

Humanism and Deshumanización –  
Fiction and Philosophy of a Transatlantic Avant-Garde  
by  
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“The beautiful stands on quite a different footing [...].”  
Immanuel Kant – *Critique of Judgment*

“In a word, Beauty must be exhibited as a necessary condition of humanity.”  
Friedrich Schiller – *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*

“Nothing is beautiful, only man: on this piece of naivety rests all aesthetics, it is the *first* truth of aesthetics. Let us immediately add its second: nothing is ugly but *degenerate* man – the domain of aesthetic judgment is therewith defined.”  
Friedrich Nietzsche – *Twilight of the Idols*

“Es un síntoma de pulcritud mental querer que las fronteras entre las cosas estén bien demarcadas.”  
José Ortega y Gasset – *La deshumanización del arte*

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## Abstract

This dissertation treats the narrative fiction, philosophical essays, and the *revistas* (cultural/aesthetic/philosophical journals) published and disseminated by the Argentine and Spanish avant-gardes between 1918 and 1936. I argue that the multifaceted relationships formed within this cross-cultural exchange are constitutive of a *transatlantic avant-garde assemblage*. The key compositors in this assemblage's constitution are Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Jorge Luis Borges, and José Ortega y Gasset. Additionally, the transatlantic *revista*, *Síntesis*, is presented as a case study that confirms my hypothesis regarding the transatlantic nature of this specific avant-garde assemblage.

Within this assemblage, the avant-garde's aesthetic expressions and philosophical figurations of the *human* provide it its unique composition and consistency. As I further submit, avant-garde notions regarding the relationship between the human and the aesthetic can often be genealogically traced to German humanistic and anti-humanistic philosophies, such as those that emerge out of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, and Nietzsche's general *oeuvre*.

A thinker trained in German philosophy, Ortega acts as the primary transatlantic avant-garde figure that rides an alternately transparent and turbid wave of thought and practice revolving around the human. In *El tema de nuestro tiempo*, *La deshumanización del arte*, and *La rebelión de las masas*, Ortega complicates and radicalizes certain humanistic concepts in the name of dehumanized aesthetics, hierarchical order, and reactionary politics. Ortega's influence in Argentina can be seen in the work of Eduardo

Mallea, whose book, *Historia de una pasión argentina*, recapitulates many of Ortega's basic theses.

Many other vanguardists receive racial ideas from both their avant-garde contemporaries and from the German philosophical tradition, though not all follow Ortega down a path toward conservatism. The Spanish writer, Pedro Salinas, utilizes a dehumanized aesthetic technique in *Vispera del gozo*, but does so in order to critique Ortega's limited epistemological approach. Meanwhile, the Argentine novelists, Roberto Arlt and Macedonio Fernández, propose their own radical alternatives in hopes of freeing life from such limited models. Arlt does so in *El juguete rabioso*, *Los siete locos*, and *Los lanzallamas*, while Macedonio does so *Adriana Buenos Aires* and *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*.

## Chapter 1

### A Transatlantic Avant-Garde – An Introduction

“La modernidad de la Estética ya es un concepto definitivamente asentado por el pensar filosófico.”

Carlos Astrada – “El juicio estético”

“Intentaré una exégesis.”

Jorge Luis Borges – “Al margen de la moderna estética”

After the Great War, as the dawn of a new century brought about the dawn of a new destiny that came to be known as modernity, what did it mean to be a human being living in what, by all appearances, appeared to be a new and modern world? What did modernity promise to give to humanity? What did *the new* promise? And the avant-garde? What promises did it make? How did writers, thinkers, and philosophers – how did creators and vanguardists – express these promises, these new ways of living? What are their stories? How did they write them? What aesthetic, political, social, and ideological theories and philosophies gave shape to these promises and stories, and, perhaps, to the world – itself an eternally-returning promise, a never-ending story? These are but some of the questions that frame the investigation that follows.

In order to rein in such expansive, complex questions, the current study addresses them within the transatlantic context of Spain and Argentina during the time of the avant-gardes, or *las vanguardias*, from approximately the end of World War One (1918) to the

outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (1936).<sup>1</sup> The literary works, philosophical essays, and *revistas* (literary, philosophical, and cultural journals) composed and issued by *las vanguardias* in Spain and Argentina serve as the primary points of departure.

Additionally, the origins of *las vanguardias* will be genealogically traced back to the advent of Italian futurism in 1909 and further still to German Idealistic, Romantic, and Nietzschean philosophies from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It may seem, then, that the questions and the context considered here are too vast to allow for a close, detailed inspection. What anchors the present work, however, are the analyses of the various aesthetic expressions and philosophical figurations of the *human*, as so put for by the Argentine and Spanish avant-gardes – that is, as so put forth by what we will call *a transatlantic avant-garde*.

Thus, while what follows will not necessarily strive to outline an authoritative “theory of the avant-garde,” à la Peter Bürger, Matei Calinescu, Renato Poggioli, or even José Ortega y Gasset, at least five theories related to the avant-garde will be advanced. *One theory put forth asserts the following*: an adequate approach to either the Spanish or the Argentine avant-garde calls for an examination of the transatlantic relationship between the two.

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<sup>1</sup> When the word and concept “avant-garde” are invoked here, they are so invoked in line with the definition of *la vanguardia* delineated by the Argentine critic, Beatriz Sarlo, in her essay, “Vanguardia y criollismo: la aventura de *Martín Fierro*.” This definition reads as follows: “El cambio de las formas y la transformación de las costumbres literarias se manifiesta como ‘vanguardia’ cuando existen actores y relaciones institucionales que pueden definirse como propios de un campo intelectual desarrollado. Del romanticismo, primera vanguardia del siglo XIX europeo, en adelante, la imposición de nuevas convenciones artístico-literarias tomó la forma de vanguardia: revolución superestructural, tiene como agentes a los sujetos del campo intelectual” (212). Additional caveat that should be added to this definition are that socio-political and ontological “conventions” are just as often “imposed” by *las vanguardias* as well.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the avant-garde in Spain and Argentina; yet, these studies tend to explore the rise of an avant-garde in regionally specific ways. Although one can find many works on either the Spanish avant-garde or the Argentine avant-garde, a sustained work that equally engages the emergence of an avant-garde in both countries does not seem to exist. Nevertheless, here, in an attempt to attend to the multifaceted transatlantic exchanges that were indeed taking place, the notion of an avant-garde will not be bound solely by Spain and Argentina's national and relative preoccupations. On the contrary, fully understanding both the Spanish and Argentine avant-gardes requires treating the phenomenon as a sort of intermingled, polyvalent, cross-cultural, and, of course, transatlantic *assemblage*: a fluid set of relations with multiple points of entry and exit; a protean configuration comprised of heterogeneous components; an encounter of varying and variable forces as strong and as supple as the very Atlantic Ocean that at once separates and connects the two countries.<sup>2</sup>

In his essay, "El cuerpo y su sombra. Los viajeros culturales en la década del veinte," the Argentine critic, Gonzalo Aguilar, notes that, "El siglo XX podría pensarse como un estado de movilidad generalizada" (208). The contention offered here – in effect, *the second theory* – is that this "generalized mobility" relates not only to the

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<sup>2</sup> This concept of the "assemblage" come from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari explicate their concept of the assemblage as follows: "We may draw some general conclusions on the nature of Assemblages [...]. On a first, horizontal axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away" (88 emphasis in original).

movement of people, but also to the movement of ideas; specifically, cross-cultural currents that convey concepts back and forth across the Atlantic, between Spain and Argentina, where some currents are stronger than others and create waves of greater magnitude and impact. This study is therefore a study of current density, a study of conceptual currencies and their capacities, a study of a macro current and the micro currents within it, a study of a micro current and the macro currents that surround it – A study of the bodies and the currents that give form and *consistency* to a transatlantic avant-garde assemblage.<sup>3</sup>

Along with the currency afforded new expressions of the *human*, some of the other more forceful currents include alternately transparent and turbid ideas concerning the avant-garde itself, *the new*, humanism, dehumanized aesthetics, minorities, masses, order, disorder, transcendence, and immanence. The bodies will be outlined anon.

Approaching the avant-garde in such a manner allows for new currents to be channeled, new relations to be explored – relations which, in turn, map out and trace transatlantic avant-garde domains heretofore unknown, or, at least, understudied. Such a relating and a tracing serve to configure certain canonical figures from both sides of the Atlantic in new ways, so as to emphasize the transatlantic relations between them. (And, of course, the same occurs with respect to the lesser-known figures cited here as well.)

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<sup>3</sup> Deleuze and Guattari explain what they mean by consistency here: “The problem of consistency concerns the matter in which the components of a territorial assemblage hold together. But it also concerns the manner in which different assemblages hold together, with components of passage and relay. It may even be the case that consistency finds the totality of its conditions only on a properly cosmic plane, where all the disparate and heterogeneous elements are convoked. However, from the moment heterogeneities hold together in an assemblage or interassemblages a problem of consistency is posed, in terms of coexistence or succession, and both simultaneously. Even in a territorial assemblage, it may be the most deterritorialized component, the deterritorializing vector, in other words, the refrain, that assures the consistency of the territory” (*Thousand* 327).

These relations, these traces, are not necessarily points of agreement, but, rather, akin to intellectual, aesthetic, philosophical, political, ethical, and, perhaps above all, *cultural* encounters, abstract as they are concrete, ephemeral as they are timeless – points of convergence and divergence, withal. The primary representatives of the transatlantic avant-garde who encounter each other throughout the course of the present study – the bodies, through which flow the currents, though which flow the bodies, and so on... – the thinkers of the time who will be assembled, configured, and related, are Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Jorge Luis Borges, José Ortega y Gasset, Pedro Salinas, Eduardo Mallea, Roberto Arlt, and Macedonio Fernández.

In the end, which, at this very moment, is also a beginning, it is only fitting that an investigation of the avant-garde seeks out and expresses new relations: at heart, this is what the avant-garde itself is all about.

Three Hispanic vanguardists who contributed in myriad ways to the construction of a transatlantic assemblage are Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Jorge Luis Borges, and José Ortega y Gasset. All three thinkers, along with a non-hispanic vanguardist, the Italian futurist, F.T. Marinetti, will be drawn out in greater detail in the following chapter. To start the sketch here: Ramón acted as the progenitor of any sort of Hispanic avant-garde. The case is obvious enough for Spain; if perhaps less obvious, the case is still the same for Argentina. For, as Beatriz Sarlo states, “El héroe de la vanguardia argentina es un español: Ramón Gómez de la Serna” (“Vanguardia” 245). This widespread and deep-seated influence over *las vanguardias* on both sides of the Atlantic came about because of Ramón’s own precocious commitment to spreading the aesthetic gospel of *the new*, his

groundbreaking translation of Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto" into Spanish in 1909, his fragmented aesthetics of fragmentation, and his innovative use of metaphor.

With regard to this last innovation – metaphor – the absolute privilege and liberation assigned to metaphor in vanguardist production, a privilege and a liberation which Ramón would promote for all his days, does not necessarily start with him. While Ramón does indeed find and impart a *new* use value for and to metaphor, especially in his inimitable *greguerías*, metaphor as such does not start there – nor, for that matter, does it start with the avant-garde, despite their common clamorous contentions to the contrary. If metaphor does start at all, it starts *anew*, yes, it restarts, it is renewed, revived by the avant-garde, but the use of metaphor is by no means in and of itself *new*. For Aristotle himself says in the *Poetics* – that is, in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BC – “But the greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor. This alone cannot be imparted by another; it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances” (47).

All proper historicisms and genealogies aside regarding metaphor – all proper digressions aside as well, if a digression can, perchance, be proper, a property which some vanguardists, i.e. Ramón, strive to give to digression, as an, if not *the*, essential means of human expression – in 1925 Guillermo de Torre accurately affirms the following with respect to Ramón in de Torre's literally epoch-making book, *Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia*:

Reconozcamos previamente que Ramón Gómez de la Serna, puede reivindicar en todo momento, con más motivos que ningún otro de su edad, una indiscutible prioridad vanguardista. Ya que, en rigor ha sido siempre un hombre de vanguardia, anticipado de su época, disidente e impar, única figura de relieve singular [...]. (43-44)

In short, this is to say that, despite being both new and not so new, Ramón was, is, and always will be *avant-garde*.

Meanwhile, in 1921 a young Borges returned to Argentina eager to contribute to, if not mythically forge, an avant-garde *milieu* in Buenos Aires after seven years spent abroad in Europe discovering new means of aesthetic expression. This would initially mean translating tenets of Spanish *ultraísmo* – an aesthetic trend Borges helps to create, propagate, and then later dismiss – into a local, Argentine context. In this ultraist light – a *new* aesthetic light beaming out upon humanity and shining brightest in Spain – the critic, César Fernández Moreno labels Borges, “[e]l jefe del ultraísmo” (32). Although such a statement may represent an embellishment, ultraism would not be what it was – in Spain or in Argentina – without Jorge Luis Borges. Significantly, then, and in line with Fernández Moreno’s appraisal, Guillermo de Torre lists Borges’ name and presents Borges’ poems first in a section of *Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia* entitled, “Los poetas ultraístas. Esquema para una antología crítica” (61-65). What is more, throughout the time of *las vanguardias*, Borges contributed articles, reviews, and poems to the most important *revistas* in Argentina and Spain (and elsewhere), and also launched what Argentina’s first ever avant-garde *revista*, *Prisma*, in 1921.

This being said, in the grand scheme of things, and despite his controversial “Madrid meridiano intelectual de Hispanoamérica” article which will be examined shortly, it could be argued that the Spaniard, de Torre, did more for the transatlantic avant-garde than any of the other three vanguardists mentioned above. If only by publishing *Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia*, and thus giving credence to the movement and its very name in the Spanish speaking world – *vanguardia* – de Torre

helped to create a discourse, helped to determine a mode of knowledge and of expression that would endure by this very act alone, by affirming a name and the special promise of a new aesthetic and a new life as so expressed in the name of this name – *vanguardia*.<sup>4</sup> In addition, and like Borges, De Torre published in the most important Argentine, Spanish, and international *revistas* of the times, and was also one of the founding members of *Prisma* in Buenos Aires. In 1923, he published a collection of poems entitled *Hélices* that relied heavily on the use of Apollinairian calligrams and, as it was only natural for a cosmopolitan intellectual and artiste such as de Torre, combined elements of ultraism, dadaism, cubism, and futurism. He also later married Borges’ sister, Norah, and eventually took up residence in Buenos Aires.

Another vanguardist of note who will only be noted here, is the Chilean poet and (supposedly supposed) inventor of creationism, Vicente Huidobro.<sup>5</sup> Huidobro’s name,

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<sup>4</sup> In *Las vanguardias artísticas en España. (1909-1936)*, Jaime Brihuega, situates de Torre, his literary compendium, and ultraism as follows: “En 1925, Guillermo de Torre consagraba para España la palabra vanguardia. No era la primera vez que el término se utilizaba en nuestro país, ni tampoco significaba la llamada de atención sobre una curiosidad desconocida; la intención de sus *Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia* era más bien la de articular la visión retrospectiva de un pasado muy próximo y la de proceder a la reivindicación de un sector del presente cultural europeo que el público español no había terminado de aceptar y ni siquiera de conocer. El concepto se proclamaba paralelamente a otra noción, la que el sufijo “ismo” proporcionaba como idea de cada una de las transubstanciaciones del flujo vanguardista. Parapetado entre la doble certidumbre vanguardismo, cobraba vida oficial el movimiento ultraísta. Con él, de Torre intentaba dar entrada a España, guiándola con su propia mano, en el concierto europeo de la cultura de avanzada. Lo consiguió. Desde ese 1925 nadie puede ignorar el Ultraísmo como estación de la espiral vanguardista, y más aún, la historiografía suele remitir el término vanguardia a sus orígenes pasando por ese libro con que de Torre pensaba consagrarlo para el mundo de habla hispano” (15-16).

<sup>5</sup> Supposed, because de Torre himself repeatedly challenged the perception that Huidobro really created creationism, arguing instead that Huidobro lifted most of his methods from the Uruguayan modernist, Julio Herrera y Reissig, both in an issue of the Spanish *revista*, *Alfar*, from September of 1923 and then again in *Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia* in 1925. Years earlier, in 1920, de Torre took Huidobro’s side in a polemic regarding

along with his aesthetic theories and practices related to *el creacionismo*, rang out across Latin America, the Atlantic, and Europe as the transatlantic avant-garde went through its periods of gestation and (im)maturity – with the latter referring to the avant-garde’s rather paradoxical growth and refinement of a propensity for and towards a perpetual, and seemingly autonomous, state of play. Though, apropos of this notion of play, Huidobro himself states in his masterwork, *Altazor* (1931), that “El juego es juego y no plegaria infatigable” (76).<sup>6</sup> The creationist, rather than be puckish like so many of his contemporaries were so often wont to do, took very seriously his self-created role as a poet. As he himself puts it in “Arte poética” – a short, if forceful, work which many consider to be a creationist manifesto of sorts – “El Poeta es un pequeño Dios.” To be sure, Huidobro says this without any sense of playfulness or irony whatsoever. A poet, a demiurge, a transatlantic vanguardist, Huidobro was one of the first Hispanics to set forth an aesthetico-philosophical program and put it into practice – in Latin America and Europe.

“Arte poética” was first published in Buenos Aires in 1916 in a collection entitled *El espejo de agua*. This same year, Huidobro visited Buenos Aires as well, though he did

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whether or not Huidobro or the French poet, Pierre Reverdy, actually originated what would come to be called “creationism,” saying that they both have their own unique take on *el creacionismo* and that, in truth, he prefers Huidobro’s style over that of his French contemporary (“La poesía creacionista” 605). Why these polemics? Like many of the polemics of the times, these seem to be propagated for polemic’s sake alone. *Polemic for polemic’s sake – Art for art’s sake*. This is not to say that there were not legitimate debates raging at the time as well.

<sup>6</sup> As it will be detailed further in the Chapter Three, in 1795, in what perhaps serves as the very first avant-garde manifesto, Friedrich Schiller proclaims in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, and in no less self-serious terms than those afforded years later by Huidobro, “to declare it once and for all, Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word a man, and *he is only wholly Man when he is playing*” (80 emphasis in original).

so to what, at the time, amounted to little fanfare and acclaim.<sup>7</sup> Then, in 1918, Huidobro visited Spain for the first time. This particular visit did indeed prove to be seminal in starting in Spain a new movement obsessed with the new.

Rafael Cansinos-Asséns – the founding father of ultraism, one of Borges’ initial mentors, and hence a vanguardist worth referencing as well – reflects upon Huidobro’s time spent in Spain a few months after the creationist’s visit in an article entitled “Un gran poeta chileno. Vicente Huidobro y el creacionismo.” This article is included in the first published issue of *Cosmópolis* from January of 1919. Here, Cansinos-Asséns characterizes Huidobro’s visit as nothing less than “el acontecimiento supremo del año literario” (68). He goes on to explain his assertion by stating, “porque con él [Huidobro] pasaron por nuestro meridiano las últimas tendencias literarias del extranjero,” and further describes the fruits of Huidobro’s fortuitous visit in superlative, if also precise, terms:

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<sup>7</sup> In his essay, “Rupturas de vanguardia en la década del 20. Ultraísmo, martinfierrismo,” Jerónimo Ledesma depicts Huidobro’s time spent in the Argentine capital as being rather inconsequential, though he also puts forward the argument that perhaps this visit, if only obliquely, marks the beginning of the ultraist movement in Argentina, which would later evolve, again, somewhat obliquely, and in tandem with Borges’ return from Spain, into the *martinfierrista* movement in the mid-20s: “La crítica aún discute cómo y cuándo las ideas ultraístas fecundaron nuestro país [Argentina]. Algunas apuntan al chileno Vicente Huidobro, empezando por el propio Huidobro, que solía remitir todo a sí mismo. En 1916 este “fundador del vanguardismo latinoamericano” pasó por Buenos Aires divulgando ideas estéticas afines a las del Ultra. Aunque no usara la palabra “ultraísmo” (a su programa estético lo llama “creacionismo”), la hipótesis no carece de interés, ya que Huidobro gravitó en la formación del movimiento en España y sus creencias y principios teóricos – autonomía del arte, antimimetismo, poeta demiúrgico, poema creado, primacía de la metáfora o imagen – no se diferenciaban mayormente de los que adoptó aquí. Por desgracia de Huidobro, no quedaron más rastros de su fugaz paso por Buenos Aires que sus propias afirmaciones y la prédica no hizo nacer ningún creacionismo argentino” (167-68). In spite of this, Óscar Collazos maintains in *Los vanguardismos en América Latina* that, “hacia 1925 el Creacionismo se mantenía como la mayor y más eficaz propuesta vanguardista hispanoamericana” (14).

Huidobro nos traía primicias completamente nuevas, nombres nuevos, obras nuevas, un ultra-novecentismo. [...] De esos coloquios familiares, una virtud de renovación trascendió a nuestra lírica; y un día, quizás no lejano, muchos matices nuevos de libros futuros habrán de referirse a las exhortaciones apostólicas de Huidobro que trajo el verbo nuevo. Porque durante su estancia aquí [...], los poetas más jóvenes le rodearon y de él aprendieron otros números musicales y otros modos de percibir la belleza. [...] En nuestra lírica contemporánea no hay nada que pueda comparárseles, ni siquiera las últimas modulaciones de Juan Ramón Jiménez, ni las silvas diversificaciones de los modernos versilibristas. Todas esas formas, Vicente Huidobro las cultivó y superó ya [...]. (68-70)<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, as the critic, Gloria Videla, notes in her study, *El Ultraísmo*, when it comes to Spanish ultraism – the first fully, if inconsistently, articulated vanguard sprouting in Spain – “El tránsito de Huidobro por Madrid fue, pues, la primera semilla” (29).<sup>9</sup>

For the project at hand, however, the central figure is José Ortega y Gasset – Spain’s most well known philosopher and the self-styled spokesman of *el arte nuevo*. Within the Hispanic world and at the time of *las vanguardias*, Ortega was a, if not *the*, major, and majorly influential, philosopher of various avant-garde, aesthetic, and, despite his frequent contentions to the contrary, political programs and practices. To this very point, Poggioli states in *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* that Ortega is “perhaps the one author to date who has faced the problem of avant-garde art in its totality (even if from a particular point of view) [...]” (5).<sup>10</sup> Of course, Ortega’s “particular point of view” is

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<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note how Cansinos-Assens does not refer to Ramón as a member of the avant-garde on par with Huidobro. Of course, Cansinos-Assens and Ramón had their own local competition and rivalry going on at the time – Cansinos-Assens had his *tertulia* in the café Colonial, Ramón had his in the Café el Pombo.

<sup>9</sup> The work of Huidobro will surely serve as a springboard for future studies, since, in him, one really does bear witness to *a transatlantic avant-garde* – Santiago-Buenos Aires-Paris-Madrid, working with nearly everyone everywhere who was ever anyone to this specific, if sprawling, scene.

<sup>10</sup> In *Las cosas en su sitio*, Octavio Paz situates Ortega as follows, specifically vis-à-vis modernity and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as a whole: “El [...] gran ensayista español es Ortega y

nothing if not problematic. Nevertheless, when taken together, works like *El tema de nuestro tiempo*, *La deshumanización del arte*, and *La rebelión de las masas* express both the problematics and the promise of the avant-garde. For Ortega's works are often just as cogent and revolutionary as they are absurd and reactionary. In a general, and hopefully not too reductive, sense, these same descriptors apply to the transatlantic avant-garde as a whole, too.

Outside of Spain, Ortega and his works were of the greatest consequence in Argentina. Ortega's "intellectual" biographer, Rockwell Gray, explains the Spaniard's impact as follows:

Argentina, and especially, Buenos Aires, was destined to become the major Latin American extension of Ortega's intellectual horizon, the main location below the Río Grande where his work was avidly read and discussed. The work of cultural diffusion was eventually promoted by Argentine figures like the novelist Eduardo Mallea, the philosophers Francisco Romero and Coriolano Alberini, and the editor Victoria Ocampo, who established the review *Sur* in 1931. (114)

Ortega visited Argentina twice during the time of *las vanguardias*, in 1916 (the same year as Huidobro, then, but to much wider acclaim) and 1928. Each visit was the source of tremendous notoriety, pomp, and circumstance. Throughout his life, Ortega wrote extensively (and polemically) on the country of Argentina and the character of its people as well. These writings are now collected in *Meditación del pueblo joven y otros ensayos*

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Gasset. Tal vez es el más grande [...], o para ser más exacto, el más radical, el más moderno y el más amplio. Un gran escritor europeo. La modernidad es el tema de su obra y su crítica anticipa a lo que, en otros países, se ha escrito sobre esta idea. [...] Pocos ensayistas modernos se le pueden comparar. En los Estados Unidos no encuentro a ninguno de su talla. ¿Y en Francia? Enfrentarlo a Camus es absurdo. Camus fue un gran artista menor y un pensador de segunda mano. La comparación con Sartre sería más justa, aunque Ortega vio con mayor clarividencia la evolución del mundo moderno. Ortega y Sartre se parecen en su limitación: ninguno de los dos es Heidegger, Peirce, Russell, o Lévi-Strauss. Ambos hacen virtud de su flaqueza: 'si no son filósofos del siglo'" (38-39).

*sobre América*. He also frequently wrote for *La Nación*, one of Argentina's leading newspapers for almost thirty years, from 1923-1952. The transnational significance of Ortega's own *revista*, *Revista de Occidente*, and its role in later inspiring Victoria Ocampo in the founding of *Sur* in Argentina – a *revista* with a strikingly similar approach and purview – cannot be denied, either, not to mention the fact that Ortega was originally a member of *Sur*'s editorial board.

Without a doubt, Ortega's concepts of "generations" and "minorities," as formulated in accordance with certain futurist, creationist, and ultraist tendencies, and first outlined in 1923 in *El tema de nuestro tiempo*, shaped avant-garde theory and practice on both sides of the Atlantic. In her critical essay, "Consagraciones: tonos y polémicas," Graciela Montaldo positions Ortega with respect to Argentina as follows:

A su vez, entre los muchos intelectuales que llegan de visita a la Argentina sobresale la figura de José Ortega y Gasset que contó con muchos seguidores entre los jóvenes y creó un núcleo de discípulos a partir de las dos visitas que hizo durante este período [...]. Ortega y Gasset va a exponer en Buenos Aires su teoría de las "generaciones" en la vida cultural como modo de explicar el cambio. Este problema comienza a ser un tópico en las discusiones de la época. Muchos intelectuales se ven comprometidos en esta discusión y deben tomar posiciones al lado de los "nuevos" o de los "viejos" y se deben pronunciar por el tipo de relación que "la hora actual" debe mantener con la tradición cultural: el cambio o el "divorcio" por un lado; la continuidad respetuosa, por otro. (31)

Orteguian concepts such as these were effectively (and intentionally) designed to be hostile, combative, and elitist in nature – traits that appealed to vanguardists in the course of their *soi-disant* struggle against the past, against bad taste, and, as Ortega would later declare in *La deshumanización del arte* in 1925, against the *human* itself.

This brings us back to the human.

For it is within the transatlantic assemblage that takes shape across and between Spain and Argentina that *a third theory emerges*: to wit, that the *human* functions as a

central concern in both the theory and the practice of this transatlantic avant-garde. It is a concern that actively marks, if not defines, the transatlantic avant-garde so assembled here. In other words, and to repeat, the various aesthetic expressions and philosophical figurations of the human impart *consistency* to the *assemblage* that the transatlantic avant-garde comprises.

“*How to create not only a new aesthetic, but a new form of human life adequate to it?*” asks the avant-garde.<sup>11</sup> Often, in the avant-garde’s response to its own question, these two creations are meant to be one and the same. For the story of the human, humanity’s life story, is the story of stories – a master narrative, virtually *the aesthetic* itself. As Paul de Man says, years later, “art is in fact what defines humanity in the broadest sense. Mankind, in the last analysis, is only human by ways of art” (“Aesthetic Formalization” 265). As Jacques Derrida says, years later, “The work of art is always that of man” (“Economimesis” 5). And as Jacques Ranciere says, years later, art “is always ‘aestheticized,’ meaning that it is always posed as a ‘form of life.’ [...] The human revolution is an offspring of the aesthetic paradigm. [...] [A] new life needs a new art.” (“Aesthetic Revolution” 137-39). In short, there exists an intimate, irreducible, and ineluctable relationship between the human and the aesthetic.

Yet, at the time of the avant-gardes, the very category of the human, along with that of aesthetics, had entered into a moment of modern-life crisis. If not an entirely new, then at least a different kind of human started to be articulated and aestheticized (and philosophized and politicized and so on); and it was one that, in many instances, barely

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<sup>11</sup> The question offered here operates as a rewording Hal Foster’s opening sentence to *Prosthetic Gods*, which reads, “How to imagine not only a new art or architecture, but a new self or subject adequate to them?” (IX).

resembled what had traditionally been denominated as being human. Moreover, many, though not all, avant-garde writers used their creative works to present new and different means of storytelling. In effect, these stories no longer looked like stories either, which, in no small part, was due to these stories' new and different relationships to their new and modern human characters.

Hence, in the wake of the horrors of World War I, faced with a massive technological onslaught, and with what certain intellectuals saw to be the threatening massification of culture and society, avant-garde artists, writers, and thinkers interrogated what it meant to think, live, and create as new human beings.<sup>12</sup> Some vanguardists simply, if also desperately, wanted to avoid humanity and the world as such at all costs, inventing and inhabiting their own imaginative, aesthetic worlds above and beyond the quotidian and the terrestrial as places of retreat, refuge, and escape; others did their best to impose upon the world the idea of human being as being essentially ordered, hierarchical, and aristocratic in nature, thereby attempting to demonstrate the natural superiority of a select, minoritarian few who were destined to rule over and give shape to

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<sup>12</sup> Videla describes the conditions that surrounded the avant-garde in Spain and Europe in more extended terms here: “la post-guerra europea originó un enervamiento, un afán dinámico y renovador. Las literaturas de otros países se habían hecho ya eco de rasgos característicos de la nueva época, quizás porque se hacían sentir allí con más intensidad que en España: la prisa, la ansiedad, las preocupaciones, las anónimas muchedumbres de las calles, la industrialización, el maquinismo. En suma, una progresiva *deshumanización*. Agreguemos a esto el jazz, el cinematógrafo, el deporte, el psicoanálisis y otras fuerzas de nuestro siglo” (14 emphasis added). More or less, this same description applies to Argentina at the same time: industrialization, modernization, immigration, dehumanization, and artistic renovation, all on a massive scale, albeit, like Spain, on the “periphery” (Sarlo). However, as the Borges biographer, Edwin Williamson, notes, “By the end of the nineteenth century, Argentina was one of the richest countries in the world, almost as rich as the United States and incomparably richer than Spain, the old mother country” (13). Argentina was thus outproducing Spain at the time, and doing so in more ways than one, perhaps.

both the world and the great masses of men who did not live up to such lofty ideals; others sought to de-center and de-mystify such notions of a transcendental human subject, maintaining that these rigid categories and hierarchies limited life's otherwise limitless possibilities; others, still, rested somewhere in between and/or across these assorted courses of action, expression, and thought. In the fullness of time, none of options were ever successfully articulated or assembled in absolute terms or void of contradictions. For such is the very human condition.

As a potential means of enriching and invigorating these transatlantic expressions and exchanges regarding the human, thinkers from outside of the high avant-garde *milieu* will be plugged into the transatlantic avant-garde assemblage at hand.<sup>13</sup> Such thinkers – humanists and anti-humanists among them, along with whatever other epithets might fall in between and/or overlay this divide – illuminate and obscure, reinforce and challenge, the relationship between the human and the aesthetic. These thinkers include Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer, Martin Heidegger, Benedict de Spinoza, Terry Eagleton, Paul de Man, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Ranciere, et al.

This is to say that, while assessing the various aesthetic expressions and philosophical figurations of the human as so afforded by the transatlantic avant-garde, the current study also examines the ways in which these expressions operate in accordance or in disagreement with a certain humanist purview that has thoroughly influenced and

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<sup>13</sup> Here, we can think of currents and currencies in a different, if also related, sense: electric hydro, hydroelectric... It is a matter of flows. And it means both everything and nothing that electricity and water do not run together!

given shape to philosophical, aesthetic, political, and cultural thought since the German Idealists' "reinterpretation of Greek art as a community's mode of life" (Ranciere *Politics* 25). This is to say, in turn, that the human has a history – a history, a story, bound up in philosophy, aesthetics, politics, and culture. The most germane history of the human for our purposes concerns the human as previously philosophized, aestheticized, politicized, acculturated in German Idealism. For, as Ortega himself asserts in *El tema de nuestro tiempo*: "Todo el alto pensamiento germánico desde Kant hasta 1900, puede reunirse bajo esta rúbrica: Filosofía de la cultura" (66). This "philosophy of culture," this notion of *kultur* as so expressed and so mediated by the German philosophical tradition, is of utmost importance to the current study, for it is also at once an aesthetic, political, and ontological philosophy as well. As per the philosophers so assembled here above who are not Germanic in origin or nationality, a large part of their collective work focuses on the very Germans listed with them. These thinkers also share a common exploration of the humanist episteme, of the timelessly timeless theme of the nature of aesthetics vis-à-vis that of man, the nature of culture vis-à-vis that of life, with politics always already present as the very interface that constitutes this *vis-à-vis*. Hence, their inclusion.

Such a Germanic history warrants consideration, first of all, because the works of German Idealism constitute an epistemic take on the supposedly special relationship between humanity and aesthetics: one which has come to be codified as *humanism*. Within this episteme, aesthetic theory and practice, aesthetic reason and creativity, function so as to fashion – that is, determine – a true, beautiful, and moral human subject – that is, a legitimate member of humanity – to where such a subject – in effect as in affect – comes to represent the true moral beauty found in a genuine work of art. In short,

in the words of Friedrich Schiller, aesthetics gives to humanity, to life, to culture, and to the world, “*living shape*, a concept which serves to denote all aesthetic qualities of phenomena and – in a word – what we call *Beauty* in the widest sense of the term” (76 emphasis in original).

Perhaps, then, it could be said that humanism defines humanity. For, to extend the previous description, in humanism, one witnesses, among other things, and for better or for worse, a desire to put into play “the material realization of a humanity still latent in mankind [...]: the material realization of a common humanity still only existing as an idea ” (Ranciere *Politics* 27). This can be achieved via the creation of an aesthetic subject shaped according to a strict set of cultural, epistemological, and tasteful principles, along with the creation of a community commensurate to this subject. Again, the articulation of this humanist desire will be examined in greater critical detail in the following chapters, chiefly with respect to Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, and the concept of *Bildung*, but also with respect to Nietzsche, a so-called anti-humanist.

To set up here what is and will be a rather complex comparison: on the one hand, the works of Kant and Schiller – works which we shall here call *humanist* – usher in, or re-impose, “the continuity of aesthetic with rational [and moral] judgment,” so that the creation and awareness of Beauty effectively stabilizes, territorializes, and rules all civilized (read: humanized) realms (de Man “Anthropomorphism” 239). This hegemony of aesthetic reason reads, more or less, as follows: there is a center, there is a tie that binds: it is beauty, it is moral, it is civilized culture, it is universal, it is metaphysical, and it is right. “The beautiful,” as Kant says, “stands on quite a different footing [...]” – that

is, a possible position of privilege and power over other things and over other beings of a supposedly lesser culture (44).<sup>14</sup> (In this light, Heidegger is later able to speak critically

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<sup>14</sup> In a brief essay entitled “El fracaso de la filosofía. (*Apuntes para un libro de filosofía intrascendental*)” and published in the Spanish *revista*, *Grecia*, in 1918, Luis Salles de Toledo suggests that transcendental, metaphysical, and theological philosophies, like those of Kant, ultimately diminish both the world and man. Salles de Toledo presents his views here: “Ciego ante la realidad, y alucinado por sus propias ilusiones, el mundo nuestro se ha dejado deslumbrar por la gama de quimeras antiguas, cristalizadas por unas palabras sin valor empírico, en torno de las que, han girado veinte humanidades, como alrededor de un foco luminoso en el que habrían por fin de quemarse las alas. El hombre es demasiado metafísico; y todo metafísico tiene algo de teólogo. La teología persiste con disfraces científicos. Los filósofos, no han sabido superar la Teología. El hombre metafísico, ha pretendido imponer unas normas ultrarreales, superhumanas, teológicas, dogmáticas, concebidas en plena observación subjetivista. El objeto no se ha tenido en cuenta... El hombre metafísico ha intentado superar la vida, por medio de fórmulas teológicas como las de Kant, disfrazadas con el ropaje de un aristotelismo riguroso, que no puede tener aplicación práctica” (15). Admittedly, Salles de Toledo is an exceedingly minor avant-garde figure – his name is not even included in Juan Manel Bonet’s exhaustive *Diccionario de las vanguardias en España (1907-1936)*; and here he has been relegated to but a footnote. Salles de Toledo is still referenced here, nevertheless, in order to show that even rather inconsequential figures of the transatlantic avant-garde assemblage offered commentary upon such philosophical, metaphysical stalwarts as Immanuel Kant. Such was the philosophical climate of the times. Further examples that color this climate can be taken from the Argentine avant-garde *revistas*, *Inicial* and *Valoraciones*. The former includes an article composed by “la redacción” in issue five from May of 1924 entitled “Kant y la juventud,” which concludes by saying, “[L]a juventud, frente a Kant, debe asumir una doble actitud, de reverencia y a la vez de liberación. [...] El pensamiento contemporáneo, por medio de Kant, ha tenido tan magnífico oriente... pero no olvidemos que desde entonces, el sol ha progresado largo sobre nuestro firmamento, y ahora que estamos a punto de recibir la luz meridiana, es bueno no evocar la luz oblicua de un alba que tenía tintes de crepúsculo” (357). The latter, meanwhile, presents a collective “Homenaje a Kant” in its second issue published a few months later and in the same year as the *Inicial* article cited above. This issue of *Valoraciones* includes the following commentaries and essays: “Homenaje a Kant” by “La Dirección,” “Kant” by Alejandro Korn, “Kant y Spengler” by Ernesto Quesada, “El neo-kantismo y la filosofía social” by Raúl A. Orgaz, “Influencia de Kant sobre la filosofía jurídica contemporánea” by Enrique Martínez Paz, “El individualismo jurídico de Kant (Reflexiones)” by Carlos Sánchez Viamonte, “El juicio estético” by Carlos Astrada, and “La estética de Kant” by Moisés Kantor. Oddly enough, this same issue also contains a five-page review of Ortega’s then recently published book, *El tema de nuestro tiempo*, as reviewed by Carlos Américo Amaya. All of the connections, all of the relations, between the transatlantic, the human, philosophy, aesthetics, and so on, thus present themselves here, in the *revistas*.

of humanism as an imperialist discourse that operates as an “instrument of domination over beings,” with those being dominated being beings uncivilized and effectively, affectively, dehumanized (“Letter” 243). The relationship between aesthetics and the human, apart from tautologically being aesthetic in nature, is also, therefore, profoundly, immediately political.) Nietzsche, on the other hand, problematizes, deterritorializes, and makes untimely the supposed continuity between aesthetic and rational judgment that structures this metaphysics, this universe, this civilization, this hegemony, this morality, this politics, this humanity. He sends the human off on all different types of trajectories, while still maintaining that the human must and can be rearticulated, revitalized, and potentially re-aestheticized, so as to expose it to more of the *will to power*, which, as he states in *Beyond Good And Evil*, is life itself – “because life *is* will to power” – which, as he states in *The Birth of Tragedy*, is only “justified” as an “aesthetic phenomenon” (194 emphasis in original; 32). A contradiction this may be... Albeit, like virtually all Nietzschean contradictions, it is one that gives birth to a certain polifacetic potential.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> To point towards the convoluted contradictions constantly at work in Nietzsche, one need only look at the penultimate section of *Beyond Good and Evil*, entitled “What is Noble?” Here, in alarmingly elitist terms that would later be picked up, and perhaps even extended, by both José Ortega y Gasset and Roberto Arlt, Nietzsche declares: “The essential thing in a good and healthy aristocracy is, however, that it does *not* feel itself to be a function (of the monarchy or of the commonwealth) but as their *meaning* and supreme justification – that it therefore accepts with a good conscience the sacrifice of innumerable men who *for its sake* have to be suppressed and reduced to imperfect men, to slaves and instruments. Its fundamental faith must be that society should *not* exist for the sake of society but only as a foundation and scaffolding upon which a select species of being is able to raise itself to its higher task and in general to a higher *existence* [...]. One has to think this matter thoroughly through to the bottom and resist all sentimental weakness: life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of the strange and weaker, suppression, severity, imposition of one’s own forms, incorporation and, at the least and mildest, exploitation [...]. ‘Exploitation’ does not pertain to a corrupt or imperfect or primitive society: it pertains the *essence* of the living thing as a fundamental

The transatlantic avant-garde seeks out and desires the birth of a new human, too. And it will be an act of aesthetic creation! Accordingly, looking back on the avant-garde breeding grounds, Cansinos-Asséns aptly describes how he and others, “Asistíamos a las rupturas de los cordones umbilicales” (qtd. in Videla 37). Oliverio Girondo’s “Manifiesto de ‘Martín Fierro,’” which will be examined again and anon, also speaks of a birth and a severed umbilical cord. However, rather than relate these images to a new aesthetic, Girondo relates them instead to what was perhaps at that point also a somewhat new geopolitical reality: *América*. “‘MARTÍN FIERRO,’” he writes, “cree in la importancia del aporte intelectual de América, previo tijeretazo a todo cordón umbilical” (25). Ramón, meanwhile, had previously taken this image one step further even in his seminal essay, “El concepto de la nueva literatura,” written in 1909: “La literatura [nueva] ha de afanarse en esa OPERACIÓN CESAREA” (*OC I* 166). In all, and as explicated earlier, this is a varying and variable desire to give birth, to create, to cut ties with the past and to extract *the new* – a desire that is itself composed of other, often conflicting and confusing desires, and one that is alternately communicated in order to advance elitist and more collective ends. A desire to escape, a desire to go deeper within, a desire to order, a desire to disorder, a desire to judge, a desire to love. This singular desire to create is therefore multiple in nature and in expression. This desire are desires. It is also, at times, a desire to *destroy as one creates*, simultaneously. This desire, this drive, toward *creative destruction*, is Nietzschean. “We can destroy only as creators,” Nietzsche affirms, further

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organic function, it is a consequence of the intrinsic will to power which is precisely the will of life” (193-94 emphasis in original).

maintaining that, “He who has to be a creator always has to destroy” (*Gay* 122; *Zarathustra* 85).<sup>16</sup>

In an article entitled, “La inquietud estética de hoy” and published in the transatlantic *revista*, *Síntesis*, in September of 1928, the Uruguayan socialist, Emilio Frugoni, effectively synthesizes this avant-garde desire to create, to generate, something new, and, not surprisingly, relates it to Nietzsche:

Es sin duda un interesante espectáculo el que nos ofrece el actual momento artístico, con sus hondas preocupaciones de filosofía estética, sus corrientes vertiginosamente renovadoras, sus afanes de emancipación integral de lo consagrado para la creación de un nuevo mundo de las formas y de los ritmos de la belleza. Es un espectáculo de fuerzas desencadenadas, de impulsos magníficos, de ansias admirables arrojadas en un vuelto febril hacia la superación de todos los confines previstos. Estamos asistiendo al parto laborioso de una nueva era del

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<sup>16</sup> While these competing desires may be combined and/or mixed, a balance between the two – between creation and destruction, that is – may, in fact, be impossible. Indeed, let us say that it is. When, either consciously or unconsciously, privilege is given over to destruction, what potentially emerges is what Walter Benjamin deems “the destructive character.” In an very brief essay – brief to the point of being rather Nietzschean-like in its aphoristic, if exceedingly complex, form – composed in 1931 and simply titled “The Destructive Character,” Benjamin presents this character, one who is not necessarily disavowed by or unrepresentative of the avant-garde, as follows: “The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room; only one activity: clearing away. His need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred. The destructive character is young and cheerful. For destroying rejuvenates in clearing away the traces of our own age; it cheers because everything cleared away means to the destroyer a complete reduction, indeed eradication, of his own condition. But what contributes most of all to this Apollonian image of the destroyer is the realization of how immensely the world is simplified when tested for its worthiness of destruction. This is the great bond embracing and unifying all that exists. It is a sight that affords the destructive character a spectacle of deepest harmony. [...] The destructive character does his work, the only work he avoids is being creative. [...] The destructive character stands in the front line of the traditionalists” (301-02). In Benjamin’s character description one notes, among other things, how it is easy to destroy, yet difficult to invigorate this destruction creatively. We will return to Benjamin’s characterization when discussing futurism. Meanwhile, in the second issue of *Síntesis*, published in Buenos Aires in 1927, the Galician philopher, Primitivo R. Sanjurjo, who, at the time, was teaching at, of all places, the University of Washington in Seattle, WA, composes a rather bizarre philosophical meditation entitled “A toda la nueva estética,” which starkly states, “Estamos ya dentro de la fatalidad estética como de la de la vida; y al crear, empezamos a destruir” (63).

Arte: y acaso vamos trasponiendo ya el periodo genésico del caos, ese caos que según Nietzsche es siempre necesario para que nazca una estrella. (29)<sup>17</sup>

Humanity is at once the creation, the destruction, the chaos, and the constellation of stars borne brightly such as these. What is more, and as it can be gleaned from Frugoni's direct reference to Nietzsche, German philosophy – be it humanistic or otherwise – bears heavily and directly on the transatlantic avant-garde. This is especially the case given the latter's inspired desire to “dar luz” to a living thing of some kind of beauty, to an object that is also alive with life, to an aesthetic being, to its own aesthetic being, which, potentially, to repeat, wields the capacity for creative destruction as well.

The weight of this German influence upon the transatlantic avant-garde is made all the more palpable in the philosophical and aesthetic outlook of Ortega – a thoroughly Germanic thinker whose indebtedness to various Germanic schools of thought, including neo-Kantianism, Nietzscheanism, and Husserlian phenomenology, is manifest in all of his works.<sup>18</sup> Calinescu speaks to Ortega's Germanic connections in *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, going so far

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<sup>17</sup> *Síntesis* will be treated in depth later on in the current study.

<sup>18</sup> This influence of Germanic philosophy upon the Spaniard stems from the fact that Ortega spent a few of his formative years studying German works in Germany from roughly 1905-07 – training that undoubtedly led him to write the amazing lines that follow in a German edition of *El tema de nuestro tiempo*, originally published in 1934: “At twenty [...] I realized that what Spain had to do was absorb German culture, swallow it whole—as a new, magnificent source of sustenance. The reader must not, therefore, imagine that my trip to Germany was the journey of a devout pilgrim who goes to Rome to kiss the Holy Pontiff's feet. On the contrary, it was a rapid predatory flight—the arrowlike dive of a hungry falcon on something fleshy and alive that his round, bright eye has discovered in the countryside below.” (qtd. in Gray 76). In contrast, the often-contradictory philosopher also said: “You can believe me when I say that probably no one has felt and will continue to feel greater spontaneous antipathy toward German culture than I. Protestant pathos, pedantry, impoverished intuition, insensitivity to literature and the plastic arts, and the political insensitivity of the average German keep me firm in my conviction that this is not a classic culture, that Germanism has to be overcome [...] thus far it has not been.” (qtd. in Gray 75)

as to say that Ortega is “perhaps the most brilliant follower of Nietzsche” (193). (A startling thought, no doubt!) Here, however, in the course of the present work, what is meant to stand out are the ways in which Ortega effectively radicalizes what is already a radical philosophical and aesthetic episteme in itself: humanism. That is, Ortega seeks to establish and put into power a “select minority” of Overmen (Nietzsche) who wield the cultural, social, and political capacity to act as the aesthetic constructors and moralistic guarantors of an aesthetic state (Schiller), with the power conferred upon such special men and such a special state – a power which is, in a word, a power of and to *judgment* – resulting from their intimate and innate understanding of all that is tasteful in beauty, morality, and experience (Kant). Beauty recognizes Beauty. Morality recognizes Morality. Power recognizes Power. What is projected is reflexive and therefore returns in upon itself so as to confirm itself. What is autonomous is heteronymous and therefore perpetually reproduces an exclusive, coercive universal. In other words, Ortega makes of humanism a more ethically and politically reactionary strain of philosophical thought and aesthetic practice, wherein order trumps individual expression, wherein differences are essential and antagonistic, and wherein taste determines rank in humanity’s supposedly natural and essentially aristocratic hierarchy. *This is the fourth theory.*

Ortega was not the only member of the transatlantic avant-garde who read and received radical ideas from German philosophy – again, humanistic and otherwise – and then introduced them into the avant-garde *milieu*. *This is the fifth, though perhaps not the final, theory.* Case in point: in 1909, in what perhaps represents the first example of Hispanic avant-garde expression ever put to paper, Ramón presents a piece entitled “El concepto de la nueva literatura” in the *revista, Prometeo*, in which he definitively states

the following: “Hoy no se puede escribir una página ignorando a Nietzsche. Esta es cuestión capital de ignorarlo o no ignorarlo todo” (*OC I* 152).<sup>19</sup> Years later, the mission statement of the Argentine *revista*, *Inicial*, concludes with the following affirmation: “Mientras tanto, que la juventud alimente su fe y su optimismo en una voluntad nietzscheana de obrar y querer” (49). Moreover, and all the more related to the current study, the forceful influences of Nietzsche upon Arlt and that of Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer upon Macedonio are also incontestably clear. To be sure, it could be said that Arlt and Macedonio radicalize their Germanic philosophical forebears as well, though they tend to do so in order to free life from humanism’s limited and limiting models, such as those advanced by Ortega.

The current chapter’s express aim is hence to establish and present the relations that are constitutive and expressive of a transatlantic avant-garde assemblage. It does so primarily via analyses of the avant-garde *revistas*. The second chapter continues with this basic *modus operandi*, focusing on the pivotal figures in this interchange, i.e. Ramón, F.T. Marinetti, Borges, Ortega, and then keys in on Ortega in order to start to speak to the extended analysis and critique of Ortega that operates as the one of the project’s central theses (Chapter One).

From the third chapter on, the focus shifts, centering upon the relationship between aesthetics and the human. As noted above, the ways in which the aesthetic relates to the human, and vice versa, tend to point toward unique political and ethical (ethics always has a way of introducing itself into, if not interrupting and also associating

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<sup>19</sup> Ramón’s seminal essay will receive a closer reading in the following chapter.

itself to, relations such as these) orientations as well – in turn, conservative, revolutionary, and emancipatory, depending on the thinker doing the relating. These manifold relations between the aesthetic, the human, politics, and ethics will first be treated in the light of German Idealism and humanism – in particular, Winckelmann, *Bildung*, Kant, and Schiller – and then as they are later revised and radicalized in exceedingly transcendental, elitist, and reactionary terms by Ortega in *La deshumanización del arte* and *La rebelión de las masas* by means of the Ortega's notions of a “select minority,” “dehumanized art,” and the “revolt of the masses” (Chapters Three and Four).

In his *Historia de una pasión argentina*, the Argentine vanguardist, Eduardo Mallea, localizes the relations outlined above within an essentialized and xenophobic Argentine context, championing the need for a “select minority” to save his country from its imminent descent into something *other* than what it should be, thereby echoing Ortega's program for Argentine progress as outlined in the Spaniard's polemical essays “La pampa...promesas” and “El hombre a la defensiva” (Chapter Four).

Roberto Arlt's novels *El juguete rabioso*, *Los siete locos*, and *Los lanzallamas* confuse, destabilize, and betray these relations, privileging no discrete politics and no discrete epistemology in the process – hence, Arlt's non-committed commitment to many politics and many epistemologies. His novels also point toward contradictory conceptions of order and disorder that are as elitist and fascist as they are populist and democratic. In doing so, Arlt, along with his alternately misanthropic and caring characters, try and tap into all that is an exceedingly Nietzschean will to power (Chapter Five).

Finally, Macedonio Fernández, a distributor of many aesthetics, a distributor of a decidedly confounded and countending Schopenhauerian immanent metaphysics, writes and asks his reader to read his “twin novels,” *Adriana Buenos Aires (Última novela mala)* and *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna (Primera novela buena)*, according to an ethics of *Belarte* – that is, according to a radical aesthetico-ethico-politico-ontological dis-positioning of the Self that liberates immanence, passion, and love (Chapter Six).

Indeed, in their own ways, all of these vanguardists are true radicals.

Transatlantic encounters and interactions will be noted throughout Chapters Three through Six as well. These exchanges include: Ortega’s later writings and second visit to Argentina (Chapter Four); Ortega’s manifest influence over Mallea and the latter’s thoroughly Orteguian reflections on his own country (Chapter Four); points where Ortega and Mallea’s philosophies regarding creativity, the nature of the human, and the nature of society diverge from and dovetail with those of Arlt (Chapter Five); the example Macedonio sees in Ramón and the ways in which Macedonio’s *Belarte* coincides with and contradicts Ortega’s conception of dehumanized art (Chapter Six).

Now that the general parameters have been established for the assemblage at hand, more content, more consistency, if also more lines of flight, must be provided. Otherwise, the transatlantic, the avant-garde, and the human would all remain situated as little more than empty, disassembled, and detached phenomenon, as separated, inconvertible currents, as empty signifiers. We still start here by addressing the first two terms outlined in the previous sentence – the transatlantic and the avant-garde – without losing sight of the third – the human.

## 1.1 – *Lo Nuevo*

Despite its ties to previous philosophical and aesthetic tendencies, the transatlantic avant-garde attempts to communicate its distinct and various, if also overlapping, approaches to the human via new means of creative, aesthetic expression. The narratives and philosophies of the transatlantic avant-garde did nothing if not document *the* (so-called) *new*. In turn, these aesthetico-philosophical means attempted to express new modes of perception, new relations between humans and the world in which they lived. Ranciere characterizes all that is at stake in these new relations as follows: “there exists a specific sensory experience – the aesthetic – that holds the *promise* of both a new world of Art and a new life for individuals and the community” (“Aesthetic Revolution” 133 emphasis added). New ways of thinking, new ways of creating, new ways of living. It was to be a new regime: The Regime of The New!<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, the *vanguardias*’ harbor a fixed obsession with *the new* as *lo nuevo*. For *the new* promises something different, something better. *The new* promises invention and innovation. *The new* promises a potentially beneficent rupture. And, for Ramón, *the new* is “esencia de la vida” (*Ismos* 14). Ramón makes this statement in *Ismos*, in 1943, years after avant-garde fervor had either evolved into something different or had seemingly faded away altogether. Nonetheless, in reflection, Ramón still has much to say about *the new*, as, for instance, he posits the following: “Si el nuevo día dijese en qué consiste su novedad, nadie lo comprendería. Lo mejor que tiene es que es nuevo.” (15). Here, Ramón alludes to the blinding, illegible, and incomprehensible force of *the new*. With so much

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<sup>20</sup> Ranciere calls this regime the “aesthetic regime of art,” and argues that it officially starts with Schiller. A similar, if also a more detailed and specifically situated, genealogy will be presented here as well. (See Ranciere’s works, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, “The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes,” *The Politics of Aesthetics*, etc.)

innovation and invention constantly at work, constantly and repeatedly renewing and negating what was once new only moments before, human perception can only process so much of *the new* at once, in the moment, and even in the extended course of time. No matter, Ramón says – this force is one of *the new*'s greatest, most powerful qualities; all that matters, even if no one, not even *las vanguardias*, understand it, *the new* is good, *the new* is life, *the new* operates as a supreme and self-regenerating value for life, art, and everything in between. *The new* is a productive tautology of revitalization – “lo nuevo no es más que lo nuevo” (15). In the end, which is always already also a beginning, “la invención debe ser incesante,” because so too is life (15-16).

As a whole, and in line with what Ramón maintains in *Ismos*, *las vanguardias* are obsessed with *the new* and all that it promises to do. To recur to Ramón: “El deber de lo nuevo es el principal deber de todo artista creador” (16). *The new* is thus an obsessive “duty” as well: an ideal and a norm. Furthermore, the obsession with *the new* goes hand in hand with the avant-garde's numerous attempts to categorically break with, if not absolutely ignore, the past – literary or otherwise – with the past serving as something that the *vanguardias* use as veritable foil that so as to to define themselves and all they pretend to be – the new, the young – compared to what they are not – the old, the worn out, the out-moded.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Additionally, and with respect to the “umbilical cord” and “C-section” examples from above, *las vanguardias* endeavored to literally cut ties with their past – with a past that is here feminized in the form of the mother and which, accordingly, alludes to what many vanguardists believed to be the sentimental (read: feminine; read: weak) propensities of Romantic works that were borne out by the previous generation – and, as a result, assert their masculinity. Misogyny marks the transatlantic avant-garde as well, which, itself, of course, is by no means *new*.

For instance, in “Un manifiesto literario” collectively written for the Spanish ultraist and avant-garde *revista*, *Grecia*, in 1919, this desire to break with the past is apparent:

Nuestra literatura de renovarse, debe lograr su *ultra*, como hoy pretenden lograrlo nuestro pensamiento científico y político.

Nuestra lema será *ultra*, y en nuestro credo cabrán todas las tendencias sin distinción, con tal que expresen un anhelo nuevo. Más tarde, estas tendencias lograrán su núcleo y se definirán. Por el momento creemos suficiente lanzar este grito de renovación y anunciar la publicación de una revista que llevará este título de Ultra, y en la que solo lo nuevo hallará acogida.

Jóvenes, rompamos para una vez nuestro retraimiento y afirmemos nuestra voluntad de superar a los precursores. (11 emphasis in original)<sup>22</sup>

Again, it matters less what is said and written, then, just so long as it is new.

Oliverio Girondo, meanwhile, further expands upon these same desires in the “Manifiesto de ‘Martín Fierro’” that he allegedly penned for the highly influential Argentine revista, *Martín Fierro*, a few years later in 1924:

“MARTIN FIERRO” siente la necesidad imprescindible de definirse y de llamar a cuantos sean capaces de percibir que nos hallamos en presencia de una NUEVA sensibilidad y de una NUEVA comprensión, que, al ponernos de acuerdo con nosotros mismos, nos descubre panoramas insospechadas y nuevos medios y formas de expresión. [...]

“MARTIN FIERRO” sabe que “todo es nuevo bajo el sol” si todo se mira con pupilas actuales y se expresa con un acento contemporáneo.

“MARTÍN FIERRO,” se encuentra, por eso más a gusto, en un transatlántico moderno que en un palacio renacentista, y sostiene que un buen Hispano-Suiza es una OBRA DE ARTE muchísimo más perfecta que una silla de manos de la época de Luis XV. (25 emphasis added)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Signed by Xavier Bóveda, César A. Comet, Fernando Iglesias, Guillermo de Torre, Pedro Iglesias Caballero, Pedro Garfias, J. Rivas Penedas, and J. de Aroca. This same “Manifiesto” was also published a few months earlier in *Cervantes*.

<sup>23</sup> Girondo also remarks, “‘MARTÍN FIERRO’ acepta las consecuencias y las responsabilidades de localizarse, porque sabe que de ello depende su salud. Instruído de sus antecedentes, de su anatomía, del *meridiano* en que camina: consulta el barómetro, el calendario, antes de salir a la calle a vivirla con sus nervios y con su mentalidad de hoy” (25 emphasis added). This idea of localizing a *meridiano* will prove to be of great import to *Martín Fierro* vis-à-vis Guillermo de Torre’s polemical article, “Madrid meridiano intelectual de Hispanoamérica,” published and hotly debated some three years later.

Similar phrasings that combine a new kind art with a new sense of vision can be found in Huidobro and Borges: Huidobro, in *Altazor*: “Todo es nuevo cuando se mira con ojos nuevos” (48); Borges, in “Al margen de la moderna estética”: “Y nosotros queremos descubrir la vida. Queremos ver con ojos nuevos” (37). In Gironodo’s manifesto for *Martín Fierro*, we also see, furthermore, how a new kind of human can in fact serve as a “new,” and therefore “perfect,” “work of art.”

The example of the common aspiration to and appreciation for *lo nuevo* is but one transatlantic overlap among many. It is also, to be sure, the most obvious. And it is not, necessarily, at all *new*, in and of itself. Again, Aristotle says in *Poetics*: “We must not, therefore, at all costs, keep to the received legends [...]” (18). Still, the avant-garde’s fixed obsession with innovation and *the new* does give consistency to this, to its, particular transatlantic assemblage. *The new* thus operated as a deterritorializing, iterative element which, nevertheless, paradoxically maintained and delineated the very territory of the transatlantic avant-garde. *The new* pushed and established boundaries.

A veritable cult of *the new* develops out of this obsession, which, within the avant-garde, often coincides with a cult of humanity. The avant-garde sites itself as being essentially, inexorably, and always already *new*: as a place “en la que sólo lo nuevo hallará acogida” (*Grecia*); as an awareness of “una NUEVA sensibilidad y de una NUEVA comprensión” (*Martín Fierro*): as a frame of mind, as a rarefied state of being to which only certain, select, people may have access. It follows that there are those humans properly initiated in the sanctified ways of *the new*, and there are those that are not. By design, the avant-garde sets itself apart. By design, the avant-garde constitutes a “select

minority,” set off against the “modern masses” (Ortega).<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, in Girondo’s “Manifiesto,” he starts off by situating *Martín Fierro* “Frente a la impermeabilidad hipopotámica del ‘honorable público’” (25).<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, in a collectively penned article entitled “Nuestra velada” and included in the second issue of the ultraist Spanish *revista*, *Ultra* – a collective *revista* that “no tiene director” – this minority posits the following: “Nuestro movimiento es superior a la mentalidad de hoy y esa incompreensión es nuestro mayor orgullo” (1).<sup>26</sup> The ultraist collective takes this conceit one step further in *Ultra*’s fifth issue, stating in brashly solipsistic terms, “Todo lo que está fuera el ultraísmo no existe. Los poetas, los literatos y los pintores, gatean a tientas deslumbradas por la luz que se desprende de nustras ventanales” (1).

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<sup>24</sup> In her article, “La fractura ideológica en los primeros textos de Oliverio Girondo,” Delfina Muschietti extends this idea, pointing out that these vanguardists often tended to be established economically beyond the locus of the common man: “el grupo martinfierrista [...] se componía en su mayor parte de la élite ilustrada de la clase dominante [...]” (381). In many respects, the same can be said of the *martinfierrista*’s rather bourgeois avant-garde counterparts in Spain as well.

<sup>25</sup> A *martinfierrista* himself, Eduardo González Lanuza characterizes this very “tone” as being the manifesto’s most “interesting” element in his book, *Los martinfierristas*. Furthermore, he directly relates this very tone back to Marinetti and futurism: “Los más interesante de este *Manifiesto* no es tanto su contenido como su tono, cuya agresividad y deliberada mala educación, muy dentro de la no formulada pero operante perceptiva del género, responde en gran parte a su directísimo modelo: el primer manifiesto del Futurismo de F.T. Marinetti, que para esa fecha ya se aproxima a su vigésimo aniversario, lo que para cualquier futurismo equivale a la senectud. La misma intención dinámica, y de trasfondo incurablemente romántico, de vitalidad impulsiva, de afán demoledor del orden constituido, al que se alude con la *impermeabilidad hipopatómica* y la *funeraria solemnidad*. Obsérvese lo significativo que resulta su carácter de reacción. No se inicia con el planteamiento de lo que se plantea, sino con la enumeración de lo que se intenta voltear. La primera palabra, enfáticamente repetida luego cinco veces, es la palabra *frente* [...] (36).

<sup>26</sup> Ortega will recapitulate this same statement in 1925 in *La deshumanización del arte* with respect to *el arte nuevo* and *los artistas jóvenes*. Macedonio, meanwhile, will do something similar, if also radically different, via the employment and deployment of *Belarte*.

Thus, as Collazos, posits, “la ‘nueva sensibilidad’ mantiene [...] su dosis de intolerancia” (8-9). Anthony Leo Geist, meanwhile, extends this analysis further in his study, *La poética de la generación del 27 y las revistas literarias: de la vanguardia al compromiso (1918-1936)*:

Este antagonismo hacia la tradición refleja una profunda desacuerdo estético con ella. El conflicto tiene otra expresión a nivel sociológico: el desprecio de los vanguardistas por el público. [...] La enajenación que siente el artista no es solo estético, sino social. “¡Oh, el dolor, oh, la inmensa angustia patética – dice [Guillermo de] Torre – de sentirse aislados y cohibidos, víctimas paradójias de nuestra propia personalidad!” Declara simultáneamente la exaltación de saberse superior a la gran masa. (39)

To repeat, intolerant and exclusionary schemas such as these are not in themselves *new*. Without them, humanity qua humanity – as an ideal, as a praxis – would not necessarily exist as such. This point will be taken up again and examined in greater detail later in the sections and chapters that follow. Here, it functions as a detectable, if also pathological, symptom endemic to avant-garde theory and practice – a symptomology, a pathology, that is endemic to the construction and thus the promise of humanity, to boot.

Within the specific context of the transatlantic avant-garde, the quotes that appeal to *lo nuevo* go on *ad infinitum*, nearly *ad nauseam*. The obsession with *the new* was by no means solely characteristic of these particular *revistas*, or to avant-garde production and ceremony in Spain and Argentina, either. Still, the fact of the matter is that the Spanish and Argentine avant-gardes communicated with and competed against each other – both within their respective countries and across the Atlantic – all while searching for a singularly new voice, all while searching for a promising voice, and all while searching for a receptive, even perhaps docile, audience, even if all of this only meant talking amongst themselves and/or effectively trying to out*new* each other.

De Torre summarizes the *vanguardias*' common and competitive obsession with *the new* in an article composed in 1920 for the Spanish *revista*, *Cosmópolis*, entitled "La poesía creacionista y la pugna entre sus progenitores":

Porque en el rápido devenir ascensional, en el cinemático evolucionismo de escuelas, modalidades, y tendencias, los esfuerzos pugnaces de imposición y avance se acentúan hostilmente. Todos aspiran a elevar en sus manos la antorcha de lucíferos creadores, sin prever su nivelación en la cumbre del Espacio. [...] En el momento bélico, impera una táctica nihilista, que destruye las normas precursores y las derivaciones futuras.

Las generaciones contiguas se repelen entre sí, aunque sus esfuerzos aboquen a metas análogas. No hay una línea directa de continuidad genealógica. Cada nueva generación rehuye la identidad filiadora, y repudiando su ascendencia próxima, busca sus antecedentes remotos o hace invocaciones desorientadoras. [...] Hoy los propulsores de las más recientes escuelas y movimientos se acometen mutuamente, luchando por ostensibles sus peculiares aportaciones innovadoras. Y declarándose en estado bélico, niegan ante todo a sus progenitores y epígonos, con una pretensión exclusivista de poetas aristos, atacados de paróxica egolatría... (591)

This being said, de Torre's contention that, when taken as a whole, *las vanguardias* seem to work toward similar goals in their common search for and expressions of *the new* will be both affirmed and refuted in the pages that follow, just as it was both affirmed and refuted at the time.

## 1.2 – *Revista* Culture

The operative importance of the *revistas* was paramount in the ongoing, internal debates regarding *the new*, as well as the avant-garde's overall theory, practice, and purpose (or lack thereof). Like *the new* itself, these *revistas* were often ephemeral, consumed and understood by few, if not also auto-consuming in their own random and, at times, exceedingly esoteric newness.

Geist sets the *revista* scene thusly:

Terminada la primera guerra mundial, florece el concepto de un arte de vanguardia en toda Europa [...]. Muestra de este fenómeno son las numerosas revistas literarias, dedicadas a propagar y difundir escritos de teoría y de creación inconformistas. Pintores y poetas lanzan manifiestos que proclaman con urgencia la necesidad de hacer un arte nuevo. (32)<sup>27</sup>

In its own response to the war and to the flourishes of avant-garde ideas in Europe, a seemingly infinite number of different *revistas* proliferated in Latin America at this same time as well. These *revistas* afforded artists, writers, thinkers, and critics in Spain and Argentina, along with the rest of the aesthetically-inclined Western World, a conduit through which they could present and publish their own new works, comment on each other's works, and comment on the larger apparatus of cultural and socio-political production in Europe and the Americas. The *revistas* therefore functioned as channels that could carry and distribute a positively limitless quantity of avant-garde currents – a true movement was thus assembled and, at once, at constant variation with itself, in pages and waves.

Again, it is Guillermo de Torre who, most compellingly, most convincingly, speaks to the decisive role of the *revistas* in the composition of this transatlantic avant-garde movement in an article entitled “Modelos de estación” published in *Síntesis* in

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<sup>27</sup> Geist goes on to note: “La nota más característica de esta proclamas es un declarado antagonismo hacia el pasado y las formas pretéritas del arte. Esta hostilidad hacia la tradición va acompañada con frecuencia de una conciencia clara de estar en la vanguardia, de la ilusión de crear algo totalmente original, de construir un arte nuevo sobre las ruinas de lo antiguo. No se trata de ruinas solo en sentido metafórico, sino reales: las producidas por el sangriento conflicto de 1914-1918. La guerra representaba para estos poetas y pensadores la última consecuencia del orden antiguo; la urgencia de encontrar una nueva modalidad artística que supera los tradicionales moldes correspondía a la violencia y la destrucción bélicas. Tristan Tzara lanza el primer manifiesto Dada desde Zurich en 1916. El expresionismo alemán surge a raíz de la guerra, convirtiéndose esta en uno de los motivos principales de su arte. Apollinaire escribe sus versos más revolucionarios después de la guerra y directamente a consecuencia de ella. Asimismo, el ‘cubismo’ en poesía cobra ímpetu a partir del armisticio” (32-33).

1928. Although he speaks for himself in his commentary, de Torre also speaks for the entire movement when he says, “El movimiento literario en que, al nacer, aparecí enrollado, dejó impresos sus gestos en las revistas mejor que los libros” (230).<sup>28</sup> From there, he moves on to make a declaration which stands out as the article’s thesis statement: “Todo genuino movimiento literario, todo amanecer, toda ruptura han tenido indefectiblemente su primera exteriorización en las hojas provocativas de una revista. [...] La revista es laboratorio de nuevas alquimias, o no es nada” (231). In a similar fashion, the avant-garde itself is “a laboratory of new alchemies, or it is nothing.” Aesthetics is also, in its own ways, a sort of magical science – Is it not? Indeed, these statements are true; and this “panegírico,” as de Torre calls his piece, overflows with truths. For the importance of the *revistas* in the constitution of the avant-garde, and in its subsequent national and international disseminations and exchanges, cannot be emphasized enough. In the end, which he hopes will mark continued beginnings, and thus a sort of perpetual avant-garde initiality, de Torre, like all vanguardists tend to do, overstates his case:

¡Revistas, jóvenes, revistas! Mis ojos quedan siempre prendidos a vuestras páginas volantes. En vosotras me he bautizado. A vuestro seno tornaré nostálgicamente en cada vuelta del camino. Seréis siempre imanes de mi atención insaciable. Repasando vuestras hojas, los minutos perderán su peso. Y algún día os compondré una oración que comience: “La revista nueva de cada día, dáosla hoy, Señor...” (235)

Though, peradventure the truth must be stretched, must represent and express some kind of *overstatement* in order to be forceful in the very fictional nature of its truth,

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<sup>28</sup> De Torre had remarked previously in *Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia*, primarily, and more practically, vis-à-vis Spanish ultraism, that, given “la imposibilidad de realizar libros, los poetas ultraístas fundiesen, en un principio, su espíritu accional y colaborador en las páginas de las revistas periódicas” (52). The same can be said of Argentine vanguardists. Yet, of course, books were published on both sides of the Atlantic as well.

forceful in the truthful nature of its fiction, fictional in the forceful nature of its truth, and so on. It also must be repeated – the truth *bears* repeating – stated, overstated, in turn, again and again, differentiated and deferred, always returning, eternally, ephemerally. The transatlantic avant-garde overstates its case again and again as well, as apostles of *the new*, bearers of truths, enablers of fictions, harbingers of some potentially great force; and, without doubt, it does so in the *revistas* more than anywhere else.

In addition, avant-garde *revistas* operated as capacitating conduits toward professionalization. Being a vanguardist thus possibly meant being able to make a living doing so. *Las vanguardias* often worked as journalists and critics just as much as, if not more than, they created as aesthetes and waxed philosophic. In *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires 1920 y 1930*, Sarlo notes the relationship between new literature, new journalism, and *the new* itself, saying, “El nuevo periodismo y la nueva literatura están vinculados por múltiples nexos y son responsables del afianzamiento de una variante moderna del escritor profesional. La redacción de un diario [...] es el espacio material de lo nuevo [...]” (21). We have already said that a vanguardist occupies his/herself with *the new* above all; of course, so too does a journalist. As a result, the nature of the *revistas* as a siting of *the new* – as a periodical, as a place designed for *news* – allows for a fusion of these two seemingly distinct occupations – even though a vanguardist would never deign to call him/herself a journalist, nor, in all likelihood, would a journalist desire to be labeled a vanguardist.

Carlos Magnone expands upon the relationship between vanguard and journalistic culture in his essay, “La república radical: entre crítica y el mundo.” Magnone links this

relationship, furthermore, to a new consumerist commercial culture commensurate with, if not inextricable to, a certain ideology of *the new*, also, perhaps, known as modernity:

La ideología de la novedad, propia del imaginario comercial, impregnaba una vida cultural dinamizada por el correlato del automóvil, el subterráneo y la movilidad social. Esto se traduce en una tensión productiva que estructura el espacio de la vanguardia artística, – oposición lucro/arte – que, por su moderatismo antimerchantil, muestra las huellas de las ideas dominantes. El público formado en esta etapa de modernización cultural comienza a consumir productos que convocan a partir de la “nueva sensibilidad,” “los nuevos,” y las cambiantes novelas semanales. En ausencia de una nueva industrial editorial, las librerías son tiendas de novedades. No por casualidad estamos en el momento de apogeo de un periodismo de noticias y cultural que tiene el sello de la *fugacidad* de su contacto con lectores que *viven a diario*. El mejor símbolo es el desarrollo del *magazine*, tanto en su versión semanario o censuario como de suplemento en los diarios tradicionales. Este almacén periodístico era el correlato cultural de las grandes tiendas de la ciudad. (64)

The avant-garde *revistas* certainly operate as a unique, specialized type of “*magazine*,” similar to the one alluded to here by Magnone. Instead of documenting new trends in consumer products, fashion, and current events, avant-garde *revistas*, as mentioned before, aim to document – literally, make manifest – new aesthetic trends. Still, as Magnone notes, and despite avant-garde claims to something approaching a hegemony of expression and discursive delimitation with respect to *the new*, the differences between these different kinds of periodicals was not that great. The avant-garde wants to sell their product, too, in spite of, or perhaps due to, the fact that their marketing technique – “*Come see what’s new!*” – is not exactly all their own. The *revistas* thus serve a double purpose of aesthetico-philosophical and consumerist circulation, in Argentina as in Spain. And, to be sure, both of these interests are ultimately interested in “la modificación del gusto” (Sarlo “Vanguardia” 234).

In terms of addressing an ongoing transatlantic circulation of ideas and commentary between Spain and Argentina, one can take, to begin, an Argentine *revista* aptly named *Inicial*.<sup>29</sup> (And in terms of the local avant-garde scene in Buenos Aires, *Inicial* is perhaps most significant because “se propuso romper la hegemonía cultural de

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<sup>29</sup> In his “Estudio preliminar” to the collection of *Inicial* entitled “*Inicial* (1923-1927). El frente estético-ideológico de la nueva generación,” Fernando Diego Rodríguez contextualizes the *revista* as follows: “Si nuestra naciente vanguardia estética amenazaba resolverse en la tolerada excursión festiva de unos jóvenes indisciplinados, la aparición de *Inicial* viene a poner las cosas en su lugar, confrontando directamente con la vieja generación literaria y estableciendo con un gestote distancia y desprecio una línea demarcatoria con ella. Esta operación fundante que *Inicial* despliega a partir de 1923 apunta a concentrar a los noveles escritores en torno de sus propias publicaciones y a establecer entre ellos un sistema consagratorio horizontal. Sin ella, no hubiera sido posible comenzar a pensar seriamente en un movimiento renovador local que se invocase como vanguardista a semejanza de sus modelos ultramarinos o de las más cercanas experiencias americanas de ruptura estética. Pese a sus elecciones no siempre unívocas entre las viejas y las nuevas formas literarias, la publicación lleva la impronta de lo inaugural: por ello, es posible ubicarla como un punto de no retorno en el camino de la vanguardia estético-literaria argentina hacia su consolidación en revistas donde las nuevas tendencias encuentran un lugar más pleno, como en la segunda *Proa* o en *Martín Fierro*” (7-8). *Inicial* may also be exemplary insofar as it expressed the combative, youthful desires and with the “contradictoria y polémica trama de discursos” that marked the transatlantic avant-garde (Saítta 689). Such desires and discourses can be witnessed in all of their contradictory, combative, problematic, and polemical glory in the *revista*’s declaration of principles, simply entitled “*Inicial*”: “Sabemos que existe una juventud que se ha puesto al ritmo vertiginoso de esta hora histórica, y esa juventud tiene muchas cosas que decir. [...] Queremos para *Inicial* una juventud combativa y ardorosa, que odie y ame, y no haya sacrificado jamás en ningún altar. [...] Luchemos contra [...] los grandes diarios malolientes de judaísmo, donde se fraguan, como en un antro de nibelungos, las consagraciones artificiales, y donde se escamotean los verdaderos valores; [...] contra los que han hecho del comunismo y del obrerismo una mentira descarada, un cálculo social sin belleza que abre los audaces el camino de Damasco; contra los que explotan los ideales ingenuos de la juventud sana, prostituyendo la Reforma de la Universidad a la caricia torpe de los advenedizos; contra las aspiraciones sentimentales y romantizantes, con que los fuertes engañan a los débiles y los débiles se consuelan de su impotencia; contra el panamericanismo yanqui y la confraternidad latina; contra los afeminados de espíritu, que ponen en verso el gemido de las damiselas y hacen ensueños sobre la ciudad futura; contra los apologistas del sufragio universal, del parlamentarismo y la democracia de nuestros días, mentira fraguadas en el gabinete de los banqueros; [...] en fin, contra todo lo que hay, en arte, en política, de engaño, de impotencia y de feminidad. *Inicial* combatirá todo eso, y mucho más, y pedimos que la juventud vuelque en nuestras páginas acentos de indignación y de entusiasmo” (47-49).

*Nosotros*,” with *Nosotros* acting at the time as *the* voice of all things culture (Ledesma 171.) A total of eleven issues of *Inicial* were published, all in Buenos Aires between 1923 and 1927. In the first issue, Roberto A. Ortelli writes a review called “Dos poetas de la nueva generación”: these two poets are an Argentine and a Spaniard, Jorge Luis Borges and Guillermo de Torre. In its third issue an article is composed by the *revista*’s staff that definitively labels José Ortega y Gasset, “Un filósofo de la nueva generación.” The sixth issue contains articles on Pío Baroja, Miguel de Unamuno, Ramón Gómez de la Serna (written by Jorge Luis Borges), and a review of Ortega’s own *Revista de Occidente*. Issue nine leads with an article written to honor the death of the Argentine philosopher, José Ingenieros, then presents a study entitled “Ortega y Gasset y la política.” Issue ten contains Borges’ essay, “Examen de un soneto de Góngora.”<sup>30</sup>

Using *Inicial* as an example would seem to indicate that the transatlantic dialogue between Spain and Argentina was rather one-sided. For what is mainly shown here is that the Argentine avant-garde looked to Spain for cultural orientation and promoted Spanish works, while still cultivating a more local avant-garde sensibility. Meanwhile, after perusing Spanish *revistas* of a similar ilk, it appears that these Spanish *revistas* did not necessarily operate in the same manner vis-à-vis their Argentine avant-garde contemporaries. In truth, most Spanish *revistas* were more interested in aesthetic trends that were either ostensibly more autochthonous, i.e. *ultraísmo*, or more European, i.e. *surrealismo*, in nature. Apart from Borges, who published in at least fourteen different

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<sup>30</sup> Issue ten also contains a collection of “Poesía americana de vanguardia,” which includes Pablo Neruda, J. Rubén Romero, Salvador Reyes, Gerardo Seguel, J. Moraga Bustamente, Vicente Huidobro, Ángel Cruchaga Santa María, Alberto Hildalgo, Manuel Maples Acre, Manuel Hübner, Salvador Novo, Alberto Rojas Giménez, and E. Bustamente y Ballivian.

Spanish *revistas*, including *Alfar*, *Baleares*, *Bolívar*, *Cervantes*, *Cosmópolis*, *El Sol*, *La Gaceta Literaria*, *Gran Guiñol*, *Grecia*, *Reflector*, *Revista de Occidente*, *Tableros*, *Ultima hora*, and *Ultra*, the work of few Argentine, let alone Latin American, writers is very well represented in the Spanish *revistas* at the time. At least, such is the case when compared to the attention and representation Spanish vanguardists tended to receive in Argentine *revistas*.

Nonetheless, exceptions do exist. In general terms, a number of Spanish *revistas* included sections labeled “Literatura americana,” “La vida americana,” “Revistas americanas,” or something similar. Sections such as these effectively presented their Spanish readership with some of the aesthetic, philosophical, and political trends that were contemporaneously developing in Latin America. To address more specific, transatlantic examples that connect Spain to Argentina, and *vice versa*, issue number 36 of the Spanish *revista*, *Cosmópolis*, from December of 1921 includes an a brief anthology of Argentine poetry entitled “La lírica argentina contemporánea,” with selections of poems by Macedonio Fernández, Marcelo de Mazo, Enrique Banchs, Rafael Alberto Arrieta, Alfonsina Storni, Álvaro Melián Lafinur, Fernández Moreno, M. Rojas Silveyra, Bartolomé Galíndez, and Héctor Pedro Blomberg. Borges selected these poets and poems and annotates the anthology as well.<sup>31</sup> The following month, January of 1922, the twenty-first issue of *Ultra* commenced with the “Proclama” of what was arguably the first true avant-garde and Argentine *revista*, *Prisma*, as signed by Jorge Luis Borges, Guillermo

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<sup>31</sup> For example, Borges says the following of Macedonio: “Macedonio Fernández: Quizás el único genial que habla en esta antología. Metafísico negador de la existencia del Yo, [...] crisol de paradojas [...]. Es lícito suponer que durante unos cuantos siglos los venideros psicólogos, metafísicos, y urdidores de estética se ocuparán en redescubrir las genialidades que él ya encontró, limo, aquilató y silenció a la postre...” (*TR 1919-1929* 163). Comparable things will be said of Macedonio here in the fifth chapter.

Juan, Eduardo González Lanuza, and Guillermo de Torre. Ingenieros helped co-direct *Cervantes* from 1916-1919; but, as S. Miguel Losada points out in his article, “Presencia de la literatura hispanoamericana en las revistas españolas de vanguardia: 1918-1939,” “la etapa interesante de esta revista comienza en 1919, bajo la dirección de [Rafael] Cansinos-Asséns y la intervención de los futuros ultraístas [...]” (43). Issue 58 of *Alfar* from 1926 includes a “Pequeña antología de nuevos poetas argentinos” that presents short sections of poems by poets associated with *Inicial*, among them Keller Sarmiento, Andrés L. Caro, Ricardo E. Molinari, Norah Lange, Jorge Luis Borges, and Ernesto Barbieri, with the “anthology” being compiled by Roberto A. Ortelli.<sup>32</sup> Other examples exist, of course; these are but a few (Losada 41-59).

In terms of particular Argentine writers, Oliverio Girondo published poems and was commented upon in *revistas* such as *Alfar* and *Revista de Occidente*. The latter also served as a means of publication and commentary for works by Ricardo Güiraldes, Eduardo Mallea, and Victoria Ocampo. *La Gaceta Literaria* published and commented upon Girondo, Güiraldes, Mallea, and Ocampo as well, along with Leopoldo Marechal, Norah Lange, Francisco L. Bernárdez, Ricardo Molinari, Manuel Gálvez, and Roberto Arlt. The artwork and etchings of Borges’ sister, and, later, de Torre’s wife, Norah Borges, was widely spread throughout Spanish *revistas* and book publications, as was that of the Uruguayan artist, Rafael Barradas. Also, three significant exceptions to the general Latin American rule would be the Nicaraguan poet and *modernista*, Rubén Darío – though Darío published more in Spain when *modernismo* was still *en vogue* at the very

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<sup>32</sup> Curiously enough, this same issue also contains articles and works by André Bretón, Ramón, Pedro Salinas, and a review of some of Ortega’s recent essays written by Jaime Ibarra.

start of the twentieth century – along with two Chilean poets, the afore-mentioned Huidobro and Pablo Neruda (Losada 41-59).

Eventually, the Argentine avant-garde turns inward as well, especially in the case of its most significant *revista*, *Martín Fierro*. Although the *revista*'s initial connections to Spanish *ultraísmo* cannot be denied and will be addressed later on in the Chapter Three, *Martín Fierro*'s *modus operandi* eventually becomes, more or less, “Lo nuevo, lo propio” (Ledesma 191). This does not mean that the Spanish and Argentine avant-gardes were not aware of and in contact with each other throughout their periods of development. So much is immediately clear when one inspects the Argentine *revistas*. For, as Losada posits apropos of the Spanish *revistas*, “La crítica española avanzada, como puede verse, se encontraba entonces puntualmente informada de las novedades que se producían al otro lado del Atlántico” (53). If, in the end, the exchange was somewhat uneven, such is the case. Few dialogues are ever truly equal in participation, anyway.

### **1.3 – *Un Tal “Meridiano Intelectual”***

It could also be that the Spanish avant-garde's resistance to the incorporation of the Argentine avant-garde stems, in part, from a Eurocentric sense of superiority over the Americas (read: over the country's former colonies). Spain had lost the last of its territorial colonies in the West in the war with Cuba and “el desastre de 1898,” and the “new generation” of vanguardists was not about to now cede any of its intellectual territory, even to a burgeoning and evermore cosmopolitan nation such as Argentina.

This sense of superiority bubbles over in April of 1927 in Guillermo de Torre's controversial piece for issue number eight of *La Gaceta Literaria* entitled “Madrid

meridiano intelectual de Hispanoamérica.” Even though the *La Gaceta Literaria* presents itself as being “ibérica : americana : internacional,” it also asserts the following:

LA GACETA LITERARIA desea ser la hoja periódica que informe a la cultura europea (América = Europa) de la zona específicamente ibérica que faltaba en el mapa de las áreas intelectuales de nuestro continente.

En tal mapa emergían ya los manchones pluricolores de Francia (“Les Nouvelles littéraires”), de Italia (“La Fiera letteraria”), de Alemania (“Die Literarasche Welt”) y de Inglaterra (“Times Literary Supplement”).

La superficie de Iberia – con su prolongación de la otra gran (enorme) península de Suramérica – permanecía en blanco: con el pespunte, en torno, de lo que había un día que llenar.

LA GACETA LITERARIA ha venido un día – hoy – a poner su ocre y su azul (meseta y océano) sobre ese esquema incolor que aguardaba el decidido brochazo.<sup>33</sup>

This sort of indiscriminate grouping in of Spanish-speaking South American countries as being a “prolongation” of Spain, and thus not as a separate body or, better still, as a set of separate bodies, registers in de Torre’s article as well. While the article, much like the *revista*’s curious mission statement, is meant to function as a sort of gesture of good will and brotherhood toward *los jóvenes* of *Hispanoamérica*, the work’s title and paternalistic tone speak for themselves.

In this article, de Torre, first of all, expresses his sincerest desires to eliminate “los espúreos términos de ‘América Latina’ y de ‘latinoamericanismo’” (43). As he sees it, these terms emphasize a Latin rather than a Hispanic connection across the Atlantic; on the other hand, though, the concept of “el panamericanismo del *hispanoamericanismo*

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<sup>33</sup> The very first article that appears in the very first issue of *La Gaceta Literaria* is entitled “Sobre un periódico de las letras” and is written by José Ortega y Gasset. Here, with respect to this specific “periódico,” Ortega affirms the following: “podrá esta hoja – aparte de otras ventajas subalternas contribuir a la mayor y más urgente empresa, que es: curar definitivamente a las letras españolas de su pertinaz provincialismo. Provincialismo es angostura, frivolidad, y pequeñez de radio moral. [...] Es hora, pues, de sacudir los restos del provincialismo y montar las almas en más prócer disciplina. Hay que resolverse a pensar y sentir en onda larga” (1).

[...] no representa la hegemonía de ningún pueblo de habla española, sino la igual de todos. Tanto en la esfera política y social; como en el plano estrictamente intelectual” (43 emphasis added). De Torre also, conceivably along with other Spanish intellectuals, resents the fact that “las juventudes hispanoparlantes” tend to choose to take their talents to France and Italy instead of Spain, “sin dignarse apenas en tocar en un puerto español, o considerando, todo lo mas, nuestro país como campo de turismo pintoresco. De ahí la necesidad urgente de proponer y exaltar a Madrid, como el meridiano intelectual de Hispanoamérica” (43). He then further explains himself and his reasoning in the extended quote that follows:

Que nuestro hispanoamericanismo, que el criterio de *La Gaceta Literaria*, en este punto cardinal de vitalidad expansiva, es absolutamente puro y generoso y no implica hegemonía política o intelectual de ninguna clase, lo evidencia el hecho de que nosotros siempre hemos tendido a considerar el área intelectual americana como una prolongación del área española. Y esto, no por un propósito anexionista reprobable, sino por el deseo de borrar fronteras, de no establecer distingos, de agrupar bajo un mismo común denominador de consideración idéntica toda la producción intelectual en la misma lengua; por el deseo de anular diferencias valoradoras, juzgando con el mismo espíritu personas y obras de aquende y allende el Atlántico.

Esta nivelación de relaciones de países y culturas heterogéneas tiene más importancia y trascendencia, es más revolucionaria de lo que a primera vista parece. Pues presupone la rectificación de un estado de cosas y la instauración de un nuevo espíritu amistoso entre dos mundos fraternos. (43)

Yet, naturally, non-Spaniards, in Argentina or elsewhere, might find problematic the idea that “el área intelectual americana” functions as “una prolongación del área española”.

They might not want everything to be equal, the same, just because their countries apparently share a common language. They might not want to thoroughly commit themselves to a Spanish culture in supposed decline, in the wake of 1898. They might want to assert themselves and their own culture, however much it may or may not be indebted to Spain.

Despite the article's best, if ill-articulated, intentions, the concept of Madrid as "meridiano intelectual de Hispanoamérica" did not go over well with intellectuals associated with the rather polemic-happy *Martín Fierro*.<sup>34</sup> Issue forty-two of *Martín Fierro* from June of 1927 included nine separate responses on the matter, all of which repudiate de Torre's stance that Madrid still served as the dominant point of reference within the Hispanic world.

Curiously enough, however, the previous issue of *Martín Fierro*, published on May, 28, 1927, focused primarily on the *Centenario de Góngora* that had taken place just five days earlier at *El Ateneo* in Sevilla and would come to define Spain's hallowed poetic cenacle, *la generación del 27*. Such a focus here on the part of the *martinfierristas* would thus seem to be more indicative of a commitment to "Lo viejo, lo extranjero," at least in this specific issue of *Martín Fierro*... Along with a number of articles, poems, and creative pieces composed by various *martinfierristas* as a collective, Argentine

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<sup>34</sup> De Torre's article also receives a rebuke in the double issue, 222 and 223, of the Argentine *revista*, *Nosotros*. Here, in a manner more mannered than that of his *martinfierrista* compatriots, Luis Pascarella notes that, "En la Argentina, los españoles son queridos y apreciados," and also notes how, "Su actuación económica o intelectual se mide con el mismo cartabón que se usa para los nativos. Más aún: hay muchos españoles que por su especial situación ejercen las funciones de censores de la producción cultural [...]" (210-11). Yet, as Pascarella also points out, the fact remains that, "el concepto de hispano americano no tiene hoy por hoy más que una dosis racial y valor fonético. El concepto latinoamericano, quieran o no, expresa con más precisión la verdad; pero el que refleja la verdadera situación es el de 'europeo-americano,' dado que en la formación de su mentalidad (por lo menos en la Argentina) participan en mayor o menor escala todos los pueblos de Europa. Sin embargo, conviene tenerlo muy en cuenta: *europeo-americano*, sí, pero con la constante sensación, cada vez más acentuada, de que es *diferente* de todos ellos. [...] Pues bien: con todas las diferencias que se quiera la situación, en el hecho, es la misma. Madrid, en el momento actual, no constituye un punto de referencia intelectual; es uno de los tantos 'meridianos' geográficos cuyo conocimiento puede ser útil [...]" (218-19 emphasis in original). It is also interesting to note that Pascarella makes no mention whatsoever of any sort of indigenous roots endemic to Argentina.

homage to the Spanish poet on the 300-year anniversary of his passing, and an inclusion of poems written by Góngora himself, issue forty-one presents a full two-page compendium of “La nueva poesía de España. – Inéditos para ‘Martín Fierro.’” This small anthology includes work by Mauricio Bacarisse, César A. Comet, Rogelio Buendía, Federico García Lorca, Antonio Espina, Jorge Guillen, Gerardo Diego, Luciano de San-Saor, and J. Rivas Panedas. The issue also contains an extended article on “Tres poetas jóvenes de España” that expounds upon the work of Lorca, Rafael Alberti, and Gerardo Diego, and is written by none other than Guillermo de Torre himself!

Meanwhile, the next issue of *Martín Fierro*, number forty-two, operates as a sort of negative homage to de Torre and his “Madrid meridiano” article, as it offers not so friendly or fraternal invective toward him and his thoughts on the matter.<sup>35</sup> The titles of the responses expressed here speak for themselves, too: “Un llamado a la realidad,” “Imperialismo baldío,” “Sobre el meridiano de una gaceta,” “Buenos Aires, Metropoli,” “La implantación de un meridiano. – Anotaciones de sextante,” “A un meridiano encontrao en una fiambra” (356-57). The responses start with Pablo Rojas Paz stating, “Desde que el andariego Cristobal descubrió esta tierras inciertas concretadas en una isla, no han cesado en Europa de tener acerca de América las ideas más sorprendentes y las concepciones más disparatadas,” and go on from there (356). Some of the more memorable quotes read as follows:

*Pablo Rojas Paz* – “América está en ella misma y no es necesario que se interne por caminos extraños en busca de su propio porvenir” (356).

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<sup>35</sup> De Torre really is attacked from all fronts here, as this issue also includes a strong chastisement offered from the Mexican poet, Jorge Cuesta, in response to de Torre’s apparently ill-informed essay, “Nuevos poetas mexicanos,” published in issue seven of *La Gaceta Literaria*.

*Nicolás Olivari* – “España no tiene ningún interés intelectual para nosotros. Seamos justos, más lo tiene Francia e Italia, pero nosotros vanguardias de la N.S. argentina, reivindicamos el derecho de ser vírgenes de toda influencia y maravillarnos todos los días con las cosas nuestras, nacionales, criollas, que vamos descubriendo en nuestra ciudad y en nuestro campo. ¡Autóctonos puede ser, italianos también, franceses siempre, pero españoles nunca!” :: “Para nosotros, España intelectual se acaba en Baroja, en Valle Inclán, en Pérez de Ayala, y en Unamuno. Todos viejos.” :: “No tenemos interés ni por Madrid, ni por España. No hay allí ascensores, ni calefacción, ni tangos porteños. No hay interés. Si ellos quieren, si los colegas de la ‘Gaceta’ mucho lo apuran, no tenemos inconveniente en reconocer que nosotros somos los conquistadores y ellos los conquistados” (356).

*Jorge Luis Borges* – “Madrid no nos entiende” (357).

*Santiago Ganduglia* – “‘La Gaceta Literaria’ nos propone una situación, que, implícitamente, significa el desconocimiento completo de nuestra independencia intelectual. Optando por uno u otro de los términos nos quedaríamos sin nosotros mismos. De modo que ‘La Gaceta Literaria’ nos concede la gracia de escoger un modelo de protectorado intelectual, el francés o el español, sin haberse detenido antes a medir nuestra propia estatura y el efecto que podría producirnos semejante ocurrencia.” :: “Somos un pueblo moderno, – y España es de naturaleza pasatista [...]” :: “El factor étnico argüido por ‘La Gaceta Literaria’ no es tampoco considerable porque nosotros tenemos en nuestra constitución orgánica el aporte universal. Estamos elaborando una entidad nueva que va a dar al mundo más de una sorpresa. Y en tal sentido no seremos sino argentinos, criollos, para decirlo mejor. Nosotros somos dueños de una recia fisonomía intelectual. Nos hemos acuñado un espíritu propio. Somos insurrectos de España. Nosotros repudiamos cualquier tutelaje intelectual, así venga con el rótulo de iberoamericanismo. Nosotros tenemos, por último, la jactancia de proclamar metrópoli a Buenos Aires desde que contamos con Girondo, Olivari, Borges, Arlt, Gónzales Tuñón, etc.” (357).

*Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz* – “La preponderancia de un pueblo nace de la fuerza de su espíritu, y la actitud arrogante no engendra de por sí en toda la historia de España la cierta presencia de un filósofo o un matemático, diplomáticos del puro pensar.” :: “No existe ciencia positiva capaz de calcular la incuabla distancia que nos separa de Madrid. Nuestro meridiano – magnético al menos – pasa por la esquina de Esmerelda y Corrientes, si es que pasa por algún lado” (357).

Included in this collective repudiation of de Torre’s thesis is a whimsical piece signed by “Ortelli y Gasset” (most likely a sarcastic combination of the last names of Roberto Ortelli and José Ortega y Gasset), though really composed by Borges and Carlos Mastronardi. Written in a style that mixes the *criollo* language of Buenos Aires with

*Italian* phrases and ways of speaking, the statement concludes with the cryptic, though certainly derogatory, line: “Che meridiano: hacete a un lao, que voy a escupir” (357). Rojas Paz and Borges make mention of Ortega directly by name in their own articles as well. While the latter’s reference is again cryptic in nature and thus difficult to decipher, the former mocks Ortega for his own pompous and paternal pronouncements regarding Argentina. These pronouncements conceivably would have come from Ortega’s many works and talks on Argentina composed and shared up to that point, including “Impresiones de la Argentina” (1916), “El deber de la nueva generación Argentina” (1924), “Para dos revistas argentinas” (1924), and “Carta a un joven argentino que estudia filosofía” (1925). Ortega’s pieces on Argentina will be addressed in detail in the following section.

Together in response, together in riposte, these *martinfierristas* present Argentina as being a more advanced society in all matters cultural, intellectual, technological, social, political, etc., while concomitantly characterizing Spain as being behind the times. A few of them also note the mixed, *criollo* nature of Argentine society and language, positing that these heterogeneous formations function as signs of a cosmopolitan, worldly strength. As a result, then, de Torre’s appeals to race and language as common denominators that make Argentina and other South American countries members of a “Hispanic” and not “Latin” American community, and thus a “prolongation” of Spain, are rebutted. The critic, Ángela L. Di Tullio, summarizes the *martinfierrista* response thusly, “La argumentación [de los martinfierristas] conduce a la inversión de la tesis: el meridiano de Hispanoamérica debe ser Buenos Aires” (590). Claudia Gilman, meanwhile, expands upon the “inversión” articulated by *los martinfierristas*, emphasizing

the way in which these Argentine writers see themselves as the prime purveyors of intellectual, philosophical, and literary matters, so that, “El rechazo último de la propuesta española se sostiene en el convencimiento de la grandeza de la renovación martinfierrista. Es Buenos Aires, por lo tanto, quien dirige el rumbo de la modernidad cultural en América” (58).

Most studies of this exchange stop at this point – that is, after cataloging and analyzing the *martinfierrista* response. Truth be told, though, the micro-assemblage formed here between *La Gaceta Literaria* and *Martín Fierro* is ultimately more multi-faceted and complex. For the heated debate with respect to *el meridiano* would continue on. Indeed, issue seventeen of *La Gaceta Literaria* from September of 1927 included a Spanish response to the *martinfierrista* response, grouped under the collective, if more playful, title: “UN DEBATE APASIONADO: Campeonato para un meridiano intelectual. La selección argentina *Martín Fierro* (Buenos Aires) reta a la española *Gaceta Literaria* (Madrid). ‘Gaceta Literaria’ no acepta por golpes sucios de ‘Martín Fierro’ que lo descalifican. – Opiniones y arbitrajes.” Here, one finds thoughts on the matter as composed by Ernesto Giménez Caballero, Guillermo de Torre, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Benjamín Jarnés, Gerardo Diego, Angel Sánchez Rivero, Melchor Fernández Almagro, Antonio Espina, Enrique Lafuente, Gabriel García Maroto, César M. Arconada, Francisco Ayala, Esteban Salazar y Chapela, and José M.<sup>a</sup> de Sucre.

Giménez Caballero begins the response to the response by directly addressing Pablo Rojas Paz, basically telling him and his cohorts to lighten up a bit. Notwithstanding, GeCé, as he was known, still speaks in dismissive and paternalistic terms of *Martín Fierro*’s pages as being “tan subidas de color y erratas ortográficas,”

refers to the collective as his “amigos retrógrados” and to their responses as “una interpretación de campesino ofendido,” and moves on to mention that such responses would not be worthy of a (fictitious) man such as “Martín Fierro” himself, who:

No sólo no habría renegado del vientre que lo parió – pues era un hombre –, sino que hasta se hubiese esforzado en no sacar el argot de cabaret, que deshonra ese trocito del periódico firmado por un falificador, por un tal alias Ortelli. “Martín Fierro” era un hombre, ya además un hombre honrado. (101)

GeCé also turns the words of the *martinfierristas* back against them, citing Rojas Paz and Scalbrini y Ortiz who had written, respectively, “Después de todo, un europeo se asombraría de las pocas cosas que a nosotros nos importan,” and, “¿Es que nosotros pensamos?” Here, then, we see another “inversion” at work.

De Torre, on the other hand, is more measured – apologetic, even – in what constitutes his own brief reply – or at least he is so on the surface. To begin, he takes back the very word “meridiano” and suggests instead that, in its place, the two sides, together, “pongamos otro término más preciso, menos susceptible de originar equívocos” (101). He next expresses his regret regarding the ways in which his initial article was rather unfortunately received, if not, as he believes it to be, completely misunderstood, noting how, “Nosotros [los españoles] amamos demasiado nuestra propia independencia intelectual para no respetar igualmente la independencia ajena: la legítima y alboreante y admirable autonomía intelectual americana” (101). Gerardo Diego echoes and expands upon these sentiments as well in his own brief response, as he posits, “Efectivamente, creo que Madrid no es meridiano de nadie. Es un paralelo. Y Buenos Aires otro paralelo: el paralelo del Sur” (101).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ramon’s reply is rather dismissive, if inconsequential, to boot. “No creo que merezca ningún cuidado esa actitud de algunos jóvenes argentinos,” he says, “¿Es tan diversa y tan

All that said by both de Torre and Diego, as per de Torre's particular response, his personal compunction does not exclude more paternalisms, in turn. So much is evidenced in the following comment:

considero totalmente inmotivado e inexplicable ese recelo surgido entre los jóvenes escritores argentinos. Se necesita poseer una susceptibilidad juvenil – y, por tanto, exacerbada, propensa a la hipérbole – para tratar de descubrir una intención hegemónica e imperialista en aquel editorial incriminado de *La Gaceta Literaria*. (101)

It is important to bear in mind how the notion of *juventud* – once the shining and universalizing characteristic of the various avant-garde movements – is not at all celebrated here, but, rather, deprecated. Surely, youthful “susceptibility,” with “susceptibility” serving, perhaps, as a synonym for *passion*, cuts both ways, as it were. (And de Torre's entire reply thus seems to center around making things, i.e. ideas, less “susceptible” to equivocation and error, i.e. the idea of “un meridiano” and the passionate ideas of the youth.) Though, at this point in time, de Torre sees in it – in youth, in a youthful susceptibility to passion – a weakness rather than a strength. By all means, this very statement, this very judgment, is not without some semblance of verisimilitude. For the avant-garde can, at times, be judged to be something akin to a sort of spirited puppy dog – that is, young, yes, but also all bark and no bite, and this on both sides of the Atlantic.

A few years later, in 1929, Ortega y Gasset will not so much chastise *la juventud*, as de Torre does here, as condemn them altogether in *La rebelión de las masas*. In this

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numerosa aquella juventud!” (101). One can also attest to a nationalistic, if also imperialistic, sense of superiority when Ramón goes on to say, “Yo tengo fe en un fantástico espíritu español, que va desde la cabecera de Méjico hasta la Argentina, recorriendo Repúblicas de un corazón independiente, que es santuario del habla y de la vera confraternidad” (375).

highly polemical essay, Ortega also issues forth a commanding condemnation of *lo nuevo*. If de Torre had his reasons for doing so, so too does Ortega, it may seem, though the latter's reasons are ultimately more self-contradictory and more specious in nature. This will be shown to be the case in Chapter Three. Furthermore, it stands to mention again that, a few years earlier, and then again a few years later, Ortega expresses his own thoughts specifically concerning – and he is indeed *concerned*, as if he were a concerned father – the Argentine youth in essays such as “El deber de la nueva generación argentina” (1924), “Carta a un joven argentino que estudia filosofía” (1925), and “Intimidaciones: ‘La pampa... promesas’ y ‘El hombre a la defensiva’” (1929). In the first essay listed here, Ortega plainly states, “La juventud necesita dejarse influir,” while saying in the second, “No he hecho nunca misterio de sugerirme mayores esperanzas la juventud argentina que la española” (“El deber” 54; “Carta” 68).<sup>37</sup> Yet, in this final essay, Ortega maintains that *el argentino* is, in great part, defined by his “falta de autenticidad,” and then proceeds to proclaim that “el argentino es un hombre admirablemente dotado, que no se entrega a nada, que no ha sumergido irrevocablemente su existencia en el servicio a alguna cosa distinta de él” (125, 136). He also offers some rather disparaging words of his own with respect to *Martín Fierro* in “Intimidaciones,” as he asserts the following: “Importaría demostrar lo que hay de narcisismo en la inspiración de *Martín Fierro*. De aquí el extraño aire de diálogo que tiene su monólogo: habla con su imagen y se queja de que los demás no lo reconozcan” (140).

Now, apropos of the *meridiano*, and, perhaps, as it was to be expected, the *martínfierristas* intended to have the last word in this extended dialogue. The retort to the

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<sup>37</sup> These early essays will be treated in greater detail at the end of the next chapter.

retort to the retort to de Torre's original piece is presented in *Martín Fierro* as written by *El Director* (aka Evar Méndez), entitled "Asunto fundamental," and placed on the very front page of what would be the final issue of the *revista*, number 44-45 from August-November of 1927. Though, as noted above, Ortega, presumably along with other Spaniards, would prefer to label this "dialogue" a "monologue" that the Argentine *revista* has with itself. And, to speak directly to Ortega's point, Méndez does indeed stake a position in rather reflexive and monological terms at at least one point in his piece when he (self)-affirms that, "MARTÍN FIERRO al discutir y rechazar la proposición del meridiano madrileño ayer y hoy, está de acuerdo consigo mismo, y desde 1924" (375). He also spends a good portion of the article citing other articles from previous issues of *Martín Fierro*. Point taken, don José.

That being so, and despite the fact that Méndez's article commences with the rather unwieldy, and, eventually, insulting, sentence that follows, the article still is, quite possibly, the most forceful, cogent, and convincing of the entire back and forth between *Martín Fierro* and *La Gaceta Literaria*:

Pretender la imposición de un meridiano intelectual extranjero a los argentinos, dueños ya de una joven cultura y un arte naciente que solo requieren tiempo para crecer y afirmarse hasta ser inconfundibles, (cultura y arte de fuente latina) y a estas horas, en que hace rato hemos optado por los mejores ejemplos, y venimos incorporándonos día a día los más perfectos elementos: desde el material humano hasta las más admirables conquistas de espíritu que se dan en la tierra,—es una cosa ridícula y grotesca, que solo puede caber en la cabeza de piedra de intelectuales cavernarios. (375)

It is fascinating to observe here how Méndez, just as any good humanist would also be wont to do, combines, if not conflates, cultural, artistic, spiritual, and human elements in a totalizing vision. *Herein lies, herein returns, a peculiar, powerful pathology*. He furthermore goes so far as to suggest that, in time, Argentina's culture will function as if

it were, and thus be indistinguishable from, a work of art – “hasta ser inconfundibles.” For, in Méndez’s mind, these elements can and will effectively, historically, and ultimately come together to create a superior entity: namely, Argentina itself. As guided by “nuestra minoría,” this living entity – both human- and aesthetic-like in its beautiful form, content, and expression – will be superior as a whole due to the superior nature of its constituent parts, whether they be judged separately or in total harmony with each other in their individual and collective aesthetico-politico-socio-ontologico-cultural expression of the nation-state (375). Superior, that is, to the out-of-touch, if not completely troglodytic and barbaric Spaniards of the day – “intelectuales cavernarios.”<sup>38</sup>

Méndez moves on then to stand behind the initial response put forth by he and his fellow *martinfierristas* in the extended citation that follows:

Fuimos leales con nuestra conciencia al expresar con entera franqueza la que resultó amarga verdad. Verdad que no es invento nuestro sino constatación de una realidad incontrovertible, no provocada por ningún individuo aislado, y que se produce de manera fatal en el país: el deshispanismo argentino, la transformación del idioma, la diferenciación espiritual, nuestra actual constitución étnica, la orientación no-española de la cultura del Plata. Todo ello parece “ingratitude histórica” e insulto máximo a los españoles; pero desatender esa verdad no prueba sino incompreensión, voluntaria ceguera, estrechez mental o torpe tosudez [sic] en oponerse en vano a la *corriente* de nuestra vida de pueblo libre. De ahí nuestro colectivo “llamado a la realidad,” no entendido sino por algunos espíritus superiores, y no escuchado por los neoconquistadores de “La Gaceta Literaria” que respondieron con una brutalidad inesperada. (375 emphasis added)

Here, along with asserting the myriad factors that mark the “bitter truth” of Argentina’s decisive break with Spain, Méndez refers to Argentina’s very strength as a supreme, unstoppable “current” and again refers to a notion of “espíritus superiores.” He sees this “current” flow through “las figuras argentinas de hoy como un Güiraldes, Macedonio

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<sup>38</sup> Although, Méndez also admits that *Martín Fierro* did at one point invite to Buenos Aires “la más prominente figura de la nueva literature española: Gómez de la Serna” (375).

Fernández, Victoria Ocampo, Gironde, Norah Borges, Pettoruti, Prebisch, Xul Solar” (375). These specific figures, with Jorge Luis Borges most conspicuously absent among them, “representan obras y tendencias nuevas que dan vastedad a nuestro campo intelectual” (375). Here, we see “lo nuevo, lo propio” at work. And, before calling for a “Nuevo llamado a la realidad,” Méndez also posits:

A esa altura de españolismo estábamos (¡buena lección hemos recibido!), cuando los hábiles políticos de “La Gaceta Literaria” metieron el dedo en el ventilador. Es decir: se enredaron en la desdichada metáfora del meridiano madrileño, la más zafia y tropezada de las metáforas del ultraísmo español, y tan fracasada que no aceptarían su concepto ni centros hispánicos intelectuales tan valiosos como Barcelona, Sevilla, Cádiz. (375)

He thus gets in a good shot at ultraism, perhaps for old-times-sake, and questions if Madrid is even the intellectual capital of Spain itself as well.

Whether we call it a dialogue, a monologue, a polemic, a fruitful discussion, or all of the above, the debate that centered around Guillermo de Torre’s article, “Madrid meridiano intelectual de Hispanoamérica,” got the two sides talking, at the very least. This is not at all to say that the avant-gardes in Spain and Argentina were not doing so before or after 1927, but rather points to what was one of the more fascinating and significant exchanges that occurred over the course these discussions: fascinating, because what ensued was a tremendous, passionate back and forth; significant, because it shows that this discussion, in superficial, artificial, and essential ways, functioned as a hotly debated contest for an uncontested claim to the crown of *the new*, a contest in which the contestants used all of the means at their immediate and metaphysical disposal in order to convince the other side, and themselves, of some kind of cultural, and therefore political, and therefore aesthetic, and therefore human, and therefore aesthetic,

and therefore political, and therefore cultural superiority. A classic case of Minority vs. Minority.

#### 1.4 – *Síntesis*

A less contentious example of a transatlantic exchange between Argentina and Spain can be afforded by the understudied and truly transatlantic *revista*, *Síntesis*. Published in Buenos Aires between 1927 and 1930, *Síntesis* was first directed by the Galician ultraist, Xavier Bóveda, and then later by the Argentine architect, Martín S. Noel. (Notably, the first signature on the ultraist manifesto in *Grecia* that was cited previously was, in fact, that of Xavier Bóveda; if nothing else, this made his name known, at least somewhat, in avant-garde cenacles.)<sup>39</sup> When Bóveda left and Noel assumed director's control, after only some seven issues and due to rather unclear and unspecified reasons, de Torre, already living in Buenos Aires at the time, assumed Bóveda's place on the periodical's editorial board. Borges also served on the editorial board from the time of the journal's inception. The scope of the *revista* included forty-one issues in all – which, for comparison's sake, was only four issues less than *Martín Fierro*. Each individual issue of *Síntesis* was published monthly and covered roughly 125 pages. All issues were also “muy bien impresos e ilustrados” (Lorenzo Alcalá 14).

Scholarship on *Síntesis* is scarce. However, in her article, “Xavier Bóveda: el ‘ultraísta’ que vivió entre nosotros,” the Argentine critic, May Lorenzo Alcalá, situates the *revista* vis-à-vis what was then an avant-garde movement in an initial state of decline:

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<sup>39</sup> Of additional interest for the project at hand, Bóveda wrote a slight piece of historico-cultural philosophy in 1934 which he entitled *Humanismo Español. Significación Histórica y Cultural de España*.

publicada de 1927 hasta 1930, la revista abarcó el período de indecisiones, dudas, cabildeos, y después la dispersión, de los jóvenes que protagonizaron la renovación de la década del veinte. Este fenómeno, el de captar una suerte de secuencia de instantáneas de la disolución de la vanguardia en nuestro país [Argentina], se le debe a Bóveda y no le ha sido reconocido nunca, ni siquiera por aquellos trabajos, pocos, en que se analiza la revista. (14)

As Lorenzo Alcalá cogently notes, *Síntesis* signified a space for the distillation of a “disolución,” or, in other words, a disintegration of the transatlantic avant-garde.<sup>40</sup> For around the time of *Síntesis*’ publication, toward the end of the 20s and at the start of the 30s, avant-garde currents either started flowing in different, dissociated directions or stoppeds flowing altogether. In their study, *Las revistas literarias argentinas 1893-1967*, Lafleur, Provenzano, and Alonso therefore characterize *Síntesis* as follows:

Muchos de los antiguos y bulliciosos frequentadores de cenáculos vanguardistas colaboraron en sus páginas, los mismos de *Proa*, *Martín Fierro*, *Inicial*, y *Valoraciones*. Pero algo había cambiado: pasado el hervor, se insinúa el tono académico natural en quienes gozan ya de un prestigio que les permite codearse con los prestigios que habían combatido. (107)

Lorenzo Alcalá, meanwhile, takes this idea one step further, suggesting that “en las páginas de *Síntesis* podía seguirse la evolución de los vanguardistas hacia la vuelta al orden” (14).

Thus, the assemblage begins to come undone – “algo había cambiado,” “la vuelta al orden” – or, rather, other forms of consistency are provided it. While Lafleur, et al. note the “academic tone” that starts to sound in *Síntesis*’ pages, this very time in the world also came to signify a rush to commitments made in the name of certain political possibilities in the face of certain political realities, i.e. fascism and dictatorship. Still, in ways similar to many other avant-garde *revistas* from across the Hispanic world, *Síntesis*

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<sup>40</sup> And if Bóveda deserves more attention for his role in creating and running this *revista*, in marking this moment, then so be it – he will receive some attention here.

was not overtly political. The *revista* exhibited no manifest or express political orientation, as its writers were liberals, communists, and fascists – and vanguardists and academics.

In a very brief declaration of purposes simply entitled “Propósitos” and composed by “La redacción,” *Síntesis* presents itself, in terms more or less apolitical, in its first issue from June of 1927:

Aspiramos a resumir a través de nuestras columnas, y en una forma sintética, toda manifestación artística, intelectual o científica de los pueblos de habla castellana.

Postulamos la existencia de una cultura hispano-americana y aspiramos a su difusión. Con esto úrgenos decir que nuestras preferencias habrán de orientarse siempre hacia el movimiento auroral, bellamente augurador, y pleno ya de magníficas realidades de las naciones de América.

Los Editores de SÍNTESIS se proponen:

Propender intensivamente a la divulgación de aquellos principios esenciales que nutren toda cultura.

Unificar la curiosidad científica e intelectual de los pueblos de progiene hispánica.

Consagrar las páginas de SÍNTESIS al estudio objetivo y amplio – verdaderamente especializado – de los valores del siglo. (3-4)

An avowed belief in and commitment to the promotion and dissemination of *culture* clearly comes through here in the “Propósitos.” As it is with its non-political emphasis, such a committed belief in and to culture is not necessarily unique to *Síntesis*. (We just bore witness to a contest waged in the names of specific and supposedly discrete cultures in the “meridiano” debates, along with, concomitantly, a certain cult of a certain culture intended to separate and hierarchize one culture vis-à-vis another.) For culture is consonant with a faith in the cooperative advancement of a select society through increasingly complex, if also, therefore, increasingly beautiful, forms of living, relating, and creating. That is, like the vanguardist (and humanist) conviction that aesthetics holds the promise for both the present and the future – as exemplified in the seemingly self-

generating construction of *the new* which, simultaneously, responds to an external crisis with respect to the possible ontological expression of an aesthetic humanity – culture, insofar as it is constituted aesthetically, i.e. with specific, superior, and harmonious values in mind, values which, in many ways, are designed to be at once self-conferred and of the times, autonomous and heteronomous, holds this very selfsame promise.

*Culture the Creator: Culture the Redeemer: Culture the Promise.*

As promising as this aesthetico-cultural promise might be, it becomes problematic, in Argentina and Spain, along with the rest of the modern world, when it is a promise imposed on a given society, when it becomes a tool of teleology that serves to homogenize difference and desire, when this promise attempts to mask its profoundly political aspirations in an ostensibly apolitical appearance of play and inconsequentiality. A promise that is, ergo, also a threat – the “threat *in* the promise itself” (Derrida *Rogues* 82 emphasis in original). A wolf in sheep’s clothing. On the other hand, the promise retains its promise – the promise remains...open – so long as it is one that exposes itself to variation and variability, letting itself be problematic and political, utilizing this volatility as a value and a virtue, and constantly questioning these qualities in an ongoing process of creation and destruction. An open promise – one that can never really be fulfilled. A naked promise – exposed to the consistencies and inconsistencies of the world. This promise of culture, is, to repeat, an aesthetic promise, which, in turn, is also a political promise – one that is actively augured by everyone involved in the assemblage so composed here, from Schiller to Ortega to Macedonio to Guillermo de Torre to the *consejo directivo* at *Síntesis*. The forms this promise can take – imposition and/or exposition – are at once mutually exclusive and intimately related. While some promises

come and go, this promise, even if, if not because, it is, in the end, unfulfilled, unfulfillable, or always fulfilled insufficiently, as only a promise such as this could be fulfilled, is forever.

*Síntesis* also promises, at least in theory, that it will not be transatlantic with respect to Spain and Argentina alone, but, as outlined above, strive to be a *revista* inclusive of all Spanish-speaking countries and cultures. *Síntesis* is designed, in effect, to be a transmitter of cross-cultural currents. It cannot be denied, however, that the *revista*'s contributors most frequently hailed from either Spain or Argentina. For example, of the nine writers included in the first issue cited above, three were of Spanish origin (Rafael Cansinos-Asséns, Julio Rey Pastor, Xavier Bóveda) and five were of Argentine origin (Carlos M. Noel, Fernández Moreno, Emilio Ravignani, Jorge Luis Borges, Pablo Rojas Paz), with the other (Manuel Nuñez Reguiero) being Uruguayan. Other vanguardists of note from Spain that contributed to *Síntesis* included Amado Alonso, César M. Arconada, Francisco Ayala, Cansinos-Asséns, Juan Chabás, Alejandro Collantes de Terán, Gerardo Diego, Antonio Espina, Giménez Caballero, Ramón, Antonio Núñez C. de Herrera, Benjamín Jarnés, Rafael Porlán y Merlo, Adolfo Salazar and, from the older guard, Miguel de Unamuno (Manuel Bonet 116).<sup>41</sup> In terms of representatives from the Argentine avant-garde, too many members from the movement contributed to the *revista* to be listed here – members both minor and major in name and reputation. However, the

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<sup>41</sup> Bóveda specifically speaks to the *revista*'s warm reception and early success in Spain in a letter written to his wife, dated August 8, 1927: “Hoy quiero hablarte de *Síntesis*. Como yo esperaba, la revista ha obtenido en España un éxito extraordinario. *El Sol* la saludó a mi llegada con las palabras más altas y la *Revista de Occidente* – que dirige Ortega y Gasset – culmina hoy la serie de ditirambos con concepto verdaderamente únicos [...]. Te envío también las palabras de saludo que me ha dedicado *La Gaceta Literaria* y que, como verás, son muy efusivas. En fin, y por lo que *Síntesis* importa, estoy verdaderamente contento pues todo marcha muy bien” (qtd. in Lorenzo Alcalá 14).

Argentine members of the *consejo directivo* included Coriolano Alberini, J. Rey Pastor, Ravnigani, Carlos Ibarguren, Noel, Arturo Capdevila, and Borges.

Interestingly, issue twenty-five of *Síntesis* from June of 1929 contains a brief piece by F.T. Marinetti. Four months and four issues later, in issue twenty-nine from October of the same year, a lesser-known Argentine vanguardist named Alberto Pinetta writes a piece that presents a return to the promise explicated above, a promise which, again, in its own ways, always returns – an eternal current, a recurrent return, that comes in and goes out and comes in again.<sup>42</sup> Here, Pinetta returns, recurs, to this promise, and does so according to Nietzschean, futurist, Orteguian, and local ideals, in an article entitled “La promesa de la nueva generación literaria.”

To begin, Pinetta speaks to “la inquietud que anima a los constructores de una nueva realidad” (207). To be sure, we will come to find something akin to the proposition of a certain group of “constructores” – that is, of a *minority* – who must and will and perhaps already have come to create a “new reality” in almost all avant-garde output from the times and from before, i.e. in Schiller and Nietzsche. And thus it should come as no surprise that Pinetta refers to Ortega y Gasset’s *El tema de nuestro tiempo* as a major point of reference here. For it could be said that Ortega’s essay constitutes a paradigmatic shift with respect to his *new* conception of *las generaciones*, a concept which Ortega would later make more or less coterminous with his concept of *las minorías selectas*. While a more expansive examination of *las generaciones* and *las minorías orteguianas* will be offered forth in the chapters to come, Pinetta takes from Ortega, among other things, the following perspective regarding the stance that has been taken by the “new

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<sup>42</sup> Lesser-known, that is, even though Pinetta did contribute to such *porteño* periodicals as *La Nación*, *La Razón*, *El Hogar*, and *Caras y Caretas*, along with *Síntesis*.

generation”: “La nueva generación literaria argentina, cuyo central vital es Buenos Aires, adoptó, pues, a igual que el resto del mundo, la actitud que el filósofo [Ortega] ha dado en llamar *beligerante*” (208 emphasis in original). This stance, as Pinetta plainly states, is meant to be *belligerent* in nature; it is a combative stance, a posture that is not only characteristic of the new Argentine generation, but all new and self-styled generations that had come to rise out of the ashes of the First World War.

Pinetta proceeds to describe this new generation as being expressive of “una propia y exclusiva fisonomía, independiente del pasado, fiel a la eternal mutación de las cosas,” and as having effectively “combated its combat” (209-11). Nevertheless, the young and artistic men of this new generation – specifically, the literati, “siendo la literatura la que iniciara el compás de vanguardia en el campo de arte” – have still been training themselves to prepare “una ofensiva fuerte en su vanguardia” (211-14). War therefore results in war – though the latter be fought on a supposedly different type of battlefield, at least for now. What is this new battlefield, then? The battlefield where fights are fought and over which these fights are fought? It is the field of *values*. For, as Pinetta, in a tone and tenor conversant with Nietzsche, futurism, Ortega, and thus the entire avant-garde, to boot, contends, “Ha llegado, pues, el instante del esclarecimiento, de la fijación de valores” (213).

Now, if the proper, vitalist, and essentially new values are known to a select few, the public, meanwhile, “aun no ha aprendido a distinguir los valores” (212). And so, who will lead this valuable and valuating crusade against values out of touch with “nuestro tiempo?” Who will be the guiding lights in the imposition and the exposition of what Pinetta deems the “deber de Buenos Aires?” Pinetta names names. Though we will not

enumerate all of these names here, suffice it to say that all of the major figures who will be treated in the present study are included in this list: Jorge Luis Borges (“introducción del ultraísmo”), Eduardo Mallea (“estilista del tedio vertiginoso, autor del primer lenguaje artístico del relato”), and Roberto Arlt (“vitalista, a quien llama Macedonio Fernández ‘bajador de estrellas, destructor de estrellas’”) (216-17). (Of course, despite the fact that Pinetta focuses specifically on his homeland and his avant-garde compatriots here, he cannot help but bring Ortega into the discussion as well. In fact, he starts this discussion with Ortega as the very first point of reference; this is because the Spaniard was always already a part of, a party to, the discussion, even, if not especially, in Argentina.)

Out of all of these names, Pinetta promises that one, in particular, promises to be “el Presidente de es [sic] deber” (218). This *Presidente* will be none other than the man who, in a passionate twist of fate, will actually later run for the Presidency of Argentina; none other than the man who writes of the *Presidente* as if he were him himself in his novel, which he calls “‘la primera de lo nunca habido,’” which, as Pinetta notes, at the time held the “‘título texto’ *Novela de La Eterna y de niña de dolor, la dulce persona de un amor que no fué conocido*”; none other than Macedonio Fernández (218). None other, indeed.

Pinetta then concludes his article, again entitled “La promesa de la nueva generación literaria,” promisingly, if also problematically, and in an exceedingly avant-garde fashion:

¿Qué mañana nos espera, ya que estamos en el plano inicial de la concepción al infinito?

Tiempo, vida, alucinación... Fin de todas las escuelas, fin de todas las tendencias, muerte fatal del adjetivo. Sólo el artista, al nacer cada nuevo paisaje, está de pie, voluntarioso y fuerte frente al mundo. (218)

We can also say that this citation is Nietzschean if we take in mind the following from the “What Is Noble?” section of *Beyond Good and Evil*:

The dangerous and uncanny point is reached where the grander, more manifold, more comprehensive life *lives beyond* the old morality; the ‘individual’ stands there, reduced to his own law-giving, to his own arts and stratagems for self-preservation, self-enhancement, self-redemption. [...] [F]ull of hopes that as yet have no names, full of new will and current, full of ill will and counter-current...but what am I doing, my friends? (201 emphasis in original).

One difference between the two, however, would be that Nietzsche takes a step back from the *milieu* of humanity that he hopes to create, and asks himself just what it is exactly that he is doing – what he is promising and promoting. This self-reflective distance is not present here in the Pinetta, nor, for that matter, is it in much of the other equally, if not more excessively, superlative bombast that so often characterizes avant-garde literature.

Given, Alberto Pinetta is not necessarily a trusted name and authority on the matter when it comes to relating the trials and tribulations, the creative and destructive desires, the elitist and the popular propensities, the doom and gloom and the brilliant, infinite destiny of *las vanguardias*. All the same, in his fervid words, the promise presents itself as such and, concurrently, presents the threat that is problematically and potentially present within it. *The pathology can indeed be detected!* Detected in the avant-garde, detected in the apparently different types of humanity that the avant-garde alternately promotes and demotes. That all of this comes out in a minor piece from a minor writer trying to find his way in what, at the time, was a disintegrating minority,

shows the enduring force of this literary, cultural, political, and beautiful promise, along with the enduring force of the threat so pathologically, so dangerously, exposed within it.

From here, we will now turn toward four major figures in the foundational foundation of a minoritarian, transatlantic, avant-garde assemblage – and thus turn back toward the beginnings, as we move forward, and without necessarily turning our backs to what has already been established. These figures are, namely, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, F.T. Marinetti, Jorge Luis Borges, and José Ortega y Gasset.

## Chapter 2

### Of Currents and Bodies – Ramón, Marinetti, Borges, Ortega

“Podíamos jugar, esté fue nuestro descubrimiento.”  
Ramón Gómez de la Serna – “El concepto de la nueva literatura”

“La elección de un punto de vista es el acto inicial de la cultura.”  
José Ortega y Gasset – *El tema de nuestro tiempo*

It is somewhat difficult to mark the precise start of the avant-garde, especially according to the transatlantic assemblage so configured here. Nevertheless, any sort of foray into a transatlantic avant-garde assemblage must necessarily start with the Spaniard, Ramón Gómez de la Serna – in Spain as in Argentina, if also as in the rest of the Hispanic world – and then include forthwith the Argentine, Jorge Luis Borges, and the Spaniard, José Ortega y Gasset; in order to round off these avant-garde origins, one must also include the Italian futurist, F.T. Marinetti, as well. Without the contributions of these four individuals, without the currencies of exchange allotted to their creations and concepts, without the currents that flow through their bodies of work, the assemblage wants for consistency and is never really constitutive of anything that would even begin to suggest something akin to a collective composition in the first place.

Behold, then, the initial composers of *the new transatlantic avant-garde assemblage*: Ramón, the playful primogenitor; Marinetti, the fascinating, the frightening futurist; Borges the cross-cultural son; Ortega, the augural aristocrat.

## 2.1 – Una “Salutación” and “El concepto de la nueva literatura” – Ramón

“No voy a revelar nada trascendental, pero voy a tener una actitud libre y heroica en mi  
arbitrariedad.”

Ramón Gómez de la Serna – “Salutación”

“Se crea la *imposibilidad de deshacer*. Nada más alarmante. [...] ¡Oh si llega la  
imposibilidad de deshacer!...

Ramón Gómez de la Serna – “Mis siete palabras”

Ramón. The man only needed one name. (Of course, early on, Ramón also wrote under the pseudonym, *Tristán*, and his use of the name preceded that of the dadaist, Tristan Tzara. Indeed, Ramón, as a true vanguardist, was the first to do many things, whether recognized for these firsts or not.) In a very short time, and as he was still living and creating, Ramón even came to be his own *ismo*: *Ramonismo*.<sup>43</sup> Ramón was the one that everyone aspired to be, all across the Hispanic world, and in Spain and Argentina, in particular.

The Spaniard, Max Aub, one of the countless creators who wrote in Ramón’s vast and wondrous wake, presents Ramón and his legacy thusly:

He aquí al monstruo de nuestros tiempos – gordo y lunático, con patillas y pipa. Que escribe desde la cuna, desordenada y vorazmente, amontonando libros, secretando prólogos y epílogos, hablando de lo que no sabe. [...] Una cierta fuerza de la naturaleza. [...] La influencia de Ramón es enorme. Influye en la prosa de Ortega y en la de sus novicios. [...] Toda la prosa española se engalana con los gallardetes de la greguería. (144, 150).

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<sup>43</sup> Perhaps the only other avant-garde writer who rivals Ramón in terms of a unique, personalist approach is Macedonio. It should come as no surprise, then, that the two admired each other’s work and maintained contact over the years. The correspondence between Ramón and Macedonio – first names suffice for both writers – will be addressed in Chapter Five.

As previously noted, the Argentine, Beatriz Sarlo, states unequivocally, “El héroe de la vanguardia argentina es un español: Ramón Gómez de la Serna” (245). Meanwhile, Octavio Paz, neither Spaniard or Argentine, characterizes Ramón in what are, perhaps, even more overstated, if therefore truer, terms:

Para mí es el Escritor, o mejor, la Escritura. [...] [H]ubo un momento en que la modernidad habló por la boca de Ramón Gómez de la Serna. Fue *tan nuevo* que lo sigue siendo. [...] ¿Cómo olvidarlo y cómo perdonar a los españoles e hispanoamericanos esa obtusa indiferencia ante su obra? Con Ramón Gómez de la Serna y unos cuantos otros – *Huidobro*, *Tablada*, *Macedonio Fernández* – nace la poesía de España e Hispanoamérica. Nace hablando en prosa y en francés y japonés. Nace como una doble herejía: un prosaismo y un cosmopolitismo. (44-45 emphasis added)

Finally, the American critic, Rodolfo Cardona, situates Ramón as being:

a forerunner of almost all of the literary movements that appeared during the first quarter of the century. Through his keen sensitivity Ramón, along with Rilke, Kafka, and others, has been able to intuit the spirit of his age and to express it earlier than other writers. Thus, in his works he has reflected tendencies akin to many of the contemporary movements, without ever being a part of them. (26)

Precocious, prophetic, and seemingly ubiquitous... Ramón... His own *ismo*...

Yet, who is this man? Who is this vanguardist who, arguably, is *the* vanguardist? What are his works? How did he come to be his own *ismo*? How did he come to be a “force of nature?” Despite the tremendous number of pieces he published, or perhaps due to the sheer size of his *oeuvre*, Ramón still remains somewhat elusive. As many critics note, it is difficult to write about a writer who wrote so much. Such elusiveness only adds to his avant-garde appeal and to his cult – be it self-styled or styled by others. Thus, it is as the Argentine vanguardist, Soler Darás, puts it in the Argentine *revista*, *Proa*, in 1925:

“¿Entonces, cómo hacer y por dónde empezar para hablar de Gómez de la Serna?” (7).

Speaking of himself, styling himself, Ramón says in *Ismos*, “He vivido antes de naciesen, y en estrecha confidencia con ellas después, con las nuevas formas del arte y de

la literatura” (9). (Appearing shortly after this quote which initiates *Ismos*, Ramón cites the French symbolist poet Saint-Pol Roux, who, in Ramón’s mind, acts as a precursor to the avant-garde, and who, in turn, aptly depicts “el arte moderno” as follows: “Huir de los hombres para acercarse a la humanidad; acercarse a la naturaleza, para conseguir huir de ella a fuerza de tratarla, y después, entre huídas y aproximaciones, centralizarse como en un punto de intercesión por una sobrecreación amanecida de un olvido que aun se acuerda” (9).<sup>44</sup> To be sure, the avant-garde conforms to this depiction of non-conformity as well. *La vanguardia*: A series of “huídas y aproximaciones” that turn and return.) In truth, Ramón’s personal commitment to aesthetic expression, writing, and *the new* – his turns and returns to these practices and concepts – borders on mania. Given the cult of personality, which he cultivated with equal zeal, some would say megalomania. Ramón relentlessly published and wrote for innumerable *revistas* in Spain, Argentina, and the rest of the world, and, of course, frequently composed his own discrete works as well. Megalomaniacal or not – if it even matters – as an artist himself, Ramón believes that an artist creates the world because the artist expresses what makes up the world: to wit, percepts, affects, and relations.

In this light, the artist’s duty is not to glorify a certain kind of humanity – or him/herself, for that matter – and, in so doing, establish the figure of the human as transcendental, towering over the world and others less ontologically-gifted. (Although, Ramón certainly did all of these things, too, as will be witnessed in his “Salutación”

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<sup>44</sup> In *Ismos*, Ramón also specifically situates Apollinaire as being “la primera letra capitular de todo lo que sucede [...],” and calls Guillermo de Torres’ *Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia* “la guía de ferrocarriles que debe acompañar a este libro más monográfico” (10-11).

below.) Rather, the artist creates in order to level the playing field.<sup>45</sup> That is, so as to create a field of and for play and ensure that it resides on one immanent plane, with the plane of play being no different from the plane of human existence, the plane of the world, and so on. As Geist argues, this leveling is a direct result of Ramón's insistence on and implementation of *metaphor*; in this way, "Todo acaba en un mismo nivel, que es a la vez múltiple" (60). Multiple, yes, but not necessarily hierarchical or transcendental. For, as Ramón sees it, everything can be related and rearranged within, immanently, via recourse to metaphor.

Whatever differences can be related can henceforth be affirmed as well. Such relations do not *level* difference as a way toward the homogenization of life; on the contrary, they demonstrate that life, in all of its different and differentiating phenomenological and ontological manifestations, exists as a relatable ontological phenomenon. This is what makes Ramón's *greguerías* so important, too – maybe even revolutionary:

*En la fiebre reaparece lo que nos queda de cuando fuimos volcanes.  
En otoño debían caer todas las hojas de los libros.  
La pistola es el grifo de la muerte.*

For, as Videla asserts, "Con una mirada agudísima, con una observación prodigiosa, Gómez de la Serna penetra un detalle insignificante y le confiere un valor insospechado" (*Ultraísmo* 21). And, to return to Geist on the matter:

Gómez de la Serna ejerció una influencia decisiva en el arte de vanguardia que se estaba formando en esos años. La greguería, por ejemplo, anticipa el uso exuberante de la metáfora en la lírica. Recordemos la ecuación con que la define su propio inventor: "humorismo + metáfora = greguería." (31)

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<sup>45</sup> Pun intended.

If tropes and *greguerías* such as these also atomized language, and, given that language makes up the world, thereby atomized the world as well, they did not hierarchize these atoms, this world. No. On the contrary, they related atoms to atoms, worlds to worlds.

Still, while all of these analyses, including the current study, speak to Ramón's power and prowess vis-à-vis the avant-garde (and beyond...), they also all arise after the fact, years after the height of the avant-garde, years after the height of Ramón's power and prowess – even though, as Paz says, Ramón still and forever remains *new*. With this in mind, and in order to perhaps more effectively, more intimately, gauge Ramón's stature and purview, we will first examine here how he is presented in the homage provided him by the (in their mind nearly peerless) *martinfierristas* in the nineteenth issue of *Martín Fierro* from July of 1925.<sup>46</sup> From there, we will then look at how the man, the myth, the legend sends the avant-garde off on its glorious, failed, apolitical, dutifully politicized, humanizing, and dehumanizing trajectory in April of 1909, thanks to his article, “El concepto de la nueva literatura.” This article is published in Ramón's own *revista*, *Prometeo* (1908-1912), which is also where Ramón publishes his Spanish translation of F.T. Marinetti's “Fundación y manifiesto del FUTURISMO,” which is also where Marinetti's subsequent “Proclama futurista a los españoles” appeared the following year. In certain respects, these two vanguardists, Ramón and Marinetti, were demigods in their own ways as well – not to mention the fact that both played with fire, if you will.

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<sup>46</sup> This issue's second-leading article is a brief, bizarre meditation on the noble nature of roofs and trees composed by Macedonio and entitled “A propósito de los derrumbes.” As we will soon see, Macedonio speaks to Ramón's greatness later in this same issue.

The *martinfierrista* homage composed in Ramón's honor, an homage to Ramón titled "Homenaje a Ramón," signifies that Ramón would prove to be the only contemporary member of the Spanish avant-garde who received special attention and treatment in Argentina's most significant avant-garde *revista* – apart from de Torre, perhaps, but he was obviously so treated for different reasons. What is more, at this very point in time – July of 1925 – the "Homenaje" dedicated to Ramón also marks the first extended "Homenaje" to have ever graced *Martín Fierro*'s pages. The panegyric was originally conceived to celebrate the Spaniard's then imminent visit to Buenos Aires. However, the trip had to be postponed – apparently at the last minute, and, perhaps somewhat speciously, because of "el gripe." In the end, Ramón would not end up visiting the Argentine capital until some six years later, in 1931.

Despite the letdown – *And what if Ramón had actually made the trip?! –* the *martinfierristas* still express their reverence toward Ramón – indeed, their "idolatría," as Aguilar accurately characterizes it – in exceedingly rhapsodic terms (210).<sup>47</sup> Hence, the homage is written by all as if He were about to arrive: He, the aesthetic messiah: He, Ramón. Within this idolizing context, Aguilar further notes that, "Pese a que muchos de los martinfierristas lo habían conocido [a Ramón] en España, todos parecen ansiosos por el hecho de que Gómez de la Serna pueda apreciar la modernidad de Buenos Aires" (210). If the *martinfierristas* are "anxious," it is because they seek recognition from a man they believe to be a sanctified master: Ramón: "Moisés de la literature," "genio de

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<sup>47</sup> Around this same time, *Proa* speaks to Ramón's then imminent arrival as well in its eleventh issue from June of 1925. This issue includes a brief note on the matter composed by Brandán Caraffa in which he asks the question that surely must have been on everyone's minds: "¿A qué viene Ramón? Hay un solo hombre en el mundo que pueda saberlo" (54).

carne y hueso” (“Homenaje” 131). They, that is, along with their city, Buenos Aires. For as the “Homenaje” puts it, “Ramón era el episodio más urgente que precisaba la ciudad” (131). His arrival was thus meant to signify not only a literary but a very much municipal and therefore cultural event. In other words, the arrival of Ramón on the *porteño* scene was also set to intimately coincide with, or, better said, inaugurate, the official arrival of the Argentine avant-garde and the city of Buenos Aires on *the scene*, i.e. the world’s cultural stage. Ramón, then, would show them all what they all already knew, yet maybe still doubted: their own worth and place in the world of culture. And let us not forget that, save a few key cases, we are speaking here of the youth, of a youth culture which, whether it be reductive to say so or not, was youthfully in need of acceptance from somewhere, even as, or perhaps due to the fact, that these same youths, simultaneously, actively, avoided being, and thought it beneath them to be, accepted by any sort of at large or *mass* public. As per Ramón: he was no *mass-man*, but rather *the man*.

After the “Homenaje” – indeed, directly below it on the same page in the *revista* – Ramón presents his own “Salutación.” Before examining Ramón’s own words, however, it should be noted that the list of *martinfierrista* names who proceed to adulate the Spanish Master reads as a sort of “who’s who” of the Argentina avant-garde of the time: Alberto Prebisch, Gironde, Borges, Ricardo Güiraldes, Sergio Piñero, Alberto Hidalgo, Brandán Caraffa, Francisco Luis Bernárdez, Arturo Cancela, Macedonio, and Evar Méndez. Oddly enough, Macedonio’s words of praise might be the most straightforward of the entire homage:

RAMÓN GÓMEZ DE LA SERNA

Es para mí la figura más fuerte en el arte literario contemporáneo. Su inventiva, la suma de sus realizaciones, exceden a toda otra de nuestros tiempos. También

supera la proporción de piezas de perfección en el conjunto de su trabajo a la de toda otra obra individual del presente. (133)

A full-page drawing of Girondo's is also included. This drawing is intended to detail an "INSTANTANEO [sic] DEL CEREBRO DE RAMÓN" – meaning, it is a drawing of all of the images that are instantaneously connected and at work in Ramón's hyper-active, hyper-connective brain.

Returning to Ramón's self-composed "Salutación," as to be expected, the greeting is witty and cheerful and full of gratitude and sympathy toward those who would have been his most gracious hosts. He mentions the greatness and the great potential of the Argentine literary and cultural spirit as well, which he sees specifically at work in the works of Borges, Güiraldes, Girondo, and Hidalgo. He furthermore minimizes his own impact on the scene, while still emphasizing his own self-styled and publicly-conferred significance, as he humbly, pompously proclaims:

No voy [a la Argentina] en tono profético ni revelador. Voy como adánico emisario que sólo se ha aspirado siempre a devolver algo de su espontaneidad a una naturaleza que era eminentemente espontánea. [...] No voy a revelar nada trascendental, pero voy a tener una actitud libre y heroica en mi arbitrariedad. (131)

This final phrase stands out, in particular, since, in effect, it could apply itself to the avant-garde as a whole, no matter where it may find, no matter where it may seek out, its home to be – so long as this home is not built upon transcendental airs, which, all the same, the avant-garde also endeavored to do.

Now, for at least three reasons there is one other section that should be noted and commented upon which comes from Ramón's "Salutación." It is the section that draws Ramón's remarks to a close and reads as follows:

Lo nuevo tiene que resplandecer en América donde no hay ningún viejo fanatismo que detenga la aurora esperada. Yo voy a augurar con vuestros augures ese nacimiento, a gritar esa epifanía, a festejar el preámbulo a proclamar el respeto que merece el advenimiento que va a consagrarse en esa meridianidad en que se congrega de nuevo la rediamantina luz de la mañana griega para que se plasme un nuevo arte, ciñendo la túnica, más innonsutil y macerada que nunca del nuevo estilo, a la desnudez de la Venus nueva recién parida por los mares siempre nuevos. (131)

First of all, Ramón invokes the work “nuevo,” or some variation of it, no less than six times as he concludes his “Salutación.” (This count does not even take into account synonymous words such as “augurar,” “aurora,” “nacimiento,” “advenimiento,” “mañana,” “recién parida,” etc.) Yet, it should be kept in mind that this continued and consistent invocation of *lo nuevo* arises here some sixteen years after Ramón sets off on his *new* crusade with the essay, “El concepto de la nueva literatura,” published in *Prometeo* in 1909. *The new*, even if it has been found and expressed countless times and in countless ways along the way, is still, as it will always be, sought after and, moreover, worshipped, with the latter evidenced by all of the religious terminology at work here and elsewhere. Indeed, the cult of *the new* inspires, requires, and dictates a devout devotion.

Secondly, and apart from, though also related to, *lo nuevo*, one notices here how Ramón uses the word “meridianidad.” This word and the attendant concept of a *meridiano* clearly had a certain currency to them at the time of *las vanguardias* and were thus used well before de Torre put them to work in his controversial article, and then subsequently, spuriously, attempted to disavow himself of them.

Thirdly, and of utmost importance for the work at hand, Ramón speaks to “la mañana griega” as a point of reference in his “Salutación.” In doing so, he shows the avant-garde’s indebtedness to humanism’s indebtedness to the assumed and adored glory

of the Greeks.<sup>48</sup> For, according to all would-be-informed reports, from the Greeks themselves, to Winckelmann, to Nietzsche, and as now passed down to, inherited by, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, the Greeks represent the zenith: an effected cultural culmination intimately attuned to the promotion of a citizen-based community, which, in turn, bases itself on a common appreciation of beauty, ideas, and freedom: a site wherein the playful and, as an intimate correlative, the beautiful nature of the human form corresponds absolutely to the cultural form that forms and informs it, i.e. gives it its special shape, knowledge, values, and means of expression. Hellenism and Humanism. The promise of culture, culture's promise, a lost and now seemingly retrieved inheritance, returns anew, returning from whence it supposedly sprang – Greece – cloaking itself in the trappings of the times – “un nuevo arte” (131). This “nuevo arte” functions at once as creator *and* creation. “Un nuevo arte” cannot come about without “un nuevo humano,” and vice versa. When the difference between the two is abolished, dialectically or otherwise, or when one becomes indistinguishable from the other, the promise has been fulfilled and the guiding light engulfs all those in the know that are ready to receive it.

Taking a step back, then – this playing field so delineated here does not appear to be so leveled, for some will inevitably be left out. And what of the rest of humanity? What of the rest of a cultural history – one that does not necessarily demand a return to Greek-like life in order to advance, historically and culturally? If the promise remains...open, as a promise imposed and/or exposed, then these questions most often remain unanswered, ignored, and dismissed – or they are answered in ignorant,

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<sup>48</sup> This indebtedness will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

dismissive ways when answered at all by the majority of the avant-garde minority. The rest of humanity – that is, the *masses*, amongst others – and the rest of culture’s history – that is, whatever fails to conform to a certain ideal *living shape* (Schiller) – accounts for very little in most avant-garde accounts on the matter.

Yet, this is most definitely not the case seventeen years earlier, in 1908, in Madrid, when Ramón launches what was at first a very much socially and politically minded *revista*, *Prometeo*. Funded by Ramón’s father and operating as an outlet for his son’s literary ambitions, *Prometeo*’s pages present Ramón and the avant-garde in an embryonic stage. At the time, however, Ramón’s aspirations, as so expressed in *Prometeo*, were decidedly political as well, leaning far to the left. Hence, *Prometeo*’s inaugural “Prólogo,” composed by Ramón, states in no uncertain terms: “Nuestra labor será social y literaria” (*OC I* 143).<sup>49</sup> As he would always come to do, Ramón writes more on the matter:

Suprimiendo las fantasías del porvenir, evitaremos que la actualidad, perjudicándose, sea inútilmente conceptuosa con esa abstracción del mañana; sólo así se reducirá el plazo de las promesas. [...] No somos utópicos ni pesimistas. [...] Acudan a nuestras filas los independientes, los sensatos, los novadores y, sobre todo, los fuertes; no tenemos prejuicio de edades: lo grande, lo original, lo herculino, es juvenil siempre. [...] Nuestro programa es amplio y lo iremos concretando en nuestro trabajos. Su dirección en lo social lo determinará la lucha por todos los proletariados de la vida, utilizando cuantos elementos sanos, altos, y bajos, alientan en nuestro país: queremos que se eduquen los de arriba tanto como los de abajo y, sobre todo, la juventud, que habrá que reemplazar a jueces, patronos, gobernantes y maestros. [...] Y ahora a la lucha. Enfrente de tantas

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<sup>49</sup> Ramón reiterates this idea in a separate article published in the same inaugural issue of *Prometeo*. This article is entitled, “Opiniones sociales. La nueva exegesis. Introducción,” and in it Ramón says: “La cuestión capital, única de la vida – claro que porque es ante todo cuestión individual – es la social, y es increíble que el hombre no se haya impuesto esto lo que debe ser su única imposición, la de solucionarla [...]” (192).

revistas de la derecha, es esta una que quiere ser el campo de todas las izquierdas. (143-45)<sup>50</sup>

A notable difference here are the politics at stake – politics that are not always such a visible, explicit part of anything that approaches some kind of “proper” avant-garde discourse, especially in Spain. What is more, Ramón questions the value of overinvesting in the future as well, speaking to how “tomorrow” – “mañana” – can go so far as to limit life if it functions as an “abstracción” that wields the potential to distract one from what one has to do today. “Y ahora a la lucha.” Not tomorrow, not in the future, but now.

By the following year, however, the narrative changes. It is still about aesthetics and, yes, politics, too. The work is still “social and literary” in nature. But now it is also about the future. A certain kind of future, that is. A future intended to be aesthetically, technologically, and politically fashioned in the name of *el futurismo*.

Before it is about the future, however, it is first about *the new*. Ergo, before Ramón gives voice to another’s voice of the future, he gives voice to his own voice of *the new*. Here we are: *Prometeo*, year two, issue six, April, 1909: the leading article, appearing before Ramón’s Spanish translation of F.T. Marinetti’s “Fundación y manifiesto del FUTURISMO,” is “El concepto de la nueva literatura,” written by one Ramón Gómez de la Serna.<sup>51</sup>

To begin, Ramón’s article functions as a manifesto as well. Given its title, “El concepto de la nueva literatura,” one can anticipate that an active combination and conflation of literature and philosophy will be central to Ramón’s proclamation of *new*

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<sup>50</sup> Significant for our purposes, the “Prólogo” also refers directly to Nietzsche and Schopenhauer.

<sup>51</sup> Since so much has already been said, and will continue to be said, in the future, about Marinetti and futurism, our immediate attention will first be given to Ramón’s lesser-known (and understudied) work.

principles regarding both manners of discourse – just as it is central to the project at hand. In short, literature will be related to philosophy in new ways. Literature will be conceptual, which means, accordingly, it will be philosophical, in light of the fact that the creation of concepts is what constitutes philosophy. As Ramón himself puts it, “Esta influencia filosófica y peregrina se debe a que la filosofía se ha hecho literaria, es decir, se ha mundanizado, mientras la literatura se iniciaba en filosofía. Justa transformación ya que el mismo arte según Taine es para el autor un pretexto para hacer filosofía” (*OC I* 153). It is this reciprocal and fluid “transformation” which makes the “new literature” *new*.

Thus, from the outset, and like all good and true vanguardists, Ramón is iconoclastic. “Nunca he podido tener una idea aproximada de lo trascendental,” he remarks early on in the piece, going on to add shortly thereafter that, “El concepto histórico de la literatura tenía que decaer. Las cosas vitalísimas renuncian a la reducción de los prejuicios con toda insolencia. Todo adquiere un valor actual sobre el etimológico al desprenderse de todo atavismo” (149, 151). It follows that *literature* and *philosophy* work together as vital parts (read: vital expressions) of *life* itself: all three parts – literature, philosophy, life – express a veritable vitality. If, historically, this has not been the case, this is now how it will be with “la nueva literatura”: “La primera influencia de la literatura es la vida, esta vida de hoy desvelada, corita contundente como nunca, bajo una inaudita invasión de luz” (151).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> This fluid and reciprocal relationship between art and life affirms Peter Bürger’s theory of the avant-garde, which, basically, says the same thing. It is curious to note, then, that Bürger does not refer to Ramón in his study, despite the fact that the latter here confirms the hypothesis of the former...

As Ramón openly admits, this emphasis on life and vitality is borne out of Nietzsche. “Hoy,” he explains, “no se puede escribir una página ignorando a *Nietzsche*. Esta es cuestión capital de ignorarlo o no ignorarlo todo” (152). Yet, Ramón also maintains that Nietzsche and his works are not necessarily in themselves *new*, but rather give back to us what had somehow gone missing: namely, our vitality, our humanity: “Nietzsche no nos ha regalado nada suyo. Ha sido nuestro agente de negocios, nos ha hecho entrar en posesión de nosotros mismos” (152). For, once upon a time not so long ago Nietzsche shot forth from his sling a vital arrow of thought – a thought as literary as it was philosophical, which aims for, as Ramón finds it, “una literatura *ideísta*” (154 emphasis in original). Ramón believes he has found this very vital arrow and hopes, furthermore, to show it to and share it with those who, in succession and along with him, will then shoot it off somewhere else. “Pone en libertad; y desde ese momento abandona,” he declares (153).<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, the primacy of the individual is not to be abandoned. As a result, “Toda obra ha de ser principalmente biográfica [...]” (157). Sans a biographical approach, sans an individual and sans an individualistic approach, literature only serves to alienate the artist from his material, and from life as well, which, again, is this material. In order to combat alienation and the estrangement of the spirit, a personal, a *personalist*, style must be provided any literary, if also any aesthetic, work. For, in response to the “cuestión de ser o no ser,” style actively affirms the former – style affirms being (158). Style, that is, as “la vida misma,” “sin carencia alguna”: a vital aesthetico-

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<sup>53</sup> Ramón repeats something that approaches this same idea in a different way elsewhere: “No debe dejarse nada en lo que es [...]. Yo diría que no se está preparando arte alguno, sino la libertad del hombre [...], la libertad idota que, después de todo, es el colmo de la libertad” (qtd. in Aub 150).

philosophical phenomenon that “compromete la complejidad del ser en un orgasmo” (158). (It should come as no surprise that Ramón says here that style is life and later says in *Ismos* that life is *the new*, since style is also a manifestation of *the new*, however self-consuming and banal this manifestation might be. Indeed, modernity/modern/modernism, as the common site, siting, and re-siting of *the new*, can be etymologically traced to *la mode*.) Paradoxically, then, this personal(ist) style operates so as to undo individual personalities in and of themselves by means of a collective, orgasmic celebration of life itself, as *will to style*.<sup>54</sup>

Such a categorical commitment to style, and to the value of “la frivolidad” as a correlative of style, could surely be condemned as being, in a word, *bourgeois*. And for a number of reasons! This essay, a sort of manifesto in its right, is not, not unlike all manifestos, without its own peculiar problematic. In spite of this, Ramón contends that style, to begin with, is not the same thing as beauty – for him a bourgeois term, “que es un término vacuo como el de los Dioses” (166). What is more, and by all means, style also maintains a tremendous social function, so long as it remains aware of the social. That is: “La nueva literatura no puede olvidar que existe la cárcel, terribles trabajos forzados que no parecen forzados sino ciudadanos, gentes que hambread, y diría con indignación que no puede olvidar que existen otras cosas sino hubiera ley de jurisdicciones [sic] y otras leyes por el estilo” (166). The *new literature* cannot forget the social, cannot

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<sup>54</sup> As we will note in the next chapter, Ramón’s claim here on and to *the new*, especially apropos of this emphasis on style and ontological freedom, is, again, not so new, for Schiller hoped that humanity could potentially will something similar via recourse to an “aesthetic education.” In addition, Macedonio Fernández, comes to say something somewhat similar as well, though, in the process, he attempts to undo such a specifically Schillerian aesthetic education.

forget that style, even as it can be affirmed because of its frivolous nature, can also be a tool of imposition and incarceration as well.

For Ramón, then, the *new literature*, *the new style*, operates as a non-privileging distributor of arbitrarities. As “una sensación *biológica, orgánica* – especificando – : *histológica*, sensación de *comfort*, de poder, de inquietud, de mamiferismo, torácica, táctil,” *the new* goes so far so as to touch, and, therefore, express being (167 emphasis in original). In other words:

La nueva literatura es en síntesis lo que dice *Lange* que es el ser: *un centro específico de fuerzas*, aunque sería preferible llamarlo un cómputo de fuerzas. Responde al concepto íntimo y funcional del ser. Todos sus imperativos son carnales y todas sus cosas establecen una sensata y acuciadora correspondencia *orgánica* entre el mundo y el individuo. Ese ha de ser en total su nexos. [...] Así [...] se ha atrevido a parecer arbitraria para ser consciente y humana. (167 emphasis in original)

What appears to be a *new metaphysics* would seem to be at work here as well.<sup>55</sup> Albeit, one that makes itself – *se hace* – solely by undoing itself – *se deshace*; one that becomes by becoming with the arbitrariness nature of the world, that is, of being.<sup>56</sup> *Ramón the arbitrary. Ramón the traitor. Ramón the traitor to the arborescent. Ramón: “introducción del Caos. Caos y realidad inmediata. Rastro, restos. Igualdad. Ramón se presenta como un autor anarquista, dispuesto a relacionar lo más pintado con lo más absurdo; pero siempre con un pie en la tierra”* (Aub 145).

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<sup>55</sup> To this very point, Ramón later states here in the same essay, “Exaltado su concepto, informado por todos los conceptos, hay en ella [la nueva literatura] una veracidad extrema. Ha hecho suya, en un nuevo aspecto, la doctrina monista. Su concepción es la misma del monismo, por eso yo llamo a mi doctrinarismo, a mi modo de concebir la literatura ‘Monismo literario’” (175).

<sup>56</sup> To this very point, Ramón later states in a different essay, “Mis siete palabras,” published the following year, “Se crea la *imposibilidad de deshacer*. Nada más alarmante. [...] ¡Oh si llega la imposibilidad de deshacer!...” (181 emphasis in original).

Humanity, according to Ramón, had thus become estranged from its own essentially *arbitrary* nature, yet holds the promise to return to it via a new literary expression that celebrates all that undoes itself as it makes itself, all that is arbitrary. This way of literature and of life does not necessarily come about on its own, however. Thus:

A la gente hay que imponerles esta maquinación. Este es el gran cometido de la literatura. Las masas, las muchedumbres son una cosa muerta, sin carácter considerada en total, pero tienen la admirable condición de llevar en sí el feto del carácter. La literatura ha de afanarse en esa OPERACIÓN CESAREA. Arranquemos a los muertos ese algo vital que no está muerto como ellos y que palpita en sus entrañas. (166)

The masses must not be excluded from the *new literature*, which, in turn, is also the *new life*, but, rather, on the contrary, must be included; in order to do so, these new phenomena must be “imposed” upon them so as to invigorate them. Give them literature, and give them life. Give them the *AND*. Use a hierarchy, but only in order to undo it: as he says elsewhere, and in what is again a sort of personalized Nietzscheanism, “Para hacerse fuerte, [...] es necesario acabar con la aristocracia, haciéndose aristócratas” (“La aristocracia” 57). If literature should be shared, if even, if only, by imposition, then, it is the same with life. Between life and literature, the difference has been leveled.

Ramón’s is one form, one formulation, of *the new*: to wit, “El concepto de la nueva literatura.” We have and will continue to contend here that it is the first of its kind in the Hispanic world, as so conceived by a Hispanic thinker. From here, from this, is born the transatlantic avant-garde. The year was 1909. The writer was Ramón. And if this call to literature and to life, a call to literature as life, was not necessarily heeded – and, in time, it could be said that it was not even heeded by the man who wrote it himself (though, all the same, how does one heed what undoes itself?) – Ramón’s manifesto surely was of its own consequence – even if this consequence proved to be ultimately

subterranean in nature and reach. If “El concepto de la nueva literatura” is privileged here, it is because it is not elsewhere. The voices of what were once major figures can often go ignored as well.

Meanwhile, Ramón’s translation and publication of Marinetti’s “Fundación y manifiesto del FUTURISMO,” was a truly major, a truly seismic, event – from beneath to beyond the surface of the cultural landscape, from Italy, to Spain, to Argentina, and beyond. (Ramón literally refers to futurism as a “[m]ovimiento sísmico que da vuelta á las tierras para renovarlas y darlas lozania” (“Introducción” 517).) Consequently, Brihuega situates this event vis-à-vis the start of avant-garde in the following terms in *Las vanguardias artísticas en España. 1909-1936*:

La fecha protocolaria [de la vanguardia] bien podría ser 1909, momento en que se publica en nuestro país el Manifiesto Futurista de Marinetti, sin que tengamos a dar a este hecho más significación que la que supone la histriónica entrada en España de un manifiesto programático, autodefinido como vanguardista, con una clara voluntad crítico-alternativa, pero que no se dirige a ningún sitio. Con la publicación de este texto, hecho que se produce por la exclusiva intervención de Gómez de la Serna, en nuestro país se va a dar por primera y única vez una rigurosa coincidencia cronológica con Francia e Italia, donde el texto se ha publicado, respectivamente, en febrero y en marzo de ese mismo año. (153)

In comparison, just as the Argentine avant-garde had hoped to demonstrate that it was up to the times by conceptualizing and carousing *with* Ramón *in* Buenos Aires, Ramón, before this time, endeavored to keep Spain, and the rest of the Hispanic world, up to the times by introducing them all to Marinetti – by introducing to them all to a new and different kind of time, *el futuro*, to a new and different kind of human, *el futurista*, and to a new and different kind of thought, literature, and life, *el futurismo*. As it will be demonstrated in the following sections that conclude this chapter, both Borges and Ortega embarked upon similar cultural missions as well.

## 2.2 – *El Futurismo* – Marinetti

“¡Es que nosotros no queremos escuchar!”  
F.T. Marinetti – “Fundación y manifiesto del FUTURISMO” (Trans. Ramón Gómez de la Serna)

What else can be said of futurism today? What else can be said that has not been said already? What else will be said, in the future? So much. So little. That futurism itself and as such never really caught on in either Spain or Argentina is of little import. For if, in 1909, Ramón attempts to level the playing field in “El concepto de la nueva literatura,” that same year Marinetti and the futurists set out to demolish this playing field and, in so doing, change the nature of the game altogether.

That said, Geist specifically explains futurism’s lack of staying power here with respect to Spain:

Su fracaso [lo del futurismo] se debe precisamente a su contenido ideológico y sus bases sociales: una estética con implicaciones políticas tan claras no interesaba. El mundo artístico intelectual español entraba en un período profundamente apolítico en esos años, del cual no saldría hasta fines de la década de los veinte. [...] Sea ella como fuere, es innegable la presencia del futurismo antes de la guerra; constituye un antecedente del movimiento ultraísta [...]. (30)<sup>57</sup>

In certain respects, the same can be said of futurism vis-à-vis the Argentine avant-garde. Although, Sarlo still contends that, “Junto al ultraísmo, el verdadero jefe de escuela de la vanguardia es, según la importancia que adquiere en las páginas de *Martín Fierro*, Marinetti, a quien se saluda como ‘grande hombre de acción y pensamiento’” (“Vanguardia” 247).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Geist does go on to note, however, that futurism did have a more immediate and palpable impact in Catalonia (30).

<sup>58</sup> The issue of *Martín Fierro* referred to here is number 29-30, published in June of 1926. This issue will be treated later in this section.

However one chooses to construe it, futurism fundamentally marked the transatlantic avant-garde. On the one hand, if futurism qua futurism, futurism as a fully articulated, fully aestheticized, and fully politicized (read: fascist) program, failed to catch on it was because, in the end, from the beginning, and as Geist accurately notes, this program was too political. On the other hand, futurism's aesthetic impact, upon the Spanish avant-garde, as it was upon the Argentine avant-garde, cannot be overstated. In grand futurist fashion, poets and prose writers alike composed hymns and homages to speed, trolley cars, airplanes, skyscrapers, typewriters, and any other sort of inanimate, technological avatar. Furthermore, nearly all avant-garde *revistas*, in Spain as in Argentina, made mention of Marinetti and his aesthetico-political ideas and strategies.

As previously noted with respect to various vanguardists and various texts that are representative of a transatlantic avant-garde, these vanguardists and their texts, together, in creating in futurism's terrific and terrifying wake, saw themselves as being(s) caught up in a battle, a war, for the future: a war against the past, against the past in the present; a war that had to be fought and won for the greater good of the present and the future. For, as Marinetti himself says in the "Manifiesto," "No hay belleza más que en la lucha. [...] Queremos glorificar la guerra – única higiene del mundo [...]" (69). To express beauty is therefore to issue a violent challenge, to wage a war, in hopes that this war will, in effect, cleanse the world. Cleanse the world of the past, and, with it, cleanse the world of past men and their past works – all in order to pave the way, level the current world, for the future and the peculiar humanity of this future. In the end, though, futurism was not concerned with bringing about the greatest good for the greatest number of people; this is particularly the case vis-à-vis Ramón's conceptions of a more collective and

cooperative “new literature” that would arise hand in hand with a “new people.” On the contrary, and despite the fact that Marinetti’s “Manifesto” states, “Cantaremos a las grandes muchedumbres agitadas por el trabajo [...],” futurism ultimately foretells of an exceedingly elitist future – a future that was, in the fullness of time, to come (69).

To start to speak to futurism’s multi-faceted, it also highly selective, conceptions of humanity, what Marinetti and his manifesto intend to show the world, first and foremost, is indeed the possibility of a new, futurist human who lives as part of a new, futurist humanity. The futurist himself says, “dictamos nuestras primeras voluntades a todos los hombres *vivientes* de la tierra” (68 emphasis in original). The futurists are truly alive; everyone else is little more than dead. Furthermore, within Marinetti’s ideal world, the creation of the ideal, living human is and will be an act of aesthetic *and* technological creation. By all means, what is aesthetics if not a technological form? A technique. *The new*. Being “technological,” being “new,” this futurist subject is also, therefore, ineluctably, an aesthetic subject. An engineering and a machination: machinating, plotting, and thereby mediating and narrating, the relationship between humanity and the world, between Subject and object.

With the advent of futurism is thus born a “new technological subject,” as Hal Foster explains in his study, *Prosthetic Gods* (114). Foster also elucidates the ideal futurist relationship between humanity and machine, between life and technology and technique as follows:

rather than resist the machine as a force of fragmentation and reification, he [Marinetti] urges that it be embraced as a figure of totality and vitality – indeed, as the modern paragon of these states. In this way, Marinetti conceives technology not as a violation of the body and nature but as a means to reconfigure both as better than new, more than whole. (124)

Marinetti, meanwhile, styles this new subject as living to the beat of the futurist aesthetic, keeping in time with its own “corazón eléctrico” (“Manifiesto” 65). In these ways, the human is also *dehumanized* aesthetically in a technical fashion and ontologically as a technological being, so as to potentially effectuate a new and more technologically powerful disposition of the human subject. In short, humanity as it was in the past had been destroyed in the present so that it could live up to its creative, technological potential for the future. In short, and according to Geist, “Se crea así la paradoja de un arte que practica su propia destrucción, formando una estética autoaniquiladora” (30).

It necessarily follows that *creative destruction* is a kind of futurist motto in its own right. See this creative destruction at work here, still in the “Manifiesto”:

Queremos demoler los museos, las bibliotecas, combatir el moralismo, el feminismo, y todas las cobardías oportunistas y utilitarias. [...] Admirar una vieja obra de arte es verter nuestra sensibilidad en una urna funeraria en lugar de emplearla más allá en un derrotero inaudito, en violentas empresas de creación [sic] y acción. ¿Queréis malvender así vuestras mejores fuerzas en una admiración inútil del pasado de la que saldréis aciagamente consumidos, achicados y pateados? [...] ¡Pero nosotros no, no le queremos [al pasado], nosotros los jóvenes, los fuertes y los vivientes *futuristas!* (69-71)

The historical human of the past must also be destroyed, or, better still, annihilated, so that a new, technological, futurist human may be created and raised in its stead. In this creative/destructive light, which here is also, it should be said, a thoroughly *dialectical* light, Foster posits that Marinetti’s peculiar move toward the creative destruction of the human “*transvalue[s] the death drive as the very principle of self-preservation, indeed of self-exaltation,*” and thus:

for Marinetti the way not only to survive but to thrive in the military-industrial epoch of capitalism is to exacerbate its fetishistic process of reification: on the one hand, in a Lamarckian-evolution, to extrapolate the human toward the inorganic-technological; on the other, to define the inorganic-technological as the epitome of the human. On the one hand, this is to accept a kind of death; on the

other, it is to stake a new future for “life” in a technology (in or beyond death). Marinetti suggests not only that the best protection against modern mass death is to be deader than dead, but that this reification must be turned into a libidinal process: that we must *desire* our self-alienation, perhaps our destruction, as the most sublime of modern experiences. (123 emphasis in original)

The human as such has thus been remade, made anew, via recourse to nothing other than its own impulse to nothingness, via its own drive toward death; this self-annihilation, in turn, and also at the most elemental and essential level, is meant to be desired to the core, exalted to the highest degree, at once an end and a beginning.

We see the “destructive character” at work in these citations, and in Foster’s analyses of them. But are they also representative of a “creative character,” to boot? Recall now Walter Benjamin, whose essay, “The Destructive Character,” was footnoted in the previous chapter, and who stipulates there the following:

The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room; only one activity: clearing away. [...]

The destructive character is young and cheerful. For destroying rejuvenates in clearing away the traces of our own age; it cheers because everything cleared away means to the destroyer a complete reduction, indeed eradication, of his own condition. But what contributes most of all to this Apollonian image of the destroyer is the realization of how immensely the world is simplified when tested for its worthiness of destruction. This is the great bond embracing and unifying all that exists. It is a sight that affords the destructive character a spectacle of deepest harmony. [...]

The destructive character does his work, the only work he avoids is being creative. (301-02)

And so the “destructive character” returns to a world that is, in effect, “simplified” because it has become immediately, unquestionably, worthy of destruction. That is all the “destructive character” has to do – destroy. In the end, he too is consumed in the harmonious fires of liquidation. Thus, according to Benjamin, this destructive character is never creative. It is not within his/her nature to be so. A creator would construct something from what remains; but from ashes nothing can be created.

While Benjamin does not directly refer to futurism in this short essay, he does in his much more well-known essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”<sup>59</sup> There, he directly critiques Marinetti: “‘*Fiat ars – pereat mundi,*’ says Fascism, and, as Marinetti admits, expects war to supply the artistic gratification of a sense perception that has been changed by technology” – “war,” that is, as the most sublime expression of what, for Foster, is Marinetti’s devotion and drive toward “the most sublime of modern experiences,” namely, self-destruction, death, the creation of creationless ashes.<sup>60</sup> Given that critiques such as these flow through both of Benjamin’s works, and are then later re-channeled again by Foster, we can assume that the “destructive character” is, in fact, in some form, the futurist.

All assumptions aside, the question remains: Are the destructive character and, again, lest us say, the creative character mutually exclusive? In the case of futurism, Benjamin’s answer, if that of Foster as well, is most definitely, most defiantly, “yes.” Yet, in time, and for better and for worse, this destructive character and this futurist, who perhaps is none other than Marinetti, does wonders for avant-garde aesthetics by providing it with a new means of expression and a new ideal of an aesthetico-politico-technological humanity toward which the creator and his/her creations, however ashen they may be, will ceaselessly strive.

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<sup>59</sup> This essay will be treated in depth in the following chapter with respect to “La deshumanización del arte” by José Ortega y Gasset – a work that is, without doubt, also “destructive.”

<sup>60</sup> Foster’s conclusion regarding Marinetti and futurism echoes Benjamin’s when he says, “This crossing of aesthetics and politics, of artistic purity and social ‘hygiene’ is ominous, especially where the language of spirituality is crossed with the technology of spectacle” (127-28).

History would come to tell us of a different story, in time. Or is it the same story, so prefigured by Marinetti? Was he indeed a prophet, perhaps like Nietzsche before him? What Marinetti does not tell us, however, is the story of history – a history, a storied historical condition from which, try as it may, humanity can never really escape, and which seems to return in oblique and unexpected ways when it is actively repressed according to avant-garde styles such as these. For the destructive character and futurism also pave the way for the aesthetic regimentation of life under a fascistic aesthetic-political form.<sup>61</sup> The prophecy is thus fulfilled, yes, but only because it marches to the rhythm and time of history – a phenomenon as fascistic as it is creative, as much a part of the past as it is a part of the future.

Ultimately, what will be left in and for the future? As Foster explains it: “For Marinetti, the answer is obvious: ‘We will have a race composed almost entirely of artists’” (127). Behold here the promise, the beauty, and the danger, intimately, infinitely, and inextricably folded in upon each other, as they would come to be years later in Pinetta and other vanguardists, as they were years before in Nietzsche and Schiller, and even years before that in the Greeks. Ergo, and as Ranciere demonstrates, this supposed

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<sup>61</sup> If it is not immediately clear, we are here twisting the theories of Ranciere, who speaks at length of an “aesthetic regime of the arts.” (See also Note 19). Yet, Ranciere does so without noting that this regime, which, for him, commences with Schiller and is then rearticulated by the historical avant-gardes, ends, historically, in fascism and totalitarianism in many countries – Germany, Italy, Spain, and Argentina, to name a few, which are, of course, all of the countries represented here in the current study. That is to say that Ranciere does not note that the cultural, aesthetic, and political dream that is part and parcel of the “aesthetic regime of the arts” metamorphoses into the nightmare that fascism came to be – that Ranciere, in ways exceedingly similar to the idealists and the vanguardists he treats, is blind to history because history is overshadowed by the grandeur supposedly inherent to such an aesthetic program.

and self-styled newness of futurism really goes back to the past, to Schiller, and, in turn, to Greece:

When the Futurists [...] declared the end of art and the identification of its practices with the practices that construct, decorate, or give a certain rhythm to the times and spaces of communal life, they proposed an end of art equivalent to the identification of art with the life of the community. This proposal is directly dependent on Schillerian and Romantic reinterpretation of Greek art as a community's mode of life [...]. (*Politics* 25)

Still, for *las vanguardias* in Spain and Argentina, futurism was as new as could be. Even if they did not necessarily become futurists themselves per se, they listened to and, in many ways, followed Marinetti's examples.

One year after Ramón publishes his translation of Marinetti's "Manifiesto," Marinetti, at Ramón's behest, writes his "Proclama futurista a los españoles." This "Proclama" is published, in turn, in *Prometeo* in 1910. Here, Marinetti pretends to speak to Spain's self-enervating condition. Before the "Proclama" sees the light of day, Ramón relays Marinetti's intentions in issue nineteen: "Resumiré en ese manifiesto, de una manera violenta y decisiva, todas mis angustiosas observaciones, hechas por mí mismo en una excursión que hice en auto a través de España [...]" (qtd. in "Un manifiesto" Gómez de la Serna 474). As Ramón sees it, such a "Proclama" calls for a celebration, fit only for a futurist! "Y beberemos en vez de *champagne* – bebida de *cocotte* y de burgués disciplinte – beberemos pólvora y electricidad" ("Un manifiesto" 476). "Dust and electricity," indeed.

In *Prometeo*'s following issue, number twenty, Ramón introduces the Italian Futurist one more time to the Spanish public, or at least to the most likely limited number of readers of the *revista*. At this point, however, just one year after writing "El concepto de la nueva literatura," after feeling the aftershocks of futurism's "seismic" arrival, the

masses and multitudes are no longer a part of Ramón's new program of literature and life. On the contrary, he now describes Marinetti and his ilk in adulatory terms as, "¡Crecida de unos cuantos hombres solos frente a la incuria y a la horrible apatía de las multitudes!" ("Introducción" 518).

Marinetti begins the "Proclama" with equal zeal, echoing the first trancelike words of the "Futurist Manifesto," as he here exclaims apropos of a dream: "¡He soñado en un gran pueblo: sin duda, en el vuestro, españoles!" (519). What holds back the special Spanish people? What pulls them back toward the dirty, muddled pool of a mediocre humanity? As Marinetti puts it, the would-be Spanish avant-garde finds itself mired in an "extensa retaguardia de mujeres y de frailes" (519). What should be loved, and kissed, and praised in their stead so that Spaniards may regain their "orgullo conquistador" (523)? Marinetti's answer, in rhythm with the "destructive character," is "simple": "la sublime Electricidad, única y divina madre de la humanidad futura [...]" (522). "Electricity," a living monument of and to a technological, dehumanized glory that awaits a select, young few, awaits beyond mountains of dead (read: historical) matter, which must be overcome. Marinetti's solution, again, is "simple" enough: "¡En cuanto a vosotros los jóvenes, los valientes, pasad por encima! ¿Qué hay ahí aún? ¿Un nuevo obstáculo? ¡No es más que un cementerio! ¡Al galope! ¡Al galope! ¡Atravesadle saltando como una banda de estudiantes en vacaciones!" (524). To be sure, this final image – "una banda de estudiantes en vacaciones" gleefully jumping over a mountainous cemetery – is an appalling, if also an apt, and a melodramatic, if also a terribly banal, description of the avant-garde as a whole. A bunch of students. On vacation. With no respect for the dead. Engaged in an Oedipal relationship with their mother – Electricity, she who must be

loved and worshiped – and their father – Father Time, he of the historical spectrum, he who must be killed. And enjoying every minute of it!<sup>62</sup>

Soon enough, Marinetti's "Proclama futurista a los españoles" makes its fascist foundation clear as well. Indeed, the futurist's first piece of advice is that the Spanish, "1.º Deben exaltar para esto el orgullo nacional bajo todas sus formas" (528). This is what remains after the destructive character does his work – "national pride" – along with the advice that the Spanish also "[d]eben transformar sin destruirlas todas las cualidades esenciales de la raza [...]" (529). Some select Spaniards came to heed these particular words of advice. Whether or not they did so because they came from the great futurist, Marinetti, "el hombre de la juventud enarbolada muy a lo alto" does not so much matter (Gómez de la Serna "Un manifiesto" 473). For, in the time to come, these words would be rearticulated, first by Ortega y Gasset, and then by the *falangistas* that followed in his footsteps, all of which worked to keep futurism's peculiar history alive and destructive.<sup>63</sup>

And in Argentina? What was futurism's legacy vis-à-vis the Argentine avant-garde? We should look to – where else? – *Martín Fierro* for an approximation to an answer.

Marinetti visited Buenos Aires in May of 1926, the year after Ramón was supposed to do so himself. As it was with Ramón, an "Homenaje a Marinetti" is

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<sup>62</sup> A few years later, the Spaniard, José Ortega y Gasset will say something quite similar, if also equally exciting and banal, in *El tema de nuestro tiempo*: "Hoy la gente joven parece dispuesta a dar a la vida un aspecto imperturbable de día feriado" (80).

<sup>63</sup> The undisputed influence of Ortega upon the founder of *la Falange Española*, José Antonio Primo de Rivera – also the firstborn son of the Spanish dictator, Miguel Primo de Rivera, who ruled over Spain from 1923-1930 – will be touched upon again in greater detail in Chapter Four.

composed in Marinetti's honor in issue numbers 29-30, published on June 8<sup>th</sup>.<sup>64</sup> The differences being that this time the donee of the homage actually visits Buenos Aires and that, furthermore, the vanguardist in question is not necessarily at the height of his polemical powers when he arrives. The "Futurist Manifesto" had been translated into Spanish some seventeen years earlier, and, in certain ways, the future had caught up with Marinetti by the second half of the 1920s. To this very point, and in an article published right beneath the "Homenaje," Nino Frank describes the futurist in the following depreciative, if also down to earth, terms: "Hoy Marinetti está calvo y es casado, se aproxima a la cincuentena. Todos nos hemos burlado un poco de su pretensión de crear todavía futuristas, después de la guerra que ha concluido con todo" (209).<sup>65</sup> This vision notwithstanding, Frank also says of Marinetti that, "A los 48 años es aún más joven que nosotros," and that, "Es, él mismo, una criatura de lo absoluto: lo veo muy bien descomponiéndose en la luz, con un color nuevo y humano (la humanidad de Marinetti)" (209). This, perhaps ironically, said of a man, a now frailer futurist, who nevertheless still actively promotes the dehumanization of humanity.

Meanwhile, the majority of the *martinfierristas* hold the *futurista* in relatively high regard, going so far as to call him the "rasurado Mesías de sombrero melón [que]

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<sup>64</sup> Marinetti's visit is previewed in the previous issue in a brief blurb simply entitled, "MARINETTI," and which tellingly reads as follows: "MARTÍN FIERRO se dispone a colaborar en la acogida cordial que un gran hombre de acción y de pensamiento moderno, Marinetti, merece de parte de los intelectuales independientes, con especialidad de los jóvenes, de cuyos colegas europeos el jefe del futurismo italiano ha sido siempre un ardiente campeón. Un número especialmente dedicado y una demostración gastronómica de camaradería, figuran en nuestro programa. Será esta la primera comida de MARTÍN FIERRO, a realizarse a principios de junio" (199).

<sup>65</sup> The next article, situated on the same page, is a reprint of Marinetti's own "Primer Manifiesto del Futurismo," complete with all eleven key principles (209).

atrae el calor de todas nuestras simpatías” in their “Homenaje” (209).<sup>66</sup> The “Homenaje” also speaks of Marinetti as, “Hombre que se adelantó a su tiempo con una acción llena de profético fervor [...],” as, “Precursor de certera intuición [...] en un movimiento rápidamente universalizado,” and, “Como luchador de mérito innegable, como animador de juventudes, como higienizador eficaz de un corrompida estética [...]” (209). In concluding the piece, the *martinfierristas* definitively state that, despite what is at the time Marinetti’s decidedly political disposition, this is not the disposition of the avant-garde *revista*:

Se ha dicho que Marinetti viene hacia estas tierras de América obedeciendo a cierta finalidad de orden político. MARTÍN FIERRO, por su espíritu y su orientación, repugna de toda intromisión de esta índole en sus actividades ya claramente establecidas. Y acaso no sea innecesario declarar, para evitar alguna molesta suspicacia, que con Marinetti, hombre político, nada tiene que hacer nuestra hoja. (209)

Surely, this apolitical point of emphasis would not be lost on the readership of *Martín Fierro*, especially when presented in terms as clear and forthright as these.

The other writers who publish pieces on Marinetti in this issue (29-30) include Sandro Volta, Leopoldo Marechal, and Piero Illari. Also included is a reprint of Guillermo de Torre’s extended essay on Marinetti from *Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia*, entitled “Efigie de F.T. Marinetti.”

In all, in looking forward to Marinetti’s visit, the *martinfierristas* hope to take advantage of this visit in order to articulate their own realm of import and influence on the local and global cultural, though not, as per their approach, *political*, scenes. Like Ramón was supposed to do before him, Marinetti will therefore serve the *martinfierrista*

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<sup>66</sup> One key exception is Macedonio Fernández, whose “Brindis a Marinetti,” though not printed in *Martín Fierro*, is nothing less than a scathing critique. This “Brindis” will be addressed in more extensive terms in Chapter Six.

cause by legitimating all that they claim and desire to be – namely, the distributors, arbitrators, and mediators of all things *culture* within their specific *milieu*. In this cultural light, Gonzalo Aguilar situates Marinetti's visit vis-à-vis *Martín Fierro* as follows:

Traído por un empresario privado en mayo de 1926, su visita puso a prueba la capacidad de la revista de hegemonizar su itinerario. [...] En Marinetti, los martinfierristas imaginarán la posibilidad de establecer un nexo con el gran público; utilizarlo como un 'barreno' y dislocar el entorno mediante una figura célebre con los objetivos que se plantean. (212-13)

Alternately at odds with and in need of their public, for the *martinfierristas*, Marinetti, the powerful polemicist, holds the promise to act as the conduit toward cultural power.

The results, however, prove to be rather anti-climactic. As Aguilar posits, looking back on what did and did not happen, "Marinetti ya no está tan interesado en instalar conflictos como en celebrar el pasado del futurismo" (213). This sense of anti-climax comes across in the *revista's* following issue, numbers 30-31 from 8 July, published after Marinetti's departure. Here, only two articles are published: one is written by Alberto Prebisch; the other, entitled "*Martín Fierro* y Marinetti" and not attributed to a direct author, is seemingly written by *La Redacción*. Also included is a fascinating picture taken at "la comida de fraternidad intelectual organizada por MARTÍN FIERRO" in which members of the *revistas Inicial, Revista de América, Valoraciones, and Estudiantina* are present as well. The photograph is a document in itself, as seemingly everyone who is anyone is there in the picture.

Prebisch's article, in particular, is also notable for a few reasons. First, it is meant to document the art exhibit that takes place at the famed "Amigos del Arte" center and includes works by Pettoruti, Xul Solar y Norah Borges, among others. Marinetti recited some poems as well. Yet, Prebisch's short piece quickly turns into an attack on what he

deems to be 1) a not so discerning public and 2) an out of touch Marinetti. With respect to the former, Prebisch says:

Desgraciadamente, el público es un factor que el artista debe tener siempre bien presente. Su suspicacia es extrema. Mal orientado por una deficiente educación estética, inocente y cotidiana víctima de la crítica ciega, su mala voluntad hacia cualquier intento renovador es indiscutible. Y la docilidad presurosa con que acepta en la vida diaria, toda innovación que concurra a mitigar los inconvenientes de una existencia demasiado febril, se encuentra ampliamente compensada por aquella incomprensible cerrazón rutinaria. (219)

Alberto Prebisch is not the only member of the transatlantic avant-garde who harbors thoroughly superior sentiments vis-à-vis the public at large (aka *las masas*). Ortega will do something quite similar later on in this chapter and in the following chapters as well. Indeed, it could very well be that Prebisch, in fact, is here echoing Ortega, as he later makes reference to the Orteguian concepts of “un arte puro y deshumanizado” (211). As per Marinetti, the invited guest of honor, Prebisch’s words are equally dismissive. He asserts that “la ideología marinettiana [sic] sabe ya a vino pasado, según el paladar de los buenos catadores,” and moves on to conclude that, “El futurismo marinettiano ha sido ampliamente superado” (219, 221).

Not surprisingly, the article composed by *La Redacción* exhibits a similarly disdainful tone as well, at least toward the public at large. With regards to Marinetti, this article maintains that, “Ante todo: nos afirmamos en nuestra convicción de la importancia que Marinetti – principal y más célebre propagandista de ideas estéticas nuevas que existe hoy en el mundo – tiene para el ambiente” (223). With regards to the public, however, *La Redacción*, picks up where Prebisch left off:

Dos años y pico de propaganda de ideas y valores nuevos – dos años en que no hemos hecho [los martinfierristas] otra cosa que sino predicar y ejercitar, no sólo lo que ha dicho Marinetti, sino todas las teorías de vanguardia, los conceptos modernos del arte en general, difundir los movimientos iniciados y en auge, y por

sobre ello, tratar de poner de relieve esa nueva sensibilidad y formar un ambiente de acuerdo (aparte escuelas) con el nuevo sentir – son muy poca cosa para conseguir acortar las orejas de los burros y transformar la mentalidad de millares de cretinos. (223)

As with the piece by Prebisch, these sentiments, as expressive and singular as they may claim to be, represent an entire mindset which, in turn, represents nearly all of the transatlantic avant-garde, notwithstanding its more socially-conscious representatives. This mindset is convinced of the fact that all that it does and disseminates is good because it is new and different, convinced of the fact that the masses of humanity who resist these theories, concepts, and movements – those who resist “el nuevo sentir” – are, aesthetically speaking, meaning, ontologically speaking, less than human, if not altogether worthless. If nothing else, and if not in a direct fashion, then at least due to what he started, Marinetti instills this sentiment of an impeccable and necessary superiority within *los martinfierristas*, just as he previously did within *la vanguardia española*.

These connections between the two avant-gardes – between those that arise in Spain and in Argentina – are, to be sure, a result of Marinetti’s extended and extensive example and influence, along with that of Ramón as well. They are also, in connective ways even greater, even more connective than those witnessed with respect to Marinetti and Ramón, linked because of the transatlantic nature of the aesthetic education of one Jorge Luis Borges.

### **2.3 – *El Ultraísmo* and the Argentine Avant-Garde – Borges, et al.**

“Y nosotros queremos descubrir la vida. Queremos ver con ojos nuevos.”  
Jorge Luis Borges – “Al margen de la moderna estética”

“Ellas [las nuevas estéticas] nos traerán la fraternidad universal, borrarán las fronteras, unirán los corazones en un puro anhelo y comunión de arte.”  
Rafael Cansinos-Asséns – “Los intelectuales dicen. Rafael Cansinos-Asséns.”  
(Interview with Xavier Bóveda in *El parlamentario*)

What Beatriz Sarlo calls “la aventura de *Martín Fierro*” is an “adventure” inextricably linked to what we might call “la aventura del Ultraísmo.”<sup>67</sup> An adventure which, in many respects, starts off in Spain, crosses the Atlantic – most likely via a cruise ship that at the time literally would have been called a *Transatlántico* – and fulfills its transatlantic avant-garde destiny in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The man, *el vanguardista*, who leads this transatlantic adventure is Jorge Luis Borges. That is, the young Borges – Borges, *el ultraísta*.<sup>68</sup>

In his essay, “Rupturas de vanguardia en la década del 20. Ultraísmo, Martinfierrismo,” Jerónimo Ledesma, an Argentine critic, notes that, “La crítica aún discute cómo y cuándo las ideas ultraístas fecundaron nuestro país” (167). After

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<sup>67</sup> It should be kept in mind, though, that *ultraísmo* and *martinfierrismo* are in no way the same thing. As Ledesma asserts, “No debe confundirse ultraísmo con martinfierrismo, aunque el ultraísmo fuera la tendencia poética más definida en el periódico que se lanzó en febrero de 1924. La ‘ruptura’ principal de *Martín Fierro* se afirma en otro plano, que cabe llamar publicitario. Bajo la dirección de Evar Méndez y la ideología estética de Gironde, ese ‘periódico quincenal de arte y crítica libre’ se propuso naturalizar una ficción de mundo que tuviera como *axis* la renovación nacional de tipo vanguardista, el valor de lo nuevo propio” (187).

<sup>68</sup> It should be noted here that, although ultraism as such is, at heart, an aesthetic movement most concerned with and perhaps best expressed through *poetic* works above all, a concern and an expression that might call into question the current study’s pronounced emphasis on “Fiction and Philosophy,” the time of the avant-gardes marks an equally pronounced fluidity in and destabilization of genre as such. Genre, that is, as distributor and guarantor of discrete categories and registers, such as poetry, fiction, manifesto, essay, philosophy, film, etc. Thus, in many ways, the avant-garde fictional works of Pedro Salinas are also poetic in nature; the avant-garde philosophies of José Ortega y Gasset are literary; and the avant-garde novels of Roberto Arlt and Macedonio Fernández are philosophical. If poetry is de-emphasized here, it is only because for so long it has served as the very privileged genre of the avant-garde; and, as made clear from the very start, we aim here to provide new relations to the avant-garde – itself a so-called distributor and guarantor of *the new*.

considering possible answers that would point toward such seminal figures as Vicente Huidobro, Marcel Duchamp, and Leopoldo Lugones, Ledesma eventually comes to the following conclusion: “En esta competencia de adelantados, la fecha oficial del ingreso del ultraísmo la marca, precisamente, Borges, quien introdujo con éxito la modalidad vanguardista en 1921 al volver de Europa” (169). Before Borges returns to Argentina, he comes to know of, write of, and, in many ways, founds ultraism while abroad in Spain. Thus, before ultraism can be treated as an Argentine phenomenon, it must be treated as a Spanish avant-garde phenomenon – one that is both supremely significant and yet, perhaps as it was destined to be, itself productive of no real great works.

Bearing this last statement in mind, Geist’s definition of ultraism is apropos, and all the more so becomes it comes from Borges. “Podría aplicarse al ultraísmo,” writes Geist, “el dictamen de Borges, militante del movimiento en aquellos años, sobre la obra de Herbert Quain: que no pertenece al arte, sino a la historia del arte” (27-8). El *ultraísmo* – also known as *el Ultra* or even more reductively, if also, therefore, more forcefully, as *Ultra* – arises as an aesthetic hodgepodge of sorts that can be traced back to *el futurismo*, *el ramonismo*, and, as noted previously in Chapter One, to Vicente Huidobro’s conceptions of *el creacionismo* as well. French influence is evident, too, especially in the case of Apollinaire and the materializations of a sort of literary cubism that were also emerging at the time. In her extensive study on the *ismo* – one of the few that, to this day, exist – simply entitled *El ultraísmo*, Gloria Videla expands the realm of this French influence, citing romanticism, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarme as precursors as well.<sup>69</sup> What is more, and despite the fact that he was a novelist and that ultraists, above

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<sup>69</sup> Videla’s tremendous study will be of great purchase here in this section.

all, were soi-disant poets, one could also speak to Proust's influence on ultraism. This is especially the case considering the Frenchman's pivotal insistence on metaphor as *the* key conduit in the expression of a (potentially new) life of sensations.<sup>70</sup> A pivot upon which the ultraists, in line with Proust (and Ramón), securely position themselves.<sup>71</sup>

In the end, however, few truly representative ultraist works stand out as what might be considered to be “great works of art” – that is, if any stand out at all. Such is the somewhat sad case of *el ultraísmo* vis-à-vis works produced by their avant-garde precursors and contemporaries, along with those that followed in their footsteps, i.e. the hallowed “Generation of ‘27” in Spain. Videla notes, furthermore, that ultraist works are often omitted from Spanish poetry anthologies to this day (13-14). Nevertheless, exceptions to the qualitative deficiency supposedly inherent to any ultraist work could include Borges' *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) and *Luna de enfrente* (1925), Gerardo Diego's *Imagen* (1922), and Guillermo de Torre's *Helices* (1923). In spite of this, ultraism still matters – to this day. For, as Geist again notes, “si el Ultra no produjo creaciones poéticas de importancia, sus elaboraciones teóricas tuvieron trascendencia y son de gran interés” (28).

Here, then, are a few representative ultraist poems:

Gerardo Diego – “Salto del trampolín” (*Imagen*)

Salto del trampolín  
De la rima en la rama  
brincar hasta el confín

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<sup>70</sup> Videla does not make this connection, most likely because her focus, perhaps as it should be, is keyed in on poetry above all.

<sup>71</sup> In this light, one could go a step father still, and make the claim that Pedro Salinas' short story collection, *Vispera del gozo* (1926), Proustian to the core, overflowing with metaphors, is therefore a (late) ultraist work as well. Salinas and his stories will be addressed in greater detail at the end of the following chapter.

de un nuevo panorama.

Partir del humorismo  
funámbulo y acróstico,  
y cabalgar el istmo  
del que pende lo agnóstico.

La garganta estridente;  
el corazón maduro  
y desnuda la frente  
ávida de futuro.

Y un asirse y plegarse  
a la música hermana  
para bienorientarse  
en la libre mañana.

Repudiar lo trillado  
para ganar lo otro.  
Y hozar gozoso el prado  
con relinchos de potro.

Y así ved mis diversos  
versos de algarabía.  
Versos

versos  
más versos  
como canté algún día.

Jorge Luis Borges – “Atardecer” (*Ultra* 14 (1921))

La vihuela  
dormido como un niño en tu regazo

El silencio que vive en los espejos  
ha forzado su cárcel

La oscuridad es la sangre  
de las cosas heridas

En el poniente pobre  
la tarde mutilada  
rezó un Avemaría de colores

These two poems should suffice.

Now, to begin to examine the ultraists according to their own non-programmatic programmatic words, these words, from the start, are inherited from other programs. See this inheritance at work here with respect to Marinetti and futurism's specific influence on ultraism, as so explained by one of the Spanish vanguard movement's key proponents, and one of Borges' best friends at the time, Adriano del Valle:

Gracias a la generosidad franciscana de Cansinos-Asséns, el Adelantado más lírico y avizorante de cuantos atalayan desde los Pirineos espirituales de nuestra República de Letras, el marinettismo furioso que pedía la demolición de las piedras sagradas de la mecas del arte para erigir en sus solares grandes fábricas de conservas, ha llegado a nosotros atemperado por los balsámicos nepentes de la moderna lírica francesa, que de una forma tan varia, tan rica en matices y tan pródiga en nuestras sugerencias, ha sabido blindar esas torres elefantinas del arte contra las melinitas verbales de Marinetti y su banda de *revolveratori*. (181)

Unlike the Argentine *martinfierristas* who would put forth their own program a few years later after Borges returns home and shows them the potential promise of an avant-garde movement's impact on a greater culture, the ultraists were cognizant of and openly admitted that their movement provided for a certain heterogeneity of both influence and expression.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, in one of the movement's first manifestos, also cited in Chapter One, the Spanish ultraists associated with *Grecia* assert, "Nuestra lema será *ultra*, y en nuestro credo cabrán todas las tendencias sin distinción, con tal que expresen un anhelo nuevo. Más tarde, estas tendencias lograrán su núcleo y se definirán" ("Un manifiesto" 1).<sup>73</sup> Ultimately, ultraism was therefore less concerned with content than it was with

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<sup>72</sup> In other words, the *ultraistas* did not exactly have the same proverbial (and here very much *cultural*) chip on their shoulder that the *martinfierristas* did.

<sup>73</sup> Geist lists the following *revistas* as being the primary purveyors of the movement: *Cervantes (Revista Hispanoamericana)* (1916-1920), *Ultra* (1920-1922), *Grecia* (1918-1920), *Alfar* (1921-1927), *Cosmópolis* (1919-1922), *Reflector* (1920), *Tableros* (1921-1922), *Horizonte* (1922-1923) y *Plural* (1925) (28). Now in Buenos Aires, *Prisma* (1921-

form. So long as whatever was written and produced was new it was ultraist and it was avant-garde and it was good.

Also, as it is made manifest in del Valle's quote from above, the *sevillano*, Rafael Cansinos-Asséns, leads the *movimiento ultraísta español*. He is the first to access and make use of the ultraist's aesthetico-cultural inheritance. Eventually, Borges would stake his claim on this, his own inheritance, and, subsequently, introduce *el ultraísmo* to Buenos Aires. First, though, Cansinos-Asséns, *el maestro, el taumatugo tierno*, shares all that is and can be *new* with Borges and the rest of the group.

After Huidobro visits Spain in 1918, meeting with Cansinos-Asséns and others, everything changes.<sup>74</sup> The possibility of *the new* becomes at once not only possible but, beyond this, absolutely necessary. "Huidobro nos traía primicias completamente nuevas, nombres nuevos, obras nuevas; un ultramodernismo," effuses Cansinos-Asséns (qtd. in Videla 28). From here, *el maestro* speaks again of *Ultra* in what would come to be a seminal interview with Xavier Bóveda that is published in December 1918 in the *revista, El Palramentario*. In the course of this interview, and apropos of *lo nuevo*, Cansinos-Asséns declares: "Hay que ser ultrarromántico. [...] Hay que ser de este siglo" (qtd. in Videla 32). In this moment, and as it will be in the immediate ultraist future, *Ultra* signifies *beyond, más allá*. "We must go beyond, we must transcend what came before us – modernism, romanticism – in order to be poets of this, the Twentieth Century:" these

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1922) was from the beginning conceived of as being an ultraist *revista* as well. In addition, Videla posits that *Nosotros, Martín Fierro, Inicial, Proa, and Síntesis* must be included as well "[p]ara tener una visión acabada del desarrollo y repercusión del ultraísmo" (64).

<sup>74</sup> This visit, this meeting, was previously documented in greater detail in Chapter One.

are the pedagogical words of Cansinos-Asséns; words that can be summed up in one word alone: *Ultra*.

These ultra-pedagogical words were forthwith discussed in the pages of the various ultraist *revistas* and also in person at the famed *tertulias* that Cansinos-Asséns held at the Café Colonial. While Cansinos-Asséns was not himself an aesthete of much repute, he must have been a tremendous teacher.<sup>75</sup> For, soon thereafter, the ultraist, Isaac del Vando-Villar, takes what he has learned, takes the word *Ultra* itself – that is, the word of the ultraist father, as so given down to newborn ultraist sons – even further in an article entitled “El TRIUNFO DEL ULTRAÍSMO.” Witness this aesthetic education and its new, conquering composition here:

#### ULTRA

Y nosotros, que hasta entonces, estábamos helénicamente vestidos de blanco, vislumbramos un más allá en la palabra lanzada por el maestro como un grito de guerra y de renovación.

Dejamos el nombre de “griegos,” con que nos habían signado los hombres sutiles del sur, para trocarlo por el de “ultraístas...” (qtd. in Videla 49-50).

It is no coincidence that this panegyric on *ULTRA* is published in a *revista* entitled *Grecia*. Greece: forever the hegemonic point of ultra-reference! However, as Videla notes, *Grecia* did not start off as an ultraist review (42). All the same, it soon converts to the movement, commits itself to the cause. As part of this vanguardist movement and cause, these specific vanguardists now see themselves as indeed going beyond and transcending their collective (read: exclusive) cultural (read: Greek) heritage and past.

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<sup>75</sup> Borges, perhaps the greatest ultraist student and master of all, and perhaps all the greater because, in time, he comes to reject the master’s strictly ultraist teachings, maintains that Cansinos-Asséns is “el más admirable anulador de metáforas de cuantos manejan nuestra prosodia,” and also promises that those who examine the *sevillano*’s poetic works will come to experience “la más intensa y asombrosa de las emociones estéticas” (“Definición” 52-54).

“There is a new paradigm,” announce the ultraists, “and that paradigm is us.” Thus, *Grecia* and the *ultraístas* who publish within it henceforth get in on the avant-garde game of *creative destruction* as well. “Un grito de guerra y de renovación” is what the ultraists hear in their master’s new words, and, in turn, it is what they then themselves shout out to whomever might be listening. Initially, if not forever, their shouts and screams prove to be more cacophonous than canorous; and whether or not they are more destructive than creative, more warlike than innovative, is perhaps still up for debate.

Despite *Ultra*’s self-professed heterogeneity of aesthetic spirit and manifestation, despite the cacophonous calls made in the name of their clamorous cause, like all *ismos*, *el ultraísmo* cannot do without at least a skeletal set of guiding principles. These principles start to emerge in 1919 – the year in which ultraism itself and as such begins to take shape. The first principle, of course, which is nothing in and of itself *new*, is still, as it always will be, the affirmation of all things *new* and the depreciation, if not, as per the futurist fashion, the destruction, of all things *old*. See this very principle at work in the “Manifiesto Ultraísta” composed by Vando-Villar, published on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1919, in *Grecia*:

Nosotros podremos estar equivocados, pero nunca podrá negársenos que nuestra manera de ser obedece al mandato imperativo del nuevo mundo que se está plasmando y hacia el cual creemos orientarnos con nuestro arte ultraísta.

Triunfaremos porque somos jóvenes y fuertes, y representamos la aspiración evolutiva del más allá.

Ante los eunucos novecentistas desnudamos la Belleza apocalíptica del Ultra, seguros de que ellos no podrán romper jamás el himen del Futuro. (qtd. in Videla 66)

Not just the ultraist’s new aesthetic ways, but, what is more, their very new way of being – “nuestra manera de ser” – corresponds to the “new world” in adequate and intimate ways. The following “frases provocativas y anónimas” taken from the pages of the

*revista, Ultra*, aka *Vltra*, show these ways: “Asomarse a las páginas de Ultra es asomarse a los balcones al infinito”; “Crear, crear, y crear. El arte nuevo sólo ha de tener frente, no ha de tener espalda”; “Ultraísmo: único oxígeno vital” (qtd. in Videla 70-72). This new art is therefore reflected, reinforced, in the ultraists’ new being, and vice versa. Infinite, creative, and vital. It is a triumphant reflection, a naturally “evolutive” reinforcement – an “apocalyptic Beauty” that only the youthful ultraists can faithfully reveal in order to fulfill their aesthetico-ontological promise to the Future.

Vando-Villar’s words, again, echo those of the master, but also, in their own way, attempt to *go beyond*, to radicalize the radical propositions and presentiments already present in Cansinos-Asséns in 1918. Here, too, in certain respects, the master’s words echo those of other aesthetic masters – to wit, Immanuel Kant and Friedrich – especially in the second half of the citation that follows:

Ésta es la manera de ser revolucionarios los artistas, porque estas nuevas estéticas siempre son subversivas y heréticas y atacan al régimen y a la religión [...]. Ellas nos traerán la fraternidad universal, borrarán las fronteras, unirán los corazones en un puro anhelo y comunión de arte.” (qtd. in Videla 34)

To be sure, the words and the promise so envisioned here by Cansinos-Asséns betray a certain Kantian and Schillerian aesthetic relation to and expression of ontology that is, in turn, reflected and reinforced via a certain ontological relation to and expression of aesthetics – which is all at once an absolute duty, an extreme privilege, and a universal feeling of community. A desire that unifies the autonomous with the heteronymous in order to bring about all that can be good, in the name of both art and being, aesthetic judgment and political freedom. This Kantian and Schillerian current that flows through Cansinos-Asséns will be all the more Kantian, all the more Schillerian, if also all the more radical, in the following chapter as it flows through Ortega’s conception of *el arte*

*nuevo*. For now, this current remains flowing and open, as yet another avant-garde promise made along the way, made in the name of *the new*, made for and toward the future. To cite *el maestro*, Cansinos-Asséns, yet once more: “Así, pues, adelante siempre en arte y en política, aunque vayamos al abismo” (qtd. in Videla 34). Ultimately, beyond the beyond so far as to be before it, there exists a caution and a foreboding to the master’s first words, though it be a portentous feeling that is, for the most part, lost upon his students and disciples.

Now, if Cansinos-Asséns is *el maestro del ultra*, then Guillermo de Torre is *el historiador frenético*. In fact, some critics go so far as to say that, without de Torre’s extensive, historicizing, and hyperbolic commentary on ultraism – all of which comes out in *Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia* – that ultraism as such would be even more of a historico-literary footnote.<sup>76</sup> This would seem to be the case. Nevertheless, as a matter of course, de Torre’s words on the matter are, as per usual, overstated. And this is precisely why they should be heeded. Words such as these that are meant to situate ultraism as a historico-literary phenomenon of a certain weight and value; words which, in turn, cite, and thus return us, to Borges, as one of the authorities on the matter:

Como una violenta reacción contra la era del rubenianismo agonizante y toda su anexa cohorte de cantores fáciles que habían llegado a formar un género híbrido y confuso, especie de bisutería poética, producto de feria para las revistas burguesas (1); y superando las tímidas metas de algunos otros poetas independientes, más desprovistos de verdadera savia original y potencia innovadora, se imponía un movimiento simultáneamente derrocador y constructor.

(1) “El rubenianismo – ha escrito muy donosamente Jorge-Luis Borges (en su revista *Prisma*. Buenos Aires, 1921) – empalmando una expresión de Torres Villarroel, se hallaba, cuando nosotros surgimos, a los once y tres cuartos de su vida, con las pruebas terminadas para su esqueleto. Ya sabíamos que manejando

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<sup>76</sup> Videla makes this very point again and again, saying, for example, “El libro fundamental [para el ultraísmo] es *Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia* (1925), de Guillermo de Torre” (10).

palabras crepusculares, apuntes de colores y evocaciones versallescas o helénicas se logran determinados efectos, y hubiese sido porfía desatinada e inútil seguir haciendo eternamente la prueba.” (*Literaturas* 46)

A case of the pot calling the kettle black, as they say, especially considering the fact that Darío is published in *Grecia*. But also, once again, this is a case of making the (overstated) case for a movement thoroughly invested in some form of *creative destruction* – “un movimiento simultáneamente derrocador y constructor.”

As to be expected, de Torre, not content to be merely a historian, also crafts his own manifesto in the name of *Ultra*, creating what he calls a “Manifiesto Vertical.” This manifesto appears in issue fifty of *Grecia* in November, 1920, contains prints by Rafael Barradas and Norah Borges (de Torre’s future wife), and, as Videla explains, “Es en realidad [...] un resumen de las tendencias artísticas, desde el futurismo al dadaísmo” (68). In true avant-garde spirit, the manifesto is basically made up of numerous neologisms and phrases meant to provoke...something – most all of which borders on the incomprehensible, if not the illegible. Yet, unlike most other ultraists, and, of course, being the historian that he is, here in his curious “Manifiesto vertical” de Torre remits to history as a necessary pre-existing condition that determines where *el ultraísmo* finds itself at that very historical moment, i.e. after the First Great War. The weight of this historical condition is apparent in the extended citation that follows – one of the more sensible sections of the entire manifesto:

:: :: ACTITUD  
VERTICALISTA

Tras la bélica convulsión europea, en el panorama ideológico, artístico y literario del Occidente resurrecto, se ha iniciado una trasmutación vertebral: El gran error, tendido como una noche opaca – preñada de sangre – entre los años 1914-1918 – ha abortado una generación juvenil e innovadora que polariza sus nihilismos burlescos paradójicamente simultáneos a sus esfuerzos reestructuradores y renacentistas. Y, en el orden ético y estético, destruye las viejas y topificadas

“ideas-madres,” los crasos “conceptos fundamentales,” generadores de falsedades y aberraciones mortíferas – cuyo reciente ejemplo sangra aún. Allende las fronteras capturadas, al derrocar burlescamente las normas vigentes, y sentirse recién nacida ideológicamente, e ingrávida en el espacio, la nueva generación ultraísta ha ascendido a un medio día más luminoso, pluralmente henchido de inéditas y sugerente perspectivas mentales. (---)

Again, the desires to simultaneously create as one destroys, and vice versa, are apparent.

As much as this “paradoxical” desire might be a part of the human condition, de Torre aptly notes that this paradox is made all the more profound, if also all the more irreconcilable, in the visible, visceral aftermath of the destruction brought about by the war which still exists concomitantly within the extended moment of the new inception that follows.

Coupled with this propensity toward creative destruction, then, comes the ultraist desire to go beyond. The ultraist, though not fully immune to the degenerative disease that is the past, stands beyond and above all that has happened, above and beyond the “Great Error.” Hence, de Torre’s manifesto is indeed *vertical*, erect, with the ultraist standing triumphant at the top, prepared to unleash the new and unknown upon the relatively lifeless masses that lay below him, waiting to be oriented and shaped. The necessary verticality, the natural hierarchy, prevails.

In accordance with this stance, Borges notes in a review of his future brother-in-law’s “Manifiesto vertical,” printed shortly thereafter in the ultraist *revista*, *Reflector*: “Contra esta voluntad de imponer a las fracciones anímicas un denominador común, Torre se alza” (“Vertical” 94). Rather than make things equal, common and shared, de Torre sets himself apart, above, and beyond – just as he should do, given his command of aesthetics, which, in turn, provides for his now obligatory command over other beings with lesser aesthetic capacities who thus lack a certain vitality, to boot. Looking back on

it, this stance dovetails with Borges' overarching literary approach to the world, that is, to his worldly approach to literature, where literature and the world operate in tandem as one common, fluid, and mutually reinforcing phenomena, insofar as Borges, as both author and authority, would always position himself to be in a place that is ultimately, if also immediately, superior to that of his public, insofar as some kind of destinal, transcendental order – an order of which Borges and only a few select others are aware – rules over all, eternally, toward and within the infinite creative, if also destructive, if also repetitive, plane of being. As verticalities and hierarchies come undone, fall apart, and fall down, new ones will arise with a vigor that is at once authentic and apocryphal. For, whether it be authentic and/or apocryphal, a greater order always lies in waiting. This is because, for Borges, “La vida es apariencia verdadera” (“La nadería” 102).

Now, Borges also contends in “Vertical” that de Torre and his fellow ultraists have successfully been able to “crearse una actitud, en una palabra” (TR 94). This is significant, profound, since, as Borges sees it, “he aquí la volición de casi todos los escritores” (94). At the time, in the early 1920s, this is Borges' decided “volition” as well. His “attitude,” his “word”: *Ultra*.

If Cansinos-Asséns is *el maestro del Ultra* and de Torre the *historiador*, then Borges, in time, comes to be both the *teórico literario* and the *transmisor cultural*. With respect to the former, Borges either wrote or signed at least four of the eight ultraist manifestoes published in Spain and Argentina (Maier 44). As the American critic, Linda S. Maier notes in her investigation, *Borges and the Spanish Avant-Garde*, this time was wildly prolific for the young vanguardist:

Between 1919 and 1926 Borges contributed to eleven Spanish literary journals, many of them organs of the avant-garde [...]. In Spain he published thirty-one

poems and nineteen articles in prose – including three Ultraist manifestoes, six annotated compilations of Latin American and German Expressionist poetry and prose, three essays on metaphor, two pieces of creative prose, a book review, and four miscellaneous articles. (43)

Obviously, these numbers do not even take into account Borges' extensive output in Argentina (and around the rest of the world, for that matter) at this same time and in the years to come. In these multiple ways, in Argentina, Spain, and elsewhere abroad, Borges attempts to give order and organization to *Ultra* – to what, by definition, is the *más allá*.<sup>77</sup>

Before Borges ever publishes anything in Argentina, he publishes an ultraist poem entitled “Himno al mar” in Sevilla in issue thirty-seven of *Grecia* in December, 1919.<sup>78</sup> He dedicates this poem to one of his many companions in *Ultra*, Adriano del Valle. At this time, and after some five years spent in Geneva (1914-1919), Borges is living in Spain with his family (1919-21). After moving around a bit within Spain, from Barcelona to Mallorca to Andalucía, the family eventually settles in Seville.<sup>79</sup> That is, Seville, the burgeoning ultraist capital – at least in the rather solipsistic minds of the ultraists, and

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<sup>77</sup> Ledesma also notes this Borgesian need for some kind of order and organization: “Bajo el lema ‘ultra,’ palabra nacida en Madrid para nombrar el deseo de superación del pasado, de ir más allá, Borges había procurado, no sin cinismo, organizar un cenáculo, codificar la polémica e insertar el movimiento en el medio” (169-70).

<sup>78</sup> Before he publishes this poem in Spain, his first ever publication is written in French and published in Geneva in the Swiss avant-garde review, *La Feuille*: the text is entitled “Chronique des lettres espagnoles. Trois nouveaux livres,” and treats novels by the Spanish authors, Pío Baroja, Azorín, and Ramón Ruiz Amado.

<sup>79</sup> Borges' biographer, Edwin Williamson also offers this curious tidbit of information about Borges' time in Spain: “While in Majorca Georgie had had a story about a werewolf rejected by a Madrid newspaper” (70). Yea, even Jorge Luis Borges was once a young man – and interested in werewolves!

their own minds are really all that mattered, anyway. Borges is thus soon to become one of these minds, and eventually becomes *the mind* at head of the entire movement.<sup>80</sup>

Borges' first significant contribution to ultraism comes in the form of an essay published at the start of 1920, again, in *Grecia*, and entitled "Al margen de la moderna estética." This particular piece is now dedicated to Isaac del Vando-Villar, the *revista's* director. The essay begins by addressing the relationship between humans and new forms of aesthetic expression: "Para el hombre y más aún para el adolescente, sobre cuyas espaldas descansa todo lo que posee el orbe de arrogante y de audaz, un nuevo poema, una nueva novela, puede ser una Atlántida, una íntima y estupenda aventura" (TR 37). Here, we see the *aventura ultraísta* at once at work and at play, opening up new and promising horizons for whomever so wishes to take part in it. Yet, this "adventure" is not for everyone. For, "[p]ara la crítica existente" – not to mention those who lack proper decorum and understanding with respect to matters of aesthetics taste – beauty is nothing more than a "rigid," "inflexible," "clean," "harmonious," "clear," and "eurhythmic" thing (37). This is not how it is for the ultraists, however. On the contrary, "la labor ultraísta," perhaps less concerned with beauty as opposed to sheer expression, less concerned with content as opposed to form, comes from a new and different "espíritu," from the "nuevo ángulo de visión que la subraya" (37). And, as Borges plainly states, this "ángulo de visión" is "diametralmente diferente" from other, more common points of view.

Thus, "Intentaré una exégesis," says Borges, in terms at once so modest and immodest that only this young ultraist in particular could have expressed them. Before

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<sup>80</sup> Also, at the time, and perhaps very much to young "Georgie's" chagrin, the elder Borges, Jorge Guillermo, was publishing in avant-garde *revistas* as well, such as another *revista sevillana*, *Gran Guignol*.

coming to what stands out as the essay's thesis statement – a statement which would seem to serve as the thesis statement for *Ultra* as a whole, a movement which, up to this point, was not whole and lacked a thesis statement, a “vision” – Borges does nothing less than presage post-structural theories to come – *á venir* (Derrida) – regarding the very nature of being – as becoming (Deleuze) – when he states, “Hoy triunfa la concepción dinámica del kosmos [sic] [...] y miramos la vida, no ya como algo terminado, sino como un proteico devenir” (38). From this very angle, we see clearly how Ramón was not the only *vanguardista extremadamente precoz*... And Borges' thesis statement? – *Ultra*'s thesis statement? – The words meant to order and organize the sprawling heterogeneity of a rather sub-qualitative avant-garde movement that is *el ultraísmo*? Quite simple, really: “Y nosotros queremos descubrir la vida. Queremos ver con ojos nuevos” (38). These are the words, the desires, of all youth in bloom, all aesthetes in creation. Here, however, they belong to Borges and to *Ultra* alone. For, speaking now a few months later on in defense of *Ultra*, “Nosotros no queremos reflejar la realidad tangible. Nos elevamos sobre ella hacia otra realidad del espíritu, siempre evolucionando [...]” (“Réplica” [Última hora] TR 88). These are the words of a superior race of artists who wield the capacity to transcend reality itself, if only in order to give it form, if only to hegemonize the autonomy of the creators and, what is seemingly the same, their creations.

And, yet, these are not even Borges' choicest words regarding *Ultra*. These words can be found in his “Manifiesto del Ultra,” published by the Mallorcan *revista*, *Baleares*, the following year in February 1921.<sup>81</sup> There are four names attached to this particular

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<sup>81</sup> We of the current study are thus in agreement with Maier, who asserts, “Borges presents perhaps his most effective analogy in the *Baleares* manifesto (1921), which is

manifesto – Jacobo Suareda, Fortunio Bonanova, Juan Alomar, Jorge Luis Borges – yet the piece is unmistakably composed by the man whose name is listed last on what is, to be sure, a very short list. The manifesto commences by establishing a strict dichotomy between two essentially distinct approaches to aesthetic creation:

Existen dos estéticas: la estética pasiva de los espejos y la estética activa de los prismas. Guiado por la primera, el arte se transforma en una copia de la objetividad del medio ambiente o de la historia psíquica del individuo. Guiado por la segunda. El arte se redime, hace del mundo su instrumento, y forja – más allá de las cárceles espaciales y temporales – su visión personal.

Esta es la estética del Ultra. (*TR* 106)

In order to actively and adequately express according to a truly creative and aesthetic “vision,” one must not only overcome the objective world and make of it, in what is very much a creationist fashion, the artist’s own malleable object, but one must also overcome the past itself, dismissing it to the dustbin of history. “Y, para conquistar esta visión,” postulates Borges, “es menester arrojar todo lo pretérito por la borda. Todo [...]. Todo, hasta arquitectar cada uno de nosotros su creación subjetiva” (106). The Subject as Artist as Ultraist, an autonomous being at play and at work and whose inalienable autonomy is reflected and reinforced by the autonomy inherent to aesthetics as such, stands above and beyond the world providing it “living shape” (Schiller/*Bildung*) according to his/her own creative, that is, subjective, desires and whims.

These connections to Huidobro’s creationism and Schiller’s general aesthetic program are significant; so too is the fact that Borges directly cites “el compañero Nietzsche” here as well (107). Because, despite the fact that Borges actively dismisses a certain kind of history here, i.e. History itself, he also maintains the following regarding

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perhaps the least known and least polemical of the three manifestoes published in Spain” (44-45).

what might be called an aesthetic history: “Los ultraístas han existido siempre: son los que, adelantándose a su era, han aportado al mundo aspectos y expresiones nuevas. A ellos debemos la existencia de la evolución, que es la *vitalidad de las cosas*” (107 emphasis in original). In no uncertain terms, if the ultraists “have always existed” it is as the privileged distributors of culture’s aesthetic promise, aka aesthetics’ cultural promise, as so elucidated in the previous chapter. To return to this promise’s propositions: A lesser culture must be overcome so that a more promising, a more proper, Culture may reign instead, with the latter benefitting immensely from the true aesthetes of being that are at its forefront, and thus at its command.

Nevertheless, Borges still holds to the claim that he and his fellow contemporary ultraists do indeed create in new and different ways – that is, according to new means of expression. “La sensibilidad, la sentimentalidad son eternamente las mismas. No pretendemos rectificar el alma, ni siquiera la naturaleza. Lo que renovamos son los medios de expresión” (107). Although such a statement contradicts what Borges and other ultraists say elsewhere, insofar as he downplays the ways in which *Ultra* potentially creates new beings, new sensations, and, hence, new beings of sensation, he still believes that ultraism’s greatest and most innovative means of expression is the *metaphor*. (Never mind the fact that, as mentioned in Chapter One, Aristotle speaks at length to the glory and the power of metaphor in *Poetics*.)

In a different essay entitled “Anatomía de mi Ultra,” published a few months later in *Ultra*, Borges defines metaphor as follows: “La metáfora: esa curva verbal que traza siempre entre dos puntos – espirituales – el camino más breve” (*TR* 118). When this essay is published, in May of 1921, the Borges family is now back in Buenos Aires,

having returned home a few months before in March. As Borges continues to publish in Spanish avant-garde *revistas*, he starts to publish in Buenos Aires *revistas* as well, though, at this point, these latter *revistas* are not necessarily avant-garde in nature.<sup>82</sup> This change in orientation, however, is *a venir*... In the meantime, Borges writes his first essay on metaphor, entitled “La metáfora,” after returning to Buenos Aires, though it is published in the Spanish *revista*, *Cosmópolis*. On that account, we will briefly speak here about metaphor in particular before moving on to chronicle Borges’ (and ultraism’s) impact on what was then a very much nascent, if perhaps totally absent, avant-garde *milieu* in Buenos Aires.

Metaphor. What a world, what a word. What a word because of how it works upon the world – Oh, how it works upon a world made of words in order to make them all – world and word – signify something new by connecting them to something different, thereby undermining any sort of standardized  $A=B$  system of signification that might rule over all language, all concept of “world,” in the first place. Metaphor actively overrules, insofar as it undoes what heretofore ruled. Metaphor: a super-creative destroyer of rigid hierarchies of signification; a re-distributor of the sensible (Ranciere); a comparison – that is, a new relation – between two seemingly unlike things or phenomena.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Borges’ first two pieces published in the *revistas* of his homeland are essays on ultraism that also include poetic examples from the movement. The first piece, “Ultraísmo,” is published in *El Diario Español* on October 23, 1921. The second, also titled “Ultraísmo,” is published in the comparatively speaking much more widely read *revista*, *Nosotros*, in December 1921. Between the publications of these two essays, Borges and other ultraists, Argentine and Spanish alike, publish their own avant-garde *revista*, the “*revista mural*,” *Prisma*, in November-December of the same year. Its “Proclama” is then later reproduced in *Ultra* on January 1, 1922. The *Nosotros* piece and *Prisma* will be explored in greater depth anon.

<sup>83</sup> In other words, here those of Ledesma: “La metáfora, en primer término, es una infracción admitida, una licencia, del código retórico. Pero convertida en principio

For Borges, all language, insofar as it is in some way explanatory and/or relational, is necessarily metaphorical:

¿Cómo creer que una cosa pueda ser la realidad de otra, o que haya sensaciones trastocables – definitivamente – en otras sensaciones? Así, cuando un geómetra afirma que la luna es una cantidad extensa en las tres dimensiones, su expresión no es menos metafórica que la de Nietzsche cuando prefiere definirla como un gato que anda por los tejados. En ambos casos se tiende un nexo desde la luna (síntesis de percepciones visuales) hacia otra cosa [...]. (“La metáfora” [*Cosmópolis*] TR 140-41)

Apart from again taking advantage of the opportunity here to cite Nietzsche, Borges points to the idea, if also the reality, that any definition, even that of metaphor itself, is, by definition, metaphorical.<sup>84</sup> “Definamos, pues, la metáfora,” he says, “como una identificación voluntaria de dos o más conceptos distintos” (141). Ergo, metaphor abounds; it is common property, too, since it is necessarily a property common to language itself.

Be that as it may, some metaphors are better than others. Some are more forceful, just as some are also more forced. The most forceful, the best metaphors, the newest and strongest relations, can only be tapped into and expressed by a certain select few. As Borges explains it, via metaphor, these few wield the capacity to change the nature of objective reality, thereby overruling standardized notions of said objective reality that

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dominante de la realidad poética, somete al texto a una inestabilidad semántica permanente. El efecto rupturista de la relación metafórica es más visible en el caso específico de las comparaciones metafóricas, que tienden a disolver la jerarquía convencional entre comparado y comparante. [...] En suma, la metáfora, por su solo imperio, procura al poeta la deseada invención autónoma, al tiempo que desorienta a los lectores, indicándoles una ruptura a nivel de enunciados” (173).

<sup>84</sup> Borges also cites Huidobro and *el creacionismo* again in this essay, perhaps doing so in line with Cansinos-Asséns’ tremendous appreciation of *el creacionista*. After speaking of metaphors as creationist forces that “tratan hechos nuevos que se añaden al mundo,” Borges asserts, “Considerada así la metáfora asume el carácter religioso y demiúrgico que tuvo en sus principios, y el creacionismo – al menos en teoría – se justifica plenamente” (141).

come out of thinkers like Berkeley and Kant (147). In other words, via metaphor, “la realidad objetiva [...] se contorsiona hasta plasmarse en una nueva realidad. Realidad tan asentada y brillante, que desplaza la inicial impresión que la engendró [...]” (147).

Ledesma thus presents metaphor’s importance to ultraism and its literary legacy as follows:

Para el ultraísmo: “literatura=lírica y lírica=metáfora. Leído como atrofia retórica y liberado de su tiempo, este programa es poco más que un juego infantil. Pero los casi niños que lo jugaron hacia 1920 confiaron en que les permitiría generar realidades nuevas sobre la experiencia propia. Creían todos en la realidad autónoma del arte, en el antimimetismo como principio de la creación, en la condición heroica y demiúrgica del poeta. Para restituir el poder de este credo, hoy tan devaluado, y el sentido de la ruptura ultraísta, que descansa sobre él, conviene repensar su ecuación fundante: literatura=metáfora. (172-73)

Roughly one month after this essay on metaphor is published in *Cosmópolis*, at the end of 1921, Borges introduces ultraism to Buenos Aires. Or is it perhaps better said that Borges introduces Buenos Aires to ultraism?<sup>85</sup> Either way, “Borges actuó en 1921 como importador cultural [...]” (Ledesma 170). The then twenty-two year-old ultraist does so by trying to make ultraism visible, spreading it around widely and noticeably – and literally. Literally, because Borges’ means of introduction is *Prisma*, a *revista mural* that is meant to be posted all over the capital city, on the sides of buildings and trees. In somewhat un-avant-garde fashion, presenting *Prisma* as a *revista mural*, as a free document, is an attempt to, in effect, democratize and share a certain approach to aesthetics, a certain kind of taste, with as many people as possible. In a letter to *el maestro*, Cansinos-Asséns, that accompanies a few copies of the *revista*, Borges shows

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<sup>85</sup> Both Ledesma and Carlos García suggest that *Ultra* actually first arrived in Argentina the previous year, 1920, when the modernist poet, Bartolomé Galíndez presented it in his *revista*, *Los Raros*. This being so, the *Ultra* brought by Borges – “una suerte de portavoz de su generación” was, lest us say, a bigger deal (Montaldo “Borges” 178).

off his pride with respect to the way he has decided to disseminate *Prisma*, and thus, *Ultra*, throughout Buenos Aires: “Sincrónicamente con esta carta le envió varios ejemplares de la revista mural *Prisma* [...] y en la cual – acaso por vez primera – se ofrenda el hallazgo lírico sin propósito mercantil ni gesto solemne” (qtd. in García 245).

Williamson, meanwhile, documents the scene surrounding the launching of *Prisma* in rather dramatic, if also representative, terms:

Thus – on the night of November 25, 1921, when Borges and four of his friends sallied forth with brushes and buckets of glue to stick up *Prisma* on the walls of Buenos Aires – was born the Argentine avant-garde (although five of the eight poets on display happened to be Spaniards. (100)<sup>86</sup>

Here comes a transatlantic avant-garde, then – one that is perhaps first born when Huidobro visits Madrid, born again when Borges takes control of *Ultra*, born again here when Borges brings *Ultra* to Buenos Aires via *Prisma*, and then carried back across the cross-cultural and cross-current birth canal of sorts that is the Atlantic Ocean when *Prisma*’s “Proclama” is published a few months later in *Ultra*. And though de does not remit to the word “transatlantic,” Ledesma nevertheless maintains that *Prisma* “daba a americanos y españoles un lugar donde hermanarse” (170). Borges created this very fraternal and avant-garde “lugar.”

The Argentine ultraists associated with the first of what would be only two issues of *Prisma* are Jorge Luis Borges, Norah Borges (sister to J.L.), Guillermo Juan Borges (cousin to J.L.), and Eduardo González Lanuza; Spanish ultraists represented include Guillermo de Torre, José Rivas Panedas, Pedro Garfías, Adriano del Valle, Isaac del Vando-Villar, and Jacobo Sureda (García 249-50). (All of the poems composed by

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<sup>86</sup> Ten artists in all were included in *Prisma*’s first issue, so Williamson’s numbers are a bit off here.

Spaniards had been previously published; thus *Prisma* 1 is really a brief anthology of sorts, rather than an avant-garde clearinghouse for new works.) Apparently, around 1,000 copies of *Prisma* were pasted and posted around Buenos Aires – though Borges also brags of a circulation of 5,000 – with other copies conceivably sent to Spain, Argentine cities in the interior, and a few nearby countries (García 244-45). Obviously, however, it is not at all clear how many *argentinos* actually stopped to read the thing.

Despite its democratizing pretensions, *Prisma*'s "Proclama" is pure *Ultra* – that is, somewhat alienating and hard to read. A specific and distinct point of linguistic interest, however, is that every instance that calls for the letter "y" is here substituted by the letter "i." Is this modification significant? Yes and no. At the very least it adds a curious local flavor to a foreign import. As per the "Proclama" itself, it is only signed by Guillermo de Torre, Guillermo Juan (Borges), Eduardo González Lanuza, and Jorge Luis Borges, and defiantly situates itself in direct opposition to "esa entablillada nadería que es la literatura actual" (*TR* 150). These four ultraists then go on to explain their own position in what for us are the familiar terms that follow:

Nosotros los ultraístas [...] queremos desanquilosar<sup>87</sup> el arte. [...] Nuestro arte quiere superar esas martingalas de siempre i descubrir facetas insospechadas al mundo. Hemos sintetizado la poesía en su elemento primordial: la metáfora, a la que concedemos una máxima independencia [...]. Cada verso de nuestros poemas posee su vida individual i representa una visión inédita. El Ultraísmo propende así a la formación de una mitología emocional i variable. (151)

What is in fact new here – new here for ultraism, if not also at least relatively new for the avant-garde as a whole – is the way in which the "Proclama" concludes, explaining its "democratizing" and beatifying intentions:

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<sup>87</sup> Meaning, literally, something like what would be the English neologism, "deanankylose," which comes from "ankylosis," meaning, "abnormal stiffening and immobility of a joint due to fusion of the bones."

Hemos lanzado *Prisma* para democratizar esas normas [estéticas]. Hemos embanderado de poemas las calles, hemos iluminado con lámparas verbales vuestro camino, hemos ceñido vuestros muros con enredaderas de versos: Que ellos, izados como gritos, vivan la momentánea eternidad de todas las cosas, i sea comparable su belleza davidosa i transitoria, a la de un jardín vislumbrando [sic] a la música desparramada por una abierta ventana y que colma todo el paisaje.  
(152)

Here, at least according to the ultraists' seemingly sincere and pure designs, we see the fusion of art and everyday life (Bürger).

Somewhat comparable to ultraism itself, the impact of *Prisma* ultimately contributes more to the history of Argentine vanguardism than it serves to promote discrete ultraist works of critical weight and value. After all, the *revista* only had two issues total.<sup>88</sup> And even Borges' own ultraist collections of poetry, *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) and *Luna de enfrente* (1925), receive mixed reviews at the time and, furthermore, were later dismissed by their author as being rather inconsequential. Nevertheless, *Prisma* sets the stage for the *vanguardismo argentino* that follows – and this, in no small part, is thanks to the works of the *ultraísta*, Jorge Luis Borges.

Borges does not stop with *Prisma*, of course. At the end of the same year that sees the publication of *Prisma* (1921), Borges publishes an essay on *Ultra*, along with an addended short collection of ultraist poems, in the relatively widely read Argentine *revista*, *Nosotros*. This essay is also of particular import because it is here that Borges lays out the clearest and most concise explanation of *Ultra*'s guiding aesthetic principles:

- 1) Reducción de la lírica a su elemento primordial: la metáfora.
- 2) Tachadura de las frases medianeras, los nexos, y los adjetivos inútiles.

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<sup>88</sup> Eleven different artists contributed to the second issue: from the previous issue, Norah Borges, González Lanuza, J.L. Borges, Guillermo Juan (Borges), del Valle, de Torre, and Sureda; new ultraists include the Argentine, Francisco M. Piñero, and two Uruguayans, Yépez Alvear and Salvador Reyes (García 250-51).

- 3) Abolición de los trebejos ornamentales, el confesionalismo, la circunstanciación, las prédicas, y la nebulosidad rebuscada.
- 4) Síntesis de dos o más imágenes en una, que ensancha de ese modo su facultad de sugerencia. (“Ultraísmo” [*Nosotros*] TR 156-57)

The poems that follow are composed by Garfías, Gerardo Diego, Guillermo Juan (Borges), Juan Las (aka Rafael Cansinos-Asséns), Heliodoro Puche (Spanish), and Ernesto López-Parra (Spanish) – all poems that are written by Spaniards, save the one published by Borges’ Argentine cousin.

After *Prisma* ends, Borges then goes on to start the “primera época” of a *revista* called *Proa*. *Proa* is (supposedly) co-founded by Macedonio Fernández, but only lasts for three issues, until July of 1923. Around this same time, Borges was supposed to act as one of the founders of *Inicial* as well, but had to back out of the position. Meanwhile, the more prosperous “segunda época” of *Proa* commences in August of 1924 – that is, the same year as the founding of *Martín Fierro* – is this time directed by Borges, Alfredo Brandán Caraffa, Pablo Rojas Paz (who eventually leaves his position in August, 1925), and Ricardo Güiraldes. *Proa* (2<sup>a</sup> época), as it is commonly known, lasts for roughly one and a half years.<sup>89</sup> Ledesma aptly characterizes *Proa*’s second run as follows:

De algún modo, esta segunda *Proa* venía a atemperar el espíritu antagonista y divisor que había adoptado *Martín Fierro*. *Periódico quincenal de arte y crítica*

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<sup>89</sup> Though it could be argued that *Martín Fierro* is grossly overlooked in this section on the “Argentine Avant-Garde,” it is only because the *revista* has already been discussed here, both in pieces and at length, on its own and as a distributor of cross-cultural and transatlantic currents; and because *Martín Fierro* marks a moment in which the Argentine avant-garde turns inward, and thus turns away from its transatlantic beginnings. This decision to focus on other aspects of the Argentine avant-garde, i.e. ultraism and Borges, is in no way meant to underestimate the significance and impact of *Martín Fierro* on the Argentine cultural scene as whole. To be sure, its significance and impact was so indeed so great that it has already been extensively treated in countless other studies; this study, meanwhile, is extensive enough on its own to not warrant yet another extended discussion of *Martín Fierro*.

*libre*, al aparecer a comienzos de ese mismo 1924, y se posicionaba como una opción menos dogmática, más abierta, distante y reflexiva. (171)<sup>90</sup>

The *revista* also boasted of its own *Editorial Proa*, which publishes some of the most importante Argentine works of the era, including *Don Segundo Sombra* by Güiraldes, *El imaginero* by Ricardo Molinari, *Alcántara* by Francisco Luis Bernández, and *Inquisiciones*, *Luna de enfrente*, and *El tamaño de mi esperanza* by Borges.

Transatlantic in its own way, *Proa*, the *revista*, also comes to publish works by such Spaniards as Ramón, de Torre, Benjamin Jarnés, and even Federico García Lorca. *Proa* is also decidedly transnational as well, citing the following thinkers and artists among its “Redactores de *Proa*,” in November, 1925: Francisco Luis Bernández (Argentina), Jore Luis Borges (Arg), Norah Borges (Arg), Brandán Caraffa (Arg), Adelina del Carril (Arg), Guillermo de Torre (Spain), Macedonio Fernández (Arg), Oliverio Girondo (Arg), Ramón Gómez de la Serna (Spain), Ricardo Güiraldes (Arg), Alberto Hidalgo (Peru), Pedro Leandro Ipuche (Uruguay), Eduardo Juan (Arg), Valerio Larbaud (France), Juan Marín (Chile), Sandro Piantanida (Arg), Alfonso Reyes (Mexico), Salvador Reyes (Uru), Fernán Silva Valdez (Uru), and Xavier Villarruti (Mex). This list, like most avant-garde lists of anything, is most likely exaggerated, however.

Furthermore, *Proa* presents itself here in its own words, as written by Borges, and taken from its first issue, published in August 1924:

*PROA* surge en medio de un florecimiento insólito. Jamás nuestro país ha vivido tan intensamente como ahora la vida del espíritu. La alta cultura que hasta hoy había sido patrimonio exclusivo de Europa y de los pocos americanos que habían bebido en ella, empieza a trasuntarse en forma milagrosa, como producto esencial

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<sup>90</sup> Also notable for a number of other reasons, it is in *Proa* that the initial version of what would later become Roberto Arlt’s first novel, *El juguete rabioso*, here entitled *La vida puerca*, is first published in issues eight and ten from March (“El Rengo,” p. 28-35) and May of 1925 (“El poeta parroquial,” p. 34-39).

de nuestra civilización. [...] *PROA* quiere ser el primer exponente de la unión de los jóvenes. [...] Aspiramos a realizar la síntesis, a construir la unidad platónica sin la cual jamás alcanzaremos el estilo, secreto matiz que sólo florece en la convergencia esencial de las almas. Queremos que se entienda bien, que no pretendemos fusionar a los grupos dispersos, malogrando tendencias y ahogando personalidades. Nuestro anhelo es el de dar a todos los jóvenes una tribuna serena y sin prejuicios que recoja esos aspectos del trabajo mental que no están dentro del carácter de lo puramente periodístico. [...] Por esto nuestra revista deberá ser un tipo especial. Ni puramente literaria, ni puramente filosófica. [...] *PROA* quiere ser esa tribuna amplia y sin barreras. [...] No es posible mostrar de antemano un panorama que estamos en camino de formar. [...] Será un trabajo de exégesis y no un reglamento de antemano. [...] *PROA* aspira a revelar en sus páginas la inquietud integral de los espíritus fecundos que viven esta hora. (3-7)

Upon first glance these are, again, by now, rather familiar avant-garde tropes. Yet they are also tropes that are, by design, more tempered and more inviting than those that might otherwise be typical of ultraism (or, for that matter, *Martín Fierro*), so that most anyone can be at the front of the front of the ship, so long as he/she has something new to say and share, and shines forth, as a beacon that at once transcends and incorporates the external/internal divide, a youthful spirit; this is all because, as we shall soon see in the essay, “Después de la imágenes,” *Proa* is not necessarily *una revista ultraísta*, since, by this point, one of its founders – namely, Borges, once the ultraist par excellence – appears to have moved on.

What is more, this introduction to *Proa*'s propositions is further of note insofar as it comes with what, at the time, is a seemingly requisite reference to Ortega's concept of *las generaciones*. This concept is taken from the Spanish philosopher's book, *El tema de nuestro tiempo*, published just the year before in 1923, and which will serve as one of the primary texts in the section that follows, here in the current study. Vis-à-vis Ortega's “biological” and “psychological” definition of a generation, along with, in particular, his thoughts on “the new generation,” *Proa* asserts, “a nosotros sólo nos interesa este último.

Consideramos de la nueva generación a todos los jóvenes, no por el hecho de ser tales, sino porque por regla general la juventud tiene como patrimonio esencial la inquietud y el descontento” (7).

At this point in his ultraist career, and still very much a young man of some twenty-five years, no less, Borges is also somewhat, and perhaps still, “discontent.” The essay that marks this discontent is “Después de las imágenes” – an essay that perhaps could also be called “Después del Ultra.” At least two versions of the essay exist: the first, originally printed in issue five of *Proa* in 1924; and the second, which is incorporated into Borges’ first published collection of essays, *Inquisiciones* (1925). The only difference is that the latter contains an additional final paragraph. This addendum serves as an ostensible critique of Huidobro, though, really, takes creationism’s program one-step further:

Hemos de rebosar tales juegos [creacionistas]. Hay que manifestar ese antojo hecho forzosa realidad de una mente: hay que mostrar un individuo que se introduce en el cristal y que persiste en su ilusorio país (donde hay figuraciones y colores, pero regidos de inmóvil silencio) y que siente el bochorno de no ser más que un simulacro que obliteran las noches y que las vislumbres permiten. (*Inquisiciones* 32)

Of course, Borges can save his harshest critiques for those whom he admires (read: resents) the most, i.e. Huidobro here, Gironde elsewhere, so it is somewhat difficult to read too far into this critique. He also tends to give rather mild critiques to lesser writers whom he personally enjoys (read: who make him look like a superior writer in comparison), i.e. Cansinos-Asséns, and/or conform to his own mythico-poetic program, i.e. Evariesto Carriego. Maybe this, too, then, is a form of creative destruction, albeit one proper to Borges alone.

In a similar fashion, what, at first glance, appears here to be a repudiation of *Ultra* in “Después de las imágenes,” is actually a further radicalization of the program. Indeed, for all intensive purposes, it is not only a Borgesian desire to design the *más allá*, but to go beyond, transcend, the *más allá*, to embrace, revel in, and live out all that is *Ultra*:

La imagen es hechicería. Transformar una hoguera en tempesta, según Milton, es operación de hechicero. Trastocar la luna en un pez, en una burbuja, en una cometa – como Rosetti lo hizo, equivocándose antes que Lugones – es menor travesura. Hay alguien superior al travieso y al hechicero. Hablo del semidiós, del ángel, por cuyas obras cambia el mundo. Añadir provincias al Ser, alucinar ciudades y espacios de la conjunta realidad, es aventura heroica. (31)<sup>91</sup>

Borges himself always wanted to be this hero – an adventurer, a sort of transatlantic, worldly, if not also otherworldly, literary crusader. Instead, however, he would have to settle for writing fantastic stories in which Borges, as author and authority and sometimes as character, to boot, conjures up and writes out characters who would also necessarily fail in what would have been their heroic acts of transcendental accession and acquisition, as they are repeatedly overruled by a greater, more supreme order, by a, by the, beyond. Borges always wanted to be a poet, to live out the ultraist life in life as in literature. He would eventually have to settle instead for writing some of the greatest stories ever, because his own life, in truth as in fiction, is one of these stories.

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<sup>91</sup> Ledesma: “El texto ‘Después de las imágenes’ (*Proa* 2, diciembre de 1924), aparente corte con el ultraísmo y el creacionismo, no es, en el plano ideativo, un corte, sino una más radical refacción del programa. [...] Borges no hace sino elevar la apuesta cuando propone trabajar no ya en la ‘mitología diversa y emocional’ de *Prisma* sino en una conjunta ‘inmortalización poética’ de Buenos Aires. Si se acepta que el mundo es metafórico, es posible ‘añadir provincias al Ser, alucinar ciudades y espacios de la conjunta realidad.’ Es decir, a través de la crítica del imperativo del ultraísta (‘el mundo ha de ser metaforizado’) pasó a sostener que ya lo estaba, porque la consistencia del mundo procede del consenso subjetivo entre los hombres, esa alucinación colectiva recovada a cada instante” (185-86).

Thus, the ultraist adventure – a transatlantic avant-garde adventure – lives on, even in – that is, precisely because of – its apparent failure. A failure that, nevertheless, and in its own ways, cannot be said to not “[a]ñadir provincias al Ser, alucinar ciudades y espacios de la conjunta realidad.”

The next thinker most crucial to the construction of the transatlantic avant-garde assemblage does not so much “add provinces to Being, hallucinate cities and spaces of the joint reality,” as he delineates being, delineates reality, doing so in a strictly separationist, and therefore not a playful, sense. It is not a matter of addition and subtraction, delirium and tedium, then, so much as it is one of this or that, one or the other, young or old, new or outdated, civilization or barbarism, order or disorder, human or inhuman. Indeed, it is all about this transcendental, hierarchical, and antagonistic *OR*.

The next thinker – the great thinker of the *OR* – is the Spaniard, José Ortega y Gasset. An exegesis and a critique await.

#### **2.4 – Ortega’s Designs Of, For, and On a *New Generation***

“Muchas gentes comienzan a sentir la penosa impresión de ver su existencia invadida por el caos. Y, sin embargo, un poco de claridad, otro poco de orden y suficiente jerarquía en la información les revelaría pronto el plano de la nueva arquitectura en que la vida occidental se está reconstruyendo.”

José Ortega y Gasset – “Propósitos” *Revista de Occidente*

“Más importantes que los antagonismos del *pro* y el *anti*, dentro del ámbito de una generación, es la distancia permanente entre los individuos selectos y los vulgares.”

José Ortega y Gasset – *El tema de nuestro tiempo*

According to his own design, according to his own self-anointed destiny, Ortega is perhaps the brightest star of the new, avant-garde generation. This is to say that his star shines brightest, covering the most territory. He hopes and believes that this coverage

extends across Spain, Europe, the Atlantic, and Latin America – and maybe, for a while, it did. For Ortega was a sort of sacred cow then, which, in certain respects, is a sacrality still very much upheld to this very day. And if, up to this point, not much has been said about Ortega, it is only because, after this point, so much will be said about Ortega.

In 1923, one year after Mussolini rises to power in Italy, the same year in which the Spanish dictator, Miguel Primo de Rivera, takes control of Spain via a *coup d'état*, José Ortega y Gasset, the Spanish philosopher, essayist, critic, and all-around self-styled Renaissance Man of the Twentieth Century, is nearing the height of what would come to be his very modern powers, his very modern sway and influence. And not just in Spain – by no means – but across Europe, across the Atlantic, across Latin America, and, in particular, in Argentina.<sup>92</sup> He had already visited Argentina once, some seven years before, in 1916. This visit, highly significant in its own right, will be treated in the following section, thereby concluding this long and adventurous chapter. First, however, a discussion of what at the time and in the years to come, would be Ortega's most influential work within and upon the transatlantic avant-garde *milieu* is, indeed, in order.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> In his study, *Ortega y Gasset en la cultura hispanoamericana*, Tzvi Medina notes that this same time period also marks a great influx of German thought and culture to Latin America. In turn, this steady current of German influence “viene a ocupar en muchos ámbitos el lugar de prominencia que previamente ocupaba la cultura francesa” (31). For better and for worse, the German influence can be traced back, at least in part, to Ortega's assertive dissemination of German thought and culture, a dissemination which flows forth from the pages of his own discrete works, along with those of his *Revista de Occidente*.

<sup>93</sup> Pun intended.

This work, published in 1923, is *El tema de nuestro tiempo*.<sup>94</sup> And although *La deshumanización del arte*, published a few years later in 1925, serves as Ortega's definitive work on aesthetics – an essay that is most key to the work at hand and which will be examined extensively in the following chapter in light of its indebtedness to and radicalization of certain German humanistic philosophies – the transatlantic avant-garde is not merely an aesthetic phenomenon.<sup>95</sup> Its “time,” as Ortega knew, perhaps all too well, is much greater than its aesthetic aspirations alone.

One will notice that the epithet, “politician,” is conspicuously missing from the list of descriptors applied to Ortega above. Though the young Ortega was once quite active in the Spanish socialist party, by the early twenties he has now cultivated “un determinado desdén por la actividad política que consideraba como mero reflejo de lo social y lo cultural [...]” (Medin 28). This, as also noted above, in the face of exceedingly political times at home and abroad. To now repeat and extend the vision of the historico-political *milieu* of the times: Mussolini had just become the prime minister of Italy in 1922; Primo de Rivera would stage his successful *coup d'état* of the Spanish state in September 1923 (just two months after the first issue of *Revista de Occidente* is published); a few years later on, 1930 would mark the start of brutal dictatorship and the

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<sup>94</sup> Though this particular idea will not be treated in detail so much here, one of this book's primary theses, which should, at the very least, be noted, reads as follows: “*El tema de nuestro tiempo* consiste en someter la razón a la vitalidad, localizarla dentro de lo biológico, supeditarla a lo espontáneo. Dentro de pocos años parecerá absurdo que se haya exigido a la vida ponerse al servicio de la cultura. La misión del tiempo nuevo es precisamente convertir la relación y mostrar que es la cultura, la razón, el arte, la ética quienes han de servir a la vida” (56). Life should rule over life, but, with Ortega, and as we shall see, it is a very select type of life that should be served.

<sup>95</sup> This is not to say that *La deshumanización* is aesthetic in its scope alone, for the aesthetic, as free and autonomous as all may deem it be, never really acts alone. Aesthetics creates relations, and relations are necessarily external to their terms.

so-called “*década infame*” in Argentina, also due to a *coup d'état* of the Argentine state; Hitler then rises to power in Germany in 1933; the Mexican Revolution, which had started in 1910, was still, in many ways, ongoing; The Russian Revolution had recently occurred in 1917; and, of course, the First Great War had just come to an end in 1918. In a word, the intensity of the political climate is staggering. Though yet this: the curious, apolitical case of Ortega y Gasset.

Ortega’s “intellectual” biographer, Rockwell Gray, explains the Spaniard’s “disdain” of politics in the following terms: “He still remained a man without party affiliations, for he nurtured the dream that a new politics of national concern would emerge at the hands of the liberal intelligentsia” (107). Whether or not Ortega’s dream of this “intelligentsia” is actually colored in liberal or conservative tones is up for debate, to say the least. Yet, such a “dream” shows that Ortega was not at all apolitical, though he often presented himself in this manner and argued, furthermore, that other intellectuals should necessarily follow suit. On the contrary, Ortega’s evasion of the political tends to make his work all the more political. He wanted political power – try as he did to obfuscate his political desires and dreams, this much is baldly clear – and seemed to reckon that, perhaps, one way to attain this power would be by sneaking up on politics as such in oblique ways, if not, indirectly, from behind.

What is more, the same year Ortega publishes *El tema de nuestro tiempo*, 1923, the publication commences of what quite possibly comes to be Ortega most popular overall publication, his *revista: Revista de Occidente*. Of the approximate 3,000 copies of each issue of *Revista de Occidente* that were published, a good number of these copies, maybe even half, were sent abroad to different parts of Latin America – again, quite

likely on ships called *Trans-* or *Trasatlánticos* – and to Argentina, in particular (López Camillo 60). In this light, given that this was, from the very beginning and at the very least up until the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, Ortega’s very own *revista*, Medin’s seemingly exaggerated interpretation of the man and the matter may very well ring true: “Ortega se convirtió en un moderno Moisés que abría de par en par las aguas del Atlántico y del Mediterráneo y permitía llegar fácilmente [a América Latina] a Spengler, Freud, Simmel, Scheler, Russel, y muchos más” (34).<sup>96</sup> Like *Proa*, *Revista de Occidente* benefitted from its own publishing house as well, which published books from such German luminaries as Husserl and, from a previous generation, Hegel (Medin 34-35). The one name most conspicuously absent from the *revista* and from the *editorial* is that of Heidegger.

With good reason, then, *Revista de Occidente* was quite popular and influential, perhaps as it was meant to be according to Ortega’s designs. Moreover, these designs dictated that the *revista* and the *editorial* be rigorously apolitical, to boot. Of course, the ultraists, both before and during this same stretch of the early twenties, are not exactly participating in *politics per se* either. Something was obviously in the air in Spain. And we mention *Ultra* one more time here not only because it is still a voice trying to resound within and, of course, *beyond* the politico-cultural apparatuses so in place, but also because *Revista de Occidente*’s first issue contains a poem composed by one of the great ultraist poets, Gerardo Diego. *Ultra*, therefore, remains.

To return to Ortega. At the time, he had accrued a good amount of experience as a journalistic intellectual – as an intellectual actively engaged in attempting to engage his

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<sup>96</sup> Note, once more, the heavy German influence, along with the strong religious imagery used here to invoke Ortega and which was also applied to Ramón and Marinetti.

audience – for he had been publishing in *El Sol*, “Spain’s greatest liberal daily,” since 1917 (Gray 107). Yet, already in *El Sol*, and in the face of clear and present political turmoil, Ortega’s ostensible apoliticality comes through, as he “speaks of a politics of ‘cuasi,’ of nothing quite adequate to the situation” (Gray 107). This sense of inadequateness is reinforced in 1923 in the requisite “Propósitos” that inaugurate the first issue of *Revista de Occidente*. Given that “[l]os propósitos de la *Revista de Occidente* son bastante sencillos” – a rather typically understated statement made by Ortega which serves to dissimulate other more profound and complex motives – Ortega squarely situates the *revista*, “De espaldas a toda política, ya que la política no aspira nunca a entender las cosas [...]” (70-71). To be sure, one would be hard-pressed to find a more dismissive and reductive definition of politics and its aspirations.<sup>97</sup>

Tossing all political matters aside, the *revista* itself aspires, first and foremost, to pique what it calls its readers’ “vital curiosidad” (70). In so doing, “procurará esta *Revista* ir presentando a sus lectores el panorama esencial de la vida europea y americana” (71). The *Revista*, as it calls itself for short, is designed to be transatlantic and, as noted earlier, transnational; it follows, then, that Ortega’s supposedly non-political and “simple” “propositions” are, all the same, extremely ambitious. According to these ambitions, these propositions are meant to give order to what otherwise might be an increasingly chaotic cultural world. In fact, Ortega senses that many modern people now sense their

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<sup>97</sup> Ortega further repudiates politics in *El tema de nuestro tiempo* when he states that “nuestro desacuerdo político es cosa muy secundaria, y carecería por completo de importancia si no sirviese de manifestación superficial a un disenso mucho más profundo. [...] El destino de nuestra generación no es ser liberal o reaccionaria, sino precisamente desinteresarse de este anticuado dilema” (21-21). He recapitulates this same opinion soon thereafter, saying, “La política [...] es una de las funciones más secundarias de la vida histórica, en el sentido de que es mera consecuencia de lo demás” (25).

“existencia invadida por el caos” (70).<sup>98</sup> In order to give order to – that is, avoid – the chaos of the modern world, the *Revista* proposes of itself the following:

Nuestra información tendrá, pues, un carácter intensivo y jerarquizado. [...] La información extensiva sólo sirve para confundir más al espíritu, favoreciendo lo insignificante en detrimento de lo selecto y eficaz. Nuestra *Revista* reservará su atención para los temas que verdaderamente importan y procurará tratarlos con la amplitud y rigor necesarios par su fecunda asimilación. (71)

In short, the *Revista* aspires to the formation of a certain kind of controlled, ordered, and hierarchically conserved consciousness – that is, to an Orteguian consciousness. In other words, and as Medin explicates Ortega and his underlying motives, “He aquí la obra de salvación del maestro español, aunque claro está que todo llegaría a través de su propio prisma de selección, y la claridad, el orden y la jerarquía del acontecer intelectual se darían desde una perspectiva netamente orteguiana” (33).

Clarity is here most crucial for Ortega. It will continue to be so for the rest of his career as a public intellectual. Clarity allows him to do just that – think clearly – and it is within the clearly and distinctly demarcated regions of thought, desire, and action that Ortega’s own concepts are able to garner their greatest purchase, their most effective use value. Without clarity, Ortega’s hierarchical nature of thought falls apart, because clarity allows for and promotes distinction. Not so that distinction can be thought and therefore affirmed – that is, as difference – but rather so that distinction can be exploited in the name of the all-powerful and ultra-clarifying “OR.” Clarity allows for the OR to do its clarifying, ordering, and hierarchizing work. See what serves as the basis for the work of the OR here:

La idea de que todo influye en todo, de que todo depende de todo, es una vaga ponderación mística de debe repugnar a quien desee resueltamente ver claro. No;

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<sup>98</sup> Recall that in the previous chapter we called Culture as such a “series of propositions.”

el cuerpo de la realidad histórica posee una anatomía perfectamente jerarquizada, un orden de subordinación, de dependencia entre las diversas clases de hechos.  
(*El tema* 12)

As Ortega sees it – clearly – the times demand clarity as well, and, if one must be anything, one must be up to the times – clearly. Ergo, Being and Reality become One: the autonomous and the heteronymous fuse – if also, dialectically, cancel each other out – so that a higher form can be synthesized. (Ortega, here again in line with the ultraists, deeply desires to both go beyond and to order the *más allá*, too.) This higher form is nothing less than an Absolute ORder that rules over all of life because it so express life’s essentially hierarchical vitality – so says ORtega, if you will. Hence, the *Revista*’s “Propósitos” conclude as follows:

¡Claridad, claridad, demandan ante todo los tiempos que vienen! El viejo cariz de la existencia va siendo arrumbado vertiginosamente, y adopta el presente nueva faz y entrañas nuevas. Hay en el aire occidental disueltas emociones de viaje: la alegría de partir, el temblor de la peripecia, la ilusión de llegar y el miedo a perderse.

Our own trip with Ortega, meanwhile, has only just begun, as we now move on to *El tema de nuestro tiempo*.

Only a few months after *El tema de nuestro tiempo* is published, the Argentine revista, *Inicial*, declares Ortega’s work to be “la justificación filosófica de las nuevas inquietudes” in a collective review entitled “Un filósofo de la nueva generación” (202).<sup>99</sup> We start here with an Argentine assessment of Ortega’s work, for, as Medin maintains, “su impacto en Hispanoamérica fue amplio, profundo, y prolongado” (39). Indeed, we have already seen *El tema de nuestra tiempo* used time and again almost as if it were a

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<sup>99</sup> Ortega himself defines this “inquietud,” here called “descontento,” as follows: “La historia humana es obra del descontento, que es una especie de amor sin amado y un como dolor que sentimos en miembros que no tenemos” (“Impresiones” 38). Ortega has his moments, too, no doubt.

requisite point of reference within Argentine avant-garde discourse. This particular panegyric review goes on to state that life now flows according to, as, a “new current,” and that “esa novísima corriente que encarna Ortega y Gasset no es más que un estallido rabioso de la voluntad de vivir plenamente, concretamente, y que revienta de una vez por toda la rígida envoltura del misticismo racionalista” (203). Ortega takes on, if not, as those aligned to *Inicial* might say, takes down, the entire Western Philosophical Tradition in *El tema*, because he is a part of the “new generation,” the “new current” of vital life; and this is simply, clearly, what he must do.

This new generation must spontaneously conform itself to the dictate of the times, must autonomously think according to the heteronomous stipulations of the times in which it lives, so as to live out this life and think out thought, within these times, to the fullest extent possible. This combination of the autonomous and the heteronomous reeks of what Kant says in the *Critique of Judgment*. This relationship between Ortega and Kant will be fleshed out in the following chapter. Here, in Ortega’s words, all of this means the following:

Para ser verdadero el pensamiento necesita coincidir con las cosas, con lo trascendente de mí; mas al propio tiempo, para que ese pensamiento exista tengo yo que pensarlo, tengo que adherir a su verdad, alojarlo íntimamente en mi vida hacerlo inmanente al pequeño orbe biológico que soy yo. (39)<sup>100</sup>

Thus, in order to live this life and think this thought, life and thought must also do away with the past – in all of its forms and contents. Rather than be thought, the past must be fought, a war must be waged against it, so that life may live up and be faithful to the new times. Ortega:

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<sup>100</sup> Here we can begin to see Ortega’s peculiar take on *immanence*, along with other philosophical concepts and phenomena.

Hay, en efecto, épocas en las cuales el pensamiento se considera a sí mismo como desarrollo de ideas germinadas anteriormente, y épocas que sienten el inmediato pasado como algo que es urgente reformar desde su raíz. Aquéllas son épocas de filosofía práctica; éstas son épocas de filosofía beligerante, que aspira a destruir el pasado mediante su radical superación. Nuestra época es de este último tipo, si se entiende por “nuestra época,” no la que acaba ahora, sino la que ahora empieza. (12)

“Practical” thought will no longer get anyone anywhere, for the times call for a different approach to thought that is, in a word, “belligerent.” A sort of dialectical belligerence, which overcomes by destroying. If it all already seems so *simple*, so *clear*, so that all one has to do is to “clear away” and “reduce” in order to “rejuvenate” one’s spirit, it is perhaps because here too do we see the “destructive character” at work (and at play). This is the kind of life that must be lived according to the times, however, and the youth must lead the way forward. For as Ortega further maintains, “Son tiempos de jóvenes, edades de iniciación y beligerancia constructiva” (17).<sup>101</sup> Creative. Destruction. All. Over. And. Over. Again.

Later on in the essay, Ortega recurs to this same “belligerent” image, extending it, in turn, when he submits the following: “vivir es [...] alistamiento bajo banderas y disposición al combate. *Vivere militare est*, decía Seneca, haciendo un noble gesto de legionario” (35). To live is therefore to engage oneself in a sort of lifelong hostile conflict that requires that one take sides in the matter, positioning oneself on one side or the other of the essentially, eternally, antagonistic OR. The fact that Ortega invokes the need to “enlist oneself under a flag” as a bona fide and, what is more, “noble” call to action portends a certain bird of ill augury, given the fact that Ortega would not so much speak out or take a side when Primo de Rivera comes to power a few months later, nor when

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<sup>101</sup> By now, this should all sound very familiar, though Ortega does have his own personal and, again, peculiar way of expressing his thoughts, all the same.

Franco assumes control at the end of the following decade in what would be an especially combative regime that emerges victorious after a terribly violent, divisive, and antagonistic conflict. That such statements do arise here, all the same, in a thinker who, it bears repeating, actively and openly rejects politics as a phenomenon that only exercises a weak command over and within life is, in short, contradictory. If Ortega does not always show his expressly affiliated political flag, waving it for all to see, the flag he does wave is nevertheless one of timid “belligerence” and Absolute Order, since a life properly lived does so according to a “proceso interno en que se cumple una ley de desarrollo” (23). This law is “belligerence”; this law is destruction. Life therefore obeys the belligerent and destructive laws of order and combats against those who would dare challenge law and order, those who would dare challenge the nobility of life itself.

When a belligerent and destructive approach must be taken so that this approach may be commensurate with the immediate reality in a way that overcomes both the immediate and the distant past, a necessary split emerges. So emerges the OR. And clarity ensues. And thus “*nuestro*” *tiempo* is not all-encompassing, but rather a select “our” that forces and, in turn, reinforces the OR so that it may be made to be clear – in being as in reality. What necessarily follows, then, is only natural, as:

la colectividad intelectual queda escindida en dos grupos.<sup>102</sup> De un lado, la gran masa mayoritaria de los que insisten en la ideología; de otro, una escasa minoría de corazones de vanguardia,<sup>103</sup> de almas alerta que vislumbran a lo lejos zonas de piel aún intacta. Esta minoría vive condenada a no ser bien entendida: los gestos que en ella provoca la visión de los nuevos paisajes no pueden ser rectamente interpretados por la masa de retaguardia que avanza a su zaga y aún no ha llegado a la altitud desde la cual la *tierra incognita* se otea. De aquí que la minoría de avanzada viva en una situación de peligro ante el nuevo territorio que ha de

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<sup>102</sup> Note how any kind of non-intellectual collectivity is excluded from this process altogether.

<sup>103</sup> For what it is worth, Ortega does not otherwise usually utilize this term.

conquistar el vulgo retardatorio que hostiliza a su espalda. Mientras edifica lo nuevo, tiene que defenderse de lo viejo [...].

Esta discrepancia es más honda y esencial de lo que suele creerse. Trataré de aclarar en qué sentido. (12-13 emphasis in original)

Ortega will point to this same necessary and natural split that essentially divides humanity according to its own inherent vital (read: biological) hierarchy again in *La deshumanización del arte* and *La rebelión de las masas*. For Ortega, such is life; meaning, such is being, whether it be human and/or otherwise. Life: divided, antagonistic, hierarchical, Manichean, exclusive.

Thus, while *El tema de nuestro tiempo* is most well known for its exceptional and distinguishing definition of *la generación*, a related concept of Ortega's comes into view here on one side of this division: namely, *la minoría selecta*. This small and select group of people are the chosen inheritors of "our (read: "their) times" – the congenital guarantors of the OR. This is just the way things are: separated, forever and as they should be. As a result, "No cabe, pues, separar los 'héroes' de las masas. Se trata de una dualidad esencial al proceso histórico [...]" (14). In separating itself from the masses according to the "duality essential to the historical process," and in subsequently ruling over them, providing them something akin to "living shape" (Schiller), while still keeping them in their proper place, i.e. below, the select few conform to what destiny has destined them to do: attain and maintain a hegemonic power over others, and over the world itself.

This life below them is the "vulgar" life of the subhuman masses. Ortega cannot hide his "disdain" here either, and the consequences are as real as they are with regards to his "disdain" of politics as somehow being subordinate to the proper level of the real of life. Politics is very much a sub-phenomenon, and, in a similar way, the masses are very

much a sort of sub-being.<sup>104</sup> With respect to the latter, this does not simply mean lower on the ladder, inferior in the hierarchy; rather these differences are biological, an inexorable and scientific fact of life. Not one to hold back when it comes to his aristocratic vision of life, we see Ortega's continued "disdain" in the face of all that lacks nobility – all, that is, that lacks life itself – in the extended citation that follows:

Y entre uno y otro extremo podremos perfectamente marcar el punto en que la forma vital se inclina decididamente hacia la perfección o hacia la decadencia. De este punto hacia abajo, los individuos de la especie nos parecen 'viles': en ellos se envilece la potencia biológica del tipo. Por el contrario, de ese punto hacia arriba se va fijando el "pura sangre," el animal "noble," en quien el tipo se ennoblece. He aquí dos valores, positivo el uno, negativo el otro, puramente vitales: la nobleza y la vileza. En uno y otro juegan actividades estrictamente zoológicas, la salud, la fuerza, la celeridad, el brío, la forma de buena proporción orgánica, o bien la mengua y falta de estos atributos. Ahora bien, el hombre no se escapa a esa perspectiva puramente vital. Es urgente dar fin a la tradicional hipocresía, que finge, que finge no ver en ciertos individuos humanos, culturalmente poco o nada apreciables, una magnífica gracia animal. *Bien entendido, una gracia animal humana*, la gracia del tipo 'hombre' en su aspecto exclusivamente zoológico, pero con todas sus potencias específicas, a las cuales en rigor no añade ninguna cultura. (Cultura es sólo una cierta dirección en el cultivo de esas potencias animales.) (72-73 emphasis in original)

The human being is naturally an "animal," yes. However, non-noble human beings, being the "vile" specimens that they naturally are, biologically "degrade" human life itself, bringing it back down to its more, if not most, animalistic level. Ortega still sees plenty of "animal" in certain lesser types of humans. Rather euphemistically, he calls this their "*gracia animal humana*," and says that "culture" is but one means that is able to cultivate "esas potencias animales."<sup>105</sup> Yet, what is Ortega really trying to say here? Basically, that

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<sup>104</sup> Ortega puts them in these places out of fear. To be sure, he is not the only one to do so at the time.

<sup>105</sup> Elsewhere in *El tema*, Ortega defines "culture" as follows: "Ahora podemos dar su exacta significación al vocablo 'cultura.' Esas funciones vitales – por tanto, hechos subjetivos, intraorgánicos –, que cumplen leyes objetivas que en sí mismas llevan la condición de amoldarse a un régimen transvital, son la cultura. No se deje, pues, un vago

some humans are more human, others more animal, than others. In the end, it is all a matter of simple science, really: simple enough for anyone who has had the proper training to clearly note these essential differences; simple enough for the “nobles” to see in the face of all that is vile and debased. Moreover, such differences can never be overcome. For there exists a “*distancia permanente entre los individuos selectos y los vulgares*” (15). Between humanity and its animals.

The “*individuos selectos*” are people that literally distinguish themselves and, furthermore, are immediately and visibly distinguishable by those who know how to properly recognize different (read: hierarchical, if also beautiful) forms of life – that is, by other “*select individuals*.” In short, only “*select individuals*” are capable of recognizing other “*select individuals*.” Appearances tell the tale, and this tale – perhaps the tale of humanity as such – is necessarily, autonomously, and heteronymously hierarchical in nature. Our visual apparatus of judgment is always capable of confirming this: “*Siempre que de manera evidente percibamos una diferencia de rango entre dos cosas; siempre que al fijar en ellas nuestra atención notemos que espontáneamente se subordinan la una a la otra, formando una jerarquía, es que ‘vemos’ sus valores*” (70). Though radicalized here by Ortega, this concept of an immediate and visible recognition of like forms can be traced back to Schiller. We will make this trace in the following chapter vis-à-vis *La deshumanización del arte*.

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contenido a este término. La cultura consiste en ciertas actividades biológicas, ni más ni menos biológicas que digestión o locomoción” (40). Culture, itself perhaps the Supreme Artifact par excellence, is instead for Ortega a “biological” entity. (A pseudo-science, one might say.) Yet, as noted before, Ortega also insists here that culture should also serve life, and not just the other way around. In short, “*la vida debe ser culta, pero la cultura tiene que ser vital*” (44).

In the following citation, Ortega maintains that another German philosopher, Nietzsche, has helped him to recognize these distinguishing characteristics more clearly as an *individuo selecto* himself:

Lo que acaece es que ya sobre el plano de la vida, y midiendo desde su altura jerárquica, como de un nivel del mar, se distinguen formas más o menos valiosas del vivir.

En este punto ha sido Nietzsche el sumo vidente. A él se debe el hallazgo de uno de los pensamientos más fecundos que han caído en el regazo de nuestra época. Me refiero a su distinción entre la vida lograda y la vida malograda. (72)

In short, Ortega asserts here that Nietzsche has taught him the OR. To be sure, there is a certain Nietzsche that promotes this very kind of thought and the very kind of life that must be commensurate to this thought. At times, and as we have already mentioned before, Nietzsche can be a terribly aristocratic thinker, too. Yet, Nietzsche is also no doubt a, if not *the*, prophet of the AND. In this way, and as we will address this tension in further detail in Chapter Five, Nietzsche is a contradictory thinker to the core. See, for example, what he says in “What Is Noble?” in *Beyond Good and Evil*: “Signs of nobility: never to think of degrading our duties into duties for everybody; not to want to relinquish or share our own responsibilities; to count on privileges and the exercising of them among our *duties*” (210 emphasis in original). See, then, from whence Ortega gets many of his own ideas.<sup>106</sup> Yet, the Nietzschean contradictoriness operates as part and parcel of his own personal will to power, which actively functions so as to both do AND undo the OR. Ortega is obviously contradictory in his own right, too. However, it is never because Ortega thinks of and promotes the AND – other ways to live, other relations, other orientations.

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<sup>106</sup> Indeed, at times it almost appears that Ortega has “What Is Noble?” memorized and goes about rearticulating all that is said therein in his own words...

Moving forward, it will be made clear, again and again, that Ortega's thought formally depends upon distinct and indivisible divisions – that is, depends upon the OR. Furthermore, the vast majority of his *oeuvre* operates as the clarification of what he deems to be natural and necessary divisions – divisions which exist and persist at all levels of life, being, reality, and world. This is the clarification of a profoundly radical reactionary philosophy whose apolitical veneer belies a certain conservatism – an arch-conservatism, in fact, that, eventually, if not at this very moment, in 1923, falls in line with fascism.

Now, we have already worked our way through this extended critique of Ortega and *El tema de nuestro tiempo*, and yet, so far, we have done so with no real exegesis of what, at the time, most everyone considered to be the thinker and the work's most outstanding concept: *la generación*. For Ortega, *la generación* – that is, his conception of *la generación* – is nothing less than the most important concept ever conceptualized in history. Clearly! Thus, like all members of the transatlantic avant-garde, Ortega has his own overstated moments, though their ultimate verisimilitude remains questionable.

Witness such an overstatement at work here in his definition of *la generación*:

Las variaciones de la sensibilidad vital que son decisivas en historia se presentan bajo la forma de generación. Una generación no es un puñado de hombres egregios, ni simplemente una masa: es como un nuevo cuerpo social íntegro, con su minoría selecta y su muchedumbre, que ha sido lanzado sobre el ámbito de la existencia con una trayectoria vital determinada. La generación, compromiso dinámico entre masa e individuo, es el concepto más importante de la historia, y, por decirlo así, el gozne sobre que ésta ejecuta sus movimientos. (14-5)

*La generación*, functioning as the eternally “dynamic” interplay between “mass and individual,” is nothing less than *the* motor that propels history forward. An antagonistic, dialectical motor, which is not in itself new, of course, but rather brandishes a storied

tradition and past, of which Ortega must be familiar. Ortega sees this antagonistic and dialectical motor at work in his present, in *his* “time,” however, and believes that it is working in order to bring about a higher synthesis of life and culture: “Por consiguiente, lo dicho hasta aquí es sólo preparación para esa síntesis en que culturalismo y vitalismo, al fundirse, desaparecen” (82). Thanks to the work of the “new generation,” work, which, as we shall soon see, is quite festive, this “synthesis,” is not only possible but also imminent.

In living out this dialectical synthesis, the new generation fulfills its destiny, completes its “historical mission.” Insofar as each generation is made up of what Ortega calls a “peculiar sensibilidad,” each generation has its own particular “historical mission” on Earth, to boot (19). Something is different about this new generation, though. They are more radical than their generational forbearers; the difference between *the new* and *the old* is henceforth more radical as well. This new and radical difference manifests itself best and above in the essentially *playful* nature of the vital aesthetic works that pertain to the *new art* – in “lo que se ha llamado tiempo hace el sentido deportivo y festival de la vida” (79). Years previous, Schiller called this play drive that acts upon man in order to confer upon him is powerful, aesthetic destiny the *Spieltrieb* – itself is a synthetic drive that overcomes the antagonistic differences between the Kantian distinction between the sensuous impulse (the physical world of sensations, i.e. desire) and the formal impulse (humanity’s capacity for rational and moral thought and action).<sup>107</sup> All of which will be

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<sup>107</sup> Ortega’s indebtedness to Schiller, and by necessary association, Kant, with respect to the *Spieltrieb* and the “aesthetic state” is all the more *political* in an essay entitled “El origen deportivo del estado.” Published in *Revista de Occidente* in 1924 – that is, in the year between the publications of *El tema* and *La deshumanización* – and thanks to some rather specious historical logic, a la Nietzsche, Ortega’s essay postulates that a sort of

addressed in more intimate terms in the next chapter, again with respect to Ortega's *La deshumanización del arte* in 1925 – all of which begins to come out here, however, in 1923, in *El tema de nuestro tiempo*.

According to Ortega's contemporary conception of the generation, then, which, again, just so happens to be the most important concept in the history of concepts and the history of the world, the current generation's "peculiar sensibility," its "historical mission," its ludic destiny, are, in many ways, best articulated via "el arte joven" (77).

That is:

Tal vez el ejemplo que aclara mejor el módulo de la nueva sensibilidad se encuentra en el arte joven. Con una sorprendente coincidencia, la generación más reciente de todos los países occidentales produce un arte – música, pintura, poesía – que pone fuera de sí a los hombres de las generaciones anteriores. (77)

This is obviously a talking point around which the new generation of artists would come to rally – for it is in clearly their best and most potentially powerful interests to do so. It is also, as Ortega further maintains, their very destiny. Be they *mass-men* or otherwise, those that might stand in the way of this destiny that has so been imparted upon and joyously accepted by the new generation of artists effectively hold history, being, and the world itself hostage. They simply do not understand this new generation, their new art, and thus their own destiny as it pertains to *the new*. They see these young people at play, with their manifestoes, and their poems, and their paintings, and their novels, and their

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*"club" juvenil*, active in dance and war, founded history's first ever fully recorded society in the form of the Roman State. This reference to Rome is significant, insofar as Heidegger would later point to Rome as the siting of the first real cultural, political, aesthetic, and imperial manifestation to the human as *homo humanus* vis-à-vis the less than human *homo barbarus* ("Letter on 'Humanism'"). Ortega also calls this initial, playful state, nothing other than "la sociedad secreta," a la Roberto Arlt (271). To be sure, this essay need be examined in further detail in future studies, as it seems to present some curiously Orteguian propositions that, nevertheless, connect a good part of the current study.

*revistas*, but they just do not get it. Until they do, until they see the light, they will continue to overshadow culture's proposed promise to dialectically transcend the ills of the world, if only so that a select few may ultimately reap the benefits.

Though it has yet to be touched upon, *El tema del nuestro tiempo* is also very much a treatise on and in favor of a certain Orteguian perspectivism. This perspectivism is one of the book's greatest strength, as it shows that the subject is always situated according to its particular perspective. In other words, and as he famously said before in *Meditaciones del Quijote*, "Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia." Nevertheless, here in *El tema*, perspective is a tool that necessarily reinforces, rather than undoes, the necessary "organization" of life. "*La perspectiva*," he states, "*es uno de los componentes de la realidad*. Lejos de ser su deformación, es su organización" (85 emphasis in original).

Ortega has a certain perspective of Latin America, and of *la generación argentina* in particular. He writes of this perspective after visiting Argentina in 1916. This perspective leads him to a conception all his own of what Argentina absolutely must do in order to live up to both its promise as a country and the promise of the times. This promise is one and the same. Argentina's autonomous desires should therefore fuse with the heteronymous desires of the times in order to cancel each other out in the synthesis of a higher form. Ortega intends to design this form. For the future is very bright for Argentina – *promising*, in a word. But they – a *select few* Argentines – must heed the words of the man who knows the times in and out, the man who desperately hopes to design the times so that they may dovetail with his own designs on philosophical influence and political power: they must pay attention to José Ortega y Gasset, the self-designated designer of the *new generation*.

## 2.5 – Ortega In and On Argentina

“Voy sencillamente a expresar dos o tres simples observaciones, las cuales ni siquiera necesitan ser exactas para que en algún modo puedan ser útiles.”  
José Ortega y Gasset – “Impresiones de la Argentina”

“Hoy estamos en alborada, es decir, en la hora de preparar a la faena. El éxito depende de la exactitud, de la perfección en cada punto de la obra; y sobre todo de que pongamos al hombre adecuado en el lugar adecuado.”  
José Ortega y Gasset – [“Discurso de despedida en la Institución Cultural de Buenos Aires”]

In 1916, Hipólito Yrigoyen, leader of the *Unión Cívica Radical*, is elected President of Argentina, thereby giving credence to the possibility of a liberal democratic movement. Argentina also finds itself in the midst of an economic boom, benefitting from “una prosperidad inigualable en todo el continente latinoamericano,” and also vis-à-vis Spain, the former colonizer and imperialist power (Medin 14).

This same year, a then thirty-three year-old José Ortega y Gasset, traveling with his father, makes what will be the first of two visits to Argentina during the 1910s and 1920s. In the course of this first visit, Ortega helps to give credence to an intellectual and culturo-philosophical movement that is on the rise and beginning to take pride and comfort in the fact that it can express itself in its native language, *el castellano* – in the fact that *el castellano* can be a language of philosophy. In light of Ortega’s personal accomplishments and pedigree one could accordingly live a philosophical life, get paid for doing so as a “professional,” and do so, again, in Spanish. Hence, Ortega arrives on the scene in Argentina and is immediately the undoubted, unquestioned leader of this movement toward philosophy and its integration into the Hispanic culture of the times, in Spain as in Latin America. With regards to the latter, Medin explains the significance and

the resonance of Ortega's visit in the following terms: "Ortega venía personificando, ya desde esos primeros momentos, no sólo la filosofía europea, sino también la reivindicación de la filosofía en lengua española" (18). What would soon follow in the 1920s, then, Medin describes as nothing less than "una orgía intelectual orteguiana" (27). This "intellectual orgy" is first hinted at during Ortega's first visit to Latin America in 1916. However, as it is with any "orgy," things can get real weird real fast, people can get offended, and feelings can get hurt. Such is the case with Ortega's tantalizing, up and down, on and off, and exceedingly intimate relationship with Argentina.

Ortega's visit to Buenos Aires had been previewed a few months earlier by his friend, the Spanish journalist, Ramiro de Maeztu, in an article in the Argentine periodical, *La Prensa*.<sup>108</sup> Here, Maeztu refers to his friend as the "descollante figura del moderno renacimiento intelectual español" and "el cerebro más influyente de la juventud española" (qtd. in Medin 15). As invited by Buenos Aires' *Institución Cultural Española*, Ortega is to give a series of talks that focus on two themes:

primero, presentar un panorama de la filosofía del momento demostrando la fecunda renovación de la misma, puesto que afirmaba que para la filosofía la fecha e 1899 significaba un pasado absoluto; y, en segundo lugar, dedicar un ciclo de lecciones a leer y comentar "algunos trozos inmortales" de la *Crítica de la razón pura* de Kant. (Medin 17)

With respect to the first theme, Ortega focuses primarily on contemporary German philosophy and phenomenology, introducing the works of Husserl, Max Scheler and Rickert, in particular. The second theme is obviously German as well. In this way, what

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<sup>108</sup> A curious transatlantic figure in his own right, Maeztu would later become Spain's ambassador to Argentina toward the end of Primo de Rivera's reign in 1928. After returning to Spain in the 1930s, he starts a *revista* called *Acción Española*, which soon becomes the mouthpiece of Spanish fascism. In 1934 Maeztu writes the severely ethnocentric piece, *Defensa de la Hispanidad*, and in 1936 is executed at the start of the Spanish Civil War by Republican forces.

Ortega offers Argentina at this moment, in 1916, is by no means anything approaching an autochthonous approach to a properly Hispanic philosophy, but rather German philosophy as so filtered by one of the initiated – Ortega, “the student of a superior intellectual tradition” (Gray 113). Indeed, it could be said that, in the course of time, this is precisely all that Ortega ever really could offer his Latin American counterparts. Yet, many, though not all, of them were content enough with this, Ortega’s somewhat meager offering; this would be all the more to Ortega’s advantage. For, as Gray argues, “there in the New World he [Ortega] could be welcomed as an unparalleled cultural authority” (113). He would talk and they would listen. He could lead and they would follow.

What is more, Medin characterizes what are again Ortega’s questionable and underlying motives that account for his intellectual actions, when he aptly notes that, “El programa implicaba evidentemente, la suposición de que los circuitos profesionales argentinos no se encontraban precisamente a la altura de los tiempos, ni los presentes ni los clásicos” (18). Ortega, then, would bring them up to the times, according to his particular program, of course.

Before *Martín Fierro*, before *Prisma*, *Proa*, *Inicial*, and *Sur*, *Nosotros* (Buenos Aires, 1907-1943) operates as the primary *revista* for the discerning Argentine public. Hence, after Ortega leaves Buenos Aires, Juan Rómulo Fernández writes a review of Ortega, his talks, and his time spent in and around the city in issue ninety-three of *Nosotros*, published in January of 1917. From this point forward, it will seem as if, on a whole, the Argentine *revistas* duly document Ortega’s every thought and move.

Rómulo Fernández, meanwhile, starts off his article by presenting the visit in what are Ortega's own relatively modest words, as submitted before arriving upon Argentine soil:

“Voy a dar un curso de filosofía, cuyo programa divido en dos partes: un ciclo de conferencias sobre los problemas más actuales de la filosofía, en que intentaré transmitir mi impresión de la fecunda renovación en que la materia ha entrado, y un ciclo de lecciones dedicado a leer y comentar algunos trozos de la *Crítica de la razón pura*.” (qtd. in Rómulo Fernández 25).

Straightforward enough. Rómulo Fernández, who conceivably attended and took part in Ortega's course and conferences, is mainly quite positive in his review, but still somewhat suspicious, perhaps. After all, despite the fact that Ortega speaks of philosophy – and does so *en el castellano*, no less – he is still at this point a mostly unknown foreigner, who, in certain respects is being presented to the Argentine public as if he were an ambassador on tour representing the great nation of *La Filosofía* itself. Nevertheless, Rómulo Fernández describes Ortega's philosophical method in front of this public in glowing terms: “Acerca de la claridad con que fue desentrañado el sentido filosófico de este tropo [de Agripa], cabe significar que el auditorio se imaginaba a un matemático que desarrolla sobre el pizarrón, fórmula tras fórmula, con perfecta nitidez, el binomio de Newton” (27). Clearly, then, they must think – *Bueno, que este hombre sí sabe lo que dice, a lo que va.*

Still, Rómulo Fernández has his questions and his doubts. All great philosophers are skeptical. These doubts come out here, regarding whether or not Ortega (Rómulo Fernández refers to him as “Gasset”) is a man of philosophy or a man of literature:

Se ha llegado a establecer dudas sobre este punto: si el filósofo supera al literato, o es que ocurre a la inversa. Es un hombre que dice a maravillas; pero es también un hombre que cava, cava, y cava hasta llegar a la última napa: la napa del agua buena, en este caso, la napa de la verdad. (28)

The response to Rómulo Fernández's own doubts, doubts that have and will forever swirl around the figure of José Ortega y Gasset, is thus that Ortega is both. He is a literary philosopher. He is a philosophical man of letters. He is perfect for the times.

In Ortega's opinion, Argentina is a country that is perfectly suited to the times as well. Thus, Rómulo Fernández closes his article, as he opens it, with the new master's words, previously apropos of his own purpose, now apropos of Argentina's purpose and promise:

“Yo no creo que exista en parte alguna un público de sensibilidad más pronta y limpia de prejuicios, de mayor perspicacia que el que encontrará en la Argentina todo el que venga con un poco de pureza y otro poco de arte en su corazón. No es esta alabanza mía, convencional y reflexiva, porque al punto añado que es un problema para mí explicarme el desequilibrio que existe entre esa sensibilidad difusa y anónima pero exquisita y la producción ideológica y artística de este pueblo, que es más reducida y menos densa de lo que tiene ya obligación de ser.” (30)

This would be Ortega's philosophical, if also paternal, message for Argentina for the foreseeable future: *You can be so great, you can achieve so much – all you lack is the discipline necessary to really be and really do so.*<sup>109</sup> Years later, this very message is recapitulated, albeit to a potentially much wider audience, in *El tema de nuestro tiempo*:

No es admisible que las personas obligadas por sus relevantes condiciones intelectuales a asumir la responsabilidad de nuestro tiempo vivan, como el vulgo, a la deriva, atentas a las superficiales vicisitudes de cada momento, sin buscar una rigurosa y amplia orientación en los rumbos de la historia. (21)

And, of course, as is common in Ortega, himself a magnificent recycler of ideas and themes, it is then recapitulated again and again in *La deshumanización del arte* and in *La rebelión de las masas*.

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<sup>109</sup> Perhaps we could call this philosophical meme of Ortega's representative of the OR ELSE!

As contradictory as he otherwise might be, however, Ortega is able to stay on message with respect to Argentina. At least until he visits Argentina again, twelve years later in 1928. A visit that will be detailed in Chapter Four. First, however, Ortega must reflect upon his first time with Argentina and the Argentines.

Before Ortega gives himself the time and distance to reflect – in his mind, the great act of all philosophers, acting as *el espectador, a cierta y necesaria distancia de la cosa en cuestión* – we have access to the very words he spoke at the *Institución Cultural Española de Buenos Aires*. These words are collected under the title of “Impresiones de la Argentina,” published in the collection, *Meditaciones del pueblo joven y otros ensayos sobre América*.

It should be noted, first of all, that included in these “Impresiones” are Ortega’s words as cited above by Rómulo Fernández. Along with this quote that has already been addressed, what also stands out here, and is also most key to the work at hand, is a curious citation that Ortega attributes to Goethe towards the end of his talk: “Goethe decía que sólo todos los hombres viven enteramente lo humano; y añado que cada pueblo es el ensayo de una nueva manera de vivir y que trae sobre sus hombros, como un escultor en su mente, la misión de crear una nueva figura y gesto de hombre” (37). This quote is indicative of all that we will call and describe as *humanism* in the following chapter. First of all, because it comes from a German thinker – here, Goethe, a humanist to the core. Secondly, because within this quote emerges the idea of humanism as a political place and ideal in which the state acts as an artist insofar as it gives living shape (Schiller) to its populace, “como un escultor en su mente,” according to aesthetic ideals that are correlative to beauty and morality. Indeed, the majority of the following chapter

will endeavor to trace and suss out these aesthetic, political, and, of course, cultural ideals so imbedded, so promised, in humanist thought. A thought which is then, in turn, twisted and made all the more radically conservative by Ortega, he of the *soi-disant new generation*.

Ortega's concluding public remarks while in Buenos Aires are included as well in *Meditación del pueblo joven*, and labeled, simply, ["Discurso de despedida en la Institución Cultural Española de Buenos Aires"]. Two quotes here related directly to the project at hand. The first is significant if for no other reason than the fact that it actually contains the words "aventura transatlántica":

Es la primera vez que en mi vida acepto un banquete: yo no sé qué tiene esta América, esta tierra joven que nos induce a adoptar usos nuevos y a sorprendernos hoy en el ademán que ayer menos sospechábamos.

Ello es que me encuentro entre vosotros tras un yantar festival con que habéis querido honrarnos a mi padre y a mí, compañeros de aventura transatlántica. (41)

The second quote, meanwhile, is imminently more substantive. It foretells of a tremendous future, so long as people are kept in their place, where they should be: "Hoy estamos en alborada, es decir, en la hora de preparare a la faena. El éxito depende de la exactitud, de la perfección en cada punto de la obra; y sobre todo de que pongamos al hombre adecuado en el lugar adecuado" (43). This final part of this statement reads as what a few years later will come to be Ortega's most basic thesis statement in *La rebelión de las masas*.

The two most significant texts collected in *Meditación del pueblo joven* that speak to Ortega's attitude toward and vision of Argentina in the wake of his first visit both benefit from strong titles: to wit, "El deber de la nueva generación Argentina" and "Carta a un joven argentino que estudia filosofía." The former was published in the Argentine

newspaper, *La Nación*, in 1924, when Ortega is well into his career as a public intellectual, and thus a much more recognizable figure; the latter, meanwhile, is published the following year in Ortega's ongoing essay series, *El espectador*.

It seems as if Ortega takes advantage of his greater notoriety here so as to transmit a few sharper-edged thoughts regarding Argentina and its people. In "El deber," for example, Ortega speaks very little of this *deber* in plain and direct terms. However, the following statement adequately expresses this "deber de la nueva generación argentina": "La juventud necesita dejarse influir" (54). So it is and so it may be. Meanwhile, the rest of the essay functions more as a testing ground for ideas that Ortega would later reuse, including an extended definition of the "select man," conceived of as follows:

El hombre que se impone a sí propio una disciplina más dura y unas exigencias mayores que los habituales en el contorno, se selecciona a sí mismo, se sitúa aparte y fuera de la gran masa indisciplinada donde los individuos viven sin tensión ni rigor, cómodamente apoyados los unos en los otros y todos a la deriva, vil botín de las resacas. Por eso el lema decisivo de las antiguas aristocracias, forjadoras de nuestras naciones occidentales, fue el sublime *Noblesse oblige*. Nada se puede esperar de hombres que no sientan el orgullo de poseer más duras obligaciones que los demás. La nobleza en el hombre, como en su hermano mayor el animal, es, ante todo, un privilegio de obligaciones. El caballo de raza lo es, ante todo, porque tiene obligación de correr más que el vulgar o resistir más largamente. (54)

The "new Argentine generation" is meant to heed these words as well, heed the call to a spirit of "sublime *Noblesse oblige*." Only then will they live up to their promise. Fulfill their destiny. Conform to their obligations of privilege. And so on.

Now, in comparison, the "Carta a un joven argentino que estudia filosofía" is quite clearer and more direct in its address. For here, Ortega signals forth thoughts that are blunt to the bone:

No he hecho nunca misterio de sugerirme mayores esperanzas la juventud argentina que la española. [...] La impresión que una generación nueva produce

sólo es por completo favorable cuando suscita estas dos cosas; esperanza y confianza. La juventud argentina que conozco me inspira - ¿por qué no decirlo? – más esperanza que confianza. Es imposible hacer nada importante en el mundo si no se reúne esta pareja de cualidades: fuerza y confianza. (68)

This is also where Ortega delivers what would come to be his most famous and frequently cited piece of advice to the people of Argentina, when he says, simply: “Hay que ir a las cosas, hay que ir a las cosas, sin más” (68). This is to say that, in Ortega’s mind, focus, discipline and rigor will take Argentina a long way – really, to wherever it so wants to go, for its promise is so great. And, thus, he concludes his letter: “Yo espero mucho de la juventud intelectual argentina, pero sólo confiaré en ella cuando la encuentre resuelta a cultivar muy en serio el gran deporte de la precisión mental...” (71). If Ortega is the father of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hispanic philosophy, in these letters, if inspired to a certain degree, he also comes off as not so modestly acting as if he were indeed the father to an unruly, if exceedingly bright, generation of children who, in their father’s eyes, severely lack self-discipline of thought, action, and desire. Thanks, Dad.

This takes us now to 1925, the year in which Ortega writes *La deshumanización del arte*. This also concludes the first section of the current project. So far, we have moved through a general introduction to the transatlantic avant-garde, and on to *the new*, the *revistas*, a contentious transatlantic disagreement regarding a certain *meridiano*, and the transatlantic *revista*, *Síntesis*. That is, we have now navigated the truly adventurous transatlantic currents. We have been guided, and misguided, along the way by Ramón, Marinetti, Borges, and, of course, Ortega. In short, a transatlantic avant-garde assemblage has now been assembled – and affirmed.

From here, we will focus on the fictional expressions and philosophical figurations of the *human* as put forward in the fiction and philosophy of a transatlantic avant-garde. Hence, the main material of study will also switch – the focus shifts away from the *revistas* and instead toward more discrete literary and philosophical works. Starting with Ortega's *La deshumanización del arte* and tracing its indebtedness to and exploitation of the what we call the German Humanist Tradition – as comprised by Winckelmann, Kant, Schiller, and the concept of *Bildung*, along its relation to the rather Anti-Humanist works of Nietzsche – we will then present a counterpoint to this aesthetic, political, cultural, and ontological, and philosophical framework as it is detailed in the dehumanized short stories of Pedro Salinas' collection, *Vispera del gozo*. From there, we will then move on to Ortega's most polemical work, *La rebelión de las masas*, showing how it extends the radicalization of the humanist tradition even further, so that Ortega effectively turns it into a squarely reactionary and arch-conservative modern political philosophy. This kind of philosophy is then echoed by one of Ortega's Argentine acolytes, the vanguardist, Eduardo Mallea, in his work, *Historia de una pasión argentina*.

In contrast to these literary philosophies, which, in time, come to be reflected in the desirable and desire-denying political discourses of Spanish fascism and the Argentine right, the philosophical literatures of the Argentine vanguardists, Roberto Arlt and Macedonio Fernández, counterbalance the present study. As fiction writers and philosophers in their own right, both vanguardists are exceedingly difficult to categorize as this OR that type of thinker, for both work with the AND, and do so in powerful, good, and bad ways. What is more, Arlt and Macedonio are heavily influenced by German philosophy as well – Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, respectively. So, really, we are

looking at a tripartite relationship here between Spain, Argentina, and Germany. Three countries with amazing literary traditions, with Germany, of course, boasting of the strongest philosophical tradition – if also three countries which, historically, all eventually succumb to some form of fascism, dictatorship or totalitarianism, to boot. The promise of culture therefore becomes a historical nightmare from which, to paraphrase James Joyce, we all hope to awake; though that does not necessarily mean that the promise is gone, forever...

### Chapter 3

#### Humanism, Aesthetics, Politics

“Taste that requires an added element of *charm* and *emotion* for its delight, not to speak of adopting this measure of its approval, has not yet emerged from barbarism.”  
Immanuel Kant – *Critique of Judgment*

“For it is as a political force that the aesthetic still concerns us as one of the most powerful ideological drives to act upon the reality of history.”  
Paul de Man – “Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist’s *Über das Marionettentheater*”

José Ortega y Gasset’s provocative, polemical, and ultimately elitist essay from 1925, *La deshumanización del arte*, will serve as a primary locus through which the narrative and philosophical works of the transatlantic avant-garde will later be examined. An essay that directly unites avant-garde aesthetics, German humanistic philosophy, and reactionary politics, *La deshumanización del arte* addresses what Ortega sees to be art’s current state of affairs, as well as a program for future artistic and, though he was always wont to deny it, political endeavors. Despite the fact or precisely because this humanistic voice often contradicts itself, especially with respect to its superficial objective to steer clear of the political, the virtues extolled by Ortega and the very ideas he sees at play in avant-garde, *dehumanized* aesthetics have been and continue to be debated.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> See, for example, the “Introduction” to Vicky Unruh’s study, *Latin American Vanguards: The Art of Contentious Encounters*, where she speaks of a distinctly Latin American “humanization” or “rehumanization” of art that sought to intimately expand art’s relationship with lived experience – a movement that surged at the same time of, if not in direct response to, Ortega’s essay (21-26).

To be sure, *La deshumanización del arte* impacted thinkers at the time and was read and discussed on both sides of the Atlantic as it was initially disseminated in Ortega's *Revista de Occidente* – if only because it gave a name to a general, modern aesthetic trend, as so utilized by a new generation of aesthetes and philosophers. Certainly not all of these writers and thinkers followed Ortega's program; however, in numerous avant-garde works, across the Hispanic world and beyond, one witnesses, if not an entirely new, than at least a different sort of human expressed – one that, in some instances, barely resembles what had traditionally been denominated as being human. Call it dehumanization, or something different.

From whence comes this story of the human, however – the story of humanity? In the main, in the Western Tradition, this story springs forth from the cultural titans. According to Heidegger's "Letter On 'Humanism,'" humanity as idea, story, and reality is first codified centuries ago during the Roman Republic in the form of *humanitas*; *humanitas* later evolves into what today can be called *humanism*. At the time, and perhaps still today, this notion of *humanitas* presented *homo humanus* as the human qua human. Heidegger tells us that this category served as both a conceptual and very real counter to *homo barbarus*, and was chiefly concerned with "*eruditio et institutio in bonas artes*"<sup>111</sup> [...]. [*Paideia*] thus understood was translated as *humanitas*," with *paideia* generally signifying the education of a citizen according to culturally specific values (244). In other words, *homo humanus* was a good Roman citizen, while *homo barbarus*

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<sup>111</sup> Scholarship and training in good conduct.

most certainly was not.<sup>112</sup> In this way and from its very inception, humanism entailed 1) the establishment of presupposed values and 2) the creation of a dichotomous other.<sup>113</sup>

In order to elaborate further on these two points, we will genealogically trace humanism and its aesthetic and political manifestations from German Idealism of the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century up until World War I, specifically via the interrelated German concepts of *Bildung* and the *aesthetic state*. While such a seeming detour may appear to take things off track – that is, away from *deshumanización* and the transatlantic avant-garde – it is important to bring the German context into play here and now. Later on, this context will serve to illuminate the influences of German Idealism on Ortega’s thoughts regarding the role of aesthetics and culture in the formation of the state as set forth in *La deshumanización*, as well as Ortega’s radicalization of this aesthetic, philosophical, and political tradition. Also, as we shall see in the chapters that follow, Ortega, the Germanist, was not the only member of the transatlantic avant-garde who read of and received radical ideas from German philosophy – humanistic and otherwise.

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<sup>112</sup> In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, “brutes” are defined by their lack of a comprehensible language, “For even brutes utter indivisible sounds [letters], none of which I call a letter” (38). Similarly, the word “barbarian” most likely derives from an incomprehensible language as well, a sort of “ba-ba” or “bar-bar” spoken by non-Romans that is incommensurate with the properly human language of Latin.

<sup>113</sup> Louis Althusser points out in “Marxism and Humanism,” that Marx attached similar characteristics to humanism: “Speaking of man and of humanism in *The German Ideology*, Marx commented that the idea of human nature, or of the essence of man, concealed a *coupled value judgment*, to be precise, the couple human/inhuman; and he [Marx] wrote: ‘the ‘inhuman’ as much as the ‘human’ is a product of present conditions; it is their negative side.’ The couple human/inhuman is the hidden principle of all humanism which is, then no more than a way of living-sustaining-resolving this contradiction. Bourgeois humanism made man the principle of all theory. This luminous essence of man was the visible counterpart to a shadowy inhumanity” (236-237 emphasis in original).

Most frequently associated with the coming-of-age novel, or *Bildungsroman*, *Bildung* also functions as a cultural, historical, and political concept that once held great purchase in German Idealism. The critic, Susan L. Cocalis, uses Dilthey's general definition to explain *Bildung* as the "process by which a young male hero discovers himself and his social role through the experience of love, friendship, and the hard realities of life" (399). Meanwhile, Wilhelm von Humboldt in his "Theory of *Bildung*," written at some point between 1792-94, develops his own outline of *Bildung* that provides for the absolute unity of the individual ego via the realization of man in his relationship with the world that surrounds him. Humboldt's theory relies upon the absolute separation *a priori* between man and the world that surrounds him, between subject and object:

What man needs most, therefore, is simply an object that makes possible the interplay between his receptivity and his self-activity. But if this object is to suffice to occupy his whole being in its full strength and unity, it must be the ultimate object, the world, or at least (for only this is in fact correct) be regarded as such. Man seeks unity only to escape from dissipating and confusing diversity. In order not to become lost in infinity, empty and unfruitful, he creates a single circle, visible at a glance from any point. In order to attach the image of the ultimate goal to every step forward he takes, he seeks to transform scattered knowledge and action into a closed system, mere scholarship into scholarly *Bildung*, merely restless endeavor into judicious activity. (60)

This separation between man and the world, between subject and object, can therefore be metaphysically transcended through man's natural recourse to logic and logical actions. Man is capacious enough to become master of both himself and the world according to his own conscious acts or free will, thereby effectively siphoning off difference and diversity in order to appropriate it for his own inner-unity.

Much like in the Roman humanism outlined above, the search for and realization of *Bildung* hinges upon a liberal education according to culturally specific values. Such an

education is designed to prepare the learner to embark upon a “didactic role within society,” meaning that he/she is meant to spread the word, as it were, and in the process help to reproduce subjectivities according to pre-established, humanistic values that would more often than not fall directly in line with those of the bourgeois state (Cocalis 401). In other words, *Bildung* allows for citizens to “freely choose” what the state wants them to do anyways, as it fuses the logical and ideological desires of both.

Expanding upon these theories, Cocalis speaks to how Humboldt “proposes that the state design new institutions that would enable an aesthetic education for any citizen, assuming that whatever is good for the individual must also be good for the state” (406). Attempting to achieve *Bildung* would therefore provide for the creation and perpetuation of an aestheticized citizenry through education. Some German thinkers – like Ortega years later in Spain – hoped that their burgeoning nation-state would be able to do just that, especially in the face of revolution abroad.

Although Terry Eagleton does not speak directly to the notion of *Bildung* in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (otherwise known as his extended critique of humanism and German Idealism), his observations of the relationship between aesthetics, politics, and the role of the human subject and aesthetic object dovetail with the descriptions of *Bildung* as outlined above. He sets the scene as follows:

What is at stake here is nothing less than the production of an entirely new kind of human subject – one which, like the work of art itself, discovers the law in the depths of its own free identity, rather than in some oppressive external power [...]. Power is now inscribed in the minutiae of subjective experience, and the fissure between abstract duty and pleasurable inclination is accordingly healed [...]. The new subject, which bestows on itself self-referentially a law at one with its immediate experience, finding its freedom in its necessity, is modeled on the aesthetic artefact. (19-20)

This very scene outlined here by Eagleton presents itself in Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, first published in 1795 – not coincidentally just a few years after we find Humboldt writing about *Bildung* – and from which the idea of the aesthetic state emerges.<sup>114</sup> While Schiller's epistemological and philosophical systems regarding the aesthetic state are not necessarily the tightest in the German tradition, Josef Chytrý explains the importance of Schiller's contributions in his highly informative (if not always highly critical) study, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought*:

Calling on the language of Kantian and Fichtean idealism, Schiller [...] became the watershed thinker from classicism to idealism, from the relative quietism of Weimar humanism to the ontological and social radicalism of the heroic phase of German dialectics. *Schiller made the concept of an aesthetic state a legitimate and respectable object of formal philosophical thought.* (9 my emphasis)

“I will, to be sure,” says Schiller early on in his work, “not conceal from you that it is Kantian principles upon which the propositions that follow will for the most part be based” (24).

Working through Humboldt's theories of *Bildung*, Kant's theories of the aesthetic faculty as presented in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), and in the aftermath of the French Revolution, Schiller initially draws upon the doctrine that proclaimed “Hellenic supremacy in all things cultural” in his outline of the aesthetic state and its relation to *Humanität* – a proclamation first proffered by the classicist, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century that would later go on to greatly influence

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<sup>114</sup> In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancière speaks of Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* as an “unsurpassable reference point” in what he calls the “the aesthetic regime of the arts,” otherwise known as, for better or worse, “modernity” (27). Importantly, and in agreement with what will be argued in the present study, Rancière goes on to state that, “Schiller's aesthetic state, which is this [aesthetic] regime's first manifesto [...] is the moment of the formation and education of a specific type of humanity” (23-24).

generations of German thinkers (Chytry 13).<sup>115</sup> A return to Greece, then: its citizens, its nature, its splendor, its art, its glory, its occidentalism.<sup>116</sup> Hence, as Winckelmann showed in his two key works – *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* (1755) and *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764), both weighty if, in the end, spotty in their assessments – there really seemed to exist the “possibility of transmuting the German temperament into Greek sensibility and Greek values” (Chytry 11). And how was this transmutation to be effected? According to Chytry, “Winckelmann’s new doctrine proclaimed the beautiful man produced by beautiful nature and immortalized by classical art as the key to the metaphysical quest for the One” (17).<sup>117</sup> And if the Greeks could do it, then maybe, just maybe, the Germans could do it, too. In other words, as Goethe says, ““Let each be in his own way a Greek!.. But let him be one”” (qtd. in Chytry 12).

Following in Winckelmann’s footsteps and in line with other German thinkers at the time, Schiller assigns transcendent privilege to the Western exemplar that was Greece. He too mythologizes the beautiful “Greek nature, which united all the attractions

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<sup>115</sup> It would also, in turn, influence members of the transatlantic avant-garde so assembled here. For instance, in the seventh issue of *Síntesis* from December of 1927, the Argentine writer, Jorge M. Furt, dedicates an entire article to Winckelmann entitled, simply, “Winckelmann.”

<sup>116</sup> Ortega will say something similar about Hellenistic supremacy centuries later in *Meditaciones del Quijote*, situating Greece as the cultural state *par excellence* in the so-called ‘history of the world’: “Cada día que pasa afirma Grecia más enérgicamente su posición *hors ligne* en la historia del mundo. Este privilegio se apoya en títulos perfectamente concretos y definidos: Grecia ha inventado los temas sustanciales de la cultura europea, y la cultura europea es el protagonista de la historia, mientras no exista otra superior” (49). Furthermore, even Nietzsche says the following in what is surely his most *humanistic* work, *The Birth of Tragedy*: “

<sup>117</sup> In terms of the importance and reach of Winckelmann’s *Reflections*, Chytry refers to the publication of this specific text as a “European event,” deeming it to be the “first modern work in German to provoke a Continental response” (13).

of art and all the dignity of wisdom, without, however, becoming the victim of them as does our own [nature]" (*Aesthetic* 37). For if Greek culture represents the zenith of culture and *Humanität* themselves the world over, this harmony and excellence once previously achieved has consistently been splintered apart and torn asunder ever since, making of Schiller and his peers culture's very own "victims." He asks: "What individual modern will emerge to contend in single combat with the individual Athenian for the prize of humanity?" (39). Surely, no one.

Why this victimization of humanity, though? What harm has culture done unto humanity? Schiller responds:

It was culture itself that inflicted this wound upon humanity. As soon as enlarged experience and more precise speculation made necessary a sharper division of the sciences on the one hand, and on the other, the more intricate machinery of States made necessary a more rigorous dissociation of ranks and occupations, the essential bond of human nature was torn apart, and a ruinous conflict set its harmonious powers [...]. Eternally chained to only one single little fragment of the whole, Man himself grew to be only a fragment [...]. And so gradually individual concrete life is extinguished, in order that the abstract life of the whole may prolong its sorry existence, and the State remains eternally alien to its citizens because nowhere does feeling discover it. (39-41)

One finds here, then, a description of alienation that precedes those of Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, etc.: alienation as "wound," as "fragmentation," as man separated from what he can do.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, Schiller's claim that "culture itself" brings about alienation

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<sup>118</sup> In a section of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* entitled "[Estranged Labour]" the "young Marx" offers his own materialist and humanist description of alienation: "With the *increasing value* of the world of things proceeds in different proportion the *devaluation* of the world of men. Labour produces not only commodities: it produces itself and the worker as a *commodity*—and does so in the proportion in which it produces commodities generally.

This fact expresses merely that the object which labour produces—labour's product—confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of labour is labour which has been congealed in an object, which has become material: it is the *objectification* of labour. Labour's realization is its objectification. In

shows how his conception of culture may in fact be more nuanced than it initially appears, since it can lead to both order and disorder in the reflexive relationship between the human subject and itself and between the subject and the world that surrounds it. Culture thus operates at once as the locus of conflict and harmony. Indeed, in what looks to be a proto-Marxist statement on commodity fetishism, the workings of the market, and, perhaps, even the “society of the spectacle,” Schiller goes on to explain:

So far from setting us free, culture only develops a new want with every power that it bestows on us; the bonds of the physical are tightened ever more alarmingly, so that the fear of loss stifles the burning impulses towards improvement, and the maxim of passive obedience passes for the supreme wisdom of life. (36-37)<sup>119</sup>

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the conditions dealt with by political economy this realization of labour appears as *loss of reality* for the workers; objectification as *loss of the object* and *object-bondage*; appropriation as *estrangement*, as *alienation*...

The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.” (69 emphasis in original)

For the “young Marx,” what therefore separates man from nature and man from himself is *alienated labor*. Because of alienated labor, nature is no longer a part of man, but external to him, outside of him, other. And this separation is absolute, so that in being divorced from nature man is therefore divorced from his true self as well. It is not a give and take or fluid process, however, but rather an absolute and defining element of the human condition; one brought about in the human objectification supposedly inherent in capitalist labor, so that what man produces is not only not for him, but against him.

<sup>119</sup> If we substitute Schiller’s definition of “alienated culture” for the definition of the “spectacle” as offered by Guy Debord some 172 years later in his seminal work, *The Society of the Spectacle*, the two seem to consistently overlap: “The origin of the spectacle lies in the world’s loss of unity, and its massive expansion in the modern period demonstrates how total this loss has been: the abstract nature of all individual work, as a production in general, finds perfect expression in the spectacle, whose very *manner of being concrete* is, precisely, abstraction [...]. The spectacle’s function in society is the concrete manufacture of alienation [...]. The only *use* [of the commodity] still in evidence here, meanwhile, is the basic use of submission” (22-23, 44 emphasis in original).

Nevertheless, a certain nostalgia for an idyllic and, ultimately, mythologized past haunts Schiller's notions of alienation – nostalgia brought about in the world after Athens. To be sure, this nostalgic haunting of a present absolutely separated from its mythologized past due to some sort of direct shift or clean break would seem to be part and parcel of most any and all concepts of alienation. This is not to say that alienation has no theoretical or empirical purchase whatsoever, but rather that any notion of alienation tends to nostalgically presuppose a pre-existent and harmonious human essence that has subsequently been categorically negated and must be restored in order for humanity (and maybe history, too) to live out its metaphysically transcendent promise, be one with both it's own nature as a subject and the nature of the world as an object, and thereby achieve true freedom.

In his essay, "On the uses and disadvantages of history for life," Nietzsche – himself a champion of the arts, albeit in his own way – likens this sort of extreme nostalgia toward and veneration of the past at the expense of the living present as being evidence of a "monumental" conception of history. He presents this concept as follows:

That the great moments in the struggle of the human individual constitute a chain, that this chain unites mankind across the millennia like a range of human mountain peaks, that the summit of such a long-ago moment shall be for me still living, bright and great – that is the fundamental idea of the faith in humanity which finds expression in the demand for a *monumental* history. (68 emphasis in original)

The problem, as Nietzsche sees it, with such a conception of history is that it tends to be "quite incapable of distinguishing between a monumentalized past and a mythical fiction," so that a "half-understood monument to some great era of the past is erected as an idol and zealously danced around, as though to say: 'Behold, this is true art! Pay no heed to those who are evolving and want something new!'" (70-71). Could we hear

Schiller, Winckelmann, and others saying something similar, perhaps? Something like, “Behold, this is true art! This is the human. This is aesthetics! This is what Greece was and what Germany could be!” It would seem so.

To return for a moment to alienation, however: while Marx and other theorists of alienation do not necessarily hold the past – a time, shall we say, before primitive accumulation – in the same regard as Schiller does, some former unified order has still been lost and must be recuperated if alienation is eventually to be overcome. Hence, what culture lacks is what effectively propels it forward as part of a mythico-historical process that imbues human nature’s rational desires for order and freedom with a purpose that is meant to be in a state of complicit accord with nature itself.

For Schiller, the antagonisms that make manifest the alienated nature of a human subject unable to ground the world or harmoniously incorporate the world into his own subjectivity can only be resolved by recourse to a culture of a distinct and metaphysically higher nature: to wit, the culture of beauty, aesthetics, and the Fine Arts. If, by separating humans from each other and from what they do, alienated culture fails to promote and realize what would otherwise unify them – this transcendent unifying force being aesthetic beauty – then humans must fashion themselves after beauty and therefore make of themselves a beautiful, aesthetic creation. Without beauty, without beautiful being, humanity will forever remain shackled to an unfulfilling culture and a politics of alienation, lacking true freedom. Schiller’s thesis, then, reads: “we must indeed, if we are to solve that political problem [of freedom] in practice, follow the path of aesthetics, since it is through Beauty that we arrive at Freedom” (27).

This “path of aesthetics” that need be followed comes about as a natural, teleological progression – “the race could have made progress in no other way” – which presents, in effect, a dialectical process that functions as the motor of and for history (43). Schiller continues: “There was no other way of developing the manifold capacities of man than by placing them in opposition to one another. This antagonism of powers is the great instrument of culture, but it is only the instrument; for as long as it persists, we are only on the way to culture” (43). Specifically within Schiller’s conception of the human subject’s workings, the distinction and opposition between the sensuous impulse (the physical world of sensations) and formal impulse (capacity for rational and moral thought and action) constitute the “antagonism of powers.” While these two conditions seem to remain eternally “*opposed to each other* and can never become one,” Beauty itself is able to dialectically combine the two impulses by a process – for Schiller, the only possible process – of combination by “cancellation” or *aufgehoben*, meaning roughly “*preserved by destruction*” (88-89 emphasis in original).<sup>120</sup> Schiller explains:

The mind, then, passes from sensation to thought through a middle disposition in which sensuousness and reason are active *at the same time*, but just because of this they are mutually destroying their determining power and through their opposition producing negation. This middle disposition, in which our nature is constrained neither physically nor morally and yet is active in both ways, preeminently deserves to be called a free disposition; and if we call the condition of sensuous determination the logical and moral, we must call this condition of real and active determinacy the *aesthetic*. (98-99 emphasis in original)

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<sup>120</sup> Despite the fact that Paul de Man maintains that notions of the dialectical process cannot necessarily be traced from Hegel back to Schiller in both his lecture entitled “Kant and Schiller” and the critical discussion that followed (see pages 147-59 in particular), it seems that there is enough of a trace to connect the two, especially considering how Schiller goes on to characterize the process of “combination by cancellation.” Furthermore, after starting from the separation of the faculties, Schiller says, “Our second business, then, is to make this combination perfect, to accomplish it so purely and completely that both conditions entirely disappear in a third, and no trace of the division remains behind in the whole; otherwise we are isolating but not uniting them” (88-89).

The impulse towards aesthetic beauty therefore works to reign in the diversity of man's sensual desires in order to marry them to reason's unifying powers – an impulse that can be cultivated through an education grounded, of course, in aesthetics. Furthermore, the Kantian division of the human faculties and their subsequent proto-Hegelian synthesis as afforded by aesthetic taste (read: judgment) makes of the aesthetic a supposedly universal, epistemological, and moral category, insofar as “aesthetic awareness as a free play of human faculties [...] directs the human being toward the universality implicit in the aesthetic dimension and conducive to morality” (Chytry 79).

Schiller's description of “free play” and its relation to aesthetics again find its roots in both Kant and Winckelmann.<sup>121</sup> Engendered by aesthetic beauty and given its ability to combine the sensuous and formal impulses, Schiller believes that the play impulse “will compel the mind at once morally and physically; it will therefore, since it annuls all mere chance, annul all compulsion also, and set man free both physically and morally” (74). In other words, through the play impulse morality imposes itself on the human subject so that it may be freed from its passionate, physical desires (which might otherwise compel it to act irrationally) and from chance (which might situate the subject in irrational circumstances), thereby providing human nature with what Schiller calls “*living shape*, a concept which serves to denote all aesthetic qualities of phenomena and – in a word – what we call *Beauty* in the widest sense of the term” (76 emphasis in

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<sup>121</sup> For example, Winckelmann's approach to the play drive (or play impulse) and the aesthetic life reads thusly: “When Nature and the human being [...] dwell together in beauty, the moment of ‘festival and play’ occurs. The festive state allows the human being to dwell in his or her own beauty, both as a living artwork and as the highest form of Nature's own character” (Chytry 19). Ortega will take up similar notions of “play” later on as well.

original). For Schiller (via Kant), the Beautiful is made active and leads towards Reason and Morality when human nature makes of itself something aesthetic.

Aesthetic judgments therefore bring humans together in reason and morality through their universal awareness of and reverence toward the beautiful, toward what is aesthetically pleasing in terms of taste. “Though need may drive Man into society,” says Schiller, “and Reason implant social principles in him, Beauty alone can confer on him a *social character*. Taste alone brings harmony into society, because it establishes harmony in the individual” (138 emphasis in original). Clearly this comes from Kant again, who speaks to the supposedly socializing nature of aesthetics as follows: “The beautiful stands on quite a different footing [...]. When he [the subject] declares something to be beautiful, he expects the same delight from others” (44). Yet, this “different footing” is not necessarily as lovely and inclusive as it might seem to be; Kant goes on to say the following:

He [the subject] judges not merely for himself, but for everyone, and then speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things [...], he *demand*s this agreement of them. He blames them if they judge differently, and denies them taste, which he still requires of them as something they ought to have; and to this extent it is not open to us to say: Everyone has his own taste. This would be equivalent to saying that there is no such thing as taste at all, i.e. no aesthetic judgment capable of making a rightful claim upon the assent of everyone. (44 emphasis in original).

Some people, real people with real taste, just know what is beautiful because they can feel it in the harmony that emerges between themselves and the aesthetic work before them. These people are able to judge others who do not seem to share this same sense of taste and, in turn, possibly condemn these others for their lack of taste.

In order for the world to be beautiful, however, this aesthetic judgment must be shared by at the very least a “select few” and therefore must be imposed upon others

who, sadly, fail to think and feel the same. In short, the aesthetic “unites us with all the authority of a law, but at a more affective, intuitive level” (Eagleton 75.) Even though it apparently always already is so, the aesthetic condition must therefore be made to be universal. For it is in the aesthetic condition that actions and choices that were once felt to be duties transform into natural habits and inclinations, so that morality becomes second nature, as it were, and this morality is henceforth able to self-govern the entire natural world as a universal imperative, making beautiful, harmonized, cultural order out of barbaric, chaotic natural diversity. Or, as Schiller puts it:

Where both [the sensuous and the formal] qualities are united Man will combine the greatest fullness of existence with the utmost self-dependence and freedom, and instead of abandoning himself to the world he will rather draw it into himself with the whole infinity of its phenomena, and subject it to the unity of his reason. (69)

A world subjected to the “unity of reason” must include the subjection of those beings without taste – and thus otherwise effectively excluded from the social world because they still exist only in barbaric nature – to a natural, beautiful, harmonizing law.

Aesthetic taste acts as the force that is meant to homogenize and rationalize humanity’s intuitions and desires. As with *Bildung*, this force is effectively able to dominate the world that presumably exists outside of and separate from a properly aesthetic and moral subject.

Indeed, Nature’s own powers pale in comparison to those that can be found in the aesthetic subject and its capacity for rational morality. Schiller presents his proof of this process when he states, “Man in his *physical* condition is subject to the power of Nature alone; he shakes off this power in the *aesthetic*, and he controls it in the *moral* condition,” so that “Man is superior to every terror of Nature so long as he knows how to give form

to it, and to turn it into his object” (113, 121 emphasis in original). Yea, it is the dream of all gods.

Furthermore, if like-minded subjects come together as a community and under such aesthetically-conditioned circumstances as those outlined above, what results will be the *aesthetic state* itself. Schiller outlines this very possibility early on in his treatise:

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 form in which the diversity of persons endeavours to unite itself. (31 emphasis in original)

And if, as Schiller says, the “aesthetically-determined man will judge and act with universal validity as soon as he wishes to,” the same could certainly be said for the “aesthetically-determined” state that so perfectly represents and reflects him (109).

Surely, then, non-aesthetically-determined men living in non-aesthetically-determined states are no match for those that are so determined. If the infinite mutability of nature itself can be reasoned away and made to be the malleable object of such a subject, then barbaric, passionate humanity stands to face similar consequences if it somehow stands in the way of Beauty, Morality, and Reason.

Thus, while the egalitarian ideals at stake in the construction of the aesthetic state are meant to have a democratizing effect, so that “Everything in the aesthetic State, even the subservient tool, is a free citizen having equal rights with the noblest; and the intellect, which forcibly moulds the passive multitude to its designs, must here ask for its assent,” the State clearly still reserves the right to impose its will upon its citizenry – human and *otherwise* – if need be (140). “Can we blame the State for disregarding the dignity of human nature so long as it was defending its very existence?” Schiller asks

(35). Apparently not. For any state so aesthetically-fashioned must maintain itself, maintain its power over others fashioned differently, no matter what. And what about the rights of individual man? Schiller ambiguously warns that they are tenuous at best and non-existent at worst:

if in the character of a people the subjective man is opposed to the objective in so contradictory a fashion that only the suppression of the former can secure the triumph of the latter, the State too will assume the full severity of the law against the citizen, and must ruthlessly trample underfoot any such hostile individuality in order not to be its victim. (33)

Even though, in Eagleton's words, the aesthetic state can be described as the "utopian bourgeois sphere of liberty, equality, and democracy," a "cultural unity must be pressed back beyond all actual self-realization, which in this order is likely to prove dominative and partial" (111). The aesthetic state must therefore assert and maintain itself and its ideological, territorial, and political dominion over its beautifully uniform citizens whose beautiful lives would otherwise be sullied in the name of threatening individual differences. In short, "cultural unity" loses out to state power.

The inability of the aesthetic to provide for a real "cultural unity" becomes clearer as we look further into how the aesthetically-conditioned human subject functions in Schiller's aesthetic state. To be sure, the aesthetic's ultimate lack of functionality would seem to undo, or at least call into question, the very purpose and privilege that it seems to hold. For, despite the fact that "the aesthetic alone leads to the unlimited," something curious happens here at this infinite threshold:

Beauty gives no individual result whatsoever, either for the intellect or for the will; it realizes no individual purpose, either intellectual or moral; it discovers no individual truth, helps us to perform no individual duty, and is, in a word, equally incapable of establishing the character and clearing the mind. A man's personal worth or dignity, then, insofar as this character can depend upon himself, remains completely undetermined by aesthetic culture, and nothing more has been

accomplished except that it has been rendered possible for him *on the part of Nature* to make of himself what he chooses – that he has had completely restored to him the freedom to be what he ought to be. (Schiller 103, 101 emphasis in original)

Still, according to Schiller, this is precisely what is supposed to happen, because out of this negated agency provided for by the “aesthetic disposition” the otherwise non-human subject comes to find “the highest of all gifts [...] the gift of humanity” restored within itself (101). Out of alienation blossoms a beautifully “indifferent and sterile” restoration and redemption, one that shows us nothing but our true selves as human beings made to be every bit as harmoniously sublime as an aesthetic artifact (101). Is this a contradiction, though, or, like Eagleton states, a “simple *aporia*?” (107 emphasis in original). Or is it more a matter of trying to establish a gorgeous citizenry void of passion and desire, a people who may encounter each other and admire the objective beauty found in the grace and style of their fellow man and nothing more, just like they would in the presence of a “genuine work of art,” without feeling the need to question what it is they see, why they feel what they feel, and why everyone else feels the same (Schiller 104)? A paralysis of free sensation. “[I]n the *aesthetic state*, he [man] need appear to him [fellow man] only as shape, confront him only as free play” (137 emphasis in original). Art, present in the form of aesthetically-crafted subjects and objects, therefore does nothing here but open us up to an ethics of spontaneous non-action when confronted with Beauty as such, along with allowing for the simply universal recognition of what Beauty is not – and what does not belong to the realm of *Humanität*.<sup>122</sup> Hence, other necessary questions that remain and

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<sup>122</sup> Although addressed to men of a different century, Nietzsche’s following admonition could clearly be directed towards men of Schiller’s age and ilk as well: “Overproud European of the nineteenth century, you are raving! Your knowledge does not perfect nature, it only destroys your own nature. Compare for once the heights of your capacity

that beg to be asked include: Who gets left out of this dominative philosophy? What happens to those others who are not necessarily so “aesthetically-determined?” How can taste determine politics and exclude those who might have – dare we say it – bad taste?

As Cocalis points out, then, Schiller’s philosophy signifies that “aesthetics should be interchangeable with ethics and politics. Instead of mediating virtue, the pursuit of aesthetics becomes a virtue in itself” (Cocalis 405). This interchangeability can lead not only to the virtuous aestheticization of man (his “formative development and the state of being well-bred”), but to the virtuous aestheticization of the state as well, in what for Schiller is the “most perfect work of art, the ideal state” (Cocalis 405). In this way, *Bildung* has now been transformed from being a personal way towards mystical self-enlightenment into a “moral and political act [...] because it implie[s] opposition to a barbaric political system and because it offer[s] its proponents an alternative to revolution for realizing humanitarian goals” (Cocalis 405). Or, as Eagleton notes, binded to *Bildung*, “The aesthetic is the missing mediation between a barbaric civil society given over to pure appetite, and the ideal of a well-ordered political state,” one that will not include anyone unable to recognize true Beauty for what it’s worth – positively nothing and negatively everything, all at once (106).

Paul de Man expands upon these ideas in his essay, “Aesthetic Formalization in Kleist.” Here he offers the following with respect to Schiller’s notions of the “ideal state”:

The “state” that is here being advocated is not just a state of mind or of soul, but a principle of political value and authority that has its own claims on the shape and

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for knowledge with the depths of your capacity for inaction. It is true you climb upon the sunbeams of knowledge up to Heaven, but you also climb down into chaos” (“On the uses” 108).

the limits of our freedom. It would lose all interest if this were not the case. For it is as a political force that the aesthetic still concerns us as one of the most powerful ideological drives to act upon the reality of history. (264)

De Man's statement accurately expresses the high stakes involved in *Bildung*, its concomitant concepts, and even, as de Man suggests, the aesthetic in general, given that aesthetics never necessarily acts as an innocent category or hollow ambition. Aesthetics does indeed give shape, language, and ideas to men and to the world. In addition, and as can clearly be seen here in the case of Schiller and, if to a lesser extent, Kant, the supposed virtues inherent in aesthetics tend to be appropriated or simply utilized in order to serve as means to an ideological end.

De Man continues:

But what is then called [...] the *aesthetic*, is not a separate category but a principle of articulation between various known faculties, activities, and modes of cognition. What gives the aesthetic its power and hence its practical, political impact, is its intimate link with knowledge, the epistemological implications that are always in play when the aesthetic appears over the horizon of discourse. (264-265 emphasis in original)

The aesthetic's power thus announces itself in its ability to act as a fulcrum and enabler of "known," or culturally specific, values. That is, the aesthetic presents, re-presents, and gives language to ways of knowing and acting so that these ways become intimately, reflexively, tied to the aesthetic. As de Man shows via Schiller (and Kant), this makes the aesthetic political, insofar as these ways of knowing and acting constitute means of and for power, perhaps power over others, especially if the capacity for proper aesthetic judgments can be imprinted upon human subjects so as to seem to be of their own intuitive design rather than ideologically imposed in order to be complicit with the beautiful power of the powerfully beautiful State.

German *Bildung* and its extension into Schiller's ideals of an aesthetic humanity living within an aesthetic state can therefore be seen to be a continuation of the Roman *humanitas* in the humanist tradition as defined by Heidegger, in that they predicate themselves upon the education of a citizenry according to self-perpetuating eternal values in the *name* of a humanitarian state and against all the barbarism that is not so aesthetically inclined. "Political power, in short, must implant itself in subjectivity itself, if its dominance is to be secure [...]" declares Eagleton, "and this process requires the production of a citizen whose ethico-political duty has been internalized as spontaneous inclination" (114). And when Schiller states that, "we are striving, after all, for a firm basis of knowledge, which nothing is ever to shake," he fails to mention that the advancement of *Humanität* and the aesthetic state strive for a "firm basis" of political power as well, "which nothing is ever to shake" (60).

For Heidegger, this makes the German *Humanität*, as filtered through the *humanitas* of *homo humanus*, an imperialistic term of political power, utilizing aesthetic language to act as an "instrument of domination over beings [...] determined with regard to an already established interpretation of nature, history, world, and the ground of the world, that is of beings as a whole" (243, 245). Such language can be used to separate and differentiate between peoples within the same nation and between supposedly distinct nations or races in order to foster nationalism at home and imperialism at home and abroad.<sup>123</sup> Additionally, this language contains and presents a moralizing logic that is

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<sup>123</sup> With respect to nationalism and its relation to subjectivity, Heidegger expresses the following: "Every nationalism is metaphysically an anthropologism, and as such subjectivism. Nationalism is not overcome through mere internationalism; it is rather expanded and elevated thereby into a system. Nationalism is as little brought and raised to *humanitas* by internationalism as individualism is by an ahistorical collectivism. The

to be taken at its word as containing and presenting eternal truths about the nature of mankind.

What is more, in *Parmenides* Heidegger shows that this very “imperial” word is, in fact, if also by law, a “command” (40). He presents this etymological and, in turn, cultural connection in the extended citation that follows:

*Imperium* means “command.” To be sure, we now understand the word “command” in a later, Latin-romantic sense. Originally “command” [*Befehl*] [...] meant the same as “to cover”: to “commit” (command) the dead to the earth or to the fire, to entrust them to a cover. [...] On its way through the French language, “command” became *commandieren*, i.e., more precisely, the Latin *imperare*, *imparare* = to arrange, to take measures, i.e., *prae-cipere*, to occupy in advance, and so to take possession of the occupied territory and to rule it. *Imperium* is the territory [*Geibet*] founded on commandments [*Gebet*], in which the others are obedient [*botmässig*]. *Imperium* is the command in the sense of the commandment. [...] Command, as the essential ground of domination, includes being-superior, which is only possible as the constant surmounting of others, who are thereby inferiors. (40 emphasis in original)

In other words, and according to the critic, Gareth Williams, “*Imperium* es la instalación de una idea de la vida basada en la superioridad orgánica y unificadora. [...] [L]a ley de *imperium* como la formación de una unidad orgánica e integradora capaz de garantizar la superioridad de cierto tipo de mente sobre el mundo” (“Ortega” 160, 163). Williams labels this *soi-disant* “superiority,” “modernity”; though, in the current context it could just as easily be labeled “humanism,” or even, perhaps, in certain, that is, many, instances, “avant-garde.” Indeed, we witnessed such instances in Chapters One and Two of the current study. When part and parcel of an imperializing discourse that separates and hierarchizes certain select humans vis-à-vis *others*, when part and parcel of the humanistic and, in turn, avant-garde logic that constitutes, and, in the case of the avant-

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latter is the subjectivity of human beings in totality. It completes subjectivity’s unconditioned self assertion, which refuses to yield” (260).

garde, *radicalizes*, this discourse, the language of Culture is, in the end, from the start, the dominative language of the Command.

As has been already noted, Nietzsche attacks this logic and language throughout much of his work.<sup>124</sup> For Nietzsche, humanism and its espousal of the human subject's ability to know and dominate the world that surrounds him/her relies on a metaphysical logic that refuses to account for, or even acknowledge the possibility of, the illogical in the nature of man and/or the state. This is because humanism fosters the conviction that the actions of man – that is, humanized and aestheticized man – come about according to conscious and logical choices that transcend, to return to Humboldt, the “dissipating and confusing diversity” that surrounds him, that come about according to *free will*. But, as Nietzsche says in, *Twilight of the Idols*, “Convictions are prisons.” (184) Life does not revolve around man – or, to speak in perhaps more Heideggerian terms, being does not revolve around man – just as the sun does not revolve around the earth. Nietzsche: “Man is not the crown of creation: every creature stands beside him at the same stage of perfection” (*Twilight* 136). Statements such as these effectively serve to counter the supposedly “‘Copernican Revolution’ in thought [which] centres the world upon the human subject,” making of it a thoroughly moral being capable of transcendence – a revolution that starts with Kant and is modified and amplified by Schiller shortly thereafter (Eagleton 102).

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<sup>124</sup> Although unaccustomed to directly utilizing the term “humanism” in his works, Nietzsche clearly aims many of his critiques at what some today would take to be the traditional hallmarks of humanism as expressed in German Idealism. At other moments, however, his arguments do indeed dovetail with those of humanists like Schiller and Kant, especially as expressed in his first work, *The Birth of Tragedy*. The ways in which Nietzsche operates as a contradictory thinker will be analyzed further and vis-à-vis Roberto Arlt in Chapter Five.

Nietzsche calls these aspirations to transcendence a becoming-reactive of man and of life, as they effectively negate life as such in search of something supposedly beyond: so much is man! But life is change, difference, necessity. Life is “dissipating and confusing diversity,” which, for Nietzsche, should be affirmed rather than negated: “Affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problems [...]” (*Twilight* 121). Deleuze echoes this in his monograph on the German philosopher entitled *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, explaining that Nietzsche thinks and works towards “the affirmation of life instead of its higher solution or justification” (13). In other words, man acts as a part of life, given that he acts as an expression of it, not as the sole mediator of it – not, as Schiller would have us believe, as an aestheticized being with “universal validity” of judgment and power, thoroughly capable of “annulling chance and compulsion.”

“Thus: it is because man *regards* himself to be free, not because he is free, that he feel remorse and pangs of conscience,” Nietzsche writes in *Human, All Too Human*, going on to say that, “No one is accountable for his deeds, no one for his nature; to judge is the same thing as to be unjust” (35). The illusion of free will enslaves man in the reactive forces of his own *ressentiment*, transforming man into a moral and reactive being of bad conscience:

‘*Man’s actions are always good.*’ – We do not accuse nature of immorality when it sends us a thunderstorm and makes us wet: why do we call the harmful man immoral? Because in the latter case we assume a voluntarily commanding free will, in the former necessity. But this distinction is an error. (*Human* 55 emphasis in original)

The moral human being fundamentally differs from the knowledgeable human being in that morality breeds judgment and instills a false sense of superiority. Furthermore, the assumption of free will as inherent in the human subject brings with it the assumption of

values: “Everywhere accountability is sought, it is usually the instinct for *punishing and judging* which seeks it” (*Twilight* 64 emphasis in original). Nietzsche likens belief in free will, morality, responsibility, judgment, etc., to symptoms of a disease that man has seemingly always carried; this disease is man himself. “The earth (he [Zarathustra] said) has a skin; and this skin has has diseases. One of these diseases, for example, is called ‘Man’” (*Thus Spoke* 153). By affirming necessity as life’s generator and a “revaluation of all values,” man will begin to cure himself of himself, and set off on the road towards the life of the convalescent (*Twilight* 31). That is to say, “The world revolves, not around the inventors of new noises, but around the inventors of new values” (*Thus Spoke* 153-154).

Much in the same way, then, that de Man points out that the aesthetic can act as a principle of articulation for thought and action, free will can be seen as a principle of articulation for values, as it involves recourse to judgment and accusation. Both principles of articulation take advantage of their ties to knowledge to exercise power over others. Deleuze reiterates these sentiments in his aptly-entitled essay, “To Have Done With Judgment”: “This is the essential effect of judgment: existence is cut into lots, the affects are distributed into lots, and then related to higher forms. [...] Men judge insofar as they value their own lots, and are judged insofar as a form either confirms or dismisses their claim” (129).<sup>125</sup> Free will in the humanist tradition thus exists and persists as a site of error in thought and, in the words of Heidegger, as a disabling concept that keeps thought out of its element, judging the acts of beautiful, civilized man, as *homo humanus*, to be pre-ordained to be logical, moral, and just.

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<sup>125</sup> This particular view of life is essentially Orteguian as well.

However, the questions for Heidegger and Nietzsche remain: Logical, moral, beautiful, and just according to whom, according to what language, and what system of beliefs? But speaking in terms of the “Who?” and “What?” means “we are already on the lookout for something like a person or an object,” which means being and thinking have been bypassed in order to think and be according to an instrumental or rational mentality (“Letter” 249). Justice does not simply exist. Aesthetic beauty, for that matter, does not simply exist either. They are not eternal laws of human nature or nature itself. Instead, they are docilely constructed over time according to culturally specific values. Recourse to truth, recourse to justice, recourse to morals, recourse to beauty constitutes recourse to a set of malleable, not eternal, values.<sup>126</sup> And, in effect, Heidegger and Nietzsche call for a transvaluation of values.

Heidegger states his case as follows:

To think against “values” is not to maintain that everything interpreted as “a value” – “culture,” “art,” “science,” “human dignity,” “world,” and “God” is valueless. Rather, it is important finally to realize that precisely through the characterization of something as “a value” what is so valued is robbed of its worth. That is to say, by the assessment of something as a value what is valued is admitted only as an object for human estimation. But what a thing is in its being is not exhausted by its being an object, particularly when objectivity takes the form of value. Every valuing, even where it values positively, is a subjectivizing. It does not let beings: be. Rather, valuing lets beings: be valid – solely as the objects of its doing. [...] Here as elsewhere thinking in values is the greatest blasphemy imaginable against being. To think against values therefore does not mean to beat the drum for the valuelessness and nullity of beings. It means rather to bring the clearing of being before thinking, as against subjectivizing beings into mere objects. (“Letter” 265)

Thinking against values thus does not equate to nihilism. To be sure, Heidegger and Nietzsche fight squarely against nihilism! Instead, by freeing thinking from the “technical

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<sup>126</sup> Another philosopher of the time, William James, says something similar in “Pragmatism and Humanism,” “Far from being antecedent principles that animate the process, law, language, truth are but abstract names for its results” (106).

interpretation of thinking,” thinking against values thinks immanently in the nameless – that is, closer to being – as opposed to in the name of something – be it values, truth, beauty, or the human (“Letter” 240). *Praxis* as opposed to *poiesis*. Thinking that thinks not in the terms of “subject” and “object” – deemed by Heidegger “inappropriate terms of metaphysics” – but in terms of a thinking that enables “thinking to be a thinking” within being (240-241). “Thinking does not overcome metaphysics by climbing still higher, surmounting it, transcending it somehow or other; thinking overcomes metaphysics by climbing back in down in the nearness of the nearest” (268). In and along with being (in the world). Let thinking think and let being be. As Nietzsche explains, this is a “*Fundamental insight*. – There is no pre-established harmony between the furtherance of truth and the well-being of mankind” (182 author’s emphasis). Thinking in the name of “truth” and thinking in the name of “mankind” mean subjectivizing truth and mankind as objects of human value.

If, then, man is not pre-destined to be in harmony with the world, it is precisely because he is not pre-destined to be in absolute control of the world. This is not to say that man wields no power whatsoever over the world and that an inhuman world would somehow be better, but that the human subject does not simply act upon and master what exists outside it as objects. Rather, what are commonly called subjects and objects necessarily affect each other, acting as *forces* in the world, in life, in being, so that the human subject is not necessarily apart, above, or in total control. Nietzsche outlines this viewpoint here in *On the Genealogy of Morals*:

A quantum of force is equivalent to a quantum of drive, will, effect – more, it is nothing other than precisely this very driving, willing, effecting, and only owing to the seduction of language (and of the fundamental errors of reason that are

petrified in it) which conceives and misconceives all effects as conditioned by something that causes effects, by a 'subject,' can it appear otherwise. (13)

As is clear, these forces are not the scientific and ideological motors of the dialectic at work in the recuperation of an otherwise alienated humanity; there is no lack that needs to be overcome. For forces, like energy, can neither be created nor destroyed in attempts at transcendent gestures, but rather combined and separated – that is, immanently rearranged. They are active and reactive forces of joy and sadness and, ultimately, forces of power that do and/or do not begin with humans.

Meanwhile, alienation, as so expressed in humanism, expresses a definite lack and a sense of *ressentiment* or reactivity in the face of this supposed lack. “Dialectic thrives on oppositions,” says Deleuze in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, “because it is unaware of far more subtle and subterranean differential mechanisms: topological displacements, typological variations” (157). Remaining solely in the realm of oppositions, however, means remaining in the realm of “the relation between abstract products,” while “difference is the only principle of genesis or production: a principle which itself produces opposition as mere appearance” (157). The dialectic, then, in not producing, functions as reactive force: “an art of quibbling beyond all others, an art of disputing properties and changing proprietors, an art of *ressentiment*” (160).<sup>127</sup> Reactive forces that sap man of his power and of the active forces at his possible disposal, separating these active forces from what they can do: create, produce, connect.<sup>128</sup> And this *ressentiment* has characterized the

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<sup>127</sup> That is, an Orteguvian art.

<sup>128</sup> What, for example, can Schiller’s aesthetic man do once he is made to be aesthetic? Where is there difference to be found between one beautiful human and another, if we all have the same ‘intersubjective’ standards of beauty? What connections can an aesthetic state make with other cultures if it acts according to a “universal validity” of purpose and judgment?

whole of history in the form of humanism, in the form of an exclusionary metaphysics! In the form of being faithful and thinking oneself responsible for the upholding of various doctrines and “-isms,” thereby not finding connections, not affirming difference, but programming. “It ought to be somewhat clearer now,” says Heidegger, “that opposition to ‘humanism’ in no way implies a defense of the inhuman but rather opens other vistas” (265).

Like Deleuze in his treatment of Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida builds upon Heidegger and Nietzsche’s critiques of metaphysical humanism in 1968 in his seminal address, “Différance.” Calling *différance* “literally neither a word nor a concept,” Derrida sets out to explore how *différance* and its possible uses express “a weaving, an interlacing which permits the different threads and different ways of meaning – or of force – to go off again in different directions, just as it is always ready to tie itself up with others” (3). In this way, life and meaning are not channeled through two distinct planes, progressing according to continual, transcendental, antagonistic contradictions, but rather on one plane – or, for that matter, all planes – without being able to be pinned down according to one distinct way of thought – say, humanism. Instead, through the play of language, life and meaning constantly become, constantly differ, and defer. And they do not do so outside of or external to the subject, but become with the subject as the subject becomes, so that the clear distinction between subject and object breaks down as both evolve and devolve constantly through and with one another, rather than as opposed to one another:

Thus, *différance* is the name we might give to the “active,” moving discord of different forces, and of differences of forces, that Nietzsche sets against the entire system of metaphysical grammar, wherever this system governs culture, philosophy, and science. (18)

This is a different way of thinking and living: namely, thinking and living.

Thinking along such Nietzschean lines allows Derrida to contend the following:

there has never been, never will be, a unique word, a master-name. [...] There will be no unique name, even if it were the name of Being. And we must think this without *nostalgia*, that is, outside the myth of a purely maternal or paternal language, a lost native country of thought. On the contrary, we must *affirm* this, in the sense in which Nietzsche puts affirmation into play, in a certain laughter and a certain step of the dance. (27 author's emphasis)

Initially, this statement would seem to be a critique of Heidegger, since *différance* expresses a constant questioning of everything, including "Being." For *différance* acts, questions, and creates – not in terms of a negation, but rather in terms of the affirmation of difference, in terms of joyful play. Unlike it is for Schiller, joyful *play* functions here as an active ethics of questioning that is not done in order to restore, recuperate, or reconstitute some essence long lost or lacking. It is not "nostalgic." It does not proceed dialectically. It is the question: What works? It is provisional. It is not forever. It is active and reactive forces of power. It is micro as it is macro in shape and scope. It is a constant questioning and destruction of values, for the ascription and subscription to any value already means, as Heidegger says, a "subjectivizing," which means metaphysics, which automatically leaves something out.<sup>129</sup>

In a way, Spinoza says something similar centuries earlier in *The Ethics*: "I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies" (153). This statement, coupled with those from Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Derrida from above, attempts to raze the metaphysical and humanist distinction between subjects and objects, between man and world. Again, this is not to say that these thinkers speak in favor of powerless human subjects, but in favor of new ways of

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<sup>129</sup> That said, a different and more inclusive metaphysical style will be seen to be active in its own right in the philosophical and aesthetic works of the Argentine avant-gardist, Macedonio Fernández, presented in Chapter Five.

knowing, feeling, and living in the world. As Nietzsche declares, “The most valuable insights are *methods*” (*Twilight* 135 author’s emphasis). New methods that constantly create ways of and towards power and active forces, rather than reproduce the values and reactive forces that ultimately sap people’s power. In short, “Other vistas.”

Spinoza, meanwhile, speaks of sad and joyful passions as Nietzsche speaks of reactive and active forces. Sad passions and reactive forces separate people from what they can do, individually and collectively, while joyful passions and active forces combine to explore methods, create connections, and therefore amplify power. For both thinkers, the notion of free will has historically separated people from what they can do; against free will they speak to necessity. “Everything is necessity – thus says the new knowledge; and this knowledge itself is necessity,” says Nietzsche (*Human* 58). “In nature there is nothing contingent [...]. *It is of the nature of reason to regard things as necessary, not as contingent,*” says Spinoza (104, 143 emphasis in original).

Heidegger also speaks of necessity; and while Spinoza does so in terms of substance and Nietzsche in terms of a general life, Heidegger does so in terms of being. Specifically, Heidegger claims that the “*human being is in thrownness*” (260 my emphasis). While he cannot control this thrownness, man happens so that he is necessarily there, there in the clearing of being: *Dasein*. Not already as a subject or an object, but “ek-sisting,” or standing in the openness of being:

The human being is never first and foremost the human being on the hither side of the world, as a “subject,” whether this is taken as “I” or “We.” Nor is he ever simply a mere subject that always simultaneously is related to objects, so that his essence lies in the subject-object relation. Rather, before all things, the human being in his essence is ek-sistent into the openness of being, into the open region that first clears the “between” within which a “relation” of subject to object can “be.” (266)

Language allows for the human being's nearness to the clearing of being, in the openness of being's folds, but it is language without, as Derrida says, a "metaphysical grammar." Thus, as necessity, as thrownness, *Dasein*'s very nature poses a philosophical and ontological problem for itself as being, just as language's very nature poses a philosophical and communicative problem for itself as expression. As part and parcel of humanist metaphysics and thus of philosophy in general, values and grammar curtail being and expression, policing the world in the process with their judgments.

Yet, by affirming chance, one effectively says "no" to free will, its metaphysical foundation, and its transcendent goal, since the knowledge and affirmation of necessity include the knowledge and affirmation of chance. In other words, and as Nietzsche shows, "By affirming chance we affirm the relation of all forces" (*Nietzsche* 44). Yet the "no" here invoked does not "necessarily point toward pure negation and the negative" ("Letter" 264). Instead, this occurs only when what one means by positive and negative is presupposed in advance according to absolute logic. "By continually appealing to the logical," Heidegger explains, "one conjures up the illusion that one is entering straightforwardly into thinking when in fact one has disavowed it" (265). The "no" called upon in the affirmation of chance is a questioning method, not a judgment. Heidegger: "Questioning builds a way" (*The Question* 3). Nevertheless, saying "no" can surely act as a means to subjectivity if taken as an act of free will, and hence as a dialectical negation, but, with relation to being, the methodological "no" is "simply the affirmation of the 'not': an 'acknowledgement,' a 'letting-be of ek-sistence'" ("Letter" 265). This is not being, but becoming, vitality, active force: power.

“No” means not that man is nothing in the world. And these radical critiques of the human as a subject attempt instead to show that man functions more substantially, more essentially, as a part with being rather than as a metaphysical subject, although he has apparently yet to fully do so. More being, less human, being the idea. Humans can and do, in fact, come together in agreement to produce great things. They come together as bodies to form bodies, to form a body. Indeed, as Spinoza states, “no one has yet determined what the body can do,” suggesting that new ways await (155). However, Spinoza also states, “Not many words will be required to show that Nature has no end set before it, and that all final causes are nothing but human fictions” (111). This would include, then, the realization of *Bildung* in aestheticized humanity and the construction of the aesthetic state.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, may contradict Spinoza’s second statement by saying the following, “The goal is yourself to become a necessary chain of rings of culture and from this necessity to recognize the necessity inherent in the course of culture in general” (*Human* 135). What it seems that he means to express here, however, is simply the fact that culture does serve a purpose in all of this. Like Schiller showed before, culture can bring people together just as it can keep them apart. Yet, as Heidegger demonstrates, those that think against metaphysical humanism do not necessarily think against culture, but do think other ways of culture, other methods of cultural expression in terms of necessity. One could even say that they do not so much think against metaphysical humanism but for a non-metaphysical humanism, if such a thinking can think.

That said, thinking without metaphysics, as Spinoza would point out, functions provisionally at best and in fits, given that sad passions and reactive forces constrain and separate the powers of most human beings most all of the time. Again, culture and the institutions that it provides can bring people together in agreement, enhancing their powers of existing in the process. But it can also do just the opposite – culture can judge. Ultimately, this is because beings, not being, make up culture as a necessary fiction that fosters sympathies and promotes judgment. Deleuze outlines both dynamics as follows:

Judgment prevents the emergence of any new mode of existence. For the latter creates itself through its own forces, that is, through the forces it is able to harness, and is valid in and of itself as much as it brings the new combination into existence. Herein, perhaps lies the secret: to bring into existence and not to judge. [...] It is not a question of judging other existing beings, but of sensing whether they agree or disagree with us, that is, whether they bring forces to us [...]. (“To Have” 135)

More often than not culture does both: it brings into existence *and* passes judgment. This fluctuating combination shows that moments of metaphysical subjectivity can ultimately be very necessary along the way, in the course of affirming necessity and creating.

It is, perhaps, in the creative arts that new ways and methods, “new modes of existence,” and “other vistas” find the greatest facility of expression. This is where Ortega and the possibility of a transatlantic avant-garde returns. For it is in the aesthetics of what Ortega calls *el arte nuevo* that he believes he sees and gives name to a new cultural method. As an aggressive manifesto and a meditative essay, a description and a prescription, a call to arts and a call to arms, Ortega titles his work accordingly: *La deshumanización del arte*. Although the polemical piece speaks at length in favor of dehumanized art, the ideas put forth therein manifest a complicated and contradictory

relationship with humanism, the human subject, and its critiques as outlined above. This relationship can be just as in line with Schiller's arguments regarding the aesthetic state as it is with Nietzsche's arguments "regarding the revaluation of all values."

Nevertheless, Ortega's ultimate desire for order – a desire for necessary antagonisms between different cultural subjectivities which effectively, dialectically, propel culture forward towards an eternal order - dictates what will be seen to be his radical, reactionary, and humanistic, if also avant-garde, way of thinking.

### **3.1 *Deshumanización* – An Orteguian Critique?**

In *La deshumanización del arte*, the main thrusts of Ortega's argument call for the destinal advent of a dehumanized and ludic art created by young artists, which, in its pure, non-transcendental aesthetics, enables properly artistic thought, thereby separating men ipso facto into two distinct social classes in the process according to their relation to this new art. This argument finds its local roots in Spanish *ultraísmo*, whose own roots can be traced to *futurismo* and *creacionismo*.<sup>130</sup>

While Ortega's relationship with the young ultraists was tenuous at best, he undoubtedly took from *ultraísmo* many of its aesthetic methods, intending to organize them under the supposedly more coherent rubric of *deshumanización*. "Es un síntoma de pulcritud mental," reckons Ortega, "querer que las fronteras entre las cosas estén bien demarcadas" (47). Indeed, the very word, *deshumanización*, had an immediate and palpable effect on the organization of the lexicon at the time, maybe only because *ultra*'s

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<sup>130</sup> This has all been addressed at length in Chapters One and Two.

effects, though felt as well, were more subterranean in nature. Geist construes the situation thusly:

Cuando Ortega acuñó el término no descubrió el fenómeno, le dio nombre. [...] La designación *deshumanización* hizo fortuna inmediatamente. *La deshumanización* [...] está detrás de prácticamente toda la crítica de arte y literatura en los cinco o diez años posteriores a su publicación. Ortega había tocado la sensibilidad artística de su tiempo. (152)

Ortega, meanwhile, attempts to directly outline this artistic sensibility according to these seven principles that he sees at work in *el arte nuevo*:

Si se analiza el nuevo estilo, se hallan en él ciertas tendencias sumamente conexas entre sí. Tiende; 1.º) a la deshumanización del arte; 2.º) a evitar formas vivas; 3.º) a hacer que la obra de arte no sea sino obra de arte; 4.º) a considerar el arte como juego, y nada más; 5.º) a una esencial ironía; 6.º) a eludir toda falsedad, y, por tanto, a una escrupulosa realización. En fin, 7.º) el arte, según los artistas jóvenes, es una cosa sin trascendencia alguna. (24)<sup>131</sup>

In Ortega's mind, dehumanized art surges as it does and when it does according to a supposedly natural and essential progression manifested in culture's totality. "Es, en verdad, sorprendente y misteriosa la compacta solidaridad consigo misma que cada época histórica mantiene en todas sus manifestaciones [...]" he states rather emphatically, going on to say, "Todo el arte joven es impopular, y no por caso y accidente, sino en virtud de un destino esencial" (10-11). Compare this, to Schiller when he declares that the "race could have made progress in no other way," and we can see that for both thinkers culture acts as a total force that totalizes in turn, leaving no room for possible fissures or ruptures in order (43). Thus, for Ortega, just like for Schiller, proper culture functions as logical, destinal ordering and acts as *the* ordering principle that naturally and logically organizes society as it progresses towards a common end. "Ya veremos," Ortega goes on to say,

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<sup>131</sup> Forget the fact that Ortega says in *Meditaciones del Quijote*, "De uno u otro modo, es siempre el hombre el tema esencial del arte" (79).

“cómo todo el arte nuevo, coincidiendo en esto con la nueva ciencia, con la nueva política, con la nueva vida, en fin, repugna ante todo la confusión de fronteras” (47). This Manichaeian tendency of Ortega’s to establish polarizing and essential differences amongst cognitive faculties, artistic styles and interpretations, political allegiances, and even entire peoples in the name of clarity and totality shows Ortega’s desires to make of culture something monolithic. Surely, then, according to such an epistemological system it would be easy to determine and pass judgment upon the kinds of cultural manifestations that do not properly express proper culture’s essential and natural destiny, insofar as they would not adhere to such rigid terms.

Eleven years before publishing *La deshumanización*, Ortega outlines what he specifically sees to be culture’s defining role in the world historical process in 1914 in his first published book, *Meditaciones del Quijote*:

Cultura [...] es lo firme frente a lo vacilante, es lo fijo frente a lo huidero, es lo claro frente a lo oscuro. Cultura no es la vida toda, sino sólo el momento de seguridad, de firmeza, de claridad. [...] Frente a lo problemático de la vida, la cultura, en la medida en que es viva y auténtica – representa el tesoro de los principios” (65-66, 68).

Culture functions in a similar way for Schiller in the aesthetic state, as it is destined to keep the sensuous and formal impulses “within its proper bounds” (72). Clearly, Schiller says, “this is the task of *culture*” (68 emphasis in original). While barbaric culture can lead to disorder, confusion, and chaos, true aesthetic culture brings order and stability because of its ability to maintain equilibrium within subjects and society – that is, because of its ability to maintain its own firm basis of power.

What is more, Ortega firmly believes that attempting to resist this authentically powerful culture and its concomitant principles of ordered destiny will prove fruitless:

Lo caprichoso, lo arbitrario, y, en consecuencia, estéril, es resistirse a este nuevo estilo y obstinarse en la reculsión dentro de formas ya arcaicas, exhaustas, y periclitadas. En arte, como en moral, no depende el deber de nuestro arbitrio; hay que aceptar el imperativo de trabajo que la época nos impone. Esta docilidad a la orden del tiempo es la única probabilidad de aceptar que el individuo tiene. (*Deshumanización* 23)

In this way, one reproduces the values of the times – no matter if they be new or different – simply because culture and its attendant morality compel one to do so by providing a logical and integral model meant to be followed. After all, it's only natural to be docile, since that's just how the world works – and resistance is futile! Cultural hegemony can hence be achieved since it is already securely implanted within subjectivity, so that any sort of critical agency that would possibly undermine the moral and artistic trends of the times is extinguished thanks to the clear light provided by culture itself. “[E]l hombre tiene una misión de claridad sobre la tierra [...]” explains Ortega in *Meditaciones*, “La lleva dentro de sí, es la raíz misma de su constitución” (81). This clear, natural, cultural light serves to combat all of the darkness that would dim culture's hegemonic radiance.

Yet, such docility in the face of cultural and moral imperative is not so much an affirmation of necessity as it is acquiescence to reactive forces that strip human beings of their power, separating them from what they can do, i.e. intuit, make decisions, and bring into existence. Heidegger, Nietzsche, Spinoza, Deleuze, and Derrida desire that human beings be more powerful and capable by enhancing their realm of desire so that subject-object relationships do not define them. Where is the creative production of desire to be found in notions that reify man and ideologically channel his desire according to transcendental, cultural, and moral imperatives? The very idea nonplusses William James – one of Ortega's philosophical peers who also published in Ortega's *Revista de Occidente*. In opposition, James asserts that, “The notion of a reality calling on us to

“agree” with it, and that for no reasons, but simply because its claim is “unconditional” or “transcendent,” is one that I can make neither head nor tail of” (103). Thinking, at least doing so independently, is surely out of the question. And even though Ortega demonstrates that by embracing new and dehumanized art one rejects the reproduction of previous and possibly outdated models, one’s becoming should not simply plateau upon arriving at this singular new model so that one then reproduces it without question simply because of its apparent transcendental novelty. Such acquiescence disables “no” as thought, therefore arresting movement of thought as a differential and functional method.

As noted above, the new, dehumanized model surfaces as one that is, by definition, *impopular* or even *antipopular* – popular or romantic art being essentially mimetic and therefore passive in nature.<sup>132</sup> Going against what Ortega considers to be the aesthetic bankruptcy of mimetic and romanticized art, dehumanized art not only avoids the human and therefore easily understood forms of romanticism but, furthermore, shows great (Orteguian) disdain in the face of such sentimentality:

el arte de que hablamos no es sólo inhumano por no contener cosas humanas, sino que consiste activamente en esa operación de deshumanizar. [...] El placer estético para el artista nuevo emana de ese triunfo sobre lo humano; por eso es preciso concretar la victoria y presentar en cada caso la víctima estrangulada. (36)

Such supposedly ironic, though really strangely *violent*, language pervades Ortega’s essay and can also be found in many manifestoes and critiques that define the epoch.

Geist, for example, points to how violent language was often typical of the ultraists and also indicative of Europe’s social and cultural climate at the time:

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<sup>132</sup> In “Manifiesto del Ultra,” published four years earlier in 1921, and as cited in Chapter Two, Borges, *el ultraísta*, presages these sentiments as well by splitting up aesthetics into two distinct camps: “Sólo hay pues dos estéticas: la estética pasiva de los espejos y la estética activa de los prismas” (TR 106).

No es casual la imaginería bélica [...] pues la confrontación de viejos y jóvenes, del antiguo régimen contra un nuevo orden que pugna por definirse, no podía plantearse de otra manera. Los ultraístas creían y pretendían ser un movimiento, una entidad aparte. *Vanguardia* – rótulo que los ultraístas se aplican a sí mismos, y que les identifica con análogos movimientos en toda Europa – es, al fin y al cabo, un término militar. El efecto de tal leguaje es doble: crea, en primer lugar, un sentido (o una ilusión) de solidaridad y disciplina; implica, en segundo lugar, un odio recíproco entre ellos y en enemigo que contraataca. (39 emphasis in original)

Despite refusing to use the word *vanguardia* in *La deshumanización*, Ortega still wages his own war, so-to-speak, against romanticism. As he was in *El tema de nuestro tiempo*, he is still “belligerent” here in *La deshumanización del arte*. And although this battle looks to be fought in Nietzschean terms of active and reactive forces, with the active man fighting in the name of dehumanized art and the reactive man in the name of romantic, humanized art, the battle lines in Ortega’s case are not necessarily so clearly drawn.

Before addressing these battle lines, however, we should further elaborate upon Ortega’s *soi-disant* war-attack on romanticism and, once more, relate it to Kant and Schiller’s notions of aesthetics. True aesthetic pleasure, according to Ortega, requires contemplation, not *human* emotion, and a certain necessary distance between the subject and the object being contemplated.<sup>133</sup> In this way, artistic objects that traffic in human emotions “sólo parcialmente son obras de arte, objetos artísticos. Para gozar de ellos no

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<sup>133</sup> In *Meditaciones*, Ortega speaks at length of the value of *meditación*, a concept clearly linked, if not completely coterminous, with *contemplación*: “En la meditación, nos vamos abriendo un camino entre masas de pensamientos, separamos unos de otros los conceptos, hacemos penetrar nuestra mirada por el imperceptible intersticio que queda entre los más próximos, y una vez puesto cada uno en su lugar, dejamos tendidos resortes ideales que les impidan confundirse de nuevo. Así, podemos ir y venir a nuestro sabor por los paisajes de las ideas que nos presentan claros y radiantes sus perfiles” (47). This citation is of importance since it demonstrates Ortega’s manifest passion for cognitive clarity, which can, furthermore, extend itself to show how his thought is, unequivocally, a quest for an absolutely firm, absolutely clear, absolutely integral basis of knowledge – one that can, in supposedly similarly unequivocal terms, make manifest its superiority over other forms of and means to knowledge in terms of an essentializing distance of distinction.

hace falta ese poder de acomodación a lo virtual y transparente que constituye la sensibilidad artística” (21). For Ortega, this “artistic sensibility” signifies a veritable universal shift in aesthetic perception and appreciation. Indeed, much like Schiller claims “universal validity” for the actions of those aesthetically-conditioned, Ortega emphatically and unambiguously states, “El arte nuevo es un hecho universal” (22). In saying such things, both philosophers assign universal, hegemonic privilege to what really are culturally specific aesthetic values. It also stands to say that when Ortega mockingly says, “Con estos jóvenes [artistas] cabe hacer una de dos cosas: o fusilarlos o esforzarse en comprenderlos,” this pathetic attempt at some sort of sarcastic black humor palliates the reality of violence that underpins Ortega’s elitist philosophies as they crave a universal validity of their own (23).

What is more, in one of the most famous scenes to come out of Ortega’s entire *oeuvre*, he here presents the power of visual recognition (or *acomodación ocular*) as a universally transparent pathway towards superior aesthetic knowledge:

Se trata de una cuestión de óptica sumamente sencilla. Para ver un objeto tenemos que acomodar de una cierta manera nuestro aparato ocular. Si nuestra acomodación visual es inadecuada no veremos el objeto o lo veremos mal. Imagínese el lector que estamos mirando un jardín al través del vidrio de una ventana. Nuestros ojos se acomodarán de suerte que el rayo de la visión penetre el vidrio, sin detenerse en él, y vaya a prenderse en las flores y frondas. Como la meta de la visión es el jardín y hasta él va lanzando el rayo visual, no veremos el vidrio, pasará nuestra mirada a su través, sin percibirlo. Cuanto más puro sea el cristal menos lo veremos. Pero luego, haciendo un esfuerzo, podemos desentendernos del jardín y, retrayendo el rayo ocular, detenerlo en el vidrio. Entonces el jardín desaparece a nuestros ojos y de él sólo vemos unas masas de color confusas que parecen pegadas al cristal. Por lo tanto, ver el jardín y ver el vidrio de la ventana son dos operaciones incompatibles: la una excluye a la otra y requieren acomodaciones oculares diferentes. (18-19)<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ortega has already used this same *acomodación ocular* example before, however, in *El tema de nuestro tiempo*: “Es, pues, necesario, cuando se filosofa habituarse a detener la mirada sobre el vivir mismo, sin dejarse arrastrar por él en su movimiento, hacia lo

In this way, all you have to do is simply look at a work of art as art in order to recognize whether or not it expresses those specific qualities of dehumanized art as outlined above.<sup>135</sup> If it does, you will therefore experience the “verdadero goce estético” in recognizing that the “objeto artístico sólo es artístico en la medida en que no es real” (18, 20). It’s the glass – not the garden – that matters. Consequently, dehumanized art announces itself as such, not catering to what Ortega would claim to be pathetic attempts at mimesis that try in vain to reflect life in art, since the distance required to contemplate antimimetic art reiterates and reinforces the contemplative distance between life itself and the type of art extolled by Ortega. Additionally, the self-awareness of dehumanized art as art, and thus as separate from life, claims not to engage in any sort of transcendental relationship to life. “Vida es una cosa, poesía es otra,” he maintains, “No las mezclamos” (47).<sup>136</sup>

Meanwhile, Schiller privileges contemplation and contemplative vision over immediate emotion as well, saying, “Contemplation (reflection) is Man’s first free

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ultravital. Acontece lo que con el cristal medio transparente a través del cual vemos los demás objetos. Si nos dejamos ir a la solicitud que toda transparencia nos hace de que pasemos por ella, sin advertirla, hacia otra cosa, no veremos nunca el cristal. Para llegar a percibirlo, es preciso que nos desentendamos de todo aquello a que el vidrio nos lleva y retraigamos sobre él la mirada, sobre su irónica sustancia, que parece anularse a sí misma y dejarse transir por las cosas de más allá. Un esfuerzo semejante al de esta *acomodación ocular* se hace forzoso para contemplar la vida, en vez de acompañarla solidarizándose con sus impulsos. Entonces descubrimos en ella sus peculiares valores” (70 emphasis added).

<sup>135</sup> Ortega: “Los fenomenos elementales sólo se conocen ‘viéndolos’” (“Para dos” 63).

<sup>136</sup> Again, compare these ideas to what Borges says regarding art and its relationship to life in 1920: “No hay arte ético, No hay arte político. No existen leyes en el arte. Cada obra de arte trae consigo su ley” (qtd. in Geist 48). Explicating these ideas, Geist goes on to say, “Leyes, se entiende, naturales y morales [...]. No se observan las leyes naturales de la realidad objetiva. [...] Las reglas morales, que corresponden a una estructura social y política, también son ajenas al mundo creado por el artista” (48).

relation to the universe which surrounds him [...]” and that, “As soon as he begins to enjoy with the eye, and seeing acquires an absolute value for him, he is already aesthetically free also, and the play impulse has developed” (120, 126). As we have already seen, the “play impulse,” acting as the primary characteristic of the aesthetic condition, also paves the way to an intranscendental, if ultimately ineffective (also read: inaffective) mode of human being as “living shape,” also apparently known as humanity itself. For Schiller, *appearance* is the key term at work, noting, “Only insofar as it is *candid* (expressly renouncing all claim to reality), and only insofar as it is *self-dependent* (dispensing with all assistance from reality), is appearance aesthetic (128 emphasis in original). “To strive after appearance,” he goes on to say, “demands greater capacity for abstraction, more freedom of heart, more vigour of will than Man needs if he confines himself to reality, and he must already have put the latter behind him if he wishes to arrive at appearance” (131). Aim for appearance! Enhance abstraction! Dispense with reality!<sup>137</sup> I appear, therefore I am (human). Man is to cultivate his glass, not his garden.

To continue with Schiller:

Chained as he is to the material, Man has long since allowed appearance merely to serve his ends, before he has conceded it a personality of its own in the art of the idea. For this purpose a total revolution is needed in the whole mode of perception, without which he would not find himself even on the right road towards the ideal. When therefore we discover traces of a disinterested free appreciation of pure appearance, we can infer some such revolution of his nature and the real beginnings in him of humanity. (132)

If such a thing as a *proto-avant-garde aesthetics* exists, perhaps we have found it here, in the work of Friedrich Schiller. And yet, as has been said since the beginning, aesthetic culture so defined, i.e. according to a privileged humanity logically set apart from

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<sup>137</sup> On second thought, maybe these three dictums should stand in place of Geist’s quote from above as forming the definition of avant-garde expression.

“reality,” really paves the way for a politics of separation – one that we have witnessed in the name of humanism, and, if we go back to Ortega, in the name of *el arte nuevo*, *la cultura*, and *la generación*. As a result, when Eagleton opines, “The only politics that will hold is one firmly rooted in a refashioned ‘culture’ and a revolutionized subjectivity,” he speaks to art and culture’s specific roles in the ratification of a dominative political process (106).

Ortega, though, does not so much advocate for the same total revolution in the mode of perception, as he tries to state in no uncertain terms that it is already happening, and that those who miss it (miss seeing it, that is), will be left behind. In this way, *el arte nuevo* “[s]erá un arte para artistas, y no para la masa de los hombres; será un arte de casta, y no demótico” (22). If, then, as Peter Bürger states in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, “It is Schiller’s idea that precisely because it renounces all direct intervention in reality, art is suited to restore man’s wholeness,” Ortega’s idea is that art’s supposed “dissociation” from reality does not so much restore humanity to humans as it perspicuously emphasizes the elitist distinction between aesthetic humanity and non-aesthetic humanity, with the former being obviously superior to the latter (46). In showing its insurmountable distance to “real life,” art empties itself of meaning, becoming pure appearance and play in what for Ortega demonstrates a “triumphantly marvelous dialectical process”: “Porque al hacer el ademán de aniquilarse a sí propio sigue siendo arte y por una maravillosa dialéctica, su negación es su conservación y triunfo” (70).<sup>138</sup> The dialectic rears its nasty head once more, producing a beautiful

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<sup>138</sup> As Walter Benjamin notes in his essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” this sense of giddy, self-annihilation, though supposedly tempered by a dialectic process, “is evidently the consummation of ‘*l’art pour l’art*.’ Mankind, which in

emptiness. In this case, the dialectic also issues in “una etapa de puerilidad” all across Europe in which, just like Schiller said it would do centuries before, “beauty for her own sake becomes the object of endeavor,” as man is able to finally be a man by *playing* (*Deshumanización* 75; *Aesthetic* 136). “For, to declare it once and for all,” proclaims Schiller, “Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word a man, and *he is only wholly Man when he is playing*” (80 emphasis in original). The child is indeed the father of the man in such an idealistic, utopian society completely caught up in creating a meaningless art that approximates the “triumfo de los deportes y juegos” over “los dramáticos movimientos sociales y políticos” and “las profundadas corrientes filosóficas o religiosas” (*Deshumanización* 74). And maybe while everyone is having so much fun, playing with and admiring not only themselves but their fellow men as well as both Hellenized artists and artistic artifacts in themselves, they, oblivious of other more serious and profound endeavors, will not notice what happens to anyone who dares to break with this sublime unity. To be sure, we have already seen the powerful rights the aesthetic state reserves for itself when it comes time to counter any attempts at the contrary.

Yet, while it can be said that Schiller aims for democracy in his vision of the aesthetic state – at least ostensibly, and the ostensible is all that seems to matter for him, anyway – even though he admits at the end of his work that it can really only be found in “a few select circles,” Ortega sees a state already split violently in twain (140). But that is

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Homer’s time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian Gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic” (242). In other words, we have here another example of the proto-, if not outright, fascist nature of Ortega’s aesthetic politics – another example of the “destructive character.”

only natural. That is life. Ortega foresees: “Se acerca el tiempo en que la sociedad, desde la política al arte, volverá a organizarse, según es debido, en dos órdenes o rangos: el de los hombres egregios y el de los hombres vulgares” (15). This is what must happen, this is what history has given us: “Bajo toda la vida contemporánea late una injusticia profunda e irritante: el falso supuesto de la igualdad de los hombres” (15).<sup>139</sup> It is unjust to think that men are equal – even, or perhaps especially, in an aesthetic state – and resistance to this natural inequality will only be made in vain. Beneath all of Ortega’s lofty language, then, a sincerely exclusionary cultural imposition persists.<sup>140</sup>

Ortega then moves on to emphasize what Walter Benjamin christens the “theology of art.” Not being one to shy away from religious rhetoric, Ortega proclaims that, because of this new organization of the world according to aesthetic values, “Todo el malestar de Europa vendrá a desembocar y curarse en esa nueva y salvadora escisión” (15).<sup>141</sup> Art, in all its absolute glory and newness, will save us all. That is, it will save the select (European) ones who know what art really is. As a result, art, in Bürger’s words,

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<sup>139</sup> In his *Discurso de la novela española contemporánea*, Max Aub criticizes Ortega for his inexhaustible desire to divide and hierarchize humanity: “usted [Ortega] suspiraba por esa antihumana división protestante de castas, razas y colores que tan perfectamente casaba con la filosofía que había usted aprendido en Alemania [...]. En ningún país [...] influyeron tanto los intelectuales en la vida pública como en España. Y usted es el mejor y peor ejemplo, don José” (153). To this day, though, Ortega often remains rather free from criticism such as that directly offered here by one of his contemporaries.

<sup>140</sup> At times, this same desire to exclude comes out in Nietzsche as well. See here, for example, what he says in *Twilight of the Idols*: “‘Equality,’ a certain actual rendering similar of which the theory of ‘equal rights’ is only the expression, belongs essentially to decline: the chasm between man and man, class and class, the multiplicity of types, the will to be oneself, to stand out – that which I call *pathos of distance* – characterizes every strong age” (102 emphasis in original). Citations like this make it seem like Matei Calinescu is correct when he characterizes Ortega as “perhaps the most brilliant follower of Nietzsche” (193).

<sup>141</sup> “Hay en el afán de comprender concentrada toda una actitud religiosa,” Ortega states in *Meditaciones*, thereby showing the cognitive process to be intimately linked with a holy approach to the world (18).

“supplants” religion (28). Art passes judgment from on high upon who will be saved and who won’t, with those that will constituting “una minoría especialmente dotada” (*Deshumanización* 13). Art will redeem, restore, reterritorialize. This way, “los ‘mejores’ se conozcan y reconozcan entre el gris de la muchedumbre y aprendan su misión, que consiste en ser pocos y tener que combatir contra los muchos” (14). Ortega’s clarifying mission has now become a holy crusade that pits a select few against the great mass of men in a battle for political supremacy. *El arte nuevo*, in supplanting religion, does indeed, as Bürger says, “generate a ritual” – a ritual that uses violent cultural antagonisms to generate itself and destroy whatever lies in its path.

Thus, a fundamental contradiction emerges when Ortega states that this apparently “intranscendental” art will act as the very conduit towards a new society effectively split in two, outlining how aesthetic awareness will lead to his own radical vision of the aesthetic state. In addressing art’s “sociological effects,” Ortega, in a much more brazenly elitist fashion than witnessed in anything Schillerian, contends:

Actúa, pues, la obra de arte como un poder social que crea dos grupos antagónicos, que separa y selecciona en el montón informe de la muchedumbre dos castas diferentes de hombres. [...] A mi juicio, lo característico del arte nuevo, “desde el punto de vista sociológico,” es que divide al público en estas dos clases de hombres: los que lo entienden y los que no lo entienden. Esto implica que los unos poseen un órgano de comprensión negado, por tanto, a los otros, que son dos variedades de la especie humana. El arte nuevo, por lo visto, no es para todo el mundo, como el romántico, sino que va desde luego dirigido a una minoría especialmente dotada. De aquí la irritación que despierta en la masa. (12-13)

Here, however, we must stop and ask: How can art lack transcendence if it is supposed to separate and select men according to their artistic tastes? Here, art intimately and inextricably links itself to life. Still, Ortega insists: “Porque el hecho no es que al artista le interese poco su obra y oficio, sino que le interesa precisamente porque no tienen

importancia grave y en la medida en que carecen de ella” (72). *L’art pour l’art*: that is, a powerful political desire dressed up as lifeless, empty, aesthetic appearance; that is, a wolf in sheep’s clothing.<sup>142</sup>

Yet, as Ortega himself demonstrates, if unwittingly, art gives does give shape to life – more specifically, to political life. And when Eagleton states that the “ambiguities of Schiller’s work [...] are signs of genuine political dilemmas,” the same can surely be said of Ortega’s work (113). Beyond these “ambiguities,” it is safe to say that Ortega’s use of violent language and imagery expresses the genuine violence inherent to any politics that utilizes exclusion, as based on supposedly natural, logical, and universal principles, as its *prima materia*. Specifically in Ortega’s case, art functions politically according to and along with a discriminating, grammatical language that separates subjects from objects and subjects from subjects, reinforcing the distinction between *homo humanus* and *homo barbarus*. As Heidegger reminds us, “the reversal of a

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<sup>142</sup> While Ortega never makes specific reference to photography (or the cinema, for that matter) here, its artistic emergence in the early twenty-first century surely signaled a crisis in representation that threatened to make anyone an “artist” at the click of a button, thereby socializing artistic production in the process. Hence, it could be that Ortega composed *La deshumanización* as a reaction, albeit implicit, to this very crisis, given that allowing art to become a mass form would mean that it was ultimately not as specialized and thus would not succeed as a way of separating those with true aesthetic taste from those without. Benjamin, meanwhile, makes the explicit connection between photography and its relationship to “pure art” (dehumanized, of course, and without transcendence according to Ortega’s system): “With the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction, photography, simultaneously with the rise of socialism, art sensed the approaching crisis which has become evident a century later. At the time, art reacted with the doctrine of *l’art pour l’art*, that is, with a theology of art. This gave rise to what might be called a negative theology in the form of the idea of “pure” art, which not only denied any social function of art but also any categorizing by subject matter” (224). In this sense, Ortega’s work comes off as being all the more reactionary, as it attempts to rescue and restore art’s rapidly disappearing “aura” that would confer supreme cultural privilege upon it.

metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement” (250). To be sure, rather than lacking in transcendence, art here acts as the concretization and point of articulation of social, cultural, historical and political issues, as if it were all just a matter of aesthetics – though perhaps it is.

As we have seen, the use of the aesthetic utilized by Ortega correlates directly to Schiller’s politics of the aesthetic state and to what Eagleton, de Man, and Cocalis outlined above as they critiqued this politics. When Cocalis, for example, presents Schiller’s concepts regarding the relationship between aesthetics and politics, it clearly corresponds to Ortega’s own concepts as well:

Art, he [Schiller] posits, may become a tool of political change precisely because of its totally apolitical nature. It is the only force capable of appealing to the masses that has remained pure despite the prevailing corruption of civilization, because it has consistently avoided the political arena. As a neutral force, art is assigned the task of mediating between the present state of moral corruption and a future utopian state: i.e., it must expose the masses to moral ideals by allowing them to flee from the sordid realities of life into an aesthetic realm. Political art would therefore have to disguise itself in a totally apolitical form, in order to hold the reader’s attention long enough to be effective. In this manner, form becomes the overriding concern of art and would sublate the didactic content. (405-406)

While Ortega’s conception of and relationship to the masses will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter that focuses on what is his most well-known work, *La rebelión de las masas*, here in *La deshumanización del arte* we see how the aesthetic acts as a political tool of power by judging and organizing men according to what they understand or are capable of knowing in the name of a supremely superior cultural aesthetics supposedly devoid of political content. And if art “builds a way,” the way in which it builds this way in the aesthetic state does not do so by questioning political power but rather by ratifying an elitist ideology that consolidates political power in the hands of a select few. In explicating his philosophy, Ortega not only declares war on the aesthetic

trends known as realism and romanticism, but also on those that do not understand the new trend that is *el arte nuevo*. And if, as Benjamin says, “All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war,” then the battle lines drawn and battle cries bellowed by Ortega in the name of aesthetic taste and cultural salvation, although portrayed as transcending politics by signifying nothing and therefore being apolitical in nature, instead perpetuate the very political and very destructive phenomenon that celebrates nothing: war (241).

All that said, at first glance, Ortega’s war looks to be very much in line with the war that Nietzsche, a fellow vitalist, wages against man as a disease.<sup>143</sup> Yet, if we follow Deleuze’s conception of Nietzsche’s project, then Nietzsche does not so much wage war as he engages in “combat” against man’s seemingly instilled “will to nothingness,” a transcendent will reiterated and extended in Ortega (“To have done” 132-34). Unlike war, combat is not a “‘will to nothingness.’ Combat is not war” (133). Rather “[c]ombat, by contrast is a powerful nonorganic vitality that supplements force with force, and enriches whatever it takes hold of” (133). Combat is not judgment passed down from up on high, passed unto life from outside of it, but a working toward augmenting one’s capability to critically act in the world and with others as one of the world’s many forces.

Still, in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche, much like Ortega years later, says, “Great and fine things can never be common property: *pulchrum est paucorum hominum*”

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<sup>143</sup> Although the brief discussion of Nietzsche that follows may take the discussion off track for a moment, it is necessary to include, all the same, for it previews the more extended analysis of Nietzsche with respect to Ortega and Roberto Arlt that arises in Chapter Four.

(75).<sup>144</sup> As is the case with Schiller, then, one can find traces of Nietzsche throughout Ortega's writings, with some traces looking more like direct plagiarism. Of course, Nietzsche himself studied Schiller as well, and this influence plainly comes across in this selection taken from "On the uses and disadvantages of history for life":

The culture of a people as the antithesis to [...] barbarism was once, and as I think with a certain justice, defined as unity of artistic style in all the expressions of the life of a people; this definition should not be misunderstood in the sense of implying an antithesis between barbarism and *fine* style; what is meant is that a people to whom one attributes a culture has to be in all reality a single living unity and not fall wretchedly apart into inner and outer, content and form. He who wants to strive for and promote the culture of a people should strive for and promote this higher unity and join in the destruction of modern bogus cultivatedness for the sake of a true culture; he should venture to reflect how the health of a people undermined by the study of history may again be restored, how it may rediscover its instincts and therewith its honesty. (79-80 emphasis in original)

Nietzsche looks to make his own case for the need to overcome alienation here. The switch, however, occurs when Nietzsche says that a people need "rediscover its instincts," for both Schiller and Ortega's projects sacrifice these passionate instincts in order to elevate taste and "fine style" in its stead in the quest for a "higher unity." And while Schiller and Ortega utilize transcendent models in an attempt to really arrest being in the form of an affectless aesthetic artifact, these models fail to account for the forces of becoming that we find in Nietzsche.

Additionally, although Nietzsche decrees it necessary to, "Create for yourself the concept of a 'people,'" and goes on to say that this concept "could never be too exalted or too noble a concept," the "concept of a 'people'" so created by Schiller and Ortega does indeed cross some kind of line, insofar as it imposes laws (moral, aesthetic, and political in nature) that ultimately limit experience and knowledge in order judge those that may

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<sup>144</sup> Beauty is for the few.

transgress these laws (“On the uses” 109). As Deleuze tells us in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, “Law, whether moral or social, does not provide us with any knowledge; it makes nothing known” (24). On the contrary, such laws have:

compromise[d] the whole of ontology: the history of a *long error* whereby the command is taken for something good, obedience for knowledge itself, and Being for a *Fiat*. Law is always the transcendental instance that determines the opposition of values (Good-Evil), but knowledge is always the immanent power that determines the qualitative difference of modes of existence (good-bad). (24-25 emphasis in original)<sup>145</sup>

Here, Deleuze seems to be speaking not only through Spinoza, but perhaps through Nietzsche and Heidegger as well, for thinking and living according to such strict laws effectively places thinking and living outside of its element, thus serving to orient thought and life toward a functioning of passive obedience as opposed to critical knowledge by saddling it with a set of transcendental, judgmental, and hierarchical values.

In the end, though, Nietzsche can undoubtedly be complicated and contradictory, too.<sup>146</sup> (To be sure, none of these three thinkers finds a way to successfully create a tight, self-sufficient mode of thought – though, in Nietzsche’s case, this failure would seem to occur because such a system is not necessarily what he hopes for anyways.) Eagleton, for example, takes Nietzsche to task in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* as a thinker who ultimately extends some of humanism’s most precious metaphysical virtues, because “art is Nietzsche’s theme from beginning to end, and the will to power is the supreme artifact” (252). Ortega, meanwhile, does not so much misread Nietzsche, as he seems to

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<sup>145</sup> The curious relationship between good and bad will be further examined in Chapter Five with respect to Macedonio Fernández’s “good” and “bad” novels, *Museo de la novela de la Eterna (Primera novela buena)* and *Adriana Buenos Aires (Última novela mala)*.

<sup>146</sup> Deleuze, for one, succinctly says of Nietzsche, “you just can’t deal with him in the same sort of way. He gets up to all sorts of things behind *your* back” (“Letter” 4 emphasis in original).

read him selectively and according to his own project – though, admittedly, the same could also be said about the current reading of Nietzsche offered here – essentially attempting to situate the Overman as an *artista joven* within the aesthetic state. See, for instance, what Nietzsche says about the artist, his/her relation to the public, and how this contradicts both his own statement from above and Ortega’s own “sociological point of view”:

*The artist and his following must keep in step.* – Progress from one stylistic level to the next must proceed so slowly that not only the artists but the auditors and spectators too can participate in this progress and know exactly what is going on. Otherwise, there suddenly appears that great gulf between the artist creating his works on a remote height and the public which, no longer able to attain to that height, at length disconsolately climbs back down again deeper than before. For when the artist no longer raises his public back up, it swiftly sinks downwards, and it plunges the deeper and more perilously the higher a genius has borne it, like the eagle from whose claws the tortoise it has carried up into the clouds falls to its death. (*Human* 89 emphasis author’s emphasis)

Indeed, the quotes could go on and on.<sup>147</sup> But, to engage the citation at hand, Nietzsche seems to be asking, at least in this passage here – What good is art if it retreats to a hermetic aesthetics that connects not with the world and the people from which it springs? What good is art if it keeps most men down below and only a select few on high? With reason, critics then and now have accused the avant-garde of doing just this: namely, promoting and isolating themselves in a “pure” aesthetics in order to avoid

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<sup>147</sup> One more quote from *Twilight of the Idols*, also apropos given the current context: “*L’art pour l’art.* – The struggle against *purpose* in art is always a struggle against the *moralizing* tendency in art, against the subordination of art to morality. *L’art pour l’art* means: ‘the devil take morality!’ – But this very hostility betrays that moral prejudice is still dominant. When one has excluded from art the purpose of moral preaching and human improvement it by no means follows that art is completely purposeless, goalless, meaningless, in short *l’art pour l’art* – a snake biting it’s own tail. ‘Rather no purpose at all than a moral purpose!’ – thus speaks mere passion [...]. Is his [the artist’s] basic instinct directed towards art, or is it not rather directed towards the meaning of art, which is *life*? towards a *desideratum of life*?” (92-93 emphasis in original).

engagement with the issues of the “real world,” claiming themselves and their work to be above social and political issue in the process.

Nevertheless, as Geist illustrates, “La ambición vanguardista es grande: crear nuevas realidades, construir con su arte un universo también nuevo. [...] Su percepción será lo que forma (y deforma) la realidad” (44). Despite many of the vanguard’s and Ortega’s attempts at the contrary, art cannot be extricated from life because of its intimate link with ways of knowing. The ways in which one conceives and perceives art affect the ways in which one conceives and perceives the world. Art, for better or worse, does contain the capability to change perception, to change the way people live. To be sure, not all avant-garde artists hoped that their art would have such far-reaching effects that necessarily included affecting reality’s (de)-formation, but they still created some thing, some effect, and/or some affect with their work.

In a way, Ortega concurs with this as well, although this agreement clearly contradicts his ideas regarding the need for human beings to be docile when confronted with cultural and moral imperatives. Again echoing Nietzsche, Ortega states the following, and seemingly implicates himself and his own work in so doing:

Nuestras convicciones más arraigadas, más indubitables, son las más sospechosas. Ellas constituyen nuestros límites, nuestros confines, nuestra prisión. Poca cosa es la vida sino piafa en ella un afán formidable de ampliar sus fronteras. Se vive en la proporción en que se ansía vivir más. Toda obstinación en mantenernos dentro de nuestro horizonte habitual significa debilidad, decadencia de las energías vitales. [...] En cambio, cuando el horizonte se fija es que se ha anquilosado y que nosotros ingresamos a la vejez. (*Deshumanización* 38-39)

Although Ortega speaks in favor of the absolute demarcation, separation, and strict order of these frontiers, surely these boundaries must be blurred, lifted and reconfigured, must be immanently combated, in order to be extended and amplified; and maybe, in an

affirmative sense, this is what occurs in dehumanized art. Art created in the nameless plane, with the substance of being, where categories like subject and object, interior and exterior, human and inhuman interpenetrate and become indiscernible, if only for an infinite moment.<sup>148</sup>

Deleuze comments further on these same notions but specifically speaks to writing in his essay, “On Philosophy,” where he states, “One’s always writing to bring something to life, to free life from where it is trapped, to trace lines of flight [...]. In the act of writing there’s an attempt to make life something more than personal, to free life from what imprisons it” (142-143). What imprisons life, then, would be what makes it personal, or, perhaps in more Heideggerian terms, gives it a *name*. Is this therefore Deleuze’s call for and recognition of dehumanized art? No and yes: No, in that this concept by no means strictly adheres to the concepts outlined by Ortega; Yes, in that both speak to how art expresses more than *human* emotion (though, with respect to Deleuze, art here generally means art, not solely dehumanized art). For, again, life expresses more than mere humanity. And what runs through life, humanity, and art are, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, sensations, percepts, and affects: non-personal individuations, events, or “hecceities,” that penetrate and flow through humanity in his becomings, but also exist in humanity’s creations, including the world.

### **3.2 – *La ficción deshumanizada* – Pedro Salinas**

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<sup>148</sup> Years later, Deleuze and Guattari speak of art in this very way in *What is Philosophy?*: “Life alone creates such zones where living beings whirl around, and only art can reach and penetrate them in its enterprise of co-creation” (173).

Turning toward the transatlantic avant-garde's literary creations, we will now explore what Pedro Salinas' short story collection entitled *Vispera del gozo* does (or does not do) in order to "free life from what imprisons it," along with the ways in which it relates to notions of the human, humanism, and *deshumanización* as outlined above. Specifically, one story from the collection will be analyzed in-depth: "Mundo cerrado." It is a story that, as the critic Robert Spires correctly notes in his book, *Transparent Simulacra*, holds the "key" to the entire collection (130).

Arguably the finest example of Spanish vanguard fiction, *Vispera del gozo* can initially be tied to Ortega because it was first published in 1926 through his own cultural journal, *Revista de Occidente*, in what would be the journal's first literary publication series called "Nova novorum" (Pérez Firmat 70). As Gustavo Pérez Firmat shows in his comprehensive analysis of Spanish vanguard fiction, *Idle Fictions: The Hispanic Vanguard Novel, 1926-1934*, the majority of Spanish literary critics thought highly of Salinas' book at the time of its publication, though it still has yet to reach much of a wider audience (8).<sup>149</sup> One point on which critics failed to come to a consensus, however, was how exactly to define the collection in terms of genre, for many of the writers considered to be representative of *las vanguardias*, including Salinas, worked consciously and diligently to make their fictional works nearly unrecognizable as such. In the specific case of *Vispera del gozo*, the work's inability to be easily categorized according to generic norms can, in great part, be attributed to the lyrical writing style

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<sup>149</sup> To this day, in fact, Salinas is better known for his poetry than his prose.

employed by Salinas which successfully merged poetry and fiction. To be sure, this refusal to take part in one discrete genre or another is an avant-garde act in itself.<sup>150</sup>

Stylistically, Salinas' stories read short on character and plot, but teem with flowery prose in the form of strings of unmitigated poetic images and meditative ideas. Oftentimes, then, there is very little "story" to these stories. In part, this is because these stories tend to shift the focus away from the ostensible protagonists, away from "human subjects," and focus instead on the ways these human characters struggle to relate to the unorganized world of sensation, percept, and affect in which they live. Within this struggle, forces beyond their control tend to strip the human characters of whatever kind of dominating free will they supposedly might have, showing them to be themselves little more than provisionally organized assemblages of these very sensations, percepts, and affects. In other words, the "world" is every bit, if not more, of a force than the human subjects that inhabit it.

For these very reasons, one could certainly classify these works of abstract fiction as thoroughly *dehumanized* in the Orteguian sense of the word. This intimate link between *Vispera del gozo* and *La deshumanización del arte* was not lost on Salinas'

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<sup>150</sup> Some critics nevertheless wrote of the collection as if it were a proper novel, perhaps because they did not know what to do with it. It also should be noted that Salinas had translated the first two volumes of Marcel Proust's extended novel, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, just a few years earlier, a circumstance that quite possibly precipitated the questionable generic connection. The link between Proust and Salinas generated some controversy around the time of *Vispera del gozo*'s publication as well, as some critics chided Salinas for supposedly stealing his general style and many of his themes directly from Proust (Pérez Firmat 9). While evidence to support this criticism is not necessarily lacking – the similarities are striking, no doubt – one crucial difference would have to be the very fact that, in terms of genre, *Vispera del gozo* is not a novel, despite the fact that Pérez Firmat, among others, maintain think that it is. Still, a more comprehensive comparison of the two talented writers could prove fruitful, if for no other reason than to respond to and investigate these very criticisms, and may be a solid point of departure for further study in the future.

initial critics and readers in Spain. Fernando Vela, for example, speaks to how “fictional technique loses its instrumentality,” in Salinas and “turns into an end in itself, with the result that his art becomes [...] intranscendent, playful, gratuitous,” and he goes on to laud Salinas’ collection as “an example of ‘the dehumanized art of today,’ an art that produces in the reader a ‘purely artistic delight’” (qtd. in Pérez Firmat 10). Yet it should be noted that Vela was himself a friend to and disciple of Ortega and one of *Revista de Occidente*’s primary editors. It would thus be in the interest of the publication if one of the most promising representatives of *los artistas jóvenes* belonged to Ortega’s aesthetic and ideological camp.

Be that as it may, the primary story that will be taken and treated from Salinas’ *Vispera del gozo* – “Mundo cerrado” – does indeed, just like Vela said, present many, if not all, of the central characteristics that define and describe *el arte deshumanizado*. Nevertheless, the story does contain more traditional, “human” elements as well. The relationship between these traditional narrative components that give voice to everyday, human concerns and the more experimental, avant-garde technique that moves away from these concerns and towards aesthetic practice as a possible end in itself – aesthetic living as a possible life in itself – is one of constant flux. In this way, and as Spires says, “Salinas’ version of the new art includes an accommodation with the old” (131).<sup>151</sup> What is more, throughout *Vispera del gozo* Salinas utilizes dehumanized techniques in order to simultaneously critique Ortega’s underlying aesthetic and epistemological system: Salinas thus offers a methodical and perhaps even immanent questioning – a “no” – rather than a transcendental championing. It is not a coincidence, then, that these stories

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<sup>151</sup> Macedonio will be shown to do something similar in his “good” and “bad” novels in Chapter Six.

are often texts about texts, texts about reading and misreading, or rather narrative expressions of what can often be a chaotic, meta-textual concatenation that becomes more of an exceedingly literary *texture* threaded through and through, with *La deshumanización del arte* serving as one the primary threads.

Pérez Firmat aptly notes that “vanguard fiction begins with a meditation on reading” (67). “Mundo cerrado,” the first story in *Vispera del gozo*, opens as follows: “Pasó dos horas leyendo. Junto a él, en el asiento, estaba cerrado el libro” (11). Yet Andrés, the character doing the reading, is not reading the book at his side – a book Salinas initially likens to “una virgen desdeñada”<sup>152</sup> – but rather reading the myriad passages that pass by his window as he rides along in a train to his city of destination (11). This reading performed outside of the purely written world signals that the entire world can be “read” as a text, that the world itself constitutes a text. Viewing the world as a text, as a constructed narration, works to collapse the supposed dichotomy between image and reality, between art and life – a dichotomy near and dear to Ortega, the radical

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<sup>152</sup> Salinas makes the metaphorical connection between the quest for knowledge with the chase of women throughout the course of the stories contained within *Vispera del gozo*. In doing so, he takes directly after Ortega, who himself is wont to utilize this comparison. Claiming that meditation is “ejercicio erótico. El concepto, rito amoroso,” Ortega repeatedly equates the cognitive process of coming to know a “thing” with sexual love between a man and a woman in *Meditaciones del Quijote* (60). “Cada cosa es una hada que reviste de miseria y vulgaridad sus tesoros interiores,” he says, “y es una virgen que ha de ser enamorada para hacerse fecunda” (12). Now, whether or not Salinas utilizes similar imagery to satirize or emphasize Ortega’s misogynistic notions is ultimately ambiguous. What can be said for certain, however, is that this means of using the female body as a reified conduit that functions to provide for male social awareness and understanding is not only found in Salinas and Ortega, but marks many writers of the times that make up the almost entirely male-centered transatlantic avant-garde, including Benjamín Jarnés, Ernesto Giménez Caballero, Eduardo Mallea, Borges, Macedonio Fernández, and countless others. Indeed, an entire book could be devoted to the exploration of this very real aesthetic, epistemological, and misogynistic phenomenon and its relationship to notions of gender and biopolitics, especially if referencing Klaus Theweleit’s work in *Male Fantasies Vol. 1: women, floods, bodies, history*.

humanist – from the very beginning. This is not to say that the whole world is necessarily fake or false, but that perhaps these are not the proper terms or designations; for all of the objects and beings that constitute the world function creatively, thereby constantly producing “reality” in a dynamic state of pure becoming. Therefore, one can, in theory, interchangeably utilize fiction and physical reality as expressive parts of an epistemological system that one engages as reality’s variable, textual fabric because there is no clear-cut beginning or end to one part or another. Rather, these parts relate to each other in the middle, in the process of becoming. Relating in the middle is also what happens when one reads actively, critically.

Furthermore, the window through which Andrés passively reads the world mirrors the glass window image that Ortega uses in *La deshumanización*. As Ortega sees it, recognizing the existence of this window makes manifest the supreme power of visual recognition in aesthetic appreciation and epistemological constitution. Thanks to the awareness of this glass window, aesthetic art can be distinctly discerned from unaesthetic art. Most importantly, those who can see the distinction live the distinction. However, as Pérez Firmat remarks, “The principal difference between the two passages is that whereas Ortega keeps the two poles of the comparison distinct, Salinas confounds them” (70). Whether or not Andrés sees the window in the same manner as he sees the world beyond it matters little, though, because the window is a part of the world, too. In confounding the “two poles of comparison,” then, Salinas shows the lack of clarity inherent to Ortega’s argument, especially since Ortega fails to account for the varied velocities that

effectively compound the comparison as well: velocities of perception, velocities of technology, velocities of the world.<sup>153</sup>

In “Mundo cerrado,” the principle velocity that affects Andrés’ perceiving and reading of the world is of course that of the train. This reading, however, is ultimately out of his control.<sup>154</sup> As the following passage shows, the speed of Andrés’ perception cannot

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<sup>153</sup> The importance of velocity as a mediator of human perception can also be witnessed in another story from *Vispera del gozo*, “Entrada en Sevilla.” The story’s would-be protagonist, Claudio, also watches the world pass by through a window, though this time the protagonist (and the reader) finds himself in an automobile speeding through the streets of Seville. As a story, “Entrada en Sevilla” reads more like a cubist painting than a piece of narrative fiction, like a way for the artist – in this case, Salinas – to show off his perceptive and poetic skills. Although some traces of humanity and human emotion can be found in “Mundo cerrado,” the only emotion expressed in “Entrada en Sevilla” is one of frustration. Neither we as readers nor Claudio (also as a potential reader) ever really come to read Seville as a complete, total form, but rather ride along passively amongst its complicating and confounding elements, as shown here: “La ciudad no se definía, lejos, depurada, y distinta, sino que vivía, cerca, complicadísima, esquiva siempre a la línea recta, complacida como cuerpo de bailarina en gentiles quiebros y sinuosidades. Sus intenciones mudan rumbo constantemente, y a fuerza de no querer nada seguido, de cambiar sin tregua, mostraban un voluntad poderosa y en el fondo rectilínea, de suerte que sobreponiéndose al albedrío humano, no iba el hombre en ningún momento allí donde su propósito le impulsara, sino donde el capricho de la ciudad, su alma voluntariosa e indómita, le atrajera, para placer o dolor – exquisita duda – con halagueros y variados recursos itinerarios” (30-31).

In the end, the heavy-handed, hyper-imagery that overflows cannot be fully processed by either the protagonist or the reader, so that the spectacle of the city makes of us all a frustrated spectator, a voyeur of both something disquieting and beautiful, of a world difficult to transmit and impossible to capture that becomes with or without us. In this way, irony, an “essential” characteristic of the Orteguian, dehumanized art, bursts forth in the story, as what is to be an “heroico viaje” turns out to be nothing of the sort (28). The thoroughly de-centered human subject finds himself at a loss, overwhelmed by the busy world that surrounds him. Claudio comes to be thusly situated because his own “albedrío humano” is superseded by that of the city and, furthermore, is shown to not really be his to fully determine anyway. In the modern world with its attendant, modern velocities there is no time for the transcendental meditation so revered by Ortega. Ortega’s would-be metaphysical man is not master of the universe precisely because the universe does not present itself to him as a monolithic text that can be so easily read, understood, and subdued according to his own “free will.”

<sup>154</sup> Michel de Certeau speaks almost directly to Andrés’ condition in a chapter entitled “Railway Navigation and Incarceration” in his work, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

keep up with the speed of transport that forcefully pushes the various scenes by him and his window:

Cierto que la lectura no se hacía a su grado y voluntad, porque él no podía pasar las hojas, y esta misión era ejecutada, con velocidades toscamente desiguales, por el maquinista, el cual, sin duda por ser nuevo en la línea, ignoraba la profunda belleza de lo que iba revelando con torpísimo ritmo. (12)

Characterized as the consummate spectator, for Andrés, simply knowing of something via a disengaged mode of seeing – that is, reading passively and not critically – equals knowing. Such a limited way of knowing will be reinforced later in the story and can be opposed to knowledge that derives from a more direct and empirical engagement with the world and its workings. Nevertheless, like a good, aesthetically-conditioned subject, Andrés does find admirable beauty in the world that seemingly exists outside of him, precisely because of his detachment from it. Be that as it may, he fails to master nature and incorporate the natural world into his own being due to the mitigating elements of technology and speed. He fails, that is, to live up to the premises and promises of *Bildung*. Moreover, at this point in “Mundo cerrado,” neither subject (Andrés) nor object (the natural passage as text) hold firm and steady as absolute, discrete placeholders in the totalizing equation of metaphysical being. Instead, they each become one flow or force that engages and alters the other in a transcendental field, thereby compounding the very relationship between subject and object as “poles of comparison.”

Still, in the course of the story, Andrés repeatedly attempts to overcome his own limited situation. Yet he does so by recourse to a vivid imagination, thereby immersing

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Here, de Certeau illustrates how traveling in a train engenders a “speculative experience” in which, “You shall not touch: the more you see, the less you hold – a dispossession of the hand in favor of a greater trajectory of the eye” (111-12). To be sure, given that his philosophy relies on visual recognition and classification, one of Ortega’s greatest pleasures comes from the “trajectory of the eye.”

himself even further in his own disconnected machinations. All the same, even his imaginings fail to offer him sufficient solace and/or escape. Instead of exploring through or in the middle, where life presents itself at its most active, we find Andrés going nowhere fast, since his location is purely determined by contingencies outside of his control.<sup>155</sup> Indeed, Andrés has no choice but to observe the rapid images that the train's speed imposes upon him.

Through the narrator's varying technique, however, the descriptions of the first few natural passages read by Andrés through the train's window read as if they are meant to present an exercise in genre-writing, as the writing style shifts from pastoral, to realism, to impressionism. Such a methodically whimsical dehumanized technique that creates art about art and refers texts to texts adds a meta level to "Mundo cerrado." In this way, the story initially appears to be about various fictional forms, thereby possibly making the reader feel as if he/she is merely along for the ride, too, a passenger-spectator forced to passively engage the images forced in front of him/her. If this were indeed the case, yet another meta level could be added to "Mundo cerrado," given that the reader's condition would seemingly parallel that of the story's other reader, Andrés. Though perhaps we should say "one of the story's other readers" instead, since, as he narrates, the narrator performs the double movement of reading and telling a story about Andrés as they both speed along.

The story takes a turn when the train and its passengers pass through a tunnel. This entrance into the tunnel interrupts and disrupts not only Andrés' reading but our reading of Andrés' reading as well. One could read this tunnel as if it were the empty

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<sup>155</sup> Hence, as Paul Virilio says in *Speed and Politics*, "the more speed increases, the faster freedom decreases" (142).

space between paragraphs or chapters in a novel. The empty space where the reader's thoughts are perhaps most free, but, paradoxically, also most dependent on the imposed structure within which they find themselves, dependent on what follows in order to continue the narrative, dependent on what happens or what they find upon exiting such a space. Again, the reader's position parallels that of the protagonist.

Going a step further with this reading, though – Could the tunnel in “Mundo cerrado” therefore signify the tunnels and illegibilities found in thought itself? The holes and lacunae that liberate humans as thinkers and strip reality of its orderly trappings, but, contemporaneously, make manifest how we are dependent upon reason and regulations to give a semblance of order to the world, to assure us that something comes next, that something follows, logically, so that instead of embracing and utilizing this blind openness, we find ourselves imprisoned by and within the freedom of thought that it provides? Or, as a different approach, could this tunnel simply allude to Andrés own tunnel vision that eschews active, direct engagement in favor of an active, if disconnected, imagination? A tunnel vision reminiscent of Ortega's, perhaps?

Either way, Andrés is simply put off by the tunnel. “Ya aquello le cansó,” explains the narrator, “le molestó en su dignidad de aficionado rico y ocioso que lee a goza a su capricho” (14). Because Andrés cannot see, he finds his status as a “señorito satisfecho” to be in danger. In an epistemological system based on a meditative aesthetics of vision, not being able to see means the collapse of such a system. Given that the tunnel temporarily blinds him, leaving him momentarily dissatisfied, Andrés feels like he can no longer know and therefore no longer master the word on his own terms. This leads him to

take out two little notebooks in hopes of procuring some kind of power or knowledge from their contents.

At this point, “Mundo cerrado” takes another important turn. We all exit the tunnel. The story turns its own page, goes on to the following paragraph, begins the next chapter, as it moves away from the physical, exterior world and moves in closer toward Andrés’ mental, interior world, away from an exercise in genre-writing and toward the people, places, and events that make any sort of writing possible. It is a double movement on the part of the narrator that opens up Andrés’ outward social connections at the same time as it moves inwardly, further penetrating his psyche. For within the two little, black notebooks, Andrés seemingly finds access to the rest of the world – at least, the world as he knows it. One book contains a list of names – friends, lovers, acquaintances, etc. – and the other contains these names subsumed under places. Through these two notebooks, and in the process of “exchang[ing] one text for another,” Andrés attempts to establish a different set of possibilities of and conditions for knowing the world (Pérez Firmat 72).

We read this exchange here:

[Andrés] hallaba en este sistema de las dos cuadernos interdependientes un mecanismo perfecto. [...] Lo nuevo, lo desconocido, lo temerosamente deseado y distante, tales ciudades, apuntadas en el segundo cuaderno, sólo cobraba movimiento y vida gracias a la rotación que le impera lo sabido, lo familiar, los nombres del cuaderno primero. Conocer personas, saber que un amigo había mudado de residencia era para él una ampliación del mundo posible. (15)

Andrés finds his own idiosyncratic system to be a “perfect mechanism,” a complete and correct device used as a basis for knowing the world. If he cannot read the world as it is, as a dynamic assemblage of schizoid sensation, percept, and affect, then he will impose his own ordered text upon it. Indeed, as Pérez Firmat shows, the one word that could seem to summarize the entire story is in fact “imposition”: “Imposition of word upon

world, of word upon world, of title upon title, of genre upon genre, of text upon reader and of reader upon text” (73).

Once again, however, the information contained within these notebooks affords Andrés merely a passive knowledge obtained via vicarious imposition and without him directly engaging these specific places – though at least Andrés here has the freedom to flip through these pages according to his own desires. As Pérez Firmat argues, “In the notebooks the disengagement from reality is more clear-cut. Here the world appears encoded and subordinated to Andrés’ interlocking system” (73). Spires echoes this analysis when he explains, “Now it is easier for him [Andrés] to pretend that he is in control, that in effect he is the origin of reality” (133). To be sure, both critics’ descriptions of Andrés’ condition in “Mundo cerrado” could be likened to the condition avant-garde aesthetes often sought for themselves, especially if they did so according to Ortega’s program, or that of ultraism, futurism, and so on. Such self-styled aesthetes might wish to escape the vicissitudes of a complex and fragmented reality by championing themselves as the creators of their own.

The notebook system consequently provides Andrés with a seductive taxonomy, with a way of knowing, that both contains and expresses knowledge. Ortega, of course, presents his own taxonomical interpretation of society in *La deshumanización del arte* when he attempts to classify different types of humans into distinct social and politically categories that stem out of two supposedly distinct levels of aesthetic awareness. Andrés’ system of classification highlights the solipsistic tendencies inherent within such taxonomies that attempt to organize reality by partitioning it up according to certain

values known only to a select few (in this case, Andrés and his friends), so that only certain groups of people might occupy certain places.

Andrés uses this taxonomy furthermore like someone uses a map. This map operates without any sort of geographical orientation or representation, but is instead oriented by personal or sentimental representations. That is, knowing Andrés socially acts as the primary value that determines existence in his own self-styled world. While some value could be found in this way of knowing, insofar as one could say that people ultimately make (up) the places they inhabit, the following description complicates matters:

su vida [la de Andrés], semejante a un progreso hacia una cartografía geográfico-sentimental, completa y sin huecos, donde no hubiese tierras incógnitas, donde cada ciudad, por enorme y remota que fuese tuviera su explicación y franquía en un nombre, en un ser humano, en el recuerdo de un amor o una amistad. Tal lugar, famoso en la historia o en el arte, no lo había visitado: no conocía a nadie allí. Pero un día, un compañero de colegio le comunicaba su traslado a aquella legación. Y partía a la conquista de la ciudad inmensa, sin más armas unas señas apuntadas en un librito [...]. (15-16)

Thus, Andrés is less interested in the actual and full three-dimensional life of these cities and more interested in them two-dimensionally, as they would appear on a map, or on a canvas. The cities do not so much exist in time as they do in space, in a closed space contained within a person's name. Nor do they seem to exist before he knows of them, and most often he knows of them because someone he knows lives there. Again, this is to say that these cities appear to have little proper duration until Andrés comes to know of them, according to his own private mode of knowing. Though this knowledge is in some ways shared or intersubjective, given the fact that Andrés uses the people that he knows and their ways of knowing to help constitute his own taxonomical epistemology, Andrés' private map shows no "tierras incógnitas" because, for him, if he does not know of the

city/person, then such a place hardly exists. In this way, he knows all of the world and his map show no holes or unknown lands. Nevertheless, this does not so much show Andrés to be adapting to his world or “combating” in by enriching it in a Nietzschean sense; rather it is a feeble attempt by a subject to impose a personal epistemological text in the form of self-composed and self-imposed territories on the very impersonal object that “goes beyond any territory,” the earth (Deleuze and Guattari *What is* 85). Oblivious to the rest of the world, Andrés believes he has found a way to organize and express his own.

More often than not, the person who Andrés gets to know and who subsequently constitutes a place, if not an entire city, is a woman. While we as readers do not receive much information regarding the cities themselves – most likely because Andrés is yet to “know” them – we do get a glimpse into the process that leads to this curious epistemology. The narrator offers an example of this way of knowing when he describes Andrés’ encounter with an unknown woman in an unknown city. Although no explicit affair is depicted, the language and possible innuendo employed suggests sex, as Andrés’ relationship with the mysterious woman blurs into his relationship with the mysterious city, depicted as “una isla codiciada e inaccesible” (16). Eventually, Andrés comes to know the city, “porque una señorita muy blanca, de ademanes ondulados y menudos, como de pluma, le dijo una tarde: ‘Venga usted a pasar unos días. Yo le enseñaré mi pueblo’” (16). Like a conquistador, knowledge of the world arrives through a process of penetration, naming, and mapping: moving across the three-dimensional phenomenological world and the two-dimensional written world of the notebooks as if moving across and in and out of the female body. Consequently, Andrés’ process of mapping and knowing is not just a benign “cartografía geográfico-sentimental,” but

instead attempts to conquer unknown lands and knowledges – an imperialist ideology that explores the world by closing it off through the exact demarcation of space through maps and names. In effect, this experience allows Andrés to write both city and name in his second notebook: “Y al escribir en el segundo cuaderno los dos nombres – ciudad, amigo – juntos y maridados, come en esas tarjetas de los nuevos matrimonios, un punto concreto del mundo se desnudaba de aprensión, de velada reservada y amenaza [...]” (16-17). Knowledge is thereby produced as a misogynistic and erotic gesture, so that one of the virgins has now been deflowered, domesticated, and recorded accordingly; this allows Andrés, in turn, to productively reproduce and enhance his own epistemological taxonomy and ultimately master the world. Perfect.

As Andrés flips further through his second notebook, he comes across a city named “Icosia,” which the reader later learns is his current destination. Curiously enough, it is the only city actually named in the story. Here again, though, the narrator metaphorizes the city through the image of a woman—as city—as woman. For what awaits Andrés in Icosia, a city still unknown? A lady! A lady whose name, as usual, is written next to Icosia – Lady Gurney. Yet this name has been written recently and only after erasing a previous name, so that, once again, one text is imposed over another. And, apparently, despite the fact that her name shows up in his notebook, Andrés does not know Lady Gurney – at least not yet.

However, as a reader, and much like Andrés himself in his own imaginative interpretations, it is easy to get ahead of oneself here. Andrés really does know Lady Gurney, though he knows her by her maiden name, Alice Chesterfield. As Andrés hesitates to let go of Alice Chesterfield and call her Lady Gurney, he also hesitates to

allow for holes to creep into his thoughts. Like the tunnel described above, such holes or gaps would obviously leave his knowledge incomplete, plotting, imposing unknown places onto his cognitive map. At this point, though, a train attendant interrupts the thought process to ask Andrés a question regarding Icosia, forcing him to finally engage the world at hand.

When Andrés eventually gets off the train at Icosia, no one is there to meet him. Nevertheless, he does come across yet another text. In this case, the text comes in the form of a letter written to him on behalf of Lord Gurney, but Andrés puts off reading the letter until he exits the station. At this point, an ominous premonition overtakes Andrés, for he can no longer just be a passenger content with utilizing the train's velocity in order to facilitate his actual disengagement with the world that surrounds him. Any sort of speculative knowledge he once had is quickly dashed because Andrés suddenly "no vio nada, ni siquiera la avenida corta y voluptuosa, toda florida de acacias, como esa mirada con que una mujer o una ciudad no invita a seguirla, a ir más allá" (21). If Andrés cannot see, then he certainly cannot know, and if he cannot know, then he certainly is no longer satisfied. In this way, Andrés "textual adventure," as Pérez Firmat puts it, comes to a close (69).

In the end, then, Andrés never comes to know Icosia. His knowledge, or "cartografía geográfico-sentimental" comes undone. Holes begin to dot his map. Texts become illegible. He can no longer master the universe. For, as the letter tells him, "Alicia ha muerto anteayer"; thus, "Icosia, al primer contacto con los labios apenas mordida le daba el sabor más amargo de todos, sabor a tierra mortal" (21). Spires explains this key scene as follows:

His [Andrés'] illusory world is no defense against the ultimate reality of death. Rather than trying to expand and enrich reality by means of invention and Imagination, Andrés tries to deny it. As a result, he is totally unprepared for the inexorable "sabor a tierra mortal" when it touches his palate. (134)

In addition, this scene presents Andrés with the brute fact that his knowledge will not always be in his hands, so to speak. His system will not succeed in its attempt to totalize the world textually according to a "cartografía geográfico-sentimental." His notebooks will be missing entries. His map will not include the entire world.

Death, then, presents itself here as the ultimate unknowable, the ultimate tunnel or hole. Taking this a step further, Michel Foucault states in *The History of Sexuality* that "death is power's ultimate limit, the moment that escapes it; death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most 'private'" (138). It would seem that Salinas means to show death as the ultimate limit to knowledge's power of knowing, as the ultimate real that eludes even the imagination. Consequently, by the end of "Mundo cerrado," Salinas demonstrates how any knowledge of the world has its limits and its holes, and that direct experience must constitute a part of knowing.

If Andrés can be said to act as a knowing subject at all, he operates as one with little empirical knowledge of the world that exists outside of his would-be transcendental, dominating sense of self. For his primary way of knowing, while it may afford him a self-satisfied feeling of aesthetic pleasure in the Orteguian sense, does not place him in the world, but rather separates him from it. Yet, as Deleuze and Guattari state in *What is Philosophy?*, "Knowledge is neither a form nor a force, but a *function*: 'I function'" (215 emphasis in original). Here, in "Mundo cerrado," Andrés has no detectable function: he thinks, he imagines, he organizes, and therefore he is. Yet, as Salinas would seem to suggest, one need actively engage life, and not just watch beautiful culture as it passes by,

in order to actively, and not just passively, produce life. That is to say, one must participate in producing life as a function of knowledge, and, perhaps, knowledge as a function of life as well. In this way, in and outside of literature, life may indeed be “freed from what imprisons it” if one seeks out and expresses new functions and, in the process, opens them up to literature, knowledge, and life, and *vice versa*. It would be a process of exposing, then, rather than imposing. Such a way offers an open, empirical alternative to the way of a “closed world” in which functions and forms act discretely, a world in which, to paraphrase Ortega, “life is one thing and art another.” Though it could be argued that by the simple act of living, even in the abstract, even in one’s own “closed world,” one is indeed producing life, this production is ultimately a social process that requires active negotiations between various participants in order to avoid the human subject’s possible tendency towards solipsism and/or uniformity of thought and desires with other subjects – a tendency realized when living life turns into detached aesthetic contemplation, when life is supplanted by a supposedly higher culture, when knowledge is without “function.”

As Schiller did before him in *On Aesthetic Education of Man*, Ortega promotes a detached way of living, knowing, and creating in *La deshumanización del arte*. In fact, he goes further with his philosophy, radicalizing the humanist aesthetic tradition. For, in effect, Ortega believes that human life itself exists as a struggle between antagonistic forces – beauty versus barbarism – but that certain, aesthetically-inclined humans can and, furthermore, are destined to separate themselves from this struggle, and thus from their barbaric counterparts, to boot. This separation will ultimately induce a higher

humanity's salvation, imposing a new order upon the world by reverting it back to a caste system based upon abstract, aristocratic, and conservative principles.

Nevertheless, Max Aub, one of Ortega's Spanish contemporaries, critically refers to the imposing and disengaging tendencies of Ortega's thought as being representative of his "[c]eguera y narcicismo" (159). To be sure, these same characteristics express Andrés' epistemology in "Mundo cerrado." By their own designs, both Ortega and Andrés are blind to the world that surrounds them; as a result, they narcissistically, desperately attempt to create their own world by separating it off from the incipient, if not eternal, chaos that they feel closing in upon them. Thus, when Aub describes Ortega as being "muy dispuesto a confundir el mundo por su mundillo," this same description accurately depicts Andrés' reductive relationship to the world as well (151). Indeed, what difference is there between a "mundillo" and a "mundo cerrado?" In the end, both Ortega and Andrés would much rather take pleasure in their own "closed worlds," live behind a beautiful window, and function according to a perfectly ineffective taxonomy of life.

Hence, in his story, Salinas exposes Ortega's closed philosophies, thereby verifying the reading of Ortega as an essentially reactive thinker offered here and reinforced by Aub. Via a creative technique that fuses the *old* with the *new art*, Salinas illustrates how the private world of contemplative, aesthetic pleasure, as described by Ortega in *La deshumanización*, as sought after by Andrés in "Mundo cerrado," is, in fact, like the pure aesthetic itself, empty. This "closed world" invents its own terms because it cannot come to terms with the social, political, and historical realities from which it tries so desperately to separate itself. In other words, and as Spires says, "Art proves to be a feeble and illusory escape from harsh reality in 'Mundo cerrado'" (132). Rather than

confront a rapid, “harsh reality,” Ortega’s dehumanized art, along with its attendant social and political qualifications, does its best to close itself off from such a frighteningly exposed ontology by establishing a beautiful aesthetic state – both within the individual citizen and as a select community in itself – that can strive to section off the more chaotic and unattractive parts it cannot control. In its own disengaged practice and reflexive self-contemplation, Ortega’s artful world attempts to set up its aesthetic practice and contemplation as an inviolable window through which the world’s volatile, ugly forces shall not pass. Yet, in separating one part of the world from the other, this window also imprisons both sides. In the end, this very closed world is therefore the aesthetic state itself.

Soon, however, Ortega will appear to disengage himself from his aesthetic principles and focus more on social matters, all the while cynically maintaining his claim that politics has nothing to do with his philosophies. This does not mean that, after publishing *La deshumanización del arte*, reality has somehow become less “harsh,” however. For an even uglier, more antagonistic, more volatile, and less human entity will come to imperil Ortega’s own closed world, knocking louder and louder on his window, threatening to destroy the sublime separation that he has worked so hard to construct: namely, *the masses*.

## Chapter 4

### Order or Disorder – Masses, Morals, and Rebellions

“And since those things we can easily imagine are especially pleasing to us, men prefer order to confusion, as if order were anything in Nature more than a relation to our imagination.”  
Baruch de Spinoza – *The Ethics*

“The benighted traveler may sing aloud in the dark to deny his own fears; but, for all that, he will not see an inch further beyond his nose.”  
Sigmund Freud – *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*

Despite Ortega's imaginative claims to be able so see the future in *El tema de nuestro tiempo* – a future that, as he later predicted in *La deshumanización del arte*, would be ruled by an affectless, apolitical, artistic aristocracy – his prophesies go unfulfilled.<sup>156</sup> The *new art* fails to inaugurate a new order in the civilized world. No sort of aesthetic state comes into being. What is more, by the time he publishes his most popular and arguably most polemical book, *La rebelión de las masas*, in 1929, just four years after publishing *La deshumanización del arte*, Ortega apparently now rejects the transcendently divisive role he previously assigned to the *new art* and its ability to create a new, separate, aristocratic way of beautiful, human life. As he plainly puts it,

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<sup>156</sup> All the same, Ortega does not exactly give up on this augural idea, insisting in *La rebelión de las masas*, “Es falso decir que el futuro no es previsible” (82). Whereas, he had previously said in *El tema de nuestro tiempo*, “No cabe, ciertamente, predecir los hechos singulares que mañana van a acontecer; pero tampoco sería de verdadero interés pareja predicción. Es, en cambio, perfectamente posible prever el sentido típico del próximo futuro, anticipar el perfil general de la época que sobreviene. Dicho de otra manera: acaecen en una época mil azares imprevisibles; pero ella misma no es un azar, posee una contextura fija e inequívoca” (21).

Ortega now sees no life-affirming value whatsoever in the vanguardist aesthetic phenomenon: “‘el arte nuevo’ [...] [n]o es creación desde el fondo sustancial de la vida; no es afán ni menester auténtico. En suma [...] es vitalmente falso” (*Rebelión* 193).

Whether or not Ortega’s vision of the new, dehumanized art is ultimately “vitally false,” as Salinas shows it to be in “Mundo cerrado,” because of 1) its propensity to revel in an ineffectual artistry and 2) its inability to provide the artist with a means of participating in a life beyond the contemplative games of the Orteguian glass window, Ortega himself does not say. In fact, any word that even remotely resembles “dehumanized” cannot be found anywhere in *La rebelión de las masas*. Quite quickly, then, Ortega goes from being the self-professed spokesman of the *new, dehumanized art* to reacting squarely against it.

Why this extreme change of position? To read Ortega is to read of extremes. Consequently, it could be that when the younger generation of avant-garde artists – and their spiritual metaphysicians, i.e. Ortega himself – failed to stake a claim on the national stage, Ortega needed to find a new conduit that would summon forth and make real his elitist, authoritarian reverie. As Gray correctly notes, Ortega’s constant desire to realize his own grandiose visions of modernity that would raise Spain up to the “‘level of the times’” essentially operated as a sort of “myth,” one “developed by critics and intellectuals seeking legitimization for their own cultural politics” (212-13). Thus, when Ortega’s mythical vision of a young generation of oligarchic artists ascending to their proper place as guarantors of the world’s natural, vital hierarchy, as heads of an aesthetic state, as uncommon grammarians, as veritable Gods among lesser beings, proved to be false, another myth was needed to show humanity to be inherently divided and antagonistic, sustainable solely via a new (read: aristocratic) cultural order as dictated

from above. Ortega, of course, had promised that the *new art* would lead the way towards cultural enlightenment. He had claimed to see it all so clearly, so totally, that he saw the future itself: our common destiny. Even so, “False clarity,” as Horkheimer and Adorno tell us, “is only another name for myth” (xvii). In spite of Ortega’s greatest attempts to legitimize his mythical aspirations – to ensure that “Enlightenment is totalitarian” – the *new art* did not legitimize his specific promise for it (Horkheimer and Adorno 4).

Instead, the modern world which Ortega witnesses unfolding before his occidental eyes turns him into a fearful, melancholy thinker. By the end of the 1920s, he comes to eschew not only the *new art*, but also *the new* itself – even though these concepts acted as the very “modern” premises of *La deshumanización del arte*. Hence, his thought supposedly progressed naturally as it really regressed reactively into conservative notions of the need for absolute aristocratic, moral, and civilized authority and order over the threat of the new “barbarism.” At the time, this new barbarism apparently manifested itself via the sheer existence of the menacing, modern masses. Since these masses were, of course, *new*, for Ortega this meant that *ipso facto* they functioned as the quintessence of modernity’s barbarous, monstrous, creative, but really now just destructive, force. And while the appearance of the masses was not in itself a phenomenological myth, the supposedly imminent, apocalyptic rebellion of these masses certainly functioned as a mythical creation of Ortega’s, one that allowed him to promote his vision of an aristocratic, totalitarian state, one that would ensure that such a barbaric catastrophe would never take place.

His book on the matter, *La rebelión de las masas*, is evidently directed toward a European audience at odds with the masses and with a certain cultural training. However,

as we have seen, Ortega repeatedly (and, perhaps, desperately) attempted to engage and win over particular conservative sectors of the Argentine intelligentsia as well. In lectures given both in and outside of Argentina, and in essays composed apropos of the character of *el argentino*, he argued that the nation required a rigorous moral reform as imposed from above by a moral, creative, and truly human aristocracy. Indeed, the elitist and authoritarian strains in Ortega's philosophies appealed to certain Spanish and Argentine thinkers on both sides of the Atlantic in their own apparently urgent confrontations with the barbaric masses and the threat of anarchic (and democratic) disorder that these masses represented. These strains became all the more significant as fascism – a political ideology itself grounded in notions of absolute order – gained currency as a means of saving civilization proper from its descent into barbarism. One such Argentine thinker whose conservative desires for moral reform and distinct divisions of humanity marked his “passionate,” philosophical work was the self-styled avant-garde writer, Eduardo Mallea, and his *Historia de una pasión argentina* will later be shown to be an extension of Ortega's own radically reactionary philosophies.

Not all members of the transatlantic avant-garde acted in step with Ortega's program, however. Whereas in his dehumanized, fictional stories Salinas utilized Ortega's own aesthetic theories to show them to be effectively and affectively empty and speciously speculative at best, many other writers proposed radical alternatives equal to those of Ortega in hopes of embracing modernity's barbaric side and, in turn, freeing life from such limited models. For example, and as treated in the following chapter, the Argentine writer, Roberto Arlt, a contemporary of Mallea's, composes his novels in an “ugly” style that shows culture to be a chaotic assemblage of political disorder and

schizoid desire, a locus of betrayal, a delirious, unstable site where, yes, people from all cultural walks of life want power and will employ whatever means necessary in order to attain it. That is, as Oscar Masotta posits in *Sexo y traición en Roberto Arlt*: “Arlt no quería más que introducirnos en los senderos de una contra-sociedad” (51). Arlt wanted to introduce us to the society that is the society that is not the society.

And yet, what intimately links Arlt with his conservative counterparts are the ways in which some of his characters express an arresting and very human sense of existential angst that threatens to halt any sort of progress made possible by modernity, especially if modernity’s project comes to be overrun by the modern masses.<sup>157</sup> Even though Masotta writes of Arlt’s writerly “busqueda” as being “una empresa de *demasificación* [...] es decir, llevar al hombre hacia el horizonte de sus plenos poderes individuales,” the modern world now envisaged by Ortega, Mallea, and Arlt – a present seemingly teeming with too many people – also inspired feelings of impotence and dread within all three thinkers (25-26 emphasis added).<sup>158</sup> In other words, in their own ways,

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<sup>157</sup> Thus, both striated and smooth spaces mark Arlt’s world; and because of Arlt’s mixed up, Nietzschean ways, I can speak of the cacophony and Masotta can speak of “el silencio,” I can speak of the movement, Masotta of “el clima estático,” and, in our own ways, we are both right (40).

<sup>158</sup> In truth, both the Spanish and Argentine populations exploded in the 1920s. González Calleja notes, for example, with respect to Spain, “En esa década, la población española creció por encima de 1% anual, tasa hasta entonces desconocida. [...] El crecimiento general de 10.7% de los años veinte suponía la incorporación de 2.3 millones de nuevos españoles, radicados de forma preferente en el ámbito urbano. Tras este crecimiento se ocultaba una caída sostenida de la mortalidad como consecuencia de las mejoras en la alimentación, la higiene y la sanidad, debidas en parte a la mejora de las infraestructuras y al creciente intervencionismo de los ayuntamientos en los servicios sociales” (259). Meanwhile, Argentina’s population skyrocketed during this same period as well, thanks, in large part to a massive wave of immigration, going from 8,972,400 citizens in 1920 to 11,935,700, a total increase of almost 25% (Recchini de Lattes 30). As in Spain, Argentina’s population growth was also mostly urban, as can plainly be seen in the fact

they all wanted the masses to go away. “Anxiety is the reaction to danger,” as Freud once said, and, within the present set of circumstances, the masses clearly represented this precise danger: a danger paradoxically made all the more dangerous because of the masses’ unwieldy imprecision as a discrete, distinct body and thus as an imprecise, unstable mechanism used for expressing anything even remotely resembling stable, streamlined desires (82). For Ortega and Mallea specifically, the pronounced possibility of the masses attaining any sort of power meant that the future, if not the immediate present, looked to lack order and, therefore, appeared to “go against its own destiny”: meaning, simply and cynically, order had to be imposed upon the times, and that these very thinkers would take charge of this grand imposition.

Arlt, however, is, admittedly more difficult to pin down, as we have already noted above. In “On Nietzsche’s Side,” Blanchot says that, “Every assertion of Nietzsche or about Nietzsche must be balanced with its opposite assertion. [...] The fundamental characteristic of Nietzsche’s truth is that it can only be misunderstood, can only be the object of a misunderstanding,” and the same can be said of Arlt – a Nietzschean thinker down to his unstable core (297, 299). For, on the one hand, Arlt clearly saw and feared the opposite of what Ortega and Mallea did with respect to the need for a new (read: traditional) modern order. That is, he and his characters fear the distinct possibility, if not the incipient reality, of a world saturated and striated by order at every level, an extreme and incessant ordering that would inevitably reproduce a sick, weak humanity. On the other hand, it would appear that Arlt and his characters also desire at least some semblance of order in their everyday lives so they might 1) organize possible powers of

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that the Buenos Aires’ population itself greatly expanded from 1,576,000 inhabitants in 1914 to 2,415,000 by 1936 (Sarlo, *Modernidad* 18).

action-packed lives and 2) live out these lives without literally and spiritually killing themselves because of the modern, if terribly banal, vicissitudes that shape their quotidian existence. Thus it is that one of Arlt's primary characters, Erdosain, is described in *Los lanzallamas* as desirous of order in order to be able to think with reason: "Lo horrible es que sus pensamientos [los de Erdosain] no guardan orden sino escasos momentos, impidiéndole razonar" (51).

Although, on the other, other hand, Arlt's characters also often aspire to death, suicide, and murder as part of an inexorable quest to expand their ontological horizons as collective individualities. This is especially the case with the brutally violent principles that serve as the basis for the Astrólogo's new world order, *la sociedad secreta*, dreamed of in savage detail in *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*. Hence, in Arlt's works this desire for order can manifest itself as liberation from it, as death in life and/or life in death, as solipsism, as getting a job, as committing a crime, and as being good and/or bad (morally-speaking), with such manifestations, like desire itself, being provisional and ambivalent. Ergo, in Arlt, order functions as a sort of disordering, and vice versa.<sup>159</sup> In these complex, contradictory ways, and despite the possible similarities between all three thinkers with respect to the masses, Arlt's relationships to order, disorder, and modernity will ultimately be seen to be more fluid, immanent, and of many politics, rather than rigid, transcendental, and representative of one distinct, shall we say, aristocratic group.

Starting off, then, by returning to Ortega, in 1929 the Spanish thinker finds himself to be a *select man* immersed in modern times, and yet practically left powerless by the *mass-man*. As a result, what he sees and writes about in *La rebelión de las masas*

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<sup>159</sup> As will be shown in the fifth and final chapter, Macedonio Fernández also believed in a similarly skeptical, conflated, and yet also metaphysical method.

is, again, for him an extremely frightening and existentially threatening social reality. Ortega watches the new world before him: it is not a “select few” artists who have come to dictate the development of humanity, but, instead, everyone else – that is, the barbaric masses. This lack of bona fide leadership has created a world without principles, a world adrift. Here, Gray describes the situation and Ortega’s motives for writing this specific work as follows: “This timely but not essentially novel essay, which brought him renown beyond Spain, was in fact a cry of distress and doubt about the very world toward which he wished to open the doors of Spain” (194-95).<sup>160</sup> In Ortega’s eyes, these masses and the innumerable *mass-men* that constitute this shapeshifting, subhuman blob enable the decomposition of civilization by not staying in their place, by rebelling against civilized culture, and by generating a general sense of disorder.

The consequences of this rebellion, as Ortega sees it, are culturally apocalyptic:

Si ese tipo de humano [los hombres-masa rebeldes] sigue siendo dueño de Europa y es definitivamente quien decide, bastarán treinta años para que nuestro continente retroceda a la barbarie. Las técnicas jurídicas y materiales se volatizarán con la misma facilidad con que se han perdido tantas veces secretos de fabricación. La vida toda se contraerá. La actual abundancia de posibilidades se convertirá en efectiva mengua, escasez, impotencia angustiosa; en verdadera decadencia. Porque la rebelión de las masas es una y misma cosa con lo que Rathenau llamaba “la invasión vertical de los bárbaros.” (81)

In the new, modern world of 1929 *homo barbarus* – a different type of not-quite-so-human-being – reigns supreme, endangering everything, including all of the myths, that

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<sup>160</sup> Ortega previously spoke to this dire “distress” in a piece he wrote for the Argentine newspaper, *La Nación*, entitled “Reforma de la inteligencia” (April, 1925), in which he describes “la grave crisis de lo presente, que se caracteriza, no tanto porque no se obedezca a principios superiores, sino por la ausencia de éstos” (75).

*homo humanus* holds so dear and has worked so hard to create.<sup>161</sup> The only option that remains: try to “contener la selva invasora” (111).

These *mass-men* can be seen everywhere. Their visible, invasive presence establishes a new, undeniable, distasteful “fact,” which is now fully illustrative of modern life: “el hecho de la aglomeración, del ‘lleno’” (46). The world is now full, blurring the clear distinctions between things that Ortega so desperately needs in order to make his points visible to himself and his readers, distinctions he depends upon for his own clear expression of thought. In *La rebelión de las masas*, however, Ortega sees his greatest fears brought before his very eyes, because things that should be absolutely separated now mix together. Obfuscation ensues.<sup>162</sup> As the masses work to actively dim civilized humanity’s cultural radiance, the burgeoning and barbaric cultural darkness that results leads instead to this sense of extreme existential angst in Ortega. Like Andrés who finds his vision negated as he passes through the tunnel in “Mundo cerrado,” Ortega finds an unilluminated world closing in upon him: a world so frightening, conceivably, because it is so free.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Not surprisingly, perhaps, Ortega claims that a similar rebellion toppled Imperial Rome: “La historia del Imperio romano, es también la historia de la subversión, del imperio de las masas, que absorben y anulan las minorías dirigentes y se colocan en su lugar” (52-53).

<sup>162</sup> As Ortega writes in *La Nación* in 1926, he considers this possible mixing or indistinguishable combination with others in a group to be absolutely loathsome to the European: “El europeo [...] sólo se siente vivir en la medida que se siente excluido de todo lo demás; encerrado en sí mismo y, si es posible, artillado contra el resto del cosmos. Le acomete un asco trascendente al notar su posible o inminente confusión metafísica con otro ser” (“Comunismo” 92). Like great *objets d’art*, great humans are meant to stand out; this is why, according to Ortega, social ideologies like communism or socialism that privilege the larger community (the common) over the individual (the exceptional) will never feel natural to a European.

<sup>163</sup> Truly, as Balibar tells us in *Spinoza and Politics*, “there is no notion more ambivalent than that of ‘freedom’” (2).

Similar to *el arte nuevo*, *La rebelión de las masas* is a sociological phenomenon that can best be recognized visually by those with superior ocular (read: cultural) training and faculty. “Tal vez la mejor manera de acercarse a este fenómeno histórico consista en referirnos a una experiencia visual,” Ortega explains, “subrayando una facción de nuestra época que es visible con los ojos de la cara” (46.) Just like standing in front of a work of art and subsequently judging its aesthetic value according to universal, visual principles, however, one can now perform the very same act by standing in front of a person, observing him/her, and then go on to judge whether or not they are of the masses: “Delante de una sola persona podemos saber si es masa o no” (49).<sup>164</sup> The difference between these two visual acts of aesthetic judgment is essentially naught, since, for Ortega, civilization itself functions as “artificio” and therefore “requiere un artista o artesano” (111). (Although, clearly, what one sees and feels when encountering the new art is a sense of true beauty, while what one sees and feels in front of the new barbarism is true horror and disgust.) As in the aesthetic state previously visualized by Ortega, the human subject itself, if accurately constructed (or captured) according to universal, humanist principles, therefore functions as a distinguishable, aesthetic artifact set apart from the masses, as the beautiful citizen, emblematic of all that is good, moral, and tasteful in civilized humanity and in the state that effectively and affectively reflects him/her.

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<sup>164</sup> This type of judgment is emblematic of what Deleuze and Guattari call the “apparatus of capture”: “What forms the apparatus of capture are the two operations always found in the convergent modes: direct comparison and monopolistic appropriation” (*Thousand* 444). The “direct comparison” made here would obviously be that between the *mass-man* and the *select man*. Such a comparison allows the *select man* to establish these two discrete categories and, in turn, appropriate the desires and possible productivity of *mass-man*, all in the name of civilization.

It follows that civilization proper and the resultant order with which it provides the world is the greatest possible work of art, made possible only by the creative genius of powerful, aristocratic aesthetes. Ortega does not back away from this radically elitist conception of society in the work at hand:

es notorio que sustento una interpretación de la historia radicalmente aristocrática. Es radical, porque yo no he dicho nunca que la sociedad humana *deba*<sup>165</sup> ser aristócrata, sino mucho más que eso. He dicho y sigo creyendo, cada día con más enérgica convicción que la sociedad humana *es* aristocrática siempre, quiera o no, por su esencia misma, hasta el punto de que es sociedad en la medida en que sea aristocrática, y deja de serlo en la medida en que se desaristocrate. (53-54 emphasis in original)

As he openly, proudly admits, Ortega believes that humanity operates as an essentially aristocratic phenomenon that constantly works towards a definite goal or accomplishment. This is natural: “La vida humana, por su naturaleza propia, tiene que estar puesta a algo, a una empresa gloriosa o humilde, a un destino ilustre o trivial” (157). Naturally, it follows that any other form of “human life” would be unnatural, unhuman. An obvious and present phenomenon to the trained eye, it is clearly the directionless masses that lead such a lifeless life.

It is the aristocratic society’s necessary, sacred duty, *a priori* and *a posteriori*, to maintain itself in power so that it reigns over others less ontologically gifted who live lives less purposeful. For these special citizens – *las minorías* – naturally endowed with a special purpose, “a quien sienta la misión profunda de las aristocracias, el espectáculo de la masa le incita y enardece como al escultor la presencia del mármol virgen” (54). Hence, despite the fact that Ortega does not elaborate upon this notion of an artistic aristocracy who sculpt and shape the masses in as much detail in *La rebelión de las*

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<sup>165</sup> The Kantian *deber*.

*masas* as he does in *La deshumanización del arte*, this creative oligarchy is still, in the end, composed of artists – artists who, like deities, exist on a unique plane of being, clearly separated from and, therefore, destined to control the lives of those that are not. Without this guiding sense of purpose, the elites find themselves lost in a chaotic world. “No le sabe su vida si no la hace construir en servicio a algo trascendente,” Ortega explains, for, “Esto es la vida como disciplina – la vida noble” (90).<sup>166</sup> This *vida noble* also functions as creationism and ultraism extended, insofar as an artist creates and dominates not only nature *qua* nature, i.e. birds, roses, mountains, but, in the noble service of a transcendental ideal, also creates and dominates those pesky, less-than-human beings that have yet to exit nature and enter civilization so as to possibly humanize them (or provide them with their own sense of humanity) in the process.

In his highly critical article, “Las selectas élites de Ortega,” Eduardo Subirats interprets this artistic, civilizing mission as follows:

Lo que otorga a esta élite estético-aristocrático su especial poder de configurar la masa como una obra de arte es su acceso exclusivo a los valores trascendentes y fundamentales de un espíritu absoluto. Es este el momento capital de la argumentación orteguiana, su peculiar revisión del héroe de Nietzsche: existen unos hombres selectos, definidos por su capacidad de ascesis, su sacrificio y su acceso a los valores espirituales trascendentes. Estos valores trascendentes [...] son precisamente vinculantes a los principios metafísicos de la civilización, a los valores esenciales del arte, a la realidad “íntegra” de la historia, y por tanto a la realidad esencial de la cultura. Semejante universo metafísico de valores espirituales justifica el papel absoluto dirigente de esas élites [...]. (53-54)

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<sup>166</sup> Although such a “profound mission” would seem to be a thoroughly serious endeavor, Ortega, in his own peculiarly Nietzschean way, had curiously opined a few years before that the lifework of the “intellectual minority” was – much like that of the ludic, young artists – not to be taken seriously at all: “Es preciso tender a que las minorías intelectuales desalojen de su obra todo ‘pathos’ político y humanitario y renuncien a ser tomadas en serio – la seriedad es la gran patética – por las masas sociales” (“Reforma” 75). Don’t mind us! Don’t take us seriously while we give “living shape” to the world!

As was the case with *La deshumanización del arte*, culture and access to culture indicate access to political power under the guise of spiritual, metaphysical truths that operate as myths. Or, in other words, “Deception,” as Deleuze and Guattari state, “is fundamental to the system” (*Thousand* 114). Once again, then, and in spite of his deceptive claims to the contrary – “El tema que persigo en estas páginas es políticamente neutro, porque alienta un estrato mucho más profundo que la política y sus disensiones” – we see how Ortega thinks and writes as a profoundly radical, political philosopher, even though the man himself did not necessarily come out and admit politics to be one of the fundamental characteristics of his *oeuvre* at this time (*Rebelión* 117).<sup>167</sup>

Comparable to the ontological, political, and antagonistic dichotomy presented in *La deshumanización del arte* between those that do and those that do not comprehend the *new art* – a division that Ortega portends is bound to take place due to the arc of common social destiny – Ortega continues to split society into two distinct species of man in *La*

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<sup>167</sup> Although Ortega was more politically committed in the 1910’s and again in the 30’s, he was not so much so in the texts at hand, nor during the reign of Primo de Rivera. As was shown in the previous two chapters, this tendency to seemingly tergiversate in the face of political commitment was not Ortega’s alone. While it could be argued that a greater number of Argentine avant-garde artists wrote with an immediate sense of political agency and identification when compared to their Spanish counterparts, Gray observes how this tendency (at least superficially) to avoid the political marked many of the most well known Spanish artists in the 20s: “For many writers, artists, and musicians in Madrid during the 1920s, the political situation was, of course, a background fact not bearing immediately on their lives. When young men like Rafael Alberti, Federico García Lorca, Salvador Dalí, Luis Buñuel, and Jorge Guillén gathered to talk of art and poetry in the gardens of the Residencia de Estudiantes on a lovely hill at the outskirts of the city, they were hardly concerned with the portly, mustachioed general who kept the trains running on time and fomented the development of hydroelectric power. But the feeling that Spain aspired to enter the twentieth century through the modernization of her economy, her highways, and her rail system echoed and indirectly supported vanguardist experimentation in prose, poetry, the visual arts, and even philosophical thought” (149).

*rebelión de las masas*. Here, once again, he pits the indolent, insolent masses again against the *minorías selectas*, outlining this division as follows:

es indudable que la división más radical que cabe hacer en la humanidad es esta en dos clases de criaturas: las que se exigen mucho y acumulan sobre sí mismas dificultades y deberes, y las que no se exigen nada especial, sino que para ellas vivir es ser en cada instante lo que ya son, sin esfuerzo de perfección sobre sí mismas, boyas que van a la deriva. (49)

In *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche also speaks to the possible existence of an observable division that crosses humanity when he writes about “*Living and experiencing*”:

When we observe how some people know how to manage their experiences – their insignificant, everyday experiences – so that they become an arable soil that bears fruit three time a year, while others – and how many they are! – are driven through surging waves of destiny, the most multifarious currents of the times and the nations, and yet always remain on top, bobbing like a cork: then we are in the end tempted to divide mankind into a minority (a minimality) of those who know how to make much of little, and a majority of those who know how to make little of much; indeed, one does encounter those inverted sorcerers who, instead of creating the world out of nothing, create nothingness out of the world. (198)

Though these dichotomies may differ, Ortega, following through on his affinity for Nietzsche, gives in to the “temptation” to divide again and again, making it an essential part of his aristocratic philosophy of human life.<sup>168</sup> Thus, just as an appreciation of “romantic” art disgusted and separated those with true aesthetic taste who were supposedly much more (dis)interested in art’s dehumanizing and abstract qualities from those that were not, the elites destined for political power over the masses also “se define negativamente por su *repugnancia estética* a los fenómenos de la sociedad industrial, desde la masificación urbana hasta el imperio de la tecnología” (Subirats 53 emphasis added). To be sure, it is this very “*repugnancia estética*” that inspires and gives reason to

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<sup>168</sup> In this way, the *mass-men* would be the very “inverted sorcerers” to which Nietzsche alludes as well.

the elites' desires to aesthetically sculpt the masses according to ideas of citizenship that will guarantee their own position of power.

The beautiful man – the man of true aesthetic taste – finds the base ugliness of the *mass-man* repugnant as well. *El hombre-masa*: “un tipo de hombre a quien no interesan los principios de la civilización [...] un primitivo” (104-05). As before, aesthetic taste marks the dividing line between the two. Nietzsche shows in *Twilight of the Idols* how aesthetics grounds itself in this very human division:

Nothing is beautiful, only man: on this piece of naivety rests all aesthetics, it is the *first* truth of aesthetics. Let us immediately add its second: nothing is ugly but *degenerate* man – the domain of aesthetic judgment is therewith defined. [...] Whenever man feels in any way depressed, he senses the proximity of something ‘ugly.’ His feeling of power, his will to power, his courage his pride – they decline with the ugly, they increase with the beautiful. [...] In the one case as in the other *we draw a conclusion*: its premises have been accumulated in the instincts in tremendous abundance. (90 emphasis in original)

In this way, “Power and knowledge,” and aesthetic taste, “are synonymous,” habitually reinforced in the supposedly universal distinction between the beautiful and the ugly, to where they become a part of man’s natural instincts (Horkheimer and Adorno 2). These are, in fact, the very judgmental instincts that Ortega’s own particular aesthetic education has afforded him.

In the “Postscript” to *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Bourdieu, who writes of Ortega in the book’s Introduction, speaks to how this disgust, this judgmental repugnance starts with Kant. It functions, as he argues, as the basis for “Kant’s principle of pure taste”: “a disgust for objects which impose enjoyment and a disgust for the crude, vulgar taste which revels in this imposed enjoyment” (488).

Bourdieu goes on to state that:

Disgust is the paradoxical experience of enjoyment extorted by violence, an enjoyment which arouses horror. This horror, unknown in those who surrender to sensation, results fundamentally from removal of the distance, in which freedom is asserted, between the representation and the thing represented, in short, from *alienation*, the loss of the subject in the object, immediate submission to the immediate present under the enslaving violence of the “agreeable.” (488 emphasis in original)

With Ortega, though, his disgust with the masses is not so much a case of alienation, but rather one of direct socialization. The contemplative, phenomenological window that, in *La deshumanización del arte*, once separated Ortega from reality – a beautiful, affectless alienation that the man came to adore and therefore need – has been opened up to the world. This opening up profoundly interferes with his disinterested, contemplative mode – and, yes, the results horrify the man. Now, with the window open, Ortega’s thinking has been forever disturbed; for, much to the *select man*’s chagrin, the vulgar masses, chock-full of crude, base pleasures, are coming in to play.

It goes without saying, then, that, along with setting off a sense of panic deep within him, it sincerely depresses Ortega to see his power being sapped away by an ugly, disgusting, inferior race of mankind. The beautiful people who supposedly should be in power feel their natural instincts to lead to be betrayed and find themselves instead in a subordinate position. Consequently, apart from a general, visible sense of fullness, what can be seen to be most threatening to the proper order of things is the infiltration of the masses “en los lugares mejores, creación relativamente refinada de la cultura humana, reservados antes a grupos menores, en definitiva, a minorías” (47). The *mass-man*, in a place of power, commands when he should naturally obey.

Given Spain's historical and political context at the time, one could see *La rebelión de las masas* as a sort of not-so-veiled diatribe against the rule of the Spanish dictator, General Miguel Primo de Rivera y Orbaneja. As the head of the Spanish State from 1923-1930, Primo de Rivera supposedly governed as this very *mass-man* incarnate: a cultural barbarian who possessed greater power than others who might be more gracefully trained. In this way, Ortega's work could be seen as responding to Primo de Rivera's ascent to power, critiquing a *mass-man* out of place in his high command. Morán, meanwhile, posits the very opposite, stating, "José Ortega y Gasset apoyó de manera inequívoca la dictadura de Primo de Rivera," and goes on to back up this claim by asserting that "[l]o más llamativo [...] es que el periodo dictatorial coincide con el clímax intelectual, político, cultural e incluso social de Ortega y Gasset" (41, 44). As it so happened, Primo de Rivera did, for the most part, maintain order; and order serves as one of, if not the, greatest of all Orteguitian values. In addition, González Calleja notes the following improvements in the lives of the great masses under Primo de Rivera:

La mejora del nivel de las masas trabajadoras gracias a las mayores oportunidades de empleo (sobre todo en el sector público), al incremento de los salarios reales, a los controles de precios o a la extensión gradual del seguro social y la sanidad pública, generó en España ese típico ambiente de los "felices veinte" que durante los años centrales de la década limitó la conflictividad laboral en toda Europa. (267)

Without question, this order made Ortega content as well, as it allowed him to write his greatest works, ostensibly without having to bother himself with politics.

Moreover, Ortega's repeated insistence at this time that he did not act, write, or think according to political concepts or motivations, going so far as to declare, however spuriously, that politics is a lesser social phenomenon that requires less attention, so that, "Un escritor no puede ser primariamente hombre de partido," for, "Su misión esencial lo

obliga a evitar serlo,” raises the lingering question of why he does not become more politically engaged when faced with *rebelión* at home (“Cosas” 96). For this rebellion, at least according to Ortega’s vision of it, is devastatingly absolute: a revolt against the natural order of things, against humanity, against civilization. This revolt has led to nothing less than “la desmoralización de la humanidad” (*Rebelión* 143). Ortega, though, seems much more concerned with the threat that comes from the disordered masses than that which comes from an ordered dictatorship that might at least offer a few guiding moral principles, along with a stable, charismatic leader – here in the form of Primo de Rivera – who would act as the supreme embodiment of these principles. Without such principles and leadership, society has no spirit and is null and void. “Por eso, sin un poder espiritual, sin alguien que mande, y en la medida en que ello falte, reina en la humanidad el caos,” Ortega ominously warns (147). In order to avoid chaos, the masses simply must be ordered. In addition, the masses must function as reified cultural objects, dominated and shaped by the true, spiritual subjects of humanity, commanded over and given form from above by whoever keeps them in their proper place. “Tal es su misión [la de la masa],” proclaims Ortega, “Necesita referir su vida a la instancia superior, constituida por las minorías excelentes” (133). While in power, Primo de Rivera ensured that this mission, if not completely fulfilled, still was not completely ignored.

In point of fact, for Ortega, society predicates itself upon and expressly functions according to this command or obey relationship; in this way, chaos can be avoided, order

achieved.<sup>169</sup> The life of the artist – “la vida creadora” – should work within this same, seemingly restrictive, command or obey framework as well:

La vida creadora supone un régimen de alta higiene, de gran decoro, de constantes estímulos, que excitan la consciencia de la dignidad. La vida creadora es vida enérgica, y esta sólo es posible en una de estas dos situaciones: o siendo uno el que manda o hallándose alojado en un mundo donde manda alguien a quien reconocemos pleno derecho para tal función; o mando yo u obedezco. Pero obedecer no es aguantar – aguantar es envilecerse –, sino, al contrario, estimar al que manda y seguirlo, solidarizándose con él, situándose con fervor bajo el ondeo de su bandera. (160)

Following this logic, art and the artists who create art do not do so in order to promote and manifest an ethics of freedom (Schiller), but rather to display their proper, “dignified” place in the chain of command. If an artist finds him/herself in an inferior position that would dictate the inalienable need to obey a higher power, the artist should not question but rather internalize and, withal, celebrate this subservient role, energetically and spontaneously aligning his/her desires with the directives and the symbols of the powers that be. Guattari speaks of this same process in his essay, “Everybody wants to be a Fascist,” saying that, “different totalitarian systems produced different formulas for a collective seizing of desire” (163). This is fascism’s peculiar power: “Fascism seems to come from the outside, but it finds its energy right at the heart of everyone’s desire” (Guattari 171).<sup>170</sup> If what Ortega illustrates here, then, is not an

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<sup>169</sup> See again how Ortega does his best to split not only the people in the world but also these people’s possible modes of action, or ways of living, into two discrete categories.

<sup>170</sup> While, in this essay, Guattari specifically speaks of fascism and totalitarianism in terms of the capitalist state and Ortega makes little reference to capitalism or any sort of economic interpretation of *La rebelión de las masas*, it is no coincidence that Ortega himself defines the state as an “empresa”: “El Estado es siempre, cualquiera sea su forma – primitiva, antigua, medieval, o moderna –, la invitación que un grupo de hombres hace a otros grupos de hombres para ejecutar juntos una empresa” (183). Though Ortega appears to be utilizing “empresa” so as to mean something more like “venture” or “task,” the word also conveys the idea of a “company or common “business venture.” Like

aesthetics or an ethics of fascism per se, it is, at the very least, an aesthetics and an ethics of totalitarianism. *Fait accompli*. Humanism has now come full circle.

What is more, and in order to indeed say more of Ortega's fascist streak, one need only observe the palpable influence that he had upon José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the firstborn son of the one-time Spanish dictator, Miguel Primo de Rivera, and the founder of Spain's first fascist party, *Falange Española*. Ortega never disputed this influence, nor did he necessarily ask that José Antonio Primo de Rivera not utilize the master's models to guide many of his thoughts regarding the political phenomenon of fascism.

For instance, José Antonio's "Discurso de la fundación de Falange Española," given in Madrid's *Teatro de la Comedia* in 1933, is clearly Orteguian. The main principle for this political thought, this fascistic vision, is "un sistema de autoridad, de jerarquía, y de orden" – that is, an Orteguian "system" (3). Thus, composed in the face of "una España en ruina moral" and as a critique of liberal forms of state organization – i.e a more democratic form, which José Antonio, in line with Ortega (and, in a way, with Nietzsche as well), maintains is "en primer lugar, el más ruinoso sistema de derroche de energías" – the *falangista* presents a political thought that predicates itself upon a necessary and vital hierarchization of life (2, 1). *La Patria*, "una unidad total [...] una síntesis trascendente, una síntesis indivisible, con fines propios que cumplir," resides at the top of this hierarchy, if it does not go even further, perhaps, transcending it and ordering all of the life below (2). The *falangista* way of life is also just that – namely, a

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Ortega's proposal for a (corporate?) state run by a select few who, through recourse to supposedly superior spiritual and aesthetic values, instill in the masses both a sense of inferiority and a desire to go along with the program as it is outlined from above, capitalism, as Guattari describes it, also "is obliged to construct and impose models of desire; and its survival depends on its success in bringing about the internalization of these models by the masses it exploits" (175).

way of life, a way of being.<sup>171</sup> Hence, as Guattari would say, fascism exists in the very desires, at the very heart, of life. Hence, *la falange*'s creator claims the following:

nuestro movimiento [...] no es una manera de pensar: *es una manera de ser*. No debemos proponemos sólo la construcción, la arquitectura política. Tenemos que adoptar, ante la vida entera, en cada uno de nuestros actos, una actitud humana, profunda, y completa. Esta actitud es el espíritu de servicio y de sacrificio, el sentido ascético y militar de la vida. (3 emphasis added)

From *El tema de nuestro tiempo* forward, this very “*manera de ser*” and “attitude” is promoted by José Ortega y Gasset as well.

Bearing all of this in mind, and to get back to Ortega and *La rebelión de las masas*, it is somewhat strange that Ortega portentously (and cogently) claims the State – *la Patria*, in José Antonio's terms – to be “el mayor peligro” (*Rebelión* 133). To be sure, his warnings about the State's extensive powers could be one instance where his vision of the future actually rings true. Here, for example, Ortega accurately describes the striating powers of States, much akin to the emergent fascist states of the times:

Este es el mayor peligro que hoy amenaza a la civilización: la estratificación de la vida, el intervencionismo del Estado; es decir, la absorción de toda espontaneidad histórica, que en definitiva sostiene, nutre y empuja los destinos humanos. [...] El resultado de esta tendencia será fatal. La espontaneidad social quedará violentada

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<sup>171</sup> It should furthermore be noted that fascism is a unifying way of life for Mussolini as well, who, a few years later in 1935 in an address entitled “The Doctrine of Fascism,” says: “Para conocer a los hombres hay que conocer al hombre; y para conocer al hombre hay que conocer a la realidad y sus leyes. No puede haber una conceptualización del Estado que no sea fundamentalmente una conceptualización de la vida: filosofía o intuición, sistema de ideas evolucionando dentro del marco de la lógica o concentrado en una visión u una fe, pero siempre, o al menos potencialmente, una concepción orgánica del mundo. De este modo gran parte de las expresiones prácticas del fascismo – como la organización del partido, el sistema de educación, o la disciplina – pueden entenderse solo cuando uno las considera en relación a su actitud general hacia la vida. Una actitud espiritual” (qtd. in Williams 158). As the critic, Gareth Williams, points out in his essay, “Ortega leyendo a Dilthey, e idea sobre la vida (1933),” Mussolini's openly fascist ideas so expressed here are very much in line with those of Ortega – the latter just does not happen to use the concept of “fascism” as a unifying, totalizing, and, supposedly, vitalizing force. Yet this does not mean that the ideas are necessarily distinct.

una vez y otra por la intervención del Estado; ninguna nueva simiente podrá fructificar. La sociedad tendrá que vivir *para* el Estado; el hombre, *para* la máquina del Gobierno. (138 emphasis in original)

Also, Ortega takes on and directly denounces fascism in *La rebelión de las masas* – at least in an ostensible way – lumping it in with bolshevism and referring to them both as “movimientos típicos de hombres-masas [...]. Uno y otro [...] son dos pseudoalboradas; no traen la mañana de mañana, sino la de un arcaico día, ya usado una o muchas veces; son primitivismo” (139-40). Of course, this is a facile repudiation of both political phenomena. Meanwhile, Ortega’s dismissive, shallow, and Eurocentric critique of communism reads as being even less convincing: “el europeo no ve en la organización comunista un aumento de la felicidad humana” (197).

Taken together, these superficial analyses betray a profound fear of leftist (or, for that matter, democratic) intervention in the Spanish state, supposedly under the grander semblance of *La rebelión de las masas*. The *modus operandi* of such barbarous, leftist states is direct intervention, or what Ortega calls “la acción directa,” while civilization results apparently from “acción indirecta” (99, 103).<sup>172</sup> In Ortega’s eyes, tomorrow never comes in the fascist, bolshevist, or communist States because the “direct actions” of such false States violently capture human spontaneity. In other words, in Ortega’s own peculiar radicalization of the humanist tradition, the future can only be achieved via an indirect reaction to (read: institutionalization of) alienation, since proper citizens should naturally know exactly how to feel about their destiny as citizens – properly nothing, save, perhaps, a healthy sentiment of civic pride! – and then act accordingly – proudly do

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<sup>172</sup> As we shall see in the following section, a deep appreciation of this same fear helps to account for Ortega’s popularity with the right in Argentina, where the driving force behind much of the civilizing rhetoric for order against the sub-human masses and/or foreigners masked extreme dismay in the face of possible leftist intervention.

nothing! – as they live lives essentially estranged from things beyond their comprehension, i.e. the sublime, indirect actions of the beautiful State.<sup>173</sup> If everything goes according to plan, then, the State will not directly interfere in the lives of its citizens and, in turn, these citizens will not directly interfere in the life of a State that indirectly rules over and totally subsumes them.

Yet Ortega's lamentations are nothing but crocodile tears. For all of these critiques, all of these warnings beg the question: Is a return to an aristocratic society – a time before the State? – guided by transcendental norms and a strict sense of morality meant to show some sort of advance on society's part? In Ortega's world, the answer is "Yes." But, still, just what kind of "social spontaneity" would exist in such a society? One that allows only "select minorities" freedom of movement and freedom to power, so that, as a result, the great mass of men live "for" the elites as part of their spiritual mission rather than "for" the spiritless State. Rather than actively striving to find and utilize ways to enhance their ability to produce, create, and live, ways towards possibly expressing power in the world, the destiny of the many calls for them to "spontaneously" and "indirectly" follow their leaders and do as they are told. As it was with Schiller's aesthetic state, individuality, or freedom of expression and thought, is here dealt a final death blow, since "[t]he unity of the manipulated collective consists in the negation of each individual and in the scorn poured upon the type of society which could make

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<sup>173</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno explain this process of the de-powering and negating of individual subjectivities in terms of the Enlightenment and the concomitant "bourgeois division of labor," but it seems that the same holds true for Ortega's aristocratic division of life: "finally, the transcendental subject of knowledge, as the last reminder of subjectivity, is itself seemingly abolished and replaced by the operations of the automatic mechanisms of order, which therefore run all the more smoothly" (23). This order is mandated by the Orteguian aristocracy that proudly sits above its powerless, thoughtless, and nearly being-less populace.

people into individuals” (Horkheimer and Adorno 9). If not a State, this is Ortega’s Great Society, all the same.<sup>174</sup>

Never mind the fact that, by the end of *La rebelión de las masas*, Ortega himself comes to call for a united, one-State Europe as an “idea nacional,” going on to give this grand, State of States a specific name: “El estado nacional de Occidente” (191).<sup>175</sup> (And what a *gran Patria* such a state would be!) Really, what “danger” could there be in such a new, all-powerful, pan-European State, especially if such a State’s reality “es puramente dinámica; un *hacer*, la comunidad en la actuación,” and if “la capacidad de fusión es ilimitada” (184-85 emphasis in original)? “Spontaneity” would now be allowed into this State as well, resurrected in the revitalized form of “el vigor estatal de la cohesión espontánea y profunda entre los ‘súbditos’” (189).<sup>176</sup> Clearly comparable to Kant’s vision of the spontaneous agreement between human subjects when presented with the aesthetically beautiful, all subjects would naturally, spontaneously agree to be a part of the new, “dynamic” State that Ortega proposes, docilely bowing down to the beautiful before them. A homogeneity of a disinterested, if also a fascist, spirit, reborn in *El estado nacional de Occidente*.

It should, therefore, come as no surprise that Ortega maintains that “[e]n cada nueva generación, la homogeneidad de las almas se acrecentaba” (192). This is the same

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<sup>174</sup> Compare this society, for example, to the one outlined by Deleuze in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*: “The best society, then, will be one that exempts the power of thinking from the obligation to obey, and takes care, in its own interest, not to subject thought to the rule of the state, which only applies to actions. As long as thought is free, hence vital, nothing is compromised” (4). In Ortega’s State, thought is certainly not “free.”

<sup>175</sup> Though he fails to mention it here, one can only assume that Ortega’s *Revista de Occidente* would surely act as the leading periodical in this imagined mega-State.

<sup>176</sup> As Deleuze and Guattari tell us in *A Thousand Plateaus*, “the State learns fast” (418).

“unidad” advocated for by José Antonio a few year later; such homogeneity ensures that because of the power of *la acción indirecta* wielded by the proper State, all subjects will naturally feel the same in the presence of such a State, given that this is the beautiful, homogenous order everyone wants in their lives, deep down, and in their heart of hearts. For such is their tomorrow, such is our future; and, furthermore, in Ortega’s rousing, nationalistic call to indirect action, “Al defender la nación defendemos nuestra mañana, no nuestro ayer” (187). The State, no longer seen as something threatening, now functions as what will ensure the victorious continuation of human history – here, of course, in the form of Europe’s continued hegemony.<sup>177</sup> This is Ortega’s new promise, one of the new myths he hopes to distribute to the new, modern Europe, a place wherein the art of the State is state of the art: the *new art* realized: given a special name and a special place in the hearts and souls of its special people.

Nonetheless, in *La rebelión de las masas*, we find the philosopher who would be elder aesthetic statesman (and, surely, Mandarin in *El estado nacional de Occidente*, to boot) also responding in a reactionary manner to a concept that previously propelled the *new art*’s supposedly destinal, and, therefore, indisputable, arrival: namely, the very concept of *the new*. In the citation that follows we witness this sudden reversal of thought:

lo “nuevo” es en Europa “acabar con las discusiones,” y se detesta toda forma de convivencia que por sí misma implique acatamiento de normas objetivas. [...] Esto quiere decir que se renuncia a la convivencia de cultura, que es una convivencia bajo normas, y se retrocede a una convivencia bárbara. (99)

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<sup>177</sup> Note, then, how, with misleading statements such as these about the state, along with a philosophy based on appearances and the supposedly unequivocal nature of visible “facts,” Ortega does not let his readers in on the little secret that appearances can, in fact, be deceiving. Once again, it follows that, as Deleuze and Guattari have already warned us, “Deception is fundamental to the system.”

*La juventud*, once a shining, very much human materialization of *el arte nuevo y deshumanizado*, suffers a fate similar to that of *lo nuevo*, now acting out of turn, ignoring its obligations, and eventually representing the “rasgo más grotesco” of the times (199).<sup>178</sup> So “grotesque,” so childish, so barbaric. Like the State under the rule of the masses, an absence of regulating norms corrupts these careless youths and *ipso facto* their belief in *the new*’s expressive powers. Instead of actively opening up humanity towards new possible orientations, towards new expressions of its self, towards new discussions about the world, the advent of *lo nuevo* as advocated by *los artistas jóvenes* now signifies the eternal return of barbarism – the eternal deterritorialization of a monolithic, mythical self reflected in a monolithic, mythical culture – given the proclivity of anything new to at least call into question and at most subvert objective notions of harmonious cultural coexistence. That is, given the fact that anything new now seems to create disorder, be it temporary or infinite.

Still, the act of creating cannot be separated from the attendant act of undoing or creating disorder. Nietzsche, for one, affirms this fluid relationship between creating and destroying, between order and disorder, saying, “We can destroy only as creators,” and, “He who has to be a creator always has to destroy” (*Gay* 122; *Zarathustra* 85). On the other hand, in the eyes of Ortega, this act of destroying, undoing, and disordering – an act which Ramón Gómez de la Serna so joyously called for as the *vanguardias* were first taking shape – is now the work of the “cynic.” The “cynic”: a person who “no hace otra cosa que sabotear la civilización. Jamás creó ni hizo nada. Su papel era deshacer – mejor dicho, intentar deshacer, porque tampoco consiguió su propósito” (*Rebelión* 126). Ortega

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<sup>178</sup> Witness Ortega the Father, and his excessive scolding.

henceforth describes those who creatively undo as barbarians rebelling against humanity, sabotaging and betraying what should be society's essentially civilized (read: hierarchically ordered) culture by attempting to destroy order and thereby introduce disorder. "As Ortega has always seen," Gray informs us, "culture was the form men made to discipline and fulfill their urgent need for direction and choice" (192). Though, in the end, humanity's "urgent need for direction" eclipses its citizen's desires for individual choice.

Creative destruction – living a traitorous life towards culture – is no easy task in itself, however. "For it is difficult to be a traitor; it is to create," Deleuze and Parnet explain. "One has to lose one's identity, one's face in it. One has to disappear, to become unknown" ("Superiority" 45).<sup>179</sup> One has to disobey, disfiguring one's own sense of identity and the presiding culture that works to instill this very structuring sense in the process. Is to create, therefore, to be barbaric? Yes, this is creation's peculiar power!<sup>180</sup> Yes, insofar as creation means the destabilization (deterritorialization) of expression's form and content – the destabilization of hierarchies – in its never-ending quest to explore and affirm what can be new and different. Yet, for Ortega, creation – disciplined and hygienic – operates in the opposite way, stabilizing (re-territorializing) cultural expression so that, as opposed to betraying, it reinforces the power structures already in place.

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<sup>179</sup> This same quote will also be used later on in this chapter to explicate the work of the "traitorous" Argentine writer, Roberto Arlt.

<sup>180</sup> Such a reading of creation's barbaric possibilities may give new meaning to Benjamin's famous declaration in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" that, "There is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (256). As Heidegger might ask: What is cultural history, though, if not the story of barbarism's creation?

Although Ortega admits that the current culture spawned by the masses may, in some way, seem to show humanity's progress because more people are now able to do more new things with life, he remains steadfast in his belief that *mass-man* has no authentic ideas, that what he does contribute to life is not culturally authentic and, in turn, that *mass-man*, like the *traitor* and the *cynic*, truly creates nothing (97). Again, this is because *mass-man* refuses to abide by the cultural norms indispensable to 1) the establishment and maintenance of culture itself and 2) the establishment and maintenance of authoritarian power:

Quien quiera tener ideas necesita antes disponerse a querer la verdad y aceptar las reglas de juego que ella imponga. No vale hablar de ideas u opiniones donde no se admite una instancia que las regula, una serie de normas a que en la discusión cabe apelar. Estas normas son los principios de la cultura. No me importa cuáles. Lo que digo es que no hay cultura donde no hay normas a que nuestros prójimos puedan recurrir [...].

Cuando faltan todas estas cosas, no hay cultura; hay, en el sentido más estricto de la palabra, barbarie. Y esto es, no nos hagamos ilusiones, lo que empieza a haber en Europa bajo la progresiva rebelión de las masas. No hay normas bárbaras propiamente. La barbarie es ausencia de normas y posible apelación.

El más y el menos de cultura se mide por la mayor o menor precisión de las normas. (97)

As with *Bildung*, a true cultural citizen freely acts within and according to a fixed set of cultural norms, so that his/her desires and sense of choice fuse with those imposed upon him/her by traditional powers as a force of habit, all under the guise of a homogenized spiritual destiny. On the other hand, those who would create their own new and different rules, or, even worse, refuse to play by any set of rules whatsoever, live barbaric and inauthentic lives because, in so doing, they go against destiny. “[E]l destino – lo que vitalmente se tiene que ser o no se tiene que ser – no se discute, sino que se acepta o no,” Ortega emphatically states, going on to say, “Si lo aceptamos somos

auténticos; si no lo aceptamos, somos la negación, la falsificación de nosotros mismos” (124-25). One must, therefore, obey these precise rules if one is to live a culturally enriched life as a privileged member of civilized humanity, or, in other words, as an authentic piece of art. “Out with the new, in with the old,” Ortega almost seems to say in *La rebelión de las masas*, because the old provides people with norms, because the old is already an established order, and because destiny naturally, necessarily appears out of what came before it. No longer privileged, however, *the new* now goes against destiny, lacking the necessary precision of universal, customary rules and norms, and instead actively promoting freedom, individualism, and difference – that is, barbarism.

Along with his conservative take on the life-affirming and life-expanding possibilities of *lo nuevo*, Ortega also issues a critique of the monumental process of modernity. He maintains that, despite its grand promises to launch “la conciencia de una nueva vida, superior a la antigua, y a la vez imperativo de estar a la altura de los tiempos,” the sad reality modernity brings about results in nothing but more of the same:

La fe en la cultura moderna era triste: era saber que mañana iba a ser en todo lo esencial igual a hoy, que el progreso consistía en avanzar por todos los siempre sobre un camino idéntico al que ya estaba bajo nuestros pies. Un camino así es más bien una prisión que, elástica, se alarga sin libertarnos. (64-65)<sup>181</sup>

Even though it brings countless changes to everyday life in the forms of various means of technology and to cultural life in the forms of new means of artistic expression, for Ortega, modern culture ultimately changes very little. Sadly, it fails to eliminate barbarism from its place of power. In its attempt to overcome the past, modernity “is in fact part of a retrograde effort whose product is a man more primitive than his forbears”

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<sup>181</sup> As we shall see later on in this chapter, for Arlt and many of his characters, modernity is little more than a “sad reality” as well.

(Cascardi 358). In its promise to break with tradition, modernity betrays civilization by questioning the constituent, hegemonic traditional norms, thereby creating a barbaric prison from which all truly cultivated men find themselves unable to escape.

And while Ortega would surely characterize himself as an active, if not charter, member of the civilized *vida noble*, with *mass-man* as acting as the prime avatar of reactive, barbaric life, his categorical denial of difference and freedom of expression, along with his consistent insistence upon traditional, hierarchical power structures based upon notions of blind obedience to a higher cause, ultimately show him to be philosophically reactive. Nietzsche explains:

While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of life itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is ‘outside,’ what is ‘different,’ what is ‘not itself’; and *this* No is its creative deed. The inversion of the value-positing eye – this need to direct one’s view outward instead of back to oneself – is of the essence of *ressentiment*: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all – its action is fundamentally reaction. (*Genealogy* 36-37)

It is a hostile world, for certain, when people give in to their desires and act accordingly, openly, when people assume powers previously reserved for those who already have it.

Ortega warns that a fate far worse than death awaits those who live in such a way, for, “Una vida en disponibilidad es mayor negación de sí misma que la muerte” (153). Once again, as opposed to affirming the openness of life – life possibly made all the more open for more people in the new, modern world – Ortega promotes the institutionalization and internalization of totalitarian, obedient desires, all in the name of a transcendent order in the world. What is Ortega’s “creative deed?” Nothing, but *ressentiment*.

That said, such traditionalist attacks on the *new art* and the modern times that it tended to celebrate as reactive phenomena because of their hollow, self-centered, and

lifeless core are, in certain ways, justifiable. These views are particularly legitimate insofar as the *vanguardias* often strove to define themselves by separating themselves from others and thusly creating, as Salinas shows, their own “closed,” if autonomous, world. In *La rebelión de las masas*, then, Ortega calls out and critiques – perhaps rightfully so – a generation of avant-garde artists so obsessed with *the new* that they would rather forever talk only amongst and about themselves in their own modern, solipsistic cenacles.<sup>182</sup>

Nevertheless, it seems likely that this evaluation from Ortega – once a vociferous champion of *the new* – has more to do with the fact that many young artists saw no place for any sort of objective norms in their *new* worlds and instead strove to interrogate, if not altogether destroy, the conception and/or reality of any hierarchical culture so rigidly constructed. To be sure, certain avant-garde artists used their works to actively question the world’s metaphysical order, an order that Ortega, by radicalizing the humanist philosophies of Kant, Schiller, and Nietzsche, so desperately sought to maintain. As Subirats astutely tells us:

era precisamente este idealismo abstracto el que cuestionaban las vanguardias. Ruptura con la tradición, cuestionamiento de los valores jerárquicos que definían el ideal clasicista del artista [...]. [C]risis y subversión de los lenguajes históricos son principios negativos que suponen, ciertamente, el destierro de una visión jerárquica de obediencia, de valores ideales, y de un concepto cerrado de sociedad. (52)

And while Ortega may have reason for his avant-garde critique, this critique never fails to rely on the very humanist principles that make aesthetics into a sublime, metaphysical

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<sup>182</sup> One need only revisit the proclamations put forth by the *ultraistas* and *martinfierristas* in Chapter 1 of the current study to confirm Ortega’s assessment.

phenomenon fashioned in order to politically dominate others in a real world. At heart, this is Ortega's own beautiful, radical revolt.

Later on in this chapter and in the chapter that follows we will examine the work of two Argentine writers, Eduardo Mallea and Roberto Arlt, both of whom were associated with *las vanguardias*. As noted at the start of this chapter, when compared with one another, Mallea and Arlt express diametrically opposed approaches to the notions of culture, order, and humanity. In his socio-philosophical analysis, *Historia de una pasión argentina*, Mallea, one of Ortega's most devout devotees in Argentina and once a staunch advocate of the new, dehumanized literary style, applies what he has learned from the radically reactionary Ortega in his analysis of his fellow Argentines. Specifically, Mallea calls for the desperate existential need to make visible – that is, to install in a place of power – the *Argentina invisible* that is guided by passionate, moral principles, a sense of transcendent destiny, and God. Unfortunately, what Mallea sees in the everyday *Argentina visible* is not “humanidad, sino apariencia de humanidad [...] una intrínseca barbarie” (79). Consequently, order must be restored by making the invisible visible in order for Argentina to overcome its barbarous inclinations and, consequently, live up to its great promise as a nation. Arlt, however, writes as an artist that Ortega would undoubtedly label a cynic, a saboteur, and a traitor. Himself a critic of the beautiful, disengaged *new art*, Arlt also writes so as to show Buenos Aires' civilized, modern culture to be the locus of both order *AND* disorder, a place where knowledge comes from everywhere and anywhere, not just from the privileged discourse of humanist ideology, a place where civilized and barbaric culture exist simultaneously in a constant

state of non-hierarchical flux on macro and micro levels, as they effectively, incessantly, and creatively compose and undo one another in the process. Additionally, and like Ortega's work before them, a thick layer of existential angst shrouds both Arlt's and Mallea's works as well, as we see Arlt's characters and Mallea himself struggle to creatively confront and assert some sort of power within a modern world that they see to be alternatively closing in upon them and opening out before them.

First, though, Ortega has a few things to say about Argentina himself.

#### 4.1 – Ortega Returns To Argentina

By all accounts, *La rebelión de las masas* was not necessarily a crisis with which non-European countries like Argentina needed contend. Despite just how European and cosmopolitan Argentina (and, more specifically, Buenos Aires) deemed itself to be, despite the fact that, much like Ortega, the Argentine elites believed the promise of their precious country to be in doubt because of the threatening, and in this case, immigrant masses, *La rebelión de las masas* clearly did not address itself to Argentina. This is mostly because Argentina is a nation that exists outside of Europe.<sup>183</sup> To be sure, Ortega,

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<sup>183</sup> In a short, rather deferential review written for *Sur* in 1931 and entitled “Al margen de *La rebelión de las masas*,” Francisco Romero finds truth in Ortega's Eurocentric analysis, saying, “En ninguno de sus libros se aproxima Ortega tanto como en éste a la realidad cotidiana, al hecho vivo y concreto. En ninguno es su prosa tan vivaz y directa [...] libro excepcional dentro de la fronteras de nuestro idioma, y destinado como otros suyos a una vasta repercusión europea” (203, 205). Still, it seems as if Romero would also like to level some sort of criticism at *el maestro español* but can't quite find the words (or, perhaps, the courage) to do so. One element he does find to be wanting in Ortega's book, however, is a lack of address specifically to the *minorías selectas*. Whereas those in power had hitherto spoken mostly amongst themselves, “Ahora la sala rebosa de público”; this means that now, in Romero's words, “Las minorías que tienen a su cargo proponer programas y fines a la mayoría, tienen que reformarse ellas mismas ante este hecho nuevo que es la presencia desconfiada y constante de la muchedumbre”

*a la* Oswald Spengler and, to a lesser extent, Nietzsche, believes there to be fundamental differences in ways of living – differences that, historically, have served to construct different parts of the world.<sup>184</sup> And while “el nivel medio de la vida sea el de las antiguas minorías,” which, importantly, represents “un hecho nuevo en Europa,” the leveling of life (or, as Ortega puts it in his pseudo-socio-historical manner, the “ascenso general del nivel histórico”) manifested by the revolt of the masses “era el hecho nativo, constitucional, de América” (*Rebelión* 57).<sup>185</sup> In short, America – a grouping of societies ostensibly created in accordance with liberal, democratic ideals – is made of, by, and maybe even for the barbaric masses. Such barbarism shows itself to be “el rasgo más decisivo de la existencia americana,” signifying that the masses have always expressed a voice and shown a visible presence in the construction of American civil society (58). Europeans, meanwhile, now hear this mass constitutive voice and, apparently, now witness the powerful presence of the masses for the first time as an undeniable fact presented before them in their own nations. Hence, “porque coincide la situación moral del hombre medio europeo con la del americano, ha acaecido que por vez primera el europeo entiende la vida americana, que antes le era un enigma y un misterio” (58).

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(203). That the *minorías* have been previously unable to engage la *mayoría* therefore testifies to “el fracaso de las minorías” (201 emphasis in original). Surely, Ortega would never, at least not at this point in his career, consider himself, or his grand, civilizing mission, to be a failure, though. (For what it’s worth, the very next article in the same issue of *Sur* announced Ramón’s imminent arrival to Buenos Aires...)

<sup>184</sup> This is one of the many instances in which Ortega’s take on history and social evolution echoes Spengler’s, as primarily presented in his influential work, *The Decline of the West*. It should be further noted that Ortega was also wont to include translations of Spengler’s works in *Revista de Occidente*. With respect to Nietzsche, Ortega’s ideas also follow the pseudo-socio-historical genealogies offered in *The Gay Science*.

<sup>185</sup> Here, when Ortega refers to America, he speaks not only of the United States of America but also of the American phenomenon (the “Americas”) as a whole.

Some might reductively say that this new fact shows how Europe “se está americanizando,” but Ortega finds something “más sutil y sorprendente y profund[o]” to be happening, something, as previously noted, more sinister and alarming as well (58). He expounds: “No se trata, pues, de un influjo [americano], que sería un poco extraño, que sería un reflujo, sino de lo que menos se sospecha aún: se trata de una nivelación” (58). Indeed, it would be “strange” to a rigorously Eurocentric thinker like Ortega if the Americas somehow influenced Europe, since Europe had effectively dominated the world for so long, extending its assumed hegemonic influence in all directions. Obviously, it would follow that, confronted with any sort of possible leveling or rebellion, the constitution of Ortega’s *Estado nacional de Occidente* would guarantee Europe’s continued domination in all facets of the world’s workings.

Things changed, however, after World War I. As Gray notes:

Europe’s “spiritual power” and intrinsic authority had faded, perhaps never to be restored again. This spiritual weakness of Europe in turn invited the new nations of the world to assert their “nationality” as equal in importance to that of the truly historic nations of the West. With Europe – which meant France, England, and Germany – in the balance, the prospect loomed of a world without cultural standards. Ortega’s insistence that the old centers – Paris, London, Berlin, perhaps also Rome and Madrid – could have no effective replacement indicated his adherence to a traditional cultural ‘map’ and his inability to imagine a multicentered, pluralistic world [...]. (200)

Despite the fact that Ortega once saw such great hope for the future in the American nation of Argentina, he never dreamed that any American nation would dare challenge, would dare assert itself as being on the same historical level as any European nation, and certainly not in terms of cultural and political dominance. After all, in the grand scheme of things, Argentina was just a new nation, and, as Ortega unequivocally states, “Los pueblos nuevos no tienen *ideas*” (*Rebelión* 154 emphasis in original). Really, only old,

truly civilized European nations on the other side of the Atlantic have had and continue to have ideas.

Back in 1916, when Ortega had first crossed the Atlantic, “América era un refugio, una esperanza, una extraordinaria sorpresa; en 1925 volvía a ser la periferia intelectual de Europa” (Medin 95). Finally, by the time of his return to Spain after his second visit in 1928, America was little more than “el paraíso de las masas [...] hecha con el rebozo de Europa” (*Rebelión* 134, 79).<sup>186</sup> In her article, “Ortega y Gasset en las letras argentinas: Mallea, Marechal, Canal Feijóo,” the Argentine critic, Gloria Videla de Rivero, tries to explain Ortega’s change of heart specifically vis-à-vis Argentina as follows:

La experiencia de su segundo viaje [...] disip[a] algo del encantamiento del primer encuentro y acentúa[a] su visión crítica. El afecto por nuestro país sigue vivo, pero Ortega tiene cierta conciencia de misión profética con respecto a nosotros, siente que su amor a la Argentina lo obliga a predicar oportuna e inoportunamente, no sólo halagando sino también fustigando. (170)

Though some would appreciate and applaud such a change in perspective and see a definite veracity to Ortega’s new position, others felt quite differently about the matter, especially if, by that time – some twelve years later and with no direct visits in between – the philosopher had come to feel that only now does he genuinely understand American life.

Here again, we see Ortega demonstrate yet another extreme change of position that could, again, perhaps be best explained by the fact that his influence was still not quite as far-reaching as he had hoped it would be. First, he rejected *el arte nuevo* when it

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<sup>186</sup> These thoroughly contradictory statements hearken back to Ortega’s contradictory statements made about Germany, as discussed in Chapter One. Of course, contradictory statements mark his entire *oeuvre* as well.

failed to live up to his potent promise for it. Soon, Ortega will reject *el argentino* when he fails to live up to the promise Ortega had previously envisioned for him as well.

Ortega's second trip to America started off in the early fall of 1928 with time spent in Buenos Aires, Argentina – a country that he “considered his second homeland” – and Chile (Gray 181). Tzvi Medin sets the stage for Ortega's grand return to Argentina as follows:

Desde la visita de Ortega a la Argentina en 1916, su presencia en este país se había convertido en un fenómeno constante, y su influencia era enorme y crecía día a día. Si en 1916 no se sabía muy a ciencia cierta quién era el joven visitante que venía con su padre, para agosto de 1928 su visita se veía precedida por elogios y superlativos tanto en los círculos filosóficos profesionales como en la periferia cultural en general [...]. Ortega, además, había quedado muy en contacto con los argentinos; ya sea en lo que se refiere a las relaciones personales o por medio de los artículos que comenzó a publicar regularmente en *La Nación*. A menudo llevó de este modo un verdadero diálogo con los argentinos [...]. (93-94)

One further notes the immediate significance of Ortega's return visit in issue number 16 of *Síntesis* from September of 1928 in which León Dujovne introduces Ortega in the glowing terms that follow:

Desde hace algunos días se halla entre nosotros don José Ortega y Gasset. Ha venido a la Argentina – donde tanto se estima su obra de escritor – para dictar algunas conferencias sobre temas de su predilección. [...] No hay en las actuales letras españolas una figura más rica y múltiple que la suya. Ortega y Gasset realiza, como nadie, una amplia labor de cultura en los países de habla hispana. Desde el observatorio peninsular contempla el magistral *espectador* todos los matices del panorama intelectual de Europa, y refiere a los lectores atentos al dinamismo de su inteligencia los episodios más salientes, que sabe descubrir con agudísima perspicacia. (109 emphasis in original)<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> This introduction of Ortega goes on to describe him as, “Introducción del pensamiento extranjero – en los últimos años, especialmente del alemán [...]” (109). Also of note, the following issue of *Síntesis*, number 17 from the month of October, contains a book review of *No toda es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos* by Macedonio Fernández. Macedonio's work will be the primary focal point of the current study's sixth and final chapter.

After all, this was now the writer of *España invertebrada*, *El tema de nuestro tiempo*, *La deshumanización del arte*, and the many volumes of *El espectador*; this was the mind behind *El Sol* and *Revista de Occidente*; this was don José Ortega y Gasset, ostensibly the most famous Spanish-speaking philosopher of all time.

As might be expected, Ortega set his own stage as well, composing a “preparatory declaration for Argentine journalists” in which he concedes that he considers himself “un poco argentino” and speaks to how he has come back with the modest hopes to “refrescar amistades antiguas y a tomar contacto con el tono actual de este pueblo acelerado” (“Aviso” 94). Ortega also makes clear that he will not do a single interview while in Argentina because he does not want to be thought of as a “personaje” (93). Furthermore, even though, “como los griegos decían, todo extranjero es como tal un poco divino,” Ortega hopes that the Argentines “reduzcan al mínimo esa mi inevitable divinidad de transeúnte” (93-94).<sup>188</sup> A little bit Argentine, a little bit divine. A god can dream, too. If it had not already by this point, Ortega’s “false clarity” here dovetails supremely with his false modesty.

As during his previous trip to Buenos Aires, Ortega intended to give conferences in both the *Facultad de Filosofía y Letras* at the *Universidad de Buenos Aires* and in *los*

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<sup>188</sup> Although talking about Greece and not Rome here, statements such as these make it clear that Heidegger’s definition of humanism as an imperialist discourse bears scrutiny. In addition, and along with not wanting to be seen as too much of a “God” by the Argentine public, Ortega, as always, did not want to be seen as having any sort of political commitment or affiliation with Spain either. For, at the same time of Ortega’s visit to Argentina, his friend, Ramiro de Maeztu (then Spanish Ambassador to Argentina and exponent not only of Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship, but also of the traditional, Catholic, and authoritarian notion of *hispanidad*), was visiting as well. Hence, as Maeztu tells the story, Ortega, “‘tuvo la debilidad de rogarnos que no fuéramos a sus conferencias para que no comprometiéramos su éxito’” (qtd. in Morán 44). Ortega, as expected, did not want to be seen as supporting the dictatorship. Though, all the same, he certainly said little to nothing against it either.

*Amigos del Arte*. The first series of lectures revolved around the theme, “¿Qué es la ciencia, qué es la filosofía?” while the second focused on “el tema de nuestra vida” (Medin 96). In the final two lectures, Ortega offered a new study of the masses that he was working on at the time and that would later be incorporated into *La rebelión de las masas* the following year. Medin characterizes the eventual impact of *La rebelión de las masas* in Argentina as follows: “El libro tuvo gran resonancia en Argentina, entre otras causas, por el hecho de que buena parte de su contenido fue adelantado por Ortega en las conferencias que dictó en Buenos Aires en 1928 en Los Amigos del Arte” (112). It will later be noted, however, that one of the “other causes” that explains the popularity of the book in Argentina was that it appealed to a conservative sector of the intelligentsia which feared a “vertical invasion of barbarians” in their own country in the form of immigrants arriving with ideas and values that might undermine those of the more traditional Argentine authorities.<sup>189</sup>

Apart from the preview of *La rebelión de las masas*, and along with the general pomp and circumstance surrounding his stay, the most significant thing to come of Ortega’s second trip to America, at least for the work at hand, would be that it would lead him to write two essays about Argentina and the “Argentine man” the following year (1929) in Volume VII of *El espectador* under the common heading of “Intimidades”: “La pampa... promesas” and “El hombre a la defensiva.” Since, at this moment in time, Ortega can confidently say that the concepts and forces behind American life no longer

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<sup>189</sup> Delfina Muschietti further explains this and fear the rejection that ensues in her article, “La fractura ideológica en los primeros textos de Gironde”: “En nuestra sociedad de principios de siglo [...] el rechazo caerá sobre el inmigrante: aquel que la clase en el poder siente como un invasor en tanto agente de la paulatina transformación de la sociedad que prepara el ascenso de la clase media argentina y la creación de un incipiente proletariado” (381).

elude him as an enigma or mystery, he utilizes these two essays to express his newfound understanding of 1) the relationship between the Argentine landscape and the Argentine man and 2) how this relationship serves to explain why *el argentino* lives how he does.

Just as Ortega feels nearly overwhelmed when he considers the limitless possibilities that lay in front of *los argentinos*, so too is he impressed by the country's natural landscape of the Pampas, with its majestic, seemingly endless grandeur. Ortega sees in the flowing Pampas the natural embodiment of the possibilities and promises that lie before Argentina:

El paisaje bebe allí cielo, se abreva y embriaga de irrealidad, y por eso el horizonte pampero vacila como borracho, flota, ondula, vibra como los bordes de una bandera al viento y no está fijo en la tierra, no radica en una localización rígida, a tantos kilómetros o a cuantos.

Esos boscajes de la lejanía pueden ser todo [...]. *Son la constante y omnimoda promesa*. El hombre está en su primer término – *pero vive con los ojos puestos en el horizonte*. (109-10 emphasis in original)

The natural elements endemic to Argentina inspire in its people – particularly its men – a grand sense of “promise” that comes to be endemic to them as well: his eyes always affixed to a point somewhere in the fluid distance, off in the undulating horizon, where what he sees oh, so far away attracts him entirely, though it be neither “firm” nor exact. A real life mirage? An eternal promise! Ortega goes on, “Acaso lo esencial de la vida argentina es eso, – ser promesa [...]. La pampa promete, promete, promete [...].” (110).

Yet, while promises fill you up, mirages deceive you, let you down. “Pero esas promesas de la Pampa,” Ortega dolefully admits, “tan generosas, tan espontáneas, muchas veces no se cumplen” (111). Ortega himself, like a disappointed father confronted with a son that seems unable to fulfill his potential, feels let down by the Argentine man, finding him to be so enchanted, so mystified by the sublime promises

offered by the distant Pampas that he fails to engage the reality that immediately surrounds him. In Argentina, “cada cual vive *desde sus ilusiones* como si ellas fuesen ya la realidad,” with the result being that, “el argentino ocupa la mayor parte de su vida en impedirse a sí mismo vivir con autenticidad. Esa preocupación defensiva frena y paraliza su ser espontáneo y deja sólo en pie su persona convencional” (110, 127 emphasis in original).

Unable to overcome and influence nature like a proper acting embodiment of *homo humanus*, *el argentino* instead finds his own desires to be dominated by his natural habitat. Blinded by his dreams, bound to the largely unfulfilled promises made to him by his country’s natural wonders, deceived and controlled by the Pampas, *el argentino* knows neither his true self nor his fellow man. He is, like *el hombre-masa*, like *homo barbarus*, less than human. These very characteristics militate against the natural abilities of *el argentino*, so that he gives of himself only to his exaggerated vision of himself, thereby forgoing his true, terrestrial, and more immediate self in the process. Ortega, of course, justifies his supposedly well-intended diagnostic by giving *el argentino* a backhanded, hollow compliment: “el argentino es un hombre admirablemente dotado, que no se entrega a nada, que no ha sumergido irrevocablemente su existencia en el servicio a alguna cosa distinta de él” (136).

Although in *La rebelión de las masas*, Ortega describes the average European man as exhibiting strikingly similar attributes to *el argentino*, the European still stands solidly above his “defensive,” American counterpart. Ortega explains this continued, unassailable superiority as follows:

Ahora bien; el europeo es de todos los hombres conocido, hoy y ayer, el que más se entrega. Ni el asiático ni el grecorromano han sentido tan esencialmente la vida

como misión, como servicio más allá de él mismo. Por esta razón ha sido más creador. Vivir para él consiste en hacer cosas. [...] El europeo se entrega a la vida, al destino, y, por tanto, hace del destino su vida misma, lo toma y acepta. A esto llamo sentir la vida como misión. (“Intimidades” 136)

Behold the European in all his human glory! He is greater than the Asians, the Greeks, the Romans! He knows life! He knows of transcendent commitment to a higher cause! He knows that to create is to obey his destiny! This is why he lives; this is his mission.<sup>190</sup> In the end, perhaps Ortega believed that such a Eurocentric comparison would appeal to the Argentines in their own quest for modernization (read: Europeanization). Perhaps, by denigrating him and emphasizing the *otherness* of *el argentino*, Ortega, the flirt, thought he could ultimately win over his heart and his mind to his own cause.

But just how could *el argentino* transform himself into *el europeo*? It should come as no surprise that, according to Ortega’s analysis, all *el argentino* lacks in order to embark upon this transcendent transformation is the ordering presence of “una minoría energética” (“Intimidades” 142). Ergo, the advancement of *Humanität* in *el argentino* can be effectuated by overcoming a spiritual lack. Such a spiritual presence would possibly save *el argentino*’s soul, as it:

suscite una nueva moral en la sociedad, llame al argentino a sí mismo, a su efectiva intimidad y sinceridad, temple con rigor su narcisismo, se muestre intratable para cuanto es mera postura o papel y le fuerce a vivir verdaderamente, a manar, a brotar de su riqueza interior, en vez de mantenerse en perpetua deserción de sí mismo. (142)

With the necessary push from such a minority, *el argentino* would stop being so narcissistic, incompetent, and defensive, and, instead, start living by accepting his destiny – his call to greatness. Order would consequently be restored within the Argentine nation

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<sup>190</sup> Without question, this sort of bombast on the part of Ortega is a prime example of the “overproud European” of which Nietzsche spoke in “On the uses and disadvantages of history for life” and which was noted in the previous chapter (148).

and within *el argentino*'s soul. And, in the end, who has called this great nation, and the great man that represents it, to act in such a way, according to its promise, its destiny? Ortega himself: the *select man*, the European, the great creator, the demigod. Here, Ortega plainly reveals his desires to personally oversee Argentina's advancement as a backward, American nation in a world that he still believes to be superintended by Europeans. For, in the fullness of time, Ortega "sought, despite the bluntness of his critique, to redirect the still 'youthful' energies of that enormous land" (Gray 181).<sup>191</sup>

Although he was indeed a European and, as he liked to say, "very twentieth century," Ortega was also a Spaniard. However, as the twentieth century moved forward in time, Spain was a country that, like Argentina, tended to find itself to be somewhat behind the times, struggling to catch up with the rest of industrialized Europe and North America. Still, Ortega confidently presents the reasons for Spain's continued superiority over Argentina, appearing to contradict what he had previously put forth in *La rebelión de las masas* in the process, by admitting in the extended citation below that professional Spaniards in places of power do actually perform their jobs well because they actually do commit themselves to their vocation:

Sería una agresión inútil objetar a esto que, por ejemplo, en España son muy frecuentes los casos de incapacidad, lo mismo en las cátedras que en los demás oficios, profesionales, y puestos. El hecho es superlativamente cierto. Pero esa incapacidad que menudea en mi península no se parece nada a la que es habitual en la Argentina. El que en España ejerce una profesión no improvisa su ejercicio. Desde siempre vivió hacia él y para él. Lo que pasa es que carece de dotes naturales. En el argentino no se trata de que suela estar mal dotado, sino que no se ha adscrito nunca a la actividad que ejerce, no la ha aceptado como su vital destino, no la considera jamás definitiva, sino a manera de etapa transitoria para

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<sup>191</sup> In this light, Medin's conclusions regarding the driving desires behind these essays ring false when he says, "Nos parece que no hay razón para no creer en la sinceridad de Ortega cuando explica que fue su especial preocupación por lo argentino lo que lo llevó a escribir sus polémicos ensayos" (111).

lo único que le interesa: su avance en fortuna y jerarquía social. Por eso acontece que aun esos españoles peor dotados que los argentinos resultan superiores a ellos como profesionales. (“Intimidaciones” 131)

Spain – an “invertebrate” nation dragged down by “una generación delincuente” – still has more backbone and a naturally superior workforce when compared to Argentina. Even though only four years earlier, if we recall, Ortega had distinctly said, “No he hecho nunca misterio de sugerirme mayores esperanzas la juventud argentina que la española” (“Carta” 68). Thus, just as it had been useless to object to the superiority and authority of *el arte nuevo* (and its own supposed uselessness), useless to deny the ascent of the useless masses to places where they do not belong, it is also ultimately and essentially useless to object to the proper, useful order of things: namely, Spain’s continued hegemony over its former colony.

Apart from the sort of reverse anthropomorphism that Ortega sees at work between the Pampas and *el argentino*, along with his not-so-dissimulated desires to ensure continued Spanish influence and authority, the other component of Argentine life that influences Ortega’s supposedly beneficent diatribe comes in the form of his general wariness towards the heightened Argentine preoccupation with advancing one’s personal wealth and social status. To be sure, in a society structured according to a natural hierarchy such desires to improve one’s lot would not be expressed, since one’s lot was just that – one’s lot – and one would have to accept this unfortunate destiny. This wariness, however, also veils a deeper-seated xenophobic relationship to Argentina’s booming immigrant population.<sup>192</sup> Here, Ortega’s fear of whatever is different returns. As he describes them, these immigrants are sub-human, “abstract beings,” undefinable by

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<sup>192</sup> The terms *emigrante* and “immigrant” will be used interchangeably for the rest of this chapter.

their country of origin because they define themselves solely according to their apparent lust for economic gain:

Pero el emigrante no es un italiano, ni un español, ni un sirio. Es un ser abstracto que ha reducido su personalidad a la exclusiva mira de hacer fortuna. Todos los hombres aspiran a lo mismo, pero en el alma de los que viven inscritos en sociedades antiguas ocupa esa aspiración mucho menos espacio y no es la radical norma de sus actos, sino que se halla mediatizada por otras muchas normas y aspiraciones. La hipertrofia de aquélla se produce a costa de éstas, que, deprimidas, dejan libre la audacia. [...] [D]entro de cada individuo – en la objetividad de los hechos económicos – ocupa el afán de riqueza un lugar completamente anómalo. Esta exorbitación del apetito económico es característica e inevitable en todo pueblo nutrido por el torrente migratorio. (129)

Despite the fact that these immigrants may come from Europe – from the aforementioned “sociedades antiguas” – they do not live according to proper European values. Argentina, therefore, suffers from their presence, losing its essence as its own sense and system of values become disordered. This corrupting, avaricious presence forces *el argentino* to be all the more on the defensive when confronted with the possibility that, at any moment, his position may be in danger – a possibility, which, in turn, causes him to be all the more audacious as well. Grasping for successes that lie beyond his natural reach, *el argentino* lives falsely, beyond his means. “Esto lo sabe muy bien cada cual en el secreto de su conciencia,” Ortega definitively states, “sabe que no debía ser lo que es,” for *el argentino* is unworthy of his spoils (130).

Ortega also attributes part of *el argentino*’s stunted growth and the way in which he lives according to false, hollow ideals to the actions of the Argentine state, at the time run by Hipólito Yrigoyen’s Radical Party. As Ortega describes it, during his second trip to Argentina, “[e]ncontré un Estado rígido, ceñudo, con grave empaque, separado por completo de la espontaneidad social, vuelto frente a ella, con rebosante autoridad sobre individuos y grupos particulares” (“Intimidades” 117). The Argentine State therefore

functions, in Ortega's eyes, exactly like the sort of "dangerous": State about which he had forewarned in *La rebelión de las masas*. In reality, though, Yrigoyen ultimately governed Argentina as an advocate of democratic principles; and, also, unlike his political predecessors, Yrigoyen "attempted to satisfy a broader constituency than merely the elite" (Deutsch 35). Of course, Ortega never said he was a proponent of democracy and freedom.

Similar to Ortega's fears outlined above, the historian, Sandra McGee Deutsch, outlines the fears of the Argentine right in the face of both leftist and democratic ideas at home in her analysis, "The Right Under Radicalism, 1916-1930." Comprised in large part by aristocrats, the right first emerged as La Liga Patriótica Argentina in 1919, in a time "before fascism in Italy or the Primo de Rivera regime in Spain, and at about the same time as the German Workers' party, the nucleus of National Socialism" (Deutsch 46). As Deutsch notes, when the Argentine right confronted Yrigoyen's democratic policies:

their real enemy was not so much democracy *per se* as it was the specter of leftist upheaval, for in their opinion the first led inexorably to the second. [...] Particularly true for the 1920s, although perhaps less so in later years, a secondary theme would be the superficial character of the right's 'nationalism,' which was preoccupied more with the need for order *against* the immigrant masses than with the masses' welfare. (35 emphasis in original)

Given that it has already been demonstrated that Ortega's philosophies are, in the end, of the right, the Argentine right's fears of disorder and desires for progress through order above all else clearly dovetail with the fears and desires expressed by Ortega in *La rebelión de las masas* and "Intimidaciones."

Eventually, la Liga morphed into Nacionalismo in the late 1920s. In the course of its development, "Nacionalismo also claimed Spanish sources of inspiration," including the elitist, traditional philosophies of Ortega and Maeztu (Deutsch 52). Thus, in the minds

of conservative Spanish thinkers and their Argentine counterparts, Yrigoyen, because of his democratic intentions to give more to more people, did not deserve his power; meanwhile, the disordered masses, because of their inherent barbarism, were unworthy of the freedoms that Yrigoyen tried to give them. In this way, “To Yrigoyen’s opponents [...] democracy seemed to mean a permanent loss of political control to the ‘New Argentines’ that they [the Argentine conservatives] despised,” for, “behind Yrigoyenist democracy lurked the danger of social dissolution [...]” (Deutsch 48-49). That is, “social dissolution” possibly arising in the forms of communist, Bolshevik, or even democratic revolutions, which, of course, conservative allies were always quick to dismiss, but also always deeply feared. If the “immigrant masses,” the “New Argentines,” and *los hombres-masa* had to come to and settle in cities like Madrid and Buenos Aires, then they had to be controlled, had not fall prey to leftist ideology, and had better not think they have a say in politics. For Argentina specifically, even though the same could perhaps be said of Spain under Primo de Rivera, the country “would continue to welcome newcomers who accepted its rules, but it would defend itself against those who advocated alien ideas” (Deutsch 39).

Given that Yrigoyen held the Presidency from 1916-1922 and again from 1928-1930, Deutsch also shows how the Argentine right “identified Yrigoyen’s seemingly perpetual rule with dictatorship,” and how, “because the people had consented to Yrigoyen’s augmentation of power, his was what his opponents called a *dictatorship of the masses*” (48 emphasis added). An aristocratic society’s decomposition, which resulted in the elites’ loss of political power meant that the elites, as proponents of conservative ideals that would maintain order (read: maintain their power), found themselves forced to

find reasons to persuade others to join their immediate cause: now, as always and forever, a crusade against the masses, against barbarism.<sup>193</sup> If, as Ortega says, Europe had declined because of “la invasión vertical de los bárbaros,” it would appear, then, that Argentina actually did need contend with a strikingly similar situation. As something that came about according to natural causes – that is, according to its own particular set of circumstances – Argentina’s decline was apparently exacerbated by the democratic policies of the Head of State and by an influx of greedy immigrants who brought with them radical, disruptive ideas, all of which brought the promising, potentially civilized country of Argentina down to a barbarous, immoral level of existence. In the end, this argument was not Ortega’s alone.

Though titled “Intimidades,” Ortega’s essays contained therein ultimately offer little more than a superficial analysis propelled by continued conservative desires to ensure progress through order, *ressentiment*, and, perhaps, other ulterior motives. As Gray perceptively tells us, “In his writings to Argentines and about Argentina, Ortega revealed the weakness in his claim to penetrate to the heart of things” (182).<sup>194</sup> That is to say, “Intimidades” lacked any real evidence of a thorough, “intimate” understanding of Argentina and its people. Although he would insist that he said what he said out of love, Ortega’s criticisms “understandably alienated much of his Argentine audience [...] and many [...] were taken aback by Ortega’s presumptuous judgments of their culture,” to where he felt it necessary to defend himself directly to the Argentine population the

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<sup>193</sup> One of the loudest voices in this crusade came from the throat and the pen of the Argentine poet and radical socialist turned radical fascist, Leopoldo Lugones. Unfortunately, a more thorough analysis of Lugones’ contributions to the discussion at hand will have to be saved for future endeavors.

<sup>194</sup> Nevertheless, Ortega’s criticisms did, cleverly enough, force *el argentino* to be “on the defensive,” as he found himself forced to try and vindicate both himself and his actions.

following year (1930) when he composed “Por qué he escrito ‘El hombre a la defensiva’” for *La Nación* (Gray 181-82).

Continuing his ongoing dialogue with Argentina – a country to which, as he says in the piece, “debo toda una porción de mi vida [...] debo una parte sustancial de mí mismo” – Ortega defiantly stands by what he puts forth in “Intimidades,” saying that in the justification that follows “el lector hallará todo menos arrepentimiento” (“Por qué” 124). Going so far as to play himself as the true victim in the situation, Ortega speaks to how doing the right thing – “mi sacrificio” – has left him ostracized from and further unable to communicate with a country that he holds so dear (127). The construction of humanity according to such lofty, aristocratic standards requires great sacrifices. As Schiller stated before, humanity functions as one of culture’s greatest victims. Woe are we, those afflicted and alienated by culture. `

Nevertheless, the main point Ortega had hoped and still hopes to make clear stays true: “yo he visto que hoy el problema más sustantivo de la existencia argentina es su reforma moral” (126 emphasis in original). Seven years later, Argentina’s own Eduardo Mallea would make a strikingly similar argument, basing his own interpretation of his homeland on the exact same problem and the same need for his fellow countrymen to rise to the surface to reclaim their moral humanity.

#### **4.2 – The Humanist Passions of Eduardo Mallea**

One of Ortega’s most dutiful Argentine disciples, Eduardo Mallea, he of the scrupulously dehumanized fictional work, *Cuentos para una inglesa desesperada*, and a frequent contributor to *Sur* (in certain respects, Argentina’s version of Ortega’s *Revista*

*de Occidente*), feels the same as his mentor does with respect to Argentina.<sup>195</sup> Without question, these feelings of disappointment and even disgust determine the ways in which both thinkers express their observations vis-à-vis Argentina, as their shared sense of affect deeply affects their philosophical outlooks.

Mallea dramatically, “passionately” expresses his feelings and observations in his extended essay, *Historia de una pasión argentina*. In the “Introduction” to his English translation of the work, Myron I. Lichtblau presents *Historia de una pasión argentina* as follows:

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<sup>195</sup> The *revista*, *Sur*, is an interesting case with respect to the issues addressed in this investigation, especially concerning traditional notions of humanism, cultural elitism, transatlantic exchanges between Argentina and Spain, Ortega’s role in Argentina, and Mallea’s philosophical and cultural formation. For a more detailed, if not necessarily critical, analysis, see Rosalie Sitman’s study, *Victoria Ocampo y Sur: Entre Europa y América*. It should be noted, furthermore, that Sitman’s book starts off its first chapter with a quote from Ortega and goes on to inextricably link Ortega with this specific *revista argentina*, as shown in the citation that follows: “la praxis de *Sur* estaría dirigida a reivindicar la misión pedagógica de las minorías selectas como conciencia alerta de la sociedad, y ahora [en los años 30] en la misma dimensión moral, al borde de lo político. Ante el avance de las masas ‘fascitizantes y comunistizantes’ que anteponían la nación a la humanidad y sometían la inteligencia al servicio de las pasiones políticas, *Sur* reelabora la solución orteguiana de unir a los europeos y sugiere reunir a los hombres en una aristocracia del mérito y la inteligencia dedicada a la tarea de defender las libertades naturales y la religión del espíritu: la verdad del *deber ser* por encima de las verdades políticas” (114 emphasis in original). Meanwhile, in “Sobre *Sur*,” Ricardo Piglia, without directly making mention of him, also speaks of the decidedly Orteguian nature of the *revista*’s objectives: “la política cultural de la revista se afirma en la idea de que es preciso modernizar la cultura argentina y ligarla con las novedades europeas. [...] A partir de 1931 *Sur* refleja (a pesar suyo) lo que podríamos llamar la crisis del sistema tradicional de legitimidad cultural. [...] El campo cultural ya no es armónico, es un campo de lucha donde se enfrentan distintas posiciones y tendencias. [...] ‘*Sur* ha trabajado durante años en crea la élite futura,’ escribía Victoria Ocampo, en diciembre de 1950. Toda élite se autodesigna, pero en este caso se trata además de asegurar la sucesión: los herederos debían establecer y mantener la continuidad de esa tradición exclusiva” (72). Clearly, Ortega also hoped for and attempted to establish a contemporary and future elite in Spain, Argentina, and, in his most grandiose of visions, the entire West as well, doing so according to both new and old, modern and old-fashioned, means.

The essay is at once an impassioned statement of Mallea's intellectual and philosophical credo and a bitter denunciation of what he perceived as his country's reprehensible utilitarianism, superficiality, and pretension. The work reveals Mallea's painful anguish over the destruction of Argentina's values and the bankruptcy of its ideals. It is both Mallea's spiritual autobiography and Argentina's national biography [...]. (VIII)

Thus, as a sort of autobiographical piece of social philosophy whose basic character arc (that of Mallea himself) aligns itself with characteristics of the *bildungsroman*, *Historia de una pasión argentina* traces Mallea's personal relationship to his country and compatriots.

At the time of the work's publication in 1937, Argentina was no longer governed by the democratic Yrigoyen, but was rather in the middle of what would come to be known as *la Década infame* (1930-1943), a time of great violence and disorder and also "a high point of right-wing thought and influence" (Dolkart 65). Yrigoyen had been overthrown seven years earlier on September 6, 1930 in a military coup that put the conservative General José F. Uriburu in power in his place. As the historian Ronald H. Dolkart puts it in his essay, "The Right in the Década Infame, 1930-1943," at the time:

The new right emerged as the militant Nacionalistas, energized by the defeat of Radicalism [Yrigoyen] and the triumph of the army. The times seemed made for their cause: the successes of European fascism coincided with the Nacionalistas' own struggle against Argentina's "democratic" tradition. (65)

In 1937, then, Argentina found itself amidst "constant political turmoil" under the right-wing rule of General Agustín P. Justo (President from 1932-1938), while civil war was continuing in Spain (Dolkart 70). Though Mallea's work could be read as a reaction against and critique of the Argentine right and its violent, dictatorial, archconservative ways, his basic thesis – the need for moral reform in Argentina – coincides completely with the right's general goals for order, spiritualism, harmony, and a restoration of true,

moral *argentinidad*. Even if the right went about achieving these goals in reprehensible ways, it is ultimately difficult to separate Mallea from the right since, very much like his Spanish mentor, he refuses to take a clear political stand and directly call out the right for its actions. Furthermore, Mallea does not exactly propose a more liberal or democratic form of government, but rather one run by select, creative elites.

Although Mallea never directly cites or makes even a passing reference to Ortega in *Historia de una pasión argentina*, the comparability of his work with that of his Spanish counterpart makes itself manifest from the start. In the “Prefacio” alone, Mallea, evoking the affect of existential despair found in many of Ortega’s works, speaks to how “este país [Argentina] me desespera, me desalienta,” because, as he sees it:

Mientras vivamos [los argentinos] durmiendo en ciertos vagos bienestares estaremos olvidando un destino. Algo más: la responsabilidad de un destino. Quiero decir con inteligencia la comprensión total de nuestra obligación como hombres, la inserción de esta comprensión viva en el caminar de nuestra nación, la inserción de una moral, de una espiritualidad definida, en una actividad natural. (17-19)

See here, for instance, what Ortega wrote in “El hombre a la defensiva” and see the obvious analytical and philosophical uniformity between the two: “El argentino, no resolviéndose a olvidar su propio ser en algo más allá de él, a sumergirse en alguna misión, es un hombre que no acepta el destino” (136-37). Hence, Videla de Rivero accurately assesses how Mallea’s text is no less a response to than a veritable (re-) affirmation of Ortega’s works, observing how, “esa Argentina visible de Mallea está constituida por hombres que responden nítidamente a la descripción del ‘hombre a la defensiva’” (172).

Also like Ortega, Mallea's social philosophy depends upon extracting metaphysical truths from visible observations.<sup>196</sup> Such truths include the fact that society is inherently, visibly divided into two antagonistic groups: in Argentine society's case, these two groups are *la Argentina visible* and *la Argentina invisible*. In his essay, Mallea specifically directs and dedicates the fruits of his observations to the latter. Functioning as the part of the Argentine population that he judges to be morally, ontologically, and artistically superior, and thus best equipped to run the country, *la Argentina invisible* unfortunately finds itself to be *sumergida* below the inferior *argentina visible*.<sup>197</sup> Mallea maintains that the "invisible Argentina" does exist, though, and finds it easier to perceive in the romanticized, ostensibly simpler and more uniform Argentine countryside than in the bustling, heterogeneous capital of Buenos Aires.<sup>198</sup> The qualities that make the members of *la Argentina invisible* particularly stand out so as to possibly be seen at all are their mastery of the world that surrounds them and the discernible sense of order that guides their lives accordingly.

The internalization of a sense akin to *Bildung* therefore defines these aristocratic, nearly angelic beings. "La eficacia de un espíritu," Mallea proclaims, "reside en su

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<sup>196</sup> In "Cosas de Europa," a piece Ortega wrote especially for his Argentine readers and published in 1926 *La Nación*, he spells out his visual process: "Debe [el escritor], ante todo, saturar de realidad su retina, luego analizar lo visto, por fin, ensayar una clara definición. De esta manera existe una vaga probabilidad de que su labor resulte aprovechable" (96).

<sup>197</sup> Now, just how does Mallea see what is *invisible* and *sumergida*? Good question...

<sup>198</sup> Contrary to Mallea, Ortega sees the man of the countryside as primarily being the one who lives a plant-like life. "El hombre campesino," he says, "es todavía un vegetal. Su existencia, cuanto piensa, siente y quiere, conserva la modorra inconsciente en que vive la planta" (*Rebelión* 167). Said difference of opinion could denote how Mallea's analysis is all the more radically conservative – the city must revert back to the country! – compared to that of his mentor. Surely, Mallea relies more on traditional religious beliefs, at the very least.

sabiduría del orden oculto en toda disparidad. Tal orden oculto es lo que se llama sentido, y aquel que descubra el sentido de la disparidad circundante será el único no devorado por ella” (125). This ordered, rational sense intrinsically fuses itself, in turn, with the civilizing aspirations of the Argentine nation. Finally, a civilized individual’s rational desires come to be as one with the State. Mallea explains the natural, rational fusion – one which, significantly, also harkens back to Guattari’s explanation of fascism – as follows:

Y sólo en la medida en que lo racional de un hombre es alto crece hacia su raíz la nacionalidad intrínseca, la nacionalidad inmanente, lo nacional [...]. No es un azar que las bestias no reconozcan patria sino donde confina su defensa y alimento. Cuanto más elevado es la racionalidad de un ser, más grande es el árbol que su nación planta y extiende en él. (19)

Not at all a stranger to such self-definitions, a significant part of Argentina’s national, literary, and philosophical history had always centered around the tension between “civilización y barbarie,” with Sarmiento’s *Facundo* (originally published in 1845) serving, perhaps, as the prime example. For Mallea, tensions such as these are essential to the construction and maintenance of every nation:

Todos los pueblos tienen fondos esenciales que superviven materialmente simbolizados en su literatura y en su historia y sin las cuales esencias las nacionalidades se disgregarían y disolverían como las islas de los archipiélagos. Y en la cohesión que guardan los elementos de ese fondo radica el destino mayor a que puede aspirar un pueblo, que es de tener, no imperio físico sobre otros, sino hegemonía de espíritu, en el sentido en que tiene hegemonía la inspiración de un artista sobre la devoción de quien lo recibe en su fervor. (164)

Because of his spiritual hegemony, the (male) artist – the creator of civilization in the face of barbarism – bears the creative, cultural crown, inspiring devotion to the artist and his great works in the forms of national myths made real. In his essay, however, Mallea does not so much maintain this tension in order to possibly make of it something

productive, but, instead, emphatically privileges the “civilized,” ordered, and national, though also *invisible*, side of it, at the expense of whatever might be “barbaric.”

Yet, as Mallea sadly sees it, *la Argentina invisible* that exists as this very hidden sense of real, national, rational order finds itself overwhelmed by the barbaric, superficial, artificial *Argentina visible*. What is “visible” is the ugly part of Argentina comprised of “irracionales, la parte irracional (a decir justo: animal) de nuestro pueblo” (19). “Rational,” “invisible,” Argentine humanity consequently determines itself in relation to its “irrational,” “visible,” sub-human other. And, in the end, only via recourse to moral reason and reform can the *animal irracional* – ¡las bestias! – of *la Argentina visible* be tamed, become a part of the sensible social order, and be brought to civilization: “Toda esa extensión salvaje [...] sólo por una cosa iba a ser conquistado, sólo por una cosa, por una forma moral tan fuerte y definida como ella: idea, pasión, o sentimiento” (34). Through access to a special kind of sensory knowledge conversant with the internal, ordered mechanisms of the otherwise ostensibly disordered world, these human subjects that make up *la Argentina invisible* will come to master themselves as Subjects and master the objects that surround them, i.e. the world and the reified beings that make up *la Argentina visible*, ultimately finding themselves to be one with their State. This is their natural destiny.

Try as he may to find the humanity necessarily essential to *la Argentina invisible*, the conspicuous, sickening lack of humanity is all Mallea sees in his fellow Argentines:

Así, pues, la primera zona visible de que se apropiaron mis ojos fue el dominio del habitante desnudo, la Argentina en su humanidad. [...] Y al llevar adelante tal intento fue cuando tuve la primera comprobación desoladora, la comprobación de que la función ejercida por ese hombre en éste no era, según lo presumible, una aplicación prolongada de ciertas aptitudes y facultades fundamentalmente

humanas, sino un tumor del hombre, cáncer que lo desnaturalizaba y consumía, nudo fisiológico que obstaculizaba su crecimiento y destino natural. (70-71)

The inability of those who make up *la Argentina visible* to apply themselves to a cause greater than and outside of themselves works like a cancer that effectively stunts their growth, clearly marking their bodies (and the bodies of their works) with stigmatic marks reminiscent of both *el hombre a la defensiva* and *el hombre-masa*, making this sick mass of men frightfully *visible* in the process.<sup>199</sup> Taken together, these “false” individuals live as nothing more than “una ficción de humanidad, representación de humanidad, comedia de humanidad” (83). Taken together, they exist with little more than a “vegetative” sense of life, unable to truly, vitally create as real-life humans do: “De más en más se ha trabajado aquí sin ensueño creador, lo que equivale a decir – en un sentido profundo – sin vida; vegetativa, telúricamente, con la obsesión de trueque inmediato; tal trabajo para tal objeto utilitario – no para tal fin, sólo para tal objeto [...]” (103). Taken together, they work to faithlessly, falsely forge *la Argentina visible*: a country “sin pasiones y sin Dios” (150). Indeed, what Mallea claims to witness is so ugly, his own passionate hatred runs so deep for these less-than-human-beings and the revolting things that they have done and continue to do to his country, he feels drawn toward enacting violence upon them – if not, in fact, liquidating them entirely: “He odiado a esta gente culpablemente falsa, habría querido acosarlos, golpearlos, reducirlos al silencio, limpiar la atmósfera de su presencia” (84). Mallea’s beautiful instincts cause him to be revolted by and, consequently, want to eliminate what is ugly and without order; and, of course, the violence perpetrated against

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<sup>199</sup> While Mallea does not specifically utilize either of these terms here, the closest he comes to doing so can be found in his description of *los hombres-medio*: “Lo terrible son los hombres-medio, esos que no pueden abandonar la cárcel del querer llegar sin trascenderse, la cárcel del fin que se queda en medio” (83).

all that is holy in Argentine humanity can only be eliminated by a stronger, more righteous violence. So speak Mallea's virtuous, violent, fascist desires.

As with Ortega, Mallea also believes that Argentina's large immigrant population is a significant factor in the current moral crisis – and, evidently, in its resultant lack of order – created and perpetuated by *la Argentina visible*. Videla de Rivero again elucidates the similarity in thought between the two thinkers with respect to the matter here:

Mallea, como Ortega, ve también en Buenos Aires y en el país, una gran acogida de inmigrantes, que para no arriesgar la cohesión nacional deberían ser integrados y plasmados por una matriz, capaz de darles una forma total, de brindarles un proyecto no meramente material, sino un destino en que lo espiritual y lo económico logran la misma unidad viviente. (172)

Mallea, for his part, considers the mass of immigrants representative of the most promising and magical, though also the most difficult and frustrating, material with which the state's spiritual artists have to work. In the extended passage that follows, Mallea details how these immigrants, unable to produce a sense of spiritual order in their own lives, must instead be naturally molded into their citizenry by the great Argentine spirit itself:

esos hombres llegados de ultramar nos traían con sus cabezas rubias y esos ojos en los que perduraba el sufrimiento de quién sabe cuántas generaciones, un elemento de vida, de energía en marcha que si no era capaz – por no ser ésa naturalmente su misión – de iniciar con su marcha sentido de un orden, significaba en cambio un magnífico material de vida para integrar en ese orden algo poderosamente activo y corpóreo. Esos hombres constituían un material humano plástico. ¿Pero quién, cómo, iba a darles aquel orden? Cuál iba a ser la matriz capaz de plasmarlos, de darles una forma total, de imponerles una gestación adecuada a la forma, no de un mero destino material, sino de un destino en que lo espiritual y lo económico logran la misma unidad viviente, el mismo orden?

Claro está que esa matriz no podía ser naturalmente otra más que la forma espiritual de nuestro pueblo. (74-75)

Just like the Liga Patriótica Argentina years before, Mallea expresses, albeit according to a loftier and more metaphysical, if equally essentializing, proposal, his wish to find a way to “mold rebellious foreigners into a pliable submissive labor force” (Deutsch 45); and, in the end, both ultimately make rhetorical recourse to their country’s unique *argentinidad* in order to hopefully inspire such a holy effort.

As Sitman notes, however, “este tipo de esencialismo del ser argentino implica también un grado de abstracción que neutraliza la problemática social” (107). That is, it is easy to set up a clear dichotomous situation of *us versus them* when there are only two terms given, with such terms here being *la argentina visible* and *la argentina invisible*.<sup>200</sup> Alas, upon arrival, all the immigrants see is *la Argentina visible* – a veritable meeting of the masses – meaning that “[e]n vez de encontrar un orden nuevo, y bueno, veían reproducido, con escasas diferencias, el malo que traían” (76). The *malo* that the immigrants bring with them: “una ruta importada de prosperidad física y vegetativa,” along with their own inordinate sense of economic ambition (and, maybe, a few radical ideas) (76). Coupled with *la Argentina visible*, these misguided, spiritually ignorant outsiders amplify Argentina’s superficial, immoral nature.

As a consequence, in a country “donde la dependencia orgánicamente inmutable de los valores ha sido sustituida por el ejercicio de los valores aparentes,” Argentina requires a revaluation of values that itself requires great sacrifices in order to restore a common moral order (83). “El orden no comienza en una evasión hacia lo comodidad,” Mallea asserts, echoing Ortega, “sino en una conciencia e cierto sacrificio para cierto fin” (74). Yet, such a transcendental, moral, and ethical revaluation can only come to fruition

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<sup>200</sup> With Ortega, meanwhile, the two terms tend to be *las minorías selectas* and *las masas* (meaning, roughly, everyone else, the majority, etc.).

if *el argentino* realizes that his life on Earth is, in sooth, a life spent in purgatory and that, in Spinozan terms, his “sad passions” define him. Mallea:

No es posible concebir vida alguna capaz de trascenderse, y, por lo tanto, de trascendencia, sin conciencia de su estado purgativo. [...] Y es en este sentido como toda razón es trágica y es en este sentido como cuando falta aquella conciencia del estado purgativo, el hombre es animalidad, vegetación. (163-64)

Why is life so sad for Mallea? First of all, because he is alive and is painfully aware of his own existence. What exacerbates this existential despair, though, is the fact that he lives in Argentina: a sad, Godless country; a disordered country that floats along *a la deriva*, negating its true existence in the process by pretending to be so contentedly fulfilled; a place, perhaps, worse than death, because life can almost still be reached.<sup>201</sup>

After all, “un pueblo que no sabe adonde va es un pueblo sin fe, y un pueblo sin fe es un pueblo triste” (167). Anyone in Argentina who fails to realize that life is so lugubrious, so purgatorial, lives a lesser, animal, and even plant-like, life.

Yet, how can both Mallea and the country that he and Ortega love so much be saved? In an impassioned address that he makes directly to *el pueblo argentino*, Mallea believes he perceives a creative way toward salvation:

Pueblo, lo que necesitas ahora es: otros constructores. [...] Pueblo, es en ti tan grande el ánimo de dar, que siendo ese sólo el primer paso de la fe, parece ya una fe completa y orientada. Pero no lo es; sólo lo parece. Y tu gran destino está en sacrificarlo todo al ser; en no querer ya parecer, en borrar de tu superficie la pululación de los que parecen sin ser. Tu gran destino está en ser más categóricamente que lo que eres. (168)

As ordered from above, self-sacrifice and an honest-to-God faith in the creative possibilities of higher powers will save Argentina, so long as such sacrifice and faith,

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<sup>201</sup> Revisiting Ortega: “Una vida en disponibilidad es mayor negación de sí misma que la muerte” (*Rebelión* 153).

along with a life spent in sadness, result in order.<sup>202</sup> Or, as Sitman describes it, this is nothing less than the “postulación de un proyecto nacional de trascendencia universal” (106).

*El argentino* must therefore overcome his superficial self in order to really be himself, that is, *el argentino*. As might be expected, Mallea volunteers himself to be one of these “otros constructores” that would facilitate such a process:

¿Qué quería hacer yo, al fin, al fin, sino eso: crearme? ¡Crearme! No es fácil, burgués, crearse. Porque hay que crear antes algo muy duro. Porque hay que saber antes negarse todo; todo, todo, absolutamente todo, hasta que no quede más que una aspiración simple en un cuerpo simple [...]. (209)<sup>203</sup>

The creation and construction of the beautiful, individual citizen run parallel to and come to join forces with the creation and construction of a State, all founded on humanist principles that include having both Human Subject and State deny themselves any sort of alternative desires outside of their transcendent aspirations to harmony, order, and power, so as to be dialectically, transcendently redeemed. In Mallea’s Argentine state, aestheticism and asceticism combine, with creative humanity regained and salvation made possible, *visible* through its negation.

In accordance with his “espíritu existencialista y orteguiana,” Mallea’s insistence that life itself is sadness, that reason is tragic, that existence is purgatory, reflects a

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<sup>202</sup> Deleuze, with the help of Spinoza, describes such a project as follows: “Any organization that comes from above and refers to a transcendence, be it a hidden one, can be called a theological plan: a design in the mind of a god, but also an evolution in the supposed depths of nature, or a society’s organization of power” (*Spinoza* 128). To be sure, such are the “theological plans” of Mallea and Ortega.

<sup>203</sup> As with Ortega in *La rebelión de las masas*, Mallea also takes umbrage at the presumed values of the modern bourgeoisie. Though both thinkers attempt to define *el burgués* as being the example *par excellence* of the *hombre-masa* or the cancerous member of *la Argentina visible*, their disdain does not stop there, as can clearly be seen in their critiques of the presumably lower and immigrant classes outlined previously.

philosophy of life that ultimately limits human capacity for action (Sitman 109).<sup>204</sup> And although Spinoza – a man of ethical action who finds a substantive God in all things – is one to admit that most all human subjects spend the vast majority of their lives wallowing in sad passions and that “men are naturally inclined to hate and envy,” he also says that, “Sadness diminishes or restrains a man’s power of acting. [...] Sadness is a man’s passage from a greater to a lesser perfection” (183, 173, 188). While sadness is certainly a necessary part of life, as a way of life it is effectively reactive. And, what is more, if any sort of order arises in the world it does so out of immanent necessity, out of patterns culled from disorder, and not necessarily naturally out of an appeal to a transcendent end – “nor do we strive to understand things for the sake of some end,” as Spinoza tells us (212).

While order can be good or bad, while it can make people active by combining them together with others through groupings that promote sympathy, or reactive by separating people from what they can do individually and with others through rigid social structures, calling for order simply to avoid disorder only helps those who desire to put people in their place. This reactionary objective is not Mallea’s alone, but, rather, one that he has derived from Ortega’s ultraconservative teachings and, maybe, one that he also derives from those on the Argentine right who harbored similar, if ultimately even more repressive and violent, desires. Within this group, then, it could surely be said that, in

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<sup>204</sup> Meanwhile, in *The Birth Of Tragedy*, the young Nietzsche might call such a way of life described here by Mallea as being essentially Apolline: “With sublime gesture he [Apollo] reveals to us how the whole world of torment is necessary so that the individual can create the redeeming vision, and then, immersed in contemplation of it, sit peacefully in his tossing boat amid the waves” (26). If the Apolline is indeed necessary for life, as it is for Nietzsche at this early stage in this thought, life is still not complete, nevertheless, without including the Dionysian as well – that is, without including joy.

Guattari's words, "Everybody wants to be a Fascist." For, here, "Everybody" is defined by their attempted construction of conservative models of desire that could make the masses, or whatever might be other or different, into a malleable, docile entity, one determined and determinable by a destiny imposed from above through calls to a higher, transcendent end and habitually reproduced from within through the spiritual institutionalization of a passive acceptance of one's destiny.

In the section that follows, we will see how the deliriously contradictory fictional works of Roberto Arlt do and do not follow these same humanist and fascist principles. With Arlt, it is never a simple choice of one principle over another, i.e. order or disorder. Any sort of analysis must *ipso facto* be as cautionary as it is brazen in attempting to understand what order and disorder do and do not mean to Arlt, and how, in his works, order and disorder come to function as opposed, yet common, forces of life and human being.

## Chapter 5

### Order and Disorder – Society, Misanthropy, and Traitorous Joy in Roberto Arlt

“Nosotros no hemos sentado principio alguno todavía, y lo práctico será aceptar los principios más opuestos.”

*El Astrólogo – Los Siete Locos*

“An explosive book always keeps an explosive charge [...].”

Gilles Deleuze – *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*

If Mallea’s *Historia de una pasión argentina* and Ortega’s general philosophical outlook show us members of *las vanguardias* who operate as conservative defenders of a hierarchical society based upon transcendental, humanist notions of authority and order, then the novels of the avant-garde writer, Roberto Arlt, show us something different. “Arlt, en realidad, va en otro sentido,” as the critic, Alan Pauls, states in “Arlt: La máquina literaria” (250). Or does he? For although the novels that will be treated here – *El juguete rabioso*, *Los siete locos*, and *Los lanzallamas* – show Arlt writing so as to resist such reactionary tendencies and maintain order and disorder in an active state of productive tension, this tension’s manifestation does not show order (and, in some cases, extreme, fascistic order) to be entirely out of the question. This is the modern world as Arlt sees it, then, and, in accordance with what Beatriz Sarlo tells us in *La imaginación técnica*, “Esta percepción de la modernidad como espacio de alta tensión, de desorden paroxístico [...] atrae a quien está dispuesto a negociar con la mezcla, lejos de todo ideal de pureza” (48).

While Arlt's mixed up, modern perception does move away from, and therefore *disorder*, the necessary purity of Ortega and Mallea's humanist ways, Arlt's worldview is not wholly without its own rules, nor is it ruled by no one. With Arlt, though, it is not a question of absolute moral rehabilitation and redemption, of establishing uncontaminated, discrete, striated categories of humans and non-humans, of the beautiful and the sublime. Rather, it is about power, politics, confusion, and betrayal. Arlt does not shy away from these themes in his own works like Ortega and Mallea do.<sup>205</sup> On the contrary, his works and the characters contained therein actively question the validity of cultural norms that would otherwise capture them in the prevailing, hierarchical order. They strive to find momentary and sometimes eternal ways and means to power, be it in the form of individual autonomy of desire or hegemonic rule over others.

Blanchot says that, with respect to Nietzsche, "Transcendence obsesses him, as that which he must endlessly surmount to be free" (296). The same can be said of Arlt with respect to order. Without question, these obsessions take on peculiar, contradictory forms of expression in both Nietzsche and Arlt. In Arlt, in particular, and as Masotta explains it, "Estas contorsiones reenvían a las contorsiones de una conciencia apresada en

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<sup>205</sup> This is especially the case when it comes to speaking directly to politics, which Arlt and his characters frequently do, particularly in *Los siete locos* and *Los llanzamas*. Ricardo Piglia speaks here to the political nature of Arlt's fiction: "Si se piensa en Roberto Arlt, se ve que Arlt es la verdadera literatura política. Un tipo que nunca hablaba de Yrigoyen, que nunca hablaba de lo que estaba pensando. Y en su tiempo había, claro, muchos otros que estaban escribiendo novelas simultáneamente con él, que hablaban de las huelgas y de los conflictos y de los contenidos inmediatos; pero fue Arlt que captó el núcleo secreto de la política argentina, y escribió una novela que se lee hoy y parece que se escribió ayer. Eso es la literatura política. Eso es la ficción política. Capta el núcleo de una sociedad. Funciona, digamos así, transformando esos elementos que son los núcleos verdaderos, los núcleos de interpretación" (114-15). Now, exactly how the "secrets" and the "society" and all this intrigue function in Arlt's political works and, furthermore, how they can be read and interpreted will take up the majority of this present section.

las contradicciones de la sociedad efectiva. [...] Esa conciencia histérica, angustiada y de comediante que se levanta en las novelas de Arlt es una verdadera conciencia delirante” (80). Delirium – not clarity of thought, being, and creative power as it is with Ortega and Mallea – is therefore what is produced (a conscience, a subjectivity) and the concomitant stuff that makes up the site of production ([modern] society). Neither order nor disorder can quell this delirious process, because both means of organization and disorganization are mixed up in it.

Overall, the oscillating forces at work can be outlined as follows: truth and untruth, order and disorder, good and bad morals, laws and crimes, individualities and collectivities, life and death. Ultimately, with Arlt, each force engages and confuses the other.<sup>206</sup> That is, as Masotta asserts: “La obra de Arlt, entonces, es [...] de una época donde lo que se sabe de la vida se mezcla con la vida, donde el conocimiento no se separa de la existencia, donde la confusión y el equívoco comienzan a tener un valor de verdad” (29).<sup>207</sup> Taken one step further, reading Arlt’s novels also produces certain delirious, confused sensations in the reader, so that one reads along and actively questions not only the actions (and inactions) and values (and lack of values) one finds in Arlt’s novels, but, quite possibly, also actively questions the current order in which one lives and one’s own sense of self. Literature, like life, therefore functions as a problematic site that produces problems along with our best individual and collective efforts to, yes, sometimes

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<sup>206</sup> Similar senses of delirium, confusion, and also conflation (both in and as non-dialectical *dispositivos*) will return with a vengeance when engaging the work of Macedonio Fernández in the following chapter.

<sup>207</sup> Admittedly, I have taken the liberty of changing this quote. The ellipsis represents the space where, in Masotta’s original, “el estertor” is written. The author later goes on to state that “ hoy se sabe que el corazón de la vida es totalitario, que toda verdad es síntesis, recuperación global de la totalidad de los niveles de la existencia histórica” (29). This is one instance, then, in which I do not think Masotta is totally right; hence the change.

transcend, but also, immanently, to interpret and come to terms with these problems as living readers.

### **5.1 – Wills To Powers – *El Astrólogo* and *La Sociedad Secreta***

Arlt's greatest, most problematic, and most deliriously Nietzschean character is the Astrólogo. Appearing in *Los siete locos* and *Las lanzallamas*, the Astrólogo's greatest, most problematic, and most delirious concept is a revolutionary new world order that he calls the *sociedad secreta*. In this society, a return to pre-modern metaphysical lies (or myths) is meant to bring about this new world order. It necessarily follows that those who wield a special knowledge of untruth – a special knowledge capable of liberating certain select individuals from subjectivity's traditional constraints – stand superior over those docile folk below who instinctively accept their subservient roles in life as being/s subjected to the dictates of those above.<sup>208</sup> Thus it is that one of the Astrólogo's chief colleagues, the Buscador de Oro, speaks of “la imprescindible necesidad de una aristocracia natural” in order to assure the success of the *sociedad secreta* (*Siete* 150).

As it was with Ortega, then, the Astrólogo also hopes to reorganize modern day life so that it resembles a time before the new times, before modernity. Here, this time longed for so dearly is a time before the death of God, that is to say a timeless time (timeless because time itself is of no importance if destiny is already pre-determined), when a singular devotion to a higher power is only natural. “Vi que el callejón sin salida

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<sup>208</sup> Such logic would seem to invert what Horkheimer and Adorno say about truth, violence, and myth: “Only thought which does violence to itself is hard enough to shatter myth” (2). Here, in contrast, the Astrólogo's thoughts serve to violently restore rather than “shatter” myth. Myth is a power both known and unknown in origin, and it is this mysteriously true power of what is untrue that the Astrólogo so overtly desires in order to establish his “secret society.”

de la realidad social tenía una única salida...” says the Astrólogo, ““y era volver para atrás”” (*Siete* 121). In the modern world a new day has dawned, yet the most viable means for seizing it appears to be cloaking it in the past. Observed from this angle, one of the main differences between Ortega’s *minorías selectas*, Mallea’s *otros constructores*, and Arlt’s vision (that is, the Astrólogo’s vision) of, shall we say, *una minoría enloquecida de otros deconstructores* who form a *sociedad secreta* would be that Ortega and Mallea see truth as being the driving force behind the society’s organization, whereas Arlt sees the truth of lies functioning as something akin to social history’s timeless motor of order. Not to mention the fact that those in charge of the *sociedad secreta* would not be paragons of moral rectitude and artistry, but, rather, libidinal, mad scientists and profiteers – though, really, the difference between these descriptions and qualities may not be so great! That said, in all three cases – Arlt, Ortega, and Mallea – it is ultimately not society at-large that must be defended, but instead the mythically powerful secrets known only to a select few who rule and determine this society that must be restored and defended – that is, kept secret.<sup>209</sup>

Also, from this same angle, Arlt looks to be less subversive than some of his championing critics, i.e. Ricardo Piglia, would like to make him out to be. Masotta, meanwhile, offers a more nuanced reading of subversion vis-à-vis the *sociedad secreta*:

Es cierto que aparecen en esta obra esas sociedades secretas cuyos miembros piensan destruir o cambiar la sociedad, es decir, donde los humillados se unen entre ellos para volverse contra quienes humillan. Pero este subversismo no puede despistarnos, y no debemos olvidar que los actos de terrorismo individual que realizan los personajes desdican los objetivos subversivos. Estos subversivos son anarquistas, pero al revés. (43)

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<sup>209</sup> Now Foucault’s words are being twisted about.

This *sociedad secreta* thus comes to approach Ortega and Mallea's radical brand of humanism turned in on itself – perhaps even made all the more radical in its basic, primitive drive toward power for power's sake. *Le pouvoir pour le pouvoir!* – Surely, this desire, here unadorned in Arlt's "ugly" prose, is not so "new." With the aesthetic veneer essentially removed, what remains is a sheer lust for power over others actually and apparently less fortunate – ontologically, aesthetically, intellectually, economically, etc. This sort of bizarro humanism cannot function properly if all humans come to see the light that is civilization; consequently, it must keep certain kinds of humans in the dark in order to ensure its discursive (read: real) power over them. Indeed, these are the very designs of the Astrólogo's *sociedad secreta* – a society so counter to society that it is not counter to society, thereby revealing the violent, imperialistic, and, to be sure, *secret* foundations inherent to the inauguration, continuation, and/or restoration of society *qua* society.

And yet, as always, as it is with Nietzsche, Arlt and his curious, contradictory concepts about human nature and society are exceedingly difficult to pin down one way or another, once and for all. For the *sociedad secreta* can, at times, come off as being so far-fetched so as to be taken as farce or parody – or just legitimately insane! Looking back on it, modernity, and the many promises it made in the name of the general advancement of life, was just as true as it was farcical as it was crazy, too. Hence, the Astrólogo is able to say, "Cuando hablo de una sociedad secreta no me refiero al tipo clásico de sociedad, sino a una supermoderna [...]," for organizing such a *sociedad supermoderna* will allow him to be a "manager de locos" (*Siete* 31-32, 129). As Bernal Herrera acknowledges in his study, *Arlt, Borges y Cía: Narrativa rioplatense de*

*vanguardia*, this confusion and conflation of truth, farce, and insanity effectively characterizes the Astrólogo's "super modern secret society":

abundan en Arlt ejemplos de esta imposibilidad de distinguir la comedia de lo serio, la farsa de la verdad. Tal es el caso de la conspiración del Astrólogo. Pese a ser el núcleo central de la acción de las dos novelas agrupadas en el ciclo de Erdosain, resulta imposible decidir a ciencia cierta si realmente existió o si fue una farsa de su líder para sacar ventaja de sus seguidores, habiendo múltiples indicios de que el mismo Astrólogo tampoco lo sabe. (164)

Accordingly, when prompted to respond to the following inquiry, "Deseo saber si usted es un comediante, un cínico o un aventurero," the Astrólogo simply responds, "Las tres cosas expresan lo mismo" (*Lanzallamas* 79).

What is more, whether or not Arlt himself knows what to make of the Astrólogo's ideas one cannot really say either – that is, if, at this point, the author's intentions even really matter at all. Ortega, on the other hand, does not share this sense of humor, unreason, or untruth, nor does he write works of fiction. Mallea, might, like Arlt, be a fiction writer from Argentina, but his fictional works, much like *Historia de una passion argentina*, are often dreadfully serious to the point of being tediously lugubrious. Still, it could be that, in line with Ortega's dictum, what makes Arlt a representative member of the *arte nuevo* is the essentially playful nature of his works. What Ortega failed to account for, though, is that even essences can exist as mixed up phenomena, too, and, moreover, that being playful does not necessarily exclude a political orientation, but can, on the contrary, perhaps act as the basis of one or many politics.

In addition, given the contradictions at stake and at play in Arlt's works, thinkers like Piglia and Masotta (along with the author of the current study) all end up reading Arlt incorrectly, or, better yet, insufficiently, anyway. "Such is the problem," as Blanchot assesses it when one reads and interprets Nietzsche – an assessment which, again, applies

to Arlt – for this “problem” “call[s] into question not the individual merits of the commentator but the possibility of any commentary on a passionate thinker, written from the outside” (289). Be that as it may, we still read and write about Arlt and Nietzsche, all the same, with both sufficient and insufficient reasoning on our side. Curiously enough, the reading of Arlt that follows starts off with the man reading and writing about himself and his own work.

Arlt begins *Los lanzallamas*, first published in 1931 and the third and final novel in a trilogy of sorts that includes *El juguete rabioso* (1926) and *Los siete locos* (1929), with a brief introduction that he calls “Palabras del autor.” In this introduction, Arlt attacks notions of the pure and beautiful aesthetics described by Ortega in *La deshumanización del arte*. Arlt, meanwhile, writes the following with respect to the matter: “Me atrae ardientemente la belleza. ¡Cuántas veces he deseado trabajar una novela que, como las de Flaubert, se compusiera de panorámicos lienzos . . . ! Mas hoy, entre los ruidos de un edificio social que se desmorona inevitablemente, no es posible pensar en bordados” (11).<sup>210</sup> Attempting to distance himself from many of the avant-garde writers at the time that obsessed over the possibility of an autonomous beauty somehow inherent to their creations, Arlt plainly states that such beauty is no longer possible, given the current social conditions.

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<sup>210</sup> In *Contorno*'s second issue (May, 1954), which was dedicated to Arlt, Gabriel Conte Reyes writes of how such supposedly self-denigrating opinions of himself really constitute, “La mentira de Arlt.” In this way, “Se postró [Arlt] para que ‘los otros’ [los que escriben ‘bien’] crecieran, pero a condición de que se condenaran, porque su salvación y su falsa humildad es una emboscada, la agachada en la que parece murmurar por lo bajo: ‘Sí, sí, ellos son los perfectos, los sin-pecado, pero nadie los tiene en cuenta’” (1). While Conte Reyes surely could be correct in his analysis, it could also be said that he himself was jealous of Arlt, perhaps because he is one of those unfortunate writers whom “*nadie lo tiene en cuenta*.”

Moreover, Arlt equates – perhaps rightfully so – the type of literature that he does not write, or even writes against, as being indicative of a certain social class of which he is not a member.<sup>211</sup> “Orgullosamente,” he remarks, “afirmo que escribir, para mí, constituye un lujo. No dispongo, como otros escritores, de rentas, tiempo o sedantes empleos nacionales. Ganarse la vida escribiendo es penoso y rudo” (11). According to Arlt, his writing lacks “beauty” and “style” because he personally lacks the leisure time necessary to make it so. For these reasons, at least as Arlt sees it, some critics say that he “escrib[e] mal” and “persiste aferrado a un realismo de pésimo gusto” (11-12).<sup>212</sup>

But Arlt considers writing to be work, and difficult work at that; that is his reality, so to speak, and he writes thusly. As trying as this work may be, Arlt nevertheless finds hope in his work. Still in the introduction, Arlt explains this hope, this promise:

El futuro es nuestro, *por potencia de trabajo*. Crearemos nuestra literatura, no conversando continuamente de literatura, sino escribiendo en orgullosamente

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<sup>211</sup> Masotta does an astute job of addressing the class conflicts at work in Arlt, though these conflicts shall not be addressed quite as diligently in the present study.

<sup>212</sup> Although not explicit, Arlt’s stance here reflects the general beliefs of those on the “Boedo” side in the famed “polémica de Boedo-Florida” of the late 1920s in Argentina. Manifested mainly in the revistas *Martín Fierro* and *Proa* (Florida) and *Claridad* (Boedo), at its core this artistic divide – perhaps, more hype than actual polemic, since, as Gilman declares, “La polémica es pobre” – situated aesthetes against realists, political evasiveness against political engagement (53). The basic disagreement began with Roberto Mariani reproaching the Florida group for “excesiva benevolencia hacia Leopoldo Lugones y la falta de ímpetu y de rebeldía que pone en su sus manifestaciones pese al ingenio que lo caracteriza” in an open letter published in *Martín Fierro* (Salvador 67). Mariani then went on to rather reductively outline the general divide as follows:

Florida – Boedo

Vanguardismo – Izquierdismo

Ultraísmo – Realismo

Martín Fierro, Proa – Extrema Izquierda, Los Pensadores, Claridad

La greguería – El cuento y la novela

La metáfora – El asunto y la composición

Ramón Gómez de la Serna – Fedor Dostoiewsky [sic]. (qtd in Salvador 68)

While we will not go into greater detail regarding the Boedo-Florida affair, it is cited here in order to show that Arlt was not alone in his disdain.

soledad libros que encierran la violencia de un ‘cross’ a la mandíbula. [...] El porvenir es triunfalmente nuestro. (12 emphasis added)

He believes in literature as work, not as mere reason for conversation and diversion, but as a tool that can effect violent change, like a punch to the face, like Ortega’s feared, barbaric, *acción directa*, violently effectuated in literature.<sup>213</sup>

Arlt writes works that work as pure movement. Even though he might call for a return to a different kind of pre-modern man of devotion, he does not sadly or stagnantly dwell on the past, on what has been lost in the modern city, as his passionate, humanist counterpart, Mallea, does. For Arlt sees “una ciudad [Buenos Aires] en construcción, donde otros escritores, sus contemporáneos, ven una ciudad que se está perdiendo: para Arlt, Buenos Aires no fue, sino será” (Sarlo, *Imaginación* 46).<sup>214</sup> Although, at the same time, many of Arlt’s characters do find themselves to be thoroughly paralyzed – in mind and body – by the very construction of the modern city that surrounds them; this is just one of the many contradictions that can be traced in his work.

The fact of the matter, though, is that the novels at hand resist straightforward description and categorization. This resistance is one of Arlt’s greatest creative qualities as a writer and thinker. For, in the words of Deleuze, “You write with a view towards an unborn people that doesn’t yet have a language. *Creating isn’t communicating but*

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<sup>213</sup> In “the first good novel,” Macedonio Fernández’s *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*, one of the characters affirms something quite similar to this pugilistic appeal to literature so offered here: “Quizágenio: Prueba de arte en novelista; trasuntar los estados emocionales de un boxeador a quien se cuentan los diez segundos” (175). This novel, along with its companion, the “last bad novel,” *Adriana Buenos Aires*, will be examined in the following chapter.

<sup>214</sup> Of course, Mallea, like all good avant-gardists, does call for *otros constructores* as well, albeit in his own way.

*resisting*” (“On Philosophy” 143 emphasis added).<sup>215</sup> With respect to Arlt, the “resistance” expressed in his novels bursts forth as a cacophonous and critical language that does not always express a direct ideological privilege. As Graciela Montaldo notes, this explosion of language found in Arlt was characteristic of the times, though only he seemed to be able to express it: “Hubo en este momento una notoria proliferación de la palabra y de la escritura, una expansión de discursos tan heterogénea que es imposible dar cuenta de su totalidad a menos que uno sea Roberto Arlt, a cuyos textos pareciera afluir esa multiplicidad” (25). That said, it cannot quite be said that everyone gets a say in these novels – one notes, for example, the general exclusion of a truly *lumpen* voice. Although, it could certainly be said that Arlt, via the *Astrólogo*, does do his best to speak for all forces, powers, and politics.

Still, at least here in his introductory “Palabras del autor,” Arlt posits that artists cannot isolate themselves in a beautiful solipsism that functions as if it were a carapace, separating and sequestering them from the surrounding world. Any kind of personal order possibly found in the genius and cult of beauty must reconcile itself with the general disorder of the world. Arlt writes of, if not directly with, this disorder in his trilogy, showing the constant struggle between order and disorder to be, in effect, a struggle for power effectuated at many levels, including the personal, cultural, political, social, literary, and historical. As the critic, Francine Masiello, states, “Arlt anuncia que todo acto se encuentra enclavado en relaciones de poder, como discursos que compiten, organizando las elecciones del hombre o negando su potencial libertad” (210). In addition, Arlt shows this struggle to be macro and micro in scope, surging on superficial

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<sup>215</sup> This same citation will be applied in the next chapter to the creative resistance of Macedonio Fernández.

and subterranean planes, channeling, organizing, deflecting, constraining, and liberating human and non-human desires.

Even so, as Arlt demonstrates in his writing, disorder and disruption of order do not necessarily mean revolutionary success and victory. In extremes, in an overdose, both order and disorder can lead to insanity, hallucination, murder, and suicide. In Arlt's world there always already exists a fascism and a liberty and an ineluctable violence endemic to order and disorder, and he criticizes it all. One could therefore characterize Arlt's novels as being categorically critical. They criticize with such speed that, as Herrera points out, it matters less what Arlt's works means and more how they work or function as critical texts. Here Herrera discusses this function in greater detail: "A un debilitamiento de la función sentido del lenguaje suele corresponder un incremento de la función fuerza, incremento que la retórica en general, y muy particularmente la retórica política, siempre afanada por potenciar su capacidad persuasiva, luchan por maximar" (203). What Arlt and his characters say and do might not always makes sense, especially when one considers the contradictions inherent to these thoughts and actions. Yet, what is said and done (and not done), if emptied of exact signification, often overflows with maximal, indefinite force – one force among many of an ordering and/or disordering nature.

Language's potency as force and function can most clearly be seen in the numerous and extensive monologues put forth by the Astrólogo regarding his proposed *sociedad secreta* in the trilogy's last two novels, *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*. The Astrólogo's voice is one to which Ortega and Mallea would never pay any mind: a forceful, disordered, and nearly schizophrenic voice that, like some kind of crazy, cacophonous speaking machine, talks equally of terrestrial functions and the

metaphysical, meaningless, necessity of untruth's truth. Pauls speaks to this machine-like forcefulness, convincingly arguing in a rather Deleuzian way that Arlt's works ultimately work as *una máquina literaria*:

Lo que está en juego es, en verdad, toda una concepción de la literatura. [...] La literatura como máquina no es una cuestión de sentidos, sino de funcionamientos. A la pregunta "¿qué quiere decir?", Arlt opone ésta que [Silvio] Astier esgrime para saber "¿cómo opera?", y al enigma oracular "¿qué significa?", la interrogación-consigna "¿para qué puede servir?" (252).<sup>216</sup>

The Astrólogo himself asks similar questions over and over, showing that what is at stake is not only a "conception of literature," but also a conception of life. In this way, life, writing, and reading all function as experiments. There is no sense of destiny in such an experimental way of and to life, and what Arlt and the Astrólogo offer instead is a "dislocation of the theory of knowledge, one that opens up onto entirely unexplored terrain"; that is, a "theory of knowledge" that moves away from traditional ways of reading, writing, and living, away from the aesthetic education of young men (Agamben 221). And while it will later be shown that the Astrólogo's dislocating discourses deterritorialize thought and action all the way to where they align with homicidal, authoritarian tendencies reminiscent of modernity's apotheosis/nadir in the form of

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<sup>216</sup> See, in particular, Deleuze's "Letter to a Harsh Critic," in which he states: "There are, you see, two ways of reading a book: you either see it as a box with something inside and start looking for what it signifies, and then if you're even more perverse or depraved you set off after signifiers. And you treat the book like a box contained in the first containing it. And you annotate and interpret and question and write a book about the book, and so on and on. Or there's the other way: you see the book as a little non-signifying machine, and the only question is 'Does it work, and how does it work?' How does it work for you? If it doesn't work, if nothing comes through, you try another book. This second way of reading's intensive: something comes through or it doesn't. There's nothing to explain, nothing to interpret. It's like plugging into an electric circuit. [...] This second way of reading's quite different from the first, because it relates a book to what's directly Outside." (8-9) For Pauls, then, Arlt shows how there are two ways of writing a book as well.

fascist dictatorships, the Astrologo's transgressive, barbarous inclinations will be treated first as something to be affirmed.

Given the way he talks and thinks, given that he is a man of (pseudo-)science, Ortega would surely harbor feelings of great contempt for a man of the Astrólogo's apocryphal ilk.<sup>217</sup> Ortega makes these feelings clear in *La rebelión de las masas*, unequivocally stating, "Pues bien: resulta que el hombre de ciencia actual es el prototipo del hombre-masa" (128). Since, in the modern world, "[p]ara progresar, la ciencia necesitaba que los hombres de ciencia se especializasen," the man of science now suffers from "*dilettantismo*": this "dilettante" "sabe muy bien su mínimo rincón del universo; pero ignora de raíz todo el resto" (130-31). Still, as the scientific expression of the *hombre-masa*, this lack of knowledge does not stop the man of science from vociferating with respect to a wide variety of topics, acting like he knows what he is talking about, when, really, he does not. In no uncertain terms, Ortega goes on to proclaim that the *barbarie of el hombre de ciencia* "es la causa más inmediata de la desmoralización europea" (132).

Consequently, the Astrólogo's *sociedad secreta* would operate as the very much feared, demoralizing, and barbaric rebellion of the masses. Yet, perhaps paradoxically, it also adheres to Ortega's aristocratic, civilized, "select few" program. In other words, this could be a *sociedad secreta* composed of a certain, barbarically civilized *minoría selecta* – truly, a cynical cenacle, if there ever was one, and there has been, and there still will

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<sup>217</sup> All of the main characters – the Astrólogo, Erdosain, and Silvio – in the novels at hand function as men of science in their own ways; thus the critiques leveled by Ortega apply to them as well.

be.<sup>218</sup> The result would thus not so much be an aesthetic state as it would be a brute state, albeit one still constructed and superintended by a “select few.” With the Astrólogo, then, his conflated notions of politics and social organizations show how the possibility of one concept and the other and the other exists – indeed, such is the confused nature of life itself; whereas with Ortega it is always a case of one or the other – again, with this “OR” being emblematic of Ortega’s insatiable desire for things, beings, concepts, and phenomena to stay in their proper place and not mix with (read: contaminate) each other.

In the end, what civilization and barbarism have taught the *sociedad secreta*’s “select few” is thus not how to make beautiful aesthetic objects that convey the timeless, natural, cultural superiority of both themselves and the State that represents them, not how to live as affectless, apolitical citizens appreciative of and devoted to all that their State gives them in the abstract form of universal values, but, rather, that power is all, and that the less power there is to go around, the more there is to have. Hence, power is this very object – a means and an end – and it is also what these people are – their common will to power as possible overmen. “El planeta era de los fuertes,” as Erdosain says to himself in *Los siete locos*, “eso mismo, de los fuertes” (112). Ergo, *L’art pour l’art* becomes, perhaps as it has always already been, *le pouvoir pour le pouvoir*. What is truly beautiful is the ugly untruth known only to a select few that keeps the great mass of man chained to ignorance, at a distance, and on the other side of the glass window.

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<sup>218</sup> Masotta elucidates the overlaps in these processes to power as follows: “Los apestados de Arlt adoptan la ingenuidad extrema para repudiar a un mundo que los repudia, y lo hacen con las categorías mismas de ese mundo: proyectan de este modo ser absolutamente autónomos ahí donde son absolutamente pasivos” (105). Here, then, we have an ontological contradiction similar in kind to the one earlier explained (movement and paralysis), though different in degree (autonomy and passivity).

Of course, like most all of Arlt's characters, the Astrólogo gleefully embraces what Ortega would call his *barbarie*. This is what is so frightening and exciting about him – and maybe even what is so modern about him, to boot. Walking a fine line between a serious political engagement and a parody of overzealous ideologues, the Astrólogo's thoughts freely and actively endorse and criticize politics of the proverbial right and left, pressing furthermore for a critical politics of inventive, disordering change, whatever it may be called. “Seremos bolcheviques, católicos, fascistas, ateos, militaristas en diversos grados de iniciación,” he joyfully affirms (*Siete* 127).<sup>219</sup> Although it is debatable whether or not the revolutionary notions put forth by the Astrólogo do entail the eventual and/or inevitable re-formation of a State, especially considering the fact that these notions are never actually put into play in the novels themselves but only discussed, the Astrólogo still seems to reason that politics moves more according to organization rather than ideas, since the ideas often come to be interchangeable and conflated amongst themselves.

One of the Astrólogo's numerous accomplices known as the Buscador de Oro explains the Astrólogo's actions to the ostensible protagonist of *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*, Erdosain, as follows: “¿Cuál es el pecado del Astrólogo? Substituir una mentira insignificante por una mentira elocuente, enorme, trascendental” (*Siete* 148). “Ya ve, Erdosain,” he goes on,” “que nosotros no inventamos nada. Sustituimos un fin

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<sup>219</sup> The manner in which the Astrólogo eschews direct ideological alignment and endorsement and focuses instead on possibilities of organization also dovetails with what Deleuze and Parnet say about politics in their essay appropriately entitled “Many Politics”: “The question has always been organizational, not at all ideological; is an organization possible which is not modeled on the apparatus of the State, even to prefigure the State to come?” (145).

mezquino por un fin extraordinario, nada más” (151).<sup>220</sup> Organized religion and the belief in God act as the former “insignificant lie” that once moved men, referred to here by the *Buscador de Oro*.<sup>221</sup> Now, however, the death of God signifies the birth of a very real and terrestrial freedom that, unfortunately, is routinely overwhelmed by the existential dread and doubt that constitutes, as Erdosain describes it, “la extrañeza de vivir” (*Siete* 106). Blanchot tells us that this dread arises because, “The infinite collapse of God allows freedom to become aware of the nothing that is its foundation [...]” (296). If one substitutes “man” for “freedom” in the previous citation – which, after the death of God, functions as a totally legitimate equivalence – then one can comprehend existentialism, if not nihilism itself.

On the other hand, awareness of this freedom also serves to capacitate men to act freely. The *Astrólogo* thinks it best, though, that not all men be made aware of their own freedom – that is, of their own essential nature post-God. Hence, what this “eloquent lie,” this “extraordinary end” ultimately will be exactly does not so much matter to the *Astrólogo*, just so long as it liberates men – though, admittedly, maybe not all men... –

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<sup>220</sup> I say that Erdosain is the “ostensible protagonist” because it could be argued that the *Astrólogo* and/or all the political possibilities put forth by all the characters act as the true protagonists in *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*. Ricardo Piglia, meanwhile, conceives of *Los siete locos* as two novels: “está la novela de Erdosain y está la novela del *Astrólogo*. Se podría decir que la de Erdosain es el relato de la queja, el relato del intento de pasar al otro lado, zafarse de la opacidad turbia de la vida cotidiana. La novela del *Astrólogo*, que para mí [para Piglia mismo] es la obra maestra de Arlt, trabaja sobre los mundos posibles: sobre la posibilidad que tiene la ficción de transmutar la realidad. *Los siete locos* cuenta el proyecto del *Astrólogo* de construir una ficción que actué y produzca efectos en la realidad. ¿Cuál es el poder de la ficción? El texto se pregunta esto todo el tiempo” (24).

<sup>221</sup> Whereas Mallea actually wants to keep God alive and bring him back to prominence, the *Astrólogo* simply wants to be able to take advantage of the metaphysical placeholder that is any sort of supreme being or myth.

to move towards action. Lies, or fictions, or forces, or myths, are thus not distinct from reality, but, for good and for bad, all interwoven together as the very texture of life.

Nonetheless, with traditional religion supposedly dead and gone, according to the Astrólogo, “Es necesario, comprendame, es absolutamente necesario que una religión sombría y enorme vuelve a inflamar el corazón de la humanidad” (128). As noted previously, then, the Astrólogo finds supreme use value in lies – in untruth – as a means towards establishing and organizing a people, and thus radically echoes Nietzsche again here, as he does almost *ad nauseum* every time he speaks.<sup>222</sup> Nietzsche himself offers the following aphorism in *Beyond Good and Evil*: “To recognize untruth as a condition of life: that, to be sure, means to resist customary value-sentiments in a dangerous fashion; and a philosophy which ventures to do so places itself, by that act alone, beyond good and evil” (36). That being said, while Nietzsche would surely see the provisional use value in great lies, he would also argue in favor of the end of the great lies that organize and order man according to apocryphal metaphysical truths. In a way, then, the Astrólogo, like Ortega and so many of his other real life contemporaries, makes a monster out of Nietzsche. Instead of going beyond good and evil, the Astrólogo would rather supplant outdated codes with apparently new, but really refashioned old ones, arguing that this is how power finds its easiest way to come into power.

In this light, perhaps Nietzsche, too, is a bit more of a humanist than he would oft lead us to believe, insofar as he also seeks, albeit by contradictory means and perhaps

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<sup>222</sup> At one point in *Los siete locos*, the Astrólogo goes so far as to say that his secret society will inaugurate “el comienzo del reinado del superhombre,” and goes on to describe how, “Muchos llevamos un superhombre adentro. El superhombre es la voluntad en su máximo rendimiento, sobreponiéndose a todas las normas morales e ejecutando los actos más terribles, como un género de alegría ingenua” (120). See here, as we saw before with Ortega, Arlt’s own peculiar revision of the “overman.”

only from time to time, the greatest good for the greatest number – that is, a new man, yes, but also new men in general. Or maybe the reading of Nietzsche offered here is necessarily insufficient, not taking into account all of the thinker’s contradictions. Not to mention the fact that he often exhibits traits that smack of elitism rather than egalitarianism. Yet, given that nothing functions dogmatically for the man, Nietzsche’s search for immanence and freedom within life tempers itself with an ineluctable search for transcendence and overcoming as well. “The essential impulse of such a way of thinking,” as Blanchot observes, “is to contradict itself. It is a movement that is all the more important since, unusually methodical, it is not the play of a capricious or confused mind, and is linked to a passion for truth” (290). This “passion for truth” also operates as a passion for mankind – a passion often conflated with an equally potent disgust, of course. The Astrólogo’s mind, meanwhile, like that of all humans, can be “capricious” and “confused.” His passions often violently overrun themselves to a point of *libido dominatur*, a point as mercurial as it is constant. What is more, in the end, maybe it is not so important that the tenets of his *sociedad secreta* liberate men and compel them to act, as long as a few chosen men are able to attain power, just like it would be with Ortega’s *minorías selectas*. “El mundo debía ser de unos pocos,” argues the Astrólogo, “Y estos pocos caminar con pasos de gigantes” (*Siete* 215).

By the same token, the Astrólogo’s belief in the necessary use of extreme violence to enact change would seem to complicate his Nietzschean ideals even further.<sup>223</sup> This belief is not the Astrólogo’s alone, however, but rather one that surfaces

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<sup>223</sup> Not to mention the fact that the Astrólogo finds is inspired by a certain “secret society” in the United States known as the Ku Klux Klan. He also plans to rely on the establishment of brothels and the general exploitation of prostitutes as the secret society’s

time and again in the course of *Los siete locos* and *Los Lanzallamas* in the form of various violent proposals made by various sketchy characters. These proposals are made not just in favor of a Nietzschean “creative destruction,” but, instead, call for all out mass murder. Hence – *The “destructive character” returns!*

For instance, the Buscador de Oro explains to those already initiated in the intimacies and intricacies of the *sociedad secreta* how, “Nosotros predicaremos la violencia, pero no aceptaremos en las células a los teóricos de violencia, sino que aquel que quiera demostrarnos su odio a la actual civilización tendrá que darnos una prueba de su obediencia a la sociedad” (*Siete* 151). One of Erdosain’s crazy friends, Ergueta, pessimistically sees a need for violent action in order to clean up the mess that is the world: “Es necesario hacer algo contra esta sociedad, che. [...] Parece que todos los hombres se hubieran vuelto bestias. Dan ganas de salir a la calle y predicar el exterminio o poner una ametralladora en cada bocacalle. ¿Te das cuenta? Vienen tiempos terribles” (172-73). In addition, Erdosain dreams to himself that he “[i]nventaría el Rayo de la Muerte, un siniestro relámpago cuyos millones de amperios [...] haría[n] saltar en cascajos las ciudades de portland, como si las solivantaran volcanes de trinitrotolueno” (231).<sup>224</sup> Society can be overcome, then, or, again, defended, serpentinely, only if certain members of it are destroyed. In this way, the *sociedad secreta* is, in Piglia’s words, more of an “utopía negativa” than anything else, as these men sincerely (and not so secretly)

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economic basis. As he assesses the situation according to rather spurious logic, the current system exploits man, woman, and child, whereas his system only exploits women, which means that it his is a better system.

<sup>224</sup> As time would tell, such savage predictions would ring true in Spain, Argentina, and around the world in the years to come with the rise of brutal dictatorships on both sides of the Atlantic. When a military man simply called el Mayor says the following in *Los siete locos*, he is, therefore, not solely referring to Argentina: “nuestro país podría ser también terreno próspero para una dictadura” (135).

admire the violent proclivities of Mussolini, Lenin, and the like, for these very proclivities are the means to and the ends of power over others (23).

Unlike the real life men admired, the characters in Arlt's novels are all talk, all suggestion and provocation – perhaps like the avant-garde itself on a whole as well. And perhaps this is Arlt's aim, too: to wit, to provoke with fiction. But, really, who is to say? Needless to say, the Astrólogo always has something to say, and he echoes Lenin (and maybe even Stalin) when he says the following:

“¿Como podemos hacer la revolución sin fusilar a nadie?” [...] Establecería [el Astrólogo] dicho principio en la sociedad. Los futuros patriarcas de razas serían educados con un inexorable criterio homicida [...]. “Todo esto es una locura posible. Y siempre se vive en una atmósfera de sueño y como de sonambulismo cuando se está en camino de realizar las cosas [...]. Éste es un país de bestias. Hay que fusilar. Es lo indispensable. Sólo sembrando el terror nos respetarán. [...] Diez hombres pueden atemorizar a una población de diez mil personas. Basta que tengan una ametralladora.” (208, 216)<sup>225</sup>

These are the very “terroristic” tendencies alluded to early by Masotta that effectively serve to undermine the “subversive” potential of the *sociedad secreta*. This is certainly not anarchism, but rather fascism based in terrorism. This is not beyond good and evil, but simply monstrous. This is not something to celebrate, it is horrifying. This is the “destructive character.” What good is what is subversive if it ends up not just limiting freedom but annihilating the possible vessels of freedom that are human beings (aka *las bestias*)? And what good is the Astrólogo if these are his goals? Who knows? Maybe Arlt wants us to see the danger and the love in the Astrólogo, in his promis?

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<sup>225</sup> Surprisingly, it could also be said that the Astrólogo here echoes Ortega as well, who, remember, said in *La deshumanización del arte*, albeit supposedly in jest, “Con estos jóvenes [artistas] cabe hacer una de dos cosas: o fusilarlos o esforzarse en comprenderlos” (23).

Nevertheless, like all of Arlt's characters and concepts, the Astrólogo and his concepts are essentially mixed up, representative and expressive of opposing, contradictory principles and sensations. For, in the same conversation cited above, the Astrólogo also says:

“Quiero a la humanidad. Los quiero a todos como si todos estuvieran atados a mi corazón con un hilo fino. Y por ese hilo se llevan mi sangre, mi vida, y sin embargo, a pesar de todo, hay tanta vida en mí, que quisiera que fueran muchos más millones para quererlos más aún y regalarles mi vida. Sí, regalársela como un cigarrillo. Ahora me explico el Cristo.” (214)

The Astrólogo wants to love and kill, bring more people into his life and send more people out of life, give away banal, if congenial, gifts to possible friends and enact transcendent gestures that “exterminate the brutes.” He is a nihilist, a transcendental humanist, a misanthrope, a humanitarian, a Christ-like figure, the anti-Christ, and something in between. As a result, and try as we may to do so, the Astrólogo, much like Nietzsche, cannot be so easily categorized and read.<sup>226</sup>

Once again, what Blanchot says regarding Nietzsche applies to the Astrólogo (and, by association, Arlt) as well: “There is no reconciliation of opposites: oppositions, contradictions do not get to rest in some higher synthesis, but hold themselves together by an increasing tension, by a choice that is at once an exclusive choice and a choice of contradiction” (290). This is not the dialectic, it is life and literature in all of their tense, contradictory forcefulness. Therefore, as Nietzsche, the Astrólogo, and Arlt understand it, the most methodologically practical way to come to terms with the infinite impulse that drives one to try and understand life is via this same vitally contradictory, crazy process.

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<sup>226</sup> For example, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche puts forth this curious maxim: “A people is a detour of nature to get to six or seven great men. – Yes: and then to get round them” (99). Such a statement looks to be squarely in line with the Astrólogo's violent ideals and, perhaps, with Ortega and Mallea's elitist ideals, to boot.

Returning to Blanchot: “This impulse is an impulse of existence as well as of thought. Life and knowledge are one” (290).

The Astrólogo, of course, is keenly aware of the possibly dangerous and possibly emancipatory contradictions at stake and at play, just as he is aware of the savagely emancipating power of untruth. Here, at the end of *Los lanzallamas*, he explains his underlying motives – his secret desires for the “secret society” – in the following manner:

“Aunque todo en nosotros estuviera contra la sociedad secreta, debemos organizarla. Yo no insisto que debe ser en esta o aquella forma, pero a toda costa hay que infiltrarla en la humanidad. ¿Se dan cuenta de qué hipócrita es uno? Digo infiltrarla cuando debería decir: ‘Debemos hacer que resplandezca nuevamente una sociedad o una orden cuyo único y rabioso fin sea la busca de la felicidad.’” (203)

By this account, the Astrólogo transmutes his fiery monologues that advocate sweeping, violent, homicidal changes into a joyful infiltration – a spark. He knows that sparks start fires in the first place, and that a fire in the mind is not easily extinguished.

What the Astrólogo ultimately does in the novels, and does more than any other character in Arlt’s works, then, is express various ways of knowledge, showing how they can all, in their own ways, produce creative change, maybe dangerous change, by effectively becoming active.<sup>227</sup> Seeking out ways to knowledge heretofore unknown, speaking out on their collective behalf, the Astrólogo shows how the personal always involves the collective as it confronts shared powers and how organization necessarily infiltrates smooth spaces, discourses, and channels in a reciprocal relationship. These

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<sup>227</sup> Deleuze and Guattari address the possible extension of such active creativity in the form of a line of flight, or a “line of escape”: “The creative line of escape vacuums up in its movement all politics, all economy, all bureaucracy, all judiciary: it sucks them like a vampire in order to make them render still unknown sounds that come from the near future—Fascism, Stalinism, Americanism, *diabolical powers that are knocking at the door*” (*Kafka* 41 emphasis in original). The Astrólogo hears these unknown sounds knocking at the door and invites the diabolical powers making all the racket in to play.

ways to knowledge act as collective forces that pass through persons in order to make of them collectively what they already are individually: a people. Not a Subject – let alone a true Human Subject lost to, though possibly regained, by Culture – but a people. A people in question, a problematic ontology, actively involved in simultaneously questioning its organization as it constitutes it.<sup>228</sup> “Nosotros no hemos sentado principio alguno todavía,” says the Astrólogo, “y lo práctico será aceptar los principios más opuestos” (*Siete* 324). A different and confused view of and approach to humanity, to be sure.

Sarlo therefore explains one of the fundamental questions for Arlt when she states, “Una pregunta básica de estas novelas es, entonces, de qué modo se puede modificar, por el saber, las relaciones de poder” (*Modernidad* 58). Truly, the trilogy’s main characters all strive to experience new ways of knowing that can lead to new powers, and vice versa. For instance, asked from whence comes all his knowledge, *El juguete rabioso*’s young protagonist, Silvio Astier, replies in the following, functional manner:

“En todas partes, señor. Por ejemplo: voy por la calle y en una casa de mecánica veo una máquina que no conozco. Me paro, y me digo estudiando las diferentes partes de lo que miro: esto debe funcionar así, y debe servir para tal cosa. Después que he hecho mis deducciones, entro al negocio y pregunto, y créame, señor, raras veces me equivoco. Además, tengo una biblioteca regular, y si no estudio mecánica, estudio literatura.” (89)

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<sup>228</sup> In Ortega and Mallea’s visions of the world no one would even be allowed to ask such questions, let alone allow oneself to become something greater and more powerful along with someone or something else if such a becoming went against that person’s pre-dictated “destiny.”

In Arlt's world, knowledge itself comes from "anywhere and everywhere," and he privileges no certain type of knowledge, no certain type of politics, over another.<sup>229</sup>

Himself an *hombre de ciencia*, interested in all things considered to be *técnica*, Arlt:

reorganiza una jerarquía de saberes en la medida en que la cultura artística letrada, que no incorporaba a la técnica como valor central, puede ahora ser vista desde afuera y contrapuesta a los discursos aprendidos en libros de divulgación o en diarios y revistas. La técnica compensa ausencias de saber y de 'saber hacer' en otras dimensiones. (Sarlo, *Imaginación* 13)

That is, Arlt shows pulp fiction and popular science periodicals to be fountains of knowledge just like more classical works of Literature; and the everyday experiences of those marginalized from society matter just as much as society's supposedly more refined denizens, because all of these accrued experiences function as possible ways of perceiving, knowing, and acting in the world. Arlt's characters strive as best they can and with whatever resourceful materials they can find to come into knowledge in their own ways, rather than according to society's prescribed and preferred official channels.

Again, the *Astrólogo* best speaks to these characters' strivings, and, perhaps, even more to the striving inherent to Arlt's work as well, saying, "Vea que lo que yo pretendo hacer es un bloque donde se consoliden todas las posibles esperanzas humanas. [...] [L]o esencial es que de nuestros actos recojamos vitalidad y energía" (*Siete* 31, 234). He goes on to expand upon these ideas in *Los lanzallamas*:

"Es la voluntad de vivir. Cada hombre lleva en sí una distinta cantidad de voluntad de vivir. Cuantas más fuerzas, más pasiones, más deseos, más furores de plasmarse en todas las direcciones de inteligencia que se ofrecen a la sensibilidad

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<sup>229</sup> In issue number forty-one of *Síntesis*, published in October of 1930, Ulises Petit de Murat composes an article entitled "Roberto Arlt, novelista" in which he describes the novelist in a similar way: "Todo es espontáneo en él. Temperamento genuino, ni en sus equivocaciones se desvirtúa. Sus invenciones no responden a ideas trascendentales, inamovibles del mundo y la naturaleza humana [...]. Sería difícil estatuir en Arlt qué psicología o religión, qué sistema de explicación del mundo es por el preferido" (162).

humana. Querrá ser general, santo, demonio, inventor, poeta... [...] Lo que hay son avances interiores de una voluntad de vivir. Cuanto más intensa y pura sea la voluntad de vivir, más extraordinaria será la sensibilidad que capta conocimiento [...].” (73)

Obviously taking many of these ideas again from Nietzsche, this vitality and energy advanced by the Astrólogo, this passionate will to live, activated and enhanced via the inventiveness of knowledge and activity, serves to sap power of its tendency towards stasis and coagulation, of its propensity for discrete categorization. In this way, the Astrólogo makes power move critically instead, makes it work, undo, and create by organizing power problematically, rather than teleologically, so as to enhance people’s capacity for action.

If the Astrólogo’s words begin to suggest an ethics here, then it would appear to be rather Spinozian in character as well. As cited earlier, Spinoza says, “*I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies,*” and Spinoza’s consideration corresponds to the Astrólogo’s ethics of a *voluntad de vivir* (152 emphasis in original). This *voluntad de vivir* functions empirically and experimentally, like Spinoza’s conception of the *conatus*: one experiences and observes, in the Astrólogo’s words, the “forces, passions, desires, and furies,” be they conscious or unconscious, that allow for a greater movement within the world. One goes on, then, to incorporate and attempt to build upon these experiences, or “*avances interiores,*” within body and mind, as a way of living in order to live a more capacious life, as a way of endeavoring to live a powerful, active life. Deleuze explains here how this same process works in Spinoza via the concept of “parallelism”:

The practical significance of parallelism is manifested in the reversal of the traditional principle on which Morality was founded as an enterprise of domination of the passions by consciousness. [...] One seeks to acquire a

knowledge of the powers of the body in order to discover, *in a parallel fashion*, the powers of the mind that elude consciousness, and to be able to *compare* the powers. In short, the model of the body, according to Spinoza, does not imply any devaluation of thought, but, much more important, a devaluation of consciousness in relation to thought: a discovery of the unconscious, of an *unconscious of thought* just as profound as the *unknown of the body*. (Spinoza 18 emphasis in original)

So, it is all about power after all: sometimes a dominating power over one's potential desires, sometimes power over others, sometimes recognizing the liberating power of one's own powers, sometimes combined with other and other's powers still... Nietzsche: "There is nothing to life that has value, except the degree of power – assuming that life itself is the will to power" (*Will* 37). It is all power for power's sake.

This correspondence between Spinoza and the Astrólogo in terms of an ethics of power can be extended if one examines it with Antonio Negri and his politically charged work, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*. The book's translator, Michael Hardt, initially sets up Negri's conceptions of the political possibilities at stake in Spinoza's ethics in his "Translator's Forward," paying careful attention, first of all, to outline the crucial distinction between *potestas* (Power) and *potentia* (power). "In general," says Hardt, "Power denotes the centralized mediating, transcendental force of command, whereas power is the local, immediate actual force of constitution," and goes on to note that for both Spinoza and Negri, *potestas* and *potentia* are essentially "*non opposita sed diversa*," that is, "not opposed but different" (xiii). Negri himself says, "In fact, in Spinoza a decision is never made between the two perspectives: the dynamic one, for which substance is a force, and the static one, for which substance is pure linear coordination," linking *potestas* with stasis and *potentia* with dynamism (79). In the manifestation of *potestas* and *potentia*, however, Negri does

make a necessary distinction and thus, as Hardt describes it, “marks the form of a response to the Marxist mandate for theoretical inquiry: Recognize a real antagonism” (xiii).

While surely there exist recognizably “real antagonisms” in Arlt’s works, Arlt himself is not by any means necessarily a Marxist.<sup>230</sup> For one, he lacks the doubly optimistic and pessimistic patience required of a true dialectical vision, and whatever vision he does put forth is a spewed and not spoken one. In addition, while the antagonism between *potestas* and *potentia* present in his novels is indeed real, it is also a much more fluid relationship that, at times, even appears completely ambiguous. In other words, and especially vis-à-vis Ortega and Mallea, Arlt’s beliefs regarding order and disorder are not always so clearly defined and neither are the power relations at stake in the relation between the two theoretical and practical terms, be they order and disorder, or *potestas* and *potentia*.

Meanwhile, Negri seems to see a humanistic mandate issued forth by Spinoza in the form of the *potestas* of the multitude. That is, Negri, unlike Spinoza himself, does seem to make an ethical and, what is more, a moral “decision” between stasis and dynamism. Arlt, on the other hand, does away with any sort of recourse to morals. (There is no need for moral reform if morals do not even exist!) In so doing, Arlt’s immediate affinities with Nietzsche again become apparent, with the latter saying, “The overcoming

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<sup>230</sup> In the same issue of *Contorno* discussed previously in Note 210, Juan José Gorini agrees with this point in a short article entitled “Arlt y los comunistas,” where he says, “si bien Arlt pudo estar, adherir momentáneamente a determinadas declaraciones de las que participaba el comunismo, nunca, jamás, pudo ser de ellos, uno de ellos. Porque su espíritu demoníaco, agresivo, violento, pecador, no se hubiera conciliado (como no se concilia ninguna de sus obras) con la seguridad satisfecha y progresista del comunismo” (16).

of morality, in a certain sense even the self-overcoming of morality: let this be the name for that protracted secret labor which has been reserved for the subtlest, most honest and also most malicious consciences as living touchstones of the soul” (*Beyond* 64).

Nevertheless, affinities do emerge between Negri’s conceptions of Spinoza and Arlt’s own conceptions of a joyful, political ethics, as best announced, once again, by the *Astrólogo*, particularly if one focuses on the *Astrólogo*’s more optimistic evocations of the energy and will to live. This energy, this will, includes saying “no” to that which might limit the connections that would bring about active engagement in life. “No” to reactive infiltration.<sup>231</sup>

Sometimes, though, Arlt and his characters also say “no” to the masses. When they do, they do not necessarily do so in an actively positive, life-affirming way. While

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<sup>231</sup> This “no” is not necessarily reactive negativity, but, as Negri puts it in his own preface, the positive activity of the negative: “the positive form of negative thought exists only in the constitutive tension of thought and it’s capacity to act as a material mediation of the historical activity of the multitude. Constitutive thought possesses the radical character of negation but transforms it and puts it to use by grounding it in real being. In this context, the constitutive power of transgression is the Spinozian definition of freedom. [...] It is the radical expression of a historic transgression of every ordering that is not freely constituted by the masses; it is the proposition of a horizon of freedom that is definable only as a horizon of liberation. It is thought that is more negative and it is more progressive and constitutive” (xix). The citation that follows helps to illuminate the previous one, as it expressly connects the notions of order and negativity and, in addition, makes the claim that Spinoza himself categorically says “no” to any kind of order: “Spinoza’s constitutive ontology does not point towards order. [...] The idea of order – or its normative abstraction, its formalism, the idea of the negativity it interiorizes – is not even thinkable in Spinoza. There is no order but liberation. Liberation as the continual conquest and construction of being” (180). In short, Negri speaks here to multitudinal governance working through agreement that necessarily includes reflexive revision and reconstitution, which, in turn, continually opens this community of beings onto new, smooth horizons in order to avoid or ward off Order, Power, the Subject, and the State. The multitude thus freely, positively chooses its own way according to both its individual and multiple becoming, for, according to Negri’s Spinoza, such is “real being.” These quotes from Negri also serve to bring the concept of the “multitude,” or what Ortega, Mallea, and other thinkers from the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would call *las masas*, into the context at hand.

Negri speaks as an unabashed champion of the multitude, Arlt's relation to the multitude, like many thinkers at the time, comes off as being ambivalently contradictory at best and highly pessimistic at worst, alternatively seeing in the great mass of man hope and loss, productivity and nothingness. And although it surely could be argued that the multitude and *las masas* do not constitute the same group – admittedly, they do not – it is curious to note that what Ortega and Mallea fear in the modern masses is exactly what makes the multitude so appealing to Negri: namely, the ability to encourage freedom by enacting radical change from below.<sup>232</sup> And while in Ortega and Mallea we see civilized, authoritarian order gone overboard, Arlt's novels can show the ugly, even barbaric side of freedom, too, when liberty becomes a menace and fascism stands hand in hand with self-determination.

Arlt seems to conceptually reside somewhere in-between and in agreement with the two viewpoints outlined above regarding the masses' liberating and devastating potential. For Arlt sees the encroachment of the, shall we say, multitudinous masses as something to be loved, hated, and feared – a cause for alarm, celebration, and mass murder. Indeed, when most of Arlt's characters evoke the possibility of killing people they mean lots of people – literally, masses of people. The Astrólogo, for example, cynically states in *Los siete locos* that, “[L]legará el momento en que la humanidad escéptica, enloquecida por los placeres, blasfema de impotencia, se pondrá tan furiosa que será necesario matarla como a un perro rabioso...” (121). Drunk on the possibility

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<sup>232</sup> In the end, however, one cannot be so sure that this freedom is as absolute as Negri might like to have us believe. For, in certain respects, Negri makes of Spinoza more of a transcendental humanist than perhaps he really is. Moreover, order is not always as evil as Negri would like to make it out to be, and simply constituting a free space for and by the multitude does not ensure absolute freedom. As Deleuze and Guattari state in *What is Philosophy?*: “We need just a little order to protect us from chaos” (201).

of power, lusting for violence, the Astrólogo would take out his most ignoble instincts on the weak in the name of a new *soi-disant* anti-civilization society.

The masses are thus at one and the same time the embodiment of hope for any sort of proletarian revolution, an undefined entity that must remain unilluminated in order for the *sociedad secreta* to succeed, and a superfluous waste of man that had best be eliminated in order to assure the advancement of *los elegidos*. While the Astrólogo does mention the first option a few times in *Los lanzallamas*, more often than not, at least with respect to the *sociedad secreta*, he tends to emphasize the final two options. Thus, if modernity means, among other things, the creation of the modern masses, the *sociedad secreta*'s "super modern" new world order really must either keep the masses in their place or absolutely destroy them in order to come to power and stay in power. (*Potentia* as a dynamic means to the static end that is *potestas*.) Modernity is itself, then, by definition, a conspiracy against the masses, for Arlt, Ortega, and Mallea. For, when coupled with all the other modern constructions and creations, the masses can be simply overwhelming. Such is the overwhelmed, powerless sensation often felt by Erdosain – presumably himself not a mass man – when confronted with what Ortega calls the "fullness" of modern life:

Erdosain se detiene espeluznado. Es como si le encarrillaran el pensamiento en una elíptica metálica. Cada vez se alejará más del centro. Cada vez más existencias, más edificios, más dolor. Cárceles, hospitales, rascacielos, superrascacielos, subterráneos, minas, arsenales, turbinas, dinamos, socavones de tierra, rieles; más abajo vidas, suma de vidas. (*Lanzallamas* 158)

In addition, it just so happens that one of Erdosain's primary contributions to the *sociedad secreta* will be his ability to chemically produce a poisonous gas capable of killing large quantities of people – ¡*las bestias!* – at once. Here, Erdosain reflects upon

the ramifications of his invention, along with what to him are, again, the horrors of the modern world's plenitude – an overcrowded world in which he must, somehow, live, too:

“A toda esta chusma se podría liquidarla con un fusil ametralladora y gases lacrimógenos. En uno no puede apoyarse.” Y de pronto acude a él [Erdoain] un horror intenso:

“La tierra está llena de hombres. De ciudades. De hombres. De casa para hombres. Donde se vaya se encontrarán hombres y mujeres. Hombres que caminan seguidos por mujeres que también caminan. Es indiferente que el paisaje sea de piedra roja y bananeros verdes, o de hielo azul y confines blancos. O que el agua corra haciendo glu-glu por entre cantos de plata y guijas de mica. En todas partes se ha infiltrado el hombre y su ciudad. Piensa que hay murallas infinitas. Edificios que tienen ascensores rápidos y ascensores mixtos: tanto es la altura a recorrer. Piensa que hay trenes triplemente subterráneos, un subte, otro, otro y turbinas que aspiran vertiginosamente el aire cargado de ozono y polvo eléctrico. El hombre... ¡Oh!... ¡oh!...” (*Lanzallamas* 163)<sup>233</sup>

Clearly, these horrors include living amongst *las masas*. Clearly, this horror produces a greater capacity to horrify than the possibility of genocide itself – at least this way, if effectuating the latter, Erdoain and the rest of the *sociedad secreta* would be rid of the masses, which, clearly, would be a load off of their already cluttered minds and lives.

Sanguine tones tinge a silver lining such as this, though. Here, destruction and violence appear as something pure, and perhaps this is why so many of Arlt's characters believe in it as the primary and ultimate power – to wit, because of violence's power of purification and truth. This would also seem to be the knowledge known not only to real men like Mussolini, and Lenin, but also Primo de Rivera, Franco, Uriburu, Justo, Perón, and so on. Not for the better, but, indeed, for the worst, Arlt's visions of a fascist, terrorist state simultaneously at one with and against the masses did come true. His novels are therefore horrifying, too, in their own right. Is this what he wanted, though? Is this what

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<sup>233</sup> Some thirty years earlier, Joseph Conrad had Colonel Kurtz say, “The horror! The horror”; now, in 1929, when faced with what he truly believes to be horrible, all Arlt can have Erdoain say, is “El hombre... ¡Oh!... ¡oh!...”

we wanted? Our common fascist desires manifesting themselves in the death of desire, in the death of so much mass flesh? It is hard to say. It is too easy to say “no” sometimes.

Thus, as Ortega predicted that the rise of the masses marks the potential threat of a catastrophic rebellion against society’s necessary, hierarchical organization, the Astrólogo also forecasts a need for those who are not of the masses to ensure that the masses are properly subdued. For the Astrólogo specifically, the masses must be controlled via “mentiras metafísicas” in order to appropriate them, for their own good in untruth, which is also their own bad in truth, to a speciously greater cause. Here we see his predictions unfolding:

“Vienen sin duda tiempos nuevos. ¿Quiénes los conocerán? Los elegidos. [...] ¿[S]abe ahora lo que hace falta? Es descubrir un símbolo para entusiasmar al populacho... [...] Créame, nosotros estamos viviendo en una época terrible. Aquel que encuentre la mentira que necesita la multitud será el Rey del Mundo.” (*Siete* 116, 131).<sup>234</sup>

These words, this crazy vision, turned out to be, in the fullness of time, true. What was the “lie,” what was the “symbol?” Perhaps the *sociedad secreta*, perhaps the State, perhaps the Übermensch, perhaps something so advanced that it had to be primitive in order to operate, perhaps God’s violent revenge from beyond the grave. Who is to blame? Everyone, no one, a “select few.”

When compared to what Ortega and Mallea call for and predict, however, is it any better that the Astrólogo’s retroactive enterprise of the future is super-aware of the fact that it is essentially of a dubiously fabricated nature? It is hard to say. The Astrólogo, too, is an inventor. He, too, betrays the new, by making it old, and vice versa. He declares the

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<sup>234</sup> When describing Kurtz on his deathbed, Marlow says, “I had a vision of him on the stretcher opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind” (72). At times, one could surely see the Astrólogo’s mouth working in a similar way.

need for his own final, judgmental Armageddon, and he would love to see man set free in his happiness. It is not hard to say, however, that the statements made by the Astrólogo that express a potential for misanthropy and positive action, for nihilism and joy, are sickening and exhilarating, if also true and untrue, just like in the declaration that follows:

“Estoy hambriento de revolución social. ¿Sabe los que es tener hambre de revolución? Quisiera prenderle fuego por los cuatro costados al mundo. No descansaré hasta que haya montado una fábrica de gases. Quiero permitirme el lujo de ver caer la gente por la calle, como caen las langostas. Sólo respiro tranquilo cuando me imagino que no pasará mucho tiempo hasta el día aquel que unos cincuenta hombres a mi servicio tiendan una cortina de gas de diez kilómetros de frente.” (*Lanzallamas* 69)

Maybe, though, violence is, for better and for worse, for good and for bad, the only truth that truly – that is, fictitiously – exists – be it creative, destructive, or both. Violence gives space to nothingness. Violence is so true as to simultaneously be what it is and is not, encompassing all. For, when something breaks it makes a beautiful sound. The eternal return that is the affirmation of difference: Truth, as fragile as it is strong, must necessarily break itself, shatter itself, in order to be true. Maybe Arlt, Ortega, and Mallea know this, but maybe they do not. Just because what they do know may also be unknown, just because what they say to be true may also be untrue, this does not lessen the forces, the powers of life composed within such thoughts and actions. At least with Arlt, there is more way than just one – there exists an incorruptibly corruptible polysemy, because such is the world – and contradiction is allowed in to be a part of thought, life and literature, because, known and unknown, it always already is.

If the masses fail to fit into these suspicious equations, fail to be a part of the program, it is because it is harder to do the mathematics necessary to map out a society if one of the elements is necessarily undefined. Are we dismissing them – the masses –

here, too, though? Let us hope not. There is so much that can be done with what is unknown. Naturally, however, human nature often means fearing the unknown. Arlt alternately embraces and seeks to eliminate what is unknown, while Ortega and Mallea and Mallea try to keep the unknown at a safe, disengaged distance.

We have not finished with Arlt yet, though, nor will we ever, most likely. For, in his first novel, *El juguete rabioso*, the young protagonist, Silvio Astier, tries to know all that he can about certain vital elements unknown to most: namely, life itself, what is good, what is bad, loyalty and betrayal, other people, oneself, and death.

## **5.2 – Silvio Astier’s In Between Days**

If, as with Schiller, beautiful civilization is supposedly composed so as to work towards freedom and liberation, then, as was shown with Heidegger’s help in Chapter Three, the creation of civilization’s discourse – aka “humanism” – completely depends upon barbarism and its supposedly transgressive counter-discourse, if any discourse be afforded the barbarous at all. Meanwhile, Arlt asks in his works: What exactly does civilization bring to humanity? And what exactly does humanity bring to civilization, for that matter? Much like his obvious veneration for and use of Nietzsche, Arlt also makes great use of ideas previously put forth by Dostoevsky, an existentialist and a vitalist, who, like Nietzsche, poses similar questions to those outlined above. More specifically, in *Notes From Underground* Dostoevsky writes, “Civilization cultivates only a versatility of sensations in man, and... decidedly nothing else” (23). This very idea aptly applies to Arlt’s own notions of civilization, barbarism, and culture as put forth in his trilogy. To be

sure, we have already witnessed such a “versatility of sensations” at work in the barbarically civilized words, thoughts, and actions of the Astrólogo.

At some point, civilization refashioned itself as modernization; the discourse of a necessary order and progress once assigned to civilization relocated to modernization and the general epistemic and ontological imperative to be modern. Modernity’s exclusionary rhetoric – “Get in line, or fall behind!” – often attempted to overcode society in order to assign people to discrete places and categories, and, perhaps in the fashionably modern way did so with greater speed than ever before. Sarlo notes, for example, that “La ciudad se vive a una velocidad sin precedentes y estos desplazamientos rápidos no arrojan consecuencias solamente funcionales” (*Modernidad* 16). That is, the speed of life appears to increase in all of its aspects. This new, modern speed also undoubtedly functions as part and parcel of civilization’s imperialistic discourse, for, as Paul Virilio posits, “*speed is the hope of the West*” (47 emphasis in original). Inexorably, the West is always already civilized and, now, always already modern, with a quickness.

Many of Arlt’s uncouth characters, especially, as we shall soon see, the young Silvio Astier, use speed to their own advantage, thereby turning civilization’s hope for control upon its head. In this way, greater speed allows for greater connections, which allows for greater knowledge, which allows for greater speed, and so on. The French philosopher, Octave Uzanne, celebrates the advent of speed in much the same way, saying “the rapid movement which sweeps us in space and piles up a variety of impressions and images in a short time gives life a plenitude and a unique intensity” (qtd. in Kern 128). In speed’s extreme celebration, though, we see the fascist claims and calls made by the Futurists, the “destructive characters,” along with the Astrólogo’s intentions

to wipe out large parts of the world's population as quickly as possible via the use of poisonous gas. What is more, the existential anxiousness manifested by Silvio, Erdosain, and the Astrólogo (and Ortega and Mallea) when confronting society show symptoms characteristic of what George M. Beard dubbed "the age of nervousness," which he claimed to be part of the "dark side of modernity" (qtd. in Kern 126, 124). The Astrólogo, himself totally aware of this "dark side of modernity," speaks directly to this "nervousness" and its incapacitating powers when he says, "Será el tiempo de nerviosidad lo que me inutiliza [...]" (*Siete* 207).

With all these new speeds furnished by modernity – moving pictures, trains, airplanes, telegraphs, telephones, tanks – the State, of course, takes it upon itself to order them. In the case of Buenos Aires, "Se trata de una purificación de la ciudad," explains Sarlo, "pensada como respuesta a los desarrollos caóticos inscriptos en la historia de la ciudad real" (*Modernidad* 26). Regulation. City-State. This is how the Buscador de Oro witnesses the city operating in *Los siete locos*:

"Las ciudades son los cánceres del mundo. Aniquilan al hombre, lo moldean cobarde, astuto, envidioso, y es en la envidia que afirma sus derechos sociales, la envidia y la cobardía. [...] Lo que hay es que en la ciudad no se puede ser valiente. Usted sabe que si le estropea cara a un desgraciado los trámites policiales lo van a molestar tanto, que usted prefiere tolerar a hacerse justicia por su mano. Ésa es la realidad. Y uno se acostumbra a ser un resignado a refrenar los impulsos..." (150, 152)

In the mind of the Buscador de Oro, the City-State effectively orders man to curb his chaotic impulses, his intuitions, his private velocities, or, essentially, that which allows him to make of his life not only an experience but also an experiment. "The State [...]" is defined by the perpetuation or conservation of organs of power. The concern of the State

is to conserve,” as Deleuze and Guattari say in *A Thousand Plateaus* (357).<sup>235</sup> Here, the State makes the city function as one of these ordered and ordering “organs of power,” a specific conductor, conservationist, and distributor of desire, life, and speed.<sup>236</sup>

Now, this is where Arlt’s first novel in the trilogy, *El juguete rabioso*, begins to enter more directly into the discussion at hand.<sup>237</sup> A less overtly political novel than *Los siete locos* or *Los lanzallamas*, *El juguete rabioso* focuses primarily on a young boy’s relationship to the supposedly ordered, regulated, and civilized City-State that surrounds him. While according to the critic, Todd S. Garth, *El juguete rabioso* is “essentially a *bildungsroman*,” such a reductive analysis suggests that Silvio Astier, the story’s protagonist, comes to align his desires with those of the society that surrounds him and that his personal coming into knowledge freely functions just as society would have it function in the first place, as it does with the young protagonist in the first

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<sup>235</sup> Of course, the *sociedad secreta*, would use speed to its own advantage to overtake the state, and then effectively “conserve” this power by seemingly slowing things down and reverting to an alternately modern and pre-modern way of life.

<sup>78</sup> Exterior to the State and its ordering order lies what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the “war machine.” “The war machine is of another species, another nature, another origin than the State apparatus” (352). It is also of another speed as well and basically acts to ward off and/or impede the formation of the State. Yet neither the State nor the war machine act fully independently of one another: the phenomena are not mutually exclusive but, instead, rather Janus-like in their relation to each other: “the State itself has always been in a relation with an outside and is inconceivable independent of that relationship. [...] It is not in terms of independence, but of coexistence and competition in a perpetual field of interaction, that we must conceive of exteriority and interiority, war machines of metamorphosis and State apparatuses of identity, bands and kingdoms, megamachines and empires. The same field circumscribes its interiority in States, but describes its exteriority in what escapes States or stands against States.” (360-61). Thinking of the State and war machine as essentially relational phenomena helps to begin to think about Arlt’s tendencies to relate and combine extremes in his very barbarically modern literature.

<sup>237</sup> As noted earlier, *El juguete rabioso* was first partially published in two installments in Borge’s *revista*, *Proa*, in March and May of 1925 (Numbers Eight and Ten) as *La vida puerca*.

*bildungsroman*, Goethe's *Wilhem Meister's Apprenticeship* (63). Opposed to this reading, however, we will see how Silvio functions alternately as State and war machine, as interior and exterior, order and disorder, stasis and swift line of flight, and, perhaps as *select-man* in training and *hombre-masa* in an adolescent state of decadence as well, searching for codes to order his identity while simultaneously working to chaotically destabilize these codes by putting them forever into question. It is these very tensions that eventually drive Silvio to try and commit suicide, saying to himself before he pulls the trigger, "Yo no he de morir, no... No..., yo no puedo morir.... pero tengo que matarme" (109). In the end, he fails to kill himself, and life goes on, and this tension remains.

Nevertheless, in the course of the novel, Silvio's radical and rapid oscillations come to express the very contentious, radical, rapid, and real oscillations inherent to modern civilization itself, present in the alternately inclusive (but, for Arlt, primarily) exclusive modern metropolis of Buenos Aires. It is within Buenos Aires – within the variable field outlined by Deleuze and Guattari – that Silvio often employs speed to his own advantage. Silvio is a thief, and thievery surely allows for the most expedient and direct means of appropriation. Finding inspiration in the *literatura bandoleresca española* that he enjoys reading, Silvio explains how, "Yo [...] aspiraba a ser un bandido de la alta escuela" (16). What Silvio learns from literature (in this case, literature that, significantly, comes from the colonizer's own tradition) is thus not how to become a better, more modern citizen, but, on the contrary, how to steal, how to impede the State's

desires to interpellate him.<sup>238</sup> Silvio makes literature function as a sort of socio-empirical capital, providing him with access to the witnessing of new ways of living and experiencing joy, while also leading to the realization that knowledge, however procured, can, like money, like power, be exchanged and used for profit. In other words, Silvio makes the reading of literature into his own, functioning machine. And although Piglia maintains that, “La lectura, en Arlt, lleva a la perdición,” for Silvio reading also betrays certain redemptive, if also transgressive, powers that mobilize machines that function outside of a Judeo-Christian telos (24).

Silvio also literally steals books from a school’s library. Before committing this crime – a possible betrayal against the tradition of knowledge itself – Silvio starts a thieves’ club with two other young men of a similarly larcenous disposition. In accordance with the grandiloquence that marks most adolescent projects, the boys call their organization “el Club de los Caballeros de la Media Noche,” and they start off by robbing abandoned houses. Here, Silvio explains the joys that their common thefts inspire within him: “Aún no he olvidado la alegría que experimentaba al abrir las puertas. Entrábamos violentamente; ávidos de botín recorríamos las habitaciones tasando de *rápidas* miradas la calidad de lo robable” (23 emphasis added). After exchanging the hot household items for cash, the boys pretend to be privileged members of the bourgeoisie, using their money to ride around in private cars on rainy days, thereby avoiding the

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<sup>238</sup> In contrary to Garth’s reading, and with factors such as these now added to the mix, Masotta offers a more convincing argument concerning Silvio’s possible growth vis-à-vis society: “A lo largo del relato el autor va mostrando, a la vez que desechando, una sucesión de maldades posibles; es como si el autor realizara a través de la marcha del tiempo un verdadero aprendizaje del mal: obra a tientas, procede, para decirlo así, por ensayos y errores” (62). Meanwhile, in Erdosain’s case, he himself speaks to how, “Deliberadamente, entendeme bien, deliberadamente voy hacia el perfeccionamiento del mal, es decir, de mi desgracia” (*Lanzallamas* 183).

downpour that otherwise would have dampened their spirits. Consequently, along with desiring to be thieves, these individuals, like most everyone else, also desire to be able to live a life of luxury and comfort.

The big job that the club eventually presents itself with is the school's library. "Tratábamos de nada menos que de despojar la biblioteca de una escuela" (30), Silvio declares; and the key word here is "despojar," meaning, roughly, to divest, dispossess, remove. "Despojar" is what Europeans did to the natives, what the early capitalists did to the land of the rural farmers, what the State does to the potentially transgressive desires of its subjects. It is also now what Silvio does to a school library.<sup>239</sup> In truth, this too is an act of "so-called primitive accumulation," albeit a bastardized, barbaric version that acts as the "point of departure" for the club's own transgressive, econo-socio-literary machine (Marx 873).<sup>240</sup>

As with the household items, the boys intend to sell the stolen books for economic profit; though, as might be expected, they also keep a few books for their own edification – that is, for intellectual profit. Clearly, such an act as stealing from a library (theoretically, a site of free intellectual exchange) is education by other means, one in disagreement with the education these subjects could have had provided for them by the State. The boys do not necessarily revolutionize the system, though, so much as they

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<sup>239</sup> It should also be noted that, after successfully completing the job and making their respective ways home, one of the boys, Enrique, is hailed by the police; but, in an act of young speed, Enrique successfully outruns his pursuers, the representatives of the State.

<sup>240</sup> Perhaps this notion of primitive accumulation could be extended and utilized, too, albeit, admittedly, in somewhat of a less strictly materialist way, as a concept that helps to explain the ways in which humanism, the aesthetic state, and Ortega's reactionary philosophy effectively appropriate the dispersed and schizophrenic desires of certain peoples, striating and streamlining the territories of desire in this real and abstract process of annexation.

reconfigure how the system's terms relate to one another; they do so by breaking, entering, stealing, and reading. According to Piglia, then, this criminal act faithfully portrays Arlt's (and Silvio's) transgressive relationship to culture proper: "el robo de libros en la biblioteca de una escuela es una metáfora casi perfecta de su acceso a la cultura" (22). Both Silvio and Arlt hope to enhance their capacity for intelligence and action in the world by any means necessary.

In all, Silvio takes pride in his multi-faceted knowledge, however he comes about it – from books or otherwise. His general capaciousness when it comes to learning thus dovetails with what Bourdieu says about reading, knowledge, and experience, "Reading, and *a fortiori* the reading of books, is only one means among others [...] of acquiring the knowledge that is mobilized in reading" ("Field" 32). In this way, and due to his socio-economic status, Silvio's knowledge also functions as what Sarlo calls "los saberes del pobre" – ways of knowing that, importantly, also function as "los saberes modernos" (*Imaginación* 10). Perhaps this is what Ortega meant when he says in *La rebelión de las masas* that modernity represents nothing but just an impoverished repetition of the past, as he comes to find *the new* to be now be barbaric and thus at odds with his own philosophical, social, and historical interpretations and predictions. What Ortega fails to mention – what he fails to see – in his analysis, is that these *saberes modernos del pobre* can, as Arlt shows via Silvio, make thought active – breaking and entering, redistributing the established terms – and therefore connect it with possible educative outlets outside of traditional education's restrictions. Modernity: where new and old, rich and poor, order and disorder, humanism and barbarism effectively, and at times violently, combine together.

For we cannot forget that modernity is also a site of great violence. Great creation and combination, yes, but creation and combination that essentially comes out of, lies in the smoky shadows of, or is itself meant to bring about great violence. As shown above, this contradictory, real, and inalienable relationship between violence and creation is clear in *Los siete locos* and *Los llanzallamas*, as expressed by the Astrólogo's fantasies regarding the *supermoderna sociedad secreta*. Meanwhile, in *El juguete rabioso*, Silvio learns how to make his own cannon – a genuine, potentially violent, war machine – from the scientific magazines and textbooks that he reads. Pride in his intellectual acumen comes about because of the success of his creation and because of its violent, murderous potential: “Acariciando mi pequeño monstruo, yo pensaba: ‘Este cañón puede matar, este cañón puede destruir,’ y la convicción de haber creado un peligro obediente y mortal me enajenaba la alegría” (18). Furthermore, Silvio's friend, Enrique, puts forth one of the more dangerously modern stipulations of the thieves' club when he proposes that, “El Club debe contar con una biblioteca de obras científicas para que sus cofrades puedan robar y matar de acuerdo a los más modernos procedimientos” (27). To be sure, Arlt, for all his odes to joy, is also frightfully misanthropic, for all his talk about the formation of groups that allow for power's invigoration, is also one to talk about how one group can effectively and totally dominate and annihilate another, is also a “destructive character.”

Positively, however, what these clubs and societies might offer someone like Silvio are a sense of belonging and fraternity – a possibility for *potestas*. For, outside of these organized spaces, Silvio often finds himself spurned by the modernizing city that surrounds him. When such rejection does not drive him to look for a job or start a club – connections that would allow for social interaction – it drives him instead to the private

act of reading – social interaction of a different degree, perhaps, all the same. An autodidact, Silvio reads whatever he can get his hands on, thereby constructing his own useful knowledge of literature and Literature, science and Science, thereby constructing his own machine.<sup>241</sup>

Although Silvio does locate other socializing outlets for himself outside of his readings, he often finds these outlets to be limited, which produces in him a keen awareness of his social status. He finds himself to be among civilization's "barbarous," living without the proper, civilized *accoutrements* there to comfort him and provide his life with meaning. At the same time, and as Pauls cogently characterizes it, Silvio effectively operates as a *bricoleur*, making the most of the scant resources that surround him in order to:

trabajar con lo que encuentra [...] desviarlo de su función original, dirigirlo en otra dirección, atribuirle otro uso. [...] Se trata de un principio de conexión, una operación de agrupamiento que sólo después, procesada por una hipótesis, puede tener un valor simbólico. Y las hipótesis, ¿qué son sino lo que pone en relación esa síntesis colectiva con una máquina heterogénea en la que empiezan a funcionar, a trabajar, a rendir? (254-55).

In other words, as a *bricoleur*, Silvio makes his knowledge and his life operate hypothetically, as one, seeking out connections, and finding new uses for old, underused things. Silvio therefore makes great use of knowledge and experience "Outside" (Deleuze and Guattari) of state-sponsored institutions, as he connects his own knowledge and experience to his own hypothetical and real machines.

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<sup>241</sup> In *Notes From Underground*, the unnamed narrator describes his own situation in a similar way to what we see in Silvio's situation in *El juguete rabioso*: "Apart from reading I had nowhere to turn – that is, there was nothing I could then respect in my surroundings, nothing I could be drawn to" (48).

In Silvio's case, then, his "poor," though "modern," education is by no means the aesthetic education of a young man, because, for one, he simply cannot afford such an education. Still, from time to time the boy drifts back toward the desires of forming himself as a proper, civilized man. "¿Saldría yo alguna vez de mi ínfima condición social," he asks himself, "podría convertirme algún día en un señor, dejar de ser el muchacho que se ofrece para cualquier trabajo?" (92). And, as when he celebrates his successes with his fellow club members, the boy still daydreams about living the bourgeois life with a pretty girl at his side – a life that he sees as existing apart from him, as shown in the passage below:

Pasamos junto a un balcón iluminado.  
Un adolescente y una niña conversaban en la penumbra; de la sala anaranjada  
partía la melodía de un piano.  
Todo el corazón se me empequeñeció de envidia y de congoja.  
Pensé.  
Pensé en que yo nunca sería como ellos... , nunca viviría en una casa hermosa y  
tendría una novia de la aristocracia. (72)

Even though he believes such aspirations to be chimerical, the pressure to conform to this sort of life still affects Silvio. This pressure comes from his mother, from society's expectations of him, and also from within the young boy's own personal sense of shame and inadequacy. Such dreams aren't simply examples of his "false consciousness," but sincere desires to rise above his impoverished socio-economic situation. He tries, unsuccessfully, to find a job and provide economic support for his family and himself. He joins the army – perhaps the ultimate locus of interpellation – in hopes of supplying his unstable life with a sense of structure. Yet, after being told by one of his superiors that he has "un gran porvenir," he gets kicked out only four days later because, as he is told by one of his superiors, "Aquí no necesitamos personas

inteligentes, sino brutos para el trabajo” (89, 96). He thus finds himself forced to confront what he deems to be his “absoluta inutilidad” when it comes to successfully relating to the civilized world via civilized means and official institutions (97).<sup>242</sup>

Forced to live life *a la deriva*, Silvio sincerely struggles with the fluidity of his own identity and the supposedly civilized “versatility of sensations” that connect him with little sense of self-orientation – thus it is that after being expelled from the army he tries to commit suicide. Previous to this attempt, however, Silvio confesses to himself what, at the time, are his most heartfelt desires – that is, his most heartfelt oscillations:

¿Qué hacer, qué podría hacer para triunfar, para tener dinero, mucho dinero? [...] “No me importa no tener traje, ni plata, ni nada.” Y casi con vergüenza me confesé: “Lo que yo quiero es ser admirado de los demás, elogiado de los demás... Pero esta vida mediocre... Ser olvidado cuando muera, esto sí que es horrible” (92).

Saying here, in shame, how he hopes, somehow, despite death, to never be forgotten, Silvio will later realize that living life *a la deriva* also means that he will encounter situations in which traitorously undoing what would otherwise function as a sort of fixed identity – allowing himself to be forgotten in life – gives him even greater access to life.

To repeat, Silvio’s “underprivileged” situation as an anonymous, direction-less child of the masses in Buenos Aires essentially forces him to intuitively produce and invent his own speeds and desires. Hence, a book becomes capital – as good as money, as good as power – and the successful lighting of a cannon he has made makes him feel that he, together with his friends, has “descubierto un nuevo continente, o que por magia nos

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<sup>242</sup> The alternately satisfying and constraining nature of institutions – seen here in Silvio’s attempts to ingratiate himself into society when he tries to get a job and later tries to join the army – shall be expanded upon further in the following chapter with respect to Macedonio Fernández’s novel *Adriana Buenos Aires (Última novela mala)*.

encontrábamos convertidos en dueños de la tierra” (19). As a result, life, a source of constant, consummate pain, also comes to be adored:

“Sí, Vida.. vos sos linda, Vida... ¿sabes? De aquí en adelante adoraré a todas las cosas hermosas de la Tierra... cierto... adoraré a los árboles, y a las cosas y a los cielos... adoraré todo lo que está en vos... además... decíme, Vida, ¿no es cierto que yo soy un muchacho inteligente? Conociste vos alguno que fuera como yo?” (79)

And all this, despite the Ortega-like commandment, “discipline el pensamiento,” that is thrust upon him during his brief stay in the army, despite his conscious attempts to achieve interpellation, find and maintain profitable employment, and, simply, live a “normal life” (94). Silvio knows that he is different, though, that he wields a radical capacity for knowledge and an exploratory, polifacetic spirit.

What all these experiences and experimenting amount to is “approximate knowledge,” in the Deleuzian sense that “‘approximate knowledge’ is still dependent upon sensitive and sensible evaluations that pose more problems than they solve: problematics is still its only mode” (*Thousand* 373). Like the *Astrólogo*, as a young *hombre de ciencia*, Silvio also employs his specialized dilettantism (his “approximate knowledge,” his barbarism) to his own advantage, creatively living out a life in question. That is, when Silvio acts according to his intuition, when he experiments, he problematizes his own existence on a line of flight away from modernity’s imposing order and civilization, creatively and critically. Silvio thus becomes, in the words of Deleuze and Parnet a *traitor*: “The traitor is the essential character of the novel, the hero. A traitor to the world of dominant significations, and to the established order [...] the experimenter is a traitor” (“Superiority” 41). This becoming traitorous is not easy; it is most difficult to forever betray, to forever ward off the State, its ordering signification, its

civilizing mission, and its hierarchies, for the traitor lives an experimental, hypothetical, problematic life.

Curiously enough, at the end of *El juguete rabioso* Silvio does in fact literally betray one of his friends, a crippled, old thief known as Rengo.<sup>243</sup> Initially, Silvio and Rengo plan to rob a wealthy engineer. “‘Todo limpio,’” as Silvio sees it (135). The robbery intrigues Silvio, because, as he says, “‘Siempre la misma vida: estarse reventado para nada. Decíme, Rengo, ¿tiene sentido esta vida? Trabajamos para comer y comemos para trabajar. ‘Minga’ de alegría, ‘minga’ de fiestas, y todos los días lo mismo, Rengo. Esto ‘esgunfia’ ya” (135). If he fails to supply and suffuse his life with meaning via official, accepted channels, then why not try something else? Something meaningless, possibly, but something that might, nevertheless, lead to a new, somewhat fulfilling, function.

Before the pre-meditated robbery occurs, however, the idea enters Silvio’s mind to turn in his friend, Rengo – to effectively rat him out. After a brief deliberation, he decides to follow through on this betrayal. Thus, before the robbery is to occur, he informs the man who would be robbed of what was supposed to be a secret between Silvio, Rengo, and one of the wealthy man’s maids (their other accomplice). That is, Silvio betrays his friend and the maid, and is instead loyal to their social superior.<sup>244</sup> Still, Silvio

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<sup>243</sup> In this betrayal we once again see the delicately heavy tension between the State and the war machine.

<sup>244</sup> Due to the class implications at stake, Masotta explains how this complex betrayal “tiene su contrapartida en la fidelidad a los valores de la clase,” meaning that Silvio privileges he who already has social and economic privilege (in this case, the wealthy engineer) while he betrays and effectively exacerbates the status of the underprivileged (Rengo) (71). Thus, “la sociedad – nos muestra Arlt – no es más que un conjunto de verdugos escalonados según su jerarquía” (74). To be sure, Masotta’s argument is not

says to himself, “No me importa...y seré hermoso como Judas Iscariote. Toda la vida llevaré una pena... una pena... La angustia abrirá a mis ojos grandes horizontes espirituales...” (140). Here, in an act of betrayal, Silvio finds spiritual redemption.

Hence, the question has been complicated – For can we really read this betrayal as acting in the spirit of the Deleuzian traitor? As noted above, in a way, Silvio does the “right thing” by refusing to commit the robbery and instead ratting out Rengo. He does what the State would want him to do and thus, since he does not betray the State, should be officially commended accordingly. But, at the same time, by turning in Rengo, his accomplice and friend, Silvio arguably commits an even greater and ultimately more difficult betrayal. That is, by turning in his fellow traitor, he betrays his own self-constructed war machine with this act as well – he undoes the bonds created and connected by and within such a machine. He shatters his own myth, only to create a new one. His act of autonomy aligns itself with a certain, hierarchical morality, just as it betrays another orientation that is only perhaps slightly more subversive than the first, and in the process shows the first to be built upon essentially problematic, traitorous premises, i.e. one must lessen the lot of those who already have less in order to insure that those with more keep what they already have. Silvio, ever the inquisitive quisling. He creates a line of flight on a line of flight. He betrays both ways. Can we say the boy kills both ways, too? That, in his betrayal of Rengo, Silvio kills both Rengo and himself? Is this an act that aligns itself with both *potentia* and *potestas*? It would all seem so, yes.

What can also be said is that betraying is a supremely complex, difficult matter. “For it is difficult to be a traitor,” as Deleuze and Parnet tell us once again, “it is to create.

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without its reasons; however, the reading offered here of the betrayal will emphasize more of the life-affirming possibilities found in and expressed by such an act.

One has to lose one's identity, one's face, in it. One has to disappear, to become unknown" ("Superiority" 45). What Silvio ultimately creates in this betrayal, in an act of de-socialization, in basically disappearing himself, is the affect of joy.<sup>245</sup> He now enjoys the fact that this betrayal will haunt him forever, forcing him to haunt the earth, "to become unknown," because it shows him that he has lived:

"Iré por la vida como si fuera un muerto [...] [P]ero escuchéme... yo no estoy loco. Hay una verdad, sí... y es que yo sé que siempre la vida va a ser extraordinariamente linda para mí. No sé si la gente sentirá la fuerza de la vida como la siento yo, pero en mí hay una alegría, una especie de inconsciencia llena de alegría. [...] Yo no soy un perverso, soy un curioso de esta fuerza enorme que está en mí..." (149)

This way, Silvio has no one to answer to except for himself. He committed the act of betrayal. He feels the force. And this life force is not personal, but rather impersonal. The force of betrayal, the pain, the joy of betrayal passes through him, like a *haeccity* – or a spirit, if you prefer. This does not mean that Silvio necessarily assumes responsibility for his actions, however, as this ultimate and double betrayal functions outside of responsibility's moral confines, if also, perhaps, beyond good and evil, beyond creation and destruction. As a reader, one might admittedly find it *difficult* to confront this betrayal, too, to not feel betrayed in the act of reading, and to think with Silvio outside of

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<sup>245</sup> Masotta further elucidates and interprets this transformation as follows: "Inventar, crear, robar, imaginar, soñar, mentir, delatar: estos actos se corresponden en que, a través de ellos y en ellos, los personajes de Arlt apuntan a una suerte de corte de amarras con lo que son [...]. [E]l hombre de Arlt encuentra en la práctica de la maldad un hálito de soberanía, la convicción de que es posible pasar a la trascendencia a través de él. En estas novelas la acción mala es tonificadora, es el aliento que ayuda a soportar la atmósfera interior, es un respiro que separa de la "tristeza" que envuelve la vida. En el mal, y de un salto, se pasa de las tinieblas a la claridad y parece entonces que la vida y la alegría ahora fueran posibles" (61-62).

morality, outside of the State, and, then, if outside of the war machine as well... Well, then what?

Masotta argues the following with respect to the matter at hand: “para Arlt, el espíritu no es el instante del ‘encuentro’ del hombre con el hombre, sino el del desencuentro” (56). While such an argument is not necessarily wrong, it may ignore Nietzsche. That is, the spirit encountered, if not, in a transcendental moment, between man and man, still functions as a spirit of immanent relation between man and life. Life, in the necessity of due time, in the necessity of its contradictory nature, betrays our best wishes. The only way to relate to life is thus to function as it does – alternately betraying and being loyal to principles known and unknown, transcendent and immanent, joyful and nihilist, self-affirming and self-denying, principles whose falsity is so strong so as to be true – is thus to create functions *a la deriva*. Life needs of humanity’s traitorous creativity in order to be maximized. Ultimately, then, Silvio’s betrayal complicates itself to no end, problematizing, stabilizing, and destabilizing Silvio, the State, the war machine, and life itself in its critical, creative activity.

Can we see Erdosain, one of the ostensible “heroes” of *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*, in the same traitorous light, too? Much like Silvio, he too feels ostracized from civilization, despite, if not because of, his unorthodox intelligence. He feels ashamed of his social status as well. In turn, the city’s own striating, classifying structures reinforce this shame:

Anduvo [Erdosain] por las solitarias ochavas de las calles Arenales y Talcahuano, por las esquinas de Charcas y Avenida Quintana, apeteciendo el espectáculo de esas calles magníficas en arquitectura, y negadas para siempre a los desdichados. Aquél era otro mundo dentro de la ciudad canalla que él conocía, otro mundo para el que ahora su corazón latía con palpitations lentas y pesadas. [...] ¡Qué distinto

debía ser el amor a la sombra de esos tules que ensombrecen la luz y atemperan los sonidos!... (*Siete* 25)

Like Silvio, Erdosain steals and tries to find love. He hopes for joy. Silvio invents a cannon and hopes for fame and adoration; Erdosain hopes to invent a metallic rose – a cold piece of totally useless, possibly glorious, beauty – and hopes for riches and power.

Yet, if, as Erdosain comes to realize, his shame cannot be overcome, then why not embrace it, exacerbate it, fill it with pain, he asks himself? Like Silvio, Erdosain repeatedly says in *Los siete locos* how he must betray someone, commit a crime – in fact, commit murder – in order to assure himself of his own violently creative will to live: “Tenía que matarlo [a Barsut], porque si no no hubiera vivido tranquilo. Matar a Barsut era una condición previa para existir, como lo es para los otros respirar el aire puro” (99-100). Additionally, in *Los lanzallamas*, Erdosain’s search for betrayal transforms into a search for utter personal humiliation, a search for pain, to the point at which it is no longer personal, but just affect, just pain. Life would be too boring – meaning, not worth one’s time of living – otherwise.<sup>246</sup> In this way, “Su dolor [lo de Erdosain] es más monótono que el estúpido oleaje del mar,” while, at the same time, Erdosain can say, again like Silvio, “Pero yo te amo, Vida. Te amo a pesar de todo lo que te afearon los hombres” (*Lanzallamas* 164, 214). Unfortunately for Erdosain, there cannot be life, without other men.

Erdosain’s case therefore extends that of Silvio’s, not so much matured or grown up – unless one believes that knowledge is essentially sorrow – as taken to the extreme, where lines of flight fall out from underneath us, where the existential crisis is quotidian

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<sup>246</sup> *Notes from Underground*: “And you may ask yourself why I twisted and tormented myself so? Answer: because it was just too boring to sit there with folded arms, that’s why I’d get into such flourishes” (16).

despair without joy, where the war machine moves so fast it stops, showing a black hole of absolute disorder and death below. The point of no return. The point at which murder, suicide, and mass death become one's only outlets. Nihilism, extended:

¡Cuántas cosas involuntarias sabe [Erdosain]! Y la principal: que a lo largo de todos los caminos del mundo hay casitas, chatas, o con techos en declive, o con tejados a dos aguas, con empalizadas, y que en estas casas el gusano humano nace, lanza pequeños gritos, es amamantado por un monstruo pálido y hediondo, crece, aprende un idioma que otros tantos millones de gusanos ignoran, y finalmente es oprimido por su prójimo o esclaviza a los otros

Erdosain aguza el mirar en las tinieblas. La presión que lo sofoca se hace siniestra y jovial. Siente ganas de reírse. Aguza más el mirar. Tiene la sensación del movimiento del mar, de la frialdad de una cúpula de acero bajo sus pies...

La fuerza... El odio...

Tampoco la verdad está en los cañones...

Regresa a la profundidad cristiana. Pronuncia el nombre:

Jesús... Tampoco la verdad está allí.

Baja más. Le parece que tantea la abovedada de una fábrica subterránea. Es inmenso. Hombres con escafandras de buzo, con trajes de impermeables empapados de aceite, se mueven en neblinas de gases verdosos. Grandes compresores entuban gas venenoso en cilindros de acero laminado. Manómetros como platos blancos marcan presión de atmósferas. Los elevadores van y vienen. Cuando se ha disipado la nube verde, la usina amarilla. Cortinas de gas amarillo a través de las cuales los monstruos lafandrados se mueven como grises peces viscosos.

Tampoco la verdad está ahí.

Rabiosamente se hunde más. Atraviesa capas geológicas. Enmuroado, grita al final:

“No puedo más.”

Cae sobre su cama y permanece inerte como un imbécil. (*Lanzallamas* 166).

Exhausted, Erdosain finds himself unable to act, create, or even really just make do. He finds truth to be nowhere, which disenfranchises him to the bone, because finding truth to be without a site of origination means that he is free to create his own truth, which is difficult to do. He finds a spark of joy and life within this freedom, but this spark is quite quickly extinguished by sinister, monstrous poisonous gases. In short, man created God, man killed God; without God, Man found freedom, which gave him joy, but also led to an ineluctable desire to exhaust, if not completely destroy, this freedom, too – meaning:

kill himself and everyone else, if these formerly purposeful beings are now found to be free as purposeless, undefined objects. In other words, and as Nietzsche says, “At the moment of supreme joy we hear the scream of horror or the yearning lamentation of something irrevocably lost” (*Birth* 20).

Are these, then, the only ways out of civilization, the only ways out of modernity? Sparks of joy *OR* suicide; joy *AND* suicide? What Erdosain witnesses shows him that nothing exists which contains or expresses truth. What he sees frightens him, paralyzes him. Hence, when compelled to confront modernity, himself, and the joyless, exhaustive monsters present in them all, Erdosain can only ask a helpless, powerless question “¿De dónde habrán salido tantos monstruos?” (*Siete* 72).<sup>247</sup>

Nietzsche explains how he specifically sees exhaustion functioning (that is, not functioning) here in *The Will to Power*:

*The most dangerous misunderstanding.* – One concept apparently permits no confusion or ambiguity: that of *exhaustion*. Exhaustion can be acquired or inherited – in any case it changes the aspect of things, the *value of things*. –

As opposed to those, who, from the fullness they represent and feel, involuntarily *give* to things and see them fuller, more powerful, and pregnant with future – who at least are able to bestow something – the exhausted diminish and botch all they see – they impoverish the value: they are harmful. –

About this no mistake seems possible: yet history contains the gruesome fact that the exhausted have always been mistaken for the fullest – and the fullest for the most harmful.

Those poor in life, the weak, impoverish life; those rich in life, the strong, enrich it. The first are parasites of life; the second give presents to it. – How is it possible to confuse the two? (30 emphasis in original)

Arlt, of course, does seem to do his best to actively “confuse the two.” What is the *sociedad secreta* if not the “super modern” repackaging of a tired, lifeless *modus*

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<sup>247</sup> According to one of the first great, modern traitors Francisco Goya, “El sueño de la razón produce monstruos.”

*operandi*? What is Erdosain if not a characterless hero? What is Silvio in his betrayal if not both strong and weak, rich and poor?

Nevertheless, at heart, however weak and exhausted they may, at times, be, Silvio, Erdosain, and the Astrólogo all function as modern inventors. They all experiment, they all create, they all embrace creation's peculiar, disordering, barbaric power. Erdosain, explicitly calls himself an "inventor fracasado," and this epithet surely applies to all three characters (*Siete* 10). Arlt creates and invents as well. Whether he does so as a failure or a success is of little ultimate importance. As Masiello explains, "La invención, entonces, se pone al servicio del fraude y la búsqueda de beneficios, como maneras de usurpar el control de los signos que circulan en el discurso social" (214). These complex, difficult individuals therefore create by thinking and acting, or to return to the beginning, by working, by making thought and action *work* in alternative ways – perhaps even in fraudulent and barbaric ways. This is how they exist – humanly – as experimental creators. Mallea might go along with this as well, albeit in his own avant-garde-if-not-really-experimental way, for he too says, "Las existencias se justifican sólo por su actitud eminentemente creadora en el más significativo gesto" (171). Furthermore, let us not forget Nietzsche's curious assertion in what is surely his most humanistic book, *The Birth Of Tragedy*: "it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*" (32 emphasis in original). Yet, Mallea's creativity creates solely in its sad, pessimistic, purgatorial existence – *sans* joy. While what is newly created is not necessarily always made out of joy, in joy's eternal absence nothing is truly created, nothing betrayed.

Modernity, of course, promised to create something as well: a new beginning for the work that lay ahead. Did it promise to betray history and what came before it? In a way, yes. For modernity as thought and action, though it surely writes itself into the State, writes itself into literature as part of the traitorous war machine as well in its attempt to resist a mythologized, State-sponsored past and create its own mythologized present that is always already the future and, maybe, in this way, also points toward new and improved ways of living. Hence, modernity writes itself so as to be a current that impersonally passes through persons – an affect and, in addition, a belief in the present and the future somehow being better than the past. Here, Piglia points out how belief and fiction work hand in hand in Arlt’s literary worlds, just as they do with respect to modernity’s myths and realities:

Uno podría decir que las de Arlt son en el fondo relatos sobre la creencia. A la vez, en Arlt la ficción se transforma y se metamorfosea y a menudo se identifica con la estafa, con el fraude, con la falsificación, con la delación. Formas todas donde los relatos actúan, tienen poder, producen efectos. (24)

The common, peculiar power endemic to both fiction and modernity betrays itself thusly as the inventive ability to make people believe, to produce belief itself.

Paul de Man takes on modernity’s claim to ultimate inventiveness and production in his essay, “Literary History and Literary Modernity.” Here De Man asserts that, “Modernity exists in the form of a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier, in the hope of reaching at last as point that could be called a true present, a point of origin that marks a new departure” (148). The Astrólogo says something similar in *Los siete locos*: “para imprimir un nuevo rumbo a la sociedad, hay que destruir esa vida” (115). Erdosain expresses how he “quiere escaparse de la civilización” (*Lanzallamas* 209). Silvio says, “Yo no he de morir, no... No..., pero tengo que matarme (*Juguete* 109). These are all

cases of Nietzschean “creative destruction” that also desire a clean slate upon which their desires can be written anew, teetering on the brink of pure destruction, nihilism –

befitting a “destructive character.” Nietzsche speaks to these desires here:

*Overall insight.* – Actually, every major growth is accompanied by a tremendous crumbling and passing away: suffering, the symptoms of decline *belong* in the times of tremendous advances; every fruitful and powerful movement of humanity has also created at the same time a nihilistic movement. It could be the sign of a crucial and most essential growth, of the transition to new conditions of existence, that the most extreme form of this pessimism, genuine *nihilism*, would come into the world. *This I have comprehended.* (*Will* 69 emphasis in original)<sup>248</sup>

Furthermore, and as de Man demonstrates, apart from the symptomatic accompaniment described above, modernity, in belonging to history, must therefore confront history, just as barbarism must confront civilization, creation confront destruction, nihilism confront plenitude, and the war machine confront the State.

But maybe confront is not the correct word. I think de Man, Deleuze, Nietzsche would both prefer the word “relate.” Would Arlt as well? Yes; his perpetual creation of machines produces, in turn, the creation of new relations. Though, to be sure, all the same, Arlt also speaks in favor of the word that destroys all relations: to wit, annihilation.

De Man, meanwhile, outlines the genuine importance of “relating” as follows:

Modernity and history *relate* to each other in a curiously contradictory way that goes beyond antithesis or opposition. If history is not to become sheer regression or paralysis, it depends on modernity for its duration and renewal; but modernity cannot assert itself without being at once swallowed up and reintegrated into a regressive historical process. [...] If we see in this paradoxical condition a diagnosis of our own modernity, then literature has always been essentially modern. [...] The appeal of modernity haunts all literature. (151-52 my emphasis)

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<sup>248</sup> Here, Nietzsche appears to contradict what he said he said earlier, in the same book. What can one ascertain from a contradictory thinker like Nietzsche, though, if not to think and live in an openly aware and contradictory fashion?

The “appeal of modernity” attempts to ward off historical organization, but fails to escape it.<sup>249</sup> What literature seeks in modernity, what literature is in modernity, it will not find. Saying this does not mean to suggest that one should simply resign oneself to organization, to order, to the State, to living out *Bildung*. Rather, the possibilities of a betraying, transgressive modernity – in the form of a literature and a people – relate to historical organization beyond good and evil, where one is not necessarily better than the other, but, like Spinoza’s *potestas* and *potentia*, function differently.

Thus, Pigilia is mistaken when he speaks to the belief in the “omnipotencia de la literatura,” which somehow overcomes the organizational regimes of the powers that be (28). Literature functions as a tool, yes, indeed, and a powerful one at that, with, as Arlt says, the capacity to deliver a “‘cross’ a la mandíbula.” But literature is ultimately one tool among many, one used to rearrange rather than overcome, one alternately used to enervate and invigorate rather than vanquish, once and for all. And although, as Piglia asseverates, literature wields “magical” powers in the endlessness of its own inventiveness, for all the books that have ever been written in the name of literature (and, in this case, in the name of modernity, or even in the name of the avant-garde), history still marks an eternal exploitation and expulsion that marches in step with the freedomlessness of time – barbarism comes in all forms, at all levels, at all times (28).<sup>250</sup>

Unfortunately, literature will always fail in its own relentless attempts to escape from and transcend what, perhaps, it should rather relate to, rearticulate, and reorganize: namely, if we must give it a name, humanity. And, yet, Arlt still writes, his characters

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<sup>249</sup> Similarly, the State must necessarily relate to the war machine, a polifacetic desiring machine that can never fully escape the State’s organizational tendencies.

<sup>250</sup> Marx: “In actual history, it is a notorious fact that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force, play the greatest part” (*Capital* 874).

still invent, and we still read and write all about it all. Literature is not “omnipotent,” then, but, in certain respects, it is certainly almost all we have, one of our sole means of inventive expression. To return to de Man:

The distinctive character of literature thus becomes manifest as an inability to escape from a condition that is felt to be unbearable. [...] The continuous appeal of modernity, the desire to break out of literature towards the reality of the moment, prevails, and, in its turn, folding back upon itself, engenders the repetition and the continuation of literature. Thus, modernity which is fundamentally a falling away from literature and a rejection of history, also acts as the principle that gives literature duration and historical existence. (162)

The terms in this specific machine – modernity, literature, history – cannot change, but they can come relate to each other in new, distinct, variably enduring ways.

To repeat: literature functions as inventive expression, expressing the personal and the impersonal, liberating the impersonal so that it can discover new reciprocal connections to the personal. Between these dualistic terms – personal-impersonal – lies a third. This third term is not the synthesis or the overcoming of the other two – it is not the dialectic – but something that can relate to and thereby enhance the possibilities for action of the other two. This term is literature. Taken together these terms form our common, insufficient, inescapable vessel, our common, dysfunctional machine. It is the stories we tell; it is the production of beliefs; and its condition is, in de Man’s words, “unbearable.” Still – There’s got to be a better way! Such is life, though. Life-in-literature/literature-in-life made “unbearable” because it always already is, because it involves a ceaseless striving towards what it cannot attain – freedom, enlightenment, truth, an exit out of histories’ atrocities – which means one strives to strive, with the vicissitudes in between. *Sans desideratum*, but with literature and with life.

Maybe these terms are being conflated too liberally, though, with metaphors mixed incongruously in hopes of constructing some sort of conceptual, vital alchemy. But isn't this what the Astrólogo does? Isn't this what Silvio does? Isn't this what Erdosain and Arlt do? Isn't this what traitors do? They take away causes and pre-established hierarchies in favor of active connections and functions; they confuse and befuddle; they resist easy interpretations; they make machines, or at least a contraption or two, whether they work or not.

“‘Es síntoma de una inteligencia universal,’ the traitorous Silvio tells himself, ‘poder regalarse con distintas bellezas’” (81). Such a statement contradicts what Ortega told us in *La deshumanización del arte* in Chapter Three: “Es un síntoma de pulcritud mental querer que las fronteras entre las cosas estén bien demarcadas” (47). For Ortega, and, undoubtedly, for Mallea as well, beauty, civilization, culture, and humanity all exist as one unique, monolithic, identifiable phenomenon, set apart on a transcendent plane, spiritually guided and maintained by superior moral principles, good taste, and an innate sense of natural hierarchy. On the other hand, Arlt and his characters, as inventors, as frightfully dilettantish *hombres de ciencia*, actively, traitorously create a variable field, conflating the boundaries between civilization and barbarism, creation and destruction, order and disorder, beauty and disgust, and life and death in order to make machines that run for them just as they fail to function, machines that establish relations with others just as they undo such possible bonds. If there is no escaping what is unbearable, i.e. life itself and the lives of others, Arlt shows how, at the very least, one can attempt to relate to what is unbearable by immanently redistributing and combining the relations' terms, going on, then, to relate to others via these new relations, and, in the end, make a machine

– that is, make these relations function. The creating, the relating, the functioning of bodies (as machines). And, still, as Spinoza reminds us, “no one has yet determined what the body can do” (155).

Meanwhile, Pauls, in his analysis, tells us that Arlt’s characters act as undetermined, open bodies:

Un personaje, en Arlt, siempre es un abanico de estados, un soporte para la acción de intensidades y afecciones. Alcanza umbrales, que lo detienen o que franquea, sigue las curvas del deseo, es sometido a magnitudes de emoción o a *quanta* de angustia. Viene de la disolución o va hacia ella; se encamina hacia un orden de velocidad o de lentitud extremas. [...] El personaje arltiano no es sino una materialidad dispuesta a transformarse, expuesta como está a la variabilidad de las hipótesis. (258 emphasis in original)

Maybe this is what being avant-garde is all about. Maybe this is what being human is all about. Freed from Subjectivity. Openness to variability: living, functioning, hypothesizing, determining what a body, what a machine can do – *a la deriva*. “A versatility of sensations.” Opposing principles, paired together to form something so that a new function might be discovered and, consequently, implemented. Power for power’s sake – But beware of power’s power of seduction! Beware of power becoming purified – not problematized or confused – by a violence either brutally adorned or beautifully unadorned! Beware of “creative destruction,” just as it is most necessary to relate to it!

In the chapter that follows we will primarily examine the work of Macedonio Fernández: a writer who lived an avant-garde life. Macedonio writes as he lives and lives as he writes: elusive, difficult, recondite, humorous, immanent, experimental. Indeed, at times Macedonio pushes creativity to its very limits, towards the brink of complete illegibility and incomprehensibility. More than any other writer from the time of *las vanguardias*, though, Macedonio thinks and writes to work the transcendent and

humanist self – *el Yo* – out of literature, out of the author, out of the reader, out of philosophy, and out of life. Art in a life and as a life that has no other ends except for itself. While Ortega says something similar about art, he clearly says something different about life and about the different types of humans who live out life's supposedly essential, natural hierarchies. Macedonio, however, undoes all of these categories and hierarchies, dehumanizing not only art, but, like Arlt, the human itself. As Erdosain says “[E]n la incoherencia hay dulzura,” (*Siete* 86). As Masotta says, “No hay sensaciones aisladas” (29). This is because, as Macedonio would say, this sweet incoherence is what is life, love, and humanity. Everything is fundamentally involved, confused, and conflated.

## Chapter 6

### Art, Good and Bad, in Life, Love, and Death – Macedonio Fernández

“El lector es por definición un simpatizante y yo puedo serle interesante en lo que  
muestro de mi dudar y variar.”

Macedonio Fernández – *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna (Primera novela buena)*

“Here we already see that we can never get at the inner nature of things from without. However much we may investigate, we obtain nothing but images and names. We are like a man who goes round a castle, looking in vain for an entrance, and sometimes sketching the façades. Yet this is the path that all philosophers before me have followed.”

Arthur Schopenhauer – *The World as Will and Representation, Vol. 1*

As with a certain number of artists, philosophers, and thinkers – avant-garde and otherwise – Macedonio Fernández admits confusion as being the vital quintessence of human being, but still seeks out moments – eternal and otherwise – of absolute clarity. Call it a paradox, call it a contradiction, call it an aporia, call it a metaphysics, call it a way of life, call it a life’s style. Whatever one chooses to call it, here, in the extended citation that follows from what he contends is both his and the world’s “first good novel,” *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*, Macedonio expounds upon the confused nature of the world and its inhabitants:

Yo digo que vivimos con muy poco saber, como para creer que no haya mucha necesidad de él [...]. No es eso lo que quise decir sino que cada uno sabe a toda hondura dos o tres verdades complejas, pero sus contactos de vida son mil aspectos más, de modo que hacemos casi todas las partes de nuestra vida a oscuras, lo que no conduce a una constante desventura ni mucho menos porque el dolor tiende a engendrar por sí mismo el placer, por mera cesación y viceversa. Los aciertos, el saber, pesan muy poco ante esta regla de cosas.

Pero si vivimos en constante sorpresa; casi todo en lo inesperado. Íntegramente no conocemos ningún trozo (*íntegramente, trozo*, denuncia la

fragilidad del trabajo mental humano) ninguna fracción total de nuestro lote de vida, a menos que dediquemos, lo que rara vez es posible, buena parte de esa vida a conocer todas las motivaciones de cada acción y pasión. Gustamos de reconstruir los comienzos de los efectos y hechos que continúan mucho o poco ligándolos y rara vez hallamos holgura para una evocación metódica.

Tampoco sabemos, a menudo sobre qué substancias estamos trabajando ideas o conductas. (53 emphasis in original)

And, yet, Macedonio writes, thinks, and lives all the same, seemingly sometimes just in order to write, think, and live, and without any other ends than to do so. This writing, thinking, and living occurs at a generally extraordinary threshold of immanence and transcendence, art and life, being and non-being, understanding and confusion. Both as a writer and in his writing, Macedonio also wants to reach out to others, to his readers, and thus to his non-self as well, in art as in life. For, as the critic, Todd Garth, tells us, “Macedonio persistently regarded writing as the only means to an alternative constitution of the individual, without a self” (30). Such a writing, such an artistic life practice, such a reaching out demonstrates that disputing what can be called demonstrative functions as an affirmation of all that is.

Like Ramón Gómez de la Serna – a comparable thinker whom Macedonio once referred to as “la esperanza racial de genio en la humanidad Americana” – and the self/critically-styled *ramonismo* that was forever Ramón’s inimitable, personal style, Macedonio’s style would only seem to be insufficiently definable via recourse to a tautology summed up in a singular name: Macedonio (*Epistolario* 50).<sup>251</sup> Names, like

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<sup>251</sup> This comparison is all the more apropos given the transatlantic relationship, correspondence, and mutual admiration between Macedonio and Ramón. As Nélida Salvador explains, with respect to Macedonio, “La relación con Gómez de la Serna resultó fundamental en este rebrote de instancias renovadoras, ya que alentó persuasivamente sus dudas y vacilaciones” (358). Concrete evidence of this relationship can be found in the numerous letters Macedonio wrote to Ramón over the years, as collected in *Epistolario*, Vol. II of Macedonio’s complete works. Many of these letters will be referenced in the

confusion, being ultimately inescapable. However mythologized the name and the man behind the name might be, whatever wonders one ascribes to his life and his life's works, Macedonio, like Ramón, lived and continues to live on as the embodiment of any and, perhaps, all avant-gardes.<sup>252</sup> That said, Macedonio did not so much invent, design, and direct a generation – as Ortega, the Astrólogo, Marinetti, and maybe even Ramón and Borges had hoped to do – as he struggled, frustratingly so for both himself and his readers, to come to adequate, passionate terms with life, art, love, and death. He struggled to find a means of expression, however legible or illegible, that included, confused, and conflated all available means of expression: good, bad, philosophical, whimsical, profound, parodic, selfless, autobiographical, systematic, disjointed, metaphysical, practical, poetic, and prosaic.<sup>253</sup>

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pages that follow, since, as Alicia Borinsky states, “Las cartas de Macedonio a Gómez de la Serna forman un todo con sus libros y completan el cuadro de una reflexión artística destinada a formular una estética de la invención” (102). Also, it should be noted that Macedonio makes direct mention of Ramón early on in *Museo de la novela de la Eterna*, glowingly speaking of his work as being “la perfección que sabemos posible” (19).

<sup>252</sup> An example of this active mythologizing can be found here in Raúl Scalabrini y Ortiz's *El hombre que está solo y espera* from 1931: “MACEDONIO. – El primer metafísico de Buenos Aires y el único filósofo auténtico es Macedonio Fernández. Su libro ‘No toda es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos’ es ya una biblia esotérica del espíritu porteño. Todo lo que se pueda decir, ya está en él. Lástima que sólo pocos elegidos pueden salvar el escollo de su idioma enmarañado. Es un alegato pro pasión, un ataque al intelectualismo extenuante. Su filosofía es la filosofía de un porteño: es la quintaesencia, lo más puro, lo más acendrado del espíritu de Buenos Aires. Por eso está solo y espera; él es también, en gran parte, un eslabón en que el espíritu de la tierra se encarna. Posiblemente me seguirá solo y seguirá esperando. Y así por los siglos de los siglos, porque Macedonio ya está para siempre el primero y más grande en la secuela de profetas porteños. Amén” (123).

<sup>253</sup> Adolfo de Obieta, Macedonio's son, extends this description of Macedonio's life and life's works here in a brief, semi-biographical introduction to the critical edition of *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*: “Creo que mi padre ha sido la persona más natural y sinceramente ‘diferente’ que habré conocido. Sus ideas, costumbres, arte, planteos y soluciones teóricas y prácticas, parecían seleccionadas de una antología de la informalidad o la heterodoxia. [...] Vivía en el humor, en poesía, en misterio, en libertad,

Such adherence to confusion, conflation, and contradiction, if for Macedonio more so than for Arlt, betrays not a new way. Is there an easier way to say this? Certainly! But with Macedonio nothing comes easy. Ergo, the contradiction that, in spite of his many aesthetics, in spite of his inclusive style, because of his belief in disorder, because of his esoteric and hermetic tendencies, Macedonio is, in the end, so hard to read.<sup>254</sup> If in Macedonio's works one intermittently engages a flowing, disordered texture rather than straightforwardly reads a structured, transcendent text, this texture often undoes itself, nearly deterritorializing to a point of no return. Indeed, Macedonio can frustratingly push creativity to its very limits, toward complete illegibility and incomprehensibility, and thereby advocating "la legibilidad como disvalor" (Sarlo *Modernidad* 99). Yet, in his own recalcitrant way, and, again, like Arlt, Macedonio's lifework aptly expresses Deleuze's conception of creativity: "You write with a view toward an unborn people that doesn't yet have a language. Creating isn't communicating but resisting" ("On Philosophy" 143). In "La 'novela futura' de Macedonio Fernández," Noé Jitrik speaks to a similar creative process according to the terms of Macedonio's specific creative technique, describing it as "la búsqueda de [...] formas nuevas, la

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en fantasía, más allá de los pares de opuestos, de todo parámetro convencional o confesional" (XXIII).

<sup>254</sup> To refer again to Obieta, he elucidates this persistent difficulty when it comes to reading and, hopefully, comprehending Macedonio: "Macedonio Fernández es un autor difícil, de oscura claridad o de claridad oscura, como se prefiera; su obra, como su persona, no son fáciles. La dificultad consiste en la compleja pluralidad de elementos constitutivos. Podría decirse que era pluridimensional o pluridireccional, aspectos alguna vez emparentados con el caos. Esto explica, en una humanidad o una sociedad todavía más bien unidimensional y unidireccional, dificultades personales para desenvolverse en la vida social y en la vida metafísica, y dificultades en la comprensión de su obra, que trasunta genuinamente las líneas fundamentales de su persona. [...] Podría decir: enemigo de las dificultades cultivadas, amigo de las naturales, para ejercitarse en abarcar" (XXIV).

frustración por imposibilidad de hallarlas dadas las dimensiones de la búsqueda, la remisión al futuro de tales formas” (32). This is precisely what the reader encounters – resistance and frustration, along with languages, genres, and conceptual constellations seemingly heretofore unknown and pointed toward the future – when working with such a frustratingly creative thinker as Macedonio Fernández.

In the previous chapter, Arlt was read as functioning as a contradictory and confusing distributor of many politics. Here, Macedonio distributes many aesthetics throughout the course of his own contradictory and confusing writings. As expressed in his two “twin” novels, *Adriana Buenos Aires (Última novela mala)* and *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna (Primera novela buena)*, Macedonio’s “good” writing is intimately linked, if not indistinguishable from, his “bad” writing, all via the expression of his own radical aesthetics and radical politics. Although precisely pinning down Macedonio’s politics can be just as difficult as it was to do so with Arlt, he often expresses variants on socialist, anarchist, and libertarian sympathies. In a general sense, and as he puts it himself, his maxim was, “El Individuo Máximo en el Estado Mínimo” (*Papeles* 74). This politics operates in order to celebrate the individual and all the connections that he/she might have with other individuals and with the world, thereby opening up and including the individual as and to a more collective sense of being in the world. Such an open, inclusive, and exposed ontology comes mediated by passion, sympathy, love, and a reflexive problematization, as opposed to the traditional, Self-serving, and humanistic conventions of citizenship promoted by a state and its desire-determining institutions. In other words, for Macedonio, “The reliance on the dynamics of sensation is key to the individual’s liberation from both self and the institutions that perpetuate it” (Garth 159).

That he ultimately speaks of politics in his aesthetic works on a more micro and minor scale and in a more indirect way than Arlt does is not to say that Macedonio subscribes to the notion that politics and aesthetics have nothing to share. Indeed, it is no mere coincidence that one of the primary characters and distributors of many aesthetics in *Museo* is named *Presidente* – not to mention the fact that once upon a time Macedonio himself campaigned for the Presidency of Argentina, albeit unconventionally.

Thus, despite Ortega's disingenuous claims to the absolute need to keep these two essential and very human phenomena – politics and aesthetics – separate and distinct, this division, as has been and will continue to be demonstrated in the current study, is essentially fallacious. Even though he would never really come out and say it, Ortega's program of and for a radical, pure, autonomous, and dehumanized aesthetics, in agreement with his paramount desire for absolute order, fuses with and is ultimately inseparable from a radical, conservative politics. Arlt, on the other hand, made it clear from the beginning that politics functions inextricably from its relations with other social (read: human) phenomena, in particular aesthetics, given that both politics and aesthetics necessarily entail and precipitate order and disorder, given that creativity is the power to assemble, disassemble, and politicize power itself. Creative power as power over some kind of material – human and otherwise.

Nevertheless, just as it was demonstrated in the previous chapter that, with respect to order and disorder, the differences between Ortega and Arlt prove to be alternately, striking, subtle, and, in certain instances, completely null, a similar comparative range arises when surveying Macedonio's confused and confusing means of expression vis-à-vis Ortega's ideas regarding dehumanized art and its attendant speculations. Different

from Ortega, Macedonio was not, politically-speaking, an elitist. Still, Macedonio's texts make little to no sense if the reader lacks a certain cultural training in aesthetics, philosophy, and metaphysics. Even with this training, even with an aesthetic education, Macedonio is exceedingly difficult for any reader to comprehend, let alone follow. Why? Again, not necessarily because he writes as an elitist, but rather because so much of his innovative and unorthodox thought endeavors to untrain his reader, thereby undoing the very concepts that would otherwise constitute an aesthetic education.

In contrast to Ortega, then, who tends to retreat reactively from crises (or “rebellions”), desperately attempting to find ways to re-impose, reinforce, and reproduce an aristocratic power structure in order to quell such supposedly imminent catastrophes, Macedonio actively creates crises at every level of thought, art, and life.<sup>255</sup> Macedonio shows creativity to be both constructive and destructive, ordering and disordering, and, in a word, problematic in nature. By comparison, Ortega's reactive ways – the ways in which he consistently *reacts* to crises, even those he purportedly promotes, such as the aesthetic crisis included in the ascendancy of *el arte nuevo* – show him acting like the “theoretical man” outlined by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche describes such a man by saying, “theoretical man takes fright at his consequences, and in his dissatisfaction no longer dares to hurl himself into the terrible icy current of existence, but runs nervously up and down on the bank” (88). If theoretical in his own right, Macedonio is also staggeringly practical, writing, as best he can, as actively as he can, as impossible as it might be, within existence's crisis-creating current.

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<sup>255</sup> Ortega: “crisis y subversión de los lenguajes históricos son principios negativos [...]” (*Rebelión* 52).

Macedonio presents his readers with a theoretical and practical crisis in aesthetics in his *última novela mala* as in his *primera novela buena*. It is a crisis that Macedonio alternately calls *Belarte*, *Autorística*, *Dudarte*, *Novela*, *Metafísica*, and which, because of their necessary relations, would seem to induce a crisis in politics, philosophy, ethics, power, and life values in general. It is also a crisis that, in many ways, corresponds to Ortega's remarks in *La deshumanización del arte*. For example, in a letter written to Ramón, it is Macedonio, not Ortega, who rather disparagingly says, "La humanidad no entiende o no gusta del Arte, sino de la información – realismo – contrastable, comparable" (*Epistolario* 52). Not to mention the fact that both of Macedonio's novels proved to be terribly unpopular within the general public sphere, with "unpopularity" being one of the primary hallmarks of Ortega's dehumanized art.

In truth, one could go as far as to say that, taken together, Macedonio's two novels of *Belarte* represent the aesthetic work of dehumanization *par excellence*, expressing all that *el arte nuevo* promised it would be ("first good novel") and would not be ("last bad novel"). Furthermore, in spite of his radically non-conservative political views, Macedonio exhibits a rather ambivalent opinion with respect to the general public's – that is, the masses' – relationship to Art. In *Museo*, for instance he says, "El horrible arte y las acumulaciones de gloria del pasado, que existirán siempre, se deben: al sonido de los idiomas y a la existencia del público; sin ese sonido quedará el solo camino de pensar y crear: sin público la calamidad recitadora no ahogará el arte" (44). While differing in style, of course, the gist of this declaration looks as if it has been lifted directly from the pages of Ortega; that Macedonio is perhaps more of an elitist than

initially stated is one of the many contradictions that will come to define a frustratingly, if also therefore creatively, arbitrary thinker who is so hard to define.<sup>256</sup>

That said, and however commonly it may be defined and expressed, dehumanized art works in different ways and toward different ends for different creators. “Los procedimientos de deshumanización son muchos,” as Ortega puts it (49 *Deshumanización*). Hence, in the final chapter, after working through Macedonio’s rather dehumanized conceptions of *Belarte*, his “twin” novels, *Adriana Buenos Aires (Última novela mala)* and *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna (Primera novela Buena)* will be treated. For Ortega, the dehumanization of art, in its radicalization of the humanist tradition, signifies an intranscendental technique – that is to say, *un arte nuevo* – executed in the name of a transcendental humanity which operates into order to distinguish and classify a beautiful, elite citizenry as (human) being(s) set apart from their nasty, massing barbaric counterparts. On the other hand, for Macedonio, something akin to a dehumanized art which expresses itself according to less expressly human characteristics functions as a way toward being within an art within the world, in all their common imperfections and disorders: a way toward showing that life, as a collection of affects and sensations, artistic as it is not, quotidian as it is not, ordered as it is not, human as it is not, exists on, in, and as one immanent plane. “Lector,” Macedonio, the author, says to his reader, “No clasifiques: ¡fantasías!, con desvío. Cotidiana tuya, como mía, es Fantasía” (*No todo* 242).

In these respects, rather than utilizing Ortega’s views and works as a sort of avant-garde litmus test, as we effectively have been doing up to this point, maybe

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<sup>256</sup> Arbitrary, again, like Ramón.

Macedonio should have served as the exceedingly non-standardized avant-garde standard-bearer all along. Given that this is not the case, however, here, too, in the present study, Macedonio's arrival on the scene, as he so often consciously chose it to be, proves to be simultaneously late, necessary, and new, all while having been and being postponed practically indefinitely. That is, Macedonio shows up as the self-styled *Receinvento*, or "newcomer," to the discussion at hand as well.<sup>257</sup> Thus, like many, though not all, of his contemporaries, Macedonio's avant-garde expression functions as a matter of personal choice, style, presence, and absence – within art and life – which actively undermines, confuses, and involves all of these terms and the limits and boundaries expressed therein.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Garth further elucidates the aesthetic, social, and political implications of Macedonio's self-fashioning as the *recienvenido*, given the socio-historical context of the times, thusly: "The deprecating term *recienvenido*, or 'newcomer,' in the Argentina of the early twentieth century, could not be employed without invoking profound and widespread ethnic, cultural, and social tensions. In Macedonio's case, this ironic self-designation serves to mock those tensions, and arguably to dissolve them, by redefining and defusing a highly charged word. Rather than suggesting and endorsement of the avant-garde classist stance of unpopularity, 'receinvenido' refers to Macedonio's refusal to participate in Argentine xenophobia. The human relations explored in literature – seen by the Martinierristas in the same social and ethnic terms as by their predecessors – are for Macedonio strictly *literary* relations. The 'literary world' is the only one in which a person can legitimately be called a newcomer. By applying the term himself, Macedonio short-circuits both the classist stance and the innate paradox of the Argentine avant-garde's distaste for the market" (75 emphasis in original).

<sup>258</sup> Specifically, Marcel Duchamp comes to mind here and would seem to be a similarly eccentric artistic character when set side by side with Macedonio. Curiously enough, Duchamp lived in Buenos Aires for approximately nine months in 1919, though he participated very little, if at all, in what was at the time Argentina's very much incipient avant-garde scene. Still, in a letter to his biographer, Duchamp said of Buenos Aires, "es un terreno perfecto para la innovación" (qtd. in Speranza 29). He was also cited as saying he intended to "cubificar Buenos Aires" (qtd. in Aguilar 207). We therefore have here another transatlantic avant-garde connection, however indirect it may be. And although an analysis of Macedonio is excluded from her study, see Graciela Speranza's *Fuera de campo. Literatura y arte argentinos después de Duchamp* for more on Duchamp's possible effects on Argentina's artistic scene. Meanwhile, in

At times, however, Macedonio's eccentric means of expression acts as a distancing technique in its own right. Julio Prieto makes good use of Macedonio's eccentricity and "ex-centricity" in his study, *Desencuadrados: vanguardias ex-céntricas en el Río de la Plata. Macedonio Fernández y Felisberto Hernández*.<sup>259</sup>

Speaking specifically to the term in the title, Prieto states:

se puede hablar de ex-centricidad en un sentido "sincrónico" que conlleva a la vez una dimensión ética y estética: la ex-centricidad como opción deliberada de quedarse fuera – o en un ambiguo borde – de la escena cultural, y de proyectar, en consecuencia, un tipo de discurso encaminado al objetivo aparentemente contradictorio de *retirarse*, de salir de escena o, cuando menos, de quedarse al fondo, en la penumbra de un segundo término – en un borroso margen [...]" (12 emphasis in original)

As the *recienvenido*, Macedonio strategically and, at times, nomadically distances himself from the philosophical, aesthetic, and avant-garde of the times, even though he did contribute to numerous avant-garde journals, such as *Martín Fierro*, and, supposedly, co-directed *Proa*'s second run with Borges.<sup>260</sup> Different from Ortega, Macedonio does

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*Desencuadrados: vanguardias ex-céntricas en el Río de la Plata. Macedonio Fernández y Felisberto Hernández*, author Julio Prieto does indeed speak to the commonalities between Duchamp's and Macedonio's approaches to constructing an artistic object.

<sup>259</sup> Though certainly apropos, an analysis of Felisberto Hernández's short stories and novellas will not fit the current study.

<sup>260</sup> Garth outlines Macedonio's relationships (or lack thereof) to both the international and the more autochthonous, Argentine avant-gardes as follows: "Macedonio remained simultaneously apart from and a part of the Argentine avant-garde for consciously aesthetic and ethical reasons. While he seized upon what he saw as the fruitful aspects of avant-garde poetics and practices, he distanced himself from those aspects that – unknown to the Martinfierristas themselves – ran counter to his own poetic and ethical vision. [...] Macedonio's poetics in many ways coincide with much more closely to the principles of the historical avant-garde in Europe, at least when viewed retrospectively. That kinship with European movements is a result of Macedonio's faith in the relationship between art and daily life more than with adherence to aesthetic programs. Much of the difficulty in reconciling Macedonio with his Argentine peers boils down to their different responses to the same problems. Macedonio is in complete accord with the Martinfierristas in their search for a new relationship between aesthetic practice and life

not always posit himself as being completely up-to-date, as having his finger on the pulse of what really goes on in the world, in the twentieth century, today. Nevertheless, with respect to his metaphysical approach to philosophy and aesthetics, Macedonio makes the following egotistical statement in *Museo*:

No creo que nadie que haya sentido el Misterio (el Misterio de sentir, diría: sentir el misterio de sentir, quizá diría [William] James) aportó una iluminación más clara que la que yo habré traído. La verdad en esas páginas no se resentiría aún si apareciesen ellas en una edición de Kant, Hegel, como parte de obra de éstos. (34-35)

Macedonio thus conceives of himself as thinking both ahead of and behind the curve, it seems. When behind the curve, such supposedly uninformed activity in the face of so many different options of and for organization is not simply a matter of Macedonio feigning ignorance or playing dumb. Rather, as Samuel Monder shows in his essay, “Macedonio Fernández y el lenguaje de la filosofía,” this distancing, or self-marginalizing, allows Macedonio enough room for maneuver to resist or “betray,” traditional discourses: “Este distanciamiento le permite transcribir el discurso de la filosofía en un espacio diferente, sacando a la luz sus secretos con el objeto de traicionarlos” (82).

Macedonio actively betrays and creatively resists what, at the time, would have been the dominant aesthetic and avant-garde discourses as well. Just as Alan Pauls was cited at the start of the previous chapter for saying that “Arlt, en realidad, va en otro sentido,” Monder, simply, but suitably, declares apropos of Macedonio: “Su programa es diferente” (250, 99). That being said, if Pauls statement was questioned before, it should

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experience. But for Macedonio, the reform of the relationship relies largely on a radical reconsideration of subjectivity. Macedonio exploited avant-garde techniques in order to expose the avant-garde movements’ inadequate efforts to discard subjectivity” (49).

be noted here that Macedonio never really elucidates a comprehensive “program” *per se*. Rather than attach himself and adhere to a particular program, Macedonio constantly invents, reinvents, undoes, and, like Arlt, resists and betrays others’ programs, along with whatever might constitute his own.<sup>261</sup> Hence, rather than a program, a “configuration” emerges, as Diego Vecchio deems it (36). This configuration puts forth connected and connecting and, concomitantly, disordered and disordering, distanced and distancing, concepts for ways of living, thinking, and creating – of doing and undoing. Moreover, as Macedonio himself says in one of *Museo*’s approximately fifty-six prologues, this one aptly entitled “Prólogo de desesperanza de autor”:

El desorden de mi libro es el de todas las vidas y obras aparentemente ordenadas. La congruencia, un plan que se ejecuta, en una novela, en una obra de psicología o biología, en una metafísica, es un engaño del mundo literario y quizá de todo lo artístico y científico.

Es mistificación de Kant, de Schopenhauer, de Wagner casi siempre, de Cervantes, de Goethe, aparentar una congruidad, un plan en sus obras. (95)

By this point, it should come as no surprise that the major points of reference here for Macedonio are, apart from Cervantes, primarily German philosophers more or less involved in a discussion regarding what we have been calling *humanism*. Surely, in Ortega’s continuation and radicalization of the humanist tradition, this sense of an ordering “mystification” applies to his obsession with creating and maintaining order as well. Ortega’s philosophy acts as a mechanism that strives to make order “apparent” as an incontrovertible reality; that is, strives to make the distinguished and distinguishing order of the Orteguian glass window an incontrovertible reality. Yet, in comparison,

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<sup>261</sup> Eagleton: “Aesthetics is thus always a contradictory, self-undoing sort of project, which in promoting the theoretical value of its object risks emptying it of exactly that specificity or ineffability which was thought to rank among its most precious features. The very language which elevates art offers perpetually to undermine it” (2-3).

Macedonio allows for disorder and chooses to work within it, deeming it to be a necessary, if confusing, component of life and, thus, any life's work.

Saying all of this now constitutes nothing necessarily new, though. Despite Macedonio's patent inventiveness, he ultimately gives little if any credence to the possibility of anything being new or original in the first place. He explains himself here in one of *Museo*'s most frequently cited prologues:

Todo se ha escrito, todo se ha dicho, todo se ha hecho, oyó Dios que le decían y aun no había creado el mundo, todavía no había nada. También eso ya me lo han dicho, repuso quizá desde la vieja hendidada Nada. Y comenzó.

Una frase de música del pueblo me cantó una rumana y luego la he hallado diez veces en distintas obras y autores de los últimos cuatrocientos años. Es indudable que las cosas no comienzan cuando se las inventa. O el mundo fue inventado antiguo. (8)

Although, not one to not contradict himself, Macedonio also states, "Efectividad de autor es sólo de invención" (*Museo* 47). That being so, his idiosyncratic idea of invention conceives of invention as being more a tool of and for repetition and repetitive potential – difference and repetition, one could say – as opposed to an invention materializing itself, on its own, as something totally unique and original. "For," as Garth observes, "the only sort of invention possible in a world without a subject – without autonomous selves to invent new things – is a world in which inventions are either always potential or always repetitions" (82).

As it is with Arlt, then, Macedonio's inventive employment of contradiction and confusion as forces and expressions of *the new* is, in and of itself, nothing new. For that matter, and as Macedonio argues here specifically against Kant, nothing is ever *in and of itself*, either before, after, or somehow outside of experience and/or sensation.

Macedonio definitively presents his position in 1928 in *No todo es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos*, where he posits that the Kantian concept of the *noumenon* is an idea in error:

La presente publicación se inspira principalmente en el deseo de dejar argumentada una protesta, contra el “noumenismo.” Asombra que los pensadores, más aún, los artistas, y sobre todo los hombres de la pasión – única justificación y fin de la vida y del arte y única condición en que hay una felicidad posible – no se hayan unido en protesta y para trabajar en la liberación del pensamiento humano de la impuras sombras que Kant le insufló, usando un poder intelectual privilegiado en negar la substancialidad del vivir y la adecuación de la inteligencia al ser, la Conocibilidad. El noumeno y el agnosticismo son las peores obras de la inteligencia, y si la Pasión no se hizo renunciante al contacto de estas dos tristezas, es porque ella es la certeza misma y el ser mismo. Pero hay algo en el día humano actual, en el Día posterior a Kant, que hace imperfecto el unísono de deslumbramiento con que el Día debe enloquecer a la Pasión. (241)<sup>262</sup>

Among other things, this is to say that subjects, objects, and the phenomena in between solely exist according to their relations with the rest of the world; oftentimes, these relations, like the terms themselves, are confused. This is also to say that relations are external to their terms.<sup>263</sup> No world, no thing, nothing exists outside of or as being transcendental to the one we know and experience. Hence, as Vecchio concludes, and as

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<sup>262</sup> A favorable book review of *No todo es vigilia* can be found in issue 17 of *Síntesis* from October of 1928. Written by Miguel A. Virasoro, the review introduces Macedonio, this specific work, and his general philosophy vis-à-vis the philosophy of the times in the following manner: “Si hay una conquista definitiva del pensamiento moderno, es la de la verdad de nuestra conciencia no puede trascenderse a sí mismo en el conocimiento y que, por lo tanto, toda afirmación de una realidad objetiva anterior a la experiencia, es hipotética y arbitraria. En este sentido toda especulación filosófica deberá partir necesariamente de una posición subjetivista. Pero el subjetivismo, llevado a sus consecuencias absolutas, recluye al yo en la soledad angustiada de sí mismo, precipitando todos los valores de la cultura en un nihilismo desolador. Toda la filosofía posterior a Berkeley, no hace más que girar alrededor del problema de la posibilidad de superar el solipsismo, manteniéndolo fiel al método inmanente. El autor [Macedonio Fernández] es quizá quien dentro de esta tendencia ha llevado a una estrictez más extrema la posición inmanentista, superando inconcientemente el subjetivismo [...]” (224-25).

<sup>263</sup> Deleuze explains something similar, albeit in Spinozan terms, in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*: “So an animal, a thing, is never separable from its relations in the world. The interior is only a selected interior, and the exterior, a projected interior. The speed or slowness of metabolisms, perceptions, actions, and reactions link together to constitute a particular individual in the world” (125).

it was said earlier with respect to Ramón, “Ahora podemos decir que el campo fenoménico que Macedonio llama mundo, experiencia, ser, realidad, sensibilidad es uno solo” (49).

The citation above from *No todo es vigilia* also declares in no uncertain terms the primacy of *Passion* (often, though not always, capitalized) in Macedonio’s vital, literary outlook. As he says it himself, Macedonio conceives of *No todo es vigilia* as “un alegato pro passion contra el intelectualismo extenuante (232).<sup>264</sup> This declaration applies to his entire *oeuvre*, to be sure.

Now, to trace a brief, insufficient genealogy of passion – a term that always exceeds sufficiency – Macedonio’s most admired philosophical hero, Arthur Schopenhauer, will serve as the primary reference point.<sup>265</sup> In *The World as Will And*

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<sup>264</sup> The book is also, in keeping with its title, an affirmation of the lack of a distinct, discernible difference between wakefulness and dreaming. This theory, like many of Macedonio’s comes from Schopenhauer, and can be summed up here in an extended and aptly literary metaphor provided by the German philosopher in *The World as Will And Representation Vol. I*: “Life and dreams are leaves of one and the same book. The systematic reading is real life, but when the actual reading hour (the day) has come to an end, and we have the period of recreation, we often continue idly to thumb over the leaves, and turn to a page here and there without method or connexion [sic]. We sometimes turn up a page we have already read, at others one still unknown to us, but always from the same book. Such an isolated page is, of course, not connected with a consistent reading and study of the book, yet it is not so very inferior thereto, if we note that the whole of the consistent perusal begins and ends also on the spur of the moment, and can therefore be regarded merely as a larger single page. Thus, although individual dreams are marked off from real life by the fact that they do not fit into the continuity of experience that runs constantly through life, and waking up indicates this difference, yet that very continuity of experience belongs to real life as its form, and the dream can likewise point to a continuity in itself. Now if we assume a standpoint of judgment external to both, we find no distinct difference in their nature, and are forced to concede to the poets that life is a long dream” (18).

<sup>265</sup> In *Macedonio Fernández, un escritor de Fin de Siglo*, Mónica Bueno remarks, “Muchas veces se ha dicho – se ha escrito desde la filosofía – que todo el mérito de Macedonio consiste en repetir el pensamiento de Schopenhauer” (124). This argument will not be echoed here, however.

*Representation Vol. I* Schopenhauer conceives of passion thus: “when passion is spoken of, we can subsume this under the concept of the greatest force, of the mightiest agency in the world, or under the concept of irrationality, and this under the concept of powerlessness or weakness” (49). Naturally, and as Schopenhauer opines, passion works in more than one way. It could be, however, that, in twisting the master’s words, passion’s very relation to and potential for the irrational makes its polifacetic nature so powerful for, Macedonio, the student of philosophy, the philosophical *newcomer*.<sup>266</sup> It could be that, at passion’s expense, overreliance on reason ultimately limits affective life; as Monder puts it, this would mean “la sensibilidad cegada ante la luz de la razón” (97). Reason can act in such a way – as a blinding, rather than an illuminating, force – by attempting to permanently, situate a variable and disordered world according to abstract principles that fail to take account of the potentially productive nature of these very characteristics; to say nothing of the fact that these same characteristics make up what supposedly occupies and centers this world: the Subject.

Meanwhile, in a brief essay entitled “El arte en presente y pretérito,” Ortega, always contradictory in his own way, says the following with respect to reason: “Nada profundo y evidente nace ni vive de razones. Se razona lo dudoso, lo probable, lo que no creemos del todo” (220). Although Ortega might speak of reason’s dubious nature here and, as a *soi-disant* vitalist, promote life’s general exaltation, he rarely, if ever, speaks of irrationality and passion as Macedonio does. Furthermore, while Ortega, like Kant and Schiller before him, speaks of free play’s profound capacity to enhance the “open disposition” of the properly, morally, and aesthetically discerning human subject, the free

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<sup>266</sup> Note that this is not the same sort of rationalizing, ordering passion found in Mallea.

play of Macedonio's passion finds its power in its constant inconstancy, rather than in a supposedly ordered and ordering feeling that is consonant with a binding sense of moral superiority. Anyone can be free to play because anyone is, because they are, expressions of a passionate ontology – not just those who supposedly share an ontological purpose with the beautiful. Passion can combine with reason, too, of course, but it does not necessarily do so in order to promote a master morality or dominate the world. Passion – irrational and rational, reasonable and unreasonable, bound and unbound – need not impose itself on the world, because, for Macedonio, it is the world.

In affirming passion, Macedonio thus affirms the irrational, to boot. He allows this very human attribute to be involved in life and function with reason – an impulse which, really, can be totally passionate as well.<sup>267</sup> Schopenhauer remarks that, “many human actions are performed by the aid of reason and deliberate method, yet some are better achieved without their application” (58-59). As discourse qua discourse, reason has its limits and, consequently, imposes limits. Passion, on the other hand, serves to obscure limits, discursive and otherwise, if not nullify them altogether. Prieto properly characterizes this limit-less nature of Macedonio's work, speaking to how it operates as “una entrega sin límites a lo ilimitado – a la Pasión” (“El saber” 112). Macedonio recognizes passion's powers because life's often irrational, disordered, dynamic, limitless, and, to repeat, passionate nature tells him so.<sup>268</sup> Via the living concept of passion, Macedonio acts as what Schopenhauer would call a “practical philosopher,” one

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<sup>267</sup> In this sense, Macedonio perhaps differs from Spinoza. Macedonio works within passion and embraces it, however fleeting, if also impossible, such an embrace might be, whereas Spinoza sees passion as something to be ultimately overcome.

<sup>268</sup> Although Macedonio rarely, if ever, cites Nietzsche, his conception of passion nevertheless appears to be thoroughly *Dionysian* in its actively self-undoing nature, especially vis-à-vis what Nietzsche writes in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

who “translate[s] the concept into life” (90). Of course, Macedonio “translates” passion into his art as well.

Now, let us return to Macedonio’s own peculiar definition of passion. He declares: “[L]a pasión – única justificación y fin de la vida y del arte y única condición en que hay una felicidad posible [...] la certeza misma y el ser mismo” (*No Todo* 241).

Passion does its greatest work in life, is indeed, as Schopenhauer says, the “greatest force, of the mightiest agency” withal, when coupled with love – itself a potentially mixed-up phenomenon. And if passion is life, then so too is love:

La vida se constituye de dos cosas: amor y suple-amores. El arte, la ciencia, el interés por la humanidad, ningún valor tienen en sí: o nacen del amor, para comentarlo, o suplen su momentánea o perdurable ausencia. [...] La vida sin compañía de amor o esperanza próxima y preciosa de haberla, es [...] como los ojos abiertos del ciego. El egoísmo es la única soledad, la única desdicha. (*Adriana* 165)<sup>269</sup>

Such conceptions of passion and love work against the exceedingly humanistic mandate of and for rational judgment, and, to repeat, against what is supposedly constituted by and constitutive of ratiocination and judgment: namely, the Human Subject. Macedonio conceives of the practice of love as an altruistic and thus radically non-judgmental act in which passionately, ethically – “la ética (que es toda la emoción de simpatía y la acción que ella provoca; la ética es la trasposición del yo, el disyoísmo)” – and perhaps even politically, the subject undoes and gives of his/herself to an other (*Teorías* 238).<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Always one to repeat himself, albeit with slight variations in tone and composition, Macedonio asserts the following in *No todo es vigilia*: “*Un Estado, cultura, arte, ciencia o libro no hechos / para servir a la Pasión, directa o indirectamente, / no tienen explicación*” (230 emphasis in original).

<sup>270</sup> In *The Political Life of Sensation*, Davide Panagia speaks to ethics in a similar way, noting that “they [ethics] compel us to relinquish our attachments and acknowledge that our subjectivities are inconsistent and open to repetitions of articulation” (4). According

Furthermore, and to return this genealogical tracing of passion from whence it came, Schopenhauer argues in favor of an identical life process as well, saying, “if the Ideas are to become object of knowledge, this can happen only by abolishing individuality in the knowing subject” (169). For Macedonio, the “Idea,” as life itself, is Passion.

Expressions similar in tenor and tone to these pro-passion, good-riddance to the self, all-is-love remarks one emerge throughout Macedonio’s works, providing them their most distinctive consonance. That said, this consonance also acts as a dissonance. For passion functions as being precisely because it destabilizes, deterritorializes, undoes, and makes immanent one’s sense of self, one’s very being. In “Immanence: a Life” Deleuze maintains that, “A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is complete power, complete beatitude” (391). For Macedonio, “life” is correlative to passion. In addition, passion functions as certainty because it is so fleeting and mercurial: passion as thought, being, and life in constant, infinite, intensive motion. Passion as flux: flux as being: “La Pasión no tiene pensamiento de situación, de tiempo, de comparaciones” (*Museo* 135). Love, in turn, functions as a great life force because it forces one to take account of a life besides one’s own. Passion as being and certainty because it necessarily betrays them both; love as the subject’s lifework because it necessarily betrays the subject. Monder further clarifies Macedonio’s anti-representational conceptions of passion, love, and de-Subjectification here:

A la metafísica de representación Fernández opone una metafísica de la Pasión. Se trata de encontrar un modelo alternativo al del sujeto moderno: el sujeto de Pasión es un sujeto descentrado; aunque éste sea de difícil conceptualización, se supone que todos sabemos lo que es en el momento en que amamos: ahí dejamos de ser un sujeto de conocimiento (entendido como sujeto de representación) y nos

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to Macedonio’s aesthetico-political life of sensation, then, what is relinquished, ethically, is the Self.

convierte en algo que a no se define sino en términos de un yo ajeno. Fernández habla de una “traslación” del yo. Quizás el término clásico sea el de “simpatía”: sentir con el otro, sentir en mí a otro, ser el otro en mí.” (95 emphasis in original)<sup>271</sup>

Passion and love therefore operate in sympathetic concert as one of Macedonio’s most memorable refrains, the *ritornello*, if also the *fugue*, that returns again and again, giving some sort of harmonious shape and sound, however inconsistent, to his often otherwise discordant and chaotic works.

As Deleuze and Guattari explain it in *What is Philosophy?*, this relationship between consistency and chaos expresses the “problem” of philosophy and thought. “The problem of philosophy,” they say, “is to acquire a consistency without losing the infinite into which thought plunges (in this respect chaos has as much a mental as a physical existence). *To give consistency without losing anything of the infinite [...]*” (42 emphasis in original). This relationship also addresses the “problem” of aesthetic creation – a problem presented in practice and without a final solution in Macedonio’s works. That his philosophy, intimate as it is with his aesthetic creations, gives all that is infinite in passionate being does not mean that it lacks any sort of consistency whatsoever. Nevertheless, since passion provides this consistency, the very stuff that gives his works some semblance of stability – again, passion, over and over again – also functions to destabilize and undo these works, along with the very possibility of a complete or completed work. In this way, Jo Anne Engelbert is able to proclaim that Macedonio’s works present themselves as “nothing less than an alternative to a typical *work* of art [...] the antithesis of the typical artifact of Western culture” (12). “To give the infinite without

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<sup>271</sup> The importance of “sympathy” will be examined in further detail in the following and final sections.

losing anything of consistency,” perhaps it could be said, then, with respect to Macedonio... To be sure, these works are painstakingly *informal*. Still, Macedonio’s seemingly random configuration does contain a few at least somewhat tightly formed, if also dynamic, conceptual constellations.<sup>272</sup> He, too, has his tenets, even if these tenets ultimately disrupt, interrupt one another via the active contradictions and confluences that serve to obscure, if not make downright problematic, both their singular conceptual premises and the relations between them.

In the main, these concepts fall under the general heading of a composite aesthetic-ontological-political-ethical constellation, a “metafísica no discursiva [...] que se da en la artística,” that Macedonio calls, among other things, *Belarte* (*Museo* 34). Perhaps the most concise, if, by design, necessarily indirect, explanation of *Belarte* can be found in a brief essay Macedonio most likely wrote around 1927. Like most of his work, the essay, entitled “Para una teoría del arte,” remained largely unpublished for years, though it is now presented in *Teorías*, Volume VII of his complete works. That Macedonio’s essay operates as a sort of manifesto in its own right, *a la Marinetti’s* Futurism, Ortega’s *Deshumanización*, Arlt’s “Palabras del autor,” and so on, cannot be denied. However, because the majority of the essay was not published until years later, Macedonio here again shows his reluctance to engage directly in, along with his

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<sup>272</sup> Deleuze and Guattari explain the nature of the concept here in *What is Philosophy?*: “There are no simple concepts. Every concept has components and is defined by them. It therefore has a combination. It is a multiplicity, although not every multiplicity is conceptual. There is no concept with only one component. [...] Every concept has an irregular contour defined by the sum of its components, which is why, from Plato to Bergson, we find the idea of the concept being a matter of articulation, of cutting and cross-cutting. The concept is a whole because it totalizes its components, but it is a fragmentary whole. Only on this condition can it escape the mental chaos constantly threatening it, stalking it, trying to reabsorb it” (15-16). Although, it could be said that, at times, Macedonio allows his concepts to be chaotic as well.

complicated relationship to, the high avant-garde *milieu* of the time. This does not make the piece any less significant.

In the essay one notes, first and foremost, that aesthetic practice is essentially reflexive, and thus inseparable from aesthetic theory. “Dicho en otros términos,” Macedonio asserts, “un arte es tanto más Belarte: 1) cuanto más consciente, es decir respondiente a un plan voluntario de técnica. [...] Arte consciente en el artista, es decir con posesión clara de toda la teoría estética de su arte y obra [...]” (*Teorías* 237, 242).<sup>273</sup> A reader encounters this hyper-conscious combination of practice and theory in their most confusing, conflated, and reflexive forms in the novels – again, “bad” and “good,” respectively – *Adriana Buenos Aires* and *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*. Before directly addressing these novels, though, a general outline of *Belarte*, however confusing and tedious it may be, is required.

*Belarte*, in principle, operates as an artistic practice that, analogous to Macedonio’s ideas regarding being and the self, continually deterritorializes, doubts, undoes, and calls Art itself into question. “En Arte,” Macedonio asserts, “mayor confianza merecen las obras de duda de arte que las de certidumbre de arte” (235). Such an artistic practice, also otherwise known as *dudarte*, expresses itself as a problematic, non-sensorially-pleasing art that serves as a counter to what Macedonio calls *Arte*

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<sup>273</sup> Although Jitrik grumbles that, “Como a pesar de la brevedad de su obra sus enunciados tienen innumerables variantes, el resultado de los análisis no ha podido ser sino un conjunto de nociones relativamente simplificadas o bien una reproducción de la maraña macedoniana en la que un concepto reitera corrigiendo o ratificando uno anterior y así incesantemente,” one finds it hard not to analyze *Belarte* in something like these not-so-analytical ways, at least when initially introducing the concept (33-34). That said, Deleuze, Nietzsche, and Macedonio all see a productive quality to repetition, provided it provides difference as well.

*Culinaria*: “Belarte debe llamarse al Arte, para excluir netamente la sensorialidad cuyo oficio y cultivo debe llamarse Culinaria” (235).

Along with his disdain for such an *Arte Culinaria* that merely and purposefully plays on and appeals to the senses, Macedonio, much like Ortega, finds realism to be a spurious art form as well. To return to *La deshumanización*, Ortega says, “es el caso que el objeto artístico sólo es artístico en la medida en que no es real. [...] El realismo [...] invitando al artista a seguir dócilmente la forma de las cosas, le invita a no tener estilo” (20, 40). *Estilo* therefore works as a correlative of *técnica*. In Ortega’s mind, true, aesthetic *técnica* implies an unreal, ultra-artistic, and therefore *dehumanized* style in order to be considered representative of *el arte nuevo*:

Aunque sea imposible un arte puro, no hay duda alguna de que cabe una tendencia a la purificación del arte. Esta tendencia llevará a una eliminación progresiva de los elementos humanos, demasiado humanos, que dominaban en la producción romántica y naturalista. [...] Ahora bien: estilizar es deformar lo real, desrealizar. Estilización implica deshumanización. Y, viceversa, no hay otra manera de deshumanizar que estilizar. (22, 40)

Any properly aesthetic technique dehumanizes. In fact, according to Ortega’s program, technique itself works as a correlative of dehumanization.

Obviously, Macedonio utilizes different terms to conceive of *Belarte*.

Nevertheless, he also speaks to realism’s artistic deficiency because of its mimetic method that supposes a *real*-ization of the world, as opposed to something more technically and stylistically inventive: “El Realismo es la mentira del Arte. [...] Realismo es para mí todo el arte que no es pura técnica. [...] El Arte [...] es por esencia lo sin realidad, lo limpiamente inauténtico, exento de la miseria informativa, instructiva [...]” (*Teorías* 241). Unpleasing, unreal, inauthentic, and uninformative, *Belarte* – that is, Art – is all about artistic technique and the ways in which this technical expression and

execution produces new possibilities for otherwise unknown emotions in the human being. Engelbert further explains Macedonio's rejection of realism as follows:

In Macedonio's view, realistic art, like the Kantian metaphysics, denied the primacy of experience. As the phenomenal world in Kant's system points beyond itself to a more real noumenal realm, the realistic work of art, however stylized or expressive, points beyond the aesthetic itself to a more real model. (107)

In a rare moment, Macedonio goes on to categorically contend that, "Fuera de la técnica, no hay arte" (326).

Thus in agreement, both aesthetes ultimately believe technique and style to be of utmost importance in artistic creation. Would Macedonio call *Belarte* dehumanized art or call dehumanized art *Belarte*, though? At this point, technically speaking, yes, insofar as dehumanized art consciously expresses itself with an awareness of itself as art, thereby reducing the immediately emotional and sensationalistically *human* elements that would have been previously expressed in the "culinary" arts of realism, romanticism, and modernism (in the Hispanic *modernismo* sense). Yet, getting away from the human ultimately concerns Macedonio less than getting at being. While Ortega and Macedonio might both disapprove of the state of the modern mass of humanity that they see before them, Macedonio does not concur with Ortega in the belief that art necessarily confirms the humanity of a select few. Rather, *Belarte*, effectively a unique mode of questioning affectively, calls into question the category of the human precisely because such an exclusive category contributes to the separation of certain humans from others. In this regard, *Belarte* also works with a categorical human, but does so in order to problematize it, not keep it separated from the rest of the world behind a protective glass window. All of the other reasons to say "yes" and "no" to the dehumanization question remain to be articulated in what follows.

While other avant-garde conceptions of what makes art “art” tend to privilege painting or poetry, i.e. those of Ortega, Macedonio uniquely, if not also self-servingly, insists that prose writing serves as the best technique for properly articulating *Belarte*. To begin, this is because the rather insipid characters and letters used for writing are the least effective for immediately and affecting the senses. As Macedonio explains in “Para una teoría de la novela,” a piece that serves as a recapitulation and slight extension of “Para una teoría del arte”:

una arte es tanto más pura cuanto menos grato a los sentidos es su órgano o medio de comunicación: el retrato de un anciano descolorido, marchito, es un tipo de arte puro aunque no indirecto como debe ser el arte, sin agrado alguno sensorial; los desagradables signos de la escritura son también puros de toda sensorialidad. (*Teorías* 255)

Another aspect of *Belarte* that shows how Macedonio ultimately privileges the (prosaic) literary can be seen in how he gives *Belarte* another name: *Autorística*. As he puts it, “Yo propondría como mejor nombre del Arte el de Autorística” (235). Clearly, this is a denomination that holds the literary, novelistic author in highest esteem. Therefore, given its indirect, non-sensorial nature, as an artistic technique, as *Autorística*, “La *belarte* perfecta es la Prosa” (250). In particular, prose writing composed in a novel – a genre which at the time Ortega believes to be exhausted (*Deshumanización* 23-24).

Nevertheless, as he says in *Ideas sobre la novela* in his typically literary style, Ortega asserts that the novel can, perhaps, still bear “egregious<sup>274</sup> fruits:”

creo que es la novela una de las pocas labranzas que aún puede rendir frutos egregios, tal vez más exquisitos que todos los de anteriores cosechas. Como producción genérica correcta, como mina explotable cabe sospechar que la novela ha concluido. Las grandes venas someras, abiertas a todo esfuerzo laborioso, se han agotado. Pero quedan los filones secretos, las arriesgadas exploraciones en lo

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<sup>274</sup> In light of the current context, it is interesting to note that “egregious” can mean both good and bad, though here Ortega clearly means it to describe what is possibly good.

profundo donde, acaso, yacen los cristales mejores. Mas esto es faena para espíritus de rara selección. (143)

At times, in his more pompous moments, Macedonio considers himself to be a “spirit of rare selection,” too. Yet, difficult as it may be, via both his presence and his absence, his awareness and his ignorance, Macedonio, unlike Ortega, hopes to share this spirit with others. And despite the fact that Macedonio considers the novel to be a tired, culinary, “bad” genre as well, he also holds fast to the idea that *Belarte*’s and *Autorística*’s techniques can invigorate the novel’s form, use, and overall “goodness.”

Taken together, then, *Belarte* and *Autorística* act as interchangeable, novelistic concepts. Here, Macedonio expands upon the ways in which *Belarte* and *Autorística* operate against *Arte Culinaria*, *Realismo*, and other bad arts that, altogether too facilely, appeal directly to the senses in order to directly please them. For, just the same, there exists an emotion in *Belarte* and *Autorística* too:

la Autorística – que no copia mentes ni cosas – típica, o el Arte, nace de emoción impráctica y suscita emoción impráctica, nunca de sensación y para sensación. El Arte es emoción, estado de ánimo, jamás sensación. [...] [L]o único posible y artístico es la *suscitación* de las emociones. (236 emphasis in original)

On one hand, *Arte Culinaria* “se aproveche de lo sensorial, por su agrado en sí, no como signo de emoción a suscitar” (236). *Belarte*, on the other hand, traffics in a different kind of emotion, as detailed and contrasted with “sensorial” emotion here: “Hay que definir la emoción para el Arte, que es sólo emoción, aunque no toda emoción es arte ni belleza. Bajo el análisis, la emoción es un complejo de sensaciones, pero su origen es central-mental, y el de la sensación es periférico, bruto” (238). That is, the special kind of beautiful emotion “indirectly” provoked or aroused by *Belarte* is not a pleasing sensation, but rather a particular “impractical” complex assemblage of sensations that make up this

emotion, which, in turn, connects to one's intellectual, mental core. Even though he says that "El Arte no es un fenómeno de Belleza," Beauty is still intrinsic to a certain emotional intelligence as one of Art's possible expressions (236).

Hence, Macedonio does refer to *Belarte* as being "intelectualista" due to its dependence on and basis in a specific kind of emotional intelligence solely amenable to specific aesthetic technique (258). In other words, "El Arte está sólo en la técnica de suscitación de estados que no están en la vida, ni en el lector ni en el autor, sin esa técnica [...]" (241). Without the combination of intelligence, emotion, art, and life, certain affective states remain unknown, unfelt; within these combinations, they can become known, experienced. Deleuze and Guattari speak to this specifically artistic effective and affectiveness in *What is Philosophy?*: "artists are presenters of affects, the inventors and creators of affects. They not only create them in their work, they give them to us and make us become with them, they draw us into the compound" (175). Ortega speaks of something akin to this curious "compound" as well, albeit in his own way:

Tenemos, pues, que improvisar otra forma de trato por completo distinta del usual vivir de las cosas; hemos de crear e inventar actos inéditos que sean adecuados a aquellas figuras insólitas. Esta nueva vida, esta vida inventada previa anulación de la espontánea, es precisamente la comprensión y el goce artísticos. No faltan en ella sentimientos y pasiones, pero evidentemente estas pasiones y sentimientos pertenecen a una flora psíquica muy distinta de la que cubre los paisajes de nuestra vida primaria y humana. Son emociones secundarias que en nuestro artista interior provocan esos ultra-objetos. Son sentimientos específicamente estéticos. (*Deshumanización* 35)

For Ortega, then, in a new life in which "aquellas figuras insólitas" and "esos ultra-objetos" function as the figures, the objects of a *el arte nuevo*, the emotional outcome for the proper, art-experiencing subject is ultimately one of artistic comprehension and pleasure. A gratifying, Self-satisfying and, lest we forget, thoroughly contemplative

orientation – all stimulated by visual recognition of a superior reflexive form. Meanwhile – What does such an experience amount to in *Belarte*? A shocking disorientation.

It is a matter of reading and writing.

For Macedonio, aesthetic theory – intellectual as it is emotional – is literary theory. It follows that, as Vecchio puts it, “La teoría de la literatura es una teoría de la lectura” (72). Plus, since *Belarte* operates primarily, if not almost exclusively, on a literary level, it is the reader who feels provoked within his/herself their particular, if rather vaguely described, emotion when indirectly confronted with something approaching a pure artistic technique – a technique best articulated what could be the least immediately inspiring artistic form: the novel.

Engelbert says that, “As a metaphysician, Macedonio had discovered [...] that the novel has enormous potential for the awakening of philosophical insight” (1). In truth, a novel’s writer values little if his/her technique compels the reader feel nothing. Yet, to try and be more specific, what is this emotion aroused by *Belarte* within the reader, this metaphysical, “philosophical insight?” It is itself a feeling of nothing, of nothingness. It is the confusing, arresting suggestion of the reader’s own inexistence: “conmoción *total* de la conciencia” (*Museo* 18 emphasis in original); “un ‘choque de inexistencia’” (*Museo* 38); “el mareo de su sentimiento de certidumbre de ser, el mareo de su yo” (*Teorías* 258). Ultimately, if also *untimely*, “esta emoción de inexistencia en el lector es lo que se propone lograr el artista” (*Teorías* 246). Coupled with the reader’s ontological disequilibrium arises the feeling of being read, of a “creencia en la racionalidad del absurdo” – that is, of being a character in the novel being read (248). Macedonio sums up this creative, destructive, and relational process as follows:

En resumen: la única Literatura o Prosa artística [...] es la que tiende no al realismo sino a irrealizar al Hombre o al Cosmos, es decir: la Prosa no tiene otro fin artístico que el metafísico obtenido, perseguido no discursivamente sino por impresión de absurdo creído, o de auto-inexistencia creída, luego de una preparación, no racionante, progresiva, preanunciada hasta una Conclusión, sino sorpresiva. (249)

*Belarte* thus challenges any sort of a static subjectivity. If it privileges a specific artist technique, this privileging functions to de-subjectify and effectively/affectively undo those affected by this technique. In having the author give of him/herself to the reader in *Belarte*, the reader, in turn, loses his/her sense of self, however momentarily, however eternally, in the reading process. In a “surprising” act of passion and love, in an act of aesthetics and reading, the subject (the reader) and the object (the work) do nothing more than totally dis-identify each other, become one another, affirming metaphysically, doubtfully what is and what is not. Being and non-being become, question, refashion, and affirm one another.

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze speaks to the active, affirmative, and problematizing relationship of being and non-being in a comparable way. Here, he asserts:

It is as though there were an ‘opening,’ a ‘gap,’ an ontological ‘fold’ which relates being and the question to one another. In this relation, being is difference itself. Being is also non-being, *but non-being is not the being of the negative*; rather, it is the being of the problematic, the being of problem and question. Difference is not the negative; on the contrary, non-being is Difference: *heteron*, not *enantion*. For this reason non-being should rather be written (non)-being or, better still, ?-being. (64 emphasis in original)

Macedonio, in his own conception of ontology, believes that fiction, given its ability to make believe and make not believe, given how it works as such an incredibly credible tool, functions as the ideal site and tool for the possibility of being believing, feeling, and becoming “(non)-being.” As described above by Deleuze, then, fiction functions as this

“opening,” “gap,” or “fold” for Macedonio. At least, that is, fiction effectively and affectively fashioned as *Belarte*. Fiction which both does and does not believe in itself, with doubt as the basis of its faith: ?-fiction, ?-novel, ?-art...

Altogether indicative of *Belarte*, this process and technique of problematically relating being to non-being, receives a different, if also repetitive, description in *Museo*. Here, however, it comes with one important caveat not yet treated: namely that this metaphysical suspension of Self brought on in the reader also serves as a means to an end that is meant to put an end to death as an end. That is:

Si en cada uno de mis libros he logrado dos o tres veces un instante de lo que llamaré en lenguaje hogareño una “sofocación,” un “sofocón” en la certidumbre de continuidad personal, un resbalar de sí mismo el lector, es todo lo que quise como medio; y como fin busco la liberación de la noción de la muerte: la evanescencia, trocabilidad, rotación, turnación del yo lo hace inmortal, es decir no ligado su destino al de su cuerpo. (33-34)

If *Belarte*, as a correlate of *la Pasión*, disconcerts limits, and if the concept of the self limits the reality of being, then why not disconcert the self’s ultimate limit, the limit to all discursive theories and practices, death? If in Salinas’ “Mundo cerrado” the protagonist’s quest for transcendent knowledge finds death to be such a knowledge’s ultimate limit, Macedonio takes on this limit, immanently. For life includes death; and all there is to really know is life, anyway. Macedonio’s metaphysics places being in death, within that which limits the self in order to decompose this limit. “*Haya poder contra la Muerte: el Ser no tiene ley, / todo es Posible,*” affirms Macedonio in *No todo es vigilia* (229 emphasis in original).<sup>275</sup> And, as it was with the metaphysical poet John Donne who once

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<sup>275</sup> The second part of this affirmation regarding *el Ser* could not be any more different than what Ortega asserts regarding *la vida* in *El tema de nuestro tiempo*: “la vida no es un proceso extrínseco donde simplemente se adicionan contingencias. La vida es una seria de hechos regida por una ley” (22).

said, “And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die,” Macedonio, being the metaphysical amorist that he is, sees death as offering little challenge to being’s loving, *toda-posibilidad* in his own immanent effort to “irrealizar el Hombre y el Cosmos.”<sup>276</sup>

Ortega, who does speak of the need to “desrealizar” in dehumanized art, has little to nothing to say about the possibility of creatively undoing destinies, systems, subjects, and objects, of effectively/affectively “dis-realizing the Cosmos” and the limits supposedly contained therein. As Ortega foresaw it, dehumanized art does not so much question the human individual and his/her relation to the full and the void as it serves as a thinly-veiled attempt to make void a certain sector of humanity’s desire for a full life because of their apparent bad taste. Ortega’s metaphysics, in its relation to his aesthetics, requires limits, transcendental planes, monolithic concepts, absolute distances. Macedonio’s metaphysics, as expressed within his philosophical, aesthetic, incomplete, and informal works, is by no means totally immune to transcendental moments – even if constantly in motion, this is metaphysics we are talking about here after all! Indeed, Macedonio’s configuration operates according to a more immanent and problematic nature, questioning and undoing all elements contained within it as it creates and constitutes them, ephemerally and eternally. Vecchio thus calls Macedonio the quintessential distributor of “la metafísica bruta,” with such a metaphysics functioning as:

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<sup>276</sup> Apart from this denial of death acting as a “disinterested” philosophical insight, it is also, most likely, a tragically personal reaction to the real life death of Macedonio’s wife, Elena de Obieta, in 1920. One reads of Macedonio’s reaction and challenge to his wife’s death in the poem, “Elena Bellamuerte.” Though, with Macedonio, the philosophical does not necessarily exclude the personal or what one’s self feels. Furthermore, if Schopenhauer’s philosophy can rather reductively be described as promoting the idea that life is basically pain, Macedonio’s philosophy could be viewed as a reaction to this very idea and an attempt to rid the world of the self in order to get rid of the self that essentially feels this pain.

aquella que se produce, no en el afuera de la cultura (porque este afuera es una mera utopía), sino en el borde. Esto es: en un lugar en que el afuera y el adentro se confunden. De ahí que la metafísica bruta se caracterice por una tensión entre reverencia e irreverencia, fuga y captura, forma y deformación de la metafísica. (33-34)

That is, Macedonio's metaphysics emerges as a complex, passionate distributor of affective inclusiveness, as a site and a siting of possibly productive tensions and contradictions, consistencies and chaos, rather than a rigid, dividing, totalitarian system made for judgments, distinctions, and exclusivities. In addition – and it is here that we see a practical ethics at work as well – Macedonio's is a metaphysics that constantly critiques itself from within itself, repositioning itself in order to articulate a fuller expression of “el Hombre y el Cosmos” together, taken as one, in being and (non)-being.<sup>277</sup>

Still, Macedonio also has the gall, or maybe just the wisdom, to say that in *Belarte*, “El estado de emoción artística no debe tener [...] ninguna otra finalidad que sí mismo” (*Teorías* 237). This means that, even though its technique effectively causes the reader to metaphysically question his/her own very being, which, in turn, serves to “liberate the notion of death,” *Belarte*, *Autorística*, *dudarte*, *Novela*, or, simply, Art, is intransitive in nature. Macedonio also explains that “el tema o asunto es ajeno al arte,” signifying that art's themes and general subject matter matter less than the way in which the art is crafted and what it does – how it functions – with respect to whoever experiences it (239). Art is free to be what it chooses to be, then, provided it is well executed. Here, in Macedonio's declaration of art's essential autonomy, we see another example of the avant-garde credo, “Art for Art's sake.” And again – This statement is

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<sup>277</sup> Deleuze and Guarrari: “Philosophy is no longer synthetic judgment; it is like a thought synthesizer functioning to make thought travel, make it mobile, make it a force of the Cosmos (in the same way as one makes sound travel)” (*Thousand* 343).

nothing new! Nor is Macedonio's belief in art's properly ludic nature: "Libre sin límites sea el arte y todo lo que le sea anejo, sus letras, sus títulos, el vivir de sus cultores [...] y todo debe incesantemente jugar, derogar" (*Museo* 47). We have seen statements that play on similar themes since the beginning – in Kant, Schiller, Nietzsche, *ultraísmo*, Ortega, Ramón, and so on.

Hence, despite Macedonio's apparent anti-Kantianism and his desire to, as he says in *No todo es vigilia*, "Codear fuera a Kant," the aspects of *Belarte* that show it to be intransitive, disinterested, and autonomous in nature show a different relationship to Kant, if not an (in)direct (dis)inheritance. Vecchio presents this possible connection between the two thinkers as follows:

Podríamos haber llamado a este principio: "al codear a Kant afuera, Kant entro por donde menos se lo espera." Porque en el concepto de autonomía puede leerse la impronta del primer momento de la analítica de lo bello de la *Crítica del Juicio* que intenta demostrar que el juicio estético está determinado por una satisfacción totalmente desinteresada. O que es lo mismo: que la esfera estética es autónoma en relación a la esfera ética o la esfera de los sentidos. (72)

Determining something to be aesthetically worthy of the name Art – or, in the name of *Belarte*, *Autorística*, *dudarte*, *humorística*, or *Novela* – requires certain supposedly disinterested standards, and, yes, conceivably, some sense of judgment. Macedonio's philosophy, as inclusively chaotic as it may be, includes consistencies, too. And yet Macedonio also says that the "ethical sphere" and the "aesthetic sphere" function inextricably and operate in tandem, that art is totally useless if not at all *sentido*. Moreover, if aesthetics is disinterested it is because life is, too. Any sort of hierarchy or classifying system that does not strive to include life and decompose the limits placed upon the individual and between the individual, others, and life itself works exclusively, as an imposition. In his works, via an approximate systematic dedication to active

inclusion, Macedonio works to creatively undo these very systems and the very idea of a system – again, even if it means resisting or betraying his own project. As opposed to the act of creative destruction, as opposed to the “destructive character,” in the act of *creative undoing* something material – the material – remains.

In the end, despite Ortega’s contention of intransitivity noted in Chapter Three, which stated that that, “Al vaciarse el arte humano queda sin trascendencia alguna – como solo arte sin más pretensión,” this supposedly “intranscendent” avant-garde rupture in aesthetics is meant to rupture humanity as a whole (*Deshumanización* 76). Even though a dehumanized aesthetics is essentially playful in nature, the inauguration and subsequent institutionalization of dehumanized aesthetics also splits humanity into two antagonistic groups according to matters of taste. Perhaps too euphemistically, we called this contention a contradiction. Yet, the same could be said here of Macedonio, insofar as it seems to be a contradiction of cosmic proportions that art lacks transcendence but nevertheless opens up the subject to a productive point/non-point of ontological crisis, a boundless emptiness in not-being being, infinite and nothing, at once – and, furthermore, that art serves to deny death its power of conclusion. All contradictions aside, Ortega conceives of a dehumanized art that reactively acts to confirm the centered, dominating, and supposedly objective nature of a select few subjects, effectively limiting being, thought, and difference in the process. In this way, in its homogenized elitism, taste is all that really matters when it comes to human beings being human. Macedonio, on the other

hand, sees *Belarte* as actively questioning all of the elements in such statements, thereby fashioning difference as being and thought.<sup>278</sup>

What is more, taste is of little to no importance to Macedonio. While according to humanism's most judgmental ways, from the Romans to Kant to Ortega, "bad taste" equates to barbarism, Macedonio never passes such a judgment. As previously cited, Kant makes this equation clear: "Taste that requires an added element of *charm* and *emotion* for its delight, not to speak of adopting this measure of its approval, has not yet emerged from barbarism" (54 emphasis in original).<sup>279</sup> Years later, in a letter to Ramón from 1928, Macedonio defines what to him is "bad taste": "llamo 'mal gusto' al falsete y falsete a lo no sentido: nada fuera de lo no sentido es mal gusto [...]" (46). In accordance with Kant and Schopenhauer's aesthetic ideals, Macedonio may seek to exclude "charm and emotion" from *Belarte* as well. At the same time, he basks in the artificial, lifeless, and dehumanized nature of his prose fiction. But he also works with, that is, *within*, these same barbaric and high-minded elements in combination, challenging the systematic uses of one and the other, so that good and bad art – confused and not necessarily antagonistic in theory or practice – work within each other. "A veces," Macedonio says in *Museo*, "me confundo por el trabajo simultáneo de ambas [las novelas] y en ésta que es la novela buena, redacto algo del género de mala" (122). And although, in terms of technical,

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<sup>278</sup> In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze speaks to these distinct processes: "When difference is subordinated by the thinking subject to the identity of the concept (even where this identity is synthetic), difference in thought disappears. In other words, what disappears is that difference that thinking makes in thought, that *genitality* of thinking, that profound fracture of the I which leads it to think only in thinking its own passion, and even its own death, in the pure empty form of time" (266). Deleuze also says that, "Metaphysics is unable to think difference in itself," but it does not seem that he ever read Macedonio's decidedly different take on metaphysics (65).

<sup>279</sup> Curiously enough, Schopenhauer also says, "The charming [...] is everywhere to be avoided in art" (*World* 208).

formal effectiveness, some sense of goodness applies to *Belarte* as opposed to *Arte Culinaria*, good and bad art do not determine a person's value when in the face of one art form or the other. Indeed, if any sort of values can be located in Macedonio's works a reflexive questioning and problematizing comes built into them. Informalities abound, which, in turn, produce new use values – new ways and means of function – to life terms assumed to be always already known.

Macedonio finds a new, expressive use for something akin to what he deems to be *bad taste* in his novel, *Adriana Buenos Aires (Última novela mala)*. Before moving on to engage Macedonio's good novel, then, its bad twin will be treated first in order to examine how what is bad can be good, and *vice versa*, and how this bad novel paves the way for the good novel of the future. As he explains it in *Museo*, "Como yo pensé que hay una Literatura buena a venir y una Literatura, una novelística mala hasta hoy [...] me propuse entretener el ánimo de la gente lectora, y que siguieran leyendo indulgentes la mala aliviados por la conciencia de que ya la buena venía [...]" (*Museo* 118). While *Adriana* may function as an entertaining, if also a tragic, novel, it additionally explores the powers of love and sympathy as a means, if not possibly the ends, in and to the problematic, passionate (non)-constitution of human subjectivity.

### **6.1 – First, The “Last Bad Novel”**

As Macedonio's first published novel, *Adriana Buenos Aires (Última novela mala)* was mostly composed between 1921 and 1922, then later revised in 1938. Its first edition was not published until many years later, however, in 1974. As with its twin, the bad novel is born late, as expected.

In line with *Arte Culinaria*, *Adriana* traffics in romantic, representational, and sensationalized human emotions, with its characters and plot being recognizable as such. As previously noted, these characteristics of bad literature dovetail to a certain degree with the disparaging definition of *arte romántico y popular* that Ortega puts forth in *La deshumanización*. Yet, again, Macedonio's aesthetic standards, dissimilar to Ortega's, are not meant to instill and reinforce radical divisions and hierarchies in society, be they cultural, social, perceptual, or political. Rather, like many avant-garde writers, Macedonio believes that sentimental literature had simply run its course, had effectively become a shibboleth, had contributed in no certain part to these exclusionary hierarchies and divisions. Thus, new aesthetic techniques must be found and expressed in order to challenge the old ways, and as a potential result, aid in the self-collective expression of what might be the new way of a new people. Still, as shown in *Adriana Buenos Aires (Última novela mala)*, the bad and the old can, perhaps, achieve this as well, albeit in their own good and new ways.

What is more, instead of a Subject seeking and attaining transcendental enlightenment and freedom through access to and understanding of superior Cultural forms, for Macedonio, the subject – like literature, like nature, like the mind, like a people – is one collection of affects and sensations among many: an assemblage.<sup>280</sup> Awareness and understanding do not come about so much from Enlightenment and Illumination, but rather from thought and experience's practical, confusing regions of *chiaroscuro*, a place that is not quite a place because one can not tell exactly where one is, nor what surrounds one in such a shadowy, active environment. Confusion is nothing

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<sup>280</sup> Deleuze and Parnet: “there is no subject of enunciation, but every proper name is collective, every assemblage is already collective” (“Many Politics” 143).

new: an eternal return that also acts as a starting point: the confusion, the conflation of concepts, bodies, and sensations; the confusion, the conflation of genres, good and bad, author, narrator, and reader. This site of confusion is also a good place in which forms deform, transform, inspiring certain connective affects. Such a site can be found in the cultural form heretofore known as the novel – the good novel, that is.

Yet, the good cannot exist without the bad. As Jitrik explains, these terms actively function as “opuestos que son correlativos” (36). If the “beautiful,” as an expression of the (morally) good, “stands on quite a different footing,” as Kant said, and perhaps as Ortega knew all too well, this position is precarious (44). Any supposedly superior Cultural form should question itself and call into question the standards that make it superior: as part of *Belarte*, art informalizes itself, practicing *dudarte*. Even though one novel is meant to be the “last” of its kind and the other the “first,” these genres of good and bad are primarily, ultimately interdependent, often intermingling, becoming one another, in between one another, altering their own good and bad conceptual premises while being written and read. In fact, in one of *Museo*’s prologues entitled “Lo que nace y lo que muere,” Macedonio makes the assertion that the bad novel is supposed to be packaged, sold, and read in tandem with the good – though things did not ultimately pan out this way. Still, Macedonio asks, “¿Cuál será la mejor?” (267). Either way, the author is satisfied that, “El mismo día muestro el pleno de mis capacidades, una ambidextría” (267).<sup>281</sup> (Or is it more a case of the ambisinister? We can say both.) It is culture, then, here in the form of a literary novel, that can facilitate the differentiation, dissolution,

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<sup>281</sup> Jitrik: “Algo parece evidente: se trata más que de dos novelas yuxtapuestas, de una sola en el interior de la cual hay un equilibrio inestable ya que aunque existe la idea de dos ‘géneros’ nada los diferencian” (35).

deterritorialization, or, as Vecchio says, “la liquidación” of certain elements that make up abstract, supposedly monolithic systems constructed according to absolute notions of values, morals, judgments, and even Culture itself. Curiously enough, in its passionately metaphysical way, love does something similar. In other words, and to return to Vecchio, with Macedonio, “Lo que debería orientarnos” – i.e. culture, literature, love – “nos pierde” (25).

To be sure, part of this process of actively affirming differences, of actively affirming that humans function as more than just themselves, more than just mere grammatical conventions, comes from reading and writing. For Macedonio, the emotions inspired by bad, “culinary” literature operate to reinforce the reader’s transcendent sense of Self – *el Yo* – a sense which necessarily maintains an irreducible duality, an unbridgeable boundary, between the philosophical categories of self and other, subject and object, and even life and death. If bad literature equates to representation, and the self equates to identity, Deleuze is thus correct in saying, “The primacy of identity, however conceived, defines the world of representation” (*Difference XIX*). Consequently, in *Adriana* and in his playfully paradoxical manner, Macedonio does his best to strategically write in this bad, representational, identity-affirming style. Doing so will hopefully make manifest the literary, social, and ontological limits of the afore-mentioned categories, along with the limits of an identity of the Self, *ergo* serving to disturb and undo, if not dissolve, them all. “Representation is a site of transcendental illusion,” says Deleuze (*Difference 265*). In *Adriana Buenos Aires (Última novel mala)*, Macedonio proposes to shake this “transcendental illusion” from within representation itself: an avant-garde proposal, expressed in a fittingly roundabout way.

In its apparently outdated and already known ways, the bad novel also challenges the vanguard insistence upon new creative forms. Prieto thus posits the following regarding the matter: “El desaforado propósito de escribir una novela ‘perfectamente mala’ implica un gesto larvadamente erosivo de estética vanguardista de lo nuevo – el mayor ‘talento’ literario es aquí, irónicamente, el que se requiere para reproducir lo ya existente [...]” (*Desencuadrados* 78). There exists, however, an important distinction between reproduction and repetition: if the former turns out the same, the latter turns out difference. To be sure, Macedonio creates according to a machine-like productive technique of repetition and difference. As Piglia explains the creative powers of Macedonio’s “machine” in *La ciudad ausente*, “Inventar una máquina es fácil, si usted puede modificar las piezas de un mecanismo anterior. Las posibilidades de convertir en otra cosa lo que ya existe son infinitas” (148).<sup>282</sup> In their good and bad, old and new forms, Macedonio’s novels operate as this very repetitive, if also difference-making, machine.

For Macedonio, any sort of literature would not be literature if it did not come created according to certain theories and concepts. As bad as it may be, Macedonio cannot resist the creative need to theorize *Adriana*. There exists a theory of and for the bad, just as there exists a theory of and for the good; and Macedonio finds the execution of bad literary theory to be all the more labor-intensive. In the seemingly straightforward “Nota a la novela mala,” Macedonio, always commenting and theorizing upon his own writing, therefore claims, “*por cierto que hacer una novela mala en falso es más difícil*

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<sup>282</sup> Piglia follows this same creative model, putting Macedonio’s (and Arlt’s) novels to use in his own novels.

*que hacer la buena en buena*” (13 author’s emphasis).<sup>283</sup> He further elucidates the arduous process of self-consciously constructing a bad novel as follows:

*Prueba dura ha sido: el mayor mérito quizá para el autor, que detenta el secreto de la doctrina de la novela buena, resistir a la incesante tentación de corregir las muchas inocencias artísticas de este relato, las ridículas interjecciones y las frases sentimentales, la casualidades y prodigios del azar; compréndase que para un autor al cual le es tan fácil hacer genial una novela, ello fue verdadera proeza de disciplina.*

*Estímeseme el trabajo que me ha costado no hacer genial a esta novela.*  
(13 emphasis in original)

As challenging as it may be for the reader to read his novel – and, really, it should not be that challenging, since the novel’s form and content are supposedly meant to function like those of any run-of-the-mill, emotionally-gratifying novel – the creation of a bad novel has proved to challenge its author as well. At least this is what Macedonio hopes his more discerning readers will believe. After all, as it was with Arlt, one of fiction’s primary powers is the ability to make believe. Nevertheless, Macedonio is ultimately unable to resist what he deems to be good literature in *Adriana*. He gives in to his good temptations quite frequently in the bad novel, couching all the sentimental affectations in digressive philosophical ruminations and a thoroughly meta form. Much like the ways in which good and bad work together as “correlatives,” creation operates as a correlative of resistance here as well.

To begin, *Adriana*’s good elements combine with the bad when the author directly addresses the reader-author relationship. The author’s omniscient awareness of *Adriana*’s intent to be bad shows through most often when he utilizes romantic clichés like melodrama and chance happenings and by playing on the reader’s emotions. This

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<sup>283</sup> In *Ideas sobre la novela*, meanwhile, Ortega says the opposite: “siempre ha sido cosa muy difícil producir una buena novela.” (85). While Ortega’s statement can be taken at face value, the same cannot necessarily be said with respect to Macedonio.

awareness complicates this intent, in turn, though, for Macedonio, the author, tends to point out to his reader exactly where such tropes emerge. In terms of style, the author is alternately proud and defensive with respect to the usage of such bad tropes, writing of his varying feelings toward these tropes in notes attached to the bottom of these specific pages. For example, one note added to an especially emotional page immodestly states, “Aquí la novela mala esplende; aquí, creo, empieza a ser última” (144). Another note composed just a few pages later, however, sheepishly defends the author’s use of chance coincidence to propel the plot: “No se precipite a la crítica: ésta es la primera casualidad con que se ayuda nuestro relato. Es una contra un millón, quizá. [...] Había una posibilidad, y esa posibilidad se cumplió. No me interesa defenderla de inverosimilitudes. Y eso fue todo” (156-157). Taken together, these notes complicate the author’s relationship to good and bad genres and complicate the reader’s relationship to the genres as well, insofar as they force the reader contemplate what exactly such genres mean and, more importantly, how they function. Furthermore, these complications actively undo and therefore liberate both author and reader from their typically passive relationship, just as they actively free up the subject-object relationship typically thought to in check when one reads a novel.

Acting as a sort of clearing, if also confusing, channel for the relationship between reader and author is the novel’s narrator, a middle-aged bachelor named Eduardo de Alto. As a narrator, Eduardo appears reliable enough and intent on being a straightforward storyteller, narrating events in and around Buenos Aires and doing so, for the most part, according to the conventions of representation. Eduardo also spends as much time grandiloquently, digressively waxing philosophic about the nature of self,

love, life, and death, as he does telling a story. Given the narrator's penchant for metaphysics, along with the work's presumably autobiographical nature, the difference between author and narrator can be extremely slight in *Adriana*. Hence, everything said and thought by Eduardo can, more or less, literally be attributed to Macedonio as well. In this way, Macedonio resists and blurs another boundary.

To speak in terms of *Adriana*'s ostensibly representational structure, which differs little, if at all, from its representational style, the novel starts off with five brief sections, including the "Nota a la novela mala" cited above. Though not exactly labeled as such, these sections effectively function as prologues. Even within the bad novel, Macedonio chooses to delay – that is, resist – its beginning.<sup>284</sup> In another act of misdirected and misdirecting initiations, Macedonio does not even get the first word in *Adriana*, but rather his son and his friends do. First, Adolfo de Obieta sets up the novel, discussing its gestation, permutations, and autobiographical nature, and also presents a dedication to Alberto Hidalgo written by Macedonio that is not, though maybe should have been, included with the text – though Obieta is not totally sure about this. Second, one encounters "Dos palabras de los amigos del autor," a bizarre description of the novel's two main characters, Adriana and Eduardo, composed by "C.D. J.L.B. S.D." (probably the initials of Macedonio's friends, César Dabove, Jorge Luis Borges, and Santiago Dabove – but, again, Obieta is not sure) and written as if these characters were, in fact, real people. From there, one reads the "Nota a la novela mala" and a page of some "Autorizadas opiniones" of *Adriana* offered by such entities as "Un lector," "Borges,"

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<sup>284</sup> *Museo* commences, postpones, and resists its official commencement with more than ten times as many prologues to begin. Not all fifty-six prologues will be named or described when discussing the good novel, though.

and “Un futuro autor,” along with a brief “Guía de omisiones.” Added up, these introductory sections keep any initial point of entry at the very threshold of this point and not quite beyond, since, in Macedonio’s world, all starts are false starts, unless they operate more as repetitive differentiations.<sup>285</sup> This world thus ritualizes the threshold as a site that produces repetition and difference from within repetition and difference – neither inside nor outside, but always already in the middle, on, or perhaps in, the verge.

The structure of *Adriana*’s story itself also includes a chapter entitled “Donde veo interarse el lector” and also a “Página de omisión.” In the former, the author attempts to draw the reader into the story’s vicissitudes; in the latter the narrator leaves such attempts aside because, even though he knows he should and is “responsible” for doing so according to the genre of bad, he’s suffering himself from “bad day,” and thus asks for “indulgence” from the reader (97). Later on in the novel, rather than write a scene himself, the author asks for the reader’s direct participation in the writing process, delegating the completion of one of the novel’s final scenes to the “labor del ingenio del lector-autor” (232). As noted above, in these instances in which the author relies on the reader to write the story, the author becomes more of a passive, if not a thoroughly dead, element in the relationship with the reader. Again, such an immanent recombination within the relationship conflates not only the given terms, but the designations good and bad, to boot. This reliance on and direct invitation to the reader to take part in the creative process therefore consciously makes the reader consciously more active in the creative reading-writing process as a whole, thereby liberating thought and life by making the

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<sup>285</sup> This ritualization of the threshold is extended in *Museo*. For more on Macedonio’s concept of and use of “umbralidad” see Ana Camblong, *Macedonio. Retórica y política de los discursos paradójicos*.

reader and the author co-conspirators, co-creators, co-lovers even, in literature's creation and the correlative destruction of the self.<sup>286</sup> The author gives of himself and gives up some of his power in order to share his self and his power with the reader's.

Another part of this complicated, conflative, and creative process of affirmation and liquidation comes in the form of loving. Indeed, loving goes right along with reading and writing, for all three acts involve sharing, giving, and receiving – intimately, fluidly, and perhaps confusedly as well.<sup>287</sup> These activities breed new beings in the multiform, if not informal, forms of art and beings: assemblages of affects and sensations: the doing that can come out of what is undone. Also, as Garth states, “one of Macedonio's central preoccupations [...] [is] the nature of love between men and women” (131).<sup>288</sup> This “central preoccupation,” is made all the more explicit in the intentionally sentimentalized bad novel that is *Adriana Buenos Aires*.

In its bad way, *Adriana* explores the complicated love triangle between Eduardo, the narrator and protagonist, Adriana, a beautiful, pregnant, and out of work immigrant girl, and Adolfo, her lover gone mad and father to her child. In its good way, though, *Adriana Buenos Aires* (*Última novela mala*) also reads as Eduardo's (as Macedonio's)

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<sup>286</sup> Recall the reference to Deleuze and Guattari in Chapter Three, who said, “Life alone creates such zones where living beings whirl around, and only art can reach and penetrate them in its enterprise of co-creation” (*What Is* 173).

<sup>287</sup> It is somewhat surprising that Macedonio does not include the physical act of making love in his ethical, metaphysical, and Self-doubtful definition of love – “el amor carnal [...] no es amor” – especially since one seemingly loses one's self when experiencing an orgasm (*Adriana* 51). In this respect, however, Macedonio is not the only avant-garde writer who comes off as being rather prude with respect to sex – Borges, in particular, also comes to mind.

<sup>288</sup> Garth's analysis of *Adriana* will be a key point of reference for the remainder of this section since most other scholars seem to choose not to pay much attention to the bad novel, perhaps because of its apparently uncomplicated badness. Yet, as Garth demonstrates, speaking of the bad allows one to say that much more about the good.

extended analysis of love according to an ethics of sensation. As per the novel's general content, then, Macedonio (as Eduardo), cannot escape what he deems to be good: to wit, love itself – a powerful sensation which wields the capacity to operate as so much more than mere emotion. “Therein lies sensation,” remarks the theoretician, Davide Panagia, “For a brief moment, I alter my disposition toward you, and yours toward me” (7). For Macedonio, however, this “brief moment,” includes the potential to be everlasting, metaphysical – to be love – precisely because of the exceedingly immanent nature of its dis-positioning connectivity.

A boardinghouse in Buenos Aires serves as *Adriana's* primary setting: a place effectively located “en el borde.” The endearing cast of characters that populate the boardinghouse struggle to survive, let alone make sense of the world. Thus, one could go as far as to say that these characters represent *las masas* of Buenos Aires... Could Macedonio therefore be criticized for producing something that approaches a social realist novel that directly addresses the plight of masses, yet calls itself bad for this very reason, for being so direct in its address? Certainly. However, apart from calling the novel bad, the author does not deride the novel's characters – he does not judge them or blame them for being in the position in which they find themselves. Ultimately, Macedonio wants his reader to *feel* for these characters, too. What is more, Macedonio contends that bad literature contributes to placing and keeping these individuals in their unfortunate circumstances. Bad literature is ill-equipped to treat the problems of these characters and the real life people they might represent because bad literature exacerbates the problem that is most anathema to Macedonio: a belief in a unified Self, separated from others, towering over the world and its less fortunate others.

In *Adriana*, the siphoning and re-orienting of sensations according to individualizing, judgmental, and often pre-established principles – in other words, a Self – comes about when people submit themselves to official institutions. Nevertheless, the novel’s characters often use the liminal site of the boardinghouse to their advantage as a space wherein traditional and institutionalized notions of love, family, home, marriage, and child-rearing come undone and transform. With respect to institutions, the following problems outlined by Deleuze in his book, *Empiricism and Subjectivity. An essay on Hume’s Theory of Human Nature*, apply to *Adriana* as well:

The institution, being the model of actions, is a designed system of possible satisfaction. The problem is that this does not license us to conclude that the institution is *explained* by the drive. The institution is a system of means, according to Hume, but these means are oblique and indirect; they do not satisfy the drive without also constraining it at the same time. (46-47 emphasis in original).<sup>289</sup>

In *Adriana*, under Eduardo’s guidance and through acts of altruistic love that shatter unified notions of self and divided notions of mind and body, the novel’s cast of outcasts undermines the ways in which they might be interpellated, moderated, and “constrained” by institutions – that is, called out as Subjects and thus confined solely to the sensations felt by their own body. Accordingly, Eduardo and Adriana can share a love not

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<sup>289</sup> Hume, the empiricist, seems an equally apropos thinker to reference here, albeit somewhat indirectly via Deleuze. Like Macedonio, like Arlt, and unlike Ortega, Hume thinks in terms of the AND instead of the OR. Deleuze and Parnet describe the AND as a concept and a quality here: “[...] the conjunction AND is, neither a union, nor a juxtaposition, but the birth of a stammering, the outline of a broken line which always sets off at right angles, a sort of active and creative line of flight [...]. AND... AND... AND... (“Conversation” 9-10). They then go on to directly relate the AND to Hume: “in Hume there is something very strange which completely displaces empiricism, giving it a new power, a theory and a practice of relations, of the AND” (15). Such a conception of the AND and the ways in which Hume utilizes it clearly apply to Macedonio’s inclusive use of AND as well. Indeed, what is Macedonio if not a “stammering,” empirical metaphysician of the AND?!

consecrated by marriage, Eduardo acts as a surrogate father to Adriana's child, and the boardinghouse itself serves as an alternative sort of home wherein people come and go and, possibly, help each other along the way. Alternative, provisional configurations of inclusion that might liberate desire are thus established, as opposed to a more rigid and possibly exclusionary system that would otherwise dictate desire according to a pre-established moral code.

For the institutionalization of desire serves to reinforce the notion of a centered Subject at the center of it all, living freely, yet strictly in accordance with society's demands. We have called such a social phenomenon *Bildung*, among other things, and have seen it up till now expressed in various, if similarly humanistic, ways in Kant, Schiller, Ortega, and Mallea. Contrary to this vision and accordance with Arlt, Macedonio seeks out ways to release desire from this otherwise striating and standardizing process – outside of official institutions, yes, but still within both individuals and collectivities – in order to experiment with other possible expressions of a people and a self. In other words, and as Monder puts it with respect to Macedonio's belief in a passionate conception of self and life: "La metafísica de las pasiones intenta rescatar al sujeto de ese encierro en sí mismo. En este sentido, Macedonio Fernández señala un punto clave: la crítica del sujeto moderno involucra la reescritura de la historia del deseo" (95-96). If institutions, at least as far as Macedonio sees them, serve to inscribe and even circumscribe this history of desire, then free-thinking and free-feeling individuals must look elsewhere in order to literally get more out of life, both individually and collectively. Art expressed within a novel – even, in this case, a bad one – would be one good place to look for this release.

Specifically, within this particular bad novel, the boardinghouse presents itself as a good place. The alternative configurations and groupings created within the boardinghouse generate and promote sympathy – as an institution is also designed to do, at least in theory.<sup>290</sup> They do so ideally and practically, though, without constraining and homogenizing desire in the process. And if, when taken together, the characters caught up in *Adriana*'s sympathetic configurations do not necessarily constitute an alternative grouping as conspiratorial as the Astrólogo's *sociedad secreta*, they still work together to forge new relationships between each other and between each other and the insecure world in which they live – in part due to their marginalized status. They still constitute an attempt at a people, a productive minority. Deleuze describes such a minority in "Control and Becoming": "A minority [...] has no models, it's a process, a becoming [...] its power comes from what it's managed to create" (173). Such an experimental minority maneuvers in ways opposite to the *minorías selectas* outlined by Ortega: first of all, because it does not represent any sort of privileged aristocracy; secondly, it does not follow Ortega's life-stifling dictum that people must either "command or obey," and that being is always already under law, but rather promotes activities such that individuals and communities can partake of, and share and create with, one another.<sup>291</sup> While the

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<sup>290</sup> Deleuze asks, again via Hume, "what can make us take hold of something and live in it, because it is useful or agreeable to the other or to persons in general? Hume's response is simple: sympathy" (*Empiricism* 37).

<sup>291</sup> The partaking, sharing, and minorizing minority established in *Museo* will also be examined in the following section. Again, *Adriana* and *Museo* are not that different. Furthermore, in an essay entitled "He Stuttered," Deleuze further speaks to the concept of "the minor": "What they [great authors] do [...] is invent a *minor use* of the major language within which they express themselves entirely; they *minorize* the language, much as in music, where the minor mode refers to dynamic combinations in perpetual disequilibrium. They are great writers by virtue of this minorization: they make the language take flight, they send it racing along a witch's line, ceaselessly placing it in a

transformations and becomings effected by such a minority might not be as aggressively political and macro in shape as those proposed in Arlt's novels, transformations come about in *Adriana* because, at Eduardo's behest, the characters attempt to attune their lives to the constant swirl of sensations that passes through them.

Garth remarks that, for the characters in *Adriana*, "The myth of integration [into society] is held out as the motivation for conformity" (130). Yet, rather than adhering to a majority model crafted for exclusion and judgment, these characters open up their bodies and minds to each other and to the active forces therein, thereby finding a clearing for being to be. Although, according to Eduardo, as parts and expressions of being, humans are already predisposed to this clearing: "El alma, el sentir, no está pegado a ningún cuerpo" (119). There is no hierarchy of life. Sensation knows no rank. All is sensation, all is difference, all is provisional: configurations of collectivities and affective states: being's eternal movement, indifferent as it is sympathetic. Eduardo, speaking for Macedonio, suggests that the bad novel's characters, along with its readers, partake in this movement, as often as they can, if not forever, in a collective, ethical, self-critical

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state of disequilibrium, making it bifurcate and vary in each of its terms, following an incessant modulation. This exceeds the possibilities of speech and attains the power of the language, or even of language in its entirety. This means that a great writer is always like a foreigner in the language in which he expresses himself, even if this is his native tongue. At the limit, he draws his strength from a mute and unknown minority that belongs only to him. He is a foreigner in his own language: he does not mix another language with his own language, he carves out a preexistent foreign language *within* his own language. He makes the language itself scream, stutter, stammer, or murmur" (109-10 emphasis in original). As the *recienvenido* and given his ability to write with and towards "disequilibriums," Macedonio writes as if he were a "foreigner" in the languages of Spanish, Philosophy, Aesthetics, Metaphysics, etc.

project, so as to transform indifference in the discrete individual into a shared and sympathetic affirmation of difference.<sup>292</sup>

Still, within this movement, love functions as the most important, active, sympathetic, liberating, and productive of these forceful sensations. If love does rank highest in terms of sensations it is because it does away with rank – it is because it creates as it undoes. In its own way, love can be both political and macro, too, especially as a minoritarian force.<sup>293</sup> Love as an ethics of sensation therefore holds great possible power. This is especially true if one defines love as Macedonio does and defines sensation as Deleuze and Guattari do in *What is Philosophy?*, where they say, “Every sensation is a question [...]” (196). Macedonio would agree with this definition; the question thus provided for in the very nature of being in thrownness, as sensation as question as love. Love as an affirmation of sensation as a question. Indeed, when love questions and forcefully breaks down barriers, individuals become one in becoming the multiple in becoming with life. In Eduardo’s words, “Mientras un movimiento no sea todos los movimientos debemos morir; cuando lo sea todos no habrá ya el movimiento sino el ser” (67-68). This does not necessarily mean that being, once realized, arrests movement; nor does it mean that there once was being in the past and now must be regained. Love, however, makes the monistic movements of its affirmations one with being itself in an expression of univocity, or, if you will, unilove.

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<sup>292</sup> In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze expounds upon this idea of the “affirmation of difference” in a circular, self-referential language that harkens to Macedonio’s own style: “Affirmation, understood as the affirmation of difference, is produced by the positivity of problems understood as differential positings; multiple affirmation is produced by problematic multiplicity. It is of the essence of affirmation to be in itself multiple and to affirm difference” (267).

<sup>293</sup> Though, to be sure, love can also act as a blind force of majoritarian institutionalization as well – that is, there exists an ideology of love, too.

While in Arlt's novels the Astrólogo does speak to his own minority about love and affective liberation as well as a means to an ethical and political end, he also speaks in favor of mass murder. According to Eduardo here in *Adriana*, however, the only thing love kills is the self, which, maybe, is like killing something that does not even exist, which, in turn, may just be impossible – though this does not mean that attempts to express and function as love cannot be made. If, politically, Macedonio exalts the “maximum of the individual,” this individual is all the more connective and creative via acts of love which itself a singularly metaphysical “Maximum.” Eduardo thus sets forth the following: “el Máximo es uno: el Amor. Amarse a sí mismo plenamente, y entonces amar a otro que también se ame plenamente” (66).<sup>294</sup> For love allows one to sympathize with someone else and feel what they feel, be it joyful, painful, or in between, forcing one, in turn, to recognize that sensations, however intimately personal, are also impersonal, passing through us, like people impersonally pass through each other, collectively. Via the language and life of love, humans approximate a collective being and, lest we forget, in Macedonio's own grand, metaphysical, vitalist vision, also say “no” to death. In the end, which is also the beginning, in life, which can mean death, in the last novel, which is eternally, necessarily contaminated by the first good novel, which are both read and not read, written and not written, loved and hated, “la única virtud, la única belleza, el único ético-estético de las cosas es el altruismo, el amor, la ruptura del yo” (153).

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<sup>294</sup> Statement such as these would seem to qualify Eduardo, aka Macedonio, as a Romantic as well. See, for instance, what one of the most passionate Romantics of them all, Percy Blyss Shelley, says regarding love, and see what is shared: “What is Love? – Ask him who lives what is life [...]” (503).

According to Eduardo's conceptual configuration, then, people can operate as collective *bricoleurs* of affects by sharing, connecting, and creating with each other outside of society's official institutions in order to work through their troubles and live good lives. These ideas of sympathy, togetherness, and respect come across in Eduardo's admonition to a young friend, "No te quedes en las calles y antes de cruzarlas mira bien por los dos lados. Ya ves todos los días cómo hay de chicos atropellados. *No hay que creerse nunca más vivo que los demás*: lo mismo te descuidarás vos que cualquiera" (55 emphasis added). Here, the affinity of Macedonio's peculiar, "brute metaphysics" with that of Schopenhauer is clear, as witnessed, for example, in the latter's assertion of immanence in *The World as Will and Representation*: "the individual finds his body as an object among objects" (176). To be sure, all bodies matter in *Adriana*. Macedonio therefore brings aesthetics back to the body, for its affects are not solely thought through by disembodied, contemplative beings, but are also felt.

Nevertheless, in Eduardo's eyes, the novel's titular character, Adriana, stands apart, transcending her squalid circumstances. This is because she essentially functions as the embodiment and expression of love itself. Eduardo feels like he knows many things, but, until encountering Adriana, love is not one of them. All of the previous quotes concerning love thus come about after Eduardo meets and gets to know Adriana – that is, meets and gets to know love. Consequently, when Adriana rather coquettishly asks Eduardo, "¿Buena me cree?" he responds with a sort of epiphany:

"Mucho más que buena o mala señorita. Usted es el amor. [...] [U]sted ama, es amada, y quiere serlo siempre y enteramente. [...] La vida es una vergüenza sin amor. El que no se enamora es un simple almanaque, un sorbedor de días. Y no es feliz. La única posibilidad de ser feliz está en el amor." (24)

Nevertheless, tragically, in *Adriana*, as in life, the novel's characters cannot simply will this altruistic love, this unity in multiplicity, into existence. Try as they may to ethically organize their lives in agreement with love's joyful passions and active forces, they are constantly subject to circumstances outside of their control. Surely, Eduardo would agree with Schopenhauer's assertion that, "the affections of this body are [...] the starting-point for the understanding in its perception of this world" (*World* 99). However, as *Adriana*, the novel, shows, not all affections and sensations that affect the body bring about clear and adequate perceptions of and relations to this world. Eduardo addresses the matter, speaking to how sensations out-of-tune and out-of-touch with love can serve to distract and frustrate: "la sensación [...] es un distrayente absoluto, es decir, sin calidad educativa alguna para la alta Vida. [...] [L]a sensación haciendo soportar vencimiento al amor, es la Frustración misma como el Amor es el Posible total" (70-71). A sensation is thus that which produces both clarity and confusion, love and frustration. Indeed, in this way, and to repeat and re-use Deleuze and Guattari's words, "Every sensation is a question." Yet, not all questions take us somewhere good; not all questions are good questions.

In *Adriana Buenos Aires*, then, art represents life, lovingly and tragically.

Whether it be a contradictory contention or not, for Maceonio love acts as life's highest form and tragedy as that of art. The two are not mutually exclusive. He explains his love for tragedy in his typically circular fashion as follows:

Si hay un "asunto" eminente único en el arte, sería el idilio-tragedia del Amor y su cesación por el Olvido, sin muertes, por imperfección, agotamiento de la facultad de simpatía: *vivir* con *olvido* los que se amaron es más tragedia que muerte. En este ejemplo la trama, "asunto," no existe. (*Teorías* 255 emphasis in original)

Though he says elsewhere that art is necessarily void of “asunto” and that “una tragedia, cumbre del Arte” is nevertheless “quizá nunca realizada,” the bad novel, just as it will be in the good novel, strives to achieve this aesthetic apex (*Teorías* 235). As hopeful and loving as it may be, though, *Adriana* also marks a certain modern realism; and, as an attempt at a tragedy, the novel certainly does not have a happy ending. That is, love as an ideal and as a reality is also “quizá nunca realizado.”

Eduardo and Adriana, for instance, do share a love, though it ultimately be platonic in nature: meaning, colloquially, asexual and, eternally, if also tragically, idealized outside of action and immediate experience. In one moment, the two share a kiss, but, naturally, it is a confused moment in which Adriana, half-asleep, mistakes Eduardo for her true love (in the fullest, most amorous sense of the term), Adolfo. A kiss as unintended and chaste as can be. Eduardo finds love in this confused kiss, but the surreptitious and rather deceitful act nevertheless seals his, shall we say, tragic fate as someone who Adriana loves but is not necessarily in love with. Still, because Adriana has taught him of love, however singular and plural it may be in its actualization, Eduardo also finds a kind of metaphysical consolation in what he has learned and felt, even if, or maybe because, this consolation is ultimately unstable:

De haber entrado en su alma [el de Adriana] quedaba yo para siempre ebrio; jamás podría ser ya otra cosa que “su ebrio.” Su yo-locura, su yo-beldad, la beldad que somos cada uno en nuestro afán de pluralidad, el yo que dramatiza el “ser,” que sólo se hace conocer a amor y que en un instante de conocido así se pierde y funde por él. (141)

Like a Dionysian intoxication, made in and for the eternal, just a taste of Adriana’s love leaves Eduardo “inebriated” for life. Eduardo loves this inebriation more than life itself

because, for him, in its craziness, in its beauty, in its tragedy, in its plurality, in its relationship to the fleeting and the everlasting, it is life.

Adolfo, meanwhile, goes mad after being grazed by a bullet meant for his head and shot at him by his original intended, Isabel. Initially separated from his true love, Adriana, because of their disparate economic circumstances, Adolfo's madness drives the star-crossed lovers even further apart. Thus it is that, even though Adriana herself is love, she is not able to actualize her love with Adolfo either. Her love, though transcendent and true, is tragic as well. In truth, none of the novel's characters find true, stable, romantic love. It is not for lack of effort, but rather because life's necessary vicissitudes and sensations – good AND bad, loving AND tragic – complicate matters. Yet, as Eduardo definitively declares with respect to Adolfo's case, “La locura única es la ilusión del yo, tan fuerte que en la locura práctica o terrenal el yo es lo último que naufraga, si acaso naufraga” (119). That is, Adolfo's unwavering, tragic belief in a unified self maintains his madness and, consequently, keeps him separated from his true love, who is also *the* true love, Adriana. This is what exposure to metaphysics, tragedy, and love, what exposure to life, has taught Eduardo.

Existential in its own way, this sense of madness nevertheless differs from what one witnesses in Arlt and, furthermore, is antithetical to humanism's Self-centering, Self-serving philosophies. In Arlt's novels, madness is lust, desiring everything, but it is also nihilism, desiring nothing. Desires to possess and maintain, but also to annihilate. Desires to be in power, to function as power itself in all reaches of the ethical spectrum. Consequently, such desires exhibit their misanthropic moments, too, and potentially arise out of a basic disgust for humanity in its modern manifestation. Ortega and Mallea share

this disgust with Arlt, but Macedonio does not exactly feel the same way. If he does, he tempers any feelings of dislike with a sympathetic and ethical vision of the need for an affective, if necessarily impracticable, philanthropy. Love is powerful, too – a power made to be shared.

Whether he would admit it or not, Macedonio is just as mad as Arlt, due to his metaphysical idealism and passionate faith that humanity can effectively/affectively become unified by partaking in a univocal being of love. Madness can therefore operate in both good and bad ways, doing and undoing *el Yo*. Ultimately, both Macedonio and Arlt love their own peculiar style of madness as much as life itself, because, however their visions may differ, they both see life as essentially being crazy and confused anyway. They constantly resist and betray whatever would make it otherwise.

In *Adriana*, for Eduardo (and, again, by extension, for Macedonio), health issues such as the Self-centered madness witnessed in Adolfo, cannot be “cured” if such a cure would serve to reintegrate his sense of a unified Self, and thus reintegrate him into a Self-confirming, institutionalized society. This kind of symptomology shows why, to cite Deleuze, “As Nietzsche said, artists and philosophers are civilization’s doctors” (“On Philosophy” 143). Not, that is, in order to interpellate human beings as Subjects, but rather to address ways in which they can shed their subjectivity, along with the symptoms that compel them not to do so. Nietzsche himself says, “Perhaps one day we will know that there wasn’t any art but only medicine” (qtd. in *What is?* 173). According to Eduardo’s doctorly aesthetic philosophy, artists and philosophers operate as civilization’s (meta)physicians in order to address ways in which people can treat their own life-limiting Subjectivity and the recidivist, individualizing symptoms that cause such

madness. Love, then, is the ultimate drug, as Eduardo and Macedonio hope to teach their readers in a prescriptively bad way in *Adriana Buenos Aires (Última novela mala)*. Love is the ultimate curative because, when taken together with reading and writing, love affirms being in difference, love affirms “la alegría de las cosas” (*Adriana* 154).

Taking a step back now, though – Does this not all sound completely clichéd? Love knows no bounds! Love conquers all! Love is all you need, which, by the way, is absolute happiness! Yes, it does sound clichéd. This cannot be denied. *Adriana Buenos Aires* is, after all, a bad novel. Still, these clichés keep repeating themselves because they have the repetitive potential to be true in passing eternally – this is difference and repetition, too. In accordance with Macedonio’s conception of originality, any claims to originality are essentially chimerical – this is the repetition. With love and its eternal powers, Macedonio does not invent this concept, but, rather, makes one look at love’s powers in new ways, showing how this power can function in new ways when connected to and conflated with notions of reading and writing, good and bad, self and other, outside and inside – this is the difference. This is also avant-garde.

If, in the end, which, again, is the beginning, love returns with its immanent, combinatory ways, so too does the transcendental Subject, for bad and for good. After all, *Adriana Buenos Aires* paradoxically operates as an autobiographical novel about the decomposition of the self. Thus, the novel ultimately fails in not being subjected to a self – just as it was destined to from the beginning. For the material of the self remains, endures. If the Subject will never go away completely, new uses and relations for it can still be explored. This is life, as it is also art. “Hay aquí un monismo,” Vecchio explains, “en que ficción y realidad, realismo y antirrealismo, persona y personaje se confunden”

(80). This is not the dialectic, because the terms ultimately are not necessarily antagonistic (good/bad, art/life, self/other), nor are they necessarily negated when combined, but rather contaminate, partake of, and flow into one another, as effects of affects, affects of effects. As Jitrik posits, “la preservación del equilibrio de los dos polos [...] parece abrir un camino en sus búsquedas [...]” (39). This is working with the AND. This is metaphysics AND it is also brutally immanent. This is not the ORteguian OR, then, as reflected in the following from *El tema de nuestro tiempo*:

La idea de que todo influye en todo, de que todo depende de todo, es una vaga ponderación mística de debe repugnar a quien desee resueltamente ver claro. No; el cuerpo de la realidad histórica posee una anatomía perfectamente jerarquizada, un orden de subordinación, de dependencia entre las diversas clases de hechos.  
(13)

The AND works against the OR, combating it, undoing its hierarchies, and conflating its supposedly subordinated, dependent, and essential differences – but the AND includes the OR, too.

As cited in Chapter Three, Heidegger tells us that “the reversal of a metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement” (“Letter” 250). Macedonio has no problem with this “statement,” what with his unconcealed penchant for a different kind of metaphysics. Different in that it functions less as an above and beyond that crystallizes its components and more as a within that confuses them. Monder presents this difference as follows: “la metafísica de las pasiones es una respuesta a la metafísica de la representación que postula un sujeto *no cartesiano*, un sujeto que podría definirse en términos de un deseo *sin falta*: ¿qué proyecto estético se desprende de esta propuesta?” (98 emphasis in original). Also, different, like Arlt, like Nietzsche, in that his

metaphysics openly operates according to power, and vice versa. Macedonio explains this intimate relationship between power and metaphysics in *Museo*:

No creo que la Metafísica sea el placer directo de una explicación; es un trabajo que tiene el placer de una perspectiva de poder; es un poder lo que se busca; un poder directo del amor: que éste pueda ser causa inmediata [...] en el mundo mecánico, en el mundo de apariencia material, en el cual está la apariencia material [...] (33).

Power, a correlative of passion, acts as the metaphysical source, site, and stuff of production – repeated and, with a slight variation, produced again.

As per the eccentric metaphysics of an amorist like Macedonio, love returns, too. Yes, “es un poder lo que se busca,” but it is also “un poder directo de amor.” Love’s power will come back again as the repeated, possible “immediate cause,” as a force that actively affirms difference, decomposing and confounding limits and hierarchies. Similarly, art, as a tool of and for life’s movement, works to affirm difference as well. “Otra verdad de arte,” Macedonio adds, “es venerar las Diferencias antes que ser fácil en las semejanzas,” (*Teorías* 247). And even if such a potentially monistic movement ultimately does not formalize itself *per se*, it does not necessarily dispose of form altogether either.

To express Macedonio’s concept differently, it can be connected to Nietzsche’s concept of the *eternal return*. Deleuze describes and interprets the eternal return here, speaking to its movement and its form:

The eternal return says: whatever you will, will it in such a matter that you also will its eternal return. There is a “formalism” here which overturns Kant on his own ground, a test which goes further since, instead of relating repetition to a supposed moral law, it seems to make repetition itself the only form of a law beyond morality. In reality, however, things are even more complicated. The form of repetition in the eternal return is the brutal form of the immediate. [...] It is a matter of knowing what it means to “produce movement,” to repeat or to obtain repetition. [...] And what would eternal return be, if we forgot that it is a

vertiginous movement endowed with a force: not one which causes the return of the Same in general, but one which selects, one which expels as well as creates, destroys as well as it produces? (*Difference* 7, 11)

Is Macedonio's informal metaphysics, his passionate dynamism, his desire for love and life everlasting, correlative to Nietzsche's eternal return? Yes, but not quite. Not exactly, no. Though it would seem to be a variation on a theme – one which affirms and produces difference, even in repetition, as opposed to exploiting difference as a means to establish hierarchical systems of classification that repeatedly serve to separate and exclude humans from one another. If love could be the immediate cause and the repeated form, surely we would all want love over and over again. “Let us recall Nietzsche's idea of the eternal return as a little ditty, a refrain” Deleuze and Guattari say, “but which captures the mute and unthinkable forces of the Cosmos” (*Thousand* 343). What if love were this very “refrain” and, at the same time, a “mute and unthinkable” force? *What a Cosmos it would be?! Macedonio asks as he exclaims.* If love destroys, it destroys the self; so that, in the words of Eduardo AND Macedonio, “Lo que muere es el individuo, es decir, lo que nunca existió” (*Adriana* 121). Yet, something remains, all the same. These words repeat those written by Nietzsche AND find new use for his recurrent expression: that expression being, “art as the joyful hope that the spell of individuation can be broken” (*Birth* 52). In its loving confusion with life, art can de-Subject life. The eternal return of these elements acts as a site and a siting of a repeated heterogenesis of the AND.

If only it were all so clear and lovely. Despite his passion for the power of confusion, Macedonio is an idealist, too, no doubt. It just so happens that his most confused and confusing, most idealized and idea-ing (*ideando*) creation is what comes out of and follows *Adriana Buenos Aires (Última novela mala)*: namely, *Museo de la*

*Novela de la Eterna (Primera novela buena)*. Even though, as far as Macedonio sees it, nothing is really ever last or first, but rather a repetition or a potentializing postponement, he still sets for himself a lifelong task: the creation and distribution of the first good novel. Attempting to live up to his own “impossible” standards, he says in *Museo*, “el Arte es posible pero todo asunto para serlo de Arte ha de ser imposible” (57). The first of its kind, concluding the study at hand, a truly “impossible,” if therefore artistic, if therefore good, novel awaits.

## **6.2 – Conclusions and Future Relations, By Means of the “First Good Novel”**

“Y aquí está el sensacional desenlace de mi teoría contra los desenlaces y lo sensacional.”  
Macedonio Fernández – *Teorías* (257)

In Chapter Three, Pedro Salinas’ dehumanized meditation on reading (and misreading) initiated our foray into avant-garde literature. Here, as things move toward a conclusion, reading returns again, in theory and in practice, and possibly in a new way. For if literary creation – that is, creation in the form of writing – functions according to a sort of artistry of resistance, reading can, potentially, function in a similar way, too. Literary creation can create in ways resistant to ineffective and outmoded ways of writing and reading. Piglia notes here how the importance of different, active, and resistant modes of reading can be applied to the avant-garde as a whole:

La vanguardia entendida no tanto como una práctica de la escritura [...] sino como un modo de leer, una posición de combate, una aptitud frente a las jerarquías literarias y los valores consagrados y los lugares comunes. Una política con respeto a los clásicos, a los escritores desplazados, una reformulación de las tradiciones. (*Crítica* 77-78)

This is the same type of “combat” addressed previously in Chapter Three with the aid of Nietzsche and Deleuze: namely, combat as a forceful means of enrichment. Reading can

function as a generative, combative means of enriching, too, resisting, undoing, and, perhaps, betraying what has been and what will be written, what has and will be experienced.<sup>295</sup>

The act of reading acts in such a way when the reader is confronted with the deterritorializing and exceedingly readerly writings of Macedonio Fernández – in both his bad and his good novel. Of course, one could also describe Macedonio’s writings as writerly. Yet, as Vecchio points out, part of Macedonio’s writerly style involves him not writing: “Según Macedonio, un autor es alguien que no escribe. [...] Muy a menudo, se trata de un Autor cuya virtud principal es la pereza de escribir” (130). While this would seem to make his readings all the more readerly, sometimes, for Macedonio, a reader does not necessarily read either. Both elements in the supposedly given equation of writer + reader consequently create, deterritorialize, and become the other in Macedonio’s novels.

By all means, we have already spoken at length regarding Macedonio’s deterritorializing tendencies and the ways in which they serve to combat the Subject, fashioning forces that forge passionate, selfless relations, disturbing other relations that reinforce the Subject’s discrete separation from the rest of the world. We have also seen his work’s readerly (and, therefore, writerly) intentions at play in *Adriana* in his frequent

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<sup>295</sup> In Julio Cortázar’s *Rayuela*, a book indebted to Macedonio in content, form, and function, one of the novel’s *capítulos prescindibles* entitled “*Morelliana*” similarly speaks to reading as a sort of generative act: “Digamos que el mundo es una figura, hay que leerla. Por leerla entendamos generarla” (540). It should come as no surprise that the character of Morelli acts as a meta-fictional manifestation of Macedonio himself. Also, in another passage that references Morelli and his literary theories, the novel also speaks of the act of creative destruction, as Oliveira asks, “¿Para qué sirve un escritor si no para destruir la literatura? Y nosotros, que no queremos ser lectores-hembra, ¿para qué servimos si no para ayudar en lo posible a esa destrucción?” (614).

appeals to his reader to participate in the writing process. The reader is always already included in the active constituting of any literary creation and, throughout Macedonio's *oeuvre* in particular, this reader is always already involved and addressed, both implicitly and explicitly, even in his/her possible absence. After all, simple as the question may seem, and try as he may to exclude writing and reading from the writer and the reader: What is a writer without a reader? Essentially nothing. One cannot exist without the aid and sympathy of the other. In this case, however, sometimes the writer reads and does not write; sometimes the reader writes and does not read. In confounding these roles, a new relationship to writing and reading may be established for the writer, the reader, the work, and the avant-garde as well.

When compared to *Adriana*, Macedonio addresses, relies upon, and includes his reader all the more frequently in the writing process of *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*. In addition, he expressly affirms an artistic and resistant approach to reading: "El lector que no lee mi novela si primero no la sabe toda es mi lector, ése es artista, porque el que busca leyendo la solución final, busca lo que el arte no debe dar [...] sólo el que no busca una solución es el lector artista" (*Museo* 70-71).<sup>296</sup> Nietzsche speaks to a similar, process-centered approach in *The Will to Power*, but, rather appropriately, phrases this approach as a question, asking, "Can we remove the idea of the goal from the process and then affirm the process in spite of this?" (36).<sup>297</sup> Yet, as a vital part of aesthetics and any aesthetic method, can reading be affirmed if it does not seek out solutions to problems? Is Macedonio's affirmation of reading to read not *L'art pour l'art* in perhaps its most acute

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<sup>296</sup> Elsewhere, Macedonio refers to such a possible reader as being "novelesco," "fantástico," and even "leído" as well (15).

<sup>297</sup> The eternal return of the Nietzschean contradiction: "Formula of my happiness: a Yes, a No, a straight line, a *goal*..." (*Twilight* 37 emphasis in original).

form? Can the avant-garde's traitorous processes of creative destruction be affirmed if they look to solve/resolve nothing? The answers to these questions, as to so many others that have been posited up to this point, are yes and no. For, as Macedonio also affirms, the goal will never be attained, the process will never stop, the reading will never be complete – the avant-garde will never live up to its lofty, if at times weightless, expectations of itself. Moreover, as Prieto posits, “La escritura de Macedonio Fernández presupone la imposibilidad de toda conclusión en el campo de la lectura – a saber, de toda conclusión que no sea inicio de otra escritura,” which also opens a way toward another reading, which also opens a way toward another writing, ad infinitum, ad nauseam (*Desencuadrados* 197).

Still, the avant-garde's more reactively humanistic manifestations certainly operate in a goal-oriented way. The goal is to effectively eliminate affective chaos. The goal is to order the world as if it were an expression of beauty's harmony. The goal is to elevate art to the highest of heights, on a different plane from life. The goal is to promote and cultivate a certain artistic sensibility within a select few in order keep power in the hands of these same select few. The goal is to change society, if not from top to bottom, then at least at the top – let the masses be forever unattuned to art's beauty, but still act with obeisance in the face of its glory, its power! The goals are many. The goals are far-reaching.

This is not to say that Macedonio and other members of a perhaps more immanent and problematizing avant-garde orientation do not share some of these same goals – whether they come out and say it or not. Rather than provide a solution/resolution, however, Macedonio's avant-garde novel, *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*, ostensibly

centers around the beginnings and the middles, and less so the ends, of the creative process. Although, as the first good novel, *Museo* is also designed to fundamentally, eventually alter aesthetic practice and everyday life. This is because, if life and aesthetics promote love, sympathy, and passion, then there exists little difference between the poetic and the prosaic; in life, and in good and bad art, hierarchies thus come undone. As he says in *Museo*, “para un alma plenamente graciosa (y sólo es tal la que no conoce otro impulso que el de la simpatía) no hay ni lo prosaico ni lo ridículo” (146). Macedonio aspires to cultivate this “sympathetic impulse” and “gracious soul” within both himself and his reader in order to diminish the distance between the two.

In line with Bürger’s general thesis on the avant-garde, then, Macedonio’s “aim” is to “reintegrate art into the praxis of life,” even if his conceptions of “aim,” “reintegrate,” “art,” and “praxis of life” differ (22); even if, at least superficially, *Museo* is not meant to resemble anything remotely approaching “life.” That being so, as Piglia sees it, *Museo* is inextricable from life, if for no other reason than the fact that its author spent most of his life composing the novel; this very lifelong quality of the work makes it all the more avant-garde: “En la novela el gesto vanguardista por excelencia es el de Macedonio [...]. [P]asarse la vida escribiendo una sola novela que incluya todas las variantes y todas las historias posibles. La novela de una vida. Pero hay que tener el coraje de Macedonio [...].” (99).<sup>298</sup> Macedonio, in line with Piglia’s reading, may be an

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<sup>298</sup> Within the specific context of Argentine literature, Piglia goes on to add the following: “Creo que es evidente para cualquiera que lo haya leído que Macedonio es quien renueva la novela argentina y marca el momento de máxima autonomía de la ficción” (*Crítica* 85). Like Cortázar before him, Piglia’s works bear the mark of Macedonio’s influence as well – in particular in *Respiración Artificial* and *La ciudad ausente*, two novels in which Piglia, in contrast to Cortázar, repeatedly speaks of Macedonio Fernández directly by name.

unabashed idealist, he is also a realist, and perhaps a pessimistic one at that, as particularly witnessed in *Adriana*, but also in *Museo*. He may have worked his whole life on *Museo*, the first good novel, but that does not necessarily, ultimately make it *good*. Macedonio feels that his novel will most likely fail in the pursuit and technical expression of its ambitious aims. He admits, somewhat dejectedly, “Yo no logré una ejecución hábil de mi propia teoría artística. Mi novela es fallida [...]” (*Museo* 18). Nevertheless, “courageous” in the face of frustration and failure, Macedonio still sets out to write a perfect, truly artistic novel. “Repetiré,” he asserts, “pretendo hacer la primera novela genuina artística. Y también la última de las pseudonovelas: la mía hará última a la que la preceda pues no se insistirá más en ellas” (16).

Jitrik further elucidates this dynamic relationship between good and bad and new and old as follows:

Se desprende de aquí que la novela “vieja” o “mala” es un hecho, un mundo de signos conocidos [...] y la novela “buena” o “nueva” todavía no es, carece de signos, es, en síntesis, una pura hipótesis que el autor pareciera no querer verificar en la medida en que promete “una próxima novela mala buena, primer última en su género....” (37)

That such intents may prove untenable matters little to Macedonio, because in the resistant writing out and reading of such intents some kind of life may be set free (Deleuze); if not in the initial moments of creation, then the conditions may be set for another creative, resistant moment in the future.<sup>299</sup> If Macedonio’s “hypothesis” does not

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<sup>299</sup> Macedonio embraces the future as both an open temporal reality and as a postponed, dislocated location of potential new activity (*a venir*). He opposes the future’s co-optation as an avant-garde, political, and ideological idea, however – that is, as manifested in *el futurismo*. He makes this opposition known in his “Brindis a Marinetti,” composed in honor of the acclaimed futurist’s arrival in 1927. Known as being an expert in the “brindis” and orally expressive genre, Macedonio states: “En materia política soy

work, if his “aim” falls short, taken together they can still open the way for others. As he puts it himself, “Lo único sensible es que siendo muy buena la nueva novelística, no se sabe todavía cuándo lo habrá. Esto es la justificación de mis promesas de la Novela Buena y también de la confección de la Novela Mala pero última: conservar al lector en espera y en ejercicio” (*Museo* 118). After reading *Museo*, a reader should be prepared for whatever kind of text comes to confront him/her in the future – at least in theory.

In a letter to Ramón from 1927, as he begins to explore his hypothesis for the composition of a new kind of theoretical novel, to be written in the future, Macedonio reflects upon himself as in the following manner: “en literatura muy atrasado de criterio y lecturas casi siempre, pero *muy interesado en estética de la Novela*” (*Epistolario* 50 emphasis added). To be sure, Macedonio’s “interest” would explain the manifold aesthetic and theoretical overtures to his good and his bad novel, all the repetitive and pronounced postponements. In the specific context of the good novel, this “interest” also

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adversario vuestro [...] pues mientras parecéis pasatista en cuanto a teoría de Estado, lo que impresiona contradictorio con vuestra estética, y creéis en el beneficio de las dictaduras, provisorias o regulares, yo no conservo de mi media fe en el Estado, más que la mitad [...]. [H]ay que confesar, insigne futurista, que el pasado no ha muerto, y no le falta un parecido de porvenir” (*Papeles* 61-62). Marinetti’s outdated faith in a greater, centralized, fascist state runs parallel to Ortega’s similarly antiquated belief in an aristocratic state – though, at the same time, both contradictorily purport to be interested in all things *new*. While Macedonio is no stranger to contradictions himself, while his own views may express both new and old ideas, he does not obfuscate these contradictions due to ideological or political reasons. As Macedonio realizes, by 1927, futurism, many years now removed from its introduction to the Hispanic world via Ramón’s translation in *Prometeo* in 1909, is clearly not simply a new and exciting aesthetic program. He restates his condemnation of futurism in *Museo* as well, stating: “Esta novela que fue y será futurista hasta que se escriba, como lo es su autor, que hasta hoy no ha escrito página alguna futura y aun ha dejado para lo futuro el ser futurista en prueba de su entusiasmo por serlo efectivamente cuanto antes – sin caer en la trampa de ser un futurista de en seguida como los que adoptaron el futurismo, sin comprenderlo, en tiempo presente [...]” (43). And, yet, whether Macedonio realizes it or not, Marinetti did also asseverate the following Macedonianism, “**In literature, eradicate the ‘I’ [...]**” (“Technical” 110 emphasis in original).

explains the seemingly interminable prologues that populate it: prologues in which Macedonio presents his process to his reader, along with the aesthetic theories behind the process, along with other general theories of metaphysics and “el Hombre y el Cosmos.” As most scholars have noted, *Museo* functions as a combination of both theory of the novel and novel. In Macedonio’s words, such a productive, immanent combination means, “pensar la corteza griz en ella misma” (*Museo* 86). He chooses to work from within – in contrast to Ortega, who always requires some sort of transcendental and contemplative distance and divide, as *el espectador*. This working from within forces Macedonio’s various linguistic and conceptual registers (Spanish, Philosophy, Aesthetics, Metaphysics, etc.) to effectively stutter and stammer, *balbuceando* one prologue after another (Deleuze).<sup>300</sup>

In *Museo* one therefore witnesses theory and practice in intimate action, together. Jitrik tells us that this intimate interaction marks “una unidad de dos términos, la teoría junto a la novela, entrando y saliendo de ella, acompañándola. [...] [P]ráctica de una teoría que no preexiste sino que se constituye junto con la práctica, que también ahí va tomando forma [...]” (31-32).<sup>301</sup> Given his penchant for the process and for postponement as process, that the novel itself was not published until 1967, fifteen years after its author’s death and seven years before *Adriana*’s publication, should come as no

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<sup>300</sup> Stephen Kern says of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* that it makes “prespeech levels of consciousness the subject of an entire novel” (27). In turn, perhaps it could be said that Macedonio’s *Museo* makes pre-novel levels of fiction the subject of an entire novel.

<sup>301</sup> Compare this to Geist’s description of *Ultraísmo* in Chapter Two: “No se trata, pues de un sistema coherente, sino de una constelación de ideas estéticas que se van definiendo sobre la marcha” (37). Engelbert echoes this description, stating, “Though its origins are different, Macedonio’s theory of *Belarte* coincides with certain tenets of Ultraism” (103). Such intents would include an aspiration toward an art as pure and therefore as artistic as possible – as impossible as such an art might be.

surprise. Still, it is Macedonio's alternately sincere, ironic, and hopeless hope that the reader will be just as interested in *Museo's* theory and practice in its process of composition as he is. Such an interest in and for the process, not solely the final outcome, would make such an ideal, virtual reader "artistic" in his/her creative relationship to what may prove to be untenable, interminable.

"El lector," Macedonio goes on to say, "es por definición un simpatizante y yo puedo serle interesante en lo que muestro de mi dudar y variar" (52). Indeed, *Museo* operates as an avant-garde creation, which, consequently, is designed to play on its reader's sympathies and ultimately create a certain kind of avant-garde reader. Such a potential reader would not read or think categorically or systematically, but would rather allow for incongruities, doubts, confusions, and contradictions to enhance and enrich his/her readings and relations to the text. As opposed to the more traditional "lector seguido," Macedonio refers to such an active reader as a "lector salteado," going so far as to dedicate his good novel to this very ideal, artistic reader (3). Because *Museo's* prologues, along with the ideas expressed therein, skip and jump around with such frequency and velocity, sometimes running counter to each other along the way, he asks that his reader be fit to do the same and read *a la deriva, a la marcha*, performing what Macedonio calls "el entreleer." Such an approach to reading, antithetical as it may be to more monolithic interpretations, is meant to show the reader that a totalized understanding of the novel, or, for that matter, culture, the world, humanity, etc., is a chimera. This kind of reading dovetails with Macedonio's approach to writing, in that, as Jitrik observes, "sólo la ruptura permitirá el florecimiento de la percepción [...]" (54). Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari contend that, "Expressions must break forms,

encourage ruptures and new sproutings” (*Kafka* 28). Macedonio contends that reading can function as these “expressions,” too. A “lector salteado” would find something to read in these instances of rupture, would be able to jump from one idea, from one reading, to the next, and would, in addition, “break forms” and “encourage ruptures and new sproutings,” all while reading.

Macedonio further explains his good intentions for these different kinds of readers – “salteado” and “seguido” – in a brief prologue entitled “Al lector salteado”:

Al lector salteado me acojo. He aquí que leíste toda mi novela sin saberlo, te tornaste lector seguido e insabido al contártelo todo dispersamente y antes de la novela. El lector salteado es el más expuesto conmigo a leer seguido.

Quise distraerte, no quise corregirte, porque al contrario eres el lector sabio, pues practicas el entreleer que es lo que más impresión labra, conforme a mi teoría de que los personajes sólo insinuados, hábilmente truncos, son los que más quedan en la emoción y en la memoria.

Te dedico mi novela, Lector Salteado; me agradecerás una sensación nueva: el leer seguido. Al contrario, el lector seguido tendrá la sensación de una nueva manera de saltar; pero trato de no pensar en que me ocurrirá el inverosímil lector seguido. (119)

Hence, Macedonio devises ways to betray, destabilize, and creatively undo even that which he celebrates as an author – in this case, the “lector salteado.” In the process, he generates a different function for any kind of reader, thereby producing within his reader “una sensación nueva.” In the “Translator’s Introduction” to her English translation of *Museo*, Margaret Schwartz interprets this sort of reciprocity of intent and reaction between author and reader as follows:

It is very much a book that teaches you how to read it. It’s not so much a question of showing versus telling, since neither form seems to apply. The reader is simply thrown into the book as Heidegger [...] says we are thrown into the world: there is no point of entrance or origin, merely a *given world* that unfolds in its own time. (XXII emphasis in original)

If a certain section needs more attention, the reader will take his/her time; if not, the reader should feel free to move on – all utterances will be reiterated eventually anyway, in the course of the life of the novel, which spans the course of a life. For, as it was with *Adriana*, in its exploration of the productive, Self-challenging affects of sympathy and love, *Museo* is also a book that teaches its readers how to live. As hermetic as *Museo* may be, it also connects itself to what exists outside of it. The staccato-like flow of its prologues encourages these connections, even if they only last the length of a single prologue or a single idea or whatever might be thought of outside of the novel in its repeated moments of rupture. In this way, by the end of *Museo*, a character cluster known as “Demás lectores” repeats back to the author a belief in this kind of artistic and “salteado” approach to reading as well, saying, ““Obra de arte en que se espera el fin ni es arte ni hay emoción. Sé nuevo, autor. No adules nuestras pasiones. Que esta novela no termine. No hay más momento de arte que el de plena lectura de presente”” (241). These virtual, avant-garde readers have learned to read *Museo* and live by what it says.

On the other hand, it could be argued that Macedonio is not so sympathetic with this reader. To begin, reading the novel itself is nearly an impossible feat. (Compiling the novel would appear to be equally challenging; variations abound, especially in terms of the order of the prologues and which ones are ultimately included and excluded.) Nevertheless, this very arbitrary, non-programmatic, difficulty makes the novel so good due to the demands it places on the reader. Macedonio knows that reading his novel is no easy task. Indeed, he has designed it this way:

Este será un libro de eminente frangollo, es decir de la máxima descortesía en que puede incurrirse con un lector. [...] Esta será la novela que más veces habrá sido arrojada con violencia al suelo, o otras tantas veces recogida con avidez. ¿Qué otro autor podría gloriarse de ello? [...] Novela de lectura de irritación; la que

como ninguna habrá irritado al lector por sus promesas y su metódica perfección de inconclusiones e incompatibilidades; y novela empero que hará fracasar el reflejo de evasión a la lectura en el lector, pues producirá un interesamiento en su ánimo que lo dejará aliado a su destino – que de muchos amigos está necesitado – . (9-10)

Considering Macedonio's passion for *la humorística* and *el chiste*, the “lectura de irritación” produced in reading *Museo* would seem to abuse its reader's sympathies, acting as one big practical (and theoretical) joke played on its reader.

Macedonio, however, theorizes (and, like all theories, desires) that some kind of pleasure will become a byproduct of a reader's disorienting, frustrating exchange with *Museo*. If the novel drives the reader crazy in the process, then so be it! The joke is supposed to be funny. The avant-garde is supposed to be provocative. One might as well laugh when confronted with such an infinitely confounding text. Indeed, Macedonio desires a reader capable of being interested in, engaging, and enjoying the challenge that the novel represents – and working within this dynamic. Monder observes that the capacity to expose oneself to the frustrated expectations produced by the novel can possibly serve to liberate the reader from the ordered constraints of the ego:

Hay un goce en la frustración de nuestras expectativas, que no podría lograrse en la vida cotidiana, en donde el educado lector probablemente maldice ante la mínima contrariedad. Esta apertura a un mundo de infinitas posibilidades supone una negación, o un olvido, del ego y su manía de manipular – etiquetar, catalogar, racionalizar – toda y cada una de nuestras experiencias, como dice Fernández: la *todoposibilidad* intelectual posee una resonancia *liberatriz*. (102 emphasis in original)

However, that only a reader with a specific artistic sensibility – a reader capable of a certain kind of patience, sympathy, and resistance, capable of appreciating and finding a sort of joyful release in frustration – can apparently appreciate such a theoretical novel would seem to be a distinction that dovetails with Ortega's elitist aesthetic theories.

This is only one way in which *Museo* reads like a dehumanized work of art – here, as an art designed to be unpopular and constructed solely for “artistic readers.”<sup>302</sup> The difference is that Ortega’s theories serve to confirm the ego of a select few who intimately comprehend and harmoniously relate to the work of art presented before them: the work’s inner-order represents and reflects their own inner-order, which, in turn, represents and reflects the metaphysical consolation that the world itself works according to ordered principles. *Museo*, however, frustrates these very representations and reflections, and, in so doing, opens up the individual reader to other, if not all, possible means of relation. In this way, frustration acts as an essential, relational element to both life and aesthetics; it also acts as humanity’s eternally tragic and, in de Man’s words, “unbearable” condition.

In Chapter Three of the current study, Salinas reaches a similar conclusion apropos of frustration in the aptly titled *Vispera del gozo*. There, however, frustration leads to little more than inaction. Meanwhile, in *Museo*, Macedonio commiserates with his reader, counseling, “Salud, lector. Qué tristes somos en libros y fuera” (46). For

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<sup>302</sup> What is more, and as Garth also notes, *Museo* also reads like the description of the specifically Spanish vanguard (and dehumanized) novels offered by Pérez Firmat in *Idle Fictions* (Garth 50, 199-200). In his study, Pérez Firmat comes to describe such novels as acting as gaseous conduits of what he calls the “pneumatic effect”; he opposes these experimental novels with those that are more traditional and thus concerned with maintaining the novel’s “architectural” structure. While this evaluation will not necessarily be put to use here, it is curious to note how, in certain ways, *Museo* corresponds to this very “pneumatic effect,” as further explained here: “The pneumatic effect figures a novel that is weightless, agile, incorporeal. The novel as nebula or phantasm. [...] Architectural metaphors, on the contrary, figure a novel that is stable, even ponderous, fixed in space and endowed with an inflexible structure: not a nebula but a monolith. [...] The vanguard novel is scandalously transgressive. [...] More generally, the pneumatic effect subverts the form-content dichotomy, while the architectural impulse endorses it” (49, 51). Of course, Macedonio radicalizes these radical characteristics all the more so in *Museo*.

frustration, along with repeated attempts and engagements, allows for new relations and functions to emerge, so that new connections can be experienced and new knowledge can be gained. All of these “news” bring about new powers as well. As a result, ideally, potentially, “eso de fracasar es un lucimiento” (*Museo* 119). That is, as Schopenhauer says, “this frustration of the will, if it is to be felt by pain, must be accompanied by knowledge” (*Essays* 46). If not one way, if not one knowledge, if not one function, then another. In addition, and to cite Schopenhauer again, being able to read in such a way, with frustration, “reminds us of what are the most necessary of all things: tolerance, patience, forbearance and charity, which each of us needs and which each of us therefore owes” (50). In being unsympathetic and frustrating, Macedonio still aims to generate sympathy and knowledge – these acts and approaches are not exclusive to each other.

Accordingly, as a good piece of new, avant-garde, and even dehumanized art, *Museo* presents itself as a frustratingly anti-representational novel. As such, the novel operates in such a way as to be totally self-aware of its existence as a novel; therefore, the reader should never think that he/she is not reading a novel. In this way, *Museo* is both a good novel and an anti-novel, with no apparent distinction between these terms. In contrast to *Adriana*, then, here Macedonio intends and pretends to avoid any sort of aesthetic representation whatsoever that might arouse within the reader a sense of “Alucinación” – a mystifying feeling in which what is read is not felt to be an artistic and artificial novel *per se*, but rather real life itself (37). Naturally, Macedonio undermines and confuses these aesthetic criteria in both novels. For confusion produces all sorts of affects, good as they might be bad, frustrating as they might be enlightening.

As previously explicated in terms of *Belarte* and against anything resembling realism, Macedonio proposes to do something different with *Museo* vis-à-vis the reader's emotional, consciencial state:

Lo que quiero yo es muy otra cosa, es ganarlo a él [el lector] de personaje, es decir que por un instante crea él mismo no vivir. Esta es la emoción que me debe agradecer y que nadie pensó procurarle.

Sepa el lector que esta impresión nunca hecha sentir por la palabra escrita, a nadie, esta impresión que se inaugura con mi novela en la psicología de la humanidad, en la naturaleza de la conciencia de hombre, es una bendición para toda conciencia, porque esta impresión oblitera y liberta del miedo nocional el intelectivo que llamamos temor de no ser. (37)

Such an obliteration of and liberation from fear would, theoretically, allow the reader to, practically, live out a passionate life, affirming love over death if non-being can be shown to be next to nothing itself. The first good novel would thus teach to its reader the *first good psychology* as well: temporary, from one state to the next, composing itself in starts and fits, unless, until... a state emerges that, however impossible it might be, beatifies love's eternal return. And then undoes itself all over again. *Entreleer, entreescribir, entreser... Ser...* A human psychology constructed in order to expose itself to experimenting, even frustratingly so, with its possible functions, in mind, body, and being.

In ways similar to *Museo*'s readers, the novel's characters also operate in a perpetually frustrated, if also a potentially productive, sympathetic, and loving, state. As the author explains to his reader: "Todos los personajes están contraídos al soñar ser que es su propiedad, inasequible a los vivientes, único material genuino de Arte. Ser personaje es soñar ser real" (39). With respect to these characters, Engelbert posits that Macedonio "is interested in fiction's potential for the play of ontological planes" (130); as a result, being and non-being can come to sense one another. Relatively undefined and

dehumanized according to representational characteristics, i.e. a mimetic and easily recognizable physical appearance and psychological motivation, these evanescent characters are presented more as diaphanous avatars of conduits of enduring functions of enduring fictions. Their names express these functions: names like Eterna, Quizágeno, Dulce-Persona, Deunamor el No-Existente Caballero, Simple, el Viajero, Metafísico, and, categorized as “[p]ersonajes por absurdo,” lector and autor (79-80).<sup>303</sup>

Most of these characters share residence on an estancia known as “la Novela,” where the Presidente acts as their benevolent boss and spiritual, though, tragically, often spirit-less, leader. Despite the good intentions of the Presidente and those who surround him, when taken together these characters represent a very sad and often brooding group. Many of them spend most of their time lamenting their inability to breathe as real people and live out real lives – an inability compounded by their inability to fully give of themselves to an other in love, which then becomes a kind of (non)-existential angst. Indeed, undefined as they might be in a traditionally representational sense, these characters are still defined and often define themselves according to provinces of pain, suffering, and a mournful sense of loss, both as individuals and in common as a group. In time, some of these characters actually come to prefer their fictional existence, for all they see in real life looks to be frustration and tragedy. The character that most often articulates this theme is Dulce-Persona, who, for instance, laments, “es tan triste toda existencia. [...] [T]odo sentir es triste. [...] ¡Mejor no saber nunca lo que es la vida!” (169, 184). Macedonio’s correspondence to Schopenhauer shows through again, then, as

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<sup>303</sup> As further “defined” in *Diccionario de la Novela de Macedonio Fernández*: “Los nombres de los personajes funcionan como concreciones subjetivas de abstracciones universales. [...] Los personajes son figuras casi planas que se mueven en la ambivalencia de los espacios [...]” (11-12).

the latter states, “Each individual misfortune, to be sure, seems an exceptional occurrence; but misfortune in general is the rule” (*Essays* 41). As a result, once it appears that the prologues have ended and the story will begin, the first good novel quickly becomes a solemn, heartbreaking meditation. And it necessarily follows, then, that Maceodnio’s most passionate work, *La Novela del Museo de la Eterna*, does not exclude sadness. For sadness, by definition, is a passion.<sup>304</sup>

While residing at la Novela, *Museo*’s characters interact within a marginalized location, just as *Adriana*’s characters worked with each other at the boardinghouse. Given that it is also set apart from society and its Self-serving institutions, la Novela would therefore appear to be a place of privilege, especially when compared to the underprivileged boardinghouse. For example, la Novela’s residents do not have to worry about things like money, food, or shelter. Thus, la Novela appears to constitute an idealized setting for non-existence: a Utopia, a non-place that is completely aware of itself as being such: a veritable *aesthetic estate*. In spite of this, and as previously noted, the immaterial nature of the character’s concerns in *Museo* often overwhelms them. They generally are not happy with who, what, or where they are, however Utopic la Novela might otherwise seem. In *Adriana* the boardinghouse’s troubled souls look to Eduardo for guidance and receive it in the form of a model of a loving ethics of sensation; in *Museo*, the Presidente attempts to espouse a similar model of active counsel for those in need of some kind of direction.

The Presidente’s leadership position in *Museo* thus parallels Eduardo’s in *Adriana* – although, due to his name, the Presidente would appear to have more power, at least in

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<sup>304</sup> Mallea knows this passionate, and, for him, particularly Argentine, truth all too well...

a certain symbolic way. What is more, as Garth notes, “it is manifest that *Museo*’s Presidente – who also serves at times as Macedonio’s alter-ego – draws inspiration from Yrigoyen” (107). Garth explains this connection in greater detail here:

Macedonio found in Yrigoyen a striking resonance with his own sentiments and ideas on the need to fundamentally reform Argentine society – and by extension all human existence – by modifying individual human behavior and thought. [...] What Yrigoyen realized was that faith in the sweeping change Radicals envisioned could only be inspired by articulating an alternative to programmatic politics. Macedonio understood that Yrigoyen’s genius lay in his refusal to play by the same rules and create with the same substance as his forerunners. Macedonio recognized that the epithet of “personalism,” inspired by an image of Yrigoyen as charismatic, was a tribute to the president’s success at elaborating an alternative to an autonomous self. (104-06)

Similarly, Macedonio believes that “sweeping change [...] could only be envisioned by articulating an alternative to programmatic politics” – and aesthetics. Indeed, *Museo*, as the first good novel, expresses this very “alternative.” As Engelbert remarks, “the assault upon the traditional novel is also an assault upon the ‘world’ that gave rise to it. [...] Macedonio challenges nothing less than the fundamental principles that *govern* life and thought in the Western world” (101 emphasis added). For Macedonio, as it is for the Presidente, politics and aesthetics partake of one another in common efforts to expose human beings to new ways of living, creating, and connecting with each other. Nevertheless, according to Macedonio’s rather “personalist” vision, part of these efforts involves conforming to the despotic, if also beneficent and non-conformist, guidance of a leader with a certain cult of personality – enter the Presidente! While the aims of Macedonio’s political and aesthetic project differ in most any other respect to the totalitarian regimes of the times and to those that were to come, both approaches centralize power in the hands of a single, “charismatic” individual. Something was in the air.

That said, the Presidente's primary praxis is initially described in terms of the active promotion of friendship – “había escogido hacer de la Amistad el asunto de su vida verdadera” (141). However, the Presidente frequently appears to be emotionally exhausted himself, and is thus unable to provide the affective support that his ensemble needs. This practice of “Amistad,” potentially political in its own right, fails to fulfill the Presidente or adequately assuage his own personal and metaphysical anxieties. “Pero es posible, Presidente, que la amistad no baste?” asks Dulce-Persona (196). Unfortunately, his answer is “yes.” In order to make up for his ineluctable inquietude the Presidente attempts to learn to love Eterna. He explains his own personal desire to love as follows:

“Es una santidad lo que ansío que reine siempre en mi pensamiento y trato con Eterna. Algún día pretenderé que mi espíritu se poseione de poderes tales que me sea dado trocar por una sin límites la frase que denomina hoy y por mucho tiempo el sentido de lo que ahora sólo es un coloquio de la simpatía. [...] Y aun: quería aprender, no inventar, mi santidad de pasión.” (171-72)

As the Presidente puts it, an affect such as love and a “sanctity of passion” cannot just be invented out of thin air – Voila! For that matter, neither can anything else. Eduardo, for instance, learned of love and passion through his relationship with Adriana; while their love turned out to be platonic, he could still live joyfully off the Self-releasing intoxication of their moments together. Here, the Presidente hopes to incorporate a similar intoxication into his very being via an illuminating, passionate relationship with Eterna. In no small part, this is because of Eterna's unique ability to alter, if not erase, the past, so that one thereby lives solely in a joyful, passionate present. Eterna is therefore able to initiate the movement of the eternal return, with passion as its substance and motor. Surely, such a life is something to be desired.

Despite the fact that Macedonio, as author, claims not to be the Presidente, their desires do overlap, just as these desires overlap with Eduardo's as well. Ultimately, it is their common desire to express the infinite nature of desire in a word, in an affect, and in a relation – in a way that can be felt by one and necessarily, altruistically, and eternally shared with an other.<sup>305</sup> Here, the author lays out his relationship to and thoughts on the Presidente, along with what he believes to be a cure for the Presidente's malaise: the panacea, "la Pasión":

“El autor: En cuanto a mí, no soy el Presidente; estoy por saber quién soy ahora. Me apena el Presidente: quisiera la vida para él y que tuviera todo un amor. Mas no lo veo en buen camino; lo consume la inteligencia, vacila entre la pasión y el misterio del ser. Le falta una palabra, una no más, una sola percepción que lo salvará. Él se dice: Hay cuatro opciones: el Misterio del Ser, la Pasión, la Ciencia y la Acción. No es así. [...] La respuesta es: dentro del misterio hay un [sic] claridad plena, la Certeza y sólo una: la Pasión.” (209)

Surely, this very desire, this very passion that is desire qua desire, and, furthermore, being qua being, led Macedonio to write *Museo*. As the Presidente has constructed la Novela, Macedonio has constructed the *Museo de la Novela*: both sites operate as a “lugar dedicado a las musas” and as a place of learning (*Diccionario* 64). Macedonio, as author, does his best to dynamize these places of potential knowledge – novel and museum – opening them up to passion, suffusing them with being and non-being. The question within la Novela, though, is whether or not the Presidente is capable of something similar with respect to himself, whether or not he can expose himself to passion and give himself up to a dynamic life devoted to “la metafísica de un todo-

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<sup>305</sup> Regarding Macedonio's search for a “univocal” word that would also combine reading and writing, Jitirik states that, “Macedonio reclama, busca o imagina una palabra unívoca – que va de la ‘escritura’ a la ‘lectura’ sin espacio entre una y otra –, un universo de puros semas que deben corresponder a las figuras del Espíritu que hacen inteligible el Cosmos o la Vida” (39).

amante” (32). At this point, however, the terms “metafísica” and “todo-amante” exclude one another, for the Presidente is unable to bridge the two. He thinks too much: a disposition which tends to amount to little more than hesitant vacillation and reactive contemplation. For this reason, what Eduardo says of himself before he comes to know and understand passion and love applies to the Presidente as well: “la inteligencia es mi fuerte y la inteligencia es lo menos del alma” (*Adriana* 228).

When not musing on Eterna and the commitment required in order to love her and, as a result, live a passionate life, the Presidente commissions some, though not all, of the other characters to go out in Buenos Aires and perform “maniobras” within the city and amongst its inhabitants. Examples of “maniobras” include an assignment to “traer la espera imperturbable, en la memoria inmarchitable” and, separately, “encontrar el lector de novelas que todavía quede y que se atufa cuando el novelista consiente en que se dude de su veracidad o admite que algo de lo narrado puede ser imposible” (132). The tasks which the Presidente delegates to his team are designed to train the characters so that they may function as more enduring entities upon their return to la Novela: that is, so that they may accrue ways and means – *dispositivos* – which would allow them to relate to a reader in a more indelible manner, which, in turn might make la Novela (as place of residence and absence, writing and reading, being and non-being) all the more eternal as well.

Since it is required by the Presidente that each character performs his/her task individually, the “maniobras” appear to have little to do with his general project of friendship. Seen here, however, this necessary and individualizing separation serves more as a way to force these individuals to exist outside of their comfort zones as characters that might otherwise live pleasantly and peacefully in la Novela:

Los que se hubieran sentido tan abrigados y felices en la Casa envuelta en eucaliptus que le daban paz y cuya música de tempestad fuera tan placentera escuchar en esa paz, debían todos alejarse de ella, marchar separados, aun la pareja que tuviese trayecto común, ni debían quedarse guarecidos, donde hallaran amparo. La orden cruda era: separarse al partir, aunque las cosas espirituales que se les había encomendado ningún rumbo ni el partir fueran necesarios. (132)

As much as existence may be a collective phenomenon, it is also an imposed exercise in solitude. The Presidente and, by extension, Macedonio have their moments of imposition, too, though these impositions may take the form of a means towards exposition. Thus, although Museo's characters could execute their training tasks at la Novela, the Presidente asks instead that his minority face a *milieu* more difficult to engage; Macedonio, of course, asks the same of a reader who would read his good novel. In this way, aesthetic engagement is a heterogenerative process of dehabitualization and defamiliarization. Moreover, whatever the characters do while away from la Novela, whatever they find in Buenos Aires, they must bring back to la Novela in order to contribute to and enhance the Presidente's aesthetic and political project: namely, the construction of la Novela as a good place which promotes "la amistad." It is therefore an investigative and a distributive minority that the Presidente has at his disposal, one which actively incorporates itself into the very being of the city during the day, and then returns to la Novela (again, a place of non-being) in the evening.

Still, even with the help of this minority, the Presidente, and, for that matter, his troupe, remains dissatisfied. La Novela feels less good than it could potentially be. Consequently, the Presidente decides to move away from "la amistad" and to turn his attention instead towards "la Acción." He explains his change of plans here:

He prolongado dos años esta prueba de la amistad y aunque me dio, por vosotros, una vida que vale más que el de no vivir, no ha dado a mi destino conciencia de

finalidad, de dignidad. Y la curación de mi alma para la pasión que no logré de la amistad, espero, última y nueva esperanza, de la Acción. (194)

He does not give up on “la amistad,” then – he simply wants more; “la Amistad” is now a means to an end rather than an end in and of itself.

What “la Acción” entails, in no uncertain terms, is “la conquista de Buenos Aires para la Belleza” (196). As to be expected, this act is introduced earlier in the novel in a prologue cleverly entitled “Prólogo a lo nunca visto,” where Macedonio imagines a newspaper’s reaction to the announcement of “la conquista”:

“en la novela de la ‘Eterna’ ayer a media tarde se produjo el siguiente coloquio”; “se encuentra esta mañana sonriente la Dulce-Persona”; “el Presidente de la Novela, reportado en vista de los rumores circulantes entres sus numerosos lectores, se sirvió manifestarnos que positivamente lanzará hoy su plan de histerización de Buenos Aires y conquista humorística de nuestra población para su salvación estética.” (43)

If we reinvoke Schiller here – “we must indeed, if we are to solve that political problem [of freedom] in practice, follow the path of aesthetics [...] (27) – the Presidente’s plan appears to follow this humanistic proposition. Only through recourse to aesthetics can people and the societies in which they live possibly be saved and liberated, if also undone.

As the Presidente sees it, Buenos Aires, currently an city fraught with “Fealdad” and “discordia,” needs to be conquered and saved, as its population has been split in two (200, 198). Why is Buenos Aires split in two? Because of an ongoing war of aesthetics between two opposed sides: the “Eternicientes” and the “Hilarantes.” Within this battle for supremacy, “Cada uno de estos bandos buscaba dominar; uno con la poemática ultratierna y la invención de relatos apasionantes, y otro con una literatura y multiplicidad

de ingeniosos dispositivos dispersos por la ciudad provocadores de grotesco” (198).<sup>306</sup>

The war is thus a question of techniques – Which style will govern, dominate the city? As the Presidente finds both techniques to be lacking, he departs from la Novela and successfully convinces the Eternicientes and the Hilarantes of “la esterilidad de su disputa y la fecundidad de obra bella que esperaba el esfuerzo común” (200).

Thus in contrast to Ortega’s desire for dichotomy, the Presidente hopes that beauty and aesthetics will serve as a unifying social and political force, as something that can be created as part of an “esfuerzo común.” “Común” as such is a word and a concept that Ortega actively avoids. Yet, the Presidente’s plan is more complex than simply swooping into town with this troupe and spreading good joy and cheer, beauty and friendship. (Even though, in response to the question of just how is it that the Presidente is able to impose his aesthetic and political will upon the city, the author, playful as always, responds with, “¡Por milagro de la novela!” (200).) For that matter, the Presidente does not give, glorious “living shape” (Schiller) to the city either. Indeed, it is not by means of a recognition and habituation to the harmonic nature of the beautiful and the sublime that the city will be saved, but by opposite means – that is, by random acts effectuated by the Presidente and his “hueste presidencial” against the population and their everyday lives that inspire feelings of dehabitualization and disorientation, along with desperation and irritation, within them.

If, as Garth posits, “In the novel [*Museo*] characters that have no mimetic value collaborate to ‘novelize’ the real city – that is, to convert the city into an open work of

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<sup>306</sup> In her notes to *Museo*, Camblong asks if this war of styles might possibly be an “alegoría de Boedo y Florida,” which could very well be (198). It could also be, however, that this war has been waged and continues to wage itself, even into the good novel, between the various aesthetic techniques Macedonio has at his own disposal.

art,” this “open work of art” disrupts the quotidian and, moreover, is essentially maddening (79). In fact, the Presidente’s tactics seem to make life worse for *porteños*, at least initially, and do so with this intent well in mind. These tactics include “el riego imperfecto de los árboles de plazas y veredas, dejando algunos sin regar lo que desespera a quienes miran regar,” distributing “los espejos fijos y delgados que no alcanzan más que para la mitad lateral de la cara,” and “la circulación subvencionada de gordos y sordos que estorban en todas partes” (200-01). Importantly, the only kind of person actually aided from the outset by the city’s “histerización” is the artist, as Eterna’s (read: the muse’s) own strategy involves having a messenger with a lighted lamp roam the city in order to give this light to artists who feel inspired but find themselves without light with which to work. Hence, while the rest of the city feels vexed, the local artists remain unaffected by the madness and instead are all the more supported and literally enlightened in order to create their work. Artists are set apart in this way; the set of rules that applies to the general *Volk* does not apply to them. Thus, “la Acción” is not necessarily an act of egalitarianism.

After all these practical jokes and annoyances are put into play, the author asks, “¿Cómo la población no iba a salir a la plaza pidiendo un Presidente Quitadolor de tantas exasperaciones?” (202). This key scene in *Museo* would thus seem to narrate a moment in which the political desires of an aesthetic and therefore political class *in absentia* fuse with those of the populace. From here, the Presidente arrives, gives the city to beauty, and saves the day. He renames the streets, leaves death to the dead and speaks only of the living, and replaces statues with “las mejores rosas” (203). Eterna, meanwhile changes the city’s past in such a way that it comes to exist in “la no-Historia,” in “un

Presente fluido” (203). In these combined ways, then, “Buenos Aires entró al Misterio” (204).

In all, it is a rather anti-climactic “conquest.” Perhaps only as any aesthetic and/or avant-garde conquest could ever be. Perhaps this was and is, then and now, “The Theme of the Times.” Ortega: “El tema de nuestro tiempo: Ahora bien, el arte es incapaz de soportar el peso de nuestra vida. Cuando lo intenta, fracasa, perdiendo su gracia esencial” (78). The author of the *soi-disant* first good novel admits as much, too, stating the following in a note appended to the chapter’s final word:

Quizá alguno encuentre poco lucida la tan prometida Conquista de Buenos Aires para la Belleza y el Misterio. Es que era inevitable [...]. [A] mi incrédulo u listo lector lo satisfaré confesando que el capítulo es simplemente la obra de un autor en agotamiento, que no da más. (204)

Previously, this author had promised to provide his reader with something spectacular. He does not deliver on that promise, however, because he claims to be exhausted. Quizagenio notices a similar sense of exhaustion in the Presidente, saying of him, “Con entusiasmo abordó la Conquista de Buenos Aires, ejemplar actividad desplegó, pero advierto ahora enervamiento de sus iniciativas” (237). Thus, the Presidente, ultimately unable to act and unable, furthermore, to complete his final promise to “dar Vida a la Eterna” – that is, unable to create an environment in la Novela worthy of her eternal character – instead, “parte para la meditación metafísica” (245). The Presidente runs away from action, then, and seeks solace in solitary contemplation. Indeed, as Camblong notes, “La metafísica es la explicación última, pero también la fuga y el refugio de toda frustración artística” (*Museo* 245). The explanation AND the frustration, at once, in literature, and thus in necessary sympathies shared in the active act of reading, living, loving...

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As a whole, the transatlantic avant-garde failed to fulfill many of its promises as well. What were these promises? Confused, maddening appeals to beauty, freedom, and life – sometimes in order to keep these possibilities to themselves, sometimes in order to share them with others. If not fulfilled, the gesture of these promises remains. Their materials remain. Along with all the other gestures put forth. Humanity is still an unfulfilled, if also, at times, misguided, promise. Like the avant-garde, humanity is totally confused, if not essentially flawed and exhausted from the start: an impracticable practice combined with an illegible theoretical statement. These realities and the stories written in hopes of adequately, if not passionately, expressing them are only possibly perfected outside of this world, with sadly terrestrial tools that clarify as they confound. All ideas are confused, all projects flawed. Yet, as Macedonio maintains, “Este confusionismo deliberado es probablemente de un fecundidad concienical liberador” (*Museo* 254). Even Ortega, though he too fails to follow through on his statement, says in *La deshumanización del arte*, “Poca cosa es la vida si no piafa en ella un afán formidable de ampliar sus fronteras” (38). While Ortega’s flawed projects results in a “closed world,” Macedonio’s projects endure because they are exposed, open.

Though not fulfilled, these promises also remain... open. In remaining open, these promises also return. Though bound as a book, *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna (Primera novela buena)* is designed to be open-ended as well. At least, that is how Macedonio describes it. An open work of art that opens up to other works of art, other philosophies, other writers, and other readers – that opens up to the *a venir* so that it may return to infiltrate a different context. *Museo* can be read any which way because this is

how it was written. In his own words here in the “Prólogo final” entitled “Al que quiera escribir esta novela,” Macedonio says:

La dejo libro abierto: será el primer “libro abierto” en la historia literaria, es decir, que el autor, deseando que fuera mejor o siquiera bueno y convencido de que por su destrozada estructura es una temeraria torpeza con el lector, pero también de que es rico en sugerencias, deja autorizado a todo escritor futuro de buen gusto e impulso y circunstancias que favorezcan un intenso trabajo, para corregirlo lo más acertadamente que pueda y editarlo libremente, con o sin mención de mi obra y nombre. No será poco el trabajo. Suprima, corrija, pero en lo posible que quede algo. (253).

Something surely remains. Something has to.

Perhaps, then, it is only fitting that, what remains here, in the end, in a study on *the human* as so expressed and configured in the “fiction and philosophy of a transatlantic avant-garde,” is a poem that turns into a prose piece that meditates upon human nature and death, composed by a writer who always admired Ramón, but whose greatest work, the greatest work of the transatlantic avant-garde, an open work, a work that works against death, was only published after its author passed away. This:

¿Llaman?... Es mi amor.  
Hay belleza: para acariciar  
el ansia del mundo,  
Para adormir en laxitud de logro  
La peregrinación de esa busca descaminada y presintiente

Que es sentido de la realidad.  
Busca sin conocer camino ni cómo es lo deseado,  
Qué será aquello que le tiene guardado aplacamiento

Y trocará su dolor de sed en delicia  
En todo el sueño de lo real:  
Hay Belleza: para detener todo el Dolor.

Respirantes, Humanos, los que, innumerables, cocéis incesantes el aire del mundo, pedido sin tregua en vuestros pechos, y lo elevan vuestras bocas eternamente abiertas a un cielo eterno, seres del latido y la voz que se alegra o se ahoga, que pide, quizá todos los días, el cesar y la eternización del Misterio, y

para parar todo el dolor. Mas ¿dónde está? ¿En el Arte, en la Conducta, en la Intelección, en la Pasión? (179)

These questions have no answers. They have all answers. The answers are yes and no, good and bad. These questions, like their carriers, remain... Open... Eternal. A passionate promise of the *a venir* that is an exhaustive museum of the new. For there are only – There are so many ways to say the same thing, to make the same promise, over and over again. And such is our human undoing.

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