radicalization of poetics both during and after Pinochet's regime is in power in Chile in her book *La insubordinación de los signos: cambio político, transformaciones culturales y poéticas de la crisis* (1994).

of '72 works toward a poetics that navigates the labyrinth of globalism and feels out a literary response that resonates increasingly with audiences who experience the ecological, political, and economic hang-ups of cosmopolitan modernity in their own right. And readers can turn to the Generation of '72, as Richard would claim, to navigate the ruinous archives of memory from the regional perspective; or, as Pippen indicates, to explore our own dissatisfaction with an advanced cosmopolitan modernity.

### **3.2. Instability, Darkened National Iconography, and Resonances of Globalism in the works of Osvaldo Soriano and Cristina Peri Rossi**

In an oeuvre largely comprised of explorations, sketches, and miniatures of lives lost in globalism, a very poignant moment stands out in Cristina Peri Rossi's "La influencia de Edgar A. Poe en la poesía de Raimundo Arenas". For an author that tends to shy away from blunt realism, preferring to locate sociopolitical reality in the uncanny and philosophically distant scenarios of Borges and Cortázar, the reader is caught off guard when the voice of a child takes on the author's perspective and speaks directly to the reader: "Estoy segura de que lo que piensas acerca de nuestra generación es completamente falso" (52). As is the case in Peri Rossi's work at large, in "La influencia de Edgar A. Poe en la poesía de Raimundo Arenas" doubt sets the tone in an anchorless performative economy. There is a strong contrast between the individual reality of the characters and the way they chose to engage with the wider world. They play to social expectations in order to survive while attempting to maintain a precarious sense of self.

And toward the end of the story, Peri Rossi uses her young protagonist to remind us that what we see at the surface, be it in the form of cultural artifacts, official national memory, or global literary narrative, is surely little more than chimera. Peri Rossi's concern for the cultural surface and broken truths does not stand alone. Reminiscent of the epigraph to his novel *Konfidenz*, Peri Rossi's peer, Ariel Dorfman, approaches a similar theme when he pulls from Jean Cocteau's quote, "I am a liar who always tells the truth". Double-edged aesthetics and blurred memory come naturally for writers whose worlds were upended by exile, who within months went from being nationally celebrated cultural icons to figures deracinated from their cultural context. Globalism worked against Peri Rossi as local cultural icons lost context as much as the writers and artists that produced them.

When discussing the writers that make up the Generation of '72, there is a tendency to speak in terms of "los que se quedaron" y "los que se fueron". Yet, this schema leads to precisely the oversimplified criticism that Peri Rossi and others feared, a reading of a generation that, as Peri Rossi herself implies, is "completamente falso". There are no easy readings for a group whose writers have dedicated a large portion of their literary careers to conveying the doubt and unease they experienced in the seventies and eighties while economic globalization paradoxically challenged democratic governments in their home countries. And the writers that chose not to leave their countries and those who knew they had to leave address similar themes.

Oswaldo Soriano a whose narrative is largely framed by national and local issues during the *Guerra Sucia* and Cristina Peri Rossi, whose settings many times take place abroad, respond to globalization with similar literary conceits, despite the differing geographical scopes that separated them. The global and local perspectives present in Cristina Peri Rossi's short stories, "El Viaje" and "'La influencia de Edgar A. Poe en la poesía de Raimundo Arenas'" and Oswaldo Soriano's *Una sombra ya pronto serás* show how both River Plate-born writers address the resignifying of their national and regional iconography and how they update the long-standing Latin American theme of the intellectual lost in the wilderness with only an outdated and ill-fitting map to guide him (and her).

Whereas in Peri Rossi's short stories, characters move from the River Plate area abroad, carrying with them manners, habits, and narratives that clash with their new spaces, in Soriano's *Una sombra ya pronto serás*, the inverse occurs: the global enters into the circulation of the national. As is the case in reoccurring moments in Argentine narrative, such as Eugenio Cambaceres's *Sin rumbo* and Borges's *El fervor de Buenos Aires*, the cosmologies of the world follow an inrush of migrants and capital and resignify national and regional orders. It is in the midst this centripetal force that Soriano narrates a picaresque, in which a seemingly innocuous Argentine wanders around the countryside eking out a hand-to-mouth existence. Set during the military junta, the protagonist, to whom everyone in the novel refers to as Zárate, embodies the Argentine



existence of the time: as a dual citizen facilitated by Juan Bautista Alberdi's nineteenth century legislation, he spent time living in Spain, where his daughter resides, he is trained in a profession, informatics, in which he cannot find work, and he does anything he can to survive the economic crisis of the early eighties. Occasionally he undertakes legitimate attempts to find a job in his profession and many other times in grifts and scams, all of which is set against a backdrop of clashes between global and local cultural and economic capital.

The novel's structure reflects the tension between competing cultural archives. Formally, *Una sombra ya pronto serás* embodies the elements of the Spanish picaresque novel fused with the popular cultural elements that the Generation of '72 was the first to fully explore in Latin America. Many scenes, including card games and shootouts, resemble Westerns and Hollywood capers.<sup>10</sup> The melding of these local and global genres, all the while, accompanies the emphasis and subsequent darkening of national icons, where folkloric elements advance the plot, only to then appear grotesque in the reframed post-national setting. The novel's climax occurs during a round of the national card game, *truco*, that ends in a heist; the protagonist boasts to have once been a

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<sup>10</sup> In her article "La realidad tragicómica de Osvaldo Soriano", Corina Mathieu adds the detective novel to the list of North American literary influences from which Soriano pulls. She claims that Soriano shows a particularly notable indebtedness to Phillip Marlowe's hard-boiled dialogue and street-wise protagonists. For more, see Mathieu, Corina. "La Realidad Tragicomica De Osvaldo Soriano." *Chasqui* 17.1 (1988). I will add to this that Soriano's first novel, *Triste, solitario, y final* (1973) is exemplary of Soriano's indebtedness to "global" popular culture and especially the *noir* novel. In the contrast between the Hollywood that produced the media that fascinated him and the porteño reality where he sets his works, we find the Soriano's concern as an author summed up in a nutshell.

professional football player, only to injure himself while showing off in front of a group of young Argentines; and livestock and cattle, the folkloric bedrock of the Argentine national icon, do not appear lively or virile but languid and moribund. The immigrants that were, according to the liberal thinkers of time – namely Sarmiento, Alberdi, and Esteban Echevarría -- were to “poblar” in order to “gobernar” and “civilizar”, under the obviously implicit logic of “blanquear” are also present in the work. In picaresque fashion, the protagonist episodically comes into contact with flat characters that are used to frame an adventurous and mobile trajectory. As Zárate wonders throughout Argentina, he comes across a Brazilian drifter, a failed American industrialist from Cleveland, and an Italian migrant, Coluccini, who speaks with an iconic *lunfardo* and comes the closest to becoming a strong secondary character.

Coluccini, who claims to use Argentina as a jumping off point to get to Bolivia and then Miami plays heavily in a tableau that is at the heart of the novel’s conceit. The movement both away from and toward Argentina that globalization causes the protagonist begins to wear on him psychologically when Coluccini suggests that they swindle a group of card players in a Western-style scene in the Pampas. The stakes are abnormally high in a weekly game, as one of the members of the small town has just sold his farm. The rural town is liquidating, and Coluccini sees an opportunity to skim money off the top of the proceeds. Soriano uses the scene to cause the reader to reflect on the influx of capital ironically. Just before Zárate realizes that the exchange of money

could work to his benefit, he pauses to reflect on the way that globalization has affected his own life. He considers the hybrid cultural archive that his daughter will pull from, a mixture of Spanish and Argentine, and considers how the geographical distance that separates them has a sociocultural counterpoint. He is surrounded by decaying buildings, roads, and city infrastructure when he experiences a swell of unease:

Mi hija estaba en cuarto grado e imaginé que hablaría marcando las eses y las zetas de España. Para ella no significaban nada la Primera Junta Belgrano, ni las campañas al Alto Perú. No le pesaban Rosas ni Caseros. Me dije que estábamos rotos y lo estaríamos por mucho tiempo. Me daba pena que camináramos al abismo como vacas ciegas y tampoco quería escapar solo a ese destino que era el nuestro (175).

Zárate's surroundings subtly parallel his epiphany. The puncturing of the nation and national infrastructure accompany his realization that global cultural and economic flows have done the same thing to his family, and the liquidation of assets parallels the liquidation of memory and shared affectations in common dialects and senses of a national self. The post-national plays out on the triple level of the economic, the infrastructural, and the familial, and causes Zárate to go into the novel's climactic *truco*-heist, itself, a simultaneous liquidation of folklore and land, unnerved and reflective upon the irony of his existence caught in globalism.

The *truco*-heist is not so much a subtle critique of the Argentine state of affairs as it is pointed send-up of the military junta, the ideology of "gobernar es poblar", and the liberal maxim that foreign investment will curtail corruption. Coluccini plans to game

the system just as, it is implied, the Argentine ruling class attempts to enter into the international market economy under the protection of ties to the military regime. The folkloric national and the free market, depicted as a casino, come together, and Coluccini assures Zárate that with some sleight of hand, they will soon retire to Miami. The scene is not without its aesthetic critique. Soriano paints a picture reminiscent of the climactic ending of Luis Buñuel's *Viridiana* (1961), in which an unruly mob swarms the well-heeled dinner of a catholic philanthropist and reframes the Last Supper through a grotesque lens. Soriano employs a similar tactic when he emphasizes the aristocratic pageantry of the card game at the Rotary Club. Coluccini and Soriano wear suits and pantomime what they imagine to be civilized behavior, attempting to drop the occasional word in English into their vocabulary -- Coluccini refers to Zárate as "onorevole" (honorable) – and enthusiastically affecting their manners. There is a tension between the superficial and the real that runs throughout the novel and peaks in Rotary Club when Coluccini loses footing, gets drunk and behaves erratically. The sense of flagging civilized behavior sets the tone as Coluccini's heist falls apart in parallel. Coluccini hides an extra deck of cards in his jacket pocket and, at just the right moment, works the perfect cards into his hand to take the pot at its largest. Though crestfallen, no one at the Rotary Club suspects Coluccini of anything underhanded until, when he stands up to leave with his winnings, the extra deck of cards falls out of his jacket pocket, which, he did not realize until it was too late, were not sewn through. In his

own words, “me dio un saco con los bolsillos descosidos y cuando salíamos caminando para el salón se me empezaron a caer los naipes. Yo daba un paso y el as de espadas que caía al suelo, otro paso y una mujer que me devolvía el siete de oros... Casi me matan” (222).

Coluccini’s inability to hold the cards parallels the failing Argentine infrastructure highlighted pages earlier and adds to the sense of decadence and grotesque pageantry at the Rotary Club. The feeling of loss that pervades the narrative from the outset of the novel, intensifies, segueing into a surreal ending in which Zárate abruptly comes across the mutilated carcass of a cow and a military general that has lost his infantry, riding around aimlessly in a jeep, “una pila de chatarra oxidada que temblaba como una hoja y largaba un humo negro”, looking for his lost troops and quoting the constitutional precedent for the genocide in the Pampas (234). Soriano, who has intentionally depicted local folk memory in unstable terms, brings three charged national icons together and layers them over a tone of panic and instability. The military leader that according to the government should anchor the national is frantic and lost. The cow, a token of national pride and a symbol of economic modernization, is a putrid corpse. And the railroad system that helped modernize and govern the Argentine countryside is not used to populate the Republic but rather to flee it. The brisk jumping from one national icon to another and the surreal way in which the national narrative is framed accompany Zárate’s exodus and brings the novel’s three-stage framework into

focus. The beginning of *Una sombra ya pronto serás* is heavy on the folkloric register and plays to the Argentine tradition of hopeful departure from the metropolitan center of Buenos Aires into the rural Pampa; the second, the entrance of global capital into the local system, leading to the liquidation of land and memory and ending in a failed heist; and the third, the reframing of a national iconography in the perspective of the absurd and abject. Having run through the three stage story, Zárate decides to celebrate the Argentine Independence Day by opening his last beer and boarding a train to Bolivia, paradoxically achieving exactly what he always planned to do while roundly letdown by both the process and the results of his journey, leaving an Argentina on the brink of collapse. Similar to his surroundings in his moment of epiphany in the Pampas, like the grotesque dressage in the Rotary Club, and as a complement to the general's rusty jeep and the cow's rotting carcass, both symbolic and real infrastructure are in heavy decline when Zárate takes his illegal winnings, and flees the country.

Given the similar geographical base, political pressures, and generational experiences, it is unsurprising that Cristina Peri Rossi's short stories complement Soriano's concern with the role that the influx of economic capital plays in distorting regional and national cultural registers. And if there is an obvious difference in their writing, it is strictly formal: despite her choice of the short-story as a medium, Peri Rossi is more philosophically aggressive, tonally oblique, and geographically expansive than Soriano. While exile, the post-national, and cultural iconographies are at the heart of her

work, she moves from her native Montevideo to urban Spain with an ease that Soriano struggles to convey. She is a writer that addresses the life of an exilic intellectually frontally, in one instance, claiming "...una Remington [...] fue mi amiga más fiel y me acompañó también durante el exilio", and the ability to use literature to work through the philosophically destabilizing properties of her generation's experience in another, "Un cuento es una ficción que esconde una verdad a veces difícil de asumir".<sup>11</sup> In her stories, "El viaje" and "La influencia de Edgar A. Poe en la poesía de Raimundo Arenas", Peri Rossi works through her concern for dissipating national boundaries, a shifting national and regional cultural archive, and the bare-life of the exilic body. In "El viaje", characters dream up an external world from their literary *tertulias* in Montevideo, projecting their fantasies outward, while in "La influencia de Edgar A. Poe...", Uruguayan protagonists are forced to obey the performative code that Spaniards heap upon them as South Americans living in Europe. There is a two-way movement of fantasy and cultural expectation that reflects the clashes of cultural archives in a moment in which transnational exchange becomes forced rather than free-willed, and cultural production operates under duress rather than in a state of good nature.

In "El viaje", Peri Rossi explores the perennial problem of mapping in Latin American letters. Yet, in the story, Latin America is not mapped by foreigners, nor are

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<sup>11</sup> These quotes are taken from pages 11 and 16, respectively, of Peri Rossi's own introduction to the publication of her collected works: Rossi, Cristina Peri. Cuentos Reunidos. Barcelona: Random House, 2007.

borders clumsily fleshed out, but young intellectuals based in Montevideo cognitively map a small country in Northern Europe. Reminiscent of Borges's *Tlon*, the *tertulia* group in Montevideo is obsessed with the city of Malibur. One character decides that he will travel to this mystical destination and the group begins to research every aspect of its culture, obsessing over it in a way that dislocates them from their daily lives. Slowly it becomes evident that the members of the group will never travel to Malibur and that learning its language will bear little fruit, set over the increasing presence of the local military government in the story. What starts as a cosmopolitan experiment ends as a distraction symptomatic of a mental disorder.

Peri Rossi depicts the young group of intellectuals' interest in the remote European country of Malibur as indicative of the tension between the local and the universal in an incipient global society. She understands that in the order of her time knowledge production does not flow from Montevideo but from elsewhere and that her protagonists are to do less observing than to be observed themselves. The young characters' desire to associate with a cosmopolitan system appears healthy and liberating when one of the characters announces to the group that he will travel to Malibur, it is a clear catalyst to look beyond the boundaries of the local and to think, "Sin lugar a dudas, el mundo era múltiple y diverso, aunque cada cual, en su aldea, pensara que su pueblo era el mundo" (506). Epistemological borders open and global desire rushes in. Peri Rossi wants us to be happy for the young group whose "pueblo"



is joining the global cultural forum, and whose members spend “largas horas sentado en un sofá, frente al mapamundi, intentando descifrar el código de rutas, cordilleras, lagos, monumentos históricos o religiosos, museos” (506).

As readers, we are as distracted by Malibur at the beginning of the story as the characters. The local slowly comes into focus, however, and is not cast in positive light. As it becomes evident that none of the characters will ever leave Montevideo, Malibur appears more like an unhealthy obsession than a stabilizing cosmopolitan referent. It distracts more than it opens doors.

The *tertulia* group falls apart. One member is sent to prison after allegedly criticizing the local military junta and other members bury their heads in the esoteric knowledge of the distant country. At the end of the story, years later within the text’s timeframe, the protagonist whose idea it was to travel to Malibur, enters the travel agent’s, and we assume that he is going to finally make good on his promise and to travel to Malibur. When he does nothing more than buy two travel posters for Malibur, we feel agitated and deceived, closed off and as isolated as we would have if Malibur never entered into the lives of the group. The emotional swing in the story does not lend itself to an isolationist reading, however. While we move quickly from the superficially beneficial aspects of the small Latin American country opening itself up to cosmopolitan cultural consumption to the loneliness of the peripheral capital city – spatially in the story from the imaginary explosion in the mapamundi to the small, dank

prison cell –, the isolated local is not wholly celebrated either. Peri Rossi parses the local – global binary and settles on a double-edged representation of the expansion of the cosmopolitan border and the entrance of the Latin American nation into the global cultural market place.

Using a father-daughter dynamic to highlight the archival contrasts between familial generations during exile, and continuing the theme of the intellectual who loses his (or her) cultural bearings in a moment of rapid globalization, Peri Rossi's "La influencia de Edgar A. Poe en la poesía de Raimundo Arenas" thematically stands between *Una sombra ya pronto serás* and "El viaje". The story explores the differing levels of helplessness for a Uruguayan father and daughter exiled in Spain during the *Guerra Sucia*. The father, who was an intellectual and literary scholar in Uruguay, relies on the meager wage he earns by selling soap in the streets of a generic Spanish city, while the daughter, who associates with Spain as much as Uruguay, paradoxically parodies the role of the Latin American when she dresses up like an Indian and begs for money in metro stations. The father relies on the daughter to control their finances and to navigate their social interactions. Interestingly, the only stable existential referent they share is the unmoored sensation that the boat trip from Uruguay to Spain causes them. During the trip, they recall that they dropped out of time and space, and the father having never recovered, relies on the daughter to prop up his day-to-day existence in Spain. It is while they are actually physically adrift in the Atlantic Ocean that the father

loses his cultural bearings, while the daughter regains a fragmented sense of self upon arrival in Spain, only to have that image grotesquely distorted by the expectations of the Spanish public. During the trip to Spain from Uruguay, every aspect of the father and daughter's relations to society is reified, including the dynamic between them. Over the course of a boat trip, the father goes from being a respected scholar to a street salesman who is only able to survive with the help of his daughter, the daughter learns what it means to be Latin American but in the terms of the distorted gaze of the Spaniard, and the very paternal relationship goes under duress, when, at the border, the guard threatens to not let them in, because they cannot prove that they are actually father and daughter. Within the context of swift exile, international law and global cultural expectation upend every aspect of the two traveler's lives permanently. The daughter takes on the paternal role and the very fact that the father accompanies the daughter puts him in a position of legal threat, when the border guard calls their papers into question. The metaphor of nationality as patria and parental relation is similarly inverted. The travelers' Uruguayan nationality shifts from comprising a stabilizing sociopolitical register to that of a marginalizing aspect of their existence, as they go from being members of a nation to dislocated global citizens.

Peri Rossi blends her own experience as an exilic writer with those of the multitude affected by global flows and works through these issues in her short stories. It is easy to imagine her own experience falling inline with the voice of the father, when she claims in *Estado de exilio* (2003), "El exilio cuestiona, en primer lugar, la identidad, ya

que desvincula de una geografía, tanto como de una familia, de una calle, de una arboleda o de una relación sentimental” (7). Beyond coping mechanism, however, “La influencia de Edgar A. Poe” empowers the otherwise unweighted voice of the hapless father and daughter. As is the case with many exilic writers close to Peri Rossi’s generation there is a common conceit in which characters are at a tremendous social disadvantage but find an until then hidden device that they use to work through their underprivileged standing in global society –Robert Bolaño has converted this tendency into an overblown standard of Latin American exilic literature, filling his novels with social outcasts that find power in the arts, including transsexual poets, paraplegic intellectuals, and one-armed painters. And it is this sense of newfound empowerment while pushed to the limit that saves Peri Rossi’s story from being simply a lament and turns it into a powerful tool, one that puts her in the position of the daughter, who, between cultural registers, finds her own means of finding a voice and speaking back to the anonymous throngs of cosmopolitan citizens that expect her to play the charade of the Latin American indigenous subject for their benefit. Peri Rossi describes the characteristics that the father and daughter acquire while on the boat to Spain, “Ambos sabían descifrar los códigos de los ojos. Lo habían aprendido en alta mar, durante las largas noches de insomnio en que ni la luna iluminaba la travesía. Allí, mientras fumaban los cigarrillos racionados, y pensaban la manera de apoderarse de un sándwich de jamón en la cocina, habían aprendido a leer en las aguas de los ojos; aguas mansas las del padre, aguas inquietas las del lago de la hija” (52).

This secret language, a visceral mode of communication that eludes the symbolic surface, connects the daughter in the story to Peri Rossi’s voice that protrudes when the daughter claims that, as I allude to above, “Estoy segura de que lo que piensas acerca de nuestra generación es completamente falso” (52). It is the contrast between the

superficial cultural performance that allows for survival and the embedded cultural message through literary artifact that makes the story and the act of writing, itself, a powerful tool. Just as the daughter performs the symbolic message only to then communicate her particular truth, the story keeps the memory of the exiled citizen alive in a destabilized global context. And it is the tool of literature that Peri Rossi alludes to when at the end of “La influencia de Edgar A. Poe” she speaks of her generation as a new post-national people forged by shared experience who keep a common memory alive through their own means of communication, when the daughter claims, “Esta era otra raza, provista de una singular resistencia, y en la matriz original habían asimilado las enseñanzas de íntimas, oscurísimas derrotas; en el útero materno habían aprendido la tristeza, el fracaso, la desolación, y cuando vieron la luz del mundo, supieron cómo vivir a pesar de todo ellos” (51).

### **3.3. Unmoored affect, developmental disjuncture, and psychological instability in the works of Ariel Dorfman and Luisa Valenzuela**

While Osvaldo Soriano and Cristina Peri Rossi reflect a resignification of national icons and collective experiences in times of simultaneous neoliberal expansion and authoritarian repression, Ariel Dorfman and Luisa Valenzuela explore the opening and closing of aesthetic, economic and political borders on the level of the individual. Both authors draw our attention to the paradoxical path that liberalism has followed in Latin America. Far from a functioning liberal government based around the atomic unit of the particular citizen, Dorfman and Valenzuela depict a Latin American nation-state, in which the individual is terrorized by doubt and second-guessing. Their characters do not comprise the self-governing citizens developed over hundreds of years of modern philosophy by Locke, Smith, Kant, and Schiller but, to the contrary, are individuals

living in precisely the world that modern philosophy dreamed up, yet are plagued by it rather than stabilized. Both Dorfman and Valenzuela are reflective of the binaries that have governed Latin American epistemologies since independence, meaningful to them in their updated form. They understand that the political and aesthetic discourse that their generation experienced in the late seventies – order versus chaos, perceived development versus underdevelopment, the mislabeled first versus second worlds of the Cold War – is a germination of the civilization versus barbarism paradigm. And Dorfman and Valenzuela, both, reflect on the lack of sophistication presented in the foundational, regional binaries by populating their works with characters that are ill-fitting to the epistemologies laid out by the regimes that exploit them. Their work is pervaded by violence, irrational action, and leftist sympathy, but there is not, by the rights of any episteme, a barbarian among them. In Dorfman's *La muerte y la doncella*, Roberto Miranda is a doctor that listens to Schubert and quotes Nietzsche; Gerardo Escobar is a lawyer commissioned by the government to head the post-dictatorial Truth Commission; and Paulina Salas is a pastiche of the ideal housewife with high culture affectations. Luisa Valenzuela's short stories are similarly filled with well heeled, high-flying, and thoroughly cultured characters, ranking among them, well connected businessmen and ambitious state functionaries. Yet, Dorfman and Valenzuela couple these ideal citizens with violence, torture, and instability. They reflect the epistemological and affective reification that their generation experience during the expansive post-WWII phase of globalization at the individual level, and they explore the lasting ineffectiveness of the civilization and barbarism paradigm on the level of the collective.

There is constant tension between the universal and the particular that resonates in Dorfman's *La muerte y la doncella* and Valenzuela's "Aquí pasan cosas raras" and "Los

censores” that depicts these global and foundational discourses as highly unnerving and destabilizing even to the characters that represent the discourse’s idyll. Indeed, it is precisely this vulnerability that connects Dorfman and Valenzuela’s work. Both writers hold up a light to the flaws in the ideal citizen, according to the regional civilization and barbarism paradigm and the neoliberal and high cultural citizen alike, in order to highlight the marginal position of the majority. At the heart of this complication of social realism, according to Linda Craig, is a blurring of boundaries that reflects the zeitgeist of the times: “Life/ death, masculine/ feminine, black/white all of these categories become mutable as too does the dichotomy marginal/ central” (173).<sup>12</sup> In what follows, I analyze Dorfman’s *La muerte y la doncella* and Valenzuela’s short stories, “Aquí pasan cosas raras” and “Los censores” to highlight their interconnected concern with the ill-fitting global sociopolitical idyll in Latin America and the coupling of developmentalist rhetoric and high culture, not with metaphors of progress and harmony, but with those of interruption and disjuncture.

The first act of Dorfman’s play, *La muerte y la doncella*, explores how a military coup resonates on both the individual and collective national level. Subtly, the play exposes us to the trauma the work’s three characters experience in the wake of the puncture in the national narrative that the coup d’etat marks, an interruption that has echoed in Latin American narrative for centuries. Dorfman, himself, claims in *Other Septembers, Many Americas*, for instance:

One of the prevalent visions in our lands is that of a continent where the past devours the future and forces eternal repetition. A continent where,

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<sup>12</sup> Though she discusses the work of Luisa Valenzuela, and her novel *El gato eficaz*, this observation is applicable to Dorfman’s work as well and further links the two authors. For more on Craig’s observations on Valenzuela see: Craig, Linda. *Juan Carlos Onetti, Manuel Puig and Luisa Valenzuela: Marginality and Gender*. Woodbridge, England: Tamesis, 2005.

appearances and calendars to the contrary, it is always October 1986, or October 1886, or October 1816 – any October except October 1492 when it seemed that everything would be born all over again. A continent where the prophecy of a different future comes back later to haunt us with its cyclical sameness (167).

Development, both individual and collective, is hijacked, and the personal lives of the characters are thrown off kilter in the first act of *La muerte y la doncella*. The reader/viewer breaks down the dialectics of the military regime when the presence of violence, represented by the threat of a loaded gun in the work, unites torturer and tortured, and truth commission seeker and benefactor of concealment and silence. Enriching the metaphor of an uneasy search for truth in the midst of psychological duress and unrequited violence is the second-guessing that we do throughout the play. The burden of remembering and seeking justice is placed on the audience, as we are expected to judge Dr. Miranda. The plot is driven by the doubt that surrounds Paulina's certainty that she is confronting her torturer when she gags and bounds Miranda. She either retaliates in kind, we think, a form of de facto justice, or she perpetrates an unending string of violent acts.

Violence, and its association with the coup d'état, is an open wound that registers on the personal level as much as the collective in *La muerte y la doncella*. The play begins when Paulina's husband, Gerardo, returns home after running over a nail, giving him a flat tire, on his way back from the capital where he has interviewed to become *Ministro de Justicia* and head of the country's truth commission. The nation's progress and path to justice after a prolonged military government, through the metaphor of the car, unexpectedly veers off course. The highway, one of many symbols associated with progress and order, is paired with the nail that causes Gerardo to veer off course. The nail in the road is the first of four metaphors that depict the abrupt



disruption of national narrative, progress, and personal development in the first act alone. The metaphor of disjuncture zooms into the domestic level when, in the middle of the night, Miranda interrupts Gerardo and Paulina's evening, knocking on their door to deliver Gerardo's flat tire. Unsettling given the context of recent dictatorship, Miranda's unannounced appearance disrupts the domestic space and alludes to the day-to-day existential reification caused by the military regime. Gerardo admits, "Lo que pasa es que uno todavía no se acostumbra [...] A la democracia. Que llamen a tu puerta a la medianoche y sea un amigo y no ..." (24). On the immediate level Miranda disrupts the family unit and its space, the broader context, with a tone already set by Gerardo's flat tire and its national implications, lends the interruption its metaphorical force. Miranda's presence both supports the allegory of the nail in the highway already presented and foreshadows the psychological unsettling at the individual level that will follow. Not long after Miranda's arrival, having decided to spend the night, the layered allegory of disjuncture takes on a third level. Paulina interrupts Miranda's sleep, when she gags him at gunpoint and claims that he is one of her torturers. And the interaction between the two, a reversal of the tortured and (implied) torturer, hinges on series of violent acts. Paulina and Miranda are presumably connected in both the past and present only by the act of torture. Regardless of their position in the power dynamic, both characters are similarly derailed by the coup and violence that follows over the course of the authoritarian government. Parallels arise between Paulina and Miranda, and the two, both (implied) torturer and tortured, are similarly humanized through their connections. Paulina reveals, "Yo no terminé la carrera, doctor Miranda. A ver si adivina por qué nunca terminé mi carrera, por qué no me recibí; estoy segura que no le va a costar mucho imaginarse las razones", while in the third act, during a forced confession, Miranda reveals that he was encouraged by the government to take part in

the torture of leftists in order to evaluate how much they take, a job that he took not only because he believed that the leftists “tienen derecho a que algún médico los atienda” but also because he had the “oportunidad de pagarles a los comunistas lo que le hicieron a [su] papá” (33, 72).

There is duplicity in each positional placeholder and an ambivalence and emotional slippage in the role reversals that occurs between Paulina and Miranda, pitting justice, medicine, progress, and truth together with violence, disjuncture, torture, and uncertainty. The undercurrent that runs throughout is violence, and the coup marks a decisive moment in the trajectory of the careers (in Spanish both in the sense of *carrera* as a highway and as a professional path), lives. Violence and disjuncture are the constants around which all of the plays’ characters revolve as they either reproduce it, as it is implied, in the case of Miranda, threaten to reproduce it, as is the case of Paulina, or attempt to find truth in it, as is the case of Gerardo. The role reversal humanizes both the torturer and the tortured, and depicts them both as victims of geopolitical circumstances that are out of their control. While there is clearly a right and wrong, a violent authoritarian government and a populace concerned with truth, the fact that violence is portrayed as radiating from an imperceptible nucleus, the torturer is also presented as a body, citizen, and individual lost in the political and discursive flows that are beyond his (and her) control. Far from the grotesque caricatures of tyrants and their functionaries from the writers of a generation prior – García Marquez’s *El otoño del patriarca* or Roa Bastos’s *Yo, el supremo*, for instance – Dorfman’s perpetrators of violence are presented as humane beings set adrift by the geopolitical flows of their time.

Sophia McClennen speaks to the erosion of hard and fast binaries in Dorfman’s work when she discusses the three tenants of his aesthetics, one that she refers to as an “aesthetics of hope”: “the bridging of the past, present, and future; the mutual

interdependence of reason and emotion; and the association of the individual with the community" (281). And, in act two, Dorfman's "aesthetics of hope" comes into focus. While act one explores the disruption and subsequent malaise caused by the coup and the dissolution of hard ethical codes and philosophical pillars in times of terror, act two addresses the possibility of reconciliation. The second act does not lead the reader/viewer to believe that reconciliation will be easy, nor will it follow an obvious path, however. When Paulina extracts a confession from Miranda only after she threatens to kill him, Dorfman constructs a parallel between the voice recorder, the physical archive that Paulina wields, and Gerardo whose post as governor of the official symbolic archive is imminent, reminding us of Dori Laub and Shoshanna Felman's claim that, "There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in *thought, memory, and speech.*" (81, their emphasis). But Dorfman emphasizes that the only hope for reconciliation is to deposit the experience of the coup in symbolic registers through theatrical and literary metaphors, to engage precisely with "thought, memory, and speech". His aesthetics does not passively allow the influx of popular culture and reified symbolic registers to sweep away memory, but on the contrary, it approaches popular culture as a means to an end; that end being to question high and popular cultural registers and the role that they, themselves, play in the lived sociopolitical reality of Latin America.

When, at the end of act three, a reflective curtain comes down over the stage, and as audience members, we are shown that we are sitting in the same audience as Miranda, Gerardo, and Paulina, as they watch a performance of *Schubert's "Death and the Maiden"*, it becomes unmistakable that the play has forced us to become Cortazarian (and Brechtian) "active readers/viewers". We witness the unwieldiness of an

undertaking to the scale and severity of the Chilean Rettig Commission in times of globalized culture and realize that our role is to listen, sift through, and store the experience conveyed as actively as possible.

In a generation caught in globalism's disappearing political and economic borders, Dorfman's work is at the center. As part of a lineage of forced global citizens, exilic writers, and representatives of the strain between local and global culture, Dorfman explores the humane limits of cosmopolitan life. Gilda Waldman asks, for instance, "¿Cómo asumir, entonces, que [Dorfman] no tiene ya una identidad unívoca: la chilena? ¿Cómo comprender que perteneciendo a Chile también puede asimilar sus raíces norteamericanas? ¿Cómo reconciliar sus distintos hogares geográficos y lingüísticos? ¿Cómo vivir con sus simultáneas "pertenencias" y "no-pertenencias" (110).<sup>13</sup>

It is in the generation of '72 that aesthetic borders find representation on the individual level. As old cultural barriers break down, Dorfman and others are exposed to new registers and icons. But to solely embrace these icons, just as, to solely embrace high modernism for generations prior, would be to neglect its colonial past. Global popular culture and high modernism alike are simultaneously placed in their geopolitical context and used as avenues to undermine dominant social structures.

McClennen claims:

Contemporary storytellers must simultaneously confront the crisis in representation, the globalization of mass media, and the ideology of neoliberalism. They must provide hope without totalizing, they must expose social dilemmas without preaching, and they must inspire despite their very limited ability to reach the public. One of the most complicated

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<sup>13</sup> For more on the Latin American writer in times of advanced globalization, and on Dorfman in particular, see: Waldman, Gilda. "Ariel Dorfman: De La Identidad Nomada a La Identidad Multiple." *Hispanica*.90 (2001): 107-12.

features of Dorfman's aesthetic vision is his combined faith in literature and a skepticism of it (58).

In *Para leer al Pato Donald* (1972), Dorfman uses Disney characters to highlight the colonial logic intrinsic in global popular culture. In *Konfidenz* (1994), he uses the hardboiled spy novel and film noir aesthetics to convey the mutability of exile. And in *La muerte y la doncella* he reminds us of the colonial legacy of modern philosophy and high culture when he places ideal bourgeois citizens in the position of torturers and accomplices of a military regime that are lettered by violence as much as they are lettered by culture.

Elaborating less on the unsettling of the Latin American bourgeois citizen, Luisa Valenzuela explores characters whose globalized affectations never take to the local body in the first place. Economic globalization mixes with the aesthetics of dress and the reified practice of everyday life, typically ending in absurd tableaux of porteño bodies dressed in ill-fitting garbs, miming the symbolic gestures of elsewhere. In "Aquí pasan cosas raras", when the story's main characters, Pedro and Mario, passively take on the clothing and habits of international businessmen, we are not far removed from the climactic gaming scene of Soriano's *Una sombra ya pronto serás*. Nor have we traveled a great distance from the use of aesthetics and especially those of dress in the civilization and barbarism debates of the nineteenth century. And the tragically bourgeois-affected Andrés from Eugenio Cambaceres' *Sin rumbo* would not be out of place next to Pedro and Mario, despite the roughly one hundred years that separates them.

The tension that Valenzuela creates in "Aquí pasan cosas raras" plays off of a clear contrast between the porteño individual and his uncritical acceptance of the global signifiers of business in their "portafolios" and "saco". The contrast between a symbolic economy not based in Sarmiento or Cambaceres' European aesthetics but in the parlance

of international business highlights a conflicting relationship between the body it letters and its citizen evoking discourse. This contrast is fundamental to the Argentine story of the *Guerra Sucia*, in which neoliberal economics and the wave of new aesthetic signifiers that the opening of the economic border brought with it are argued to be progressive and are presented as an apology for the violent terms of the Junta's rule. Similar to Dorfman's "aesthetics of hope", Josefina Delgado reads Valenzuela's literary treatment as means of exploiting the holes in the discursive canvassing, put forth on the double level of the military regime that wishes to cover its tracks, and neoliberal tendency to resituate experience from the perspective of the free market. For Delgado, "*Aquí pasan cosas raras* es en todo caso el libro del caos, donde el único límite lo pone demostración sistemática de que se ha abierto un agujero en el orden percibido hasta entonces como natural, algo así como un agujero en ese ladrillo de cristal del que habla Cortázar" (113).

The haunting aspect of "*Aquí pasan cosas raras*" is how simultaneously subtly yet quickly Pedro and Mario's day goes awry. Valenzuela emphasizes the passivity of her two protagonists in a way that implies at worst complicity and at best docility. Pedro and Mario simply respond to the objects that are new to their visual horizon and react in kind, in a causal chain that leads to a decadent and drunken meal in a restaurant, in which no one wants to pick up the tab. Pedro and Mario simply respond to their environment. In neoliberal terms they are "free to decide" and casually make incentive-based decisions: "Al salir, uno de los muchachos deja caer un paquetito a los pies de Mario que, en un gesto irreflexivo, atrae el paquete con el pie y lo oculta tras el célebre portafolios apoyado contra la silla" (393).

The "paquete" that Pedro and Mario pick up gives them an influx of capital that is accompanied by the aesthetic signifiers of the "portafolios" and the "saco". The three artifacts immediately reify Pedro and Mario's relationship to their environment: "Pedro

y Mario ahora tienen color, tienen máscara y se sienten existir porque en su camino florecieron un portafolios (fea palabra) y un saco sport. (Un saco no tan nuevo como parecía, más bien algo raído y con los bordes gastados pero digno. Eso es: un saco digno.)” (391). The newfound capital also leads to a novel set of ethical dilemmas. At first the two vow not to spend the money but to find its rightful owner. Yet, their ethics quickly erodes and previously sound logic blurs – “En épocas de claridad pueden hacerse todo tipo de preguntas, pero en momentos como éste el solo hecho de seguir vivo ya condensa todo lo preguntable y lo desvirtúa. (393). What begins as a benign gesture, giving money to a homeless man, leads to an abundant feast between the three of them, in which no one has any intention to pay, causing them to use the money from the “paquete”.

The economy of the story is zero sum in the financial sense but costly on the human level. In the narrator’s own description of Pedro and Mario at the end of the story, “pagaron con sus vidas siete sandwiches de chorizo y dos jarras de vino de la casa. Fue un precio equitativo” (396). And as Delgado points out, Valenzuela clearly uses the collection, and specifically this story, as an allegory for the national experience during the *Guerra Sucia*. A weakened economic border leads to an influx of new capital, which in turn, reifies local experience and quotidian urban practice, bringing along with it a set of affectations and visual signifiers that clash with the local body, which as Valenzuela puts it, are ill-fitting. Pedro and Mario take on the role of the State as they mete out social benefits, ending not in a strengthened presence of a welfare economy but a rapid ascension and decline, as they squander an outsider’s money. In the end, Pedro and Mario are left with little more than a hangover after their drunken feast and leave the “saco” in the street and the “portafolios” in the restaurant, “demasiado pesado, ya –

entre la intrincada construcción de sillas y mesas encimadas, seguro de que no lo van a encontrar hasta el día siguiente” (396).

In “Los censores”, from the same eponymous collection, *Aquí pasan cosas raras*, a political leftist decides to work for the government during the military Junta. The protagonist, Juan, corresponds with Mariana, knowing that as politically conscious intellectuals, they must create their own symbolic code; they must use common writing but communicate a hidden message within their letters. They know that “las cartas las auscultan, las huelen, las palpan, las leen entre ley en sus menores signos de puntuación, hasta en las manchitas involuntarias. Sabe que las cartas pasan de mano en mano por las vastas oficinas de censura, que son sometidas a todo tipo de pruebas y pocas son por fin las que pasan los exámenes y pueden continuar camino” (251). Juan stands in for the fractured body in the authoritarian state when he has to make personal choices that jeopardize his leftist beliefs. Left with no above ground political outlet and no viable means to professional development, Juan makes a Faustian pact when he, a writer of clandestine, politically minded letters, becomes a censor himself.

In Juan, Valenzuela comments on the failure of both the aesthetic and the economic state models to create a unified citizen at one with the national project. In Valenzuela’s nation, Juan is fractured by his tripartite sense of self, the aesthetic, in which he writes clandestine letters, the personal, in which he strives for basic comforts and development, and the professional, in which he hopes to advance his career. Valenzuela uses a sense of the Cortazarian and Borgian absurd when she pits the aesthetic version against the professional version Juan. His aesthetic self strives to write as well as possible to get his letter pass the censors, while his professional self slaves over the letters, decoding cryptic content, and advancing professionally due to his uncanny ability to crack the letters. The political and the aesthetic are set on a crash



course; yet Valenzuela does not situate the two dialectically opposing sides in two massive parties of people. These are not a raucous bunch at a political rally, nor are they the madres de la plaza de mayo. And they are not a distant and emotionally detached military regime either. By placing the conflict on the level of the individual, Valenzuela, at once, undermines discourses of the unified aesthetic and developed citizen and highlights the effect of rapid shifts in the socioeconomic landscape on the individual subject.

The story ends on an absurd note, when the professional version of Juan, comes across the letter of his aesthetic, leftist counterpart. Valenzuela writes, “Estaba a punto ya de sentirse orgulloso de sí mismo, estaba a punto de saber que por fin había encontrado su verdadera senda, cuando llegó a sus manos su propia carta dirigida a Mariana. Como es natural, la condenó sin asco. Como también es natural, no pudo impedir que lo fusilaran al alba, una víctima más de su devoción por el trabajo” (253). On the micro level, Valenzuela shows that institutional and discursive dialectics of the Junta during the *Guerra Sucia* both resonate at the level of the individual, fracturing rather than uniting the multiple senses of self through the state. On the macro level, she points out the absurd ends to the paradoxical neoliberal-authoritarian state, in which, despite the developmentalist rhetoric that the Junta claims, they really fracture the citizen and show no qualms over creating citizens bound by stasis.

### **3.4. Argentine Realism Turned on its Head: Tomás Eloy Martínez's *El cantor de tango* and Ricardo Piglia's *La ciudad ausente***

It is the nineteenth century, “citizen fabricating” Argentine realism that Gabriela Nouzeilles, invokes in her description of the violent history that biopolitics and the development of the Argentine realist novel share, when she writes:

El realismo era particularmente atractivo porque proporcionaba tanto un criterio de validez estética como un programa epistemológico que, asentado en la supuesta transparencia del lenguaje, facilitaba el estudio de una sociedad y una geografía inexploradas al mismo tiempo que garantizaba la educación sistemática del lector. El énfasis en la formación del ciudadano futuro generó una inevitable paradoja: la insistencia en la imitación de lo real traicionaba el deseo de construir, más que de copiar, el perfil simbólico de la nación (13).

By the time Tomás Eloy Martínez and Ricardo Piglia begin to enjoy a wide audience, the Argentine body, both individually corporeal and collectively political, has undergone an updated form of violence. Citizen evoking has become less state-forming and more market-driven and political tactics are forceful and violent rather than epistemological and coercive. And fiction and the realist novel will have also undergone a facelift. No longer a tool used to tailor a normalized aesthetic citizen, by the time the Generation of '72 writes around the River Plate area, the realist novel will have become a means to undermine dominant symbolic institutions rather than affirm them.

Eloy Martínez and Piglia are both self reflective of their position in the Argentine canon. In *El cantor de tango* Borges' short story, "El Aleph" is the conceit around which the plot revolves, while in *La ciudad ausente* a fictionalized Macedonio Fernandez creates a subversive fiction machine that combats the military Junta's ability to read the thoughts of Argentina's inhabitants in a dystopian fictive landscape. Both writers are aware of the history that fiction has in Argentina and comment on it. When the cosmopolitan border expands in the nineteenth century, leading to an aesthetic lettering of the bourgeois citizen, writers respond with somatic fictions. Some bodies take to the new order, such as Sarmiento's Facundo Quiroga, and others resist, such as Cambaceres'

Andrés in *Sin rumbo*. With the late twentieth century cosmopolitan expansion, caused by the neoliberal policies of the *Guerra Sucia*, the literary response is to not represent the body as extension of city, which in turn, is an extension of the national narrative, but to analyze the representability of all of these subjects in a rapidly shifting symbolic order. Eloy Martínez and Piglia analyze how the opening of the economic border leads to a performative expectation of the Argentine citizen and the role literature plays in both the challenging and consolidating of political power. In a realism that second-guesses itself, Eloy Martínez and Piglia present protagonists that question the representability of national history, of literary potency, and of the contribution of letters to both sides of the dialectics of dictatorship. They analyze the symbolic strata that lend Buenos Aires its weight and, in turn, explore how useful the lettered city is in Latin America, if the lettered city, itself, is flawed. And their realism is filled with dynamic processes in constant motion, both journalistic inquiry, as is the case in *La ciudad ausente*, and doctoral dissertation, as is the case in *El cantor de tango*. In both texts, a protagonist attempts to decipher the code of the enigmatic lettered city, only to discover violent mechanism just beyond the surface of the metropolitan space's psychogeographic sheen. But both protagonists, despite the grit and gloom of their experience, come out of their studies with a reaffirmed belief in the power of narrative and inquiry to belie the rhetorical dominance of institutional power. The works of Eloy Martínez and Piglia do not so much affirm an aesthetic order and narrative history that will singularize the lettered citizen as to shift the terms of what the very concept of aesthetic citizenry.

In *La ciudad ausente*, Piglia employs a literary tactic exemplary of his generation: he uses a universal, popular medium to critique the avenues through which global culture flows. In this case, he mixes the dystopian science-fiction novel with Argentine

realism and fills his work with references to Argentine literary icons under duress during a fictive, authoritarian regime in which the world is loosely divided into two-pronged yet, fragmentary warfare. In the streets of Buenos Aires, citizens battle for ideological reasons that are not readily clear to them. And memory, literature, and the nation are called into question in a liminally apocalyptic urban landscape. We are not far, in *La ciudad ausente*, from the hermeneutical battles over national and political narratives of *Respiración artificial*, nor are we in thematic terrain that varies greatly from Dorfman and Peri Rossi's disjuncture or Soriano's national iconography in flux. Piglia pushes a war of letters into a literal scenario and uses an actual narrative production machine, stored in an Argentine museum, to symbolize the decline of the local institution during an incipient wave of global signifiers. More than physical, the battles in *La ciudad ausente* are epistemological, and the majority of subjects that inhabit the novel's urban space are caught in a frenzy of mixed messages, lettering and counter-lettering, and a looming sense of hysteria. It is, for Patrick Dove, the pushing of founding Argentine utopian paradigms to their logical end in the context of neoliberal flux: "... the utopian tradition that was initiated with Echeverría and Sarmiento now reveals its dystopian kernel of truth: its having been based on an imaginary structure of opposition and mutual negation", and in which institutions battle for the total imaginary "annihilation of the other" (243).

*La ciudad ausente* measures how discourse unfolds on three levels: one, on the level of Deleuzian signifying machines; two, on the level of the body that is lettered and unlettered by discursive apparatuses; and three, on the level of the writer and journalist that is expected to store trauma and lived experience in cultural memory that is, itself, under duress. It is a narrative cognizant of the Argentine intellectual's tradition of taking the collective national imaginary into his or her own hands both for better and for worse. It is a fictive playing out of Beatriz Sarlo's reckoning of the Argentine intellectuals' political ambivalence, in which they often times use their cosmopolitan privilege recklessly: "a veces lo usaron para disputar con los ricos y con la autoridad; otras veces lo usaron para imponer sus puntos de vista sobre los desposeídos"

Piglia reverses metaphor, making tangible what should simply exist in theory. In Macedonio's machine, we read an apparatus that spins myth and metaphor and consolidates the collective creation of counter-narrative to a central point of origin. Piglia breaks down the hermeneutical struggle of the *Guerra Sucia* by creating physical points of discursive enunciation, showing both how these machines are used for massive benefit and how their battery of signifiers wages violence on both the individual and collective memory. Symbolic malleability may be an effective medium in counter-warfare, but we never lose sight of the Benjaminian concern for the past's mounting oblivion. Piglia forces us to dwell on the danger of a symbolic battle that is dialectical rather than diatopical: what is lost of the original symbolic outliers to the Junta's

neoliberal modus, and the singularity of the frame of a global battle, even if it occurs on strictly discursive terms.

Nowhere is the conflictive relationship between local and cosmopolitan discourse more evident than in the novel's protagonist, Junior, who, like the sleuth in Santiago Gamboa's *Perder es cuestión de método*, is a beat journalist trying to get to the bottom of the political situation through analytical reasoning. Junior, himself, comprises a confluence of discourses. His father is an exiled Hungarian whose vocabulary is based on José Hernández's epic poem, *Martín Fierro*, whom the narrator jokes is a perfect metaphor for Macedonio's machine, a symbolic operation steeped in mythology that, though politically useful, bears no relation to reality, a character that tells "con palabras perdidas la historia de todos" (19).

Though all encompassing and truly cosmopolitan – representative of the "historia de todos" – Junior's father's language is inorganically framed. His cultural pallet and linguistic referents are overly restricted by a "national classic" that he only has a partial relationship with. Junior's father is able to make do, but he cannot fully express himself through the alien cultural icons, much less in the sweeping scope that he intends. Junior's lineage frames his own philosophical limits. On one hand, Junior reverses his father's cultural trajectory. Junior is obsessed by British radio news, and, though Argentine, is regularly mistaken for a foreigner. On another, his father's

linguistic frame mirror's his attempt to capture reality in the limited set of discourses and myths that the competing symbolic machines afford him.

Piglia, further, adds a high literary register to Junior's problems in popular representation. He compares a Joycean modernism, in which a hermetic language is created on an island of the coast of Ireland, to the task of a watchmaker, when a fictitious writer, Stephen Stevenson, attempts to isolate reality in a perfect metaphor, whose insularity is not subtly supported by the metaphor of the island, just as a watchmaker would capture the universal constant of time. The aesthetic universal parallels the utopian myth of the Argentine lettered city and the evocation of the universal citizen by way of a set of totalized aesthetic and ethical principles. The universally pure aesthetic is no more successful in mediating the relationship between the individual and the collective than the competing mythologies in the dialectics of a military regime. The island citizens never acquire a meaningful language that registers on the universal level, nor do the perpetrators of combative myth find a stable discourse. And the island's inhabitants turn, one after another, toward suicide, and the urban dwellers in Buenos Aires become increasingly harried as they switch from one discursive key to another. Junior can never track down the Macedonio machine, the locus of mythical enunciation, and the modernist-styled attempt to isolate a pure hermetic metaphor fails on a similar level. The cosmopolitan city and universal aesthetics are both bolstered and belied by discursive registers, neither failing to inscribe the Argentine body nor fully evoking a

functioning citizenry. And at the end of the novel, Junior concludes what the reader has been led to think all along: literature and myth may create a verbal ordering of the world, but life consists of more than words, it is also comprised of “cuerpos”, “enfermedades”, “dolor y muerte” (114).<sup>14</sup>

Eloy Martínez's *El Cantor de Tango* (2004), similarly, constructs a historical snapshot of Argentina, and more specifically its symbolic and political capital, Buenos Aires, by layering the multiple narratives of Argentine ontology and lore on top of one another. The official national history, guarded by an international epistemology, mixes with two of the most prominent progenitors of the Argentine image: The Tango and Jorge Luis Borges, setting these two images, commodified for and by an international market, against the backdrop of the Argentine financial crisis. The tale skillfully sifts through the dense symbolic strata that constitute the Argentine national narrative, while ironically maintaining a critical take on the role that world history, global markets, and performative tourism play in the constitution of an Argentine identity.

The novel's portrayal of Buenos Aires sets up both an intriguing sense of intellectualism and an ironic take on historical narrative as early as the first page when the reader is introduced to the young graduate student from NYU, Bruno Cadogan, who approaches the city with an academic scrutiny that is mediated by both popular

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<sup>14</sup> *Plata quemada* (1997) and *Respiración artificial* (1980) are also exemplary of Piglia's concern with the relationship between the body and literary and symbolic signifying and the mutability of history in times of terror.



understanding and canonical-textual reference points. At the onset of the novel, the reader is offered a glimpse into Bruno's academic perspective when through a first person narration he confesses that although his dissertation will rely heavily on the city of Buenos Aires, he does not feel that a visit to the city would benefit his project

"Uno de mis profesores me había aconsejado viajar a Buenos Aires, pero no me parecía necesario. Había visto cientos de fotos y películas. Podía imaginar la humedad, el Río de la Plata, la llovizna, los paseos vacilantes de Borges por las calles del sur con su bastón de ciego. Tenía una colección de mapas y guías de Baedeker publicadas en los años en que salieron sus libros. Suponía que era una ciudad parecida a Kuala Lumpur: tropical y exótica, falsamente moderna, habitada por descendientes de europeos que se habían acostumbrado a la barbarie" (13).

Cadogan's imaginary and conclusions regarding Argentina are a clear product of an academic reading of the country, a structuralist epistemic construction that imbues his sense of understanding to the extent that he considers it superfluous to actually spend time in the country with which he is academically engaged. He reduces hundreds of years of Argentine history to the singular moment of the present, which he in turn lumps under the vague classification of "peripheral city".

Cadogan quickly runs out of referential terrain, however, and is encouraged to travel to Buenos Aires to finish his thesis on the relationship between Borges and the Tango, when he hears that the alleged best Tango singer of all time, Julio Martel, is still alive and singing in the small bars of San Telmo, a mythical singer that does not record or market himself for a massive or international audience for the simple reason that he

doesn't like any "mediadores entre su voz y el público" (15). Martel's distaste for mediation contrasts strongly with Cadogan's admitted hesitance to leave his local campus to work on his doctoral project, creating tension between Cadogan's pursuit of knowledge and the cultural event that takes place fleetingly and resists codification. In thinking that he will gain easy access to the missing link to his dissertation, Cadogan is surprised by the fact that he cannot find such an important singer at Tower Records and is forced to concede to a trip to Buenos Aires in order to further pursue Martel's mythically pure voice.

The conflict between representation and reception that Martel and Cadogan's relationship presents conjures up notions of the post-structuralist and critical theory that Eloy Martínez self-reflectively obsessed over throughout his career. In *El cantor de tangos*, Eloy Martínez uses Martel's voice to open up two contrasting versions of Argentine history and to continue the Argentine tendency to analyze Buenos Aires as somatic riddle, as a living, breathing enigma. Martel's voice comes to be linked with a local version of history, or a version of history enunciated from the Argentine perspective: "Cuando vio desplazarse a Martel hacia la tarima, junto al mostrador, incorpóreo como una araña, y lo oyó cantar, cayó en la cuenta de que su voz eludía todo relato porque ella misma era el relato de la Buenos Aires pasada y de la que vendría. Suspendida por un hilo tenue de los do y de los fa, la voz insinuaba el duelo de los unitarios, la pasión de Manuelita Rosas por su padre, la Revolución del Parque, el hacinamiento y la

desesperanza de los inmigrantes, las matanzas de la Semana Trágica en 1919, el bombardeo de la Plaza de Mayo antes de la caída de Perón ...” (41). Eloy Martínez’s emphasis on the way in which Martel’s pure voice eludes description forces the reader to acknowledge the linguistic principles at play within the narrative: every signifier communicates either more or less than is intended and, as a result, when a signifier enters into the mediating symbolic system, its meaning is necessarily distorted.

There is a tension between local and the global cultural signifiers, in the text, that hinges on Martel and his tangos. While Martel’s singing is in large part independent and untraceable, a more polished version of tango is neatly packaged alongside other stereotypical national images, such as existential writers and daylong *fútbol* outings for tourists:

A eso de las siete de la tarde llevan a los turistas de paso a ver los cafés de la Avenida de Mayo, de San Telmo y de Barracas. En el Tortoni les preparan un espectáculo con jugadores de dados que revolean sus cubiletes y se amenazan con facones. Oyen cantores de tango en El Querandí, y en El Progreso de la avenida de Montes de Oca conversan con escritores de novelas que están trabajando en sus computadores portátiles. Todo es trucho, pura fachada, como te imaginás” (52).

The false imagery invoked by the performative tourist register opens up a gap between outsiders and insiders. The tourists, mainly Northern Europeans and North Americans, arrive with a canon of expectations, for which they are willing to pay to confirm. The mentioned quotes place an emphasis on the tourists’ imaginary. Before arriving to Argentina, a matrix of signifiers and metonymic chains will have created an

imaginary Buenos Aires in their minds. This is the Buenos Aires that they buy into, and the Buenos Aires that the locals chose to farcically perform. The local imaginary is intertwined with a performative economy associated with an international tourist industry and the universal historical episteme and through serial communicative distortion constantly muddies the waters of local identity.

Eloy Martinez expresses the nexus between market and identity with a critical fluency, by creating a protagonist with a sound understanding of post-colonial theory. Cadogan, like the reader, is versed nation-state theory, such as Hommi Bahaba's claims that the affective properties of nationhood stem from a cyclical relationship between the national narrative and the social body that performs to the standard of the narrative itself. The collective subjectivity produced by the national narrative for post-colonial nations is, then, built upon the basis of both a historical episteme that is slanted by the European-based geopolitics of knowledge and a canonical iconography that caters to the global market, leaving historicity and identity uncomfortably rubbing up against one another.

Eloy Martinez understands that it would be reductionist to portray the citizens of Buenos Aires as strictly passive agents with no control over their sense of self, and the novel's structure proposes and recapitulates this idea by establishing a sense of fleetingly obtainable historical purity through Martel's voice, Borge's Aleph, and Cadogan's attempt to link the two in his doctoral thesis. Cadogan's research in Buenos

Aires runs parallel to a side narrative involving an ageing intellectual named Bonorino and another friend that Cadogan makes, El Tucumano, setting up a multilayered theme that underscores the entire novel. The elderly Bonorino dedicates his life to writing an encyclopedia of Buenos Aires from the absolute perspective of positive knowledge. As should sound familiar to readers of Borges, Bonorino is aided by the Aleph, to which he gains access when he lies in the supine position underneath his basement stairs. El Tucumano, who makes his living as a tour guide, convinces Cadogan that if they could find a way to kick Bonorino out of his apartment, they could make a fortune showing off the Aleph to tourists who would be eager to experience the idealized world of Borges. With a heavy sense of guilt, Cadogan comes to agree with El Tucumano and is about to cause Bonorino's eviction when a development company stops him short of betraying his new friend and demolishes the apartment building that houses the Aleph to make way for a new apartment complex. The relationship between Cadogan, El Tucumano, and Bonorino supports the storyline dedicated to Martel's pure voice. While Martel signposts purity of voice, the reader comes to associate Bonorino the pure recording of the national narrative. If Martel's voice is pure, Bonorino's encyclopedia marks the representation of the pure voice through undiluted communication. But El Tucumano is willing to betray Bonorino and ruin his encyclopedic compilation in order to explore a niche market in the local tourist industry, and the developers' desire to demolish the building further emphasizes the role that the market and the rhetoric of development

play in distorting the local historical perspective. In the name of development, both a national icon and a spatial representation of Martel's pure historicity are both figuratively and literally leveled.

The violent relationship between history and the market as is portrayed by Bonorino's failed project compliments the semiotic distortion that occurs when local culture enters into the global symbolic economy. Both Decolonial takes on culture and post-Marxist approaches to singular and global markets place emphasis on the role that a univocal modernity plays in framing the difficult task of representation from the periphery. While decolonial theorists draw attention to the epistemic violence that modernity causes when it ignores alternative histories and memories in the name of development and reason, an orthodox-Marxist approach contends that the very violence of modernity is what creates the framework for an internationally enunciated history. Frederic Jameson goes as far as to claim that this paradoxical relationship between subjectivity, history, and representation, is, in fact, one of the necessary pillars of modernity, or that Modernity both grants and retracts the possibility of a local narration of self, because the kernel of modernity, Descartes' *cogito*, is not representable in the massive sense. Jameson puts it concisely when he plays off of Heidegger's theory that all knowledge is a simultaneous act of disclosure and concealment in writing, "Consciousness is unrepresentable, along with the lived experience of subjectivity itself" (53). This modern crisis of representation that is taken further by the decolonial

perspective and the impossibility of pure signification highlights the fact that the post-colonial subject is at more of a loss than the privileged modern subject when attempting to narrate the experience of self, be it individually or collectively, through the international narrative of history.

It would seem, then, that the incongruous pushing and pulling of modernity would bury any sense of history deeply beneath the layers of political discourse, a reified market mentality, and popular lore. Throughout the work, Eloy Martinez narrates Buenos Aires ironically. Both the *Guerra Sucia* and the 2001 financial crisis are juxtaposed to the city's inherent beauty and dense intellectual history. The internationally idealized Argentine narrative and the darker tales of epistemic, corporeal, and economic violence waged in the name of development are not extracted from one another, but are presented as the ironic dialectics of peripheral nationhood, not allowing one narrative to trump the other. And the self aware admiration for Buenos Aires that arises in the text does not stray into the waters of Peronist populism in a superficial attempt to reclaim history nor does it fall into the traps of a reductionist high civility reading of the city, but instead aims to frame it as a national symbol whose history has been lost in the aesthetic and epistemic expectations of globalism.

Eloy Martinez himself argues that the writer's task is to wade through self-referential discourse in search of the lost purity of history. In an interview for *Americas* magazine he states, "History is written by those in power. Thus, if those in power have

the right to imagine a history that is false, why then shouldn't novelists attempt with their imaginations to discover the truth?" (Bach, Americas 1998). With this quote in mind, it is easy to imagine that Eloy Martinez would view his work as a writer as similar to that carried out in Bonorino's encyclopedic project and Martel's tangos, both symbols of purity. But he also presents us with a third historical agent, the narrator and cosmopolitan critic, Bruno Cadogan, whose academic interests frame the novel. Although, Cadogan's opinions and academic sensibility become less and less naïve as the novel progresses, the reader is always cognizant of his role as an outsider in Argentina, there to rewrite the local history according to his perspective. While they are similar in motive, the three different academic and artistic projects, yield very different results. Bonorino's encyclopaedia is perfect but is buried under the rubble of development. Martel's voice marks a pure aesthetic representation of history but is never recorded. And Cadogan's doctoral thesis, which attempts to unite disparate modes of Argentine cultural production in an act of admiration, further buries the truth of history. As a result, the reader is left not with the notion that truth and pure history are nonexistent but that their reverberating cacophony must be approached with caution and, perhaps, can only be captured by an author that is not afraid to bend the rules and buy into myth, himself.

### **3.5. Errant Cosmopolitanism and the Unlettered Center in Fernando Vallejo's *El río del tiempo***



Vallejo develops his eponymous narrator, Fernando, over the course of the five novel series, *El río del tiempo*, comprised of *Los días azules* (1985), *El fuego secreto* (1987), *Los caminos a Roma* (1988), *Años de indulgencia* (1989), and *Entre fantasmas* (1993). The series is partially autobiographical and partially canon interpretation. Vallejo grafts his life onto those of his literary forbearers and compares his personal relationship with highly charged national historical hallmarks with those of Ancient Greek philosophers' position in relation to the development of global history. It is this tension between the global and the local around which *El río del tiempo* revolves, in a collection filled with paradoxes, digressions, and clear lived contrasts.

Formally, Vallejo insists we read the novel as a river analogy. Throughout the collection, and especially in *Los días azules*, Fernando compares his life with a long streaming body of water, springing from his grandparents' Santa Anita *finca* in Medellín and meandering throughout the globe until he ends in Mexico City. This river is not so much a peaceful guide as it is a turbulent force, and the epigraph from Heraclitus announces as much: "no volveremos a bañarnos en las aguas del mismo río". This turbulence is marked by the formal tendency to run off the course that the river metaphor itself insists upon. Vallejo's style in *El río del tiempo* is circular and driven by nostalgic regressions. Over the course of the collection, no matter where the narrator may be, Medellín, Rome, Madrid, Paris, London, New York, or Mexico, the text implies

both a linear course with no ability to return to the point of origin and the many times maudlin laments about the attempt to return to childhood. Only at the end of *Entre fantasmas*, when Fernando returns to his grandparents *finca*, and realizes that he will never be able to fully recover the past does the narrator, and text, give up on trying to make the linear and circular compatible.

Beyond style, *El río del tiempo* is a text filled with philosophical and discursive contradictions. Fernando, more than a philosopher insistent upon his control of picaresque scene after picaresque scene, comes across as a body swept up in the streams of geographical and political shifts. The river of time carries Fernando away more than it gently nudges him; it is as much a source of trauma as a developmental vehicle.

Vallejo's fictionalized autobiography emphasizes the discursive push and pull at the cosmopolitan border, highlighting a series of inherent contradictions. Vallejo, at once, places emphasis on his national and global influences. On the local level, Fernando's trajectory is a synthesis of the biographies of his national literary heroes, José Asunción Silva and Porfirio Barba Jacob and in many ways opens itself to the same tragic travel narratives. Like Silva and Barba Jacob, Vallejo settles in Mexico City, and, keeping in mind Vallejo's insistence on framing Silva's life with the shipwreck he experienced while traveling from Paris to Colombia, Fernando's claims that the existential tension he feels while skipping from nation to nation will end in a "náufrago" resonates strongly within the local cannon. Yet, Fernando travels to the "centers" of

cultural production, studying in cinema schools in Rome, Madrid, and Paris, and going to New York with the hope of finding resources for his films. While traveling, Vallejo alludes to the influences that he picks up from the global cultural canon and European philosophy, ranging from the pre-Socratics to Heidegger.

Fernando, also, embodies the plurality of voices experienced from the perspective of local life in Medellín and as a Colombian abroad. There is a sharp contrast in the voice of the erudite Fernando that is the standard tone of the collection and the local *paisa slang* and racist and xenophobic rants that occasionally come over him. Caught between multiple voices, Fernando interrupts long poetic monologues with Conservative set piece rants that would have been in circulation during his childhood in *Violencia* Colombia – on urban youths caught up in *pandilla* violence, for example, he takes a tone of population control: “muerte natural, como se muere en Colombia: asesinado. Le aplicaron el control de la población por cuestiones de política” – with the pretense of his sociopolitical forbearers who viewed themselves as high cultural ambassadors to the periphery – “Suerte común a todos los filósofos anteriores a Sócrates, de lo que escribiera Heráclito nada queda: solo referencias de autores muy posteriores, aproximaciones, fragmentos pasados de escrito a escritor, de siglo en siglo hasta llegar a nosotros como el agua de los brahmanes a Alejandro enturbiada en muchos canales” – and with the contrarian and impish actions and oral semantics of urban Medellín – while in London he urinates in the middle of Piccadilly Circus: “¿En el centro de la metrópoli, en el cruce de los caminos, en el corazón del Imperio? Sí. Ahí. (185, 285, 430). While the poetic observations and nostalgic laments for his lost Medellín prevail, these alternative discursive forms to which Vallejo would have been exposed throughout his life clash in the character of Fernando, erupting spontaneously. Vallejo

emphasizes this tension formally by contrasting the complex hypotaxis of Fernando's poetic ruminations with the orality of colloquial Conservative rants and street parlance.

As the architecture of Fernando's voice dissolves as he enters into hysterical fit after hysterical fit, in many ways, he embodies the aesthetic and cosmopolitan border. At once, he is exemplary of Schiller's aesthetic citizen and Kwame Anthony Appiah's cosmopolitan steward and an ideologically unstable and, at times, quasi-sociopathic subject. Vallejo's cultural and geographical fan plays triple duty in *El río del tiempo*. He solidifies his place in the global canon; he writes his memoirs of the time he spent in Europe studying cinema; and he forces us to think critically about the very cosmopolitan tradition that he enjoys. He encourages us to view the rite of traveling to Europe to become lettered ironically rather than celebrate it. His process of becoming a lettered citizen is violent, and largely ineffective, rather than empowering and sublime. Fernando goes through prescribed motions yet never achieves the promised return.

Vallejo's use of Fernando undermines apologetic currents in a singular globalism based in European modernity by taking aesthetic and cosmopolitan modernity at their word, pushing them to their limits, and failing to become a functioning ethical citizen in the process. Fernando falls well in line with Appiah's partial cosmopolitan who is neither "the nationalist who abandons all foreigners nor with the hard-core cosmopolitan who regards her friends and fellow citizens with icy impartiality" (xvii). And he follows the rules of aesthetic globalization. His goal is to create a series of films, to depict the Colombian *Violencia* and to make a national classic through the technique

and principles that he learns while in Europe. He understands that laws of globalization, be they juridical, ethical, or aesthetic are based in Europe, so he follows the lead of his literary forbearers and travels to the metropol in order to learn the universal form. Silva traveled to Paris to learn poetic modernism, and Fernando follows suit to learn the cinematic equivalent. For Appiah, the centrality in this system in which Fernando engages is not only beneficial in a post-globalized world but is essential:

When we're trying to interpret the concept of cultural property, we ignore at our peril what lawyers, at least, know: property is an institution, created largely by laws which are best designed by thinking about how they can serve the human interests of those whose behavior they govern. If the laws are international laws, then they govern everyone. And the human interests in question are the interests of all humankind" (130).

This borderless community, Appiah continues, is a place where, "The believer in human dignity spreads across the nations, and they live their creed (138).

Yet, when Fernando follows the presuppositions of Appiah's "creed" to the letter, human dignity is far from what he witnesses. Fernando experiences failed institutions, subjective and racial tension, and oppressive financial systems in Europe and North America as much as he does in his home country. There is a cloak and dagger game that Vallejo plays, as Fernando travels. Each work is associated with a geographical region, and Fernando arrives with a fresh-faced innocence and a wholesale belief in both the region's cultural code and that his journey to the metropol will end in a cultural product, his films, that will be of great developmental benefit to Colombia. This

innocence is quickly trumped by the blunt reality of each major city he visits, as he quickly moves onto a new global capital, in a long chain of hopeful globetrotting. All the while, Fernando fetishizes his point of origin in a layered metaphor that includes his grandmother, the *finca* Santa Anita, where he spent much of his childhood, and the city of Medellín. In the constant cycle of hope and cynicism, of pomp and lived reality, Fernando is caught between a cultural particular and a global system.

It is telling that the first travel novel of the series, *Caminos a Roma*, begins with an analysis of the geopolitics of cultural production: “Amigo, todos los caminos llevan a Roma. Así ha sido siempre y así siempre será. Por algo es la capital del Imperio. Quien viven en Biblos, en Treveris, en Hispania, Lusitania, Germania, en Medellín o Envigado está fregado: vive en la periferia” (326). Vallejo, who in the first two novels that focus on Fernando’s development in Medellín, announces to us the reason for Fernando’s reluctant departure in *Caminos a Roma*. And the reasons are aesthetic. While European philosophy, and global letters come to him in *Los días azules* and *El fuego secreto*, there is a need for expression that Medellín and Colombia cannot meet. Fernando’s fondest memories are of his *abuela* reading Heidegger to him in *Santa Anita*, yet he must seek out the form, himself, as he becomes an adult. Vallejo adds an ethical dimension to Fernando’s aesthetic problem. While *Los días azules* scene-sets a point of origin for Fernando, *El fuego secreto* deals largely with desire that is illicit in that same point of origin. Fernando is forced to leave the national womb in large part due to the fact that

he is gay and, though there is an abundance of underground gay clubs and groups, his sexuality is sharply frowned upon on the national level. As he leaves the confines of the nation in order to explore both his limited aesthetic and sexual desire, Appiah's insistence on reading the global as a forum for universal rights, makes sense. And the *fuego* that acts as a metaphor for this very desire becomes too large for the confines of the particular. At the end of *El fuego secreto*, Fernando knocks over a candle burning down a gay club, El Café Miami, forcing him to flee the city. His ontological state, his aesthetic palate, and his physical actions force him into Appiah's cosmopolitan avenues of ethical acceptance. The reality that follows in *Caminos a Roma*, *Años de indulgencia*, and *Entre fantasmas*, however, highlights that Appiah's humane oneness is not as inclusive as Fernando may have imagined. It is not the idea of a universal ethical system that he uncovers but the iniquity in its bearings.

Vallejo starts in Rome where he plans to study at Italy's national cinema school. Upon arriving, however, he experiences a bout of nostalgia for Colombia and real conditions in Rome that are not as fulfilling as he had hoped. Vallejo mirrors the romanticization of the metropol with Fernando's nostalgia for home: "mi segunda noche romana, soñé con Medellín. Soñé que la calle Junín era un río. He ahí mi paradoja: cuando vivía empecé a soñar con Roma. De tope a tope del mar se iban mis sueños inconformes, viajeros, con su nostalgia necia" (338). In *Caminos a Roma*, Fernando travels geographically and emotionally more than in any other novel in the collection, and he

comes of age as he applies the same romanticization to new cities as he hops around Europe. Not finding success or the sentimental education that he anticipated in Rome, Fernando moves to Paris, where a series of exams keeps him from entering French film schools, to Madrid, where he does not make it past his first interview at any university, and then to London, Amsterdam and Munich with similar results.

Vallejo complicates Fernando's failed cosmopolitan experience by gilding his structural inability to gain acceptance into the aesthetic system on the meta-level with particular negative experiences on trains, in which, while he travels from capital city to capital city, disillusion foreshadows the flagging idealism that he will experience in the next country. In one of the more revealing train scenes, Fernando has an aggressive encounter with a French train steward, while traveling from Rome to Paris. Fernando tries to buy food from the steward who refuses his Italian lira, claiming that it is a useless currency since, in the interim of the train journey, they have entered France. Fernando goes on a prolonged rant, berating the steward, in a mixture of languages, none of which allow for fluent expression. The scene sets the easily traversable political and physical borders against its more turgid subjective, linguistic, and affective counterpart. In the emphatically un-national space, Fernando, who is a cosmopolitan traveler, not at home in any European country in particular but, in theory, at home in all of them, experiences a hang-up. His currency is no good on the literal and figurative level. Not only can he not physically pay for the service that he desires, but his



linguistic currency does not allow him to express himself, and his affective currency does afford him the know-how to navigate the situation. In the cosmopolitan non-place of the train traveling between two European capital cities, subjective hierarchies and boundaries do not disappear but are reproduced, and Fernando's exclusion from the global center redoubles, leading to bitterness rather than empowerment.

By the time of his fourth international train journey, Fernando's description of his fellow post-national subjects has gone bleak. Paradoxically he begins to resort to addressing those around him with national stereotypes, rather than finding a sense of humane oneness in them. And we have traveled a long way from the early idealization of the European and cosmopolitan space when, on his way to London, Fernando complains about the alienating rather than empowering properties of the metropol:

Va el tren oscuro y silencioso culo sucio de hierro, de ceniza, con todos los asientos ocupados. Todos ocupados y sin embargo ni una palabra, ni una mirada que se cruce con otra mirada. Viajeros hieráticos. ¿Me he despeñado acaso por una hendidura del tiempo en otro tiempo, de otro planeta, de otra dimensión? No. Son ingleses. Y ahí donde usted los ve tan propios, tan circunspectos, tan callados van borrachos. Yo sé lo que les digo, yo los conozco, yo soy experto en humanidad. Borrachos pero callados, rumiando los pensamientos, con el pudor de existir" (428).

Vallejo emphasizes Fernando's struggle by placing him in a train that is physically at capacity but is empty in terms of meaningful symbolic exchange. And as the infrastructure of the train rusts (let's not forget Soriano's employment of a similar metaphor at the post-national level in *Una sombra ya pronto serás*), his ideal of the

cosmopolitan experience atrophies in parallel. Fernando emphasizes that he is an expert in the matters of humanity; he wants us to know that he has traveled to the center and now he can report that it is nothing like he imagined. Life in the metropol is not to be glorified, and he wants us to imagine an alternative along with him. Yet, like his linguistic and monetary currency, his understanding of self begins to lose traction, and, when his tone turns entropic – “Españoles, italianos, franceses, holandeses, voy por estas tierras de Europa de patria en patria rezando mi rosario ecuménico. Colecciono nacionalidades. Para el futuro, para el recuerdo. Después pasaré las viejas cintas desvaídas, borradas, tratando de ver” – it becomes clear that Vallejo paints the image of a *náufrago*, updated for the end of the twentieth century, and Vallejo’s interest in Silva’s loss of his body of work while traveling from Paris to Colombia by boat comes into focus (438). Fernando – and we could easily bring any of the authors already analyzed back into the fold here – loses his cultural bearings, his own literary output (“cintas desvaídas, borradas”), lampooned on a train in the middle of Europe, as Vallejo, again, plays the two-way game of writing himself into the Colombian national canon and exploring a post-national world. Silva’s boat is replaced by Fernando’s train; Silva’s written work is replaced by the *cintas* with which Fernando will film; and the in-between space, in which the Colombian writer becomes lost, is, in Vallejo’s version, not in the open sea but the cultural center itself.

Motion is central to Vallejo's rendering of the river of time. While Heraclitus's interpretation of the flowing waters of time set the tone of *El río del tiempo*, there are counter interpretations strewn throughout. The broad sense of time that frames the collection revolves around the concept of universal flow. There is a clear point of origin in Vallejo's river, be it literal, cultural, or figurative, and a clear tributary. The river is all encompassing – he repeatedly remembers Heraclitus' maxim *panta rhei* ("todo fluye") – and flows in a singular direction, and Fernando's malaise is based in his knowing challenge to these principles. Vallejo uses Fernando to confront the singularity of these flows by tracing the universal, cultural telos in reverse. If no one can escape the currents of the river of time, Fernando insists on examining their origin and most meaningful deltas. When he travels to New York, London, Paris, Madrid, and Rome, in order to seek the knowledge and funding to create a national cultural product, he traces the flow of global history and the telos of Empire. But, in his rapid disillusion with these centers of global cultural and economic capital, Fernando challenges their primacy. He links aesthetic epistemology – the know how to make the Colombian films in a modern tone and style –, cultural capital – the cachet associated with each film school to which he is rejected –, and the geographical flow of globalism, ending in a deromanticized rendering of the universal, cultural river and a challenge to the preeminence of the global centers to which he travels.

There are three clear linear paths associated with movement that, further, underscore Fernando's anxiety over the global and the local. There is a universal river of time, which he associates with naïve idealism followed by material cynicism, the trains on which he meanders through Europe, which he associates with failed cosmopolitan experiences, and the road from his neighborhood in Medellín, Boston, to his grandparents' *finca*, which he associates with a youthful felicity. *El río del tiempo* revolves around these three linear paths, and Fernando's malaise – the clash between high and colloquial registered voices, the obsession with the memory of his grandmother reading Heidegger to him on the very *finca* with which he associates local experience, and the emphatic disdain for cosmopolitan centers – staggers these three forms of motion and flow, arranging them in an ordering of local and global associations. And Vallejo places Fernando in the middle of these flows and uses his experiences on the three rivers to explore the borders both at the “center” and the “periphery” and the unsuitability of long-standing cultural binaries, as he constructs, in Fernando, a revealing case study in aesthetic and archival border dwelling.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

The Generation of '72 comprises the most interesting take on cosmopolitanism and globalization in the contemporary Latin American literary canon. The highly publicized generations that act as their bookends – the *Boom*, on one side and *Crack*,

*McOndo*, and *Visceral* and *Dirty Realism*, on the other – experienced, and continue to experience, a much more favorable publishing terrain. The soft-power investment by American philanthropic and governmental organizations during the Cold War, along with the need to fill a cultural void in Spain during the Franco regime, made for a fecund global publishing market for the *Boom*, while the increased ease of travel and communication and the act of coming of age in a non-dictatorial political environment fosters a very different experience with cosmopolitan centers for younger generations. When *Boom* writers traveled to Paris and London it was an act of free will, largely out of desire to be close to the epicenter of the modern form. When generation-X writers move to Barcelona or New York, they do so to be close to their publishers and within budget flight striking distance of centers of intellectual capital. When the Generation of '72 left their home countries, it was under duress. As such, their collective poetics treats themes of globalization and cosmopolitanism critically and with a darker tone than that of the generations on either side of them. They focus on the disjuncture and rupture caused on both the individual and massive level by political interventionism. They depict the opening of the neoliberal border as disruptively resignifying local visual and discursive orders. And they call into question the role of literature and high culture in times of terror.

It is an uneasy aesthetics filled with irony that the Generation of '72 produces. They, at once, are the first generation to take popular mediums seriously en masse and

are presented with the problem of critiquing the largely imperial culture from which popular mediums emanate. They are caught between the publishing effortlessness of the *Boom* and the pop-cultural fluency of those born a decade after them. Neither fully at ease in soirees at the Balcells' nor the blogosphere, the Generation of '72 leaves a telling aesthetic inscription of the not so comfortable phase of incipient globalization. Not indicative of a publishing culture that fosters violent tomes for export, nor young enough for political oppression to act simply as a bildungsroman backdrop, the Generation of '72 marks a group whose collective poetics captures the difficult terms of the movement of the aesthetic and economic border to Latin America for the first time.

## Chapter Four

### The Global: Fernando Vallejo, Aesthetic Citizenship, and the Closure of World Literature

What the cultural industries are creating today is a complex *reorganization of hegemony*, and it requires that we conceive of them as key devices for the construction of collective identities, that is, the differentiation and recognition of subjects who make up diverse social groups.  
-Jesús Martín Barbero

It may have seemed like low-hanging fruit. It may have been the sort of ironic twist that Fernando Vallejo, a writer with a standing, reciprocal and highly publicized love-hate relationship with his home country, himself, would have considered heavy-handed had it come in prose form. But when the Bogotá stop of the book tour for his most recent work, *El don de la vida* (2010), was scheduled to take place in the Centro Cultural Gabriel García Márquez, Vallejo could hardly help himself: “Estoy muy contento de estar con ustedes en este centro cultural tan hermoso. Lastima que le han puesto un nombre tan feíto: El Centro Cultural García Márquez. [...] No es un escritor, es un burócrata”.

Though the comment attracted some nervous laughter, few in the audience were surprised. Vallejo was clearly channeling Fernando, his literary persona and recurring narrator, whose default, public setting is snide and premeditatedly divisive. There is reason to believe that Vallejo was even simply playing to the crowd. García Márquez was at the event in name only and has become an easy target for members of a younger generation that have struggled with his far-reaching shadow. And Vallejo, in his home coming, decided to address the elephant in the room head on. His own literary career covers and comments on the Colombian cultural canon piecemeal. He is at once

Colombia's most intriguing living writer and it's foremost, if ad hoc, literary critic. And he is in a generational position, directly preceding the *Boom*, that pits him against Colombia's largest cultural export of the late twentieth century, magical realism, without the privilege generation-X irony, new media, and prize committees and critical cultures that favor diverse literary production.<sup>1</sup>

Vallejo's anti-totemic tendencies are at once pioneering and revealing. As an urban novelist in a Colombia that has largely played into narratives of the rural elsewhere for international audiences, the unsullied, spiritual backwater that one day may finish, though not contribute to, European projects, Vallejo struggled for decades to gain publishing and critical attention with a tone and subject matter that depicted his nation in a way many found too harsh: more real human experience than tourist advertisement, more grit than exception, and more urban than rural. While publishing houses and prize committees averted the gaze of willing international publics from the harsh realities of Latin American during the seventies, eighties, and nineties, authors that worked toward a poetics that would represent the lived reality of the time, struggled to find an audience, and Vallejo decided to relish the irony in presenting a book to an admiring audience in a building named after a figure that had acted more as obstacle than edifice for him.

One must question how a literary icon as well regarded as García Márquez can hinder rather than foster local literary production. And to understand how we travel from a largely romantic Nobel Prize winner to an *enfant terrible* like Vallejo in the span of one generation, an assessment world literary systems and the form of the novel itself is

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<sup>1</sup> Further, I discuss how it is mainly conservative cultural institutions and press that embrace the easily exportable style of magical realism.



in order. Is World Literature a forum through which diverse groups express themselves? Or is it a constricting and aesthetically limiting epistemological framework? Is the novel a revolutionary medium? Or does it simultaneously colonize as much as it emancipates.

Having placed Vallejo's work within the context of both the Colombian Urban Novel and the Generation of '72, in this chapter, I offer a more sociological reading of the way that that literary aesthetics circulate around the globe and how Vallejo and the members of the two generations of which he forms part have largely suffered from such large-scaled literary machinery. In doing so, I argue that Vallejo complicates notions of World Literature, a literary framework that has largely been regarded as revolutionary and emancipatory. I explore to what extent current formations of World Literature are liberating and to what extent they foster Vallejo's literary bureaucrats that oversimplify spaces of dense literary output. To explore Vallejo's relationship with the celebrated literary styles of the time, I focus on the *Boom* generation, a group that is regularly celebrated as exemplary by proponents of World Literature, and the Colombian Urban Novelists that struggled to gain acclaim due to a publishing and critical culture that favored, and in many cases continues to favor, the style of García Márquez's most internationally recognized works. My reading of world literary systems and the late-twentieth century Colombian novel through Vallejo and his contemporaries' experience analyzes the epistemic violence that a singular literary system causes. Similar to my analysis of the continued sociopolitical and literary ramifications of the *lettered city* in

chapter 1, I examine the ongoing implications of the closure of the literary world during the nineteenth century, in the birth of what Goethe labeled early on as the “market of general intellectual commerce” in *Weltliteratur*.<sup>2</sup> I analyze the theoretical development of World Literature and point to the shortcomings of using “peripheral” figures such as *Boom* writers to justify an emancipatory reading of both the novel and a singular literary epistemology.

There is, of course, no shortage of irony at play when anti-totemic figures like Vallejo become widely regarded literary icons themselves. It presents a series of literary challenges that forces us to question if literary personae like Vallejo can survive the process of becoming canonized representative of their home regions in their own right. Since Vallejo’s ascension within the literary scene, the tone and poetics that he represents has gained attention with international audiences and favor with publishing houses and prize committees. This has led to a mixture of further distrust for major Latin American literary publishing houses on behalf of local authors, questions over whether or not Latin American urban and realist representations are any less marginalizing than the taste for magical and rural tones and settings already in

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<sup>2</sup> Later in this chapter I discuss Christopher Prendergast’s tracing of the semantic root of World Literature to Goethe’s “*Weltliteratur*”. Here it is also worth noting that James English writes, ““It dates back, after all, to Goethe’s coinage of 1827 (*Weltliteratur*), and has essentially served, at least since the early decades of the twentieth century, to name the canon of comparative literature – a canon constructed in and for the core Euro-American educational apparatus, but which includes texts drawn from peripheral cultures” (305). Quoted in: English, James F. *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and Circulation of Cultural Value*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005.

circulation, and for advocates of a singular literary system to highlight that the system, itself, corrects its own aesthetic blunders.

In order to complement Vallejo's experience with the both national and global literary systems, I elaborate on two movements that have highlighted the irony of the cosmopolitan success of visceral aesthetics and an alternative to World Literary systems, respectively. In the first instance, I analyze Roberto Bolaño's ironic take on his own success and aesthetics in *2666* and argue that his final collection points to an evolution away from faith in the international publishing industry. This is an issue that Vallejo takes to heart: Vallejo plans for his next novel to only be published in the written form on a personal not-for-profit website and in spoken form on Youtube, precisely in order to bypass the filters presented by the publishing industry.<sup>3</sup> As a supplement to the debates revolving around the visibility of urban anemic groups already presented in my discussion of Alonso Salazar's *No nacimos pa' semilla* and Vallejo's *La virgen de los sicarios* in chapter 1, I analyze Washington Cucurto and Javier Barilero's *Eloisa Cartonera* movement that involves subjectivities largely left out of literary production in the process of creating novels, by making literature available to large populations usually not accounted by the publishing world. These responses, that critique literary production from the inside on the one hand and include subjectivities typically treated

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<sup>3</sup> Vallejo discussed this idea with me when we met in Mexico City on 10 June 2011. He expressed his belief that technology would benefit literary and aesthetic diversity, precisely because it would help bypass traditional editorial and institutional circles. In what I took as an illustration of his point, he insisted that we try to erase Shakespeare's Wikipedia page. While we tried to erase the page for over thirty minutes, we found out that Shakespeare's page was "semi-protected" by Wikipedia and impossible to simply erase.

simply as subject matter on the other, couple with Vallejo and his generation's tendency to draw attention to the literary production that world literary systems sweep away, pointing to a literary citizenship that dwells outside of the world of privileged voices and casts the political economy of prestige in a harsh light.

I bring Bolaño and the Eloisa Cartonera movement into the conversation in order to show how the concerns that Vallejo represents have evolved and also in order to end on an optimistic note. Though Bolaño depicts the world literary system that he manipulated and capitalized on so masterfully, ironically, he still alludes to literature as a hopeful and politically effective medium. And if Bolaño buries his hopefulness in the myriad side characters that populate his novels, Cucurto and Barilero put belief in literature's social properties into practice, in a spirit that is indicative of the collective literary approach of both Colombian Urban Novelists and the Generation of '72.

#### **4.2 The Aesthetic Border and the Closing of the Literary World**

In terms of recent projects that attempt to make sense of literary aesthetics through the lens of globality, the theorization of World Literature, or Literary Systems Theory as we could also refer to it, offers at once the most intriguing and ambitious framework readily debated internationally. And due to her seminal text, *The World Republic of Letters* (2004), the French theoretician, Pascale Casanova, is, in large part, responsible for its popularity. Pulling from literary debates with scholars interested in

similar, largely Marxist, global aesthetic formations and their political potential, Casanova offers a combination of the Distance Reading theorized in the late nineties and early aughts by Franco Moretti, the philosophical explorations of a singular modernity and unified form of resistance by Fredric Jameson, and the application of these later thinkers to the World Systems economic analysis theorized by Immanuel Wallerstein and Fernand Braudel in their revamping of an orthodox-Marxist stage based teleology with a totalized temporal experience in the Capitalist present, in which, for them, at least, “the only totalities that exist or have historically existed are minisystems and world-systems, and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there has been only one world-system in existence, the capitalist world-economy” (4).

The argument becomes more interesting when culture is applied to this world-economy instead of economic capital. What arises when we explore the infra-world of symbolic capital, cultural cachet, and the border created by the expansion of literary styles and trends rather than the development and underdevelopment of economic capital? What arises, for example, when Wallerstein and Braudel’s core, periphery, and semi-periphery are not measured in terms of industry, post-industry and unindustry but within the logic of literary renown and aesthetic potential?

For the name “World Literature”, at least, and, perhaps, for the earliest theorization of anything resembling a world literary system, one must look to the German Enlightenment, and more specifically, to Goethe and his place in a charged

historical moment in which economies became highly globalized. Along with the consolidation of a new global economy based around the Atlantic, the movement of raw materials and goods brought along with it the sped up movement of cultural exchange. And while cultural borders, prior to Northern-European industrialization and the need for raw materials and cheap, if not slave, labor, remained rigid by industrial standards, the new global economy created a situation in which cultural borders began to arise all over the world. As merchants, and the theoretical machinery concerned with the formation of a modern subjectivity followed, culture became the social indicator as young nation-states began to shrug off pre-democratic political infrastructure, creating a need for comparison, or a representative other to evoke a new sense of cosmopolitan self, many times revolving around, until then, unprecedented aesthetic borders.<sup>4</sup> It is not by chance that the etymological root of World Literature, comes in a letter that Goethe writes to a fellow scholar, referring to a “common world council” in “*Weltliteratur*” during precisely this period of cultural flux.<sup>5</sup> Goethe gives a name to the aesthetic shifts, literary opening and closing of doors, and increased global aesthetic resonances that he perceived in this moment of sped up commerce. What he did not take into consideration, however, is that, perhaps, a singular form of perception – or a

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<sup>4</sup> For more see Mignolo, Walter. The Idea of Latin America. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> In his chapter of the anthology, *Debating World Literature*, Christopher Prendergast analyzes the origin of the concept of World Literature, tracing its earliest enunciations to these phrases. For more detail, see: Prendergast, Christopher, ed. Debating World Literature. London: Verso, 2004.

singular aesthesis – was far too simplistic a tool to analyze such a rich and diverse cross-section of literary output.<sup>6</sup>

If there is any correlation between Goethe's early theorization of a *Weltliteratur* and today's World Literature, beyond its obvious semantic indebtedness, it is in the idea that culture, and more precisely aesthetics, have the capacity to create a unified geo-temporal framework; Casanova argues that writers, and their geography, create nodal points in a world literary system of international influences and resonances – she uses Vargas Llosa's consolidation of "Sartre's stature in the eyes of young intellectuals throughout the world who came to Paris in search of literary modernity" as one of her central examples, for instance (130). And time, set to the metronome of "literary modernity", is measured according to the aesthetic marker in the center, which, problematically, though not surprisingly, is anchored in Paris. In reference to aesthetic distance and literary time, Casanova writes:

As against the national boundaries that give rise to political belief and nationalist feeling, the world of letters creates its own geography and its own divisions. The territories of literature are defined and delimited according to their aesthetic distance from the place where literary consecration is ordained. The cities where literary resources are concentrated, where they accumulate, become places where belief is incarnated, centers of credit, as it were (23).

No doubt, these places of belief and "centers of credit" are well intentioned, and the analytical framework created by this global literary system, at least, attempts to send

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the message of “one people, one struggle”, using literature as the grand stage of aesthetic exchange and intercommunication. And to others that have taken part in the theorization of the World Republic of Letters, the novel, though unarguably rooted in Europe, is the cosmopolitan form par excellence, a medium that is more revolutionary than colonizing. For these theorists, the novel offers an aesthetic equivalent to Badiou’s *global event*, Wallerstein and Braudel’s *world economic system*, and Jameson’s *singular modernity*, all of which, they argue, occur under the sign of emancipation. Sometimes, the liberation is from nationalisms; sometimes it serves as an outlet for depositing trauma in narrative.<sup>7</sup> But it is always a source of symbolic resistance.

In this vein, Franco Moretti offers, arguably, the most interesting analysis of the world literary system through his idea of *Distance Reading*, which, he argues, shows signs of the novel’s inherent, revolutionary potential (2000). According to Moretti, in following a Marxian telos of development, literature in countries on the “periphery” follows a process of “literary evolution” and gravitates toward the modern novel as its home countries modernize sociopolitically. He contends, however, that the process does not occur seamlessly: that aesthetically, and maybe the implication here is that the same occurs in terms of economic development, we witness hang-ups along the way. He argues that literary modernity is, in fact, revolutionized from the periphery; or that as the form of the modern novel travels from its European center (core), it begins to appear

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<sup>7</sup> Franco Moretti’s summary of world literature highlights the singularity of this literary system and its resonances of the mentioned scholars and theories: “I will borrow this initial hypothesis from the world-system school of economic history, for which international capitalism is a system that is simultaneously *one*, and *unequal*: with a core, and a periphery (and a semi-periphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality. One and unequal: *one* literature (*Weltliteratur*, singular, as in Goethe and Marx), or, perhaps better, one world literary system (of inter-related literatures); but a system which is different from what Goethe and Marx had hoped for, because it’s profoundly *unequal*” From page 150 of Prendergast, Christopher, ed. *Debating World Literature*. London: Verso, 2004.



“uneasy – garrulous, erratic, rudderless” (158, in Prendergast).<sup>8</sup> According to Moretti’s logic, the encounter at the aesthetic border – the place where the breach opens between core form and peripheral experience, or in Casanova’s vocabulary where the aesthetic distance and incongruity in literary time is most flagrant – is precisely the site of revolutionary potential. In reference to the novel’s distortion on the periphery, he writes:

I hadn’t expected such a spectrum of outcomes, so at first I was taken aback, and only later realized that this was probably the most valuable finding of them all, because it showed that world literature was indeed a system – but a *system of variations*. The pressure from the Anglo-French core tried to make it uniform, but it could never fully erase the reality of difference (See here, by the way, how the study of world literature is – inevitably – a study of the struggle for symbolic hegemony across the world.) the system was one, not uniform (158, in Prendergast).

To make sense of the singular literary world in which an aesthetics emanates from the core “like a wave” until it is met with resistance at the peripheral border, Casanova adds the concept of literary time. At the center of literary time, the center from which Moretti’s wave flows, literature’s atomic clock finds its ultimate referent in what she refers to as the “Greenwich Meridian of Literature”. And while the socioeconomic time of industrial and postindustrial modernization is rigid, literary time is understood to be flexible, all based on the theory that symbolic battles can be won on the periphery where they may struggle to gain purchase by liberal developmentalist standards; or that a totalized global literary system facilitates a dynamic process of modernization (in the modernist sense), where it would struggle in the strictly *modern* sense – by this train of thought, it is taken as a given that Latin America has had a notable impact on modernism but not necessarily on political modernity.

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<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that Moretti uses the phrase “literary evolution” tentatively.

Casanova's "shifting of the meridian of literature from the periphery" would appear revolutionary and liberating, if not for the fact that it was accompanied by an excessive decontextualization of the very literature that the world literary system celebrates. Casanova, arguably, makes the process of literary circulation appear too glossy when she writes:

The power to evaluate and transmute a text into literature is also, and almost inevitably, exerted according to the norms of those who judge. It involves two things that are inseparably linked: celebration and annexation. Together they form a perfect example of what might be called Parisianization, or universalization through denial of difference. The great consecrating nations reduce foreign works of literature to their own categories of perception, which they mistake for universal norms, while neglecting all the elements of historical, cultural, political, and especially literary context that make it possible to properly and fully appreciate such works. In so doing they exact a sort of *octroi* tax on the right to universal circulation. As a result, the history of literary celebration amounts to a long series of misunderstandings and misinterpretations that have their roots in the ethnocentrism of the dominant authorities (notably those in Paris) and in the mechanism of annexation (by which works from outlying areas are subordinated to the aesthetic, historical, political, and formal categories of the center) that operates through the very act of literary recognition (2004).

Despite the due diligence paid to the ethnocentrism inherent in a publishing industry and culture of criticism based in Europe and North America, Casanova sweeps away the negative externalities of the world literary system, labeling it a sort of collateral damage in the name of the emancipatory World Republic of Letters.

This would all be well and good, from the Latin American perspective, if it were not for the fact that one of the central examples of the shifting of the Greenwich Meridian of Literature held up by proponents of World Literature, were not, in fact, a highly problematic group of writers for Latin Americanists: the *Boom* generation. While no critic would deny the internationality, both in terms of the way this group traveled and in terms of the international references and influences that they claimed – *la nouvelle roman* for Cortázar, and Faulkner for García Márquez, for instance – the idea that the

*Boom* generation and the publishing culture that surrounded them is liberating and revolutionary is only valid if the critic both ignores the relationship these writers had with their publishing environment in Spain altogether and, further, fails to consider any Latin American literary trends both subsequent to and parallel with the *Boom*. Only if it is taken as a given that the *Boom*, now incorrectly but roundly associated with García Márquez's magical realism, is taken to be the end of Latin American literature, does a favorable reading of the shifting of literary time to a Latin American signature hold true.

As early as Goethe's initial perception and labeling of *Weltliteratur*, similar critiques surfaced. Christopher Prendergast gives a concise appraisal of Erich Auerbach's fear of what such a totalized literary system might imply when he writes, "Auerbach, out of the less propitious conditions of his experience of Nazism, entertained, in his famous essay 'Philologie der Weltliteratur' the melancholy, even apocalyptic, possibility that the future of an integrated world was difference-obliterating standardization" (ix). At least in the case of Latin America, though, perhaps, not to the extent of apocalypse, Auerbach's argument stands the test of time. The most internationally famous generation in Latin America Literature, the *Boom* writers that are readily celebrated by international publishing houses with a vested interest in the perpetuation of their iconic standing and easily marketable style and world literary scholars that use them as proof of the revolutionary potential in a singularized aesthetic system of resonances and shadows, is actually a group that allows a gross oversimplification of not only the history of Latin American literature, even to the extent that the machinery of World Literature does not fully account for the Latin American influences so important to the *Boom*, but more importantly of the writers that wrote alongside and subsequently to the likes of García Márquez: generations of writers that refused to bend to the pressures of international publishing houses that encouraged

them to produce García Márquez's aesthetic of quaintly remote underdevelopment and those that, until recently at least, have been wrongly persecuted for challenging the established international literary pallet. Though all signs point to the contrary, one could make a substantial argument that when García Márquez won the Nobel Prize in 1982, the world literary system did as much to consolidate, erase, and, oversimplify the multitudinous aesthetics of Latin American arts and letters as it did to actually celebrate the lived experience of any mass of Latin American people.

In the *Boom*, we witness the development of Goethe's *Weltliteratur* into a period of advanced globalization. While for Goethe the perception of a world literary system was part and parcel of the increase in global commerce, in the case of mid to late twentieth century Latin America, it is global commerce that begins to wholly dominate the literary market, increasing the centralization of form in Europe –not only does the modern novel present a form that, as Moretti claims, struggles to capture the non-European experience, but that, when tied in with the marketing interests of massive publishing houses, becomes highly exclusive and reductionist, pandering to the tastes of an oversimplified global expectation of unc cosmopolitan literatures. It may not come as a surprise, then, that one of the world's biggest publishing houses, one that is responsible for the English translations of many of Latin America's most famous authors, Holtzbrink – the holding company of Pan Macmillan and Picador among others – is based in Germany. And it is, also, not by chance that the Spanish-speaking publishing world revolves, around Madrid and Barcelona, predominantly through Anagrama and Seix Barral (under Grupo Planeta). Indeed, within the Latin American critical context, it is now widely taken as a given that the *Boom* generation resembles less an unprecedented wealth of Latin American literary talent than a marketing ploy undertaken by Seix

Barral to solidify an image and increase sales in Latin America under the censorship of the Franco regime; or, as Anadeli Bencomo puts it:

La idea de la construcción de un marco de referencia cultural para los territorios hispanohablantes resultaba congruente con la arremetida neocolonial y expansiva emprendida por la España franquista en búsqueda de nuevos mercados que revigorizarán a un país en crisis. En el caso literario, ciertos proyectos editoriales contribuirían de manera definitiva con este programa de consolidación de nuevos públicos para la narrativa escrita en castellano. Pero para que se diera la feliz conversión de la producción de la comarca latinoamericana dentro del amplio mercado hispanista e internacional, se hacia necesaria una labor de literaturalización o, en otras palabras, de una naturalización que normalizara la producción de los novelistas latinoamericanos dentro del marco más amplio de la literatura iberoamericana y, por extensión, dentro de ciertas tradiciones del modernismo europeo (34).

Insofar as we can maintain a connection between Goethe's *Weltliteratur*, current publishing markets centered around New York, London, and Berlin (and Madrid and Barcelona in the Spanish-speaking world), and epicenters of criticism that lend authors credibility on the global scale based largely in the United States and Northern Europe, The World Republic of Letters creates a singular world under one form of aesthetic citizenship. There may be dynamic potential within such a totalized framework, and, no doubt, resonances and recapitulations that travel from the periphery to the cosmopolitan core do a great deal to lend literary spaces, such as Latin America, notoriety and cultural cachet. Yet, in the context of the *Boom's* totalized literary time, Auerbach's fears of a "difference-obliterating standardization" appear apt. What Auerbach alluded to, of course in a much earlier form and vocabulary than we now have at our disposal, was that such a framework, intentionally or not, posits that there is only one aesthetic response to alienation and sociopolitical trauma – we could go further and argue that it

only opens itself up to arguments of a singular alienation – and that with the evolution of *Weltliteratur* into the World Republic of Letters, paralleling the unification of pluriversal forms of aesthesis into one Kantian-based aesthetics, we witness the reduction and closing of the literary world, with Latin America, and its non-Garciamarqueños, offering an example of the danger of such a an oversimplified critical and publishing culture, leaving altern authors to aesthetically de-link, challenge literary borders, or renounce their aesthetic citizenship altogether.

#### **4.3. Fernando Vallejo, the Urban Novel, and Aesthetic Citizenship**

On May 6, 2007 Fernando Vallejo renounced his Colombian citizenship in an act that simultaneously came as little surprise and total shock to the Latin American literary world. The Bildungsroman made up of the five-novel series, *El río del tiempo* (1985-1993) had come to a standoff, and the two main characters, Vallejo–fictionalized in the recurring character of Fernando – and Colombia were going their separate ways. Vallejo had legitimate cause for concern over his country. He had long been underappreciated as a writer whose style did not match the expectation the world had of Colombian literature, and the Catholicism-guided sociopolitical discourses that surrounded him candidly disapproved of his open homosexuality. Still, Colombia, especially members of the conservative press, may too have had reason to question the way he treated local, still touchy, subject matter, namely the long history of violence, revamped in Vallejo’s

narcocartel run Medellín. Consider the way in which he communicated to the nation that he was about to leave his citizenship behind in favor of a new life in Mexico, for example: "Desde niño, sabía que Colombia era un país asesino, el más asesino de la tierra. Cuando reeligieron a Uribe, descubrí que era un país imbécil. Entonces, solicité mi nacionalización en México".

The statement is overblown, haughtily simplistic, and perfectly attuned to the key of Fernando, a narrative voice that seeps into his interactions with the media and always mixes bombastic statements with intrigue. Yet, while we suspect that there is more behind Vallejo's public statements, we wonder if conservative members of the Colombian press understood that they were playing to Vallejo's gambits when they retaliated in a similar register. In the run up to the premiere of the film adaptation of Vallejo's most acclaimed novel, *La virgen de los sicarios* (1994) Germán Santamaría, a critic for the conservative lifestyle magazine, *Diners*, claimed unequivocally: "Vamos a decirlo de manera directa, casi brutal: hay que sabotear, ojalá prohibir, la exhibición pública en Colombia de la película *La virgen de los sicarios*", he continues:

Y no puede ser paradigma de la creación quien niega la vida, la misma posibilidad de la continuidad de la especie humana. Esto no se le ocurrió ni a Nietzsche, D'Annunzio o Sartre, apóstoles de la desesperanza. Grandes artistas de Colombia son un García Márquez o un Fernando Botero. El primero, que jamás habla mal de Colombia fuera de sus fronteras, que participa en los planes de ciencia, educación y cultura para la juventud colombiana; y el segundo, que le acaba de hacer al país, en obras de arte a Bogotá y Medellín, el regalo más generoso que jamás colombiano alguno haya tenido para con su nación (*Diners*, October 2000).

In his diatribe, Santamaría, no doubt, reveals more than he intends, highlighting precisely the lack of critical appreciation that led Vallejo to leave Colombia in the first place; in the subtext of his argument, we read that Vallejo was never actually a citizen of Colombia in aesthetic terms to begin with. He did not play the game of potboiler magical realism, and he did not pay lip service to the abstract nation. While he did donate the entirety of his Romulo Gallegos Prize (\$100,000 USD) to animal shelters in Caracas, an act of actual infrastructural benefit to a local country, he did not go through symbolic gestures that propped up the nation in World Literary systems. For many, Vallejo was too materially real and too light on gloss to have ever been a late twentieth century aesthetic citizen of Colombia to begin with.

The contemporary Colombian critic, Mario Armando Valencia, addresses the terms of Vallejo's departure when he writes: "[Vallejo] renuncia a una *cultura política* dominada por el monstruo bicéfalo del bipartidismo liberal-conservador, renuncia a una *mentalidad coercitiva y represiva* expresada en los *patrones de conducta* derivados de un catolicismo rancio e hipócrita, cuñado por los *códigos de valor* procedentes del narcotráfico, y renuncia a una *cultura estético-literaria* entregada mayoritariamente al realismo mágico..." (2009). When Vallejo leaves Colombia for good, an *ida* without the implicit *vuelta* so common in Latin American narrative, he renounces his aesthetic citizenship, giving equal treatment to World Literary systems – and the fallout they



imply – conservative media, and the Catholic Church, a combined target that few would typically lump together.

Yet an analysis of the genealogy of the contemporary Colombian urban novel sheds light on Vallejo's disdain for World Literary systems, going back to the *Novela de la Violencia* and a time, in which aesthetic debates over how to treat themes of national trauma were largely split between a gritty urban realism based in major cities – places of both failing urban infrastructure due to massive migration and lived political violence – and the provincial literature of the magical exception. In an analysis of one of the *Novela de la Violencia's* strongest proponents, Rory O'Bryen traces the resuscitation of this hardly celebrated form to Gustavo Alvarez Gardezabal's (1945) doctoral dissertation, written in 1971, in which Gardezabal laments the fact that Colombia does not have a structural equivalent to the Mexican *novela de la revolución*. Gardezabal found it hard to believe that, despite the fact that there was a great amount of urban literary production that grappled with the themes relevant to Colombia directly after the *Bogotazo* and during the onset of the *Violencia*, predominantly written between the years of 1951 and 1970, the literature failed to garner any lasting support with international publishing houses and, as a result, was largely left out of international literary debate.

The logic of publishing houses appears to be threefold. First, they felt, one might presume that literature that dealt with issues such as violence and failing infrastructure head on would be considered shameful on the national scale in Latin American

countries that continued to struggle to produce functioning states. Second, the Cold War created a taste for un-psychologized marginality in places that were considered geopolitical battlegrounds without sociopolitical agency. And third, at a time in which nineteenth century novels appeared to have exhausted the realism and the global avant-garde pointed to “new” realities, no matter how much magical realists became the cause célèbre of global socialist institutions, distancing oneself from social realism was good politics in a publishing culture based largely in Spain, Northern Europe, and the United States. Indeed, politics through the lens of escapists distancing was much easier to sell to a public of all political stripes, even in a highly politicized era, than a literature that would force a mass readership to deal with material issues head on. With the privilege of forty years of hindsight and the theoretical tools that World Literary theory provides, obvious answers begin to arise to the questions that Gardeazábal presented in his thesis. Bencomo writes about World Literature’s celebration of the *Boom*, the Latin American publishing culture’s leveling of dense literary production, and the singularity of global tastes when she writes:

El *Boom* narrativo latinoamericano figura como un momento clave para la modernización y la proyección en el mercado internacional de la novelística hispanoamericana alrededor de la década de 1960. La consagración de esta novelística latinoamericana iba ligada con la imagen de Barcelona como una suerte de meridiano de Greenwich decisivo para su promoción y visibilidad, junto al impulso suplementario de premios como el Biblioteca Breve, el premio Formentor y el Prix Internacional de Literature que actuaron en su momento como plataformas idóneas de lanzamiento de los nuevos prestigios narrativos. Dentro de la conversión de la narrativa latinoamericana al marco más amplio de las letras

hispanoamericanas resultaron igualmente decisivos ciertos procesos de *literaturalización e internacionalización* que actualizaron en su momento cierta lógica particular del Hispanismo... (34).

A reduced concept of Hispanism and a Latin American experience, manipulated by both international critics and publishing houses, followed the “shifting of the Greenwich Meridian of Literature” –the success story for proponents of World Literature – leaving in its wake simplified concepts of Latin American literary production and a demand for the performative repetition of the same aesthetic, alienating urban fiction, especially in García Marquez’s Colombia, that did not fit into the new narrative of twentieth century Latin American modernism.

The Colombian writer and critic, Harold Alvarado Tenorio (1945), himself, a figure for whom World Literature has done few favors, adds to Bencomo and Gardeazábal’s criticism, going so far as to write out a list of authors that directly suffered García Marquez’s success in Colombia. His list of authors that would fall under the purview of Gardeazábal’s *Novela de la Violencia* include, Eduardo Caballero Calderón (1910-1993), Manuel Mejía Vallejo (1923-1998), Próspero Morales Pradilla (1920-1993), Héctor Rojas Herazo (1921-2002), and Manuel Zapata Olivella (1920-2004). He adds to this list a group of writers whose work would fall after the period of the *Novela de la Violencia*, authors that wrote and published subsequent to the publishing of *Cien años de soledad* (1967): Gardeazábal, Luis Fayad (1945), Luis Caballero (1943-1995), and Fernando Vallejo. And Alvarado Tenorio is, perhaps, less diplomatic than most when he offers a

thesis of the underdevelopment of Colombian urban narrative, pulling no punches when he writes: “Pero lo cierto es que los verdaderos promotores de los narradores y poetas hispanoamericanos, a nivel mundial, fueron dos *aristócratas* catalanes, miembros de una célula subversiva conocida como Grupo de Barcelona: Carlos Barral y Jaime Gil de Biedma ... En torno a ellos se desarrollaría, a medida que Barral se arruinaba como editor, el prestigio de nuestros escritores posteriores al Modernismo” (2010).

According to Alvarado Tenorio and Gardezabal’s firsthand laments of the machinery of World Literature, the literary prizes, predominantly set up in Barcelona to consolidate a Latin American cultural capital that would project Latin American literature onto the world stage in a moment in which an easily marketable Spanish cultural commodity was in crisis under Franco, must be treated, at least, as a Janus-faced undertaking. The author’s movement from Wallerstein and Braudel’s periphery to the literary center or nodal point – a cultural equivalent to the traveling of a raw material to be processed in the metropolitan core – at once develops a literary icon that does a great deal to develop *and underdevelop* the Latin American literary space, which, to the extent that World Literature’s “bureaucrats” chose one of two clearly distinct styles in a highly politicized Colombia, brings with it a series of ethical dilemmas.

While it is difficult to fault García Marquez, not least because *Cien años de soledad* is, in fact, a literary master work, the contemporary critic must wonder why he insisted on such sleepy, rural settings and why the cultural industry so quickly embraced him, given that in precisely the moment in which García Marquez took off, Colombia was in the midst of one of the most violent periods of its otherwise not serene history; and this moment in history, arguably more so than in any other period, presented largely *urban* problems. Far from the romanticized figures that resonate in Colombian history in a

magical setting, Marco Palacios discusses actual political citizens and their migration to the city in search of new opportunities in the years preceding García Marquez's magical realism when he writes, "En un ambiente inseguro, buscaron protección entrando a las redes caciquiles y de compadrazgo, supletorias de las instituciones estatales. Este campesino migratorio, ora colono, ora peón de obras públicas, tuvo en *la violencia* una opción perversa" (1995). And on the new problems that urban migrations and a mass popular culture, unrecognizable in Macondo-based novels, he writes, "La cultura, más ruralizada y heterogénea, creó una cultura de masas que colonizó las culturas regionales. Se esfumó la hegemonía de la cultura letrada y elitista, laica o religiosa. A la formación de la cultura urbana concurren otros factores como el menor aislamiento del país a partir de la posguerra, el aumento de las tasas de escolaridad y la integración de los colombianos a una matriz de comunicaciones centrada en la radio y la televisión" (1995). While García Marquez theorized a new aesthetics of Colombian rural life and Spanish-based publishing houses celebrated a new revolutionary form, Colombian cities presented unprecedented cultural issues that required literary exploration and working through. New forms of mass culture challenged old aesthetic norms. Violence and crime erupted in city centers as a release for increasingly unbearable living standards. And cyclical national violence became centered around urban spaces.

Though the publishing and critical cultures that operate under the logic of World Literature would lead international critics to believe that there is a hole in the Colombian archive, or a failure to account for these urban experiences and polemics, as Gardeazábal and Alvarado Tenorio point out, a large amount of literary production that grappled with mid and late twentieth century Colombian issues was simply overlooked in favor of glossier representations. Subsequent critical and writing generations have picked up where the *Novela de la Violencia* left off, recognizing the short shrift that international

literary prizes and easy marketing answers have long given its authors. And in his book *La dimensión crítica de la novela urbana contemporánea en Colombia* (2009), Mario Armando Valencia offers a list of writers that have, effectively, resuscitated, or at least inherited, the form of the *Novela de la Violencia* in the updated context of late twentieth century and present day Colombian cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali. Armando Valencia lists writers whose work shows an aesthetic and intellectual indebtedness to Alvarado Tenorio's list of writers that suffered García Marquez shadow, including contemporary writers such as Antonio Caballero (1945), Jorge Franco (1962), Mario Mendoza (1964), Efraím Medina Reyes (1967), and Alonso Sánchez Baute (1964) – a writer that appears on both lists is Fernando Vallejo (2009).

Vallejo's literary battles with the publishing and critical industries that surrounded García Marquez started early. And to the extent that the tone and literary persona of "Fernando" condensed and took shape after a long series of negative tit for tat with the national media, one might venture that Vallejo's iconoclast style still bears the weight of García Marquez's shadow, in that Fernando is born from the aesthetic rupture with his popular forbearer's literary time signature. Armando Valencia writes, "La literatura de Vallejo rompe y ataca toda forma literaria romántica, inclusive en los episodios literarios en los que deviene melodramático y hasta cursi; pareciera que ello hace parte de la trasgresión estética que se propone y con la que encaja armónicamente siguiendo el propósito último de su transgresión, transgresión que se hace estéticamente concreta en una suerte de *hiperrealismo crítico* en el que devienen sus novelas" (2009).

In Vallejo's recurring narrator we find a character whose world could scarcely be further from the largely non-material settings of Macondo. And while his work is still based on a poetics of hyperbole, Vallejo's unfiltered, id-heavy ramblings give testimony to the cultural clashes and violence of late twentieth century urban Colombia. One of

the more interesting contrasts that Vallejo draws arises through his rants about the growing popular register and the distortion that it causes when set against Fernando's insistence on a high grammatical and communicative level. Despite the fact that the novel, itself, does not skimp on melodrama, the interaction between Fernando and Alexis offers a densely packed urban, cultural polemic. Vallejo forces the Colombian tradition of transcendental grammarians – Antonio Caro and Rafael Nuñez, for example – to interact with popular rhythms. He places the grammatical precision of the Caro y Cuervo in the context of the sights and sounds of urban dwellers from down-market barrios, leading to a destabilizing dissonance that would parallel the symbolic crisis and attempt to establish new representative aesthetic forms in urban Colombia during the late twentieth century.

Vallejo is not alone in exploring this urban cultural problem. Fellow urban novelists, spanning three generations, deal with similar issues. Andrés Caicedo uses music to represent the destabilizing presence of a new form of urban popular culture in *Que viva la música* (1977). Jorge Franco alludes to an aesthetics of the *narco-nouveau-riche* in *Rosario Tijeras* (1999). And Mario Mendoza draws parallels between the hardboiled detective novel and popular radio shows in *Scorpio City* (1998); all of which – and, of course, this is more the case for members of earlier generations, such as Vallejo and Caicedo – represent an actual massive lived Colombian experience rather than pander to the celebrated international tastes of the rural marginality that took off in the combined context of Franquista Spain and Cold War cosmopolitanism and gave way to a facile escapism that largely failed to give literary representation to the cultural challenges that Colombia in the fifties, sixties, and seventies presented. Though Vallejo's work brings with it its own ethical problems, and despite marketing and critical pressure in the eighties and nineties to do otherwise, he unarguably represented the pressing issues that

Colombia faced much more than the magical realism that the international public demanded at the time. Armando Valencia continues, "...Vallejo subvierte todos los órdenes morales que la sociedad colombiana había conocido hasta entonces. Una defensa a ultranza del homosexualismo y una crítica feroz a las instituciones de la iglesia, la familia, y la sociedad, acompañan ese impulso incontenible de afirmación individual sobre la base de la desobediencia en todos los órdenes" (2009). In keeping with his iconoclast and subversive literary persona, when Vallejo renounces his Colombian citizenship, he, in turn, renounces his aesthetic citizenship, delinking from the singularization of taste created by the infrastructure of World Literature in favor of a more complicated and nuanced look at the real cultural issues in his far from Macondo Colombia.

#### **4.4. Colombian Urban Literature and the Political Economy of Prestige**

In his acclaimed memoir of the death of his father at the hands of paramilitary groups during the Colombian *Violencia*, Hector Abad plays a game with the reader and his critical audience that reminds us that neither his story nor his style are anything new. He, along with other Colombian Urban Novelists, who have written in order to work through the trauma of the Colombian mid-Century for decades, are not going to let publishing houses that swoon over them, critics that rush to praise them, or international audiences that act as if they had been there all along get away without at least a few barbed lines. Abad describes a fictional writer that his narrator tries to track down in a novel that projected Abad, himself, onto the Latin American literary scene, *Basura*, when he writes: "El problema es que nadie puede escribir después de muerto; de ahí que la solución sea vivir como si se estuviera muerto y seguir escribiendo, pero nunca publicar nada. Más aún: sin siquiera tener la menor intención de publicar nada



[...] En todo caso Davanzati seguía con su perorata, con su cantaleta, con esa idea reiterada que parecía explicar su apartamento y que corregía mi corrección, pues él de verdad no parecía tener el menor interés en que lo leyeran, ni vivo ni muerto, y menos en publicar” (20). Given his situation, as a writer born in the Colombian fifties, Abad describes not only what he would consider an ethical yet paradoxically silent author, but the publishing milieu of his generation. He, along with generations of Urban Novelists on either side of him, wrote as if they had no audience, because, until recently, they scarcely did (some exceptions on the national level, at least, would include Gardezabal and Franco). We can read Davanzati as a way of coping with a lack of readership, or ironically, *Basura* as a text that, itself, panders to a prize committee – striking remarkable resemblance to the early work of Roberto Bolaño, the novel won the first ever *Premio Casa de América de Narrativa Americana Innovadora* (2000), on which Bolaño sat as a judge. Regardless of how we read *Basura*, there is an uncomfortable irony behind the increasing recognition that Abad’s generation receives. On the one hand, this is a group that, as the title *Basura* implies, has been swept to the dustbin of history by the success of glossier alternatives; and on the other hand, the lag time in the evolution of taste between cosmopolitan critics and the Latin American prize committees that act as their feeders has many times shown complete disconnects in the framework of World Literature.

Abad’s latest text to be translated to English, *El olvido que seremos* (2006), highlights precisely the problem of “peripheral” awards and “core” reception. Despite his real tone, sparse prose, and urban setting, Abad cannot shake off specters of what Colombian literature is *supposed to be* for cosmopolitan critics. While London’s the *Independent* put the translation of *El olvido que seremos*, *Oblivion: A Memoir*, in its “Top 10 Indy Book Choices”, the critic could not resist both alluding to García Márquez and describing the book with affective hyperbole in his three hundred word summary. It

may be the twenty-first century, but Colombia is still a place for armchair emotional extremes, according to London's press, "This compelling memoir of the man, written by his son Hector Abad, is a chronicle of a death foretold in which the frequent reminders of the father's eventual fate lend the narrative a near unbearable pathos".<sup>9</sup> The *Independent's* critic is not alone. Though Julius Purcell's review in the *Guardian* goes into detail about the measured reserve of Abad's tone, he too cannot resist the inevitable comparison to García Márquez, who has absolutely nothing to do with Abad's work: "Abad's fellow countryman Gabriel García Márquez famously began his novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* with the words 'On the day they were going to kill him...'. In *Oblivion* Abad employs a similar effect, only revealing the details of the murder towards the end of the book, its inevitability making the almost artless outpouring of filial love all the more unbearable".<sup>10</sup> Beyond both texts involving a death and both authors being from Colombia, at no point does *Oblivion* show any signs of García Márquez's *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* (1981). And if there is anything remotely magical about the relationship between Abad and García Márquez, it is that the latter's ghost simply will not die. His specter resonates and appears everywhere a Colombian writer is mentioned by name. And, having been awarded some critical traction and attention in publishing circles, Abad recognizes the irony behind his generation, and more precisely, his particular situation, writing in *El olvido que seremos*, "Es una de las paradojas más tristes de mi vida:

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<sup>9</sup> This review is taken from the *Independent's* online "Indy Choice" section. It was published on 13 November 2010 and can be found at, <http://www.independent.co.uk/extras/indybest/arts-books/indy-choice-best-of-the-new-books-2132468.html?action=Gallery&ino=8>.

<sup>10</sup> This review is taken from the 24 November 2010 issue of the *Guardian*. It can be found at, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/oct/24/oblivion-memoir-hector-abad-faciolince-review>.

casi todo lo que he escrito es para alguien que no puede leerme, y este mismo libro no es otra cosa que la carta a una sombra" (22).<sup>11</sup>

Abad clearly does not consider the act of writing to be futile, and by the time that he writes about a lack of an audience, he knows that his work will enjoy a wide reach. What we witness through Abad and Contemporary Colombian Urban Novelists, including Vallejo, however, is the growing attempt to laud and embrace a literary style whose authors pull largely from their negative experiences with World Literary functionaries and publishing systems for inspiration. They straddle the line of aesthetic citizenship and publish with one foot in and one foot out of the publishing economy. Critics may call them sellouts. In fact, some originally fervent supporters have already begun to question their moral fortitude now that it appears that they will inherit the club jacket of World Literature. Harold Alvarado Tenorio, who has been the great critical advocate of the urban novelists swept away by the machinery of World Literature, has not viewed these authors burgeoning success favorably. If they become the new icons, whether they are openly critical of the very aesthetic system into which they enter or not, should we not also critically attack them? Wondering if the generation of Urban Novelists does not reproduce an oversimplification of Colombian letters, Alvarado Tenorio writes about the group's recent world tour in *El País*:

Gracias a la cooperación de las multinacionales de espectáculo y las agencias inmobiliarias, una de las sucursales de los Hay Prisa Festivals y Abadfaciolince Apartmens & Condos, diez agraciados reporteros e insidiosos, y dos novelistas, han recorrido cuarenta y tres pequeños municipios belgas y franceses donde han perorado en igual número de minúsculas librerías donde trabajan otros tantos colombianos exiliados y

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<sup>11</sup> This quote comes from *El olvido que seremos*, and is part of an explanation that Abad gives about the lack of an implicit interlocutor in his work. According to him, he writes for his dead father who "no leerá nunca". Abad, Hector. *El Olvido Que Seremos*. Bogota: Editorial Planeta, 2006.

abandonados de la suerte y la fortuna, acerca del odio que profesan al recién abolido gobierno de Alvaro Uribe Velez, financiados, eso si, con el dinero que la prosperidad democrática de este último, ha permitido que el Ministerio de la Cultura, les financie los pasajes y las profusas libaciones”.<sup>12</sup>

Months after Alvarado Tenorio publishes articles attempting to resuscitate these very Urban Novelists, he writes a sardonic critique of their growing prominence, and critics must question the obvious paradox.

We can read Alvarado Tenorio's response one of two ways. As neither literary agent, publicist, or member (be it because he rejected the offer or was not invited) of the touring caravan, Alvarado Tenorio possibly feels that he does not receive the credit that he is due. On the other hand, and more likely, however, he articulates the very mixed literary message that Colombian Urban Novelists represent. If they straddle the aesthetic border and epistemological line that the machinery of World Literature creates, then they must send two messages. In Alvarado Tenorio's journalistic about face, we read the style of a generation condensed. We witness the political economy of prestige both embraced and satirized, World Literature's facilitating avenues both populated and ironized, and the form of the novel both celebrated and challenged.

For James English, the problem lies in the very nature of global circuits of prestige. In his book, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and Circulation of Cultural Value* (2005), English examines the origins and development of World Literature through the focal point of prizes and awards. He highlights the economic interests behind cultural awards and ceremonies, ranging from the Nobel Prize of literature to local

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<sup>12</sup> This quote is taken from Alvarado Tenorio's critique of the very group of writers that he helped resuscitate, from his piece in *El País*, on 14 November 2010. It can be found at, <http://lacomunidad.elpais.com/la-lengua-viperina/2010/11/14/les-belles-colombienne>.

competitions for best new novel. For English, prizes do not simply account for a system of monetary exchange but moreover, in a similar vein to Casanova's World Republic of Letters, follow an international market of cultural exchange. English focuses on the limiting effects of such a system. He finds that many prize committees that tie into the interests of publishing houses, as is clearly the case in the build up of the cult surrounding the *Boom*, simply shadow economic markets, both fiscal and prestige markets that level cultural diversity in equal measure. While literary prizes are capable of empowering authors, even at the local level, and can lead to dynamic shifts in literary trends, for English, the overall schema of such systems forces literary aesthetics to pass through a reductionist focal point - the political economy of prestige reifies literary aesthetics, glosses tones and trends, and then exports them to a global market. Even the Noble Prize, an award whose six Latin American recipients have unarguably done great things for Latin America's cultural weight on the international scale, is not beyond reproach, for English. He describes the terms of Goethe's *Weltliteratur* in the twentieth century, using exactly the moment in which magical realism begins its ascension on the international scene, when he writes:

As the pace of economic and cultural globalization has accelerated since the 1970s, this tendency of prizes, festivals, and related forms of competitive cultural events to facilitate exchange of symbolic capital between the indigenous [taken to mean local] and the metropolitan market-places – often by circumventing strictly national institutions – has become much more pronounced. Though still capable of exerting powerful symbolic effects through their own proper systems of reward and penalty, the national fields of cultural productions have seen their significance seriously diminished. This is now, however, simply because they have been subsumed within a vast transnational field on which an artist's national prestige is recalculated according to ever more disadvantageous (or Disneyfied) rates of exchange. It is, even more critically, because the "local hero," the artist celebrated at the subnational level of indigenous community, can now be fed directly into a global market for indigenous cultural production without any reference to a national standard of value. Indeed, as regards prizes and awards, the national honors which used to serve as prerequisites for "Nobelization"

now themselves often trail behind global consecrations serving merely as post-facto adjustments or corrections of the domestic symbolic market; the global awards, meanwhile depend on a particular sifting of local or “fourth world” prestige as a basis of eligibility for global celebration (272).

The text that did as much as any other to simultaneously gain regional prestige and reduce the breadth of Latin American literary aesthetics for at least three generations, *Cien años de soledad*, followed a shift from regional recognition, to the center of the World Republic of Letters, to the largest literary award in the world in the Nobel Prize. García Marquez’s text won the second ever Venezuela-based *Premio Rómulo Gallegos* in 1972 (he is straddled by fellows members of the *Boom* on either side: Mario Vargas Llosa’s *La casa verde* won the prize in 1967 and Carlos Fuentes *Terra Nostra* won it in 1977), the French *Prix de Meilleur Livre Étranger* in 1969, and the Noble Prize in 1982, all while the *Novela de la Violencia* and the *Novela Urbana* failed to gain international attention. At over thirty million copies, *Cien años de soledad* has sold more than all of the works of the Colombian Urban Novelists combined. And places as geographically distant as coastal Colombia and Buenos Aires now have cafés and bars in their tourist districts called Macondo in an attempt to produce the regional expectation of foreign tourists. Cultural prestige clearly does not come without its cultural price.

In this publishing atmosphere, Abad’s reluctance to recognize his own reading public is understandable. Alvarado Tenorio’s mixed message to a generation for which he has acted as spokesmen is fitting. And Vallejo’s typically heavy-handed tendency to lay into the beneficiaries of the political economy of prestige at a moment, in which he, himself, is gaining prominence is apt. When basing a literary style on the struggle for agency, headlines in global newspapers and prizes awarded by star-studded committees sit uncomfortably. And the generation of Colombian Urban Novelists responds with a

poetics that accounts for the epistemological violence (read: the aesthetic offshoot of Quijano's *Colonial Matrix of Power* described in my introduction) that the form of the novel and the economy of prestige cause writers in a place on the periphery of world literary systems. It is doublespeak, of course, when Abad claims that no one has ever really read him in a book that is bound for a large audience, when Vallejo attacks published authors from the bully pulpit of Alfaguara sponsored events, and when Alvarado Tenorio argues on behalf of urban literature in the local press, while criticizing the same authors in an international forum (*El País* owns Alfaguara it is worth adding). But by engaging with the system, it is a poetics that also alludes to the need for alternatives. It is a literature that simultaneously benefits from World Literature and calls the systems bluff. And given that Colombian Urban Novelists and other Latin American authors that have been openly critical of the publishing culture surrounding the *Boom* now gain large amounts of international attention and winning prizes, themselves –Bolaño won the *Rómulo Gallegos* in 1999 for *Los detectives salvajes*, Vallejo won it in 2003 for *El desbarrancadero*, and William Ospina in 2009 for *El país de canela* – they are challenged with alluding to a literature that delinks from the singular aesthetic system that World Literature and the economy of prestige imply. In turn, they have responded with a poetics that sends mixed messages about the tension between local and global aesthetics and at once contribute to and undercut the world literary system.

#### **4.5. Finessing the World Literary System: Roberto Bolaño's *2666* and the *Eloisa Cartonera* Movement**

While the most pronounced articulations of the tensions of world literary flows in contemporary Latin American literature come through the Colombian Urban Novelists, the most famous example consists of the quick and tempestuous ascent of Roberto Bolaño onto the world literary scene. Generationally speaking, Bolaño would

fall into the same category as Abad, Jorge Franco, and other Colombian Urban Novelists, but he offers a more pan-Latin American perspective. He pulls from different local experiences, mainly based in Chile, Mexico, and Spain, but as a Latin American writer who came of age in the publishing shadow of the *Boom*, he expresses literary success with a vocabulary of irony. Doing Abad one better, Bolaño does not only allude to the publishing industry and the political economy of prestige, but he situates them at the center of his two most ambitious works, *Los detectives salvajes* (1998) and *2666* (2004). At its most bare, *Los detectives salvajes* is about the relationship between the publishing industry, literary icons and the tensions between local and global literary communities. Not subtly critiquing the *Boom*, Bolaño's text follows the two founders of an avant-garde literary group named the *visceralistas*, in an obvious jab at the Latin American, potboiler style of *realismo mágico*. Members of the *visceralistas* forge bonds when challenging literary figures that enjoy prominence on the international and local scene. Octavio Paz stands in as Mexican Literature for export, and anyone that benefits from state money or wins literary prizes that are not locally administered receive a dressing down at some point in the work. Bolaño, who in the introduction to one of his first written novels (though published much later), *Amberes*, discusses how he, himself, lived off local literary prizes in Spain early in his career, attempts to articulate the tension between a literature that focuses on a stripped down version of a local experience and the literary trends that are caught up in the markets of global prestige. An underlying "real" local experience, or a "real literature", implied by the name of the group to be a purely visceral, or entirely stripped down, aesthetic, is treated as an enigmatic form that the head *visceralistas*, Arturo Belano (Bolaño's alter ego) and Ulises Lima, attempt to decipher throughout the work. There is a purity that we always almost reach in *Los detectives salvajes*, yet cannot ever quite grasp, an allusion on Bolaño's part, perhaps, that



acknowledges the impossibility of a large international audience to ever fully understand the complexities of Latin American literature. For Belano and Lima, this enigma is embodied by Cesárea Tinajero, a long-forgotten literary icon that disappeared in the Sonora Desert after publishing only a few issues of a literary magazine that the young group emulates. Beyond her name, which alludes to a Cesarean section from which a new form will be born, and a Spanish feminization of the word Cesar, Tinajero is a poetic figure, who, in her impossibility to be reached, represents an experience, like that of Abad's fictional author, that writes for no one, or like the chord that Vallejo strikes in his celebration of Silva's life's work, that sank in the ocean off of the coast of Colombia. It is pure only until global flows project it to a wide audience. Yet, this sort of enigmatic insidership does not ever amount to anything of substance in the novel, and the world literary model ultimately wins out. The *visceralistas* disband after publishing only a few anthologies of poetry and its founders become lost in a labyrinth of globalized exile. When Ulises Lima, by sheer luck, is confronted with the chance to actually confront Octavio Paz, he fails to produce a meaningful interaction. Lima stumbles upon Paz in a park, and despite his at length diatribes against him earlier in the text, which largely stem from the fact that he is a literary icon more than any meaningful formal critique of his work, Lima responds by impishly walking around him in circles. He literally encircles Paz in a way that parallels the group's relationship to Cesárea Tinajero, whom they figuratively encircle. With Paz standing in as both a version of literary Mexico for export and as a nationally protected icon and Cesárea Tinajero representing a pure local literature, the *visceralistas* base their own aesthetic drive and epistemological currents on the clash between both figures, Tinajero and Paz, without ever successfully capturing or reproducing either. Like the Colombian Urban Novelists, Bolaño alludes to both forms, the local and the global, in the extreme and

highlights his own impotence as a writer that cannot fully rebel against the prestige of Paz nor fully capture the voice of Tinajero. Caught somewhere between the two epistemologically and paralleling his alter ego, Belano, who is physically adrift and unmoored geographically, Bolaño sends two messages and alludes to what a successful local literature may resemble in times of globalism, while drawing attention to the fact that he, himself, can only, at best, encircle it. For Bolaño, like Abad, the writer caught up in the machinery of World Literature can at best allude to an artist entirely unconcerned with his (or her) reading public. And for Bolaño, like Vallejo, he (or she) can only complain about its bureaucrats.

If in *Los detectives salvajes*, Bolaño explores his own misgivings about the ability of his generation to write a “pure” countercurrent to the aesthetics of the *Boom*, in *2666*, he casts the entire framework of World Literature in a harsh light. Bolaño takes the secular trinity of literary prestige – publishing houses, academics, and lay literati – and places them alongside a series of violent rapes and femicides in his fictionalized version of Ciudad Juarez, Santa Teresa. Borrowing a tactic from the Generation of '72, he forces the symbolic registers of high culture to dwell in a space of extreme physical violence, and in dissipating the nodal point between dyads, he forces culture to confront its negative and the aesthetics of modernity to interact with the physical toil and violence of coloniality.

By the time Bolaño wrote *2666*, he had a firm understanding of the machinery of World Literature and his place therein. With the reception of *Los detectives salvajes* reaching feverish levels, Bolaño knew that he resonated with reading publics that were ready for a shift away from *Boom* literature. And his writing deserves the cachet that it has received, but the image surrounding him is arguably just as deliberately creative a construction. Bolaño makes a cameo in all of his works, and by the end of the nineties, it

appears that the fiction that he had built up around himself had bled over into the way that editorials tailored his image. The mystique surrounding him as an icon and commodity hinges on two, now debunked myths, for instance: one, that he was imprisoned in Chile under Pinochet, and two, that he contracted the hepatitis C that would eventually contribute to his death through heroin use. While Larry Rohter of the *New York Times* has shown that there is no evidence to support either of these points, Sarah Pollack has argued that the rise of Bolaño as a literary icon has as much to do with a continued cosmopolitan expectation of barbarian peripheral literature, even if the barbarians are now, in fact, all poets, as it does with the quality of Bolaño's body of work alone.<sup>13</sup> While Pollack is too quick to underestimate both the ability of Bolaño's work to stand alone and his own role in cultivating the image of the Latin American poet-ruffian, we can unarguably read Bolaño's success as a capitulation of the world literary system. With a combination of literary critics eager to write him into the canon – according to the dust jacket for the English translation of *Los detectives salvajes*, critics for *El País* claim that *Los detectives salvajes* is “the kind of novel that Borges would have written” – academics keen to celebrate a literary icon that will facilitate the wide analysis of post-*Boom* literature, and a cosmopolitan reading public that, in the words of Francine Massiello, exhibits a tendency to seek a “fantasy of intervention”, by the time that Bolaño won the *Premio Rómulo Gallegos*, he clearly understood how to manipulate the flows of literary

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<sup>13</sup> Two of the first articles that concentrated on a sociological reading of the image of Bolaño and the questionable tactics behind the marketing of his literature are: Rohter, Larry. "A Chilean Writer's Fictions Might Include His Own Colorful Past." *New York Times* January 27, 2009. and Pollack, Sarah. "Latin America Translated (Again): Roberto Bolaño's *the Savage Detectives* in the United States." *Comparative Literature*.61 (2009): 346-65.

prestige.<sup>14</sup> And in *2666*, more than anywhere else, he ironizes the very system that contributed to his fame. Bolaño's writing is not so much a sham, as perhaps Pollack implies, but with the rapid decontextualization of his work, following his quick ascension in the World Republic of Letters, Bolaño, like other writers surrounding him generationally, realizes that he must send mixed messages to his reading publics. And in his final work, *2666*, taken by many critics to be his masterpiece, one of the central thematic concerns revolves around how to do just that.

Bolaño bookends the five novel collection of *2666* with studies on the enigmatic and cultish literary star, Benno von Archimboldi. And while he writes parts of himself and his life into many scenes and characters in the novel, it is no stretch to argue that the cult of Archimboldi is set as a metaphor for Bolaño's own success. Bolaño begins and ends with ironic depictions of his fans and critics. The first novel, *La parte de los críticos*, takes jabs at an academic audience that rushes to capitalize on his prestige with fast and loose readings of his work. Some rush to buy everything they can based simply on Archimboldi's last name (exotic, it is implied, for a German author). Others write at length treatises on Archimboldi's body of work, having only read one or two of his novels. And others forget that authors and artists are actual people, not just mythological personae.

A common trope in Bolaño's work is to advance themes and emotions through a multitude of characters, making use of what María Luisa Fischer has referred to as his employment of moral mirror characters that will help us gauge the actions and context

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<sup>14</sup> For more, see María Helena Rueda's analysis of the marketing of violent literature in: *Dislocaciones Y Otras Violencias En El Circuito Transnacional De La Literatura Latinoamericana.* " *Revista de Critica Literaria Latinoamericana*.69 (2009): 69-91.

of his work's central figures.<sup>15</sup> In *La parte de los críticos*, Bolaño refracts the image of Archiboldi off of the cult artist, Edwin Johns. Johns fascinates one of the four critics that we follow throughout the section, not least because Johns cut off his painting hand while he was still reasonably young and developing as an artist, an act that simultaneously projected him onto the European artistic map and ended him in an asylum. Having already established that Archiboldi's literary agent cares much less about the quality of his work than the profit he generates from it – Bolaño describes the relationship between Archiboldi and his agent, Schnell, as purely monetary when he writes, “Schnell nunca había visto a Archiboldi, el dinero, cada vez mayor, que redituaban sus libros y traducciones, lo depositaba en un número de cuenta de un banco suizo”, while the owner of Archiboldi's publishing house later admits to him that she had never read his work, “When Archiboldi wanted to know why she kept publishing him if she didn't read him, which was really a rhetorical question since he knew the answer, the baroness replied (a) because she knew he was good, (b) because Bubis had told her to, (c) because few publishers actually read the books they published” – we quickly learn that Johns, despite all of the mystique that surrounds him, acts not out of artistic curiosity but out of economic interest (41, 863). We are as surprised as Morini, the critic obsessed with Johns, when we find out that his artistic actions resemble more a bankers concern with the bottom line than an artist yearning for meaning. Morini asks Johns point blank why he cut off his hand, when he visits him in his asylum, to which

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<sup>15</sup> María Luisa Fischer describes the function of Bolaño's tendency to employ moral mirror characters when she writes “Se indica así la manera en que la imaginación móvil del narrador interpreta los hechos, a través de procedimientos analógicos. Con ellos, las historias de vida encuentran una completitud que deberíamos llamar poética, en el sentido de ordenarse por contraste –condenación, como unidades móviles en un espacio textual. Con ellos, las historias de vida encuentran una completitud que deberíamos llamar poética, en el sentido de ordenarse por contraste y condensación, como unidades móviles en un espacio textual” (157). This quote is taken from: Patriau, Paz Soldan and Gustavo Faveron. *Bolano Salvaje*. Barcelona: Editorial Candaya, 2008.

Johns responds by whispering in Morini's ear matter of factly: "'por dinero', 'Porque creía en las inversiones, en el flujo de capital, quien no invierte no gana, esa clase de cosas'" (132).

The scene plays a trick on both Bolaño's audience and Bolaño himself; Bolaño's work is filled with peripheral artists who go to drastic lengths to give metaphors for their social impotence. But beyond a prod at the cult surrounding Bolaño, the refraction of artistic importance between Archimboldi and Johns sets the basis for a theme that will run throughout the collection: that the relationship between aesthetics, institutions of prestige, and the flows of cultural and symbolic capital are thorny and rarely clean cut. Once more, Bolaño uses interspersed metaphors of a common theme to allude to an underlying aesthetic purity that he cannot quite reach. But unlike the purity that Tinajero represents in *Los detectives salvajes*, we do not approach aesthetics from the perspective of the artist who strives for a perfect Latin American form, but from that of the critic that dedicates himself (and herself) to deciphering the transcendental truths that the artists and authors they follow convey. The two most telling metaphors for purity and their relation to critical cultures come in the second and third novels of the collection, *La parte de Amalfitano* and *La parte de Fate*. *La parte de Amalfitano* explores at length a Chilean critic and Heidegger specialist that works in La Universidad de Santa Teresa. We meet him in the first novel, when three of the four critics we follow, Pelletier, a French academic based in Paris, Espinoza, a Spanish academic based in Madrid and Norton, an English academic based in London, travel to Santa Teresa after hearing a rumor that Archimboldi has inexplicably been living there. When the critics, whose presence at the United States – Mexican border clashes heavily with the landscape and lived experience of the inhabitants of Santa Teresa, and whose work seems utterly trivial in the context of a series of unsolved femicides, ask Amalfitano who

moved to Santa Teresa after working in a university in Barcelona, what it was like being a European philosopher and literary critic in a small town in Mexico, Amalfitano responds that it is like being at a symphony, but only the people at the very front can see into the orchestra pit. The conductor has his back to the audience, even to the people in front. And while it is clear that cultural production is taking place and that everyone in the hall can hear the music, no one is allowed to observe the process. The orchestra, for Amalfitano, is less an invisible pit and more a natural, cultural void.

Bolaño bolsters Amalfitano's image with a corresponding metaphor based in a popular register, when the protagonist of the third novel, Fate, a journalist for a small Harlem based daily, *Black Dawn*, covers a boxing match in Santa Teresa. In opposition to Amalfitano's figure that sits in the back of a concert hall, Fate has ringside seats to a boxing match. The music in the boxing scene does not come from the ring but from the upper tier of the arena, where all of the fans sing popular songs mixed with Norteño and Sonoran Jazz rhythms, which Fate describes as, "solemn and defiant, the battle hymn of a lost war sung in the dark" (308). When Fate looks to the arena's upper tier to observe the singing public, the glare of the floodlights used to light the ring blind him.

If in the high cultural register, Amalfitano's hypothetical critic is not permitted to witness the inner workings of the cultural machine, in its popular equivalent, the infrastructure of the spectacle, itself, blinds the journalist that is there to describe the event for an international public. Paralleling the point – counterpoint style that Bolaño uses to weight his characters, the string of metaphors comments on the miscommunication between large subjective groups for whom culture acts as a mediator and the distortion that occurs when a cultural artifact enters into massive circulation. If *Los detectives salvajes* hinges on Bolaño's inability to depict a pure Latin American literary aesthetic for a large audience, 2666 presents the claim that, even if Bolaño were, in fact,

capable of condensing Latin American aesthetics into a pure form, the agents that make up the political economy of cultural circulation would undoubtedly distort that purity. The impossibility of sight is redoubled and portrayed as a collective problem rather than just that of the Latin American artist. Pure form does not simply emanate from the Sonora Desert, as it would in *Los detectives salvajes* but is layered over the disjointed presence of high European aesthetics. Like the outsider looking in for Amalfitano and the insider looking out for Fate, the failure of the aesthetic gaze is reciprocal.

Bolaño uses two metaphorical currents to critique the agents of World Literature in 2666, both of which resonate on an aesthetic and violent level: The first consists of the presence of a singular, universal form in Santa Teresa, made most explicit through Amalfitano's obsession with a geometry book, *Testamento Geográfico*, and the second of gatekeepers, whether they are epistemological gatekeepers, as in guardians of the canon, or actual doormen at nightclubs, prone to violence, as is the case in another instance.

By the time we witness to what extent Amalfitano has come off the rails in Santa Teresa, the thematic connection between his obsession with a universally pure form based in a mathematical and innate order – an obsession that has myriad resonances in the Latin American intellectual canon but most obviously in the lettered city (see chapter 1) – and the presence of the three European critics in Santa Teresa has dawned on us. Just as Pelletier, Espinosa, and Norton do not fully grasp the absurdity of their presence in Santa Teresa until they are actually there, Amalfitano does not question the utility of teaching Heidegger in the Sonora Desert until he is there and in the act. The aesthetic and philosophical epistemology of the four critics clash with the lived experience in Santa Teresa, and Amalfitano pushes this existential problem to its limit. Putting Pelletier, Espinosa, and Norton's high-academic undertakings set against hundreds of rapes and murders in relief, Amalfitano hangs the *Testamento Geográfico* on a clothesline



in his back yard, where he observes how it responds to nature, how it reacts to the breeze of the Sonora Dessert. Having already attempted to establish enigmatic links between European and Latin American philosophers through geometrical models, Amalfitano's contrast between form and terrain, stands in for the world literary and philosophical agents in an incongruous space. And just as the critics all question their social function while in Santa Teresa, the breeze of the Sonora Dessert harries Amalfitano's geometry book: a collection of pure formal archetypes.

Wind is a constant in *2666*, which contrasts with the rigidity of social and aesthetic institutions. It represents a natural freedom that universal inscriptions – in *2666*, predominantly literary – cannot encumber. When Norton crosses the border between the United States and Mexico to catch a flight to London, for example, she is fixated by a bird that sits on the top of a fence that acts as a barrier between the two countries. Wind and nature are the constant in quickly shifting geography in the collection: in varying instances, wind blows messages into rocks over the course of millions of years in Mexico, it artfully blows through dresses in Harlem, and it rustles trees in the suburbs of Paris and Madrid. And, for Bolaño, the critics are wind catchers, in a sense. They seek to reduce and harness what is, according to the logic of the collection, free and natural. The scene at the border-crossing alludes to the freedom of the bird that the guard cannot stop from entering and exiting the country, while in a more violent encounter, the critics witness the doormen at their hotel in Santa Teresa beat a taxi driver to a pulp over a turf war, which reminds them of an instance in which, without explanation, they, themselves, attack a Pakistani taxi driver, leaving him on the verge of death, in London months earlier.

The theme of gatekeepers always appears with an undercurrent of violence, in *2666*, and the critics' presence and academic impotence at the United States border brings

economic and literary globalization together in a fictionalized version of Ciudad Juarez, whose femicides are not at all figurative. When Bolaño, in the fourth novel of the series, *La parte de los crímenes*, depicts hundreds of crimes with detail and background about the victims' lives, he draws a connection between the physical entropy of Amalfitano's geometry book, the tendency for the geography of Northern Mexico to harry the sanity of the academics and critics there to research and teach European philosophy and letters, and the maquiladora project's descent into extreme violence. He reduces the global publishing industry, the academic ivory tower, and economic globalization onto one plane and forces the reader to watch on as things fall apart. Reminiscent of *Los detectives salvajes*, Bolaño maintains that there is a form that can resist the political economies of prestige and for-profit literary institutions; one character bluntly puts it, "Antes leía de todo, maestro, y en grandes cantidades, hoy sólo leo poesía. Sólo la poesía no está contaminada, sólo la poesía está fuera del negocio. No sé si me entiende, maestro. Sólo la poesía, y no toda, eso que quede claro, es alimento sano y no mierda" (289).

Laying out lists of authors, tropes, and formal aesthetics that miss the mark, only to abstractly allude to a pure and underappreciated literary source is one of Bolaño's signature conceits. He fills a text with demons and then casually mentions an angel, one that is never in a position of authority and many times exhibits physical or social handicaps. By the time Bolaño writes *2666*, the set piece feels awkward. One of Bolaño's contemporaries, the Chilean writer Carlos Franz, reads the tendency as an irreverent take on one of the two clichés of twentieth century Latin American literature. For Franz, there are two epicenters of tone that act as models for Latin American writers throughout the twentieth century: 1) a Magical Realism based in the Caribbean and 2) the intellectually brooding realism centered around the Río de la Plata. Resonant of Casanova's nodal points of literary currency, these spaces project two Latin American

styles for export to the literary world. Bolaño obviously gives a caustic take on Magical Realism, but he also, according to Franz, shows us how badly the introverted Porteño intellectual fits in contemporary Latin American reality.<sup>16</sup> Bolaño's irreverence undercuts his audiences at home and abroad, his publishing house and editors, his critics, and even his own trajectory as a literary star.

One might argue that Bolaño's handicapped angels have established their own currency in the market of clichés, and his insistence on a symbolism of tragic impotence may only resonate with younger generations of writers performatively. And following his "star is born" reception on the global scale, Bolaño consciously represented and chronicled the anxiety of international projection experienced previously and in parallel by the Generation of '72 and Colombian Urban Novelists. The tipping point at which Vallejo, Bolaño, and Abad et al apprehensively gain favor in the international economy of prestige raises questions about how they might disengage with such well-trodden aesthetic avenues, no longer writing as outsiders, but as outsiders on the ascent.

In the context of the liminality of renown and the tension between local and global reading publics, one might point to the Buenos Aires-based *Eloisa Cartonera* movement as a hopeful indicator of future aesthetic horizons. It is precisely in the Porteño space that acts as one of Franz's epicenters of literary cliché that challenges to economies of prestige, staid relationships with reading publics, and world literature's rigid flows find practical resistance. Washington Cucurto (1973) and Javier Barilario's (1974) *Eloisa Cartonera* movement puts the epistemological challenges that Cucurto makes in his revision of Argentine history from the perspective of traditionally

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<sup>16</sup> This is a summary of a talk that Franz gave on trends in contemporary Latin American literature at the University of Cambridge on 24 October 2010. The event was entitled "Four Visions on Contemporary Latin American Literature" and also included Santiago Roncagliolo, Jordi Soler, and Juan Gabriel Vasquez.

underprivileged voices in *1810: La revolución de Mayo vivido por los negros* (2008) into practice. While he upends rigid historical epistemes when he gives agency to otherwise subjugated voices in *1810*, in *Eloisa Cartonera*, Cucurto concerns himself more with the listener, reader, and receptor of narrative. *Eloisa Cartonera* comprises an alternative publishing house that gains donated rights from Latin American authors to print their work on recycled cardboard bought from Buenos Aires' *cartoneros*. And volunteers, who many times consist of atypical reading publics decorate the covers and bindings of the books.

The literary process involves readers physically as well as cognitively and combines a localized arts and crafts technique with an ecologically sound method of production. It parses the relationship between the reader and the author and encourages active participation in aesthetic production. In framing novels with their own cover, the reading public dialogues with the author and narrative. The process disengages with the liberal market since readers give their own time and energy in exchange for the book they take home with them and interestingly takes on an un-modern art-as-collective approach. Cucurto and Barilario's own description of *Eloisa Cartonera* highlights exactly how far we have traveled from the literary agents that Vallejo cynically derides, the world literary system that Bolaño irreverently ironizes, and the political economy of prestige that sits uncomfortably with Colombian Urban Novelists, when they write in their ad-hoc charter:

"A principio del 2003, cuando comenzamos con Eloísa Cartonera, no podíamos imaginar un presente más lindo. Comenzamos con la crisis de esos años, como algunos dicen "*somos un producto de la crisis*", o, "*estetizamos la miseria*", ni una cosa ni la otra, somos un grupo de personas que se juntaron para trabajar de otra manera, para aprender con el trabajo un montón de cosas, por ejemplo el cooperativismo, la autogestión, el trabajo para un bien común, como movilizador de nuestro ser. Nacimos en esta época loca que nos tocó y nos toca vivir, como muchas cooperativas y microemprendimientos, asambleas, agrupaciones

barriales, movimientos sociales, que surgieron por aquellos años por iniciativa de la gente, vecinos y trabajadores, acá estamos".<sup>17</sup>

While one might argue that *Eloisa Cartonera* fails to fully shrug off the metronome of international literary time, the movement offers a positive alternative to the knotted relationship between the neoliberal market place and excessively quaffable literary offerings from spaces with dense layers of plural consciousness. It dwells in the space of the aesthetic border and makes positive decisions that make narrative available to otherwise forgotten social groups. And in a moment in which all that is solid appears to melt into air, it relocates the literary process in the local, urban setting and engages with reading publics face to face.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

Perhaps the greatest irony surrounding the relationship between Colombian Urban Novelists and the framework of World Literature is the fact that new generations in critical and publishing cultures have begun to look at urban and gritty aesthetics favorably. Roberto Bolaño (1953-2003) has most famously undone the aesthetic map left by the likes of World Literary stars, such as García Márquez, with his own overblown mythology and suspect marketing decisions in tow. And Vallejo has also won international prizes and is something of a burgeoning star, himself. Oddly enough, in renouncing his aesthetic citizenship, Vallejo has helped shift the international aesthetic palate, forcing critics to wonder if the global taste for marginality has simply changed

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<sup>17</sup> Cucurto and Barilaro describe the ideology behind *Eloisa Cartonera* on the movement's website, <http://www.eloisacartonera.com.ar>.

geographies, moving from the rural to the urban and if escapism has been replaced by what María Helena Rueda refers to as a “comercialización de la marginalidad” (2009).

As the World Literary system appropriates new figures and styles, Erich Auerbach’s worries of the reductionism and “difference obliterating” tendencies that a singular literary time implies, no matter who is in a position to radicalize it, hold true. Just as Immanuel Kant’s shift from multiple aestheses to a particular aesthetics, Goethe’s labeling of “Weltliteratur” marks the closing of the literary world, which plays out clearly in late twentieth century Colombian narrative. As is seen in the case of Vallejo, and in a larger context, the Colombian Urban Novel, a singular modernism is too narrow an approach to literary production, and its proponents ignore the difficult literary terrain that the internationalization of literary icons leaves in its wake. Within the framework of World Literature, critics that argue in favor of the emancipatory properties that larger than life literary personae present when they move from the “periphery” to the “core” many times ignore the fact that the same figures they celebrate are considered highly conservative, if not altogether kitsch, in their home regions. And while Vallejo’s literary delinking certainly runs up against its own set of problems, and his maldito persona risks becoming a caricature for international consumption, one can hardly blame him for complaining, even if so bombastically, about World Literature’s bureaucrats.

## Chapter 5. Conclusion

### Lettering and Unlettering the Globalized Body

Decolonization does not need to coincide with formal independence movements because decolonization posits the cultural as necessarily political, as integral to struggles for social equality, as in the call for the Cuban independence leader José Martí to get “Spain out of our habits” and in the Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio’s call for a “mental revolution” to remedy the shortcomings of the Mexican Revolution. In these accounts, the attainment of independence for the nation-state sets in motion a lengthier process of decolonization in which the transformation of culture plays a key role” (David Luis-Brown, *Waves of Decolonization: Discourses of Race and Hemispheric Citizenship in Cuba, Mexico, and the United States*, 5).

“We need to mine the metaphorical potentialities in the concept of *Nepantla* more deeply. It suggests that prior to living between two cultures, the transmovement of the human subject is reflected in its fleeting and vanishing movement between two or more signifiers” (Antonio Viego, *Dead Subjects: Toward a Politics of Loss in Latino Studies*, 128).

What ties together my analysis of the Colombian local, the Latin American regional, and the aesthetic global is the insistence of all of the writers covered in this collection to theorize and write from the place where multiple aesthetic systems converge. They, to paraphrase Antonio Viego, mine the metaphorical potentialities of *Nepantla*; they at once further the Latin American exploration of the peripatetic signifiers civilization and barbarism and testimonialize the collapsing of this foundational paradigm in on itself. When Colombian Urban Novelists color the post-

*Violencia* cityscape as unlettered polis rather than stabilizing cognitive edifice, when the members of the Generation of '72 draw our attention to the barbarism not in their home country but in the "civilized" discursive centers in which they dwell, and when post-Boom writers approach the reemergence of the Latin American novel on the global scene with a trepidation that wavers between reluctance and scorn, the negotiating of "the global in one's habits" is thrown in sharp relief.

The three approaches outlined in this thesis revolve around the common marker of Fernando Vallejo. And the in depth analysis of Vallejo's complication of local, regional, and global inflections of aesthetic citizenship bring his obsessive return to José Asunción Silva's *náufrago* of one hundred and fifteen years prior into focus. Not far from the *Bocas de Ceniza*, indeed, not far from where Gonzalo de Oviedo first mislabeled an "ochi" a "tigre", the points where global and local cultural systems converge continue to reverberate in distortion. If there is a flag under which Colombian Urban Novelists and the Generation of '72 collectively write, it is not the national, regional, or global, but the epistemic and aesthetic *náufrago*.

Colombian Urban Novelists and the Generation of 72 contribute to the very Latin American tradition of complicating the civilization and barbarism binary, while creating a novel aesthetics that will leave both monikers behind once and for all. Their literary anxiety comes from the desire to unletter the center rather than champion its values, to complicate the teleological global rather act as its disciple.



Vallejo, the writers that comprise the Generation of '72, and Colombian Urban Novelists all write from very similar positions. They analyze and complicate the *modernista* versus *no-modernista* bodies to which Colombia's nineteenth century poet-presidents allude, the same consuming, productive versus *sicario*-like, lumpen city-dwellers that undergird Alvaro Uribe's *Ley de justicia y paz*, and the same discourse of ordered versus chaotic citizens and social actors that dominate Latin American national projects during and following the Operation Condor.

The cross section of cultural output surveyed in this project – the roughly twenty Colombian Urban novels and films, the slightly larger number of works by members of the Generation of '72, the literary output of apprehensively successful post-*Boom* writers, and Fernando Vallejo's entire oeuvre – focus on the ways in which geopolitical flows and global cultural institutions have lettered, unlettered, and relettered the Latin American body. The writers surveyed, work toward a poetics that unearths the aesthetic potentia buried beneath universal templates. They explore the space between geographical and epistemological nodal points and complicate the ongoing ramifications of century old literary and philosophical formulae.

The local perspective gives an analysis of the Colombian lettered city and the challenges that it sustains in the shift to the *mediated city* in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The regional perspective explores the Generation of '72, a group of writers that, in traveling to cosmopolitan spaces out of force rather than goodwill,

offer a critical take on globalized culture and the very aesthetic centers that have long lent the Latin American city its authorial weight. And through a sociological reading of how Latin American authors and cultural icons are traded and marketed internationally, I conclude that the sustained relationship between aesthetics and global and national citizenship foster a collective literary output unique to the Latin American canon.

I have analyzed the literary and cultural production of these three spatial and cultural geographies in which economic and aesthetic borders are very much on display, in order to explore how Latin American intellectuals and writers respond to the overlap of multiple lettering systems. These authors do not simply locate nodal points in metaphorical binaries but insist on forcing the cultural apparatuses of which they are articulations to face their reductionist limits. Their poetics does not settle for two neatly divorced aesthetic systems but forces the two to stand face to face, exposing their cultural machinery. When Colombian Urban Novelists challenge the primacy of the lettered city and attempt to reletter the urban imaginary, when the Generation of '72 forces high culture to confront its violent past, when post-*Boom* writers only wear the club jacket of World Literature with an asterisk, and when Vallejo's narrator naively buys into universal civilizing rhetoric only to watch it dissolve into the materiality of incongruous lived experience, it is literature that acts as a tool to probe the entangled knot of globalized culture.

The convergence of lettering systems is more, for these authors, a source of inspiration than it is indicative of a dominating imperialism at which the writer should simply give up. And, as we have seen in the previous four chapters, their literary battles do not so much capsize as they are born and reborn from a long series of *náufragos*, culminating, I argue, in a poetics of globalism.

Leaving the last thought to Vallejo, we see that he does not mince words when discussing writers that were not so bold. Vallejo has Nuñez in mind when he contrasts the lastingly pertinent cultural icon of Silva with the image of a comfortably retired poet that has exploited his lettered privilege and is happy to spend the rest of his life passively letting the symbolic and real waves of elsewhere wash over him.

Shadowboxing the Colombian Urban Novelist and Generation of '72's negative, he asserts, "Mal poeta, mal filósofo y mal presidente, un perezoso y lujurioso al que le fatigaba hasta mandar. Le entregó las riendas de Colombia primero a Carlos Holguín; después a Caro. Y se encerró en Cartagena en su mansión de El Cabrero con su segunda mujer, a rumiar los pensamientos y a oír sonar las olas" (63).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vallejo, Fernando. *Chapolas Negras*. Santafe de Bogota: Editorial Santillana, 1995.



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