

WHO SAYS I?
THE SELF-CREATION OF SELF-EXPRESSION
AND THE SINGULAR CASE OF
GUILLERMO CABRERA INFANTE

(based on real life events)

By Roberto Montiel

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To Yanery

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation sets to explore three major concepts: the self, literary style and the author. This exploration is performed by finding out how the self of a person converges with the literary style of a writer so as to bring about, through this convergence, an author with which the reader converses. This conversation, and the way in which this convergence occurs, can be manageably brought about by having a study case. This study case is, in this dissertation, the literary work of the late and renowned Cuban writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante. It could be said that the investigation of these three concepts and the way in which they interact is framed within Cabrera Infante's works. It could also be said that his work is framed in a conversation with his life, insomuch as this latter is approached as those conditions through which we can find any meaning in his work; for it is suggested that if his work is meaningful it is because there was a living person filling it with meaning, and thus with life. His life, it is said, informs his work and vice versa. The way in which the reader converses with this author is precisely by activating this meaning in his work, which thereby participates in informing the reader's life and, as this dissertation aims to show, the reader's work. The present dissertation is doubtless informed by Guillermo Cabrera Infante's work and life; that is to say that it is informed by his style and, being this concomitant with the self, it is thus informed by his self. It is meant with "information" the constant exchange that inevitably occurs in a dialogue; for what this dissertation means to do is to create a dialogue from author to author, wherein the activities of reading and writing find in the text a common point of convergence.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Read at your own risk

There may be some pressing, complicated, even irritating questions arising from the reading of this dissertation. The objective of this preface is to anticipate as many as possible of these questions and to explain the framework wherein this investigation is set.

The problem of “who is the *I* speaking in and behind the text” is a problem as old as the written word. We know about this problem because of Plato, who posed in his *Phaedrus* many of the main faults of the written word: the presence in the written word is an absence, is not there; interlocution is interrupted by dead graphic characters that can answer no doubts and can give no reason as to anything but themselves, characters that are bound to eternal repetition (275d). Clearly, this is the problem that ignited Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive enterprise. The French philosopher did take issue with this opposition between presence[orality]/absence[textuality] that, ultimately, entailed a sort of opposition between life and death. It is, according to Derrida, at the root of this opposition that Western metaphysics (as if there were any other) is really to be found, since it is here where logocentrism found its most fertile soil¹; in his own words: “the origin of logos *is its father*. One could say anachronously that the ‘speaking subject’ is the father of his speech” (“Plato’s Pharmacy” 82). So this “I”, this presence who constantly erases itself behind the letters, behind the eyes and sounds of the reader, behind the mechanisms and intricacies of textuality itself, is the problem with which this thesis takes issue.

As it is well known, this problematic presence has had many approaches, and it has had many names, but perhaps the one name that has permeated the most is the one that has

¹ This is very clearly expressed in his “Plato’s Pharmacy” 80-97 and his *Of Grammatology* 18-26.

been most vilified in the later years: the author. This dissertation is about the author, about her/his rising and about her/his life. This dissertation does not, however, want to rescue this figure but, on the contrary, it only means to recognize him/her as s/he arises. The main argument of this thesis is that the author emerges from the convergence between self and style. Now, before pausing in these two even more problematic terms, it is seminal to point out what they entail: to affirm that there is a converging point between self and style is to ascertain that there is a connection between life and work and that this connection should be necessary in order for the author to arise. This means that an author cannot exist without a work and, in turn, an author cannot exist without a life, for there is no life without work nor is there work without life. We should keep this in mind later when we discuss the main themes and the order of this dissertation. First, however, we should see why such a convergence is important and how it is different from those approaches to authorship given to date, approaches which, according to the overall argument of this dissertation, have been inadequate to the problem.

Most of the debates about the problem of authorship revolve around the indefinable connection between life and work or, as it has been also posed, between “the man and his work”—yet, in addition to the gender issues, this latter formulation poses yet another difficulty. The concept of “man”² (i.e., human person with a personality of his/her own) is a somewhat recent invention, which was delineated during the Renaissance and found its full form in Rene Descartes’ thought: man, as other than things, does not simply exist; he thinks and is even capable to doubt his own existence (*Principles of Philosophy* §1-§11, §51-§53)³. This man was, admittedly, alive; but this *cogito* was, in all truth, the *raison*

² Let us retain, for the sake of the argument, the male figure here; after all, the premises and conclusions following from them are most patriarchal.

³ It is worth noting that the birth of the modern subject, of which we are speaking here, is not the birth of “rationality”, for this is a notion as old as the Pre-socratics (it can be even found in Thales) and, everything seems to indicate, it can be traced back all the way to the beginning of writing, which is, also, the beginning of history. What Descartes discovered (or invented) was the doubting subject, that is, the transcendental virtue of rationality itself: the *cogito* not as a faculty anymore, but as an entity itself, that was able to doubt its

d'être of this man's life. This is why the "life" of this "man" has been approached and conceptualized within the rule of his *res cogitans*, as it has been and it is still approached as having a history, that is, as biography: a thinking man is, by definition, a historical man—a man aware of his own history⁴. Even though Cartesian metaphysics do not enjoy the best of reputations nowadays, the assumptions behind "what is a person's life" still retain much of the conceptualization of this "thinking man"—or subject, as he was later called. It is not gratuitous that the origin of biography as a genre about the life-story of "the man and his deeds" can be traced back to the late-Renaissance with Giorgio Vasari's perennially updated *The Lives of the Artists*, and that this genre peaked by the early eighteenth century—the century in which this subject was at his prime⁵. As a matter of

own existence, but that could not, logically, doubt the existence of the doubter. This is why Cartesian dualism had to develop a whole other realm that was not about existence (*res extensas*) and that did not depend on physical extension to be an entity on its own right: the *res cogitans*. This was the realm of the mind, and this was the realm of the modern subject; the one I am pointing out here.

⁴ In §57, Descartes speaks of time in terms of "measured stretches of duration", having this as the sufficient condition for time to exist (movement can be measured, and this is measured in time), which is, very much, what is behind the conceptualization of our historical beings: events in measured stretches of duration; events and measurements of which every man is aware, much more so when these concern those of his own life.

⁵ We should bear in mind that Diogenes Laertius' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* differ from modern biography in that the "lives" therein portrayed are not historically organized, nor are they historically told. The emphasis of the accounts lies on the doctrines and thoughts of the philosophers, for whom their life-history was incidental or, at best, a faithful illustration of their doctrines. In this way, these accounts are filled with (and exemplarily cultivate) anecdotes rather than with a chronologically organized account of the history (and thus the story) of the portrayed person as, doubtless, Vasari's did. It is also worth pointing out that Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* was also structured through the exploration of the character of his portrayed subject much more than with a historical account of his life. What made Vasari's work so influential is precisely this connection between the historical account of the biographized subject and his deeds with a critical assessment of his work. We should not forget either that Vasari's historical template has as its main antecedent the innumerable hagiographies that were written during the Middle-Ages, which follow much more recognizably the historical pattern of the life-story as we know it today: the person was born in such date, in such place and in such family, had a childhood, started to work during his puberty ... died in such place and in such date.

fact, this century saw the emergence of another form of biography; a subgenre that would give back the voice to the protagonist of the story: autobiography. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* is often credited as the first modern autobiography ever written by a modern man⁶. Every connection found and sought between the life of the author and her/his work regards this life in biographical (and autobiographical) terms; that is, in historical terms: a human life is, by definition, a historical life.

According to these principles, which equated life with history, it came as no surprise that by the late 1960's, when poststructuralist thought was finding its space (or non-space) as a philosophical and archaeological project, so many conceptual casualties, epistemologically speaking, seemed so necessary for this project to flourish. If the thinkers and works that influenced every poststructuralist theorist are manifold and often difficult to trace, there is one thought that exerted an undisputable influence in all of them: the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. We can perceive in these theorists an almost adolescent urge to declare dead as many as canonical concepts as they found; after all, God, the most canonical concept imaginable, was already dead. It is no coincidence that the author, declared dead in 1967 by Roland Barthes⁷, passed away shortly after the subject, as was declared by Foucault in 1966⁸; a death close to the passing of grand-

⁶ Augustine's *Confessions*, which could also be thought of as one of the first examples of autobiography, has as its point of departure quite a different pattern. Here, the historical man is not as prominent as the mystic thinker who searches for God in the admission and disclosure of his sinful self and who seeks purification through the written inscription of his deeds. This work, particularly after Augustine's canonization, should be rather considered as the first example of *autohagiography*.

⁷ See his little Molotov-essay "The Death of the Author", where the French theorist declares that it is the reader who constitutes the text, and that the author is nothing but an obstacle for every possible original reading. We will see more in depth this work in the seventh chapter.

⁸ See his *The Order of Things*. His essay, written three years later, "What is an Author?", rescues the dying author from the grave, only to put it in the necessary function that it has in discourse; not as a creator of meaning but as a historical initiator of meaning—that does limit its otherwise arbitrary proliferation. We will discuss Foucault's essay more in depth in the seventh chapter of this dissertation.

styles, as “engineered” by great writers, and the emergence of the *bricoleur*, the eternal epigone of textuality and *intertextuality*, as was declared by Derrida in 1967⁹. This was the death of the creator and the emergence of the objective conditions for the “generation” (rather than creation) of persons, artists or otherwise: the text, *episteme*, discourse ... language¹⁰. Structuralism, inspired by the Russian formalists, had already (if unwittingly) paved the way for these demises by proposing objective ways to approaching literature insofar as there was, by then, enough work to say there was an objective way to approaching language, given that linguistics was, by the 1930’s, already a developing science, recognized as such by most structuralists¹¹. In another vein, “New Criticism”, which anticipated these deaths in literary criticism by some 20 years, did not declare the author (and the subject, and the style) dead, the author was just declared irrelevant; in the words of Wimsatt and Beardsley: “the design or the intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art” (468). And it is at this concept of intentionality where we should pause in order to see why it is found in the present study that these approaches to authorship, as well as the

⁹ See his *Of Grammatology*. This eternal epigone, always already inscribed in *intertextuality*, attempted to finish with the idea of a more or less grand-style ruling over what literature (as an institution, or a quasi-institution) was about. Derrida’s counterposition between the “engineers” (those writers who “designed” texts and purported to be, to some degree, outside of them, as their rulers) and the *bricoleur* (the working figure assembling texts from the inside, already from an existing body of texts in which s/he is inscribed) is one of the leading tropes within this groundbreaking work. Our discussion of style in the fifth chapter will not include a more extensive discussion of this work, simply because it was Derrida himself who would later refine these ideas and who would separate the trope of the “engineer” (or writer-designer) from his conceptualization of literary style. This dissertation will include, though, a more in depth discussion of Derrida’s later works and ideas on literature.

¹⁰ A most fascinating study on the way in which these dying subjects return in the later work of these three thinkers: Barthes, Foucault and Derrida, can be found S. Burke. For a most intriguing argument on late-modernity’s “internalized epigonism” as a way of getting around the concept of creativity, see Benedetti 194-196.

¹¹ Roman Jakobson’s essay compilation, *Language in Literature*, contains almost programmatically these assumptions coming from considering Linguistics as a developing science, and thus the study of literature as a scientific exercise.

very foundations of these concepts (self/subject, style, author), are unsatisfactorily defined.

The kind of subject and the kind of self that died is one that, as is discussed within the body of this dissertation, was asking for his death; for we are speaking here of a very ill-defined kind of subject. What is at the core of the modern man is his autonomy. This is no trifle, for this is precisely what the poststructuralists, and the modernists before them (and the critical theorists before them, and the *avant-garde* artists before them, and Levinas, Heidegger, Freud, Jung, Levy-Bruhl and Nietzsche and Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard and the romantic poets before them), targeted from the start: the subject of consciousness. This spawn of logocentrism, whose wills, passions, desires, cravings, in sum, everything that integrated his self and sense of selfhood, his subjectivity, were or should be governed and oriented by this unifying structure called consciousness. Autonomy, the innermost human capacity of governing oneself and thus of being responsible of oneself, was the most precious value for any modern, enlightened man—and it was this value that was torn apart by these thinkers. Yet, once dismantled, the concomitant conclusion that if there is no autonomy then there is no self was, admittedly, hasty.

Otherness is at the epicentre of these criticisms. The commonsensical acknowledgement that heteronomy was as constitutional as autonomy (if not more) to who we are became the banner under which poststructuralist thought made its pledge. Before knowing anything at all, prior to any consciousness, we are *affected* by otherness: by our surroundings, by our parents, by our history, by our traditions, by our political structure, etc. And this affection determines to a great degree our being conscious, inasmuch as it determines of what and in which way we are conscious of anything at all¹². Language

¹² Please understand “affection” within its connotation as a noun deriving from the passive voice of the verb “to affect” (“to be affected”). This concept will keep coming and growing all along this thesis. It is worth noting that this concept is at the very core of the ancient understanding of *eros* as bodily affection; that is, as the body being affected by another body. This is the definition of “affection” we will be using here.

was, in this way, the paradigmatic articulator of affection, for it is not possible to say that we are conscious of language: if we cannot be conscious *without* language, then we cannot be conscious *of* language itself, for how could we be conscious of the very mechanism that enables consciousness? We are, first of all, affected by language. Unfortunately, at this time the spirits were so high that the claims got carried away: we ended up becoming a function of language (discourse, etc.) rather than this being a function of us; and, after some time passed, and the thinkers got some time to think (particularly these three: Barthes, Foucault and Derrida¹³), they would nuance and correct these claims. Yet the resentments against this autonomous subject of consciousness, the ill-feelings against logocentrism, never really healed.

Something similar goes for literary criticism. The author we should not care about, according to the New Critics, or the one that should die, according to Barthes, or the one that should remain as nothing but a function of discourse, according to Foucault, was the offspring of this autonomous subject. This is the reason why the argument of his disappearance remains so persuasive; as Sean Burke asserts, this persuasiveness lies “not in the manner of the author’s death but in the nature of the author who apparently dies” (21). This author is the one who can dispense with the reader, the author as the guarantor, safeguard and ultimate authority of the text’s meaning, the intelligent designer, the God of his texts. Yet, as Burke cleverly points out: “The Author in ‘The Death of the Author’ only seems ready for death precisely because he never existed in the first place” (26). To add difficulties to the problem, we know very well that despite the attempts to get rid of

¹³ See Barthes’ more nuanced positions about the relevance of the author in his *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* and in his *Sade, Fourier and Loyola*. See Foucault’s later work on the subject and self-knowledge in his *Hermeneutics of the Subject* and, very particularly, in the interview that opens the English edition of his *Technologies of the Self*, where he affirms that there is an irretrievable connection between his life and his work (we will better explore these words by Foucault in the second chapter of this dissertation). See Derrida’s later work, after his so-called “ethical turn” (a term he had no qualm in rejecting), particularly his essays compiled in the two volumes of *Psyche: Inventions of the Other* and in *Acts of Literature*.

this kind of author by late-modern and poststructuralist thinkers, this author is at the top of his game in today's everyday practices. Currently, we can even have "authors without texts"¹⁴, people who are authors because they are spoken about in such terms in the "system of designated sites" where they should be spoken this way (i.e., the media, literary reviews, etc.) and for whom, therefore, their work is merely incidental: they are authors first and writers after. This, I would claim, is the last consequence of the autonomous author, an author whose work needs not be read in order to become one; an effect, more than a function, of late capitalism: an epiphenomenon of the free market. This is the author as a brand, whose proper name (not his work) is copyrighted; just as happens with Paris Hilton or Kim Kardashian, these kind of authors are famous without anyone being able to really say what their work is about—or even whether they have one: "The textless author is himself his body of work" (Benedetti 3)¹⁵. Despite the persuasiveness of Barthes' forensic report, the truth is this author is more alive than ever. And, in all truth, if this kind of author ever died, it is doubtful that s/he will be missed.

This dissertation does take issue with this kind of author, mainly because this dissertation takes issue with autonomy as being at the core of selfhood. And here, we are right at the front of the problem we were starting to look at a few paragraphs ago: the burdensome concept of intentionality as being constitutional of our consciousness. Even more unprejudiced critics, such as Carla Benedetti, who does not necessarily assign consciousness to intentionality, and can therefore acknowledge the possibility of having unconscious intentions, declares that intentionality ("artistic intention") is necessary in

¹⁴ I owe this part of the discussion to Benedetti's work, see particularly chapter 1.

¹⁵ Benedetti offers as a most radical example an "author" whose name is known in all Italy (Alfonso Luigi Marra) because of the consistent advertisement published weekly in the main newspapers of this country every time a new book of his is "published". The advertisement includes a photograph of the author, an excerpt of his "new" book, a tagline declaring it a bestseller and praise by some "critics" hailing it as yet another masterwork. However, as she explains, nobody she knows had ever read any of his books, and, what is more, she had never been able to find any of them in any bookstore.

order to consider a work of art and therefore to have a recognizable author¹⁶. Intentionality is primarily conceptualized as a consciously oriented desire, emotion, will, etc. that becomes, within this conscious orientation, a purpose¹⁷. For some strange reason, when “meaning” got out of its semantic cage (as signified), it got into a bigger one, as a purpose: the message of “what is meant” (the purpose of what is uttered). This equivalence between meaning and intentionality is another thing with which this dissertation shall take issue.

The author’s responsibility towards his own work has been also built within these terms of autonomy and intentionality; that is, in terms of ownership. Being responsible for this or that work means, automatically, being the owner of this or that work and whatever benefits (i.e., royalties, etc.) come from this work, as well as whatever harms (e.g., lawsuits, etc.), should be assigned to the person(s) responsible. As Emmanuel Levinas ceaselessly elaborates in his work, the paradigm of responsibility owes nothing to the “Other” in the Western tradition; it has been, instead, made upon the concept of totality (from which the concepts of presence and autonomy come from). For Levinas, responsibility is not primarily about ownership (responsibility “of”) but about otherness (responsibility “for”), a responsibility that precedes me and that transcends me (i.e., “infinite responsibility”) in a way in which it cannot be owned or disowned; we can only respond to it, for we are forever bound to that other to whom we respond¹⁸. In this vein,

¹⁶ Benedetti 10-14, 75, 151

¹⁷ Even if the component of desire would not be too prominent in conceptualizations as those of Edmund Husserl’s (one of the major thinkers behind the concept of intentionality), the purposeful orientation towards something (being conscious is a being conscious of something) is evident all throughout his work, from his *Logical Investigations* to his *Cartesian Meditations*. It is this intentionality in terms of purposiveness that is behind the attacks of the “intentional fallacy” by the New Critics, and, to a great extent, by Barthes’, Foucault’s and Derrida’s works. However, that there can be no intention without conscious orientation is right at the dawn of the concept of rationality, as Husserl very well explains in the introduction of his *Cartesian Meditations*.

¹⁸ This can be soundly elaborated in his *Totality and Infinity* and, mainly, his *Otherwise than Being*. We will discuss the latter work into more detail throughout this thesis.

authorship is not about ownership, but about responsibility; however, the “other” for whom the author is responsible is, first and foremost, the work; as Benedetti asserts: “The author of a work of art is that person to whom we can attribute the responsibility of how the text is made” (76); an attribution that, according to what we will see in this thesis, should start from the writer: the writer will always be responsible for the author s/he leaves in the text s/he wrote. As it is understood in this thesis, the author is something other than the writer; the author is issued by the writer, as her voice is issued from her mouth and flies through the air to the ears of others: this voice is, unmistakably, hers, the writer’s. It is thus that the writer leaves this author in this text, where this voice flies anew every time the text is read; this voice is, and will always be, the one issued from the writer’s mouth (pen, typewriter, fingertips ... body). More than an attribution, this responsibility is realized by the writer’s self-inscription and self-ascription in and to her text; a double movement that will be further elaborated within the body of this thesis. This kind of responsibility entails a wholly different way of owning, as it supersedes intentionality (artistic or otherwise) inasmuch as the non-autonomous self that is conceptualized here, as well as the immanent style discussed throughout this work, supersedes all possible intentions. Our history, our ancestry, our tradition, our experience, our physiognomies ... are embodied traces that are always already incarnated by every living person and that are thus incarnated in her/his work via expression. This is how meaning is approached in this thesis, by means of the expression of these embodied traces. Meaning, by necessity, bears the traces of its own history (of that of the doer, but also of the environment of the deed, etc.), of its own tradition, of its own narrative frameworks (also called here myths, which are understood as linguistic organizations of events), of its own physiognomy in the signifier, etc.: all of which are incarnated in and by the doer, the doing and the deed. The concept of incarnation is chosen here because it transcends the concepts of substantiation and materialization in one crucial aspect: to incarnate is to give more than a body to something; it is to render this made-body flesh; that is, it is to render this body (book, text, work, etc.) meaningful.

To speak of a non-autonomous, immanent self and of a non-autonomous, immanent style is to dissolve the borders between the many selves one can display (i.e., public vs. private self, etc.) and between the many styles one can adopt (i.e., in parodying certain genres or certain voices, etc.)¹⁹. This means that the self and the style that are conceptualized in this thesis are beyond choice and, consequently, beyond consciousness, unconsciousness, etc.: it is a style and a self beyond the mind. Perhaps the best analogy for this process is the actor, who can try many masks, become many people and build many characters while constantly remaining her/himself. A paradigmatic example of this is the case of Marlon Brando. Doubtless, Brando created many of the most complex characters ever filmed or staged; his characters were so “real”, and could be so different one from the other (we just need to remember that *The Godfather* and *Last Tango in Paris* opened nearly in the same year) that they can almost be seen outside of the screen, breathing and having breakfast, walking the streets and having dreams of their own. Nevertheless, one of the reasons why he became such a huge star (aside from his good looks) was that he, Brando, the actor, the crafter, the performer, the “real person”, was recognizable in each and every one of his characters: his seal was unmistakable. Here, in this “unmistakability”, in this singularity of the self and style converging at the moment of creation, and of expression, the author emerges and remains for as many times his performance can be enjoyed. This is what we find in the text. The author, in this way, is neither the founder nor the safeguard of meaning (not the only one in any case), but certainly becomes, through this convergence, a founder of meaningfulness: both the work and his unmistakably being his, his singularity found a different way, a singular way (and thus a “new way”) of meaning, another form to mean: a pathway through which something can be meant differently, singularly. This meaningfulness goes beyond our understanding of meaning as the “what

¹⁹ It may seem a contradiction to have these two concepts hand in hand: heteronomy and immanence. Yet, this is only at first sight, for, as it will be argued in the fifth chapter of this thesis, what is immanent cannot be awakened (let alone developed) without the other. Both immanence and heteronomy constitute each other in time, and in time they develop and grow. These somewhat abstract concepts will be fully unfolded in this fifth chapter, and further elaborated in the discussion of the thesis.

is” of the text, as “what is” to be understood and/or interpreted in/of it; it goes beyond the message to be decoded by an author-designer-oriented-critic; yet, it also goes beyond the structure and/or function to be found by a text-discourse-oriented-critic, and definitely beyond significance (i.e., evaluation: “what is worth”) and context in a reader-rewriter-oriented-critic. This meaningfulness places the reader face-to-face with the author as an agent of affection and responsibility; face-to-face with the creative power that always dwells at either end of writing and reading.

As it might be clear by now, the method that leads every conceptualization in this thesis is that of finding convergences there where, at first, there is only difference—or even opposition—to find out then what it is that this convergence produces. This approach entails that every concept is assumed to be the product of some convergence and that it is the researcher’s task to trace such convergence and to find the ways in which it occurs. The text, in this way, is understood as what emerges at the convergence between reader and writer. The main advantage of this form of conceptualization is that it becomes possible to think difference without the necessity of thinking it in terms of hierarchies or priorities; that is, it allows the researcher to establish relations of mutual constitution wherein all the parts involved are equally necessary, without having to establish which comes first and which comes after or which is more primordial, etc. Similarly, the approach to each and every concept in this thesis is erotic; that is, it involves the whole body as it is meaningfully lived: as flesh. This, in other words, is to read and write with our flesh, with all our bodies, of which the brain, and even the mind, is just a part. Thought, in this fashion, is assumed to occur everywhere in the body, as well as perception, feeling, emotion, etc. The understanding of experience that arises from this approach is not “unified”, but always plural and, what is more, irremediably plastic. It is therefore assumed that whatever relation that may emerge between reader and writer, between author and author, this relation is bound to be an erotic relation²⁰.

²⁰ Here, we need to go back to the Pre-Freudian concept of *eros* as being primordially unified by desire (the body as a desiring body); we should even go further back from the

It will be argued in this dissertation that a conversation with the author is inevitable in a good reading of the text. This conversation, which is, as we have just said, a bodily conversation, is what is meant to be enacted in this project. This implies a sort of *mise en abyme*, but one without mirrors; it is one in which the text becomes a threshold through which reader and writer find each other by means of their respective authors. This entails that the overt presence of the researcher as the writer of this text is required at all times. And this also means that the researcher assumes himself as the author of the present text. It is this assumption that ultimately permits a face-to-face encounter with the author. Stylistically speaking, this project is a continuous testing of the borders between “inter-” (two or more discernible units having mutual activity: inter-acting) and “trans-” (two or more discernible units joining, becoming other than themselves, indiscernible: transforming). It is thus that this project was written as if it were at the very threshold where the “conver-” of the conver-sa-tion, of the conver-sion, occurs²¹; that point in which “inter-” and “trans-” converge and, simultaneously, convert, as they are transformed into something else: the “inter-” becomes “trans-” and the “trans-” becomes “inter-”. This conversation is, indeed, as erotic as it gets.

Roman folkloric translation of this god: *Cupid*. We should keep in mind that *Eros* was not only the god of love, but, also, of sexuality, of the bond that this irretrievably seals, rather than of what provoked this bond to occur (i.e., desire). As we know, it was Aphrodite’s intervention which provoked this desire, but it was what emerged by these relations (this bond, this love), by these converging bodies, that *Eros* brought about. *Eros* would be, in this way, more accurately considered the God of fertility than of sexual desire. In the foundational *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, it is written that “[a]ccording [to Hesiod] Eros was one of the fundamental causes of the formation of the world, inasmuch as he was the uniting power of love, which brought order and harmony among the conflicting elements of which Chaos consisted” (50). This is what is meant with *erotic* in this thesis: everything that is brought about by these converging bodies (where the text is also considered a body) and, mainly, the bond that is sealed by means of this convergence. As we will see, the concept of meaningfulness primarily refers to this bond.

²¹ The root *conver* derives from the Latin verb *converto* (the root-word of the verb in English “to convert”), which means “to turn, to rotate, to reverse”, from which the early definition of “conversion” as “to turn (a thing or oneself) about” comes from.

So we have, at this point, spoken of three main categories: self, style and author; from which several themes may be identified. If it is said that self and style converge, it is because they are compatible in their properties (i.e., their themes). Let us see this more in detail:

1) The self corresponds to the life of a person, which is understood as being historical (in the sense of being biographical and autobiographical), cultural (located within a set of traditions), singular, immanent and hence expressible, constant in time (even if flexible and subject to changes, in the sense in which one can say to be the “same” person one was 20 years ago, despite the obvious differences) and therefore developable; it is thus assumed that the self is what makes a life meaningful. A person with no sense of her self cannot experience her life as being meaningful. It is understood that this life is necessarily narratable, as all lives can be transformed into a text. It is at the convergence between history and tradition that we find the narrative frameworks through which these lives are narrated, and these narrative frameworks are called, in the course of this work, myths. The life of a person is, in this manner, always concomitant with her myth(s)²².

2) The style corresponds to the work of a person, which is understood as being located at a specific historical time (epoch) and within a specific tradition (set of practices), singular, immanent and hence expressible, constant in time and thus developable; it is therefore assumed the style is what makes a work meaningful. A person with no sense of his style cannot experience his work as being meaningful. It is understood that this work is necessarily incarnated, that is, it is invested with a meaningful body, as all works can be transformed into a text (in the broad sense of any-thing invested with signification). It is at the convergence between epoch and practices that we find narrative forms through

²² Here, I am subscribing to the early root of the word “myth” as *muthos*, as the transformation (by linguistic means) of an event into a narrative as explained by Paul Ricoeur in his *Time and Narrative* (especially in the first and second chapter of Volume 1); that is, “myth” not yet as a collective narrative, but only as an event made narrative.

which these works become meaningful, and these narrative forms are called, in the course of this work, fictions. The work of a person is, in this manner, always concomitant with his fictions.

3) The author is, in these terms, a founder of meaningfulness. Meaning, as it follows, is what arises at the convergence between life and work. Meaningfulness is hence understood as an erotic gesture through which affection finds a linguistic (not necessarily oral or written) articulation; that is, meaning. The convergence between life and work is performed through an act of *poiesis*, of the creation of something in the sense of the manufacturing of an artefact that is made in the world and that contributes in making the world²³. Meaning is, in this sense, always created, and it harbors the perpetual potential of re-signification, which, as it is argued in this thesis, is intrinsic to the creative act. It is in this context that the rhetorical figure of metaphor finds a decisive space for discussion: as the creative potential implicit in oral and/or written language.

These categories, and their respective themes, would sound intolerably abstract if it were not for the possibility of grounding them on the body of work of a specific author. This is the case of the present thesis. The argument of this thesis, namely, that the author emerges at the convergence between self and style, is illustrated in the study case of the work of the late Cuban-English writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante. The reasons why this writer makes for an ideal illustration will be discussed in brief. First, nonetheless, it is important to point out the assumptions that operate at the basis of his case.

It has been assumed that we are speaking here of a meaningful life that can be assessed in its entirety (which is not to say that it can be exhaustively assessed) in the sense in which his life is complete; it can be told from its beginning to its end; that is, we have a full

²³ As we know, *poiesis* is the root-word for poetry, but, we should not forget, its first connotation was that of begetting, of the making of something “else” by means of given, natural resources (which is why sexual reproduction is also a kind of *poiesis*). This is the way in which Plato employs this concept in his *Symposium*, 207d.

historico-biographical perspective. Consequently, it is assumed that we are already speaking of a meaningful self. So, the reasons as to why is this person significant to his trade (literature) or his historical importance are not subjects of discussion in this thesis. It has also been assumed that we are speaking of a meaningful work, and although posthumous works keep appearing, the potentialities of what he could write can be entirely assessed, since he cannot write anything else anymore. Subsequently, it is assumed that we are already speaking of a meaningful style. So, the reasons as to why this work could be considered literature or its artistic or aesthetical values are not subjects of discussion in this dissertation. Now, having touched upon these assumptions, we can elaborate on the reasons that make Guillermo Cabrera Infante an ideal study case for this argument.

Guillermo Cabrera Infante is currently regarded as one of the finest stylists of the Spanish language (and, for some critics, also of the English language). With the most particular writing strategies, he composed many of the most *sui generis* books of the so-called “boom of the Latin-American literature” during the second half of the twentieth century. According to his writing ethos, each book demanded from him a different kind of language, which required the manufacture of a whole different structure; often blending genres (i.e., novel, memoir, essay, film criticism, literary criticism, chronicle, etc.) in one book and, sometimes, even in one page. Several of his books are, to date, completely unclassifiable. From his *magnum opus*, *Three Trapped Tigers*, to his later English experiment, *Holy Smoke*, these books are referred to as “novel” (the former) or “long essay” (the latter) only for the sake of assigning them a shelf to dwell in the bookstores or for the librarians’ convenience. Additionally, he had an outstanding ability to mimic and channel other writers’ voices, and he delighted in parodying them in several of his works. As well, he had a most attuned ear to catch and capture the innermost subtleties of people’s speech; he devoted the major part of this skill to the almost verbatim recreation of the *Habanero* (Havanan) speech—up to the point in which he claimed to have written the only book completely composed in this dialect: *Three Trapped Tigers*. As in Marlon

Brando's case, this immense capacity allowed him to wear this or that mask, thus becoming, modelling and channeling many voices at once while his style remained unmistakable for the reader. Correspondingly, most of his work revolves around his life: he was himself the subject of all his literature. Several critics of his work have even said that he was a myth-maker, as he made a myth of his life in pre-revolutionary Havana—a Havana that never existed, but that is more real than the one many Cubans have already forgotten, either in the diaspora or inside the island. The myth of his life is bound to his life in exile, to his lost city and to all his losses; his work, in this way, is constantly mending a past for which he feels an unbearable nostalgia, a past with which he never really finished reconciling: a changeable past that constantly determined the course of his present and, in consequence, of his future.

The way through which these convergences between Guillermo Cabrera Infante's life-work and his self-style are set in motion in this dissertation is by focusing on those major events in his life that fuelled many of his works. This, I may argue, is one of the main contributions that this dissertation does to the literary criticism devoted to Cabrera Infante's work to date. As it will hopefully become clear in this thesis, this connection between life-self—work-style opens a sort of fluidity between these features that allows the connection among various aspects of his work in a way in which it had been never done before. Listing these connections, and the readings that these open, would be a most idle exercise, for it is expected that these will emerge on their own as the reader moves forward in the thesis. I will, nonetheless, single out an example of this kind of connectivity so as to illustrate this point.

As it has never seen before in the literature devoted to Guillermo Cabrera Infante, his 1972 nervous breakdown is approached through a very close connection with his writing, particularly of his works: *A Twentieth Century Job* (and its relation to the death of his alter-ego *Cain*) and his film script for the movie *Vanishing Point*, where the ever-present tropes of betrayal, speed and jealousy in the writing of *Three Trapped Tigers* are put in

perspective as they develop and die throughout the rest of his narrative. The two first mentioned works (*A Twentieth Century Job* and his script for *Vanishing Point*) are, more importantly, put in a deep relationship with works of which we know but to which we have no access as readers, since these are works the writer failed to acknowledge in his later compilations (notably in *Mea Cuba*, where not a single of the writer's political essays pre-dating his divorce with the Cuban revolution are included) or works that failed in their completion (as is the case of the script he adapted from Malcolm Lowry's novel *Under the Volcano*). The possibility of joining all these threads in his work with such a life-changing event (e.g., his nervous breakdown) is something that this convergence (life-self—work-style) allows; that is, this fluidity allowed me to say and see things about and in his literature that have been never said or seen before by any of his numerous critics. In the spirit of this convergence (life-self—work-style), each chapter (with the exception of the first, the fourth and the seventh) focuses on a major event of his life-story and in the work(s) he wrote while living such event. This dissertation approaches Cabrera Infante's life and work chronologically. The only book that is not the subject of a chapter alone is his mentioned *Three Trapped Tigers*. This book is approached as an arc that bridges all across his literature. It is argued that all the best and the worst of him, underdeveloped, developed or in its process of development, is present in this work.

The second chapter is thus devoted to the emergence of meaning in the convergence of life and work (*poiesis*). This entails a robust conceptualization of these concepts as well as the elaboration of the possibility of approaching responsibly a work of art, which I argue is possible by means of gratitude towards the presence necessarily dwelling behind the work. This grateful gesture also means to acknowledge the many licences that the critic and researcher is and will be taking as he speaks on behalf of Guillermo Cabrera Infante. Making these licenses explicit (something rarely done in literary criticism) helped me initiate a more responsible writing about Cabrera Infante's work. The category of the self is taken up in the third chapter, but from its discontinuities and ruptures. As was just pointed out, this chapter goes from Cabrera Infante's first important book, *A Twentieth*

Century Job, to his attempt to adapt Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* for a movie script. We meet here with the first fissures of totality (the very place in which autonomy is built, as it will be shown in this chapter) that eventually led the writer to a nervous breakdown that cost him considerably. The fourth chapter takes the category of the self as Guillermo Cabrera Infante heals himself (and his self) by repositioning his character in history, and thus it deals with his regaining the meaningfulness of his life through his recovery of his myths and fictions. We see this recovery through the writing of two of his most peculiar books: *View of Dawn in the Tropics* and *Exorcismos de Esti(l)o* [Exorcisms of Sty(l)e]. The fifth chapter is devoted to the more abstract conceptualization of self and style; it is through this conceptualization that the bridge towards their convergence is built, through the convergence of self-expression and self-creation, which are conjoined by the concept of "development". I argue here that both self and style are immanent and that they develop in time. This latter concept is of vital importance to the second half of the argument and, correspondingly, to the second half of the thesis; for time is conceptualized as a flux, a depth in which we are irretrievably immersed and of which we have a plural experience that translates into a plural relationship with it. Metaphor, as the trope of re-signification par excellence, starts to become more prominent in the discussion at this point. The sixth chapter deals with a different approach to discontinuity and rupture, as this latter is approached in the way in which Guillermo Cabrera Infante became a chronicler of his daily life, but also of his losses, cravings, obsessions, etc. The concept of nostalgia, which is first sketched in the third chapter, gains prominence here, as we deal with a most unusual novel/autobiography, his celebrated *Infante's Inferno*. Upon reading this work, it is argued that a different approach to the past means a different approach to the present (and vice versa), as this temporal shift is extensively discussed in this chapter. The seventh chapter is concerned with the way through which Guillermo Cabrera Infante transcended his own myth by living up to it, by experiencing the convergence between the "inter-" and the "trans-" in both his works (as happens with their translations, compilations [as is the case of *Mea Cuba*] and exercises of free association [as is the case of his *Holy Smoke*]) and his life (as assuming himself a Cuban-

English, a Havanan living London, and not only *in* London, as was before). I explore in this chapter how Cabrera Infante became the host of his own myths and of his own fictions, and, all things considered, of his own character. The eighth chapter is devoted to the way in which a “new time” (where “new” is just another word for “other”) is created: the time of the author; a time in which finitude is recognized, and whose recognition is concomitant with the recognition of mortality. It is in this chapter where the conceptualization of the author, as it has been spoken about in this preface, is most comprehensively performed. This author, living in her/his own time, separated from the writer’s and from the reader’s, but never unrelated to them, opens a pathway to the realization of a time that is continuously touching our bodies. By delineating this “time of the author”, I argue that becoming an author is a way to learn how to age and how to die; how to let go of ourselves and of our styles; which is, at the end of the day, a way to learn how to live as a self-producing yet finite entity. A discussion of the concept of faith (outside of its religious connotations) becomes central for the construction of this time, as I argue that it is because of faith that the future can be conceived, even though it is always conceived within its own finitude; given that our future is, by definition, limited by our own mortality.

After having sketched this brief itinerary as to how these categories and themes connect, I should warn the reader that the way in which this connection occurs is not straightforward, or, better said, it is not as linear as it may appear. These categories and themes would seem, at first sight, to be dispersed throughout the body of the thesis, sometimes as if they were thrown out of nowhere and, often times, interrupted without any apparent explanation. They are organized in this way, ebbing and receding as it were, because I have assumed that their development should occur in this “time of the author”. That is, the way in which these categories and themes develop into concepts within the thesis is analogous to the way in which ideas grow and develop into concepts in our own lives; which is by no means linear or straightforward, as they may stabilize at some point and then, many years later, be challenged or put in question, leading us to reformulate and

reconceive them. The text is, in this way, a finite body, a perishable body, whose life extends from page 1 to page 548 (and would include the footnotes as asides in its life). The text, as is explained in the last chapter of this dissertation, is considered a life-like self-producing (*autopoietic*) artefact and the way in which it develops (its argument, its categories, its themes) is, or wants to be, also life-like, erotic.

Another pertinent warning for the reader is to clarify many stylistic gestures and mannerisms that would seem odd to a reader unfamiliar with Guillermo Cabrera Infante's work. I have allowed, within the composition of this thesis, the constant and systematic contamination of my style by Guillermo Cabrera Infante's style. Given that the template for the life of this dissertation comes from Guillermo Cabrera Infante's work, there are several notable changes within the course of the thesis. The more arbitrary, digressional, anarchic, miscible compositional forms of exposition occur within the third and fourth chapters, where the works (and parts of Cabrera Infante's life) investigated therein are at their most arbitrary, digressional, anarchic and miscible—and also at their frailest. The sixth and seventh chapters deal with a person much more content with his fate, calmer, more confident and more aware of himself and of what he was doing, as it is noticeable in the works there explored; the compositional forms of the exposition within these two chapters also bear these traits.

There are other kind of stylistic traits that, it could be said, I shared with Guillermo Cabrera Infante; and by “shared” I mean that they were part of my writing before I ever read any of Guillermo Cabrera Infante's books. However, it should be noted that these traits also suffered a determining influence by Cabrera Infante. Mixing and blending genres, registers, voices and life events was an important feature in my writing, as it is a most recognizable feature in Cabrera Infante's. Also, mixing different times that are included in the composition (i.e., a far reaching reminiscence that may be interrupted by some immediate event [e.g., a typo]) was part of my writing before reading Cabrera Infante. Yet, the way in which Cabrera Infante performs these mixes decidedly ended up

contaminating my compositional strategies. For instance, the recreation of far reaching memories was never important in my writing, which, of course, were not mixed with sudden temporal changes wherein different and disparate references (i.e., a political, a cinematographical and a literary reference) were conjoined in one sentence. This kind of blend owes everything to Cabrera Infante's writing. In my case, this kind of mixing has always obeyed more immediate needs, since my interest has always been the recreation of simultaneity (the way in which a memory could arise simultaneous to an idea, an emotion, etc., and they could all become a part of the text at the same time). The way in which memory acquires a more prominent participation in these mixes is much more noticeable by the last three chapters, where this blend is performed more efficiently than in the earlier ones; and thus the digressional style that characterizes Guillermo Cabrera Infante's writing is better channelled.

Nevertheless, I would like to point out that this kind of contamination can never be unilateral—at least when it is correctly performed. This means that, in some way, my own quirks, mannerisms, preoccupations, obsessions, compositional strategies, etc., are somehow infused in Guillermo Cabrera Infante's. An example of this could be given by way of the mentioned mixes. The recreation of the very experience of writing is not a major feature in Cabrera Infante's style (it is somewhat prominent in his *Exorcismos*, but more as stylistic exercises than as a central concern). This feature, which is and has been a major obsession in my writing, could be appreciated in several passages in which Cabrera Infante's reminiscences end up blending with metalinguistic inquiries, where the present progressive of the "I am writing, why? how?" (i.e., "why am I writing this word and not this other? why am I using this specific syntactic structure?" etc.) blends with the preterite of the "I did, what? why?" etc.

Other shared features that are subject to this kind of mutual contamination are: 1) we both share a proclaimed love for cinema, something seminal in shaping our lives. The way in which movies, and more specifically cinematographic *imagoes*, constantly appear in the

stead of our words is always evident; as if these images were the very shadows of our written words. 2) The preponderant part that humor has played in both our lives, for it appeared in both as a pronounced mechanism of defense against hostile environments or at the face of manifest adversity. It is thus that humor became a constitutional part to the way in which we learned to think and to the way in which we learned to formulate our thoughts; both thinking processes are constantly seized, assaulted and pacified by jokes, irony and puns that hence become indispensable to the rhythm of the thinking itself. Sentences, paragraphs and, often times, whole passages would lose their rhythm if a joke, a jibe or a pun was extracted from them. 3) This connects with our shared relation, almost an obsession, with words. For both, this obsession started with a devouring curiosity and an early fascination with comic strips that moved us to teach ourselves to read those little spots filling the balloons issued from the characters' mouths. The way each letter joined the next to make a familiar sound exuberantly exceeded by meaning was a lasting impression that sealed an unbreakable bond with words. That might be behind an irresistible penchant for the use of those rhetorical devices most useful for word-playing, such as paronomasia, implicatures, dilogies, homographs and homophonies, as well as alliterations, anagrams, consonances and assonances, which are extremely useful in the production of ludic tones and textures.

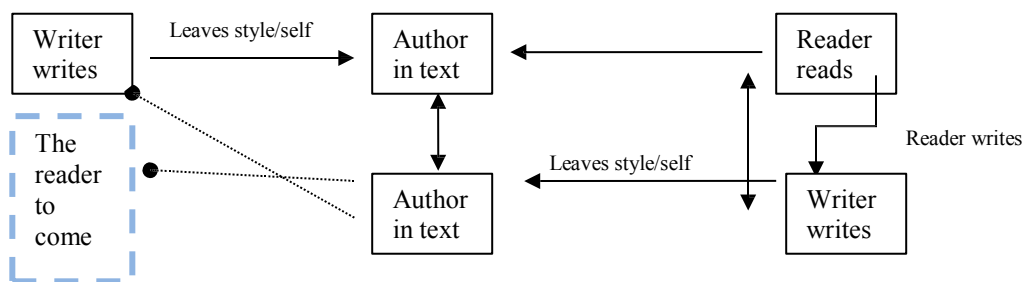
This mutual contamination would serve as a physical proof of what was posed before as an author-to-author conversation, which is another way of saying, a face-to-face encounter between reader and writer. Consequently, if both our styles are mutually contaminated, both our lives should be as well—however differently. Of course I cannot claim that anything I do here can contaminate Cabrera Infante's life, to say so, even to insinuate it, would be as ludicrous as it would be insulting. His life was lived, up to its end: and that was it. However, where I can claim that our "lives" contaminate each other is by looking at the way in which my own biography is ingrained with his, the way in which my life-events are transformed into narratives that, more often than not, tie up with his life-events: the way both biographies converse. Sometimes, my own biography comes

to illustrate a point or to take an argument further, and the events narrated seem to be separate from Cabrera Infante's, but then, as the reading progresses, we find some commonalities between what I narrate about my life (my current preoccupations, my childhood memories, my preferences) and what I narrate about his; if the content is evidently different, the way in which they are reminisced, and what and how these reminiscences connect and are connected bear the traces of this mutual contamination. I can confidently say at this moment that one of the main reasons why I chose (if unwittingly) Cabrera Infante as my study case shortly after landing in Halifax was because I left (and felt) in a sort of semi-exile from my homeland, Mexico, where my cutting off the threads with my former environment was a pre-requisite before I boarded the first plane that got me out of there. I arrived as well, without any previous experience, to a place in which I was required to change my language in order to respond to everyday interactions and, as happened later on, in order to meet academic requirements. My only experience with the English language was as a kid in elementary school. After arriving in Halifax, I noticed, with more relief than joy, that the basic structures I learned of the English language as a boy had stayed with me for all those years. Yet, my lack of command of written English (particularly of academic English) was something that confronted me with a temporal loss of my sense of self (let alone with my sense of style); given that, before leaving Mexico, writing was already my primary means of expression. I believe that this experience transparently transpires in the writing of this dissertation, and it was this experience that drew me even closer to Cabrera Infante's biography. Additionally, this continuous testing of the borders between "inter-" and "trans-" is most evident in this thesis in the constant interaction and translation between the Spanish and the English languages. I ventured at the early days of this project, as I wrote my first (illegible) research statement, that my English would inevitably end up mixing with my Spanish (as is noticeable in, for instance, some convoluted syntactic structures and the use, almost abuse, of subordinate clauses, so very strange for a native English speaker). What I did not expect was that my Spanish would also end up mixing with my English. Given that I have continued writing texts in Spanish, I have noticed, to my great surprise,

that many of my writing strategies are now, unmistakably, attributable to the English structures. My Spanish has become increasingly logical. Short sentences and noun phrases now combine with the long sentences I was much more used to write and in which I used to feel much more at ease. I am, also, much more aware of homophonies than I was before, since these are much more ubiquitous in the English than in the Spanish language—more particularly for a foreign ear, which has made (and continues making) for some serious and, at a distance, hilarious confusions.

This mutual contamination is therefore something that, as I discuss in the ninth chapter, is constantly occurring to both authors in the course of this dissertation. Authorship, as it is conceptualized here, has nothing to do with fame or reputation; it only responds to our being responsible of and for the thing made, wherein one’s self and one’s style converge. This is to say that after such a conversation occurs neither the reader nor the writer will ever be the same in terms of their respective authors. Admittedly, my work (and thus my life: myth, fiction and character) will never be the same after this conversation with Cabrera Infante. Hopefully, neither will Cabrera Infante’s.

This process could be best summarized in the next diagram:



It is important to note that this conversation is, constitutionally, multiple; that the reader participates in multiple conversations with the author or that, better said, the reader converses with the author every time he opens any of the writer’s works. The way through which the reader responds and leaves a record of these conversations is not, generally speaking, in his interpretation of Guillermo Cabrera Infante’s texts, but rather in

his writing this *other* text wherein the Cuban writer is everywhere apparent: this dissertation. Within this *other* text, this mutual contamination is conceptualized as a double movement of invocation and evocation. The way in which Cabrera Infante himself makes use of this double movement so as to recreate other places and other times, as well as other writer's styles, is also discussed in great detail in the course of this thesis. What is most important in this double movement is that it opens the possibility of infusion between both participants. This is what any real dialogue is: a process through which otherness is not only listened to but, basically, incorporated into the participants' lives and works.

It is argued then that by the double movement of invocation and evocation a real conversation, a real dialogue is set in motion, which opens the possibility of infusion; of infusing one-self into another self analogously to how one style is infused into another style. What this means in practical terms is that texts do not only affect and/or shape the way people think, if with this it is understood the way a set of mental contents is integrated, enriched and/or comprehended by a person, but that texts mainly affect the way people live, how they do what they do. Since style cannot be approached but as the formal expression of the writer's meaningfulness, her ways to mean, how a writer composes what s/he writes, it can be said that the self must also be approached in this very way; that is, formally. I argue in this thesis that this double movement is what allows the reader to infuse himself in the writer's writing, for the writer is evoked by the reader at the same time in which the writer's writing is invoked. Reading and writing thus become mutually constitutive deeds not only in the formation of the text but, more importantly, in the formation of reading and writing themselves; for writing is as necessary to reading as reading is necessary to writing. The infusion of one into the other could be characterized as the point in which these two activities happen simultaneously. Hence, if the style of a writer profoundly affects the style of another writer, it will be determining not only in how this second writer writes, but also in how the first writer is read.

It would be pertinent to comment, as we approach the end of this preface, on three important words used throughout this dissertation, which could be understood (in principle) as being neologisms; they are: *preseedence*, *spreadssion* and *authorpoiesis*. To explain their role is, at the same time, to render their origins explicit; the way in and through which they originated. Yet I would like to clarify first that approaching these terms as neologisms would be misleading. A neologism is usually understood as the induction of a “new” word in the current lexicon that results from the combination of (most of the time) two terms stemming from any of the root-languages comprehended by this lexicon, from which a “new” concept is brought about upon the semantic combination or encounter of these two terms. It is almost a requirement for these root-words to remain consistent with one language. The way these three mentioned words came about in this dissertation differs in this important matter with a neologism. They do not remain consistent with just one language, and borrow and combine roots and sounds from more than one. This should be elaborated a little further.

In order to keep consistent with the way in which these three words, *preseedence*, *spreadssion* and *authorpoiesis* originated, they should be regarded more like visual metaphors, or, in the spirit of Cabrera Infante, who was a great admirer of Lewis Carroll, and in the spirit of one of his most memorable characters, Bustrófedon, an everlasting echo of the Victorian writer, they can be approached as *portemanteau words*, that is, those kind of words that contain *in-themselves* (phoneme, grapheme and seme) a considerable variability of meaning, sense and entailment. Regarding the extent to which they can be considered visual metaphors, they can be so regarded insofar as we consider a grapheme as fundamentally being an image. This aspect is important, since, before the homophonic play, the visual element of these words was prioritized, both for their reading and contextualization.

The context in which *preseedence* is first written is within the metaphor used to illustrate the way the self “grows” inside one’s body as a sort of original soil wherein some seeds stick and blossom. Thus this term, *preseedence*, opens further this context of “the garden of the self”, which, in turn, provides this term with depth. Something similar occurs with the word *spreadssion*. This word is first written in the same chapter in which *preseedence* appears (chapter 5), and is complementary to it. It is used as a metaphor as to how this immanent self *expresses* her/his style in the world and to others, and how these expressions reproduce themselves in the world and in others; similar to the reproduction process of certain organisms, most particularly, spores. Given that the conceptualization of style is, in this chapter, discussed within the context of the concept of “voice”, the metaphor of reproduction by means of wind, i.e., by dispersal and spreading of spores, can be read and re-contextualized by means of this “expressed immanence. Finally, the word *authorpoiesis* is first written in the ninth chapter upon the discussion of the concept coined by the Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela: *autopoiesis*. This word, *authorpoiesis*, thus re-contextualizes the process of self-production of all living organisms in the process of self-production of authors and authorship. Since it is said that, by virtue of the dialogue between reader and writer an author is activated and left, and that this author is thus produced; and, since it is also said that all authors should produce more authors (that each reading should produce another process of creation, another work), then this word helps to open this concept of *autopoiesis* to heteronomy. Furthermore, the dilogic nature of the term “self-creation”, as both something producing more of itself and as something that produces (or helps to produce) a self, is most pertinent in the context in which *authorpoiesis* originates.

On the visual side, the word *preseedence* combines, etymologically, two root-languages: Latin and Old Frisian. The root-word of “seed” comes from the Old Frisian “*sêd*”, which means both to sow and that which is to be sown. On the other hand, the word “precedence” comes from Post-classical Latin “*praesedentia*”, first applied in astronomy to refer to the progressive movement of the celestial bodies, one before the other; whence

its use in English as “being prior to”. Thus the word, as an image, bears these two words at once; a process that is rounded up with the homophony between both “precedence” and “*preseedence*”. Similarly, the word *spreadssion* blends a word coming from Low German, “*spredde*”, meaning “to disperse”, and an English suffix, stemming from Middle English, “-tion” (“-ssion”, when the suffix is added to a word ending in “s”), added to transform a verb into a noun that thus indicates the action or result of its verb (the result of “to express” is “expression”). In virtue of the latter, the term is rounded up with the close-sounds between “express” and “spreads”, and the sharing of a common suffix: “*expre-ssion*” and “*spread-ssion*”. Lastly, the word *authorpoiesis* combines the Latin root-word for agent, that is, “*auctor*” (also the root-word for “author” and “autonomy”) with the Greek word for production, manufacturing and/or creation, namely, “*poiesis*”. This word, unlike the other two, is not rounded up homophonically; it is rather the difference in the sounds between the “t” of *autos* and the “th” of “author”, whose “r” sort of gets in the way of the utterance, that is meant to remark this difference between “self-production” in autonomous terms and “self-production” in terms of heteronomy, in terms of development and, most importantly, in terms of an artefact that is *not* a living organism, only life-like. It is as if this “th” and this “r” introduced the “**other**” in the equation of self-production.

Before concluding, I would like to briefly explain a graphic strategy through which another voice is both introduced and emphasized. The reader will find summaries at the end of each section (most of the times). These summaries mean to introduce the voice of a “meta-critic” who is there to provide the reader with some orientations as to where the discussion is going or to summarize a long discussion so as to help the reader to articulate it in the longer scheme of the overall argument.

And this leads us to the kind of reader I seek for this thesis. If the reader (or the “reader to come” according to the diagram) has never read any of Cabrera Infante’s work, the very possibility that the present text may instill in her/him the desire, curiosity, interest (etc.) to

read him would prove a most positive outcome. If, on the other hand, the reader is well acquainted with Cabrera Infante's work, and is even an expert or a scholar devoted to his literature, the very possibility that this dissertation could affect the way s/he thinks, approaches, comprehends ... reads his work would produce a most favorable result. All in all, it must be said that this thesis has been written for the reader who is willing to open herself to the author here discussed as much as s/he is willing to engage in a conversation with the author left herein. This thesis asks for a reader who can accept being affected and who can respond with as much conviction as with which s/he can listen; who can follow the text with patience and can challenge it patiently. This thesis seeks a reader who can live with and in it for the time s/he spends reading it, as s/he accepts this invitation, formulated right here, right now, to live it and dwell in it.

And, if it is not too much to ask, I want the reader to work.

CHAPTER 2
“THANKS FOR COMING”: WORK AND ITS RELATION TO GRATITUDE

2.1 What am I doing here?

I should write this chapter as a reader. And so I will: as the other approaching the life of another (an-other) person, a dead person. What is to approach life from its absence, from death? What is to approach a person whose life is already complete, and thus already over? What is to approach a dead person? The past life of he who is no longer here: the lives of those who are dead can only be spoken by those who are alive, thus the lives of the dead are for others to speak: Who was this person? I am, here, the author of this person; rather, am I, here, the author of this person? What are you doing here? Hopefully, by the end of this work you, my reader, will get to know the reason for this enterprise—or will, at least, get to know me better.

Here is my problem: I am setting to write a dissertation on the life and work of the late Cuban writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante, who passed away in London in the winter of 2005, and whose new (i.e., previously unpublished) and collected works are still being published—as though he were still writing, as if he were still around us. The truth is that he is not.

Here is my point: What right do I have to speak on behalf of a person who is no longer around? For doubtless to speak of a person who is absent, even to speak *about* this person, entails to speak on his behalf. The literature *about* Guillermo Cabrera Infante’s life and work has been copious. His literature became an interesting phenomenon after the publication of *Tres Tristes Tigres*²⁴ in 1965²⁵. Then, the interest grew to hold his work as

²⁴ Published in English under the title: *Three Trapped Tigers*. From now on referred to as *TTT*.

²⁵ See, for instance, Matas, Little, and Cabrera Infante’s 1970 interview with Rita Guibert (that will be later enlarged and published in her book *Seven Voices*, where the Cuban writer is selected among some of the seven most important Hispanic American living

being indispensable for what was called the “boom of Latin American literature”; this despite Cabrera Infante’s rejection and profound dislike (not to mention his decided distrust) of both the term and the phenomenon at large²⁶. After the publication of this book, the name of Guillermo Cabrera Infante started to draw attention among critics all around the world²⁷. Of course, the biggest attention came from Hispanic critics²⁸, yet the main issue is that among all this criticism his name became inseparable from his work.

This poses a first problem, for any proposition that says something in somebody’s name is done, to a great degree, on his behalf. This is most apparent when we read a critic or a

writers). Perhaps the most influential article about *TTT* was published by the renowned Uruguayan literary critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal in 1969. This was the critic who, according to GCI, finally shaped, coined and defined “the boom of Latin American literature” (see the introduction of his piece “Yo acuso en el Wilson Center” in his *Mea Cuba* [this piece did not make it to the English translation, though it was published in English with the title “Castro’s Last Stand” in the newspaper *The Sunday Telegraph*, in 1990]).

²⁶ His *Mea Cuba* is all coloured by this distrust and dislike, which starts with his pronounced opposition against the very term “Latin America”, which he saw as nothing but a facile cliché (if this is not a redundancy), a term that, by 1989, “is already beginning to smell as if it said ‘Latin America’” (*Mea Cuba* 223). His scepticism about the concept of “the boom” had to do with the fact that it was a bourgeois movement that pertained more to marketing than to literature. On this last claim, see Gibert 423-424.

²⁷ Between 1965 and 1975 there were about a dozen dissertations devoted to Cabrera Infante’s *TTT*, or that had it as a relevant subject matter (there is even one written in 1970 devoted to his collection *Así en la paz como en la guerra*), written in non-Hispanic countries. It is also worth mentioning Siemens’ 1975 article (published after his dissertation) and Kadir’s approach to the same book in 1974.

²⁸ As said before, the particular attention of Emir Rodríguez Monegal to Cabrera Infante’s work was seminal in positioning this book as being determining in the phenomenon he was so eager to keep spreading (i.e., the “boom”). However, it is also worth mentioning here the work of Block de Behar and of Sánchez-Boudy. The inclusion of Gibert’s interview to Cabrera Infante (the most extensive he ever gave) in her now classic *Seven Voices* (one of the most important efforts to give an understanding view to the emerging phenomenon of the “boom” in the Anglo-Saxon world, whose prologue was written by Rodríguez Monegal himself) along with writers such as Neruda, Borges or Paz, brought him even more attention as an established intellectual in exile (he was “chosen” as the Cuban writer among others maybe better known as Alejo Carpentier or others just as well-known, such as Severo Sarduy).

reviewer writing sentences such as: “Cabrera Infante does...”, “What Cabrera Infante is doing...”, “after Cabrera Infante did...”, etc. What happens with criticism in this regard is that even if it can be claimed that the use of the name of the writer is purely referential and that it is therefore not a “speaking for” someone but rather a “speaking about” someone, this “speaking about” becomes a “speaking for” when it is not the person himself speaking on his own behalf; more particularly so because the person “about” whom we speak is *not there*, which entails the sort of extreme passivity that characterizes the substitution made in the “speaking for”, “on behalf of”, “in the name of” someone else, someone absent²⁹. To be sure, I am assuming here that absence implies passivity. But so I will do unless there were any reason whatsoever to think that an active absence is even conceivable.

Yet, what about those who claim that it is possible to do literary criticism just by concentrating on the work itself, thereby forgetting about the absence that lurks behind it³⁰? There are two brief answers I can give at this time: first, when I speak about any of these critics, I do not concentrate *exclusively* on the critiques themselves; for I still say, “Crowe Ransom claims...”, “Tate touches on the idea that...”, etc. Secondly, I have found neither literary criticism nor any single critic that solely speaks “about” the work without employing such propositions as: “Mr. Blackmur has plenty of...” or “In the present book Mr. Blackmur several times states ...”, etc³¹. It could be perfectly valid to say that the

²⁹ We shall see a little more in detail the way in which the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas made this concept of substitution an important basis for his conceptualization of alterity in the next chapter.

³⁰ Perhaps the best known example of this kind of critics would be those stemming from the somewhat radical claims of the so-called “New critics”, who became an important trend within the 1940’s and the 1950’s. John Crowe Ransom’s 1941 essay collection *The New Criticism* gathers most of the ideas of what can be probably regarded as the program that would become a paradigm in literary criticism for nearly three decades; a paradigm that was to be led by the creed of approaching the “work for the work’s sake”.

³¹ From John Crowe Ransom’s “Ubiquitous moralists”, where he discusses a fellow critic’s (R. P. Blackmur) vision of the role of the figures of both the poet and the critic as moralists.

absence in the case of a critic that refers to a writer (to a person who writes, whether a fellow critic, a fellow scholar, a remote and renowned international figure, etc.) who is still alive is surmountable, since the absence of this person is *only* a matter of distance (both spatial and temporal); that we can still expect, or at the very least wish for interlocution. In other words, this speaking “on behalf of” can initiate a response that attenuates the substitution and that either nuances (“well, it is true that I state thus and thus, but I also...”), reaffirms (“yes, that is absolutely right”) or categorically denies (“I did never state such a thing”) what was spoken. Based on our everyday interactions, we can easily say that the first kind of response is the most frequent; that is, the one that nuances our predicates about the other person.

I should admit that this possibility of a delayed interlocution introduces another side to this problem. However, it does not solve the problem that the liberty taken by the critic (commentator, scholar, or aspirant as the present case, etc.) of speaking “on behalf of other” is a unilateral gesture; one that was neither agreed nor requested by the person in whose name I speak (i.e., the writer), and furthermore, one that takes for granted that this person will agree to be involved in such interlocution. This is to say that the unilaterality of speaking in someone else’s name when this someone is not there to agree to this does not only entail a radical unilaterality but, moreover, it entails that this unilaterality is *necessary* for the critique to come about. We are speaking here of the extreme unilaterality of initiating an activity out of extreme passivity. This, for sure, is even more accentuated when we can be absolutely positive that no interlocution will emerge out of this gesture, simply because the other on whose behalf I speak has ceased to exist. And given that this is a doctoral dissertation, I want to (I must) keep within a rational frame of mind during my whole discussion. This means that I should not get mystical and discuss the possibility that Guillermo Cabrera Infante is listening to my words in some other place, maybe somewhere in the house of being³². I thus declare this possibility foreclosed.

³² I am paraphrasing here Martin Heidegger’s famous phrase: “language is the house of being” (“Letter on Humanism” 262).

It is then that this first chapter will have the function of building my confidence to do what I proposed when I started with this project: to speak on behalf of Guillermo Cabrera Infante, and to do so responsibly. To fulfill this task, I will speak nearly nothing about him or his work in the present chapter. Rather, I will examine how, as a reader, I can feel confident enough to write *in the name of a writer*, for I am planning to do this to a great extent in the coming chapters. I should therefore examine the constitution of the place that the creative work has in the world from the viewpoint of the receiving party, from the stance of the beholder: from the reader's point of view. In this way, I should also examine the *role* of the reader in the constitution of the work. What does the reader do? To tackle this question we will need to first examine the place in which both the reader and the work come into existence; that is, the world as the place in which any work (past, present and future) exists. There is no work without a world. Though, is there a world without work?

2.1.1 Summary 1

In the next section, the “world” will be defined as the space in which every work takes place and, more importantly, where every work makes sense. Through this discussion it will be possible to establish a connection between “work” and “life”, which is needed in order to bridge towards the connection between “style” and “self” that will unfold in the coming chapters.

2.2 The world

It could hardly be contested that the world is human-made. This means that everything that is worldly is human. By the same token, everything that is human-made can be regarded as an artefact. An artefact is anything that has been transformed so as to make it worldly, whether a tool or a piece of equipment, an ornament or a piece of protection,

everything that is human-made is an artefact, as everything that is made is worldly³³. So, all artefacts are worldly because they constitute the world; the world is a world of artefacts. Nonetheless, if we admit that the world is human-made, we are moved to admit that the world is an artefact. Here, we would be facing an *aporia*, since the world would contain itself. That is, if the world contains artefacts, and the world is an artefact, then the world contains itself. Let us first distinguish what is made from what is not made, which we can very broadly understand as anything that is given: not-yet-transformed-by-human-hands. Then, we can decide whether the world is human-made or not.

It would be a mistake to try to distinguish between what is given and what is made by tracing the former as the cause of the latter³⁴; that is, the distinction between given and made cannot be done through aetiology because what is given does not cause what is made³⁵. Taken to the extreme, such aetiology would imply that the sky is the cause of the

³³ For instance, in his “The Question Concerning Technology”, Heidegger, writes: “The current conception of technology, according to which it is a means and a human activity, can therefore be called the instrumental and anthropological definition of technology” (312), wherein technology, as primarily defined as means used by humans, could be perfectly understandable in terms of world-making.

³⁴ We can find a similar distinction in Heidegger’s “The Question Concerning Technology”, where he distinguishes between matter and material, being the latter the transformation of the former through the intermediation of form. Matter is, to some extent, formless, for, according to Heidegger, the form of material is defined by its use (so, using his example, we give form to the hammer as we use it, as it hammers the nail on the wall). He will extend this discussion to artworks in his “On the Origin of the Work of Art”, wherein he understands the artwork as being all form and no use; that is, the artwork also springs from matter, but it is not material, for it is useless. We will see this to more detail later in this chapter.

³⁵ This would be the canonical differentiation introduced by Aristotle in his *Physics* (Book II), where he distinguishes four causes in every possible thing that is made: material cause (kind of matter, i.e., a piece of marble), formal cause (the arrangement on the shape of the thing, i.e., a statue), efficient cause (the agent to whom the arrangement can be attributed, i.e., the sculptor) and final cause (the *telos* that the thing serves, i.e., celebrating the memory of a deceased person); each causing the next. Heidegger observes that Aristotle’s *telos* should never be confused with purpose or aim, even though he admits this is a more than common mistake (“The Question Concerning Technology” 315).

airplane, or that motion is the cause of the motor; thus confusing conditions with causes. As a matter of fact, it could very well be the other way around; we can very easily say that we can find what is given through our understanding of what is made, as when we hold a plastic pen in our hands: we may ask about where the plastic comes from just to find out that it is a made-resource, that its matter is already material, and that it is manufactured through the mix of organic polymers and petrochemicals in a highly complex process. But this would be aetiology in reverse. This distinction should not be approached from an aetiological framework because imagination participates in what we make, but moreover, because, before there is anything to imagine, we had already interpreted what was given, and by the time we get to the given (the tree, the soil, etc.), this was already endowed with signification.

Signification and interpretation are like the two sides of the same coin³⁶. Let me add, however, that the two sides of the same coin are like the six flat faces of a cube, which, in turn, are very much like the twelve flat faces of a dodecahedron, and so forth. All these similes should lead us to what I want to point out, namely, that interpretation and signification are inseparable, and therefore, that we cannot trace which is the cause of which. Anything that can be interpreted can be done so because it has been signified. The same applies the other way around. Accordingly, the world is human-made insofar as it is the place in which everything that humans make and can make is constituted. The world is the *place* of signification³⁷. I say this by being aware that a place is a marked space, a

³⁶ This understanding in relation to signification already appears in Ferdinand de Saussure, who regards a similar mutuality in the constitution of the sign in his dichotomy: “signifier/signified” (67). Yet this inseparable relation between signification and interpretation already appears prominently in Charles Sanders Peirce’s “triads”, which are composed by “sign, object and interpretant” (§ 3). We can find as well a similar relationship between signification and interpretation in Yuri Lotman’s conceptualization of the “semiosphere”, wherein the atmospheric metaphor does to the world of interpretation and signification, i.e., “the semiotic space”, what oxygen does to the body.

³⁷ This idea about the interdependency between world and signification, where the world is, to some degree, understood as being primarily the space of signification, can be found in a vast range of thinkers and thoughts. See, for instance, Arendt (*The Human Condition*

space invested with signification by the very virtue of being inhabited. To inhabit a space is to make it a place³⁸. To inhabit is thus to take place, to occur, to happen; and therefore, the world, as a space that we by definition inhabit, is where all significations *take place*, where every interpretation is possible and made possible³⁹.

Probably, the proposition “everything that is signified is worldly” makes more sense by now. Still, can we say the same about everything that takes place? We have said that all significations take place in the world, and so do interpretations. It might be good to add that such a “taking place” is what we usually regard as an experience⁴⁰. To take place in this world is to experience this world *qua* world. Our experience of the world is already defined by a network of significations and interpretations that make this experience

168); Blanchot (*The Unavowable Community* 56); Butler (*Giving an Account of Oneself*, 17); Derrida (*Positions* 57); Heidegger (“The Question Concerning Technology” 330); Kant (*The Critique of Pure Reason* 193-200); Lyotard (*The Postmodern Condition* 27-37); Marx, especially section 1; Nancy (*Globalization* 41-43); Russon 1; Scarry (*The Body in Pain* 171).

³⁸ Cf. Heidegger (*Being and Time* 59-105), Nancy (*Globalization* 42).

³⁹ Nancy comments in this regard: “To take place is to properly arrive and happen ... what takes place takes place in a world and by way of that world” (*Globalization* 42). Similarly, Paul Ricoeur draws a distinction between facts and interpretation in his *Oneself as Another*, where he writes: “Where positivism says ‘there are facts’, Nietzsche says ‘there are no facts, only interpretations’” (15)

⁴⁰ Edmund Husserl understood meaning in terms of the form rather than the content of the *noema* (intuited content of an object of consciousness); as he writes in his *Ideas*: “meaning ... is not a *concrete essence* in the constitution of the noema as a whole, but a kind of abstract *form* that dwells in it” (275, emphasis in original). Within these terms the distinction between signification, as something made, and meaning, as being structural of the *noema*, has remained a most controversial process, for signification has been regarded in terms of what Husserl called *noesis*. The way we are defining here the “taking place” of experience as already always embedded in signification/interpretation could not be defined within an object of experience (*noema*) and thus meaning could not remain *only* structural to such object; but rather the experience as such already entails this “taking place” and thus the making of such place by way of signification/interpretation. Meaning, consequently, could be understood more *in* our bodies than in the “form” or “formation” of the idea of other bodies/objects of experience; a process we shall be seeing more in depth soon in this chapter. For some critiques to this *interpretation* of meaning in Husserl, see Ricoeur (*From Text to Action* 25-52) and Gadamer (*Truth and Method* 234-243).

possible in the first place. This mainly suggests that all experience is communicable, since everything that is signified and interpreted is, ultimately, communicable. In this way, experience is as worldly as your next artefact; yet it is not an artefact. Experience is human, but is not *made*. Experience has to do with an acquired familiarity with the things of the world, and with the world itself by way of inhabiting it. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that the world is a place in which all significations are the same, a unified space of homogeneous significations. I am saying, however, that familiarity resorts to similarity, to commonality. And, in the same way in which my brother is different from my cousin and they are different from my partner who is positively different from my best friend, there is a sound commonality among us that binds us together, through which we can say that we *know* each other—that we had met. In the case of my brother and my cousin, they just happened to come into being in a very proximate space to where I was. In the case of my partner or my best friend, they just happened to be (take place) in a certain space and time in which I was (taking place)—but our experiences, our communicating them to each other, our experiencing together, is what has made our familiarity possible. The world as a network of relations is thus only possible if there is familiarity among those relating⁴¹: a common ground⁴². This familiarity may be given (e.g., family) or developed (i.e., friendship), yet the way these experiences are communicated and re-signified by having different interpretations is what makes our life in the world worldly enough—worthy enough.

Signification in this case is what *makes* common ground for interpretation. That is, as in the case of interpretation, a signification is a predicate of something about something⁴³.

⁴¹ Cf. Heidegger (*Being and Time* 80-82) and Arendt's enrichment to Heidegger's concept of the world as a "system of relations" through her beautiful metaphor of the world as a "web of human relationships" (*The Human Condition* 184). We shall see this latter more in depth later in this chapter.

⁴² Cf. Nancy (*Globalization* 43 and 49).

⁴³ This was extraordinarily put into question by Jaques Derrida's conception of *differance*, as he traced the "aporias" or *impasses* that stemmed from applying a concept to itself (or a subject becoming its own predicate) by way of a question (i.e., what is

To say “this is that” about anything does not only entail signification (“this signifies that”), but it also opens a common ground of communicability about “this” and “that”; still, it also indicates a particular interpretation of such signification: “this *as* that”. We will speak of this process (the “this” *as* “that”) in more depth later in this chapter. For the time being, it should suffice to say that the world, *as* the world of experience, *as* the place of significations and interpretations, *as* the space we inhabit and where we thus take place, *is* as much human-made as it is human-making; it makes humans to the same degree in which humans make it: a manufacturing whose origin can be neither traced nor retrieved. The world is the work of someone else’s hands, for its network of significations was already at work and set for interpretation when we arrived in this world. And perhaps I should add that when I arrived here, I, myself, was already being signified and set for interpretation. The world *was* the work of others.

2.2.1 Summary 2

So: the world is the product of human work, the made-place for all artefacts to come about, for it is the place of signification, where these artefacts make sense insofar as it is already a space transformed and marked by human interpretation; in sum, the world is the place of experience.

2.3 The other that is the reader

Perhaps we should proceed by accepting a limitation, an extremely significant one though: no matter how great our familiarity with the other is, we can never get to know

what[?]: A is A). This mainly has to do with Kant’s own concept (*Critique of Pure Reason* 210-265) of predication and his distinction between “noumena” (objects that can be thought but not experienced) and phenomena (objects that can be both experienced and thought); and therefore, with his distinction between category (*a priori*) and concept (empirical by necessity). Derrida sets to prove that these categories are aporetically constituted insofar as the very nature of the concept’s meaning is always other than itself (A is B + C), and thus the very effort of “thinking” a category (A is A) becomes an *impasse*. For a detailed explanation of this aporia in Derrida, see Bennington 70-84.

the other fully, just as we can never render ourselves fully knowable. We arrive into this world in awe, a myriad of significations offered to us. And then, out of the blue, we find ourselves offered to signification. As an Aztec maiden who is offered to the Gods, her heart still beating to the sun, we find ourselves in the very hands of others who offer us to the world, our selves quivering to the call we listen for the first time: our name. Suddenly we are called, and after this had happened there is no way back: we are in the world. We find ourselves at a middle point in our lives and, by the time we realize it, we are already offering our “accounts” to others⁴⁴. If the world was signified/interpreted, called by others, is it possible to know *what* these others *did*? My answer would be no, we cannot know; but what we can know is that whatever they did, they started by reading, which is the first instance before calling.

The use I am making here of the concept of reading is broader than the one we have as looking and interpreting printed characters. We can hold, though, the first part of this definition so as to expand it to wider horizons; reading as looking and interpreting; reading as interpreting “characters” whose names we know by heart. For instance, I read: computer, desk, keyboard, monitor, window, windowpane, night, landscape, tired... before I say: As I am typing this, I realize the night has fallen already as the landscape disappears on the other side of my window—then I feel tired. Everything I read was called before I say anything about it⁴⁵. I was called Roberto, I had no saying in this—and, believe me, if I had, my name would have been less pretentious, less Italian (a country neither my parents nor me had ever visited), less formal, less soap opera-ish. Maybe you

⁴⁴ As Butler would have it: “An account of oneself is always given to another” (*Giving an Account of Oneself* 21).

⁴⁵ Heidegger understands language as an opening as it names things for the first time. In his “On the Origin of the Work of Art”, he writes: “Language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings being into the world and to appearance ... Such saying is a projecting of clearing, in which announcement is made of what it is that beings come into open *as*” (198, emphasis in original).

would be reading what Juan, Pancho or José had written. But you are reading what Roberto writes, as I am the person who answers to this name⁴⁶.

In this way, just as we expand our understanding of “reading”, we can expand our understanding of what a text is⁴⁷. We should admit that the world is not mute, that the world speaks as it is spoken about: we should admit that there is not a world devoid of language, a wordless world—a worthless world⁴⁸. At the background of every landscape, of every room (empty or otherwise), of every sky and every tree, lurks a language already spoken, already there. This background is what we can understand as a text. Why text and not discourse instead⁴⁹? After all, this latter term has been used for the last forty to fifty-

⁴⁶ See for instance the way Butler speaks of this calling in terms of interpellation, which she takes from Althusser’s own conceptualization (105-108), wherein being called is always being called by another (the “hey you” and his now famous example of the police doing the calling) and always in the context of an ideology (or Ideology, as he would have it). Butler, however, will extend this “naming” and “being interpellated” by joining it to John Austin’s theory of the “performative”, from which her theory of “performativity” comes from. For a more detailed account of Butler’s interpretation of Althusser’s ideas and her conceptualization of “performativity”, see her *Gender Trouble*, more particularly chapter 3.

⁴⁷ This understanding of the text is highly indebted to Ricoeur’s own elaboration of it. See his *From Text to Action*, mainly his “What is a Text” and his “The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text”.

⁴⁸ This presupposition spans through the whole history of Western philosophy, from Epicure to Augustine to Aquinas to Rousseau to Heidegger to Ricoeur to Foucault, and any attempt at listing this would be an idle exercise. Enough should be to say that this presupposition is, mainly, rooted in what has been called Continental Philosophy, for in the Philosophy of Language of the so-called Analytic Tradition, this presupposition is not as clear-cut and finds some vehement challenges, mainly from the neo-positivists (also called “realists”), whose philosophical project has as its point of departure the extra-linguistic reality to which language does nothing but referring to. For some examples of this kind of neo-positivist challenges, see Carnap 69-95, Davidson 81-85, Kripke 98-109, and Quine 203-208.

⁴⁹ The concept of “discourse” as being constitutive of a linguistically and historically organized reality that is, by necessity, known, is central to the work of Michel Foucault. For a thorough, if at times equivocal, definition of this term, see *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, particularly the second part. For a more comprehensive relationship between discourse and language, see *The Order of Things*, chapters 2 and 4.

years with wide acceptance among scholars. I am subscribing here to the hermeneutical assumption that language is not primarily constituted by political power, nor that it is primordially a site of political struggle⁵⁰. Rather, language is understood more comprehensively as the link that binds *reality* together. I am mentioning this dangerous word for the first time here, “reality”, but that is exactly what language is supposed to constitute in hermeneutical terms. Hermeneutically speaking, reality and text are one and the same. Therefore, language is an epistemological necessity before it becomes *the* site of conflicting powers. Language precedes politics. Texts include politics, and though they include it to a very large extent, they also include imagination, eroticism, death, desire, memories, poetry and many other features I will not even try to list. Texts are plural. Every text is polyphonic⁵¹.

Since we have already expanded our understanding of “reading” and “text”, we might also expand our understanding of “narrative”. The old idea that all narratives are plots is,

⁵⁰ In his *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explains that hermeneutics is mainly shaped by the understanding of experience and the relation that this has with texts; as he writes in the introduction of his book: “the human sciences are connected to modes of experience that lie outside science: with the experience of philosophy, of art, and of history itself” (xxi), all those which, as he elaborates within his book, are constituted by texts.

⁵¹ This concept, polyphony, has become prominent in literary criticism due to Bakhtin’s use of it in relation to the novel, and mainly to those written by Dostoevsky; whose incorporation of multiple “voices” (i.e., *Brothers Karamazov*) by way of the characters (where there is not one leading voice/character) made for a broader approach to truth (*Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* 8-15). However, we should note that the original use of this concept comes (as Bakhtin very well acknowledges) from music, and polyphonic pieces can be found as early as the 9th C. (with the writing of the *Musica Enchriadis*). Polyphonic music reached its technical climax during the Baroque in the 16th and early 17th C., with Johann Sebastian Bach as its main exponent. As a matter of fact, it was this latter composer who became a sort of paradigm for Bakhtin’s analogical use of polyphony in literature. Yet, polyphony in music means more than “many voices” without any becoming dominant over the other; it mainly refers to a sort of independence between melodies that makes it possible for each to stand as a composition of its own (Apel 132-134); something that in, say, *Brothers Karamazov*, would not apply, since not one character may stand on its own without its relation to the others.

at the very least, debatable⁵²; plot being the organization of *actions* in time and space. This idea is very much responsible for the synonymy between narrative and story⁵³. This synonymy responds more to a convention than to an epistemological necessity. If we understand a convention as being purely a functional operation that rules over restricted (mostly social) interactions, then we should concede that whatever is understood conventionally, it responds only to the function that this convention facilitates. Thus, the notion that narrative is synonymous with story responds to the function that this conception of narrative facilitates (and has facilitated) in Western societies⁵⁴. We are inundated with stories, and it seems as if they had always been there. The story (linguistically organized actions in time and space) is thus a narrative convention. In this vein, the only condition we need in order to have a narrative is the linguistic organization of *events* of any nature in a particular space and time. That is, these events are not restricted to actions, they rather include whatever takes or may take place in the world: a meteorite moving too close to the Earth, falling rain, a thunder bursting, some tree

⁵² It can be argued that Aristotle (*Poetics*, 97-122) understood narrative as being always already in relation to plot (since the making of narratives entailed the making of plots; i.e., organization of actions in time and space), being this [*muthos*] the most essential part of the six elements constituting tragedy. For an outstanding critique to Aristotle's approach, which broadens the concept of "narrative" beyond characters who act, see the first chapter of Ricoeur (*Time and Narrative*, V. I.).

⁵³ Schrag's words on this matter summarize this traditional prejudice: "If narrative does not tell a story to someone, it is not narrative" (26). This is what Ricoeur's project set to broaden with the three volumes of his monumental *Time and Narrative*, where the concept of narrative is not necessarily indebted to the creation of a plot. For an engaging discussion on this presupposition coming from Aristotle and Herodotus (which owes a great deal to the differentiation between myth and history) see chapter 2, vol. 1. In the following chapter, he proceeds to elaborate his concept of "threefold mimesis", through which he extends the conceptual field of what can be counted as an action in a narrative. Early by the second volume, in the second chapter, Ricoeur proceeds with a rich conceptualization of the "event" and its necessary construction in history (historiography included).

⁵⁴ For a very interesting account of the obsessive drive to tell our stories and the way in which current social media have participated in channelling this drive (seemingly to "share" our stories, but more to "shape our [social] selves" or personas), see Holstein & Gubrium 104-116.

springing, the city lights shining for the first time today, the one and only tap-dancing atom, and so on. In this sense, this organization brings about a sort of coherence (a binding together among elements: the sky, the rain, the water, the soil, etc.) and continuity (the water falls, the soil gets wet, etc.) proper to itself. This is to say that every form of organization determines its sense of coherence and continuity. There are as many forms of organization as there are events that can be recorded in the world. There are as many narratives as there are forms of organization in this life. It is worth noting that narrative conventions exist very much as signification does. This might help to explain why our forms of organization reveal our ethical position. The place we take (the place we occupy, where we happen to be) thus becomes a position in regard to the world we inhabit. Our narratives, our forms of linguistically organizing events in time and space, say a great deal about our ethical positions, of our values, of what we regard as valuable and significant⁵⁵. In any event, we should not confuse narratives with narrations, the latter being the result, the product of our narratives (the story told, the song sung, the poem recited, etc.).

Reading understood within the terms elaborated just two paragraphs ago can be understood as both interpreting and signifying. When we started to read, the words were not ours, nor were the names, the texts or the narratives, and neither was the context, the con-text (the relation of proximity among words and names); yet we kept reading, and so we must; for it is only thus that these names, these words, texts and narratives can be re-signified. And as a word is never read on its own, a person never reads alone. Re-signification is thus the task of interlocution. In reading texts there are, at the very least, two people involved⁵⁶. It is then, as we will see later, that this dyad proliferates in *intertextuality*. Why is re-signification so important? Why is it treated as a “must”? What

⁵⁵ See the relationship between value and signification in Ricoeur (*Oneself as Another* 115). We shall see in greater detail the relation between signification and meaning, and therefore between meaning and ethics, later on this chapter.

⁵⁶ Cf. Derrida’s concept of “counter-signing” (“Psyche: Invention of the Other” 20). We shall see into more detail this concept in the seventh chapter.

is at stake here is life itself—life in the world. If we accept that there is no life devoid of movement, and if this applies to bare life, to natural, physical life, then it applies with equal significance to worldly life⁵⁷: it is the time and space of signification, texts and narratives, that must be re-signified so as to keep them moving, so as to keep them alive. By as-signing a position to the reader, the text does not only assigns its reader, does not only call her, but it also invents her by opening a new position in the world for her. For this task, the reader is very well-endowed with his “inner-eye”, which reads every time it blinks. The task of reading is a task of listening. Our “inner eye” is blind, and it is when we acknowledge its blindness that we get to realize what a great listener it is.

2.3.1 Summary 3

To read is to be able to signify and interpret. To be able to read entails that what is read was called before: the text. To be a reader is to be in this world. To be in this world is to be called. To be called is to be read. To be read is to be real. To be real is to be narratable: to be linguistically organisable in time and space. Would this mean that life is, by necessity, readable and therefore narratable? The discussion is moving now towards a conceptualization of meaningfulness in terms of signification.

2.4 Life: Action!

We should start by pointing towards yet another limitation: life *qua* life exceeds all forms of linguistic organization; life itself *is* organization, yet one kind of organization that is always already spilled all over our world. There is no world without life, but there may very easily be life without world. Even so, I believe that we can agree by now that worldly life is a life endowed *with* signification. And hopefully we can agree that human

⁵⁷ For a very compelling account of this difference (*zoe*, bare life and *bios*, political-worldly life) as was lived (since there was no one word in Greek “to express what we mean by the word ‘life’”) in Greek *polis*, and how this difference was seminal in shaping Roman Law, see the Agamben, especially his introduction.

life, life in the world, is life as it is humanly organized: a life linguistically organized in time and space. What this means is that we read the linguistic organization of life as it has been organized for us when we first came in. We said in the previous section that *our* main form of linguistic organization (this possessive pronoun referred to a geographical metaphor that has expanded beyond its spatial possibilities: the West spilled all over its cardinal points) has been by means of a “plot”, that is, by means of linguistically organized actions in time and space. We are going to dwell a little bit here, just to clarify our current position in this world: as Westerners.

Life constituted by actions is a story older than the world itself, the Western world I mean⁵⁸. Now, the degree to which humans have owned their actions has varied over the centuries. So, the question of agency in a story, to whom an action might be attributed, is what has suffered manifold variations all along the history of stories⁵⁹. Yet, the question of actions as “remitting to ‘whys’” (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 61), either causes,

⁵⁸ Here we should trace the line to Persian folklore, mainly after the influence of Zoroastrianism, which most likely also influenced the Judaic tradition (Applegate 184-186). As we very well know Persia and Greece shared much more than a warlike rivalry and a numerical system; that is, both mythologies were contaminated by each other. Something similar happened in Spain during the so-called “Golden Age” of Christianity during the 15th C., as the Muslims at the South of Spain had already exercised a considerable influence in this region (Menocal 3-48). In this same vein, Prehispanic lore (particularly of those cultures that were dominant at the time the Spaniards arrived to America), from Mayan to Incan to Aztec, hardly ever disappeared from these regions and ended up creating a unique syncretism in Catholicism and the Catholic faith; and, we should not forget that, though America is more geographically to the West than “the West” itself (that is, Europe), the “Western culture” does not include any of the Amerindian cultures. This is all to say that the relation between West and East (or Pre-West, as is the case of America) has never been as clear-cut as our historical stereotypes would have it. For a most fascinating account on the exotization of the East and Eastern lore (and the many “coincidences” with Western lore) see Said 31-73.

⁵⁹ See how this principle has operated in theatre, for instance, from the introduction of the *Deus ex machina* in the Greek Theatre (very likely since Aeschylus) to the role played by God in 15th and 16th C. Spanish theatre, as was Calderón de la Barca’s overt use of the character of God in his *El Gran Teatro del Mundo* [*The Great Theater of the World*], which may be opposed to Samuel Beckett’s absolute absence of God, often translated in a paralysis of action, such as happens in his *Waiting for Godot*.

intentions, motivations, conditions, or simple puppet-moving (divine or evil forces or political powers ... “pulling the strings”) remains intact. A narrative defined by actions is a narrative in which every action necessarily “remits to a chain of ‘whys’” (61), and in which this chain links actions in such a way so that they cohere and find a sense of continuity. It is precisely this chain of “whys” what, among many other things, was put into question by the so-called Postmoderns (in philosophy, modernists in literature)⁶⁰, wherein it is the language that facilitates this chain that is offered as the ultimate “why”, but also as the “why” that never *finally* arrives⁶¹.

But moving back to the good old days when we believed in actions that remitted to “whys”, in actions that “explained themselves” throughout a story, and to life in the world as being organized in terms of actions, we might say that a cluster of actions within “the (Hi)story of the world” constituted a text in a very similar way that a cluster of names constituted a sentence in the previous section⁶². This mainly suggests that actions in the world can be read in a very similar fashion to the “things” in it (that is, of course, if we

⁶⁰ Perhaps the paradigmatic example in the novel is James Joyce or, rather, that work of his that contains an entire literature, *Ulysses*; in poetry, however, it is likely that the first name that comes to mind when we speak of modernism is that of Stephan Mallarme. In philosophy, on the other hand, post-modernism was a term coined by Jean-Francois Lyotard that ended up defining an entire generation (i.e., Jacques Derrida’s, who was never comfortable with such an epithet, or even Michel Foucault’s, who did not entirely subscribe to this “group”).

⁶¹ It is likely that the metaphor (now almost a metonym) of this waiting (for any totality to arrive, whether a deity, language, etc.) is to be found in Samuel Beckett’s groundbreaking *Waiting for Godot*. In terms of language, however, Jaques Derrida’s concept of *differance*, as the perennial deferral of meaning (as a total value) is the one that would come first to mind. In the last interview made to Derrida (published as *Learning to Live, Finally*), the French philosopher says: “I never *learned-to-live*. In fact not at all! Learning to live should mean learning to die” (24, emphasis in original), which is the *only* final stop that either (both?) modernism and post-modernism would finally admit/accept.

⁶² You know, the example of the “computer, monitor, etc.” and the sentence composed right after.

regard the sky, the tree, the soil, etc., also as things⁶³). This would lead us to conclude that actions are bestowed with signification; that they are and were signified before we came into the world. So, we read actions in the world in a very similar way to how we read things in the world⁶⁴. All actions are worldly.

Then again, we should not go as far as to the good old fashioned days of divine intervention and cosmic forces; we should approach instead to the old-yet-still-fashionable days of attribution and retribution: the days of agency and production⁶⁵. The world of actions is also the world of deeds, of actions that *produce* something in the world (more world, its maintenance, its support, its re-signification, etc.)⁶⁶. Thus every product produced must have a producer. In the world of products and production the agent is regarded as a producer; for all products are worldly products, but also, or because of this, they are worthily products, or so they should be. We ought to admit that in the modern world, that is, the world that started with the industrialization of its own process

⁶³ That is if we subscribe to the phenomenological notion of thing; as an “intentional object” or an object of consciousness that can never be completely severed from the one “having consciousness of it”. We can find this definition of a thing in Edmund Husserl’s first Meditation of his *Cartesian Meditations*. Martin Heidegger’s understanding of the “thing” was very much indebted to Husserl’s; it is from here that Heidegger draws to conceptualize his tiered concept of “thing” in relation to humans (the “thingly thing”, i.e., matter; the “workly thing”, i.e., material: equipment or tool or artefact; and, finally, the “artly thing” [this latter neologism I derive it from the other two, which are Heidegger’s], which refers to the work of art). See his “On the Origin of the Work of Art”.

⁶⁴ Cf. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 64.

⁶⁵ For a better comprehension on the way this old-but-still-fashionable days still operate, see MacIntyre 4-19; Taylor 11-36; Martin & Barresi *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* 213-230, 265-278.

⁶⁶ The philosopher that would first come to mind in this regard is, certainly, Karl Marx. We should bear in mind, however, that the whole vocabulary about “production” in social terms originated from the field of Biology, and from the notions of reproduction and life-maintenance. Auguste Comte would be credited as the greatest champion of transplanting biological concepts to society and, ultimately, as the father of Sociology (if by artificial insemination). Marx was no exception in the adoption of this language, and his ideas of “production” in the capitalist systems were very much related to these metaphors stemming from Biology (i.e., the “economic cell-form”, “circulation”, “consumption”—more importantly, he saw the artifact as the recreation of the body). See Marx 661-670.

of production and which reached its climax during the emancipation of slavery throughout the nineteenth century, every product has a producer who should be paid for her work. I am getting at the conceptualization of this word for the first time, “work”, we should see more on this concept in the next section. For the moment, it will be enough to say that in the world of products and production every action can be transformed into work.

Thus far, we have already spoken of plenty of worlds: the world of artefacts, the world of signification and interpretation, the world of texts and narratives, the world of actions, the world of products and production; yes, and we shall be adding some more layers by the end of this chapter. For now, we should just add that in this world of products and production each agent is potentially a producer who, by this virtue, is entitled to receive some remuneration in exchange for her work. But we are thinking of something else in this chapter. We will be trying to think *beyond* remuneration; that is, we will try to think beyond self-sufficiency⁶⁷.

According to the current liberal paradigm (some still say: neo-liberal) a producer can and ought to feel entitled to some payment for what s/he has produced. This payment is most frequently translated into current currency, that is, it is usually translated into money; though not necessarily so, it can also translate into state, shares, stocks, etc.; the point being that there should always be *someone* (this could also be a group of “someones”, as in an Anonymous Society or S.A.) to whom to write the check, as well as, on the other end, someone (or a group, etc.) to whom to send the bill. Nonetheless, what we are thinking here, this “beyond payment”, refers to actions that, by their very virtue of their taking place in the world, can be understood as being already “out there” (Levinas 54).

⁶⁷ As Levinas writes in *On Escape*: “This conception of the ‘I’ as self-sufficient is one of the essential marks of the bourgeois spirit and its philosophy ... This conception presides over capitalism’s work ethic, its cult of initiative and discovery which aims less at reconciling man with himself than at securing for him the unknowns of time and things” (50).

And it is by virtue of this being “out there” that we can think of action (and production) in terms of creation. This is to say that if the world is always already “out there”, no self-sufficiency can be assigned, neither to the world nor to its creators, for an “out there” is, by definition, plural; that is, it is by definition common and it is therefore shared. But before getting into this discussion of an “out there” as it is shared, let us first concentrate on getting a better grasp of what we mean by creation, and add yet another layer to the crusts of worlds that keep accumulating on these pages. What we are thinking here is a world that can only be achieved by a different kind of work: a creative work. This would be a world of creations and creation.

2.4.1 Summary 4

Only life in the world can be narrated. Everything that is narratable has signification and can be therefore interpreted. Western narratives, however, have heavily depended on the organization of actions rather than events. As will be seen in this section, actions need characters, events do not. There is a prejudiced interdependency between life and action. Characters have become agents in Western narratives. The problem of attribution in a story and the necessary connection between agency and consciousness is tackled here for the first time in the thesis; how does this attributable agency occur in a life-story? This is a question that will be developed all throughout the dissertation.

The relation between the production of things and the production of signification entails a relation between the product and its producer, which is another form of agency, and which, in the course of this thesis, will connect with authorship (already “beyond self-sufficiency”).

Before defining the creative work (*poiesis*) as the production of re-signification, it is important to define work and production at large, in the way in which Hannah Arendt defined it in her analysis of human activity (*vita activa*), where, as it will be seen, she does not distinguish enough creative work from production at large. The temporal framework of each of Arendt’s three activities, it is worth mentioning, will not only be

retained in the discussion of the creative work that will follow, but also will grow and develop throughout this dissertation. Thus, the discussion of Arendt's categories is seminal in expanding the concept of work and *poiesis* beyond intentionality, and, what is more important, of meaning, as will be apparent in brief.

2.5 Vita Creativa: Poiesis

2.5.1 *Vita activa*

I will base my account of the creative work on Hannah Arendt's memorable analysis of human activity in her *The Human Condition*. Actually, the title for this section, as the basis of my analysis, is a paraphrase of Arendt's analytical framework. *Vita activa*, she says, is understood as being opposed to *vita contemplativa*, this latter having to do with the passivity of thought and the former concerned with the activity of deed. This opposition was, as Arendt explains, a major keystone in the organization of the Greek *polis*, which was almost integrally inherited by the Romans, whose "natural law" was based on a more thoughtful approach to the life of the body. Given that this is exactly the same world in which *Metaphysics* was invented, it is not surprising that there were two lives, one for the mind (*contemplativa*) and one for the body (*activa*).

To be sure, as in all *Metaphysics*, purity on either pole is only ideal, the first being the ideal for most philosophers⁶⁸, and the latter thought of as a less-than-ideal life, only reserved for slaves (who were not considered humans after all⁶⁹).

⁶⁸ This was, indeed, Plato's famous formulation of the ideal of *the philosopher* (i.e., *The Republic* Book VII), the one who could get out of the world of shadows projected in the Cave and who could consequently *see* the light. This is something that Aristotle took to heart when he wrote about his *eudemonia*, which consisted in a pure contemplative life, only attainable for the good philosopher (i.e., *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IV). Epicurus, however, was not far behind, as he proposed that absolute happiness was only attainable for those who were no longer "in need" of pleasure, and thus already lived a pleasurable life; his *ataraxia* consisted in a self-sufficiency attained by absolute freedom which, to a great extent, meant the absence of physical labor (i.e., Laertius Vol. 2, Book X). Even

For Arendt, the *vita activa* (a form of organization of life) is based on three main activities: Labor, Work and Action. The first one refers to those activities concerning the body, wherein what is at stake is bodily survival itself⁷⁰. Work corresponds, she says, to the “unnaturalness” of human life, to the artifice and the production of artifacts, that is, to the world itself; what is at stake is not the bodily survival of the species but the worldly outlasting of their world, of everything and anything that we design to outlive us⁷¹. Action, on the other hand, does not necessitate of the production of worldly things, for it is the activity of humans living among humans par excellence, this is why politics is the realm of action—where action happens⁷². According to this reasoning, there is no apolitical action, given that politics refers to the world *as* we inhabit it; Arendt writes: “No human life is possible without a world which directly or indirectly testifies to the presence of other human beings ... All human activities are conditioned by the fact that men live together but it is only action that cannot be imagined outside the society of men” (22). So, living together is living in action. However, living humanely is living actively. That would be a first distinction between action and activity that we should leave for a little later. First, I shall explain in more detail each of these three activities as they are defined by Arendt.

Let us start with labor, not only because this is the one with which Arendt starts, but also because it is most particularly concerned with present time—because it is the most necessary. Labor only cares for necessity, and it only attends to those arising from the

though, it should be noted, this latter philosopher admitted slaves amongst his potential pupils.

⁶⁹ See Arendt, *The Human Condition* 83. On an interesting commentary on the defense of slavery by Aristotle and Plato and a most interesting interpolation with the sophists (who were among the very few who raised any objections to this practice at that time), see Svendsen 52.

⁷⁰ “the human condition of labor is life itself” (7).

⁷¹ “the human condition of work is worldliness” (8).

⁷² “the human condition of action is plurality” (8).

body. Indeed, the bodily efforts involved in labor are its *raison d'être*, for it is bodily necessity that drives these efforts. Nothing memorable, nothing lasting emerges from labor, but only immediate bodily satisfaction⁷³. As we just said, in ancient times labor was opposed to those activities devoted to deliberation, choice, and foresight, which characterize free action. Consequently, labor was the opposite of freedom, just as necessity was the opposite of free will, which gave all the more justification for the practice of slavery. We can be sure that without slavery neither Plato nor Aristotle would have written a word, as they very explicitly said so, more particularly the second philosopher, who was a devoted advocate of slavery⁷⁴. As Arendt elaborates, it was not until modern times, that is, when the practice of slavery was seriously put into question, that the association between labor and productivity first came about; and thus when a new nuance was introduced to this concept⁷⁵. This nuance means that the efforts invested in labor, so necessary to the maintenance of life, entitled the laborer to the fruits of her pains and efforts. This sense of entitlement was the basis of modern economy and the root of all the violent protests against machinery at the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, just at the dusk of the so-called “First Industrial Revolution”⁷⁶.

⁷³ See Arendt, *The Human Condition* 80-81, where she comments on the use of the word “labor” as a noun, which never designates the finished product resulting from the laboring exertion, but only refers to its painful efforts; whereas the word “work”, when used as a noun, unambiguously designates the finished product resulting from working (as happens in German’s *werken*, French’s *oeuvre* or Spanish’s *obra-trabajo*).

⁷⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition* 83.

⁷⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition* 85-88.

⁷⁶ In his *Capital*, Marx writes: “The revolution effected by machinery in the juridical relations between the buyer and the seller of labour-power, causing the transaction as a whole to lose the appearance of a contract between free persons, afforded the English parliament an excuse, founded on juridical principles, for the interference of the state with factories” (chapter 15, 3A). As we know, Adam Smith was much more optimistic about the effects that machinery would have in free labor. In *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, as he speaks about the “burghers” (who were at the lowest scale of the social ladder but who could also become “free-traders” due to the “rise of industry”), he writes: “the principal attributes of villanage and slavery being thus taken away from them, they now, at least, became really free in our present sense of the word

Now, for the second activity: work. According to Arendt, this is the domain of the future as something to be expected rather than as something that takes us by surprise—for this is the realm of mediation. Work is necessarily mediated by tools, by artefacts designed to ease bodily efforts while optimizing their productivity and bolstering their powers⁷⁷. This language was not certainly the one employed in ancient times, for productivity was not at the core of human activity. Yet, even at that point in time, work was unavoidably mediated by the use of tools. That is, in the same way in which labor is bound to necessity, work is bound to use⁷⁸. Fabrication, “the work of our hands”, brings about useful artefacts. In this manner, a useless artefact is a product of worthless work⁷⁹. The worth of work is in direct relation to the reification of matter turned into material, which is then turned into something else. Arendt writes: “Fabrication, the work of *homo faber*, consists in reification ... Material is already a product of human hands, which have removed it from its natural location” (139). Certainly, Arendt makes an exception for artworks (which, she points out, are the *only* exception to this rule in mass society, which excludes the most important exception of antiquity: the philosopher), whose products are not meant for use, and where, therefore, reification is more apparent, since “it is more than mere transformation; it is transfiguration, a veritable metamorphosis in which it is as though the course of nature ... [was] reverted” (168). Thus, what makes an artwork more

Freedom” (book III, 3.6). For a very insightful comparison on the value of technology between Smith and Marx, see Arendt 136.

⁷⁷ See Arendt 120-121.

⁷⁸ If we compared how Arendt traces the history of the artefact as being bound to use in her brilliant historical account with Martin Heidegger’s ontological understanding of the artefact as something in between matter and art (the “worldly thing”, which is equipment) in his outstanding phenomenological investigations (“On the Origin of the Work of Art”; “The Question Concerning Technology”), we will find no few coincidences, as the artefact is always already an intermediary—the very core of the realm of mediation. However, we must, of course, bear in mind the two very different frameworks from which each philosopher writes, so that we can understand the important differences through which they arrived at quite different conclusions: art is central in Heidegger, whereas politics is the realm in which everything comes together for Arendt.

⁷⁹ See Arendt 137.

“intensely worldly” is its “outstanding permanence”, which can only be attained because it is not “used”, and hence not consumed by human hands. The use of an artefact is supposed to determine its duration, just as the quality of its fabrication is supposed to determine its durability⁸⁰. For that reason, use implies consumption, in the sense of wearing down that which is used. It is in work that human beings find a sense of “sameness” and from which s/he derives an identification with the world; the stability proper in every object, the stability we assume in objectivity, has to do with the fact that such objectivity comes with the fabricated object, with its fabrication process. As Arendt observes: “men ... can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table ... [A]gainst the subjectivity of men stands the objectivity of man-made world rather than the sublime indifference of an untouched nature” (137). It is work that makes habit possible, for the very process of fabrication must grant the resources through which this process can be repeated. Work is a matter of habit.

Thus far, we have focused on the relations between humans and what humans make. But, what about other humans? Humans are not human-made (well, at least not manufactured by human hands); thus, the relation between humans should not be primarily mediated by human-made artefacts. That is, the relation between humans must not be an artefact. This is what Arendt seems to imply when she says that action is the “only activity [between humans] without the intermediary of things” (22). Even so, the place in which these relations occur seems to be human-made, although created by virtue of the relationships themselves. The public realm, the place of human relations, the headquarters of all

⁸⁰ According to Arendt, the drive for novelty, which acts contrariwise to the logic of durability, can be traced back to the sixteenth century, reaching its peak in the seventeenth, when scientists and philosophers alike claimed to be the first on something (a discovery, a thought, a philosophical system, etc). She elaborates on this point within the context of Galileo, who certainly was one of the first in his field. It is only natural that this process would get to the economy of waste we now live in, since the durability of conserved objects is its greatest impediment to the turnover process (of novelty). See Arendt 250-253.

political operations, is constituted by humans acting together; when these relations change, so does the public realm. According to Arendt, the public realm is the place for individuality par excellence; it is the place in which individuality as such arises, for it is the place where individuals can show “who they really and inexchangeably” are. The rise of individuality can only happen among plurality, and plurality is the main feature of “the body political”; Arendt writes: “the term ‘public’ signifies the world itself ... It is related ... to the human artifact, the fabrication of hands as well as the affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together” (52). And it is in this togetherness that every individual action has the potential to single out a person, for, Arendt adds: “Every activity performed in public can attain excellence never matched in privacy; for excellence, by definition ... needs the formality of the public, constituted by one’s peers, it cannot be the casual, familiar presence of one’s equals or inferiors” (49)⁸¹. It is then that the public realm is the realm of action, but human action is not only *shown*, it is also *told*. In this fashion, speech and action constitute worldly human life; they are what keep this togetherness going and what make all relations possible: “With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world ... This insertion is not forced upon us by necessity, like labor, and is not prompted by utility like work ... To act ... means to take initiative, to begin ... it is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself” (176-177). To act is to begin being as a “somebody”, to be a “somebody”. Therefore, actions can only be so called if there is a “somebody” who acts and to whom the action can be attributed. Agency is, in this respect, a political matter before it starts to operate in any moral, ethical or even legal mode; for, those who are not part of the body politic, those excluded from the public realm, those “nobodies” (i.e., slaves) cannot be regarded as moral, ethical or, even less so, legal persons; their insertion into the human world is

⁸¹ We should put Arendt’s thoughts in perspective today, wherein “individuality”, the need to be singled out, has become such an obsession and, to a very large degree, a trifle. See, for instance, Svendsen’s discussion on this issue, where he writes: “Individualism is so pervasive these days that it is hard to think of anything more conformist. If you emphasize your own individuality you definitely do not go ‘against the grain’, since everybody does that these days” (26); which points towards a sort of perversion of Arendt’s idea.

made out of utility on one of the parts involved and out of necessity on the other, the excluded part. Hence this realm, this body politic of “somebodies”, this reality is called by Arendt “the ‘web’ of human relationships, indicating by the metaphor its somewhat intangible quality” (184); what is intangible? naturally, the relationships themselves; Arendt continues: “It is because of this already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions, that action almost never achieves its purpose; but it is also because of this medium, in which action alone is real, that it ‘produces’ stories with or without intention as naturally as fabrication produces tangible things” (184). So, the haven of action, its afterlife, the realm in which its durability can be granted, is history. Just as work makes habit possible, action is what makes history come into being⁸².

Having briefly described these three categories through which Arendt explains the active life of the human species, we may ask about another kind of activity that was left hanging as an “exception” in the world of work, namely, art. To avoid engaging in a futile discussion on what are the criteria to declare something an artwork and something else folklore, popular art, amateur art, etc., we are going to discuss the minimum criterion through which art has been understood throughout the centuries, and through which it is still understood today, the only criterion in which everybody who engages into this

⁸² Then again, as it was discussed before, this would be only a part of the story; for narratives are not necessarily composed by actions, and narratives can be easily differentiated from stories—from which we could conclude that history is only one kind of narrative. This has already been said by various thinkers in the recent years. Most notably by Lyotard, who distinguishes between narratives and grand-narratives; history mostly belonging to this latter category (*The Postmodern Condition* 37-38). He also distinguishes between narratives and meta-narratives; this latter being those devoted to speak *about* (inquiry, investigate, put into question, etc.) narratives themselves (i.e., theories of knowledge). Despite these distinctions, I believe that the plurality of narratives (of possible forms of linguistic organization) is not restricted to actions, for it can be very well expanded to all kind of events (see, for instance, Badiou 174-176, where he defines his concept of “evental site”). The disproportionate importance that Western civilization has put to “initiative” and “action” clearly transpires in Hannah Arendt’s investigation.

discussion agrees upon: art is creative, art is a creative activity. In this way, we can proceed to discuss the *vita creativa* as an additional layer to the active life we just revised.

2.5.2 Summary 5

The following part of the discussion aims at a robust conceptualization of the creative work, that is, *poiesis*, taking into account both practices and performances (investment of symbolic attributions into actions), but also introducing a more detailed discussion of imagination as being embodied (incarnated) and its relation to the creation of difference. This discussion will be seminal to elaborate a broader conceptualization of meaning, particularly of its “creation” in terms of founding meaningfulness.

2.5.3 *Vita creativa*

As Arendt did with *vita activa*, I also find that frameworks work better in triads; at least, it worked for me as well. I should consequently clarify that the next three categories sprung from my close reading of Arendt’s work, and that they correspond to what I believe is missing in Arendt’s otherwise extraordinary account: the other pole of initiative, manipulation, agency, which, I believe, is the pole of happening, occurrence, gratuitousness. This being clarified, I can introduce my three categories: activity, practice and performance. I will explain each in its own right.

ACTIVITY: As labor is bound to necessity, to the efforts and motions to which our bodies are subjected in order to satisfy it (hence being the most proximate to “life itself”, to physical survival), activity is bound to existence, or rather, existence is bound to activity. The most encompassing concept we can think of to fulfill the minimal condition of existence is not its “being there”, but rather its condition of being constituted. This means that everything that exists is by necessity constituted. For what we know, nothing that is constituted is devoid of relations, since whatever exists does so only in relation to what constitutes it. What constitutes “some-thing” is never single, never one (for then it would be the thing itself and not what constitutes it), but rather manifold, multiple, and activity occurs within this multiplicity. There is hardly any doubt that there is subatomic activity

in every atom (constituted by subatomic particles), nor that there is atomic activity in every molecule (constituted by atoms etc.), nor that there is molecular activity in every single thing around us (in the air we breathe, in the beer we drink, in the bed we sleep, and so forth). In a similar fashion, I can be absolutely sure that as I am writing this sentence there is cellular activity in my body, as well as molecular activity and neuronal activity. As it happens, right now, at this very moment, a new cell might be coming into existence, to the great jubilation of the other cells... or an exhausted neuron might be ceasing to exist, to the grave grief of the other neurons, more particularly those who were really close. This means that a particular activity only begins when something comes into existence, and it only ends when something ceases to exist. Activity thus understood just happens; it is neither initiated nor set forth. There is no will involved in activity, at least not by necessity. And those activities we do initiate, those we do set forth, already initiate and are initiated by innumerable activities that precede, happen simultaneously and proceed ours—most of which we will have no clue about. Thus, there is no knowledge involved in activity, at least not necessarily. All activity is bodily, but not all activity is human. Activity is necessary, but it is not bound to necessity, for it is necessity itself. Whenever an activity ceases, so ceases the existence of what this activity constituted. If there is no neuronal activity, there are no neurons (and consequently no thoughts, no will, etc.). Therefore, activity is not exclusively about those bodily necessities we are aware of (i.e., cellular activity, neuronal activity, celestial activity, etc.), but majorly about those ontological necessities we might not even know about (e.g., an infinitesimal string vibrating at the center of the earth without which its rotating movement would be impossible, the *Aleph*, etc.). It is thus that each particular activity constitutes some particular existence.

PRACTICE: Just as work is understood by Arendt as a chain of mediation and mediators (matter reified and transformed into material, which in turn is made into tools that ease

our labor and enhance our powers to transform other matter into material and so forth)⁸³, practice can be regarded in Paul Ricoeur's terms, as "long action-chains", "global actions coordinated between systemic and teleological segments", in which "the rule" is "constitutive of the signification of the action" (*Oneself as Another* 154). Every action (and of course we cannot forget that each and every action is always already political) that is repeated continually for a long time—the measure of which will be directly dependent on the complexity of the action—can be regarded as a habit. What really constitutes it as a practice is not its repetition alone, but, more precisely, the fact that this action is subjected to some "rules" that invest in it not only a certain signification, as Ricoeur asserts, but also a know-how that enables its mastery⁸⁴. Every rule implicitly upholds the secrets of its mastery. There is a finality to every practice, and that is the mastery of its rules. Subsequently, practices cannot be conceived of as solitary, as pertaining just to one person: "Practices are first of all cooperative activities whose constitutive rules are established socially ... [Even] competition between practitioners would not occur if they didn't share a common culture and a lasting agreement" (Ricoeur 176). A rule must last in order to qualify as a rule, and its determination must be done by more than one person (otherwise, there would be no agreement, unless this one person suffered from multiple personality disorder or something similar). It is by repeated encounters among parties involved that an agreement upon criteria can be achieved. This repetition starts to establish a custom, wherein the criteria start to sound intrinsic to their execution. For instance, the offside rule seems so intrinsic to the soccer player that there is no way someone who ignores it can ever aspire to play decently. These criteria do not only determine the execution but mainly determine our response to this execution.

⁸³ Arendt, *The Human Condition* 153-159. The extreme case of this model can be found in utilitarianism, wherein the human being is regarded as the *only* end, and thus everything around her is (and must be) used as her means. See, for instance, what Jeremy Bentham has to say about "utility": "By utility is meant that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness ... or to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered" (chapter 1.1).

⁸⁴ See, as well, what Scarry has to say about this issue (*The Body in Pain* 280).

Criteria create demands, and demands make us answerable to these criteria; our execution would be, at least in principle, the *way* in which we make ourselves answerable to these demands. This is what we ordinarily call to learn a trade⁸⁵. For instance, I am trying to show how answerable I am towards academic demands: to do so I was required to write a dissertation, for which I have been practicing for five years, writing a variety of texts for various academic purposes; if I succeed my authority over these activities will be confirmed and certified by the pertinent authorities, and those who are authority figures now will become colleagues tomorrow—at least theoretically, since I do not have a job yet. This last point is important in contemporary society, for a job can be understood as work made practice. A trade is useless without a job; we can call it a hobby, but not, under any circumstance, work. Jobs are the way work manifests itself in the public realm, where we *show* our mastery, where our answerability is most useful. It is worth noting, however, that the concept of “job” is quite recent, and the concepts of “temp” and “full time” jobs even more so⁸⁶. Practice leads, most than anything else, to craftsmanship, to the acquisition and development of skills⁸⁷. Being skillful is being more answerable, more reliable, more worth trusting. The bind between what we do and what we do for others is what grounds our mastery in an ethical position. How our skills are to be oriented and used in relation to others is what makes it ethically worthy. Being trustworthy is to be so regarded by others. Confidence, on the other hand, is very much related to authority: the more authority I feel over my trade the more confident I will be to perform it.

PERFORMANCE: All these rules, all these criteria, all these requirements, what do they make? we can say that they set the stage for practices to be performed. It is worth noting,

⁸⁵ For a more comprehensive explanation of what is a “trade”, see Svendsen 43.

⁸⁶ The really long working week is linked to modern capitalism, which up till the second half of the nineteenth century was constantly increasing its working hours. For instance, during the Middle Ages there were nearly 180 days reserved for festivities every year (the reason having to do with the fact that most people were badly fed and therefore could barely stand so many hours of work). For a more comprehensive account of this issue, see Svendsen 41.

⁸⁷ For a thorough explanation, see Svendsen 44.

though, that the term “practice” could be also used as a synonym for “rehearsal”, referring to those repeated “quasi-performances” through which we get to master the “play” before we play it (without the quotation marks)⁸⁸. Just as an action has a lasting place in a story, a performance has its lasting stage in a narrative. Ricoeur says that practices “contain ready-made scenarios” (Ricoeur 157)⁸⁹, which constitute the physical recreation of a narrative, or a particular linguistic organization of space and time. The ready-made scenarios of practice are the stage where performance takes place, the physical place for the enactment of our narratives. One of the canonical definitions of learning is that learning means imitation. The standard etymology of this word, imitation, has been, also canonically, traced back to the Greek word *mimesis*, which is also the root word for impersonating, for “acting as” somebody other than yourself; that is, for performing⁹⁰. Although the reputation of the very word *mimesis* has always been dubious, there have always been thinkers who had drawn attention to its creative potential⁹¹. Notably, it was Paul Ricoeur who gave an extensive account of the Aristotelian use of this concept and displayed most clearly the process through which imitation becomes “creative imitation”⁹². This is too complex a process to discuss it here; it is enough to say that

⁸⁸ My deep appreciation to Dr. Jure Gantar for bringing this to my attention.

⁸⁹ Other thinkers have reached similar conclusions by labelling practices differently. For instance, MacIntyre calls these scenarios: “settings” (103, 157, 206-213), and Butler calls them “the ontological field” (*Giving an Account of Oneself* 17-18).

⁹⁰ It was Aristotle who gave to this word, *mimesis*, its creative potential (*Poetics* part I-IV), since Plato regarded it as nothing but plain imitation that could only give us a second-hand (or a third hand) impression of the *eidos* (Republic book II). Aristotle’s broadening of this concept started with his conception of what the actor did in theatre by impersonating and performing actions that were like “real actions”, but that, unlike “real actions”, were “emplotted” and therefore had a cathartic potential (part VI).

⁹¹ Following Aristotle (and taking him further), we find an enormous creative potential in *mimesis* in Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, where *mimesis* is the very recreation of the vital struggle between Apollonian and Dionysian forces; we can also, of course, find a most sound defense of this term in the work of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe (see, for instance, his *Typography*, with particular interest in chapter 5).

⁹² This is the whole idea of Paul Ricoeur’s “threefold *mimesis*”, wherein, by way of an escalating movement that by means of “pre-figuring”, “con-figuring” and “re-figuring”, the representation of anything (in his case, most particularly, of a narrative) is re-created

creative imitation transforms what is apprehended by putting it in motion, by enacting it: by dramatizing it⁹³. Here, it is human action that is reified and that thus becomes “the object” of artistic transfiguration. Hannah Arendt also comments on the inseparability of politics and theater; as she points out, “the theater is the political art par excellence; only there is the political sphere of human life *transposed* into art” (*The Human Condition* 188, my emphasis); and so this transposition, this transformation, this transfiguration (*muthos*) of actions is what we call performance. The performer, in this way, is the one who “acts” *as*; the actor does not merely “act” deeds s/he has learned by heart (that is what we call “bad acting”), s/he also *suffers* the consequences of such deeds, *suffers as* the character s/he impersonates, lends her body to do and her flesh to suffer; for, as Arendt concludes: “To do and to suffer are like the opposite sides of the same coin” (190). To suffer in this context means to experience something *as* it is regarded to occur, to be occurring or to have occurred. For instance, let us suppose that during some performance there is a point in which everything, the whole narration, depends on me running to a marked point on stage. If I *only* run, my performance will not only be ineffective but will fail to make sense to the eyes of the viewer; I must run with the conviction that everything, the whole world (which is the whole narration) is at stake by this motion; only thus will I communicate the necessity of my action. The best performers are those who *really* believe in their deeds and who *really* suffer what occurs to them; those who *know* what it is to die, to win or lose the world, to love with rapturous passion or to quit an addictive substance overnight. No doubt, these are rare cases, just as good narrations do not abound. All of our social practices are “ready-made scenarios”; they are part of one or several different narrations at the same time to which we subscribe as performers. Most of the things that occur to us in our daily life (and even more so in our working day) just “occur *as*”, accordingly to which we act: i.e., using money *as* an exchanging device for “stuff” or services or for getting access to some place, or using a

as it is “imitated” every time it is “re-figured”. See his *Time and Narrative*, especially chapter 3, vol. 1.

⁹³ The word “drama” derives from the Greek word *dran*, which means “to act”.

piece of paper *as* a certification of my successful defense, and so on. Let us note in this way that the use of something *as* something else, of “this” *as* “that” (when the “that” is invested with primarily symbolic attributes) is not only an interpretation of the “this”, but further, it adds something to the very use itself. Here, we perform the symbolic use of something, we perform the signification of what we use, and not *merely* use it. The world of artefacts is not only the world of tools and equipment, but also and chiefly (as we can attest in any contemporary metropolis) of the symbols they embody and the use we make of them; in other words, to perform is to use the symbols behind the artefacts, to enact them. This is what is behind creative imitation, an interpretation that shows something more, something different, something else not clearly visible in the original; it opens the original up for different possible uses. This “opening up” is what we know as *poiesis*.

2.5.4 *Poiesis*

According to what we just saw, practice basically requires the repetition of an action, which is by this virtue stabilized so as to make it “narratable”. We also saw that social practices set the stage for performance, and that a performance requires, among other things, a narration wherein to dramatize the action it (creatively) imitates. Additionally, we have understood by now that the repetition entailed by a practice participates in the mastery of its rules, and that without rules, there are no practices. This process of perfecting an action, we said, is what “makes” a trade. However, we are very well aware that among those who have a good command of their trade and are able to respond effectively to the requirement of its practices, there are some who are able to go beyond these mere requirements and who can produce something more, something “different”. We may agree that if it were not for the work of imagination repetition would be impossible and we would be bound to sameness, to the same criteria and to the same rules which would produce exactly the same results over and over again⁹⁴. If things were like this, painters would still be painting stripes on rocks with vegetal colorants, musicians

⁹⁴ Deleuze (*Difference and Repetition* 70) makes a very clear distinction between sameness and repetition, where the latter “has no *in* itself” (the reason of which it begets difference) whereas the former is “all *in* itself”.

would still be hitting their palms on dead trunks, and writers... well writing would have never come to exist. I hope that the point I am trying to make is crystal clear: repetition holds the seeds of its own breakthroughs. This is a fancy way to say that breakthroughs, significant changes within a “chain of actions”, have to be worked through and through; or, in more vernacular terms, breakthroughs must be sweated. The work of imagination is what allows for such an exhaustive (and exhausting) activity. Imagination is what allows us to see “this” *as* “that”, what allows us to perform it. This is where human *poiesis* begins.

Like *mimesis*, the word *poiesis* is a tricky one. The attempts to capture the meaning of this elusive word (which is, as it might be obvious, the root for the word “poetry”) might end up in an unnecessary, and sometimes brutal, reduction of its extraordinary possibilities; for this is what *poiesis* empirically suggests: the extra-ordinary, the “out of the ordinary”. To this day, the most comprehensive definition of *poiesis* I have found is in one of the most thorough and outstanding works devoted to this subject: Heidegger’s essay “The Question Concerning Technology”, where the philosopher offers the following definition: “Not only handicraft manufacture, not only artistic and poetical bringing into appearance and concrete imagery, is a bringing-forth, *poiesis*. *Physis*, also, the arising of something out of itself, is a bringing-forth, *poiesis*. *Physis* is indeed *poiesis* in the highest sense” (317). This is the understanding of *poiesis* to which I want to subscribe: a bringing-forth that may or may be not produced by human hands. Often times, everything that we need to do is to appreciate what has already been *poetically* brought forth, like a storm flooding out the paths leading to a river, like a thunder bursting in the sky, and so forth. What is most important is that where our imagination starts, where our appreciation of “this” *as* “that” commences, is where our activity of bringing-forth begins.

The work of *poiesis* I want to focus on in this work is *human poiesis*, which by no means suggests any higher or lower or otherwise hierarchical positioning in the activity of bringing-forth. As Heidegger points out, *poiesis* neither starts nor ends with humans.

Regarding humans though, we can perfectly assume that there is no human *poiesis* without composition (just as there is no life without organization), which can be comprehended as the physical transformation of “this” into “that”; the physical intervention that transforms contingency into necessity.

This transformation is very clear in narratives—particularly in those which are convincing—for when a narrative is well composed it seems as though everything that happens there must have happened just in that way; any change, any minimal alteration would completely change the narrative, thereby making it other than itself⁹⁵. This is to say that this physical transformation (of “this” into “that”) derives identity out of contingency. What is *poietically* composed is unique; its uniqueness being part and parcel of its composition. What is brought-forth is something *as* it has never been before. As it was just mentioned, this is most evident in narratives, for if it is true that our *mythopoietic* power (our power to transform events into narratives) does not bring forth any physical transformation (no matter how well narrated, perfectly composed and uniquely identifiable they may be, we cannot breed unicorns), it is also true that it helps to bring forth new modes of existence, which are all the more apparent when we stumble upon the unknown (such as Marco Polo did when he first saw a rhinoceros and hurriedly concluded that though unicorns existed, they were ugly⁹⁶). In view of the latter, the encounter with the unknown is what we colloquially refer to as a “discovery”⁹⁷; it is a finding that finds, that establishes a new access to the world; *poiesis* finds where *poiesis* finds.

Yet we said that *poiesis* is as much related to sweat as it is related to imagination; that developing and perfecting a trade is crucial for it to happen. This peculiar kind of knowledge is what Martin Heidegger understands as *techne*, and which is frequently

⁹⁵ In *Oneself as Another* 142, Ricoeur makes a very similar point referring to personhood and narrative identity.

⁹⁶ This anecdote is masterfully told by Umberto Eco in the opening chapter of his *Kant and the Platypus*.

⁹⁷ This is profoundly elaborated by Derrida, see “Psyche: Inventions of the Other” 23.

translated as technique; in the German philosopher's words: "*Techne*, as knowledge experienced in the Greek manner, is a bringing forth of beings in that it *brings forth* what is present as such out of concealment and specifically into the unconcealment of its appearance; *techne* never signifies the action of making" (184, emphasis in original); *techne* does not refer to the skills developed by practice or to the mastery thus achieved, since it is not in making but in discovering (unconcealing) something for the first time and then being able to dis-cover it once again. It has to do with the fact that a stroke of luck would not suffice for *poiesis* to emerge. If by such a stroke we bring forth something for the first time, it most likely will be brought fourth for the *only* time. This is what *techne* ensures: once dis-covered, once brought forth, what is done can be done again.

Then again, imagination is a matter of perspiration; there is hardly anything more physically demanding than an imagination at work. To imagine is not to mentally represent objects that may or may not be present; this is imagination very poorly represented. To imagine is to *become* the object imagined, or rather the objects, for nothing can be imagined on its own, bearing no relation to something else. In her exceptional book, *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry makes a very pertinent comparison between pain and imagination; she writes: "The only state that is as anomalous as pain is the imagination. While pain is a state remarkable for being wholly without objects, the imagination is remarkable for being the only state that is wholly its objects" (162). Embodiment is thereby an act of the imagination, something only doable through its intervention. In truth, to speak of imagination in this way, as something impersonal, objective, functional, is the work of imagination. So, if the "this *as* that" is the work of imagination; what is at work in the "this *is* that"? We are now ready to speak about meaning.

2.5.5 Meaning

Meaning is the ultimate creation, and at the same time, it is the condition for any creation to come about. If we asked the question: What does *poiesis* bring forth? and we heard the

answer: “it brings forth being” (Heidegger, “On the Origin of the Work of Art” 198), we would be at least a little bit puzzled. It is likely that by way of this answer we will never find a definite response. But if instead of asking “what”, we asked “how”: how do we know that something was brought fourth? how does this bringing forth manifest? how can we be sure that it is new? These questions can be approached by way of meaning.

Primarily, the “thing” that changes when something new is brought forth is the signification of the thing and of its relations to the world. What changes in this “thing” is its meaning. Meaning is *not* signification: it is neither a semantic addendum⁹⁸ nor a repository of images⁹⁹ nor a container of associations¹⁰⁰. Yet, what meaning is, and wherein all these portrayals coincide, is a carrier, a bearer that makes it possible to speak of the world, to communicate about the world, even to give birth to it. Meaning is the “re-” in re-signification itself—its very process at work.

Every re-signification is a new signification. Meaning is thus the bearer of re-signification and its guide; it is what orientates signification. When we say “this *is* that”, it is not being that appears between both relatants, but rather meaning: “this” moves to “that” and “that” to “this”, yet neither replaces the other. Meaning is the carrier of difference when this was brought forth from the thing itself by *poietical* activity¹⁰¹. Meaning approximates “this” to “that” and “that” to “this”, so much so that they can nearly touch each other; it takes what “this” expresses to/for/about “that” and “that” to/for/about “this”. By this process, each expresses and receives the worth of the other; it is worth that emerges out of their encounter. “This *is* that” thus becomes a *fact* in the world as it has now worldly existence: it signifies something; it is now some-thing, communicable, sharable, worldly: it takes

⁹⁸ As, for instance, Davidson, Piaget (“The Role of Imitation in the Development of Representational Thought”) or Saussure (as is clear in his famous distinction of signifier [phoneme/grapheme]/signified [semantic/conceptual filling) would have it.

⁹⁹ As, for example, Fodor, Locke or Todorov would say.

¹⁰⁰ As Husserl (*Cartesian Meditations*), Peirce or Vigotsky would claim.

¹⁰¹ I am drawing this idea of meaning as a carrier of difference from Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 62-73.

place rather than just occupies it. Jean-Luc Nancy illustrates this point very well in his book *Globalization*, where he observes:

The meaning of this *fact* [that the world exists] is the meaning that the without-reason makes possible. Now, this means that it is meaning in the strongest and most active sense of the term: not a given signification ... but meaning, absolutely, as *possibility of transmission from one place to another* ... a reference that forms at the same direction, an address, a value, or a meaningful content (52, my emphasis).

Meaning thus precedes all possibilities of transmission. Nonetheless, expressed in this way meaning sounds like some-thing out there, like a magical little creature with a teeny weeny bag going from one place to another with “this” and “that” taken by the hand—something like the Cupid of abstractions. In order to think about it within the framework in which we were speaking of earlier, in the framework of creation and deed, we need to describe how this process of carrying, of bearing and transmitting occurs between people, and not only between “this” and “that”.

2.5.6 Summary 6

Meaning is thus understood as re-signification, or as the very carrier of it. It is hence possible to speak of incarnation as the concept wherein *poiesis* (as an embodied imagination) and meaning (as the carrier of re-signification) converge.

2.5.7 Incarnation

Here we come back to the other end of imagination: to memory. The body remembers; nothing that happens to us is indifferent to our memory, which, through constant repetition, finds a sense of continuity that allows it for learning, acquiring, developing and/or knowing anything and everything we learn, acquire, develop and/or know. Practice is a matter of memory. Without memory no practices could arise and no *poiesis* would be possible. Furthermore, without memory no meaning could emerge; for no re-signification is possible without signification (no “this is that”), and therefore no interpretation (no “this as that”); without the guide, the orientation provided by memory: “this” would get

lost in its way to “that”. Our bodies remember. Even the tiniest microorganism in our bodies is marked by memory; as Scarry very lucidly puts it in her *The Body in Pain*: “The body’s self immunizing antibody system is sometimes described as a memory system ... So, too ... the DNA and RNA mechanisms for self-replication are together understood as a form of bodily memory” (110). Nothing that happens to the body is lost for the body. Bodies, remember! Scarry continues: “What is remembered in the body is well-remembered. It is not possible to compel a person to unlearn the riding of a bike, or to take out the knowledge of a song residing in the fingertips, or to undo the memory of antibodies or self-replication without directly entering, altering, injuring the body itself” (110). Our bodies are our maps of remembrance. Everything we learn, acquire, develop and/or know is embodied, or, better still, incarnated: made flesh.

Meaning is thus made flesh. The movement that transmits “this” as it expresses it to “that” is incarnated. It is the most basic principle of theater, movement as it is extracted from *physis*, movement as it enacts *physis* while extracting from it all possible expressed significations by bringing them forth. The stage is thereby activated, not only in its spatial sense but also in its temporal one; the stage as a stage in history, an era in which signification is dramatized and re-signification is performed a number of times; just enough times till it becomes signification again, till it becomes habit once more. Signification is thereby comparable to a costume, a piece of clothing that is worn over the flesh, a second skin that sometimes becomes a second nature; a custom, a piece of clothing worn over our actions, dressing them up. By virtue of repeating them (and retaining them) our customs become valuable; just by virtue of approximating us to others, of moving us and guiding us towards others, our customs affect us, and in so doing, they become meaningful.

Through this incarnation, our body becomes our first artefact; it becomes our first tool for signification long before we cognitively “grasp” the conceptual reality of what our body does. A baby does not need to grasp the concept of crying to do so, nor does she need to

know the other's conceptual framework in order for her crying to express something: "I'm hungry", "I'm hot", "I'm cold", etc. On the response of the interpreter, the signification of such cry will gain a familiarity proper of a performance; so a cry may start signifying a call for attention *only* if the crier receives such attention by doing so. It is within this familiarity, in which what the body does repeatedly finds what it receives, that a stage is set to perform, that a society is formed by and between these two people; for a reality has emerged between these two performers and, with it, a new path is brought forth by their imagination. In this way, an action becomes a form of description. This is what incarnation mainly entails, namely, that there is the consent, the acceptance of the other to be so predicated—described: "*Oh, my poor baby is hungry*". Signification, hence, can be understood as predication: "this is that". Incarnation might be therefore understood as an activity in which the body is transformed into the symbolic forms that are brought forth, conserved, remembered and transmitted, whereby meaning is transformed into actions, actions into practices, practices into performances and performances into traditions; this latter may be understood as History made flesh.

Now that the *vita creativa* (its constituents [activity, practice and performance], what it does [*poiesis* and meaning] and how it does it [incarnation]) has been thoroughly explicated, we can move to the relation that the work bears to the life behind it, and hence to how the work is able to incarnate the life behind it.

2.5.8 Summary 7

It is in incarnation where meaningfulness really occurs, as it is here where meaning is enacted, where meaningfulness is embodied, transformed into *physis*. Our bodies are understood as the proto-tool of signification, as the first site of predication we get to know and through which it acquires meaning, the first possible site of meaningfulness (i.e., flesh). Imagination is here conjoined with memory. This junction will be seminal for the convergence between history and tradition, life and work and of style and self; convergences that will keep developing throughout the dissertation.

2.6 A work, a life

What do we mean when we speak about a writer's "body of work"? Through this metaphor the writer's work *becomes* his body. But, according to what we have just seen, we might start to grasp the "literality" of this metaphor. To a great extent the work incarnates the writer, and in her work we can appreciate her life transpiring. In the interview that opens his *Technologies of the Self*, Michel Foucault makes the next assertion: "Each of my works is a part of my own biography. For one or another reason I had the occasion to *feel* and *live* those things" (11, my emphasis); this "feeling" and "living", this undergoing, suffering that finally makes its way to his work, this *pathos* is incarnated *in* his work. Yet, we may find that the biographical trope may not be the best one; mostly because part of what I have been aiming at here is to say that to incarnate a life is not exclusively to narrate it or to tell it (let alone represent it!), as is the case with biography, and/or even with autobiography¹⁰²; it can do so, but essentially the work *becomes* that life by means of transforming it¹⁰³.

¹⁰² Ever since Philippe Lejeune published his *On Autobiography* in 1989, his "Autobiographical Act", sorry, "Autobiographical Pact", which dictates that the name of the cover referring to the author is necessarily the same than the name of the subject about whom the work is, has become a canon assumption in autobiographical studies. For some of the problems stemming from Lejeune's paradigm see Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography*, with particular attention to his introduction, and Loureiro, *Ethics in Autobiography*, also with especial regard to his introduction. Regarding biography, it is a paradigm in biographical studies that the subject of whom the work is about did (or does) exist and did all (or most and as veritably as possible) of the deeds therein narrated.

¹⁰³ It is difficult to utter (or to write for that matter) this word, "becoming", without somehow resorting to Heidegger's "becoming of being", which basically relates temporality and movement as an intuition of something "becoming" something else (*Time and Being*, 393-396); a concept from which he heavily draws for his conceptualization of "authenticity" (or *aletheia*) and of "becoming what one can be" (185, 296). I have my own reserves with this relation of becoming and authenticity, since, for Heidegger, this authenticity is strongly related to "disclosedness" and "unconcealing", which is what the German philosopher understands as truth; thus having a very narrow space to introduce any possibility of "transformation" whatsoever; for being authentic (and thus becoming oneself), if it included "transformation", would also mean to "transform into oneself", which is pretty much an oxymoron. "Transforming oneself" already entails "becoming

This is mainly what I have been striving for in this chapter; I have been trying to show that not only does the work of *poiesis* bring forth something to existence out of things themselves but also that it brings to the fore the existence of the one behind it via incarnation. The movement of incarnation is never one-sided, but always reciprocal. The body incarnates but the thing does so too by the symbolic investment travelling back and forth so long as there is activity between creator and creation. After this activity ceases, namely, after the physical death of its creator, the incarnation is only on the part of the work, but it does not remain one-sided, for it keeps revealing its origin, travelling to it, just as a trace reveals its source by virtue of only being a trace¹⁰⁴: this “revealing” is incarnation on the part of the work. To be sure, the work not *only* brings-forth its source (this would be as boring as it is narcissistic). In fact the source is not brought forth by this incarnation, but rather, as was just said, the source is brought-to-the-fore, as an emergence that can be attested just by the fact that the other, the beholder, the reader, me (and you) recognizes him or herself as not having participated in the composition of the work you and/or I are/am holding in your and/or my hands; in its *poiesis*. Origin thereby understood is not about a fixed point in time and space, or an affixed point by way of names or graphic signatures, not even by way of history and/or archaeology; it is, instead, about a *source*, as indelible from the work as the very words (colors, materials, chords, frames, etc.) that constitute it. Each word is to the work what each cell is to the body,

other than oneself” or “different than oneself”. We will be able to tackle more in depth this discussion in the fourth chapter.

¹⁰⁴ This, “the trace”, is an incredibly loaded concept, particularly for Continental Philosophy and for virtually every work stemming from this tradition within the last 40 to 50 years. The concept was extraordinarily relevant in the work of Levinas, who understands it in terms of what “the Other” inevitably leaves imprinted in us (that is why this concept is concomitant with his most prominent concept of “the face”). Jacques Derrida, on the other hand, clearly introduced this concept in his *Of Grammatology*, where the trace refers to the historical load each word has and with which it has developed across time—a history that, necessarily, is imprinted in and by others. We will see more in detail this concept of the “trace” in our next two chapters, and more in depth in the fifth and sixth chapters.

change one and change the body (though not to a very significant degree of course); change many and it will change the body (now to some more considerable degree); change their organization and it will elicit cancer (now to a definitive, irreparable degree): sentencing the source to death, with everything that the work could or did incarnate.

The source thus spoken is not *in* the writer or the work *only*, but in the relationship that emerges from the writer and her words. Heidegger articulates this relationship and this kind of origin beautifully in his essay “On the Origin of the Work of Art”, where he writes: “The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other ... In themselves and in their interrelations artist and work *are* each of them by virtue of a third thing which is prior to both, namely, that which also gives artist and work of art their names—art” (143, emphasis in original); the main source, the source that comes to existence by way of this activity, by way of this relationship, is “art”, the human creative activity itself: *poiesis*. I am aware that the use of this concept in Heidegger includes the manufacturing of artefacts. We should recall, however, that the only criterion for an activity to be creative, to belong to the *vita creativa* just explained, is that this activity must be creative; that is, it should bring forth, it should dis-cover something not-yet discovered, not-yet brought fourth. By these tenets, a hammer can be as much a work of art as the *Quixote*, and it was very likely so the first time a hammer came about into this world; it is just that it did not have the luck of being *poietically* re-signified as other artefacts (such as a bicycle wheel had or a urinal for that matter¹⁰⁵) were. According to what has been just said, the life in the work is the one that arises from the relationship between the creator and the work, or as in the case that most compels me here: between the writer and *his* words.

¹⁰⁵ I am referring here of course to the two famous ready-mades made(?) by Marcel Duchamp in 1913 (and then, its 1951 reproduction) and in 1917.

2.6.1 Summary 8

Creative work, *poiesis*, transforms the life of the worker as much as this latter transforms the work. This incarnation, which has to do with the very act of *poiesis* (composition, etc.), is where the reader distances herself from the writer, and where the writer has some primacy over the work, where the writer appears as a sort of origin. This is where the concept of origin as “source” first appears. This concept will keep gaining in importance during the course of the dissertation.

2.7 A life, a gift

So then, what am I doing here? As a reader, I am appreciating what the writer did; that is all I can do at first. What I have found though as I re-read (again and again) Guillermo Cabrera Infante’s “body of work”—chronologically, tropologically, thematically, biographically, chronologically once again—is that now I feel something for this person. When I first read him on my partner’s suggestion (who as a Cuban in exile had an utmost respect for him), I was impressed by his extraordinary use of words, by his incredible skills as a stylist and his erudite knowledge of films and popular culture. The first book I ever read by him was a collection of film criticisms called *Cine o Sardina* (which translates in English more or less like *Food or Film*), a title that came from his mother’s (a film fanatic in her own right) dictum pronounced all during his childhood, when she gave him and his brother the choice between going out to eat or going to the movies; of course, they never ate out. All these anecdotes, masterfully ingrained into his criticisms, as well as his love, no, his passion for movies, made me feel a strong proximity for this writer. But neither this proximity nor my awe moved me to esteem *him* any more than I esteemed his writing. I started, as I always do when I like something, to look for his books wherever I could and managed to read everything that was published at that time (it was 2007, two years after his death). As I did, the proximity and the awe became familiarity, and I felt more at ease *in* his works. But now, I feel for him true, authentic affection; I esteem him beyond his name (and everything that it entails: awards, fame,

prestige, cult, etc.), and I can only express my gratitude for what he did: I feel grateful that he was born.

Paul Ricoeur says, in his *Oneself as Another*, that by esteeming others as oneself one learns to esteem oneself as another; that is, we start to care about our narrative identity (that other lurking on the other side of the text) by esteeming others' narratives and others' texts (193). I find this to be true, though as I have been repeatedly pointing out, this extends to work, to *poiesis*, and hence to texts and narratives thus regarded. I do believe, now more than ever, that works are gifts, but gifts that contain life itself under their wrapping paper. The gift of the work is the gift of life, for the gift of work is re-signification. I feel that Guillermo Cabrera Infante has offered himself in his writing for re-signification, that he has done so as a gesture to share himself with the world. Those who read him partake of his texts, but not *in* them. We partake of his narratives, but we are not *in* them; we are neither characters in his works nor contributors in their composition. This is to say that we do not complete his work in any way; his work, as *poiesis*, is complete and it does not need us to re-compose it¹⁰⁶. What I do, however, by reading his work is to partake in his world of *intertextuality*, the world of the interlocution of texts. It is thus that I do my share in this world in which re-signification is a daily trade, in which sharing is a deed of love: this is the erotic life of reading.

My familiarity with Cabrera Infante's work is by now complete intimacy; an incarnated, bodily intimacy. Our words, our sentences, our compositions, our *poieisis* love each other, and this I share with you.

¹⁰⁶ This *contra* Roland Barthes (and his many epigones) who affirms that it is the reader who *makes* the work, as is well-known from his "The Death of the Author"; we will discuss this work much more extensively in our seventh chapter.

2.7.1 Summary 9

The work as a gift: the gift of life that the other, the reader, receives. It is from here that the reader's first response is that of gratitude, for the reader learns to appreciate the work as much as s/he learns to appreciate the life behind it; since both, life and work, are thus offered for re-signification. This relationship of appreciation grows into familiarity and this into intimacy. This concept will be capital to understand the erotic conversation between authors, as will be explained in chapter 8, as it is said in this latter chapter that interlocution occurs by way of *intertextuality*.

2.8 World revisited: The work is the world

Our life in this world of re-signification is a life in a meaningful world, hence a meaningful life. Since we live in a world that has already been signified, and in whose re-signification we continuously participate, our life in this world is already always meaningful. In his *Bearing Witness to Epiphany*, John Russon defines reality as those terms "in which human life is meaningful" (1). Meaning seems ubiquitous in all human life lived in common. By now we have added, maybe even brought forth, a third dimension to meaning, which adds more to its *sense* as continuity/direction and coherence/unity: meaning as depth is meaning as intimacy; the shared and sharable space between people, from which care and gratitude emerge. The world of re-signification is the world of meaning. The world of meaning is the world of sharing.

I should elaborate a little bit on this concept: sharing; for this could be easily confused with exchanging (a typical bidimensional understanding of this word). Sharing is the transformation of two (or more) "*there's*" into a *here*. *Us* becomes *here* through a common bond. In an erotic encounter, this created *here* is experienced and made corporeally, and it is taken (literally) to its limits: a one inside the other, however

partially¹⁰⁷. But it is very important to note that this *here* is not to be understood as being affixed, for it exists so long as the inter-action, the sharing, occurs; otherwise, the *here* evaporates, but the two (or more) “*there’s*” that once constituted it do not. Russon writes in this respect: “As well as deriving this specific nature from the specific nature of my body, each of these activities [of sharing] is a meaningful engagement with the world beyond my immediate body. Each is an engagement of the body with something other than itself” (29). This engagement is the one I *feel* with the other via meaning. In the case of *intertextuality*, this engagement is *felt* via one’s work, via our offering ourselves for re-signification. This activity is what opens in sharing a common space, a space of communion, which, by definition, is uninhabited by either part; it is common and thus for no one to dwell¹⁰⁸. Where does sharing take place? What is this *here* of sharing? The answer to the first question is no-where; and to the second question is no-thing. Yet we should not take these “no’s” as negations, but rather as conditions of possibility, a space in all the extension of the word: unoccupied, uninhabited, “unworked”¹⁰⁹; very similar to our understanding of “a life to live is a life not-yet-fulfilled”. The “inter” of interlocution, of *intertextuality*, the erotic space of sharing is workless, not-yet-worked: and thus the condition for every work to emerge—its intangibility being the very form of its bond and the very shape of its binding together. We even have words for this, words that have no “thingly” character and no referent other than its referential function: we call them prepositions, conjunctions, articles; we call them but they do not call us, they just move us *from here to there*—the very words *off/for* communion. *And you and I*.

This “unworked” space is the condition of possibility for any work to happen, for a world to be erected, the “where” to set up a world. Heidegger makes this point very clearly in

¹⁰⁷ See Russon’s concept of “co-action”, 75.

¹⁰⁸ See Nancy’s concept of “sharing out”, *The Inoperative Community* 35; *Globalization* 64, 109.

¹⁰⁹ See Nancy’s whole conception of the “incomplete, inoperative, workless community”, *The Inoperative Community* 35. See also Blanchot’s distinction between the finite and the incomplete, *The Unavowable Community* 21-38.

“On the Origin of the Work of Art”, *where* he writes: “To be a work means to set up a world. / The *world worlds*, and is more fully in being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home” (170, emphasis in the original). The “inter” of *intertextuality* and interlocution (and of any other form of “inter” you can think of; i.e., intercorporeality, interdisciplinarity, etc., or the best “inter” among all: interval) is at the “re-” of re-signification, at the shapeless space calling for its own form, for its own “innovation”, its re-invention via its dis-covering: set to work, touched with the erotic wand of life—bringing it to life. Let us listen to Scarry’s wise words: “The habit of poets and ancient dreamers to project their own aliveness onto non-alive things itself suggests that it is the basic work of creation to bring about this very projection of aliveness ... *What in the poet is recognizable as a fiction is in civilization unrecognizable because it has come true*” (286, my emphasis... all of it!). *Fictio*, the Latin word of “shaping, giving form”, of “making and fashioning”, is what emerges as the ultimate artefact from the relationships among artefacts. We could very well say that the “web of human relationships” is a fictive web. Scarry asks “what does this fiction do?”, and she finds that it “remakes human sentience” (307); that is, fiction remakes the very condition for experience to happen, the very condition for consciousness (intentional or otherwise) to emerge: sentience, bodily awareness. To which extent is this remaking a re-signification? As I have been saying, to every possible extent; on this point, Scarry elaborates: “The human being, troubled by weight, creates a chair; the chair recreates him to be weightless; and now he projects this new weightless self into new objects” (321). The world revisited, sentience reloaded.

2.8.1 Summary 10

The pre-condition for the world to be world is that it is a meaningful place. Meaningfulness occurs by way of re-signification, by way of *poiesis*. Creative work is the foundation of the world *qua* world, the world as a meaningful place. A meaningful life can only take place in a meaningful world. The nature of every work is to be shared. The “re-” of re-signification is this empty (not-yet-filled), “unworked” (not-yet-worked)

space. All space is shapeless. A place is a space invested with form. The understanding of this space will be seminal in the understanding of “fiction” in chapter 4 and of the “in-between” in chapter 5.

2.9 Doing justice to the work

To conclude, what I can do, as a reader, is to show appreciation, but what this means is to go beyond this very gesture of “showing”, for this appreciation *makes* two things: first, by engaging in this erotic activity of *intertextuality*, it becomes ingrained in the depths of meaning, in its third-dimension of care and affection, and thereby it participates in *making* the work meaningful. Secondly, it welcomes (it well-comes) the possible arrival of the source to which the work always points at, and by so doing it opens the space of sharing just by letting it be, just by letting it emerge. Jacques Derrida asserts, in his essay “Psyche: The Invention of the Other”, that to invent is to “come” and to “answer to the coming” of the other, who is beyond possibility, the reason why he thus views the other as an im-possibility (39). I insist we should understand this im-possibility just as we understand in-completeness: as not-yet-completed, and not as a negation. It is in this way that we “well-come” the arrival of the other to the world that takes place as we “open” the book (as we “open” the work), and with this, we well-come its source to this world—an arrival which might have had taken place long before we open it, but which necessarily took place *before* we open it, for we “well-come” the source’s very birth, the source’s very “coming into this world”, and we express our gratitude for such a gratuitous and wonderful event: by means of our appreciation we transform the contingency of birth into a necessary event.

Within this line of reasoning, neither appreciation nor gratitude should appear to our eyes (or appeal to our senses) as mere passivity, yet it should not be over-interpreted as being what “completes” the work as if it had been eternally waiting for you to feel fulfilled, for not even what comes about, what is brought forth by the artist, the work, was waiting for the artist to come into existence, and when the work emerges, it only does so due to the

activity the artist has set to work, which, in consequence, brings the work forth already different, already “out of itself” and hence already embedded in a set of relationships (Derrida 47). It is this set of relationships which allows for the work to be re-signified over and over, but moreover, it is what allows the work to fulfill itself as giving more work. If, as Heidegger says, “*the world worlds*”, and it is this “worlding” what makes for its worldly activity, then we could affirm that the *work works*, which means that it sets forth its own activity by which it therefore “creates” and “gives” more work¹¹⁰. This would mean to conceive of the world *beyond* remuneration and to resituate it *around* reciprocity. Scarry refers to this process as the “arc of reciprocation”, in which “an artefact *is* [the] capacity of excessive reciprocation ... the total act of creating contains an inherent movement toward self-amplifying generosity” (318, emphasis in the original), whereby the other, the user, the reader finds himself able to reciprocate this use to the world by creating more world. In addition to this, our gratitude, our thankfulness, is addressed to the source to which our gesture inevitably leads us, for it is here where this gesture was first issued—every deed bears implicit the address where to remit your “thank you” notes: it is in the very recognition that by the time the work is in my hands, this work is done, and thus that it was done by somebody other than myself (though having a name to whom refer our thanks always makes things easier). It is thus that by so addressing we invoke/evoke the source behind every trace, behind every work, behind every book: the writer. This instance of thanking is what sets out an intimacy that was previously “inside” the work; an intimacy in which familiarity becomes trust, and this trust translates into trust in the world. This is the beginning of letting the work be, for, as Maurice Blanchot says in his *The Space of Literature*: “Reading does not produce anything, does not add anything. It lets be what is. It is freedom” (194). This is where

¹¹⁰ About the perversion of work as creating more capital, see Marx, more particularly chapters 7-11. In this case, I agree with Marx in that this is a perversion of work, and that work should produce more work, but I would give to this production a Levinasian twist, since more than producing work, it could be understood as *giving* more work to others. About this kind of “giving” (that may replace or complement “producing”), see Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* 171.

setting becomes a form of letting, letting be what was set in being. Then, by letting the work be we let ourselves go and, for a moment, we become one with the work, we find ourselves shared. Blanchot adds: “What most threatens reading is this: the reader’s reality, his personality, his immodesty, his stubborn insistence upon remaining himself in the face of what he reads—a man who knows in general how to read” (198). I would say this is the very threat to all erotic activity and to all creative activity as well: we must let ourselves go so as to let ourselves *in* the other, *in* the work. Here, in this founded *here*, we find our-selves dissolved; and here, once dissolved, we can speak on behalf of the other, for there is no longer an-other or one-self, just the *here* so emerging from us. Then, afterwards, we come back to our other activities and, to our great relief, we find ourselves in one piece, our hands where they are supposed to be, our ears on either side of the head, our head still topping our neck and our lips still smiling our smiles—yet we know that deep inside, deep in the depths of meaning, we have changed. As it happens, Guillermo Cabrera Infante asked for this kind of critics. In a 1977 interview with Rosa María Pereda, the writer says that his best critic must also be his best reader; s/he should be so close to himself that s/he can nearly be confused with him. Admittedly, he logically concludes that his best critic and best reader can only be (naturally) Miriam Gómez, his wife and long-time companion, now his widow and the person behind the publication of all his unpublished work and of the compilation of the countless articles, conferences and papers dispersed in magazines and archives all around the world (from South America to Australia, from North America to South Africa), with the exception, as you would expect, of Cuba. In this way, I just can declare that I am determined to “pay my quota of sweat and blood entailed in the very exercise of writing”, as Cabrera Infante concludes¹¹¹, that I

¹¹¹ In this interview, the Cuban writer states: “I expect from the critic (there is not criticism without critics and I can almost affirm that there is no literature without criticism) to be my best reader –and I believe that my best reader must be as close to myself that s/he can be confused with myself. Thereby, for instance, my best critic is the person who is the closest to me than any other living being: Miriam Gómez” (107). Then, he concludes: “I would very much like that the critics would take the quota of sweat and blood entailed by the very exercise of writing. I envy the company of the critic: a critic is

will diligently work in opening all possible pathways towards the dissolution, the confusion—to whichever extent that may be—of myself in my reading, of myself in my writing *in his work*.

Now, in the coming chapters, I will be sharing how Guillermo Cabrera Infante’s work has become meaningful in my life, and has thus made it more meaningful. I will be working on the presupposition that this is a highly meaningful work, and will be wishing that its meaningfulness is applicable to those aspects we will be touching upon here; for the time being, this has been my way to say “thanks” to the life behind it. I hope that this gesture of gratitude will give me confidence enough to speak on his behalf, to speak on behalf of Guillermo Cabrera Infante, and so to speak about his life by way of my own. If this should not happen, the gates of my life, each and every word I say, will remain open just in case he resolves to show up. Every time I say “thank you” I trust you had already come. And so we are here: the three of us.

2.9.1 Summary 11

We find here the first **autopoietic** trope of this dissertation: “the work works”, which means that the ethos of the work is to produce more work, where “production” is already understood as a form of “giving” (letting go), for the other is everywhere apparent. The first movement of invocation/evocation is thus performed by the reader invoking/evoking the writer via his/her gratitude. This is the first gesture before any criticism, analysis, etc. can occur.

never alone; he is accompanied by the work he criticizes. But creating is a terribly lonely act” (108). Unless otherwise indicated all translations are mine.

CHAPTER 3:
“I KNEW IT”: REGRET AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE TOTAL SELF

3.1 “What happened?”

I should write this chapter as a friend. And so I will: by telling you a rather intimate story, intricate as well, for we will be diving into the depths of darkness and despair, of vanity and banality, to the abyss of totality and the precipice of the total self. Perhaps I should start by telling the facts: Guillermo Cabrera Infante killed himself, after which he went mad. There is an inaccuracy in this sentence; he killed *his* self and *his* several names, some of his many selves; though he killed (or let die) the one he loved the most, the one he hated the most, to whose death he dedicated his first important book. He killed (or let die, that we will have to determine later) his alter ego and first pen name, the one who became a writer before he did, the film critic: Caín. After this terrible tragedy, he created and recreated other selves, some of which were even “better” than Caín; “better” constructed, more emblematic, “better” described, more finished; yet nobody, no one could replace the critic who died within. He tried to compensate for this death through delirious invention, through frantic composition, through boundless originality; but nothing, not a thing could give him back the self-assurance Caín used to give him. His grief was the grief of oneself, of oneself mourning one’s self. And then, little by little—though faster than a possessive loses an apostrophe—he lost it; he lost himself: he found himself lost.

This is the synopsis, the short version of the story told in this chapter. As all synopses, it condenses the causes into one big cause; when, as a matter of fact, we will see that in order to understand this story, we should forget about causes and embrace rather its source: Guillermo Cabrera Infante. Yet the life and death of Caín will be a sort of arc that shall lead us to the point of breakdown, and thus to the point in which Guillermo Cabrera Infante broke down to pieces and was not able to recognize the figure these pieces composed. Movement stopped actions and motion became nothing but inertia, thus

resulting in inactivity—fractions of actions, bodies' leftovers: catatonia. After reaching this point, we will first hope that the present text will not find there a full stop, its final period and the end of it all; then we will try to see us out, accompanying Cabrera Infante out of his ordeal of madness and regret. So this is what it is all about: regret, regretting one's actions. If it is discomfoting to regret something done or not done, it could be just as discomfoting to regret something *because* you are suffering its consequences, and even more so *because* you have become a victim of these consequences. Who should you blame? To whom should you address your protest? Who betrayed you? Maybe no one person is to blame, maybe it is more complex than it seems; there were others who betrayed you, who betrayed the cause to which you committed, the cause why you did what you did—but you cannot get around the fact that you are part of this, that ultimately you did it, and you did it to yourself. You are to blame: shame on you!

This is starting to sound like too vehement a lecture. We should start our story by telling what happened, and we should try to distinguish as best as possible between causes and actions before this turns out to be yet another pamphlet for etiological truth. We will see that this is more important when we speak of politics, where causes can quickly turn into Causes, and movement into Movement. Guillermo Cabrera Infante paid for this short-sightedness more than his fair due: with daily instalments of lithium and other mood-stabilizing substances for the remainder of his life¹¹².

3.1.1 Summary 12

At this point of the thesis, the biography of Guillermo Cabrera Infante's life-story is going to start threading with the main argument of the thesis as well as with his work. That is, his nervous breakdown and the death of his alter-ego will be connected with the concept of the self, and these are going to be examined through the works pre-dating his

¹¹² Listen to his 1984 interview "Guillermo Cabrera Infante: Memories of an Invented City". Here, besides describing a little the paranoid delusions that led him to a state of catatonia, he speaks about his medications (which he had to have daily), and particularly about lithium. See also Souza, *Guillermo Cabrera Infante* 119.

1972 crisis. It is worth noting, however, that the kind of self that will be investigated in this chapter is the one that arises from the autonomous agent; that is to say, the kind of self that produces the author with which this dissertation takes issue. This chapter will show how, in Cabrera Infante's case, this total self became a broken self.

3.2 "Just be-cause"

In the late Spring of 1972, Guillermo Cabrera Infante collapsed into a state of catatonia. He became completely unresponsive after several months of showing symptoms of decreasing mental health. This happened while he was working on a script based on Malcolm Lowry's novel *Under the Volcano*. The results of this script were all disastrous and we will see them in more detail later on. We shall see later as well the conjunction of suicides and tragedies that surrounded him within this period. For now, it will suffice to say that while he was working on this script (overworking would be more accurate), he started to show some alarming symptoms; which were attributed to fatigue and mental exhaustion. As his biographer, Raymond D. Souza comments, some of these symptoms included "periods of intense agitation and suspicion accompanied by hallucination" (117). Later on, after his wife (and admittedly the central figure in his life¹¹³), Miriam Gómez, went to Miami for a couple of weeks to see her mother (who had finally left Cuba and whom she had not seen in 10 years), she returned to find him in a state of *intense agitation*, claiming "to have discovered the solution to all their problems and those of the world in an episode of the television program *McMillan and Wife*" (118) or having paranoid outbursts after "sudden revelations" that included terrorist threats to his daughters due to "his culpability" (118). This descent into the labyrinths of paranoia and into the dead end of unresponsiveness seems to have a long story. Part of this story will

¹¹³ Among the many interviews in which he affirms this, we can find one piece in *Mi Música Extremada* called "*Mi persona favorita*" [My favorite person] in which he clearly speaks of Miriam as the central figure of his life. Yet ever since his first important interview with the Argentine journalist Rita Gibert (433, 436), he speaks of her in this very way. See also Pereda's interview (107) and his 1976 interview with Soler Serrano in *A Fondo*. Miriam and his two daughters (and, of course, his beloved friend, the Siamese cat Offenbach) were, with literature, his highest priorities.

be, unfortunately, irrecoverable and thus untellable; since it belongs in the unconscious of Cabrera Infante. This means that part of this story, a significant one, will be lost forever—as it was very likely lost for him. If it helps, we should add that a great part of our own unconscious is and will be irretrievable for ourselves, let alone for the rest of the world. So we should be contented with the parts and pieces we can retrieve and recover from his words, from his work, from his narrators. This is all to say that within this work there will be *no* attempt to psychoanalyse the writer; an exercise I find to be in inconceivably bad taste, and more particularly dishonest when it is performed *in absentia*, after the person's demise—something like spiritual autopsy. Borrowing Cabrera Infante's words (or should I say, one of his many puns), this is one of the instances in which Freud sounds like fraud (*TTT*, 67). What we will see here, though, is a series of approximations from various stances to his breakdown as it is *read through* his works and those of others. We will discuss these positions from the frameworks of different theoretical works that should add depth to the discussion, and we might arrive at a conclusion that can round up this chapter's argument: denial of responsibility *is* self-denial. But let us start discussing causes and actions, if only to clarify why this approach—used by so many moral and legal theorists to make deeds attributable and agents responsible¹¹⁴—will not lead us to where we want to go, that is, to responsibility itself.

You might be asking yourself why such a fuss to distinguish something that seems so clear-cut from the beginning: of course an action is different from a cause, just as a motivation is different from an outcome. Yes, they seem transparently different, and yet for millennia a cause has been as inseparable from its action as an agent from her

¹¹⁴ We can see this approach in the context of the liberal tradition (which is the leading one in the implementation of “globalization”; i.e., “global market”) from Kant (*Critique of Practical Reason*, chapter 1) to Bentham (chapters VII to X) or from Stuart Mill (chapters 3-4) to the work of Sharon Lamb (chapter 1), T. M. Scanlon (chapter 1), Thomas Nagel (part I), Charles Taylor (chapters 1-4) or Alasdair MacIntyre (chapters 1-3).

deeds¹¹⁵. Actually, if an agent cannot assign causes to his actions, these latter cannot be attributed to the agent. This is also where the realm of morality comes to the fore, since moral actions cannot be severed from moral causes. Suppose that your neighbor pays you a visit while you are sick, and he offers to cook every day for you till you feel fully recovered. This could be understood as a moral action in all right. But suppose that your neighbor has been secretly obsessed with you and doing this gives him an unmatched opportunity to invade your privacy. Now the cause seems not all that moral, though the action is not properly wrong, at least not yet. Let us suppose now that your neighbor is a devoted believer in witchcraft, and he is using the access he just gained to your place and your food to “get inside you” by putting a spell on his cooking. Now both the action and the cause are immoral. So, you see, the difference is not as clear-cut as we would initially assume. We should hence first tackle the presupposed relationship between agency and morality.

The agent is an “I” who is always already moral, and who is thereby accountable for her actions¹¹⁶. As a matter of fact, an “I” is not so if it (s/he) is not accountable for itself (him/her). Therefore this “I” emerges within the realm of the “you”, as being always already interpellated: “Who are you?” precedes and might even originate “Who am I?”; as Butler very properly puts it: “we are interrupted by alterity” (64). Agency is attributed; it is not of our own making¹¹⁷. An important reason why we *must* be accountable, why

¹¹⁵ Perhaps the clearest form in which this was formulated in antiquity can be found in the third book of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, which was, arguably, one of Kant’s major influences (and therefore, of all his epigones; i.e., John Stuart Mill, Charles Taylor, Thomas Nagel or Jurgen Habermas).

¹¹⁶ As Butler puts it in her *Giving an Account of Oneself* (in a most Adornean fashion, with a noticeable Althusserian twist): “We assign ourselves an ‘I’ that is accountable by being interpellated” (11).

¹¹⁷ This idea can be traced in Butler all the way to her *Gender Trouble* but was not until her *Excitable Speech* that it became prominent in the development of her concept of “performativity”; here, she combines Althusser’s idea of interpellation in the realm of ideology with Levinas’ in the realm of ethics and both of these are put in perspective through Austin’s “performative acts”. See Butler, *Excitable Speech* 2-69. For a most deep

our very “I” emerges out of interpellation, is because others are mysterious to us and so we are to others. According to this reasoning, morality emerges from this fear of the opaque causes that move others to act, for there is no way to know these causes beforehand. No agent is immoral, though no agent is free from fear either¹¹⁸. By the same token, an agent is not only obliged to be accountable as a result of interpellation and interruption, but s/he is also endowed with rights that s/he would not even have thought of had s/he not being interpellated and interrupted. Our rights become, as Charles Taylor notes, a “quasi-possession”, which we thus attribute to ourselves (11); they become our attributes even before those features that delineate our individuality, for before being white or black or brown or whatever shade I might find myself in, I am entitled to not being discriminated for it. So, as much as all agents are moral, all morality entails rights; morality is the realm of attribution, but attribution is not only the realm of interpellation, it is as well the realm of entitlement.

Charles Taylor goes as far as calling this realm in which agents dwell *qua* agents, the “ontological field” (25); the field wherein agents find their ontological status. In this moral ontology, the framework in which values, obligations, rights, etc., arise is prior to epistemological claims, so long as this field is a *topos*, a location that has as much physical horizons as a coastline has an edge or a mountain has a top. Consequently,

exploration of the idea of being born and the contingency of birth, see Cioran, where he writes: “I long to be free—desperately free. Free as the stillborn are free” (§1). Also, we could see how this idea of utter freedom before birth is present in Sigmund Freud’s mythical “death drive” (*On the Ego and the Id* 30-32), which complements our first instinct (that of *Eros*) and which proposes that we are constantly missing (most melancholically) and longing to return to an original, inanimate state (i.e., the one preceding birth).

¹¹⁸ Most notably, the champion of this reasoning is Thomas Hobbes (21-74), but we should also add Machiavelli as the thinker who, before Hobbes, gave this fear a different twist, changing morality/mortality (and the need of legality) for the necessity of power (chapters 24-26). Psychologically speaking, Freud was also a notable champion of this idea (*Totem and Taboo* chapter 3 and *Civilization and its Discontents* § I); which was thus taken by the psychologist Sidney Jourard as a point of departure for his theory of the “transparent self” (4-31).

frameworks are not just unavoidable in our thought, but moreover they are “unavoidable in our lives, we cannot do without them” (25). Any “who am I?” already entails a “where am I?”, and this question is moral rather than ontological. We could hence approach morality as a “ready-made scenario” wherein the right causes for our actions can be and are indeed settled. We should therefore understand that it is within this framework, inside this field, that interlocution takes and must take place in order to be so. The “webs of interlocution” (36) can be thus woven from different positions within these frameworks, they can actually make those positions appear and appeal to others. Interlocution can only occur when the “where” of the speakers can be and is so determined: Where am I speaking from entails to a great extent to whom I am speaking.

As noted earlier, our position and our orientation as agents are already moral because we are accountable for ourselves. Moreover, the framework in which this position arises and from which this orientation comes from already entails a “sense of the good”, and can (though not necessarily does) direct ourselves towards it. Our values, those enacted representations of our sense of the good, are thus produced. Just in the same way in which we “cannot live without frameworks”, we cannot not produce values; we produce them in our mind just as a spider produces silk in her belly; they are constitutional to our experience; Taylor has a more straightforward way of saying this: “values are not optional: we cannot help but experience the world thus” (54)—if you will, you can see this value-making as our moral GPS, fully-equipped for the accountable agent. This means that all descriptions entail evaluation, just as all decisions involve an orientation. Settling the right causes hence means to orientate the course of our actions according to our values; these, of course, are “ranked” (66): goods among goods, and some goods above others. Our ranking will be very much entangled with our evaluation, but we should not forget that our evaluations are already entangled with our values. If, as Taylor concludes, there cannot be an “hypergood” because there cannot be just one framework that rules all over the other frameworks (for this would mean a framework outside all other frameworks, and thus outside itself, revealing a paradox, a logical dead end, very

similar to that one with which Bertrand Russell stumbled upon and decided to rule out, and which now notoriously bears his name, “Russell’s paradox”¹¹⁹), then not one good course of action can exist: there must be more than one correct course of action; but, we cannot help asking, where does it lead us? And, since we are no longer speaking about “one good” above others, we are no longer speaking of deontology, thus we are not speaking about morality anymore—we are rather speaking about ethics, and this entails a very different kind of agent.

I would be jumping ahead of myself if I followed this trail of thought. If it is true that plurality is quite a celebrated value in the Western world nowadays (we are not going to discuss whether it is as applied as it is celebrated, not even whether the implications of this concept are more or less understood, let alone well-conceptualized), it is equally true that autonomy is still necessary to conceptualize agency. Being fully accountable for our deeds means being autonomous in this regard: in regard to our deeds. Simply speaking, this means that no external coercion should be exerted upon the agent’s will for him to be fully accountable for what he does. And here we start to move into swampy waters inasmuch as now we have an intermediary between our causes and our actions, namely, our will. If an agent does something against his will, then his deeds cannot be fully attributable to him, and he cannot be held fully accountable for what he did. In this way, our will would be very proximate to our capacity to *agree* with something. Here, our values play again an important role, and therefore so does our evaluative capacity. As a

¹¹⁹ Simply speaking, Russell’s paradox says that a “set of all sets” that is not a member of itself (i.e., any totality, like in: “all trees” are not larches or oaks, rather these are members of the set “all trees”) must contain itself (viz., “trees” unlike [\neq] “animals” or “clouds”), which contradicts the definition of a totality, since in containing itself it becomes a member of itself (if it were not a member of itself, then it does not contain itself, and then it is not a set). Russell used this paradox to refute Georg Cantor’s “naive set theory”, which defined the “set of all sets” as not being a member of itself but as containing itself. Russell’s way out of this paradox is, essentially, to “rule it out” once met (as is unavoidable in trying to define any totality [e.g., “all trees”] as other than any other totality [e.g., “all animals”, “all humans”, “all clouds”, etc.]). For a more exhaustive explanation of this paradox, see Russell, especially part V, chapter XLIII.

matter of fact, we ought to evaluate something in order to really agree with it; otherwise, though we might consent, we would not *really* agree with it. Let us suppose that a fifteen year old girl is living in a little room with her two younger sisters (one of them an infant) and both her parents; they are going to be evicted the next day if they fail to pay all the past rents they owe. Her father is jobless, and since he is a typical macho of the Cuba of the 1950's, he has forbidden his wife to work (not that it would be easy to find a job for a woman in Cuba at that time, for he must bear his wife's impossibility of bearing him a son, and of having born him instead only "useless women"). There is a neighbor who has been telling this girl that he could relieve her family of all debt if only she consents to have sex with him. She does, and is paid with enough money to pay all past rents—now she is even considering buying some clothes for her sisters¹²⁰. Though this girl has consented to do what she did, we cannot say that she really agreed with it. Furthermore, we can say that her evaluative possibilities were greatly restricted, and that she acted out of desperation and necessity. This gives us a first nuance to evaluation; we cannot say we evaluate correctly (that we can correctly rank our goods/values) when we are driven by necessity. A second nuance to our evaluative powers is that we can only evaluate something about which we have enough information. If it were the case that I was asked to sign a petition to "save the whales" (an *ad hoc* slogan to ask governments to take action against whale-hunting) and I consent to sign because initially I agree with this cause, but I fail to know that there is a company behind the NGO promoting this campaign, and that this company is interested in stopping whale-hunting because, say, they hunt porpoises and the decrease of the population of whales is impacting the porpoises' breeding habits, which is bad for business (I am, of course, making this up), it would not be possible to say that I *really* agreed with what I signed, for I lacked a very

¹²⁰ This is the storyline of Guillermo Cabrera Infante's short-story "Un rato de tenmeall ", which appeared in his first book, the collection *Así en la paz como en la guerra* (1960), and was later translated as *Writes of Passage* (1993). The short story appeared under the title: "Gobegger foriu tostay". What makes it even more tragic is that it is masterly told by the younger sister of this girl, a six year-old child who cannot "interpret correctly" what her sister is doing.

important element to evaluate my deed and to inform my will. There are other nuances as to what counts for a “correct” evaluation (i.e., being in our senses, not suffering from a chronic mental disorder, etc.); my point is that in order to draw will and agreement together, we must take our evaluative resources into account¹²¹.

In this vein, the autonomous agent is the one who can use her evaluative powers that precede her causes and who so wills what she does. Hence, the autonomous agent (a pleonasm in the terms in which we have just examined it) is the one who agrees on what s/he does, and thus commits to what s/he is doing. This means that as much as I have the right to agree with something before engaging to do it, once I agree, I have the duty to comply with it; otherwise my agreement would be spurious. Subsequently, our “sense of the good” is concomitant with our “sense of duty”; we would not agree with anything we could not evaluate as good, and we would not commit our will to any duty we cannot agree with. In his *Oneself as Another*, Paul Ricoeur summarizes this sense of duty, with which our autonomous agreements define our independent decisions; he writes: “The good without qualification has the form of duty, the imperative moral constraint ... moving from the finite condition of the will to practical reason, conceived as self-legislation, as autonomy; where the self finds the first support to its moral status” (207). Though evidently different, causes and actions are glued together by the power of the will, through which the moral agent arises as a dutiful, willing and autonomous entity.

¹²¹ This triad is the keystone of Kantian ethics and practical reason, for it is what informs the categorical imperative (“to act according to that maxim that you shall will it to become a universal law”; to be sure, if it is a law, and it is universal, everybody *must* agree with it). This triad is what has fed all Neo-Kantian thought, which claims that our will should be directed in accordance to social agreement (either by consensus, a la Habermas, or by moral standards, a la MacIntyre, or by contracts, a la Rawls, etc.). The deontological consequences of this imperative had been amply discussed by many other thinkers, and will not need any further discussion in this text. For some examples of these consequences see: Arendt *The Life of the Mind* (vol. 2); Badiou *Being and Event*; Foucault *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*; Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition* and *The Differend*; Luhmann *Social Systems*; Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*; Ricoeur *Oneself as Another* and *The Course of Recognition*; Zizek *Living in the End of Times*, and (paraphrasing Zizek) so on and so forth.

But returning to the subject of our investigation, what did Cabrera Infante do? Let us get into this story; though we might agree by now that, provisionally, we should approach him as an agent.

3.2.1 Summary 13

This discussion on the distinction and relation between action and cause in the attribution of responsibility is crucial for the conceptualization of the autonomous self (i.e., agent), which is behind the liberal paradigm of selfhood to which GCI subscribed at the time that pre-dates his nervous breakdown—and, it should be added, the ruling paradigm in today's society.

Responsibility is, in the terms just discussed, synonymous with accountability. Thus responsibility does not only mean attribution, but also entitlement. The realm inhabited by this agent accountable for his actions is a moral realm, which provides her/his actions with a *topos*, in an analogous way in which the world provides humans with a place. The agent's actions and his/her causes are conjoined by way of his/her will. Will in this context could be understood as the capacity to agree with what is done and to be able to correctly evaluate the causes behind what is to be done.

3.3 "What's wrong?":

At 10:10 p.m. of the 3rd of October, 1965, Guillermo Cabrera Infante left the airport of Rancho Boyeros on the flight that would be his last from Cuba. That day (or rather, that night) he started his exile. What went wrong? Why, as the airplane crossed the point of no return beyond Bermuda, did Cabrera Infante feel so relieved? He loosened his seat-belt, as if with it he was loosening something else—a long, long, long silver thread. He looked at his two daughters, who were sleeping beside him (Miriam was in Brussels, where her husband had been working as a cultural attaché since 1962; the reason for his last-minute trip to Havana was the sudden death of his mother, Zoila Infante), and he took a look at

some papers he managed to smuggle in the suitcase he used when he was working for the “revolutionary” government; some manuscripts that will later become *Tres Tristes Tigres*. As he wrote later: “I knew then what would be my destiny: to travel without returning to Cuba, to care for my daughters and to occupy myself by/in literature” (*Mea Cuba* 11). He seemed so clear about his destiny, but something along the way went wrong; something between 1965 and 1972; or rather, something before 1965. This flight put an end to a brief though intense affair with the Cuban Revolution (capital letters retained for symmetry), an affair that Cabrera Infante started during his late twenties around 1957; or even before, during his late teens, when he met the friend who would prove an important literary mentor and a prominent figure (later repudiated by Fidel Castro) in the revolution, Carlos Franqui; or maybe even before, as a child growing in a household of committed communists, having both his parents founding the Communist Party (capital letters retained by convention) in his native town, Gibara. Regardless of when it started, what we can be sure of is that something went very wrong with the revolution he championed and in which he participated so enthusiastically, and something went very, very wrong for him, as he left and there was no way back.

We should start asking what the difference between being wrong and making a mistake is. After all, GCI¹²² could have reached the conclusion that it was all a big mistake; but not that he did something wrong. It is as if he felt a heavy burden, the kind of burden we usually feel when we *know* that what we did was wrong. Empirically we can say that this is not the case when we make a mistake; we might feel silly, clumsy, absent minded, bedazzled, confused, but there is a constitutive innocence within this feeling that exempts

¹²² I will use his initials often in the dissertation so as to save space and to make more fluent the writing; also because GCI himself used them many times to refer to himself in chronologies and essays—so much so that it has become almost a familiar way of calling him among those who write about him. He said he did not like (actually despised) his name because it was very long and pompous and did not fit him at all; one of the reasons why he never used it in his literature (there are few exceptions, which we will see in chapter 7), so I believe he would not mind my taking this liberty.

us from experiencing guilt or anything like it. As it happens, when a wrong is done, two opposite types seem to emerge from it: a victim and a perpetrator. Yet, this distinction is not as easy to make in practice¹²³. Still, it is important to note that despite the fact that no sharp distinction can be made when attributing shame and blame, these labels imply a radicalized form of agency; for one becomes a non-agent (the victim) while the other is seen as a total-agent (the perpetrator)¹²⁴. Such a simplification does, of course, end up expunging all dimensions and all possible depth from the wrong committed. For some reason these two figures do not arise in a mistake, for, if anything, a mistake may result in people who suffer it, but not in true victims; as it might have doers, but not real perpetrators. According to what we saw earlier, a mistake is a curtailed action that results in a non-desired outcome. Indeed, this action is not curtailed by anything external, but by something emerging from the doer herself; yet her ignorance, as can be attested in her thinking, believing, judging, evaluating that what she was doing and how she was acting was correct, is what excuses her from being the perpetrator not of the action, but of its outcomes. There are too many examples of this kind of actions in our everyday lives to purport some illustration that can help support this point. Thus I believe we can move on with our inquiry.

So what tells us that we *have done* something wrong? I would say that exactly what tells us that we *are* wrong; though naming “it” would prove a little more complex. We might say that permissibility could be an acceptable parameter, since we *know* what is

¹²³ See Lamb 5, on the practical difficulties that this distinction entails.

¹²⁴ A victim stops to be an agent when s/he is seen *exclusively* as a victim, which has become a sort of prerequisite for people to act “compassionately” with that person (as we can attest in the many cases in which, when a victim does not respond to this non-agency, s/he is made not only accountable but an accomplice of the deed s/he suffered; many cases of rape have been thus evaluated, where the raped person is blamed for what happened to her/him), as Lamb asserts (53). Alternatively, a perpetrator stops to be a person when s/he is seen *only* as a perpetrator (as we can easily attest [so very unfortunately] everyday in the media, where any given perpetrator becomes the protagonist of his/her own spectacle, though a protagonist that is “our very antagonist”, a true monster; the more devoid of human features the better), as Lamb does not hesitate in adding (60-63).

permissible and what is impermissible *before* we act, and to some degree we participate (or should do so in a democratic, liberal society) in deciding the criteria of such permissibility, or at least agree that what is permissible is right and what is impermissible is wrong. Here we have a quasi-objective parameter to answer this question, for what is permissible is not about the agent's motivations, but rather a matter of principles. T. M. Scanlon has devoted some time in exploring this concept, and has arrived at the following conclusion: "What is wrong [with a certain action] is not that it is impermissible but rather that the agent should [given his beliefs] *see it as* impermissible" (46, emphasis in the original). So, coming back to our "nice" neighbour, even if witchcraft is not a forbidden practice in today's society and though you do not believe in it (which will very likely render his efforts futile), his actions are wrong because he is doing something without your consent, and he *knows* he is wrong because he did not ask you before: "Sorry would you mind if I put some spells on your food so that you may fall in love with me; oh, and do you have any allergies?". We know when we are doing something wrong when what we do is hard to recognize in front of others¹²⁵. If there is a reason why we find it so hard to recognize what we do, it is because we *know* it is (we "see it as") impermissible—what we just did is within the range of the unacceptable¹²⁶. Thus, what truly renders a deed wrong is ignoring this foreknowledge (i.e., that the deed was impermissible).

¹²⁵ I once made a quite extensive argument to broaden the semantic field of this concept, "recognition", so as to understand it as being infrastructural of cognition. I will use this concept as I worked it later in this chapter and very extensively so in the coming ones (more particularly in the last three). I will then speak about the paper where I developed this argument. For the time being, and given that I am arguing for a concept I find most dislikable (i.e., autonomy), let us leave this concept as simple as it is, as a "telling to others".

¹²⁶ The liberal understanding of liberty[= rights] (inevitably stemming from utilitarianism) has to do with permissibility. The person is the agent who performs an action, the action can be assessed in relation to intention and decision-making (which refers to a degree of control) and this couple somewhat constitutes our will, the cornerstone of utilitarian freedom. For a more extensive commentary on this, see Scanlon, chapter 1.

GCI never seemed to have a hard time recognizing his own participation in the Cuban Revolution. There are times in which it even seemed a little bit hyperbolized, particularly when he was speaking with a present interlocutor, that is, in his interviews¹²⁷. Within the body of his literature, these actions are not mentioned in much detail (particularly before 1972), and we only know he sympathized with the movement and collaborated with it to some extent. We find bits and pieces in some of his essays¹²⁸, whereas in his fiction, this can be inferred through his criticism to Fulgencio Batista's regime¹²⁹. So it seems that his

¹²⁷ This is most apparent in his 1970 interview with Rita Gibert, where we find a confrontational writer (who actually rewrote the interview and used the tapes as raw material for his rewriting)—almost too witty, though who could be at times immensely insightful. He keeps repeating that he took an active part in the Revolution [i.e., “My work for the insurrection was modest, infinitesimal compared to that of some heroes and martyrs, enormous compared to that of many ministers in the present Castrist regime”] until the interviewer asks him to give some more details as to what he did; here, he is not so confident [“I helped to edit the clandestine periodical *Revolución*; I was in contact with several revolutionary groups; I transported arms for the directory and explosives for the 26th July {*once, and it was his sister in law who smuggled them*}; I attempted to found one or two clandestine organizations, one for young intellectuals and another for journalists {*which, it is worth noting, consisted in a couple of failed meetings, one that never took place*}—and very little else”] and, as we can see, he leaves us with a couple of not so very significant actions. See Guibert 359-360.

¹²⁸ See for instance “Bites from the Bearded Crocodile” or “Between History and Nothingness”, both in *Mea Cuba* or “Obsceno” in *O* (later translated to English as “English Profanities” and included as an Epilogue in *Writes of Passage*; we will speak more of this latter later in this chapter).

¹²⁹ In *TTT*, this is really made obliquely, by a couple of direct commentaries (but self-censored; a self-censorship that works as a joke through which he establishes that, in a regime like Castro's, his book is more political by being apolitical) and also by the way in which the two Batistean officials are negatively portrayed (though also obliquely so, through the voices of their *queridas* [mistresses], such as Beba Longoria (and the later revelation made by Magalena, about the perversions of both Beba and her general {“Cipriano Su rez D mera, M.M., M.N., R y P. ... pundonoroso militar y correcto caballero” [6, in Spanish in the original: “honourable military man and correct gentleman”})); this criticism focuses mostly on Batista's corruption and the hypocrisy that reigned during his mandate. Of course, the book that could be said to be the most associated with the revolution by way of a direct criticism to Batista's regime is also the most repudiated by the author, I am speaking of his first book and collection of short stories entitled *Así en la paz como en la guerra*, whose vignettes were a direct commentary against Batista's military tyranny and in which he narrates different episodes

participation in the revolution could be interpreted as having been a mistake; more particularly so since he has affirmed that the whole revolutionary project went astray; as so many other intellectuals and exiles have said and keep saying¹³⁰. So he, as so many other Cubans (most of them dissidents, most of them exiles), could say that the revolution to which he contributed was not the one that it became, that it had an unwilled outcome, that he was fooled, that it was all one big mistake: one big, fat lie. We shall see later in this chapter the relationship between these feelings of betrayal and feelings of distrust and jealousy. For the time being, we should understand that GCI did not feel that his wrong was in his participation with the revolution. In that case, can we conclude that he felt he made no wrong? We should not try to move so hastily.

of the abuses and murders committed by his officers (he narrates there, for instance, the murder of Frank País, one of the most celebrated martyrs of the revolution, in which he dies as a young, immortal hero [he was 22 years old when he was shot]). It is not surprising that these vignettes do not appear in the 1993 English translation (*Writes of Passage*), in which the order of the short stories is also different, obeying to a different (more organic) logic. We have also what he says in his novel/memoir *Cuerpos Divinos*, the only work in which he narrates to a great extent his collaboration with the revolution (here we have a detailed narration of those couple of times in which he transported arms and about those meetings he organized, as well as his desire to go to the Sierra Maestra with the rebels under the justification of guiding a journalist from the U.S., and his failure to do so due to bad timing... the revolution triumphed a couple of weeks before he fetched all his stuff). However, this book was published posthumously, in 2010, nearly five years after the writer's passing. Also, if it is true that he spoke of this work as the "novel" that would follow *TTT*, we cannot know when this part (which is the last part of the book) was begun; so, we cannot be sure whether this account was written before his nervous breakdown in 1972.

¹³⁰ See for instance the work of two "former revolutionaries", one who abdicated and the other who was at the brink of being shot by firing squad, and was pardoned due to international pressure and *only* served 20 years in prison, after which he went to Miami. The first is Carlos Franqui, who describes in great detail this "project going astray" in his *Diary of the Cuban Revolution*. The second former revolutionary is Húber Matos, whose work has been boycotted by leftists all around the world (notably in Mexico, where the presentation of his book became a one-way battle with rotten fruit). See his *Cómo llegó la noche* [How night befell].

There is something patchy in all this account of GCI's affair with the revolution, something that has been narrated and told up to the point in which it has become an official truth in most of the literature about GCI's life and work. This has to do with his work (from mid 1959 to early 1961) in the official newspaper of the 26th of July Movement (Fidel Castro's) *Revolución*, which was run by his friend Carlos Franqui; a person who at that time was an important figure in the rebellion and who founded and directed *Radio Rebelde*, the clandestine radio that transmitted from the Sierra Maestra and which had as its main objective to refute the official information spread by Batista's media (filled with spurious numbers and overstated triumphalism). It was here that one of GCI's greatest contributions to public culture was created, and one of his most cherished babies: the literary magazine *Lunes de Revolución* [Mondays of Revolution]. This magazine did not only become the most read and circulated literary supplement in Hispanic America, but also one of the most respected¹³¹. It set to be one of the most inclusive publications in Hispanic American history. This meant that it published political essays by Fidel Castro, *Che* Guevara, Mao Tse Tung and Lenin (that is, your official communist paperback reader), but they also dedicated numbers to Trotsky, Afro-Cuban religion (*Abakuá*), jazz music and abstract art; that is, it was supposed to be a space for everybody, for culture in all its manifestations and for all their meta-narratives¹³², but from the tenets of a triumphant revolution and a brilliant future. During the first two years following Batista's defeat, these tenets celebrated all-inclusiveness (jazz music or abstract art were declared counterrevolutionary after 1961), but they were also very clear as to the revolutionary expectations from the intellectuals; such as an art not devoid of political commitment and unconditional support for the measures the revolutionary government had to take in order to secure a successful transition (i.e., executions by firing squads,

¹³¹ For an account of the degree of respectability that this magazine achieved in the Hispanic literary world during its very brief existence, see Rojas, *Tumbas sin sosiego* 259; see also Luis 18-19.

¹³² For a more extensive account on this, see Luis 20.

militarization of virtually every political space, etc.)¹³³. This meant that all members of the Cuban intelligentsia were supposed to join in envisioning and designing the brilliant future that was finally opening for this island, so very battered and abused by betrayed revolutions and serial tyrannies¹³⁴. This, for instance, stirred the controversy against the *Orígenes* group, and particularly against its patriarch, the extraordinary Cuban poet José Lezama Lima. Part of the reason behind the attacks published in *Lunes* against the members of this group was due to their hermetism, their almost occultist poetry and their aloof vision of art, whose only compromise was with art itself. GCI was part of the attack and so was, paradoxically, Heberto Padilla, the poet who will later become –justly so—a symbol of free speech in Cuba, after becoming the first important poet incarcerated by the “revolutionary regime” only because of his poetry¹³⁵. The truth is that during those first months, a little more than a year, the impetus of the triumphant revolution had infected

¹³³ We should not forget that GCI made guards, rifle in hand, during the weeks following the revolution in the offices of the homonymous newspaper, and that “Ella cantaba boleros” (the story that set in motion the whole project later called *Tres Tristes Tigres*) was started during one of those “voluntary but compulsory” guards [see his “Two Wrote Together” in *Mea Cuba*]. And, though he joked about this (about his poor command with weapons or about the whole idea of making guards), it is undeniable that he did it, and, at least at the beginning, he did it willingly.

¹³⁴ About this trope of the “betrayed revolution” and its different manifestations in the history of Cuba, see Rojas, *El Arte de la Espera* 220 and *Isla sin Fin* 30; see also Sorel 27-31.

¹³⁵ The “Padilla Affair” was the first serious confrontation between the revolutionary regime and the intellectuals of the left around the world, when the poet was sent to prison in 1971 due to some verses published in his award-winning book *Fuera del Juego* [Sent off the Field], where he openly criticizes Castro’s regime. Also very, very paradoxically, Lezama Lima became the prototype of the Cuban *inciled* (a neologism if not invented by GCI, at least made popular by him in the Spanish lexicon), that is, the one who flees into himself because there is no space in the public realm for him (his masterpiece, *Paradiso*, was interpreted by GCI as the most perfect example of this phenomenon [see GCI’s “Two Wrote Together”]). And more, more paradoxically, Cintio Vitier, one of the targeted figures of the *Orígenes* group, became, later, an official (and one of the most celebrated) intellectual of the revolution; and he who held that poetry was for poetry’s sake in those first targeted essays, ended up defending the importance of a political committed art. He is thus twice attacked by GCI for exactly the opposite reasons (in “Mordidas del Caimán Barbudo” [“Bites by the Bearded Crocodile”] in *Mea Cuba*; the reference to Vitier did not make it to the English translation).

most of the Cuban population, and GCI was part of that teenage enthusiasm that execrated whatever fogged or tried to fog such a brilliant, promising vision: such Utopia. Just a few years later, GCI would be one of the fiercest champions against committed literature, and will direct many of his most acrimonious attacks against those who defended it.

So, what lurks behind such a radical position? naturally, an earlier radical position. The Cuban journalist and critic, Jacobo Machover, is one of the few who had drawn attention to this peculiarity in GCI's literature, and who has been critical of the writer's political positions, which, though insightful and often prescient, always harbored a radical taste. It is worth quoting Machover at length, he writes:

The radicalism of his current positions should be read in terms of his earlier positions; not to underline their contradiction but rather to explain how his criticisms are targeted at the same time against Fidel Castro's regime and against what he once was: one of the main spokespersons of that regime in its beginnings, which led him to make terrible mistakes before he was marginalized and condemned to ostracism as so many others were before and after him; and who finally went to exile to avoid a worse and definitive sentence. Guillermo Cabrera Infante does not finish settling his bills, not with others or with himself. (*La Memoria Frente al Poder* 62)

This radicalism, wherein mistakes are "terrible mistakes", and wrongs become the source of a shame that prevents disclosure, might very well explain why GCI failed to include any article preceding 1968 in his celebrated collection of political essays *Mea Cuba*; this particularly so because between 1961 and 1968 he did not published any essay that dealt with politics. As he said often, he decided to keep silent about his exile; a silence he only broke when he agreed to answer a questionnaire for the Argentine magazine *Primera Plana* in 1968, with the only condition that his answers would be published without an amendment. So it was that this interview became the first time in which GCI articulated his political position against the tyranny that made him flee to exile; but, as Machover points out, also against the tyranny he so contributed to put into power; and moreover, against the tyranny with whose tenets he once enthusiastically identified (even if it was before it *really* became a tyranny). The very few essays in this collection published before

1972 are all devoted to said questionnaire and with its consequences¹³⁶, which included a long unpublished (by his request, because the editors of the magazine delayed its publication for too long and took out most of his humor) reply to one of the first intellectuals who reacted fiercely (the exemplary reaction of any good communist) against GCI's words, the Argentine journalist, Rodolfo Walsh. What makes this reply somewhat discomfoting is that, as he explains, at the time of the publication of this letter (published for the first time in 1992), Walsh is already dead, counted among the *desaparecidos* of the Argentinean military council that ruled between 1976 and 1983, very likely tortured and murdered by members of the *Junta* (council), and who suffered the murders of his daughter and his best friend before he was finally caught. So it is not very thoughtful that this letter is preceded by a preamble entitled "Polemic with a dead", which opens saying: "Rodolfo Walsh was one of the *desaparecidos* of Argentina –which is a pity. He should have lived to see his paradise far from paradise, Cuba, complete its vocation of hell, while the Communist world, which he believed eternal, was falling apart, like the Berlin Wall, each day" (21)¹³⁷. So the pity was not so much that Walsh died a terrible death, but that he died before watching that world he so firmly believed in falling apart. It is as if GCI could not forgive anybody who was not able to realize that Fidel Castro was a tyrant, that this revolution was a masquerade for the implementation of totalitarianism in Cuba and that communism was nothing but a front for a new form of despotism, just *at the same time* he realized all these things. Not one article of the many he published in *Lunes* (not all of them about politics, but there were more than several) was included in this collection; as if his *mea culpa* (beautifully paraphrased in his title, which also plays with the third person singular form of the verb *meor*, which means to urinate in Spanish) was also subject to a process of selection as to *what* was worth

¹³⁶ Actually, published before 1984, since his breakdown imposed yet another silence on him; now of some 4 years before he accepted interviews again (being Pereda's interview in early 1977 one of the first he gave after his recovery and one of the first in which he spoke, if briefly, about this period of madness), and it would take even more time before he could start writing again about Castro's regime and his role in the revolution.

¹³⁷ This preamble was written in 1992, twenty years after his breakdown.

repenting. This selective forgetfulness is quite shocking in a writer who has as one of his main characteristics his nearly supernatural use of memory. These articles (of which I know only by others, very particularly by Machover's work) seem to be the antithesis of his later position, which seems just as radical. In the example that Machover offers us in his study, there is a peculiar text, dated January 6, 1959, only five days after the revolution's triumph, and which bears the not very discrete title of "Somos los actores de una historia increíble" [We are the actors of an incredible history]. Among the many things that would shock an average reader of GCI's literature (let alone a devoted one, as myself) there is a defense of the shootings by firing squads, arguing that for some this was a more than deserved punishment. Less terrible, though not less shocking, are other elements, common to the rhetoric of masses employed by the revolution. I should quote Machover at length again:

Here we have together, with the conviction of the neophyte, all the necessary ingredients for the affirmation of the commitment. First, in the title, the collective: '*Somos*' [We are]. Cabrera Infante, who years later would refuse, except for very rare occasions, to sign any text he had not written, proclaims himself the spokesman of a whole people whose will has not been consulted. (163)

As I just said before, this kind of rhetoric is in full contradiction with the creed the writer kept with almost monk-like discipline during all his exile: so to one radicalism, another radicalism. What these omissions confirm is that there is a vanity behind GCI's radical position, a vanity that helps sustaining it. I do not think I need to engage into a long explanation to assert that radical positions usually sound arrogant, and that those who keep them seem to pride themselves on them; as if they had earned them. Thus, these omissions indicate that, as a father who fails to tell his son that he had a blast every time he smoked weed when he was young and experimented with all kinds of narcotics as he advises him about the many dangers involved in drug-use, the teenage impetus is lost in the account of GCI's deeds. He is able more or less to say what he did, even sometimes to take pride in it. But he fails to tell us that it was so much fun, that he was fooled because he was infected with that contagious bug called Utopia. Just because it was *that* impetus

what he found so hard to recognize, we might say that it was this enthusiasm that he found wrong.

3.3.1 Summary 14

The distinction between doing something wrong and making a mistake is important to understand that regret can arise only by realizing one's wrongs. Regret, as will be seen in this chapter, is an ill-defined form of responsibility; the kind that arises when things go wrong for the autonomous subject (something that will also be seen in this chapter).

Within this framework of the autonomous subject, making a mistake means to be innocent of its outcomes; whereas being wrong (or wrong-doing) means having to take responsibility for the consequences of one's actions, so long as there is a foreknowledge in the doer that what he is doing is impermissible. Now, after having made these distinctions, it is possible to explore what GCI arguably did wrong.

GCI was, during the first months after the triumph of the revolution, not only a firm believer in its tenets, but also a fierce defender of its principles, among which was that art must be politically committed in order to be so. Later in his life, he will remain scornful about this position. These principles were maintained by GCI because he shared a common vision of a Utopian future for Cuba. This Utopian vision inevitably leads towards totality, towards the totalization of the future; as it will be argued in brief.

3.4 The "Utopia Bug": a taxonomical approach

As happens with all bugs, every healthy organism looks for ways to expel them from the body. When this bug is a "moral bug" (or better yet, an "ethical bug"), expulsion happens by way of regret. GCI affirmed many times that he found his first book opportunistic within the political climate that reigned during those days following the triumph of the revolution. In the prologue of the 1994 edition of *Así en la paz como en la guerra*, he

explains how he resented for years those vignettes that were supposed to give context and add depth to the short-stories, and ended up adding petulance and self-righteousness (two of the main features he found in the hypocritical regime he so hated)¹³⁸. Actually, the English translation of this book, published just a year before (in 1993), does not include any of those vignettes; these were just airbrushed. In this 1994 prologue, GCI declares this ban off, and comes to terms with the vignettes because they begot something that resulted in a literary gain, as they helped to shape the narrative of one of his favorite books, *Vista del Amanecer en el Trópico* (1974)¹³⁹. Additionally, the first version of *Tres Tristes Tigres*, the book which won him his first important literary award, the *Biblioteca Breve* in 1965, written before his trip to Havana to his mother's funeral, was also airbrushed, expunged from history; and we will never be able to read it. Not to say that we would miss it. What he rewrote and later published as *Tres Tristes Tigres* is a masterpiece in all its right; and it is dubious that the first version was, indeed, remotely as good as this one. Often times, GCI would say that after leaving Cuba in 1965 to what he knew was going to be his lifetime exile, he reread this first version and found "a book I morally repudiate ... [I] saw it essentially as a politically opportunistic book ... My political thought had changed so much that I did not have a political thought about literature anymore. That is, my position had become totally and absolutely an aesthetic position" (qtd. in Hernández Lima 69). His 1965 trip, and his three-month ordeal to find a way to leave the country, in what he described as a "Kafkaesque experience" (Gibert 353), finished to unsettle a bug that had long been unsettling his mind; this trip made him "wanna throw up" (359).

¹³⁸ He says in this foreword: "This book had being banned by me before. It bothered me that a part, the vignettes, passed judgement on the whole book when it was first published in 1960" (11).

¹³⁹ Published in English as *View of Dawn in the Tropics* in 1988. He concludes his foreword to *Así en la paz como en la guerra* by saying: "Of the short stories, I prefer *En el gran ecbó* [The great ecbó] with all its re-writings, and *Josefina atiende a los señores* [Josefina, take good care of the señores], and *Abril es el mes más cruel* [April is the cruellest month]. The vignettes, of course, do not interest me anymore. But it must be said on their favor that they gave place to *Vista del amanecer en el trópico*" (13).

We will try to isolate the moral bacillus better known as the “Utopia Bug”, and, to do so, we will have to ask ourselves first: what is a Utopia? Of course, it is the title of a piece of fiction written in the early 16th century by Thomas More about a fictional island located in the Atlantic (coincidentally) Ocean, wherein everybody is good and everybody is happy. This ideal place plays with the ambiguity of its Greek etymology derived from the voices *oú* and *eú*, the former meaning “good” and the latter meaning “no”; both voices were Latinized as ‘*ú*’, and so the island is called both “good-place” and “no-place”¹⁴⁰. For those of us who love fictions, we know these are the kind of ambiguities that enrich them. For those who hate fictions, we know these are the kind of ambiguities that demand a stance. So, for this latter group, the translation of an ideal place meant the foundation of the “good-place”: the Utopia. For us, who know that not only do fictions tolerate ambiguities but that they are thus begotten, we are aware that such a place does not exist, as “hypergoods” or “supermen” make for beautiful machinations, but for despicable presences. We know that those willing to build the “totally-good-place”, a “total-place”, are bound to build a “no-place”; that is, they are bound to destruction.

Within the first steps of the clinical history of this bug, there is a persistent compulsion to break with something; which is both the prerequisite of any destructive action and the precondition to founding a new beginning. This is what, as Hannah Arendt notes, is behind the concept of revolution (*On Revolution* 7-10). Both blueprints, the French and the American, did aim at breaking with something old in order to found something new. This has been also Cuba’s case. In the course of Cuba’s very unfortunate history, there have been more years of war and military conflicts than years of peace and political institutions¹⁴¹. Just in the twentieth century alone (which comprehends nearly all of

¹⁴⁰ On a very insightful look at this concept and how it has enrooted in Cuban history and historiography, see Rojas, *Tumbas sin sosiego* 11-49.

¹⁴¹ Very extensive, intelligent and critical accounts on this unfortunate history can be found in Rojas, *Tumbas sin sosiego* and *Isla sin fin*; Sorel; and GCI, *Mea Cuba*.

Cuba's history as an independent country¹⁴²) there have been four breakages, three coups¹⁴³, and three dictatorships¹⁴⁴, with the 1959 revolution as the fourth and, so they say, the last breakage. Some historians agree that being the last Hispanic American country in reaching their independence from Spain produced an uneasy sentiment that could be interpreted as an inferiority complex¹⁴⁵. As with most inferiority complexes, this manifested as a delirium of grandeur that made of Cuba *the* Island, *the* exception, *the* one country in America for whom providence had prepared a "magnificent destiny"¹⁴⁶. The Cuban historian and Mexican exile, Rafael Rojas, has called it "the apple of discord complex" (*El Arte de la Espera* 134)¹⁴⁷. This providential destiny demanded an *ad hoc* teleology. So it was that the conflicting ideas for the best possible course of this "paradisiacal" island that populated the pre-independent country during the 19th century, and which oscillated between annexionism (mainly with the United States, though there were other countries in the roster, such as Mexico) and independence, all agreed on one thing, that there could not be any brighter future for any other country in the world, for *this* was the chosen place (by History, by God, even by Columbus)¹⁴⁸. And it has been

¹⁴² As we know, Cuba was the last Spanish colony in America. They reached their independence (with a great and later infamous assistance of the United States) in 1898.

¹⁴³ The first by Gerardo Machado, who ruled between 1925 and 1935; the other two were led by the same person, Fulgencio Batista, who got to power first as a conspirator and ruled between 1940-1944 and later instrumented a military coup that put him in power again from 1952-1959.

¹⁴⁴ If we count Fidel Castro's regime as a dictatorship, which I believe we should, he would be the third dictator after Batista and Machado.

¹⁴⁵ I am taking this idea from Rojas, *El arte de la espera* 71; *Isla sin fin* 128; *Essays in Cuban Intellectual History* 43.

¹⁴⁶ See for instance what the Cuban intellectual, Jorge Mañach understands is the glorious *telos* preordained for this island in his *Historia y Estilo* 67.

¹⁴⁷ A propos of this complex, GCI was no exception, as he often made reference to "an old geopolitical law" (which is never attributed to anybody, and was very likely his own theory, or hypothesis better said) that dictates that "all islands must become eager to dominate the neighboring continent" (as in Japan, UK or, to be sure, Cuba). See Gibert 374; see also his "*J'accuse* at the Woodrow Wilson Center" in *Mea Cuba*.

¹⁴⁸ Rojas, *Tumbas sin sosiego* 12; Mañach, *Historia y Estilo* 74.

this common providence contaminated by so many conflicting teleologies that has produced so many breakages—so many historical breakdowns in such a short time.

It goes without saying that every new beginning entails a new end; and that it is the end of the end (this sounds too pretentious), the end of a teleology that brings about the necessity (or the idea of the necessity) of a new *telos*, a new fate, and a new beginning¹⁴⁹. Yet this “new” *telos* usually stems from an “original” mission, which is customarily seen as being constitutive of the nation itself, and thus which can arise “new” (or renovated) nationalistic feelings¹⁵⁰. Nationalisms, those exalted feelings of belonging to a (most frequently) “great nation” that is called to fulfill a great destiny, are fed by ideas of the past and the future that translate into programmatic blueprints, more commonly known as ideologies. An ideology entails in its very definition a totality of ideas that direct (and should direct) a number of people, most likely a very large number of people, all gathered together within the concepts of “mass” and “masses”¹⁵¹. Given their recent invention¹⁵², both ideologies and revolutions came to existence as being mutually constitutive; ideologies are the theory behind the breakage carried about by revolutions, which is the practice. All good revolutionaries, according to Ernesto *Che* Guevara, must be both men of ideas and men of arms; which is what was immediately imposed in Cuba after 1959¹⁵³. This new left-handed version of *The Cid*, the CID (which may stand for “communist ideologue dies”, for a true revolutionary “is he who gives his life for the cause” etc.

¹⁴⁹ On teleologies as new beginnings, see Rojas, *El arte de la espera* 133.

¹⁵⁰ On the role of “beginnings” in fanning nationalistic feelings so as to justify a revolution, see Arendt, *On Revolution* 13.

¹⁵¹ On the intrinsic relationship between ideologies and masses, see Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 311-315.

¹⁵² Both the concept of ideology and the idea of revolution were first conceptualized as such during the French Revolution, and it is not coincidental that it was during Napoleon’s reign that they came about as full programs in the construction of nationalism and nations—the French nation, that is... the very germ of the now infamous concept of *chauvinism*. For a more detailed account on these issues, see Arendt, *On Revolution*, mainly chapter 3.

¹⁵³ For a first-hand account of this idea between the ideologue and the man of action as the true revolutionary, and, of course, of love in revolutionary times, see Guevara 10-23.

etc.¹⁵⁴), went as far as claiming that a true revolution did not only found a new beginning but also beget a new man¹⁵⁵. The rupture that a revolution is supposed to commence, and the course it is supposed to catalyse, springs to a great extent from the decadent *telos* that gives this breakage its full justification. So all the enemies, the counterrevolutionary causes, the matter of which Utopian nightmares are made of, come from this other/former hideous ideology, from this terrible teleology conceived by perverted people and nefarious nations; such as, in this case, Fulgencio Batista, the United States of America, capitalism and its inherent imperialistic impulses, and so on¹⁵⁶. All these peoples and

¹⁵⁴ Guevara 12.

¹⁵⁵ This was the logic behind the persecution against homosexuals during the years following Batista's defeat. Between 1964 and 1968, thousands of men and women, many of them accused or just suspects of "deviating behaviour" who engaged in "scandalous practices", were sent to camps of forced labour "wherein work would turn them normal"; these camps were euphemistically called UMAP (*Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción* [Military Units for the Aid of Production]). As you see, the "new man" should wear something more than a straight face. Cf. GCI *Mea Cuba*, particularly his piece on Reynaldo Arenas, "Reynaldo Arenas, or Destruction by Sex". See also Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal's 1984 documentary "Improper Conduct" and Ignacio Ramonet's (sympathetic) interview to Fidel Castro in his *My Life: A Spoken Autobiography* 222-226, where the *Comandante* admits this to be one of the "few abuses of youth" committed by his regime.

¹⁵⁶ Though there are some exemplary exceptions. For instance, between 1961 and 1962 jazz music was declared counterrevolutionary because it was "the music of the Empire", and saxophones were banned all across the country, due to the fact that it was a *Yankee* invention (the fact that jazz music's rhythmical basis came from slave-chants mattered very little)—the recently passed and outstanding Cuban pianist, Bebo Valdés, was a hostage of this ban for more than 30 years. However, for some reason baseball (*béisbol* in Spanish, *pelota* [ball] in Cuban), an entirely *Yankee* game, which did not admit black players until 1947 (when Jackie Robinson, now more popular for the recent biopic directed by Brian Helgeland, lined up as a starter with the Brooklyn Dodgers), was declared the national sport in Cuba (even though "professional sports" were banned; i.e., being paid for practicing a sport). See, the leader was not only a big fan, but also an amateur pitcher (it is even said he was a prominent player at the Universidad de la Havana); there is even a legend that he was seen by some Major Leagues scouts (mainly, from the Washington Senators) in the late 1940's, but he was not picked—which, if it proved true, would make baseball for Castro what architecture was for Hitler: a passion fueled by failure. Though, it must be said, this story is, by all means, most unlikely—nothing but a fabricated irony. On some of the many inconsistencies of Castro's bans, see

nations embody *the* Enemy (capitalization retained for emphasis), the one the revolution defeated but failed to destroy completely, the one from which the revolution must safeguard its people, and which, with all the solidarity and enjoined forces of all the revolutionaries of the world (young and old, men and women, workers and soldiers, past and yet to come), the revolution is nothing but bound to defeat and destroy entirely in the future. It is in this way that Utopias always abide by the sign of “under construction”, when this Utopia is a socialist one it abides by the sign “*Hombres Trabajando*” [Men at Work]. In addition to planting a vision of a perfect society, this bug implants a revision against those other flawed societies that are (constitutively) against perfection, those which are the reason why perfection will never come about: with the mirage comes the ghost; with Ophelia came the father’s phantom; oh Hamlet!

This lone Hamlet figure has a typology in Hispanic American history. So long it has dwelled in our history that it has transmuted into a historical archetype (if there is such a thing), something that seems has been there—in this soil that goes from Mexico to Argentina, and which includes that complex of islands of which Cuba is the biggest one—forever; which means, before Hispanic History (symmetry retained for capitalization’s sake), that prehistory for those who believe that civilization started in these places with European colonization: prehispanic history. Even as far as prehispanic times, this lone figure had a Caribe name: *cacique*, which means he who abusively rules over an “indigenous” population. *Caciquismo* is not a strange word in Hispanic America to refer to a dictatorship, or to power seized by force. The word *cacique* refers to a dictator or to a person who extends his rule for an indefinite period of time or for a self-appointed leader. There is a heroic counterpart to the figure of the *cacique*, embodied in

Sorel 75-80; see also GCI and Rosa María Pereda’s *Mi música extremada*, wherein Castro’s crimes against music are ubiquitous. On the legend of Castro’s tryouts for the Major Leagues, see Morgan and Tucker, where the authors regard this story as a complete fabrication. Also, the prominent Hispanist, Roberto González Echeverría, has argued (with a very convincing historical basis) that there is no record whatsoever that may even give credit to Fidel Castro as a good pitcher, let alone one who could attract the attention of Major League scouts; see his *The Pride of Havana* 6-7.

the voice (now coming from Spain and derived from a Latinism) of *caudillo*, who is the man who successfully leads a group of people in war. After some centuries of having these two types battling against each other (i.e., Fulgencio Batista, the *cacique*, vs. Fidel Castro, the *caudillo*) at least once every decade within the last two hundred years in some (usually more than one) Hispanic American country, we have more or less learned that the *caudillo* traditionally becomes a *cacique* once he seizes power. But these lessons have not prevented us from thinking that the lone warrior, the ideal one, the one who shall lead his people to the great fate for which his nation is preordained, will come after all the abusive ones are finally defeated, and some still think their leader had come already, but he was taken away too soon¹⁵⁷.

This idea of the *caudillo* is just another form of *messianism*, for he can be easily identified (and particularly given the great number of Catholics in these countries) with a “political Messiah”, almost as if appointed by Jesus himself. Fidel Castro was seen as such figure, even early on his way to become the leader of the 26th of July Movement, and very quickly so for his guerrilla *compañeros*¹⁵⁸. When Fidel (this is how he is called by all Cubans who love him, who, according to him, are all Cubans) delivered his first speech after his triumphant entrance into Havana, even pigeons were on his side. All Cuba was one voice supporting his new leader. But there was this one white pigeon who became one of his best allies, as it came back after the other pigeons fled and complied to

¹⁵⁷ A last example of this can be found in Venezuela, where hordes of people joined to mourn their leader (for more than two weeks!) and who grieved the uncertain destiny their country would have now that Hugo Chavez is gone.

¹⁵⁸ See for instance the absolute devotion his comrades or *compañeros* show in Franqui’s *El libro de los doce* [The book of the twelve], wherein Franqui makes an exercise of what now could be seen as raw history, lending the microphone to some of the most important *guerrilleros* (like Juan Almeida, Haydee Santamaría, Celia Sánchez, Efigenio Amejeiras, etc.) and where we can appreciate these figures without any historical makeup; like learning how the revolutionaries dreamt of and discussed their futures (personal, not national) as if they were kids writing letters to Santa Claus. It is not irrelevant to read how most of them venerated Castro as a leader and as a political strategist and, following Santamaría’s words, a sort of Nietzschean superman for whom “everybody could die but him; for if he died the whole revolution was off” (62).

their duty of symbolizing the freedom just attained; this peculiar pigeon returned from its flight of freedom to pose over Castro's (this is how he is called by all Cubans who hate him, who, according to him, are not Cubans but *gusanos*, worms) shoulder. White pigeons are all doves for Catholics and for *Abakuás*. For the first, they are a symbol of peace, as this was the first animal that came back to Noah with an olive branch in its beak so as to announce that God's wrath was over; while for the latter, they symbolize a messenger of Oshún, who is the *Orisha* (God) of love and maternity (and who can also have quite an explosive temper). Today, we ignore what happened to this dove, but it might not be surprising to learn she found a good place in Castro's office, maybe as a personal adviser or something like that. The point here is that the Utopia bug also provokes visions of a solitary leader, a hero among heroes, an epic man who we have now seen is called a *caudillo*; though in the heart of his people he will always be called either by his first or his last name: Fidel, Hugo, Zapata, Villa, etc., etc.

To be sure, all decadent teleologies become so rooted in the national soil that there is no way of overthrowing them other than by force—ripping its poisoning roots from the very entrails of the earth. Freedom must be fought and won, and this can only be done by way of transgression. As Hannah Arendt sharply notes: “freedom has appeared in this debate [on the justifications for a revolution] like a *deus ex machina* to justify what on rational grounds has become unjustifiable” (*On Revolution*, 4). Mayhem must be let loose in order to recover our freedom. Once we assume that all beginnings were inaugurated through an act of violence, revolutionary rhetoric starts to make more and more sense—until it is seen as necessary and natural as the motion of the stars¹⁵⁹. This is how, continuing with Arendt's extraordinary logic, revolutions confuse freedom with liberation, being the former something that has the public space as a necessity and the sharing of human power as a precondition, and the latter as something which needs of an inaugural transgression

¹⁵⁹ I am borrowing this image from Hannah Arendt. In her *On Revolution* (40) she explores the connotations of the word “revolution” and finds the parallel between revolution as catalyst and revolution as movement (as in the movement of the stars), which, when put together, give the impression of necessity.

to come about. Freedom, for Arendt, is human-made, something not only created but sustained by humans who share and keep the public space; liberation, on the other hand, points to liberty, as if it were an original state, a sort of ontological gift or an inherent human capacity—it dwells the grounds of an original entitlement whereas freedom speaks of an inevitable responsibility. Liberty can be thought of individually. Freedom cannot even be conceived without others. Liberty can be envisioned as a boundless, total reality. Freedom is only possible because no totality can exist¹⁶⁰. This is why tyrannies “engender impotence instead of power” (149-150). Freedom is necessarily about power, and power is necessarily about others. And otherness necessarily entails (to any degree you might will) responsibility. So freedom is about responsibility. There is no such thing as irresponsible freedom, this suggests that there could be a public privacy or an autonomous heteronomy or the living dead: a zombie, an oxymoron that is more than a contradiction in terms: a monster.

One of the few scripts, out of the many scripts, that GCI wrote and made into a film¹⁶¹, and the only one which became both a critical success (more of an underground cult movie) and a financial success (regarding the revenues in relation to the low budget invested) was the iconic road movie *Vanishing Point*. Though GCI declared many times that the director, Richard C. Sarafian, got his message wrong (“it was supposed to be a movie about a man with problems in a car and it turned out to be about a man in a car with problems” (Souza, *Guillermo Cabrera Infante* 111), this movie reveals many of the

¹⁶⁰ This idea can be found all throughout Arendt’s work. See *On Revolution* 22, 25, 112, 124-125.

¹⁶¹ There were only three in his lifetime: *Wonderwall* (1968) and *Vanishing Point* (1971; and then a TV remake [with a terrible twist in the storyline] in 1997) and the TV documentary *Sharon Stone: La mujer de las cien caras* (1998) [Sharon Stone: the 100 faces woman]. There is other script that was filmed posthumously by Andy Garcia, based on a screenplay in which, like with *Cuerpos Divinos*, he worked for decades and of which he never produced a definitive draft (which is noticeable in the movie, wherein besides Garcia’s sloppy storytelling, easily attributable to his lack of directorial experience, there are several scenes that are clearly overwritten while others suffer from the exact opposite problem) called *The Lost City* (2005).

compulsions that led the writer from chasing totality to being haunted by nothingness. This is the tale of Kowalski, an ex-car and motocross racer whose job is to test and deliver cars, moving them from one state to another. He is a man who goes from everywhere to nowhere as he attempts to go from Colorado to San Francisco in less than 15 hours. This means a non-stop journey with *speed* and speed as his best allies, one to keep him awake and the other to help him reach the gates of totality. He seems to have no other motivation than running, escaping up to the point of vanishing, of reaching the point zero of speed called “vanishing point”, which purportedly is the maximum possible velocity that a body can reach before it disappears¹⁶². This is, for instance, Michel Foucault’s understanding of transgression, as the movement which “opens violently onto the limitless”, which “carries the limit right to the limit of its being” and thus “forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance” (Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression” 34)—that is, violence by other means. This movement of transgression seems to lead nowhere else but to the very precipice of denial and totality: a total nothingness that seems a total depth just at the edge of the abyss and a non-stop, interminable downfall. This is the no-place towards which ideologies seem to lead in their non-stop revolutionary motion, imbued with the always bewitching enthusiasm of increasing speed: when it seems you have found the one and only correct answer to all the world’s problems, you want to put it into practice as quick as possible; for *all* ideologies aim at universal explanation¹⁶³. It is thus consumption, the devouring of space by means of speed; getting to the limit as fast as possible, making space out of time, making bodies out of history¹⁶⁴. This is where Utopias try to render space out of time, spatializing history

¹⁶² This is terribly misunderstood in the 1997 remake, in which Viggo Mortensen’s whiny Kowalski has as his main motivation making it to see his wife whose health is in a very delicate condition due to complications of childbirth—a motivation that thus turns Kowalski’s tragic character into a borderland soap-opera lovesick fool (literally so, for there is no way in which he can justify not taking the airplane that is going to get him to the hospital sooner than the car).

¹⁶³ This point is brilliantly elaborated by Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 73.

¹⁶⁴ This making time out of space by virtue of speed is a frequent trope in GCI’s work before 1972, notably in the script just discussed. Pereda was one of the first to draw

and its horizon, ideology and its teleology, in what is to be considered “the chosen nation”. There is a sort of Faustic deal in this, when it is thought that One Party (capitals retained so as to keep appearances) might assure some consistency, some permanence and will reduce contradictions probably holding sway in the period preceding a revolution. This deal finds its personal parallel when somebody aspires to find any form of totality that can ameliorate her inner contradictions, her inconsistencies and discontinuities—in both cases, what they search to ameliorate or to completely solve is only repressed, ruled out, at best tore off, with all the skin and blood implied in this movement. This is how revolutions confound catalysis with catharsis¹⁶⁵: the purge of purification is mixed up with the purge of negation—something about which we might find a literal illustration in Stalin’s application of the term¹⁶⁶. This is how we can finally identify this bug, which starts by giving a pleasant vision of a total reality and ends up sucking every possible realization: the Utopia bug pertains to the genus of the “meaning suckers” (*sentir chup-chup*), which all share the quality (or the defect) of sucking out the life out of life¹⁶⁷, of rendering everything meaningless through negating possibility, of squeezing every drop of joy out of everything it touches.

attention to this trope in GCI’s *TTT*, wherein Arsenio Cué sets on a frantic search of time in space while driving in Havana, particularly by the *Rampa*, where, as he goes down to the *Malecón* [breakwater] he seems as if he wanted to continue all the way to the ocean so as to reach what dwells beyond the horizon. Actually, Silvestre (GCI’s alter ego in this novel) exclaims at some point, as he narrates these driving romps in “Bachata”, that “they were totalitarians”, that they aimed at “totality” (344), which here, again, could be understood within the terms of transgression just explained, but also of compulsion and consumption; that is, ultimately, of negation.

¹⁶⁵ See Arendt’s idea of “perpetual motion-mania of totalitarian movements”, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 306.

¹⁶⁶ Stalin’s purges consisted in the executions (sometimes summary, sometimes massive) of those he considered his enemies; and thus the enemies of Russia. For an exhaustive and detached explanation of this concept see Amis 166-180.

¹⁶⁷ I am borrowing this phrase (and the rhythm of this passage) from the comedian George Carlin, who used it to refer to euphemisms. See Carlin, *Doin it Again*.

3.4.1 Summary 15

A Utopia is a “no-place”, a total-place that is bound to destroy every possible place once it is taken out from its fictional space; for, being total, it destroys possibility itself. This is clearly behind the drive in all revolutions to break with something in order to found a new beginning—usually an original state of totality (e.g., total harmony, total productivity, etc.) that is located at the core of the nation’s (place) itself: what could be called a total world. The total body of ideas of this Utopia is contained in an ideology. This Utopia, with its important historical particularities, is very visible in all of Cuba’s armed movements. This, it must be noted, is also quite noticeable behind the history of all of Hispanic American armed movements. Freedom thus understood must be attained by way of transgression. This kind of freedom is closer to the concept of “liberty”, which is the kind of freedom that is noticeable in GCI’s trope of “speed” (i.e., velocity); a very common trope in his literature before 1972.

3.5 “I’m so sorry”

So what then? Is this bug fatal? Is there a way out once contracted? How is the recovery if possible? This bug might be fatal for the carrier, particularly when s/he is prone to suicide, a propensity that is not rare on this island¹⁶⁸. It may also be fatal for some of

¹⁶⁸ See Souza, *Guillermo Cabrera Infante* 7, 113, where writes about how suicide and self-immolation (almost synonyms in Cuban practices, particularly in women who set themselves on fire as a form of taking their own lives, a technique inherited from *Abakuá* mythology) ran in GCI’s family, especially on his father’s side. His paternal grandfather, Francisco Cabrera, killed himself after killing his wife, GCI’s grandmother, Cecilia López. After a fight nobody witnessed, he came back to the town carrying her body, wounded by a bullet in her forehead; he ordered for a doctor and locked himself in his room; after the screams in the neighboring room confirmed she had died, he shot himself. He had been diagnosed before with melancholia [homesickness, at that time a clinical diagnosis; but we will see more of this in chapters 4, 6 and 7] and was sent to the Canary Islands for a visit, supposedly to recover his health. When he came back to Cuba he was, reportedly, not the same. On GCI’s own thoughts about suicide and its almost inherent relation to the Cuban character, see his piece in *Mea Cuba*, “Between History and Nothingness: *Notes on an Ideology of Suicide*”, where he declares suicide “the only Cuban ideology for the Revolution, for the Republic before, for Cuba since the last

those who are close to the carrier (whether friend or foe), which is a more frequent case. There may very well be more than one way out of this bug, though we will see here only one: literature. The recovery period could be rather long and the person may never quite get over some tendencies towards totality. What normally renders this recovery most difficult is that this bug develops a symbiosis with the carrier that makes him dependent on it; so, trying to get rid of it could bring, immediately after, a general malaise way worse than when leaving the bug alone; and during therapeutic work, the bug might manage to suggest that the best way of getting rid of it is through yet another rupture (or a series of them). So, to recognize our wrongs is what generally unsettles the bug, and which moves it to defend itself. Distance, however, often times helps to put the bug in a dormant state, a period during which it is possible that the carrier finds it likely to reject what the bug produced, and to dismiss everything as a mistake and even to attack it. Yet it should be kept in mind that when faced with the facts again, this bug awakens fiercer than ever.

Guillermo Cabrera Infante spent some three years distanced from the revolutionary process. From late 1961 to 1965, he went to work in Brussels as a cultural attaché for the Cuban embassy, a post he knew was given to him after *Lunes* was closed down (due to the first internal affair that put intellectuals in dispute as to which was the course the island's intelligentsia was to take and which culminated with Fidel Castro's [in]glorious "Words to the intellectuals": "with the revolution everything, against the revolution nothing": the *P.M.* affair¹⁶⁹) because he had been already ostracized, and he kept insisting

century" (138). This piece was most controversial, for it was the first time in which he elaborated on his theory of Martí's martyrdom, which he interprets as self-immolation—something inconceivable for his hagiographers in Cuba, since a suicide cannot be *el padre de la patria* [the father of the homeland].

¹⁶⁹ He speaks virtually everywhere about this. He does so to a great extent in some interviews (i.e., Gibert; Pereda; but he speaks about this at a great length in his interview with Zoe Valdés, in which he tells the whole story in detail). In his literature, the most important account can be found in *Mea Cuba*, in a piece called "P.M. means Post-Mortem" and then in the following court-like piece "Bites of the Bearded Crocodile".

on participating in the island's cultural (agonizing and *agonizante*: dying) life. So he was sent to a place "that for a Cuban would be like the other side of the moon" to work as a petite diplomat. He was sent away to see if this mini-exile would make him reconsider participating as an intellectual who sided *with* the revolution; that is, with everything and anything Fidel Castro and his government declared revolutionary enough. This distance gave him some perspective as to how difficult it would be to come back to work in Cuba; it gave him a taste of exile, but it also led him to crave for his beloved city, Havana, more than ever. He thought (as we usually do when we find it hard to let go of something) that there was the alternative to live inside the island and publish outside of it (particularly after his first draft of *TTT* was accepted for publication by a reputed editorial house in Spain, Seix Barral), that the tyranny was not going to last too long... that there was hope¹⁷⁰. When he travelled back to his mother's funeral in mid-1965, he found his hope shattered to pieces: just as when meeting with an old love whose beauty and wit you treasured for years just to find her a heroin addict who would sell her brother for a hit, he

This affair started with a short-movie directed by GCI's brother, Sab Cabrera, and Orlando Jiménez Leal. The film was a piece of *free cinema* that was set to show the nocturnal life of Havana after the revolution, showing *habaneros* of many different classes dancing, drinking and having fun. It was declared antirevolutionary because it portrayed a biased vision of what the Cuban people was supposed to be doing at that time: that is, working; and showed instead "a bunch of *negros* dancing drunk and in disgraceful attitudes, opposite to the principles of the revolution". As stated by the writer so many times [i.e., Gibert, Pereda and "Bites of the Bearded Crocodile" and "Questions and Answers" in *Mea Cuba*] the composition of *TTT* started as a continuation of *P.M.* by other means. The censorship of this movie (the first performed to a work of art by the regime after its rise to power) brought a heartedly response by many Cuban intellectuals who signed a petition, published in *Lunes*, asking the government to "set the movie free". This resulted in a series of conversations (three) in which all the intellectuals of the island had the possibility to "openly" debate this issue with the government (there represented mainly by the then president, Osvaldo Dorticós, the minister of education, Armando Hart, the minister of the ICAIC [Film Industry Institute], Alfredo Guevara and Fidel Castro himself, leader of everything that moves) that ended with Castro's speech and with the foreclosure of *Lunes* (due to lack of paper!).

¹⁷⁰ So much so that he let his daughters go back with Zoila, his mother, when she went to visit them in Brussels, as if he thought that getting out of the island was going to be easier for a public intellectual, which he already was at that point.

found Havana unrecognizable. He had, though, three months to familiarize himself with this new monster, now inhabited by zombies who had lost all hope and lived day-by-day waiting for their final day, before he was detained for no reason and his flight back to Brussels was subject to delay after delay (the official the justification was that he had an appointment he never requested with the minister of foreign affairs—an appointment that, of course, never took place). It was within this time that his disappointment became complete and his regret started to show¹⁷¹.

It should go without saying that regret is *not* the same as responsibility. It should be, but it often is not. Regret has to do with entitlement, with this sense through which we believe we deserve something (i.e., a right) just by virtue of being in this world (i.e., a human right) or being Canadian (i.e., a right for medical attention) or being educated (i.e., the right to have a good job) etc¹⁷². Being regretful has also to do with this burden of which I spoke earlier, of *knowing* that one was wrong and of ignoring this foreknowledge. Regarding entitlement, regret arises usually because it is not unusual to see this entitlement escalating into vanity and, in fact, it is quite difficult to draw any sharp line distinguishing them: where one ends and the other begins. In any event, anything jeopardizing this sense of entitlement or seriously harming it (i.e., losing your job) unavoidably shakes any vanity that could be thus residing, and leads a person to reconsider his former position and whatever he may have done that might have led him

¹⁷¹ This is when he started to work on his concept of *incile*, after his meeting with Lezama Lima, where he found a man who could neither write nor speak about poetry without feeling terribly afraid of being heard (his second perception was correct, the first was not; since he was writing, secretly, not even telling his wife, that masterpiece called *Paradiso*). Nonetheless, two bigger shocks were meeting with his friend, Virgilio Piñera, once a brilliant and daring writer, completely ostracized and unproductive, spending his days playing *canasta* with his neighbors; and the other came from speaking with his old friend, Alberto Mora, once a revolutionary hero who was slowly falling from grace, now terrified of speaking with him and having lost all his convictions, “almost like a walking dead”. It was, however, because of him and his few remaining influences as a military official, that GCI could leave Cuba with his two daughters after all.

¹⁷² On the relation between rights and this sense of entitlement, see Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* 102-111.

where he finds himself now. This upheaval is usually accompanied by an “ethical anxiety”¹⁷³ whenever it is the case that one may find wrongs in one’s way, wrongs which one failed to see at that time because one was blinded by one’s sense of entitlement (sometimes also confused with self-assurance, confidence, etc.)¹⁷⁴. The more tragic the upheaval, the more shaken our sense of entitlement will be and the likelier those sentiments of regret will arise. This is why regret has been a common trope in confessional writing¹⁷⁵. Yet, when these sentiments do not propel on to a compulsion to “tell all”—in which we can often find hyperbolized interpretations of not so terrible actions— and more particularly when this “telling all” is accompanied by a “I find convenient to tell so as to regain my sense of entitlement”, regret can be a huge “meaning sucker”; often resulting in paranoia and self-delusion¹⁷⁶.

It is within this same realm of entitlements that we find disappointment as a sentiment arising from holding expectations mainly driven by self-interest. These expectations are formed when our motivation to act in a certain way is seen as an investment on a certain thing. Disappointment is, in this sense, entangled with having expectations as to the outcome of something in which we invested a (preferably) calculated amount of time, energy, thought, etc. Time is money could very well be translated into “doing is investing”, for time thus seen is always pregnant, expecting the outcome it shall bear for us at the end of the line. Disappointment, along with regret, can become a major “meaning sucker”, particularly when our investment seems too great to expect any recovery if we fail.

¹⁷³ I am borrowing this term from O’Rourke 20. He uses this term to refer to some of the motivations behind the writing of Rousseau’s *Confessions*.

¹⁷⁴ There is passage in GCI’s life in which he tells how he associated regret with wrongdoing for the first time when, at eleven years old, an infant sister (Zoila’s second attempt) died of septicemia just two days after she was born. A day before she died, he had killed many baby birds in their nest “deaf to the mother’s ayes”(O 185). Curiously, the writer died of septicemia in 2005; he was 75 years old.

¹⁷⁵ On regret as a main motivation behind confessional writing, see O’Rourke 2; Goodheart 37; Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography* 34.

¹⁷⁶ These are some of the consequences identified by O’Rourke 61-181.

It is thus that behind both disappointment and regret dwell broken expectations and a shaken sense of entitlement. The idea of the “betrayed revolution” in Cuba, which is older than the 1959 revolution and dates back to the first armed movement in the island (their movement of independence), seems to stem from broken expectations and a shaken sense of entitlement; that is, the entitlement to a great destiny just by virtue of being Cubans. For many Cuban historians and intellectuals, the Republic (capitalization retained out of habit) was stillborn, and its history is a story of interruption and deferral by each revolution and coup that had taken place there¹⁷⁷—it is a story of betrayal: the betrayal of a great destiny¹⁷⁸, of a great Republic¹⁷⁹, of a modern society¹⁸⁰, etc. Violence is paradoxically the reason why Cubans feel so betrayed, but also the power through which they keep beginning anew. It is a matter of investing something in this violent motion (their hopes, their lives or those of their loved ones, their money, their time... their hopes) which ends up turning against them; and as much as they can feel entitled to see their expectations met, once these are broken and their entitlement shaken, they arrive at the guilty realisation that this violence was wrong and that they were wrong in participating or investing whatever they invested in this forceful blow. Betrayal, in this sense, is a matter of entitlement and expectations, not a matter of trust.

For instance, it is said that torture makes the tortured lose his/her trust in the world¹⁸¹. Yet this loss is not a matter of feeling betrayed; for there is no expectation broken there, since

¹⁷⁷ See Rojas, *Isla sin fin* 30, where he explains how some Cuban intellectuals, as important as Jorge Mañach or Fernando Ortiz, considered that the Republic was born dead; this at the time in which the republic was supposed to be at its highest.

¹⁷⁸ In his “Our America”, José Martí already writes about this betrayal, first led by those “termites who gnaw away at the core of the *patria* that has nurtured them” (120); that is, the Europeans; and secondly by those “sons of America” who feel ashamed of their Indian heritage; all betrayals that are against the development of America’s (here referring to the whole continent) great future.

¹⁷⁹ As envisioned by Mañach, *Historia y Estilo* 94-99.

¹⁸⁰ As Rojas asserts, *El arte de la espera* 70.

¹⁸¹ On this understanding of torture, see Scarry, *The Body in Pain* 27-29 and Amery 33.

there was no previous investment. Nor is there a shaken or broken entitlement, since not being tortured is not something a person can be entitled to, but rather what entails to be alive: just as you cannot say that you are entitled to breathe, you cannot say that you are entitled to not being tortured. Torture is the maximum possible form of human unilaterality¹⁸²; it cancels the body of the other and makes him/her forfeit it¹⁸³. As we said in the past chapter, the body is the place in which meaning happens and through which meaning is and can be transmitted. When you literally cancel the body, then you automatically cancel all possible meaning-making in this body. Torture is to experience one's body in self-negation; to take it up to the limit in which it is as though the body wanted to escape from itself¹⁸⁴. If you want a common organelle for “meaning suckers”, you can say that they arise from any form of purported totality.

What hence arises in betrayal is a sort of shattered selfishness, very different from what arises in a broken trust. We will not speak for the moment about this latter, which will demand much more time and space within the course of this dissertation. We will rather focus on the former, on this shattered selfishness, from which doubt emerges as a most familiar feeling: not being sure whether you will be betrayed. Such a hazy feeling may make you wary as to where and with whom you invest your expectations and when and how you might declare yourself as being entitled to something; for it is when you finally feel entitled to something that you might be protective and, moreover, *jealous* as to anybody else having the same entitlement you do. This is most evident in intimate relationships, when one of the lovers declares “I love you, I want you to be my wife” and when the other accepts. It is after this moment that both parties can declare themselves (as so many couples so often do) entitled to be jealous/protective of the other—more particularly when there is a reasonable doubt that you might be betrayed by him/her. To be sure, this is always a sort of bet, for you might expose your doubt and jealousy without

¹⁸² On torture and unilaterality, see Scarry 80.

¹⁸³ On torture and the cancellation of the body, see Scarry 29.

¹⁸⁴ I owe this powerful image to Amery 33.

any fundament and this romp can literally explode in your face, which may leave you abandoned by your lover, with your entitlements completely shattered and feeling guilty, so very guilty; paying a fortune in flowers and jewelry and baseball tickets and many “I’m sorry” cards.

If it is true that betrayal is an important trope in GCI’s literature (particularly before 1972), it is also true that jealousy is just as important and, I would argue, much more ubiquitous. GCI had no qualm in declaring that the main topic in *TTT* is betrayal¹⁸⁵, and this is everywhere apparent: friends betraying friends¹⁸⁶, lovers betraying lovers¹⁸⁷, language betraying language¹⁸⁸. Everybody in this book betrays or had betrayed someone. And this is particularly important because this is what gives grounds for everybody to harbour a reasonable doubt about the other¹⁸⁹. This can be better attested by the love/hate relationships in which everybody in the book is involved; a kind of relationship not strange to your average Hispanic American fellow. We can read how everybody badmouths everybody else, how they take pleasure in mocking and ridiculing the other, whether a friend or a potential lover; what the narrating voice has to say about his friend

¹⁸⁵ As he declares in Pereda 108.

¹⁸⁶ Notably, Silvestre (his alter-ego) betraying Arsenio Cué by marrying Laura, the only woman for whom this latter showed anything resembling love; but Arsenio betrays Eribó with Vivian, and Códac betrays Eribó with Cuba Venegas; and so forth.

¹⁸⁷ Vivian Smith-Corona is, of course, the consummated *Lolita* in this regard, who convinces Eribó to court her under false pretenses while she had already betrayed him with Arsenio Cué; Cuba Venegas betraying virtually anybody who has ever had any feelings for her, notably Eribó; and so on.

¹⁸⁸ As in the contradicting accounts given by Mr. and Mrs. Campbell about exactly the same event and later on the terrible translation made by Riné Leal which, of course, reinstates the old Italian *adagio* of *traduttore traditore*, which is actually brought about again by Silvestre at the end of the last piece of the book, “Bachata”, when he starts speaking something between Spanish and English (thus also drawing attention to the writing and to the translation simultaneously); he says: “I was sleeping dreamiendo soñing of the sea lions on page a hundred and a one” and finishes: “*Tradittori*” (481).

¹⁸⁹ The only character that seems exempt of this web of betrayal is Bustrófedon, but he also seems exempt of all human relations, for he seems to articulate everything so long as he *is* the incarnation of language, and, within the book, there is no doubt that he *is* language; so he cannot betray because he does not act.

(“imitating his voice, but making it sound more pedantic than friendly” [322]) or lover (“anyone who sees Cuba falls in love with her but anyone who hears and listens to her can never love her again” [299]) is never laudable. They despise themselves as much as they love each other. This veiled form of scorn is very much enrooted in the Cuban *choteo*, which is the way whereby everything, particularly everything terrible, is made into a joke¹⁹⁰; something that is more salient when another person is the target of the joke—which will wrap both comradeship and contempt, and which will tear open the untraceable wound of an original betrayal that shall lead you to protect yourself against being betrayed: the original wound of doubt. It is from this wound that many Hispanic Americans first encounter love. Doubtless this was GCI’s case, who narrates how very early, when he was seven years old, he was initiated by a green-eyed precocious cousin in, simultaneously, love and jealousy¹⁹¹. After watching her “giving her love” to another kid, smiling and knowing he is watching and suffering, and thus discovering these two feelings at the same time, it seems as if GCI could never be absolutely sure when he is in love with someone unless he feels jealous of her: the bigger his jealousy, the bigger his love¹⁹². His jealousy was his romantic barometer all along his literature. For GCI, being

¹⁹⁰ This led the renowned Cuban anthropologist, Fernando Ortiz, to a most scornful criticism against the *choteo* as the reason why Cuba was not able to export great intellectuals to Europe (a propos a correspondence he keeps with the Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno), elaborated and published in his *Entre Cubanos* (see mainly “No seas Bobo” [Don’t be fool]). These assertions elicited a most fascinating dialogue with Jorge Mañach, who would respond to Ortiz with his celebrated book *Indagación del choteo* [Inquiry of the *choteo*], where he defends this form of humor as different forms to finding ways out of difficult, sometimes tragic events, something that he deems to be of utmost importance for the development and survival of the Cuban culture.

¹⁹¹ He tells this episode to better (literary) detail in his *Infante’s Inferno*.

¹⁹² This, of course, is most apparent in *Infante’s Inferno*, where he finds that his feelings for Margarita (aka The Amazon) are starting to grow when he sees her with another man, and knows that those feelings are gone when he knows she had “being unfaithful” with another woman and he does not care. Yet this is much stronger in *La Ninfa Inconstante* [The Inconstant Nymph], where he realizes that he loves Estela once he feels uncontrollable jealousy for her. And yet much more significant (for what it means) in *Cuerpos Divinos*, when he discovers he is absolutely, madly in love with *Ella* (her, who

jealous and caring became early synonyms, just as doubting others and taking care of himself became recurrent tropes¹⁹³. And as I have been trying to point out throughout this section, protection is the only form of care the autonomous agent knows. Being sorry in this context is nothing but trying to get rid of this burden we feel from past wrongs and present disappointments so as to recover our sense of entitlement. This may be a very good reason why dictators very rarely have to say that they are sorry. A dictator is confronted with situations of this nature very rarely: for being a dictator is being invested with total entitlement.

3.5.1 Summary 16

The conceptualization of regret (what emerges at the loss of one's sense of entitlement and broken expectations) is important to understand two main tropes in all of GCI's works: jealousy and betrayal. This latter is a common trope in Cuban history. The way in which these two tropes will transform in the course of GCI's work will be explored in the next chapters (mainly the sixth). In the present chapter, however, it is significant to understand how these tropes relate to GCI's sense of regret, to his feeling regretful. This discussion is particularly important because, in the same way in which the autonomous agent will be contrasted with the kind of self sought in this dissertation (immanent and heteronomous), the "meaning-suckers" here conceptualized can be understood in a sharp contrast with the "meaning-making" (i.e., *poiesis*) that, as has been argued up to this point, constitutes life in the world.

we know is Miriam Gómez) when he cannot think of anything else but in the possibility of losing her to another man (and even to another woman).

¹⁹³ As so many of GCI's readers have commented (among whom was Rosa María Pereda, who edited with GCI the book *Mi Música Extremada*, in which this relation is extensively explored) and as GCI tirelessly said (see, mainly, his interviews with Pereda and Gibert), music is of capital importance in his work, but in *TTT* it can be seen (or listened) as a background over which everything happens and over which words (as music) emerge. It is no coincidence that in *TTT* the chosen musical genres are the *bolero* and the *filín*, two musical genres that have betrayal as their epicentre. Actually, *boleros* can be listened as short poetical pieces (and many times masterpieces, particularly when there is a good singer behind it) of soap-operas.

3.6 Alter-ed—ego(s)

On “some October day” of 1952, Guillermo Cabrera Infante was arrested for publishing a short-story containing “obscenities”, for which he spent some days in prison. This experience would turn his whole world upside down¹⁹⁴. For the first time in his life he found himself hostage of a political system that had the power not only to censor the work but to punish the worker; and he lived in his own flesh the whims to which a tyrannical juridical system could subject any person they so willed. Many things changed for him that day, during which he experienced a sort of despair he had never felt before, a desperation stemming from the impotence of having nothing to do to alter the course of your own fate. He felt impotent, and impotent he left his cell three days after, with the help of a friend who will later become his first wife’s brother-in-law. This brief imprisonment propelled him to rush into a series of life-changing decisions, as though with them he was recovering his potency. For starters, in his own words, it drove him to marry his first wife, Marta Calvo, when he was way too young for this (he was 23 years old)¹⁹⁵. This youth is in relation to his will to take responsibility for a marriage (which in a place like the Cuba of the early 50’s meant almost immediately having children, which

¹⁹⁴ The short-story is called “Balada de plomo y yerro” and appears in his first book, *Así en la paz como en la guerra* (published in English as “Ballad of Bullets and Bull’s Eye”). The “obscenities” are written in English in the original and are attributed to a stereotypical American tourist (therefore a drunken nuisance) who sings a peculiar version of some Cuban song he had just heard, but altering the lyrics so that they can express both his frustration and his desire to find a Habanera for his sexual partner. This story was supposed to be a homage to Ernst Hemingway’s “The Killers”—a most palpable homage in the English translation. Yet GCI’s story does not contain nearly as much of the cursing language that Hemingway’s work customarily has. As we know, the American writer was living and writing in Havana at that time, and he would sometimes appear in public a little bit like the drunkard in GCI’s story (actually, the drunken singer somewhat resembles the Hemingway that GCI describes in other works, very much in *Cuerpos Divinos*), but, of course, the American writer never had a problem with Batista’s moral police. A matter of prestige I guess. After all, prestige is privilege’s right hand.

¹⁹⁵ On this relationship between his short incarceration and his rushing in his first marriage, see his “Orígenes” and his “Obsceno” (in *O*, 94; published in English as “English Profanities”, and contained in *Writes of Passage*, 147).

he did) when he was starting to manage other responsibilities he took long to reconcile; such as an incipient career as a writer, his journalism studies, his job as an assistant to the person who would be his first important mentor, Antonio Ortega, then director of *Carteles*, the second most read cultural magazine in Cuba after *Bohemia* (owned by the same person, Miguel Ángel Quevedo Pérez, who was securing competition by bearing his best competitor) and finally, his recently discovered sex drive, which will prove a little later to be rather compulsive. Marrying a devoted Catholic did not help matters. This short imprisonment also ignited in him a long-settled tendency to fragment and multiply himself in names and names. In his words:

For two years I was prevented from pursuing my degree at the School of Journalism. Nor could I publish another story, feature, or article under my real name for a long time. Perhaps this was the origin of my passion for pseudonyms (I've written under at least six pen names) and the successive transformations my proper name has undergone over the years. All because of what the jovial judge called English profanities. (*Writes of Passage* 148)¹⁹⁶

After this, he would never use his name in his literature, not even when he was speaking in first person or when he was narrating a personal event, not even when he wrote his memoirs, wherein the name of Miriam was also omitted (she will always be *Ella*)¹⁹⁷. What is behind this aversion to his name and this compulsion to alter his ego through the production of alter egos is what we will see now.

¹⁹⁶ He gives his literary account of this event in the aforementioned “Obsceno”, contained in his book *O*, a strange book in GCI’s bibliography, wherein he compiles and mixes some articles published elsewhere with essays and literary exercises filled with wisecracks and fancies. He wrote this piece especially for this book (first published in 1975), which would later serve as an epilogue for *Writes of Passage*. Curiously, in the original piece, he mentions that he had published by then at least under *four* different pen-names, something that could be attributed to the fact that this piece was published almost 20 years before the English translation; but which also tells us that by then (1994) he had added (at least) two more pen-names to his reservoir.

¹⁹⁷ With the only rather oblique exception of his piece in *O* called “Onom stica”, which, incidentally, goes about pseudonyms and the importance/unimportance of the name (the piece has Shakespeare’s [“Shakesprick” here] famous words “what’s in a name?” as an epigraph). Not surprisingly, the only time he mentioned his name in his literature, it is a parody of it: “G. Cabrera Infame” [*Infame* standing for “infamous”]. There will be two more occasions, but we will examine them in more detail in chapter 7.

That we *other* ourselves when we write [about] ourselves is no secret¹⁹⁸. This “other” self, who is, presumably, oneself, is and has been approached as an alter ego¹⁹⁹; that is, an *ego/cogito* that is a made alterity: a construction. This construction, of course, is not just a one-way ticket to otherness, from me to you (or from I to me), but it affects me or, to say it better, I am affected by me: I am affected by this altered “I” called me. This is all to suggest that this *othering*, this other that is “me” and who I make, cannot be constructed unilaterally²⁰⁰. Yet a not-me, an other-than-me who, to a great measure, is *a part* of me (and apart from me), can be a unilateral construction. Just as a character in a novel might be created out of many people a writer might know, mixing many attributes, behaviours and attitudes of different persons, some who had never existed, some s/he wishes they existed, some attitudes and behaviours are unaltered, some are written as s/he wishes they were, this creation can be interpreted as being unilateral when the writer has the sole word as to what this character is like, why s/he does what s/he does and which will be his/her fate; this character is a unilateral construction. An alter ego is such character. It is a character that has the particularity of having more features attributable to the writer than to any other person around her. Such a creation might include sharing a past with the writer, sharing some distinctive feature that can be thus explored and can be thereby overemphasised in the construction of the character’s attributes, sometimes as if it were her *only* feature; in sum, it can be an exploratory incarnation of what the writer conceives

¹⁹⁸ Paul Ricoeur has written what is perhaps the greatest study to date on the *othering* of oneself as being constitutive of one’s identity (one’s self or selfhood, as you prefer) in his *Oneself as Another*.

¹⁹⁹ On the relationship between this “other” that is oneself and the creation of an alter ego, see Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography* 115; Goodheart 67; O’Rourke 16; Ricoeur 331 and 335.

²⁰⁰ For a fascinating account of this impossibility, see Ricoeur 335. This, indeed, comes back to an earlier part of this chapter, in which we said that agency is attributed and that it comes as a result of interpellation and interruption; thus, it is not unilateral. In a similar vein, the *other* we construct to narrate ourselves is also the “protagonist” of the accounts we make of ourselves, from which it follows that this other cannot be unilaterally done; for it had already been interpellated and interrupted by alterity before the first word is uttered.

as worth exploring²⁰¹. Unilaterality as just seen does not suggest that this creation does not affect/alter the “I” behind it, but it does suggest that the way this affection takes place is the same as to how another person or character might affect me; from the beginning “I” know is not-me. So if my alter ego, for instance, dies a terrible death, it might affect me to degrees I might not even be aware of, or could not be able to anticipate; still, the thing is, I am not dead. Maybe I can say that some attribute, preference, passion, obsession, compulsion or all together died with “him”; but what I cannot say is that I died with him, nor that what died with “him” cannot arise ever again within me.

There is another way in which we know this alter ego, and that is with the concept of *persona*, which is a functional alter ego we make up to respond, behave, act, etc. within certain contexts; particularly working contexts²⁰². Yet the literary alter-ego has the particularity that it can be dramatized much more in the sense that it can be played as if it really were another person, independent from yourself, with a different past and a different fate. You can, if so you will, make him share your past but give him a different future, as a homeless person or as a tycoon, neither of which you are, but one you dread you could become and the other you yearn to be. An alter ego is an altered ego, different from a narrated self.

²⁰¹ In his “A Penchant for Pseudonyms”, Edward Gorey writes about this proliferation from all the possible suggestions stemming from the signifier: the name. He writes: “About the time my first book was published over fifty years ago I found my name lent itself to a number of anagrams, some of which I’ve used as pen names, as imaginary authors, and as characters in their own books ... However, I am still taken aback whenever someone asks me if that indeed is my real name” (70-71).

²⁰² That this term, *persona*, comes from the Greek voice for masks, and that masks had such a great role in Greek society, for theatre was a ritual rather than an entertainment, should tell us that this *persona* is not supposed to hide the face of the person but to accentuate some of her attributes, values, etc. If you will, you can see it as clothes for our agency. You can compare this image with the one that was used to speak about performance in the previous chapter: as “dressing up our actions”.

Then again, we should be careful with unilaterality, and even more careful with unilateral creations (unilateral in the sense of self-exploring, as it was said). We should be careful that we are not creating an alter-ego as a result of something we are trying to evade, as if we were trying to get around something so harmful, odd, complex, ungraspable, etc., that you rather look for ways to escaping it than for ways to coming to terms with it. Traumatic events or tragic occurrences, for instance, may elicit in the writer a most propitious urgency to show herself out by all possible means²⁰³. As it was pointed out in the last section, regret and disappointment may result from or become a traumatic event, or from a tragic occurrence, leaving our sense of entitlement maimed and our expectations curtailed. “Writing your way out”²⁰⁴ of something can very easily take us to the edge of the page and find us cradling between angst and nothingness, trying hard not to look back and focusing rather on the endless possibilities of the blank page. This attempt to escape makes evident the tension between the agent and his actions (or those of others) that threatens to tear both apart while it seduces him with finding a vanishing point where his actions may harbor. The biggest threat is thus that we might get lost as we are looking for our way out; and then, all possible exits are rendered futile.

When the writer ends up fusing with her/his own creation²⁰⁵, it is likely s/he will lose all perspective as to what s/he was looking for, why and where did this self-exploratory enterprise begin: it is likely s/he will end up con-fused, stagnated, and the searching will turn into persecution. Escaping agency is, necessarily, self-delusional, as it is enhancing it²⁰⁶. Nonetheless, the autonomous agent is used to search for absolute responsibilities (in himself, in others) and is thus susceptible to finding intolerable regrets and/or unbearable disappointments. Autonomy as we have been seeing it, in terms of an agent who is and should be in full command of his will and is thereby accountable for his actions (and what

²⁰³ This is very well elaborated by O’Rourke 109.

²⁰⁴ I am borrowing this term from Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography* 141.

²⁰⁵ See, for instance, what Helprin has to say about this fusion in his “Helprin and I” 84.

²⁰⁶ See O’Rourke 16, on what he has to say about the role that self-delusion played in Rousseau’s *Confessions*.

caused them), is most susceptible to Utopias that may not bear the weight of political or ideological agendas, but might just as much emerge as totalities of any kind: with the face of economical or corporate trends, of technological or hi-tech fads, of scientific or scholar plans; any desire for totality, the size of the scale notwithstanding (i.e., the size of an autonomous “I”), is bound to negation and at some point to breakage. But let us return to the source of our investigation.

*Un oficio del siglo XX*²⁰⁷ was the first book that GCI properly recognized as being fully his²⁰⁸. It is strange not because just a year before, in 1960, he published his first book, his collection of short-stories *Así en la paz como en la guerra*, but because *Un Oficio* was almost entirely written by Caín, wherein Guillermo played a role more of editor, biographer and, lastly, panegyrist of Caín’s life and work. Caín is a pseudonym that GCI ideated when Ortega asked him to write a small cinematographic column with film criticisms for *Carteles* in 1954. This small column quickly escalated into a whole section that, due to its popularity and success, ended having a considerable space in the magazine. Ca-ín is not only Abel’s brother, as we can very well remember from the Bible, but in this context is mainly a contraction of the first syllable of GCI’s paternal and his maternal last names: **Cabrera Infante = CaIn**; though he often remarked that both the biblical reference and the just as biblical reference for a movie-lover, the reference to Kane (the Citizen), were happy accidents²⁰⁹. It was here that he became a writer, for it was here where his *oficio* [trade] will be fully developed, as he had to write and write and write and write for almost six years. The more he wrote critiques, the more he discovered how much he loved it, which may help to explain why his critiques kept growing and growing with each published number. Story-telling was more of a hobby, something he

²⁰⁷ Published in English as *A Twentieth Century Job* in 1991. Translated by Kenneth Hall.

²⁰⁸ As explained by Souza, *Guillermo Cabrera Infante* 57; see also his interview with Pereda 104; his conversation with Mario Vargas Llosa in “Writers Talk” and Munné’s prologue to the first volume of his *Obras Completas*.

²⁰⁹ For an elaboration of this “happy accident”, see Gibert 403.

did in his spare time, when he felt like it²¹⁰. This is an important reason why there are so few short-stories in his literary body of work, whereas his film criticisms, interviews and chronicles fill more than 1500 pages²¹¹.

We should bear in mind that GCI's debut as a writer, when he was 18 years old, though very fortunate (one story written, one story published in *Bohemia*, the most widely read and distributed literary magazine at that time), started as a dare with Carlos Franqui, and very much as (in his own words) an act of arrogance, and a neophyte arrogance it was; for he decided to parody a writer he had not read before and of whom he knew nothing (the Guatemalan Nobel Prize, Miguel Ángel Asturias) just as he finished reading a fragment of what later became *El Señor Presidente*. He shared his neophyte scorn with Franqui: "if this is writing then I'm a writer", from which Franqui dared him to write something like it²¹². He did. Franqui read it, liked it, and advised him to take it to *Bohemia* (where he had friends); after which it was published. Just like that, so easy! Though GCI never really gained any more respect for Asturias, he definitely acknowledged that his taking the bet could have only been explained due to his "astronomic ignorance" about literature and the

²¹⁰ About GCI's juvenile attitude towards literature, see Souza, *Guillermo Cabrera Infante* 47; see also what GCI says about his laziness, which he found sometimes hard to overcome, in his interview with Pereda 123.

²¹¹ And this just includes his work from 1954 to 1960, which has been recently compiled and published in the first (and so far only available) volume of his Complete Works (capitalizations retained due to profound respect). There is, at least, another book of this size that will include his film criticisms and commentaries written in exile. It is worth noting, however, that his collection *Cine o Sardina* (which compiles *some* of this latter work) is more than 600 pages long.

²¹² The transcendence of bets and dares should not be obviated in GCI's literature, since many of the most important decisions and motives in his life/work stem from there. From Kowalski driving frantically after betting to his drug dealer that he will call him from San Francisco in 15 hours, to GCI courting Miriam frantically after betting his wife's brother in law (another one, this one called René, who is sometimes called Riné Leal, and whose real name was very likely this one) dared him to sleep with her; "the most difficult woman" in the whole theater school (this story can be found in its whole extent in *Cuerpos Divinos*).

literary trade²¹³. This was not Caín's case, for here we deal with a critic who took his job most seriously and worked arduously to develop and polish his craft until he became not only a popular and respected critic but also, as *Un oficio* shows, a very unique one; for here is a critic whom one can read whether one has seen the movie or not, and enjoy it just for the pleasure of reading. Reading his criticisms are a literary experience as much (if not more) as they are a cinematographic one²¹⁴. This is where he really became a writer.

A Twentieth Century Job is a work mostly composed by a selection of what both Caín and GCI considered the best pieces of the first; from both his years in *Carteles* and in *Revolución*. Caín asks GCI to compose his masterpiece, what he thinks will be his great contribution to art and cinema and culture and to the world at large. From this, GCI composes a prologue that is a parody to prologues²¹⁵, wherein the laudable terms in which most prologues are written switches to a form in which Caín's egocentrism and idiosyncrasies are exposed naked to the reader. GCI here appears as a sort of reasonable friend who tries to put the eccentric critic in his place by formulating the most basic requests to him so as to make a readable book. His birth is also told, his coming to the world out of a signature. It is worth noting that just as much as GCI is reluctant to mention his name, Caín is keen to speak of himself in the third person, referring to himself as "*el cronista*" [the reporter/chronicler], which makes for a very interesting metaphysical threesome resulting in linguistic origami²¹⁶. GCI becomes the critic of the

²¹³ These are the words GCI used with Souza, *Guillermo Cabrera Infante* 22.

²¹⁴ Mario Vargas Llosa already pointed out that GCI used in his film criticisms images and personal memories in a most literary way "to build a reality that was self-sufficient, that existed and persuaded the readers of its truth all by itself" (Cabrera Infante, *Obras Completas* 22).

²¹⁵ "Portrait of the Critic as Caín", the Joycean reference is more than obvious.

²¹⁶ The edition of the first volume of his Complete Works contains many illustrations that contribute most positively to the reading. Among these, there are two in which Caín is seen as a circle of letters forming a double, an "other"; the second illustration consists of some small letters, emerging from GCI's pipe, composing Caín's name, as if he was there

critic, telling us in the text he wrote as an intermission²¹⁷ about his friend's penchant for hoax (in English in the original) and for attacking everything, even the most sacred things, particularly the most sacred things. Within this intermission, GCI gives us an account of his many difficulties in convincing Caín to compose something that could provide his work with some cohesion. This request results in a dialectic battle a la "Hegel (Valdés)", in which one affirms (QUE SI, the book is not complete) while the other just negates (QUE NO, the book is complete); something like Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and Elmer Fudd's routine with the "Rabbit season-Duck season", which produces the only footnote added by Caín to say: "tú tampoco" [neither do you]²¹⁸. For the first time, after his "dead serious" immersion into literature with *Así en la paz*, we find boundless humour, a spirit that gives the reader the impression that some passages have been written by Groucho Marx himself. It is as though he had been repressing this humour for too long. But we should not forget that this book was composed during the period in which GCI got more and more disappointed (and more and more ostracized) with the revolution: his humour spurts from a leakage, a crack in his sense of entitlement (he was marginalized as much as he marginalized himself) and a fissure in his expectations (the revolution was proving to be worse than the tyranny it fought).

It is, however, in GCI's third and final instalment of the book, the epilogue that is more of an epitaph²¹⁹, which he wrote almost as a eulogy (a la Groucho, of course) for the death of Caín. Here, as so many others (including GCI himself)²²⁰ have noted, he mourns for the critical spirit that must be either killed or aligned in the revolutionary environment in

engendered; the idea of the threesome and the third man (dialectic a la "Hegel Valdés": "neither one nor the other but just the opposite" [51]) is crystal clear in this illustration.

²¹⁷ "Nondescript manuscript found in a bottle ... of milk"

²¹⁸ Hegel Valdés' dialectic did not make it to the English translation.

²¹⁹ "Requiem for an alter *egotist*", this title adds a criticism to Caín's character (his egotism) that the Spanish version does not have; the requiem written there is only for an alter ego, making the elegiac tone a little more ceremonious (though very little and for a very little time).

²²⁰ See Souza, *Guillermo Cabrera Infante* 162; see also his interview with Pereda 106 and with Gibert 403-404.

which he found himself in. GCI portrays this period as a dream within a dream, confusing himself only to wake up and find that he did not know what he was dreaming about or who was dreaming the dream: “Caín dreamed of being a *cronista*. When he woke up he didn’t know if he was Caín who was dreaming about being a *cronista* or if it was the *cronista* dreaming he was Caín”, but this perplexity, these centripetal forces released by the dictatorship’s first blow, left him in a estrangement that heralded his death, for a “critic can die of strangeness, what he cannot do is live in strangeness”. Caín was killed by his dreams, devoured by the jaws of a future that never came about. He “was dreaming of a future in which work would not be a miscasting and life would stop being a serial of prejudices and man would cease to live, as in a melodrama, between fear and hope. Dreams and more dreams” (356). Caín did not die in his sleep; instead, he was killed by his sleep; for those Utopian visions of an Abel-like world turned against himself and dreamt him to death. GCI often said that in the Cuba that followed the 1959 revolution, the critic could only exist as a fictive entity²²¹. We cannot know whether Caín was murdered or if he killed himself or GCI just let him die; what we can be sure of is that those same dreams that propelled GCI to deposit his hopes and expectations in the revolution were the dreams that ended up killing his beloved, be-hated and ultimately beheaded alter ego²²².

In the end, GCI cannot tell if Caín is his alter ego or if he is Caín’s. He is positive of his demise. And there and then, jobless and out of favour with the revolution, disappointed and with his tail between his legs, GCI asserts that “Caín dies to give further life to his *alter ego*, who has more important things to do: mend his socks, trample old nuns, write obituaries. That is to say labours of lust” (360). This is not just a Grouchesque line, nor is it a Buñuelesque one; this line, the final line of the book, must be taken to the letter: he must learn how to live without Caín and, more importantly, he must learn how to write

²²¹ *Ibidem*.

²²² A leitmotiv within this book is a beheaded little figure of a fencer, which was supposed to reside on Caín’s desk. GCI speaks of it as if it had something to do with his dead friend, keeping his poise while losing his head.

without him—perhaps he must learn how to *be* Caín. *A Twentieth Century Job* is a book of memoirs, the alter ego's, but memoirs nonetheless. It is also a coming-of-age book, but through the lens of a coming to writing: a coming to the trade and a coming to voice. The arrogant kid who started writing stimulated by a dare read himself and found a daring voice that made of writing a way of life. Just like Citizen Kane before his final collapse, this lens projects the self into an infinity of mirrors and rather than alterity finds fragmented faces in numerous reflections which alter the same image reproduced and confronted by a bouncing light: it is sameness spawning sameness: Narcissus reflected in the eye of a fly²²³.

“I prefer to see him alive, even if he had to wag his critical tail grateful to be with us. Caín thought otherwise and chose a farewell” (357). In the illustrated edition of *A Twentieth Century Job* we see a caricature of GCI, with a shovel over his shoulder, leaving the site where he had just buried Caín while a tear makes its way through the frame of his glasses, crying the uncertain end of this citric critic who was once a friend of his. “Caín went away: he vanished, he disappeared ... Simply, he was lost from sight” (357-358). But this alter-ego did leave a corpse, which although it was buried by GCI, it did leave a ghost. The first version of *TTT*, then called *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* and which had before the pretentious title *La noche es un hueco sin fondo* [Night is a bottomless hole], was written with the hand of the story-teller, the politically committed writer who used his spare time to play God in his narrations, the pompous voice who paid tributes to Hemingway and Faulkner and Sartre, that one to whom *Así en la paz como en la guerra* could be attributed; yet, the eye who reread this awarded draft already accepted for publication, and the hand that guided his pen to rewrite it and called it after a tongue twister, was Caín's. We owe to Caín's ghost this masterwork called *Tres Tristes Tigres*.

²²³ See Cuadra 42-43, where he comments on GCI's collaborations in the Spanish newspaper *El País*, to which he sent his “correspondence”. The title of these collaborations, “Icosaedros”, came from Alfred Jarry's puppet-theatre prototype of tyrant, *Ubu Roi*, in which one of his servants says that he had to slap the icosahedron in each of its 20 faces because he was starting to take too many licenses.

Though I think he owe to him a little bit more; for it seems GCI was haunted by Caín's ghost more than enough, and that "other" agent, that one who signed his script in *Vanishing Point* 'Guillermo Cain', was not really let loose or let go: "What if he hadn't died? What if he were lurking not like a shadow in your heart but hidden in the star dust, cosmic ash his comic ashes?" (355). This shadow will haunt him and follow him, hidden in the keys of his typewriter, sprinkling comic dust with every strike of the fingers: "I do not want the comeback of Caín if I have to pay the price of waiting for it" (356). And so it was that this impatient Vladimir leaves the stage before Estragon leaves his sit and Godot manages to not arrive. The vanished agent became a secret agent, a pursuer, a persecutor and finally a ghost. We shall now see the many manifestations of this phantom²²⁴.

3.6.1 Summary 17

GCI's penchant for creating alter-egos, and more specifically the birth of his most beloved alter-ego, the film critic Caín, is revised in depth here. The alter-ego is a unilateral creation, something in between a character and the narrated self. It is said that this kind of unilateral creation entails a sort of fragmentation within the self through which other, fictitious fates and pasts can be elaborated within one's own self. The implicit dangers of this unilateral process of fragmentation (particularly when this is performed as a way of escaping one's self) as well as GCI's unexpected grief and profound affectation for the death of Caín are here also discussed in depth; particularly the way in which humour emerged in his writing out of a process of mourning. The book that he wrote after Caín's death, *A Twentieth Century Job*, is discussed within this framework, but also within the framework of GCI's becoming a writer ("coming to writing" and "coming to voice"; these two tropes will be very prominent in chapters 5 and 6). This discussion should provide the reader with a broader framework as to the kind

²²⁴ I was not planning on this, but coincidentally *The Spirit* was one of GCI's favorite comic strips; from which the name of his other, milder alter ego of some of his fictions (including *TTT*), Silvestre, comes from. See his interview with Gazarian Gautier, cited in Souza, *Guillermo Cabrera Infante* 173, endnote 13.

of self that GCI had developed at that point: a self so autonomous, so absolute, that created in him the need to invent alterity within himself as the only possible way to experience otherness; a self so devoid of responsibility that ended up becoming his own prison-cell.

3.7 “Where are thou that I can’t see thus?”

In February of 1972, Guillermo Cabrera Infante met the American filmmaker, Joseph Losey, during a brief stay in Rome²²⁵. The fact that they were both exiles in England (the former for not being communist, the latter accused of being one and blacklisted during McCarthy’s witch-hunt) made their Italian connection all the more eccentric. During the second half of the 1960’s, GCI devoted most of his time to writing scripts; which although were not produced, brought a very necessary income to this household in exile. The filming of *Vanishing Point* and its subsequent success took GCI to several places, which included a memorable trip to Hollywood, where he met Mae West, a long-time favorite and an ageless sex symbol²²⁶, and some other not-as-pleasant events, such as his “disappointing” night at the Oscars, where he found more of a vanity fair than a cinematic celebration. It was during these trips²²⁷ that he coincided with Losey in Rome; the filmmaker was favorably impressed with his script and asked him to work on an adaptation of Malcolm Lowry’s schizoid novel *Under the Volcano*; a work that GCI had read 5 years earlier on the recommendation of the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, who also told him that Luis Buñuel was interested in filming it in Mexico²²⁸. GCI set to work

²²⁵ As with most of these brief narratives, I am most indebted to Souza’s *Guillermo Cabrera Infante*.

²²⁶ He relates some events of this trip and his encounter with the comedian into great detail in “Mi memoria de Mae” [My memory of Mae], published in *Cine o Sardina*.

²²⁷ These trips were made all the more difficult because he was still in London under a visitor visa that he had to renew every four months, and so each trip posed a problem at his re-entry. He did not become a British citizen until 1979, after which Miriam got her citizenship, in 1980. See Souza, *Guillermo Cabrera Infante* 108.

²²⁸ Perhaps after the *Quixote*, Lowry’s novel might be the second most cursed work in film’s history. Many have been the attempts to film it and many the failures to do so. As it

immediately, embracing eagerly Losey's project of following the novel as closely as possible. By May of that year, he had finished a 247 page first draft. If you take into account that a page in a script represents more or less a minute of screen time, you can imagine what a long film this was. Though Losey liked the script and found it filmable (of course, if it was shortened), the events that followed the finalization of the script went from bad to worse.

GCI was paid a first instalment of 25 thousand dollars for this first draft, which he handed personally to Losey at Cannes. He did not realise that due to contractual conflicts he was delivering the script to the wrong party (to the director and not to the producers) and was requested to repay the money: "All he had to show for his months of intensive effort was fatigue and exhaustion" (Souza 117). The production never saw the light of the day, and it was postponed indefinitely. On top of that, GCI learned in those days that a former colleague from *Lunes*, Natalio Galán, had taken his own life by jumping from the window of his home at Puerto Rico; also, the secretary who was assisting him with the writing of the script made a suicide attempt with a less tragic outcome than the former; she was saved in the nick of time by a neighbor. GCI's mental health was already decreasing while he was working on the script. But these events awoke old demons long dwelling in his memory. Self-immolations, of which he heard since he was a kid in Gibara and later in Havana, and which took a different dimension for him since it seems that Zoila, his

is well known, John Huston's 1984 adaptation is regarded as one of the weakest films of his otherwise brilliant career. Albert Finney, who plays the self-destructive consul, was nominated to an Oscar for best leading actor. Yet this is a role that, its difficulty notwithstanding, has gotten old and Finney looks nowadays more like a pathetic drunken best-man that has lost his way in a wedding taking place in a foreign country than like the tragic figure he purportedly is; reciting his lines as if he had suffered a stroke rather than as an effect of excessive alcohol in his system, and moreover, as a symptom of the many ghosts inhabiting his brain. Not even Gabriel Figueroa's cinematography (though color never was his forte, and here it is most apparent) helped to make the movie more watchable. If Cabrera Infante criticized Huston for being too a cerebral filmmaker (see his talk on Huston in *Arcadia todas las noches* [Arcadia every night] entitled "*John Huston o la filosofía del fracaso*" [John Huston or the philosophy of failure]) this film is no exception; yet here, though there is no pathos alright, there is no brains either.

mother, showed suicidal tendencies as well²²⁹, the suicide of his dear friend, the Cuban writer Calvert Casey three years earlier in Rome, all these arose as figurations and ghosts that translated (treacherously: *traddittori*) into paranoia and hallucinations. Now his urge to escape was taking over everything else: “Finally, no longer able to cope with the accumulated weight of a lifetime of real and imagined traumas, Cabrera Infante collapsed into a catatonic state” (118). Then again, why did GCI collapsed into radical unresponsiveness rather than, say, a suicide attempt or a psychotic outbreak?

Lowry’s character (and alter ego), the British consul Geoffrey Fermin, a petit diplomat working in a small Mexican town (now a medium-sized city) in Morelos, Cuernavaca, finds himself in a romp of self-destruction right at the middle of the two greatest lovers we Mexicans had ever known, and particularly Mexicans of the center states (D.F., State of Mexico, Hidalgo, Morelos), the two volcanoes: Popocateptl, the great warrior, and Ixtlazihuatl, the sleeping woman. These two monumental testimonies of eternal love frame what wants to be a love-story but drowns at the bottom of a glass of mescal, like the very worm dwelling in each bottle. GCI seemingly developed a symbiotic relationship with Fermin²³⁰ in a narration that constantly changes perspectives and narrators, but wherein they all seem to be narrated by a ghost, by a *cronista*, in the most impersonal first-person narrator since Charlie Marlow spoke for the first time through Joseph Conrad’s pen in *Heart of Darkness*²³¹. These streams of consciousness (which seem more

²²⁹ The reasons as to why self-immolation (suicide by burning oneself alive) is not a strange practice in Cuba (and such a resorted resource, particularly for women) is still debated (though, it is worth noting, this tendency is still a taboo topic, as GCI very well explains in his “Between History and Nothingness”); yet there seems to be a sort of consensus about the Cuban penchant for suicide in times of despair. Souza, for instance, has drawn attention to GCI’s indications in his own writings about Zoila’s “suicidal tendencies” (113). See GCI’s own telling of this story in his *Infante’s Inferno*.

²³⁰ On the great dimensions that this identification took in GCI, see Souza 117. For GCI’s input on this “identification”, see Pereda 253-254.

²³¹ The narrators are Geoffrey, his wife-ex-wife Yvonne, his brother Hugh, and a sort of omniscient narrator which is more in the midst between Jacques Laurelle and Dr. Vigil at the opening chapter. The novel itself makes various references to the life of seamen

like steamed consciousnesses) all merge in repetitive interruptions that dismiss interpellation; it is as if each character found it hard getting out of their own heads. “Stay away from mescal”, Geoffrey repeats to himself; yet you can feel it in each word, each interruption, each hyphen that leaves sentences and paragraphs hanging on a violent rupture of cells, molecules, letters, sounds and memories—“worse, so much worse than tequila”.

In this novel, we do not only read about the downfall of a man spiralling into his own destruction, but also that of his wife-ex-wife, Yvonne, who cannot let go of her sickened husband-ex-husband. They both have died by the beginning of the narrative, opened by an old friend of Fermin, Laurelle, with his wife, and is spending his last day in Cuernavaca (“Quauhnahuac”), speaking with another of Fermin’s acquaintances, Dr. Vigil, about the mishaps that led to the tragedy in which both Geoffrey and Yvonne were killed (though they died separately, their deaths are connected by a runaway horse). We find here another ambiguous friendship between two people who do not particularly fancy each other, but who are bound together by a catastrophe: Hugh, Geoffrey’s half-brother and likely Yvonne’s lover-ex-lover, and Laurelle. This latter feels that Hugh’s departure has left a huge gap; for he had rediscovered hope through Hugh’s dreams—which are more deliriums of grandeur. As the narrator puts it: “Hugh, at twenty nine, still dream, even then, of changing the world ... through his actions—just as Laurelle, at forty two, had not quite given up hope of changing it through the great films he proposed somehow to make” (9); but which were all in that land of self-indulgent fantasies called Utopia: Change under construction—labors of conceit in their last stages.

Ghosts populate the consul’s crumbling mind. They come as hallucinations that are attributed to his alcoholism; of course, he attributes them to the varying potencies of the

(Lowry himself went to the sea when he was 15, the adventures of which he narrates in his first novel *Ultramarine*), and though the reference is made by Laurelle about the consul wanting to be a *Lord Jim* living in self-imposed exile, the Conradian impersonal voice perfected in *Heart of Darkness* is hard to shake from one’s reading.

substances he is consuming, so he moves from mescal to tequila to strychnine and all the way back. However, it is the tension between the consul's wish to disappear and his own fear of disappearing that articulates the novel, and disarticulates him. This tension is, as was just said in the past section, the most propitious place for phantoms to appear and for specters to haunt. "Specter season" should be another name for delirium tremens; the moment in which the hunter becomes the prey and his prayers turn into parading apparitions, like lights swirling while falling in a downward spiral: in "continual terror of his life", that is what the consul looked like those last days in town. "Being afraid *of* one's life" should be another name for paranoia. A ghost is a body that has lost all its depth because it has become all depth, transparent but not invisible: a body that has failed to vanish completely—thus becoming a complete loser. Ghosts populate the consul's crumbling mind; his world that has lost depth and meaning, seen in all its transparency, wherein anything and everything could mean anything, nothing or just the same.

As we saw earlier, GCI's humour emerged at the time of rupture: his own with a revolution that was as slowly dispensing with him as he was with it. Irony, his most frequent humoristic resource (accompanied by those funny-looking cousins, parody and sarcasm) always dwelt in him, but it started to show, as usual, at times of adversity²³². He was the offspring of what he believed was a most incongruous union (not Union); he never quite grasped his parents' marriage; and particularly always asked himself why his mother (to whom he always referred to as a local beauty, smart, strong, amenable, and, all in all, a force of nature) chose his father (to whom he always referred to as a timid, dejected, dead serious little man); the only cause that bound them together (besides the two children) was the Cause: communism. Inside the household, Guillermo Cabrera Senior showed a strong commitment to the communist party and preached a most exemplary sobriety, almost to the point of prudishness, while outside of it he let loose his innermost, clandestine compulsions as a womanizer. Zoila, on the other hand, was very much the same inside and outside the house, she took her incongruities home, for she,

²³² As told by GCI in his interview with Pereda 104-106; see also Souza 65.

who was a fervent communist, was as well a devoted Catholic: Stalin and the Sacred Heart of Jesus hung next to each other and coexisted on the wall of the living room in their house in Gibara (as well as on the wall of what was the living room, master room, spare room, etc. of the rooms the family rented in the two *solares* in which they lived when they moved to Havana), as if there were no contradiction between them²³³. It is no secret that irony and paradox are really proximate. It could be said that irony normalizes a paradox as much as it points it out²³⁴. “Normalizing” in this context should be understood as a sort of trivialization through which the paradox is stripped of its apparent complexity to present it naked to the unclothed eye. The transgression of a contradiction is like a thief who robs from a thief: a meta-crime, a meta-transgression that ends up neither balancing nor equalizing the tension springing from the paradox, but only contributing in keeping it open. This is why breakage, contradiction, incongruity, incoherence and discontinuity are the most favorable culture medium for irony to grow. Pointing at a contradiction is not ironic (i.e., “look mom, Stalin and the Sacred Heart stand for very much opposite things”), but stripping it naked is (e.g., “mom, I think that if Jesus was aware of his

²³³ GCI’s fascination with and good command of contradiction is everywhere apparent in his literature, from his use of paronomasia to his use of tongue twisters, palindromes and anagrams; from his literary references (Lewis Carroll has the first place, but also James Joyce, Francisco de Quevedo, Alfred Jarry, Shakespeare, Mallarme, Cervantes, Borges, Sterne and Mark Twain) to his love for popular culture (Corin Tellado, La Lupe, Chano Pozo or the person he admittedly would have liked to be: Groucho Marx); but it is nowhere more apparent than in his professed admiration (and often mentions in *TTT*, in *O*, in *La Habana para un infante difunto* [*Infante’s Inferno*], in *Holy Smoke*, and in several essays and film criticisms) for the *Contradictorios* [Contradictories]; an Indian group of whom he only seemed to know one anecdote, which he wrote and rewrote in all its possible variations. They were so good in times of war, that they were most pampered during times of piece—even though they were absolutely useless; they used their spare time to do exactly the opposite to the dictates of norms and convention: thus exposing them bare for everyone to see.

²³⁴ On contradiction in terms of betrayal in GCI’s work (mainly in *TTT*), see Nelson, *Cabrera Infante in the Menippean Tradition* 18, 66-69, 84-89; for the relation between paradox and irony, which points it out by virtue of saying the opposite of what is meant, see Gans, particularly chapter 5.

companion in our wall he would probably suffer a massive stroke; though I don't think Joseph would stomach it any better, he would very much likely need a purge").

We had also said that GCI's humor emerged boundless in the pieces that he wrote for *Twentieth Century Job*. It is humor for humor's sake. I argued too that it was this boundless humor that took over GCI as he rewrote *TTT* and transformed it into the delirious invention it is now. Both works share a sense of loss, a loquacious grief, in which one mourns for a disappeared alter ego, a critic that will never be again²³⁵, and the other for a disappeared city, a Havana that will never again exist, "only in my dreams" (Cabrera Infante, *Mea Cuba* 18). As it was likely in his past, when dealing with an adverse environment or with some event hard to swallow, humour helped GCI release some hostility and aided him to undergo (and perhaps sometimes to understand) contradiction. Yet it was his imagination (his best ally and his worst foe), his capacity of making things up, which really took him to a dead end. It is well known that the most evident quality of GCI's imagination was his capacity to alter language from within its foundations. His linguistic wizardry found its best expression in neologisms, puns, acronyms, palindromes and everything a writer can do with words. If it is true that Bustrófedon, that iconic character from *TTT* who seems to be the incarnation of language itself, is what GCI would have liked to be, it is no less true that Bustró (as his friends, more his epigones and groupies, called him) is more a manifestation than a character. Bustrófedon is not a person (no such person could exist) but an abstraction; yet it is a

²³⁵ This must be taken literally, since the film criticisms he wrote later (those compiled in *Cine o Sardina*, which he signed with his own name) lack many of Caín's best known attributes (e.g., his hoaxes, his overstatements, his humongous sense of confidence, aloofness and detachment from the events surrounding him, which often made him seem yet another filmic character) and have many of GCI's best known attributes (i.e., his erudition, his intelligent use of digressions, his prodigious memory, his timing for irony, his refined sense of words and story, his skills as a narrator, etc); though you can still tell they were very good friends, as they keep sharing common attributes (i.e., their use of hyperbole; their fascination with the feminine body, particularly with feminine legs; their love for some directors, actors and actresses; and all in all their love, their obsession with cinema).

creative one, just as if we could provide our imagination with flesh and voice: Bustrófedon *is* GCI's unbounded imagination. His outstanding capacities to mimic other voices (as is shown in Bustró's glorious parodies of the most iconic Cuban writers, or those most iconic for GCI), to catch the Cuban written voice "*al vuelo*" [in passing] just to reproduce it in speech, reveals him as yet another "Contradictorio", yet another exchange in the mirror, since it channels GCI's extraordinary mimicry skills for "catching" the Cuban spoken voice "*al vuelo*" [in passing], which is translated in this book into the written language [*tradittori-contradictorious*]²³⁶.

All these frantic inventions and wild innovations point towards a veiled form of liberation or release. Releasing could be very well associated with venting: letting out something that *needs* to go out; whether because it troubles, harms, haunts or simply bothers you. Venting will not solve the problem, but it will bring you some relief as to how you feel about it. Saying "my head hurts" will not put an end to your headache, but it will likely give you some relief as to how you feel about it (getting you a sympathetic smile, a kiss, or just, if you are alone, getting it out of your system). GCI had, as we have seen (and, more importantly, as we will not be able to see) a lot to get out of his system. The boundless venting that came with these two books through which he led words to the gates of delirium made him realise how easily they could lead him "to verbal delirium tremens" (Pereda 254). This venting egged on the multiple larvae of ghosts and phantoms that had been dwelling in him for longer that he could remember: it shook the beehive of the unconscious and broke it open, letting homeless, angry little bugs on the loose This is how GCI's writing went from being a *genius loci* to be a *genius loco*.

²³⁶ See his "Advertencia" [Warning] in *TTT*. It is also worth noting that Bustrófedon dies in the narrative (he had to) just after having his most inventive night, as related by Silvestre. The fact that he died for what the doctor found out later was an inborn problem in his brain in relation to the size and shape of his skull (which, the physician speculates, made him create all these linguistic marvels) should not be obviated either. We should see more of this in chapter 5.

I would argue that this boundless venting reveals a very particular kind of selfishness, since it compulsively chases a form of liberation that looks like absolute creative freedom but, as GCI would have admitted, ends up looking more like absolute delusions. This is yet another form in which the Utopia bug manifests, through visions of boundless creativity that is not responsible for anything else than for pushing its own limits: an endless mission. As GCI's ill-fated island very well knew, such a path leads to pathology, for it leads to isolation: the space in which freedom dies of asphyxia. His madness, his unresponsiveness, could be very well read as an extreme form of isolation: selfish becomes shellfish²³⁷. In this way, selfishness denies responsibility just as totality denies alterity; they deny by way of destruction, of taking over, of devouring and consuming. Maybe we should remember the anonymous parable of the immensely fat guy whose bed was of no use for him anymore, his humanity exceeded it; but instead of finding ways to correct his compulsive eating habits and his meagre physical activity, he bought a new, bigger bed; until it was of no use again, and had to buy a bigger bed that no longer fitted his apartment, which made him move to yet a bigger place, and when this was of no use, he moved to a bigger and to a bigger and to a bigger space, until the universe was of no use for him: his humanity exceeded it. So, unable to get another universe, a bigger one, he found he had become a paradox and, having read Russell before he went to sleep, he decided to rule himself out: he imploded.

But what is all this responsibility that intermittently appears in this text without being properly introduced? I should not try to speak too hurriedly about a term that deserves all my care and attention: for it *is* all about caring and attending. This is a concept that will grow as the dissertation moves forward. Yet, as we move towards the end of this chapter, we can see what the absence of responsibility can provoke.

²³⁷ I owe this beautiful pun to Yanery, who in addition to intuitively initiating me into Guillermo Cabrera Infante's literature, and to always lending me a ready ear for my readings, she has provided this text with a most accurate image. Sometimes a mispronunciation can be a missed pronunciation from which a new word, or a new meaning, can radiantly emerge.

3.7.1 Summary 18

The moment that led GCI to his final collapse is narrated in this section and is seen in relation to the strong identity that the Cuban writer developed with the protagonist of Malcolm Lowry's novel *Under the Volcano*, which he was adapting for a screenplay at the time of his breakdown. The many ghosts (conceptualized in this chapter as regrets and disappointments that are materialized in characters and alter-egos) that populated GCI at that point are examined in a close relationship with Geoffrey Fermin's haunted psyche. It is ventured in this way that these ghosts led GCI to the delirious venting that started with *A Twentieth Century Job* and that reached its climax in the rewriting of *TTT*. This kind of venting entails a radical form of selfishness, which is the reason why the writer's breakdown ended in unresponsiveness. It is argued here that such a radical form of selfishness is intrinsic to the constitution of the autonomous agent.

3.8 "Mind your step"

The realm of responsibility is trust, just as the realm of sickness is protest; protest because we have ignored our bodies, we have been indifferent to its signals, to what we have to tell as we get involved in more contradiction so as to escape former contradictions²³⁸: sickness is the body in contradiction with itself, the body who can no longer trust itself. This negative form of hearkening, what the experts call stubbornness, can produce a deafness that can only be tolerated through performance enhancers, such as drugs (legal and/or illegal)²³⁹, alcohol²⁴⁰, work (i.e., a workaholic)²⁴¹, etc. That is, through anything and everything that our environment provides and on which we can become dependent; what the experts call hooked. Being hooked is being irresponsible. Responsibility is the

²³⁸ For a very lucid elaboration on the thesis that bodily illness is the body protesting the way one is leading one's life, see Jourard 31.

²³⁹ Ibid 128.

²⁴⁰ As in Lowry.

²⁴¹ As observed by Svendsen 23.

realm of trust and trust arises out of sincerity. Being sincere is being able to listen and care; being insincere is hearing something you ignore and for which you do not care. This is why there can be no responsibility without the other, because caring for yourself entails caring for others²⁴². Beyond and/or before the public realm in which freedom constitutes and is constituted by power, by the sheer possibility of re-signification, there is the intimacy in which caring and trust are formed; within an interaction that do not occur overnight, but is made upon time and affection, that is, upon a different form of knowledge: wherein knowing means caring for and taking care of what you know; wherein one cannot tell the difference between ignorance and indifference: for I know and I care. Within the logic of these couple of chapters, we might find that caring (as a “knowing”) is very close to what I have insisted to call meaning (as incarnation)²⁴³. Meaning, as it was said, occurs socially, or, if you prefer, in the public realm. But we also saw that re-signification, which is like meaning’s breathing hole, cannot occur without intimacy; or, if you will, without a private realm. This is why totalitarianisms, which aim

²⁴² See for instance Foucault’s *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, where he says: “The caring of oneself is an attitude towards oneself, the others and the world” (10), and then later: “‘Taking care of oneself’ is to care about justice” (72).

²⁴³ This is why we should not confuse this form of caring (made upon intimacy, time and familiarity) with the Heideggerian concept of “caring”, which is constitutive of *Dasein*. As we have seen here, we can very well stop caring, and we are still “there”. It is true that we have said that the consequences can be quite catastrophic, but only in extreme cases, as we have also examined. In mild cases, which is most of us, we can stop caring for little things that might escalate to bigger things, and we might start caring again once facing the consequences—or even before; this is to say that most of us will not likely suffer a nervous breakdown, even though we may experience a state of nervousness, stress or anxiety in our everyday lives. Not being an extreme case does not make us healthy. Though it is true that for Heidegger “care” and “authenticity” (what I am calling here sincerity) are bound together, we might say that the latter, which is a “being fully”, occurs *because of* the former, which is structural of being as such. What I have been trying to emphasise during these chapters is that caring is as much a thing we are as it is a thing we do. Indeed, we might not care, and still *be* (regardless if fully or not, that measure will always be hard to asses). On Heidegger’s thoughts on this, see *Being and Time* 171-180 and 258 (about the “authenticity of the call”).

at nationalizing both the public and the private realms, so frequently end up meshing together (when not mashing together) intimacy with intimidation²⁴⁴.

It is worth noting then that a cause is not a source; that this latter is not, properly speaking, an autonomous agent, but rather a living being always already related to others. A source, a living person, already bears witness to her or his life, and thereby to the life of others. It is an “I witness” that is a source of witnessing: who can say “I was that person” with the same conviction with which s/he says “I was there”²⁴⁵. Disowning what you have done is like walking without watching your step; sooner or later you start to run, and sooner or later “you’ll trip”, as they say. This is why responsibility transcends the realm of will²⁴⁶. GCI’s ghosts, hallucinations, paranoia; GCI’s madness came unwillingly; but, as we have seen, he was responsible for them, and he had to take responsibility after he recovered his health. That means not to be a spoiler, but we are approaching the end of the chapter and I should say that this story has a hopeful ending. GCI got out of his ordeal

²⁴⁴ See for instance the whole logic behind the, also euphemistically called, CDR (*Comités de Defensa Revolucionaria* [Committees for Revolutionary Defense]), which are nothing but an *aficionado* web of espionage which makes gossip a matter of state. Each block has one, and it is composed by neighbors, but only by those who are in good terms with the Party (not to be confused with a party, actually their gatherings are the exact opposite of fun), and though the president is elected by the members (who are all neighbors), only those who are in good terms with the Party (repetition helps to bring its rhetorical ridiculousness to the fore) can participate in the election. For a spine-chilling account on the operational practices of these organisms, see González Freire’s testimony.

²⁴⁵ See Ricoeur’s conceptualization of attestation in his *Oneself as Another*, where he writes: “The action of each person (and of each person’s history) is entangled not only with the physical course of things but with the social course of human activity” (107). On his part, Emmanuel Levinas builds his whole ethical project based on the concept of “transcendence”, upon which he explains the “beyond” in terms of what is otherwise than the “there is”, which already implicates presences/essences getting out of themselves; in his words: “The void that hollows out is immediately filled with the mute and anonymous *there is*” (*Otherwise than Being* 3, emphasis in the original).

²⁴⁶ In his *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas explains that “We can have responsibilities and attachments through which death takes on a meaning. That is because, from the start, the other affects us despite ourselves” (129). Will, consent, and all these constructs of autonomy actually aver responsibility.

of madness, and how he did so will be the matter (among other matters) of our next chapter.

So, to wrap things up, I would only like to briefly speak about what Utopias do directly to our sense of responsibility, and why they, as a matter of fact, deny it. Utopias pretend to create a world wherein ethics is supplemented by politics; a reason why all Utopias (of which we have knowledge to date) have resulted in dictatorships. Making ethics subordinate to politics is as dangerous as making a country subordinate to one ruler. Ethics transcends politics in the sense that you might be denied your right to be a political person (i.e., you are a refugee, or an exile striving to have a stable status, or whichever figure that means not being a citizen, or not being recognized as one) but you might (you should) still be an ethical one. You might be stripped of your “right” to participate in the public life (i.e., a prisoner of war; a Jew in Eastern Europe between 1933 and 1945; a Mexica between 1526 and today; a Tlaxcalteca caught by a Mexica between the 1480’s and 1526; a Cuban dissident between 1959 and now; etc.) but that does not mean that you have been stripped of your capacity to be ethical. This is what it is all about: being ethical is not a necessity, but a capacity, something we *can* do. Being ethical is being responsible, and we might very well find our way around it. As we have seen in this chapter, the results may be atrocious, but that does not make ethics any more a necessity than, say, aesthetics. Caring is something we can stop doing, for it is something that we do. This is what Michel Foucault seems to suggest with what he calls the “*ethopoietic* character” (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 327); that an *ethos* is necessarily produced, it is not given to us, in the way morality purportedly is; neither is it something we should preserve untouched, in the way a doctrine should purportedly be left. An *ethos*, like a life, is best preserved by continuous activity (inter-activity). What this means, and what is mainly at stake here, is that ethics is a most demanding activity; you cannot learn it by heart, you cannot play it by ear; it requires from you to be creative about *all* your responses and to be responsible for *everything* you express. So long as there is no *higher order* above all other orders, a “hypergood” above all other goods, any order, any good,

must be figured *as* we make it, enacted *as* we act, and so forth. It is as if we accepted that ways (every path, every road) are made with every step we take, each of which we are responsible for. Insofar as you walk you should mind your steps. Regardless how helpful a map might be, it cannot aspire to be accurate enough. Ethics thus does not entail that the body is (only) a material fact, as if this were the first condition for existence (i.e., extension). Ethics thus entails that the body is an erotic act, a condition of possibility; the very site of memory and imagination, habitat and dwelling, house and action. Everything that is has a body; everything that exists is embodied: sounds, words, ideas, memories, images, pasts and futures. Madness is not. It is a void that voids the body, impedes it, turns it into all matter and no possibilities, all extension and no dwelling, all presence and no contact, all flesh and no blood: a limitless future is a most limited present. Doing nothing means that anything *could* be done, thus nothing *is* done. Meaning nothing entails that everything *could* be meant, thus nothing *is* meant. Thus nothingness is made an artefact of the soul, a handcrafted limbo, just as utopias (de-capitalization due to loss of power) are built as artefacts of the body, manufactured indeterminateness. This is how we can explain that History (with capital “h”, i.e., as an institution) has become a synonym of posterity, and has turned posterity into our secular form of eternity, as yet another utopia.

When he was cured of the Utopia bug, he no longer believed in history, and it was only then that he felt ready to tell it.

3.8.1 Summary 19

Several of the main themes through which self, style and authorship will be conceptualized in the coming chapters (i.e., responsibility, trust, sincerity, freedom, the convergence between ethics and poetics, embodiment and eroticism, meaningfulness, the source, the “I-witness”) are announced in this last section and are put in relation to other important themes that were conceptualized in the previous chapter (meaning, incarnation, *poiesis*, re-signification). These themes are here, however, contrasted with the kind of

subject that has been criticized throughout this chapter, and in the dissertation at large:
the autonomous agent.

CHAPTER 4:
**“I STILL DO” (NOSTALGIA NO. 1): REALIZING/RECOGNIZING WHAT WAS LEFT
BEHIND**

4.1 “Tell me”

I should write this chapter as a teller. And so I will: as the one narrating a story (with characters, actions and events) and as the one unfolding the facts (“real-life” events included). Perhaps I will also be a scrutinizer, the kind of fellow who scrutinizes a process to later deliver its results, like those who scrutinize votes, since some scrutiny should come to the fore after the counting and recounting of the events. Or maybe even as the one who delivers a service, like those bank-employees to whom you turn to check your cash and to cash your cheques. What I should not try to do, though, is to tell any fortunes, for I am not in the position of foresightedness; it would be most irresponsible to make any attempt here to predict anything but the past. And this is what we shall be doing in this chapter (and this is the last prophecy you shall read here—or the second to last), for it is the past that matters to us: past events are the matter that present narrations transform into material.

So what should be this past I am talking about? Let us start with our character, for all stories have characters—though not all narratives do. Guillermo Cabrera Infante is going to be here approached as a character rather than as a source, as was approached in the two former chapters. This mainly means that he should be seen as a person who acts and his actions could be attributable to him. This also means that we will assume that his actions had reasons and that we can engage in deciphering them, counting on the fact that there were antecedents for them already presented in the past chapter. This therefore means that we should approach GCI as an agent. As it comes, the only difference between a character and an agent is that the former is written down (that is, it is always already fictional) whereas the latter is (or was) s/he to whom the character refers—the agent is a real-life person, or so they say. This is a distinction that should be refuted in this chapter (or the second to second to last prophecy), but for the moment let us retain it, if only for

the sake of the argument. The character is GCI and the story is *his story*. I find this calembour most telling, for this is what he did, or rather, these are the actions/deeds in which we should be focusing on: how he started to reconstitute his story by reading and telling history, more particularly, the history of Cuba; and how History turned into history, as Truth became truth, Literature literature, Culture culture, Fact fact and Fiction fiction: the de-capitalization is compensated by the addition of an ‘s’ at the end of the de-capitalized noun (or an ‘ies’, depending on the word you are modifying); that is, for instance, “history” becomes “histories”, “truth” “truths”, and so forth. Stepping into the waters of plurality came, as we saw, at the expense of a terrible breakdown that nearly drove the writer to the irrecoverable regions of unresponsiveness and madness. As we saw before, holding radical positions might be difficult to quit once the bug (the utopia Bug we said) has held sway over your life. And as much as GCI had to take medications for the remainder of his life after his breakdown in order to “keep it together”, he had also to constantly remind himself that there is no last word about anything at all so as to keep plurality (history to histories, truth to truths, etc.) as the space that precedes every singular position. Sometimes he did, sometimes he did not; that is the fate of every recovering addict—and utopias, as we saw, are one of the hardest addictions to eradicate.

Guillermo Cabrera Infante became a storyteller in *Tres Tristes Tigres*. But we should also recognize that this is the work in which he became a writer as such. This book, as the masterpiece it is, contains everything the writer was: the best and the worst. Here, as we saw in the past chapter, we can find his boundless imagination at work, his most crafted skills as a parodist of both the written word and the spoken speech, his prodigious memory, his outstanding capacity to compose stories from dialogues (inner dialogues, which are more monologues, and interactions among many persons), his extraordinary eye for people that made for bigger than life characters (i.e., La Estrella Rodríguez or Bustrófedon) as well as for almost naturalistic characters (e.g., Magalena or Eribó), his wizardry with words and linguistic structures (i.e., syntax, morphology, etc.), among other things. But there was also his logorrhea, which led sometimes to nearly gastric

pages of delirious words and words and words aimlessly springing as debris out of a detonation, his arrogance and pedantry that transpires in some pages in the form of ridiculing or patronizing “lesser” characters (and undeservedly so, since there should not be any problem in ridiculing and patronizing Batista’s officers or their mistresses, but there should be some when performing that on characters as tragic as Magalena, whose ignorance is as saddening as it is touching), his “totalitarian drives” (as those described in “Bachata”), his jealousy and his distrust of even his closest friends that translates in an ubiquitous sense of betrayal. *Tres Tristes Tigres* is not only one of the most complex books that GCI ever wrote, but definitely one of the most complex books ever written in the Spanish language (and perhaps ever written in any language). This means that when approaching the sum of his body of work, this book appears over and over again as a sort of arc that extends between everything that he did before and everything that he did after it. It is not possible to approach this book singularly when approaching to GCI’s literature, for this book *is* GCI’s literature.

Alternatively, the books that he composed immediately after his breakdown can be approached singularly, since we can find in them both his being a storyteller and his not being a storyteller—a sort of oscillation that is also a kind of dialogue. *Vista del Amanecer en el Trópico* was written between late 1972 and early 1974, the year in which it was published²⁴⁷; though several segments (particularly those dealing with the 1959 revolution) were written between 1962 and 1964, for what was going to be originally the first version of *TTT*²⁴⁸. This book tells the history of Cuba from its emergence as an island in the Caribbean Sea to the possible disappearance of the “last living Cuban”. In between these two moments, we read about a series of historical events and catastrophes, all bearing the unmistakable mark of violence and human-made cruelty. Some of these events are hallmarks in Cuban history (i.e., Columbus’ arrival, the assault on the

²⁴⁷ It was published in English as *View of Dawn in the Tropics* in 1988 and was translated by Suzanne Jill Levine, one of the two English translators of *Three Trapped Tigers* (with Donald Gardner).

²⁴⁸ As it is described in Souza, *Guillermo Cabrera Infante* 123.

Moncada Barracks, Hatuey burning at the stake, etc.²⁴⁹), and some are minor events that happened to anonymous people, like those that made the headlines of a local newspaper or that became local legends spread by hearsay. Here the writer is really assuming himself as a storyteller; a storyteller of the history of the country he loved so much and was now sure he would not live to see again: a teller of his own history. We shall discuss later in this chapter the indivisible relationship between narration and ascription, and thus between self-narration and self-ascription; it is important now, though, to point out that for Cabrera Infante History was his story, and he wrote accordingly.

On the other hand, *Exorcismos de Esti(l)o*, the book that followed *Vista*, published in 1976, is a book of fragments—though it would be more accurate to say that it is a fragmented book. By compiling many fragments (or as he said, “*retazos*” [shreds]²⁵⁰) he had written from 1962 to 1972, and by adding some “new” fragments to the old fragments, GCI composed a book in which trying to find any narrative thread would prove an enjoyable waste of time. It would prove more fruitful if one approached this work as narrative leftovers, as if we were approaching wood shavings spread on the floor after a busy day in a carpentry workshop: each shaving making for a fragment, some longer than others and not one identical to the other, though many resembling each other. In this work, we do not have a teller anymore, but the sufferer of the telling; or rather, the sufferer of what was told. This book is a creative purge, and as much as *Vista* was meant to be a cathartic book²⁵¹, *Exorcismos* fulfilled its task of purging the writer’s drive to

²⁴⁹ Columbus’ arrival to the “*tierra m s hermosa que mis ojos hayan visto*” [the most beautiful land that my eyes had ever seen] is now part of the mythology of America and its “discovery”. The assault on the Moncada Barracks on July 26 (whence the name of the rebel movement) of 1953, has been determined as the key moment of the Cuban 1959 revolution by Fidel Castro’s self-made mythology: this was the moment in which the fuse of the revolution was lightened. Hatuey was a Taíno *cacique* who commanded one of the few attacks against the Spaniards in the early 16th C., actions for which he was sentenced to burn at the stake.

²⁵⁰ As described by GCI in his “Orígenes”, in *TTT* 359.

²⁵¹ *Ibid* 358-359; see also Alvarez-Borland 29 and Souza 136.

compose fragments, which had taken over most of his literary life by then²⁵². Both were cathartic works, one dealing with the scars in the body and the other with its excreta. But both are, above all, works of art.

Let us start, however, with Cabrera Infante picking up the pieces of his broken life and let us try to see how it was that this writer, who was already an important intellectual figure with a solid trade and reputation (also as a film critic and a screenwriter), started this exercise of telling, of narrating, and of making a narrator of himself.

4.1.1 Summary 20

This chapter deals with the way in which the past is reconstituted by telling it, and therefore how it is turned into a myth and a fiction. It will be argued that these, myth and fiction, must be brought forth through a process of witnessing, and that witnessing can only be done so responsibly; i.e., sincerely. How the past must necessarily be turned into a myth, how events must necessarily become fictions and how people must necessarily become characters in this process of myth-making will be thoroughly examined in this chapter. The main objective of this chapter will be to show that the distinction between agent and character is as futile as the distinction between history and myth.

4.2 “What if?”

Just as literature helped pave Guillermo Cabrera Infante’s way into madness, it was literature that helped him pave his way out of it. By late 1972, GCI started to write—right after his hospitalization. “To write” is also a way to say that he started to compose, for this is how this writer used to work: by assembling old pieces and adding new ones to the old, sometimes inserting them in the middle of what was already-written, sometimes leaving them for other pieces yet-to-be-written. *Vista del Amanecer en el Trópico* could be described as such a book; a composition in its own right. At that time, GCI’s memory

²⁵² Ibid 359.

was literally shocked, not only by his ordeal of madness but also by the medical treatment applied to get him out of it. He received electroshock treatment, and it was Miriam who had to decide for him and who thus took one of the most difficult decisions of her life, for she knew how much her husband's life and work depended on his memory—and she knew the treatment would inevitably alter it²⁵³. These electric discharges applied to an unresponsive body seized a profoundly distrusting person; when he responded again, he did not trust the paradigmatic properties of history anymore. His memory, in whose accuracy he used to take enormous pride, aimed at accuracy no more, but rather at purification. The historical enterprise was, first of all, a literary quest; it was bound to be aesthetical or it was not to be at all. He knew now that those who had made of history a political venture had committed more crimes against humanity than those they had committed against truth. He knew then that a historian committed to the scientific reconstruction of past events is, first of all, arguing for a debatable version of the truth—for history can be rewritten. He knew thus that an ideologue committed to the construction of identity through the reconstruction of past events is, above all, committed with her/his own agenda as to how the future should be looking like. After all, he believed that “History is no more than a book that has on its cover the title History ... the best proof [are] the Marxists, who, in China, Cuba and the Soviet Union, have rewritten the past in order to affect the future” (qtd. in Alvarez-Borland 28). It is from this distrust in history that he ventures to rewrite it, and it is from this distrust that he starts reconstructing his trust in memory.

Here we have a person whose sense of history is seriously warped. It is not only that GCI stopped trusting history, but his own sense of history was broken: his own sense of narration was shattered into pieces. The narrative reconstruction of a life could be very well compared to the narrative reconstruction of a country; we have a narrative unit brought about by the continuous and coherent organization of events across and throughout time and space. As we saw in the past chapter, writing does not bear narrative

²⁵³ For a more detailed account of the way this treatment affected GCI, see Souza 119.

organization as a necessity; it can act, indeed, contrariwise and end up disorganizing events up to the point of obliterating them and, sometimes, even of negating them. GCI's writing of *Vista* was an attempt "to begin to reassemble a shattered life and to reassess the fragmented history of his country. His journey to the past was not an easy undertaking and was fraught with emotional danger. It is not surprising that many questions remained unanswered or that he concludes that cruelty is a predominant norm in human existence" (Souza 136). So, conclusions aside, the reconstitution of his sense of narrative, fueled by his deep distrust of historical truth, came as a form of therapy through which GCI remembers a history he knew but in which he did not take part (or only partially, as in the events referring to Batista's coups or the 1959 revolution). It is true that his *View* of history is a tragic and predominantly pessimistic view, but it is no less true that in spite of this pessimism, he kept on writing; his trust in writing was reassembled through his trust in narrative and, furthermore, his trust in language, which gave him back his trust in the world.

Rest is best during the period of physical recovery; it is possibly the best remedy for an exhausted body. But this is not the case for a body that is recovering from unresponsiveness, which is a form of radical rest, and that had required external discharges of energy to come back from whence life was receding, hiding away. You cannot treat a tumoured memory in the same way in which you treat a tumoured brain: you cannot operate the tumor so as to extract it from the healthy organ, with the utmost care that you are not cutting out any (or as little as possible) healthy tissue. Tumoured memories, ghosts as we said in the former chapter, cannot and should not be extracted—they must be treated, spoken of, recognized. It is its repression, the purported suppression of a memory that made it a tumour in the first place. Work means everything during the period of recovering one's memory²⁵⁴. Tumoured memories and self-deception produce

²⁵⁴ This, for instance, may be behind Freud's concept of "working through" so as to stop "acting out" compulsively some symptom provoked by a traumatic experience ("Remembering, Repeating and Working Through" 147-159). This "working through" is

sick expressions: the body in protest against itself, a protesting language, a language against itself, speaking against itself; as Maurice Merleau-Ponty beautifully phrases it: “The body becomes the place where life hides away” (*Phenomenology of Perception* 164).

Guillermo Cabrera Infante frequently expressed his penchant for chronologies²⁵⁵. This preference mainly points out to a deep trust in chronological order: that events occur within a certain time, that this time goes in one way and that its data (dates) can be referred to as though they were cosmic compasses. Chronos, the Greek god and principle of all order, who put Chaos into chains, is, chiefly, the god of time. Time begets order and it does so in linguistic terms. Language does not only work in terms of being-as what it

a way of making an interpretive (thus linguistic) framework where a traumatic memory can be told and thus a framework where the ego may be re-interpreted, or “remodeled”. Many of Freud’s readers had reached the conclusion that “working through” does not only entail a linguistic framework wherein the traumatic memory can be articulated and communicated, but that this framework already entails a creative gesture on the part of the patient, sufferer; a symbolic framework wherein these ill-memories can and should be re-articulated (La’Capra 141-144; Kristeva, “Psychoanalysis and Freedom” 1-8). There has been, however, some deal of contention about the irretrievability of traumatic memories, and thus the futility of trying to build frameworks of representations wherein these memories get nothing but different contexts for their re-enactment (Caruth 185-188). Perhaps the philosopher who worked the most on the necessity of articulating these memories, and even of inventing new idioms for them, new phrases to speak the unspeakable, is Jean-Francois Lyotard (*The Differend* 32-59). I, on my part, would lean more towards Lyotard’s reasoning, for if something keeps presenting to us as being truly unspeakable, it is a most necessary endeavor to search for different ways of speaking it—this is what, in my view, language (in terms of re-signification) is constantly doing, inventing new ways of speaking what exceeds it; whether for the better (i.e., unconditional love) or for the worse (e.g., genocide).

²⁵⁵ Many of his books (and those of others about him) contain his life-story told as a chronology (“a la Lawrence Stern”, referring to the narrative form through which this latter writer composed his celebrated *Tristram Shandy*, admittedly one of the most influential books for the Cuban writer). See Pereda, 100-101, 122-123 and his interview with Soler Serrano (as a matter of fact, this is his first answer to his interviewer: “I like the question because I like chronologies”).

stands for, its referent, but it mainly works as an “it-is” what it stands for²⁵⁶. Just as there is no human group of which we know of that is devoid of language, there is no human time devoid of linguistic means. Time as such, whether “pure duration”²⁵⁷ or just “physical time”, does not have (at least we cannot prove it does) “verbal tenses”²⁵⁸; that is, time as such does not necessitate language to exist. Yet the event, this “happening” taking place in time and space, cannot be brought forth without language: there are events because there is language²⁵⁹. And there is order because there are events. If “nothing happened”, time would be inconceivable for us—we would not have a sense of time. Yet that “which does happen” is not “everything that happens”, but only that which is linguistically constituted, the “privileged moment” that makes it to the “order of things”²⁶⁰ and that therefore goes from “chronos” to “*kairos*”²⁶¹. And just as there is no human group (of which we have record) without language, there is no language (this more of an epistemological necessity) without culture. Language always comes about *in* a culture, which is the time and space we first get to *know*. I am not going to engage in a discussion about whether culture precedes perception or not²⁶². But it is almost commonsensical to affirm that no knowledge can arise without culture—whether culture precedes it or not. We know nobody who was born without culture; that is, we know nothing about anybody who was born devoid of a cultural environment. To avoid a long

²⁵⁶ For a spellbinding elaboration on this idea, see Heidegger, *Being and Time* 150-152.

²⁵⁷ See Bergson’s concept of “real duration” in his *Duration and Simultaneity* 50-53.

²⁵⁸ See Tallis 124-125, where he comments on Einstein’s letter to his cousin, in which the brilliant physicist asserts that there is no past, present or future in physical time.

²⁵⁹ On the event as being constitutionally historical, and therefore necessarily linguistic, see Badiou 175-176.

²⁶⁰ This is a paraphrasis, of course, from Foucault’s groundbreaking *The Order of Things*.

²⁶¹ This is very keenly observed by Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography* 174.

²⁶² Some of the fierce defenders of this idea that experience precedes culture (who were the same who defended the idea that the person is, at the time s/he is born, a “tabula rasa”, but more of this in the next chapter) are the hard-core empiricists who, following Aristotle’s conceptualization of the senses in the third book of his *De Anima (On the Soul)*, went on to affirm that it is experience, and experience alone, that shapes *what* the person is and becomes. Perhaps the best known example of this can be found in Locke, mainly in books I and II.

conceptualization about an idea to which so much literature has been devoted within the last four to five centuries, let us agree that by culture we mean something analogous to what was conceptualized as “world” in the first chapter²⁶³. Within this train of thought, we can say that our sense of time and space (that is, our sense of order) is transmitted with, in and by the events that are therein contained. In other words, *chronos* and *topos* come in the form of chrono-logos and topo-logos, as chronologies and topologies, and therefore in narrative form. This is how History, as mainly a modern institution²⁶⁴, is just one form through which this order is transmitted from generation to generation. With the world came the language, and, with it, came narration.

If we could somewhat agree with these claims, we would not find it so hard to accept that the relationship between (human) life and narrative is more of a mutual constitution. Our life, in the sense of “bios”, that is, as socially and politically informed, rather than exclusively defined by our physiological conditions, is indivisibly bound to the narratives we can compose about it²⁶⁵: our lives, in the very sense of “living them”, are defined by what happen to us, and this is narratable (at least potentially) or simply lost—what is lost

²⁶³ This conceptualization, as we saw, is very much indebted to Arendt’s and to Heidegger’s understanding of the “world” as always already human-made (always already linguistically constituted).

²⁶⁴ We should bear in mind that Medieval history was defined more through the lyric tradition than by the objective reconstruction of past events. It is important to note, however, that Western lyricism was not entirely defined by Christian theology; other theologies (and other cosmologies) enriched this lyric tradition, such as the Judaic and the Islamic traditions. This latter was, for instance, dominant in (popular) songs. For a full account on this framework of history built and defined within the lyric tradition, see Menocal, particularly chapters 2 and 3.

²⁶⁵ In her *The Human Condition*, 184-188, Arendt argues that every “life is a story”, an argument that helps her develop further the inseparability between politics and history. Although this could be understood within the narrative framework I am developing here, we should note that narrative is here conceptualized in a wider way than by the composition of stories with characters, which very much assumes that everything that is told is *about* humans and human-deeds. We said in the first chapter that this is not a necessity in order to compose a narrative, the reason of which it is possible to make narratives of, for instance, the origin of the universe by way of extraordinarily extensive explosions, or “Big Bangs”, if you prefer.

to our narrations is as if we had never lived it²⁶⁶. Narratives are everywhere we can find humans, and they have been there for as long as we can remember. There is no life devoid of meaning. Meaning *is* life, not *in* life, but life itself: a meaningless person is a walking dead. In this sense, as was conceptualized in the first chapter, there is no meaning without organization: a disorganized meaning is a delirious invention that usually ends in madness, and thus in self-negation. A disorganized meaning is not. Let me illustrate this point: “disorganized A not is me point meaning and this. illustrate Let”. There are all the words you need to form two sentences, and all the words you know, though they are in a *different* order, a *dis*-order and thus they “make no sense”, for they render meaningless sentences that go nowhere. This is the very principle of narrative, organization, just as this is the very principle of life (as we *know* it). There is no disorganized life-form; an equivalent of the previous nonsensical sentences to a life-form would be something like a badly written genetic code that would translate into a hideous joke; like the Creature of the Green Lagoon or Godzilla or the Medusa or a Progressive Conservative: echo-logical disasters, ontological cacophonies.

It is thus that if all our narratives are products and produce our sense of order, and every language is thereby constituted, then it is not possible to think about an ethically neutral language, let alone an ethically neutral narrative. The construction of the world is always already ingrained in the constitution and reconstitution of narratives from which histories, stories, fictions, in sum, cosmogonies (here only restricting ourselves to ordered time and space) spring.

So, coming back to our character, GCI found himself at a point in which his life looked very similar to the disorganized sentence that was formerly (or in-formerly?) written. And

²⁶⁶ As said before, there are some contentions to this claim that argue for the “incommunicability” of truly traumatic events (i.e., Caruth). Yet, I continue to subscribe to the necessity of “creating” linguistic means through which we can, if not communicate traumatic events as such, at the very least express them, speak them out—so, in this instance, I would subscribe to Lyotard’s ideas on this necessity.

what followed his efforts to pick up the pieces of his life so as to reassemble something life-resembling was a day-to-day effort to organize past fragments and writing present ones, to organize a past that was not his, but of which he irrevocably was a part, and furthermore, with which he *identified*: He knew himself as a Cuban, and now he was a Cuban without Cuba, an exile for whom the history of this country lacked the most important part: the country itself. He now knew that this, the country, the land, was not an idea (as he once thought when he was living there), but that this place was as real as his very body, and as sensitive as his very skin—and just as vulnerable. And as happens when we realize our own vulnerability, he became cautious, which is another way to say that he began to care; he was more careful: “He confirms that his relation to writing has changed, and though he before has let words to reach delirium (a process that culminated with the translation of *Three Trapped Tigers*), he knows now that they can also lead towards verbal delirium tremens—and he becomes cautious—” (Pereda 254). This caution is thereby taken almost to the limits of its form, as Souza explains: “Unlike the fictional works that precede and followed it, *View of Dawn in the Tropics* is a model of restraint ... Assembled during a period of deep despair [this book] is a collection of vignettes based on a melancholic and dark view of Cuba” (Souza 123).

Just as GCI was starting his recovery, he learned that Alberto Mora, his dear friend in Cuba, one of the main leaders of the *Directorio* (which was the second armed rebel movement after the 26th of July), and the person who finally got him out during that terrible ordeal when he came back in 1965, had committed suicide—he shot himself in a way that resembled a piece he wrote some years before when he handed in a short-story to GCI, then editor of *Carteles*, so that he could publish it. Not only was the fact that he did not publish the story a source of remorse at that time, but the fact that he failed to notice what this story said about his friend, and that he gave it so little attention,

pedantically pointing at its literary qualities (or lack thereof)²⁶⁷, seriously threatened GCI's already frail mental balance.

The prose of *Vista* is not only a model of restraint, as Souza points out, but also of detachment. The terrible events here narrated are told by a true *cronista* [we said, a “neutral” eye, a dispassionate journalist or chronicler], whose own feelings are never in the way of the telling. There is sometimes a drop of humor in the form of irony, as in vignette no. 5, which is nothing but a question that contains in it the whole paradox as to how this nation came about from slaughter after slaughter. He asks: “In what other country of the world is there a province named Matanzas, meaning ‘Slaughter’?”(6)²⁶⁸. Here is the irony, but also the quasi-objective view of the *cronista* who tries to restrict himself to the very facts. And it is in this quasi-objective tone wherein the overarching irony of the book resides. Behind the whole project, there is a question, which shapes the whole narrative: “What if this happened just this way?”. This is, indeed, a very different form of counterfactual imagination, for the writer is not engaged in uchronic descriptions like: “what if this had happened differently?”, but rather, “what if this happened in this very way?”, which allows him to introduce subtle but significant additions to the anecdotes and stories hereby told. For instance, the vignette just quoted follows the description of a slaughter started by a nervous Spaniard, who prompted an attack on a native population just because they were behaving too kindly towards him and his companions, and thus, naturally, he was led to conclude that “so much courtesy was intended to kill them for sure” (5). GCI is facing his own trauma, his loss of trust in

²⁶⁷ This episode is written with blood in *Vista*, in vignette 89; unlike other vignettes, in which he focuses on the feelings of one or some of the characters (and which are even written in first person), this vignette is a model of restraint and detachment. Written in third person, he speaks with almost an ironic view of a most ironic parallelism between literature and life (or the end of a life, as it is the case). The book in which he explores his feelings about this event to some extent is *Cuerpos Divinos* and in his piece about the relationship between the Cuban “character” and its penchant for suicide, “Between History and Nothingness”.

²⁶⁸ Quotation from the English version as translated by Suzanne Jill Levine.

historical truth, by giving some credit to what history said. The question he asks becomes, in this way, a most distrusting question: “what if this happened just like this?”. He works through his memory by accepting the most terrible case scenario: “if it did, then this country’s history is nothing more than a sequence of catastrophes, slaughters and cruelty; if this happened in this way, we are nothing but the historical spawns of violence”. If his catatonic state remitted him to a blocked memory in which everything was as if in an eternal present, then he was resolved to regain his memory by letting himself imagine the possibility that history can be, in fact, rewritten *as if it could tell the truth*—and he was thus engaged in “telling the truth”. It is as if he was teaching himself how to remember, and therefore as though he was teaching himself how to forget. It was by relearning how to forget that he could relearn how to imagine in a more responsible way; for it was not anymore about arbitrary inventions, “fictive situations” in “real settings” as in *TTT*, but about “factual situations” in “imaginary settings”. He was determined to learn how to trust narrative again by learning how to believe in history—a process which started with his disbelief in History. GCI was going to imagine that he trusted History in order to tell his-story.

It is this position of “What if-ness” that is articulated in GCI’s book. His distrust, as the book very clearly reveals, is not a distrust in history or in narrative, but in History as an institution and in the historian as the person invested with superior powers to tell the past. What he no longer trusts is the irrevocable capacity of the historian to assemble facts that can compose a reality more resembling the past than the one remembered by people who might have lived it or just heard it. History, as he was starting to realize, was as much made by those who lived it as by those who researched it as by those who witnessed it as by those who heard about it. And this is the kind of history he tells, one in which he tells us some things he researched, some things he lived, some things he witnessed and some things he heard: all under the guise of a quasi-objective *cronista*. But what is most important in this recovery of trust is that responsiveness –how other people, the people involved in the events, were responding to what happened—took primacy over everything

else. History thus becomes a means to understand responsiveness, and this is what provides depth to the events, what this memory at work, this memory that lives and breathes, this living memory remembers and reconstructs in its remembrance. The depth of the event is not given by understanding “why” people reacted, responded, acted in this or that way, but rather by asking “what if” they reacted, responded, acted in such a way; and he therefore engages to explore “how” was it possible that these people responded (etc.) in the way they did. Just as this understanding is beyond causality, this description is beyond representation, for it might tell us how this person felt, what passed his mind while s/he was facing this or that terrible situation; that is, it might tell us those things that cannot be retrieved but only imagined, and that yet cannot be imagined in isolation, rather they can be recomposed by listening, observing, being proximate to your source, and exploring *how* they felt, *how* the events were suffered—this is why imagination transcends representation. These gestures are not very prominent at the beginning of the book. They are restricted to some commentary at the margins of the action, as when he describes Hatuey’s proud attitude as he is going to be burnt at the stake, and says to the priest that he would very much rather go to hell than find another Spaniard in heaven: “Then the Indian raised his proud chieftain’s head, with long, greasy hair tied behind his ears” (3). Since GCI is describing to us an engraving, as he very well let us know at the beginning of the vignette, and this engraving represents a well-known legend about Hatuey’s exemplary dignity in face of indoctrination by giving this response to the priest who was asking him to trust his soul to God, there is no way in which GCI could have *seen* this movement of “raising his chieftain’s head”, nor was it possible for him to appreciate the qualities of the chieftain’s hairdo.

This kind of commentaries will grow intermittently during the book. And he will even compose whole vignettes in which the “historical event” is at the margins of what he is there recreating. This is what he does, for instance, in vignette no. 33, in which the killing of two *mambises* chiefs is narrated marginally within a situation in which we get to know what they ate and what they talked about a few days before being assassinated: “It was

like a picnic” (38). The depth of these events is provided by adding a dimension of people who *suffer* in the stories as much as (and sometimes more than) they act. This is how a meaningful context is created out of the incredible distance that separates GCI from most of the events he tells. And not only does he recreate them retrospectively, but he also lets them emerge from a prose that is now more preoccupied with telling the events than with the way they are told—at least at a first glance.

The way in which what is told seems to have primacy over how things are told is achieved through GCI’s use of parataxis in this work. As was said in the past chapter, the vignettes in *Vista* sprung from a failed exercise started in his first book, *Así en la paz como en la guerra*. One of the most convincing literary devices that GCI employs in these early vignettes is precisely the parataxis. As prone as we know he is to digressions and long, very long, extremely long sentences with lots of subordinate clauses that often take over the main clause and make us forget what he was speaking about in the first place (some pages of his “Brain-teaser” in *TTT* would suffice to illustrate this point), we can see how short sentences, sometimes formed with one or two words, usually a verb and an indirect pronoun (i.e., “Ya estaban en tierra firme. Lo cargó.” [“They were in mainland already. He carried him”]), contribute to give the narrative a more assertive tone, which also makes for a more fragmented reading; for it is as if something were left hanging in between the sentences, something that prevented them from telling these actions together, as though they found it hard to inhabit the same space; it is similar to what happens when a person can only recall flashes of something occurring very fast, faster than her capacity to perceive it, and then she reassemble a coherent account of it by giving order to the flashes: flash #1, flash #2, etc²⁶⁹. We can even say that the whole structure of the book is paratactical, since each short vignette is like a short sentence, each making a short clause

²⁶⁹ See Glowacka 122, for her insightful ideas on the use of parataxis in helping to recreate traumatic events in the context of Holocaust testimonials, and how she relates this to Lyotard’s own ideas on the connection between parataxis and ellipsis in approaching “the sublime”.

for an action; and all within a big, broad, all embracing action-sentence called “history of Cuba”.

Vista del amanecer en el trópico started as a sort of therapy and ended up as a redefinition of history: a paratactic catharsis and a cathartic parataxis. As Isabel Alvarez-Borland draws to our attention: “This apparently fragmented narrative constitutes a search for [GCI’s] own identity as a writer without a country, a kind of re-examination of the past in order to rebuild a shattered present” (29). This is a book about building an identity without a place, a history without a nation, a past without a referent: it is a vista without a landscape, a view without a room.

We shall see next how this past without a referent is not only at the origin of myth but, moreover, at the origin of history: it is *the* origin.

4.2.1 Summary 21

The use of memory not as a device to accurately reconstruct facts but as a faculty to purify one’s past was behind GCI’s writing of *Vista*. The kind of memory that can be thus understood is one that is beyond truth; or rather, the kind of truth about which this chapter speaks is a truth that is beyond correspondence or equivalence (which has been behind the canonical definition of history and historiography). A trustworthy memory is not necessarily an accurate memory but rather a memory for which one can be responsible; that is, a memory through which the events that are linguistically organized and ordered in space (places) and time (dates) can speak about and in behalf of people who suffered in and these events as much as about characters who act therein. Memory is therefore not about truth-telling, but rather about truth-making. The claim made in the first chapter that every human life is narratable is taken here further through the conceptualization of “organization” as the converging point between life (the event of been alive, and of living, undergoing events) and narration.

4.3 “It all started”

When. We are missing something here, the subject to whom whatever is going to be predicated in this paragraph will refer: who or what is that “it” in the subtitle? We usually assume that a historical narrative refers to a “real-life” event, to a reference that transcends textuality and can be thus called “a referent”, an extra-linguistic material fact. This referent behind pronouns, for instance, can be somewhat recoverable inasmuch as whenever I say “I”, here, in these words, is the proof that “I am writing”. The same goes for you. Every time I say “you”, I am assuming that there is a living proof of this, namely, that “you are reading”. Yet, saying “who” this “I” is, even pointing out to its bodily “reality”, will prove much more complex than this, since there is no story that can contain the body to which it refers²⁷⁰.

The material origin of this text can only be pointed to, but is, in textual terms, irrecoverable: look as much as you will, you will not find my body anywhere in this text—neither will I. Now, this is very evident, but we might still say that the “me”, this “other” reality spawning from myself, which includes my “mental contents”, is here; it can be found in this text. Yet this will always be very difficult to prove, since, by the time you start reading, it becomes quite difficult to determine which mental contents are yours and which are mine. And what about those things I cannot remember but that are “there”, in my mind, making their way beyond my will; things I am not aware of or I might never be aware of, things that spring in the text as I am writing it: can I say that they are mine? to whom can I ascribe those mental contents I am not aware of? those that are in this sense “unconscious”, not yet conscious, though not lost either? If I fail to appreciate them

²⁷⁰ On a most lucid exploration of the linguistic relationship between the uses of the “I” and the “you” (and the polarity they entail, with the third person as a sort of mediator) and the challenge these two pronouns imply to subjectivity in writing, see Benveniste 221-230. On the unspeakability of the body from the perspective of an expressivist philosophy of language, see Bar-On 428, where she concludes: “I can speak my mind, but I cannot speak my body”.

but you succeed in noticing them, are they really attributable to me? Why? Through all these questions I am trying to make one simple point: the origin of our being conscious is irretrievable; it is a lost referent of which we know nothing, or nearly nothing, for knowing means being conscious²⁷¹, and if I am to speak about that of which I am unconscious, I can only do so retrospectively, and speak about that of which I am unconscious no more²⁷². Therefore, my body only has a deictic property in a narrative, but no referential value²⁷³; still, this does not make it any less real. Similarly, what precedes my consciousness can only have a speculative property in a narrative, but no referential value; still, this does not make it any less real.

Could somebody counter the claim that all theories are narratives of some sort? Would it be possible to produce a theory without narrative means, that is, without some linguistic organization of events in space and time? If the answer is no, then the way we organize reality is only a matter of narrative frameworks, and not a matter of ontological perception, which is just a fancy way to say that no “universal” (that is, applied to all humans) perception can be spoken of, and therefore not a “real framework” can exist²⁷⁴. It is thereby that the way in which reality is constituted is fictive, which only means that it is invested with linguistic form²⁷⁵. But before leaping to fiction, we should first finish with narrative, and try to grasp it in the terms we have been speaking of: history.

²⁷¹ This is wonderfully elaborated by Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* 96.

²⁷² For a very compelling argument about this issue, see Freeman 152.

²⁷³ This is vividly argued by Lyotard, *The Differend* 33-35.

²⁷⁴ Most of those defending the existence of a (or *the*) “real framework”, and therefore the ontological status of the referent, have been called “realists” within the Analytic philosophic tradition. They go from Reid (and the “School of Common Sense” he founded), and goes all the way to Twentieth Century philosophers of science such as Quine or Putnam. The major work of early realism could be said to be Reid’s *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*.

²⁷⁵ On the relation between “perceived reality” and its linguistic form, see Merleau-Ponty 342.

Within these tenets, would it still be possible to draw a sharp distinction between history and myth? I would say that no such distinction could be drawn, but I should also add that the question is a little tricky, because the qualifier “sharp” usually renders all attempts at distinguishing fruitless, and frustratingly so. I might say, however, that myth is a much more embracing concept than history, for there may very well be myth without history, though no history without myth—historiographies notwithstanding. But we should look at this in more detail.

The myth of “who I am” started before I started to speak. The story I know about myself, about my first 18 to 24 months was set in motion by other people. Yet it is quite odd that these years, so determining in the life of a person, do not figure so much in *my* life-story: it is like a prehistory of myself. Conversely, those events I started to compose are prominent in *my* life-story, those I particularly remember. This is because myths are not so much reservoirs of information in which we “discover” our pasts, but rather deeds through which we “make” them²⁷⁶. If we point towards the Greek etymology of the word “myth”, we will find that it is not a story, but rather the *making* of the story, the transformation of events into a story what it describes: the *muthos* of events into narrative. This is why, before urban semantics appropriated this concept and re-signified it in terms of “rumour”, “lie” or “unscientific” (in the sense of “information not-yet-verified by scientific means”), myth was so very well distinguished from tale. The tale was made up, it was about events that never happened and of characters that never existed. But the myth, insofar as it *made* the narrative with which reality was organized, meant to explain what happened; so it both made claims to veracity and explanation. In this sense, myths did (the past tense is euphemistic, but let us retain it for the moment) what history does today, but also what biology, chemistry, physics, astronomy and even (or more so) meteorology does today: it explained what happened and made for

²⁷⁶ On the way through which the past (creation) and future (destruction/new creation) are *made* by myths, see Eliade, *Myth and Reality* 11-13; see also Valery for a different view of the *making* of the past by (necessarily) linguistic (poetic) means.

reasonable frameworks of prediction²⁷⁷. Since we have just said that theories are inconceivable without narratives (or narrative frameworks for that matter), we can confidently say that our *mythopoeitic* power to transform “real-life-events” into organized narratives already precedes these frameworks—and thus that myth is the body of theory: its very flesh and blood.

In the same way in which we *recognize*²⁷⁸ that theory is different from practice, we *recognize* that myth is different from life; that what is told is not what *is* lived, but what was or what could be lived. The transfiguration of occurrences into events via language is the best definition we can offer as to what a myth is. Here, in this transfiguration, something “magical” happens, for banal, everyday occurrences acquire a halo of necessity only possible within a narrative. Take away the narrative and necessity will fall into pieces. The banal can be thus transformed into the sacred, and thus contingency into necessity. Birth is not a miracle; it happens everywhere, every day and there are millions of them occurring in a split second. Human birth perhaps does not occur by the millions every split second, but there are plenty of them in any given day. Now, *your* birth was a miracle, it just happened once, one day, at one time, and it was unique; you have picture album after picture album of this miraculous event and it is oh so special that you even commemorate it every year. And so you might think about your parents, had they failed to be born, you would not be here now. When we see things as they are now, we *realize* they could not have occurred otherwise, or they would have had a different outcome. Necessity can only be appreciated retrospectively, though we live by it on a day to day basis: we *must* eat food, drink liquids, sleep and so forth everyday so as to keep ourselves alive—the rest, what occurs to us after this point, is completely contingent. A myth is

²⁷⁷ On this embracing function of myth, see Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* 46.

²⁷⁸ Here, I am speaking of recognition as being infrastructural to cognition, wherein our responses and our expressions already inform both language and meaning. I called this process of informing language and meaning: *responsive expressions*, which is what lies underneath our very capacity to *know* anything at all. See my “Here say yes” (since it is not published anywhere, you can give me your e-mail and I will send it to you right away).

begun at the moment in which it ends²⁷⁹. It is myth that performs the “magical” act of transforming the past into necessity and the future into destiny.

It is therefore that there is no history without myth. All histories are myths, though, as it was said, not all myths are histories. The institution of History as *the* Institution is supported on a myth, just as the institution of Religion as *the* Institution was supported on a myth—and of Literature for that matter. Institutions are supported on this transformation of daily occurrences into organized events, and they are meant to keep those events yet-to-come equally organized. This is how GCI’s distrust on History was a distrust on its function as an institution of truth. He became sceptic as to the consequences this institutionalization of truth could have; one of which could be the literal “institutionalization of truth”, as if *it*, the truth, had gone mad²⁸⁰. This kind of truth, he found, was dangerous, for it was not so much that it *could* be manipulated (he knew it was manipulated when it was transformed into narrative) but that its manipulation *did* effect the lives of real people, real bodies: tortured, shot, incarcerated or in exile, as he was. Truth, when institutionalized, could very well work as massive self-deception²⁸¹; for facts are as true when they are written as fictions are when they are lived²⁸².

What happens (fact) does not constitute an experience any more than what is told (fiction). Fiction should be understood within the framework of “form”, but not a form that is given: it is a “made form”, a form that is given because it is made; that is, a narrative form. All narratives are fictions because all narratives are made and so are their forms. GCI used to say that in a book the only thing that was real, factual, was the book itself, the object as you hold it in your hands; what was written in a book was, by

²⁷⁹ Derrida cleverly elaborates this point, see “This strange institution called literature” 46.

²⁸⁰ On truth going mad (where madness is on the realms of the inconceivable, the unspeakable, the “this can’t be happening”), see Lyotard 147.

²⁸¹ For more about the institutionalization of truth, see Loureiro 55.

²⁸² See Lauritzen 21 for an interesting commentary on Rigoberta Menchú’s case in this regard.

necessity, fiction, even if based on facts and memories and experiences—all these had been transformed into language, and hence into fictions²⁸³. It is thus that what is factual (the so-called extra-linguistic reality) has no past and no future: it is the body and the body devoid of language—what is factual is what *is being suffered* here and now. What is told, what is remembered, what is referred, what is written, what is *experienced* is all fiction; it all have a linguistic form. Let me illustrate this point: suppose that you go to Oaxaca to have a mystical experience, for which you contact your local shaman and arrange a trip with hallucinogenic mushrooms included. The morning after, you wake up just to find out you blacked out and you do not remember anything at all. The shaman tells you that you went pretty wild and said some profound words while you did some stupid things, and she had to tie you up until you fell asleep; the time during which the gods came to you, one by one, and touched your forehead, as some star flew from your chin. Can you say you had a mystical experience? You can say you were told you had one, and you can say, based on how changed you feel, that *something* happened to you last night, and you might be led to *believe* what the shaman said to you. What you cannot say is that you *really* experienced these things, even if you underwent them. As we can see, experience is nothing without memory, and is very little without language: just disarticulated scribbles in the form of disorganized perceptions.

Am I saying then that History, Science, Religion, that everything we tell is nothing but a big, fat lie? No, I am not saying such a thing. A lie is not synonymous with fiction, nor is it a cognate of myth. A lie has nothing to do with form or with organization; on the contrary, it has to do with the negation of form and organization; it de-forms what is already formed and dis-organizes what is already organized. A lie is a willed misconception of an event, which is followed by a willed misrepresentation of it, and it culminates in a significant misunderstanding. It is wrong because I very well *know* I am mis-conceiving, mis-representing and provoking a mis-understanding of which I can take advantage, avoid shame, or simply and plainly: avoid taking responsibility for what I say

²⁸³ See his foreword in *Cuerpos Divinos*; see also Souza 81.

and what I do. A lie is conceived in such a way that what is avoided can be veiled, hidden behind the conception, and thus underneath the representation. What I repress (fail to tell) and what I falsify (fail to represent) ends up producing an understanding in the other (the recipient) that, by necessity, will be a misunderstanding. Suppose that a big corporation hires a group of scientists to prove that the effects of a certain substance they are using is not harmful to the human body, yet the scientists work only to prove otherwise. However, the results that are disseminated to the public are those that the corporation expected, thus spreading the story that nicotine is not addictive (but withholding the part that says that tar is), and those puffing their puffs confident that they are not harming their respiratory and nervous systems are all living a big, fat, puffy lie. The corporation and the scientists have produced a willed misconception about tobacco and cigarettes, and have spread a misrepresentation as to what cigarettes do and do not, thus producing a misunderstanding in smokers, who are also participating in deluding themselves because they are reluctant to accept that they are hooked on this vice. This is what GCI was against: the institutionalization of lying accredited by those institutions of truth. And he found out that these institutions could not make a claim to any more truth than other non-institutionalized forms of truth. Therefore, science could not claim more truth about cigars than movies or than shamans or than poems²⁸⁴. For GCI, it was the institutionalization itself that produced the malady; for anybody can lie, but it is only when there is some entity that can claim authority over this lie and “make it true” (just by the very virtue of the power it represents and of which it has been invested) that this lie can become *truth*. A lie is something in which the liar, by necessity, cannot believe; if he does, we are not speaking of a liar anymore but of a person who is starting to show mild

²⁸⁴ See his *Holy Smoke*. This work is composed by drawing together all kinds of references as to what *tobacco* has meant for the world in the last 500 years. It might be fortunate he did not live to see today’s radical anti-tobacco campaigns that had gone as far as denying a person the possibility of smoking a cigar in his/her own apartment or house (if s/he is renting it, since the insurance companies have found there a great way of getting around their insuring responsibilities). It is likely that GCI would have had a great deal to tell and laugh about this new-made horror story about tobacco and its effects. We will see this book in depth in chapter 7.

symptoms of madness. Lying is not about not *being able* to sharply distinguish between fact and fiction (who can in all her senses do such a thing?), but about *making* such a distinction and withholding it from the other so as to take advantage of her/him.

Fiction and myth, as we have being conceptualizing them, open possibilities rather than negate them: originate nuances and meanings previously unknown. Fiction and myth open the possibility for the event to happen²⁸⁵. This is most clear when we speak of origins and ends, which are those horizons that exceed events themselves²⁸⁶. Let us have two examples of this: can we speak of the origin of the past, about that original past before which there was no past and after which everything is: an absolute past, an ex-past²⁸⁷. What about the future? can we speak of the end of the future, about that final future before which everything was and after which nothing will be: an absolute future, a post-future. These events cannot be conceived empirically, as we conceive “yesterday” or “next week”, for they do not make periods, but they are, instead, the beginning and the end of all periods; and they do not have duration, for they are the beginning and the end of all duration. This space can only be opened by narrative, and it can be thus explored fictively by enabling language as its main arbiter and legislator. It could be countered, for instance, that many of such accounts have been produced in the realm of theoretical physics, wherein it is not language but numbers that are used as main arbiters and legislators. I am not going to engage in a discussion about whether numerical codes

²⁸⁵ This was behind Badiou’s argument on the impossibility of a pure “evental site”, that is, a place devoid of language (and therefore an “ahistorical site” also devoid of tradition, habits—in short, form); from which he concludes that all “evental sites” are historical, and thus that all events are made by history, rather than history being made of events. See Badiou 108-111.

²⁸⁶ On this understanding of origins and ends, see Eliade, *The Myth of Eternal Return* 40-44.

²⁸⁷ In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty speaks of a similar kind of past to perception in one of his most (fairly) celebrated and bewildering passages: “Reflection does not grasp its full significance unless it refers to the unreflective fund of experience into which it presupposes, upon which it draws, and which constitutes *for it* a kind of original past, a past which has never been present” (242, emphasis in original).

constitute a language itself and whether they should be approached as the mental algorithm preceding thought, schemas or schemes (as Descartes or Kant believed²⁸⁸). I am just going to say that the theoretical physicists whose accounts I have read to date do not dispense with narratives to illustrate their points or to accommodate their formulas²⁸⁹. Their examples are often more imaginative than most of the science fiction currently available in bookstores and cinemas. Actually, their use of metaphor can create most memorable and poetic lines, such as: “we do not know what is happening at the moment farther away in the universe: the light that we see from distance galaxies left them millions of years ago ... Thus, when we look at the universe, we are seeing it as it was in the past” (Hawking 38), which is also one of the most poetical ideas I have ever heard; was it not Lorca who said that when we see the sky we are looking at our own pasts?²⁹⁰ These horizons, which transcend the immediate bodies of the present, which transcend thought and memory, can only appear in the space opened by narrative and language, by myth and fiction; for they constitute the space and time of space and time as such. Origins and ends are at the top and the bottom of the page, dwell in the silences before and after speech, inhabit our narratives ever before they came about and will do so ever after they all disappear (or second⁵ to last prophecy). Origins and ends, *arche* and *telos*, only have a space in narratives: this is the space in which they, as events, can come into being.

Fiction, in the way we have been approaching it, is close to what we understand as metaphor. We will not engage in a long conceptualization about metaphor for the moment, for this is a concept that should have much more prominence and weight in the sixth and seventh chapters. What we can say for now is that every time we inquire into

²⁸⁸ See Descartes, *Mediations on First Philosophy*, mainly his V Meditation; see also Kant’s elaboration of his “a priori categories” in the “Transcendental Logic” of his *Critique of Pure Reason*.

²⁸⁹ I.e., Hawking; Einstein; Gamow; Poincaré; Penrose; Feynman.

²⁹⁰ See his “Ciudad sin sueño” [Sleepless city], where he says that “nobody sleeps for/by the sky”, that “life is no dream” and that “there is neither oblivion nor dream, but living flesh”; and this in the form of those haunting cries of the dead: those refusing to go away, to sleep, to dream—living ancestry stamped in the flesh of the sky, the world and life.

origins and/or ends, we end up resorting to metaphors. The more abstract what we need to tell is, the more metaphoric our language becomes. This is, indeed, a difficult figure of speech; for it has been understood as a rhetorical device as much as a poetic one. Having two simultaneous images and/or concepts provided by one figure that puts them together, one (the vehicle) standing for the other (the tenor), can prove most helpful both when trying to make an argument so as to persuade our audience (reader and/or listener) and when trying to transmit a *pathos* through which we can purge feelings of pity and fear (that is, our most basic understanding of poetry as developed by Aristotle²⁹¹). It seems that when we look at the end of our horizons, right at the point in which the borders of our memory and imagination extend, we find both our memory and our imagination as if fused in one emotive, entangled embrace. As we can confirm in any given day, metaphors (the substitution of one concept/image with another different concept/image) are ubiquitous in social interaction and in daily speech²⁹². Facts, when they come to language, are mimetic in relation to the referent they stand for (look wherever you want, you will not find the referent *in* the text). This mimesis, this incarnation in text (“textualization”), is metaphoric in nature, for there is the substitution of one image/concept/thing (the referent) by another image/concept/thing (the reference; that is, the linguistic fact constantly referring to the “real fact”)²⁹³. This is exactly what a metaphor, in its simplest terms, does: the vehicle of any good metaphor should refer us to its tenor; otherwise, the metaphor is ineffective inasmuch as the vehicle appears to us as the tenor itself; we must find similarity in difference and difference in similarity, but never identity and/or

²⁹¹ See his *Poetics*, particularly XIV-XV. See as well what Paul Ricoeur has to say on this matter in his *The Rule of Metaphor* 12.

²⁹² On the ubiquitous use of metaphors in daily speech, see Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic* 117; and Geary 5.

²⁹³ In the twentieth century, several philosophers have spoken of this to great extent, such as Derrida [i.e., *Writing and Difference*], Lyotard [e.g., *The Differend*] or Ricoeur [i.e., *The Rule of Metaphor*]. Yet, it may be said that it was Nietzsche’s work on the “origin” of morality which really opened this field to philosophical argument, namely, the asymmetry between referent and reference. See the first treatise of his extraordinary *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

sameness²⁹⁴. If I say: “Life is a journey”, both the tenor (life) and the vehicle (journey) are crystal clear. But if I say “she completed her journey today”, to refer to someone’s death, and you just understand that this person has come back from a sort of quest or spa, then my metaphor is not a metaphor. Fiction, like metaphor, invites us to sit at the edge of the precipice where the horizons of one thing end and of another one begin; and it invites us to bear witness to the moment in which they fuse, in which they come together and then they come apart. It is as if we could sit at the edge of a cell as it is reproducing itself, our feet playfully hanging and swinging in the air while one thing becomes two and then one again: mitosis : *mythosis*.

Here we are facing a very different kind of fact; and therefore, a different kind of fiction. Fiction is not exclusively for tale-tellers, but for any kind of telling. Myth is not only for charlatans and superstitious, primitive people, but also for scientifically-minded, historically-oriented, well-informed modern humans. Metaphor is not for poets and rhetoricians, preachers and street vendors, but for anybody and everyone who uses language as their main means of expression, communication and/or interaction. Once this is understood and the two poles of origins and ends, of a past before the past and a future after the future, the ex-past and the post-future are effectively (and affectively) situated in and as fictions, then the present stops to be a *continuum* of perennial progression from point A to point B: and then time-slices (one of the main argumentative resources for Analytic Philosophy²⁹⁵) seem as possible as water-shreds. When you can learn how to slice a piece of water, then it might be possible to claim that you know how to slice a piece of time: for time thus seen, mythic-narrative-fictive, is more a flow than a *continuum*, having multiple origins and multiple ends, in constant though irregular motions that lead towards manifold paths flowing into different mouths. This is what we

²⁹⁴ This is very well worded by Geary. See Geary 2.

²⁹⁵ A most comprehensive compilation of works where these “time-slices” have been used to frame the arguments on the problem of personal identity in Analytic Philosophy (from Locke to Lewis, and from Hume to Parfit) can be found in Martin and Barresi, *Personal Identity*.

learn from GCI's history class; we learn of a time that is not regulated by some "historical *daimon*" ruling over everybody's fates (a la Hegel), building and demolishing nations and civilizations. We learn about a time in which the events are literarily constructed, poetically enriched and arbitrarily selected for our memories to remember and our deeds to immortalize; since, certainly, writing and reading a book are "immortalizing" deeds that evoke the event as much as they invoke its outcomes, feelings, atmosphere, tones, gestures, actions... even the weather. And this is the memory in which GCI starts to trust again, the one that gives him back his capacity to bear witness to his life and to that of others as a writer and, more crucially, as a person. This is the fluid memory in which he dives just to swim again: strokes of his arms stand for armed strikes. His heart powerfully pumps again, and it beats beautifully.

4.3.1 Summary 22

The discussion of the lack of referent (i.e., extra-linguistic, physical/bodily reality) in the tracing of origins or beginnings in one's life-story (i.e., birth) is connected to the impossible referent right at the end of this same story (i.e., death), which relates to the lack of referent at the beginning of the beginning (the origin) and the end of the end (the end). This discussion takes further the point made at the first chapter about how narratives turn necessity out of contingency and how this process "makes" (fictionalizes, mythifies, transforms) that missing referent with the assistance of others, of whatever vestige, trace (ancestors, fossils, etc.) of the past that is left and can be found. Experience, itself, is the subject of this process in which memory and narrative participate not only in recreating it, but also in making it. Origins and ends are therefore examined through the lens of a more plural approach to time; an approach that will keep growing during this dissertation. As well, the discussion about origins (i.e., the source of the text in writing and reading) will also be highly significant in the discussion of authorship in chapters 7 and 8. The discussion of metaphor that will continue during the whole thesis is introduced at this point, in the context of how it is necessary to use this figure of speech in referring to origins and ends at the same time in which they are made.

4.4 "And there I was"

According to what was said, Guillermo Cabrera Infante found that the process of the development of Cuban history was subject to tragic events occurring within a paradisiacal landscape. The vignette that opens *View of Dawn in the Tropics* closes with the following passage: "There's the island, still coming out between the sea and the gulf, garlanded by keys and cays and fastened by the stream of the ocean. There it is . . ." (1), and it is from this ellipsis that the historical occurrences unfold: one catastrophe after another; stories of cruelty, fratricide, abuse, betrayal and dispossession. It was also said that the writer himself admitted that his view of history was rather pessimistic, which means that he did not see this changing any time soon. Yet, even if his view about the future can be characterized as pessimistic, his view of tragedy and of the literary powers to write it should not bear such a characterization. As we said, *Vista* is for GCI a way of learning how to remember and how to forget; in short, how to heal his memory. We should keep in mind that tragedy can not only purge the spectator by leading her to a process of recognition (*anagnorisis*) and purification (*catharsis*), but also that this process is meant to teach her how to accept her destiny and learn to live with it²⁹⁶. GCI was starting to accept his destiny as an exile: he was never coming back to Cuba; the harm was beyond repair and the city he so dearly loved had disappeared forever. The future thus could only look gloomy to someone still harbouring expectations as to the possible restitution of Cuba as it once was. But learning to live with some damage beyond repair means to learn how to live without expectations and accept one's current situation with the best possible face.

²⁹⁶ This is the canonical view of tragedy as developed by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, especially XXIV-XXV; the tragedy of humans trying to overcome and overturn their destinies, as they were preordained by the Gods. On a most insightful commentary on this Aristotelian view in relation to the passing of time, see Ricoeur, *Time and Narration*, vol. I, chapters 1 and 3; see also his *Oneself as Another* 243, where he comments on the relationship between *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and tragedy as being ignited by the lack of this virtue (which is, as we know by Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, at the core of all virtue).

Tragedy, particularly Greek tragedy, teaches us that more harm is done out of trying to change the unchangeable than by learning to accept it. To be sure, the “unchangeable” is not as straightforward as, say, Oedipus’ incestuous and parricidal fate; it does not come from the oracle of providence, but from the waters of memory: it is the past what cannot be changed, what we keep repeating *ad infinitum* till no future is possible anymore. The more we try to fight it, the more we repeat it. *Vista* is truly as if it were constituted by three large actions: the one in the first vignette, the one in the following 112 (in the English version, 98 in the Spanish one) vignettes and the one in the last vignette. Within this extraordinarily large action lasting 112 vignettes, we face the very border of undecidability where no decision can be made by neither the writer nor the reader without this resulting in a bigger harm—yet, we keep reading.

Recognition (*anagnorisis*) becomes equivocal, and one is faced with an either/or situation: either I close the book or I finish it. *Phronesis*, practical wisdom, is constantly superseded by moralities (i.e., most of the vignettes dealing with the wars of independence), by ideologies (e.g., most of the last vignettes dealing with Castro’s regime), by utopias (i.e., most of the vignettes dealing with the *mambises* and the wars of independence, but also those dealing with the Republic after Machado and with its overthrowing and, of course, those about the 1959 revolution), by racial or nationalist entitlements (most of the first part, dealing with one Indian group subsuming the other until the arrival of the *conquistadores*), etc. And then, the tragedy of Cuba’s history is the tragedy of Cubans who cannot accept themselves and who would very much rather surrender their own fates to the realization of a collective, national chimera. GCI now knows better, and he works hard to learn (and had learned the hard way) *how* to accept his destiny: *how* to be a Cuban without Cuba and properly live his life-time exile—his-story interrupted.

The way in which GCI started this exercise of learning how to remember and how to forget was by learning how to bear witness. He first learned that the unity called Cuba was as fictional as the unity of his most trivial perceptions. The thing, whichever thing, perceived is never grasped as such: but only some of its aspects as they “enter” into our bodies among many other aspects that surround the thing and my own body. The “thing-as-such” is nothing but a fictitious unification performed by my imagination which comes under the guise of awareness. Nothing can be perceived on its own and nothing can be totally perceived²⁹⁷. As I press these keys, I have the unified perception of the computer’s keyboard and each of my fingers *knows* more or less (sometimes with more accuracy than others) how to move within it so as to produce the letters I rapidly seek for the words I mean to form. But while I am doing this, I do not perceive the dust that keeps accumulating in the cracks between each key, nor do I perceive their atomic and subatomic activity; as a matter of fact, as I am pressing them, I do not perceive neither of their visual properties, for I am looking at the monitor rather than at the keys, I listen to the sound of my fingers pressing them, and I kind of know by heart how each key sounds like, which occasionally warns me of a typo before my eyes do. The unified entity called Cuba is a fiction of whose perception GCI knew a little, but he knew that he missed dearly and clearly (the palms, the saline wind of the gulf stream, the streets of Havana, some streets in particular [notably the 23, where La Rampa was], the sun that never made him sweat, etc.). The thing called “History of Cuba” is a fiction that, in his case, continues for 114 vignettes (100 in Spanish). But, more importantly, he now reckoned that this tragic thing called Cuba dwelled in his body: in his skin that did not sweat, in his tongue and his thick lips, in his short-sighted eyes and even in the frame of his glasses, in his hair and his eye-lashes, in his clumsy fingers striking slowly and awkwardly the keys of his typewriter... the thing was unified *in* his body. His “inner experience” of Cuba, his identifying as a Cuban, and more particularly as a *Habanero* [a Havanan], was nowhere “inside” him, but everywhere visible in his body and in how it expressed itself. His body

²⁹⁷ This point is exceptionally made by Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* 233.

was a Cuban body, a body born and raised in Cuba: his body was *informed* by Cuba (with everything and anything this entails: family, friends, schools, lovers, etc.): this is our Cuban buddy.

As was pointed out in the first chapter, the body remembers; our bodies are our site of remembrance. History (and myths, and narratives [personal, national, etc.] and fictions) is embedded in our memory in the same way in which this is enacted by our bodies. In this sense, memory and meaning are in a fluid interaction and come as fluid substances slipping our very skins²⁹⁸. Memories are relevant because they are meaningful. Meaning is possible because we can remember. And as much as our bodies cannot be objectified within this fluid interaction, our memories (meaningful by definition) cannot be made into an object—and neither can history. History is present in the way in which I decline my “t” and my “s” and my “c” (more of a “k” actually) *as* a Mexican, and more particularly as a *chilango*, a Mexican from Mexico City (including the State of Mexico); it is in the way I walk; it is in the way I blink: it is in my body, but not (or not only) in my phenotypic features but, much more importantly, in how these are enacted, incarnated. In this context, to remember is entangled with being, with being ourselves. This helps to explain why remembering has been such an important exercise to preserve what we do not want to lose: such an important *ethos* in most communities we know about.

It is thus that we cannot remember as an act of solipsism, since our memories are everywhere exposed in our bodies. Solipsistic remembrance is an illusion of distrusting fellows: “you cannot get into my head”; yes, and I cannot get into your entrails either, but I do not need to so as to see that you incarnate your history. The self-made man (the U.S. citizen’s utopia par excellence) is nothing but an insomniac fellow who forgot to change his costume after the party was over. This kind of people, with self-invented pasts and

²⁹⁸ In her *Shards of Love* 15-16, Menocal talks about how this fluid interaction was common in medieval Europe’s scholarship and in their everyday practices, particularly in Spain and, even more specifically, in its neighbouring part with the North of Africa.

self-invented names and last names, always look a little bit funny, and phony a great deal—genius notwithstanding (i.e., Bob Dylan, Andy Warhol). Their bodies always look too dressed up, as if they were wearing too much make-up; you can barely see their faces—though, in these few, rare exceptions, you always have their work, and great works they are.

Memory, as we have just approached it, is not personal, but, as Angel G. Loureiro accurately points out: “always a response and a responsibility. Memory ... is not simply marked or haunted by the other, it is also addressed to the other, for the other” (97). My body is not only my vantage point to the world, but also the very site in which memories are formed and expressed. “Neuromaniacs” aside²⁹⁹, memory is not only in our heads; it is in every pore and in every follicle and in every fluid of our bodies: it is in this body that “attends” and is “aware” of everything that “happens” to it; yet its attention and awareness cannot be understood as physiological reflexes with which we are all programmed (i.e., “hardwired”) to respond. *What* we attend to and *what* we are conscious of is not (only) the result of our biological battery, but comes as a response to our bodily surroundings, which, as was said before, are cultural by necessity. The world incarnates its memory (history/myth) in its traditions. We incarnate our memories in our awareness, and in the way we respond to that what we are aware of, and also in what we express with such responses. Awareness is a matter of habit more than a matter of perception³⁰⁰. Awareness can always come into language, this is its destiny. This is the body that becomes a witness, an “I” insofar as it bears witness to his/her life and to that of the world.

²⁹⁹ I am borrowing this term from Tallis, whose reading, as so many others, I owe to Yanery (she is actually who is reading him diligently) and who coined this term to refer to the way in which some current streams of academic and scientific thought have made the brain the center of everything that is (human), and have even got as far as claiming to discover everything about us in the colourful results of neuro-technological devices (i.e., fMRI’s plaques).

³⁰⁰ As accurately observed by Merleau Ponty 78.

We bear witness, first of all, to signification, to meaning: to the world and to myself as being always already meaningful. According to Emmanuel Levinas, “signification precedes essence”, and meaning is “taken” by proximity, our skin in contact with other skins, and our faces facing the face of the other (*Otherwise than Being* 13-16). Levinas approaches “the face” in a way very similar to how I want to approach the body; though for Levinas, it is always “the other’s face” I face, which is the source and origin of my responsibility as a person. Given his (justified) rejection of the autonomous self, how oneself experiences one’s face is never a matter of philosophical investigation; his concern (justly so) is only with how “I” experience the face of the other, since my own is always already exposed to the other. In spite of how beautiful an image this is, I prefer to stick to the whole body, including the filthy parts, to continue my investigation on the witness³⁰¹.

Where we could agree with Levinas though is in our bearing witness to the Other as something that is not-yet-finished; as never total and thus never graspable in its totality: my limitations to grasp “everything” bear witness to the infinite (or the Infinite, as he writes), and to my infinite (never-quite-completed) responsibility stemming from this pre-condition for witnessing: “Here I am” (Levinas 146). We should, however, be careful as to what compels us to bear witness. We do not want to fall into what the Basque journalist, Joseba Zulaika, called “excessive witnessing”, which is when your bearing witness comes as if from a “higher call” that implants a “higher telos” (90), such as being willing to join the Basque guerrillas just for the sake of writing a book. Knowledge for knowledge’s sake cannot be a responsible reason as to why you are willing to bear

³⁰¹ A beautiful anecdote is told by Roman Jakobson in his essay “Linguistics and Poetics” where he tells how a missionary reprehended his “African flock for walking around with no clothes on”, to which he received a more than fair question: “what about yourself, there are parts of your own body that are bare to the naked eye”; the priest, somewhat disturbed, offered a bedazzled gesture from the very part that was bare for all to see and retorted: “but this is my face!”, to which the not-yet-converted flock replied: “in us, everywhere is face” (93). For us, too, everywhere is face.

witness to something. Bearing witness out of “sheer obedience” to some “higher telos”, such as morality, actually suspends the ethical realm, which is overridden by this finality and “ethics” ends up becoming nothing more than a temptation³⁰². “The road of violence, repression and murder is usually preceded by calls of morality and martyrdom” (Zulaika 93). As we said in the previous chapter, ethics cannot be superseded by either “higher calls” or a “higher telos”. Within the terms we characterized it, this is nothing but bearing witness to a utopia; which, as we saw, ends up negating the very act of witnessing inasmuch as it ends up denying responsibility. So what makes for responsible witnessing? We should start with ourselves, bearing witness to our experiences, which, by definition, entail others: since one never experiences anything alone (even when we are “alone”, without human company, we are never alone, without human context [even if it is just one’s own] or without other life-forms or without our past [informed by, mainly, other humans]). In this way, we should relax about giving accurate testimony as to the facts and rather take full responsibility for what we experience; for we should know that honesty is as plural as the versions that can stem from any single event: honesty is plural because interpretation is always singular³⁰³. We should, instead, embrace our experience as fully as possible so that we can add depth to our testimonies: the depth of *how* we experienced that to which we bear witness (how we felt, what was crossing our minds at that point, how we responded, etc.).

³⁰² See Zulaika, where he gives quite a surprising twist to the parable of Abraham’s homicidal attempt out of sheer obedience. This is something with which I have never felt fully comfortable in Levinas’ theory, having Abraham as the paradigm of “absolute responsibility” stemming from “absolute obedience”: if you do not believe in God (in that Other who can play the parts of all others), then Abraham looks more like a madman at the middle of a psychotic romp than like the paladin of absolute responsibility. In Zulaika, this God stands for any kind of “higher telos” that can lead, for instance, *guerrilleros* to plant bombs in places wherein former acquaintances may be or in places in which they studied when they were kids (i.e., the *guerrilleros*, who are for many just terrorists, of the ETA in Spain) out of absolute obedience with this “higher cause”: the respect of the Spanish government to the sovereignty and independence of the Basque people, and retribution for so many centuries of oppression.

³⁰³ On the singularity of witnessing see Young 281.

Our power to remember is embedded in our bodies by our power to imagine³⁰⁴. The reason is quite simple: we cannot remember it all and we cannot attend to everything. Try this exercise right now: try to remember what you did this morning. Most of the things that come to mind are the “usual” stuff (i.e., waking up, leaving the bed, etc.); now, can you tell me if you can remember what was the color of the bird that was singing on the tree outside your window, or what were you thinking while you brushed your teeth, or what was the second to last sentence of the article you were reading while you were in the washroom? If your morning was business as usual, it is likely that these issues escape your memory because it is very probable that you did not pay any *particular* attention to them; which is what defines the “usual”: that which is undeserving of attention; you have gone through it so many times that it is as “natural” to you as breathing. And it is in the “usual” that forgetfulness is a daily trade; things come and go, recede and vanish—and we do not feel any particular affliction for these losses. The “usual” is the luxury that can only be afforded by peacetime.

The “usual”, in this context, is not the “boring” (unless you think your life is boring, in which case you should start rethinking if you want to continue leading it like this). The traumatic is, first of all, in the realm of the “unusual”. The “unusual” requires our full attention, yet we should not think that because of this we remember it any better. On the contrary, when something “unusual” happens, or something “radically unusual” (i.e., traumatic, shocking, amazing, etc.), our attention cannot mend the radical unfamiliarity that separates us from this experience. It is likely, as so many testimonials of this sort attest³⁰⁵, that our feelings will take over our observational capacities, that our bodily sensations will be more prominent in our descriptions than *what was really* happening,

³⁰⁴ This is beautifully phrased by Glowacka: “the obligation to remember, which derives its ethical force from the horror of the victims’ experiences, requires aesthetic prowess and the imaginative tools of a poet so it can be carried out” (1).

³⁰⁵ Some highly insightful examples of this (bearing witness to the traumatic, and, often, the impossibility to do so) may be found in Caruth; Glowacka; Felman & Laub; Scarry. Two breath-taking personal accounts reflecting on this impossibility can be found in Amery and in Levi.

that what was going on in our heads take over what others said or failed to say; yet we feel compelled to speak, and to imagine what we cannot remember if this is what we must do in order to remember³⁰⁶. Then, as time and distance pass (or as you accept the memory as much as you accept the event), you articulate a more “coherent” account wherein your imagination makes a great deal filling those unbridgeable gaps in which your attention was exceeded by the events taking place therein. Our imagination, indeed, does something very similar day-in and day-out with the “usual”. As time goes by, we remember something and this memory is suddenly “coloured” and articulated by some small, seemingly insignificant, variations introduced by our imaginations, variations that fill and give mobility to the spaces and gaps supplied by our forgetfulness, by our inattentions³⁰⁷. When we remember something (again, that is not exceeded by the event itself), we do not remember something fractured, fragmentary, but we have a fluid image in which everything moves as fluently as we move in our everyday lives: like little home-made movies projected in the inner cavity of our foreheads. Our “stream of consciousness” usually reflects the “stream of life” where deeds and words and sensations and thoughts and desires and anxieties and... fluidly flood the space and time where/when we dwell in: interwoven threads of liquid narratives.

Now, these threads, in the realm of the usual and at the size-scale of communities or very large groups, are what we get to know as *tradition*, which was characterized in the first chapter as the incarnation of history, but now we should add that it is, foremost, the incarnation of myths. Traditions are narrative articulations of practices that take place in a “normalized” (i.e., homogenized) time and space, or better, date and place; for these are the cardinal points of tradition, time as date and space as place. Cultures, collectively speaking, are best expressed in their traditions; just as people are best expressed in their performances; for the practices of tradition are necessarily symbolic³⁰⁸. Tradition means

³⁰⁶ On feeling compelled to remember, see Glowacka 124.

³⁰⁷ For an imaginative example of this, see Merleau-Ponty 15.

³⁰⁸ This is very lucidly explained by Halliday 36.

transmission. Tradition transmits culture. Seen this way, we could say that in its most general signification the social body is a poetical event. For immigrants, foreigners becoming usual dwellers in a foreign country, this should not be surprising: when they witness a particularly foreign tradition in progress, and when they look at it with the right kind of eyes (that is, not blinded by their own cultural prejudices), they can see how this startles them as a poetical happening, since we are not “synchronized” with the events there taking place—they are rather walking diachronies³⁰⁹.

We can appreciate this kind of embodied diachrony in GCI’s compilation *O*, which gathers some of the few works that the writer wrote *about* his life in London, particularly *about* his life during his first years there. Published in 1975, we can hear the voice of the immigrant bearing witness to his own process of adapting to an unfamiliar environment; and speaking with his foreign mouth about those traditions of which he marginally participates and that he is striving to grasp. The memorable essay “Eppur si muove?” is one of the most compelling accounts ever written by a foreigner about the “Swinging London”. The privileged access he has to the most “exclusive” places of London’s popular culture, gets him to a party at *Apple* (when the green fruit stood for the Fab-four rather than for the one-Jobs), wherein he meets “The Beatles!”, among many other celebrities. He reckons, however, that the power behind all these celebrities resides in their appearances, and that the most powerful people in London are those in charge of judging and establishing fashion trends: clothes were Londoners’ real customs. This essay is a testimony to Dallas and Fantoni (editor and illustrator of the fascicle called *Swinging London*), Mary Quant (“more powerful than the queen”, for she was the queen and inventor of the mini-skirt), Simon and Marijke (the owners of “The Fool”, the boutique that dressed the most influential figures of England at that time, the rock-stars [from The

³⁰⁹ In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes: “the subject of sensation is a power which is born into, and simultaneously, with a certain environment, or *synchronized* with it” (211, emphasis added), which means that our time is always already in sync with that of the tradition in which we are born; an environment from which even our most inane sensations have (or acquire) their sense.

Beatles to The Rolling Stones to Jimi Hendrix to Procol Harum, we meet some of their royal clientele]). But further, this essay is a testimony to the trembling scaffolding of the “hippie movement” (more of an oxymoron actually) and the “end of an era”. Since he wrote this essay in the Summer of 1968, GCI was one of the first intellectuals who pointed out the decadence of the “rock ‘n roll era”, something only possible for a foreigner with an acute ear to hear the exhaustion of the myth and the exhausted structures of its traditions (the subtitle of the essay could be translated as “of London considered as a Babel Tower of Pisa made of Jell’o”), as they were enacted with more and more disbelief. He was able to appreciate this disbelief mainly because he was not a believer and so his participation in this tradition was only partial³¹⁰.

The city is GCI’s favorite place and, for him, it is there where traditions reach their climax as everyday practices; this more particularly so because he finds that people in the city never shut up. This (in addition to the size, majesty and omnipresent city-lights) was what impressed the 12 year-old GCI as he arrived in Habana: people never stopped speaking. As a matter of fact, the *Habaneros* have a nickname among Cubans: they are called *Habla-neros* (since *hablar* is the verb in Spanish for “to speak”). This was quite a contrast from the town in which he was born and where he spent his childhood, Gibara, in which quietness and discreetness were exemplary in the agora (for he very well knew how little these attributes lasted inside the four walls of a house, wherein gossip was your everyday dish). These incessant, perennial voices transpire in all of GCI’s accounts of the

³¹⁰ See for instance the great difference in tone between this essay and his short-story “The great Ekbó”, where he goes to an *Abakuá’s Toque de Santo* (a ceremony for the saints) and he (well, his alter-ego, Silvestre) acts as if he were an expert in the eyes of his lover (*ella*, Miriam). Fortunately, for the aesthetic quality of the story, the writer is well-aware of his alter-ego’s pedantry (the character’s name is, as we know later from *Delito por bailar el chachachá* [published in English as *Guilty of dancing the chachachá*], Silvestre) and mocks him often because of these pedantic displays of “knowledge”. Conversely, in “Eppur si Muove?”, we find a witness that assumes himself, since the beginning, as a foreigner in awe, but who has not shut down his critical eye and who could therefore arrive at some conclusions from bearing witness to traditions he admits are still strange to him.

cities he visited³¹¹, and, most especially (of course), in Habana. The *habladera* of the Havanan is nowhere better explored and taken to its limit than in *TTT*, in which GCI composed, indeed, “a gallery of voices” as he himself defined this book, which has been wrongly called “a novel”³¹².

GCI used to declare how much he loved the way in which people spoke in Cuba, and more particularly in Habana³¹³. The Spanish spoken in Hispanic America is, indeed, quite peculiar, since there are plenty of lexical borrowings and syntactical structures stemming from the (hundreds of) native languages spoken before (and after, and today) the arrival of the *conquistadores*. As a matter of fact, as it is well-known, the name *Cuba* is a *Caribe* name whose meaning has been forgotten³¹⁴. Some intellectuals have said that part of the particularity and wide (wild) variety of accents within Hispanic America is due to the resistance that the conquered people showed when learning the “new” language³¹⁵, which, as we very well know, was introduced through the butts of the Spaniard’s muskets. Others have also pointed out that the *conquistadores*’ crews were largely constituted by

³¹¹ See his *El libro de las ciudades* [The book of the cities], published in 1999, which is a compilation of most of his essays-chronicles about many of the cities he visited (which were plenty) after he went to exile.

³¹² This is his textual definition of this book as he declares in the interview he gave to Gibert, where he also insists on something he will keep insisting the rest of his life (see his interview with Vargas Llosa almost 10 years after Gibert’s): that the tag of “novel” was only for the convenience of bookstores, so that they could shelve and sell the book within a somewhat familiar category. See Gibert 412-414; for his definition of *TTT* as a “gallery of voices”, see 414.

³¹³ See his interview with Soler Serrano; see also his conversation with Vargas Llosa; his interview with García Márquez and his own *Infante’s Inferno*.

³¹⁴ We can only hope that there is something meaningful behind this name (something like island or green or vegetation)—it would be most unfortunate to learn that, as happened with Yucatán in Mexico, there was nothing but a big mistake (Yucatán literally means in Mayan: “I don’t understand”, which is what a Mayan responded to the always insightful *conquistadores* who asked them what was the name of this land). This is a story that is still told and repeated by most Mayans in Yucatán.

³¹⁵ This is one of Galeano’s leading ideas, see 15-27.

immigrants, mainly Jews and Moriscos (starting with Columbus' crew, and with Columbus himself, who was Genovese)³¹⁶.

Language, as we also know, not only has a social function, but a political one as well. For GCI, however, the most important (ever since he started to write, ever since he started to listen) was the poetical possibilities of language³¹⁷. GCI was so impressed with the way in which *Habaneros* spoke that he devoted a significant amount of time perfecting his own *Habanero* accent so that nobody would take him for a *guajiro*, the country hick he was³¹⁸. This is a capacity everybody has, more of an intuitive drive than a skill, to mimic the dominant speech habits (accent, sociolect, dialect, idiolects, etc.) of the people who inhabit the very place in which you find yourself³¹⁹. Nonetheless, some have better mimicking skills than others and some get to perfect these habits up to the point of almost passing as "locals" (or sometimes even passing as locals). As we have repeatedly pointed out, GCI's mimicking capacities were among his fortes, and he developed such a good accent that nobody could tell he was anything but a *Habanero*. Not only is diversity at the core of language, but also in the very marrow of its speakers.

So, if we understand all this, we can agree that a witness is always partial. Just as there cannot be a neutral event, nor can there be a neutral experience, there is no way we can say that there could be an impartial testimony. Whether one is in or out of a certain tradition (or somewhere in-between, as happens with most immigrants), one's testimony is always partial; one might be too involved in the tradition to look at it from the outside,

³¹⁶ For a full and compelling account on this issue see Menocal, with especial emphasis on the first chapter.

³¹⁷ Almost a redundancy, but we are not going to engage in Jakobsean functionalism and assert that there is a "poetical function" all on its own. For such a discussion see his "Linguistics and Poetics".

³¹⁸ This story is developed and told by GCI himself into great detail in his *Infante's Inferno*. For another perspective to this story, see Souza 15 and 17.

³¹⁹ For more about this capacity in humans, see Halliday 59 and Garrido Medina 103 and 109.

too distanced from it to involve with its innermost subtleties, or neither one nor the other: still quite not sure of what is going on, or still making sense of what is happening, etc. This is to say that the credibility of a testimony cannot be assessed based on its accuracy, and even less so from its impartiality; it should be approached in goodwill from the honesty with which this person is laying her memories bare for you, giving *her* best. What such an account can give you, again, is a different dimension to the event, adding this third dimension of depth provided by the person's *suffering* of the event. Credibility among people is a matter of honesty and not a matter of truth—it is a matter of trust and not a matter of accuracy. This means that if I prove some aspects of your story “wrong” or inaccurate by, say, listening to other testimonies and comparing them with some records, my trust in you will not suffer any alteration and neither will my trust in your testimony. This also means that if I learn that some things you told me were blatantly false (i.e., I happen to learn that you were not where you claimed to be), my trust in your testimony will be broken and my trust in you will be, at the very least, seriously harmed³²⁰.

When we come to terms with the “fact” that forgetting is constitutive of our experience and that our imagination is inseparable from our memory, we come to terms with the

³²⁰ This is likely the source of indignation by many who took Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio* as valid, since they were fooled by this woman who claimed to have been where she was not and to have seen what she saw not. There have been attempts to use Menchú's example as a paradigm about the impossibility of witnessing (see, for instance, Douglass), as if those enraged with her were so because she failed to render facts and produced, instead, a veritable fiction. This is not representative of all those who felt deceived by this woman; many of us felt infuriated just because she was lying (and blatantly so) and offering (and profiting with) a false testimony. Moreover, this source of indignation came from the fact that both she and her editor knew the testimony was false *before* her book was finished. Those who claim that her lies were “strategic” [i.e., Douglass 74], so as to draw the world's attention to the suffering of native populations in Guatemala, are missing an important point: strategic lies are a daily trade in war, and those abusing these populations also created strategic lies so as to legitimate what they did. No matter how good the cause may be, there cannot be ethical lying; lies are unacceptable regardless the nobility of their motivations.

impossibility (now as a non-possibility) of an absolutely accurate description of any event, and we start to value testimonies for what they are: *traces* of an irrecoverable event, a past event. Memory transcends the past it remembers by inventing the parts it forgets³²¹. Memory and imagination, always working together, thus transcend perception by literally *creating* the experience (which does not mean by “making it up”). The past cannot be recovered; it is gone forever. Every time we remember, we do so in the present, now, with this body, with all of it. Memory points to the past, but works in the present. Our origins are forgotten in a very similar way in which we cannot recall our own births; they can only be assembled by the stories told by others. And just as our present is never free of its past, our past is never free of its present: “I remember” is “I make my memories”, “I create them”. In Mexico, we have a very proper expression for this; when we remember something we say “*hacemos memoria*”, which could be translated into: “we make memory”, and, with it, we create memories; we create a past that was never present, except now. Remembering the past is, also, imagining the past. Imagination is hence as fundamental in preserving the past as memory is³²². No preservation could be made without some invention, and vice versa.

What all these tell us is that the past, as the future, as all narratives (what was, what will be and what could be) is plastic; which means that our presents are so too, that is, our identities (or how we identify ourselves, our bodies, here-now). This is the kind of history we learn about in *Vista*, wherein GCI tells us about a country made out of *suffering* and he engages to tell us about the *suffering* that was, the *suffering* that is and the one that will be; but, more importantly, he tells us about the *suffering* that could be and that could have been: we learn very little about the events themselves (his accounts are based on history textbooks, mainly Fernando Portuondo’s, and on engravings and photographs and newspaper notes and memories and local legends and hearsay), what we learn about [a little, which is a lot] is about *how* these events were lived and experienced; and he takes

³²¹ This is wonderfully put by Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 287.

³²² This is one of Glowacka’s main points. See 214.

the license to speak on behalf of people he did not know just by trying to *imaginarily* locate himself right at the middle of the event, like a compassionate angel of history³²³ who can do nothing for the sufferers but to witness their suffering and tell it to the world; and who trusts that by spreading this word the stories will become contagious, and more than one will *suffer* with those *sufferings*, maybe hoping that, for those who are so touched, cruelty will be more repulsive and violence more revolting.

If the past is plastic, and if memory is plastic, and the future and the present and our identities are plastic, then meaning is plastic just as much. It was set clear in the first chapter that it is, that its very plasticity (the “re-” of re-signification) is what keeps it alive. Insofar as fictions (and the incarnation of fictions), our history (our myths) and our traditions are plastic by necessity, their horizons are not affixed and their borders are fluid: like the shoreline in the sea. Contexts, the relation of proximity within and among texts (within and among words), are plastic inasmuch as they mean “constant contact” between their participants. Contact is only a matter of degree, and so is distance: and truth *emerges* at the interval between these two. Identity, a relation of sameness (A is [identical with] A), is not to be found in either “A”, but rather in what separates it from itself and simultaneously puts it in contact with itself: *is*. This “is” (a verb) already points towards its own mobility, towards the “eventhood”³²⁴ that it harbours. It should not be approached as a noun (a substance) or as a super-structural-noun (an essence), but rather as a verb that bears itself all the possibilities of change, but always within the same body (all of it, including the problematic parts, i.e., the unconscious, the hypothalamus, the pineal gland and the brain in general); that is, plasticity in all its right.

³²³ I am referring here to the famous painting by Paul Klee as it was beautifully described by Walter Benjamin, who made of it one of the main tropes of his “Theses on the Philosophy of History”.

³²⁴ I am borrowing this term from Badiou, who understands it as the very possibility of the event to occur: the convergence of space and time *with* the person involved. See Badiou 182.

It is possible in this way to be a Cuban without Cuba, though it is necessary to point out that this means a “different form of Cuban”. Contexts change, and with them spaces and places, times and dates, memories and losses. When we forget that we are remembering, we might be tempted to think that the past could be approached as an “objective fact”, and when we do so we might find ourselves with origins that have mutated into principles and pasts that have transmuted into altars. Such a past is condemned to the same fate that a meaning that has lost its power of re-signification: their rigor metamorphosed into *rigor mortis*. Facts are non-lubricated fictions. Objects are meanings that have forgotten whence they came from and where they are going to: meanings that have lost their way. A different kind of Cuban, a Cuban in exile, can only tell a different kind of story, an ex-story. By picking up the traces in our bodies, we find plastic traces leading to manifold pasts: the clues of multiple futures.

Far and away, GCI now comes to know *what* to recreate: the place that is no more, the place that is no less, *the* place—home.

4.4.1 Summary 23

The character that emerges from the recognition and acceptance of his destiny in exile (i.e., GCI's) is a witness of the history of his lost country, but also of his losses and of his life at large. This connection between History (as an institution) and the process of witnessing is discussed in the context of fiction and myth-making, and is put in perspective in the way in which traditions are enacted. This connection will be of seminal importance throughout the rest of the dissertation, and will come again with full force in chapters 6 and 8, for it is linked to the induction of the embodied first-person-singular into the recreation (evocation/invocation) of any event of his/her concern. This connection, which starts to explore the mutual constitutionship between memory and imagination, will keep growing within the thesis as well. Also, the concept of the trace, that will be better examined in chapter 6 and will be of enormous relevance in chapter 8, finds its basis in the context of this discussion.

4.5 "Away we go"

Before he finished fetching his stuff for his trip back home, Guillermo Cabrera Infante still had some demons to exorcise. We saw that for GCI worth (self-worth) was starting to transcend the stereotypical understanding of *amour du soi*, usually translated as pride³²⁵. Worth and witnessing were beginning to go hand in hand with literature and creation. Yet many of his innermost urges to play with language just for the sake of playing, this onanistic compulsion that led him to stimulate his words by twisting his mother tongue up to the point of ecstatic salivation, was not yet gone. To be sure, there is nothing wrong with playing with words; linguistic wizardry is a great quality, particularly in a writer. However, we might find more than one thing wrong in a compulsion, and more so in a solipsistic one, wherein the person feels compelled to do something whether she wants it or not: we are not speaking of responses here, but of reflexes, like nervous tics developed in a person who had no other way of digesting some difficult reality (the "unusual" forcedly becoming the "usual") than by showing some little protests in her bodily responses. GCI's compulsion to play with language can be read as such a thing, and he wrote(?) a book to exorcise it as best as he could. This is what his *Exorcismos de Esti(l)o* meant to be: the gathering of all his "fragments", of all his "textual shreds" into one "unified work". The allusion to Raymond Queneau's *Exercises of Style* is not only obvious in the title³²⁶, but was unashamedly admitted by GCI³²⁷. Yet, unlike Queneau's book, which tells one rather inane anecdote and then plays with 99 different ways of telling it, there is no "core" in this book, nothing that might give these "shreds" any other unity than the physical object called book.

³²⁵ See Goodheart 15, where he comments on how Rousseau unwittingly popularized this idea of pride as self-worth, as it is everywhere visible in his *Confessions*.

³²⁶ Raymond Queneau, who was a renowned French writer (novelist, poet and essayist), was also co-founder of the group *Oulipo*, which was most celebrated for the way in which they experimented playing with language by creating most arbitrary and restrictive rules for the creation of texts (i.e., write a page in which every word starts with the letter "b", etc.).

³²⁷ Cabrera Infante, *Tres Tristes Tigres* 359.

GCI's compulsion to play with words was there in him since a very young age³²⁸; yet it was accentuated after his flight into exile. *TTT*, as a frantic composition, was really set in motion after he left Cuba in 1965. Probably, as he was flying back to Brussels that night, he thought about the almost symbiotic relationship that Cuba has created between literature and exile, and how its most loving children are those who are sent away from her. The first renowned Cuban poet, José María Heredia, lived and died in exile in Mexico, where he wrote many of the most enchanting songs about this island now so far away from him, and yet so close to him in his poetry. Maybe, as he was flying over Bermuda, GCI thought about José Martí, this extraordinary poet (and everything indicates that he was an outstanding person) who has been so unfairly eclipsed by the size of a historical figure that has been used and abused for nationalistic purposes by every tyrant that had ever ruled this country (Machado, Batista and, perhaps the one who had used and quoted him *ad nauseam*, Castro). Probably GCI recalled Martí's repeated fear of exile, given that he very well knew what to be away from one's country means for one who loves his country (Martí spent most of his adult years in exile, and he was killed in Cuba very soon after he finally landed there): exile takes you to the very limits of your body, since exile puts you at the very edge of what you came to know as space³²⁹. It is not only an interruption but it is mainly a loss, something you cannot recover after the interrupting intervention concludes. Maybe GCI also remembered what another notable exile, the Spanish writer María Teresa León (who lived in exile with her husband, the renowned poet Rafael Alberti, during the 38 years of Francisco Franco's dictatorship), thought about exile: loss is the matter from which paradise is made, since remembering, for an exile, is always a form of wishing³³⁰. GCI devoted the next year and a half to rewriting

³²⁸ This is told into great detail in his *Infante's Inferno*. See also Souza 16-30.

³²⁹ For an outstanding commentary on Martí's thoughts on exile, see Rojas, *Tumbas sin Sosiego*, more particularly "Memoriales del éxodo". For the relationship between exile and limits, see Loureiro 82.

³³⁰ What is quite disheartening is that in 1977, after Franco's death, she came back to Spain and soon after she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease; her memory started to

TTT and transforming it into a book in which he let his compulsions on the loose, as if he were there exerting a boundless freedom, through which he composed the masterpiece we know today.

It is possible that this “freedom” in meaning, wherein anything and everything can mean anything and everything (more of a newly found arbitrariness at the center of language, like in the eye of a hurricane), stemmed from the measureless unfamiliarity an exile finds on her way out. Immigrants know very well this feeling of strangeness, of overwhelming unfamiliarity and this pressure of having to “adapt” as quickly as possible so as to “fit” in your “new country”—your very life is at stake—; yet deep inside we know how very unfamiliar everything is to us, and we know how very little we know where we are. The Cuban novelist and Mexican exile, Eliseo Alberto, used to say that the most difficult thing for an exile is that “nothing reminds you of anything”³³¹, spaces are not places yet, unmarked by memories of a lost past, a past you missed because you were busy being born and raised in a different country. Meaning is all about familiarity, and language is all about being familiar, not so much with meaning itself as with “how” meaning is meant and “how” meaning is made: this is meaning in context, in culture and tradition. When we are lacking this “how”, we find that we are “strangers to ourselves”³³²: we can almost see ourselves striving with these new “hows”, feeling at times ridiculous, grumbling and grimacing so as to make ourselves understandable, finding our thoughts accumulating in

recede at the point in which she came back to the place where her memory was born. See Loureiro 89.

³³¹ See his interview for TVUNAM *Tres o cuatro cosas que decir* [Three or four things to say].

³³² I am borrowing this beautiful image from Julia Kristeva’s book (from its very title!) *Strangers to Ourselves*, where she describes this difficult process of “estrangement” for refugees, displaced people and exiles (as she was one herself). Though we will (second⁶ to last prophecy) not see this work in great detail, for its theoretical framework differs widely from ours (its conceptualization, as most of Kristeva’s work, owes a great deal to psychoanalysis and, more particularly, to Lacan’s work), I should only add that Kristeva’s memorable image is masterly developed in her book, wherein the stranger becomes a familiar stranger.

our throats as cars on a bottleneck at rush hour—and we find ourselves difficult to recognize.

GCI found this “how” of meaning as lost as he found himself and he asked it out; this “how” accepted his invitation and, after a wild night in an imaginary place called Havana 1958 (to which he always referred to as *TTT*), they both woke up with a huge hangover and trying to remember each other’s name. The “how” did not stay for breakfast; it got dressed and left without even leaving a note. However, GCI knew, after he woke up and had a glass of milk, that the “how” knew better where it was going now; for he sort of felt the same way. As he was taking a shower, he replaced the customary song (a *son*) with deep reflection. As the water steamed the bathroom of his house at Gloucester Road, absence acquired meaning in itself: “what is lost could always be evoked, what is gone could always be invoked”. Although, unlike Miriam, he did not believe in *Abakuá* powers of invocation, he found himself a true believer in literature and got to know *how* to perform his ceremonies of evocation/invocation of a city that was lost, of a past that was forever gone and of a person (himself) that was no more. Just as souvenirs acquire meaning because they evoke and invoke a place/time/moment that is no more, our deeds, particularly those we love, and those in which we are outstandingly good, can do the same—if not more.

As we know, the coherence of a story is not only given in meaning, and not only in the coherent continuity of the events as they unfold; the most basic structure through which a story (and a sentence, even a syntagm) is rendered coherent is syntax, which is where the connectedness among words achieves its first prerequisite for “readability” (Tufte 9). Coherence is a matter of cohesion in syntax. Just as narrations create contexts for different worlds to emerge, syntax creates contexts for different words to get along. Cohesion is coherence at the level of the signifier just as connectedness is continuity at the level of graphemes; and both these attributes are what create rhythm, which does, at the sensual level, what stories (situations, adventures, scenes, etc.) do at the level of

action. Rhythm incarnates our bodily motions, just as stories incarnate our human actions. GCI's *Exorcismos* is a purge of rhythm, though it is, too, a celebration of the creative possibilities of syntax and of the word itself, of the grapheme as a physical reality: of language as a referent. In this book, it is syntax and graphemes what are invested with symbolic powers while meaning is divested of them (he still was a little angry for the way it left... not even a note!), leaving for it nothing but its functional attributes as a courier.

There are fragments in this book that can create a whole context just by suppressing a letter from a word. Take, for instance, his "*Reglas de higiene*" [Rules of hygiene], where the word *mano* (hand) is turned into *ano* (anus) which is turned into *no* (no)—a most basic rule we all had very likely learned during our first few months in this world. In a similar way, he can create an antithetical context just by suppressing a word, in which what is said first is contradicted by what is said last: based on a Cuban *son*, his *Canción cubana* [Cuban song] goes from *¡Ay, José, así no se puede!* [Oh, Joseph, no way!] to *¡Ay, José, así no sé!* [Oh, Joseph, that I don't know] to *¡Ay, José, así no!* [Oh, Joseph, not like that!] to *¡Ay, José, así!* [Oh, Joseph, like that] to *¡Ay, José!* [Oh, Joseph!] to *¡Ay!* [Oh!]. In this book, GCI also explores one of his favorite phenomena in Cuban speech, diglossia (a very pronounced difference between formal and informal language registers). For instance, his account of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* as told by a shoe shiner who just had seen the movie, with Marlon Brando as Mark Anthony, in his piece "*Los 'Idus de marzo' según Plutarco... y según Shakespeare y según Mankiewicz y según el limpiabotas Chicho Charol*" [The "Ides of March" according to Plutarch..., and according to Shakespeare and according to Mankiewicz and according to the shoe shiner Chicho Charol], this phenomenon (with all its particularities in the Cuban population, which has as an extra ingredient its immediate contact with the *Lucumí* language) is taken to its most hilarious limits, but also to its limits of (in)coherence.

We have pointed out GCI's penchant for vignettes and fragments, and we have said that his writing consists in composing fragments (which may grow or shrink) that are later put

together with other fragments and are organized in a single body called book. But we have not pointed out yet that one of GCI's most lasting passions (besides cinema) were comic strips, and that, as a matter of fact, his whole motivation as a reader started by trying to teach himself how to decipher the "little balloons" issuing from the characters' mouths³³³. Vignettes, unlike stories, work like independent modules that do not contribute to the fluid mobility of the events in sequences and scenes. They offer you a quick glance [a *vistazo* in Spanish] at the event, always arriving in *media res* to it, after it had started, and always leaving it before it finishes³³⁴. Like frames in comic strips, it is the reader (and/or viewer) who establishes the connections between them and who provides them with cohesion and coherence. *Vista* works with vignettes that mimic the comic strip-like structure; *Exorcismos* is not such case. Trying to read *Exorcismos* as a comic strip would be like composing one with Jackson Pollock's or late Kandinsky's canvasses: go ahead, try to make a story. *Exorcismos* should be read, rather, as narrative leftovers, as everything that you leave out as you are making a story; all your *ocurrencias* [this word is really untranslatable, but try to imagine something in-between "remark" and "wisecrack", and you will get the idea]. *Exorcismos* is a book of *ocurrencias*. And just as the *cronista* in *Vista* bears witness to the plasticity of the event (and of narrative, memory, imagination... you should know the list by now), here, the writer bears witness to the very plasticity of language itself. Here, he is not the editor of his memory, but he is rather the editor of his tongue: a linguistic surgeon. He never lets language die of "agraphia"³³⁵, for he also proves to be an effective linguistic shrink: he never lets writing take its own life.

³³³ For more about the origin of GCI's passion for comic-strips, see Souza 10. Would it be just an accident that, in all this later passion for fragments and vignettes, the first word he was able to decipher was *Cual* [Which], thus pointing to a future preference (which was, at the same time, a deep repudiation) for ambiguity and amphibology? Were not GCI treated as a character in this chapter, I would say that this is an overinterpretation; but, for a character, this cosmic coincidence works perfectly well.

³³⁴ This is sharply observed by Alvarez-Borland 27.

³³⁵ I am borrowing this term (and the idea of writing committing suicide) from Barthes (who else?), *Writing Degree Zero* 75.

Language never disintegrates into chaos, but always emerges from it, over and over again, and we are there to clean its filth every time it does.

Language in this book makes the journey towards its origins in *poesy*, in pure arbitrariness³³⁶, and is thereby composed as a “language of coincidence”³³⁷: its organization could be attributed to no one: “¿Quién escribe?” [Who writes?], asks GCI, “el lenguaje” [language] he responds; the writer is nothing but its echo; but then, he asks again “¿de qué voz original es el lenguaje el eco?” [which original voice does language echo?] (*Exorcismos de Esti(l)o* 147). Work is, in this book (as it was in *Vista*), a creative way out of radical ostracism and madness. This is the work of a former madman, a person who survived mental illness and comes back with some souvenirs from this journey to “unresponsive-land” and “compulsion-village”. And each of these pieces in *Exorcismos* becomes much more meaningful as each bears witness to such a place (or non-place, better said), but each does so as long as he is no longer there: the souvenir is truly now the embodiment of a memory—and not anymore the manifestation of an urge.

When one looks at GCI’s face in a picture, one always gets the idea that it resembles one of this stereotypical masks that have stood for “Tragedy”³³⁸, though one always seems to get the feeling (given that one have read his work) that another face unfolds to complete the duo, and one imagine him smiling sarcastically, with that Cheshire cat-like smile (as

³³⁶ See Heidegger’s brilliant approach to this concept of *poesy* and its relation to poetry in his “On the Origin of the Work of Art” 198.

³³⁷ I am borrowing this idea from Merleau-Ponty, who writes in his *The Visible and the Invisible*: “Language of coincidence: would be a language of which no one is the organizer, words one would not assemble, they would combine by virtue of a natural intertwining of their meaning, through the occult trading of the metaphor—where what counts is not the manifest meaning of each word but the internal relations, kinships, implicated in transfers and exchange” (125).

³³⁸ Actually, it was Yanery who brought this to my attention, as she was seeing one of the many pictures that populate our place at the moment (Dorota had a great *ocurrencia* last time she visited: “this place is infested with Infante!”).

Miriam used to tell him)³³⁹, standing there for “Comedy”. I said before that there is a pendulum-like movement between *Vista* and *Exorcismos*, but I did not hesitate to add that this could be seen more as a dialogue. It is in this dialogue between a tragic image of history and a comic notion of literature where we could listen to one of GCI’s most distinguishable features as a writer. Yet, there seems to be a common tongue between these two poles dialoguing with each other, namely, the language of superstition, which comes from his firm belief in chance; or rather, in the belief that some words and deeds may help to give chance a little order³⁴⁰. We might find another pendulum-like movement, dialogue really, between his love for *chronos* (as for chronologies) and his belief in chance (chaos). GCI was an incredibly superstitious man³⁴¹. If we understand superstition as the belief that some words/deeds have the power to invoke their meanings into the physical world, then we can grasp how this otherwise sceptical man attempted to give order to this chaos called chance by calling meaning to the world of *physis*, by performing things that, he believed, would have a direct effect in ordering that force he acknowledged supersedes it all, namely, chance. If it is true that he believed in chance as the only constant in the universe (i.e., *poesy*, pure arbitrariness), it is no less true that he believed in coincidence as its constant source of meaning (i.e., *poetry*). Superstition was for him more of a joke he lived than a real mania, and he joked about it in his literature—notably in *TTT*, where he mocked Arsenio Cué’s superstitions aspiring to the category of science, or better yet, of cabala (such as that great in moment in “Bachata”, where he prides himself on almost finding the ultimate meaning in “the magic square” made with numbers and Silvestre does nothing but mocking the exercise by saying things like “oh, Pythagoric elixir” or “the more I know numbers, the more I love letters”). Yet, the possibility that words have to invoke physical presences, that they have a direct effect in the physical world, and that linguistic deeds have powers beyond reason and cognition, was something that accompanied the writer all his life. Discoveries came as coincidences,

³³⁹ This Cheshire cat-like smile is a running trope in *Cuerpos Divinos*.

³⁴⁰ On his belief in chance as the only absolute constant in the universe, see his interview with Pereda 140 and his interview with Gibert 434.

³⁴¹ *Ibidem* (both of ‘em!).

and inventions (the real trade of the exile) come as a result of opening a space in which any coincidence might arrive. True recreation, for GCI, was made by both memory/imagination (evocation) and meaning (invocation). Now his writing will be all about (ok, there will be a few prophecies!) recreating the past, the place whence he came from before he started to write (a minute before, a day, a year, 20 years, 40 years...). His task was now to evoke and invoke this *place*, and he will do so by creating a space in which these two (evocation/invocation) could coincide. Let us take a look.

4.5.1 Summary 24

This section deals with the exile and with his/her broken relationship with the past and with meaning as s/he arrives in her/his host country, which, in GCI's case, translated into an almost devouring compulsion to play with language and to compose fragments that, often times, led nowhere. The book he wrote in order to "exorcise" himself of this latter compulsion, a book in which he plays with words up to the point of taking meaning to its maximum possible degree of ambiguity by taking syntax to its maximum possible degree of elasticity, *Exorcismos de Esti(l)o*, is examined in this light. The double-movement of evocation/invocation, that will be a prominent part of the argument in chapters 6 and 7, appears in the discussion within the context of GCI's mending through his work this broken relationship with his past and meaning-making. This double movement is introduced from the possibilities that the word (at the level of the signifier, as a body) started to offer to GCI not only as a writer, but also as a character.

4.6 "Open house"

The *trace* is one of the most prominent concepts in continental philosophy to date. Many philosophers made it a central concept around which most of their ideas gravitate³⁴². This

³⁴² Notably Derrida, who made it central to his philosophy of language, for he said that there was no language without trace [see *Of Grammatology* (and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's excellent explanation on her deciding for the English term: "trace") and *Writing*

is an important term which will require much more time for a fair conceptualization in the coming chapters. What mainly concerns us now is to understand it from its *bodily* qualities, not only as that “mark” inscribed in the body that points towards a past event, but also as a body itself: an event made flesh. Like a scar on our skin, like the wrinkles in our face, traces should not be confused with “that which point at an absence”, but rather should be tackled for what they bear witness to, that is, the very passing of time as it is inscribed in our body and our language. What is inscribed in this latter is the undeniably affective load that words acquire as such within their daily use: for instance, words that are banned because of what has been called “cultural sensitivity”, which chiefly consists in recognizing what some words *mean* (affectively) for many cultures for which they bear the very marks of the mistreatment and abuse they had received in the past. But we do not have to walk such distances (of abuse and mistreatment) to find words that are heavily loaded and bear the marks of their usage, words, for instance, that I am forbidden to use in this text, being this an academic work (i.e., swear-words). Traces are the embodiment of this past to which bodies and languages are bound: they affirm their sources (the past, the event and the body) rather than manifest their absence (the past as gone, the event as happened and the body as younger). Denial of the traces does to languages (and to the body for that matter) what Botox does to faces: it keeps them smooth while it kills their expressiveness.

and Difference]. For Levinas, the trace is also a crucial concept that parallels the concept of “the face”; it is also a precondition for responsibility, for a trace appears with the face, and it is the trace what we are able to “perceive” when we face “the face” of the other, or rather what we are able to apprehend from her; since her face, as such, never quite appears, as it stands for the face of the Infinite [see his *Otherwise than Being*]. Some other philosophers who had made this concept central to their thought are: Agamben; Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*; Bataille; Butler (*The Psychic Life of Power*); Glowacka; Lyotard (*The Differend*); LaCapra; Nancy (*The Experience of Freedom*), etc.

For Cabrera Infante, the body had value because it was the place in which experiences left their traces. This was first explored by way of geography³⁴³. The importance that geography acquired for him during this time of recovery is perhaps more evident than anything else. The island was not *the* island anymore, but was, first and foremost, an island, a piece of land-mass in the middle of the ocean. History leaves their traces over this body, which are what *make* of it “Cuba” (and everything this implies), but these traces may become ruins, like wounds become scars, which do not prevent the island from continuing floating even after the past (or those there to remember it) is long forgotten. It was said that *Vista* started with the emergence of this island in the Gulf of the Caribbean Sea, and we also pointed out that it ended with the disappearance of the “last Cuban” in it; let us quote this last vignette at length: “And it will always be there. As someone said, that long, sad, unfortunate island will be there after the last Indian and after the last Spaniard and after the last African and after the last American and after the last Russian, and after the last of the Cubans, surviving all disasters, eternally washed over by the Gulf Stream: beautiful and green, undying, eternal” (159). The idea, fully developed in the Enlightenment, of History as the secular institution that supported the “only” rational form of afterlife, posterity, was for GCI not only disappointing (history, when given credit, is nothing but the narration of different forms of violence) but it was mainly lame: it seemed to him like a graveyard where old utopias were buried; or worse, like a geriatric, where forgotten and dying utopias went to spend their final days. Geography was, on the other hand, a most appealing consolation, for it was the body that all human bodies (and all living beings) inhabited, the space that humans transformed into places by virtue of their memories and myths and experiences together. Yet for this space, for this body, people were nothing more than microorganisms that happened to be there and that

³⁴³ Dr. Glowacka made a most pertinent point that I just completely oversaw: Geography is not the body (land-mass), but rather the science that studies such body (land-mass, its formation, etc.). This is absolutely true, and maybe GCI’s choice of words was (something most strange in him) inadequate in this sense. Most of his commentators have taken this concept without further questions (where I include myself), and have repeated what GCI has pointed as his alternative for History and the only form of eternity he can conceive: Geography. I am most grateful to Dr. Glowacka for pointing this out.

left some marks as they lived and dwelt in it. Eternity dwelt in the body of land that emerged from a greater body of water. In this way, GCI's love for Cuba transcended its historical account and was all directed to the space, his *eros* (his love, his affection, his very life) made into a place. His love could no longer go to the *thanatos* that the historical project represented; that is, his love could no longer go to the spatialization of time in a place erected out of ideas: this was the place of the death. His *eros* stopped to be a "Cogito interruptus" (*Exorcismos de Esti(l)lo* 184), a piece (whose subtitle is "Aposiopesis", which he applied diligently) in which he speaks about his own idea of eschatology: the soul dies first and then the body—the idea dies first and then the word, which is the only and true literature: "words, words, words"³⁴⁴: bodies, the geography of concepts and ideas and... meanings: these latter may vanish, go, but the word remains³⁴⁵. Now his *eros* was only for the body; recreation was to bring about the evoked/invoked body or it was not to be!

The moment in which this island called Cuba came into being, in which it emerged from the very innards of the ocean, is as eternal as the moment in which it shall disappear, maybe sinking again, searching for its roots, maybe crumbling into pieces that will be spread through the Atlantic Ocean, maybe coming back to the continent: this moment is eternal because it is dateless, it belongs to a dateless past and to a dateless future: it belongs to chance. The island is eternal because it is a "here-less" place, a place with neither a reflexive nor a deictic "here-now". It will be a place for as long as there are humans inhabiting it, inscribing its traces on it, *making* it a country. But how are we to understand that *our* country is nothing but a piece of land-mass? Well, in the same way in which we can understand that our flesh is nothing but a piece of skin³⁴⁶. Following the

³⁴⁴ This is the answer he gives to Gibert when she asks him "What does literary creation mean to you?" (471).

³⁴⁵ Keister Moore makes this point by drawing to our attention the degree to which literary criticism (and literary theory, with all its great ideas) is perishable and how literature is the only thing remaining. See Keister Moore 4.

³⁴⁶ On this distinction, see Ricoeur, *Oneself as another* 325.

logic of GCI's "Cogito interruptus", the body precedes the flesh: it is from this *erotic* activity of loving our bodies, of caring for our bodies, that flesh arises. Bodies are *made* flesh out of love, caring and attention; that is, out of responsibility. The same goes for countries. Lands are thus made into homelands: countries.

Something similar happens with one's life. Our lives are *made* so by virtue of our *suffering* our experiences and being able to recreate them; to evoke/invoke this *suffering*, which is what really gives our experience an erotic quality. It is the experience of our suffering that is inscribed in our bodies, that becomes flesh. Here we are at the origins of boundaries, when and where my flesh starts is where my boundaries begin. If I am to trust in this world, I am to trust that my flesh will not be transgressed by any-body. If I am to be *touched*, it is only because I have so opened my boundaries and my flesh is ready for yours. Contexts are for texts what flesh is to bodies and what countries are to lands; they are the relations of proximity through which each context, each flesh, each country determines how, why, when, where to open their borders. This is so, and to such a degree that when someone, purposefully, kills or injures another body (another's flesh), s/he refers to it as an enemy, who is never, through this lens, a sufferer. As a matter of fact, the euphemisms that deny sentience to "our" enemies abound in warfare (the "person is neutralized", the "base is killed" or the "ship is wounded")—as if the flesh therein was the extension of the artefact and not the other way around³⁴⁷. Prosopopeia, the anthropomorphized version of inhuman entities (animals, things, etc.) invested with human qualities, is reversed in these cases. However, in the case of "places", and of our making of places out of spaces, prosopopeia is boosted.

³⁴⁷ On the use of euphemisms to deny sentience to the "object/target", see Scarry, *The Body in Pain* 110-144; see as well Carlin's brilliant routine on euphemisms, available in *Doin' it Again*.

For GCI, culture *takes place* in geography³⁴⁸. It is because of its cultural quality that geography can be made portable. Many of the people who visited Guillermo and Miriam in their house at South Kensington, noted how much it was like visiting a piece of Cuba in the middle of London³⁴⁹. Our powers of recreation translate into our capacity for portability. This was GCI's first step into nostalgia, which was far from how it has being wrongly understood since its very conception as a medical term. Nostalgia made a very unfortunate debut in our lexicon in the 17th Century when Johannes Hofer (then a medical student) had the brilliant idea of enjoining the Greek words *nostos* (homecoming) and *algos* (pain, ache) to diagnose a strange form of melancholy he detected in some Swiss soldiers who showed symptoms which today would be diagnosed as depression due to what he concluded were fantasies about their homes. Nostalgia thus came into language as an affliction, as a physical affliction indeed; as an illness that had to be cured³⁵⁰. This diagnosis was very timely, since at that moment many attempts were made to prove that cultural attachments were nothing but a big sham; of course, the military was behind these attempts, as, we should also point out, this was the moment in which borders were starting to open to what was intended as “international commerce” (Deciu Ritivoi 19): an exchange without boundaries. Within these unfortunate beginnings, nostalgia came to be understood as a failure to adjust to change, which is very much the kind of preconception that rules over this concept in our days—long after the word stopped to be accepted as a physiological affliction requiring medical treatment. Today, however, right at the center of this pop-form of cosmopolitanism called globalization (which is, as we know, completely led by commercial exchange), this understanding of nostalgia, as a failure to adapt to change, as a negation of the present for the sake of the idealization of the past, has become dominant. I believe, with GCI, that this is a concept worth re-signifying.

³⁴⁸ In this regard, see Israel's idea of “cultural geography”, wherein ethnicity, national identity and the conception of place are made portable by the exile as they shape his/her narratives. See Israel 27.

³⁴⁹ See, for instance, Pereda's introduction to *Mi Música Extremada* and Souza's preface to his *Guillermo Cabrera Infante*.

³⁵⁰ On the coinage of the word “nostalgia”, see Deciu Ritivoi 16.

How to give body to this re-signification? Longing, the very matter of which nostalgia is made, should not be understood as desiring an absent referent, namely, my past; and, even less so, should it be understood as desiring an invented one, namely, my idealized past. As a matter of fact, longing should not be approached as desiring after all—desire belongs in the realm of melancholia, “cathexis”, fixation with an absence, transference³⁵¹. Longing, real longing, comes long before the past is understood as gone; for it still dwells in us: its traces are still active in our bodies. This is whence “missing” comes from: realizing that something in the articulation of our very bodies is missing, not quite there, but not absent either, only vanishing, receding. In the case of longing, what is receding is not our past, or not our past experiences for that matter, but those *conditions* that made the experience possible in the first place (those relations, those interconnections). I just cannot help but realizing that the experience of “frantic laughter” (an experience that always put a smile in my face) is vanishing, slowly receding from my body. It comes, however, often in my dreams—and then I remember: my friends, those relations it took so long to make (a lifetime, since very early childhood, as is the case of one of them), are not here, and this experience lack most of the “elements” that articulated it when it could come about, as if “spontaneously”: “frantic laughter” has lost its place in my life—and now its space is slowly fading away. I know, for experience, that a mark will always remain (as a scar, as a wrinkle), but the experience will never be again. We do not long for what is lost, but for what we realize that we are gradually losing. This happens all the time, because life mainly entails change; it is called “growing up”. Yet, the desire for autonomy has penetrated our culture to such an extent, that we procrastinate “missing” as if it were some sort of dissatisfaction—when, Proust knew best, it does not even resemble it³⁵². Longing belongs in the flesh; it is there where it takes over our attention for some

³⁵¹ On the relation between melancholia (“cathexis”) and a fixation with a lost (mostly idealized) object (almost always the mother), see Freud, *The Ego and the Id* 14-15.

³⁵² A propos of Proust, Deciu Ritivoi writes: “[In Marcel Proust] nostalgia projects a mythic world, which is not only perfect, but also primordial, a world from which

sudden and brief period of time (a period during which we even lose track of time). The way through which these experiences show themselves as present is by experiencing some of those sensations that they bring about: here we are remembering with our skin. When one has quite an outstanding memory, as GCI did, one happens to remember these sensations prodigiously good, as if one's body were literally possessed by the past one *was*. This is, literally, memory made flesh; and during that ecstatic (static) moment in which your body is possessed by your past, you are one with space and time; for movement has stopped and you feel as if bound to an eternal present: a microcosm of eternity. It is in the landscape that time passes, in the (wo)man-made-place in which time goes by. The body, all suffering now-here (dateless/placeless), has met with its geography, and there is no more time³⁵³.

4.6.1 Summary 25

The conceptualization of the trace is taken in this section to a greater extent, and it is connected to the way in which the body becomes flesh, that is, the way in which the body becomes meaningful through the traces that life has imprinted in it (him/her). This is discussed in the context of those meaningful bonds at the core of the articulation of every meaningful body (people, places, traditions, etc.). In this way, the discussion of rendering the body meaningful via flesh is extended to rendering a meaningful space via making it a place, as doubtless happens with the constitution of one's country. This is approached from GCI's use of the concept of "geography" in his work after the writing of *Vista*. A

everything else unfolds" (35), and this, the primordial, the "perfect memory" is what we keep missing as we feel it slowly vanishing from our bodies.

³⁵³ The place in which both *Vista* and *Exorcismos* meet is precisely in this erogenous originality brought about by geography. In the last *exorcismo*, we find a calligram entitled "*La Isla*" [The Island], which is formed by the repetition of the word *mar* [sea] surrounding a space that composes the caiman-like form of the island of Cuba. Actually, the word *mar*, when repeated: *marmar*, forms, in Spanish, a calembour with '[m]armar' [to assemble, but also to provide with weapons; for *arma* means both arm, weapon, and the third person indicative of the verb to assemble]: the island assembled where the graphemes recede, vanish—washed out by the sounds of the written word, of the written sea: THE SPACE.

preliminary discussion of nostalgia is held in these very terms. This latter discussion will grow in chapters 7 and 8, and it is in the latter chapter where this concept will find its full form, something that is nothing but announced in this section.

4.7 “Let me tell you my story”

But maybe some other time. We are running out of space and we are getting short of time. So I should start wrapping up. Our character is still Guillermo Cabrera Infante. *Who* is this character anyway? We had already said that it is not a “me”, an-other spawning from the “I”. No, this is not the whole story of what we said (see? memory is plastic, elastic, and sometimes tricky). We said that it is not a “me” inasmuch as this latter stands for my mind or for my “mental contents” here and now. The “me” is not a representation; it is an-other “I”—an “I” that has “othered” itself in a narrative: it is the “I” brought to life in an (or in various) event(s). This looks more like it. It is worth noting that this “me” has been the subject (yes, that too) of various attempts to capture the “I” (its opacity, as an object that is a body that is flesh, its unconsciousness, etc.), and therefore to tame it, to domesticate its urges and drives, its compulsive (and combustible) nature; because the “I” is all nature, all body and no flesh. This metaphysical hoax has produced those “technologies” through which oneself attempts to master oneself³⁵⁴. The “me”, as unfolded in a narrative, as the agent of purge and self-transformation, is as old as the written word itself.

Yet, if there had ever been one tendency towards the exploration of the “inner life” of ourselves and towards the possibilities that the creative imagination has to rule over it and to transform it, there is nothing better than late 18th C. and 19th Century Romanticism, particularly the Romantic poets³⁵⁵. Perhaps we can agree with Guillermo Cabrera Infante

³⁵⁴ This seems to be at the core of Foucault’s argument in *Technologies of the Self*. See 18, 35 and 49.

³⁵⁵ I would say that the first romantic poet completely concerned with the exploration of the inner life is also one of the most influential figures in nineteenth century idealism, as

on the revelatory powers of literature just as we can agree with the Romantics on literature's incantatory powers. Still, we should be wary of confusing the revelatory as witnessing the emergence of the symbolic, of the meaningful in the body; where the revelatory bears witness to a sacred word as it has been transmitted by the gods. I believe that if we were to compare GCI with the Romantics, he would resemble more a *poet maudit* than a singer to the powers of nature. GCI expressed many times that he found the cruelty of nature difficult to swallow³⁵⁶, that this was one of the reasons he so much fancied what humans made (history aside) and why he was so much in love with the city. GCI could be closer to Baudelaire than to Keats. In this fashion, GCI believed in the *autotelic* nature of literature, which should never be confused with solipsistic or with self-indulgent³⁵⁷. This only means that the work of literature does not respond to a "higher call" (nor to a "lower" either), but that, all things said, it only responds to itself, that, once finished, it has a life of its own: it is its own place and its own space—it is shared for it is sharing itself. The Romantic "I" is not self-centered but rather centre-making, producing its own center in the texts that it produces, fusing and di-fusing with it—modernists did not invent the decentered self, and neither did post-moderns.

Throughout this chapter, I have been pointing out that this "I" is a body and that this body is made flesh by *eros*³⁵⁸, which is similar to how the "me" is made "self" by our narrations and the "self" is made "my-self" by my responsibility. I do not live in my

he worked hand in hand with both Schelling and Hegel; I am speaking of Friedrich Holderlin (it seems that in the late eighteenth century, early nineteenth, nine out of every ten great thinkers were called Friedrich, right Nietzsche?). Other poets who made the exploration of our inner lives the main matter of their poetry are: Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, Lord Byron, William Wordsworth (for whom every word was worth its weight in gold), Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, etc. See also what Taylor has to say on the relationship between the exploration of the inner life and the Romantic poets. See Taylor 419.

³⁵⁶ See for instance Souza 9.

³⁵⁷ On Baudelaire's views on art and beauty (whose ends were in-themselves) see his "The salon of 1846".

³⁵⁸ For a similar progression, see Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* 92.

body, I live my body. I do not live in me, I live me. I do not live in myself, I live myself: this is *how* I am myself. Now we have a different kind of source, an erogenous source, one that originates as much as (and at the same time in which) it is originated. Whence does this *eros* come from? Of this, we know not. This is a source of whose origin we know nothing—or, rather, we know little. These origins have always been introduced to me by others, in others, *through* others. This is why “I” must other myself so as to love myself—something that transcends self-interest or primitive self-preservation (in the sense of bodily survival); for this is something that comes to me always in the shape of other *erotic bodies*, who love “me” and care for “me”. It is, indeed, quite hard to love oneself when one has never been loved (cared for, attended) by others—though, as we keep learning, it is not impossible. “We are not divine bodies”, says a potential lover (a Cuban beauty, but, alas, a radical rebel) to our young GCI to comfort him in his shame after his bowels betrayed him during some rather “romantic”, intimate moment (*Cuerpos divinos* 345). No, we are not, we are *erotic bodies*, and very much so. In the same way in which I learn about my own mortality because I live among those who know it, I learn about my own eroticism through others. The journey from “me” to “my” in the self is like the journey from body to flesh. I have a sip of death in the death of others; I have a sip of love in the love of others: I have a drink of death in the death of *my* loved ones, and a drink of life in the life of *my* beloveds. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty masterly elaborates this point: “How could I conceive *his* pains, *his* colours, *his* world, except as in accordance to the pains I have had, the colours I see, the world wherein I live. But at least my private world has ceased to be mine only; it is now the instrument which another plays, the dimension of a generalized life is grafted onto my own” (11, emphasis in original). Those are the traces that make our erogenous zones, those we put into play in a world of privacy (which is not a private world): the journey goes from “me” to “my” and from “my” to “yours” and from “yours” to “you”.

The character in the narrative has been very well distinguished in the Western tradition from the writer of the narrative, and this latter has been very well distinguished from the

reader. They are three different entities: one (the character) is fictive and the other two (the writer, the reader) are real, and these are agents. But we should know better by now. If fact and fiction are not distinguishable in the narrative (the latter being the linguistic formed version of the former, which is shapeless), how are we to distinguish character and agent in the narrative? What if the “me” and the “you” and the “I” and the “he”... were approached as unities *because* they are points of convergence: “I” and “you” and “them” converge in “me” and the “me” converges in the “I” and the “you” (...) and so forth? A unity formed by convergences (by various bodies [fleshes, texts, narratives, etc.]) is very different from an affixed unity that is all to itself; i.e., a self-exhausting presence. The way in which we have characterized the present so far (the here/now) is as a point of convergence of multiple pasts and manifold futures, of multiple places and manifold events. The body, as a unity, the “I”, as a unity, the “me” as a unity, is the point where other bodies, “I’s” and “me’s” converge: a space always already open for coincidence, for *eros* to emerge as always already plural.

This is all very good, but what about myself? Self-ascription (the journey from me to my) is like self-inscription, a double-movement: I ascribe to my self because my self has been inscribed in me: I bear its traces, and they are everywhere to be seen. “My” (Mine) does not demarcate a possession (grammatical forms notwithstanding) but rather renders visible the boundaries of my flesh—the boundaries over which “I” have very little control and in which “you” participate a great deal. Somewhere in-between description and prescription I find myself; I find ascription and inscription in this middle-ground (which is sometimes a playground, sometimes a battlefield, but always an erogenous ground where suffering [*pathos*] is articulated for others to bear witness to it) called narration. This is our poetic ascription and our erotic inscription to and in ourselves: in this narrative where “I” imagine myself, “I” remember myself—for this is where I create myself³⁵⁹.

³⁵⁹ For a detailed account on the relationship between imagining and creating oneself in a narrative, see Ricoeur 148; see also Freeman 10.

This is myself merging in and emerging from language, and I bear witness to its emergence. My witness is my narrator, my character is my agent.

Returning to our character, let us hear what Souza says: “Cabrera Infante’s blending of fact and fiction or history and narration ... is a strategy that he would use extensively in his works. He also attempted to convey the unreality of the entire event with several references to film but closed with the observation that he had not just seen in a movie but a slice of life he did not know” (35). This is, however, not a slice of fiction, one of GCI’s many fragments and/or literary exercises; this is GCI telling us about a “real life fact”, an unusual and, to some point, a traumatic one: the assassination of a mafia boss he witnessed while he was in New York with a good friend of his (of GCI, not of the mafia boss), the photographer Jesse Fernandez (a more than an usual character in GCI’s literature). Given that Jesse did not have his camera with him that day (something he always regretted), GCI put himself to the task of recreating this event in literature. The result will give him one of the most lasting lessons he received in his life about the powers of the written word: fact and fiction were fused; it was difficult for him, after he finished writing the story, to distinguish between these two and, what is more, his memory of the event now resembled a great deal the story he had told. The germ of mythmaking was becoming prevalent in his life and work; however, as we saw in the past chapter and, to some degree, in this one, the complementing germ of meaning-making had to wait a little while to wake from its numbed slumber. And, what I have been insisting since the end of the past chapter, and what I will keep insisting till the end of this dissertation (this is more a warning than a prophecy), is that there is no responsibility without meaning (without care, without *eros*); which, in the terms in which we have been speaking in this section, would mean that there is no “my” (no “mine”) without meaning: no self-ascription, no self-inscription, but only a desperate anguish to possess it, which usually ends up in an urge to possess the other(s).

So this erotic self-ascription and self-inscription to/in the narrative gives us a different sense of space and time (without which there is no self, and no me, and no my; the “I” fixated in a perennial blink), and quite a unique one, for it ascribes us to and inscribes us in a place and a date now inscribed in our bodies and enacted (performed) in our daily lives.

We have seen how GCI healed his memory by ascribing and inscribing himself (his-self) into his story (his-story), and how, by doing so, he ascribed and inscribed himself into the lives and stories of others, particularly his loved ones. Not only do we know ourselves and others through narrations, we mainly perceive ourselves and others through them³⁶⁰. Similarly, not only do we make ourselves known to others (and others to ourselves) through narrations, we make ourselves perceivable to others (and others to ourselves) through them. Self-expression (this movement of “othering myself”) is thus a necessary process of alteration (and of alternation, but not of alter-nation); we are never the same when we come back from this journey, and my “I” is forever changed, for it is now “mine”. Self-narration is never a matter of sameness, but always already of alterity (not only in terms of the addressee, but primarily in terms of the addresser). In this way, my character, GCI, who is also a textual construct (or a number of them) is a source. As a text should always be approached by writing (producing, creating, painting, building, speaking, etc.) more texts, as work should produce more work (as was asserted at the end of the first chapter), a character should be approached by recreating another character. The GCI I have been writing about is other than himself, and I will never be sure if he would have liked such a characterization. But, from my character to his I tell him: I have offered him *my* best. As a witness, as a narrator, I bear witness to what I tell, always—even after my death: now, there is a prophecy!

³⁶⁰ This would be Eakin’s main assumption behind his whole argument that to write oneself is to create the fiction of who one was upon who one is. See Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography* 131.

We should conclude by pointing out that a character is always plural. There is always more than one character about “the same” person, just as there is always more than one text about “the same” event. And as a writer, the more you write, the more selves you find. A writer is always a “many-selved” storyteller. All characters are therefore partial, and there could never be someone who can claim full possession of any of them; they are always out there, they are always shared. The same goes to the self (or should we say already that the character *is* the self?); it is never in possession of itself, it is always shared. Myself is never fully mine, it is always shared in responsibility. My responsibility is fully mine, though it is always erotically constituted with others; it always occurs with (and due to) others. The mythmaker, whom GCI perfected in *TTT*, became a narrator in *Vista* and a sufferer in *Exorcismos* (the writer as the sufferer of the *exorcism*). They all were witnesses. They were all their testimonies. The history with which GCI was now concerned was an “intra-history”³⁶¹ that could situate him in an “inter-history”, the in/between turning into the in-between, a deep contact among stories speaking to other stories. Intertextuality acquired a different taste now for this writer. It was not a matter of erudition anymore; he had nothing else to prove to nobody. Now he could become an artist of his own life; for now he could listen, loudly and clearly, to his own voice.

4.7.1 Summary 26

This last section rounds up the argument made at the beginning of the chapter: there is no difference between the agent and the character; that is, all agents are approached as characters in a particular kind of narrative framework. The discussion between “inner life” (the self exploring oneself), as performed by the Romantics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, is examined in these terms, since this exploration is made by performing an act of *othering* through which the self becomes another: the self in the narrative. It is argued that this exploration entails a sort of mystification, something that is to be avoided in the present discussion of the past (and the evocation/invocation of it).

³⁶¹ I am borrowing this term from Alvarez Borland 35.

The difference between “inner” and “outer” life is proved, in this manner, completely futile, and the concept of intimacy is re-introduced in this context. The concept of the source (as the living body of the self, or the living self) reappears in this particular view. The reappearance of this concept is of capital importance for the conceptualization of “self” and “style” (and their convergence) that will occur in the next chapter. Also, the double-movement of self-inscription and self-ascription (going from “me” to “my”) will be important in the coming chapters, but should be more particularly kept in mind for chapter 8.

CHAPTER 5:
“I’VE GOT MYSELF”: THE GIFT AND THE CONSTITUTION OF ONESELF

5.1 “Hey, listen listen listen”

I should write this chapter as a diver. And so I will: for we shall be plunging into the depths of the bottomless waters that pull us towards the dwellings of the originary voice. This means that in our trip deep down inside we should listen to some voices; more than one, less than many. Where we go, however, with utmost risk, is to the originary sediment where only one, exclusively one, nothing but one, solely one, wholly one, totally one, fully one voice voices, one string strings, one self is. This is another way to say that, although many voices will be heard in our way down, we should never lose our course, we should keep it all the way to the point of departure, to the point from which everything comes from, to the currents that pushes us down, deep down inside, and to the flow that moves us despite ourselves—and then, and only then, can we prepare ourselves to get completely lost. So this is all to say that we shall get lost—at least I will.

This chapter means to inquire who is Guillermo Cabrera Infante; though most exactly, it means to search for the *what* behind the *who*. I cannot start answering this question by the predicate (Guillermo Cabrera Infante), who is at the same time the subject (Guillermo Cabrera Infante) of the question (who?). What do I mean when I say, when I ask: “who is behind the text?” Is this a question about Guillermo Cabrera Infante’s life? I doubt it, we have been answering this question by way of character: GCI as a character. It must be something else. Is this a question about Guillermo Cabrera Infante’s personhood? Too late, he is not a person anymore. Today, he is nothing but a memory embodied in his work. In that case, is this a question about Guillermo Cabrera Infante’s work? Possibly, though sooner or later we will be having a circular answer to this question, for we will be either approaching the work as the only possible access to the work itself (the work for the work’s sake—an approach we criticized in the first chapter and of which we have distanced ourselves already) or the work as an access to the person behind it; and then we would be asking “who is this person?” “who *was* this person *behind* the work?”. As you

see, we have too many *behinds*: “the person behind the work”, “the who behind the person”, “the what behind the who”... and we should still add some more to this list: “the man behind the name”, “the name behind the signature”... and each “behind”, when carefully observed, appears as an horizontal precipice producing a flat vertigo in us, the kind of vertigo we feel at the borders (particularly when we do not have our documents with us), the kind one feels when facing for a second the naked edge of a horizon. Time, the very condition of all possible “behinds”, soaks through us and, when we look behind, we are, as a matter of fact, looking back, which is nothing but a looking in and a looking down: horizontal and vertical, behind and in, back and down, are just planes unfolded for our convenience in a circular environment; but they all fuse as we move towards the center, as we move towards the original point, as we move towards the bottom that is the original edge—they all fuse in depth. I should, for the moment, unfold this again on the two-dimensional plane of the written page (up and down, left to right): the “what behind the who” could be approached by way of self, the “who behind the person” could be approached by way of voice, and the “person behind the work” could be approached by way of style. We should see, however, that these three approaches are just the same. We must start, nonetheless, with the latter one, and then move forward (this is just a manner of speaking) to the one before it and then to the first of them. That is, we should move from style to voice and from voice to self.

This is a rough sketch of our itinerary in this chapter. Now let us proceed to it.

5.1.1 Summary 27

The question of “who is behind the text?” tacitly entails “what is behind the text?” This entailment is behind one of the oldest questions in Western Metaphysics: is the self a thing (a “what”) or not? This question will be answered in this chapter through three different approaches: 1) As it was settled in the first chapter, for any work to exist there must be a worker bringing it forth, so there must be a worker behind the work; the worker will be explored by a thorough conceptualization of style; 2) if there is a worker, then

there is a “who” to whom this worker responds and whom can be referred and/or addressed, a “who” that is, in these terms, textual; the tacit “who” behind the worker will be investigated through a detailed conceptualization of voice; 3) if there is a “who”, then this “who” must stand for a “person”, something that is beyond the worker him/herself, for this worker may be absent (i.e., dead or in a different country, etc.) and yet this “person” can still be addressed and/or respond; the necessary “what” behind the “who” will be considered through a comprehensive conceptualization of self. Given that of these three categories, the style is the less abstract, and the most “present” in the eyes of the reader, it will be the first subject of investigation in the next section.

5.2 “Hey man, what’s your style”

Language seems so natural to us that we assume it had been lingering around forever. It is a similar case when we think of ourselves; it is unlikely we can remember a time when language was not around. Strictly speaking, it is actually impossible to think of ourselves without language: coming to language is, to a great degree, coming to ourselves³⁶². Yet, when we look at it really closely, we realize that language is a great achievement. Neither completely learned³⁶³ nor utterly acquired³⁶⁴ nor completely in our minds³⁶⁵; neither the

³⁶² I would just like to clarify here that with “language” I do not refer exclusively to verbal language (or written language), but to all kinds of language (sign language, body language, etc.); that is, to every possible means we have used (and we can use) to communicate with each other and with our environment. I thank Dr. Jure Gantar for bringing this to my attention.

³⁶³ It is perhaps in the realm of developmental psychology where language, as being entirely a product of learning, has been furthered as the leading paradigm. For a more detailed account of this, and on how language is learned (and not developed), see Jean Piaget, “Cognitive Development in Children”.

³⁶⁴ This would be the position held by more moderated thinkers, such as Lev Vigotsky, who claims that language enjoins both the ontogenetic aspects of development and the phylogenetic aspects of learning, see his *Thought and Language*, with especial interest in chapters 4 and 7.

³⁶⁵ This is the famous position held by psycholinguistics, whose major exponent, Noam Chomsky, claims that there are “deep structures” in our minds from which language arises and “surface structures”, wherein language (as speech) develops and multiplies.

product of conscious effort nor the offspring of unconscious mimicry nor the generation of mental structures, language is something to which we respond because we are always already called to it, and thus something we accept because we are always already responding to it³⁶⁶.

Some writers have been able to write about, and hence to recognize, their ordeal of achieving language, as the situation forced them to do so³⁶⁷. When we are under circumstances wherein our own capacities to express ourselves (to speak our minds, as they say) are crucially challenged, such as being an immigrant in a foreign country with a language other than your native tongue, you very likely start to question the “nativeness” of your own language, its “naturalness”, and to reckon that coming to language, coming to speech, coming to expression, is something of a great achievement—an achievement you have the occasion to relive when you are immersed in these kind of circumstances. Now, can you imagine what this must be for a person who has language (now restricted

One of the greatest counterfeits to this theory is that it only refers to the development, the growth or the emergence of verbal language. For instance, in their paper “Language as Shaped by the Brain”, Christiansen and Chater argue for a Darwinian model of the evolution of language (that is, our brains as shaping language and not as “generating” it, as is Chomsky’s position). One of the biggest disagreements we can find in the scholars who answered to this paper was, precisely, that it failed to take into account other forms of non-verbal language (i.e., sign language) and their possible evolution, which could not possibly match with this model. Chomsky’s ideas (as well as their progression in time) are best summarized in his *Language and Mind*.

³⁶⁶ I had already made this argument elsewhere, see my “Here say yes”. This alternative approach to language (as being accepted and to/through which we respond) does take into account alternative forms to verbal language (i.e., sign language, pictorial language, etc.). Again, if I still do not have your e-mail, then this might be a reminder to send me one so that I can send a copy to you. Though I forgot to say before, if you own a magazine or are part of the board of a journal and you feel curious about this paper, maybe you can help me publish it so that I do not have to keep collecting e-mail addresses indefinitely. Thanks so much.

³⁶⁷ As is Saul Friedlander’s, Maxine Hong Kingston’s or Hellen Keller’s cases. For an excellent commentary of Friedlander and Hong-Kingston’s works (and their “achieving language”) see Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography*, chapter 4. On a most interesting study on Keller’s case, see Freeman, chapter 3.

only to speech and the written language) as her daily trade? What is it like for a person who has deposited in language, in speech and writing, most of her own expressive capacities? Yes, this must be quite a shock.

Now, let us step back a little, let us go back to that moment in which this hypothetical person expressed himself in his native language. It seems that a great deal in language, as a creative process (creative in terms of creating clusters of words to form sentences, syntagmatic units, etc.), happens unconsciously; that is, it occurs faster than our own capacity to make ourselves conscious as to how the words and sentences that we utter were formed *before* we utter (or write for that matter) them³⁶⁸. This entails that there is very little “decision-making” when we deploy language, particularly when we express ourselves, since this latter implies a great degree of spontaneity that might be present to a lesser degree in a ready-made scenario within a somewhat conventional use of language as in, say, a job interview. All decisions entail deliberation and reflection, but more importantly, they all entail consciousness. Even a decision that is taken rather hastily, as a tattoo made while you were drunk or a marriage with your first sweetheart because you wanted out of your parents’ house or you simply felt extremely insecure, even these poorly made decisions required consciousness; something we know about because there were choices. If we have no choice, it is unlikely we can make a decision; we mostly act according to the *only* possible way to act. In order to make a decision we must be able to *see* more than one choice (a redundancy actually, there is always more than one choice, otherwise, there would be no choice), and to see it, in this context, means to be conscious of it—that our consciousness is oriented towards this or that choice we favor. This is not the case with language, particularly at the time when we produce it, when we find the sentences already made before they slip our mouths, or before they propel our fingers. Thus, the question *how* do we make of our native language, a most unconscious process, *our* language, how do we appropriate language so that it sounds *ours*, is most pertinent at

³⁶⁸ See Lancashire 28.

this point; for all writers had made (some to greater degrees than others, and some to out-of-this-world degrees) their native language *theirs*.

You might be thinking that the process is not as simple, for although a writer may produce language unconsciously, he makes revisions (some quite extensive, meticulous, tireless revisions, such as Cabrera Infante did) and rewrite from them, which can be understood as a most conscious process. Yes, this is true; yet we could not say that, however conscious this process of revision may be, it includes the *absolute* rewriting of what was already written (this would be more like *writing* something new rather than rewriting); and also, even if the rewriting includes some language that was already produced, those bits that are rewritten, are produced *again*, which means that during this very process unconsciousness takes over consciousness once more³⁶⁹. Unless otherwise proved, we cannot say that it is possible to be conscious *simultaneously* of the utterances we produce and of ourselves producing those utterances—something that happens almost at the same time. If something like this could be done, we would be able to affirm that we can be conscious of the past (e.g., when remembering some past event) at the same time in which we can be conscious of the future (i.e., when projecting a future happening)—we can move back and forth, but we cannot do it simultaneously. So if our producing language is unconscious, can we say that a person’s making of her native language *her* own language, her process of appropriation, is unconscious as well? Could this process of appropriation be deemed as the writer’s style? This would contradict many of the canonical definitions of literary style. Let us see if it is worth it.

³⁶⁹ Roman Jakobson asks a similar question in his “Subliminal Verbal Patterning in Poetry”, where he asks whether the designs disclosed by linguistic analysis (functionalist and structural of course), and thus by rational means were in the mind of the poet as if s/he had rationally planned it that way. He, not surprisingly, concludes that a “significant poetic composition, whether it is an improvisation or the fruit of long and painstaking labor, implies a goal-oriented choice of verbal material” (250). We will try, within this chapter, to do without the *telos* (retrospectively interpreted either as intention or meaning) in the work and, therefore, without a goal-oriented style.

Most conceptions of literary style, particularly those coming from stylistics, define style within a process of decision-making³⁷⁰. These conceptions can claim to be direct heirs of the classical idea that originates in rhetoric as an art and trade, mostly developed by Cicero (based on Aristotle's canonical conceptualization of rhetoric as speech shaped for persuasion), which conceives of style as the way in which words are arranged (preferably beautifully) so as to initially seduce and later persuade an audience³⁷¹. In this way, whether in speech (and more so public speech) or in the written word, the embellishment and sophistry of discourse composed "in such a way that it sounds natural to the audience" was understood as a matter of technique and training: that is, of learning³⁷². Style was thus defined within the framework of exteriority, as delivery, while "good delivery" came to be understood as performance. Even when the techniques of good-speaking and good-writing are so perfectly mastered by the user (rhetorician or stylist) that s/he can produce good discourses as if spontaneously, as if coming from her/his unconscious itself, style, as such, is something coming from the outside—from intrinsic rules in language (or in *langue* as a system, as in Bally³⁷³) or in society (as a system, as in Halliday³⁷⁴) or in both (as in Ullmann³⁷⁵).

It is worth noting, nonetheless, that the idea of style as being representative of the person herself, as if it were *in* her, was already prominent by the late 18th C.; that is, also when

³⁷⁰ It could be said that this canonical approach started with Charles Bally's *Traité de stylistique française*. Given that Bally was one of the most celebrated epigones of Ferdinand de Saussure, it is hardly a surprise that his approach to literary style is a reinforcement of structural linguistics. Many of Bally's ideas are available (in Spanish) in his *El lenguaje y la vida*. More accessible (and known) are the works of Roman Jakobson, Michael Halliday or Stephen Ullman; all subscribers, to greater or lesser degrees, to Bally's project of taking structural linguistics to the realm of personal expression.

³⁷¹ This idea of rhetoric is present in Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1: 2; ideas of which Cicero was clearly a heir.

³⁷² This is aptly explained by Yagoda 11-18.

³⁷³ See Bally 22-27.

³⁷⁴ See Halliday, *Linguistic Studies of Text and Discourse* 23-29.

³⁷⁵ See Ullmann, *Semantics* 54-79.

the idea of individuality as the basis of autonomy was starting to become dominant³⁷⁶. George-Louis Leclerc's famous dictum (the French naturalist better known as the Count of Buffon): "style is the man himself", should not be read only as "style contains the man's personality", but more clearly within the context of the *belles lettres* and therefore within the framework of *good taste*, which was the central paradigm in art during those days³⁷⁷. Personality was all about good taste, that is, about those dispositions that led the person to prefer the beautiful over everything else (the vulgar, the common, the banal, etc.) and who could thus appreciate what is transcendental in the world and therefore worthy of praise, celebration and, ultimately, of effort: for apprehending the beautiful was a most demanding task, as the Count very well knew³⁷⁸.

It is true that the concept of personality as we know it pertains much more to the late 19th C.; still, it is no less true that the idea of the "individual" came into full force already during the 18th C. and that concepts such as "temperament", "character", "dispositions", etc., designed the individual (and her features) in a similar way in which personality did later on, where these concepts were integrated. Buffon's dictum should not be confused with the Romantic idea of an innate, intrinsic, immanent "I", which started to become popular also around Buffon's time (Goethe was one of the pioneers of this idea)³⁷⁹. This latter idea of style as being innate meant that sincerity played a more prominent role than

³⁷⁶ On the dominance of the idea of individuality at the end of the eighteenth century, see Yagoda 18.

³⁷⁷ It is worth mentioning how the Cuban-Mexican historian, Rafael Rojas, draws to our attention that the canonical explanation of style in Cuba during the early 20th C., mainly represented by the renowned historian and writer Jorge Mañach, was associated to this idea of grand-style (beautiful style) as conceived in the 18th C.; the beautiful style reflecting and containing a beautiful spirit. Mañach expanded this idea to the nation, holding that each nation had a style that guides its historical course; a great part of his historical project was devoted to the description and design of this "Cuban style". See Rojas, *Tumbas sin Sosiego* 243 and Mañach, *Historia y Estilo* 28-29.

³⁷⁸ See Buffon's extraordinarily influential essay "Discourse on Style".

³⁷⁹ This is acutely presented by Yagoda 17.

taste³⁸⁰, since sincerity meant to return the “I” to its original state of “Nature”, wherein the “I” becomes a sort of cosmic alignment with the world and with the universe as such³⁸¹. Be it as it may, all three approaches (stylistic, *belles lettres* and Romantic) aspired to one thing: absolute transparency, either in terms of function (to communicate, if communicative, or to transcend linguistic forms, if poetic³⁸²), or in terms of beauty (the work as a translucent sight to the beautiful), or in terms of the “I” (sincerity as letting the “I” emerge in its fullest). This transparency (even for those works that aim at being “neutral” and style-free, such as journalistic or academic works) has proven most elusive, since style seems inevitable.

From what has been said, we can gather that style is a matter of organization at the level of language, just as we have insisted that narrative is a matter of organization at the level of events. Style points towards endophoric properties (*in* language and in its rules [grammar, morphology, etc] or *in* the “I”³⁸³) just as narrative points towards exophoric

³⁸⁰ See for instance Flaubert’s opinions on the importance of sincerity in style in Yagoda 18-21.

³⁸¹ On the way in which these ideas penetrated in and sprung during the German Romanticism, see Benjamin, *El concepto de crítica de arte en el Romanticismo alemán* 29-41.

³⁸² This approach, of course, owes a great deal to the work of the functionalists, but much more particularly to Roman Jakobson’s work, who defined the following functions for language: communicative, language for the sake of something other than itself, so as to elicit certain response from the addressee [phatic, emotive, conative and referential functions] and poetic function [language for language’s sake]; with the metalingual function [language speaking about language] as a sort of bridge in-between these two. It is worth noting, however, that he says that no work can bear the poetic function alone, that this is always a matter of degree. See Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics” 69-71.

³⁸³ This debate between nature and nurture in style (innate vs. acquired) can be traced all the way back to the Renaissance, and to the debate between Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola (who defended an innate idea of style) and Pietro Bembo (who defended the idea of a self-fashioned style, acquired through imitation of higher works). Since the Renaissance can be understood as setting the foundations for the values that will be later explored and expanded during the Enlightenment, it goes without saying that, by the late Renaissance, Bembo’s ideas were more wide-spread and enjoyed a better reputation. This was even more so due to the great popularity that Raphael’s work gained during this time,

ones (people, things, etc, and more importantly, events as an extra-linguistic reality/referent). Just as the previous chapter was devoted to proving that the borders between the extra-linguistic and the linguistically constituted events are fluid, this chapter will be devoted to trying to do the same with the borders of style, either *in* language or *in* the person herself.

There is another common trope about style that reconciles the *belles lettres* position with the Romantic one, that is, the trope of style as worldview. This idea was particularly championed by early 20th C. writers and there were several critics who paid particular attention to it³⁸⁴. What is important about this trope of style as worldview is that it gives us a more nuanced perspective of style as a means of expression (i.e., as expressing one's worldview) without either mystifying it (a la Romanticism and its cosmic view, or a la *belles lettres* and the not-less cosmic powers of beauty) or depersonalizing it (a la stylistics). The style is not the man, or the woman for that matter: the style is the (hu)man expression par excellence. This is the pathway we shall be taking in this chapter to answer the question about "the person behind the work", the person as expressed in the world. Nonetheless, I find the idea of worldview most narrow, since it refers to a set of mental contents bordering with those of the concept of personality (set of preferences, dispositions, attitudes, etc.) or of individuality (perspective, position, agency, etc.); two concepts that would lead us astray in our effort to answer the questions of the "who behind the person" and the "what behind the who". Still, understanding style as expression may shed some light on how language becomes one's own language; for the

which had nearly eclipsed Leonardo da Vinci's, and which had also eclipsed many of Leonardo's ideas. This latter artist was a fierce supporter of the innate idea of style, whereas Raphael set to become the living proof of a self-fashioned and refined style. It is no coincidence that Bembo was the person appointed to write Raphael's epitaph, which, among all other things, celebrated this great feature in the painter as a self-fashioned artist. For an insightful account of this debate, see Williams 37-42.

³⁸⁴ Most notably, the writer who favored this idea was Marcel Proust, to whom Stephen Ullmann devoted a great part of his work. See, for instance, Ullmann, *Meaning and Style*, with especial interest in the two last papers therein collected.

writer must create a language through which he can express himself. This creation, regardless of how naturally or how painstakingly it may come to each writer, is customarily set in motion by becoming a good reader of your work, by caring, attending, diligently reading yourself; which is a good way of saying that a style is forged by learning how to take good care of yourself³⁸⁵.

Style thus understood, in terms of expression, can revivify the metaphor from whence it originally came from. Style, from the Latin *stylus*, meaning pen against the paper, or engraving bone or wax, indicates a kind of inscription, something that can neither be ruled out nor chosen; a creation that has already been created. Like your nose, your teeth, your cheekbones or your feet, style refers to those features that appear prominently in your physiognomy; style is there in your expression even before you have any saying about it—no wonder that all good writers can be parodied so well by other good writers and can be so badly imitated by some mediocre hacks. A copycat is immediately apparent, and immediately annoying; a parody (a good parody, that is) is immediately recognizable, and immediately amusing³⁸⁶. Style lies there where our control appears; we can control our facial expressions (unless we are prone to tics), but we cannot control the facial features that make these expressions possible in the first place. I cannot control the size of my nose or the shape of my toes or the solidity of my cheekbones or the texture of my teeth; I can only have some saying as to what I do with them when I gesticulate, when I smile or frown or step into a crowded bar as I search for my dancing partner. Style

³⁸⁵ A paradoxical thing that happens when the style seems to come too naturally, almost effortlessly, to a writer (i.e., Hemingway, Faulkner, Joyce—all GCI's youth favorites; as he was himself such an example of a style effortlessly crafted) is that sooner or later the style ends up becoming a sort of cage that traps the writer in a dead-end of perennial repetition; which is another way of saying that they may become boring. And it usually takes more efforts and pains to "reinvent" themselves than to those writers who forge their styles more gradually, with more effort. For an extensive commentary of this paradox see Yagoda 50. Also, for an extended commentary on the relationship between reading yourself and knowing yourself, and of knowing yourself and taking good care of yourself, see Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 45.

³⁸⁶ As it should become apparent by the end of this chapter.

sprouts from my fingertips, yet they bear the fingerprints of what I express, which, provisionally, we shall say is ourselves³⁸⁷. Only exposure to lasting, systematic, constant violence can destroy and prevent our style from growing and from growing back, since only violence can turn our expressions into repressions.

Decision-making plays a very minor role in style, though it does not mean it does not play a role at all; it does, but style always stems from this original ignorance, from this original veil to which control is surrendered in ecstasy. And it is only because we are originally ignorant that any invention can come about, for we cannot invent what we already know³⁸⁸. Style is thus inscribed in being; invention, not intention, drives it; chance, not choice, defines it. And, as happens with everything that is defined, the very constraints of its borders (i.e., one's skin, one's flesh) open the very possibilities of transcending them; for expression is all about transcendence, given that expression is always already addressed out there. This is why style is not about taste, let alone about the beautiful; for good taste, the beautiful (as was very well expressed by several post-kantian [not neo-kantian, these are the followers] thinkers, such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche³⁸⁹) is all about the *known*, all about tradition, the culturally instilled: good taste is playing safe, is being in control, autonomous, rigorous—as the writer John Irving very well phrases it: “Good taste is the suburbs of literature” (88).

So, more than form, style is about formation, but formation always from what is already formed: my body being flesh; that is, my caring, attending, loving my body as something more than a piece of skin with nervous terminals distributed all across it, which makes it rather reluctant to pain and quite prone to pleasure. All skins are, biologically speaking, the same; each flesh is different. It is thus that my very flesh is expressed in my style.

³⁸⁷ For a very imaginative use of this metaphor, see Betts 21.

³⁸⁸ On this original ignorance as a prerequisite for invention and originality, see Bartheleme 38. See also Derrida's groundbreaking essay “Psyche: Invention of the Other”.

³⁸⁹ As it is noticeable in works such as Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* and Nietzsche's *Gay Science*.

Though this is not all the story, we still need to toil a little more to start listening to what we cannot touch. For the moment, it should suffice to say that just as narrative renders necessity out of contingency, style renders a necessary form out of a contingent formation. The main indicator of a good style comes when you recognize that what you read does not only sound right, but it mainly sounds inevitable; it comes when you have the irrepressible feeling that this could have not been written in any other way. And just as you see yourself in the mirror every morning and find that had your eyebrows been more fuzzy or your lips a little thicker or your chin less pointy, not only would your face be different but also your facial expressions, your smile would be odd and your sadness would be foreign: you would find it hard to recognize yourself. I do not know about you, but I have undergone this experience of faking so much that one day I saw myself in the mirror and I could no longer recognize myself; my neck, my cheeks, my hands, my feet were swollen; my skin was yellowish, with an ash-like tonality under the eyes and on my forehead; my eyelids were heavy, almost closed, my eyeballs (or what I could see of them) were reddened and my lips contracted, as if they were frowning at the terrible smell that was daily populating my mouth (verbal halitosis)—and I can tell you, this was a most depressing picture. Something similar occurs when you try to fake your style, when, overwhelmed by others, you do everything to resemble them, to be like them; you would cross the seven seas just to write like them, to graft their styles onto yours, as if you were grafting new skin; you would sell yourself to the devil as some people do to the surgeon just to make themselves resemble their everyday models—or you would give yourself up only to write with the naivety and strength you had when you were younger, as some people give up themselves to the surgeon to see the face they saw when they were young... then, that very day, you violate your expressions, up to the point of killing them or leaving them seriously injured. See, the image in the mirror, the face there reflected, is plastic. Plastic surgery (cosmetic surgery, I mean), is everything but plastic; it has an affixed face, an affixed model, an affixed representation as its orientating goal. This is the problem with imitation as plain *mimesis* (that is, when it is not creative imitation, which is

at the anteroom of *poiesis*³⁹⁰): it is a representation of an affixed model extracted from a suspended reality—a reality devoid of time, a reality devoid of time and *pathos*: a reality devoid of expression, and thus devoid of meaning; for nothing is meant where nothing is expressed: incarnation becomes imitation or, at best, personification.

In the imprint of my style my life is engraved, traces upon traces of my past and pasts, all ingrained in the traces that I suffer now and those that are yet-to-be. Traces interfused, overlapped, intertwined, interpenetrating, bonded... but more importantly, constantly shifting their borders, moving as they share: traces *in* time, traces *of* life, traces *of* time, traces *in* life: traces alive, inscribed into my moving body, inscribed into my breathing flesh. Language, as DNA protein sequences, is in my veins, flows in my blood, pumps in my heart and populates my brain: language, my language, is the DNA of this text.

5.2.1 Summary 28

Language is first approached as an achievement; not as something that is “done” or “acquired” automatically, but as something that is developed through time and that becomes inscribed in (rather than appropriated by) the person who uses this language. Language is thus approached as something to which we are always/already responding, and therefore as something that we accept once we responded to it for the first time. Given that once language is achieved its production becomes unconscious (i.e., the person uses it without being conscious of most of the compositional features s/he employs), decision-making plays a very minor role in a person’s use of language. This is even more so in a person who uses language (restricted in this case to verbal and written forms) as her main means of expression. Expression is here understood as the form in which a person responds to the world, the way in which his/her life and his/her being is inscribed in his/her responses. Style is hence understood as the way in which the life of

³⁹⁰ For more on this concept of “creative imitation”, see Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1: 33-35.

the person (her past, her environment, her physiognomy, etc.) is inscribed in her/his linguistic expressions.

5.3 "Can you hear me?"

In order to move from style to voice we need to attune our ears to what is beyond the framework of our own aqua-lungs. Expression is always out there, but it comes from within. Experience always happens out there, but it resides within, in our memories. Our voice is *in* our body, even though it is always out there; we listen to it as it leaves our mouths, as we feel its moist caressing the epithelium of our lips. We express our experiences, though we do not experience our expressions. These are two moments occurring simultaneously. Just as I cannot be conscious simultaneously of my utterances and of my producing these utterances, I cannot express my experiences and experience my expressing them at the same time. The body harbours all the simultaneities that consciousness insists to unfold. All the letters of the alphabet simultaneously dwell in my mouth (in my tongue, in my palate, in my teeth and my gums, even in my saliva), but I can only think A (to) B (to) C, etc., and I can only speak so. To order, to unfold, already entails to restrict, to constrain: to conceive of interdiction. Prohibitions were very likely conceived in our heads before we even had the chance to suffer from them. Prohibitions operate through the logic of linearity, of folding and unfolding, and of ordering thus what in our bodies is always plural, simultaneous. We learn to speak A (to) B (to) C (each letter a thought, each letter an idea) because we learn to speak *as* we think: A (to) B (to) C. Our verbal valve starts to operate by the interdiction of propriety: a proper place in a proper time³⁹¹.

If we are to listen to our voice, we must pass beyond the muscular relaxations and contractions of this valve; we must be willing to get dirty. The trope of the writer's voice

³⁹¹ For a detailed commentary on the association between prohibition and learning to speak, as well as on the relationship between ascetism and truth, see Foucault, *Technologies of the Self* 17.

is not as old as the trope of literary style; it is more in relation to tropes such as “the breath of life” and “being vocal”; that is, an oddly old trope combined with a rather recent one. Postcolonial literature, for instance, has been one of the most prominent advocates of this trope of voice, which has come to stand for agency, subjectivity, individuality (what before was taken by concepts such as “personality”, “autonomy”, the “I”, etc.)³⁹². “Giving voice” to some community, group or minority that has been deprived of it, has been a more than common ethos in postcolonial writing; it has become synonymous with giving the very “breath of life” to such community: so crucial has expression become in these postcolonial efforts, since, as we very well know, colonialism is all about homogenizing expression while divesting others (the colonized ones) of it. Conquests are, first of all, projects of disseminated silence. Voice is therefore understood not as a “coming into language” but as a “coming into my language”, which is a “coming to expression”. “Find your own voice!” we hear this saying often in many writers and critics and also in literary circles and among humanists and so-called cultural scientists: the group, the community, the writer, the poet must “find her voice”. This finding is, to a great degree, synonymous with achieving expression, with making a language *my* language; not through an act of appropriation, but more exactly through acts of care and attention. Finding a voice is learning to listen to ourselves, finding our “inner ear” that “tries”, among the many (infinite) choices there are to say something, those “it” finds “fit”; and it is thus that we find *a* way to saying whatever we want to say³⁹³. Our inner ear is our speaking voice—and it is to be found way beyond the valve that “controls” our utterances in public. It is to this ear to which one resorts when wanting to know *what* (which word, which syntactic structure, which punctuation mark, which morpheme, which verbal tense, etc.) sounds *right*, and hence *what was* inevitable in our writing something—what *must* not be rewritten, what is not subject to change.

³⁹² For a more at length commentary on this trope and its relation to postcolonial studies, see Moore-Gilbert 43.

³⁹³ On the “inner ear” and its relation to literary style, see Yagoda 29.

In some literary criticism, however, the trope of the voice has had a very different function³⁹⁴. It has been approached as the voice *within* the narrative (most frequently in the story). That is, it is the voice of the narrator in the narrative (a first-person narrator, an omniscient narrator, a third-person objective narrator, etc.) that can be most definitively distinguished from the writer behind it. This kind of voice is at the service of the character and of the narrative unfolded therein; it is not at the service of some solipsistic *auteur* who aspires to express himself and nothing more than himself, but of a story, a narrative, a composition that expresses always something more than the author's personality, worldview, etc.: it represents the world, the nation, the city, and so on. This voice is, to be sure, an interpretation; for this voice does not and should not aspire to universality, but only to "something more", to express "more" than what the writer himself is, understands, wants, yearns, thinks, etc. It is this interpretation that gives the story its flare of uniqueness in the eyes of the reader, since all themes (love, hate, rage, honour, violence, family ties, and so forth) are pretty much the same everywhere; it is this interpretation, embodied in the performance of this voice (this narrator), that individualizes the work beyond its themes³⁹⁵. Similarly, the voice of some poets has been understood as the "who" speaking in the poem, who, just as well, can be very well distinguished from the poet herself: the voice of the poet is a persona through which the person explores herself (and sometimes even creates herself)³⁹⁶. Nonetheless, voice thus seen leads us to yet another kind of character, something like a meta-character creating (speaking for, about, on behalf of) the characters contained in the narratives or poems; this approach, I must say, will not help us answer the question about the "who behind the person".

³⁹⁴ Here I am referring mostly to formalist critics such as Roman Jakobson or Vladimir Propp, but more specifically to the work of Algirdas Julien Greimas, whose "actantial model" precisely aims at the identification and structuration of voices *in* the text (from different characters, from different kinds of narrators, etc.), as can be found in his "Actants, Actors and Figures".

³⁹⁵ For a broader account of this issue, see Payne 123-136.

³⁹⁶ This point is very clearly presented by Maio 1-5.

It is true that there is something other in the voice; something liquid-like in which it floats and flows, like the air in which it breathes and is conveyed. But this alien quality should not be confused with the voice; this would be like confusing the thing with the space it occupies. The splendour of the voice is precisely this mobility it shows as it travels from the writer to the page and from the page to the reader, as a constant chord that is never cut and resounds its vibrating tone uninterrupted, resonating in every corner of our pores—an echo that never loses its force. The voice thus felt is like liquid air in which we breathe and swivel, like a nose diving in its lungs.

Many writers, as they speak about the voice, assume this sense of “other-than-myself” that, at the same time, conveys, transports, and outgrows me—always out there³⁹⁷. The voice sounds too plural at once, particularly for the writer, who can realize the many strings that constitute it and the many nuances between the sounds each string produces; each string a word, which is a sound that has been waiting for you forever³⁹⁸. The voice flows if and only if it is let loose³⁹⁹. The voice felt as a Socratic *daimon* that comes from and personifies the past; my past, but also of those before me, prior to my coming to this world, and who is so self-assured that can easily transfer the writer’s doubts to the reader⁴⁰⁰. The voice heard as being distinct from the writer, who masks himself to write, who assumes many personae, while the voice remains the true face behind each and every

³⁹⁷ The book edited by Daniel Halpern, *Who’s Writing This?*, explores this idea from the many viewpoints of (North American) writers who speak about their own voices a propos of Jorge Luis Borges’ famous piece “Borges and I”, in which the Argentinean writer exhibits (with his characteristic cunning and always outstanding brevity) the very “other” who writes and asks and formulates demands to the person, to him, the one who drinks *mate* and coffee and *lives* and *suffers*, so that he can write. It is like the relationship between an employee (but quite an extraordinary employee, the star of your team, the one who keeps the company going) who knows very well his humongous value and plays the diva some times, as if constantly negotiating the boundaries of his contract.

³⁹⁸ As is for Apple 15.

³⁹⁹ As Brodkey says. See Brodkey, 34.

⁴⁰⁰ As is Davenport’s case. See Davenport 55.

one of them—the face due to which the writer never becomes any of these masks⁴⁰¹. The voice experienced as an imposing other, one who inspires fear more than respect, older and bossier than the most original other that we know, our m-other⁴⁰². The voice seems all these things at the same time, yet it *seems* so because it is always in the middle, in-between the personal and the impersonal, always in-here but only knowable as it comes out-there, when it is not one's own anymore, but for everyone to hear⁴⁰³. It seems as if the writer, or the poet (if it is not the very same thing), is responding not only to those who address her from the outside, but from something requiring her from her very innards, something stemming (steaming?) from within.

The Andalucian poet, Federico García Lorca, awoke a very old folk figure that was very likely born from the union of “Gipsy”, Moorish and Catholic folklore: the *duende*. In all Andalucía (and now it is in all Spain), dancers, performers, musicians, scientists, composers, poets, writers, cab-drivers and athletes alike invoke this figure to refer to that force that possesses you while you are creating something. When something does not have *duende*, it matters little its technical or formal achievements, it is just no good. Contrariwise, when something has *duende*, all imperfections (technical, formal, academic, etc.) are superseded and the work achieves what all works aspire to achieve: it touches the other in such a way that it just cannot be forgotten. As in all metaphors coming from Spain (in the North, as in La Rioja, in the South, as in Andalucía, West as Galicia or East as Valencia), the *duende* has blood as its main trope; it inhabits the blood, it boils it up to the point of burning it; it is different from the muse or the angel because it does not come from the outside⁴⁰⁴, it is nowhere to be found in the skies or in the curves of your significant other: it is there, in your veins, expanding your pores and reddening your skin, colouring your very brain, right at the heart of your sentences. This *duende* is the “true

⁴⁰¹ As Hawkes has it. See Hawkes 81.

⁴⁰² As O'Brien acknowledges. See O'Brien 145-146.

⁴⁰³ An interesting exploration of this “tension” between the personal and the impersonal from the perspective of literary criticism can be found in Poulet.

⁴⁰⁴ On the externality of the muses see Lancashire 28.

living style”; you must go and “wake it up at the blood’s last rooms”, where death dwells more than anywhere else; the death of each moment, of each dying second and cell and globule, “the *duende* does not arrive if it does not see a chance of death” (“Teoría y Juego del Duende” 11). Not only does the *duende* love to play with fire, it is fire⁴⁰⁵; which is a curious contraposition to another Spanish saying about those writers who risk everything in their writing: they say that these writers *se mojan* [get wet]. This sounds more like the voice I want to speak—about.

The voice is simultaneously the creator and the creature. The life within expressed becomes, in the ears of the reader, something that stands up as itself and nothing other; once recognized, the voice of a writer can be mistaken for no one else’s—just as the person herself. It is suddenly the other who calls us, who calls us with her strange language we hardly recognize as we enter into this world, but to which we feel compelled to respond. This is the kind of compelling that arouses our passion and awakens our love. Language thus gradually inhabits my body and fires my neurons; language wakes up my *duende*; and just as I start responding to this call that compels me to voice the world out there, I find myself expressing this voice that has been lingering for so long herein. My giving voice to the world around me is my singling out this very world in its innermost singularity. The world and myself come together as two singular bodies giving flesh to this third we now call “environment”; intimate and private, this environment expresses one singular call—and that is you in front of the work, hearkening to my voice.

5.3.1 Summary 29

The “voice” is understood as both the vehicle of expression (that through which a person can express him/herself, the personal) and as the “what” of expression (“what is expressed”, the impersonal). The voice, unlike a form of expression (style), is not achieved but rather found. The voice is found by learning how to listen to oneself. A

⁴⁰⁵ On the writer as constantly playing with fire, until eventually she is seized by it, see Cixous, *Three Steps in the Ladder of Writing* 118.

person can learn how to listen to him/herself by attending to this voice that calls her/him from the inside. This internal addresser is illustrated through Federico García Lorca's use of the folk-figure of the *duende*, which is that inner force that seems to possess the person as s/he is creating something. Since this force only awakens through *pathos*, through suffering and deeply caring for what is performed and/or created, this force also indicates the person her/his true "calling" in life. When this force wakes up, the voice is not only audible to the worker possessed by it, but also to anyone who gets in contact with the worker's work. The voice is "what" is expressed in the work. But what does the work express? That is what will be elaborated in the next section.

5.4 One of a kind

In the way we have been speaking about the voice, it sounds quite unique. Yes, it is as unique as the person it expresses. Yet we should not confuse uniqueness with individuality, not even with *having* something like an exceptional personality, or just having a personality. This uniqueness we are beginning to envision is more on the side of what we commonly understand as singularity. Everything that *is* is singular. This does not mean that everything that *is* is one, whether *in* itself (self-contained) or *for* itself (self-centered). These two notions as the axes of "oneness" have a rather old story and most of it pertains to the Western thought. Singularity, on the other hand, already speaks of plurality; for a plurality can only be constituted of singulars, and singularity can only come about among plurals⁴⁰⁶. Singularity is the already exposed, its uniqueness always already there, mine to yours and yours to mine; there is no way we can even try to start describing it—we will always be short of words, concepts, ideas, sentences; yet, out of love for the other, we must keep trying to do so, no matter how futile we can recognize the enterprise is: singularity cannot be narrated because it is the very condition for all narrations to be told. Every narration makes the attempt to single-out events, people,

⁴⁰⁶ On the inseparability between singular and plural, see Nancy, "The Inoperative Community" 27. See also Badiou 186-190, where he discusses the concept of "the multiple" in relation to what he calls the "ultra-one".

relations, that cannot be exhausted, not by the narration, not by the narrator herself. This singling out is nothing but recognizing singularity as already there, hearing out what the other expresses just by the very virtue of being herself.

I am speaking of singularity and of the uniqueness it expresses just by its being there because I understand that there is no singular without plural, and neither can be conceived without difference. There have been many approaches to this concept, difference, and we are not going to explore them in detail⁴⁰⁷; let us content ourselves with speaking about the one approach we are going to take here: difference is there; we neither make it nor create it nor grasp it nor comprehend it nor apprehend it... for it is the very condition for all these things to occur. Everything that is presupposes everything this is not; particularly if

⁴⁰⁷ This is, indeed, an old concept, which can be found as a leading trope in Heraclitus' poetry, where "non-being", the principle of all motion, stands very much for what later on will be understood as "difference". It was maybe Freidrich Nietzsche who first attempted to delineate a detailed conceptualization of difference by introducing it in the constitution of language at the beginning of the first treatise of his *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where he sets to perform a philological study on the history of the oppositions between "good/evil" and "good/bad". Later on, Ferdinand de Saussure formulated (from a different, not strictly philological, point of view) that difference (here understood as opposition) was at the very foundation of language; as is clear in the first part of his *Course in General Linguistics*. Almost at the same time, Charles Sanders Peirce's work on language (and its relation to the overall constitution of logic) developed another approach to difference, now more from a mathematical perspective of relations and relatants, as can be found in the second book of his *Collected Papers*. After all this happened, particularly after Saussure's formulations spread, philosophers such as Lyotard expanded this operational system of difference to the very constitution of culture and (most particularly) its power systems, as is clear in his *The Postmodern Condition*. Perhaps the best known philosopher of difference in the Twentieth Century is Jacques Derrida, whose groundbreaking collection *Writing and Difference* introduced to the lexicon another, more nuanced (and at the same time more radical) concept: *differance*, which referred to a deeper comprehension of the Saussurean oppositional system in *langue* (language as a synchronic system of signs) that included the perennial deferral of meaning and the constitutional asymmetry between referent and sign—or, more in his terms, between nature and language. Yet, I believe that the best contemporary account of difference (in what might be the most profound study of it to date) is to be found in Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*, an extraordinary work composed much more in the Heraclitean spirit, that is, right at the edge of delirium and despair.

we assume that everything that *is* is singular. Difference is not; it cannot be represented, there is not in-itself or for-itself in difference, for there is not anything at all⁴⁰⁸. This “is-not”, should neither be understood as negativity nor as negation; it should be rather approached as the affirmation of everything that is, which is different and other than everything else. Alterity is not only the condition of identity in this sense, but it is mainly the condition of uniqueness as such⁴⁰⁹. Identity, as sameness (being the same than itself), is not uniqueness; for this latter is not about *an* essential quality (*quid*) localized (and localizable) as essence (*ousia*)⁴¹⁰. Uniqueness is always already constituted, and therefore always already plural, which means that there is no essence of who I am anymore than there is a substantial “here I am”. The crux of who I am is neither *in* me nor *in* you, but in-between us. This in-between is difference—what separates us is what relates us and what makes us singular. This is not merely ontology (existential or otherwise)⁴¹¹, this is eroticism and therefore poetry, that is, aesthetics and ethics simultaneously happening—let us see why.

Singularity is impersonal because it is in contact with the entirely indefinite, that is, with the in-between. No matter how close I can get to you, how much my flesh can touch yours, how much they can interpenetrate; there is always a little space in-between us, and it is in this space where time passes by. This in-between, as the condition of our very

⁴⁰⁸ This idea can be found in its full light in Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 52.

⁴⁰⁹ For an excellent explanation of what identity has meant in the Western tradition, see Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 212-219.

⁴¹⁰ On identity as essence (as its first principle), see Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (1: 3-8).

⁴¹¹ I am referring here to Martin Heidegger’s project of an existential ontology based on the structure of *Dasein*, (loosely translated as “being-there”), see his *Being and Time* 29-48. These precepts led to (literally) outstanding misinterpretations that provided the basis of exceptional and immensely influential works, such as Jean Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, where this structure of *Dasein* is translated as nothingness by the French philosopher. We are here not preoccupied with the structure of being, and therefore we are not on an ontological quest; we are not concerned with structures at all, but with the plasticity of their very condition (a structure that is not plastic is a structure condemned to disappear—as has happened to all those concepts that had attempted to explain the structure of being only to open spaces of refutation that eventually superseded them).

singularity and uniqueness, as the very condition of everything that is personal, is entirely impersonal. It cannot be defined because we dwell in its very in-definition: it is in-definition where we are uniquely defined. No matter how close we are, you cannot live my birth, you cannot live my life, you cannot die my death. That is the difference.

For a long time, the empiricist paradigm of a *tabula rasa* as describing *what* we are when we are born has dominated most of our Western institutions⁴¹². Anybody who claims that we are “somebodies” just by virtue of having being born, particularly when speaking with scientifically-minded policy-makers, is nothing but a religious radical speaking the fixated language of hocus-pocus. Being “somebody” only by virtue of being born is something that evokes the concepts of “selves”, “cogitos”, “souls”, “spirits”, “*quids*”, all ghosts we have taken long to exorcise out of our juridical and political systems—or so we say: “It is ok if you believe you have one, I, as a policy-maker, may believe so too; but those beliefs shall never get in our ways as to how the law is made and applied: the law is neutral and thus it is for everyone”—or so it goes. The soul, for instance (the non-substantial reality I am and that lives “in” my body as implanted by some supernatural [or absolutely Natural] force, a la Platonic *idea*), still lingered around as a firm belief when autonomy was first conceptualized—at the times of Descartes and, of course, of Kant. These philosophers believed in something “innate”, in a soul, which was to drive our autonomy; they, to be sure, localized it where Plato first found it: in our minds, in our

⁴¹² This is mostly developed by Locke in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which is still regarded as the pinnacle of empiricism. The *tabula rasa* principle can be summarized as: we are our experience, for our experience is what allows us to have mental contents. Therefore, before we have any experience, we are devoid of all mental contents. However, some interesting antecedents to this principle can be found in Aristotle’s *On the Soul*, where he establishes a relation between soul-body in spite of the materiality of one and the immateriality of the other (the concept of *ousia*, developed in his *Metaphysics* is, as we know, structural and not personal; it concerns to all things, to everything that is—and therefore, having an essence, in Aristotelian terms, is nothing like having “innate mental contents”, or ideas, as his master, Plato, would have it). Another crucial antecedent to Locke’s argument can be found in Bacon’s *Novum Organum*, where Bacon tries to explore (and exhaust) the laws that concern the physical world as separate of (and having no causal relation with) God’s laws.

rational capacities, in our intellects. The soul was thus the principle of self-governance; for the soul always knew better, inasmuch as the soul was supposed to outlive us. Immortals are always better qualified than mortals in law-making⁴¹³.

In antiquity, when morality was first conceived in relation to the law, self-governance was one and the same with taking care of one's soul; thus morality was inconceivable without a soul, and hence subjectivity was not only absurd but also unnecessary without a soul; an idea that took full force during the rule of Christianity in the Middle-Ages⁴¹⁴. The whole issue about innateness had to do with an afterlife; that is, with bodily survival. The foundation of the concept of an innate "somebody that I am" was essentially eschatological. To be sure, Locke himself did not completely negate the soul, because he never dared to negate God—being the good Puritan he was. He only unlocked ("what's in a name?", a figure of speech Mr. Shakespeare) the soul from experience: the soul belonged to God, while experience belonged to the world. God was to be feared and believed in, He was the greatest law-maker of all, but God was not about to get busy with our affairs; this is why He gave us free will. And that is what the *tabula rasa* meant to be, being free of all innate ideas so that we could lead ourselves freely in and through our experiences⁴¹⁵. So, since empiricism appeared after Descartes, and since Kant wrote after Locke, this *tabula rasa* principle did not hold sway immediately in the agenda of our

⁴¹³ The best "practical" account on the soul (the soul in action) in Plato can be found in the Book IX of the *Republic*, where he argues for the immortality of the soul and thus establishes a relation (more of an analogy) between the soul and the city, between taking care of one's soul and taking care of the city (the main analogy is with the figure of the tyrant). Regarding Descartes, we can find his actual "localization" of the soul in the Pineal gland (something that heralded the fMRI's and all of today's "Neuromania"); see his *Passions of the Soul* 9-11. Lastly, in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (3-14), Kant championed the importance of the soul (as being simple, that is, in itself) in the constitution of our actual experience of the world, and furthermore, he makes it central to his idea of freedom (which will acquire its full shape in his *Critique of Practical Reason*).

⁴¹⁴ For a full account on the relation between taking care of the soul and self-governance, see Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 45-57 and 172-173.

⁴¹⁵ See Locke Book II.

policy-makers; it was in the midst of an ongoing discussion that lasted for nearly another century.

The Enlightenment (the first flame of Modernity as we know it) did not try to dispense with the soul, it just tried to move it as far as possible from the political realm and leave it as private as it gets. It is around this moment, late 18th C., that the concept of the self took over the concept of the soul when speaking about our private affairs in public. The rise of the subject coincided with the rise of the self; this meaning nothing but a unified mind and body in an agent called person⁴¹⁶. All persons were conscious of themselves (of their selves), and therefore all persons had selves. Each person, as being the living proof of this unification, was identical to him/herself and was thus the one and only reservoir of all his/her experiences. Selfhood was already understood within this framework (empiricism on) as the unification of “bundles of perceptions” into one experience⁴¹⁷. Consciousness, by virtue of making us aware of our environment, performs this unification at once: I experience myself unified because I am conscious of myself. I am thus identical with my experience, my actions, my thoughts, my perceptions, etc.; for I am “one” with them. The materiality or immateriality of this “self” was not something that should concern us anymore in order to recognize it; nor was what it was supposed to be or do after my bodily demise⁴¹⁸. The afterlife of the self suffered a similar fate to that of our religious beliefs: “that’s anything of our business”, said the policy-maker. Yet, this did not solve all our issues with selfhood. Even if we focus on this worldly life, how can we account for the self remaining the same in time? If my body changes and even my mind changes,

⁴¹⁶ For a great historical perspective of this rise, see Martin and Barresi, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* 143-145.

⁴¹⁷ For this definition of the self as “bundles of perception”, see Hume 1: 133.

⁴¹⁸ Aristotle was one of the first philosophers who stopped worrying about the materiality (or immateriality) of the soul (*anima*) and about its afterlife. He remains the definite pioneer of the relationship between the body and the soul (the mind, the intellect). Aristotle’s affairs were those of this world—even his *ataraxia*, this sort of paradise of absolute happiness, was worldly; for the philosopher it was “absolute contemplation”, something like a retiring home for deep thinkers who stop all human interaction to focus on human (and inhuman) contemplation: a peeping-tom of essences.

“what” is this that remains the same despite all changes over time? What is that unifying my-self? Where is it? Is it material or immaterial? Is consciousness material? Is it the brain or all of the nervous system? What if I have a brain injury or I black out or I am in a comma; am I not myself then? How can I say that “I” survived? Welcome to the age of mind games and thought experiments⁴¹⁹. At the end of eschatologies the self found science fiction. The problem is that if I am not myself tomorrow morning, why should I care about what I do today? If I am not the same person in two weeks from now, why should I care for what I do in the coming days? The concern about our self is still, mainly, a concern about our future; though not about an otherworldly future as much as the most mundane one: what am I going to do tomorrow?

This idea of the self as a *tabula rasa* of unified experiences which remain continuous through time has also led the idea of “socialization” as the main crafter of our-selves; since it can be assumed that all experiences are framed within a social milieu. In this way, what I experience is already generated within a set of values, preferences, meanings, etc., that we “internalize” as we “conform” to our social environment (as we become part of this society). Society, in this sense, sounds a lot like a collective personality (a set of values, preferences, dispositions, etc.), and the only thing that makes me unique (an

⁴¹⁹ There are notable thought experiments already in Locke, Reid, Hume and even in Hobbes; but they all sound still quite naive when we put them face to face with the undefeated champion of thought experiments: Derek Parfit. His famous book, *Reasons and Persons*, put this philosophical procedure in fashion among all the North American and Anglo-Saxon tradition (that is, of course, in all Analytic Philosophy); for these were experiments performed without net (the net, that is, of the immortal soul and God almighty). His conclusions were, of course, less than satisfying; for he ended up denying what he set to study in the first place, namely, he ended up denying personal identity for the sake of something he called “psychological continuity” (a mix between Locke’s identity as memory and Hume’s identity as fiction). But having another name for this (Personal Identity, PI) does not solve the question of whether this “P-relation” (psychological continuity) is material or immaterial; following his own thought experiments: it does not solve if it can be transplanted to my replica in Mars or not (if it can be, it is because it is material, thus a part of my body localizable in some of its organs, etc.; if it can be not, it is because it is immaterial, thus not a part of my body, thus something else, ghostly, like, say, a soul).

individual or a subject) is the combination of experiences that I have had, “conformed” and “internalized” during the course of my life⁴²⁰.

Would it still be necessary to clarify that, just as style should not be confused with personality, the self should not be confused with personality either? Psychology (particularly personality psychology) has done with personality what religion has done with the soul: affix it into a more or less well-defined concept⁴²¹; you take one position about it (i.e., the soul is immortal—personality is unchangeable) and you get one result (the soul is otherworldly—personality is in the genes) and you get a way to treat it (do not sin so as to keep your soul clean—take these pills so that you can feel a little less anxious). Selfhood should be distinguished from personality because it should be understood as the very capacity to have a personality (if such a thing exists) in the first place; it precedes socialization and it even precedes our familial bonds. If we reduce everything we have been speaking about of the self to this “unified being” (mind and body), and thus we locate the self in our consciousness (of ourselves), then being conscious is the capacity through which socialization (and all the other stuff) can occur. A person who is unconscious of herself cannot socialize, cannot develop a personality or even have one (at least not a “normally” functioning one). And although this seems too great a simplification, and the *poietical* landscape we have been trying to see so far seems much more complex and rich, we should bear this trail of thought for the moment, since we are starting to dive deep and we are leaving the epipelagic zone behind, so we are not to trust our eyes anymore—though we cannot leave it all to our instincts yet. Some scarce gleams of light still penetrate these waters, we can still see a little bit, and this should suffice to keep speaking about the unification of the self or of the self as a unified (human) being.

⁴²⁰ On the many forms that the concept of “internalization” has had in contemporary psychology, sociology and anthropology, see Holstein and Gubrium 41.

⁴²¹ For an example of this kind of position about the self in personality psychology, see McAdams, *The Stories we Live By*.

If we understand that when we perceive something, we do so already within a unification performed by our consciousness, that there is not “one thing” in perception, but a great many things that are framed within the tag of one experience, then we can come to the conclusion that the very “thing” itself is unified; for when I perceive “e” as a graphic sign, for instance, I do not perceive any of its constituents alone (the indeterminate number of dots that constitute the lines and shades of black over white, the piece of byte it occupies, etc.), but *one* “e”, already shaped and formed. The thing is made into a unit just as our perceptions are unified into a single experience. Maurice Merleau-Ponty points out that when we direct our attention towards something, we already create a field for that thing to appear; he calls it the “phenomenal field”. This field may be “either conceptual or mental”, and it is from this field that any perception can arise as an “originating knowledge” (*Phenomenology of Perception* 29-43). Thus the greatest drawback of our relying on consciousness alone to answer “what” a thing is, is that we end up confusing *what we do* with *what it is*—we end up forgetting that the unity of the thing is something performed by our very consciousness; that the very field in which the thing appears is a field already created by my consciousness. This overlooking is not strange in classical science, where what our consciousness does is lost in the descriptions of the object under study (Merleau-Ponty 57); and it may go as far as making the model that represents the object more real than the object itself—and then, when the object does not fit the model, well, there must be something wrong... with the object!⁴²² This model I am speaking of here thus posits the physical (the object) as being in-itself (self-contained: dots, lines, shades of black over white, etc.) and the psychical (the subject [of consciousness]) as being for itself (self-centered, only giving credit to what is or can be unified by it). The question here, however, is whether this consciousness that unifies it all, that unifies myself (mind-body) is already unified or not.

⁴²² On how this approach has permeated the field of Neuroscience, where the results of lighting colors in fMRI’s have become the standardized measure of consciousness, see Tallis, particularly chapters 2 and 3.

Maybe we can start going deeper by thinking of singularity as something more complex than a unity unified by a self-centered unifying, cacophonous consciousness that is all for itself. Maybe we must start thinking the singular and selfhood beyond the individual self. Singular means unique, but it does not mean indivisible. A singular “something”, like a singular lamp, may be divided into many parts I can perceive and into many more I cannot; it can also be thought of in relation to other lamps different from this and many others similar, or even “identical” (replicas), to this one; but this lamp in front of me is unique in that its relation to me and mine to it is, right now, unique, unrepeatable, irreplaceable: this lamp constitutes now a singular point of convergence between me, the computer, the window, the desk, my notebooks, books, pens and flash drive—and it is as this point of convergence that it is unique. To think of singularity in this way will require us to get outside our comfort zone of the two dimensions of the page and start opening it to its third dimension. Time, in principle, is what transcends relationality and thus creates the possibility of uniqueness as such; for each moment, each second, each instant is unique and cannot be repeated. Wherever time goes, wherever it originates, whichever is its course, we can be certain that once it passes it cannot pass again—at least not in the *same* way. What is unique, what cannot be replaced, is not the lamp or myself or my notebooks or my books, but rather what we create together as we converge, right here, right now. What is truly indivisible is *how* we are together, *how* we create among ourselves a “manner of being”, *how* each of us, in its singularity, gives to this convergence its particular taste.

Once we understand selfhood within this convergence, it is possible to understand how our “gifts”, our “talents”, as being truly ours, are always already offered to the world. Being gifted is not being exceptional, outstanding, better than everybody else (or than a significant number of “somebody-else’s”). Being gifted is being unique, something that may be anything but exceptional under the terms in which we have been discussing it

here: being gifted is having our singularity always already offered to the world⁴²³. Everyone, in this sense, is gifted in her/his own way. This is where uniqueness, as a gift, may be found; inside the chests of what we do *as* we have done it: the book I write is the book that writes me. Montaigne said this first, and he said it better: “I have no more made my book than the book has made me” (qtd. Martin & Barresi, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* 121); consubstantiality, convergence, may give us a different feeling about the self, its uniqueness and singularity. This life I live, this work I make, is a gift that was given to me (my life) and that I give to you (my work). Unlike the uniqueness created by the convergence of the lamp, notebooks, computer, myself, etc., this work I make is a convergence created *by* me, another singular point, a space-time in which we can coincide⁴²⁴. Here is myself, expressed through the voice of my style: it is for you to take it.

5.4.1 Summary 30

The voice expresses the person’s self, which is conceptualized here as her/his singularity. The concept of “singularity” is chosen here over individuality, personality or oneness because it transcends cultural and/or psychological biases, as it grounds the discussion on difference itself (rather than on the features that determine such difference). Singularity, as difference, is always already “out-there”; it is neither an attribute nor something made; it is neither “in” nor “for” itself, but always already exposed. The self is understood in this context beyond identity, for it is singular. Singularity is articulated by what is here called the “in-between”, which is neither in nor out. Therefore, singularity (and uniqueness) is impersonal, in the sense that is beyond the person and his/her personal affairs, attributes, etc. The “what behind the who” is this self defined as singularity. Singularity is therefore a point of convergence with other points of convergence through which singular relations are brought about; this convergence, as the points therein

⁴²³ See Levinas’ idea about “uniqueness without identity” in his *Otherwise than Being* 57.

⁴²⁴ Please, do not confuse this with *agree*, but only restrict it to its most primary meaning: to co-incide, to meet and to affect each other.

converging, is unique. All convergences occur in time, and it is time that renders each singularity unique. This is how one's gifts, one's talents, are conceptualized in this chapter as being unique and yet as anything but exceptional. These talents can be understood as what each point offers in its convergence with others, and therefore as the "manner of being" that these convergences make possible. The work, each work is, in this sense, a convergence that is created by the worker with her/his environment. In other words, what the worker creates with his/her work is another point of convergence that will help to bring about a different manner of being in the world.

5.5 "Just gimme a call"

We are entering the aphotic zone now, where light does not reach anymore, not even gleams or deflections—now we must leave everything to our instincts. And here, blinded by an obscurity recently met, not absolute, but most opaque, we start feeling something *in* there, something that, the more it resides out there, the more it inhabits in here; something inherent, intrinsic, immanent. Would it be possible to speak about transcendence without immanence? Would it be possible to conceive of transmission without inherence? "What" would transcend, "what" would be transmitted then? Transcendence already bears witness to the immanence it transmits, moves, conveys, carries away. Is this immanence an origin, an *arche*? That I am not sure, possibly, though I do not think it would be something original in the sense in which transcendence would be something final, yet another *telos*. A source perhaps? Yes, perhaps a source. But we need to explore further.

We spoke about simultaneity above, now I ask, would there be any plurality conceivable without simultaneity, without several, many, a lot of singulars there, happening simultaneously? No, there would not be. And if we said that plurality and singularity constitute each other, then simultaneity must be most important for what we begin to understand about the singular and the unique. Immanence, in this fashion, describes a form of singularity that is simultaneous with its transcendence: immanence works *in* singularity just as transcendence works *for* plurality. This is a very different *in*(itself or

whatever it may) and a very different *for*(itself or whatever it may). What I perceive, here and now, as time passes by between my perceptions and those converging points in which my perceptions are constituted, is not a resemblance appealing to my memory, or a sensation awakening my thought that thereby reproduces patterns long stored in my consciousness, “retentions” and “protentions”⁴²⁵; what I perceive, here and now, seems more like a huge cluster of immanences emitted from those points with which I (my consciousness, my attention, my body, my flesh, etc.) converge⁴²⁶. When we experience these emissions closely, we can feel how the environment keeps expressing itself; how the lamp, the notebooks, the computer, these letters are expressing something, an immanence that is already transcended as each converges with all these others environing it. “What” is that immanent? Again with our Socratic questions; the immanent seems *in* there, but not *in-itself*, not self-contained, for if this were the case, I would never be able to perceive it. Yet, as I perceive it, I realize, or I recognize, by a hunch or a well-founded intuition, that what I am perceiving was not out-there all the time; that it is *emerging* from *inside* of what I perceive, something opaque as it is not-yet-reflected, and one has this intuition because one can realize that this in-between that separates us and unites us is always already unreflected, opaque, neither folded nor unfolded, unrepresentable and unperceivable. Well, but if it is unrepresentable and unperceivable how come that we are speaking of it? We are not, we are obliquely speaking about what it already makes possible, about the convergence as it had already occurred, but not about *it* as such. Let

⁴²⁵ I am borrowing these two terms from Edmund Husserl’s outstanding *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* 29-34, where he speaks of these two poles in consciousness as they simultaneously (at the same time) formulate a quasi-perception of the most immediate past (what is retained) and of the most immediate future (what is intuited). Paul Ricoeur elaborates extensively on these two poles and formulates a most pertinent critique of them, see his *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3 chapter 1.

⁴²⁶ In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes: “To perceive is *not* to remember, it is to see an immanent significance without which no appeal to memory is possible” (122, emphasis in original). On the difference between what is immanent (and thus finite) and what goes “beyond” it, see Heidegger’s *Being and Time* 13-23. I reckon that the immanence of which Merleau-Ponty writes about refers to such immanence *as it is expressed* by what is perceived and by those others converging therein.

me elaborate this through a very easy exercise: try to define this “re-” and this “co-”. If you have succeeded in doing so, now try to define the hyphen “-”. Likely, very likely, you had at most been able to describe its function, but almost certainly you have not been able to fill it with content, conceivable *in-itself*, all on its own, but necessarily in-between what it separates and unites. This is what happens with “space” as such; it is only mentally conceivable as distance, only if there are points through which we can provide ourselves with frames of reference, namely, things like the space *between* the chair and the desk, and the desk and the coffee table, and the coffee table and the ceiling, and the ceiling and the floor, etc. There is no such a thing as an absolutely unoccupied space—that would be like an absolute distance between nothing and nothing else.

Paradoxically then, this in-between devoid of all immanence is what gives us the intuition of immanence in everything we perceive, because, as was said in the previous chapter, everything that we perceive might turn into an experience, which is necessarily mediated by language and memory, for which it is thereby necessary to *know* the signification of what is perceived, or, at the very least, recognize that what is perceived has some signification of its own. We are reading now, but not with our eyes anymore (there is no more light in this place remember?) but with our voices and with our ears; we are reading the voices of what surrounds us through the ear of our own perceptions.

What is immanent is imminent; it just happened, just like that. There was nothing before it but space, but in-between, which thereby became some-thing, another point of convergence brought about by convergence: *ex nihilo*, but with no *ex* anymore: *nihilo* just itself. There was no-thing and now there is some-thing, just like that. There was something intangible forming (or helping to form, shaping) our convergence, namely, the in-between us; but now, something tangible has appeared (it has even lost its hyphen, the umbilical cord of graphemes), and now we can touch it, interact with it, create another convergence wherein we can recreate ourselves. Immanence means this being enjoined, and being enjoined is what makes it possible to enjoy and to be enjoyed—for no joy

springs from absolute solitude (if such thing is even possible): a singular constituted something amid other singular constituted somethings. Then again, just as I (insofar as a point of convergence) and you (insofar as a point of convergence) are sources of this recently born third point of convergence that originated in this in-between us, this newly arrived something is a source too (insofar as a point of convergence) and whatever *nihilates*, whatever originates between us two will necessarily (to lesser or greater degrees) include this third.

Being original hence entails being simultaneously originated and originary, which is what I formerly meant by being a source. This simultaneity seems to overwhelm the very foundations of the in-between and, to be sure, those of the sources themselves; what is transmitted seems to be exceeded by the very process of transmission itself. This simultaneity, this process, precedes the formation of the sources, and (this will be a risky assertion, immersion) even of the in-between as such. The in-between is not “nothingness”, “space”, as we saw, not “empty” but always already a relation of distances amid converging points. It is thus that time, as it transcends space, as it literally goes through it, creates the first simultaneity and the first in-between of all. This moment when space and time first converged is, of course, similar to that moment that precedes myself, even to the one that precedes my own unconscious, and it can only be told obliquely, by way of myth: “Space-time”. What remains enigmatic are not the two points, the two sources, but the hyphen itself: time *through* space and space *through* time.

Theoretical physicists, when read carefully, numbers and formulas notwithstanding, are performing something as speculative as Parmenides or Heraclitus, or, better, as Anaxagoras or Pythagoras performed some two thousand years ago (slightly more); their first causes (water, *apeiron*, “is-not”, “is”) sound as fictional today as “Big Bangs”, “extreme heat”, “gasses” or “black holes” may sound in some thousand years from now; and just as mythical as Bergson’s *elan vital*, or Aristotle’s *ousia*, or Plato’s *eidos*, or Derrida’s *differance*, or Heidegger’s *Dasein*, or Levinas’ *Other*; each expresses

something very different, and none of them is devoid of complexity, but they all coincide in one thing: the concept is overwhelmed by what the concept is trying to point at. It is this preceding simultaneity that is an originated source; a source that is originated at the moment in which it originates other sources, other points of convergences. This original source is transcended by its very originality; it is neither visible nor invisible, neither tangible nor intangible, neither singular nor plural, neither nothing nor something, neither divisible nor indivisible: it is neither, it is both. The original *in-itself* could be understood as the original depth that separates as it unites; this depth is entailed by every possible distance—horizontal or vertical, this is just the same, it all depends whether you are diving or swimming, whether you are flying or soaring. The top, the bottom, the original *fond*, as Jean-Luc Nancy calls it in French (“The Inoperative Community” 6)⁴²⁷, has no ground, has no form, has no origin at all; it is anarchic in every possible sense (with the exception, perhaps, of anarchy as an ideology, if such a thing can ever exist). The original depth, the in-between precedes all other dimensions and all other matters, precedes time and precedes space; what separates them and unites them: the kernel of dimensionality itself. We are not speaking thus of any-thing in particular any-more, we are only speaking of degrees amid everything and anything, “intensities” as Deleuze calls them (*Difference and Repetition* 227): the strength, the force with which a convergence occurs and is sustained—which can only be measured by means of passion. Intensity is a matter of passion, and passion (*pathos*), as we know, is a matter of flesh, and flesh, as was explicated in the previous chapter, is a matter of care and attention, of responsibility and love. To add yet another word to the list of “first causes” just displayed at the beginning of this paragraph, I shall call this original depth: *preseedence*.

Am I saying that space and time are passionate about each other, that they love each other? Well, I do not mean to sound gossipy, so I will not tell anything I do not know; I

⁴²⁷ *Fond* is *fondo* in Spanish, which always makes for a beautiful alliteration when referring to this other originary simultaneity mostly explored by aesthetics: form and content, *forma y fondo* in Spanish, *forme et fond* in French, retaining the romantic alliteration of a wonderful copula; you know, Romance languages.

ignore the details about the erotic life of time and space as they converged for the first time—though there must be something as they keep converging. I only know about my passion, the one with which I keep converging with everything that surrounds me, and with which I keep trying to surround myself (those people and things I *can* love, those with whom I *can* create an intimacy). The third dimension of depth can only be perceived, can only be experienced (and therefore can only be measured—can we measure anything of which we have no experience at all?) by means of *suffering* it, by means of passion and by means of flesh; that is, by erotic means. This in-between, as we very well know, does not occupy a space, for it *is* the space that distances those points therein converging. Depth is that dimension that rather than occupying a space *makes* a space for interiority, which is what we have gotten to know as intimacy. Intimacy is interiority by other means: the intimacy of our homes, the intimacy of our bodies, the intimacy of our thalamus (and hypothalamus?), the intimacy of whichever space we have created to *be* intimate (in discourse [“can I tell you a secret?”], in practices [sleeping, cooking, bathing, etc.] and so forth). This place you are dwelling as of now, aphotic as it is, is intimate. This *preseedence* is the place of in-fusion, where those sources there converging are infused, simultaneously fused and fissioned, and where a new third might be brought about, might be originated and originate a new source of fission and fusion, of in-fusion—just like that, through an act of love. We have already said that this is how skin is made into flesh, and how spaces are made into places. Now we know what *preseeds* this, what constitutes the groundless soil in which all the seeds released by interaction, by sharing, by whatever figure you want to use for convergence, are spread and what may constitute a newborn source. Time, again, is so important because it keeps passing by, going through these *preseedence*, and is seminal in erecting the space of convergence, in creating the conditions for it to keep track and record as to *how* the convergence looks like so that it can become a “manner of being”, a form of interaction, of sharing. Therefore, this space of convergence starts to develop a past, a history that is marked by the uniqueness of the sources there converging. This past, this history, will transcend the ancestry of whichever newborn source that might come about as a result of

convergence, for it will bear the very ancestry of convergence as such; it will bear the traces of what any convergence creates (a certain intensity, a certain degree of intimacy) since its very origin. Let us think of this convergence as a silent conversation, for a conversation (in its very etymology) bears the traces of the possibilities of *conversion* it entails, and let us thus think of the newly arrived source, this just enjoined point of convergence, as joining to (and enjoying of) this conversation at which it arrives, just in the middle of it: as a wonderful interruption instantly inscribed and instantly turning into a startling possibility, there, embodied, incarnated.

Preseedence is always possible. Yet we cannot conceive possibility as such; trying to do so would be like trying to think difference as such (or space, or time, or the hyphen, etc.). We know of possibility only when it stops to be so, when it affirms itself and then appears as multiple, as possibilities; all tangible, all visible—or potentially so. Possibility alone means anything, everything, whatever or just the same; that is, it does not mean at all. The region of *preseedence* is possibility, this is the groundless soil where, as not-yet-formed, as not-yet-occupied, is suddenly populated by something as it comes into being. *Preseedence* is always already finished, it neither begins nor ends, it is a beginning that initiates but that is not initiated, because it has been always already finished, always already there; it gives a point of departure, but it is not a point of convergence. These words I am writing now were not here before, but the page, the blank page over which they are inscribed, has always been there, in all its depth: immutable, eternal. This piece of space I occupy (my body as it enwraps my entrails and my insides, my body as a developing depth⁴²⁸), this piece of eternity of which I got the lease and I embody, and I incarnate, is the depth that I enclosed, shaped and enveloped since my very conception, the depth that develops with me, that grows with me, that precedes me and will proceed my death. It is here, *in preseedence*, where the seeds of my soul sprout; some do, some do not—it all depends on the season. It is here where, as I listen, as I live, I receive the seeds

⁴²⁸ On the idea of nothingness filled with being, see Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* 75.

that grow to be myself. It is here where immanence dwells: *preseedence* is the soil of the soul.

It is thus that my means of expression, as *preseedence* itself, were there before I came. I just need to recognize them as the other calls me and as I respond to this call. The conditions to express myself (just an expression to say: to express my immanence, what *preseeds* me, the depth that grows within me) had long lingered before the conditions for me to be expressed. Yet, these conditions were and are there, for the convergence would be impossible without the conditions through which each source can express itself. The thing is that, since I come to occupy a formerly unoccupied space within this convergence, since I come to envelop this depth that now develops within me, my means of expression will be necessarily different from those of the other sources. I am singular and unique, and so are you. These means of expression, or these expressive meanings if you will, or these *how* of meaning if so I prefer, are the creative power, the original power that lurks inside me: the power to express myself is the power to recognize you and vice versa, for this is the very power of finding and founding meaning⁴²⁹.

The intensity with which I respond to these calls from the other, the passion imprinted in my responses, can transform some of these calls into “callings”, which are those expressions that stick in immanence, that find fertile soil in my *preseedence*, and that therefore linger *in* me until there is no other way *for* me: my *preseedence* is populated by the grown, ripen sprouts of these callings. This is what the Romantics called “vocation”, but they were unfortunately oblivious of the Protestant metaphor from which this concept

⁴²⁹ Nietzsche’s “will to power” could be understood as this creative power, as this original power. This is most apparent in the way in which he works through this concept all throughout his *Gay Science* and in the way in which he quasi-defines it in the third part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Gilles Deleuze’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s concept as being primarily a creative power that necessarily generates more power is also relevant to this discussion. See Deleuze, *Pure Immanence* 73. This creativeness intrinsic to the concept of power may be also behind Schopenhauer’s conception of will, which, as we know, was seminal to Nietzsche’s elaboration of his “will to power”.

originated, which made us answerable to the almighty, supernatural, cosmic CEO that gave us our gifts and called us to act accordingly so that we could serve Him better.⁴³⁰

Vocation notwithstanding, this calling is concomitant with what we have come to call “talent”. The border between hard work and talent is still so difficult to determine today because it has been approached through a similar method with which “inspiration” and “perspiration” were formerly approached. In our current world merit (hard work) seems to be more deserving than talent (ease). However, in practice, we know that neither could come about without the other; talent may be more prominent once or twice, and might save us a lot of time on this or that occasion; but without hard work, talent becomes nothing but an exotic ability. Do this often and not only will all the sprouts dry, but the soil will become infertile, and, at some point, in some season, nothing will stick: our *preseeds* will be an ordinary depth alright, but it will remain undeveloped; one to which we are not able to listen anymore. It is no secret that all great works we value and celebrate today (*duende* aside) came from people who were working all the time. Genius notwithstanding, we know that Mozart was a hard worker and that even Rimbaud’s teenage romps of exuberant poetry were the result of a feverish affair with words produced by a young man who was writing all the time; what he did afterwards is not of our business; it should be enough to know that he stopped writing for a long time, and that at some point he was not even able to write a decent letter⁴³¹. Spontaneity and improvisation take long labors to emerge.

⁴³⁰ It was John Calvin who exchanged this work ethics for a more mundane finality, and so he revealed his flock a divine memorandum that said that it was everybody’s duty to bend their vocation so as to fit in those professions that would bring them the biggest income; accumulation replaced customer service—no wonder Calvinism served capitalism so well (C & C). For a more extensive account of vocation as conceived by Protestant faith, see Svendsen 20-24. On the Romantic interpretation of the vocation of the bard as a calling coming from the Gods (though not from God) see Moore 175-176.

⁴³¹ On Rimbaud’s “lost ability” and the story (hypothesis) as to why he stopped writing, see Vila-Matas 75-78. On Mozart’s obsession with work and a most enjoyable tale as to his creation of *The Marriage of Figaro*, see Robinson, chapter 8.

So this “unconsciousness” that seems to take over when a gifted, talented person is in the middle of a creative romp should not be understood as “inspiration”, as if breathing the voices of amusing muses who thereby dictate wonderful things to this Aeolian worker. This has been just a way to divert most of us from our very callings by instilling the belief that those gifted are the “happy few”, and those who are not-so-much (most of us) should come to terms with it and work upon merits, which in today’s culture has been another way of subsuming ourselves to arbitrary authorities and to even more arbitrary working hours. In the way we have been speaking about it, everything that *is* is singular, and every singularity is unique, which means that each envelops and can develop her/his/its originary depth, its/his/her *preseendance*. We all have been listening to a calling since a very young age; ever since we started to respond (which was, simultaneously, when we started to express ourselves). It might just happened that some people (ok, many people) have failed to respond to these callings. If we understand this *preseendance* as preceding those external conditions that allow us to express ourselves, that they are there in spite and beyond ourselves and others, then we could confidently say that a talent (a gift) is that which can emerge from the minimal possible conditions—almost by the very virtue of a person’s being alive.

The calling voice penetrates the soil from which your calling sprouts, and it requires you; it just do not let go when left unattended—it haunts you till you answer to it. Responding to it becomes your utmost passion: compelling, vocal, evocative, provocative, vocative: vocation reloaded. These are all the reasons you need to respond, to act according to the designs of the sprouts you start to grow: the garden of yourself that turns into your driving passion; your *pathos* that is your *ethos*: grow what you will offer to the world, which is nothing but those limited sources (points of convergence, other selves, living, dead and yet-to-come; person, animal, plant, thing—each in its/his/her vocative uniqueness) that surrounds you and with which/whom you converge, and those who/which, by means of what you do with your work, may come your way. It is in the stems of the sprouts that you grow, that become your soul, that are your soul, your-self, yourself, where the breath

of life circulates and forms the sap that is later synthesised as the voice that will infuse, fuse with your body, your flesh, and with everything that you express (your incarnated meaning). This breath is what you offer to the world, to the out there, the in-between: the breath that becomes the bread of the living soul: the breath that nourishes it.

5.5.1 Summary 31

The concept of “immanence” is discussed within the framework of its mutual constitution with the concept of “transcendence”. What makes immanence and transcendence possible is the original depth that separates and unites everything that is with everything that is not; that is, immanence and transcendence are possible because what is in-between them is all depth. In this context, immanence could be understood as signification, and transcendence as the possibility that this signification has of converging with other immanences. Each point of convergence is thus approached as an immanence, and in this sense as a source of expression of what it/s/he signifies. Each immanence converges with its/his/her environment (i.e., others) with which/whom it/s/he brings about other points of convergence, other immanences; in this sense each immanence is a source of what is brought about in its/his/her environment. Each immanence, each point of convergence is consequently understood as an “enveloped depth”, that is, as something that physically envelops the in-between, the original depth wherein it/s/he takes place. The concept of “time” is brought to the discussion in these terms, as the primordial depth produced by its convergence with “space”. The original depth, the “in-between” is hence the condition for time and space to converge. It is called *preseedence* to every “in-between” as it is enveloped by a singularity. This *preseedence* is the condition for any possible interiority to emerge, and hence for any possible intimacy between every possible convergence. Each convergence is thus understood as an intimate conversation insofar as every convergence already entails a possibility of conversion by inevitably bringing about a new point of convergence. The concept of development starts to become relevant at this point, as a developing depth that grows within everything that grows (within every living thing). The “calling”, a person’s talent or gift, is issued from the environment (from

others) and originates in each converging point's *preseedence*. This calling is understood as the call to develop oneself, to express oneself. It is concluded then that the voice arises from this calling.

5.6 "How're u doing"

We just left behind the aphotic zone and we are entering now the bathypelagic one. Not only does light is absent in here, but also the resources start to become scarce.

It is true that here, with few resources, we find the most important resource of them all: the calling. This calling enters in us and dwells in our *preseedence*, from which it arises as a most distinct voice: sprout by sprout, string by string of sounds that voice ourselves, our surroundings, all other sources with which we keep converging. It is not that we have *no* choice; we do, but all our choices (limited and restricted as they are) are already shaped, formed within this *preseedence* from which they emerge and from which they arise. In our *preseedence* lurk our voices, in our *preseedence* lurk our styles, for in our *preseedence* lurk our selves. This is where every seed (each with a mixed load of tradition, history, voices and the singularity of the sources from which it comes about) roots itself and from which each develops, grows, and, when well cared, when well attended, starts to flower and yield crops that leave ourselves as other seeds, flowers and crops that shall help feeding the in-between where others could, might, will come. This is life.

Life entails growth. If there is no growth, there is no life. But growth does not imply the expansion or increasing of our physical dimensions, of our height and width: neither a taller nor a fatter body makes place to a greater interiority, to a greater intimacy for its original depth, for its *preseedence*; since growth mainly entails development, and development is all about maturation. This is what is truly oriented towards the future, rather than our mere survival—not even survival within self-constancy. A self-constant person who survives many years with all his *preseedence* dry and all his sprouts spoiled,

with all the garden of himself abandoned to bad weed and sunburn, is still *the same* person he was yesterday; yet, he is nothing but bound to survive for survival's sake, mechanically, living a most mediocre life, for everything he does (so long as his *preseedence* is dry and nothing really grows in his garden) can only be bound to mediocrity, to mechanical imitation: his survival is a mere reflex. Growth, on the other hand, is about developing ourselves according to our callings, maturing our sprouts and getting acquainted with our *preseedences* so that we get to know their cycles, the best seasons to sow and the best to reap. Our *preseedences* are only knowable to us by their crops; we only know about them as they are already exposed, already out there: expressing and spreading what is therein produced, originated, created, grown, developed and matured, reaped and sowed. Self-constancy means thus a doing rather than a state of perennial essence. Growth is gradual. Maturation is slow. Radical transformation, overnight transfiguration, looks like what happened to Gregor Samsa: "one day I went to sleep feeling a bug and the morning after I woke up a bug". This is a terrifying picture⁴³². Metamorphoses are only desirable in fictions—but quite abhorrent in our flesh; our bodies can only take change slowly, gradually, little by little, step by step, like a drop of sweat slipping through our skin, like a smooth diver fondling in the sea. Development, to be sure, cannot be appreciated *as* it happens, hence maturation itself is only comprehensible through its crops: we get to know about it *after* something is done, finished, culminated—though no *telos* itself can be envisioned *before* it comes about. It is not like growing peaches and having *peaches* as the finality of your growing. It is more like growing *whiches*, something of *which* you know about only after it is ripe and ready to reap. Being well-acquainted with your calling (and thus with your *preseedence*) gives you more or less an idea of the kind you will get to grow.

Development, as we are understanding it, is more like an awakening, a seed that sprouts and grows, of which we take care until it shows itself as fully *mine* and that can be thus shared so that it can be fully *yours*. What emerges from this awakening is yourself, your-

⁴³² See Kafka 1.

self, your very soul as it is at a particular place and time: a unique integration of “here’s” and “now’s” that are now transformed (*poietically*, slowly, gradually) into a veritable expression of your self. The calling is thus a “wake-up call” for you to start your day, your life awakes. This is the journey from awareness to self-awareness: I can only be aware of myself because I have been already expressed. Now I can say: “here I am”, at the same time in which I can say: “there I was”. This is a waking call for the witness to open her eyes, her ears, her nose, her pores, her mouth, her: here.

In order to wake up, however, we must be asleep; and this is most important. An insomniac witness is something to be wary of, somewhat unreliable, irritable, even neurotic: a witness who is afraid to dream is a witness who is afraid to live—too suspicious, too distrusting... of himself⁴³³. We must sleep to be awakened, we must sleep to wake up, and to do so, we must trust ourselves and our surroundings. We must rest; we do not want tired witnesses. Have you seen a sleeping face? Or, better yet, a face sleeping peacefully? There are few things more beautiful than this. There is a most pleasurable expression of trust manifested in relaxed muscles and a joy apparent in having all the flesh’s defenses down. There is always great risk in sleeping, for you are most vulnerable to all kind of predators and disgraces. To sleep or rest in peace (not “rip”, please, but only temporarily, a body that breathes) is to be trustful of the intimacy you have created there where you are asleep. A face sleeping peacefully is a face provisionally devoid of habits, idiosyncrasies and yearnings: it is an innocent face, dissolved in the intimacy it dwells, in the depth it occupies—almost one with it. Then you wake up, you are called to your

⁴³³ This is another of Levinas’ metaphors with which I have never felt comfortable; i.e., the autonomous, selfish self as the one who is in a sort of slumber that prevents her from seeing “the other”. Thus the witness is, for him, truly an “insomniac witness”. I have made elsewhere a critique to this figure, so much used in the literature of “witnessing” (i.e., Kelly Oliver and bell hooks) and also by other readers of Levinas’ works (e.g., Jill Robbins). See my “Here say yes” for a thorough critique to this metaphor and to its several limitations in producing a true testimony of one’s life. I hope that by now you already feel compelled to read this paper and are doing all your best to have it (and to have it published, if so you can—but I do not want to sound pushy, though pushy I am).

passion, to your calling, and to your garden you go. As you work, the garden grows, and so do you. The seeds coming from the outside, from the other(s) surrounding and converging with you, merge with the soil of your immanence, with the very properties of your original depth, with the nutrients and resources of your *preseedence*, and once they merge, they e-merge as always already many constituted in one: “plant”; but its many sprouts (flowers, leaves, branches, roots, crops and seeds) bear witness to the very plurality from whence it came about. It is worth noting, however that the structure of the “plant” is irrelevant. It can grow vertically as a tree⁴³⁴, or horizontally as a creeping-ivy, or rather flexibly as a rhizome⁴³⁵; it just does not matter. Actually, gardens are notable for their variety. There might be all of these structures (and others I might be leaving out due to my limitations as a Botanist) in any given garden. What is important for our discussion is that sprouts emerge already *merged*, that the emergence of the sprouts of the self, as a matter of fact, is an *e-mergence*.

There is, however, an important element we will have to see more in depth; an element that is as part of development as growth itself, namely, learning. For what has been said to this moment, our talent seems not to be the product of learning; yet this does not mean that we do not learn anything whatsoever. The thing is that we learn *from* our talent(s), *from* our gift(s); by responding to its calling we start to learn *what we can* as much as we learn *what we are*: learning means in this context waking up to our creative power(s). At

⁴³⁴ As we know from Aristotle, the tree has been the most recurrent metaphor to illustrate the way through which we organize ourselves and the world in our minds. This metaphor has been for a long time the cartographical equivalent to organigrams in epistemology. For a most detailed account of the history and development of this metaphor, see Hacking.

⁴³⁵ The “Rhizome” has become, since its very publication, a sort of banner for “alternative epistemology”, one that dispenses with the hierarchical categories of linear logic (represented by trees, a la Porphyry). This figure was developed by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze and the psychiatrist Félix Guattari in the introductory text of their celebrated *A Thousand Plateaus*, the, equally celebrated, “Rhizome”, which was to describe the style of the whole work and ended up becoming the basis of an alternative, non-hierarchical (though, sometimes “schizophrenic”), approach to epistemology.

the end of the previous section, I said that talent was about *that* which develops under the minimal possible conditions; I will try to illustrate this point. Listening to a strong calling in, say, music (the sounds of everything around you stick in your *preseeds*, you can listen to them sequenced, ordered, and you can fill some gaps between sound and sound; as when listening to a bird chirping while a squirrel cracks its nut), means that you do not necessitate of great institutions to develop it, not even know the language of musical notation, this may help (i.e., it helped Bach or Mozart or Beethoven or Satie), but you may only need a musical instrument (i.e., a guitar for Jimi Hendrix) or you may only need a computer and some underdeveloped software with an electronic box called synthesizer (e.g., Brian Eno or Vangelis) or you may only need a piece of well-tempered wood, which you had gotten to know as *tumbadora* and the palm of your hands (i.e., Chano Pozo), or you might only need your voice and nothing more. Insofar as you are alive, you are surrounded; inasmuch as you are embodied, you are always already converging; *there* is everything you need to learn about and from your talent, to develop and to grow it. You only need to care.

The infrastructure of what we are *capable* of (what we *can* do) is in all our bodies, it *preseeds* us and is awaken *in* us. As language, unconsciously produced almost simultaneously as it is uttered, our talent(s) is(are) infrastructurally set to work almost simultaneously as we start to work. Learning thus cannot be understood as a two-way cause and effect (teaching and learning) process, but rather needs to be approached as plural as it is. No matter how many gadgets we may have to aid our memories, to enhance our learning capacities, to perfect our working tools, what we do and what we are capable of doing is always already supported by this infrastructure in which working takes place, from which work grows. And no matter how great the gadgets we acquire, they will not make it up for not having developed a trade. A trade is a developed sprout; it is talent ripe and ready to work. This can only be developed gradually (for regardless what a great genius you may be, your body can only take change gradually, remember?), over time, and with hard work. Despite everything you have read on the Internet, on the margins of

your e-mail account (if your address is that of a company that relies on advertisement), there are no talent enhancers, neither testosterone nor creative boosters; you cannot learn a language in a matter of hours and you cannot develop a trade instantaneously: this *is* a lie. For a talent, insofar as infrastructural, to develop, the self must develop with it. It all seems to indicate that everything that comes effortlessly make for selfish, conceited and, ultimately, repetitive, redundant styles. As we saw in chapter two, this is what happened to GCI's first collection of short stories, *Así en la paz como en la guerra* [Writes of Passage], which the writer (who was writing at that time short stories only when he felt like it, and who thought had found his voice quite effortlessly, for his style seemed unique from the very beginning) grew to reject as "too consciously artistic and contrived" (Souza, *Guillermo Cabrera Infante* 48), and whose influences (Hemingway, Faulkner, Sartre) seemed not only too obvious, too consciously exalted, imitated, but also greatly underdeveloped. A style is developed, a voice is found, a self is growth.

It is thus that the learning process is a maturation endeavor wherein ideas, preferences, dispositions, attitudes, etc. (either personality or whatever you may call this unit) change. A concept that may be crucial in all your work may be as crucial during all your life, though it may change substantially as you "grow up". Words, in GCI's case, went from committed agents of political and social change to spaces wherein delirium and frantic freedom could be limitlessly poured to "geographical" spaces of erotic constitution. We have seen a little bit of this transformation in the previous chapters⁴³⁶. Intentionality, in this way, that which orients our consciousness (a la Husserl⁴³⁷), as a paradigm through which a work could be approached (which is the intention of the author, or the work, or whoever?⁴³⁸) is most fluid in the terms we are discussing it here. It is the way in which we

⁴³⁶ But more on GCI in a moment, we have not gotten there just yet!

⁴³⁷ For more of his concept of "intentional consciousness" (and the huge debt this concept owes to Cartesian doubt) see Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, more specifically the first meditation.

⁴³⁸ This (now considered a most old-fashioned) approach reached its climax during Romantic hermeneutics. It was Wilhelm Dilthey who gave to hermeneutics a scientific

approach “the object(s) of our consciousness” that is changing constantly and that constitutes this approach [“what” is approached] differently over and over again, not the “object” itself. We might probably consider the work as a process of growth, acceptance and change within a whole body of work; wherein the self is voiced through style, and thereby met, converging with myself (and, luckily, with my style): wherein one *faces* the voice of the other. I like the trope of the face better this way, as a verb: to face; for this requires a huge amount of honesty. When this verb is devoid of honesty, it should be replaced with: to mask. Lack of honesty can only translate into a deformed style—ugly, unsightly, underdeveloped⁴³⁹.

This may give us a different perspective on death. Although we have not gotten that deep so far, we can speak a little bit about death. What we can say about death is that just as *preseedence* precedes us and proceeds us, this space, unoccupied before I came in, can never be the same once after it has been occupied by me. Just as the traces of what precedes me (my ancestry, but also the ancestry of the “place” where I came in [myths, history, etc.], the ancestry of the very actions in which I am inscribed [traditions], etc.) are inscribed in my *preseedence*, “I” inscribe myself in it and leave my traces there once after I am gone. Whatever e-merges there, in a now unoccupied, vacant *preseedence*, will necessarily include those traces I left on my way out. Something similar happens with everything that surrounded me and thus converged with me; it just can never be the same.

turn thus performing a synthesis between “History” (objective approach to the text) and “Understanding” (subjective approach to the text) so as to reach the author’s intentions, “what the author wants to say”. This was the main target for the New Critics’ “Intentional Fallacy”, thus looking for intentionality elsewhere, that is, in the work itself. The complete reverse of authorial intentions can be found in Roland Barthes’ approach to authorship. In his “The Death of the Author”, he claims that the only intentionality that matters is the reader’s, as this is the only intentionality of which we can be certain. See Dilthey, *Hermeneutics and the Study of History* 229-234; Wimsatt and Beardsley 468-470.

⁴³⁹ For a most interesting account on how Paul Cezanne’s lack of honesty translated into the underdevelopment of his style, and how his style started to flourish again as he started to be honest with himself (and with his work: face to face with it), see P. Smith 63-66.

“What” is *that* which sticks there, that is inscribed in the very “in-between” and in the sources there converging?

What emerges (me, you, him, her, it) is always already merged, and thus always already many. As it is fused and fissioned, it is in-fused in the difference it makes just by virtue of being there: “Being *in*” is already a “being *as*”. The difference I inhabit, the “in-between” I dwell, in which I appear and where other sources converged, is always already incarnated *as* something (boy or girl; Canadian or Mexican or Cuban; Montiel or Navarro or Cabrera; upper middle-class, wealthy or poor, etc.). I am always already many, even before I started to “other” myself, even before I responded to you and I expressed myself for the first time: I am always already in an helix-like motion in which my life takes place⁴⁴⁰.

This *e-mergence* thus speaks of an original motility, a power that is there, acting and in action, moving before I even started to move “my body”: my body itself, and everything that constitutes it, owes everything it is to this power, to this motility, in which it merged and from which it e-merged. Before thought, before consciousness, there is power; there is a capability to think, the capability of being conscious, of *moving on*. We are always already in a flow (time as it passes by and through) wherein being is always already passing: To-be refers precisely to this, to a verb that constantly carries oneself from here

⁴⁴⁰ Of course, this helix-like motion is most known today as the form of our DNA. But we should not forget that the helix has been a more than common trope to represent time since very ancient times: a helix of cyclical time. It is found in Japanese mythology and also in Chinese, as well as in many Prehispanic cultures, such as in the Mayan and the Aztec calendars. The linear time in which we live (and believe) today is quite a recent invention, mainly a Hellenic invention. For an interest account of this latter development from the viewpoint of poetry, see Thalmann, *Apollonius of Rhodes and the Spaces of Hellenism*, mainly chapter 2. For a most complete account on time in Prehispanic cultures, see Read chapters 2-5 and Bricker & Reifler Bricker chapter 3. For the representation of time in Japanese lore (from early Buddhism to the end of the medieval period) see Bowring 15-33. For an early view in Chinese thought about time as being helix-like, see Laozi, mainly book I. For an insightful study on early commentators of the *Tao*, see Chan 159-191.

to there, from this to that (and even from this to this)⁴⁴¹. Everything that *is* is the verb that sets and keeps in motion *that* for what the verb stands for; which stands for *how* this verb is enacted, *how* it is incarnated: the *way* the verb is to take in each and every one of us is one's own style.

Imagination, in these terms, draws us closer to this original motility in the e-merging of being. It is true that everything that we can imagine is enfeebled in the face of anything we can touch; that perceiving is always more attractive than imagining, for the former entails an experience that in the latter is always already incomplete, left to our very capacities to compose what in perception is entirely given to sensation⁴⁴². If tomorrow, somebody proved that Hobbits really exist, that they are alive, and that Hobbiton can be visited and is open to tourists, it is likely that Tolkien would lose a significant amount of readers: for in the dilemma of reading *about* Hobbiton and visiting it, perceiving it, touching, smelling, tasting, seeing and hearing it, this second option would have the upper hand. At the face of a great storyteller, who can almost take us to the places and times where the events s/he tells occur, we find, first of all, someone extraordinarily gifted to instruct us through the actions, events, places, characters, moments, etc., that s/he

⁴⁴¹ On the relation between being and the verb “to be” (and to the relation of this verb to time), see Levinas’ concept of “temporalization” in his approach to apophysis in his *Otherwise than Being* 39-40. On a similar note, the renown quantum physicist, David Bohm, got to a somewhat resembling concept in the second chapter of his *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*: the “rheomode”, which is the form through which everything that *is* is in relation to a time in which its order (its “being as”) constitutes its appearing as a whole (its “being”). In this manner, the prefix “re-” is implicit (and implicated) in every verb we utter; it is a “once again”, wherein each “again” entails a difference. Besides other influences that may escape me, I believe it is relevant to point out that Laozi’s concept of “Tao” is of considerable importance to Bohm’s “rheomode” (and we should not forget that *Taoism* and *Buddhism* were not strange to quantum physics). Regarding Levinas, I believe that the Heideggerian voice of “On the Origin of the Work of Art” (where Heidegger finally concludes a point on temporality that he started in his *Being and Time*; that is, the point that “the world worlds”) is quite apparent in his own conceptualization.

⁴⁴² On imagination as lacking the vivacity and vitality provided by what is given to perception (“enfeebling it”), see Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* 4.

describes to us. Description becomes a form of instruction (both instructions we follow and instruction in the sense of education). Yet, this storyteller's greatest ability is to create in us a dream-like state in which we can actually *feel* what is going on there. A good storyteller can always teach us how to dream. This is what creating and learning our trades (not only as storytellers, but as creative people we all are) is all about: teaching ourselves to dream and to convey thus this dream-like state in which the other can immerse him/herself *as if* experiencing what happens therein. In our dreams, in those that are particularly memorable, we have maybe flown, breathed underwater, died, hugged our absent loved ones (dead or otherwise), etc., and we know very well that as the dream is happening we are *there*, experiencing those sensations, *suffering* them in our bodies, while we are not exactly perceiving any of these sensations; we neither die nor fly nor hug our absent loved ones; all this is gone when we wake up—and yet, as we know, we are not the same. This is what dreams can *do*, invoke/evoke those conditions and those sources through which a certain convergence, experience, event emerges, and thus invoke/evoke our sensations therein. Not only, of course, convergences we know, stored in our memories, experiences we have had or events with which we are familiar; but many that have been nothing but childish cravings (i.e., flying, breathing underwater) or utmost fears (e.g., dying) or grand illusions (i.e., hugging our absent loved ones). This is because in our dreams reside both our powers of invocation/evocation and that very moment in which the original merging from which we came into existence occurred: our dreams are the enactment of the ancestral moment in which something merged and e-merged from the first time; a moment that is kept in the very event of our own e-mergence⁴⁴³.

⁴⁴³ This is the approach that, for instance, Jung gave to dreams. His approach (as other than Freud's) included the buried knowledge of others preceding the dreaming subject; others that were there, at that very place where the subject is dreaming now, hundreds, thousands, hundreds of thousands of years before. This is what his concept of "collective unconscious" (and, of course, of the "archetypes" as the very forms through which this "collective unconscious" manifests) meant to encompass; as he tried to offer a psychological complement to Levi-Bruhl's anthropological work. For a most extensive account, see Jung, particularly part I.

Our capacities for recreation bear a most proximate relation to these capacities of invocation/evocation as well as to this original merging. These capacities are beyond mimesis, and even beyond *poiesis*, for they are the conditions for these to happen⁴⁴⁴. This is how motility can be imagined, and furthermore, how can it be recreated: because everything is always already moving—including ourselves, including ourselves while we sleep, including our eyeballs while our eyelids are closed. Even when we are “resting”, we are already in a state of passage, in a flow of which we perceive nothing directly, but only *as* we move, *as* we suffer, *as* we wake up every morning. Dreams move us from one day to the next—not sleep. Motion is the very tissue of which sentience is made of. What we are able to invoke/evoke in our work is this quality of “aliveness” in what we would otherwise perceive as an inert object: a book, a canvas, a guitar, a plate of *chilaquiles*⁴⁴⁵, etc. And it is because we *feel* these objects’ “aliveness”, because we *suffer* them within our own flesh [no plural form, unfortunately], that these objects become so meaningful for us (financial value aside, though that too, if so you wish).

This is where meaning finds (and finds) its seat: in mobility and aliveness, but more specifically, in our living flesh and in our moving bodies. Possibility thus understood is always already embodied, incarnated: it is a possible motion, a possible life (as those we dream and suffer in our dreams). Depth is never static; it is alive, and therefore moving constantly; we do not move *in* depth, we *are* depth: our flesh is the depth of our skin, of its pores, follicles, nervous terminals, dermis, epidermis, etc.; it passes through us and us through it; life transcended through motion: life is depth in motion. Life thus cannot be understood either from its origin or from its end, it has no *arche* and no *telos*, but many,

⁴⁴⁴ See, for instance, Scarry’s approach to this kind of perception (dream-like) as a “mimetic perception”. Scarry 7.

⁴⁴⁵ Typical (no, magical, magnificent, monumental) Mexican dish, usually served for breakfast, that consists of *totopos* (dried tortillas) and a spicy sauce made on the basis of green or red tomatoes (depending the color of the dish) and chiles (mostly serranos and jalapeños).

and many more we have (and will have) no clue. Life goes nowhere, but it is the source of everywhere; it in-forms the living, and the living is in-fused in and with it.

Life thus transports us just as dreams do from one day to the next; dreams are like the blinking of the soul, lubricating its surfaces, its epithelium, and relieving its flesh from a hard labor journey. In our eyes, an instant lasts a glimpse. In our soul, an instant lasts a night (or whichever time you have to sleep). Dreams teach us a different kind of transition, one in which we can invoke/evoke everything that merges and e-merges in us during our labor journey of multiple and contingent convergences⁴⁴⁶: it is the depressurizing process through which we can swim to the surface once again without having our heart at risk or even our heads exploding. How would we be able to appreciate, comprehend, apprehend, just perceive a passage if there were no blinking? If everything is in flux, if everything is in passage, because time does not stop, and we are in this perennial passage, how would we distinguish this passage if not by temporarily interrupting it? If all is passage, then there is no passage. This interruption, when we see, is blinking; when we walk, is stopping; when we live, is sleeping. Sleeping is being in a death-like state; and if our body *knows* we are not dead, it is because we keep moving, and we keep dreaming. Dreams, like us, arise from the “in-between” (days), and thus emerge from an anarchic convergence to which not one source can be designated; but always many, plural, more than we can count. This is the anarchic power we find in dreams, just as the anarchic power we find in ourselves: its sources always already converging, merging, other than themselves. This is why dreams transcend interpretation, just as ourselves: we overwhelm interpretations; dreams overwhelm interpretations. Helene Cixous writes in this regard: “Like plants, dreams have enemies, plant lice that devour them. The dream’s enemy is interpretation” (*Three Steps in the Ladder of Writing* 107). This is why works of art overwhelm interpretations. This is where the verb is always already in-fused: in what everything is, which is what everything begets. Work

⁴⁴⁶ On the significant participation that dreams have in teaching us to write and to transition in writing, see Cixous, *Three Steps in the Ladder of Writing* 79.

begets work (or so it should), works of art beget works of art (or so they should), dreams beget dreams and being being. Criticism, explanation, at the face of art, can only be done by way of art; by way of creation—or it is not to be.

5.6.1 Summary 32

Self and style, just as the voice, lurk in every *presecedence*, and therefore self and style can be understood as being immanent. Life is conceptualized as the growth, development, maturation and expression of this immanence, of this interiority. The “future” is for the first time mentioned as something that primarily concerns this development, rather than as something oriented by/to a particular *telos* (this discussion will gain in complexity in the discussion of faith in the eighth chapter). The calling to each *presecedence* is what awakens the self in terms of self-awareness, in terms of bearing witness to his/her life and to that of his/her environment. Trust means to be trustful of the intimacy created with the environment, trustful enough to fall asleep, rest and, more importantly, dream, for it is claimed that every work teaches people how to dream, as it teaches people how to conceive of possibility, and thus enhances every person’s power of invocation/evocation. Meaningfulness appears in this context, as the interiority that is brought about in every converging point. These concepts of dreaming (in terms of invocation/evocation) and trusting will keep growing and will become seminal in the discussion of the future in the eighth chapter. The basis of learning is also discussed in this section. The basis of learning is in this *presecedence* from which everything that a person learns and can learn is shaped. In this context, people do not learn to work, they rather learn from and through their work. This is how the concept of trade (formulated in chapter 2 in the context of practice) is discussed, now in the context of developing a talent. The concomitance of self and style is hence made through the concomitance between trade and talent. Style is the form that each verb takes in everything that a singularity moves. This means a different approach to intentionality, which is approached as something fluid and in constant change. Change is understood in terms of fluidity, as something that a person necessarily does through every converging point s/he helps to bring about, each of which is a trace

that a person inevitably leaves in the depth s/he occupies during the time s/he is alive. This latter discussion will be of capital importance in our discussion of death and the time of the author in chapter 8.

5.7 "Come on in"

We are approaching now the last possible depth. The abyssal zone is in front of us; we are entering the deepest of the depths. Here, there is nothing but an entry; an interminable, perennial entry: a threshold. Now we are in pure passage; neither in nor out, but affectively traversed by the waters where we dwell.

Where do we go from here? We are arriving at the threshold. As you have already been able to gather, the borderlines have all dissipated in-between the words we are saying. Like poetry, like *poiesis* itself, the borders have become fluid, unstable, so much so that we cannot even gather one edge when this has already become other. There is no purity here to find. Nothing pure, nothing one, as such: in and for itself. Pure passage is no purity, but a plural purity, if such a thing can exist. Yes, it can, for we can reckon now that there are no opposites anymore, but only mutuality, convergences through which everything that is constitutes everything there is. For what we can recognize, no zero degree can be found, no neutrality; this is just a dream of reason, and, as Octavio Paz used to say, dreams of reason make for most terrible nightmares⁴⁴⁷. This is not a dream, but a drama, a drama instilled by fear, a desire aroused by terror: Style-free texts, dead already, ghosts freed in a ghost town: pure reason, real logic. Is this not an oxymoron? Logic is as real as number 8 or as this sign of =; it can only be *made* real by means of meaning, by means of incarnation. This = has meaning (even if only functional), just as this 8 (even if only in context), just as this logic (even if not too logic). Definition, in the sense of a dispassionate (and thus naively thought neutral) description, *is not* meaning; it is \neq from meaning. There is no such thing as a dispassionate meaning and even less so a neutral

⁴⁴⁷ I am paraphrasing, of course, the closing statement of the last essay of his *The Labyrinth of Solitude*.

meaning⁴⁴⁸. Horizons are “in-betweens” as experienced by us: they are where familiarity starts and ends, where the foreign finishes and begins, where I start and you begin, where you finish and I end. Horizons are “in-betweens” always already meaningful to us.

Where we are now, in textual terms, in this text you are currently reading, is precisely at the dwelling place of metaphor; we have just gotten at the threshold of its residence. We knock, nobody answers, because there is no door. We do not knock, somebody answers, because there is a door. An answer emerges. The world comes in its way. A question is merged. Shape comes in its way. Metaphor thus reveals a way of being (“this” is “this” and it is not “this”) that translates into being in a certain way. A doubt is submerged. Thought comes in its way. Yet thought shrinks in the face of metaphor; it comes to accept it before it can even represent it—and after too. There are metaphors that cannot be represented, that transcend thought in that way, that cannot be thought. These are waiting, though some are not. Some have already entered their way out. Some have already made the very conditions for thought and doubt and questions and answers: for metaphor dwells in simultaneity⁴⁴⁹; that which thought keeps unfolding and which logic keeps explaining (from the Latin *explanare*, to flatten, to make plain). Metaphor is the style of meaning, its very voice. I incarnate what I am and what I am not (what I was, what I might be, what I will be). Metaphor is *autotelic*, just like life, just like us (when we come to like ourselves, to enjoy ourselves). We start making metaphors even before we can comprehend them⁴⁵⁰, because we begin incarnation before we begin to know anything at all. We come to threshold before coming in or out.

⁴⁴⁸ This approach to reason (and to meaning), this mission of giving it back its *pathos*, has been the kernel of very much every post-kantian work, from late 18th and early 19th C. Romanticism to Kierkegaard to Schopenhauer to Nietzsche to neo-nietzscheans (i.e., post-structuralists) and hermeneuticists (from Gadamer to Ricoeur).

⁴⁴⁹ On metaphor and simultaneity (“copula”) in grammatical systems, see Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* 256.

⁴⁵⁰ See Geary 161.

This is the difference. I recognize the difference and I am recognized as different: I am different: singled out, singular, always already addressed singularly: “you”, that is “I”. I recognize myself: a multi-layered flesh, singularly meant, incarnated, expressed; this is “me”. I recognize myself in what I do, there is a correspondence in-between, connecting and separating us: uniting, binding us; this is “myself”. To recognize myself in my writing is to recognize the very difference in which I come about as me; it is to be able to recognize the correspondence with which the convergence of “I”, “me” and “myself” brought about this “new” thing, namely, this work. Guillermo Cabrera Infante wrote that reading old pages, written a long time ago, was like looking at old photographs, wherein one recognizes that person as myself, as the me I used to be; though always having this sense of seeing someone alien and, at the same time, being able to nearly remember myself at that time, as if reproducing in my memory those moments in which I thus saw myself, and recognized myself thus: “*De alguna manera ahí está uno, pero uno no es uno exactamente*” [In some way there is oneself, but one is not exactly oneself] (*Exorcismos de Esti(l)o* 14). You find your words yours, in some way, and it is *in this way* in which they are all yours; even if there is this feeling of strangeness at the face of them. This feeling of reading one’s work and finding this correspondence (strange as it is), is a feeling that is only known to the writer; for the reader always *knows* that what is written therein was not written by her. No matter how close you feel to your reading, to the material that you read, to the writer herself, you just know that you did not write these pages; you just cannot recognize yourself in this work in *that* way. Montaigne could have maybe said: “I have no more read the other’s work than the other’s work has read me”. You may find that you identify with a character or with the story or with the style of the writer—you may even find that the writer is herself your twin soul; yet this correspondence, this transparency (odd, strange as it may be) is a feeling only known to the writer. It is only the writer who can listen to the original tone of his voice, to the very timbre of his original depth, the sound of the calling that awoke his *preseendance*: the voice behind the voice.

This relation with one's language (as with one's former "me's", the self I was) is much richer and much more complex than any one-to-one correspondence. This is "meaning in such a way", to mean something, to incarnate it in such a way that appears as if for the first time; as if it really were an invention of your own—when the only thing truly different, truly yours, is yourself, your voice, your style: *how* you mean *what* you mean. Ideas are never new. Ideas, as such, have been lingering around forever; we just open new points of access to them, and these accesses [is there a plural for this word?] can have so much power that they seem to overwhelm the idea itself, as if the access were, indeed, inventing the idea. The wheel was never new; it was only a new access to motility, to locomotion and to a shape that has been here all the time: the circle. In the wheel, these elements were merged into one "new" thing that opened new accesses through which we met motility, locomotion and the very circle in a different way. So, please, we are not inventing anything here; at the very best we are opening a little passage, a teeny-weeny access to many, many, many old ideas and to the work of a person who is so old that he even died of it. This is to inaugurate meaning, to found it and find it: to mean in such a way.

The tone, the original timbre, the voice behind the voice, possesses the writer's body and, for a moment, fuses the writer with the very text s/he is writing, with the very thing that s/he *is* at that point (writer writes while the voice voices while the text texts); something that is tangible only for the writer herself. This is experienced as unparalleled joy; a happiness only similar to those moments in which one is fused, in-fused, con-fused with another person, with our loved ones; where, for some brief period of time, you are your work; and then again, you are not, you are the something else, the something other than your work; and then you kind of feel that the work works itself. This is style in all its splendour, where the word words itself, finds itself completely incarnated: the word is made flesh. The self selfs itself, finds itself completely incarnated: the self is made flesh. The style styles itself, finds itself completely incarnated: the style is made flesh. There is no rigour coming from anywhere else but from the text that seizes you, to which you

respond and for whom you find yourself in absolute responsibility: there is no freedom coming from anywhere but from your writing the text. The word thus expressed bears the traces of my *preseedence* and therefore it bears everything and anything preceding and proceeding me, what I was not and what I will never be: but what was before me and after me. I find myself before my behind and after my back: a true diver. A witness is not if s/he does not express him/herself; for these traces s/he bears can only be borne by his/her expressions, which are, always already, simultaneously, her/his responses. This can only occur by listening to your calling, which is the source and origin of all my responses and the means and ends of all my expressions.

Now you can spread the word that will, to some extent, spread the style, spread yourself, spread your voice. Meaning, you see, can be reproduced, repeated, “iterated”⁴⁵¹; but it is only the *how* of meaning that can be contagious, that can be transmitted, that can be recreated: this is what I should call *spreadssion*.

And this is where we find ourselves face to face with Bustrófedon, that character who is not so in *TTT*, who I said was GCI’s very imagination, but who now I say is GCI’s very voice. Do you remember his piece: “The Death of Trotsky as Described by Various Cuban Authors, Several Years After the Event—Or Before”? In this piece, central in *TTT*, we learn that Bustrófedon had just died due to a malformation in his brain, which was responsible for generating all those verbal wonders we know by others, some of which we are able to read. As Rosa María Pereda asserts: “It is this malfunctioning brain that made him say wonderful things; but it doesn’t matter now, science, the physicians ... cannot turn the mystery back; because although Bustrófedon is dead, the word has already been said” (97). No science can really reveal the mystery that pushed Bustrófedon’s wondrous verbal wizardry: no anatomic defect can explain the voice behind the voice—it can be

⁴⁵¹ In his “Signature, Event, Context”, Jacques Derrida explains this concept of “iteration” as the repeatability to which a concept is subjected as it is repeated, while the deferral of its meaning, as set in *differance*, is also iterated, repeated.

localized nowhere; not because there are no good scientific reasons to conclude that this malformation may bear a causal relation as to how he produced this out-of-this-world wisecracks, a machine of *ocurrencias*, but because these reasons mean little when facing the fact that Bustrófedon is no more and that Bustrófedon spoke his words, and that these are indelible traces in the *preseidences* of all his friends, particularly of those who were in love with words; that is, mainly Silvestre and Arsenio Cué (this latter a sort of nemesis, who had a love/hate relationship with Bustró because this latter always found his Achilles' ankle and mocked his pedantry in public over and over again): Bustrófedon's traces are everywhere in the book, are the book, made the book: Bustrófedon is the voice behind the voice, the original tone of this book. After his death, his friends went to Bustrófedon's place to find the only thing he "wrote", which was not exactly written, but recorded on tape: "the only thing he left". They played it and found themselves as if at the very midst of everybody's voices. Bustrófedon never wrote because he was all voice and no-body, hence every-body. The mystery of his genius can always be explained again, his file can be reopened and studied and restudied—but his words, his way of meaning, are no more: they had been *spreadssed*.

The piece ["The Death of Trotsky..."] consists of the narration of the murder of Leon Trotsky on the hands of Mornard (aka Santiago Mercader) as if told/written by seven of the most paradigmatic writers of Cuban literature; in order of appearance, they are: José Martí, José Lezama Lima, Virgilio Piñera, Lydia Cabrera, Lino Novás Calvo, Alejo Carpentier and Nicolás Guillén. Each narration is a parody of the style of each of these writers. But it must be said that these were the most paradigmatic Cuban writers in GCI's eyes; the most influential in his literature (if we restrict ourselves only to Cuban writers, and bearing in mind that many of GCI's main influences were non-Hispanic writers, such as Sterne, Joyce, Carroll, Mallarme, Hammett, and the list goes on and on). These parodies are a way of recognizing the other's singularity by in-fusing himself, his very voice, in the other's style. They are so good that it is really difficult to tell where the parodist ends and the "parodied" begins. This is more apparent in those writers whom

GCI knew well and for whom (besides their works) he felt most sympathetic. This is the case of Lydia Cabrera, Virgilio Piñera and Lino Novás Calvo. Reading these three parodies is as if reading the writers themselves; Piñera could not be more Piñera than in this “Afternoon of the Killers”, with his quirky observations, his acute sense of the absurd, his refined use of antithesis, his astronomic self-confidence as an artist, etc.; Lydia Cabrera could not be more Cabrera than in this “The Initiate Takes the Cup that will Make him a Cupbearer”, with her translucent intelligence and elegant prose always at the service of her informants’ voices, etc.; and Lino Novás Calvo could not be more Novás Calvo than in this “Hold that Tyrant”, with his journalistic eye, his short sentences, his perfect mix of registers, etc.: if they were in another context, i.e., in a collection or an anthology, you would swear they were written by each of this writer’s making fun of their own mannerisms. Martí’s parody, on the other hand, is more of an academic exercise; Martí is there, for sure, his convoluted language and his baroque images accompanied with his constant allusions to history (past and yet-to-come: making history) are there alright, but at a tangible distance, that makes the parody all the funnier. This is not what happens with Lezama Lima, his extremely baroque, obscure and impenetrable style is taken to the limits of incoherence, and it ends with a paraphrasis of his *Paradiso* (“quote like one possessed who has just been penetrated bodily ... by a soft assegai unquote”⁴⁵²), which are attributed to Trotsky’s “infamous last words”, thus making this parody a little more irreverent and playful; though GCI’s respect for the poet is everywhere to be read. This is definitely lacking in Carpentier’s and Guillén’s parodies, and this is because GCI always expressed his utmost respect for their work, but his utmost antipathy for their persons (both benefitted from the Cuban Revolution, though Guillén was eventually ostracized). This dislike is clearly discernible in the parodies. In Carpentier’s “Lot’s

⁴⁵² This is one of the most controversial lines of *Paradiso*, which included many erotic allusions that were taken by Fidel Castro’s moral police to the letter, one of the reasons why the book was so poorly distributed and no second edition was published right after the first one was sold out. The line is “me siento penetrado como por un hacha suave” [I feel penetrated as if by a soft axe/hatchet], which was one of the few more or less direct allusions the poet would make to his homosexuality.

Steps”, we find the writer’s erudition portrayed as ridiculous sophistry that translates in an urge to tirelessly describe everything with, literally, absolute detail (every object becomes a justification to display his knowledge by enunciating each of the parts of which it is composed), or the writer’s musical scholarship translated into silly instructions for the reader (the piece should “be read in the time it takes to play the *Pavane pour une infante defunte*, at 33 rpm”⁴⁵³). The parody of Guillén’s poetry, on the other hand, does respect his poetic dexterity while GCI has no mercy in denouncing his ideological sins; for he is presented as a Stalinist who celebrates with his poetry the assassination of the traitor [Trotsky] and invokes all the *Abakuá* saints (mainly Changó and Yemayá) to protect both Stalin and Mornard/Mercader. All in all, what is crystal clear in these seven parodies is GCI’s extraordinary ability not only to mimic others’ styles but to distinguish himself from them. This differentiation is the very act of recognition, in which we simultaneously appreciate GCI’s voice (or Bustrófedon’s for that matter) while we are touched by these other writers’ voices. It is no coincidence that the interruption of this piece (of this recording) comes just as Bustrófedon is starting to merge all these styles at the middle of a delirious ending to Guillén’s poem, as he starts to incorporate other influences (notably Shakespeare, but also Carroll and Quevedo for instance) and, through this merging, we start listening to Bustrófedon’s own voice e-merging—only to be interrupted by (who else?) “the voice of Arsenio Cué”, whose doctrinaire, envious intervention emerges dominant, just to censor him: “what the fuck are you saying, that is not Guillén”, and then Silvestre’s and Rine Leal’s voices:

phantasmal, in the background and my own voice [Códac’s, who is narrating], superimposed on each other, but the voice of Bustrófedon is heard no more and this was all that Bustrófedon wrote if this could be called writing although if Origen (Silvestre’s suggestion) and Early Stanley Gardner (my own modest contribution) had done the same twenty centuries late, then why not him? But I don’t believe he had the intention of *writing* (Arsenio Cué’s italics) at all but rather to teach Cué himself a lesson by absolutely refusing to write a single line however much Silvestre insisted ... Although Bustrófedon has said very plainly on this and other occasions that the only

⁴⁵³ It is so curious that GCI’s next major book would bear a parody of this piece by Ravel: *Infante’s Inferno*, that is originally called *La Habana para un Infante Difunto* (which plays with the homophony between *pavane* and *Habana*, and with the meaning of *infante* [infant, that in Spanish is a child, not a newborn; and his family name] and death: *Habana* was the place where his childhood went to die. But more on this book in the next chapter!

possible literature was written on the walls (increment out of excrement), when Silvestre said that he had already said just that thing and that he had written an essay with that title (B. excreted on him ferociously when he said it and explained him exactly what the similarities and differences could and should be between essay and assail and hustle and asshole) Bustrófedon said that he was talking about the walls of public conveniences, men's or gent's, bogs, W.C.s, johns, cans, loos, escusados, shit or pisshouses and he gave a recitation of his analectasy or selected pieces of Faecetiae (recited, of course, by Arsenio Cué) such as In these old and 'allowed 'alls/ Use the paper not the walls or My mother made me a homosexual..." (277)

And it goes on and on and on, with superimpositions, with superimposing voices, with Bustrófedon's slowly receding: slowly turning into a true "gallery of voices".

At the end of this piece, however, we get to know that Bustrófedon actually *wrote* something of his own: his memoirs left "under the bed with a chamberpot as paper-weight". Silvestre gave them as a present to Códac, who reproduce them verbatim in what we get to know as the next piece/part/section(chapter?) of the book: "Some revelations", which are everything but that; they reveal nothing: they are play over play over play with words, with language, with structures, with meanings: it is the voice behind the voice's true autobiography, as if GCI's style could write its memoirs, as if his *preseedence* could tell its story: nothing but simultaneity battling against itself, tenor and vehicle wrestling on a textual ring. As you see, even though works work and words word, they cannot speak, only *we* can give them voice; *preseedences* *preseed*, but they cannot give accounts of themselves, a *preseedence* cannot write its autobiography, it needs you to voice it, to give it expression: this is what *it* is all about.

As I told you, we have just reached the *fond*, the bottom; and just as I said, there is nothing of the like. As depth kept moving, as its threshold kept moving us, it rotated, and now we are up again, even if you think that we are down—wait and see at the turn of this original depth, of this *preseeding* words and texts, at the turn of this page, and you will find yourself right at the top again (and right to its left): safe and sound.

Now, come on there, do it, turn it: I should be waiting at the other side for you.

5.7.1 Summary 33

The discussion of meaning is taken again in this section, now in the context of its necessary relation to passion (*pathos*) and, therefore, to meaningfulness (affection). It is in this context where metaphor is discussed once again, in terms of the horizons, the “in-betweens” it joins and thus in the way it becomes the textual materialization of meaningful convergences. Metaphor is in textual terms what immanence is in physical terms: a source of convergences. Expression is therefore of utmost importance for both self and style, for their concomitance, emergence and development in time; but, more importantly, it is of utmost importance for a person to recognize her/himself in the work s/he had done in the past, just as s/he can recognize her/himself as s/he was in the past. This kind of recognition opens an access to the worker’s originary voice, to her/his *preseedence*, that is exclusive to the worker. Expression is therefore understood as “what” converges with other expressions in every new enveloped depth, in the production of every new point of convergence. Expression thus understood is what is called *spreadssion*. It is in this context that the way in which GCI’s use of parody in *TTT*, perhaps the work in which he used this resource the most, is a form of recognition not only of the other (the parodied voice) but of his own voice, as it is incarnated in the quasi-character of Bustrófedon.

CHAPTER 6:
“GOTTA GET GOING” (NOSTALGIA NO. 2 IN M MINOR [METAPHOR # 1]):
RECONFIGURING THE PAST IN THE RECONFIGURATION OF ONE’S PLACE

6.1 Motion of Order

I should write this chapter as a chronicler. And so I will: for time and again, I should be noting and noticing, taking notes and translating them into an ordered text, notes of events as they are ordered in time and space; not a narrative yet, though not a happening anymore. Somewhere in-between narrative and happening, between witnessing and event, testimony and memory, is the chronicle, and thus the chronicler behind it. Detached yet not radically remote, outsider but not outright objective, singular and not entirely subjective, the chronicler is at the midst of what happened, always already ordering it into events that can be told, that can be narrated, that can be displayed, showed, exposed... but doing neither; for s/he neither writes nor tells; s/he only puts a little order, crafts the events evenly and symmetrically, synchronically: what occurs in dissymmetry, diachronically, disorderly, arbitrarily, from everywhere and anywhere, is made into a chronicle—an account that is not a narrative yet. What I am really saying here is that this task I am undertaking now is really very common, too mundane, almost banal. Just think that this is what we do on an everyday basis and almost all the time as we are awake: we make the templates of our life-stories. This has been called by some scholars “autobiographical memory”⁴⁵⁴, but, we should admit, perhaps by the end of this chapter, that it is nothing but awareness itself.

⁴⁵⁴ It is possible that the first explorer of autobiographical memory as such was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose *Confessions* differ from Augustine’s work in that the former’s emphasis was in telling his life-story (confessions, scandals and spicy lies aside) whereas the latter’s emphasis was in finding divine illumination (and reconciliation) by opening himself to God—it was performing in writing the ritual that was designed to be performed in privacy, always addressed to a priest. Yet the philosophical investigation of this “autobiographical memory”, its participation in shaping who we are, how we behave, act, see ourselves, etc., is a somewhat recent invention. We can find this in full force in Paul Ricoeur’s *Oneself as Another*, where autobiography stops being a literary genre to become the very source of our personal identities. It is important to note that this idea

So, I am coming back to our character, but differently, in a side-to-side relation, or better yet, face-to-face; very much as peers in this daily trade we call “being aware”, which is so often called “being alive”. The rationalistic assumptions to which this last claim takes us will not be tackled here, for they were attended and countered in the previous chapter (awareness is not in the mind only). For the present chapter, we should content ourselves with sitting next to Guillermo Cabrera Infante as we watch him chronicling his life, and do so as chroniclers, almost as voyeurs; though this is not a fine comparison, not yet, will be, later in this chapter, but not for now. So as chronicler I start, taking notes and noting what I noticed. Now sit back, get comfortable and listen, for this is not a short episode, and even less so is it a small event.

6.1.1 Summary 34

The question about to which degree is “awareness” constituted by an “autobiographical memory” that orders the events happening to the subject in a particular space and time will be tackled in this chapter. It will be argued that “being aware” already entails “chronicling one’s life”, where “chronicling” stands for this “ordering” events in time and space.

6.2 “Just follow me”

We are approaching the concept of simultaneity, again. In order to understand the kind of memory that makes it possible to have, create, generate, etc., an ordered time and space, we should dwell in simultaneity once again. Just try to think about the minimum

could be found (quite clearly, though greatly underdeveloped) in Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* as well as in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. For an extraordinary exploration on Arendt’s ideas (of “life being a story” etc.), see Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, whose subtitle paraphrases Arendt’s unforgettable words: *Life is a Narrative*. On a very acute commentary of Wittgenstein’s ideas on the relation between memory and autobiography, see Hagberg.

condition for a narrative to be assembled. It was said before that it was organization (chapter 1 and, later, with more detail, chapter 3). And in the previous chapter a great deal was spoken about the originary source of ourselves as being always already embedded in simultaneity. But neither organization nor simultaneity can be conceived without a *sense of order*, for they are not static, nor do they happen statically. If there is time, then there is movement, motion really, which is the *thingly* character of movement: this latter designates the “something that moves”, whereas the former designates movement itself, static, as a noun—motion then. We should draw attention to a first aporia though: does motion move or do things move in motion? This aporia has had all kinds of approaches and answers, from physical⁴⁵⁵, to philosophical⁴⁵⁶, to aesthetic⁴⁵⁷, to... and we are not

⁴⁵⁵ We can find the earliest approaches to this aporia from the well-known (though mythically exaggerated) quarrel between Parmenides and Heraclitus, where the former affirmed that motion could not *really* exist, whereas the latter affirmed that motion was, indeed, the very condition for anything to exist. Later on, it was Aristotle who tried to reconcile these views (and others, including Plato’s approach to it) in his *Physics*, where he concludes that motion is a temporal condition for measurement, but not a condition as such for existence; that is, motion was the sufficient condition for a thing to move, but was not the sufficient condition for a thing to exist. This latter account was extremely influential for later thinkers, such as Euclid, Galileo, Newton and even Kepler (cf. Hawking). It would take quite a long time for Western culture to reconsider Heraclitus’ position, which has found a most favorable home in quantum physics, where motion does seem much more important for things to exist than we would initially assume—at least, motion and movement cannot be entirely distinguished from each other. For a more detailed account on this position, see Feynman, *The Character of Physical Law*, more particularly chapter 6.

⁴⁵⁶ The “other”, non-physical approach to the relationship between motion-time-existence, is what we might call the phenomenological or, if you will, the “experiential” approach to it, which will have as its main pioneer Augustine’s enquiries in his *Confessions*. This approach was much more influential in accounts such as Leibniz’ (mocked by Newton, who was, as we know, not such a nice chap, as Hawking observes). However, Augustine’s approach was also immensely influential in more contemporary thinkers, such as Henri Bergson (cf. *Duration and Simultaneity*), Edmund Husserl (cf. *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*), Martin Heidegger (cf. *Being and Time*) and Paul Ricoeur (cf. *Time and Narrative*).

⁴⁵⁷ The problem of the “representation” of motion has been a major issue in every art, but particularly in those that are most static: architecture, painting and sculpture. Most of the preoccupations of the artists of the Renaissance dealt with this problem. Giorgio Vasari

going to engage with them here—we do not need to answer to either of these questions in order to go where we want to go.

Motility was its recurrent name in the past chapter, if well I recall. The question, however, is not whether motility (the quality of everything that is *in-motion*) moves, but rather how is it that we can perceive it. Do we perceive motion or do we rather perceive *things in motion*? Do we perceive motility or *things' motilities*? That is, again, a paradox that will lead us to one of those idle philosophical exercises that so much resemble puzzle-making. For our discussion, this is of no importance either. What is important is that we do perceive that things change, and that therefore they move, for this is how we perceive that things move. Whether we perceive change itself or even whether there is an “in-itself” for change is irrelevant when what we want to answer is *how do we make some order for these changes*? Basically, we perceive something being in some way (i.e., in some position) and then we perceive it being differently (i.e., in another position or set of positions)⁴⁵⁸. But this is not the whole story. We do not perceive only the thing *as being* in some way, but we also remember ourselves *as being* in some relation to this thing; and now we are also in a different way, for we bear a different relation to the thing that changed⁴⁵⁹. Still, this is not all the story. Not only do we remember but we also *imagine*

(the artist best remembered for the coinage of this term, with which he baptized a whole era), for instance, asserted that this was one of his “biographed” artists central concerns, and one of the main reasons to which it could be attributed the extremely fast development of these arts (painting, sculpture and architecture) during this period (cf. *Lives of Artists*). In literature, this has also been an important concern, if somewhat more covertly attended. For a fascinating account of the central role of motion (and the depiction of motion) in literature, see Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book*. Of course, trying to discuss how motion has been, more than a concern, overtly central to the development of theater, film or dancing since their very origins makes for a most idle exercise.

⁴⁵⁸ Again, the canonical relationship between change and motion goes all the way to Aristotle’s *Physics* and reaches its full form in Euclid’s principles, which were, as we know, seminal for Newtonian mechanics. For a more “modern” account of our perception of change (and thus *of time*), see Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 32-40.

⁴⁵⁹ Again, too, it is Augustine who best (in the Western tradition) enquired the relation between ourselves, our memories and the relation we bear to things and to change. This

the thing *as* it changes. For one thing is impossible, that is, to perceive *all* the changes the thing is suffering before we are able to perceive it again, now changed, now differently. This means that we are not able to *follow* this thing during its *entire* trajectory. And the same goes for ourselves.

It is actually this quota of imagination that helps us synthesize the myriad of things happening around us and to us, and also to give some order to our memory of the thing (and of ourselves) as it moves and after such movement stops—or at least until my perception of such movement does: from memory number 1 to memory number 5 (thing in position A to thing in position B), my imagination enables my understanding of those 3 mid-memories that, if a little blurrier, are there, as stages *marked* during a specific trajectory⁴⁶⁰. From the football as being impacted by the forward's left foot to the football at the end of the net, there are some stages that I also perceive, if fuzzier: the ball passing the central defender's head, the ball bending to the left, the ball passing the goalkeeper's fingers. Some order has emerged in this synthesis, in which I simultaneously perceive numberless things and in which what I remember and what I understand are simultaneously fusing by what I imagine and what I experience—and the thing is, this happens all the time.

Within this order, there is a “chronos” that is constantly emerging and, more importantly, constantly continuing. This “chronos” is a timeline, a line in which the past is enjoined to the present and to the future—and swiftly so. We said in chapter 3 that there are no tenses for time as such, or at least that we cannot prove there are. Now we can say that were there no tenses in time *as we perceive it*, there would be no changes, there would be no difference. We are pretty much sure (and so far we have not crossed our ways with any

was of seminal importance for Henri Bergson's distinction between “real duration” and “perceived duration” as elaborated in his seminal *Duration and Simultaneity*.

⁴⁶⁰ In his *Difference and Repetition*, Gilles Deleuze writes about “an originary imagination synthesising memory and understanding [that performs] a passive synthesis” (71).

human group claiming otherwise) that time does not stop. Time passes by. It just did. It is doing it. It will do so. In this way, it would not be crazy to affirm that nothing is at rest, that everything keeps moving, keeps changing; whether I perceive it or not⁴⁶¹. But, in order to perceive these changes, I need some rest—I need a break. Ok, granted! This is why our timeline is so crucial in our perceiving time, because time is always already ordered *for* us and *by* us, simultaneously, even before we realize it. What we perceive at rest is what we *can* perceive at rest. But it is not so, we gave it a break, and the break is on us—in us. Elsewhere I called this memory in which and through which our timelines are created a tracing-memory; a memory that picks the traces of what happens, the traces of motion as change, as *marked* differences, and *gives* it an order by providing an ordered space, namely, a line, a timeline⁴⁶². We should bear in mind, however, that “a line” does not necessarily entail a “straight line” (this is just for our Western prejudices that refer to every “straight line-like time” as “linear time”), but that it includes any kind of line—shape notwithstanding (a circle, a square, a spiral, etc.).

Chronos already entails Cosmos. That is, there is no Cosmos (order) without Chronos (ordered time). And, to the best of my knowledge, there is still no human group of which we know of that have neither cosmos nor chronos. All human groups have cosmologies (narrative means through which their cosmos is transmitted) and cosmogonies (narratives about their origins and ends). Yet, no cosmology of which we know of is ever complete. We may have predictions about the end of the cosmos (of order as we know it, thus of organization as we live it, and therefore of life as we conceive it), but, if we are speaking

⁴⁶¹ Remember Galileo’s beautiful (ironic, up to the point of scornful) phrase: *Eppur si muove*, and how movement (in this case the Earth’s, which was preposterous for the Catholic Church, who believed [and thus dictated] the Earth was the centre of everything and was therefore, as a centre, immovable: “If the Earth moves how come we’re not moving all the time?” asked these very gifted, mindful, preposterous priests) was constitutional to his whole system.

⁴⁶² See my “Just a second please: On the mutual constitution between measured and experienced times”. Again, since it is not published, maybe you can give me your e-mail and I will send it to you or (I do not want to sound pushy) if you have means to do so, help me publish it (ok, at this time I can recognize I am a little edgy).

of a cosmology that is still valid and of a cosmogony that is still current, that date has not been met. This is the future as we experience it, the future in order and as principle of all order: a not-yet, a yet-to-come; that is, a somewhat known and knowable fate that has not yet arrived, that will not wholly arrive, always partially, little by little, step by step: its final arrival is the end of all order, just as its final arrival is, for me, the end of my ordering. The source of our ordering is the not-yet that allows for change, that makes place for motion. And, as long as there is life in this world, there will be order in these lives. If time passes by, we are bound to follow it, to go behind it, picking up the traces of everything it leaves behind (changes, differences, motions, emotions?)—and we cannot do otherwise. Not only do we make events by narrative means, we also make the lines of order in which these events fall in and follow each other; we also make the lines of order in which we can trace these events and determine whether they occurred 10 years ago or 10 days ago or 10 seconds ago, and determine which was before or after, how they follow. The memory that picks the traces that time leaves behind is the same that enables us to trace what it picked—when, where and how.

So this memory, this tracing-memory, is really our very faculty for fiction, our very capacity to create it. This creative faculty is *in* our bodies. As we have kept insisting throughout this work, memory is in our entire bodies: our bodies remember. It is thus that we are not speaking of a memory stored in our minds, or worse, of a storage facility located in our brains, spread out on our cerebral cortex. We are speaking of a memory that creates an entrenched timeline that is as entrenched in its body and in its daily activities as the lines on our skins or in our circulatory systems are. In the same way in which we remember with our whole bodies, we are aware with (and not only of) our whole bodies; even with those parts we are not properly “aware of”, like our neurons or blood cells or sebaceous glands. Our pasts are not only displayed in the privacy of our minds, but continuously emerging everywhere in our bodies; from our heels as we walk or hike to our backs as we sit or lay down. Those traces our tracing-memory

accommodates, deposits, arranges, in sum, orders, are everywhere to be shown in our bodies. We show our pasts as much as we remember them.

Once we understand that our memories are not like home-movies projected in the living-room of our brains, we are able to understand that awareness (and perception in this way) is not a self-reflective space that we provide to our perceptions like subtitles constantly displayed at the bottom of the frame. Tracing-memory is not meant to be *only* visual (which, for a long time, has been the main trope for the representation of memory⁴⁶³) but mainly fleshy, if you do not mind the colloquialism. Our tracing-memory is activated at the very moment in which we start to *care* for ourselves and, as a necessary consequence, to *care* for our environment. This is why this memory is the principle of all fiction, because it is the principle of all form *as we make it*. Here, I am taking a position in regard to order as being external (natural or otherwise). My claim is that just as there are no tenses in time as such, there is no order intrinsic to time (and neither to space). Order is something made, something we make despite ourselves; but it is a “despite ourselves” closer to blinking or breathing than, say, synaptic or cardiac activity. And we get closer to where we were before, when we were asking for a break, some rest, in order to perceive change (in order). I cannot breathe or blink at will, I *must* do so and there is no way I can decide to take my own life by not breathing or blind myself by not blinking. What I can do, though, is to more or less regulate their *rhythm*, for we breathe differently when we are resting, than when we are hiking than when we are doing yoga—actually, is not this the very principle of this activity: “learning how to breathe”⁴⁶⁴. The same goes for

⁴⁶³ The canonical example of this marriage between image and memory comes from Plato’s concept of *eidos* (the root-word for “idea”) which was supposed to precede the very *logos* (from which the concepts of intellection and reason come from). For a more detailed account, see Plato’s often cited “Allegory of the Cavern” in his, not less cited, *Republic*.

⁴⁶⁴ See for instance, the relationship that Arendt draws between poetry and rhythm with time and language, *Human Condition* 169. See also Russon 20, where he makes a very pertinent relationship between meaning and rhythm in what he calls “musical temporality”.

blinking, we do not blink at the same pace when we are watching a movie than we are in a first date than when we are in a job interview than when we are contemplating the landscape. Our tracing-memory does the same: by giving order it also establishes a rhythm to that order, a pace for the events therein.

Think for a second which is our minimum possible temporal unit. Do not try to answer to this in terms of a possible measure (a second, a microsecond... a nanosecond) but rather in terms of an embracing concept that may include all these measurements (and all those yet-to-come): an instant. All instants are plastic, they may last a minute or a minute and a half or two seconds or one hour. As a matter of fact, when you think about it, the further the memory extends the more we compress in one instant. For instance, when I think of something that happened in my childhood, say, my first kiss, I kind of remember *that* instant (I almost wrote “*that* instance”) as something that lasts near as much (or twice as much) than everything that preceded it or proceeded it, i.e., two hours in one instant, etc. This is what is unique about our tracing-memories, not that we can make chunks, *periods* of time (measured or otherwise: one month, one day, one hour... one kiss, two blinks, three songs...), this is all for our other memories (episodic, semantic, etc.), but that by determining the *duration* of each instant, it also creates the *intervals* that separate them. An interval is like that little, nearly unperceivable moment that separates one blink from the next; that quick, extremely ephemeral moment that separates and unites our gaze. Or better yet, since I am such a proclaimed movie-fan (those things named after what they do: moving images on a static surface), an interval is like every cut between frames that set the conditions for each frame to be separated and enjoined with other frames, which is what enables the editor to actually cut and paste a different shot so as to create a scene and then a sequence and then the movie, thus determining its rhythm. Intervals are to time what distances are to space: the very condition of our frames of reference.

So, what we have here is an infrastructural memory that enables all the other memories to work/proceed (as the “working” or “procedural” memory) as well as to recall far reaching

chunks, episodes or periods (as the “semantic” or “long-term” memory)⁴⁶⁵. We are not speaking of explicit (semantic) or implicit (working) faculties, but of one that is simultaneously explicit and implicit, that separates and unite these (explicitness and implicitness) and that makes the conditions for us to create so many different forms of remembrance, so many different lines, so many different shapes.

Happenings, what happens to us, which is not necessarily (actually, necessarily not) everything that happens around us, are thus transformed into ordered happenings, from which events can be made and narratives composed. Our tracing-memory is similar to what Henri Bergson called “a memory within change”, a concept that, unfortunately for us, he did not elaborate as much as he elaborated his two key concepts of time, his metaphysics really, “real duration” and “perceived duration”; the latter corresponding to time as we perceive it and the former to time as such⁴⁶⁶. Yet, I would say our tracing-memory is *within* the traces left by changes *as* they occur and *while* we perceive them. Fictions, formed events (which is the only kind of form we can make: artefactual form), are plastic because instants are plastic too, and therefore events may grow and/or shrink, they may be enshrined, hyperbolized, simplified, impoverished, etc.—it all depends on their intensity, that is, on our passion and on how each affects us. Moments, those “physical” receptacles of events, thereby create the impression that they stem one from another, and instants give us a sense of flow, of an ordered, continuous motion that also creates in us the feeling that *everything* moves at the same pace. Yet, thinking so would be like thinking that everything must move to the equivalent of 24 frames per second, less frames look kind of funny (like silent movies, that were shot at 18 frames per second) and more frames look too dramatic (what is called slow-motion, which is achieved by adding more frames, like, say, 50 frames per second, as in the first part of *Friday the 13th*, when Jason’s mother is beheaded, which helped to mask the cheap special effects by adding a dramatic effect that thus gave us the impression that an actual machete was cutting an

⁴⁶⁵ On this other kind of memories, see Lancashire 194.

⁴⁶⁶ See Bergson 44-46.

actual head in an actual body [with boldly broad shoulders and very hairy hands, certainly not Betsy Palmer's]). We should not be so conceited. This would be like thinking that our fictions are the only valid fictions and so that they should be imposed to everybody else's; something as absurd as, alas, practiced throughout our history. Maybe we can do otherwise, let us see if we can, at least, think so.

So, how do we create this sense of flux, of uninterrupted motion in our memories? By blurring the distinctions between figure and ground, between one thing and the other, by remembering almost as if one memory fused *with* the other and as if each thing I remember were infused *in* the other⁴⁶⁷. The faster the motion (action[s], happening[s], gesture[s], etc.), the rarer the recalled thing, the less solid it is to our memory, as the less solid it appears to our gaze, like the landscape does while we are in a train in motion—and the rarer it seems, even to our touch; for the memory flees before we can really apprehend it, and we only have its overarching action: a kiss, but not so much its sensations (the lips and mouths and salivation, etc.), all these arise as quickly as it goes, yet I always have *the* kiss. Speed, as we know, is at the opposite end of solidity; just as velocity is just another word for brevity.

There is, however, something for which this tracing-memory cannot create an instant: its origin, how it came about: its starting point. Just as we know nothing of the end of its line, we are in an invisible ignorance of its beginning. This might be why the lines we live by are so difficult to change—in spite how much we experiment with different lines in our narratives. Meta-fiction, a hallmark of modernist literature, but as old as the *Quixote* itself, this quality of telling the fiction at the same time in which we speak of the composition of the fiction (which is like remembering at the same time in which we remember ourselves remembering, something not so strange, as we know), speaks about this anarchic quality of the line. There is no beginning to it, and certainly no end. In spite

⁴⁶⁷ See Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* 213. I am most indebted to her account of motion and motility in imagined scenes as created in literature.

of how many narratives one might unfold, how many timelines one may add to one narrative (i.e., James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which gives us more timelines that we can count for a less than 24 hour ordeal), we keep living-by, perceiving, experiencing the world, and generating lines for this experience, pretty much in the same way in which we did when we started to produce our timelines, an instant of which we know not. There is no inaugural instant for this tracing-memory, and this is the reason why it is as plastic as the narratives we keep composing. This memory is not autobiographical because it is not primarily a "storyline" that we create (follow? Create?), but rather the very template over which we can make as many stories as we like of the same event, or we can alter the same story as much as we will.

Then again, I do not mean to suggest that we create stories because we will so, but rather that our will itself is (in relation to our pasts) already informed by these stories. If imagination is so critical for this tracing-memory, it is not only because we need to resort to it so as to fill the gaps in and between instants, but also because we need it to move and alter the intervals that we create. An instant is anything but a totality. The intervals between my getting under my grandmother's bed, my kissing my cousin and my going to eat with my family, may be suddenly *altered* by "new" memories, like playing and pretending that we were campers and the bed was our tent at night and like feeling a funny flavour in my mouth that made me drink more water than usual during dinner. These "new" memories move the intervals by creating some "new" ones in-between the old ones. Imagination, indeed, constantly labors against totality. Our imagination moves what our memory keeps storing, packaging, affixing; one opens what the other preserves (and sometimes hides, compartmentalizes). These traces thus transform themselves into a constant source of time⁴⁶⁸, a source in which time inscribes itself, in which time leaves its

⁴⁶⁸ See Heidegger, *Being and Time* for an account of the difference between temporality (which has to do with historicity) and Time, which is informative of the structure of *Dasein*. See also Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* 32, where the philosopher speaks about the inextricable relation between being, its qualities, and time. For a compelling commentary on this relation, see Glowacka 136.

marks; traces that are thus inscribed in us, in our bodies: every kiss bears the traces of that first, clumsy kiss.

This is whence “my chronic I” comes from: tracing-memory⁴⁶⁹. This is my “I” always already in line, in shape, in order, in time: “chronic”. Before being accountable, I need the conditions and the faculty to be so, and so far we ignore everything about any human who is not accountable through and in an ordered time and space. We will engage with the discussion of this second “I” (as ordered in space) later. For the moment, we should agree that the “chronic I”, the “I” already ordered in time is always in a timeline generated, created, produced... by and in our tracing-memory. As I said before, this is not an “autobiographical memory”, at least not yet. It rather makes the temporality (the temporal form) for our autobiographies to be formed and told, and even through which we can experiment with different forms of narrating our lives, though, not necessarily, of living them.

6.2.1 Summary 35

Simultaneity (many events happening at the same time) is only conceivable in memory because there is a sense of order, where motion (what happens) is ordered in time. The mutuality between memory and imagination is explored from this perspective: in order to perceive change (motion), it is necessary to be able to imagine the thing as it changes as much as it is necessary to be able to remember it before it changed. Order emerges from the synthesis between memory and imagination. It is within this synthesis that the concept of “tracing-memory” is introduced, as a memory that produces the timelines wherein events are ordered. It is thus that tracing-memory is understood as the very faculty for making fictions (narrative forms and/or frameworks). This order that is produced cannot be controlled, but it is claimed that it can be regulated. This regulation is more traditionally called “rhythm”. The future, a concept that will be extraordinarily

⁴⁶⁹ I am borrowing this fantastic image of “my chronic I” from Goodwin 18.

relevant in the eighth chapter, is here conceptualized as the source of all ordering, as it makes space for any possible motion to take place. However, it is argued that just as the tracing-memory cannot produce the instant of its own end, it cannot produce the instant of its own origin. All tracing-memories are bound to start and finish in *media res*. This is the main reason that is given as to the plasticity intrinsic to all tracing-memories, a plasticity that bears witness to the necessary synthesis between memory and imagination, remembering and forgetting; a necessity that was discussed in detail in the third chapter. The “I” is always already “chronic”, in the sense that it is always inscribed to the timeline produced by this tracing-memory.

6.3 “Do it, as it is”

What are we to do now? Accepting that we must go on is something that is not as easy as accepting to continue reading what, as of now, I am writing. There is something really difficult in writing, something that does not stop even after we have stopped doing so, namely, expressing ourselves. For some reason, the extraordinary difference between reporting something and expressing something makes this latter all the more difficult than the former and, what is more, all the more inevitable. Expressive language, however, is not only about venting or “getting out” (of our systems) something that was “in-there”, it is a much more complex process; a process that starts and culminates (in the utterance, in the written word, etc.) with accepting something⁴⁷⁰. There seems to be an unmediated relation between the expresser, what s/he expresses and language. When I say, for instance, “I don’t know what else to say”, I am not exclusively describing some mental content (or lack thereof) or a current state (mental or otherwise) or reporting a current incapacity or impasse or a somewhat broken relation between what I am writing, what I am saying and what I am thinking, etc.; what I am doing is, first and foremost, expressing something I am feeling, thinking, realizing, avowing... *suffering*, and this is the key to understanding expression. Expression transcends (even when it may start with) giving vent; it transcends avowing a current state of affairs, and it transcends it because it locates

⁴⁷⁰ For a more elaborated account of this idea, see Bar-On 189.

us at the very threshold of language and passion itself, of suffering and uttering, of communicating and undergoing. Expression, first of all, needs us to accept what we are about to express.

What we do when we express ourselves is giving voice to ourselves as sufferers, and therefore, giving voice to what we suffer; which is just another way to say what we live (experience, think, believe, desire, etc.): what affects us. Suffering is always already being affected by what surrounds us. In this fashion, it is only possible that we are absolutely responsible for what we express even though we are not to sharply determine what affects us and how it does so⁴⁷¹. Yet, as we said in the first chapter, this is not something we do *only* with our mouths, within this interconnection that Western thought has invented between the mind and the mouth: logos. We express ourselves with all our bodies. Even now, as I am writing, my back, my eyes, my posture, my legs, and, more importantly my fingers are expressing something and many things, some that will not make it to this page, but all definitely affecting what I write. Expression is always already bound to affectation. My body, thus, as an expressive space, an environed, enveloped depth (of which we spoke in the previous chapter) is the core of expression⁴⁷². It should be noted then that inasmuch as expression is bound to affectation and affectation is so close to what we understand as caring (we cannot care for something that does not affect us, in the sense of what affects us in terms of touching us as we come in contact with it) the body is a core that cares: a core of expressiveness, caring for what and how it expresses itself⁴⁷³.

Are these words, then, expressions of my body? What if we could approach words in-themselves? That is, what if we could approach words as expressive bodies themselves? The reason why you have the capacity of interpreting what I say quite differently from

⁴⁷¹ On being affected by the other despite ourselves, and being responsible of it (also despite ourselves), see Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 175-186.

⁴⁷² This idea can be found in Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* 146.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid* 147.

me, why you can approach these words and give them different meanings than those I gave to them, is because words are not *exclusively* expressions of my own writing, but *also* expressions of your own reading. If the word *has* a meaning *in-itself*, it is because it is a body, an envired, enveloped depth, and hence it is expressive in its own right. The word “word” meant something *before* I wrote it. Actually, it *had* to mean something for me to learn it⁴⁷⁴. And, no matter how much I twist its meaning: “the word is a body”, this “twist” is irrevocably bound to the meaning I learned before; for I am not saying: the “worm is a body” or the “war is a body” or “the world is a body”; although that could be said too, I am positively not saying that. Though you may be reading something like that—that I do not know. The word “word” may be, in your case, proximate to the concept of, say, “worm”, and you might find that if the “word is a body” and “word” is proximate to “worm”, and body is also a word we use for “corpse”, you may read that “the word is a worm decomposing its own body” or whatever you will. Words, as bodies, are infinite (in the sense of not-yet-finished).

This is alright for words, but what about me? This is where style comes to the fore, again. But now, since you are here too, and in front of me now, face-to-face, we must speak of style as being bound to you: affecting you. Just as I am affected and I respond to what affects me as much as I express my affection (what I suffer), *how* I respond and express my affection is just as important, if not more. In the preceding chapter we said that this “how” was always already ingrained into an immanence that was born in my coming to be a body and in my enveloping a depth in-between those convergences from which I emerged, and we called that immanence a *preseendance*. Well, now we must say that *how* I respond to what affects me and express what I suffer (a “how” that, we said, develops with me parallel to what we called style) inevitably affects you as you come in contact with me; that is, as we converge. But, more importantly, this “how” affects your “how”,

⁴⁷⁴ See George Carlin’s brilliant routine “Everyday Expressions” and the foolishness behind asking a person to speak “in your own words”; as we very well know, we pretty much use the words used by everybody else.

this style affects your style, one way or another. We said that this is how the “how”, how style spreads itself simultaneous to its being expressed, and we called this process *spreadssion*. Now, coming to accept one’s own style is most important in order to express it. Consequently, coming to accept what affects us and how it affects us, what we suffer, is crucial in coming to accept our styles. That is what we know as coming to accept our luck, or our fates. But let us just retain the first one, luck, to then grow, step by step, to fate.

If we agree that unities are nothing but converging points affecting us as we converge with them, then we can agree that everything that we express is, to some extent, a creation, an artefact: a creature⁴⁷⁵. We are always responsible for that creature, regardless how ephemeral, how brief its existence may be: this is not for us to determine. Some creatures will outlive us, some will not even live enough for us to realize them, some may not be listened to and then be listened too much, some we will forget and will be reminded about by someone else, etc.; but all are our creations—though not exclusively ours. If we said that all unities come about in and from convergences, then all creatures are as much *of* one point of convergence as they are *of* any other. This is true. But no less true is it that the “how”, which determines *how* this creature manifests itself (its form) has to do with me, and the part of that “how”, as undistinguishable as it may be, is *my responsibility*, my part. The thing is that I do not choose where and with what/whom I converged when I came about, nor do I choose any of this now (or rather very few and to a very small degree): all these I am to accept, I should accept; for here is an imperative I must come to terms with: I cannot not express. Even when I repress something, I am expressing something. The Palo Alto school that popularized the slogan: “We cannot not communicate”⁴⁷⁶, should have gone further, to the foundations of communication, for I cannot communicate if I do not express something (whether this corresponds to what is understood, received, etc., or not), and I can only express what I accept: repressing comes

⁴⁷⁵ I am borrowing this idea from Merleau-Ponty 395.

⁴⁷⁶ As appears in Watzlawick, Beaving, Jackson & O’Hanlon.

by accepting (even if forcedly, even if against my will) what I am repressing—whether consciously or not. Acceptance is not about consciousness, but it is mainly about responsibility. A more foundational slogan would therefore be: “We cannot not converge”. Thus we are always already in contact, and hence always already expressing, for we always converge in *some* form, a singular form, we said before, but a form that necessarily affects those converging with us, we may say now. Thus, if expression precedes consciousness and, to a great degree, it is constitutive of the body, then everything that is around, everything with which we converge, is expressive. Yes, everything expresses something, for everything is *in some form*, and thus everything expresses its form (as it converges with me, as it affects me and as it is affected by me).

This idea of style in literature, as something somehow preceding or even eluding consciousness, is at the core of the most scholastic study of literary style (and the best known) to date, that is, of stylistics⁴⁷⁷. We know that stylistics has centered its studies in the “extra-logical”, the “para-logical” aspects of language, which means: that which cannot be apprehended, exclusively, by the logos, that which is outside [extra] or beyond [para] the logical. This extra/paralogical in language is expressivity and the “how” of expressivity, which is considered as being inseparable by this discipline (or subdiscipline, if you will). In this way, stylistics cannot teach you how to write well (as rhetoric claimed to teach you how to speak well), but it can only teach you how to *read* well, how to *identify* a particular style⁴⁷⁸—a singular form of expression. Furthermore, stylistics can also teach you how to approach each creation singularly, and so it can show you that this singularity owes a great deal to others; as well as this style you learn to identify owes a great deal to others. We already took distance with stylistics, though, by clarifying that its main drive is towards language itself, and therefore towards the work itself, much more than towards the person behind it. We should also note that classic stylistics owes a great

⁴⁷⁷ Some examples of this approach can be found in Garrido Medina; Fernández Retamar; Ullman, *Meaning and Style*; and Yagoda.

⁴⁷⁸ For an elaboration of this idea of stylistics as teaching to read well, see Fernández Retamar 23.

deal to Saussurean linguistics, and more particularly to his distinction between *langue* [system of signs] and *parole* [speech], since classic stylisticians would attribute the paralogical to what Saussure already considered extra-logical (diachronic, out of the system), i.e., speech, always a unique event. Disagreements notwithstanding, I believe that this idea of “teaching how to read well” may be worth retaining for the future of our discussion.

Style and expressiveness thus go hand in hand in its most orthodox approach (i.e., stylistics) as well as in its most spiritual one (i.e., Romanticism: style as the manifestation of the spirit or self, etc., as discussed in the previous chapter). What is important for us now is to understand that expressiveness goes hand in hand with meaning and that this is not (majorly) cognitive, but rather affective. We already said that expression precedes cognition, now we can say that meaning is all about expression; for all meaning is expressed inasmuch as it is incarnated. “What” something incarnates is “what” we apprehend as “its” meaning, right here, right now, *as* it converges with us and *as* it affects us: the *as* as *is* of meaning (*A is A*). The world *is* all expressive, all the time, and *this* is the foundation of its meaning, not our minds. Now, if we could parallel “converging” to what we understand as “perceiving” (can we perceive what we have not contacted?) and we could thus parallel expression to experience (can we experience without expressing?), then we can say that there are as many forms of experience as there are forms of expression—and so many styles⁴⁷⁹. All these only bear witness to variation, that is, to singularity. And, in this way, all these can only bear witness to the indivisible relation between form and content. What I say is always already bound to how I say it and this bears witness to the singularity of expression and of style. We might thus define expression as the bond between form and content, and style as the way in which this bond binds them together.

⁴⁷⁹ This relationship between so many expressions and so many styles (in terms of creating a rhythm), can be found in Deleuze and Guattari’s essay on Mannerism, “Of the Refrain”, in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

This is our luck, now, which is our fate? Each converging point is a destiny, each convergence a fate. The doctrine of autonomy dictates that we can choose our destinies, that we can choose our fates. Well, not so much. As we said in the past chapter, the style is not the man (or the woman) himself (or herself). The style is the man and woman's fate. If we have understood that *how* we express is "what" we are (right here, right now), and *how* we are always already affects that with which we converge, then we can understand that "what" we express always bears the traces of ourselves. It does, and we said in the former chapter that this *how* is our style and that it always already bears the traces of the voice e-merging from our *preseedence*. If this is so, then our styles necessarily express "what" cannot be otherwise, of whose change I only know through its development and growth, but not by its possible substitution or replacement. And, since I do not choose the points that make my convergence, the depth I envelop, the convergence from which I came about, in sum, my *preseedence*, I do not choose my style, and less so do I choose my fate: I accept it and with it I come to terms.

Being oneself, within this context, means a great deal to accept oneself, my style: this is the self that I am. To do so, and according to our tracing-memory, we must also be able to say: this is the self that I was, with no hesitation, with no remorse—no matter how much and how big our regrets may be. I may regret deeds I did, but I should have no remorse about the self I am; perhaps I can regret *not having being myself*, not listening to my voice, but now that so I am, and now that so I express myself, fully responsible of those regrettable things, I may show no remorse, and then I might act accordingly. We will see in more detail what remorse can do to our pasts, for the time being we should only add that it heavily hinders our capacity to recognize ourselves, to realize ourselves, to express ourselves, for it tends to transform the traces in our tracing-memory into disgraces (dis-traces), and thus disconnect them from all other events: like tumoured instants.

I know that this may sound too deterministic. But it so might sound if you are committed to the notion of freedom only in relation to autonomy and autonomy only in relation to choice. The thing here is that we *do not know that fate*, we know as much of it as we know about our *presecedence*, that is, only what we have been able to express and what we have been able to realize as it developed. Fate cannot be reduced to determination because it can never be fully determined. Fate can only be realized retrospectively, after the fact, after-expression. That is how we realize our styles. We cannot accept what has not happened yet. We may, if we believe in oracles or in Sophocles, come to terms with the information revealed to us, but never with what will happen to us, because there is nothing to be accepted yet. I cannot accept that I will lose my hair and that I will be bald because I have no idea how I will look like to myself when I look at my bald self in the mirror. I can only accept that my hair is thinning and that there are some parts in my skull where there is no hair now and where there was hair before. But it is only by the gradual picture I have been looking at in the last 10 years, by the gradual experience of losing some hair within this time, that I may come to terms with this issue and that may make it easier to accept it when it comes. The more sudden the change (what emerges in our fates), the more it overwhelms our tracing-memories and the more difficult it is to trace; thus, the more difficult to accept. This, however, only suggests us that in spite of its possible suddenness, we can only accept what happens to us *after* it has happened to us. We can only accept our style as it is *expressed* and as it developed—though we come to terms with it gradually, as it grows with us.

Let me tell you what is truly deterministic: the paradigm of autonomy and self-fashioning; freedom as choice: that is deterministic a great deal. Let me elaborate this point. A choice entails not only a motivation (a preferred choice, based on deliberation, reflection, etc.), but it mainly implies a finality informing our choice. What is greatly paradoxical is that this finality (that becomes the “cause” of the “because”) preceding our decisions (our making choices) is actually what should proceed them, what should come after, as a consequence, an effect, an outcome of my preferred choice. This is how we

have deluded ourselves that we can tame the future, by somewhat predicting it through our finalities, our *telos*, our plans⁴⁸⁰. This is what truly determines our choices within this frame of mind. And what is worse, self-fashioning, the self that we construct and live by is similarly determined by the self-I-would-like-to-be (or to become)⁴⁸¹. In contrast, we may get to believe that we are not that autonomous and rather locate the forces that shape us outside, as in, say, social forces that make us what we are, that instil in us finalities we did not even know they existed or preferences for things we did not even know we liked, whether we want it or not. If we do believe this, we can easily reach the conclusion that the only way of self-fashioning (of being autonomous) is by way of resistance (resisting these oppressive but larger than life social forces [capitalism, racism, sexism, etc.]) against an always already adverse environment. This is nothing but autonomy with the flu, the doctrine of “freedom as choice” in reverse. This is something of a very old idea that, actually, sprung almost simultaneously with the idea of the autonomous subject: the shadow that lingers projected from the enlightened subject ever since s/he saw the light, or so the popular tale goes: the Renaissance⁴⁸². We have thus arrived at the conclusion that we can reinvent one’s style as we continuously reinvent one-self: as if reinvention was a matter of drying our hair or writing shorter paragraphs. Within the framework we are working on here, development is what happens, not reinvention: sometimes it may seem so, but later on, as we gain a better perspective of it, we get to recognize that we only discovered (and in this way invented) what was already there, growing, developing what, at some point, seemed to us brand new. Necessity is made, but this does not mean that there was no necessity before; it only means that we cannot completely anticipate its form (not quite, though sometimes, when we are lucky, the insinuation of its silhouette)—yet, just as we grow to know that a maple tree does not (and will not) produce milk, I grow to know that I do not (and will not) be a soccer star. That is as far as my plans go.

⁴⁸⁰ An example of this kind of delusion can be found in McAdams 92.

⁴⁸¹ As is explained by Holstein and Gubrium 10.

⁴⁸² For a full account on this simultaneous emergence of the autonomous artist and the artist as shaped by his/her social environment, see Williams 36.

Though I do not care less for what I do, I sort of know I will (do everything I can to) finish this chapter, and this work. That is as far as my finality goes.

Products are not purposes but passions⁴⁸³, and so are outcomes, results, etc. We always know that we are doing something, but never exactly know what, never exhaustively so⁴⁸⁴. Motivations are multiple, they multiply themselves in the course of our lives, they grow with and within us, and some they grow enough to become works, things, tangible transformations—artefacts or products. In this way, *knowing* oneself, in the sense of getting acquainted (meeting and becoming familiar) with our styles, is never a *telos*, a single, simple finality, but a passion, a *pathos* of a singular, unique person. This is a very different kind of motivation, which is the true source of all power in us, of motion: an e-merging motion: an e-motion. This should not be simply confused with feelings or moods or glandular activity or with a combination of these (and others I am not going to list), it should be understood, instead, as the power from which motility, human motility, motility in *our* way, emerges—always already complex, always already many: this is the force that sets our lives in motion and that moves our narratives⁴⁸⁵. A narrative devoid of emotion is not only boring to death, but it is, mainly, dead of boredom.

6.3.1 Summary 36

This section examines the relationship between embodiment and expression (i.e., expression and affectation), and thus between embodiment and style; a relationship that is meant to lead towards a more robust conceptualization of eroticism and writing. This

⁴⁸³ On consciousness as self-affectation (and thus its teleology understood within the framework of passions), see Deleuze and Guattari, “On Several Regimes of Signs”, in their *A Thousand Plateaus*.

⁴⁸⁴ For an elaboration on this idea, see Freeman, mainly his study on Philip Roth’s autobiography, and how he set to write it by not-knowing what he was going to write; even though, as we may easily assume, autobiography is one of the most restrictive genres in these terms; we should know *what* we are going to write, after all, is our life!

⁴⁸⁵ On the “unconscious force” that can set an autobiography in motion, see Eakin 30, About emotion as meaning in motion, see Merleau-Ponty 187.

relationship is introduced by way of understanding words (at the level of the signifier) as bodies, and therefore as already always being embodied (enveloped depths, as was seen in chapter 5); this brief discussion will be more and more relevant within the development of this chapter. The relationship of affectation and expression, and, ultimately, of embodiment and style, is also put in relation with the reader, as someone who's style is affected by the style of the person s/he reads, an affectation that will, necessarily, be embodied in the reader (as much as it is embodied in the writer). This is the first step to explain the process of mutual contamination between reader and writer that will be fully developed in chapter 8. In this sense, every expression is treated as something that is "brought-about", something for which everyone involved (the addresser, the expression, the addressee) is inevitably responsible. This discussion takes one step further the discussion begun in chapter 5 about how everything (every unit with which something converges) is expressive, which points towards the conceptualization of an expressive reality, and therefore a reality that is always already meaningful. Meaningfulness is understood, in these terms, as being affective much more than cognitive. The mutuality between accepting and expressing comes clearer when it is understood that one's style can only be accepted and developed, for one's *preseedence* (as well as those points with which a person converges as s/he comes to this world) cannot be chosen; it can only be accepted. Yet this acceptance can only be performed retrospectively, once the style, and the *preseedence*, has been expressed. This approach will be central in the conceptualization of a non-teleological understanding of the future, as will be fully elaborated in the seventh chapter. The present discussion, however, should prove helpful in developing a different perspective on consciousness outside the realm of intentionality.

6.4 "What's the story"

We have finally arrived to the point at which we get to speak about, side by side, face to face with Guillermo Cabrera Infante. I do not know if you have missed him, but I had a great deal. We will see now the writer as an autobiographer, who is at the same time a

storyteller; but who is, among all, a chronicler: we will see GCI as a chronicler of his own life. There are three important works published with this format (autobiography-fiction-memoir). First, *La Habana para un Infante Difunto*⁴⁸⁶ [*Infante's Inferno*, 1984] written between 1975 and 1978, and published in 1979. Then, two books posthumously published: *La Ninfa Inconstante*⁴⁸⁷, published in 2008, and possibly the last book the writer ever composed⁴⁸⁸; and *Cuerpos Divinos*⁴⁸⁹, published in 2010, written, intermittently interrupted, constantly revised and rewritten between 1974 (when he first started to talk about this project) and some weeks before his death in 2005⁴⁹⁰. We will focus here on the first book, not only because it was the only the writer lived to publish, but mainly because, in terms of its literary achievements, this is the most important. Along with *TTT*, *La Habana* is a master work of the Spanish-written word. This is not, however, to diminish either the literary qualities or the aesthetic importance of the other two works, but rather to emphasize that since the writer never really gave his absolute approval as to their final version (which is sometimes noticeable, particularly in some pages of *Cuerpos*). The relevance of these two works starts contrariwise: first as posthumous testimonies and secondly as literary achievements. Perhaps, after some time has gone by and we gain some perspective, we will be able to put their aesthetic values

⁴⁸⁶ Henceforth we will refer to it on as *La Habana*.

⁴⁸⁷ No English translation available, but more or less translatable as *The Inconstant Nymph*.

⁴⁸⁸ According to his widow, Miriam Gómez, this book was the one in which her husband was purportedly working before *he* (I just corrected the typo in which I said “we”; too much affectation?) got sick. My main source for this information comes from the presentation of the book during the Book Fair in Miami, which I attended and where she told the story of the “minimum editing” process that the manuscript underwent, which is why it was published (in addition to a better financial deal) by a different editorial house (Galaxia Guttenberg instead of Seix Barral, which was the editorial house that published most of GCI’s work).

⁴⁸⁹ No English translation available, but more or less translatable as *Divine* or *Heavenly Bodies*—take your pick.

⁴⁹⁰ This, also according to Miriam Gómez. See what she has to say about the pains she underwent to sort out the spectacular amount of pages that her husband left for her to organize and publish, almost as his last wish (for, as she reveals, it hurt him to write it) in Fernández-Santos.

before their testimonial qualities. But this is not the case, at least not for now— at least not for me.

These books are autobiographical works, but they are also fictional. What they show, for the most part, is that GCI has become capable of speaking of his own past straightforwardly rather than obliquely; that he does not require surrogates or alter egos to speak about his own life and that he has become capable of starring his own fictions. Although he never says his own name in either of these books (we have already spoken of this game of his, remember?), we are perfectly clear to whom the “I” refers to. Furthermore, we get the feeling (particularly for those of us who have become acquainted with his life) that we are getting to know things about this man’s past that *only he could know*—which is the first and major motivation for an autobiography to be read. GCI is giving us an access to his life that nobody else could give us, but, at the same time, he is becoming conscious of the weight that words have acquired for him: words are not bodies to play any more than they are bodies to concentrate on, for now they can tell stories, and they can do so by claiming their bodily signification to his writer: words have become places, flesh through which the *topos* (the place) of his own body and his own life can emerge, just like that, like flesh—and so his past emerges. These works show that autobiographies are, too (like poems, like novels, etc.) made of words, and that words are not open spaces for arbitrary inventions anymore (as they were in *TTT* or in *Exorcismos*), but that they are marked places for particular memories; he now knows that, in the case of autobiography, words are the flesh of the past.

Autobiography has, since its appearance in the Western tradition circa the 11th C., shown that it is a genre (or subgenre, if so you will) that constantly toils against the totality of the self⁴⁹¹. The *othering* process entailed in life-writing helped to render palpable the

⁴⁹¹ For the first antecedents of autobiography in the Western tradition see Martin and Barresi, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* 87. It is true that self-writing is way older in the Western tradition and can be traced as far as Presocratic times (i.e., Parmenides or

variability not only among people (as others affecting the narrator) but also of the self in relation to past-selves⁴⁹². If we want a working definition of autobiography, we could say that it is the process through which a person writes his/her past and who, by virtue of this process, *others* his/her past. The other is that other emerging in and through language. Nonetheless, for many years, particularly within the last three centuries or so, in which autobiographical writing started to penetrate literature up to the point in which it became central to it⁴⁹³ (as we can attest today and as it has been in the last 50 years or so), there has been an assumption that autobiography refers to facts and that it, as biography, can claim to historical truth but that, as other than biography, it can give us a privileged access to that truth, for the person who refers to those facts is the same person who suffered them⁴⁹⁴. Autobiography, thus understood, is a modern genre that has championed many of the modern assumptions about the self (autonomy, self-reflection and self-fashioning, etc.)⁴⁹⁵. Yet, by the beginning of the twentieth century, and more forcefully during its second half, these assumptions were seriously put in question and the way the

Heraclitus' works or those of the Epicureans, for whom self-writing was central). However, we should not confuse self-writing with life-writing. The aim of self-writing as an access to self-knowledge and a way of taking care of the self (or even of self-vigilance) made for very different kinds of texts, closer to what we now know as journals (but also, for instance, correspondence, like Seneca's use of letter-writing and dialogue as sources of self-reflection and self-vigilance) or accounts of specific events through which the chronicler did exercises of self-reflection, or even as confessional writing. But life-writing, as other than purging through truth-telling (as in confessional writing) or than performing a daily exercise of self-reflection, requires a very different use of memory (and of a more far-reaching memory) to reconstruct a past that is told *as if it were a story*. For self-writing and their very diverse relations to caring for oneself and taking care of oneself, see Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, particularly the first nine lectures.

⁴⁹² See for instance how Abelard used life-writing to refute sameness between persons in Martin and Barresi 88.

⁴⁹³ For a historical account of the penetration that the autobiographical genre had in literature, particularly after Rousseau's *Confessions*, see Freeman 7-20; Eakin, "Mapping the Ethics of Life Writing"; Regine Hampel 58.

⁴⁹⁴ Cf. Hampel, *op. cit.*, 63; Silvia Molloy, *At Face Value*, 143.

⁴⁹⁵ For the relation between modernity and the rise of the novel, and with it the rise of autobiographical writing, see Taylor 284-287.

self is transformed and fictionalized in the text became one of the main concerns around autobiographical writing⁴⁹⁶.

It is at the core of these questions wherein GCI writes, and where *La Habana* grows from a couple of stories he was asked to write for a Spanish magazine in 1975⁴⁹⁷; stories which, of course (it was just after Franco's death, which was supposed to be a liberation for the Spanish citizens, who lived for 35 years at the "backyard of a convent home" [*Mea Cuba* 447]), were about sex. It was Miriam who suggested him to expand these stories into a book, which started an exercise on memory that will become the *sui generis* autobiography we know now⁴⁹⁸. The self, in this book, is from the beginning assumed as a text and, unlike most autobiographies and memoirs, the narrator does not offer any rationale as to why he starts telling his story⁴⁹⁹: he just does it and we just read it. This exercise is also unique in its context and language, for autobiography is not among the Hispanic tradition's (and more particularly, the Hispanic-American tradition) fortes⁵⁰⁰.

What is doubtless dominant in GCI's *La Habana*, though, is the body, his and those of others; for this is a work devoted to the celebration of the body, but more of the feminine body, and his in relation to this. The topography of his memory is inscribed in the topography of many of those women (real, imagined, fictionalized, hyperbolized,

⁴⁹⁶ Hampel elaborates on the way the notion of "fictional autobiography" penetrated literature after the 1970's and was definitive in works such as Salman Rushdie's; see also Eakin's pioneering work in this field, *Fictions in Autobiography*. For a most amusing, and a most intelligent, approach to the antecedents of this phenomenon of fictionalizing oneself in one's life-story (from Rousseau to Nabokov), see O'Rourke.

⁴⁹⁷ The magazine was *Flashmen* and the stories were "La plus que lente" and "Mi último fracaso" [My last failure], which later appeared as chapters 4 and 6, respectively, of *La Habana*. The second one appeared in *Infante's Inferno* under the title "You can always tell".

⁴⁹⁸ As told by Souza, *Guillermo Cabrera Infante* 140-141.

⁴⁹⁹ On the narrator writing rationales so as to introduce herself in her/his memoirs and/or autobiographies, see Hampel 89.

⁵⁰⁰ On how weak this tradition has been in the Hispanic countries, see Molloy 3-5; Loureiro 2-4. About the Cuban case, see Rojas, *Essays in Cuban Intellectual History* 116.

compressed) who were inscribed in his own flesh and in the flesh of the place in which he met himself as he wanted to be: Havana is the place and *Habanero* what he wanted to be. If *TTT* was a gallery of voices, *La Habana* is a gallery of women, each ordering his memories, each standing for a part of his beloved city and of the city wherein he learned to love (with his body), each ordering the pages, the paragraphs, the ideas: those other bodies with which we, as readers, get in contact: words. Women made of words, flesh stemming from phonemes, gratification ingrained in the graphemes: the work of art is the body, each body, every body thus composed. GCI used to say that he learned how to describe women from the romantish, soap-opera-like protonovels of the most read Spanish writer in history: Corín Tellado⁵⁰¹. Yet, if it is true that his descriptions of the feminine physiques resemble a little bit the corny portraits of the Asturian writer, it is also true that his portrayals of these women could be more comparable to works of art than to stereotyped formulas of beauty. This is most palpable in the way in which we get to know how many of these women arouse the youngster's passions by reminding him of a character of some novel (Maupassant is a favorite) or of some movie (*Scarface* appears often) or of some actress (Gene Tierney is a proclaimed preference).

Words become in this work like coordinates of the *topos* for the young GCI's desires, which, to be sure, are for women and movies, sex and cinema. It is no coincidence that he devoted a whole chapter to his attempt to connect these two passions, wherein he became a professional "taster of foreign flesh, a tickler, a touch artist in the moviehouses" (78). Also, it is not coincidental that so much of the book is devoted to the art of watching (often spying, voyeuristically peeping), of becoming a silent, secret spectator who will join his passion for watching anonymously and at a distance (and what else is a movie

⁵⁰¹ See his interview with Pereda. It is also of seminal importance his essay in *O*; the one on Tellado herself, called "*Una Inocente Pornógrafa*" [An Innocent Pornographer], including the "Addenda", a most amusing interview with his eldest daughter, Ana, relating to him (or trying to do so) one of Tellado's convoluted stories. See also his very funny telling of his visit to Tellado's house in his "*Corín Tellado: visita o ¿misión cumplida?*" [Corín Tellado: visit or accomplished mission?] in his 1996 collection (edited by Pereda) *Mi música extremada* [My extremated music].

watcher? Alfred Hitchcock, professional voyeur and proficient genius, said that all movie-goers should be given an eye-lock before getting into the theatre⁵⁰²) with his passion for sexually pleasing himself. See, he was an accomplished onanist way before he became a mediocre lover (or later, so he says, a great lover) and way, way before he became a cited critic. This book is the book of Havana, mainly of Old Havana (since *TTT* is the book of, mainly, *El Vedado*), but articulated by the threads of desire and pleasure. For instance, in this cited chapter (3, “Love thy neighbour”) in which he starts joining his love for watching the screen in front of him with his love for touching the girls (always strangers, always unpredictable, which made them all the more exciting) next to him, GCI gives us a list of all the movie theatres with “pornographic” programs in the Havana of the 1940s, and then he extends this list with one containing virtually all the movie theatres of Havana at that time—all of which he knew. The landscape is so important for the Cubans that, as the writer often said, it supersedes its history (“geography” he called it), that it becomes a sort of land-escape, a way of escaping the cruel claws of historical truth. Places do not frame history, but the other way around⁵⁰³. Geography is history’s haven and a haven from history. In this way, this book is GCI’s topography of his Havanan havens.

This is one of the many particularities of this book as an autobiographical work (fictional autobiography or whatever it is called): places are the flesh of spaces, just as words are the very flesh of remembrance. *Eros*, something that in GCI went from a drive to a compulsion to love (however neurotic), is thus reconfigured in a past wherein all his

⁵⁰² As reported in Susana López Aranda’s (one of my first and best teachers on film-criticism) lectures on Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* and *Psycho*. Unfortunately, though she used to repeat this dictum, purportedly formulated by Hitchcock, quite often, she has not written anything about it (or not anything I have been able to find). However, even if it proved to be an urban legend, this dictum is most consistent with the British master of suspense’s character.

⁵⁰³ For the extraordinary importance of the landscape in Caribbean history (up to the point of prosopopeia), see Arva 154. For an outstanding account on the way in which prosopopeia and the landscape fitted (and was fitted) in the Abakuá religion, see Lydia Cabrera, *El Monte* 148.

passions emerge as and in places; not symbolically, but rather, erotically: at the very flesh of each page we touch.

This book thus offers us a time that we can virtually touch: a chronography rather than a chronology; a time in *graphos*, in the grapheme, rather than just localized in the *logos*, *eidetically* constituted and/or apprehended: this is GCI's embodiment of his tracing-memory, his "chronic I". This is the narrator, the "I" that is the protagonist of the whole narrative: the "I" in time, the "I" making time in and for himself. A lot has been spoken about the deictic property of the "I" in language and in the text, an "I" that has a referential rather than functional value, almost guaranteeing the presence of the speaker⁵⁰⁴. But, as it has also been widely spoken, this is a problematic figure, and the assurance of its presence all the lot more⁵⁰⁵. The "I" has no more referential value *in-itself* than the here and the now, which, as we very well know from reading, is always other, always already there and then for us. The immense dissymmetry of the speaking subject with the spoken (let alone the written) "I" is everywhere apparent; for the "I" rather than a limit to the world of the text (the utterer as the limit of the utterance) emerges, first of all, as being in clear dissymmetry with the proper name bearing this "I" (or the "I" bearing the proper name), for they seem two different limits to two different worlds, though in the very same text; one is historical (the proper name) and one is referential (the "I")⁵⁰⁶. The "chronic I", however, is this "I" *as it* unfolds in its tracing-memory, *as it* extends in its timeline and *as it* creates, multiplies, diversifies lines within this sort of "master timeline": Memory made flesh.

Memory, in this manner, as it displays the traces in which it is constituted, also displays the depth with which it is enjoined to *a* time: "a time in which I was like that". Words

⁵⁰⁴ As is one of Wittgenstein's main points in his *Philosophical Investigations*.

⁵⁰⁵ As is one of Derrida's main points all throughout his work. For an early approach to this point in Derrida, see his "Meaning and Representation" and "The Voice that Keeps Silence".

⁵⁰⁶ On this division in-between the "I", see Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 51.

thus provide the depth for memory to pour over the traces through which the past is incarnated, not now in my body (as we have discussed already in the previous chapters, mainly in the second and fourth), but in the words lining over the page as stars in the *firmament* (as *firma* is the word for “signature” in Spanish). Synchrony and diachrony, referent and history, thus find their place on the page and the page finds its way through the words: intersecting rather than cohabitating. Each intersection makes an *era* (also the imperfective past tense of the verb “to be” in Spanish), which is the mark over the period, the tag over the chunk of time therein contained: the proper name of the trace⁵⁰⁷. Each era is thus the expression of the instants compressed within the period of time therein contained. In *La Habana*, the eras are sometimes marked by places (like Zulueta 408, where GCI spent his first and formative years in Havana), but, most often, they are marked by women (most notably the three lovers to whom he dedicated three chapters, one per woman: Juliet Estevez, “The most beautiful girl in the world”, chapter 7; Honey [Rose] Hawthorne, “Faux pax with a ballerina”, chapter 9; and Violeta del Valle aka Margarita del Campo aka Margarita Perez, [aka] “The amazon”, chapter 10).

We have repeatedly pointed out GCI’s love for chronologies, as the one he wrote (a la Laurence Stern) first for his *O*, later extended for Pereda’s *Cabrera Infante* [included in the uncensored edition of *TTT*], and then extended again for the book edited by Pereda and enriched by GCI called *Mi Música Extremada* [My Extremed Music]: “*Orígenes*” [Origins]. In these chronologies, we read a “life” marked by eras and ordered by years (from his 0 years, April 22, 1929 on), but, more importantly, structured by small paragraphs; to each paragraph a constitutive event (or later, the composition, writing, or publishing of a constitutive work): to each paragraph an era. These eras are what chronologically orders all his books, and through which he was able to compose his own

⁵⁰⁷ See Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, which contains the first sketches of what indicated could have been a brilliant work, his *Passagen-Werk*, where he starts to envision the idea that eras are collectively dreamt and thereby constructed; that each epoch is the result of the dream of this collective, unconscious. A convincing elaboration on the idea that each era is the expression of the times can be found in Moore 56-58.

mythology. The anecdote that he went to the movies for the first time when he was 29 days old, was not only repeated by the writer on every possible occasion⁵⁰⁸, it was one of those instances in which the writer combined his superstitious self with his penchant for numbers and with his love for dates: he was born in 1929; thus creating a numerical symmetry that seems too much of a coincidence for real life but perfectly appropriate for a myth: his own⁵⁰⁹. Memory is thus inscribed in language, where it becomes many memories; a word for which in Spanish we have a noun independent of the faculty (memory): *recuerdo* [memory as the reminisced thing], one of GCI's favorite words and one of his favorite distinctions: *La memoria* [Memory] *nunca es el recuerdo* [is never the memory/memories]. So, once memory is turned into memories, the chronography is composed and the chronology set in motion. Accuracy is unimportant, for time is nothing but the matter of which mythologies are made: "Perhaps the chronology is not exact, but my memory is the device that measures my time" (142).

Yet we should not forget that GCI is an exile, and we should not obviate either what this process can do to a past, to a land (or to the craving for it) and to a memory. The crisis supposed by the exilic process is most important to the revision, reminiscence and reconstitution of the past in writing. Crisis, the self in crisis is, nonetheless, not a strange figure for your typical Hispanic-American fellow; we were born in it. The independence of our countries, and our sense of selfhood, have been, historically, marked by break over break, interruption after interruption: we were born between commas⁵¹⁰. So strong has

⁵⁰⁸ This anecdote is in the second paragraph of his first year in this *Orígenes*, but then repeated in almost every interview he gave (i.e., to Gibert, to Pereda, to García Márquez, to Soler Serrano, etc., etc.), and also in his collection of film criticisms, *Cine o Sardina*, and, of course, we have the most extended version of this anecdote in his *Infante's Inferno*, chapter 3: "creating for me a second umbilical cord, a tether to the theater" (98).

⁵⁰⁹ It is Souza who draws this to our attention. For a most compelling commentary on GCI's chronologies and for the whole argument of this kind of symmetries crafted for personal mythologies, see Souza, "The Cinematic Imagination".

⁵¹⁰ Would this be the reason why GCI dedicated his *Exorcismos* to the comma, and actually included there a piece in which he affirms how happy he is when he sees a comma appearing between an "i" and an "i"?

been this sense of crisis, this threatening uncertainty that pervades our deeds, that even the readers are uncertain, a constant concern being “to whom should I write?”⁵¹¹ Autobiographies and memoirs were therefore scarce in Hispanic-America, but not *testimonios*, a genre that seems almost native to us, Hispanic-Americans. *Testimonios*, however, have been, since their very beginning, tools to move political agendas rather than testimonies of survivors of terrible though hidden events produced by political powers in turn (from the *conquistadores* to dictators to local *caciques*)⁵¹². These are the kind of accounts that have given such a bad image to nostalgia in these countries, for it has been an idealization of an inexistent past turned into ideologies promising to bring it back—that is, utopias seen through the rear mirror. If the basis of *testimonios* is testifying to abuses and unacceptable uses of power against oppressed minorities (a figure of speech actually, for in countries like Guatemala the native, “indigenous”, population is anything but a minority, and in Hispanic-America at large, powerful, wealthy people constitute a most microscopic minority), then we are in front of a genre constantly aiming at its own extinction—for we have nothing but wishing that this basis shall disappear: from tip to toe.

All these are important reasons as to why GCI is such a unique memoirist within the context of Hispanic-America, and of Cuba in particular. Most memoirs written in Cuba (another figure of speech, since most of them were written outside the island by Cuban writers) are either accusative, or vengeful, or remorseful accounts of past deeds, or pathetic justifications of these same deeds, or most desperate efforts to define a collective identity, or all these together. And the first generation of exiles that fled after the 1959

⁵¹¹ On the self in crisis in Hispanic America and its relation to the movements of independence in the XIX C., and this “to whom I write “I”?”, see Molloy 4.

⁵¹² See Molloy 39 for a similar point in relation to Juan Francisco Manzano’s *testimonio*. We can also mention, of course, the “Menchú affair”, a *testimonio* that was used by leftist and communist groups to advance their agendas against the ruling regime in Guatemala, deservedly so, but for the wrong reasons, since the Guatemalan native groups were the least benefitted from all the international attention brought by Rigoberta Menchú’s made up account.

revolution, added to these leitmotifs the constant theme of the “betrayed revolution”⁵¹³. As we now know, GCI harboured no more space in his literature for these issues, and, when he did, as an essayist (something of which we will see much more in the next chapter) he did so always critically against these exact topics; criticizing as much the false nostalgia of the republicans in exile as the helpless nationalism of the communists in (and outside) Cuba. His autobiography centers (if there is *a* center, which there is not) on his *eros*, on those things that gave him life in Cuba, as a Cuban, as a Havanan and as the Havanan he became; seeking the recognition of his memories rather than the imposition of his political beliefs, which were decreasing by the day.

Nevertheless, the mark of exile, I insist, should never be obviated in GCI’s case. In *La Habana*, there is the unmistakable mark of a person who displays, shows, exhibits (as an exemplary exhibitionist) his freedom to remember, which is in candid contrast with the two only possibilities that are left for those wanting to remember in Cuba, either silence or exile—if you take neither, you *must* remember what the regime disseminates as worth remembering, what the revolution discriminates as valid memories. For a long time, eroticism was not worth remembering (it was not even worth speaking about) for the revolutionaries; afterwards, it was, but moderately, never desiring too much, less so showing it too pristinely: *regaeton*, for instance, was forbidden in Cuba on just these premises about a couple of years ago⁵¹⁴. Those Cubans outside the island are bound to remember a space they no longer inhabit. Those Cubans inside the island are compelled to remember a time they never experienced⁵¹⁵. Memories in Cuba are (at least those that *can* be expressed) subject to a sort of atemporal amnesia in which collective memories, constantly reinforced and propagated by the propagandistic apparatus of the regime, make

⁵¹³ On the relevance of this leitmotiv in Cuban’s intellectual history, see Rojas 119.

⁵¹⁴ See the note in the most important (and virtually only) newspaper in Cuba, the *Granma*, November 30, 2012; Year 16, Number 331; available in <http://www.granma.cubaweb.cu/2012/11/30/cultura/artic02.html>. It is worth noting that as of May 2014 this note is no longer available in the website of this newspaper.

⁵¹⁵ On these two forms of exile, from space (outside the island) and from time (inside the island), see Rojas 32.

for an inexistent past; for the manipulation of the past inherent in every totalitarian regime makes for the systematic forgetfulness of anything and everything that the regime deems forgivable (and hence forgettable). This explains why GCI was recently “forgiven” by the Cuban regime and re-introduced to the cultural reality of the island after more than 40 years of prohibition. It is not that an average Cuban can access his books easily; it is only that an average Cuban is allowed to say that he existed, that he was Cuban and that he wrote about a Cuba that existed before the revolution and about the revolution. Whatever the regime judges forgivable, the regime pronounces forgotten⁵¹⁶.

For the Cuban exile thus looking back is always an ethical deed. The true task of the exile is to tell what s/he left behind, GCI reminds us in the prologue he wrote for Natividad González Freire’s *testimonio: Descubriendo a Fidel Castro* [Discovering Fidel Castro], wherein the journalist gives an account of those terrible years she spent in limbo after her husband, the writer César Leante, decided to ask for asylum in Spain, and after she requested her visa to leave Cuba to the Cuban bureaucratic apparatus; a procedure that took more than 10 years—see, they were short of personnel (or was it of personhood? I forgot). Since exile means a radical interruption, a disconnection that is an alienation from your surroundings (and therefore from yourself), it is only natural that the exile

⁵¹⁶ In 2011, two Cuban journalists, Elizabeth Mirabal and Carlos Velazco, were awarded an important prize in Cuba (the award of the *Unión de Escritores y Artistas* [Union of Writers and Artists]) for a book on GCI’s life and work (from his childhood years in Gibara to his definitive exile in 1965) called *Sobre los pasos del cronista: el quehacer intelectual de Guillermo Cabrera Infante en Cuba hasta 1965* [On the steps of the *cronista*: the intellectual activities of Guillermo Cabrera Infante in Cuba till 1965]. As you can see, even the title is boring. These kind of “pardons” started in the early 1990’s, when the works (and figures) of Gastón Baquero, Lydia Cabrera, Jorge Mañach and Severo Sarduy were published in the island again (with, let me add, most deplorable introductions, in which the “scholar” in charge lectures us on the enormous value of these works, while s/he let us know her/his bewilderment and disappointment for their decisions of going to exile and of not supporting the government that was about to finally fulfill the promises of the future they helped to envision). For a most powerful account on these re-insertions and some of their consequences, see Rojas 40.

teller will look to anchor the sense of space (as places) of which s/he has been just stripped of in her/his sense of time (as memories in chronos: dates and dates).

It is funny that in a language in which the concept of “exile” is intrinsic to its history, this word was somewhat banished from its dictionary (the only official, the RAE, *Real Academia de la Lengua Española* [Royal/Real Academy of the Spanish Language]). GCI draws our attention to the fact that this concept was not inducted into this dictionary until 1956⁵¹⁷. Still, this practice is almost as old as the history of its policy-making⁵¹⁸. It is true, though, that exile as a common trope for the human condition is even older for us, Westerners, starting with the first and most (in)famous exiles in history, the sinning couple par excellence: Adam and Eve. Yet, in the last two centuries, this list has grown considerably thanks to the copious contributions of the Hispanic American countries⁵¹⁹. During the independentist movements of the 19th C. alone, expulsion became a source of harmony for the new appointed leaders (sacking close competitors, as Bolívar did with Santander in Colombia and San Martín in Argentina). And later, during the 20th C., serial exiles produced hordes of intellectuals, military officers, dictators, etc., swapping from country to country, thus transforming Hispanic America into a sort of swinger resort⁵²⁰.

⁵¹⁷ In Sznajder and Roniger 15.

⁵¹⁸ Expulsion, exclusion: exile has been part of the Iberian political practices almost since its constitution. The Jews were sent into exile (when not killed by the Holy Inquisition) during the 15th and 16th C. (actually, they were sent in big numbers to hopeless enterprises, like Columbus', who had among his crew a large group of Jews). The Moors were also persecuted and expelled (when they were not killed by the *crusaders*) during the 16th C., and so on and so forth. We should not forget that the first important literary work ever composed in Castilian, *El Cantar del Mio Cid*, was about an exiled hero; yes, the Cid, Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, was not a favorite of the king. It should not be forgotten either that in Spanish America, banishment was instituted as a way of punishment in the *Real Consejo de Indias*, which, among other issues, was behind the expulsion of the Jesuits (and the requisition of their properties) during the 18th C. For a detailed account of these issues, see Sznajder and Roniger 40-47, and Menocal's outstanding *Shards of Love*, more specifically chapter 1.

⁵¹⁹ For some (illustrious) names in this list, see Sznajder and Roniger 12.

⁵²⁰ Just to provide some examples: Chileans went to Argentina, fleeing from the ultra-right wing dictatorship of Pinochet, where they were received; Argentines went to

Omissions aside, we should agree that an exile (from wherever place) is located at an “either/or” position as she arrives in her host country: either I adapt or I remain true to myself⁵²¹. And, for some time, this proves a most difficult process during which the exile feels alienated from himself while he works hard in reconstituting his sense of selfhood. At the outset, all our assumptions as to what constitute ourselves are, at the very least, seriously put into question. Everything that was usual for us is nowhere to be found, and the unusual must start to become usual as fast as possible. We feel ourselves in a state of transit, similar to the one our bodies (and our identities, in terms of our papers, our “status”) are in. Today, this does not seem that terrible, since globalization has created the mirage that our identities are in perennial transit, that we are moving fast, that we should try to move even faster, and that roots are nothing but big nuisances in the process of moving on. Rootlessness is an important trope for globalization. This may be true, to some extent, but it is also true that individual *will* plays a great deal for ideal global citizens; so, being *forced* to move to another country plays no part in this deal. And it is precisely this force that throws you, that thrusts you in and then blows you out, which creates this sense of estrangement that takes you out of rhythm and delays and derails your tracing-memory. This is to feel estranged from your very flesh. And this is the true meaning of *missing* for an exile: something is missing in your flesh, something does not quite fit, there is too much or too few in your skin, in your pores: in your-self in motion; you do not feel as incarnating anything in particular: you have been amputated from those places that made it work.

Paraguay, and later to Uruguay, fleeing from the ultra-right wing military *Junta*, and they were received; Paraguayans went to Argentina fleeing from Stroessner’s military regime, where they were received; Uruguayans went to Trujillo’s Dominican Republic and so on and on and on—with the sole exception of Mexico, who was receiving exiles and refugees (from Spain, from Argentina, from Chile...) without producing so many (they were busy producing *braceros*, cheap labour-force for the United States under the guise of illegal immigrants). For a more detailed account of this exile-swapping, see Snzajder and Roniger 136-192.

⁵²¹ For a most interesting account on this “either/or” position in the exile, see Burke 38-44.

At the beginning, the exiled writer cannot help but writing about what he misses, and thus about those responsible for the amputations. At the beginning, exile-writing deals mostly with the politics that threw him out. Later, he starts to write about his determination and his efforts of/for not losing himself, and within this process, he starts to transform exile into a sort of ethnicity of its own, which both resists assimilation and welcomes change. *La Habana* is the book of this sort of exile, who has assumed himself as a lifetime tenant, a citizen of nowhere, a permanent resident of his memories and a civilian of his dreams. Yet, it should not be forgotten that GCI never quite forgave the mistreatment he received during his first 15 years of exile, when he was treated as a non-person for pronouncing himself against Fidel Castro's regime. Even after becoming an English citizen (quite late), his ill feelings against those hostile hosts he had in Spain and in Hispanic America never quite healed. And we should keep these feelings in mind for the next chapter. For the time being, we should retain the image of this chronicler slowly passing from longing for what he misses to reconfiguring his missing members.

A most moving passage occurs at a point in which GCI is in an "either/or" position as his lover (and first *real* love), Margarita del Valle, "the amazon", offers him to leave with her to Venezuela and to support him with the good money she was making in Venezuelan television (her well-paying beauty). GCI does not go, and does not follow his love because of ethics (not leaving his wife, pregnant as she was with his first daughter), but out of fear of losing himself: "But for me she (the city of course) is a fixation, while Margarita was my perpetual motion, my emotion" (347). He later answers to her most tempting proposal: "My life is here in Havana ... I'm not going to leave Havana ... I never intend to leave Havana" (365), and one cannot help but thinking "if you only knew"; but he concludes his relation with her by saying: "Havana was not only my beginning and my end but my middle queendom ... I don't want to lose you ... But I don't want to lose myself either" (366), and this is almost heartbreaking for the reader aware of GCI's fate.

The bodily motions (and emotions) of the exile seem, for the outside observer, greatly funny, often inadequate, out of time. This is because we are looking at a body that has lost several of its members and limbs, whose means of articulation have been severely severed. The immeasurable freedom to remember with which GCI found himself after he went into exile was attained as if by a shove, a force coming out of nowhere and from everywhere, pushing him out: suddenly, the outside is all that surrounds him, the line between privacy and intimacy has become all distance and everywhere is an edge, everywhere is a horizon. Everywhere is outside and he only had sensations of limbs where there were none: ghost limbs. With time, he regained that sense of intimacy, and an access to those missing articulations (though the limbs, as we know, do not grow back) and he developed some new ones through which he transformed that bewildering freedom into a sense of utter distancing whereby he achieved a passionate sense of distance and a distanced sense of passion—what, in some cold countries, is called maturity.

But, for some time, quite some time, each missing limb, each missing member grew into an obsession; and to each obsession GCI dedicated a book⁵²². It was by this dedication that each obsession opened a new access to his loss and thus gave him a different grasp to being obsessed and to being passionate: this could be done also at a distance. As a matter of fact, this could be done much more healthily at a distance. Obsession can be a most destructive feeling, wanting to possess what you implicitly know cannot be turned into a possession: something in its totality. Obsessions, like utopias, can be most entertaining in fictions; but terribly destructive in our everyday practices. Losses are thereby most vulnerable to become obsessions, because losses grant that what is lost can never be regained: only reconfigured, remade—and this, most frequently, can only be fictionally performed.

This is what happens with our articulations, those points with which we have been converging for a long time, when they are abruptly cut from our surroundings (or when

⁵²² This idea is elaborated on by Rojas 262.

we are, instead, abruptly cut from our surroundings). Incarnation is impossible without engagement, because you cannot incarnate something with which you cannot engage. Engagement is highly hard to do in estrangement; for it is not mainly about commitment, but it is rather about intimacy. The creation of intimacy is engagement. This is the only way through which my body becomes flesh, inter-humanely, in contact to other flesh I came to love, with whom and with which I am familiar, wherein “I” am articulated; for articulation can only arise in proximity, and so signification⁵²³. The in-between us, which has developed into *a* relation, singular and unique as it is, can bring forth something new, a form of interaction that can only arise when we are here, proximate to each other. Together also means apart, for together always entails more than one, hence not the same, and therefore each a part of this being together. All in-betweens are principles of contact, all intervals are sources of proximity, and all proximities are fonts of caring. Being engaged is nothing but being always already in-caring; caring to such an extent (and with such familiarity) that it does not even seem something we do, but something *we are*. Being a son means caring for my parents, being a Mexican means caring for Mexico, being a lover means caring for my partner, etc. All these I incarnate, and for all these I care. But this is so entrenched in my flesh that it is as if it were part of my very body: being the son of my parents means having yellowish eyes, being a Mexican means having small hands, being a lover means having big feet, etc.: it is all inscribed in my body; they all articulate my reality, it is the bond through which I am “I”. And all these I express, in my incarnation of myself (and of everything I *can* incarnate), as expressions that are embodied, enveloped in and by my flesh. So, when these bonds are severed (or those conditions that made the bond possible), it is as if your limbs had been severed (a finger, a hand, an arm, etc.)—and you find yourself all at once *making sense* in the in-between, living in intervals (instead of living through them), yourself hyphenated, your-self: neither other nor itself, but “something in between, I guess”⁵²⁴. Guessing becomes the

⁵²³ On signification as being born in proximity (and its crucial relation to touching), see Levinas 63.

⁵²⁴ As Leonard Cohen sings it in his marvelous *Closing Time*.

main cognitive resource for this hyphenated self; for how could I know what should I care, or even why, if I am not to know how should I care? This, we will need to find out.

6.4.1 Summary 37

This section deals with the way in which the writing of GCI's *Infante's Inferno* already approached words as bodies, and how this approach makes for a much more erotic composition, which contributed to give flesh to his own tracing-memory. It is therefore examined how this work was composed by using the techniques of autobiography, and yet how GCI gave absolute primacy to the reality (including the self) that words were therein composing. Words, in this way, start to reconstitute a topos, a physical place, almost at the point in which this reconstituted place becomes more real than the referent itself, namely, the Havana remembered therein. This is the process of making flesh out of memory, that is, of creating a meaningful access between the body and its memories that is made through rendering bodies out of words. This exercise, it is said, radiates a most particular feeling when the one performing it (in this case, GCI) is an exile, for memory is reconfigured by way of its losses, and these losses are recreated and reconstituted through these words that recompose a past that was, at some point, an interrupted present. This discussion prepares the way for a deeper reconceptualization of nostalgia, a concept that is taken again from where it was left in chapter 4, as that particular sentiment that propels the writer to reconstitute his/her past by way of his/her losses. This concept will be reconceptualised accordingly in the next chapter.

6.5 "Come to me"

According to the classical assumption of life-writing, and of autobiographical writing in particular, the self displayed (expressed, etc.) there is a centered, integrated self—whose presence is everywhere apparent (whether a past or a current presence)⁵²⁵. This centered,

⁵²⁵ For more on this assumption, see Moore-Gilbert 3.

integrated self, whose consciousness is mainly expressed in its intentionality, is what has guided most of the attacks against literary criticism as finding meaningful connections between the life of the writer and her work. This, in the spirit of these detractors, could be called “the biographical fallacy”⁵²⁶. Intentionality was, in this sense, attributable to an autonomous, centered, integrated self, with whom our main problem was that we, as critics, had to trust her/his sincerity if the writer’s intentions were to guide our criticism, and (the 20th C. is not coincidentally the century that saw philosophies of suspicion proliferating under the guise of critical [and sometimes hyper-critical] thinking), as we know, sincerity cannot be a reliable criterion for academically assessing a work of art⁵²⁷. If we want to be objective (thus fair) in judging the aesthetic virtues of a work of art, we must concentrate on objective, neutral criteria of evaluation. This is the only way to find a “universally valid expression” as to how art looks (and should look) like. If it is hard enough to get to know one’s true self, and express it accordingly, it must be even harder to know (let alone evaluate) another’s true self, particularly if that other is absent. There is another problem with the biographical model, which is that it climaxed during the times in which art dealers bloomed almost as an unofficial institution. The artist’s biography

⁵²⁶ There would be several proponents of this fallacy (see, for instance, Ullmann 79), but the absolute champions would be the “New Critics” (an epithet that sounds today not so adequate for a school of criticism that climaxed during the late 1940’s and the early 50’s). Their main claims were that the work of the writer was independent from the writer once it was finished and read, and that it was impossible for the reader to try to find the work’s meaning by trying to find causal connections between the work and the writer’s intentions. Instead, they proposed, the critic must concentrate on the work itself, for concentrating on the reader (as was going to be suggested soon later by Roland Barthes in his “The Death of the Author”) was under the risk of falling into relativism, and thus on a similar fallacy than that of focusing on the writer’s intentions. Against romantic hermeneutics (whose main proponents were the late 19th C. philosophers Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey), the “New Critics” (now more like “middle-aged critics”) did not want to answer “what does the author want to say?”, but rather “what does the work can say?”. For a full account of these fallacies and the “new” alternative of focusing on the work itself, see Crowe Ransom, *The New Criticism*; see also its quasi-program as is contained in Wimsatt and Beardsley.

⁵²⁷ For an insightful commentary on the unreliability of sincerity as a criterion for literary criticism, see Moore-Gilbert 30.

(his life) and its relation to his work was exploited (and often manipulated) by art dealers who were mainly seeking to find a good place in the market for the artist's work. This model thus made of criticism a sort of touristic package wherein you get brochures and guides about the artist you want to get to know before deciding on and making your purchase. This narcissistic, client-oriented model (well, what is a client but a Narcissus reflected in the mirror of the retailer's babble) helped to further give the connection between biography and work a bad name⁵²⁸.

Perhaps all this is true, but it is not truth what concerns us here. All this discussion is, according to what we have been working up to this point, futile since these presuppositions could not be further from ours. We are neither concerned with an autonomous, centered, integrated self nor with his/her intentions. GCI has been treated in this work as neither of these things, nor his life-story, nor his work, nor his style, nor his literature. For us, GCI *is* all these things (his life-story, his work, his style, his literature), yet we have never claimed that he is (or was) *just* these things nor that we could exhaust either of them. For us, life and work are irretrievably interwoven, but more so in the case of a writer for whom his life and his work were so close, as it is obviously GCI's case. Trying to approach his work independently from his life would be as pointless as trying to approach Cuba independently from its history and its political reality; like visiting it through any of its resorts—they are all the same, though, of course, each is framed by a different landscape, like the kind of works stemming from "New Criticism" for instance. As a matter of fact, I can say that I came to read several writers because I was first fascinated by their lives; this was the case with Poe or Dostoyevsky. And this relationship only enhanced my literary experience, rather than biased it. And, again, we are here speaking about a literary experience, about the possibility of experiencing together with a writer who is no longer here, but who left us some of his life in writing: a most important part.

⁵²⁸ For an interesting account of this kind of use of biography as a client-oriented model, see Salas 10.

So this is what it is all about: experiencing together. As we have been pointing out, the *othering* process of GCI, through which he wrote himself in *La Habana*, was also a form of re-experiencing what he left behind and of experimenting with that experience. This is a process of recreation, rather than of representation, and this is the self that concerns us here (and *the* self as it has been here conceptualized), the self as recreated and as, simultaneously, recreating her experiences, her past, her happenings... her *pathos*. The Havana evoked in *La Habana*, as the young GCI evoked therein, is invoked through language's conjuring powers. This is not so much about a self as it is created in/by autobiography, not even about another self created for public purposes, resorting to strategies that may capture the reader's attention and plead for her willingness to identify with the autobiographed self; a reader who, by virtue of this overidentification, will overlook many of his actions, feelings, etc.⁵²⁹ Sincerity is still of the utmost importance for us, but in a different way than in presenting (or representing) a truth as transparent as the self it bears. Instead, we are concerned with sincerity in terms of opening for us an access to an always already complex form of authenticity that tells us as much about ourselves as it tells us about our world, as it tells us about the writer: an *authentically* being together⁵³⁰. Autobiographical truth is for us that which we can discover about

⁵²⁹ For such a kind of self created for the purpose of eliciting a bond of sympathy between the autobiographer and the readers, see O'Rourke, wherein he analyses (starting with Rousseau, of course) those autobiographical "strategies" (lies, often times) through which the autobiographer asks (and frequently obtains) for the reader's comprehension and, very frequently, for the reader's complicity. It is of particular interest his study on Charlotte Bronte, 133-191.

⁵³⁰ Authenticity is a concept that was so central to Martin Heidegger's philosophy that it is almost impossible to mention it without directly or indirectly alluding to the German philosopher. *Aletheia* (frequently translated as "authenticity") is not what we mean here, for, in Heidegger, this concept responds to the "authenticity of being" through which we can see "it" as it discloses in unconcealing. Authenticity is, in this sense, treated as a noun, as well as something achieved (close to Aristotle's concept of *ataraxia*). Again, authenticity, in the way we are speaking of it, is not "thingly", and it is not a quality either, but something we *do*, an adverb if you will; being authentically is something that

ourselves, about the writer and about the world; something similar to what it has been for various autobiographers and notable memoirists⁵³¹. The self is thus approached as a fictive structure, not false but rather *formed*. We are searching for discovery in and by invention⁵³². This is the kind of authenticity we are looking for: an achieved authenticity that is necessarily recreated—and this is what *La Habana* achieves.

This kind of authenticity transcends epistemology (what and how we know) and anchors itself in ethics. This, also, makes it most complicated; for ethics (normative as it can get) always means: “up to you”; it always means that you must *not* be forced to do what you do, that you cannot be forced to act responsibly. Ethics makes a claim to a kind of responsibility that *should* not be ignored, to whose call one *should* always respond, but that is up to us whether we do it or not. This is what makes us so uncomfortable with ethics. Unlike morality, it cannot be established universally, but is bound to respond singularly (case by case) to the call of contingency, which is where we happen to be thrown. We can only know contingency as necessity *after* it happened. Yet we cannot respond ethically *after* the fact. Being ethical requires from us, mainly, being trustful in the other, and this necessarily requires from us to regard the other (from the start, as we meet him/her) as always already sincere: it is up to him/her to prove otherwise—not to you. This is just a matter of position, not of philosophical argument. It would be most difficult to prove whether sincerity is at the very origin of language⁵³³; we may easily

can only be done and about which we can only speak partially, *while* we do it. For Heidegger’s concept of *aletheia*, see *Being and Time*, mainly 29-37.

⁵³¹ In his *Fictions in Autobiography*, Eakin analyses important writers who were/are also notable memoirists, or both things at once (e.g., Mary McCarthy, Henry James, Jean-Paul Sartre, Saul Friedlander and Maxine Hong Kingston), and who deeply reflect on the process of fictionalization (self-invention) ingrained in the project of discovery (self-discovery), something that, Eakin claims, often happens at the same time.

⁵³² For a most celebrated (and profound) argument on the aporias that stem from the inseparable relation between invention and discovery, see Derrida, “Psyche, Inventions of the Other”.

⁵³³ One of the most notable champions of this idea (sincerity at the origin of language, or “saying”, as he called it) is Levinas. See his *Otherwise than Being* 143.

assume that it is the other way around: that language is there to conceal the truth, that it is yet another tool for insincerity⁵³⁴. Nonetheless, this argument is equally difficult to prove. So, I very much rather take the first position; the premises stemming from it make much more sense than those from the second one, whose premises inevitably lead us to justify oppression and domination: “I should better oppress/dominate you first, before you do it”.

Evocation /Invocation are thus the resources through which we can recreate what is long gone: our pasts (and even those of others). To evoke means to remember, but also to make present through expression that what we remember, and hence to reconfigure it. To invoke means to call, but also to conjure up what we call, and hence to reconfigure it. For GCI, this was made through words and through the configuration of texts. The geography evoked/invoked in *La Habana* is the topography configured in the text; and so are the women, the friends, the family, the houses, the city, etc. As Jacobo Machover points out: “Cabrera Infante has spent practically as much time in exile as in his native country. This is why the word ‘Cuba’ acquires an incantatory dimension, obsessive, tragic and magical at the same time. To appropriate the word is to recuperate the geography” (*El Heraldo de las Malas Noticias* 23). This kind of remembering, this re-remembering, reconstituting his missing members, became GCI’s new and most important tradition in exile: his collective rituals in solitude.

And this is where we come in, as GCI’s readers, at the other side of the page: completing this collective ritual in solitude: this ritual called fictionalizing, mythmaking. Form and ritual are one and the same, since a ritual is a practice invested with form. What in the myth is all narrative, in the ritual is all practice. As Regine Hampel writes: “A lie is only a lie when the one lied to thinks he is hearing the truth. When ... both know it is a lie, then the lie becomes a ritual ... This is where form becomes more important than content”

⁵³⁴ Perhaps the best known argument about language as insincerity’s main channel can be found in Machiavelli, who gave the most surprising twists (and also the most realistic observations of his political environment) to Cicero’s rhetoric lessons so as to transform the successful prince into a fox, a master of deceit. See Machiavelli 37-38.

(232). Though with “lie” she is referring to what we have conceptualized as fiction [a given form], I would still insist on substituting the word “lie” with “fiction”; because words are most important for us here: they are the very bodies that make tangible what we share. Words making fictions, words made flesh.

We thus know, as readers already involved in this ritual, that words are incarnated bodies; they are flesh and thus they are not representations anymore. Words are invested in this ritual with a life of its own, and, for the duration of this ritual, word and life become one, enjoined, embraced and entangled, as two backs for which we see no end. We very well know, though, that word and life are two different things; because we know that words know no death—only life does. Words only meet ends, oblivion perhaps, but no death: words do not die and nobody dies in and by words, just as no-body is born in words. Words may bring about death for a person, as much as they can bring about life for another. And, in a tradition such as the Cuban oral tradition, heir of ancient Lucumí and Christian lore, wherein words play such an important role (however differently)⁵³⁵, the possibility of participating in a ritual in which words may bring about life, death, a divine presence or an ill-fate is always latent. But not even in these traditions are words considered to live or die themselves. We should not conclude, however, that words are immortal or something like that. We may, following GCI’s conjuring rituals, comprehend how words *preserve* life and death, *eros* and *thanatos*, beauty, love, passion, joy, desperation, jealousy, anger, bewilderment, doubt, and so forth.

⁵³⁵ See Cabrera, *Anagó* (a book that means to preserve the words of, mainly, the Lucumí language by creating a dictionary in which what is transmitted exclusively orally is inscribed into the written language and translated into the Spanish word). She explains in a passage how the *Holy Father* suffered significant changes when it was translated to Yoruba, since the translation was transmitted orally from generation to generation, and, every time they wrote the words, they wrote them differently; for notes and notebooks were only good “to refresh one’s memory” (17) but not to really translate one’s utterances.

We are in front of the text then; the text as an incarnated space: as a place populated by words. And, in this sense, we are in front of life's innermost possibility: infinity, its infinite extension in a future that never finally arrives. The trope of life as a text that is in its process of being written is not strange to literature⁵³⁶. This might have to do with the text's spatial possibilities of harbouring bodies wherein life itself (and sometimes, death itself) is preserved and born. Probably, the power of this rituality alters our very sense of suffering. At least, it is likely that it offers us a different connection between speaker and character, between listener and speaker and between listener and character. At some point, the self (the speaker's as expressed in the text, the character's as invented through the text, the listener's as discovered by the text) belongs to all at once, and the connection is transfigured into the evocation/invocation of *what* this connection is connecting in the first place: us with and through the text.

This ritual hence has its own particularities for the exile, for the text *becomes* and *is made into* the *topos* of the writer in exile⁵³⁷. I am not sure if this would be the same for everybody, but, being an expatriate reader (which is like being in a semi-exile, if there is such a thing), I read and participate in GCI's rituals also as making the text a *topos* of my own, if partially; for I am neither a Havanan nor a Cuban, I was neither a youngster in the 1940's nor considerably poor as a teenager, but, anyway, I am not GCI, nor am I his narrator. What I am is a reader and a participant of this ritual of reading, and, for the duration of the ritual, I participate in this fiction-making of transforming the text into a *topos*, a place to dwell: a place *I* dwell in the *I* of the narrator. This is not identification at all, but a process of in-fusion whereby one blends oneself in affectation.

In GCI's case, the *autos* of autobiography is mixed with the *alter* of fiction. We have seen how much he loved to mix history and fiction, but, now, in the case of *La Habana*, we learn how much he enjoys doing this with himself: with no surrogates, with no alter-egos

⁵³⁶ See for instance Cixous, "The Book as one of its own Characters" 427.

⁵³⁷ For the text as being the *topos* of the exile, see Prade 7.

to speak in his name—though with no name either. As his biographer Raymond D. Souza says: “Just where the autobiography ends and the fiction starts is difficult to ascertain, and it is doubtful the author himself knows” (139). Autobiography and fiction are, in this book, always already blended⁵³⁸. The “I” of the narrator blends with the “I” of the writer and with the “I” of the speaker and with the “I” of the reader; but, mainly, it blends with the landscape of the text: a landscape made of words. The text, in this way, becomes self-referential, and we participate in its invention, but only as observers, chroniclers at the very best, watching how the text reaches the height of its powers of self-invention: the life there preserved is the life here invented. Within this ritual, we are witnesses to *poiesis* itself. It is for this very reason that I said that our reading does not start as identification, just as I insisted that GCI’s process of recreation (evocation/invocation) is not mimesis, not even a creative one. There was considerable (creative) mimesis in *TTT*, where he tried to capture the *Habanero* speech “*al vuelo*” [in passing]; but this is not *La Habana*’s case, where recreation achieves its greatest heights in us—some who (like me) have not even been to Cuba ever in their lives. GCI used to say that he did not consider himself a writer of novels or short stories or essays or film criticisms, but rather a writer of books. And he said that not only does each book have a language of its own, but that each book *must* invent a language of its own⁵³⁹. So, for each text, he made a place, and in each place he poured his bodies, all his past bodies, all that the place could harbour. We see these words as bodies moving, rhythmically, and we find ourselves distilled in the tracing-memory emerging therein: we are suddenly seized by another sense of time—now we are moving at a different pace, even though we still are at the same place.

⁵³⁸ Souza says how much he prefers to call *La Habana* an “autobiographical fiction”, something not so strange as it was a very fashionable term that took full force during the late 1970’s and 1980’s (*La Habana* was published in 1979, and Souza’s biography was published in 1996). For an in-depth exploration of the term (“autobiographical fiction”) see Hampel.

⁵³⁹ See his interview with Soler Serrano.

Nostalgia, within these re-creational terms, is not about compensating for the inevitable darkness of future times with the splendid luminosity of times past. We are implying here that the autobiographer lives backwards⁵⁴⁰, but this is not done because the future does not offer you anything worth pursuing, but because the future offers you nothing worth recreating. The attempt to recreate the future is not only counter-intuitive, but it is mainly utopia-generating. The past, however, irreversibly gone, is and should be worth recreating. A past not worth recreating points towards a life not worth living: made out of remorse. This does not mean that, for instance, those tragedies in your life (like losing a child, or being expelled from your country, or overnight becoming a non-person in your homeland and being sent to some camp in which you suffer unspeakable mistreatment) that you are not keen to remember are worth remembering in-themselves; what this means is that there should be moments of your life you fondly remember, and those moments can be deemed as much (or even more) constitutive of who you are as those tragic moments that befell you. Yes, but what about, for instance, the perpetrators, those extreme cases who should be remorseful and ashamed of themselves and their pasts forever and ever? you know, such as Charles Manson or Joseph Stalin or Augusto Pinochet or Fidel Castro... or Lance Armstrong: shame on you! we believed in you and you failed us. Here is a first problem, the part: “we believed in you” has nothing to do with them. And here is a second issue, even if it is true that it is desirable that these people meet (or had had met) the responsibility of their past (terrible) misdeeds, it is not desirable that they become non-persons by becoming a living reservoir of remorse, for, if this were the case, they would be better off dead: their remorseful present lives would be as harmful (for themselves and for others) as their past unscrupulous ones. A life lived in remorse is a non-lived life, it is a life broken off all relations; for it is a life lost in time, with pasts that sting (and stink) and with torturous memories. When memory is turned into a weapon against oneself, the future cannot be imagined and the tracing-memory is bound to fail: oblivion is remorse’s middle-name.

⁵⁴⁰ For this splendid image of the “living backwards” of the autobiographer, see Eakin 152.

This kind of recreative nostalgia then points towards just that kind of past: the past as worth remembering. Here, the “I” of the autobiographer is destabilized as a referent⁵⁴¹, and it multiplies itself in a series of “I’s” springing and jumping from the text, for the past, as a referent, has been destabilized just as well. Language has come in the past’s way, and thus language intercedes in the name of the “I”. The memory of the exile has left behind a great deal of things, just as most of us had, but it bears the peculiarity that what it left behind was stripped off their lives at one stroke, suddenly, as if a chimp were moved from its habitat to a cage and from the cage to a lab; we just cannot expect it will behave the same—less so can we expect it will ever be the same. This sudden break forces a sudden distance in the exile that imposes over his evocating exercises a most brusque perspective. Nostalgia, within this context, will never be a solipsistic exercise; it is turned, instead, into an expressed urge to validate, recapture and recreate an irrecoverable world; not only irrecoverable as past, but not-possibly-coverable as space: that place is neither there to be covered nor discovered by the exile anymore. That world is a lost referent whose only possible place is in that bridal chamber still shared by memory and imagination: *poiesis*.

But, then again, the exile should be wary of trying to fit *everything* into the thing he makes. The writer in exile (and the writer at large) should avoid trying to try and fit himself in the text, or to tailor texts that may toil to “correct” the past in favor of the future (readers)—a retrospective exercise of self-censorship⁵⁴². If you remember, write!

⁵⁴¹ See Eakin 186, for an interesting commentary on Paul de Mann’s “unstable referent in autobiography”.

⁵⁴² See Loureiro 40, where he explains how the Spanish, Joseph Blanco White (originally, José María Blanco Crespo, though more originally, probably, at least for him, Blanco White, for he was searching for his Irish ancestry) made a part of his own philosophy the constant attempt to make coincide his autobiography with his life; reaching the point in which the autobiography became a sort of sketch of his life, and where, literally, “life imitates autobiography”. For a great account of self-retrospective censorship and of the

but do so *as* you remember, not as you would rather remember. To be sure, this “as you remember” has a great affective charge of fiction and (if you do not mind a categorical contradiction) inaccuracy. Just to begin with, everything that we remember is necessarily coloured by our present; and, since we necessarily remember *in* the present, there is no way for those tones touching and retouching those past rhythms to be vanished or obviated. Given that when we write, we write for others to read, particularly when we write an autobiography (for it could be argued that writing a journal, for instance, is only for personal reading), “skeletons in the closet” could tempt the autobiographer to bend her nostalgia a little bit towards the image of herself that she believes (or would like) others (to) have, or others (to) endorse⁵⁴³. In the case of Cuba, this kind of exercises may come with an additional ingredient: future as fear. The 1959 revolution benefitted a great deal from the rhetoric of this instilled fear that came in the Spanish caravels; some with evangelical habits (fear the future, welcome death, for true life is the afterlife, etc.). The fear to the unknown that the future may bring was one of the major reasons why the revolutionary utopia grew to the proportions it did, since it promised to tame that fear in order to expect the future, rather than fear it. As we know, what this revolution did was to domesticate this fear so as to disseminate it in the everyday life⁵⁴⁴. Paranoia, being chased by the always uncertain future (as well as by the past), adds yet another layer to self-delusion in Cuban self-portrayals.

GCI has cast out those fears (he exorcised them, remember?) by the time he starts writing *La Habana*. The past and the place recreated in the text reconfigure a different kind of referent, one always already in motion, changing in front of our very eyes (and of our very “I’s” too). His memory is a trans-memory traversing the barriers of past, present and future. This is most apparent in the way he plays with time in the text, and in which he

memoirist as a tailor of his self in posterity (in the case of the Mexican intellectual and politician, José Vasconcelos) see Molloy 205.

⁵⁴³ On this kind of nostalgia coloured by “skeletons in the closet”, see Deciu Ritivoi 141.

⁵⁴⁴ For an extended commentary on this domestication of fear by the 1959 revolution, see Rojas 69.

constantly reminds us that the past there recreated is being fictionalized. Sentences in which he reminds us he is speaking from another linguistic reality, already ahead of himself: “(I’m getting ahead of myself, in this case linguistically: in my vocabulary the word *tenement* did not yet exist. I have already gotten ahead of myself before, but that was the introduction while now we’re *in media res*)” (9). Or sentences in which he addresses a particular addressee, a friend he knows will read his work and who will inevitably find a revelation: “[I] never told Franqui” that he kissed his girlfriend, Beba, before he did, and that possibly (at the middle of a fever romp) she told him that she only loved him, “a secret between Beba and me until now” (48), a secret that was kept “for all these years”—“it’s only now ... that I share it” (50). Sentences in which he tells us that “All that was in the future”, only to confess us that he has lost track of time: “I don’t know when then was now...”)” (77). Sentences in which we are reminded about a future that has already past: “there’s only one other [perfect back] that I remember with such fervor upon seeing it naked for the first time—but that memory belongs to another time, another place, and will be revived elsewhere, in another book where I won’t be me” (82), “—but that memory belongs to the future and now I’m talking about the present, that is, the past” (110). Sentences that reminds us the plasticity of memory: “Some time later—I don’t remember exactly: the rememberer alone only knows that time is elastic” (164). These are sentences that place memory as already in motion and *chronos* as already in place.

This motion, which is the rhythm of the exile, of he who looks back so as to wind his watch, the watch that marks the time of his own past, suspends referentiality and locates it in the incessant movement of physical time. The “I” of the narrator of *La Habana* finds thus its point of proliferation; it becomes multiple within the only span allowed for an autobiographer: the middle. The “true” beginning of the autobiographer’s life, and its “true” end, are banned for him to tell; he cannot but refer to them, for there is not, properly speaking, a referent to them. The referent, as the “I” who writes, is transcended by its origin and by its end: they are references without referent. The “I” of *La Habana* is

therefore pointing back to a self already dissolved and reproduced in a time that is everywhere propagated. The true referent is the word. This is why *La Habana* toys with and constantly hinders the reader's possible identification with that "I", because reality is, in this way, decomposed into words and recomposed as a text—the one you are holding in your hands. The past without a referent, the Cuban without Cuba of which we spoke in the fourth chapter, thus makes a place for this past to bloom and fructify. The agonic protagonist of *La Habana* comes always already as manifold waves flooding and ebbing, breaking and receding as paper-creatures, or, better, as creatures in paper: they keep coming and going as we watch. Form is *La Habana's* true protagonist, or rather, forms (of feminine beauty, of the streets of Havana, of eroticism, of onanism, etc.). In this fashion, we start to inhabit GCI's past possessed as if by an "intuitive osmosis"⁵⁴⁵.

(No animas were harmed in the making of this ritual)

6.5.1 Summary 38

This section starts with a much more thorough critique to intentionality than all those made before. This critique opens a discussion about authorship that will be fully developed in the next chapter. In the case of the present chapter, this critique centers on building a different relationship between biography (autobiography in this case) and work. This relationship introduces again the reader, who necessarily experiences together with the writer, having the work as a sort of *topos*, a meeting place. The process of recreating (rather than representing) reality, a recreation that allows the experiencing together of that reality, is spoken here in terms of the double-movement of invocation/evocation that was briefly discussed in chapters 4 and 5. The double-movement of evocation/invoke is taken here again, but now as a ritual, as if through this ritual words were rendering present those places, people, times, etc., in sum, the self, past and present, in and through the recreation of his/her tracing-memory. This ritual thus enjoins life and work, as it brings the work to life and puts the life (of the writer and of

⁵⁴⁵ I owe this marvelous image to Root 128.

the reader) to work. It is in this section then that the concept of nostalgia is reconceptualised as a power to reconstitute one's past as it arises from one's losses. It is also understood within this reconceptualization that, by this virtue, nostalgia helps to open a process of acceptance through which a person can come into terms not only with his/her past, but also with his/her future. The way in which this process occurs will be fully described in the next chapter.

6.6 "Come with me"

Before being an exile, GCI was an emigrant. The first place he left behind was, at the same time, the one in which he finished an era: GCI left his childhood in Gibara. He will always remember fondly this Oriental town, once rich and vibrant, but in perennial decadence after the central highway was built in Havana by Machado and nobody passed through it anymore. The title of *La Habana* in Spanish, that parodies Maurice Ravel's *Pavana pour une infante defunte*, does not only reinforce the musical (classical music this time) motif of this work, but also tells us what the work is about: the end of childhood. Literally in English, the title would be "Havana for a dead infant" (no wonder he, and Suzanne Jill Levine, changed it to *Infante's Inferno*, replacing Ravel with Dante), which also plays with his maternal surname and with the consonance between the words "infante" and "difunto". The word "infant", though, has quite a different meaning in English, for it refers to nearly a baby, which makes the title nothing but a joke in bad taste; and if we take in account that GCI was very conscious of the baby-sister he lost when he was a little boy, the joke in bad taste becomes a cruel jest of fate⁵⁴⁶. The end of his childhood had a specific place and date: July 25, 1941, Zulueta 408. At the beginning of the book (that is, the end of his infancy) he is facing a staircase for the first time in his life, the staircase of the *solar* (the name of mammoth colonial buildings that were transformed into low-income oriented house-units; with many people and few services) in

⁵⁴⁶ On the many titles with which GCI and Jill Levine toyed with until they arrived to *Infante's Inferno* (mainly retained because it was alliterative), see Jill Levine, "Infante's Inferno".

which he will spend most of his puberty (and poverty); this staircase is the inaugural memory of his teens⁵⁴⁷. The book starts: “It was the first time I climbed a staircase”, but, before climbing, he watched, he contemplated the “vertical movement” that this structure expressed to the young hick: “Time stopped at that vision”, and there and then, that very morning, “my adolescence began” (1).

Adolescence, as we know, is an age of transition—and a difficult stage it is. You are in-between childhood and adulthood, between the paradise of innocent mimesis and the laboratory of forced incarnations. Responsibility is a common trope for the teenager moving towards that age of adulthood. But this is not so much. This is mainly, in Western culture, a moment to get acquainted with the kind of performances that are expected from you and with the kind of duties you are required to fulfill in order to become autonomous, independent and, who knows, maybe even successful. Theater thus transitions from play to obligation, and it is within these terms (obligation, duty, autonomy) that responsibility is framed upon. Mimesis may probably become incarnation, but it must also become functional (rather than creative, playful, as the child’s): we go from fiction to function⁵⁴⁸. Adult’s current multiphrenic state: multi-tasking, multi-jobbing, multi-texting, and so on, “demands that each of us act and think in a multitude of different, sometimes contradictory ways” (McAdams 118). The crafting of personas (imagoes *of* certain aspects or attributes expected from me: as my teaching persona, which is different from my uncle persona, and different from my friend persona, etc.) in this age of multi-acting (where, paradoxically, plurality is nowhere to be found) requires from us a most sophisticated sense of mimesis, which, sometimes, conflicts with our capacities of incarnation (our caring capacities and our capacities of engagement)—it all depends on our interests.

⁵⁴⁷ For the staircase as the inaugural memory in *La Habana*, “just like the madeleine is for Proust”, see Machover 25.

⁵⁴⁸ For the city as a theater, see Mumford, mainly chapters 12 and 13. For a pertinent interpretation of Mumford’s idea in the context of GCI’s *La Habana* (as well as of Alejo Carpentier’s *El Acoso*), see Izquierdo 13.

GCI was no exception and, as most of us, he lived his puberty full of anguish, anxiety, uncertainty, etc. But middle-aged GCI (he was around 46 when he started to write *La Habana*) has an advantage: his style. We said that we watch the “I’s” of the narrator multiplying and receding in the text, but we did not say that we also behold how a style, singular as it is, remains constant in time. It is GCI’s style that gives the text a sense of continuity, what remains constant within change and over time. We thus become witnesses: of his singularity, of his style remaining constant over time, of his “I’s” multiplying in times; but, moreover, witnesses of his process of becoming a witness. If we said that this is a “coming-of-age” book, we would not be mistaken, but we would not be sincere witnesses either, for this is a book on “the-age-of-coming”. We should, however, open the verb “to come” to all of its connotations, to the vast terrain of its semantic field. If we accept that adolescence is, mainly, an age of initiations, we can agree that it is therefore an age of “coming to’s”: coming to love, coming to city, coming to Havana, coming to Havanan speech, coming to flesh... coming to writing. Each initiation (and there are plenty marked by the writer) points towards the reality that lingers on the other side of the page: a coming to witness.

For GCI, Gibara will always incarnate *the* place of nature, which is, also, the common trope for childhood (the age of nature): of familial bonds, of untouched beaches, of all sort of animals (and all sort of pets) and of all sort of vegetation; the town was like the auditorium in the theater of natural order—and a cruel theater it was (animals eating animals, hurricanes killing trees, etc.). The city, on the other hand, impressed him from the very beginning. This was the hometown of artefacts, of cultural creations at their very height, of human powers at their very best (and, as he soon realized, at their very worst). This was the birth of his urban self, of the kind of self that has been waiting for him for all his life: a (wo)man-made place with (wo)man-made roots and (wo)man-made soils. The city was not the place of familial bonds but, as it quickly showed, the place of

(wo)man-made bonds⁵⁴⁹; it was the transcendence of kinship in favour of the affirmation of affinity. This was the kind of place to be one's own man.

The first important initiation of which we know in *La Habana* is the city-speech, with the particularities of what we told was the *hablanero* dialect; a dialect of city dwellers who spoke too much about everything and who had an immense gamut of registers between formal and informal speech. For the young GCI, the dialect of Old Havana, with all its variations, was one of the most enchanting novelties with which he met as a small town *guajirito*. Since Havana is (and was, for a long time, even before it became the capital of Cuba after Santiago) the urban center of the country and the country has a most centralist (as most Hispanic American countries do) political system, it is not strange that so many dialects emerged within a two-century span. Many families of *guajiros*, like Cabrera Infante's, moved to Havana looking for what his family came to look for: better luck (better salaries, better education, better opportunities, etc.). Most of them would experience even a more pronounced poverty than the one they knew in their hometown, as was GCI's family's case. But, as the old saying says "*Habana, quien no te ve no te ama*" [Havana, who doesn't see you, doesn't love you], this ill-fate was compensated by the many marvels the city offered and, what is more, the city promised. Cities are seedbeds of cravings. A good part of the first chapter of *La Habana*, "The House of Changes", is the narration of this coming to the city with an insider's look, and a good part of this chapter is devoted to highlight and celebrate GCI's enriched lexicon and perfected accent; something that grew by the day. His newly developed speech was one of his most important values as a newbie Havanan⁵⁵⁰. Coming to Havana was coming to a new universe, wherein, as Machover points out, the old speech was insufficient and for

⁵⁴⁹ On the city as a constant stimulus to imagine one's futures and pasts, see Boym 76.

⁵⁵⁰ For the relation between dialects and values, see Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic* 179.

which he needed to design and learn a new speech⁵⁵¹. Coming to Havana was a coming into speech.

If so immense is GCI's love for the *habanero* speech, it is only natural that he would commit to it even if, unlike *TTT*, he will do so from his own voice—or from that of the “I” of his narrator, which is pretty much the same. This is how digression, an old habit of his, becomes in *La Habana* an important resource for the reconfiguration of Havanan speech. As Lydia Cabrera explains in *El Monte* (a book that GCI himself estimated to be the best written work in Cuban history), for Cubans, digression is inseparable from explanation. It should not be understood as self-indulgency, or as lack of rigour, but rather as their enrooted distrust in teleologies (that was further enriched by the Yoruba's own traditions, as Cabrera [Lydia] observes⁵⁵²), and therefore as an almost religious commitment with the word. Only the saints had plans, only deities had methods; humans have neither, humans digress because humans think and thought should not be obstructed and cannot be anticipated—when it can, it is because you are channelling some saint's message, and you must reproduce it verbatim; but this is rather rare. To achieve this effect without properly (or improperly) changing the course of his story (as he often did in *TTT*), GCI constantly uses appositions (juxtaposed noun phrases, either unrestricted [with commas] or restricted [without commas]). I pointed out before that we, Hispanic Americans, were born between commas (and I mentioned GCI's penchant for commas), and, styles aside, digressions seem to be intrinsic to our explanations; it is not strange to find very large sentences and very large paragraphs in Hispanic-American very early texts⁵⁵³. Nonetheless, in *La Habana*, digressions are at the service of the anecdote (and not the other way around, as happened with his former books, with the exception of *Vista*,

⁵⁵¹ *Op. cit.* 27.

⁵⁵² *El Monte* 11.

⁵⁵³ Just a few pages reading Garcilaso de la Vega, *Inca*, who is canonically considered the first important writer born in America (whence the epithet of “America's first *mestizo*”). If you are reading an average couple of pages, it is likely that you will not get to finish the paragraph.

all stripped of digressions). Diglossia is also retained, as if by an ethical call, but differently, in a most curious way⁵⁵⁴. He integrates it in his very discourse and not only in the recreation (impersonation included) of the other characters' speech: he makes it part of his own telling. And he does so to remind us that the vernacular, the popular, the colloquial, is always already interacting with the classical, the formal, the learned.

The city, Havana, as we have been speaking of it here, hence enjoins, almost perfectly, history and geography: the [wo]man-made and the space, the place and the landscape, the ordered time of history, the *chronos*, and the ordered space of geography, the *topos*: a *chronotope*; but not as Bakhtin would have it (as spatio-temporal coordinates for the characters' languages⁵⁵⁵), rather as a place where initiations are set in motion and register a time and a space that runs parallel with the life and narrative of the narrator. Havana as a *chronotope* would work then as a union between GCI's history (his-story) and GCI's place, which is, first, his body and then (though not secondly) his body, his flesh and the discovery of his flesh. Havana is the great artefact that harbours his own artefact (body made flesh, speech made writing). Havana is "the transformer and transmitter of the energies of the community" (Izquierdo 18), energies transformed into and transmitted as culture—a wildly varied, fast-paced changing culture. Havana was the polycentric city, home of plurality, with no proper style insofar as it is "a carnival of styles" (60), exuberantly expanding, as the universe does; with *La Rampa* as a constant interval GCI

⁵⁵⁴ In her *Shards of Love*, Rosa María Menocal explains how, following the Petrarchan tradition, the disappearance of diglossia from the accounts of the chroniclers and missionaries who came with the *conquistadores* (such as Las Casas) contributed (and aimed at) the homogenization of the Spanish language, or, at least, to the impression that it was an homologized language. The dialects of the Jews and of the Moors were completely obliterated. But what is most interesting is that the many accents, registers and grammars ("bad grammars" included) and even the songs of the Spanish sailors were rendered inexistent. As Menocal says: "the alternative has been that medieval scholarship (what we even call philology) has been doing, and that we are moving purposefully—struggling inexorably—toward pristine Castilian, or pure Italian, or perfect French" (13).

⁵⁵⁵ For a succinct though detailed explanation of this concept, see Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a History of Poetics".

made into the leitmotiv of the nightlife in the Cuba of the late 1950's in *TTT*, but this learning belongs to the future. *La Habana* is not only the book of Old Havana, but also the book of daylight (he even went to the movies at daytime, another urban discovery). Havana is a text, but a text regarded as “an aesthetic object”, open to “polyphonic, inexhaustible readings” (20). Havana is a poem in progress, the poem of all the *habaneros* dwelling therein. As another city lover, Helene Cixous, writes: “The city is the first book that I read, that read me ... I live in a book, I travel a book. And the other way around ... But first there is a city as Being” (“The Book as one of its own Characters” 415). This is the chronotope to which I am referring. This is the Habana I understand GCI met.

GCI, who frequently attacked the (intellectual) idea of style (the grand-style that expresses and defines great nations, a la Mañach), and who thus affirmed vehemently that he had no style⁵⁵⁶, was also a great advocate of singularity. Within a conceptualization of style as other than grand-style, and of style as singularity, we could affirm that GCI's style was a chronotopic singularity—a chronotope that grew in him, with him, just as his style did. His love for Habana was coloured by the critical eye of a foreigner, of an immigrant who arrived when he was 12 years old. He grew up in Havana and Havana grew up in him. He came in at a crucial time in the city, at the end of the republican story, and “he felt its transformation ... as he felt growth in his own body ... Cabrera Infante's body and the body of Havana thus came to experiment a sort of vital correspondence” (Rojas, *Tumbas sin sosiego* 257). We find here a most merry marriage between two bodies in sheer transformation. This is how words grow in the text, like bodies in a place, both in utter transformation. The place grows and becomes a city. The text grows and becomes a book.

Havana is therefore the perfect place for an emerging sexuality; a sexuality that, after a slow awakening, “(I was always a retard in sex though advanced in love)” (18), reached a

⁵⁵⁶ On GCI's contempt for grand-styles, see Rojas, *Tumbas sin sosiego* 240. For GCI's contempt in his words, see Gibert 417-418.

compulsive urge that took him to look for satisfaction everywhere, anywhere and with whoever (with the exception of prostitutes, for whom he had a “terrible terror” instilled by his mother, and by all his family: they were vessels of syphilis—this was a terror he never overcame). His coming to sexuality had a more than perfect scenario in Zulueta 408; as he affirms, “only the sexual education I received at the school for scandals that was Zulueta 408 saved me from a fate worse than death, that of a denizen becoming a decent citizen” (39). Havana was the stage for his first kiss, his first kiss-kiss, his first real kiss, his first orgasm (well, not really, he discovered masturbation in Havana but could only complete it for the first time during a holiday in Gibara; where there was a lockable and not a communal bathroom), where he felt a woman’s breast for the first time, and a woman’s leg, thigh, tongue, hip, bottom, vagina (not in that order and not the same person’s), where he was touched for the first time, where he fell in love for the first time, where he really fell in love for the first time, where he learned what love was for the first time, where he loved for the first time (all with different women), where he had sex for the first time, where he performed oral sex for the first time (despite his reluctance, only the intelligence and verbal dexterity of Juliet could persuade him: “Dear, love is wet and it doesn’t smell good” [196]), and we could idly fill pages with first times and with discoveries that uncovered the mysteries of *eros* for GCI.

However, as we have been saying, this was not all that GCI discovered. Havana meant the initiation (simultaneously) of three things: speech, cinema and sex⁵⁵⁷. More importantly, though, is that all these initiations only point towards one appointment to which he had to come eventually: his “I”, which coincided with his arrival in Havana. His coming to Havana was his coming to his “I”⁵⁵⁸. This coming to “I” was already invested by a coming to *poiesis*, so long as it happened in and through language: this “I” came fully worded. This is how GCI came to witness, and started his testimony from the very start,

⁵⁵⁷ For a more detailed account on these initiations, see Machover 59.

⁵⁵⁸ For an account on how the “I” appears first and before any other collective affiliations (familial or otherwise) in *La Habana*, see Machover, *La Memoria Frente al Poder* 24.

asking us what every witness asks his interlocutor right from the start, before there is any transformation, before anything is displayed or shown: “Come with me”.

Recreating Havana was GCI’s way of rescuing it, just as he rescued his past (“I’s”) by recreating it (them). This meant fictionally freeing *his* city from the tyrannical clutches of totalitarianism; just as it was fictionally freeing him from the wounding wrapping of loss. He exercised his past selves with the skilled and loving hands of his present style, which led him to treat himself differently, but also sympathetically and almost amusingly, like a father listening to the enthusiastic adventures of his little boy, compassionately and in complicity—but never indulgently; for his eyes are the eyes of a critic who has learned that being honest is as important as being critical. As when we read about some ill-feelings, of which he still takes pride, if knowing they are not precisely right; he, for instance, does not hesitate in putting them to the fore, with blatant honesty after serendipitously meeting with an old (non-corresponded, as were most of them in his teens) love who has fallen from grace: “I had felt happy to see coy Catia converted from a model miss, my youth’s yearning, a unique object of love, into a common Cuban cow and ugly at that; it was an almost savage or at least unhealthy joy, which lasted the rest of the day” (119). He is as capable to recognize how unhealthy is the joy he felt, as he is capable to articulate it just like that, doing no effort to rationalize it or justify it; quite on the contrary, owning it with a little bit of present joy as he remembers it. This is how his past provided the soil for his memories, by soiling them with no remorse: by owning them as they came.

GCI saved himself through writing. Though he did not rescue himself; he was already safe (and sane). He did not come to accept himself or to proclaim himself in a drowned cry as other writers did; as, for instance, his good friend (and one of those responsible for his quick critical success in Spain) Juan Goytisolo did. Juan saved himself through and in writing; he came out as a homosexual there, as a “full, absolute, helplessly homosexual” who had come to comprehend why and how his marriage failed. This rescue enterprise,

however, came at the price of repudiating his past self (the one who got married to please his family, who masked his desires to meet his social expectations, etc.), and this repudiation became a source of strength rather than of shame or remorse⁵⁵⁹. GCI saved himself in *La Habana* in the sense of preserving himself, his past and, most crucially, his coming to past. But he saved the city, Havana, and he did it in the sense of rescuing it: he committed himself to say, to bear witness, to leave his testimony to how it was before (before totalitarianism fully seized it, before fear finally penetrated it). It was not that it was a fearless place, but it did not live in constant fear, that fear was turned against itself and was transformed into urban paranoia. This was not how it used to be. This was a city that, as most cities in bloom, looked forward to its future by imagining itself, and that found that sense of anticipation by dreaming its own past. He rescued his city by imagining it once again, and by letting it, if only in his memories, to imagine its own future. The city of his dreams was turned into his dreams of the city that was and will not be—that is no more.

This ethos of saving the city, of rescuing it in memory, was the leading ethos of GCI's first masterwork, *TTT*. The epigraph that watches over the book is a sort of epitaph for Havana, Lewis Carroll's wondrous words from *Alice in Wonderland*: "... And she tried to fancy what the flame of a candle looks like after the candle is blown out". His work, in relation to Havana, was that of Alice: trying to fancy how the flame of the city looks like after the city is blown out⁵⁶⁰. He does so via the recreation of the city as it was, as it used to be. It is by *poietical* means that GCI finds a way between contradiction and contradiction, and finds a way to perpetuate this city—even at the price of having to put it in captivity, inside a book. *La Habana* is a similar case, but now he is not trying to fancy

⁵⁵⁹ See Goytisolo's magnificent, and extraordinarily powerful, *Coto Vedado* [Forbidden Territory] as well as his most exceptional *En los Reinos de Taifa* [Realms of Strife]. For a very insightful analysis to these texts (and of Goytisolo's last book of memoirs, his *Memorias*, published in 2002), see Loureiro, chapter 4.

⁵⁶⁰ Some critics who have drawn attention to the importance of this epigraph in relation to the extinguishing Havana of which he was speaking about are Rodríguez Monegal 23; Pereda 29; Hernández-Lima 75.

such flame, but he is able to recuperate it and use it to fuel his whole text. He does not recuperate what has been lost, but he does recuperate what was there: the flame that grew with(in) him, of which such an important part comes from Havana. And he lights this flame, carefully and patiently—until he is able to produce sunlight in the middle of his blackened pages: gleaming letters in a most complicit speech.

6.6.1 Summary 39

This section looks at the way in which eras, as the form through which periods of time are defined within and by the tracing-memory, are ordered in GCI's *Infante's Inferno*, particularly this book being about the end of his childhood. This discussion leads to a more complex discussion about how each era is marked by a certain event that supposes an initiation, a "coming to" something ("coming to language", "coming to love", etc.), and how the tracing-memory is informed by these initiations. This, is argued, is what GCI recreates most successfully in this work, and it is said that the success of this recreation heavily depended on the way in which GCI's style was very well-developed at the point in which he started to write this book. This developed sense of style is therefore concomitant with a more developed sense of selfhood that allows for better ways to invoke/evoke past times and past losses. It is argued in this context that a more developed style and a more developed sense of selfhood necessarily translates into a better working tracing-memory, which entails a better sense of awareness. All these enable the emergence of a more responsible witness.

6.7 "Come inside":

We are now exactly at the threshold between inside and outside. Right here, right now, language emerges from the simultaneity it dwells. Language, as such, whether a system of signs or whatever you will, only exists between what it designates and its means of

designation⁵⁶¹; that is, it only exists as a threshold. Language opens what it simultaneously closes, the access to that other world referred that, just as you enter, is deferred⁵⁶². Yet, language itself continues to open as a *place* itself, already marked and already something: our means of communication also ignites our erotic means of communion. The place of language is not infinite (i.e., not-yet-finished), but constantly finishing itself so as to begin again. Language relentlessly comes back to the place whence it came from: the in-between to which it inevitably points at. Absence is not any more a negation than presence is an affirmation: absence (a non-presence) rather affirms the passing of the presence(s): the incessant, uninterrupted passing that gives language its time-like quality of flux. No language is static, just as no language is stable; polysemy and figuration (figures of speech) contribute to its motion as much as they participate in its destabilization: nothing in language is univocal—less so language as such.

The exile makes literal what in language is all figuration: its being between borders, at the border. The problem that the exile realizes is that borders keep moving with her motion. This middle ground called transition, passing, interval, transit, keeps moving with her own body, with her, just as her “here”, her sense of “being here”, which is everywhere and anywhere she is—at least deictically speaking. If I were asked to point where I am now, I would have to start reckoning with the answer: here. The “there”, awakened by the other(s), can only be recognized as “there” inasmuch as I am familiar with the other, which allows me to point: “there is”. Before getting familiar with such “there”, what is there still hits me as shapeless, difficult to perceive, elusive; just as the following word: eeiqwjeiaeu. An “eeiqwjeiaeu” is neither here nor there, for it marks a stoppage, an edge that closes the flow and that sets out the border before setting forth what is at the other side. “Eeiqwjeiaeu” is all border, all threshold: could be anything and everything. The exile, as literally dwelling at the border, thus gets acquainted with the border’s dynamism:

⁵⁶¹ This idea can be found in Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 15.

⁵⁶² Jacques Derrida’s concept of *differance* is based precisely on this very deferral of meaning, of the referent as a presence that keeps receding in language. See his *Writing and Difference* 203.

the threshold moves as one goes, just as the horizon keeps moving farther as we try to get closer—it keeps opening itself.

We said that polysemy and figuration participate in the destabilization of language (as they contribute to its motion). If we want the very figure of speech that unites polysemy with transfiguration, transformation and sameness, all at the same time, we should speak of metaphor, again. In the beginning was the metaphor, for “in the beginning” is, itself, a metaphor⁵⁶³. As was discussed in chapter 4, all origins and ends can only be fictionalized, made myths—and metaphor is the matter of which myths are made of. Metaphor is that exile that literally dwells in the borders, whose very place is the threshold where she (I will retain the gender of the Spanish word: *La metáfora*, because for me it has always suggested a feminine body) sleeps and in which we wake her up with our calls. “She” activates convergences in language, and therefore, activates language (for there is no language without convergence): this is her very *modus operandi*. The “inter-” of motion is metaphor’s right hand—being the left the “inter-” of sharing. Does metaphor have two hands only? she always works with pairs, coupling, joining two by two; so we can safely assume she does: two hemispheres, just like we do. Metaphor is between that what it refers to and that what is referred, between referents, between references; but [no comma no splice] its real power resides in drawing these referents, these references to such in-between, where they meet and are never the same again. So many couples had metaphor united; so many couples had it pronounced (husband and wife, husband and husband, wife and wife, husbands and wife, wives and husband... tenor and vehicle) that it is hard to think how polysemy, the very seed of plurality in language, keeps adding to each coupled image: each metaphor reveals a new polyseme.

Is it possible to speak non-metaphorically about metaphor? If you want a non-figurative language, not only are you in the wrong text, but you are in the wrong language. Thus far, there is no language we know about that is non-figurative, just as there are no non-

⁵⁶³ I am taking this reflection from Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* 125.

metaphorical words⁵⁶⁴. As Roberto Fernández Retamar would have it: “No word is, all in all, straight. To call some words ‘metaphors’ is an abridged way of saying that they are ‘more metaphors than the others’” (58). The deviation between the word and its meaning (the name and what it designates, its referent) introduced by metaphor is what participates and contributes to the destabilization and motility of language. Deviation is at the semantic level what digression is at the narrative one: its very means of locomotion. If there were no digressions in narratives, we would very likely still be telling the same stories and in the very same way. For topics, plots, characters, attributes, conflicts... have not changed so much within the last couple of millennia, only how these are mixed and told had. Deviations, long ways, are what actually make it possible to find ways where there were none. Identity, resemblance brought about by metaphor, is transcended by implicit difference: one is not the other. And then again, there is one resemblance that metaphor cannot bring about: the resemblance to itself, its metaphoricity. Asking about the metaphoricity of metaphor is like asking about the origin of origins or about the end of ends: no such thing. And just as a threshold cannot resemble itself, for there is not in-itself any more than it is in-here or out-there, metaphor cannot resemble itself; it is neither in nor out—but always in between, at either edge at the same time. In metaphor, what a thing *is not* is what sets the condition for that thing to be *as*; or, in Paul Ricoeur’s words: “Seeing ‘X as Y’ encompasses ‘X is not Y’” (Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* 214, emphasis in the original).

We should not be led by this humble explanation to think that metaphor likes vagueness, nothing could be further from its character. Its accuracy is error-proof. A vague, imprecise metaphor is a poor metaphor; and it hates nothing more than poverty⁵⁶⁵. Metaphors move, they are in a state of “trans-”: “they transform as they transfer” (Geary

⁵⁶⁴ For the impossibility of a non-metaphorical language, see Ricoeur 138-149. See also de Man 247-254.

⁵⁶⁵ This is to such an extent that advertising and propaganda (one for the market and the other for the truth... of ideology) work upon metaphors on a day to day basis. Seemingly, a good metaphor always sells better. See Geary 71.

163)⁵⁶⁶. By opening the window of resemblance, it opens the access to the other: how is it to be (think, feel, express, etc.) *like* the other. And, about this, she is most rigorous: either you are (think, feel, etc.) like the other or you are nothing even resembling a metaphor. To really appreciate (understand, grasp, comprehend, etc.) a metaphor, you must be willing to change, for this is what it is all about: change. Change your metaphors and you will, inevitably, change your ways, and, therefore, necessarily, change your life⁵⁶⁷. So, as you see, there is quite a lot at stake here. Metaphor is already transforming energies, transporting them, and translating from the inside to the outside, “from insight into action” (Geary 222). In this very way, which are many ways, metaphors move and find, open, found ways to move in and through: ways from which new orders are brought about, new paces, spaces and rhythms. What is redescribed by a good metaphor, an appropriate, precise one, brings about a new way of being and a whole new way to see the world. *Differance*, for instance, seems now as real in language as the signifier/signified couple seemed before—and how hard it is to tell neither are metaphors! The redescription of reality is the reinvention of reality.

We should not be so hasty as to assume that reality is “out there”, and even less so to feel the enormous entitlement of thinking that it can be described. All descriptions are always already redescrptions; for they are always already coloured by our current assumptions of what reality is. What is literal, in language, is not “real”, in the sense of having an extra-linguistic niche where it “is”, but rather, the literal is the “usual”, the “familiar”⁵⁶⁸. Metaphors strike us with their unfamiliarity, for how unusually they emerge from discourse, and they almost remind us how much what is usual, familiar, “real”, once created that same feeling in people before; how *differance* was once as strange as *sign*

⁵⁶⁶ On metaphor and motion, and this in relation to one of its two constituents, the vehicle, see Derrida, “The Retreat of Metaphor” 48-49.

⁵⁶⁷ See how the psychologist, David Grove, introduced metaphor as a core element of his therapeutic methods in Grove and Panzer, mainly chapters 1 and 4. For a commentary of this work in relation to metaphor, but from a more holistic perspective, see Geary 212-222.

⁵⁶⁸ On familiarity and unfamiliarity in metaphor, see Ricoeur 290.

and this was once as alien as *eutrophication*, and how all these were once as strange as *eeiqwjeiaewi* is now. Feeling this way may make us a little more open towards difference; may make us a little more tolerant with that awkward, extremely uncomfortable feeling at the face of unfamiliarity, at the face of otherness, and maybe even at the face of the other. In a metaphor, *poiesis* and *mimesis*, incarnation and expression, form a most harmonic bond that makes it difficult to tell which is which, though, curiously, we hardly ever confuse them: they make such a cute, happy couple! This is the threshold where we come in, the threshold between epistemology and ontology, between being *as* (of description) and *it is* (of ascription). And it is at this threshold where we find that life founds an order, where life is lived in order: in the text, where everything, save the words, is *as* that to which the text refers. Texts are *as if* they were extra-linguistic (good texts for that matter) but they *are* nothing but bound to be linguistic. In texts, it is only words that matter.

Artefacts should be seen in this very way, as embodied metaphors, as textuality by other means. Artefacts are vehicles with perfectly localizable tenors (i.e., the wheel as a metaphor of motion and circularity, of locomotion, of cyclical order, of transportation, etc.), and, moreover, they are sometimes vehicles with a wide (so wild) variety of tenors (i.e., a computer, as a metaphor of our cognitive capacities, of our epistemological faculties, etc.) that are, also, an embodied mix of tenors (mix of typewriter, T.V., calculator, data processor, telex, etc.). We can see in each artefact the embodiment of our myths, just as in every metaphor we can see an abridged version of a whole mythology⁵⁶⁹: a whole cosmogony and a whole cosmology condensed in a fork⁵⁷⁰.

So, at this threshold where we still are (always already trying to come inside), borders are born rather than pointed at; edges are formed rather than found; boundaries are spoken

⁵⁶⁹ See Betts 12, for an interesting use of Vico's *dictum* "metaphors are short myths".

⁵⁷⁰ This idea can be found in Levi Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, where the French anthropologist argues that our "manners in the table" bear a direct connection to the way in which food is acquired, prepared and eaten.

rather than marked⁵⁷¹. This birth is what Jacques Derrida calls the “chiasmatic invagination of borders” (“The Retreat of Metaphor” 67), and this is why, for me, metaphors are feminine and they are not gender neutral: because their invagination is their imagination; they imagine what they bear and that to which/whom they beget. Thresholds, as metaphors (thresholds are metaphors?), give birth to the space in which they come about, as they come about. They articulate the interruptions they produce by their initial unfamiliarity, by producing the interval, the space wherein the familiar can be articulated *once again*, differently now, all the same, but in a different way. “Between the before and the beyond” there is motion, and motion alone... is nowhere to go⁵⁷². Motion, as we know it (as we experience it, describe it and redescribe it over and over again) is *something* in motion. In the case of metaphors, this is the voice. Metaphors do not come from anywhere. They are, necessarily, as all words, as all discourses, as all texts, voiced. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the voice articulates the body that voices it, for it articulates the style as it grows and is expressed from our *preseedence*. It is the voice that gives us access to the threshold, to the house of metaphor; this is how we are invited to her place, by a silent invitation we receive in between words—in silence. It is here (a figure of speech if you do not mind, for metaphors are neither here nor there, remember?) where the “I” emerges textually, always already beyond deictics, beyond all possible pointing at, pointing nowhere and everywhere, at me and you and the word and the character and the text at the same time: the textual I. Between the writer and the reader, between the writer and the teller, between the diver and the chronicler, between the author and the witness, this textual I emerges, interceding for all of us, unbound from all literality. Only what is unbound can bind, only what is free can tie together.

⁵⁷¹ The relation between the word and the marking of a border is Derrida’s point of departure for the writing of his spellbinding “Shibboleth”.

⁵⁷² I am paraphrasing Derrida’s reading of Levinas’ “Other” and, particularly, the proximity I necessarily bear to the other, from his “At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am” 166.

This is the “I” of *La Habana*, the narrator/writer/person who finds himself responsible for the composition of a most self-conscious prose. Words are to lead nobody to delirium (he became cautious, remember?); they are to constantly remind us about their textual quality, their textuality. GCI finds it to be his responsibility to constantly tell us: “Remember, this is a text”. He did it in relation to time and future and present and past times (some examples were provided just a couple of sections ago, remember?). But there are other instances in which he makes us aware that he is composing what he is writing. Sentences as: “Atone (pardon my typewriter) at one...” (121), or “On the contrary (my typewriter, so close to Sappho, almost wrote cuntrary)” (262), or “(You will ask how I had known she was a prostitute just by her behaviour, and a pointed question. But you don’t have her before you as I did...)” (166), or “—I don’t remember asking for a room or entering to it or having closed the door, which is why we could very well be undressing in public” (166), or “I don’t know if you know me this early in the book, if you do you would realize that I’m incapable of surviving not only in a desert island (or key), but even in the city without the help of my family. Despite my working class origins, born in poverty, living in misery, I’m a mama’s boy who runs home for shelter at the slightest difficulty and who always goes to bed early. But I’m also daring in theory and might have gone with Juliet to another island” (202), or “(There are many allusions to Jekyll and Hyde in this book, I know. It’s probably because the fable of the intellectual and the beast is a sexual metaphor disguised as a moral dilemma)” (279), or “The words, now dead and horizontal in memory, cannot transit the hiss of her voice that had completely lost its caressing tone” (308), or “She looked beautiful that day with her short, straight blond hair. (Yes, I know I’m contradicting myself: I said before that she had permanent, but I remember her with short, straight hair the second time I saw her. But I have to be faithful to my memory even though it can betray me.)” (136); and this he never betrayed, he remains faithful to it, even at the price of constantly revealing the most basic and the innermost truth of his text: “this a text and I am writing it”. This would be like reading *The Odyssey* with Homer constantly telling us: “Excuse my accent” or “Don’t mind my

tuning my lyre”. We therefore learn that “memory is time” (386) and that memories are texts.

Just as narrative transforms the contingency of happenings into the necessity of events, texts transform the transitoriness of presence (i.e., “I”) into the permanence of discourse: the book [or whatever other artefact you may think about, the blog, the html, the pdf, etc.]. The lifework, the body of work, thus becomes something more than the repository of the writer’s life; instead, it transforms the writer’s life into a thriving time: the time of sharing and being shared. This is the “I” as incarnated in the word, and the word as an incarnated reality; tangible, material, bodily, fleshy. This, doubtless, is part of GCI himself (some even said “the better part of themselves”⁵⁷³) as it *becomes* part of ourselves, as we read. This part is the foundational power at the heart of *poiesis*, which is the power that supersedes all other powers (political, economical, etc.) and makes them possible: the power to remember (remember!), which is, always already, the power to imagine (imagine!). GCI shows us that he creates myths by creating closed universes, which are, just by that very virtue, open works. The work opens where the myth closes, and we must accept the myth (which is not necessarily to believe in it) before we are able to open the work. If we do not accept that *Dumbo* can fly (an old scriptwriting teacher used to say), then we are as well not watching the movie⁵⁷⁴. If we do not accept that Havana looked the way GCI recreates it in the 1940’s (or love, or GCI, or...) then we are as much denying the possibilities of the book, and we should close it at that moment, for we are wasting our time. The work’s openness always echoes life’s own openness, as well as it echoes its closures. All lives are finite, all works are finite: all begin and end. Both, however, happen in the open, and alternatives open always at the face of otherness. This is where we come in. Texts cannot be opened logically, from their start to their end; with the cause-effect relation that we use (or we think we use) to open the world. Meaning is there, always at the open, and texts are bound to meaning just as we are and everything

⁵⁷³ As Ovid does, according to Prade 15.

⁵⁷⁴ Or reading the book—in case you are not one of those Disney (il)literate—as I am.

we do. At this threshold, where metaphor resides and rests, we find that meaning opens to the alternatives of its usual sense: ways and senses and directions and alternatives proliferate. In this text, at the threshold of it, we find an-other (and many others) sung and singing “me”; as Helene Cixous would put it: “Helene Cixous isn’t me but those who are sung in my text because their lives, their pains, their force demands that it resound” (*Three Steps in the Ladder of Writing* 47). The “I” is a (wo)man-made sound—the very voice that sounds her/him.

The work thus becomes the haven of language, but also a haven for memories, for the voice, and, therefore, for the self (the writer’s, the reader’s, and everything in-between, character, narrator, etc.). The work is the incarnated metaphor, metaphor made flesh: the embodied threshold—threshold made haven. The work is to the self what the city is to its dwellers: a safe place, a place of domestication (in the sense of domesticity, not of taming) where the self can rest in peace (sleeping, not dying). And to this place we keep coming back, as some do come back to their childhood, remembering it and remembering it; recreating it, or as some do come back to their youth, or to their school-days, or to their first marriage or to their second marriage or to all these repositories of “first-times” enveloped and embedded in an era. We keep coming back to those times of “coming to’s”.

There is an important leitmotiv in *La Habana* about this coming in and coming back as enveloping our “coming to”, and, unsurprisingly, this has to do with the movies. It happens when GCI goes to the movies for the first time during the day with his younger brother, and he is initiated by his first urban hero, Eloy Santos, *güagüero* [bus driver] and professional *hablanero*. Despite the many revelations contained in that experience (the revelation of who will become his favorite actor, Edward G. Robinson, incarnating both good and evil in the same movie), the words with which Santos persuaded them to get out of the theater (in what was, also, his first *función continua* [continual function, where you could arrive in the theater at anytime and leave at the point in the movie at which you

arrived]), Santos told them: “This is where we came in” (11). These words, reticence aside (his brother’s in the Spanish version; his in the English translation), revealed to him a new ethos about the movies: you are the only one who knows when you arrived and therefore the only responsible to determine when to leave. Later, when he came back to the movies with his brother, with something additional in mind besides the movie (getting to touch the girl next to him), it is his brother who pronounces this ethos: “This is where we came in” (79). This phrase then meant: “this is where we leave”. At the epilogue (entitled in Spanish, precisely, “*Función Continua*”; and in English has the less fortunate title “Movies must have an end”), we find this leitmotiv as the words that end the book: “This is where we came in”, and this is where we go out. In the English translation, however, the *we* is very significantly replaced by the “I”, and so he says: “and when I was about to wake up screaming—I fell freely into a horizontal abyss, abyss! / Here’s where I came in” (410). The “I” finds, unlike the Spanish version, the moment to leave, and this is precisely the moment in which *we*, as readers, come in: where the “I” of the writer ends, the “I” of the reader starts. The writer leaves his place for the reader to come.

A “horizontal abyss, abyss!” is mentioned prior to his leaving. This is because the epilogue is a dream/nightmare in which GCI condenses the whole book. He goes to the movies and waits in the lobby for a girl/woman who will sit next to him and will let him touch her, while she (another *femme fatale*, another trope within the book) enjoys some *Pluto* cartoons. He, no longer a child, loses his wedding ring in her vagina and then, as he tries hard to find it (and as she observes amused, both by *Pluto* and by his desperation), he loses his wrist watch. Now he starts to feel really anxious and he tries to find it without disturbing her, something physically impossible, even in dreams and oniric images. By this moment, she tells him to look wherever he wants, but to stop whining or she will get really mad, something psychically possible, even in dreams and oniric images, much more in dreams and oniric images. He carries on, again, with the girl/woman taking the initiative in and of their relation, and he embarks (after she, most annoyed, hands him a flashlight) onto a most improbable quest: he goes back from whence he came, inside the

woman. First his hands to open the girl/woman's lips, then his head, his neck, trunk, legs and feet; he is suddenly inside, completely inside, and he tries to find his way out. Here, he is inside a most threatening labyrinth, where he has gotten in without a silver thread. The one guide he finds is even worse, an anonymous ship's log (which also serves as an excuse to perform a mild parody of *Moby Dick*), where we find out (or in?) that the whole crew was irremediably lost, that they were falling where there was "No bottom", that there was the imminent presence of a gigantic monster based on the teeth marks they found (the *vagina dentata* [the toothed vagina])—in sum, that there was no hope. The narrative is interrupted, and we know not (though we infer) the crew's fate. This is where GCI falls, and this is where we come in.

The trope of the "umbilical cord" is also frequent throughout *La Habana*, and it comes to tell us about GCI's passions (as the umbilical cord his mother created between him and cinema), or to tell us about scars that will never be healed (as Zulueta 408, which "was really an umbilical cord which, cut off forever, remains in the navel's memory" [75]), or to tell us about his erotic bond as sealed with the feminine genitalia ("her covering cunt moving around my naked penis, adopting, adapting it, the two tethered by that other umbilical cord, moving us in unison, like the mother with her son in her belly, my fanatic fetus fused with her and in this fantasy we climaxed together. In love's lewd labor she finally gave birth to me" [196]), or to tell us about broken bonds ("Our love was an umbilical cord and she had just cut it with a click" [370]). Those umbilical cords are his silver threads in the human labyrinth of the world; his affects, his passions, his loves. Devoid of them, he is absolutely lost, falling without hope; with no story to tell and no timeline to order. A self-aware fetus is a lost cause: this is what will come out.

6.7.1 Summary 40

It is in this section where a deeper examination of metaphor becomes imperative. At this point, this examination includes what has been previously discussed (in the fourth and fifth chapters) about the metaphor as a threshold (the very border between inside outside)

and takes it further to understand the metaphor as the very source of signification and re-signification. This is achieved by understanding metaphor as a sort of begetter wherein the copula that generates it becomes possible in the first place. This approach to metaphor is therefore extended to the possibility of inventing origins and ends, of making myths, and more particularly to the way in which GCI elaborates an end for his autobiography that corresponds to the strategy of elaborating fictional endings to a life that has not met its end yet. The figure of the exile is important again, but now as a trope of the place wherein metaphor dwells: the in-between. The exile lives, for a period of time, literally in the in-between. It is from here that the relationship, the mutual constitution between “inter-” and “trans-” is discussed in depth for the first time in the dissertation. This approach to exile as well as this mutual constitutionship will be further discussed in the next chapter.

6.8 “Keep this in mind”

The “I witness”, the “I” who bears witness to his life, experience, surroundings, etc. (others’ lives, experiences, etc.) is born in textuality—in *intertextuality*: in between texts and “textual I’s”. It is worth insisting, however, that with “texts” we are not speaking *exclusively* of the written word, but rather of narratives, fictions and myths (in any possible form; e.g., graphic, oral, musical, etc.). Our expression, the way we respond, already bears witness to these (life, experiences, surroundings, myths, etc.), and the “I witness” is thereby born in the midst of these texts. This is the reason why sincerity is the foundation of witnessing, and not truth, because when we respond sincerely to the other, when we express ourselves sincerely, we are opening an access that is otherwise curtailed when we move in insincerity. If I *know* that a maple leaf *is not supposed* to present a cyan colouration, and everybody around me says that it is red, but I continue to see it cyan, I would be insincere in saying what everybody says, and, worse, in feeling a lesser observer because the pronounced difference between what I see and what everybody else sees. I would be equally wrong, however, in seeing other people’s perceptions as being lesser than mine. But it is only by sincerely bearing witness in my description of the leaf

that can we get to something worthy: maybe at some point of the day and at some position, it is possible to see this new nuance in the leaf, maybe there is some problem with my sight and only by being sincere can I attend it, or come to terms with it (degenerative colour blindness or whatever). Invention, discovery, can only arise out of sincerity, for we can only understand some-thing's form if it is *authentically* expressed. Witnessing is not about truth; it is about being *authentic*.

It is within this framework that we can say that we see “with one’s own eyes”, and consequently, with one’s own “I”. This is the foundation of witnessing, what, in principle, gives authority to the witness’ testimony⁵⁷⁵—what appeals to the listener’s eyes (a synecdoche for attention). It must be noted, however, that this “with one’s own eyes” does not mean, constitutionally, a “being there”, but rather an acknowledgement of the testimony from a “being here” perspective that ascribes the witness to his testimony and *makes* him responsible for it; something that cannot be disowned. Testimony is all about *sayability*, building frameworks of expression through which you respond to what you witness and witnessed⁵⁷⁶. To bear witness means both to transmit and to be transmitted—to transmit a memory that was (by any means) transmitted to you.

“Seeing with you own eyes”, *suffering* a particular event (or even just listening to such event as it was transmitted to you, as in listening to your grandfather’s stories) is therefore to have a privileged access to that event. There is another expression in Spanish

⁵⁷⁵ On the authority of the witness’ testimony and its relation to “seeing with one’s own eyes” (as a synecdoche for undergoing, *suffering* something), see Lyotard, *The Differend* 3.

⁵⁷⁶ This is one of the main, and most controversial, arguments of Lyotard’s understanding of bearing witness, namely, *sayability*. The whole project of *The Differend* is to invite the witness to build, create, imagine new frameworks of saying what is, under the current frameworks of *sayability* (what he calls “phrases”), unsayable, so that those testimonies never fall into oblivion, inside secret compartments that will be lost after the witness’ demise. Despite the several disagreements with Lyotard about this point [i.e., Cathy Caruth, *Trauma*], it is clear that when something is “unsayable” and “unsayable” will remain, there will be no testimony. I am not saying that all events *are* “sayable”, only that all *should* be, and that this is more an ethical than an ontological or an epistemological necessity. “Uncommunicability” notwithstanding, testimony cannot be brought forth without a framework to express it; whether this is unhealthy, we are still figuring out.

from which GCI draws substantially: *alcanzar a ver* [where *alcanzar* is “to be able” but also “to reach”, and *ver* means “to see”]. We already spoke about how much he enjoyed being a spectator, but we have not mentioned that an entire chapter of *La Habana* (ch. 8 “*La visión del mirón miope*” [The vision of the short-sighted peeping tom], cleverly translated as “Vigil of the Naked I”) was devoted to this activity of becoming a professional voyeur. He has told us before, in the first chapter, how he cured himself from a terrible fever (he was a sickly boy) by masturbating as he saw the naked vision of a distant nymph while she lied down on a bed in a room of a building in front his in Zulueta 408. Now, he takes the therapy further and, living in *El Vedado* (a way better neighbourhood, even though they were just as poor), he discovered a variety of nymphs undressing unaware of these secretly intruding eyes (it was after he stopped seeing Juliet, with whom he lost his virginity, and, as he says, found in this activity a good way to compensate for his growing sexual compulsion). Here, we learn about the onanistic “I witness”, who devours his testimonies and leaves them all to his own, selfish, intruding, disrespectful, nearly raping eyes. Yet, as he narrates this, he becomes a witness once again, not only bearing witness to what he did, but also to what he saw: “the most memorable vision of that time—of all times” (213). With memorable, we should not understand wonderful, but both beautiful and terrible: a most beautiful teen undressing in front of the mirror, almost making love to her reflection, in love with her image, “Nocturnal Narcissa”, “the perfect Narcissus” (216); a teen who he discovered (was as famous in the neighbourhood because of her beauty as for her father’s possessiveness) was wearing a chastity belt. This shocking image, a perfect juxtaposition between beauty and horror, put an end to his obsession, his incurable “voyeur’s vice” (211), for which he quit friends, family, school, women, literature, for this image he hunted night after night, which augured him “to fulfill the voyeur’s love ... had served only to create nightmares” (217).

GCI has let these secret, privileged, vaulted images he *alcanzó a ver* to emerge into the open, and he offers his testimony: of his vice, his compulsion, his crime, his joy and punishment—even if to do it he had to speak on behalf of others. This is inescapable

to testimony, offering it already entails speaking on behalf of others, because we always witness something other than ourselves⁵⁷⁷. Yet, no matter how much we speak on behalf of others, we always offer *our* testimony, which is also a testimony of ourselves. By narrating how we were before a certain life-changing event, for instance, we are bearing witness to our own process of conversion, of becoming different: the end of something and the beginning of something else⁵⁷⁸. My testimonies thus give voice to the event (and not only to the people on whose behalf I speak). And by thus giving voice, testimonies help to give expression to it, and hence to spread it; to transmit it as it is transformed (and in-formed, made into a narrative, fiction, myth). Our responsibility as readers is to listen to these testimonies, lending an open ear to them, and help them spread when we listen to their call and we cannot help but giving voice to spread them: to aid their *spreadssion*.

All witnesses are, by necessity, survivors of what they bear witness to, and therefore all testimonies are narratives that tell us (among so many other things) something about survival. GCI survived his childhood and, more difficultly, his adolescence, something that some of us sometimes believed we would not live to tell. All pasts are past survivals, and they all leave traces in their passing. But traces are voiceless. It is our responsibility to voice them, to bring them to life again. GCI did this to a great extent, by articulating his life and, occasionally, those of others—as he did in his many tributes to other people

⁵⁷⁷ See for instance, how Lydia Cabrera explains that it is the others, the “negros” who really made her book, how she only organized their accounts, their testimonies, and gave them the space of the text (not a trivial task, we should add). See Cabrera, *El Monte* 13.

⁵⁷⁸ This is possibly one of the main reasons why Lydia Cabrera’s book was so crucial for GCI, because this is another “age of coming” book; wherein the brilliant anthropologist (and magnificent writer) gives an account of her own conversion, as this book tells how she became a devoted believer of the Yoruba faith (of which she remained a believer till the end of her life). This passage (of her book of passage) is worth quoting at length: “I couldn’t comprehend the lightness of that woman, who anybody would have believed impaired by her excessive overweight, and who, in a normal state, seemed so peaceful and indifferent; even less so, that just a moment before, she hadn’t killed herself by breaking, logically, her skull. But logic, happily, does not match with faith” (39). She is speaking about the first *toque de santos* she witnessed, where a saint possessed this middle-aged, oversized woman who moved and danced swiftly and erotically inciting and who finished her performance by falling to the floor with her head impacting the unmediated concrete, and then, as the saint left her, stood up as if nothing had happened.

(he knew or only admired, as movie stars or filmmakers). This is how he began to cultivate the necrology around the time in which he started to write *La Habana*, thus becoming a chronicler for the dead. One of his translators, and a scholar of GCI's work, Kenneth Hall, called this "mock encomia" because he used this genre to parody both the genre and the person to whom the homage (the main purpose of a necrology) was addressed⁵⁷⁹. He practiced this kind of encomia with several writers who passed away, revealing many anecdotes of which he was a witness or many that were transmitted to him: stories you do not hear in this kind of texts; stories of grand-poets and their visits to brothels, or of great thinkers and their quirky idiosyncrasies, etc. Yet what he does with this kind of revelations is to help humanize these figures. GCI makes no effort in trying to portray any of this figures as less worthy of admiration (their works, themselves or both); his portraits actually contribute to give them a human dimension that makes them even more fascinating figures; myths closer to our reach. It is as if we learned about Achilles' favorite dish and his petty quarrels with Patroclus when he put too much rosemary in it: of the hero as a quirky husband.

It is in this very way in which GCI renders "what he saw" inseparable from "how he saw", which becomes an inseparable part of what is finally transmitted/spread. Then, if we are always already at the midst of texts, of transmitting (and being transmitted) narratives, fictions and myths (not necessarily in that order), we are always already *in intertextuality*—which is, as we just said at the beginning of this section, the birthplace of the "I witness". Witnesses emerge from the "endless layering of text upon text" (Freeman 133); a layering from which we learn the facts already fictionally formed, from which we learn interpretations as much as we learn how to interpret, always at the midst of an overwhelming multiplicity—knowing not the definite source of a text, for all texts remit us to other texts⁵⁸⁰. This does not mean that we do not suffer or that we do it textually, because we most definitely do not. What this means is that we can only suffer here and now; before and beyond, in motion, with no break—and therefore with no available

⁵⁷⁹ See Hall, "Movies and Mock Encomia".

⁵⁸⁰ As Derrida would have it. See Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 27-74.

account of it, until we do it (or until someone else does it for us). This means that we always suffer in context—outside of it, we suffer, but we know neither what nor how. Context, in its most strict sense, means proximity among words that form sentences (or word-clusters)—and it is the principle of reading and writing; for we neither read nor write “words” on their own (not even when we are writing our lists for the grocery store). When I say that we always suffer in context, I am not only saying that we do so necessarily in proximity to others, but that we do so already within a linguistic frame (narrative, fiction, myth), and that we therefore can (potentially) always offer testimony of what we suffer. This is where figuration is so important, where metaphor, for instance, plays such a decisive role in opening new frames to access events for which we “have no words”, which means that we do not have a context in which to frame them (or phrase them, as Lyotard asserts⁵⁸¹). Figuration helps us to see *as* what we cannot see *the way it is*, which only means, the way we suffered it: straightforwardly, directly (the kind of figuration GCI practiced at the beginning of his writing career). By these means, we can create contexts, new frames of reference (new ways to order time and space, to narrate, etc.) and thereby new proximities between and among words (or images, or colours, or musical notes, or sounds, etc.) that may eventually help us to give events a more straightforward, a more direct access (which is what GCI did in *La Habana*, and, notably, in *Cuerpos Divinos*).

Contexts are very similar to timelines, for no instant can be conceived on its own. A context echoes a timeline (or is it the other way around?). Therefore, by creating new frames of reference for instants to emerge, we create new frames of reference for our tracing-memory that will hence find new courses, new directions, new senses, new ways, new lines to continue its task of tracing. This may even happen with origins and ends, with those events to which we have access (i.e., other person’s death/end) and reconfigure them in such a way that we recreate them in a different light, we put them in a different context—one that we find more proximate to the person therein portrayed. The oniric epilogue of *La Habana*, of course, is GCI’s fictional account of his end, because, to be

⁵⁸¹ See Lyotard 32-38.

sure, the access to his real end (the one that happened on February 21, 2005) is not for him to tell. But this is not so in the case of others. This is how, for instance, one of his dearest characters, La Estrella Rodríguez, of the piece “*Ella Cantaba Boleros*” [“I heard her sing”] in *TTT*, of whose dead we learn by the end of the book, reappears differently in a later edition of this piece, under the title “*Ella Cantaba Boleros*”—now in another context. He published this book in 1996, and it contained two pieces, the one just mentioned (we should not forget that in *TTT* this piece is fragmented and distributed throughout the book) and “La amazona” (“The amazon”, ch. 10 of *La Habana*). From this 1996 book, we gain a different context to read this latter piece, as if it were independent of the larger narrative from which it comes, and it stands on its own with innermost poise. But to the former piece he added a “Meta-final” [playing with the Greek sense of the morpheme *meta* and with the Spanish word “meta”, meaning goal or target]. La Freddy, the singer on whom the character of La Estrella is based, died in Mexico in a very similar way in which it is narrated in GCI’s story. But, in his “meta-final”, we get an entirely fictional account on how her immense corpse was sent in a cargo ship to Cuba as neither Mexico nor her homeland wanted to pay for the expenses of transporting such a big casket back to the island. Here, a most comical ordeal is told about how the casket (with her corpse inside) ended up floating in the Mexico Gulf Stream, thus performing the aquatic motif that accompanied her during the whole piece (her resembling a whale is the most frequent). There is another notable “meta-final” in GCI’s literature; it is in the account he wrote about his favorite person when he was a kid: the most eccentric, controversial, opinionated and ultimately contradictory Pepe Castro, his maternal great-uncle. In this short story, entitled “*Mi Personaje Inolvidable*” [My unforgettable character] and published in the same year as *La Habana*, we learn a great deal about this fascinating (and often irritating) person. But then, in this story, GCI makes up a most unlikely death for his uncle, for we learn how he ended his days in Yucatán and was taken captive by a Mayan tribe who used him as a human sacrifice—his heart still beating to the sun. He and his father then travel to Mérida to take revenge and kill the *cacique* responsible for the sacrifice. After he tells us all the details of this ordeal, he attaches

verbatim the telegram he received from his father: “*Pepe murió ayer del corazón en Gibara*” [Pepe died yesterday of a heart failure in Gibara]. The story ends with this telegram, which makes a sort of addendum to his dream/nightmare-like state.

These meta-finals thereby create new contexts for recreating those events that, at some point, are not so much unsayable as they are colourless, unworthy of the life portrayed. A great illustration to this can be found in Tim Burton’s film *Big Fish* (based on Daniel Wallace’s novel), wherein Edward Bloom (Albert Finney, now in a most charming performance) creates a whole mythology about himself, a mythology that includes a myth about why he missed the birth of his son (never sympathetic to his father’s “indulgent” imagination) because he was catching an uncatchable fish, a fish of mythical proportions. We learn later, from the doctor who participated in the delivery and because of the son’s insistence, that Edward missed this great event because he was selling brushes in Wichita, a revelation after which the doctor adds: “but if you ask me which story I would prefer to tell, I still prefer the fish story”. At the end, the father asks the son to help him die (he has cancer, the reason why the son is visiting him after 3 years of not speaking to each other) by narrating him his death; a death worthy of his life—that mythical life that accompanied and outlived him, that made his life worthy, meaningful.

The creation of a meaningful context by the meaningful recreation of our past thus results in a better sense of awareness, since the access that we open to our “textual I” becomes the very access through which we make meaning. Nostalgia, as we have been seeing, the re-membrance of the past through affectation, thereby helps us to reconstitute both the lost place in the text and our own sense of selfhood preserved therein: the witness who can bear witness to his past; his “here I am” already embedded by his “there I was”. The contexts that we create become places where our pasts can dwell but, more importantly, where we can dwell in our past: recreate it, understand it, redescribe it, reinterpret it. Therefore, these contexts open to us a new access to dwell in our present (understand, describe, interpret it)—a richer, more bodied sense of awareness then.

The self-ascription of the “I witness” to her testimonies is, under the terms we are discussing, not in the narration, or in the kind of narrator created there (homodiegetic,

autodiegetic, etc.⁵⁸²), for it is not a referent deictically pointed at the kind of “I” to which we are referring. The ascription we are speaking here about is a *poietical* ascription; an ascription *made up* and *out* of convergences, of converging contexts, and therefore a self-ascription made in *intertextuality*. Similarly, the self-inscription of the “I witness” to his testimonies is, in these terms, not determined by external forces that either oppress or help to voice the witness’ narrations, nor is it made from external forces imprinted in the witness’ discourse (e.g., internalization, identification, etc.⁵⁸³), but rather *performed* erotically, as the erotic inscription of our narratives *in* and *from* our bodies, our flesh. This process of *poietic* self-ascription and erotic self-inscription is crucial to the process of belonging to and in our narratives; a process of which we will be speaking in our next chapter.

We are now, then, at the threshold between chapters, nearly at the end of this one—nearly at the beginning of the next. We must, to gain the momentum we need so as to go towards this transition, think for a second (or two) about the relation between the “I” as a source, as discussed in the last chapter, and the kind of “textual I” we have been discussing up to this point. Where is the witness? The “I witness”? In the proposition “the source sources”, we may find the three of them. The flesh and blood “I” as a source, always already converging with others, is there, as a noun, obviously. The “textual I” is in the determinate article, for sure, that deictically creates a context for “*the source*” in *this* text. The “I witness” is, as you may have already guessed, in the verb, verbalizing, moving and simultaneously narrating, telling and making the order for the telling to come about: bringing her tracing-memory to life. *The source sources* is just another way to say that it creates contexts for meaningfulness. For there is no way something can be meaningful

⁵⁸² For an account of the kind of first-person narrators in autobiographies and fictional autobiographies, see Hampel, chapters 1 and 3.

⁵⁸³ For a sympathetic and detailed account on these forces as they participate in the process of self-formation and self-narration from a sociological standpoint, see Holstein and Gubrium. From an equally sympathetic account, but now from a psychological (developmental psychology) point of view, see McAdams.

without meaning, and there is no way there can be meaning without context. This is more a witness speaking from *intratextuality* than from *intertextuality*. We suffer with and in our bodies, but it is with and in our flesh that we are affected: *intratextually*. We are, we were, we will be (we should be) always already meaningful, with and in meaning: loved. This is where we come out.

6.8.1 Summary 41

Following the discussion started in the past section, the concomitance between the “I witness” with the “textual I” is fully developed here. This concomitance will be central for the argument on the development of authorship and the “author-to-author” dialogue that will be held in the eighth chapter. The conceptualization of “*intertextuality*” starts to be much more robust than when it second appeared in the first chapter, for it is clear now how the “I” is shaped and fully developed in texts (in the broad sense of the concept; i.e., anything endowed with signification). In this sense, the concept of “sincerity” starts to become more relevant, as it becomes the condition through which “*intertextuality*” can open its possibilities of mutually informing every participant involved in it (i.e., writer-reader; author-author; etc.). Sincerity also opens a possible convergence between what is other than oneself (what the testimony is about: the event, the others on whose behalf one speaks, etc.) and what is all of oneself, which entails what is one’s responsibility (the testimony itself, the account as it is organized by the witness). This form of “owning” as responsibility will be a key point in the elaboration of authorship in the next chapter. The creation of contexts to frame one’s testimonies (narratives where the “here and now” can be told) is here examined by relating it to the creation of timelines in one’s memories. That is, contexts are to narratives what timelines are to memories. It is thus that the argument of this chapter: self-awareness already entails self-chronicling, is elaborated. In this way, the argument: a better sense of one’s past necessarily translates into a better sense of awareness, is shown apparent. A well-functioning tracing-memory means, necessarily, a responsible witness. This relation should be retained in order to

reconceptualise the author in the way in which it was spoken about in the first chapter of this dissertation. This reconceptualization will start in the next chapter and will be fully elaborated in the eighth chapter of this thesis. The double-movement of self-ascription and self-inscription to one's texts (as was discussed in chapter 4) is finally defined in this section. Self-ascription is always done *poietically*, that is, it is always a creative gesture. Self-inscription is always performed erotically, that is, it is always an affective deed.

CHAPTER 7:
“I WILL REMEMBER” (NOSTALGIA NO. 3 IN M MAJOR [METAPHOR #2]):
HOMEMAKING WHILE CLAIMING ONE’S PAST

7.1 “Be my guest”

I should write this chapter as a host. And so I will: for you should be my guest, and it is you who I shall receive. As you take a seat (anywhere would be fine), I should try to reproduce my experience as a guest in Guillermo Cabrera Infante’s house. I have been there several times already, but it is only now that I mean to recreate this event. Such a nice house it is; classy, but unusually vulgar here and there. You know, there are corners where all there is to see are jumbled ornaments that go from souvenirs to memorabilia to fetishes to extravagant mementos of popular culture. If you are somewhat learned on this latter, you will instantly feel a strange feeling flashbacking in your spine, a strange sort of nostalgia for times you never lived (that, I mean, if you were born within the 1970’s), like clippings of a childhood you never had, maybe your parents’ childhood—yes, that perhaps. Actors, comic-strip heroes, film-makers, musicians, jazz players and *soneros* and *boleristas*, singers and crooners, comedians, children-book characters, monsters, cowboys and actresses, oh, so many actresses, reminding you of an unbeatable beauty, only possible by silver nitrate acts of prestidigitation: *vamps*, *femme fatales*, dancers, chorus-girls, blondes, brunettes, *morenas*, red-heads, eyes of blue and green and brown and yellow and olive-like, naive, joyful, treacherous, loving, kind, caring gazes of feminine bodies, curves of wonder, curved lips and curved hips and curved eyebrows and legs, oh, so many legs on high heels and flats and ballet shoes and leather boots and barefooted. Cuba is everywhere apparent though. There are Cuban carpets populated by English furniture, Cuban wallpapers populated by Cuban landscapes framed in English frames. The house, a typical Georgian building of South Kensington, is covered inside with a smell and taste of Cuba. The kitchen smells like it; that must be Miriam, who is a very good cook. But before you get there, the smell of cigars, of fine cigars, gets your nose as sudden as you find it emanating from the walls, all impregnated by this penetrating aroma—as the sunlight sets over the living room you can appreciate the dust coloured by

the smell of *Havanas*. Oh, of course, you cannot forget to take a look at the studio. Here, the smell of burnt tobacco blends with the smell of healthy pulp, old and new, of pulps of different kinds and with the marvelous smell of letters—usually a mix of ink, thought and paper. But if you do take that glance (if GCI opens this place for you), do not ever forget to direct your gaze towards the last window at your right: there you will see, through the windowpane and the plants in their pots, the saline air of the Caribbean materializing in a salty dust called Cuba; a tear-like salt still seizing the fog that Londoners have for many centuries associated with a heavenly touch of a silent nostalgia weighting over their heads, a taste of past whenever they lift their eyes. Hope sometimes comes as a feeling of dissipation, as the wish that sun-rays will finally sneak through the thick white sky and will show again the shades of blue that Londoners remember seeing in their childhood. Childhood is remembered in the sun. Even when there was fog or rain or thunderstorms, there is this unique radiance colouring our eyes, and we smile—or so we should.

But the Cuba you see constantly coming through GCI's window bears none of these traces. It is not a sun breaking over thick molecules of condensed vapors, nor is it a radiant sky ruling over his childhood laughter; it is not the joy of days that turned into nights and nights into mornings over luminous and vibrant streets where movement never stopped and music never shut, where dancing bodies filled the nightclubs and cabarets and the tropical dead-ends of the *malecón*, where even cars were dancers precipitating graciously over the asphalt stage making roads out of highways, legs out of eyes. All these is not what you sniff as you breathe in this room, at the vision of air turning into salt and salt into dust—a vision that leaves you totally out of breath. There, at that window, you see a very different kind of memory materializing a very different kind of past—a very different kind of nostalgia. And this is what we will be talking about today.

7.1.1 Summary 42

This chapter deals with the constitution of the writer as a host in and of his own work. It is thus examined the way in which GCI became this kind of host for his readers. As there

is an assumed concomitance between life and work (as was argued in chapter 2), it can be assumed that being a host of one's work already entails being a host in one's life. This latter is clearly the case in what is discussed throughout this chapter. GCI became a host of his own past, of his own process of recreating it, as well as of his preferences, passions, obsessions, etc. It is argued that, in this process, GCI also became a host of his own present. Given that in the previous chapter it was argued that a better sense of one's past already entails a better sense of awareness, it is argued in this chapter that this better sense allows the person to claim authority over his/her own life, past, present and future, as well as over his/her own work. This is the principle over which the concept of authorship will be built in this chapter.

7.2 "You're welcome"

Now, you would ask me, are all houses homes? Of course not! But the problem is that not all homes are houses either. A home is more of an abstract concept, while a house is more of a concrete fact—many of them literally made out of concrete. Home, for most of us, starts as a loss: from the womb to childhood and from childhood to its steady search—till we find it once again. When we remember our childhood, home was that common place for people who (kinship notwithstanding) shared common bonds—most of which were marked by the traces of a common remembrance⁵⁸⁴. Being familiar means having common memories, which make ground for having common bonds. There is no home without familiarity. As we lose one place with which we are familiar (i.e., the womb), we find another place to get familiar with, a place dwelt by other people (e.g., your family), and, as we grow up there, we learn that we are not expected to be there all our lives, that we must leave this place to make a home of our own: that we must lose this space in order to find (and found) ourselves. This is, in a nutshell, the process of losing and gaining a home—of leaving it behind.

⁵⁸⁴ See Silvia Molloy's take on homes as "solid common places of remembrance". See Molloy 159.

Nonetheless, for the exile, home starts as an interruption that feels like a breakage: that feels like homelessness. The materialized interval that marks your journey from your first home (that of your childhood) to your “real” home (that which you found), this “journey between homes”⁵⁸⁵, is suddenly broken by a thrust that removes the floor under your feet and the walls around your body. Familiarity suddenly becomes “referentiality”, something of which you know because this is now nothing but memories, because now you can only refer to it. The exile eerily feels familiarity receding from a new, unwelcoming surrounding, with most of her referents lost but, more importantly, with nearly all her references useless. If meaning is mainly enacted, incarnated, then reference is all a matter of use⁵⁸⁶. Not only is this common place of remembrance gone, but your memories themselves have lost their roof over their heads; it is now mainly a weight over their shoulders what they have. These roofless memories are, just like the exile’s very skin, exposed: bare flesh—in the flesh. And now these memories feel more like open wounds than as dermic protection.

It is not so much that your memories do not find complete coherence, nor that your surroundings look incoherent to you as your frames of reference feel seriously handicapped, but mainly that neither seem meaningful to you. Home is the place of meaningfulness, where it lays, rests and wakes up every single day. Meaningfulness transcends coherence, just as homes transcend concrete buildings (or brick, or iron, or cast stone, etc.). Home is the materialization of interiority in the world, in the out-there; where conflicts are suspended—or where so they should be⁵⁸⁷. To lose our home, to be sacked from it, is to lose the textures, the colours, the shapes, the sounds, the smells, the flavours that made our surroundings meaningful; the very place wherein they gained

⁵⁸⁵ On this journey understood within the “logic of the interval”, see Ahmed 330.

⁵⁸⁶ On meaning as use, and its relation to familiarity (in what is called “language games”, another way to refer to contexts), see Wittgenstein 83.

⁵⁸⁷ On home as the “zone” where the “*differends* between genres of discourse is suspended”, see Lyotard, *The Differend* 151.

meaning as all other conflicts were pacified and framed. Our new surroundings feel lacking in texture; they seem short of meaning⁵⁸⁸.

Many have felt like exiles in life, for many have felt homeless in the world. This group of people, perennially out of place, sanctify travelling and find the establishing of a home as a radical impossibility⁵⁸⁹. Solitude becomes the very condition of humanity and homelessness the very trademark of this world. No place is safe, no place is solid; only oneself is safe, only motion is solid—you do not need a home, even less so do you need such an inane craving. Oh, this human tendency to universalize impossibilities of our own. If something is impossible for someone, it is not strange to hear from him that this very thing is an impossibility as such: “home is a bourgeois concept”, “home is an anthropocentric idea”, etc⁵⁹⁰. I must agree with Hannah Arendt (*The Human Condition* 71) in that an entirely public realm becomes shallow, that privacy is what actually provides depth to the *agora*, for I can only say that it is intimacy that gives meaning to human relations. It is true that your home can turn against yourself, that far from suspending conflict it increases it, that far from giving meaning to the world it sucks it out—but you should not be calling this place a home in the first place, should you?

The lost home, as the originary place, the place wherein we originate, is, to a huge degree, forgotten; and therefore it is re-created a great deal⁵⁹¹. The womb is probably in our hypothalamus and we have no distinct memory of it; only disparate sensations fired when

⁵⁸⁸ For the relationship between losing our homes and the loss of “social texture”, see Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 293.

⁵⁸⁹ Jean Genet, who never had a house, and went on from rented room to rented room during all his life (way after his success as a writer) may be one of the best known examples of this perennial homelessness, but we can find another notable example of a chronic homeless with a travelling compulsion in the poet and writer Elizabeth Bishop. On a most interesting study on this particularity in Bishop’s life and writing, see Goodwin.

⁵⁹⁰ On Bishop’s views (home as anthropocentric), see Goodwin 116. On Genet’s opinions (home as a bourgeois concept), see Genet 6-7.

⁵⁹¹ On these “original homes”, which are lost to our memories, see Ahmed 330.

we are, for instance, pleasantly floating in a lake or in a bathtub. Of our childhood, we have somewhat sharper memories, but not sharp enough; it is all kind of mixed up, liquid to the point of viscous; we have mainly sensations associated to colours and smells and sounds and... from which we complete an image. At home, we all started out as guests, not as hosts. And the more guest-like our dwelling, the less we can recall. We find similar traces in our mother tongue, our original tongue, wherein we feel most at home (or so we should). Of its reception as its guests we have nothing but disparate sensations stemming from our cerebellum: that primordial safeness of being inside the womb of language itself⁵⁹². A word, an onomatopoeia, an arbitrary term, even a swear-word may fire an entire array of sensations of whose memories we have not a distinct account, but of whose emotions we have nothing but to accept them as they emerge. It is like feeling the heat of the melting pot in which our language was forged. This is where our incarnations originally melted and where everything stemming from them (behaviours, practices, actions, reactions, responses, expressions, etc.) was originally blended⁵⁹³. As was said in the previous chapter, initiations are what distinctively mark our “coming of age”, our “growing up” and becoming an adult understood within that transitional period called adolescence. It is worth noting that the language in which these initiations were spoken (written, whispered, read, etc.) is most important: the language in which you, for instance, made love for the first time is part and parcel of its becoming meaningful, of this experience’s meaningfulness; and hence of your incarnations of it⁵⁹⁴. In which language you respond to something for the first time (when something became meaningful, which is when you were *really* initiated in it) determines in which language this experience will feel most at home. In which language did you realize you own mortality?

⁵⁹² This idea can be found in Mukherjee 24.

⁵⁹³ See, for instance, how this becomes difficult to determine when you grow in a bilingual household with two mother tongues in Tan, where she writes: “To this day, I wonder which parts of my behaviour were shaped by Chinese, which by English” (29).

⁵⁹⁴ I owe this extraordinary example to Lacqueur 92.

In contrast, feeling homeless when experiencing something, with no language to remember it, or wherein your own language is turned into a weapon against you, the language with which you were harmed or, ultimately, refused, is difficult to overcome⁵⁹⁵. Within all the Cabrera Infante's family ordeal of being hanged on temporary visas for quite an extended period of time, with the anxiety that this supposed, GCI's youngest daughter, Carolita, insisted that the sign placed outside Belgian movie-houses, "Enfants non Admis", was directed to them—a pun unwittingly backfiring at the Infante's household⁵⁹⁶. This anecdote is most illustrative as to what being systematically refused can produce in us: a feeling of perennial homelessness. We can get used to being refused, and get to the habit of never having a home—even after we have one⁵⁹⁷. This is the innermost wound in the exile, who gradually realizes that there is no way back but, even worse, that, while in-between homes, there is no moving forward either. It may work out in the end, as most exiles (who have been able to tell their stories) can tell, but there is no doubt that during those years (even months or weeks) you lived in "quiet desperation"⁵⁹⁸ this manifests as the experience of being nowhere as you await acceptance and as you fear yet another refusal. Jean Amery once said "One must have a home in order not to need it" (Amery 46)—I could not agree more.

Home is the place of recognition par excellence; the place you recognize blindfolded because everything is in its place, because you know everything's place by heart; and the place where you are recognized as yourself, where you are most recognizable (or so you should be). This must be why most people associate home with safety. This is most

⁵⁹⁵ On not having a language to articulate a traumatic experience, see Glowacka 62, where she speaks about how the Hungarian writer, Imre Kertesz, arrived at the conclusion that the experience of the Holocaust "remains homeless in the house of language".

⁵⁹⁶ This anecdote can be found in Souza, *Guillermo Cabrera Infante* 143.

⁵⁹⁷ Jean Amery elaborates on this "Pavlovian reflex" of fear in every border, way after being able to cross them legally, in his brilliant. See Amery 41.

⁵⁹⁸ This beautiful characterization (nearly antithetical) can be found in Pink Floyd's magnificent song "Time". The entire line reads: "Hanging on in quiet desperation is the English way".

certainly what I mean when I associate it with intimacy. Your home is in this sense a second flesh, the exteriorization and artefactualization of your very flesh; the horizon of everything that is other for you, and of everything that is yours for the others: the very expression of what (and where) inside and outside is *for you*. And, as in your flesh, this place is determined, bordered, delimited by affect: what affects you is in-corporated to it and what is therein incorporated will always affect you—wherever you may go. This is the definition of inhabiting, no! better, of *dwelling* that we should use here: the place (the world, the country [the county?], the province, state, neighbourhood, etc.) as it affected you and as you affected it; as it affects you and as you affect it.

This is also the kind of nostalgia that seizes you as you look through GCI's window: a nostalgia that searches not for a way back, but for a way in; a route to relentlessly toil against alienation, to escape homelessness. This salty dust proliferates in cells that recreate Cuba. If you are lucky, and if you observe really carefully, you may find some stem cells of his primeval home. It was only by this recreation that he could create alternative paths for his tracing-memory to reproduce a timeline of continuation after several (and so severe) interruptions/disruptions (exile, but also a nervous breakdown, 12 years hanging on one temporary status after another). It was only by virtue of this nostalgic recreation that he could continue creating the "sense of intimacy with the world" (Boym 251) so necessary in order to *make* a home.

Homemaking is a continuous task. Contrary to its common understanding, a home is not an affixed place, but one that must be kept so as to keep existing. Homemaking and homekeeping are one and the same thing. Yet, how do we claim the space where we make our homes? We start our lives as guests, always already in others' homes. And, strictly speaking, being a guest means not to have a home there where you are a guest. A homeless person, in this manner, is a permanent guest, eternally stuck in that point of no

return where s/he felt the safest (i.e., the womb, childhood, non-existence⁵⁹⁹). Before making your home, you need to feel confident enough to claim it. Where are we to claim it? There where you listen to its voice most distinctly: within that call [as was conceptualized in chapter 5] that calls you, with that person you feel most intimate, on that piece of land that claims you back, in that language that speaks to you. For a writer, this is most important, for it is only when s/he listens to language (textual, written and spoken language) speaking to her/him that s/he can start writing therein; this language thus becomes a *place* from which expression emerges. Home is not *the* place, but those articulations that put you *into your place*; where you can rest and work, where you can dream and wake up, where you can stop. Just as a culture is not a country or a nation or a nation-state, home is not *a* place, but those articulations that make it physically possible. In GCI, as we saw, these articulations were movies, literature, music, cabarets, tropical nights, but also Miriam, Ana and Carola (his daughters), etc. And, in his way, he left behind some of these articulations, friends (as those that made the templates for characters in *TTT* and who we get to know better in *Cuerpos Divinos*, like Rine Leal, Roberto Branly and, most especially, Adriano de Cárdenas y Espinoza, the best but betraying friend, and very likely the template for Arsenio Cué) or family (Zoila, his mother, most especially; his father, his maternal grandmother, Pepe Castro, etc.) or some with whom he just broke relations (the most important is, perhaps, the least mentioned in his literature: Marta Calvo, his first wife and the mother of his two daughters).

Things change, but your home remains—or so it should. Then, through distance and by leaving behind, you realize how much some past articulations participate in your feeling or not feeling at home. It is as when you start to command another language, when you

⁵⁹⁹ This, for instance, was part of the logic behind Sigmund Freud's concept of the "Death Instinct", a kind of missing the death-like state of "absolute stillness" that preceded our birth. See Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* 64-69. This longing for that "absolute stillness" was also behind Emile Cioran's whole philosophical project. His classic *The Trouble with being Born* could be read as the work wherein the extraordinary Rumanian writer reverses the odds as to what humans have assumed as their biggest fear, for he argues that it is the prospect of birth, and not that of death, what is to be dreaded.

start feeling at home in a second language, and you realize how much your native language constituted your being at home, for those voices are listened to most distinctly once they are not in your everyday life, but only in your mind, in your dreams, in your writing, etc. Now you listen soundly to these voices, you recognize them—like when you finished furnishing your new place, which feels now so cozy and homely, only to remind you of the first house you moved in after your father’s first big promotion. You start as a guest despite yourself. You can only claim your home because of yourself. And then you realize that your claims are in a great part shaped by your days as a guest. No matter how much you get to master another language, your native language will always whisper in your ears as you compose. When you grow with more than one native language, they all will whisper to each other constantly: rhythms, verbal tenses, adjectival forms, etc.⁶⁰⁰

This form of home-claiming renders our homemaking, our very own creation, something of a more modest feat. Many of today’s social practices (particularly in Anglo-Saxon and some European countries) celebrate the passage towards college as the induction of the young (wo)man into homemaking. Alternatively to the ruling paradigm in Hispanic American (and also Portuguese-American) countries (and to this day Spain, and Portugal too), wherein homemaking typically starts with the foundation of a new family (i.e., with marriage), these countries send the 18 year-old student on a quest of “living on her/his own” and thus of starting to make homes of their own⁶⁰¹. In these countries, this structure

⁶⁰⁰ For an example of this latter, wherein Spanish is constantly rivalling with English and vice versa, see Dorfman, “Footnotes to a Double Life” 215.

⁶⁰¹ Cuba, as a communist country, is an exception to this paradigm, since most of the students that get into University are harboured in what they call *becas*, which are rooms with two, three or four beds in which the students live while they are studying; these rooms are provided by the government. It should be noted, however, that these students have been living in a similar fashion since they were in junior high, since it seems that young girls and boys, particularly those who are promising enough to get higher education [those *pioneros y pioneras* [pioneers] as they call them], are sons and daughters of the State, of that big family called the Cuban revolution. So, by the time they reach these *becas*, they are well-used to living “on their own” (though closely watched by the school authorities, another training stage for learning to be watched by the State at large).

is supposed to secure the difficult transition from adolescence to autonomous adulthood: a rite of passage towards independence⁶⁰². This is not the form of homemaking we are speaking about here. We are not interested with the constitution of individuality but with the emergence of witnessing, or, better, with the emergence of memory as a place in which the witness thrives: a place of remembrance wherein you start to *make* your own articulations—those with which you feel most at home.

Now, you have heard these sounds and voices most distinctly, and you have managed to claim them; is this enough to make a home? No. It was said that making a home was a continuous task, something that is never really finished—not while you are alive. Once you claim a home, you must start taking care of it, which is what really *makes* it your property. I am, to be sure, not going to engage here in a discussion of the history private property; it will suffice to say that even within this form of conceptualization property is to be taken care of by the proprietor, which is what is understood as *his* responsibility. I believe, however, we should be trying to go a little further from contractual obligations and take this caring closer to the way we have been speaking about within the course of this work: as love, as *eros*. This you take with you wherever you go. The land may vanish, the house might be torn down or the country disappear: your caring will always keep you company. Away and at a distance you may start to appreciate what you do, what you love, as well as what you did, what you loved and what you lost; they all can find a place in your new home, the place you *made* and *keep making* to remembrance, to remember, to evoke/invoke your past, lost, dearly missed articulations, and trace them

We should also note that GCI did not live within this structure, and that his transition from the parental home to *his* was more according to the Hispanic-American model, particularly of the Hispanic-American poor family model, which is: everybody in the same household, with one of them having more financial responsibilities over the others, usually one of the sons or daughters—the one who is doing better. In GCI's case, the one appointed to assume these responsibilities was, indeed, GCI.

⁶⁰² For an interesting account on how this is structured in Dutch universities, see Cierrad 87, where she speaks of the “social embarrassment” that failing in this rite can suppose to the soon-to-be individual, leaving in him/her a social mark difficult to remove.

with your present ones as you weave them with those yet to come. For a writer, indeed, this place is, to a most significant extent, language; but not language as a tongue anymore (mother or whichever other relative-figure you want to attach to it), not a system of signs, or a grammar, or a syntax, not even a reservoir of melodies and rhythms, but a *unified* place, a *handmade* unity that unifies, that articulates past, present and future; that helps to shelter those dispersed voices that went lost after you were forced to leave your home, and start again.

In this way, to make a home is to de-fetishize it, to take it down from the altar that renders it an impossibility. When a place starts to *make* sense on its own, a home has already started to *give* sense to this space, and it is therefore that memory can have its place—the place it should always have in our lives: sense-maker, tracing-memory. We make places by making sense of the spaces around us. Feeling estranged, out-of-place, as most immigrants do (as all exiles have felt), is to feel removed from all space. And here, as in those days of youth when we first left our homes, we start to search for common grounds to remember, to found familiarity again. For we have this certainty, and this certainty alone, no matter how well unified our home may have once been, that home is never one; it is always incomplete. Svetlana Boym once wrote “This incomplete measure is the measure of freedom” (337); and we should agree, otherwise a home would turn into a cage! We are constantly affected by new things, events, people... by everything we consider other, unfamiliar, suddenly seizing us and calling for our attention, and we feel this urge to respond to this call, to be friends or lovers or only acquaintances, to become familiar, to have them over in our places, to receive them in our homes, as happened with you before we met, and after; as it is happening right now.

7.2.1 Summary 43

The distinction between a house and a home is crucial in order to understand the difference between building (which entails *poiesis*, i.e., becoming a host) and dwelling (which entails accepting, i.e., being a guest). This distinction should be made by better

understanding what “making a home” means. To “make a home” is to “build new familiarities” there where, at first, strangeness abound. This entails to leave behind what is absolutely familiar (i.e., utterly given) so as to build new bonds, new relations, etc. Since a house of one’s own must be other than the one that is completely given (i.e., the womb, parental household, etc.), the process of building a house should be concomitant with the process of making a home. Estrangement emerges when these two processes diverge. This is where the discussion of being an exile becomes relevant. Since the exile is forced to interrupt this process, her/his process of “homemaking” will necessarily diverge with that of “house-building”. This interruption means a divergence between familiarity and referentiality, wherein most referents are lost and only their references stand (something that is only present as memory). In his/her new environment, the exile finds most of her/his references useless. Meaningfulness, what is made meaningful within a common place of remembrance, is therefore interrupted and temporally lost for the exile. It is from this estrangement that the exile sets to “re-build” his/her house, and to “re-make” his/her home. Home is the place of meaningfulness. House is the physical space through which meaningfulness is safeguarded. The relation between the original home and a person’s native language is also extensively examined in this section. This is an important relation as it should help to explain the concomitance between home and house (life and work).

7.3 “Where were we?”

So you already know that Guillermo Cabrera Infante never went back to Cuba, that he died in exile and that the last time he saw this island was in 1965, after cutting the maternal thread due to his mother’s death. But what you probably do not know is that he never really attempted to come back “home”, that this place had earned its quotation marks and that he learned that the fiction that awoke his interest in literature was better preserved there, as fiction: *The Odyssey*. Homecoming, Odysseus’ not being recognized but by his dog, was what first seduced a young GCI to read, no, to plunge into a book. He said that the literature teacher who taught this book in high-school was as snobbish as he

was passionate about his subject matter⁶⁰³, and was one of his first inspirations to approach books that did not contain any *dibujitos* [drawings/illustrations]. Not only was *Cuerpos Divinos* the book he started to prepare after *TTT*, but he was also preparing another text called *Ítaca Vuelta a Visitar* [Ithaca re-visited]⁶⁰⁴, which was supposed to tell his ordeal during those three eternal months he waited before finally going to exile, before finally deciding to never coming back, before making his mind that there was not going to be a homecoming evermore, because that place, home, was devoured by the revolution in less than a decade—*that* home was forever lost. Unfortunately, we do not know anything about the destiny of this text, and we know neither if he finished it nor left it hanging or abandoned the whole idea: we have only to hope that it (incomplete or not) will be published somewhere in his *Complete Works*; but for that, we will have to wait; Miriam and the editor, Antoni Munné, are planning for 9 to 10 volumes, and only one, more than 1500 pages long, has been published so far⁶⁰⁵. What we can be sure of, though, is that, unlike Odysseus, GCI's yearning to coming back was complemented by an equally strong conviction that there was nowhere to go, that homecoming was nothing but a waste of time, a landing in limbo—as the one he had to live in during those months of mourning in the Spring of 1965.

After the resounding success of *La Habana*, GCI took the next decade and a half to compose brief pieces and articles for all kind of publications and to give lectures nearly everywhere he was invited, which, at that time, were quite a few places⁶⁰⁶. He also spent

⁶⁰³ This anecdote can be found in Pereda 186 and in Souza 19.

⁶⁰⁴ See Souza 73, 81, 120, 141.

⁶⁰⁵ See Munné 9-38. As it turns out, this book was published almost exactly a month after this dissertation was completed. This will be explained in more detail in the afterword of this thesis.

⁶⁰⁶ He went from the West Coast of the United States to the East Coast of Australia giving lectures and courses (some of his destinations are mentioned in the third instalment of his “Orígenes”, published in *Mi Música Extremada*; also some chronicles of these journeys can be found in his *El libro de las ciudades* [The book of the cities]). The pieces were published usually in the Spanish newspaper *El País*, but there were plenty of magazines

some time assisting the translation to English of an important part of his work (including *La Habana*⁶⁰⁷, but also *Un Oficio*⁶⁰⁸ and *Vista*⁶⁰⁹ and *Así en la paz*⁶¹⁰). Additionally, during the 1980's he ventured to compose his only book in English, *Holy Smoke*, a book that we shall discuss more in depth later in this chapter. By the beginning of the 1990's, however, GCI looked through his studio's window and decided to finally compile what was going to be the definite biography of his exile: *Mea Cuba*. Published in 1992, this book contains several of the writer's most poignant pieces dealing with Cuban politics. Nonetheless, the way these pieces are put together (more or less chronologically in the Spanish version, very much tropologically in the English one⁶¹¹) gives you the feeling that you are reading the very biography of his exile. This book is much more than an account, and so much more than a collection of essays; for there are also chronicles, *testimonios*, reviews (mainly of books, but also of a movie), responses to letters and/or editorials, letters to editors, biographical portraits and obituaries... it even contains a vignette-like description (a la *Vista*) of an old engraving that criticizes Cuba's birth out of violence⁶¹². Although some pieces did not make it into the English translation, most of the titles did; and, more significantly, the distance provided by the time elapsed between one and the other version led to a rereading of its timeline, which led to a redistribution of the pieces. This redistribution, I must say, is better than the original in this idea of displaying *a life in exile* (his) much more than coping with it. It is as if after the Spanish version was published, GCI found himself better equipped to cope with this salty dust sifting through

where he published often (many of them are mentioned in *Mea Cuba*, such as the Mexican magazine coordinated and directed by Octavio Paz, *Vuelta*).

⁶⁰⁷ Published as *Infante's Inferno* in 1984, translated by Suzanne Jill Levine in collaboration with GCI.

⁶⁰⁸ Published as *A Twentieth Century Job* in 1992, translated by Kenneth Hall in collaboration with GCI.

⁶⁰⁹ Published as *View of Dawn in the Tropics* in 1988, translated by Suzanne Jill Levine in collaboration with GCI.

⁶¹⁰ Published as *Writes of Passage* in 1993, translated by John Brookesmith and Peggy Boyars in collaboration with GCI.

⁶¹¹ Translated by Kenneth Hall and published only two years after the original, in 1994; marking the fastest translation ever made to any of GCI's works.

⁶¹² See "An Old Engraving", *Mea Cuba* 209.

his window, and found himself more able to *relatar* [relate/tell] *his* life in exile. This book could be read as the memoirs of an exile, and as the only book the writer ever composed dealing exclusively with politics.

Mea Cuba does not share the “we are all immigrants of some sort” approach that was starting to become popular at that time (the 90’s were the official decade of globalization), or worse, the recycled Judeo-Christian trope of “we are all exiles of some kind”. GCI makes this clear since the very beginning, since the very first piece in which he finally decided to expose why he went to exile (the piece because of which he was ostracized as an exile and excluded from many of the most important literary circles at that time, since the *boom* of “Latin American” literature, as you may very well know, was directed with the left hand). In his 1968 response to the Argentine magazine *Primera Plana*, he tells us that “it is easier in this time to adopt the literary style than to copy the lifestyle of James Joyce” (11)⁶¹³, thus asserting that it is easier to be metaphorically an exile, or an immigrant or a nomad, than to *really* be one: it is easier to speak as a homeless person than to live as one. He says all this while being perfectly aware that he harbours no hopes of homecoming: “Cuba no longer exists for me other than in memory or in dreams – and nightmares. The other Cuba (even the one of the future, whatever this may be) is, in truth, ‘a dream that turned out badly’” (17-18). He is saying this, we must note, with utmost pain, without any of the half-baked cosmopolitanism that was so much in vogue at that time in so many other exiles, expatriates and cultural tourists that were “refusing to belong anywhere”, for their home was the world itself⁶¹⁴. As GCI very well

⁶¹³ In 1972, *Editorial Lumen* published GCI’s translation of James Joyce’s *Dubliners*, the book that the Cuban writer affirms is the true antecedent of Joyce’s *Ulysses* (unlike *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*). Later on, when he was offered to translate this latter (monumental) novel, GCI rejected the enterprise, affirming that it would take him a lifetime to responsibly translate this book. See Guibert 431 and Pereda 110-111. Regarding his translation of *Dubliners*, we will speak of it some more later in this chapter.

⁶¹⁴ This trope has gone as far as making an organization to represent these “nomads of the world”, these crackpot cosmopolitans. “Global Nomads International” (GNI, not GCI

notes, most of these people were either grafted in their host country or had the possibility of coming back whenever they desired⁶¹⁵. And in this book he will pay homage to those true exiles that were living a life outside Cuba and who were, some better than others, trying to reconstitute their lives and works outside the island. People like Heberto Padilla, Lino Novás Calvo, Lydia Cabrera or Reinaldo Arenas are regular cast (and even have pieces of their own) in this book—people who suffered and died in exile and some (as is, arguably, Arenas’ case) died from it. He shared with them a common lack: a home-country—and a common attempt (in which, we must say, some of them, as Arenas or Novás Calvo, failed): to make a home without it. You should know that although GCI learned to appreciate, value, even love London, he never felt a Londoner anymore than he felt an Englishman: “My clothes make an Englishman of me but my nakedness erases me” (*Mea Cuba* 484).

Nedda G. de Anhalt writes apropos GCI’s *Mea Cuba*: “the only way to resurrect Havana is through time, memory and writing, and this is exactly what he has done [in *Mea Cuba*]. As long as he longs, he will remember, and as long as he keeps writing about Cuba, the book of life will be an open one, a limbo without an end but with both Genesis and Exodus” (200). This book of life is precisely the one that is everywhere apparent in *Mea Cuba*, where the story of his Exodus is told and of whose Genesis we learn a great deal

please) is supposed to “give a place” (a manner of speaking) to all those who “refuse to belong to any particular place”, for the world is their homeland and the very globe their hometown. Yet, such an organization sounds as oxymoronic (mind the last three syllables) as an “Anarchist Political Party” or a “Pataphysical University” does—the first a serious attempt (and a serious failure), the second a great joke. On some of the important differences between “literal and metaphorical migration”, and for more on this organization (GNI), see Ahmed 336-340.

⁶¹⁵ The examples of what he considered “grafted exiles” included people like Alejo Carpentier (who, GCI affirmed, always felt more like a French man than a Cuban) and Severo Sarduy (who, according to GCI, always felt like a true Parisian). Among the many writers who were living outside their home countries with a visa to travel back whenever they so wished, we have Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, Pablo Neruda, and the list goes on and on—God, it even includes Mario Benedetti! On GCI’s views, see Gibert 343-344.

(in a most sardonic humour). Just as GCI defined *TTT* as “a gallery of voices”, and we said before that *La Habana* could be read as a gallery of women, we can say, with Jacobo Machover, that *Mea Cuba* is a “gallery of portraits” (*El Heraldo de las Malas Noticias* 33), each of which gives us a different feature, a different angle, poise and wrinkle of the macro-portrait of his self in exile. Portraits are abridged biographies, as if written and completed in an aphorism.

The true Genesis of GCI’s Exodus starts with the text “P.M. Means Post Mortem”, wherein he gives a detailed account of what was for him the true “end of an era”, the one that his brother Sabá Cabrera and Orlando Jimenez captured with their camera at night in Havana, with people of all classes drinking, dancing, loving, fighting and challenging life with death and death with life. This small piece of “free cinema” was seized by the ICAIC and later became the guilty hostage after which all the other cultural heads started to roll, including the literary magazine that GCI directed, *Lunes de Revolución*. This piece is framed with enormous irony, for everybody is presented as if in a court; this more resembling that of the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland* than a realist portrait of a communist trial (no irony but only horror could be derived from such a thing). GCI provides us here with a brief biographical profile of the accused (Sabá and Orlando), after which he opens the real trial, which is yet another text: “Bites from the Bearded Crocodile”, a piece written and published originally in English, in *The London Review of Books* in July of 1981 (and later in Spanish, in *Quimera en España*, in 1984). Here we have the *Alice*-like trial with all its mordant humour: a *testimonio* that is firstly a denunciation and then an essay on the decline of the Cuban cultural renaissance—a rebirth aborted by revolutionary bureaucrats: professional abortionists.

But before beginning all this, GCI had to underscore one of the most difficult tasks for the exile: finding his feeling of *belonging* somewhere. This is a rather difficult concept, but as necessary to homemaking as to claiming a space is; you just cannot be at home if you do not belong somewhere. When you belong nowhere, then everything and anything you say

(particularly what you criticize and/or denounce) sounds like the rancorous rants of a resentful teenager: they just cannot be taken seriously. We saw in Chapter 3 how this feeling is palpable in GCI's first pieces collected in *Mea Cuba* written before his nervous breakdown. However, once put in context, the rancour can be balanced by an undeniable feeling of belonging: the writer feels as being definitely part of some place.

This is the beginning of belonging: belonging *to* somewhere, *to* a place. This mainly means *partaking* of that place, a constitutive part of what articulates it; you go, and the place cannot be itself anymore. In order to *partake* of a place you must be aware of it, which primarily entails a *being there*, a being present. You must belong to where you are in order to take place there. If you belong to your present time, you belong to time: this is what be part of something means, being able to participate in it. This is what truly being in the world is, *taking part of it*⁶¹⁶. This belonging is thus marked by the possibility of incarnating a particular reality that therefore contributes to the articulation of that *to which* you belong. This is hence a belonging *to* meaning that feels as if *fusing* with it. When you feel that you belong to some reality in which you take part, you feel as if you were fused with such a part, for your participation is, indeed, crucial to the constitution of this reality.

This is why you cannot belong to something by decree; why belonging by law, universal belonging, is nothing but a self-contradicting utopia: belonging is, by necessity, partial. Democracy, in this context, means equal opportunities to participate, not equal

⁶¹⁶ This idea can be found in Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* 424. His view of what it means to “being conscious” and “being in the world” can be compared with Martin Heidegger’s structure of *Dasein* (wherein *taking part of the world* is a necessity of *Dasein*, rather than something we are able to, but not necessarily must—as when we are in *a* world we are not able to understand and where nothing makes sense even though we are forced to be there, either by someone else, a government or a person [i.e., a political prisoner or an homosexual in one of the Cuban UMAP camps of forced labor] or by the force of circumstances [e.g., being in the middle of the ruins of your house after an earthquake or a big fire]).

participation. It is then that if you find yourself belonging to something (group, community, place, organization, etc., all somewhat gatherable under the umbrella concept of “reality”), you find yourself caring for it and engaging with it. This bears the unmistakable trace of responsibility: belonging to something, being part of something, is being responsible for it—which requires all your care and attention. This, again, is what defines property, as embodiment, as incarnation, as being as much a part of something as this becomes a part of you⁶¹⁷. And this is why you must be present so as to belong to some reality, because engaging and caring are things you do, not things you are (or were); and you cannot do something if you are not there.

To be sure, being part of something means that you are *able* to partake therein⁶¹⁸. If you cannot properly take part in something, you cannot fully feel as belonging to it. For instance, I was never *able* to take part of this reality of a soccer pitch; I just lacked the conditions (ability perhaps, but also my being present, there and then, was significantly handicapped). To this day, I still love everything related to the game, but as a spectator—and here I do belong: you should see me in a stadium or talking with other fans/aficionados or listening to the experts and giving my opinionated inputs! Here I feel recognized and I find myself most recognizable, but moreover, I feel *able* to recognize

⁶¹⁷ On property in relation to embodiment, see Russon 99.

⁶¹⁸ This *being able* has been commented and (fairly) problematized as it has become a criterion of exclusion and even of elimination of otherness, so long as it can lead (and had led) to nationalisms of all sorts, even to the justification of genocide. In his outstanding “Shibboleth”, Jacques Derrida, for instance, tells the Hebrew parable of how the Gileadites used a code-word (“Shibboleth”) to identify surviving Ephraimites trying to cross the Jordan River so as to save their lives once their town was taken and defeated by the former group. This pass-word (an oral pass-port) decided not only the access but the lives of those who were not able to pronounce it (even if they *knew* the word, their *native* pronunciation was what marked their belonging to such reality, and therefore their worth as living people). This parable becomes, for Derrida, a metaphor to reflect on the structure of the refugee systems and to criticize the whole apparatus of “welcoming the other” under restricted conditions. For a most fascinating commentary on these issues in relation to the Holocaust, see Glowacka 72. We will try to counterbalance this always latent possibility of exclusion by adding a second variable to this kind of “belonging to”, namely, a “belonging in”, in just a few paragraphs.

others as taking part of this “reality” quite quickly, as so do others, which makes the organization of this “reality” not only viable but, mostly, proficient, fertile, productive. Belonging to some reality entails mutual recognition from all taking part therein; it means a being together that implies an each otherness setting in motion a dialogue in and of reciprocal incarnations (or interactions, if you prefer this term). Here, we participate in an embodied conversation of deeds and actions and practices that therefore opens an access towards intimacy. We cannot be intimate there where we do not belong.

As we have been seeing within this work, GCI belongs to Havana as much as Havana belongs to him—a belonging that transcended his “original” place, Gibara, for which he always had fond memories, but where he never quite belonged. He perfected his Havanan accent, he mastered the lexicon, he learned all its streets by heart, he attended to its story and history and could not care more for its fate. He was most intimate with Havana, though, as we know, this was not his only love. He belonged to Miriam and to his daughters as much as they to him, and they made a household. He belonged to words as much as they to him; and they made books. Etc.

Still, participation does not explain property. Although GCI partook in Havana, it was not his property, nor was Miriam or Ana or Carola or words for that matter. Here, we need to introduce another component to this “belonging to” a reality, which is “belonging in” it—this may help us explicate property to a better degree.

We should distinguish between *making* something and *taking part* in it. To incarnate meaning as partaking in a “reality” is not so much my making as my caring for and engaging with the meaning I incarnate and the part of this “reality” I take part in constituting. As was said in the second chapter, meaning *must* be continuously re-signified—and this is *what* we make. To re-signify meaning (as I incarnate it, as I transform myself with it and it with me) requires from me to wholly dissolve in it; not so much to become this meaning as to erase those borders in which it starts and I end. It is

within this dissolution that I belong *in* this meaning *as* it was re-signified. This is what lies behind the trope, almost the cliché, of “roots”: not an affixed place, not what keeps us in one place (this is within the logic of nationalisms etc.), but what let us in, that through which I get inside a place, through which I dwell in it. As I was called by my name before I thus realized it, as I realized myself through my listening to this name whereby I was called, as I started as a guest of my name by inhabiting it, I get dissolved in it, and I transform it, as it transforms with me, and then, it is my name that starts inhabiting me, dwelling in me. This is also what is behind the logic of the signature. If you check how many “Guillermo Cabrera Infantes” are in an average phone book of any Hispanic city; you will find, at least, a handful of them. Yet, I know *who* Guillermo Cabrera Infante *is*, the one *to whom* I refer, the one *whose* life is dissolved in this name—and so do you⁶¹⁹. Our roots thus root us there where we can trust an access, where we can dissolve in. “To root” then means to open in, to dissolve in, to trust: a “between us” that turns into a “within us” in an always already open access. This is the world of privacy erected through and from our roots: privacy is there where our roots still are.

It is thus that one belongs *to* what one does, there, in our *here* and *now*, whereas one belongs *in* what one did, there, in our *there* and *then*. I am dissolved *in* what I did, in everything I had made so far: in my past. This includes “my story”, “my childhood”, “my country”, “my city”, “my native language”, “my second language”, etc. Yet I can only fuse *with* what I do: “this text”, “my history”, “my home”, etc. Intimacy, in this fashion, is something that we do and that we must *keep* doing so as to keep it going. Privacy, on the other hand, is built upon familiarity, a shared past: common roots of made accesses. We should not confuse (not con-fuse either) dissolution with vanishing or blending with; that is, we should not confuse dissolution with confusion. Dissolution is infusion. And infusions are made; they are the power, the energy, the force we imprint *into* something else. This infusion is what I called in previous chapters the double movement of self-

⁶¹⁹ For the fascinating relationship between roots and names, and how this relationship brings about the signature, see Cixous, *Three Steps in the Ladder of Writing* 145.

ascription and self-inscription. To belong *in* and *to* is to infuse oneself there where we belong by *poietically* inscribing ourselves in what was ascribed to us (e.g., our names) and vice versa, ascribing ourselves to what was inscribed in us (i.e., our family names). We hence create the space in which we ascribe and inscribe ourselves, and thereby *make* space for self-ascription and self-inscription: this is where property emerges. All property is private in the sense that all property entails privacy to come about, for this double movement cannot be done without privacy. Therefore, all property is, by necessity, trustworthy, for no privacy can arise without trust. And it is within this trust that we belong in what we have made, re-signified.

GCI did belong in Cuba, and, as he very well attests throughout his work, exile did not prevent him from continuing doing so: “Cuba is more than somebody else’s facts. She is my constant concern” (242). Havana was *his* city, *his* place; he belonged in there forever; his roots ran deep and there was just no way this access could be closed from the outside. Take as an example the 1989 piece dedicated to the photographer Walker Evans, who had a relation with Havana as brief as it was decisive, since he, “as an invisible witness”, “a ghost”, photographed the Havana of the *Machadato* during 1933. This piece is called: “Walker Evans: Eye Witness”, and here, as GCI sees his book of photographs (and as he reviews it), he is able to recognize and hence to own *his* city, even before he moved in (he arrived in 1941, remember?); and thus he is able to bear witness to what Evans makes, as he “makes us return to Havana in the dream (and in the nightmares) of his portraits” (99). In contrast, he disowns this same city as he reviews another book of photographs, now his 1988 piece (which comes immediately after the one of Evans—told you his biography was not chronologically ordered) “Havana Lost and Found”. We know that the book he is reviewing is called *La Habana*, though the photographer is not worth mentioning for GCI; as he sentences and concludes that: “The Havana of the book entitled *La Habana* is not my Havana ... There can be no end sadder, in its laconicism, of a city that was loquacious, chatty, the fatherland of the *Habla neros*. The laconic aliens inhabit it now and Havana has become a ghost city for torpid tourists” (105). And this city,

photographed in the mid-1980's, does not resemble that which was photographed in 1933; this city that GCI left is not the one to which he belonged. He can own the Havana "before" his arrival, of which he took no part, but he disowns the Havana "after" he left, of whose re-signification he fled.

In *Mea Cuba*, GCI makes his contribution to the Spanish lexicon with yet another category in the whole vocabulary of exile by coining its exact counterbalance: the incile [*insilio*]⁶²⁰. This is the kind of exile who flees within the domains of his or herself, who can be only possible within the hyper-bureaucratized systems supposed by totalitarianisms, wherein who you are and what you express is very much given by decree. This is part of totalitarianisms' spell, and one of their major achievements: decreed silence through decreed creeds (always already echoed). According to GCI, those who stay in Cuba must subject themselves to this *other* form of exile, unless you are part of the governmental apparatus, and even then you must *know* beforehand what your convictions *must* be and act accordingly (to those of the *Máximo Líder* [Maximum leader, one of the many epithets Fidel Castro made for himself]). As Rafael Rojas points out, the politization of culture has been hand in hand with "two forms of intellectual marginalization: exile and *incile*, banishment and entombment [*destierro y entierro*], escape off-walls and cloistering, exodus and interior flee" (*Isla sin Fin* 183). The second

⁶²⁰ Rafael Rojas credits GCI for the introduction of this concept to the textual universe of the "exile", and doubtless to the coinage of the term in Spanish. However, though recent, this seems to be a category that was possibly lingering around before the publication of GCI's pieces in the 1980's (and definitely before the publication of *Mea Cuba*, after which the term became popular among Hispanic scholars). The Polish writer, Emanuel Prower, draws to our attention that within the communist regimes imposed in Poland, wherein identity was equally imposed "by fiat or decree", millions of Poles went into internal exile, "more commonly called in Poland internal emigration" (20). The fact that Poles were reading GCI's pieces at that time is more than dubious. So, we may credit GCI with the word *insilio*, translated in the English version of *Mea Cuba* as "incile"—but definitely not with the manufacturing of the concept. For GCI's induction of this term into the Spanish lexicon, see Rojas, *Isla sin Fin* 167-187.

kind has been reserved for those whom Rojas calls *hiperinsulares* [hyperinsulars]⁶²¹, that is, those who just cannot give up the island, for “the hyperinsulars prefer the spatial tautology of the nation to the limitless escape, the fixity of the domestic place to the helplessness of distance” (187).

Now, even for GCI there was something worse than being an “incile”, and that was being an internal refugee [an *asilado interno*, where the word *asilado* (the English word “asylum” has a common root in Latin) makes for a wonderful anagram with *aislado* (isolated)]. These are the Cubans who request a permit to leave the country, which leads to being ostracized everywhere (marginalized from your job, till you are finally fired; harassed by bureaucrats, by the police and even by your neighbors [remember the CDR’s?], etc.)⁶²². An *asilado* could spend years waiting for a permit for herself and for her family members (often times, some member of the family is refused, leaving those with a permit in a most terrible dilemma), and, sometimes, the waiting process can extend her whole life⁶²³.

⁶²¹ The example of the *hyperinsular* par excellence is the paradigmatic *incile* for GCI: the poet José Lezama Lima, who never went out of Cuba for more than one week (his poem *Para llegar a Montego Bay* [To reach Montego Bay] tells beautifully how a scale in Jamaica on a trip to Mexico could become an ode to the unbearable melancholy of being outside Cuba, and his terror of finally reaching the continent) and who thus decided to see most of his friends (as well as his beloved sister) leaving the island to finally hide within his considerable humanity and reach in its depths that impenetrable, opaque and wonderful novel called *Paradiso*; right at the ninth circle of his esophagus, at the center of his soul, he found the voice to write the swan song of the *incile*. For a full account of this figure, see GCI’s wonderful portrait “Two wrote together”, which includes the disparate relationship with another inciled writer but outright homosexual (Lezama finally never came out as such, even though it was *vox populi*), Virgilio Piñera.

⁶²² For a most chilling *testimonio* of this process, and how it threatened to break a family more than once, see Natividad González Freire, *Descubriendo a Fidel Castro*. For a more detailed definition of the figure of the internal *asilado*, see 50.

⁶²³ For what I have been able to understand (a figure of speech, of course) of the migratory [unwritten] law in Cuba, this is what I gather: You may leave whenever you want, wherever you want, in any way you want; you just have to request your permit to the government. What you are not allowed to do is to want to leave Cuba, and even less so are you allowed to declare it—if you do declare that you want to leave the island, you

It is important to note, nonetheless, that this figure of the “incile” is not restricted to totalitarian regimes, but that it extends to any form of organization aiming at homogeneity, which is just another word for totality: the “exile from the inner self”⁶²⁴. Those people who are willing to give up their voices in order to belong somewhere (the same a Club Med than a gang), those people who get lost in pretentiousness, in their longing to belong, to stand out just for the sake of it, who would be willing to *enact* their own stereotypes in order to fit the bill, are almost contractually bound to a perennial sense of anxiety, since they know there is something phony going on within them. When well-acted, that is, when properly internalized, this kind of exile is lived in “quiet desperation is the English way”. Such a shame that GCI did not provide an account of this kind of figure—nothing but rough sketches⁶²⁵.

GCI’s entire attention was for Cuba. He never stopped belonging there. This is most apparent in his acts of reciprocation, which is what makes of *Mea Cuba* a true “gallery of portraits”. GCI never forgot that had not been because of a most fortuitous accident of fate, the fact that he befriended another youngster who would turn out to be an influential officer (even if for a short period of time) of the revolution and of its transitional government, Alberto Mora; had not been because of this, GCI would have probably become another *asilado*, or another “incile”, or, even worse, another political prisoner. His portraits of specific people to whom he dedicated entire pieces went from the obituary (there are seven of them, dedicated to nine persons⁶²⁶) to odes to the life and work of

automatically become a social pest, a “*gusano*” (this is the actual term used by Fidel Castro and thus by everybody in Cuba who has the right to speak, who is nothing but obliged to agree with him): a worm. Those comrades who fail to make this people feel like a pest become, also automatically, worm feeders, and therefore, another social pest. This resembles more Lewis Carroll than Kafka!

⁶²⁴ I am taking this term from Burke 42

⁶²⁵ For instance, the already mentioned piece about the *Swinging London* in his book *O*.

⁶²⁶ These are, “Two wrote together” (this title adapted for the English version so as to create a symmetry with the piece that follows it, and which is dedicated to the most

people he admired dearly and had a most close relation with Cuba (there are two of them⁶²⁷) to prologues (there is one of it⁶²⁸) to reviews (there are two of them⁶²⁹) to testimonies (there are three of them⁶³⁰) to a blend between obituary and testimony (there are two of them⁶³¹).

disparate relationship [an “antianalogy” he calls it in the Spanish version] between Lezama Lima and Virgilio Piñera (both he knew, though he always was closer to the latter, both personally, as they always had a close friendship, and literarily) which makes for a most comic piece, almost as if we were reading about the Laurel and Hardy of Cuban literature; “Two died together” (dedicated to Lydia Cabrera and Enrique Labrador Ruiz, both exiles and great writers [though GCI always expressed his utmost admiration for Lydia] who were born and died in the same years); “Montenegro, prisoner of sex” (dedicated to Carlos Montenegro, not a major writer but one of the first *periodistas* [journalists] who impressed a young GCI); “The ninth moon of Lino Novás” (dedicated to Lino Novás Calvo, one of the major writers of short-stories for GCI, and, now perhaps, for most Cubans); “A poet of popular Parnassus” (dedicated to Nicolás Guillén, one of the major poets in Cuban history); “Alejo Carpentier, a shotgun Cuban” (dedicated, of course, to Alejo Carpentier, one of the major novelists in the history of Cuba); and “Goodbye to the friend with the camera” (dedicated to his dear friend Néstor Almendros, perhaps the greatest cinematographer in Cuban history and one of the major ones in the world during the 1970’s and 80’s).

⁶²⁷ One is “Lorca, Rainmaker in Havana” (read in Madrid during the 50th anniversary of the assassination of the poet, and dedicated to the mutually decisive visit that Federico García Lorca made to Cuba, particularly to Havana, where his poetic style was as contagious for other young Cuban poets who met him there, as Cuba was important to the development of his style); the other is “Capa Son of Caissa” (dedicated to José Raúl Capablanca, arguably the best chess player of all time and one of GCI’s all time heroes, which celebrates and enhances the legend of the genius Cuban athlete).

⁶²⁸ “Antonio Ortega returns to Asturias—dead” (the qualifier, it is relevant to point out, was added to the English version even though Ortega was dead already when GCI wrote the original in Spanish; which definitely adds impact to what we are about to read: the prologue to Ortega’s collection of short-stories *Yemas de Coco* [Coconut Hearts]).

⁶²⁹ One is the mentioned “Walker Evans: Eye Witness”; the other one is “The Tyrant and the Poet” (dedicated to Heberto Padilla, a propos of the edition of an anthology of his poems translated to English).

⁶³⁰ These are “Lives of a hero” (dedicated to Gustavo Arcos, who was one of the original assailants of the Moncada Barracks, there wounded with a bullet that permanently paralyzed his left leg, and very quickly left out by Fidel Castro [who was driving the car in which Arcos travelled during the assault], sent as an ambassador to Belgium [at the time GCI went as a cultural attaché] and later sent back to Cuba and imprisoned with no apparent reason); “The unknown political prisoner” (dedicated to all those political

These portraits complete, in reciprocation, the whole cycle of belonging to and in a place: they call him as much as they call those others to whom the portraits are dedicated. As Jacques Derrida very well phrases it: “*our* invention, the invention that invents *us*” (“Psyche: Invention of the Other” 45). This this is surely right, for when you *make* something *in* which you belong, and as you partake of something *to* which you belong, this, immediately, belongs in and to you; that as the inventor (anonymous as s/he is, or maybe as they are?) of the wheel called it: “wheel”, it was, in turn, calling s/he(them?) back—as it now doubtless calls us (i.e., drivers). This is, truly, an act of reciprocation. And just as the Cuba *of* GCI was invented (in there and, most importantly, out of there, at a distance and in exile), *it* invented him; and he thus reciprocated this invention with the portraits of those who were there, *in* and *to* his invention, *taking part* of it: helping articulating it and him. His portraits, therefore, elevate gossip to the level of art. Gossip is history told *with* intimacy, told at the level of the everyday life. And thus he composes his obituaries with a mix of erudite criticism of these people’s works and personal knowledge of these people’s lives through several spicy anecdotes (witnessed or transmitted by the protagonist or just by hearsay—almost to the point of being legends of their own).

The paradigmatic portrait is the one he made for Lezama Lima and Virgilio Piñera, “Two wrote together”, wherein the most poignant contrast between these two poets (in styles, in lifestyles and even physically: Lezama was obviously overweight while Virgilio was

prisoners who do not have the luck of being public intellectuals and who, because of this reason, were not defended by any international organization); “Prisoners of the Devil’s Island” (again, mainly dedicated to Gustavo Arcos, after the dubious freedom in which he was put after the publication of GCI’s first piece; this piece, however, also includes the cases of the *asilados*, as Natividad González Freire. It is also worth noting that a part of the prologue he wrote for Natividad González Freire figures in this piece).

⁶³¹ These are “Reinaldo Arenas or destruction by sex” (dedicated to Reinaldo Arenas, a propos of the publication of his masterpiece [thus labelled by GCI] *Before Night Falls*); and “Who Killed Calvert Casey?” (dedicated to his dear friend, the writer Calvert Casey, some years later after his suicide in Rome; this piece celebrates both the person and the [very unfairly forgotten] work of this writer of short stories).

skinny to the point of undernourishment) occluded many of their commonalities (not only their homosexuality, but also their trades, and mainly their extraordinary love for Cuba—that ultimately made “inciles” of them both). This piece is not only a celebration to their life and work, and a report of their deaths, but it is mainly a denunciation of the inhuman “incile” they lived that, ultimately, dried both of their extraordinary pens. GCI’s portraits also give us unreserved access to his personal and literary affections. He unreservedly declares Lydia Cabrera “the greatest Cuban woman writer of the century” (361) and the inventor of what he called “anthropoetry”, a mix between anthropology and poetry. She is hence presented with all her charm and grace. Or people like Carlos Montegro, a weighty presence in his journalistic imaginarium (and the person who gave him his first typing lesson, to whom he always owed typing clumsily with two fingers as “a true newspaperman”, since those who typed with their 10 fingers “were only typists”—oh, so that I am!), and who even though was never a great writer is here presented as a courageous one, whose masterpiece *Hombres sin mujer* [Men without women] should never be forgotten. Because this is something GCI hates and fears with all his heart: oblivion. This is why he is so determined to value with his heart and with his trade works of major Cuban writers already forgotten, as was the case of Lino Novás Calvo, another weighty journalistic presence for GCI as a child, when he met him at the offices of the newspaper *Hoy*, where his father worked (labored really) at that time. Novás Calvo is presented in his long and unfair agony in exile, forgotten and forgetting in senility, but always alive and vivified by his work, as GCI tells us how during a visit in the hospital where Lino was slowly dying, he, again, showed a stroke of genius: “Lino had shown that up to now ... in spite of the strokes and the cerebral embolisms, despite the methodical, almost malevolent destruction of his mind by his body, his writer’s memory was intact; a word had been enough to activate it. But for a writer a word is always more than a word” (374). On the other hand, there are celebrations of great trades and great works, though not so great persons (in his eyes), as those of Nicolás Guillén and Alejo Carpentier, both great artists, but one “a Stalinist” (Guillén) and the other “a bore. But me, personally, I liked Alejo. He was a man cautious to the point of cowardice and distrustful to the point

of loneliness. But I liked him, really” (386); the irony here is as clear as the one he used in his parody in *TTT*. In contrast, the portrait of his friend Néstor Almendros, to whom *Mea Cuba* is dedicated (“a Spaniard who learnt to be a Cuban”) celebrates both his life and work and most dearly laments his death; paraphrasing Billy Wilder at Lubitsch’s funeral: “How sad that there will be no more films by Néstor Almendros! How much sadder that there will be no more Néstor Almendros!” (411).

GCI’s odes, on the other hand, are more those of an impressed child trying to enhance beautiful legends as if he were speaking with his friends during recess in school. This, for instance, does not happen with his prologue to Antonio Ortega’s book. This prologue is all about his loyalty (the quality Ortega valued the most) to his mentor, to one of the main people responsible of his becoming a writer. This is a prologue written with gratefulness and loyalty to his teacher. Alternatively, he writes with sympathy but distance his review (originally written in English) to the English translation of Heberto Padilla’s poems; a review written with the common bond of the exile, but recognizing how much more pains and hardships Padilla had to endure in the island, and how much his poetry was forged by these sufferings over the template of what always was an obvious talent: “The life of the poet is the work of the poet and the work of the poet is the life of the poet” (291). His testimonies, on the other hand, were the way through which he *se ocupó* [took care in Cuban; literally: got busy] of those who were suffering injustices and who, he thought, he could help by making public these injustices. This happens with Gustavo Arcos, a person GCI admired and who protected him when he was suffering in Belgium his first exile as a cultural attaché. Thus he wrote, even if he did not know “if the publication of these notes will do Gustavo harm. I truly believe that Gustavo can’t be any worse off ... I don’t know if it will do him good either. But I make public his *Via Dolorosa* because while it was private no one paid any attention” (194). It turned out it helped. The piece forced Fidel Castro to finally make public the charges of his imprisonment (after 15 years!) and Arcos was “set free”—though, as GCI later testified in another piece, this freedom was dubious, as he was constantly harassed and severely ostracized. This latter piece is “Prisoners of

Devil's Island", where he speaks against the terrible (and secret) conditions in which the *asilados* live in Cuba. He also takes time to pay homage to all those anonymous political prisoners who, by virtue of not being public intellectuals, did not have anybody to speak on their behalf. This is a portrait of all those people "in iron masks", as he writes in his "The unknown political prisoner". Lastly, his celebration of the life and work of Reinaldo Arenas, or of his beloved friend Calvert Casey, makes for testimonies that denounce the terrible hardships that homosexuals went through (and still were going through at the time of the publication of these pieces) in Cuba—hardships that inevitably ended up suffocating and killing the person, even at a distance, even in exile, because of exile. All these portraits are tributary gestures, each reciprocating the gestures of people that participated in composing the Cuba GCI loved, the Cuba where he belonged.

7.3.1 Summary 44

This section deals with the way in which homecoming, coming back, becomes an impossibility for the exile. As it was explained in chapters 4 and 6, it is this impossibility that fuels a particular kind of nostalgia and that enables the exile to recreate his/her past, as well as his/her losses. This kind of nostalgia was definitely behind GCI's work. However, his exile, the story of his exile, was not a matter of reflection and recreation in his work until the arrival of *Mea Cuba*. It is said that this book is like the biography of his exile. This is the context in which the concept of "belonging" is discussed: the exile as belonging nowhere, thus reconstituting his/her place and, consequently, her/his sense of belonging. The difference between "belonging to" and "belonging in" is discussed within this framework. "Belonging to" means to be a part (an active part) of some place, while "belonging in" means the dissolution of the person in what s/he has made. In this way, a person always belongs to his/her present (her/his deeds) and belongs in his/her past (her/his life-story). The concomitance between "belonging to" and "belonging in" is what defines property as responsibility and intimacy. In this way, the concept of *insilio* (incile) is introduced as the exact counterbalance of exile, since *insilio* means to flee within oneself. It is argued thus that neither the exile nor the *incile* have any sense of property,

as they have lost their sense of belonging, of intimacy and trust in the world. It is within this context that the “portraits” that GCI wrote and compiled in *Mea Cuba* are examined.

7.4 “No Trespassing”

Being an exile for a long time is being in a sort of transition. It is only after you accept that there is no way back that you are able to settle down. This is something that GCI did. Setting limits without being settled, claiming ownership while you transition, however, is not as easy as it sounds, or more difficult than it seems.

As was said in the second chapter, an immigrant (an exile, refugee: foreigner) is a “walking diachrony”, which very much amounts to being an embodied transition. We are neither there (where we come from) nor here (where we are); our sense of belonging (to and in) is still transitioning. Yet, this should not prevent us from owning this very transitionality as *something*—even if “what” that something is cannot be completely determined: our roots feel hanging in the air like the branches of a tree in winter. Our “identities” (a too loaded word if you do not mind, to which I prefer to refer as “our sense of self-articulation”) are in a provisional state, lacking in referents. Writing in Spanish, for instance, while being in an English-speaking community, is a form of owning that transition-like state, of owning yourself as an embodied transition: with your readers far and away from where you are, from your ideal readers (e.g., Cubans in Cuba) banned from reading your work, with your editors and publishing houses and all the world of your work away from your work-station: you are *writing home* from away; like sending letters in the feathers of a messenger dove: writing down your home, your addressee, your home as you go—*making* it as you fly back.

Your native language, in this context, is like a hyphen: it brings together as it sets apart⁶³². Even though this could be seen as yet another embodied transition, we quickly recognize that it really becomes the very vessel wherein otherness and sameness travel from one place to the next; the vessel that contains them, carries them and, in due course, provides them with a private place to breed (and breathe): the ark at the midst of flooding unfamiliarity. This hyphen, like the wing of the dove, like the ark in the flood, becomes a source of power: to soar, to float, to fly, to navigate and keep on going. What starts as a defect, as an obvious limitation, your “hyphenated language”, your “ethnolet”, may turn out to be a virtue, an evident advantage, as your native language (through “loan words”, through borrowings, through code-mixing, etc.) roots in the contact language and enriches it with new words, new meanings, new syntactic forms, new verbal tenses, etc⁶³³. Were not for immigrants all languages would have already disappeared. The more closed a language, the faster it becomes extinct (this is what happened to Latin, which once saw Spanish as a vulgar, dirty and unworthy dialect—no more than slang)⁶³⁴. So, I have nothing else to say other than: “you’re more than welcome”.

As an immigrant, you are bound to always being marked by this transition-like state. In terms of language, your accent, for instance, will always be there, reminding you and everybody else that you “come from away”⁶³⁵: like “the man who fell to earth”⁶³⁶—or the

⁶³² For a most interesting account on what it means to approach our native language through the metaphor of the hyphen (from the viewpoint of Egyptian writers writing in Arabic outside of Egypt), see Telmissany.

⁶³³ For an account on how the “hyphenated language” or “ethnolet” may turn into valuable contributions to the contact language, see Cecchetto.

⁶³⁴ See Herman, ch. 1. The sequence that followed the last two qualifiers may be a little bit hyperbolic, for vulgar more than dirty or unworthy could be more accurately understood as vernacular—yet, that Spanish came from the part of Latin that was not meant to be written, and therefore from the social stratum that was not literate, is hardly a source of debate.

⁶³⁵ These three words, with the cute acronym CFA, is a hallmark in Nova Scotian provincial pride, and a common trope you still hear in everyday discourse here; which is not restricted to be Canadian, but includes being from anywhere outside of Nova Scotia. To this day, I feel much more a Haligonian (a dweller of the city [some still say; a big

man who just had left it. For this is how an immigrant, closed to otherness, feels like in her new country, as if in another planet. When you are more or less open to otherness, this transition is still hard, but at least you can own it as part of *your own life*. In his piece, “Bites from the Bearded Crocodile”, GCI creates a trial-like atmosphere with his own account of leaving for good (which was not after this trial that sent him to Belgium, but later on, after he came back to his mother’s funeral): “With crocodile tears, I decided to leave Cuba. I had seen and been heard long enough and had made up my mind. I didn’t tell anybody I was leaving for good, but I did. *Adiós to Cuba—and, what is worse, to Havana*” (74, the emphasized fragment was added to the Spanish translation)⁶³⁷. This sentence, which seems like a conclusion, is a transition that is woven into the introduction of the *Padilla affair*: “Enter Padilla laughing” (74).

Being an embodied transition entails, to some degree, not feeling safe; yet this does not entail lacking in confidence; that is, it does not mean you have no limits, that you are borderless. To set limits-borders is to feel confident enough *in* your skin to do so; for these are the very first limits we experience: our skins—later on made flesh, later on made borders. This setting starts as an act of reciprocation: that what I cannot allow to be done to my flesh, I cannot allow myself to do in others’. Permissibility, what *I* allow and

town, I may correct] of Halifax) than a Nova Scotian, for I am (and will always be) a CFA.

⁶³⁶ Here, I am referring to the 1976 movie, directed by Nicolas Roeg and starred by David Bowie (a most fortunate choice), who plays an alien humanoid who comes to Earth in a mission to get water for his dying planet, and builds an emporium in order to collect the fortune he needs to build the vessel that will take him back home, thus having to face the boundless greed of the capitalist world. CEO, CFA and UFO are not only homophonically close acronyms—they are semantically close as well (unless you are a tourist, not looking to take any resource with you, but bringing and spending yours here: then, you are warmly welcomed).

⁶³⁷ The *Adiós a Cuba* may come from Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s poem “*Al Partir*” (admittedly, for GCI, the best Cuban woman poet of the 19th C. and one of the most notable examples of what exile can do to one’s work, as well as a regular cast in *Mea Cuba*), which inspired the *contradanza* composed by one of the greatest Cuban composers of the 19th C., Ignacio Cervantes.

do not allow, the access that *I* open to whom I so will, is marked by this reciprocity; for instance, “I cannot allow myself to murder”, tacitly entails “I cannot allow myself to be murdered”⁶³⁸. As was said in chapter 4, the convergence of our styles-selves-voices emerging from our *preseedence* is what becomes ungiving, the part that we just cannot cede. This immanence is not a home, but rather the source of all homes. In this manner, to set a limit is not to forbid an access; to mark a border is not to prohibit an entry—but only to regulate it. Prohibitions necessarily create the conditions for their own transgression, for these presuppose a radical closure, a denial that will inevitably set the ground to open it, to affirm it. Negating an access is the best way to affirm its existence, and hence the best way to promote its transgression. Limits and borders, conversely, always already set the conditions for their own transcendence, for they are not created over radical negation; instead, these are always already open to otherness, but gradually so. This is what regulation is all about: gradualness. A border is there to be passed, but also to be noticed, and therefore respected. A limit is there to be moderated, but also to be stretched out: otherwise, no inventions would ever come about⁶³⁹.

Just as the difference between limits-borders and prohibitions should be maintained, so should the difference between property and possession. We said that all property is private, as it comes about from a recognized privacy that sets out a continuing intimacy: a relation of trust. It is by virtue of this trust that all property marks a “here-mine” relationship, wherein I ascribe-inscribe myself and which is thus ascribed-inscribed in me. As Claudia Brodsky writes: “With the ‘privilege’ of property comes the joint privileges of definition and deixis: the land-space is identified in distinction from all others by an illocutionary act” (115). We should, however, admit that this definition transcends performative speech and roots itself *in* our bodies, *in* our flesh. In the way we have been speaking about it, the “here-mine” deictically defines a space within its

⁶³⁸ This example emerges from taking my argument to the radical limits over which Thomas Hobbes founded human morality. See Hobbes Part I, 56-74 and Part II, 140-144.

⁶³⁹ This idea can be found in Derrida, “Psyche: Invention of the Other” 26.

borders, and makes it a place. A place is always made within its own limits. Yet, in the case of work, this definition is an “I here have made this”, where the “this” is what is made and what stands off as property: “this mine”. As a space is made a “here” by thus marking its borders (or by just defining its limits), a work makes a “this” in space by virtue of making its borders (or by delimiting its form). It is within these two, the “here” and the “this”, that property arises always already as private, and as a continuous gate towards the maintenance and deepening of intimacy.

In the English version of *Mea Cuba*, GCI includes a response to a letter published in the *London Review of Books* (where GCI was a frequent collaborator) written by Pedro Pérez [“who is Pedro Perez”(?)] a propos of an essay in which GCI attacked Graham Greene’s naive love affair with Fidel Castro. Mr. Perez [“who(?) ... and why is he saying these ludicrous things about me? He claims he knew me as Cain but I swear I don’t know him from Adam” (242)] “discloses” that it was precisely GCI who received Graham Greene when he went to Havana to film with Alec Guinness, Noel Coward and the director Carol Reed, an adaptation of his novel *Our Man in Havana* (of which Greene also wrote the script). GCI extends this information. He was working as the film critic for *Carteles*, and he was sent there to interview not only Greene, but Guinness, Reed and Coward as well⁶⁴⁰; then, he was used as their *host* because, as he explains, “I had to. I was the only Cuban official there who had any English” (242). Similarly, in the Spanish version of the book, he includes a piece called “*Un saludo a todos menos uno*” [Regards to everyone with the exception of one]. Here, GCI published a text he intended to read in the *Conference on Latin American Literature*, wherein he expressed his indignation after learning that someone (his name is not mentioned in the text) has been invited to this conference, someone who, literally, seized one of his works to include it in an anthology of Cuban literature after the revolution—following a text by Fidel Castro! Here, he puts some limits on intertextuality and recontextualization, and declares his intentions of

⁶⁴⁰ These interviews (the one with Guinness and with Coward are journalistic gems) can be found in the first volume of his *Obras Completas* 1404-1414.

taking this matter to court for the violation of copyright. However, in a brief preamble written by the editors (and one of the few times in which his complete name appears in his literature, though in the words of his addressers—there will be another occasion, but we will see it in its due time) we learn that GCI did not read the text, giving up to the petition of the president of the executive committee of the Conference. Now, the reasons why this text did not make it to the English translation are still obscure to me.

Here, we have two examples of GCI clearly putting limits and marking borders that should not be trespassed; if this occurs, he expresses his utmost disagreement, and all his ill feelings that result in, at least, letting everybody know (everybody who wants to listen) that those limits were set and those borders were marked, and that those who crossed them are not only trespassing but violating his very property, vilifying his privacy and slandering his sense of intimacy. He will do, consequently, whatever is possible to keep these trespassers back in place, away from his property, so that he can come back, confidently and with trust, to his own place.

There is, at the level of the signifier, a sign for these limits: the bracket, the parenthesis as an oversized punctuation mark that has long been used to harbor *asides* (explanations, examples, extensions, lists [like this one], etc.) that would be otherwise lost for the text, or that would derail its train of thought and logic. This grammatical resource has harbored digression over digression for years and years, and for many more to come. I said in the previous chapter that Hispanic-Americans are born in-between commas. Now I can say that Hispanic-Americans fit in best in parenthesis; these are like recesses in the linearity of logic. However, there are other people who feel that brackets also mark, at the level of the signifier, the temporary state of the Hispanic-American exile, her transition-like place, since her very life could be said to be “between parenthesis”⁶⁴¹: brackets are the perfect complements for the commas, as they suppose graphic borders where the commas just entail brief interruptions. Rafael Rojas supports this idea. He holds that in Cuba there is

⁶⁴¹ See Sznajder and Roniger 20.

nothing but the exercise of the “logic of the parenthesis. Lacking a national public opinion, the Cuban intellectuals borrow, or simply steal, some other from the public space of another country” (*El arte de la espera* 29). Would this be true? Would this be why GCI used so many parenthesis, and why he brackets many of the most important revelations of his literature⁶⁴²? I believe that Rojas is right to some degree. For instance, in the commented piece, “Bites from the Bearded Crocodile”, GCI introduces in his trial-like essay many of the Cuban officials that participated of the *conversaciones* (conversations, which were nothing but a public witch-hunt) with the intellectuals and then, right after each name and rank, we learn about their fates (all of which are bracketed: some death by their own hands or sent to prison or also in exile or still wagging their tale to the Maximum Owner). By bracketing these fates, we are moved to feel a strange pity for the people presented there, powerful and convinced (some even convincing), all ignorant of their ill luck. Yet, I still think there is something more as to why GCI’s penchant for parenthesis: they offer to dangerous, spontaneous, passionate thoughts a safe place in the text; neither *in* discourse nor in the course of the events, but elsewhere, as if wrapped in the bubbles from which they emerged in our brains, lending them an artificial womb, an incubator, so that they can finish growing. What happens in brackets, stays in brackets. They are the textual mark of trust.

Here, within these limits, a most problematic figure for the Hispanic-Americans emerges: the *mestizo*. This figure is as problematic as it is inevitable for your average Hispanic-American lad. In Mexico, for instance, it is calculated that nearly ninety percent of the population is *mestiza*, which means half-Spaniard/half-Amerindian. It is hard to say that the *mestizo* came about within any limits of respectability, for it originated as the result of an imposition and an original transgression: that of a conquest, with an imposed language and an imposed ethnicity that defined the fates of all those who were born under American soil. The *mestizo* was a step above the *indio* and a step beneath the *criollo*

⁶⁴² Just check again how many of the quotations extracted from *La Habana* in the previous chapter were bracketed—and these were his, not mine!

(those who were born of Spanish parents, but on American soil), who, in turn, were a step beneath the *peninsulares* (those born of Spanish parents in Spain); only these latter could have access to official posts. It is worth noting that the independence in Mexico was mainly organized by *criollos* and not by *mestizos* or *indios* (very much like what happened with the rest of Latin America, despite the few [though symbolically significant] exceptions, such as Simón Bolívar, a *mestizo* in all order). This figure arises as a broken, hybridized model of selfhood, wherein ethnicities remain constantly (and consciously) juxtaposed; both from the outside (as in all these racial/social distribution of rights) and, most importantly, from within (as in a love/hate relationship with one's own ancestry). All these result in a cultural ambivalence that makes you feel a half-breed, never reaching the sentiment of wholeness attributed to the self; not being able to take the step towards cultural maturity⁶⁴³.

These are the bad news for the *mestizos*. Now, for a more nuanced vision: we have, at least, two paradigmatic symbols of *mestizos*. One, the mother of *mestizaje* in Mexico, the *Malinche*, Cortez's interpreter, who became his lifetime lover and mother of their several children: she is one of those who willingly mixed with the *others*, who, we might say, even *loved* one of them (and, everything indicates, the feeling was mutual) and opened him an access to her privacy and built an intimacy with him⁶⁴⁴. The other paradigmatic

⁶⁴³ For a detailed account on this social distribution based on castes, and how this affected the Hispanic Americans' self-conception, see Galeano 267-338. For a most insightful reflection on the love/hate relationship that Mexicans, for instance, have with their ancestry (as reflected in everyday speech and practices), see Paz 89-116.

⁶⁴⁴ It is worth noting though that, for the Mexican average folk, she is not seen with very good eyes. She has even become a synecdoche to indicate those "bad" Mexicans who prefer anything foreign (regardless of its quality) over anything local; this practice is called, after her, *malinchismo*. Octavio Paz, for instance, developed this idea to a most fascinating speculative philology on the (undeterminable) root of the swear word "*chingar*" [the English equivalent would be "to fuck"], which is used both in good ways, as in *ser un chingón* [to be a big shot], and in bad ways, as in *estar chingado* [literally, to be fucked, ruined]. This is one of the few Spanish words that is, in its participle form, *chingada/o*, a noun, a verb and an adjective—all at the same time. According to Paz, this word could have been derived from the Hispanization of the word *Malinche* (originally

example could be by way of the offspring. The *Inca* Garcilaso de la Vega, called the first *mestizo* of America (which is blatantly false), who was the first great American writer (which is completely true), was also the son of a Spanish *conquistador* and an Incan princess; the reason for which he was recognized with his father's name, the *conquistador's*, and enjoyed some privileges only reserved for *criollos* (i.e, having an education in Spain). Here, we have the case of a person whose access to these two cultures is already open, and whose cultural ambivalence is enhanced by an innermost familiarity with the two worlds, which translated in the ongoing intimacy that gave us that masterpiece called: *Comentarios Reales de los Incas* [Royal Commentaries of the Incas].

It is thus that in the *mestizos*, the best and the worse of two cultures dwell within. No less true it is that this has presupposed a silent pact with forgetting as a form of forgiving and with oblivion as a form of obviation. Through oblivion we obviate that most of us are the offspring of all kinds of violence. Through forgetting we forgive our forefathers who very likely raped our foremothers; the reason why we are in this world. However, we should know that, by virtue of this *mestizaje*, we are always already in-between two worlds, and we have always been a bridge to and of intimacy for them, to and of privacy and to and of *eros*. It is in us if we continue tracing an untraceable (though not for it less likely) hatred. After 500 years and more than 60 generations, some love stories have been written, and we could veer a little bit towards this side.

In language, this kind of veering has been more common. The *mestizaje* in language, as happens with those people of the so-called 1.5 generation⁶⁴⁵ or those who grow with more than one language in their household and their other social environment (e.g., the school), is now a more than common trope in literature. As the Chilean writer Ariel Dorfman (who

Malinxin). Whether Paz's philology is right is debatable, but that it is fascinating, this could be hardly countered. For a full account of this art of speculative philology, see Paz 65-88.

⁶⁴⁵ Those who, for instance, were born in Cuba but moved to another country when they were very young.

grew with both Spanish and English as native languages) says, one has the possibility of “*escapar lenguaje adentro*”⁶⁴⁶, to escape inside language, getting inside one language so as to escape the other; an escape from which the merging of the two becomes, after some time, inevitable. If it is true that this merging starts out as hiding from what seems a menacing language (and please, remember your grammar lessons in elementary school: were they not menacing enough?) loaded with a complete other system and culture, it is also true that this “escaping within” opens new accesses towards both the language where you find in and the one you are hiding from: one from a considerable closeness, the other from a decisive distance. As Dorfman asserts: “The language I wrote my memoir in may be English, but the aesthetic seems to be resolutely Spanish American, the creation of that parallel conjuring up of what might have been, what still might be, language as one irrevocable site of freedom, my life as not only what happened, but what almost happened ... Latinos: embracing our margins as if we had chosen them instead of history imposing that marginality upon us” (215). And then, a wholly other aesthetic, or maybe not wholly (holy?), but precisely that, mixed, *mestiza*: a new language that inevitably resembles both: a language of transition, as has been happening with the perfecting of *Spanglish* within the last 70 to 80 years, up to the point that it has produced a literature of its own: the *Chicano* literature⁶⁴⁷. One that is always two that is always three, etc.

⁶⁴⁶ This beautifully plays with the Spanish *ir mar adentro*, which would be more or less translatable as: “to go sea inside”, though, I am aware, this is too idiomatic, for the common expression is “to go out sea”, which would render the metaphor, *lenguaje adentro* (language within) useless. For the beautiful use of this metaphor see Dorfman 214.

⁶⁴⁷ Though this is not as straightforward, since many bilingual writers (Cuban-American, but also Dominican-American and Salvadoran-American... even Mexican-American) seem to reject *Spanglish* as a valid aesthetic basis. Most of them prefer to write under the influence of both languages, but always choosing between one or the other (as other than, for instance, the poetry of Gloria Anzaldúa, manifestly written in *Spanglish*). For an interesting account of this rejection from most of the Cuban-American writers living in the United States (particularly in Miami), see Cox.

7.4.1 Summary 45

This section attempts to reconcile the way in which an exile reconstitute his/her sense of belonging, thus claiming ownership, at a time in which s/he is still transitioning from one place (i.e., her home country) to another (i.e., her host country). How the exile set limits at the very point in his life in which limits are nowhere to be found is illustrated by way of language, of the exile writing in her/his native language while s/he finds himself at a different speech community. Writing in one's native language may be a way to own this transition, as both the native language and the contact language contaminate each other, and hence both of them change each other. It is therefore that being an embodied transition means to start setting limits once again in one's body, which is like starting all over again, for these are the first limits that any human knows from the very beginning of his/her life. Subsequently, this transitionality enables the exile to re-experience the very foundation of human ethics: reciprocity, which tacitly entails, mutual affectation, and hence mutual change. Setting limits, claiming ownership, is conceptualized in these terms as something that can only aspire to regulate interaction, but never to completely close it (forbid it). Limits and borders, as well as property itself, are plastic. This is what distinguishes property from possession. Property necessarily entails a mutual responsibility that comes from mutual affectation. A possession, conversely, can be thought of unilaterally. It is within this context that the figure of the *mestizo* is discussed: as the embodied transition of a racial and cultural mix. This *mestizaje*, this mix is also discussed within the context of language.

7.5 "Thru and thru and thru"

So, within these terms of *mestizaje*, we could add another term that may help to balance the bill for us. This self-in-transition, in-between cultures, belonging nowhere yet, but building the space to so belong, is in a "transcultural quest for selfhood"⁶⁴⁸ that

⁶⁴⁸ I am borrowing this expression from Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography* 275.

transcends mere integration into a new environment. We should note, and come to terms with, that when we arrive in our “new country”, in our “host county”, we came uninvited; we should accept that we had taken our host by surprise. This does not justify exclusion or segregation. But it does help to explain some “exotic” features of which we become conscious through our interaction with others, particularly with natives. This is to say that *transculturation* does not happen easily, that it comes little by little and that it has, indeed, odd beginnings: the beginnings of two strangers meeting, unannounced, for the first time. Our wit, our charm, and all our qualities we found most recognizable (and which we developed and even built) in our countries of origin suffer a significant drop; as Bert Keizer humorously writes: “Anyone who is not fluent in a strange language sheds about 30 to 40 IQ points; that is quite a dive, which few intellects will be able to sustain without some damage to their underlying ego” (56); he adds: “Writing in English at first felt like trying to plough a stretch of marble ... I [feel] reasonably comfortable now writing in English—though please note I would never say that of Dutch. Why not? Well, it’s the difference between a natural biped (man) and a circus biped (dog). You wouldn’t ever say to a human that you admire the way he manages so well in two legs, while a dog is applauded for just this feat. The dream of a foreign writer using English is that the natives will forget about his dogginess and say to each other: I just love the way he moves” (66).

At the beginning, our transition means lack of fluency; later on, our fluency looks exotic; later on, if we persist, our fluency looks foreign, but quite in a unique way—and it is then that we can confidently relate to others. When our fluency stops being circus-like, then we are ready to enter into more meaningful relationships. A more meaningful relationship is a deeper relationship with your *nativity*, with all that is native to you. In language, for instance, the better command you get of another language, the deeper the relationship grows with the other, native one—and the more you appreciate it. As you explore this relationship, it becomes richer, deeper, and you find in there things that formerly were not part of your attention. This happened to Dorfman, who was suddenly stricken by “the verb system in Spanish, perhaps the richest in the Indo-European family of languages. I

had come to adore the fluid use of time that Spanish plays with, I had internalized the subjunctive, to mentally live a plurality of forms of time that had not yet occurred, a time that was suspended and waiting to occur, a time that existed in the mind even if it had no chance of materializing in history, the construction of alternative imaginary universes always haunting the hard reality of our hearts trapped in the prison house of today and now and right there” (215). As you start transitioning towards the *other* culture, you become more appreciative of the one you are coming from—which enriches your relationship with both.

Now, what is this “transculturation” of which I am speaking about? The concept is Cuban in origin, from the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, who coined this term in his superb *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y el Azúcar* [Cuban Counterpoint of Tobacco and Sugar], first published in 1940. The term was so innovative and useful that the Polish anthropologist (already a celebrity then) Bronislaw Malinowski offered to write a prologue for Ortiz’s book. In Malinowski’s words, “All change of culture or ... all *transculturation* is a process in which something is always given in exchange of what is received ... It is a process in which both parts of the equation are modified. A process from which a new, complex and composed reality emerges ... a new, original and independent phenomenon” (5). Ortiz proposed this term as an alternative to the concept of “acculturation” that was so in vogue at that time, which entailed the assimilation of the newcomer into her host country so as to attain “full integration” therein, something that he considered utterly impossible. Through the metaphor of the two Cuban “national” products, sugar and tobacco, Ortiz explains his theory of transculturation in which all ethnicities that were brought to Cuban soil (Spanish, African, Chinese, English, American [US]) participated. The *contrapunteo* is a form of contrast, which is impressively well-used by Ortiz’s mythology: “Tobacco is born, sugar is made” (16), wherein one is a trade (the making of sugar) while the other is an art (the making of cigars), “tobacco is a magic grace of savagery; sugar is a scientific grace of civilization. / Tobacco was from America taken; sugar was to America brought” (48), “The *vega* [where tobacco is grown] is a term

of geography; the *ingenio* [sugar factory] of mechanics” (56), “Tobacco has created middle class and a free bourgeois; sugar has created extreme classes, masters and slaves” (63), “in Cuba, sugar has been an exogenous force ... while tobacco has been an endogenous force” (67), and, though these contrasts seem to open a breach of rivalry between them, Ortiz quickly points out, “but note as well that if sugar and tobacco have contrasts, they have never had conflicts against each other” (87). Contrasts, in this way, do not entail conflict. And this is one of the most important points for transculturation to occur. Contrasts happen in pairs, and here, Ortiz has extracted two of the most symbolic products in Cuban mythology to create a whole gamut of cultural significations, from their gestation to their respective ritualities to their consumption; i.e., tobacco is harming, masculine, nocturne, arrogant, dark, adult... but also a marker of socialization, peace, friendship, etc.; sugar, on the other hand, is feminine, sweet, healthy, diurnal, ludic, nutritional (the drawbacks were already written a couple of sentences ago). These binary contrasts point thus to a *complementary compatibility* that enables these two products not only to influence but to transform each other. These differences are compatible (like those between a man and a woman) and can therefore create something other, for they *can* belong to and in each other, and so they can reproduce. Here we have, in their “happy marriage”, a wonderful copula through which a “*mestizaje de sabores*” [a mix/*mestizaje* of flavors] is brought about: “There is not, thus ... a *fight between Don Tabaco and Doña Azúcar*, but a mere flirtation that should end, as in our fairy tales, in marriage and happiness ... And in the birth of alcohol. Cuban Trinity: tobacco, sugar and alcohol” (88, emphasis in the original) Here, have a cigar, congratulations on your parenthood!

We have spoken before about GCI’s deep understanding, nearly a love for “contradiction”. This love for contradiction is reflected in his literature by the constant creation of contrasts. We also spoke in the previous chapter about his beloved maternal great-uncle, Pepe Castro, a Nazi and a *Fidelista*: “You see, my favourite great-uncle was a diehard totalitarian” (*Mea Cuba* 59). In the surface, this person would incarnate everything GCI hated, but just in the surface, for Pepe was not *only* these things; he was

also extremely kind, witty and good with words, a fascinating character with fascinating stories and most fascinating idiosyncrasies, one of which was proclaiming himself an *aficionado* inventor. He inspired many features in several of GCI's characters (like the penchant for wild inventions in Riné Leal in *TTT*) and he was even one of the templates for the character of Bustrófedon⁶⁴⁹. Mixing was GCI's favourite methodology for creating characters; yet it was also one of his most distinctive features as a writer: mixing references (movies, popular culture, history, hearsay, gossip, comic strips, cult music, literature, poetry, etc., etc.). He also mixed genres (i.e., essay with book review with short-story with *testimonio*, as we frequently find in *Mea Cuba*), styles (as in his most celebrated piece in *TTT*, "The Death of Trotsky"), and narratives (*TTT* is a paradigm of this in his work, but we saw that in some detail in the fifth chapter, and we can say, for instance, that "Bites of the Bearded Crocodile" presents just this kind of mix, which comes [as in *La Habana*] under the guise of long digressions). This is what truly forges GCI's *intratextuality*, and why, as we read his work, we find bits and pieces, clues and solutions for the great puzzle he made out of his life—wherein *Cuerpos Divinos* comes as, almost, the solution sheet at the other side of the box.

But there is another form of textual transculturation of which we have not spoken about so far, namely, translation. If we do not assume that language is, primarily, a container and/or a shaper of *the* truth, or, even better [or worse?], a system of truth, then we might very well understand that language already transforms truth—whatever this latter may be. Translation is part and parcel of this transformation, for it is not, essentially, a message that is translated, or a truth as contained (and made?) in a system, but rather the recreation of those traces that are left in transforming anything (thoughts, things, actions, happenings, etc.) into language. Self-translation, in this context, feels as much as a vehicle for self-expression as a way of rewriting oneself, of transforming oneself while duplicating, *othering* oneself. It is not strange for a bilingual writer to write her memoirs in her second language only to translate her work later to her native one, which provides

⁶⁴⁹ This can be found fully elaborated in Souza 4.

an ideal framework for transforming, “rewriting herself” in her mother tongue⁶⁵⁰. Language, as Heidegger noted, is most hospitable; and therefore, in each language, in each tongue (regardless of its kinship [mother, father, uncle, etc.]), there is the seed of hospitality for other tongues, for other languages⁶⁵¹. And, seen in terms of responsiveness and expression, it is more than *being* that language houses (or than Being for that matter), for it welcomes otherness in all its forms—for it houses meaning⁶⁵². Within this train of thought, the translator is part of the reception committee to welcome (and introduce) otherness into language. Language is the *inter-* and the *trans-* par excellence, for meaning is our ultimate carrier. This moving is a perpetuation, *transportation*: translation; from one vital energy to another, from a memory to a word to a sentence, from a sentence to an action to a text, from a text to a tongue to another (to a mother?). As often times happen,

⁶⁵⁰ We have already spoken of Dorfman’s case, but we can also see, for instance, Silvia Molloy’s ideas on rewriting oneself in the case of the Argentine writer (and also proficient translator) Victoria Ocampo, who wrote her autobiography in French and translated it to Spanish herself. See Molloy 72. Similarly, Angel Loureiro puts a similar example in the case of Jorge Semprún, who also wrote his memoirs in French to later translate them himself to his native Spanish. See Loureiro 143. Writing their memoirs (most painful for both, but evidently traumatic in the case of Semprún, who was a Holocaust survivor) in their second language, proved most helpful for these two writers to detach themselves from their excruciating experiences, and thus to create an aesthetic framework wherein to express them. For another perspective on Semprún’s distancing, stemming more from temporal distance (he was able to write his experiences twenty years after his release from Buchenwald), see Glowacka 25-26.

⁶⁵¹ See, for instance, Glowacka’s commentaries on Jean Amery’s reflections of friendship and hospitality as being at the core of language in Glowacka 71-72. On the concept of “linguistic hospitality” in translation, see Ricoeur, *On Translation* 10.

⁶⁵² The difference between meaning and being (and Being) is sometimes not as clear-cut in Martin Heidegger’s philosophy of language. In his “The Way to Language” (114-118), meaning seems to be somehow enmeshed with being; though he will end up considering the former from the epistemological-semantic viewpoint, which contributes to the unconcealing of being. However, to which point is meaning as structural of language (or of our way to it) is never too clear. Heidegger will later try to enjoin these structures (meaning-being) through poetry, which is always already embedded in thinking. As said before, we are not concerned with a structural account in this work, so it is irrelevant to determine whether meaning pertains to the domains of epistemology or to those of ontology; we have rather said that it is the convergence between them that concerns us here, and also where meaning emerges most forcefully.

we may experience something in one language and recreate it in another. Language is always already tended towards otherness, this is its *raison d'être*. Thus truth as equivalence is most irrelevant to language, for equivalence as such is unimportant; it is rather “creative transposition” what matters—and so it is with translation⁶⁵³; actually, this was the “original” meaning of translation in Latin. The canonic term “translation” did not start with perfect equivalence but with a “mistranslation”, for in Latin this word was used for physical transportation, and was “misused” by Leonardo Bruni to metaphorically refer to the transportation of one language to another, and then, by the 15th C., the word settled for the second meaning and lost all its physical denotations⁶⁵⁴. Consequently, despite the many frictions that could arise in-between languages (you may find yourself to be less spontaneous, less witty, etc., in your second language), all possible violence should end in an act of transposition, rather than in one of imposition; otherwise you are not translating but imposing, and there, it is not language what you deploy, but weaponry⁶⁵⁵.

Translation is hence ignited by a desire to share: what you have read, what you have lived through, what you... desire? yes, that too. It is this sharing that makes language private, as

⁶⁵³ On translation as “creative transposition” rather than equivalence, see Bassnett 23.

⁶⁵⁴ For a more detailed account of this “mistranslation”, see Eco, *Experiences in Translation* 74.

⁶⁵⁵ And we very well know language can become, too, into a most mordant weapon (see, for instance, Elaine Scarry’s work on the use of language in torture in the first part of her brilliant *The Body in Pain*)—though, strictly speaking, as Lenny Bruce used to say, language *itself* cannot hurt anybody; it can do so *only* if you credit it with such power. There is a famous routine in which he refers to an African American gentleman attending his show at the front of the stage as a *nigger*, after which he starts to procrastinate the crowd {“are there any *fags*?” etc.}, to finally say that these words are only that, words, and that if you reciprocate the load of hatred by taking offence, you are a complicit of the offender. To which degree does this could be interpreted like “blaming the victim”? I ignore it. I will just say that it was only after I stopped taking offence with words that belittled me because of my short height that they stopped hurting me and therefore that they stopped being effective weapons for other people to use against me. Yet, discrimination to short people is not, in any way, comparable with racial discrimination, for example. However, I should add that Lenny Bruce was a Jew, and he included some heavy anti-Semitic language in this routine. This routine is marvellously recreated by Bob Fosse in his 1974 biopic *Lenny*.

it makes it (or rather recognizes it) meaningful, and it is this meaningfulness that can be carried to another language. As much as language is always already open to otherness, translation is always already *meant for the other*⁶⁵⁶. Translation is “lending an ear to the other”, which is making a place for the other, there creating a sharable place. Since language is responsive and expressive, translation is by necessity about responsiveness and expression⁶⁵⁷. Then, we might accept that works of art are not intended for *the* reader (or for *the* readers), which homogenize him/her in a somewhat simplified category, overriding thus their intrinsic plurality (and therefore their undeniable singularity), but they are intended for expression and, as was said in the fifth chapter, for *spreadssion*. Who is going to receive the message is always mysterious for the writer (or for the artist). Translation is meant for readability, but readability is only achievable within a considerable familiarity and an irrevocable intimacy with the writing (and with the writer).

For centuries, the idea that there is a “mysterious core” in the work that is ungiving, and that this must be common in every translation of such a work, has been a paradigm for translators of all kinds⁶⁵⁸. This is what lies behind the still valid debate between “word for

⁶⁵⁶ See what Glowacka has to say on Primo Levi’s ideas about translation as always translating for the other in Glowacka 98.

⁶⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, in his “The Task of the Translator”, has the expressiveness of all languages as a point of departure. Nonetheless, this was also his point of departure to affirm that there was a “pure language”, a sort of pre-Babelian language, from which all other languages sprung—and this was, in his eyes, the principle of translatability among languages; their common ancestor. I have always found this assertion difficult to follow, the possibility that a “pure language” could have existed is not unimaginable; however, that this “pure language” can be spoken about is, in my book, completely unconceivable. This is why, in order to articulate my argument, I have chosen meaning as the common denominator of all languages and the point of convergence of responsiveness and expression.

⁶⁵⁸ See, for instance, Basnett 33.

word” or “sense for sense” translation⁶⁵⁹. Positing this “core” in the writer, in her “intentionality”, for instance, made for most obscure translations, where readability was second to “authorial intentions/spirits”⁶⁶⁰. There was, also, the more ethnocentric position of retaining this spirit but translating it to current times, making “Virgil speak such English as he would himself have spoken, had he born in England in the present age”⁶⁶¹. Or translations that aimed at retaining this spirit but simplifying it to “what the author says” (and not what s/he would have said had s/he been English, etc.), making for very much literalist translations, wherein content prevails over form (metric, for instance, or rhyme, became instantly unimportant under this view)⁶⁶². When this “spirit” was expunged from subjective intentionality but retained as an aim for translation, the center of it was in language itself: it must be the spirit of language that must be retained and recreated⁶⁶³. The common tropes, however, in almost all approaches to translation are these: reproduction and recreation (one for the copula and the other for the *poiesis*). Now, *what* is it to be recreated is what remains debatable, and what continues to incite debate

⁶⁵⁹ In the 19th C., this debate was enhanced by the debate about whether translation was a mechanical activity (a la Schlegel) or a creative one (a la Coleridge). For a detailed account of this debate, see Bassnett 63-88.

⁶⁶⁰ A most important exponent of this position is, for sure, Friedrich Schleiermacher. See Schleiermacher 5-6.

⁶⁶¹ These are John Dryden’s words, as quoted in Bassnett 64.

⁶⁶² As a pertinent illustration, we can see Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s position in Bassnett 78.

⁶⁶³ Perhaps the most notable approach in this regard is the Structuralist approach, wherein language (as a set of related systems operating within a set of other sub-systems, from which literature was one) is regarded as what is worth recreating (and the only possibility of recreation as such for the translator). Yet, although from a very different perspective, this was the logic behind Benjamin’s “pure language”, whose “spirit” made translatability possible and also made possible the “spirit” of the work as such: “Translation thus ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the innermost relationship of languages to one another” (Benjamin 255). In his *On Translation*, Paul Ricoeur also shares that language struggles with “its innermost secret” (33), which, though inexpressible and initially untranslatable, is what articulates it, what is at its very core. Other thinkers, like José Ortega y Gasset, endorsed the idea (that started during the Romanticism) that each language had a style of its own, which made for a sort of national spirit. See Ortega y Gasset 35-38.

after debate. What is true though is that while a text in its SL (source language) may live for centuries, very few texts in their TL (target language) do so; translated texts seem to expire with the contexts of readability from which they came about. Yet, when those contexts share an innermost intimacy with the writing (that includes the writer, but that transcends him/her), translations seem to enjoy a longer life, for they become works of art in their own right—if in a peculiar way⁶⁶⁴. Accordingly, *what* remains untranslatable in translation is subject to a similar debate. There could be linguistic untranslatability because of too pronounced differences between languages (SL and TL). There could be cultural untranslatability due to too pronounced absences of relevant features in one culture for rendering it into another⁶⁶⁵. However, what remains untranslatable in translation is what remains irreproducible in language: the body. And, as many bilinguals (and multilinguals) can attest, each language is expressed as if it belonged to a different body, for gestures, quirks, facial expressions, etc., are significantly changed when switching from one language to another⁶⁶⁶. Meaning, for all we know, can only be touched when incarnated, and even here, I only touch the incarnating body, but not meaning as such. Meaning cannot be touched, only transformed (moved, translated, incarnated). And its very nature, its being in perennial transition, always in motion, is documented by translation, but remains ultimately untranslatable. We keep attesting how, for instance, translation by means of adaptation is very close to integration by means of assimilation or acculturation. The attempt to culturally adapt to the TL the cultural values of the SL is ethnocentric, as it prevents the encounter with otherness and any possible dialogue in favor of a suspension of disbelief (i.e., the TL reader receiving the text in the “same way” the SL reader does—an impossibility), which thus negates the possibility of a

⁶⁶⁴ One example should suffice: Friedrich Holderlin’s translations of Sophocles (for which he was mocked by many of his acquaintances, Goethe among them) are now as enduring as Sophocles’ works themselves. A lot has been said about the quality of the translations as such (See Benn), but their poetic quality remains beyond dispute.

⁶⁶⁵ This phenomenon is observed by Basnett 38.

⁶⁶⁶ For a most compelling account on this kind of difference, see Dorfman 216.

different reading to emerge, and hence of alterity at large. Equivalence in translation, and truth as equivalence, are but veiled forms of colonization.

So, as in transculturation, what we are looking for in translation is mutual affectation, mutual contamination in which both languages are affected, influenced and eventually transformed: this should open a convergence for both wherein a copula can occur⁶⁶⁷. It is in this way that a translation cannot be measured in terms of better or “mores”, but rather as creating a space, a sharable space, through which this mutual affectation can come about. Translations thus neither say better nor more—they are bound to say otherwise: this is where the translator’s voice can be heard, where her ear is most appreciated. All translations are a composite of voices to which the translator (even the most mediocre translators—especially the most mediocre) contributes. This is why intimacy is a *must* in translation, because when this is lacking, there cannot be any convergence, but only open spaces, voids in the open waiting to be occupied: idle holes. This relationship, as all intimate relationships, is subject to something more than professional relations and can change over time. I just cannot imagine a translator of GCI’s work who would suddenly embrace communist ideals, or sympathize with Fidel Castro’s principles(?). Though I cannot conceive of a translator of GCI who would unexpectedly learn that GCI was a child molester, for instance, and continue working on his texts—on my part (and I am not half as intimate as any of his translators), I would stop writing this, and maybe even would think twice about wanting this text to have any other fate than the burning pyre. But not only must the translator be intimate with the writing, s/he must be intimate with the languages as well, for s/he must be able to hear in the TL the sign as “it sings the language”, and as this latter “sings the culture” within (Rabasa 91). Then, what we are searching for is compatibility, that is, creative difference. Equivalence is impossible, but

⁶⁶⁷ Umberto Eco draws to our attention that Humboldt [Wilhelm] already spoke about how a translated text could definitively affect the TL; to which Eco adds: “Certain translations have obliged a given language to express thoughts and facts that it was not accustomed to express before; the translation of Heidegger into French has radically changed ... the French philosophical style” (21).

compatibility is always latent in meaning—it is what makes incarnation possible, what makes its travelling endeavors so successful. Translation “constructs comparables” (Ricoeur 34), and comparables find (found?) compatibles; otherwise, rather than comparing, we are discriminating. Translation is therefore a form of transculturation, and furthermore, of *mestizaje*: reproduction and recreation lived in one’s own flesh. It goes from *mimesis* to recreation, and from incarnation to reproduction. SL and TL become indebted and bonded by this third newborn book, sharing important information, and thus making for a most reliable transformation. What translation teaches us is to come to terms with loss, for all transformation, insofar as necessarily entailing a transition, suppose a necessary loss. What is lost in transition must be let go, as we may very well do when our works are translated into languages of which we have no idea and wherein we will never know how our work sounds like (other than musically, as if listening to foreign chants). There, the text is no longer mine, for I know not how it means, how the signs sing in this or that language.

But let us speak here of the languages that GCI did know, and in the translations of which he worked closely with his translators, up to the point of becoming a rewriter of the translated texts. Yet, before getting into that, we should remember a passage from *TTT*. We can speak here about “Vae Visitors”, Mr. Campbell’s story about his three days in Havana and Mrs. Campbell’s comments that are more another version of the story, a translation of Mr. Campbell’s restricted vision of his (very smart) wife, who is presented, in his story, as a stereotypical moronic American middle-aged female tourist; and where he presents himself, in turn, as a most sophisticated, intelligent, well-traveled gentleman, when, in truth, he is neither of these things, only a skilled writer. We first read Silvestre’s translation of this short story into Spanish from the original in English, and we have, right after, the terrible, pretentious, idiomatic translation of Riné Leal. We learn this in “Bachata”, while Silvestre and Arsenio Cué are having dinner after a speed-romp through *La Rampa*. Silvestre remembers, quite alarmed, that he must finish this translation, which is going to be printed the next morning, and tells Arsenio Cué, with a mix of scorn and

regret, that he still has the rejection note addressed to Riné Leal. This latter's translation is one of the best examples of translation without intimacy, of mechanical and not creative translation. Furthermore, this translation also shows clearly many of the important differences between Spanish and English. Through Riné's bad translation we can realize better (if we are more or less well-acquainted with English, which I assume, as you have kept reading) what the SL text must have looked like. Particularly in syntactic terms, we get a very odd rhythm that consists in sequential clauses (the basic unit of English syntax, independent clauses) with very few transitions between them and full stops where, in Spanish, there should be a comma or where two clauses could have been merged into one through appositions or by making one the dependent clause of the other. As we may very well know, Spanish language has a highly flexible syntactic scaffolding that allows for very long sentences, and where the word order may vary much more than in English (not that uncommon are hyperbatons in your Hispanic everyday prose)⁶⁶⁸. Also, noun phrases are not as ubiquitous in Spanish as they are in English (since this latter's lexicon is, mainly, made out of nouns, which gives a way bigger stock to its semantic reservoir). This may be why the transformation of names into verbs through the

⁶⁶⁸ This is, unfortunately, disappearing in Spanish written language, particularly in highly homogenized contexts (i.e., newspapers or academic journals), as Spanish is following more a cultural than a linguistic lure: the Anglo-Saxon (dominant) paradigm of rendering a more economic, efficient and concise prose; not only avoiding digressions, but "unnecessary ideas" that may "unnecessarily enlarge the sentences". I think that this is something that comes with the times, as English prose used to employ more dependent clauses in its construction in the past (as is attested by Tufte 139); but never to the extent Spanish prose did, since large sentences and dependent clauses seem inherent to the language itself—to the very flexibility of its syntactic build up. Maybe had Proust written originally in Spanish, we would have had 10 or 20 page-paragraphs (hyperbole is also intrinsic, but this is more attributable to the Hispanic culture than to its language). The semicolon, the dash and the colon (all punctuation marks very often used in the English language, but with a low rate of appearance in Spanish—as they are substituted with commas and transitional phrases) are now more often used in Spanish prose and shorter sentences more widely required; now, I must say, even in literary magazines! Perhaps I am saying this with my own nostalgic agenda, as (you may have very well noticed) I am a very good friend of long sentences, subordinate clauses and digressions—"the salt of conversation" as GCI would have it.

use of the gerund or the progressive form is so usual in English (i.e., “googling”). A bad translation usually opens a better access to either language (SL or TL), for one is *clearly* dominant over the other—and domination is thus rendered readable. Readability is about *trans-*, about *mestizaje*, about the two languages accessing and transforming each other.

In this way, the *trans-*, the *mestizaje* must be complete—at least this was GCI’s ethos. Composing is, for him, the art of blending. We should distinguish here between blending in the sense of hiding, of assimilation (as in blending in your surroundings so as to belong etc.) and blending in the sense of mixing, fusing elements (variables) and infusing them in the other’s life; that is, of blending in the sense of creating. The perfect metaphor of this comes from GCI’s most blended book, *Holy Smoke*. Written and published originally in English (the only book he wrote in this language) in 1986, this work blends genres more than any other of GCI’s books did before or after—perhaps because the blend starts with the language. This is a long essay, an extensive study, chronicle, memoir, biography, literary criticism and homage to the cigar and to its culture. Here, the genres (the tradition: as in an essay is distinct from an article which is distinct from a dissertation, etc.) and the text-types (the medium: as in an academic journal is different from a magazine which is different from a supplement, etc.) are all blended in a very similar way in which tobacco is blended so as to make a cigar. A good cigar is all about a good blend, which results in a paradisiacal flavor (if you are a smoker) and a most pleasant aroma (whether you are a smoker or not—unless you are too susceptible to strong smells). And a good blend is recognizable even when the cigar is unlighted, as you smell its leaves, and as you feel its *vitola* (its shape, its form: a whole art in the making, as we learn from both Ortiz and, more vehemently, from GCI) in your fingers: it calls you to light it. This is what this book does; it calls you to read it, as you can read its balanced blend and almost touch its well-rounded *vitola*.

7.5.1 Summary 46

Fernando Ortiz's concept of "transculturation" is introduced in this section within the context of *mestizaje*. It is argued that an embodied transition necessarily undergoes a process of "transculturation". "Transculturation" means that when two cultures meet (through language, traditions, behaviors, etc.), there is necessarily a mutual affectation, a mutual contamination that will, by necessity, change them both. This is to say that the opening of meaningful exchanges (mutual affectation) also opens a place for intimacy, trust and responsibility, which inevitably occurs in any encounter with otherness; it happens even when there are unilateral purposes (i.e., a conquest), for affectation is inevitable. Two things are discussed upon this concept of "transculturation" in GCI's work: 1) his *intratextuality*, the way in which mixing constituted the main resource for the constitution of his texts; 2) translation, the process in which the "same work" may be transferred to another language, a process through which, it is argued, both languages (the source language and the target language) are inevitably affected. For GCI, it was extraordinarily important that his translators took as much licenses in their languages as he took in his. The case is made that language is constituted at its very core as a process of translation, which gives a better framework through which a bridge between translation and transculturation can be built. It is also through this discussion that an access between the "inter-" and the "trans-" can be opened, by understanding that language is the place wherein these two prefixes continuously converge. What is therefore translated from one language to another is that core of meaningfulness that the work opens, rather than "the meaning" of the work, for it is argued that every translation already entails a re-signification, thus an alteration of the meaning of the work. GCI's book *Holy Smoke* is introduced within these terms.

7.6 "Your place or mine?"

Guillermo Cabrera Infante is, at the time of the writing of *Holy Smoke*, already a great host, and a very good guide too. We can safely assume that by the time in which GCI

wrote this book he did not owe any more instalments on his mortgage and he felt most at ease in his house. He receives you, and then invites you on a trip to his memories, to the Cuba of his love, to Havana, but also to Vuelta Abajo, where we visit some *vegas* and we get to the cigar-factories, where we can appreciate this art in progress. We also meet some of his friends, tobaccoists and smokers (and non-smokers), writers and actresses and actors and comedians and poets. All these as we learn a bit about the history of tobacco and, more importantly, about its process of transculturation.

But, as we have been seeing throughout this work, this house was erected after long efforts and periods of homelessness and deep solitude. To say it succinctly, writing itself did not make an author of GCI, but learning to be a good host did: building a house in the privacy of his work. I am using this noun only now: author—a most recent invention, and a most discredited one. But I believe it is about time. It is true that this concept has more in common with the paradigm of autonomy than it meets the eye; yet it is also true that beyond this gaze, at the other side of the pupil (or of the epigone, if you prefer), we might find that this concept can resist much more than what autonomy can bear. For instance, the paradigmatic understanding of “being the author of your own fate”, is within this logic of autonomy. As we very well know (even if we may find it hard to recognize), we are, at the very best (and with lots of luck), the co-authors of our fates; and as we have seen in the fourth chapter, a great many of the most important “decisions” of our lives were made by others, starting with our being in this world. Of my life-story, I might be my narrator, I might be my character, but its author—one of its contributors (a main one perhaps, but not *the* main) at best⁶⁶⁹. Similarly, authorship and self-creation have borne a most forced proximity. We saw in chapter five that this happens also to a very limited degree, and that our participation in self-creation starts with listening to a call we did not install within ourselves; it is developing this call (gift, talent, etc.) all what we can *do for ourselves*. So not much authorship on this side either—at least, there is not much if with

⁶⁶⁹ About this latter reflection regarding the interaction between *idem* and *ipse*, see Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 160.

“much” we mean much control. The concept of the autonomous author is the achievement of a self-centered subject to whose achievements we clap in wonder: the owner of his intentions, the master of his desires, the marshal of his dreams—he who always knows what he means. This concept of authorship was perfected during the Renaissance and later put to work during the Enlightenment to be finally elevated by Romanticism, where the *genius* of the Renaissance became a solitary, melancholic, orphaned demigod always pointing back to the sky (or to the hells) where s/he came from. Pragmatism (utilitarianism in a lab coat) later criticized the Romantic approach so as to humanize this figure again, and adopted the milder (more instrumental) approach of the Enlightenment: the author *knows* what s/he means. It is worth noting that for Pragmatists cognition and epistemology refer to the same thing—only that the former is way better rooted in the brain than the latter, the reason for which it is favored⁶⁷⁰. Although lately it has been accepted by these same Pragmatists (now with a wide variety of sub-divisions, as “stylistic analyst”, “critical discourse analyst”, “stylostatistician”, etc.) that not all choices an author makes are made consciously, they have also set as their main task to “unveil” these unconscious choices so as to “reveal”, for instance, the “hidden” logic of an ideology (“critical discourse analysis”) or of linguistic structures (“stylistic analysis”) or of “style markers” (“stylostatistics”)⁶⁷¹. The intention of the author is not less so when it is not all conscious for him; it is only broadened and so is his autonomy. This is the author who can “manipulate” the reader, who can “seduce” him; the autonomous author who always *knows* what s/he is doing—even when s/he is not so conscious about it; s/he learnt the trade (a cognitive process), and with the trade came the know-how. This is the author who induces calculated effects in the reader. This is the author that had to die (or be murdered).

⁶⁷⁰ For more on the Pragmatist approach to authorship, see Bassnett 20.

⁶⁷¹ On critical discourse analysis, see Wodak & Meyer; on stylistic analysis, see Payne; on stylostatistics, see Hanlein.

Here is where literature found its best hitman: Roland Barthes. Now, speaking of hitmen, we should bear in mind that the 20th C. saw the emergence of a whole myriad of neo-Nietzschean thinkers on very different fronts. One of these fronts is the one we could call: “the forensic front”. We will never know whether Nietzsche (or Zarathustra) killed God or just found It(Him/Her?) dead. What we know for sure is that he declared It(?) thus—and thus spoke Friedrich. It was thus that a forensic drive emerged in these neo-Nietzscheans, all eager to find death as they thought: “I see dead concepts”⁶⁷². Enter Roland Barthes. His 1968 essay, “The Death of the Author”, instantly became a canonical reading for post-modern philosophy⁶⁷³. As with Nietzsche, it is difficult to determine whether Barthes killed the author or just found it dead—but again, it is irrelevant, for it was his declaration that lived on. But we should pause a little bit and reflect on the kind of author that died. Writing, as Barthes tried to prove, was the space of “destruction of every voice, of every point of origin” (142), the space where voices went to die. Both a graveyard and an abattoir, writing arises as a gigantic grinder, provided with the sharpest blades at its bottom: voice-grinders, as they grind them into the fluids of the text—that which precedes and follows the author, where s/he, by writing, performs her act of immolation. It was not so much the autonomous author that he declared dead, but the one built by capitalism, the one that Victor Hugo defended, and that was so incorporated to the legal system only to be policed thereafter⁶⁷⁴. For Barthes, a neo-Marxist, the worker was comparable to a machine, whose performance could be admired, “but never his genius” (142). This metaphor is, indeed, typical of Marxist animism; it is the text that

⁶⁷² Some examples include Francis Fukuyama’s “death of history”, the collective contemporary artists grouped by the art critic Arthur Danto and “the death of art” (remember Salvador Dalí’s memorable phrase: “Painting is dead, long live painting?”), and so forth. These conclusions, it is true, owe more to the other Friedrich (Hegel) than to Nietzsche, but the drive, the guts: that is all Nietzsche’s.

⁶⁷³ A label not of their authorship, which most of them (including Lyotard himself) rejected.

⁶⁷⁴ See Barthes 143. On Victor Hugo’s “invention” of the legislated author, see *Hemmungs Wirten*, more particularly chapter 1.

lives in its enunciation, by virtue of the hard labors of the reader⁶⁷⁵. This is how Barthes finalizes his manifesto: with a call to his comrades of all the [textual] world to join for this sacrifice that must be made: “The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author” (148), wild applause, “with the revolution everything, against the revolution nothing”, the room goes crazy, riotous cheers and tears of joy: take a vow—but who? Enter Michel Foucault. Just a year after “The Death of the Author”, in 1969, Michel Foucault responded to Barthes’ forensic report with a list of flaws and loose ends with his fêted “What is an author?”. Here, Foucault traces the “singular relationship that holds between an author and a text” (115). He starts this task by criticizing Barthes’ animist, substantial concept of the “work and the unity it designates” (119). Foucault proposes, instead, an “author-function”, that is, the author seen as “a functional operation of discourse” (123)⁶⁷⁶. This operation locates the author as an initiator (not an origin) of “discursive practices”, who historically limits their interpretation⁶⁷⁷. Hence, the “author”, as well as her presence and intervention in discourse, should not be approached as a

⁶⁷⁵ It is the writing that designates the performative in which the text is eternally written, always here and now. As we know, all performatives are uttered in first person simple present indicative, for instance: “I disagree”. Now, who is the “I” of this performative in writing? The text, of course—but (and this, as a good Marxist, is what saves the animist view) through the skilled eyes of the reader, the worker... the proletariat. On the grammatical and lexicographical form of the performative, see Austin, mainly his first lecture.

⁶⁷⁶ It would take at least an extensive chapter to try to explain “what is discourse” for Foucault—a concept as ubiquitous as loosely defined throughout his work. In brief, which will reduce a great lot this difficult concept, “discourse” could be understood as those conditions created by language so as to reproduce itself within the complex operations of human social relationships (speech, writing, rituals, etc.).

⁶⁷⁷ Freud and Marx are, for Foucault, the two paradigms of this initiation, for the terms “Freudian” and “Marxist” transcend their theories and even what they initiated (one transcends psychoanalysis and the other communism), thus becoming “transdiscursive”. In terms of historical limits, it would be highly improbable to try to interpret practices of exchange and administration of resources from the Palaeolithic as being Marxist, for there was no Marx then. We can find *antecedents*, but these must be interpreted as such—unless we can argue that Marx was not only transdiscursive but trans-spiritual too, and thus all-transcendent, so that he could travel back in time to give some economic advice to his ancestors. On these examples, see Foucault 132-134.

creative human being, but should be “analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse” (138)—thus animism travels from work (text) to discourse: “the author must live... as a function”. End of Act “I”.

The autonomous author that was killed by Barthes and repositioned by Foucault is far from dead nowadays. Furthermore, the autonomous author has been further retouched by the marketplace. This kind of author, a cornerstone of capitalism, has something of an interesting story. It starts with Victor Hugo’s 1879 speech, where he strived to give an account of “individual universalism”, in whose construction, of course, Paris had a vital position. It is this “universalized individual” that made the template for the author as we know it today: the owner of his/her work, and of the work as private property. This universal individual was the one who lived in History, but also the one who made it—a process for which the print culture (as a serial producer of documents and, thus, of records) was ideal. The author, in this manner, arose as a historical figure at the same time in which it emerged as a legal and, mainly, as an economic one. This figure was supposed to be autonomous, and so he made his work, wherein his personality, originality... his *individuality* was, autonomously, poured. We should not forget either that this was the time when the novel was at its peak and that this genre was “the perfect vehicle for the nation-state to promote itself” (Hemmungs Wirten 16). So, with the author came yet another form of national pride. This is the author on whom Barthes performed the autopsy, and whom Foucault reinserted in our discursive practices—as yet another cog.

Neither one nor the other, for us, the author is an initiator, but a creative one: someone who initiates *another* process in intertextuality. All authors are born therein, in intertextuality. Indeed, this has been one of the most difficult borders to legislate and police, and one of the instances in which plagiarism has been most difficult to

determine⁶⁷⁸. We could define intertextuality as the set of texts that constitute our (authorial) minds—those at work when we work (write, as is the case of the present discussion). As the Spanish Romantic poet, Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, used to say: “There could be no poets; but there will always / be poetry”⁶⁷⁹; Heidegger could not have agreed more, he who said that: “If all art is in essence poetry, the arts of architecture, painting, sculpture and music must be traced back to *poesy*. That is, pure arbitrariness” (“On the Origin of the Work of Art 199). And here, in the midst of *poesy*, intertextuality comes to bridge between the world (as composed) and chance (as pure arbitrariness). The poet, the artist, the author, leans towards one through the assistance of the other; she can only come back from her journey to *poesy* because of the previous texts in/to which s/he had inscribed/ascribed herself. Some, as happened to Holderlin, lean towards *poesy* too much, and are never able to come back. Here, in *poesy*, where language is originated, forged and merged, is where the author is articulated, as s/he touches upon these extraordinary forces—always with the protection of those others who had done it before. Language, poetry, and art always exceed authorship—this is where the author is ascribed-inscribed. In the same way in which GCI’s geography always exceeds its dwellers, the land always exceeds the house. The author builds a house in the land of language, with the materials of poetry and with the assistance of art. Helene Cixous, for instance, says of Clarice Lispector: “I feel ‘at home’ in Clarice Lispector’s night” (*Three Steps in the Ladder of Writing* 104). Lispector has made this night into a house and also Cixous dwells in this night, even if only provisionally; for all authors are hosts and all readers are guests. Even the author, when coming back to her work, does so as a guest; the host is left in the deed *as it was made*. As guests, we must learn to receive, and this is why the best available organ for the reader is neither her eye nor her ear, but her skin. As hosts, we must learn to receive, for every time the author’s work is opened, her “here I am” must be inscribed in such a way that it touches the reader as she comes in, saying, with her heart: “*and so am*

⁶⁷⁸ See, for instance, Mark Philip Freeman’s insightful example about Hellen Keller’s case of cryptomnesia, which could be interpreted as “unconscious plagiarism”: “Virtually everything she thought (and thus everything she wrote) was somehow derivative” (66).

⁶⁷⁹ *Rima IV* “*Podrá no haber poetas; pero siempre / habrá poesía*”.

I'. This is the present that joins the reader with the writer, the mutual gift of mutual constitution; for there is no host without a guest, or a writer without a reader. If there is a work, the author will always be there—and so will be the reader, co-authoring the present (gift), but never the deed.

At this end, we find a very different relationship between the author and the translator. Translators must always know their place, for the translator should always know s/he is not the author—however, s/he should also know s/he is not a common reader, not even a familiar guest, but a most intimate one. The translator of an autonomous author (citizen of utopia) can point towards an “inferred author”, and can be thereby tempted to find *the* “intentional author”⁶⁸⁰. These figure is similar to that of the “implied reader” for the author—nothing but a neurotic symptom, wherein the *other* is obviated and the dialogue curtailed: this “inferred”, “entailed”, obviated other is never a companion to our trip to *poesy*, but an admirer on our way back. This is where the idea of the translator as *tradittore* comes from, with the idea of a solitary genius engaged in a most valiant enterprise. This model responds to the stereotypical relationship of author-translator as an odd couple, comic competitors at best, elusive enemies at worst. This is the invisible translator for the self-centered author, the ghost behind the host, the autonomous host, who needs no guests but followers, the public figure: the host of a talk show. The translator of the autonomous author is as immaterial as the rights s/he has over her work; it is the author who *must* enjoy the benefits of the export/import dynamic articulated all around him⁶⁸¹, the global author: the new *conquistador*. When we get out of this idea of an autonomous author, we find out that the translator is a most “destabilizing” figure, as he “can make us question who a text’s owner really is” (Hemmungs Wirten 56), which thus leads us to question what kind of a guest s/he is. Well, s/he is a most intimate one, almost part of the family; the kind of friend who, after frequent visits, stays for long stretches of time, and whose visit is always looked forward to; the kind of guest that can

⁶⁸⁰ See Bassnett 34.

⁶⁸¹ For a more detailed account of this, see Hemmungs Wirten 54-59.

sometimes invite her own friends and even become *the* host at those times when the owner is not there; the kind of friend who can be trusted to house-sit, to take care of the house when the host must leave it for whatever reason. The translations of this kind of translators are like intimate composites in which the translator takes an active part as a creator of the text.

This is the kind of translators GCI asked for: those who were confident enough to take the text away from the author's control, and who allowed themselves to play with words in a similar way in which he did. This is the kind of translator he made of himself when he contributed to his English (and, to a much more limited degree, his French and Italian) translations and when he worked hand-in-hand with his translators, who would hand him drafts that he would rewrite almost in their entirety. This is why GCI's English translations are, some more than others, with *TTT* as a paragon, rewritten versions of his work. This sort of collaboration could be understood as a form of "transediting"⁶⁸², where the translator becomes an editor, and so the writer, and through which a text *other than* the original, but *resembling* the original, is achieved. Curiously, GCI's only experience as a translator could not bear a most distant relation to this kind of collaboration—mainly because the writer he was translating was already dead. His translation of James Joyce's *Dubliners* has become a classic among the several Spanish translations of this work. When we read it, we discover a strong intimacy combined with a deeper respect. Sometimes, the writer's penchants are transfused with those of the translator's (e.g., the constant use of alliterations, as GCI absolutely adored alliteration). Some other times, the writer's idiosyncrasies are left untouched by the translator (i.e., the writer's sense of detachment, which, as we have seen, was not among GCI's fortes; an exercise he could keep for no more than a couple of pages, as was the case in *Vista*). GCI's translation of *Dubliners* is not "transediting", and maybe not even transculturation—but it is certainly an intimate composite.

⁶⁸² I am borrowing this term from Hemmungs Wirten 48.

All in all, the guest and the host, the reader and the writer, the translator and the author, engage in a mutual constitution set in motion by a mutual recognition. This recognition, of the writer by the reader, of the author by the translator, of the guest by the host, is what Jacques Derrida calls “counter-signature” (“Psyche: Invention of the Other 5). If the work is not recognized *as* work, and therefore *as* already made, then the work is not so, and neither is its maker. And this work, as plural as it is before it reaches the hands of the reader (passing by the ghost hands of the editor, the printers, the cover designers, etc.⁶⁸³) has been recognized *as* a work, and thus *as* already made—though not already finished; whether this is ever reachable in a work of art is most debatable. Let us use the typical trope of the author’s *signature* as a synecdoche of the *making*, if only to bear with Derrida’s beautiful concept. The first thing to keep in mind is that there is no reciprocation without a prior deed to reciprocate; there simply cannot be “counter-” without signature. And this is where the author signs in. By recognizing this previous action, the reader bestows some primacy to the author as to the work the reader approaches. Once this primacy is bestowed, the reader must be able to listen to the author’s voice. The author’s signature emerges there where her voice most distinctly sings, and thus where it is heard the most. Regardless of its serialization, in spite of how much a work has been reproduced, translated and/or printed in years and centuries and even millennia, if we can still listen to a voice formerly dissolved in the work, a voice in which our own dissolves, there is still an author. A writer who disappears without dissolving her voice is like a burglar who vanishes without a trace, since this voice is the author’s primeval trace; and thus her primordial gift⁶⁸⁴. This has been for a long time the idea behind the (in)famous “writer’s block”, which is nothing but a temporary (though sometimes permanent) deafness, a leaving without a trace, a writing without a voice—something most noticeable for most readers; for it is the person’s labor and not the

⁶⁸³ This is elaborated into more detail in Yagoda 146.

⁶⁸⁴ On a similar reasoning about the gift of never “disappearing without leaving a trace” (a propos of Emanuel Levinas’ understanding of this trace) and in relation to (Levinas’) conceptualization of presence as a “here I am”, which is making oneself present for the other, see Derrida, “At this Moment in This Work Here I am”.

author's house that we visit; something most readers find unimportant—to say the least. If we cannot listen to the author's voice, if we cannot bear witness to those traces, there is just no way in which a work can become meaningful *qua* work⁶⁸⁵. The signature transcends the name on the cover (even the fact that there may be no name in the cover) of the book, for it protects the secret path it made towards its way to *poesy*. This is the signature that outlives the person, the author that outlives the writer—the house that outlives the home.

Understood within these terms, authorial recognition transcends authorial rights; these latter understood within the framework of copyright, of course. The *what* protected by copyright is most problematic—and, to say it briefly, the author's voice cannot be protected by law. It is not a title stemming from a patent (an idea, for instance, inscribed in intertextuality as a system of citation), but rather a right bestowed by public recognition: “this is yours, and *you* gave *this* to me”. Originality is not about innovation (or uniqueness for that matter), but rather about the source from which this voice, this signature e-merges. Thus, authorship recognition should not be confused with a sub-division of stylostatistics (a sub-division itself of forensic linguistics) that treats familiarity as “*déjà vu* processes” through which the reader “identifies style markers” that can be attributed (and legally copyrighted) to a particular person⁶⁸⁶. Property is not, basically, about protection (something that protects and should be protected), but, as we have been seeing here, about privacy. Within a system (such as a hyper-mercantile system) in which property (materialized as state) is equal to freedom (being able to have

⁶⁸⁵ I am not ruling out that a voiceless thing-work-artefact can become meaningful because of the circumstances in which it was acquired (e.g., it was given to you by your dying father, by your loving boyfriend, etc.) or due to a particular event that frames its meaning (i.e., the t-shirt you wore that day in which you scored a hat-trick with your team or the day you went to the last concert of your favorite band). But, in this context, meaningfulness is not emerging from the thing-work-artefact itself; instead, it arises from those external, envioning events that *frame* the thing, wherein its *making* is irrelevant to its meaning.

⁶⁸⁶ For this kind of analyses, see Hanlein.

property), and freedom has, as its most basic point of departure the protection of this “freedom to own and do whatever we so desire with it”, it is not strange that authors have materialized as the recipients of intellectual property. What the law protects is not, of course, the book as such, nor its contents per se; instead, it protects something most immaterial: a mix between mental contents and *the way* they are composed [i.e., materialized] in a text (book, magazine, etc.). It is so that the industry of the immaterial (i.e., ideas, mental contents, composition [whatever that is], etc.) has demanded the regulation on the production of immateriality. Given that the global citizen could be thus understood (as nothing but an idea), this kind of author is a perfect producer for a globalized market⁶⁸⁷. Recognition, within this context, means financial worth, fame and praise, so much praise: because in the world of immateriality, just like in the material world, the best known houses are the best protected—and so are the best neighbourhoods. The production of knowledge (as if this were the main aim of writing) situates intellectual property within an “economy of knowledge”, wherein content is a resource and composition a tradable good: of free trade as freedom of creation.

This is neither the recognition we are speaking of on the part of the reader nor the property we spoke about in relation to access. As we very well know, the counterpart of access is control, and as you have very likely inferred already, the author has no control over the way the reader will recognize his primacy, or to which extent will the reader access his work, or the level of privacy they will achieve—this would be like saying that we can control who we become friends with or who we fall in love with. We only *know* this after it happens, after we are already friends or already in love. This is the very reason why the public domain is at the exact opposite end of intellectual property. Friendship, love, familiarity, privacy, they all start in the public domain; there, in the already shared, for the “most important feature of the public domain is to be a prominent

⁶⁸⁷ See for instance the many efforts that some writers had taken to render their intellectual property objectifiable through dressing it as labor; thus her pains and efforts are what they justify should be copyrighted and enforced by the law. For a detailed account of this see Hemmungs Wirten 21.

producer of authors” (Hemmungs Wirten 134): intertextuality is the *agora* of texts. The reasoning of restricting the public domain (to be sure, in exchange of money) is like sending your daughter to “the best schools” so that she can make the best acquaintances, the best possible friends and, ultimately, meet the best possible mate—quite a reasoning. The author we are speaking about here is therefore *as-signed* by the other, by the reader, in his recognizing the author, and in so recognizing himself as a guest in the house of her work. If, as it was said in chapter 2, the *ethos* of work is to produce more work, the *ethos* of authorship is to produce more authors, and not, as is the case today, more readers (however proactive they may be). And please, do not take this as producing “more writers”. Rather take it as producing, fostering and taking care of (a responsible kind of protection) more voices, *other* voices.

This is the kind of visit I paid to GCI in my way to *Holy Smoke*. This book starts with a well-known social formula: “Have a cigar, be somebody”, a formula that summarizes the whole process of transculturation that smoking underwent from a mystical component of ritual importance (for the small group of *Caribes* found by Rodrigo de Xerez [the other well-known Rodrigo in Columbus’ crew]) to a social marker of status to a chimney fuming cancerous cells for both the smokers and the ones around her (something of which GCI only saw the beginning). The “be somebody” trope is taken to such an extreme that the book starts “quoting” Dr. Pretorious in *Bride of Frankenstein*; a cigar can make a somebody even of his Monster. This process of transculturation started with the “discovery” of the “new continent” (although it had been there for as long as Europe), for tobacco (and smoking) was the first “discovery” made in these lands. But, as GCI unapologetically notes, this process occurred in time and, as all transculturations (particularly those that start out as conquests), it had rather clumsy beginnings. We learn, for instance, about how European ethnocentrism operated in this encounter with otherness: from thinking it was the devil’s device (it burns, it emanates black smoke, etc.), which led the Holy Inquisition to burn and imprison some unholy smokers (only to later canonize the weed, as the Spanish royalty had acquired the habit and, additionally, it

brought immeasurable income to the Spanish crown), to the many failed attempts to decipher the etymology of the word *tabaco* (an Anglo philologist went to the ridiculous length of deriving it from an English expression: the *Arawak* expression for “I’m smoking”, *dattukupa*, understood by De Xerez as “*that’s tobacco*”—now, “how two Spaniards straight from the Middle Ages could be speaking modern English” [*Holy Smoke* 10] is not for us to know). But from this clumsy encounters with otherness invariably comes innovation and mutual contribution—however unwittingly or self-interested. For instance, if the natives invented smoking, and turned the seed into a magic-like inducer; the Spaniards turned it into a profitable crop and, moreover, into an art, for they transformed the chimney-like smoking devices into that work of art we now call a cigar—an art of which GCI has a lot to say.

But very early on in the book, by page 16, GCI has started to *weave* his account deeply immersed in intertextuality: films and books (the book actually ends with a full account on books and with an untranslated poem by Mallarme) and other people’s stories and biographical profiles, histories, anecdotes, gossip, hearsay, perceptions, opinions and arguments. His personal account come a little later, by page 24, woven with the significance his hometown, Gibara, had for smoking (as it was the place where De Xerez and his companion first saw the “chimney-people”). If GCI described *Holy Smoke* “as an autobiography written in smoke” (qtd. James 179), we should note that it is, mostly, a *text written in smoke*, where words drift up into the air and each paragraph is like a puff during which some idea springs and dissipates only to give place to another idea. As a matter of fact, just as happens with smoke, you can see how words intercalate, change places, enjoin, fuse and confuse, weaving ephemeral instants for provisional memories and portable places: Havana, Vuelta Abajo, Miami, London... As in all his works, it is the word that directs his thought, but unlike those preceding this book, words constantly recede as thoughts (ideas, images, memories, opinions, etc.) vanish in the air of our reading. Just as happens with a good cigar, this book is for nothing else but to be read and enjoyed; conserving afterwards nothing but a most delicious *savoir* in our mouths (or is it

in our brains? well, in our whole bodies). Perhaps the greatest feat of this book is that it, more than any other of GCI's books, *does what it speaks about*. He who said that each book had to create a language of its own (because, ideally, each book should *create in language what is spoken about with language*), finally achieved a blend in which the text *does what the text says*; a blend that includes, for the first time (and perhaps for the only time) in his oeuvre his entire process of transculturation.

We should start by recalling that *Holy Smoke* was the only book that GCI wrote in English; however, we should not be tempted to think because of this that this is his most English book. The book starts with a most Cuban product and a most Cuban practice: tobacco and smoking. Not only did these two entered Spain via conquest, but they also penetrated the English society very early on—up to the point in which it became all a culture on its own. Introduced by Walter Raleigh (loved by a queen but beheaded by a king), tobacco (and all their manifestations: cigar, snuff, pipe and cigarette) reached in England a very different kind of cult than it did in Spain. The weed was a favorite of dandies, prime ministers, nobles and most importantly, artists, especially writers. The second and last part of the book (which could be read as a long epilogue or as an extended appendix) called “*Ta Vague Litterature*”, although in French, mainly deals with the role that tobacco has had in, mostly, English literature. As GCI makes clear throughout the book, even though smoking was a prominent practice in Spain, it hardly has any role in its literature. In contrast, few things are as iconic in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th C. English literature as smoking. From Sherlock Holmes ubiquitous pipe to J. M. Barrie's *My Lady Nicotine* to W. M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, we get to taste the way in which this plant, this weed, this art, this habit, this vice, this pleasure powerfully penetrated the English imagination and strongly stimulated it up to the point of becoming a symbol—a most peculiar case of transculturation for those who fought, defeated and were thus hated by the Spanish crown, and who never knew the prehispanic cultures dwelling in the Antilles: a whole process of re-signification.

And this is the exact process that GCI lived (and performs, does, makes, creates) by the time he was writing this book; already an English citizen, already safe in his house in South Kensington, already sound in the house of his literature: this is the book of a *transculturated* Anglo-Cuban (or Cuban-English, or whatever you find fitter). Neither a transplant nor a graft, GCI lives in between these two cultures, one for his memory and one for his everyday life; one for artistic enterprises and the other for mundane errands, GCI is now a *transculturated* writer writing what he is and being what he writes: doing what he speaks about. Beyond invoking/evoking lies this *doing in language* what the *language speaks about*; this house-making—and, in this case, a house in exile. The second to last text in the book is a transcription of a small note from a friend having to do with cigars and paranoia. This is the only other exception in which GCI's name appears unaltered and with utmost familiarity in his literature; he is called the same way *his friends* called him: "Dear Guillermo". No play on words, no diminutives, no formality, no detachment: this is most certainly how his name sounded like coming from those close to him; how he was called. The cigar thus makes for a metaphor of GCI himself, of his life in London, of his life as an English citizen.

According to GCI's mythology, the book was born out of Marcel Duchamp's dictum: "I, who was born to do nothing, must do everything at least one time"; which finally lighted a long settled desire in his American publisher to write about cigars (when all he wanted to do with them is what he tells us to do: enjoy them): "Then I remembered Duchamp and made some more rings. Things are in smoke, art is in the rings. The wheel of a bicycle can be a ring too. The book, I thought, could be for Duchamp and the rings would then be considered Marcel waves, but he would remain aloof, aloft. Just like the rings. Hello, halo" (*Holy Smoke* 164). Although this myth of Duchamp igniting GCI's desire for writing this book is arguably overacted⁶⁸⁸, the metaphor of Duchamp's ready-mades, and

⁶⁸⁸ Souza reminds us that the book began, as most of GCI's books, as a fragment for an article originally intended for the *New Yorker*—an article that kept growing and growing, till it became a book of its own. See Souza 168.

more particularly of his dictum, is crystal clear. GCI *must try everything* at least one time, and he tries in this book many things for this one time, starting with writing in the English language and continuing with writing such an extensive essay (blended with all these other genres: autobiography, chronicle, film criticism, literary criticism, monograph, etc.) that resembles neither of his other books. GCI got carried away to such a point with the English language that he rendered for himself an untranslatable manual for punning (though, it must be said, the rhythm, the syntax, is more Spanish than Anglo)—and untranslatable it remained. He later declared that he did try to translate the book into Spanish, but the enterprise became frustrating and futile as the puns “didn’t travel well”, which resulted in his resolution to never translate anything again⁶⁸⁹. He abandoned the task and the book was not translated into Spanish until 2000⁶⁹⁰. He did something very similar with this translation than what he did with all the others before, namely, he appointed a “culprit”, that is, a translator that would take all the blame for not playing with the text as much as he did, and then rewrite this translation. Notably, this Spanish translation includes many jokes (most of them as footnotes) that have to do with the historical moment (his allusions to Clinton and his scandalous use of a cigar are perhaps the most frequent) of translation—thus opening a breach in time to make it more obvious that almost 15 years have elapsed between these two versions. This translation thus became another exercise of “transediting”—yet an exercise performed through the mirror glass (from English to Spanish).

⁶⁸⁹ This is what he says in the second instalment of his “Orígenes” (a chronology that will have a third instalment that would include till the year 1996, the year in which his collaboration with Pereda took place for the edition of the book *Mi Música Extremada*). It is important to note that neither of his chronologies included an account of the process of the Spanish translation of this book, and that he did translate again: *Delito por Bailar el Chachachá* is actually the only book that GCI translated singlehandedly; published as *Guilty of Dancing Chachacha* in 2001.

⁶⁹⁰ Translated as *Puro Humo* (playing with the semantic ambiguity of the word “*puro*” that means “pure” but also “cigar”, thus making two nouns or, as it is most likely read at first, a qualifier and a noun, pure smoke [*humo*]) by Íñigo García Ureta.

This is what *Holy Smoke* ultimately teaches us: the *living through* of the transculturated person, this transition-like state as it is incarnated by the person and as it is authored by the writer. The *through* is the preposition par excellence of the *trans-*, and therefore of the hidden hyphen behind every verb pronounced in present tense. This is why intertextuality is so crucial for GCI, because his being an author is clearly rendered as an existing *through* others; even though it is clear he writes all by himself. His literature is a cornucopia of references, of authors and quotations, cites and citations and, most crucially, of references that point towards the same man who wrote in the past about his past, the same man who is writing again about this past, and the same man who wrote in the past tense a time that was then present: it is a cornucopia of references without referents. This is what constitutes GCI's *intratextuality*: he refers to his other books as other rooms in the house we visit. Some of these rooms are already built/written, some others are yet to be written/built, some are already translated, and some are soon to be translated. GCI also keeps referring to his characters with their real names, telling us who they were in other works through their aliases, etc. We face a rhizomatic author, an author in progress, with neither a beginning nor an end, but subject to endless references, coming from here and there—emerging elsewhere. The difference between inside and outside, yours and mine, is transformed into referents through the arbitrariness of reference: “this-mine”; and the reciprocity of recognition: “that-yours”. Just as there is no referent for “absolute” or for “nothing” or for “through”, there is no referent for “here”, or for “this” or for “yours”⁶⁹¹. Our present tense recognitions are what constitute the author as a referent: “me reading-this yours”. This is what GCI constantly reminds us—that he will always remember himself.

7.6.1 Summary 47

This section illustrates the process of transculturation (including translation) through a thorough examination of GCI's book *Holy Smoke*. The part that touches on translation is

⁶⁹¹ In this vein, Ricoeur asks in *The Rule of Metaphor*: “Do we actually know what ‘reality’, ‘world’ and ‘truth’ signify?” (221)

discussed within the concept of “*transediting*”, through which translation becomes a sort of editorial process upon which the work may be rewritten while it conserves is what pulls it together as a singular work of art. It is of particular importance that the way in which GCI lived this process of transculturation in his own life is widely discussed in this section, as he assumed himself as an English person while he never lost his Cuban origins (both as a writer and as a person). It is also discussed how *Holy Smoke* was written as a book that does in and through language what language speaks about; a process that, although he attempted to perform in every text he wrote before, he accomplished most successfully with the writing of *Holy Smoke*. The concept of “the author” is also introduced in the thesis. The author is approached as a host of both his/her life and his/her work. The reader is, in this way, unequivocally a guest in the writer’s house, in the writer’s property. Given that during the preceding sections, the case has been made that property is about intimacy, responsibility and trust, it is possible to say that authorship is, too, all about intimacy, responsibility and trust. The kind of intimacy a reader gets with an author’s work, the kind of responsibility that the reader acquires through this intimacy, and the kind of trust that s/he develops is necessarily bound to his/her being the author’s guest: s/he trusts in her/his host; s/he is responsible of her/his host’s house while s/he is there; s/he can be intimate with this place to great lengths, including that of becoming a dweller in it, but never, under any circumstance, can the reader become intimate enough so as to claim ownership of this place. The example of the translator is given within this context, as it is said that s/he becomes a guardian, even a part of the welcome committee for other guests to come, but s/he never gets to own the house that s/he guards and where s/he welcomes other readers/guests. This approach starts to prepare the way for an author beyond autonomy and intentionality, and therefore to speak of a process that will be fully developed in the next chapter.

7.7 “What time is it?”

If you had ever smoked a cigar, I would like to ask you how does it feel to watch your cigar going away? GCI said that there is a definite relation between a cigar and its

duration in memory: “a cigar is matter and memory connected by smoke. The *elan vital* can be found in a cigar as it is smoked” (76). What is curious is that this relationship between the cigar and its duration connected him to another important, if veiled, trope in his literature: dying. How should we face the death of the cigar? “make sure the cigar is really dead and never kill a cigar as if it were a cigarette. Don’t crush it either by rubbing it against the ashtray Don’t throw it to the floor! ... simply leave the cigar in the ashtray as gently as possible and let it die its slow death” (77); just contemplate the smoke leaving the cigar “as the soul leaving the body” (78). This, watching the smoke go by, contemplating a dying cigar and letting it go, is an exercise of nostalgia; of the kind of nostalgia that rehearses its own death. This is the logic behind proclaiming eras, for all eras must come to an end. As we saw in the previous chapter, GCI understood his life thus, in terms of eras; and he thus understood time and history, as he loved identifying and proclaiming “ends of eras”. In his short story, “The great Ekbó”⁶⁹², revised and re-fashioned twice to build two different stories in what would become *Delito por bailar el chachachá*⁶⁹³, GCI tells us through the mouth of Silvestre how much he anticipates

⁶⁹² Originally published in *Así en la paz como en la guerra*, the short story he will always consider the best of the collection and one of the best (among the handful he penned) he ever wrote.

⁶⁹³ As was said before, this is the only book that GCI translated singlehandedly. Published in 1995, GCI republished and recontextualized “En el gran Ekbó” and added two more stories with the same couple as protagonists (Silvestre, his surrogate, and *ella* [her], Miriam). These two stories play with a similar setting as a point of departure (a restaurant) taking different courses. The story that gives the title to the collection (which is also the longest of the three) has an already ostracized GCI as he waits for *ella* to return from her rehearsals in the theatre (we will learn from *Cuerpos Divinos* that he did this often when he was courting and slowly falling in love with her, though in *Cuerpos*, Miriam does not correspond his feelings [yet], while here, in this story, it seems they are both madly in love, probably soon before they finally got married) in front of who we can easily infer is Alfredo Guevara, the Minister of the ICAIC (Cuban Institute of the Cinematographic Arts and Industry), the person who will (also soon after) seize his brother’s movie and orchestrate the termination of *Lunes*. We see here, however, a GCI still confident of himself, someone who still thinks he is stronger than this kind of bureaucrats, someone who is still ignorant of the methods of totalitarianism, and who hence shows himself arrogant and corrosively ironic in front of his interlocutor in his several attempts to make him understand that the revolution has a meaning and that all the

memories, how much he looks forward to them and how much he “liked remembering. Nothing was better than remembering. Sometimes he believed that he found things interesting only if he could remember them again ... He was deeply moved by wondering what the exact recollection of this moment would be like tomorrow. Or even better, the day after tomorrow” (*Writes of Passage* 109). This is the nostalgic rehearsing what it would be like to lose the past, to let it go, and to remember it again. This is the nostalgic that rather than letting go, rather than coming to terms with it, does nothing but rehearsing these gestures—never quite able to do so.

What has given nostalgia such a bad name is this kind of nostalgia, which in our era bears the particularity that it anticipates its own losses, as if rehearsing them: this is nostalgia as a preservative of the past, a conservation area wherein the past is untouched, untainted, and where restoration seems plausible. This “restorative nostalgia” is the one behind nationalisms (and radical nationalisms, with mythical, pure origins that must be restored etc.) rather than the one behind cultural intimacy—the one behind homogenizing the future in order to achieve a pure past, where the only thing in common between people is that nobody knows (but they all can, or so they should, infer) what this past, and what this future, looks like⁶⁹⁴. The preservation of an ideal past begets the revelation of a utopian future: that of its restoration.

The other kind of nostalgia, the one we care for in this work, is the one that expresses our very primal need of longing for our pasts as we lose them—for this is what happens in life, not only do we lose the past as it passes by, but we lose people, places... times that will never come back. Loving is being exposed to being hurt by these losses, and there is nothing more primal than longing for what we have lost and loved much. Coming to

intellectuals are needed in its manufacturing. The English translation would be published in 2001, just a year after the Spanish translation of *Holy Smoke*.

⁶⁹⁴ On the two kinds of nostalgia, “restorative” (more leaning towards *nostos*) and “reflective” (more leaning towards *algia*), see Boym. On an extended account of how the first kind of nostalgia has turned out to be quite bloody within our history, see 43-49.

terms with and letting go of our losses are gradual and (I would argue) never finished processes. Longing is and will be natural in these terms—we should come to terms with it. This kind of nostalgia that lurks behind our “coming to terms” is and could be an empowering source of creativity; as Dennis Walder writes: “Nostalgia begins in desire and may end in truth” (3). The truth we mean here, nonetheless, is as plural as the memory that brings it about; it is the truth of sincerity, of authenticity, not of accuracy. Nostalgia, in this vein, is as plural as the memory and as the pasts it helps to bring about, always already in *pathos*, suffering it a little bit again, inflaming our pores in our longing so that our memories can access our emotions, so that we remember how we felt and we can understand how we feel now: “The more conscious we are of our own nostalgia, the more we reflect upon it, the more aware we may become of our history” (9), Walder concludes.

Nostalgia, in these terms assists us in coming to terms with the past, which is the only way to really claim our futures. As we come to terms with the past, the idea of origin (and original) vanishes, and, with it, the whole idea of a *telos* dissipates. We come to terms with our losses as we understand how much they meant to us, how their meaning was (and, perhaps, still is) articulated in who we are and in what we do. We can thus claim our futures because we can imagine them, since we can imaginatively explore the irrecoverable and therefore create alternatives (i.e., the alternative of living without a daughter, a husband, a job, etc.). This exploration is not meant to help us coping, but it is meant to help us accepting, and to envision from this acceptance what the world may be without that which is no more. This is how we can imagine alternative articulations while we still struggle with our missing limbs—for this is what losing may feel like, particularly when losing something/someone that/who was central in giving meaning to our lives. To be able to claim our future, we must be able to see the very “potentialities of the present” time⁶⁹⁵. We then own our futures by virtue of owning those transitions that shall lead us

⁶⁹⁵ See Boym 28, where she analyses Walter Benjamin’s “messianic time”, which, she observes, deals with “crystallized experience” (in contrast to Nietzsche’s “eternal

there, thus turning the lost past into an enabling fiction. As was said, GCI did this in his prose, and his English composition could not be more attuned with this owning: *the text does what the text speaks*. Never quitting his style was part of his *ethos*, as should be for all of us, immigrants and exiles, foreigners in our newly built house, our recently founded homes. “Convoluting syntax ... is part and parcel of exilic ethics” (341), said Svetlana Boym. It is called “syntactic nostalgia” (Mukherjee 22).

And this is how the metaphor enters the scene again, now with a major role: as an empowering transition. As was said in the two previous chapters, the principle of being, the verb to be, the *is* (what the verb to be *does*), if it is not to be a tautology (this *is* this), is bound to be metaphorical in nature (this *is* that *as* this *as* that). The *as* of the metaphor establishes its referential *is*, *what* makes it a referent⁶⁹⁶. It is the reference that marks the “here” and the “now” and that invests them with the properties of presence always already *in* place, *in* context, *in* its own history; for there is no such a thing as an ahistorical present—an instant devoid of context. The verb *to be* of metaphor thus transforms possession into expression, what the thing bears as properties into the thing *being* its properties, expressing them so that we can notice them. Yet we should note that just as this verb *to be* of the metaphor performs this transformation, the verb *to be* itself is transformed by metaphor. A metaphor thus performs an “essential translation” from the world of the *psyche* to that of *physis*, from the *as* of resemblance to the *is* of existence; from embodied imagination to incarnated artefact: production starts in metaphor. A very pertinent example of this can stem from one of GCI’s favorite places, from the domain of artefacts above all others: the city. GCI said that “men did not invent the city. Rather the city invented men and their customs”⁶⁹⁷. If we follow his logic, we would quickly grasp

return”), a method that, she argues, “can be called archaeology of the present; it is the present and its potentialities for which he is most nostalgic”.

⁶⁹⁶ See Brodsky 10, where she tackles Rousseau’s thoughts on how civil society emerged from the establishing of the referent *as* a referent.

⁶⁹⁷ See his “*Elogio a la ciudad*” [Accolades to the city] in his *El Libro de las Ciudades* [The book of the cities] (1999). It must be said that in Spanish the word “man” still

how all of the urban referents (i.e., the architecture) are, first of all, *made* so, referents; not only in the sense of made as being built, but mainly in the sense of being *referred as* such, for all buildings are bound to their history. Architecture, in this way, becomes the referent “to which historical life and language adheres” (Brodsky 24). And these referents, the historical referents, are the only ones we *know*; of the others, the natural, untouched by sense, language, meaning... metaphor, we know nothing at all. Cities were invented in metaphor. There is no transculturation without civilization.

According to this reasoning, the bond between material (i.e., referent) and immaterial (e.g., reference) is metaphor, and not the verb *to be*; less so *being* (not even Being)—whatever that may be. It is this bond *through* which we get access to other dimensions of reality that allows for *other kind* of artefacts, things, materials... referents. As a matter of fact, “reality” as such (whatever *that* designates) is a dimension opened and accessed through the metaphor. In *poesy*, there where the bond of the metaphor can be found unbound, we can see its secret: it harbors a free word. All metaphors express at their very core the freedom from which words came, come and will continue coming about. As Ricoeur points out, “metaphor is not polysemy” (*The Rule of Metaphor* 170), which is completely true, and polysemy is not *poesy* either; polysemy emerges from *poesy*, as it bears witness to this originary freedom that lurks in each and every word we say. It is polysemy that allows metaphor to thrive. It is *poesy* that allows metaphor *to be*. The ontology we know (and the only knowable for us) is, as Ricoeur calls it, an “ontology of ‘correspondences’” (303), neither pointing out nor purely describing a “reality” out there, but rather binding it together with our very existence. This is the realm of mutual constitution to which metaphor gives us access, the realm in which “what is” is because

designates the whole of humanity (gender aside). The incorporation of the term “human being” or “humanity” or just “humans” (that in Spanish is not gender neutral, for “human being” and “humans” is also male: *humanos*; whereas “humanity” is female: *la humanidad*) to substitute terms such as “man” or “mankind”, etc., is relatively recent in the Spanish lexicon of political correctness, so it is unlikely that GCI is falling in the very politically incorrect mannerism of sexist discourse that excludes a whole gender from it by clustering the whole of humanity into one gender (the dominant, i.e., male).

what corresponds to/with it. We only know about convergences, but few to nothing about *what* converges as such. We know nothing without language and language is nothing without metaphor. Dead metaphors are what we meet first as “stable concepts”, and if language were made *only* of stable concepts, if metaphors could not be rejuvenated, language would be already dead by now. And since I do not like to find death as I think, I would very much take a “living metaphor” rather than a stable concept any given day; for metaphor vivifies language, but it also vivifies thought: it is the very “soul of interpretation” (303), the spark of life at the heart of our imaginations—and, consequently, of our memories. It might be true that this sounds too anthropomorphic, that it seems *as if* I were saying that in order to assert anything at all, we need to humanize it, to prosopopeically transform it. Yes, I am willing to assume that; for I believe that unrecognized anthropomorphism often turns into implicit anthropocentrism.

It is within this textual broth called metaphor that GCI conceived of himself as a writer, and that he conceived the task of literature. For GCI, literature could be literally summarized in three words: “words, words, words” (qtd. Gibert 407). But these were not ordinary words; these, the words he looked after in his literature, in literature, in his *ethos* as a writer, were free words. He declared many times that the most important value for a writer (and for a person at large) was freedom of creation⁶⁹⁸. This freedom, as GCI developed his trade, was not to be localized as an external force *letting* you to work, but rather as a force found in between the writer and the words he finds in *his* way to *poesy*. There, in this way, he finds out that it is precisely the incognoscibility of the referent that bears witness to the free word lying (though not “lying”) therein; it is within this incognoscibility that we recognize the word free, and so does the writer. The writer’s *ethos*, “to write as good as possible” (qtd. Gibert 408), is not about writing beautifully or according to endophoric or exophoric rules in language; it is about bearing witness to this

⁶⁹⁸ This he points out repeatedly in his interview with Gibert, as well as with Pereda; and he also does in *Mea Cuba*. We might find it more succinctly stated in Jiménez-Leal’s documentary.

freedom and taking care of it, with utmost responsibility, with utmost love, doing everything at hand to never lead any word towards the cage of a canonical concept (stable or whatever you want to call it).

By the last stage of his writing career, which is the one about which we have been speaking in this chapter, GCI has set to make public this freedom in those referents for which he cared the most: Cuba and the Cubans living there. These referents, people *suffering* under tyranny, deserved to, at least, have access to his testimony. However, since he very well knew his books were banned for these readers, he set to *make public* his testimony and, moreover, those instances in which he was not able to testify because he was too locked up in himself (which led to a state of radical unresponsiveness, a nervous breakdown). *Mea Cuba* is the book in which GCI set to dispel his incile from coming to terms with his exile. He concluded that when this freedom of creation is extirpated from a person's life, s/he will flee towards her/himself and go to a most painful and, often times, unrecognized incile. Incile, as we saw before, is *altericide*, the murdering of *alterity* for the sake of the preservation of the self. In case you have not guessed it yet, all totalitarian regimes are incilic in nature; this is why they produce so many exiles. In *Mea Cuba*, GCI sets to make public everything he can in relation to what he was able to remember and what he was able to reproduce about his own life as an exile, and about his own life as a dissident. He had to face, for instance, ideological stances that proclaimed him a right-winger, a bourgeois, etc. Nothing could be further from the truth. This is the typical unimaginative reasoning that can only conceive two positions and puts you (forces you, better said) in one when you pronounce yourself against the other. GCI was not a lover of free-trade and not even a democrat. He was able to appreciate that democracy was, among the available political systems, the one that allowed the most for freedom of creation—but never stopped being critical with it; as is clear in pieces like “Actors and sinners”, wherein politicians are (wonderfully) compared to actors (a propos of Ronald Reagan), and where he explains how acting can be a most important asset for both democratic and totalitarian leaders. Furthermore, an important

part of his task of *making public* includes letting us know the luck of some of the pieces we are about to read (or just read). For instance, at the end of the piece just mentioned, GCI let us know how his piece was rejected by several journals because of what seemed (to a very short-sighted reader, let me add) a praise to Ronald Reagan—something most literary magazines of Hispanic America (driven left-handedly) could not tolerate; and how it was only *Vuelta*, the magazine that Octavio Paz directed in Mexico, the one that dared to publish it.

Words are therefore free, but, in the world of literature, it is by publishing them, by making them public, that the writer completes his testimony, his bearing witness to this freedom. All of GCI's works (to lesser or greater degree, including *Así en la paz*) seek to bear witness to this freedom, and they all seek to complete this testimony. His house, the one in which he receives you, is built not upon *poesy*, but upon *his* testimony of it—his joyful experience is, at the end of his writing enterprise (which was also, by the end of his life), everywhere apparent. He also bears witness to what he learnt through *poesy*, which is how not to get yourself lost. Here, in addition to *intertextuality* (the texts of others), *intratextuality* (the world of your own texts) is most handy; that is, your house should never be lost on your way to *poesy*, it should never be absorbed in it. This is mainly why I said that GCI was not only a great host, but a very good guide too: the best possible guide of his house, of his texts, of his life. As a good host, he lets you in. As a good guide, he shows you out.

7.7.1 Summary 48

The discussion about the ordering of time in “eras” (and how this was seminal in GCI's own conception of time) that was elaborated in the previous chapter is taken in this section one step further. This discussion is taken now from the angle of “the end of an era” and its relationship to finitude and dead. The concept of nostalgia is reconsidered from this new angle, thus locating the restricted scope in which this concept has moved and due to which this concept has had such a bad reputation: nostalgia as the anticipation

of one's losses. This is the kind of nostalgia that aims at restoring an original, lost past. On the other hand, the kind of nostalgia that has been argued for in this thesis is a perennially incomplete process of letting go of the past (and everything that is lost with it) and of coming to terms with it, which, it is said, ultimately entails coming to terms with one's own finitude; a discussion that will be central in the next chapter. In what concerns to this chapter, this discussion serves the purpose of integrating nostalgia as an empowering and creative source through which "new alternatives" to the lost past can be produced. Thus understood, nostalgia is also complementary to ethics, for the comprehension of one's past losses, and of their meaning in one's life, enhances the comprehension of one's present and of how much this past meant and means to oneself. Within this kind of nostalgia, it is possible to dispense with a telos and still have an idea of the future, as the future can be imagined rather than projected. This discussion will also be further elaborated in the next chapter. In this vein, metaphor is examined once again, but now under the lens of an empowering nostalgia. Metaphor is, in this context, an empowering transition that does not only materializes the "in-between" from which language comes from (*poesy*), but also the temporal threshold in which language moves and lives. This is metaphor seen by virtue of its primordial verb, the "is" between tenor and vehicle; where the very "is" entails a motion and a copula through which one thing moves to another. Metaphor is thus the materialization of time in language, the bond between the material and the immaterial. This approach to metaphor supports the argument that freedom is at the core of language. It is therefore argued that an equivalent freedom is required to make public whatever a person composes, which means to willingly and responsibly become an author by bearing witness to this constitutive freedom in language.

CHAPTER 8
“I’LL BE BACK”: LIFE-PRODUCTION AND THE PROMISE OF THE FUTURE

8.1 “How come?”

I should write this chapter as a writer. And so I am, for the future of this text is in my hands. The future is the realm in which the writer ends and where the text starts. We are all certain of our futures, yet we have no clue about our fates. We all know we are going to die, sooner or later. But we have no idea when, where, how... we ignore everything about this day, this instant in which all others cease; the time in which our time is due. Is this ignorance what grants us a future? Just as much as this knowledge: would there be any future without death? would there be any future without aging, deteriorating, slowly losing life—or slowly leaving it behind? No, there would be not. Immortality, eternity... are timeless, and therefore futureless. As anything in perpetual motion fails to notice any transition whatsoever, because it is *all* transition; anybody in perpetual life fails to appreciate any passing, for it is *all* life. All life and no death means all present and no past, and no future either: can there be any future devoid of past? But what about the dead? what about those who have no future, one of whom has been our central concern within this work? what about those who write no more? those who are all past, all memory? what about Guillermo Cabrera Infante? Is he anything more than a name, than a signature, than a reference pointing back to referents, deeds done in the past? Is he anything more than a dead author? Well, you must understand he is not so; *that* he is not.

We shall be thus trying to render explicit those mechanisms through which, by which and because of which it is and it has been possible not only to speak about a dead person, a dead writer, but also to converse with a living author; for this is what GCI still is. This work has been a conversation with an author who is not, by any means dead. The person, however, is dead—just as this very text Guillermo Cabrera Infante is dead, he is not writing anymore, he is nowhere to be found; this person has no more experiences because there is *no more* for and of him. We are not bringing him to life, and we are not bringing his texts to life either. Texts are inert objects; life-like, maybe, when very well-

done and when there are good readers, but inert on their own—they require readers, all of them, with no exception (not even the *Bible* or the *Qur'an* or the *Necronomicon*). As we have seen all the way through, authors are of a similar breed. No author can exist without a reader, just as there is no reader without an author.

8.1.1 Summary 49

This chapter deals, for the first time in this thesis, with the future time. It deals with the relationship between the past and the future, and with the way in which the future determines and frames the present. It is argued that the future cannot be conceived without also conceiving finitude, which, in the case of living people, entails the conception of death. This conception, is also argued, comes from a person's realizing other people's death. In the way in which a concomitance was traced between work and life in the first chapter, a concomitance between future and finitude should be traced in this chapter; a concomitance that entails, all in all, a mutuality between death and otherness. It is from this mutuality that the life of the author, his/her emergence out of the convergence between selfhood and style, will be made.

8.2 "After all"

Property in intimacy is forged; it is made by and in intimacy. But, where does this intimacy come from, or how is it created? Intimacy is there, always at the hither side of our *presecedence*, spreading our call and expressing ourselves. Now, without sounding weird, how can we create intimacy with a dead person? Why do not we reformulate the question by taking into account that intimacy is voided by death, that we cannot attempt intimacy with the dead other than by rendering it onanistic. The question should therefore be: how can we create intimacy with an author? All authors insofar as they are listened to (read, etc.) are alive. To create a realm of intimacy with an author we should approach the realm where s/he first built her/his house, which we have said is her/his work. Not only does the work erect itself as a house wherein the author dwells, it has mainly created the

space wherein his/her style and his/her story (life-story) converge. Even if we were not speaking about an author for whom autobiographical writing was as indispensable to his literature as words themselves (as is certainly GCI's case), even if we were speaking of an author who had created a most marvelous world in which his life-story is nowhere apparent (i.e., Lewis Carroll or Michael Ende), we should not forget that there, in those words, in those sentences, in those... works, the writer's experiences (what he heard, read, underwent, suffered, was told, etc.) have there been transformed from *poesy* to text via *poiesis*. We should bear in mind that all these experiences (first hand or not) are already woven in *inter* and *intratextuality*; that is, they are all woven with other texts and with other events and with other experiences... and with other lives. This is where the reader appears in all her/his glory.

At this convergence (incarnated in the work) between "my story" and "my style", the reader reads *another's* life and *activates* that *other* author, with whom s/he starts a conversation. Nonetheless, the reader must be careful, always careful, in not trying to impose sharp distinctions between the writer's *intratextuality* (what he suffered) and his *intertextuality* (what he read); for the reader should always keep in mind that between *lo vivido* [what is lived] and *lo leído* [what is read] there is nothing but *poiesis* making its way out of *poesy*⁶⁹⁹. These two categories keep carrying over to each other within the work, and, as in the case of GCI's *Holy Smoke*, they keep contaminating each other up to the point in which (inside the work) all distinctions are rendered spurious. Even though in my everyday life what I have read and what I have suffered (lived, underwent, etc.) are more or less clearly distinguishable, in my work neither can be clearly determined. But allow me to give you an example of this. Can you say that in your everyday performances, say, in your verbal language, your gestures can be clearly distinguished from those of others you have been unconsciously (or very much consciously) mimicking throughout the years (from your parents to your partners to your role models to your

⁶⁹⁹ About this difference between *lo vivido* and *lo leído* in the case of Victoria Ocampo's life-writing, see Molloy 48.

favorite film star)? The only thing that can be clearly distinguished is that *you* make those gestures, that they are *as if* they were yours (when you are not cheaply aping them) and that you imprint in them a very personal touch that *identifies* them as being *yours*. Furthermore, these gestures are as part of your performances (behaviours, attitudes, etc.) as their very outcomes. This is meaning *incarnated*, and the way in which a text incarnates meaning is by way of the author's voice, wherein "his story" (in *intratextuality*) and "his style" (from *intertextuality*) are as interwoven as a person's gestures in her everyday performances. Life is meaning in the sense that it cannot help but producing it.

Life, on its own, however, is like a text that stands on its own: meaningless. All texts are meaningful (or so they could, or so they should, or so they must) in the same way in which all lives are (or so they must, or so they should, or so they could): by way of the other. In this way, the identity of the author is the life of the author. The writer (at least those we keep reading, those who keep calling us, compelling us to read them) *transforms herself* through her work; her work is the space in which she performs a bodily catharsis, which is much more than a change of skin and way lesser than a bodily exchange. The writer's body is very much the same after he finishes writing late at night (or at noon, or in the evening, or at whatever time he uses to write); there might be minor bodily alterations (physical exhaustion, irritated eyes, etc.), but basically, it is the same body (and, please, remember we have said that the mind [i.e., brain for "Neuromaniacs"] is also part of the body). Yet, after this "bodily ritual" is finished, really finished, the writer knows his life, his self, has changed⁷⁰⁰. Even if his self may continue very much under the same mundane mantle of the everyday life (daily errands, eating, having fun, etc.) and even if his style goes pretty much around the same issues (passions, preferences, obsessions, etc.), the writer's story is rendered *his* to extents he did not even realize

⁷⁰⁰ For more on these "bodily rituals" in the context of the Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo and the reconstruction of his identity via these "profound transformations", see Loureiro 109-111.

before, and so is *his* style. We have described this double-movement as self-ascription and self-inscription. Now, on the side of the reader, we may say that s/he keeps witnessing these rituals over and over again—for the author keeps this transfiguration, this transformation, this rite for every time s/he is read. The author keeps being other than oneself. It is not that you ever work *for* the other (for an-other), but rather that your work, the work, any work, is already other.

What the author finds in his work is what the author finds therein: authorship. As we have been seeing in this work, GCI's Havana was founded by the writer at the very same time in which he found it. But, as we have also insisted, GCI kept transforming himself in his memory, kept transforming his story and kept, consequently, transforming his memory. All these could only be possible because of the powers of imagination. In chapter 4, we referred to this as a *mythopoietic* power; that is, not only the power of transforming our stories, but the very power of making them, of remembering them—and even of following them (as we can see in chapter 6). The writer's finding and founding of the author is the very *invention* of his authorship. Since we have said that the author becomes a host in the house he builds in his work, authorship could be understood as those *ways* of inhabiting, of dwelling, of living in this house wherein the author is a host. Not only is GCI's Habana opened to us as readers, and therefore as guests, of GCI's work; his past, his memories, Gibara, his household, London, Gloucester Road, his present and, most importantly, his future are opened there, where we can still find him as a host (but never as a ghost, as was examined in chapter 3). This is what authorship creates: new forms of dwelling, of inhabiting, of living in our work—and therefore, new ways of existing in this world, of living this life, of being this self.

What could be more contrary to the “death of the author” than a eulogy to one? This is what, for instance, Jacques Derrida does in his text “The Deaths of Roland Barthes”, in which Derrida celebrates the life of this thinker and treats him, nothing less, than as an author: “[his first and his last books] accompanied his death as no other book ... had ever

kept watch over its author” (266). Derrida also takes time to celebrate Barthes’ exceptional style, since, disagreements notwithstanding, we should always bear in mind that in addition to a notable thinker he was a considerable writer. This style, this “manner is unmistakably his” (270), and no reader, regardless how talented, brilliant and ultimately alive may be, can *substitute* or *replace* this manner; activated as it is read, but forever inactive (in the sense of not producing any more texts), as he is dead. This is the first approach we have taken towards GCI’s work and towards GCI as an author welcoming us in his work, in his house, in his home. We have activated the author’s life as we have read him. We have conversed with the author as we have interpreted him. We have shared with the author as we have exposed our lives bare—at least I had. We have witnessed the author’s body pulling itself together, articulating itself in words and sentences and paragraphs and pages—and thus we have spoken (at least I had). The body of his work constitutes the author’s body: his limbs, his skin, his saliva, his eyelids, his mouth and esophagus and... voice, his voice everywhere aloud, sounding clear and sound—as now I hope mine does. And this is a big issue, for writing *about* GCI’s life and work cannot be done at the price of hiding myself behind him. Writing down my conversations with him cannot be done in exchange of silencing my voice. This work, however much it owes to GCI, should not hide my own self, nor should it obliterate my own style. If so I did, I had been eluding my responsibilities as a host, your host; for you are not reading GCI, nor are you learning to do so (if so you want, better open one of his books, better start getting intimate with him). You are, instead, reading my text, and perhaps, if you want, you are starting to learn how to do so. This is a major problem for researchers, or for an academic doctrine that dictates all researchers should vanish in favour of their “object/subject of study”, in favour of bringing “it/him/her” about with no (or as minimum as possible) bias, prejudices, quirks... interventions on the part of the researcher: ghosts in a ghost house. This is not what I have done, this is not what I am doing, this is not what I shall do—because you matter, because I matter: because GCI matters. Want to *learn* about him? go pay him a visit at his place. Want to know what *I learned* from him? go on, continue reading.

If I brought Roland Barthes to the fore again it is because I still believe that he did something very important, not so much in proclaiming the author dead (no author can ever be dead as long as he is listened to, so long as he is read), but rather in drawing our attention to the extreme closeness that authorship and death bear to each other, for the author is always a future endeavor. There is no author here, now, as I write. There is nothing but a writer. It may happen, it could be, that this will be read somewhere, somehow; but, more significantly, it may very well happen that it will be listened just as well. If this possibility may be harbored, it is only because the finitude of what I am writing as of now, it is only because this text can and will be finished—or me before, but hopefully not. Even posthumous works, such as GCI's *La Ninfa Inconstante* or *Cuerpos Divinos*, were somehow finished before they were published. Even unfinished works (as when possibly *Ítaca Vuelta a Visitar* may be published) have to reckon with finitude, with that of the writer, which is what gives them a final stop; there where we can only (where we will only) speculate where could have this text gone had the writer finished it. Death is everywhere in writing, just as it is everywhere in life; but we busy ourselves with reading... till the end, just as we busy ourselves with living... and so on. Were there no forgetting, there would be no remembrance, but there would be no past or future either. We do not write to be remembered, we write so as not to forget, and then, when we inevitably do so, so as to learn how to do it well. The author we find in his/her text is not a memory, or a fiction of our manufacturing; the author we find is alive and his life is all myth; he is the protagonist (the always agonic prototype) with whom we get intimate. We share myths, we dream lives, and then, after all is done, we have them in our hearts; for we have almost learned them by heart.

The author, in this way, learns to love her readers. Even those who show themselves scornful, resentful or just plainly grumpy with their readers, they all learn to love them as their readers learn to do so too. The author's last breath, his final sentence, is full with gratitude towards life, and towards the life made possible by the reader. GCI's last pages,

or what we presume are his last, at least in the myth of his published work, those of *Cuerpos Divinos*, his last posthumous work, are all devoted to encounters that GCI had with people we had met in this book or in some other books of his. These are all last words told to or by a person who was already fated to go, to never come back. Properly speaking, the last sentence of the book would be a rather inane exchange with a friend who appeared “as if coming from another book”, someone who is not mentioned anywhere before in *this* book, but who could very well be that literary initiatrix called Olga Andreu, mainly because of the very obscure content of her words (and the very dark tints of her death: she threw herself out of the window of the apartment we knew in *La Habana*, a death of which we learn in *Mea Cuba*⁷⁰¹). She approaches GCI and tells him that now she knew who the “bald soprano” was, “The bald soprano is death. / The bald soprano is dead? / The bald soprano is death. Well, bye. / She didn’t say more and disappeared at the next corner, to which we had unwittingly walked” (552-553). Next, GCI writes two “Postdates”, the first, “Beginnings of 1961”, in which he casually meets with Silvio in the street, with his American visa in hand, and with whom he talked “for what I thought would be the last time ... I told him about Havana, about how it would become a ghost, about how much I will remember it in the future, about how each past would be its present” (553). The second postdate, “Mid 1962”, is perhaps the weightiest of the two, not so much because it is the longest (and the last), but because of the nature of the encounter. He meets with his beloved but treacherous friend Adriano after he has betrayed him for the second time (now “a political betrayal”, rather than a personal one, the reason why GCI did not break with him definitely). Here, as he is walking (and not in the car Adriano drove, a la Arsenio Cué in *TTT*) with him, GCI starts thinking:

Revolutions are the end of the process of ideas, not the beginning; and they are always a cultural process, never a political one. When politics intervene –or better, politicians—a revolution is not produced but a *coup*, and the cultural process stops so as to give place to a political program. Culture is thereby made into a branch of propaganda. That is, culture’s

⁷⁰¹ On Olga’s very important role in *La Habana* see “La plus que lente”, chapter 4 of *La Habana*. On Olga’s death, see *Mea Cuba*, third Appendix of “Between History and Nothingness”, his brilliant piece dedicated to the relationship (most close) between suicide and Cuba (or being Cuban).

illusions, the dream of reason, they become a nightmare. I thought this as I walked with Adriano by the *Malecón* (554)

After this, Adriano starts a conversation with GCI, a conversation all centered on memories; each sentence a question, and each question starts with a: “Do you remember...?”; all memories GCI recognizes. Adriano closes this conversation by saying: “Do you remember? Those were the best days of our lives. / Yes—I told him—. It is very likely they were the best” (555). Then, right away, after everything that was going to happen in Cuba has already happened, we get a “Colophon” in verse, wherein we learn about everybody’s (or some people’s, but this sounds nicer) fates:

Olga Andreu, José Hernández *Pepe el Loco*,
Miguel Ángel Quevedo, Alberto Mora,
Javier de Varona, Haydée Santamaría
and Osvaldo Dorticós, they all took their own lives.

Adriano died alcoholised in exile
and with acute mental problems.
He failed in several suicide attempts.

Them, he and she, got back together
and they never got apart and travelled much
and went to strange countries

Life was, after all, good with him.

8.2.1 Summary 50

Intimacy can only be achieved when there is life. Intimacy is voided by death. So, to be intimate with an author already presupposes that the author must be alive. This section argues for the “life of the author”, and thus makes the distinction between the dead person and the live author. The author lives in the text written by the writer. The writer is the person who dies, but s/he is also the person who writes and, in doing so, leaves (or can leave) an author behind. The author is the trace that outlives the writer, the trace of the convergence between his/her self and his/her style at the moment in which s/he writes. It is thus that the author is the trace of the event of writing, singular as an event,

but also brought about by a singularity: a writer. The author is what the writer leaves of his/her *preseedence*, of the environing depth that precedes and proceeds the writer long after s/he is gone, but also the environing depth that is necessarily changed by the life of this person, by what s/he did during that period of time in which s/he environed this depth, empty and available before s/he came into this world. As it was argued in the fifth chapter, the voice arises from the convergence between self and style. It is the voice that lives on, that keeps on speaking in the text. This speaking voice is the author. However, in order for this voice to speak, this voice needs of listeners, and this is where the reader comes in. An author can only arise when there is a reader. Without a reader, there is no author. There may be a voice, but it is in latency, not-speaking, for it is not-listened-to. The more intimate the reader gets with an author, the better s/he listens to her/his voice, and hence the clearer does the author speak. The author's life starts where the writer ends, where the writer finishes his/her work for the other to come, for the reader.

8.3 "Where now"

So we know how our story ends, or pretty much so. Much travelling and some homemaking. But there was no return for this couple; for *él* [him] and *ella* [her], Cuba, Havana, stopped to be part of the world, ceased to be an inhabitable space in order to become a habitable memory: Cuba was expunged from the world of things to be inducted into the eternal place of myth. This myth, as all myths, was well-received by language, always hospitable not only to being but also to the shape through which it is expressed, to fiction and myth. The house of language is primarily the house *in* language; the house we build therein, the house of the author, of her fictions, of her myth, of her story, of her self and style—the house wherein all these are voiced as they talk to each other, as they interact, as they converse and engage in dialogues. The paradigmatic ending, the one everybody expects before watching the credits roll by, has been, since the times of Homer, that is, since the dawn of epic, and also those of the dawn of storytelling (*as we know it*), “homecoming”. GCI did not live up to this ending; he could not, and he thus came to terms with it. We are on a one way ticket to the future, to death; but this does not

mean we cannot look back, we cannot reminisce what was left behind, because we can—and very often, we should.

Transcendence knows no circularity. We know the story: the hero leaves home, the hero has many adventures, the hero returns to his home, the hero is ready to govern/rule/lead/etc. over this place to which s/he returned. This is the cycle (and “the circle”?) of the same. No transcendence here, only enhanced returns—echoes in stereo. Transcendence, as Emanuel Levinas would have it, requires us to leave our homes, but not to leave them there, waiting for us to come back; but rather leaving them so as to open a space for another to come⁷⁰². This is where the writer leaves and the reader arrives. Yet, we have already argued that leaving without a trace is for baggy burglars and coy creations. We leave, but something is left there, in what was built: the home that is ours no more, but the house that will always be so. I leave so that you can come, but herein I have left my voice, or part of it, or what I had then, or what I have for today: that much. And then you listen to it, and follow the conversation, and, all of the sudden, you are in a dialogue, recomposing the traces, letting them spread in your ears, eyes... skin like foreign cells coming across your pores; and you catch them, house them, and leave them again, there, in the work where you found them. Yet now they are different. Yet now they shall never be the same.

This is the first way in which the writer returns, as an author, *in* authorship, which is, necessarily, *in* language. The other author, the autonomous one, as we have seen just a chapter ago, is nothing but an allegory, and his return, an allegorical return. An allegory is the unreserved externalization, the unmediated objectification of one’s own fantasies (*phantasies*, phantoms) as they come back within a figure, a shape that has been devoid of all its other attributes, that has become *only* this or that fantasy⁷⁰³. It is unmediated because it is not materialized, but only invested with these ghostly fantasies (desires,

⁷⁰² See Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* 183.

⁷⁰³ On this approach to the concept of allegory, see Crow 125.

yearns, longings, etc.) that are bound to grow and grow, and so the allegory and what it ends up representing. This is the kind of Cuba of so many writers and intellectuals and, ultimately, Cubans of the diaspora—the ones you can find, for instance, in the streets of Miami (like *Calle 8*, also called *Little Havana*), imposing on the object the obligation to resemble that with which it was invested, an utter impossibility. This is the kind of object in which time is petrified, as it wants to preserve pure those qualities found in our fantasies. This is the kind of object that anchors you in a static ground, a static time, an unbearable, perennially deferred ecstasy. This is the kind of memory that never lets you back; the kind that cages transcendence in a stubborn circularity from which no future can be imagined, since no past can be remembered. Resemblance overthrows semblance, and this latter is lost to reminiscence. Forever forgotten.

We have not touched upon the dangerous addiction that prowls these allegorical buildings. It is not time yet. Suffice it to say that an allegorical house makes for a petrified home, for paralysed guests and indolent hosts. This house of language is cemented by its own referent. The referent (ontological) will never coincide with the reference (epistemological), though both constitute each other in our own way of linguistically “giving being” (not Being) to the world, of re-signifying it, and consequently of constantly creating it⁷⁰⁴. We can think *good* and *bad*, we can refer them and to them, but there is no referent for either and, although we can experience them, we can experience neither on its own, purely. The same applies to all kind of referents, such as the sky, of which we never have a *pure* experience, but which we always experience *in relation to*: clouds, the wind, the ocean... and, most importantly, the ground. The Cuba (Havana, youth, etc.) that GCI wrote into existence has no referent other than the book in

⁷⁰⁴ This lack of coincidence between referent and reference is one of the flames that ignited the whole post-structuralist philosophical project. After Heidegger, each post-structuralist philosopher, in his/her own way, tried to make up for this lack of coincidence through deconstructing it (Derrida) or creating symbolic frameworks for it (Julia Kristeva) or imagining new phrases that could create new relations (Jean-Francois Lyotard), and, paraphrasing Zizek once again, so on and so forth. See Derrida, *Writing and Difference*; Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*; Lyotard, *The Differend*.

which it is composed. GCI's return was coloured by this assumption that the more he wrote this Cuba down, the farther its referent was. And he assumed this not with little pain; though, it seems now, with utmost dignity. This is the home to which he kept coming back. This is the house with which he was most intimate and wherein we, his readers, create an intimacy with him, with his place, with his *beloved* Cuba. The Cuba with which I am most familiar is the one that I have visited in GCI's house. I have never been to Cuba, and it seems unlikely I will till its tyranny ceases. But I do feel familiar with it, with some part of it, one that took place within the two decades that went from 1940 to 1960. GCI kept realizing this "imaginative return" to Cuba⁷⁰⁵, and it was this return which allowed him to build, to create a place wherein trust and *eros* could emerge from those surroundings he once took for granted, those he failed to fairly appreciate before, and those he did appreciate from the start (as is the case of La Habana, *his* city). Language, his language, the one he concocted by developing his prematurely unique style, gave him access to a past that proved fertile for as long as he lived: Cuba was made into an inexhaustible resource.

For GCI, writing most of his work in Spanish, a language he learned to love, was a most important link to both his past and his Cuba. There is a piece in *Mea Cuba* called "Spanish is not a dead language", in which his appreciation for this language transcended his initial love for the *Hablanero* dialect (the one to which we owe *TTT*); he says:

Borges, to his later embarrassment, tries to defend a dialect, the Argentine, at the expense of a language, Spanish. I must confess that not only Borges has committed that crime of America. I myself, in an editorial note to *Tres Tristes Tigres*, take on that greater task. Why insult a language to praise a dialect? That happened twenty years ago and today I see it as presumptuous and vain. I did not want to write in a dialect but in an exclusive universal language. I wanted for myself the possibility of Esperanto in the reality of Spanish. But – why write in Cuban, a language dead for me? ... I decided then to look in English for what I had not found in Spanish (454).

GCI is referring here to the English translation of *TTT*, which did not make English language any more universal than his universal (failed) mix of Spanish/*habanero* language. Spanish started to transcend this search for Cuba and constituted a language for

⁷⁰⁵ I am borrowing this image from Tadevosyan Ordukhunyan 167.

his Cuba, the one that still lives in his myths. Spanish started to become “a pleasure ... as a language, it may have its faults, inconveniences and strange manias ... but [it is] an *alba* matter, that language from the dawn [*alba* in Spanish, whence the bilingual dilogy] of consciousness, that mother tongue that limits us but also defines us, that nourishes us and leaves us out of breath, that sets up obstacles for us to leap over in a verbal steeplechase of a rhetoric eternity” (453). GCI’s language, *his* Spanish (and *his* English no less than that) has turned into a language that produces language, whereby he engages in language-production, from which the production of meaning is nothing but a natural outcome of the first. Language, beyond and before what it houses, *must* produce language, just as memories must produce more memories, and meaning more meanings, and pasts pasts; a production in which the self inscribes and ascribes itself, and so the signature it brings forth. This realm of production is not the realm of tautology (this *is* this) but of *autopoiesis* (this produces [more of] this), of self-production.

8.3.1 Summary 51

This section elaborates on how the house of the author, the text, is built in language (in the case of a writer, it is built in the written language). This elaboration means to take what was argued in the previous chapter about the relationship between “house” and “home” one step further: the building of a house for the author (in the work) entails the transcendence of the home for the writer (in the world), as the work becomes the home for both the writer and the author, though differently. For the writer, it is the constant access that s/he has opened to her/his voice that constitutes her/his work a home, which is continuously in the making. As was argued in the previous chapter, homemaking is an activity that never ends. It is possible to argue now that, for the writer, this activity can only be interrupted by the writer’s death, by his/her finite condition. It is because of this transcendence of the home by the house that this home is always an open house for the other to come, who, in this case, would be the reader. This is how the work is always open for re-signification, and how the author is kept alive for as long as s/he is read. Style, the self-ascription and self-inscription of oneself in one’s deeds, is (in the case of

the writer) the device through which language keeps producing language, through which language enters into its own process of re-signification.

8.4 “So far”

So, back here: do you trust me better now? We know that familiarity and, ultimately, intimacy help a great deal—but this is not all. What do you need to trust me? I think that if I were to trust you in the way in which, for instance, I trust in GCI as an author, then I must say that I would need you, first of all, to be your own self. I should try to explain this last idea. We usually assume that to “be one’s own”, to “own oneself”, one must be aware of oneself, to be there; and we customarily think of this awareness in terms of being conscious. So, you would trust what I say (particularly being this an academic exercise) inasmuch as I *know* what I am talking about, which, at the very least, means that I am conscious of what I say. What about the sincerity in terms of authenticity we have been speaking of within the last three to four chapters (I do not remember well)? Would not this count as a criterion for trusting me? “well, that is very nice from you, but you must understand this is, above all, an academic enterprise, so in spite of your good intentions and all your authenticity, we need to know that you know what you say”, you would say—maybe. We have said in the past chapter that this has been the paradigm behind the canonical understanding of the autonomous author, which, we said, needed to die (or to be murdered); and I do not plan to say less for any writing enterprise.

The writer who writes, the writer *while* writing, tends to lose himself as he lets himself loose; as he loosens his pen so as to fasten his style. This loss could be very well identified with a loss of consciousness, where the writer stops being “s/he who gives directions” to dissolve in the very directions that s/he takes. Yet this loss of consciousness does not give the writer any less authority over what s/he writes; on the contrary, this loss, this dissolution is what really gives her authority over her writing. As Paul Bowles phrases it: “The author is not at a steering wheel” (31); s/he is rather *in* a blot of ink,

within a thick, liquid flux where s/he is dissolved, but where s/he never disappears. This dissolution, actually, is what makes the author appear, for what is dissolved in the text is his voice; this latter composed by those traces the writer leaves in writing. Therefore, it is this dissolution that constitutes the writer's authority over her writing.

I trust myself, and I do so way better as I build this authority over myself. I trust myself because I have been intimate enough with what I do to be trusting. This intimacy is in the same vein of dissolving with what I do *while* I do it to such a point that, for an instant, I *am* what I *do*. We should thus accept that there is no meaning without *eros*, for how could I incarnate without love, how could I engage without loving (this is, again, not incarnation but mimicry, a distinction that was clearly made in the second chapter). Now can there be any freedom without any trust? If we agree that there cannot be, then we might agree in that no ethics can arise in the absence of mutual trust and, in this very way, of trusting oneself. If I am not trustworthy, how could it occur to me that it is good (positive, productive, useful... meaningful) for me and/or for anybody else to be free: I should very much rather be controlled and you better keep an eye (or two, or three, or a million of them) over me because I may very well betray you or myself at any given time. The meaning of authority, in these terms, is self-confidence, trust in yourself, trusting that you are trustworthy, and therefore trusting in one another. This is why sincerity, *authentically* expressing oneself (a la fifth chapter), is an ethical *must* in our having authority over anything at all⁷⁰⁶. The other kind of authority, the kind that only takes into account the autonomous agent, and hence the autonomous author, the one that credits it all to our consciousness, this kind of authority is inexpressive and primarily worries itself with dominating, imposing, conquering... controlling everything and anything that needs to be controlled, which is everything and anything that is not trustworthy; that is, you and me and everybody else.

⁷⁰⁶ John Russon traces a beautiful analogy between authentic expression in relation to authority and ethics with music and rhythm. See Russon 11.

So, it is clear that authority, the one we are speaking about (I almost wrote “spanking about”, but this is for the other kind of authority!) is not to be derived from consciousness, but rather from sincerity. Let us listen to what Helene Cixous has to tell us about her own writing: “the author proceeds in a consistent blindness, which produces effects that can be good or bad. The fact that the author can perceive his or her darkness doesn’t change the quality of the darkness. / It can also happen that the author will kill himself or herself writing. The only book that is worth writing is the one we don’t have the strength or the courage to write. The book that hurt us (we who are writing), that makes us tremble, redden, bleed” (*Three Steps in the Ladder of Writing* 32). Yes, indeed, and we cannot write this kind of text, we cannot write in this way, stripping ourselves bare, by being conscious; we can only do so—and this is a most courageous step—by letting ourselves go. When we write in this way, we write at the edge of our flesh, almost, nearly, virtually, practically, not quite but just about becoming others. The order that we produce there where we compose, all these organizations we create as we produce this order, is always already other than ourselves; it is not in us, it is not us; no matter how much it affects us, in spite of the lengths we have travelled and the pains we have taken, this thing, this order is other—in writing I am *othering* myself and *ordering* myself as another, *as if* there was another, which there is not. What you listen, as you listen to my voice, is within “a steady stream of erased imperatives” (*Dreaming by the Book* 35), as Elaine Scarry very well notes. But these are not imperatives that impose you something, nor are they imperatives that yell at you, to which you subdue because, well, it is in a book [not yet my friend, this is just a thesis]; it is not the kind of imperative that requires your integrity (whether you want to give it up or not, as when you resort to an “authority quote” to win an argument); it is rather the kind of imperative that shows you a path to follow up to its final stop.

If it is true, as we have agreed in chapter 2, that the *ethos* of a work is to produce more work, and that it is thus that the work works, then the authority over this work is not over its production; the authority over this work is, in turn, over its *letting work*. Writing, as we

are approaching it, as I have been doing this whole time, is a form of allowing oneself to write, of letting oneself go so as to write, and therefore of letting the work work. Reading, if we follow this stream of thought, would be a letting yourself go in what you read, of dissolving in it, of witnessing how the work works as you work through it. It follows then that the *ethos* of reading is to produce more readings. What we are doing, writer and reader respectively, with this *letting the work* work is to *authorize* it—whence our respective authorities. I come, I write, I leave the author with whom I converse, the one who *others* and *orders* this working space, the one who hosts in this place. You come, you read, you find the author with whom you converse, etc. “Meaning”, in Spanish (as in French), is *sentido* (*sens* in French), which is also “direction”; and this latter is not only about a pathway but also about directing, leading, setting clear directions for others to come with you. So this is what is authorized, meaning. The reader authorizes a writing and a writer a reading; yet neither the writer authorizes *the* reader nor the reader *the* writer—they must have been there, reading and writing, before their corresponding arrivals.

This authority we are speaking about is hence an authority over a transformation, a *poietic* authority that transcends all other authorities. We are transforming ourselves, and we have authorized this transformation. Now, please do not confuse “to authorize” with “to decide” or “to choose”, because there is no such thing. Once *in* the exercise of writing, choices are few and decisions nil. We just open ourselves to do so because we follow the compelling call to do so. If I kept reading GCI, this is because I heard sound and clear his voice stringing mine, resounding in mine, asking me to go on and on and on. I have read GCI because I could not have done otherwise.

When we read, we travel—and we travel as much as we read. A strange author is like a foreign land. You come and start to read and, maybe, you become a frequent visitor. What you cannot become (or you should not become) is an immigrant; a homeless looking for permanent residency in another’s voice. This is not so much because you may

exhaust the resources therein, you might as well enrich them a great deal; but this is not the point. If you do become a permanent resident of another's voice you will never find out (or develop) yours. As happens with all immigrants, all readers have an "accented identity" when they arrive in this foreign land of another author. As happens with all immigrants, the accent is never really lost (I know GCI lost his from Gibara, but even he admits that after some time it would show and, more importantly, that as he grew up [and stop worrying about not passing as a hick] both accents mixed up⁷⁰⁷). As happens with all immigrants, you lose your native accent while you still have an accent in the foreign tongue. So, as happens with all immigrants, those readers looking for permanent residency in other author's voice become neither one nor the other; they might become both, but that would mean they had opened a house of their own. Then, in front of a strange author, a reader searches for those "oases of intimacy" with which the author can provide her in his text—oases that are more ardently sought as we move in a desert of estrangement⁷⁰⁸.

When we write, we travel—and we travel as much as we write. Travellers we are all, but travellers that know themselves free to travel; confident of themselves, enough so to authorize other writings, other readings: other destinations, routes and plans. This is a travel that requires no passport, no papers, no bureaucratic identities, but the freedom in ourselves to let us go, to let us travel, to authorize ourselves a leap from here to there. This is the kind of person who has authority over her work. This is the kind of person who has authority over herself. "Free man' is someone who succeeds in developing inner freedom, independent of external politics" (342), vents Svetlana Boym; something with which I agree; I believe this is the kind of freedom that GCI attained if we understand this "inner freedom" as "freedom of creation", as *authorizing* whatever we find fit; always already responsible for it, for letting ourselves go.

⁷⁰⁷ See Pereda 127-134.

⁷⁰⁸ I owe this terrific analogy to Svetlana Boym's image of those "oases of intimacy" sought by the immigrant, always already accented: accented in her mother tongue, accented in her foreign language. See Boym 336.

8.4.1 Summary 52

This section deals with a re-conceptualization of authority over oneself that goes beyond self-awareness, self-consciousness, intentionality and/or autonomy. Trust can only arise when there is this authority over oneself. This authority, it is argued, only arises when the person is able to let her/himself loose in what s/he does. Doing such a thing entails that the person is confident enough in herself so as to infuse herself in her style, and her style in her deeds. The idea of dissolving oneself in what one does that was introduced in the first chapter, and further developed in the fourth, finds in this section its full completion: in order to dissolve oneself in what one does, one must trust in one's authority to do so. The author emerges from this authority, for it is the voice of the author what is dissolved in the text that the writer writes. It is therefore said that this dissolution is, in all extent, an erotic act. This argument completes the claim, made in the first chapter, about the "erotic life of the reader", for this is only possible if there was, before, an "erotic life for the writer". It is through this eroticism that the author lives and continues to live. It is argued in this vein that freedom, as we know it, is founded on this authority over oneself.

8.5 "Coming next"

Now then, in all reality, do you trust me better? what about yourself? do you find yourself trustworthy? If so, it is such a relief you have kept reading so far; whether you trust me better or not; you, in this sense, have the priority. But, in all reality, can we trust it? reality I mean. For the scientist-empirical-positivist frame of mind in which we live on a day to day basis, this is a rather troublesome question, quite hard to tackle indeed. If reality can be trusted insofar as there is a referent which we call "reality", then we will be in dire straits when using the auxiliary "will" (which is also a noun and a verb in its own right—not to mention that, when capitalized, it is a familiar calling for William [Guillermo in Spanish]), for we *will* find the future most difficult to grasp, let alone to trust it. The future is real, so long as we are still alive, for no life can be lived (believed?) devoid of

future. But the future takes no place, we have no referent of it⁷⁰⁹, only intuitions reinforced by the habit of always having had one (every day, every minute, every second of our lives); for, when it does take place, it is not future anymore, but present, now, and then, as fast as it came, it is past, it *took place*, with no clear referent either, but only as memory. Yet, we might find it is easier to externalize the past, to transform it into “referents” (i.e., photographic albums, documents, records, etc.); still, we cannot do so with the future; neither speculations nor predictions can aspire to the character of *taking place*; they are nothing but present utterances of imaginary scenarios, and they are as real (in terms of referent) as parallel universes, unicorns or Hobbiton. The future, in these terms, is nothing but a reference that keeps actualizing itself.

Then again, this is not the reality we have been speaking about, and therefore this is not the future I have been promising you since the very first line of this work. “And so I will”, I do remember: and so I will. The reality we have been speaking of is always already ingrained in language, myth, and it is therefore historical; the reality about which we have been speaking is always already expressive and enmeshed in expressivity, always already responsive and related to others’ responses. The referent, all on its own, is inert, and thus it is not any more historical than a black hole or a quark. There is no way we can prove whether the referent, all on its own (if such a thing is even imaginable), is temporal. For us, the referent is real only until it is incorporated to our own history, only until it *has* a history and only until these histories interconnect. It is this historical interconnection that opens reality towards a future of its own; the one accorded by our accumulated and transmitted interactions with our surroundings in years and years and centuries and centuries and millennia, from one generation to the next⁷¹⁰. This *generation* is what manifests itself as the promise that the future spawns.

⁷⁰⁹ For the many problems that emerge from confusing “reality” with the “referent” (and a thorough critique to positivism), see Lyotard 28.

⁷¹⁰ For reality as being primarily expressive, and in consequence historical, see Russon 128.

We can trust the future, we should trust the future, just in the same way in which we can trust ourselves. The future is a promise, or so it manifests itself. We *know* how to promise because we have always had (before identity over time, before selves, before animas, souls, *preseedences*) a future. To make a promise is not (as Austin would have it) a performative made in the present (first-person, indicative etc.; e.g., “I promise”⁷¹¹); it is mainly to keep it in time, to assume that tomorrow I will still be here, and so will you (to whom I promise), and that we shall remember this promise in order to honour it. Self-constancy, as Paul Ricoeur points out, is as important to promising as sameness of character, which means the possibility of keeping this promise, that is, of preserving it somewhere safe in our selves till it comes the time to honour it. Promising grants us the possibility of always coming back to it, for as long as we still hold it. A promise thus “opens an *interval of sense* that remains to be filled in” (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 124), an interval that, in time, in the future that keeps approaching, coming, arriving, transforming itself into our pasts, finds itself fulfilled in its due time, just as our very lives are when our time is due. The future keeps promising life as it gradually shows us our deaths.

A promise is always given to another, even if it is given by oneself to oneself (already as other)⁷¹². Keeping our word is only possible because we still have words to utter, because we still have a life to word. To “give one’s word” thus turns into the most finished form available to us for manifesting, for materializing the trust of others, since the others count on us keeping this word. Can we rely in this same way on the future? As it comes today, after so many years of catalyzing it through technologies, of investing in it constant demands according to the wrong assumption that the future should always “bring us more”, “be better” and “better ourselves”, that we should “break past records”, and then “keep breaking them”, that there is always “*more* to come”, it seems that we have

⁷¹¹ See Austin, mainly the fifth lecture.

⁷¹² It is no coincidence that Ricoeur finds in promising (and in keeping a promise) the highest expression of the identity of the *ipse* (the narrative self, the self as already other). See Ricoeur 267-268.

outsourced our futures—that we cannot but expect the future in the next five to ten minutes. However, this feeling is not new, not from *today*; it had accompanied most of our technological breakages, whose covert side have always been that of harbingers of the apocalypse. All apocalyptic promises have failed to show up. All the ill-predictions issued in this age of “endings” and “deaths”, from “the end of history” to the death of every living thing that stands, have fallen flat on their faces. And there is a very commonsensical rationale for this falling: if such a promise were ever fulfilled, who will be there to validate the prediction?

Many Cuban exiles and citizens of the diaspora have learned to see the future as a herald of homecoming and an industrious source of nostalgia. Ricardo L. Ortiz draws to our attention the melancholic shades of the toast that Cubans of the diaspora (mainly those in Miami) have every New Year’s Eve: “next year in Havana”; a toast that refers to the *next* year that never comes, thus the year to come, the archetypal coming for the exile: the archetype of return: “a redemptive and impossible promise” (R. Ortiz 63). This return entails the whole package, a return in time when they lived prosperous lives in Cuba, and therefore the return of their states and capital. This toast, Ortiz points out, is symptomatic of one of the most common vices (an addiction actually) of these Cubans: the addiction to nostalgia. This toast expresses the fantasy of an allegorical return, which corresponds and “feeds their congruent fantasies of reunification and restitution fantasies on which they’re hooked and of which they take ‘hits’ at least as often as they drink coffee” (69). And these “hits” are what make the future more bearable and their exile less painful. This is one of the dangers of nostalgia, particularly of the bad one, about which we have spoken in the two previous chapters: the one that aims at the restitution of an original state of purity (or prosperity or whatever fantasy you may prefer), the one that operates within the logic of a former utopia, the garden of Eden lost after eating the fruit from the tree of communism; the one that operates within the infinitive verbal form, *regresar* [to return], suspended in time—a suspension that helps to explain the addiction: “our addiction to nostalgia is an odd form of amnesia indeed” (73, fn. 40); remembering so as to forget,

fantasising so as to varnish (and vanish) the past. This is indeed a return to something that never occurred, that never was, a return that was paved by the way in which the Cuban intellectuals of the 1920's embraced Hegelianism; the return of sublation, of negation that is later synthesised with what was formerly sublated, namely, the thesis⁷¹³. This promise, repeatedly proffered and indefinitely deferred, prepared the way for Marxist “messianism”⁷¹⁴, which turned Hegel's epistemology into a class-struggle. The metaphorical return (as GCI did all along his literature) has not been accepted by these Cubans, which, paradoxically, is what keeps preventing their literal return to the island: as long as they keep issuing this impossible promise sieved by these fundamentalist fantasies, their return (of any kind) will be rendered void—again and again.

But now that we are speaking of allegorical promises, let us speak a little bit of this Messiah of the *Sierra* called Fidel Castro. After the revolution was “won”, and after the *barbudos* [the bearded ones, as they called the “revolutionaries” at that time] changed the lodgings of the *Sierra Maestra* for the quarters of *El Vedado*, Fidel Castro was interviewed in “the privacy of his home” (a typical suburban-like set) for the U.S. television⁷¹⁵, just a day after Batista's flight (Castro was not even in Havana). In this interview, given to Edward R. Murrow, Fidel, in his pyjamas and, at some point, accompanied by his eldest son, Fidelito (who speaks perfect English, and was there

⁷¹³ Ortiz explains that Heberto Padilla was one of the first Cuban intellectuals who observed this veering to Hegelianism in the Cuban intellectuals of the 1950's, which, says Padilla, paved the way for Fidel and the revolution to victoriously enter Havana and seize it the way he did. Rafael Rojas, however, traces this yearning for “synthesis” in the Cuban imaginary way, way back, and locates it in, mainly, José Martí's political essays [i.e., Rojas, *El Arte de la Espera* and *Tumbas sin Sosiego*], a yearning that will be later supported by Fernando Ortiz's anthropological research and that the Cuban erudite will transform with his concept of *transculturation*; a concept that, by the 1950's, was not as popular as nationalism (a la Mañach, for instance, who was proposing to search for the Cuban national “spirit” [a la Hegel]), which kept peaking.

⁷¹⁴ As was deconstructed by Derrida in his *Specters of Marx*.

⁷¹⁵ He gave several interviews for the American media at that time, notably, the one he conceded to Ed Sullivan (who saw him as “a very fine and smart young man”) merely 11 days after Batista's surrender *in absentia*.

greeted through a card by his former schoolmates in New York), is asked when is he going to visit the U.S. again, to which Fidel answers that he will “delighted” do so “as soon as I have the chance”; Murrow, jokingly, asks him if he will do it “with or without the beard”, to which a smiling Castro responds that, if he does it soon, it will be “wihs [sic] the beard”, since “my beard mean [sic] many things to my country. When we have fulfilled our promise of good government [sick], I will cut my beard”. To his credit, he has honoured this promise till this day.

“Nostalgia can be both a social disease and a creative emotion, a poison and a cure. The dreams of imagined homelands cannot and should not come to life” (354), writes Svetlana Boym to Russia with love. The promise of the future is one that should keep actualizing itself at the same time in which it is deferred. Promises only concern the survivors, us who can see and appreciate that there was not a time when we were not nostalgic, because there was not a time before the past: the ex-past must never come to life—and the same applies to the post-future. There is no way back once you start remembering, you will always feel nostalgic. Yet you can perfectly learn to accept this emotion with responsibility, with utmost care; just as you can learn how to stop waiting for the future with anticipation, to take it as it comes, when it comes. “Always the promise of return”, punctuates Derrida (“The Deaths of Roland Barthes” 286); yet this promise must never be fulfilled, it can only be actualized as it is uttered, for what comes back is already other and has come back to an already different place; a difference that gives us another perspective on singularity: the irreplaceable place, the *then* and *there*, the other “once upon a time”. We are in front of a different kind of “anamnesis” here, for we are always (so long as we live) bearing the present knowledge of past incarnations, and with each, we keep beginning anew, already others to ourselves; yet always familiar to others. The promise to begin again always remains there: in the future; it always “remains to come” (298).

All promises contain this “to come” implicit in their annunciations, for all promises announce something that shall come, that shall arrive, even when it never does. In this manner, there is no self-referential promise, for all promises, insofar as announcing something, are issued to others, for others: they all comprise the gift of the future in our lives. Emotions, for instance, cannot be promised, not sincerely at least. We cannot promise to someone: “I will love you”, or worse, “I will always love you”, for these kind of things are not for you to know in advance⁷¹⁶. Accordingly, compassion is not something that can be promised, and it is not something that should ever be promised; we should act upon it when it arises, when we feel it, when the other’s *pathos* arouses ours, when we find ourselves already sharing it. A certain form of acting can be promised though, and actually, it can be granted (which is not the same as promising). Solidarity, for instance, can be granted beforehand, in the face of necessity, hardship or plain common sense; but this can be granted independently of our feeling compassionate, of our finding ourselves sharing our *pathos* with others. This, instead, should be done because we are responsible, because we care, because we listen to this responsibility as a compelling call we can ignore, but we cannot definitely pretend we have not listened to. What we grant and what we promise differ in that the latter needs not to be fulfilled, but rather honoured; as it may be indefinitely deferred, as it may remain forever “to come”.

We can conceive of this “to come” in the same way in which we can conceive of the future and in the same way in which we can, ultimately, conceive of death: by always bringing it back. The future is conceivable to us because of all those other futures that have become past before *this* coming one; and we keep bringing those past futures back so as to organize, order and *other* this one “to come”. The *other* future, the one that is not organized or ordered is the one we dream about, the one in which we talk with our dead, with our beloved ones far and away; it is the one we bring back as we let go. This is the future that concerns us here, the one we do not expect to fulfill its promise, but the one

⁷¹⁶ Despite what Miguel Bosé, Javier Solis, Lino Borges or Silvio Rodríguez, each singing different versions for the verbal tense *te amaré* [I will love you], say.

whose promise we keep honouring over and over again, every time we look back, and forward, and far and farther: every time we dare not to look away. This is the future where we come from, the future we find in *poesy* and enact in poetry, *poietically*; the future that turns the “to come” into a “coming to” (language, life, love, *eros*... death). This is the future where we keep coming from.

There where we originated, from wherein we first emerged, even before we did, was, at some point, a future. All of us were future endeavors, future facts at some point. Beginnings, not endings, are what the future keeps promising us, even when it is not us who shall begin again. This, as Hannah Arendt says, is our real capacity, the capacity to begin, to initiate, there where there is still time to initiate and to begin something new: “Beginning, before it comes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man, politically, it is identical with man’s freedom ... this beginning is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed every new man” (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 479). This is the ultimate freedom we may ever know. Once Immanuel Kant said that we should treat every human being as an end in itself and not as a means, and from there he founded his ethics (*Critique of Practical Reason* 141-152). But how much greater would it be if we treated everyone as a beginning, a begetter that was at some point begotten: a living promise.

8.5.1 Summary 53

The discussion about the future is taken once again at this point of the chapter. The future is discussed as having no referent and yet as being “real”. It is argued that the reality of the future depends on the promise that everyone has of it. “Having a future” means, by necessity, that this promise is still valid. In this sense, the future is a promise that never finally arrives, but that, consequently, keeps actualizing itself every time it becomes one’s present, and then one’s past. Promising and keeping one’s word thus transcends self-constancy. It is here that this promise of the future is contrasted with the “allegorical promise” of the return as a *telos*, as the restitution of what is conceived as an “original” or “pure state”. It is said in this context that the promise is bound to fail when it is filled

with content. The promise of the future, in this way, is never supposed to bring about its own end; it rather brings about a new beginning every time it is actualized, every time it comes. Every person should thus be treated as a beginning and as a begetter, as someone who can always begin, beget and bring about a new future.

8.6 “Coming soon”

So the promise is not about endings, about a constant obligation of fulfilment pending upon its issuing, but rather about beginnings. “The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, ‘natural’ ruin is ultimately the fact of natality ... the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born ... Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow human affairs faith and hope ... Faith and hope for the world” (*The Human Condition* 247), exclaims Hannah Arendt for the new generations. To lose hope does not mean then not to be able to see *any* future, but, on the contrary, it means to be able to see one and only one, which is how the promise dissipates in thin air. I believe we are at the point of this dissertation in which it is imperative for me to use the “F” word: “Faith”—even though Hannah Arendt just did it for me. One future means no faith, but expectation, illusion, fantasy... finality, *telos*—and we would do anything to reach it, better sooner than later: to reach that monolithic future we have planned for so long, or that was planned for us way before we arrived to this world. This is one of the most precious (and precocious) presents from homogenized secularization: a rational *telos* (a contradiction in terms, I know, but bear with me, trust me). “Modern man, when he lost the certainty of a world to come, was thrown upon himself and not upon this world; far from believing that the world might be potentially immortal, he was not even sure if it was real” (Arendt 320). To lose one’s faith means to lose this promise of a “to come”, which means also to lose the promise of a “coming to”; for reality, and with it the world, loses all its density when it is devoid of faith, and, obviously then, devoid of trust.

Living without this promise is like speeding non-stop; sooner or later, you will run out of gas. This, for instance, is what happened with the pop art era (as happened with the rock and roll era a decade before): it lost its steam. This loss might be very well explicated as a consumption of faith; the consumption of every corner, of every angle of this promise that is rendered unique, petrified, inevitably coming, turned into an allegory that, initially, produced excessive energies, larger than life personas and overwhelming life-styles. Yet this consumption also begot, after some time passed, paunchy artists (musicians were the most prototypical), incapable to find their “creative energy” again, repeating themselves *ad nauseam*, becoming either performing anachronisms (i.e., *Kiss*) or channels of nostalgia (e.g., *The Rolling Stones*) or just plainly dead (you know the motto: live hard, die young—a la Basquiat).

In terms of groups, or very large groups (and even larger ideas) as is the case of nations, this consumption of faith by means of a *telos* is no more forgiving. In Cuba, the revolution, as GCI very well phrased it, transformed the *esperanza* [hope] into *espera* [waiting]⁷¹⁷. In contrast, progress-led countries (you know the type, neoliberal democracies with blond eyes) have turned this *esperanza*, this hope, led by this *telos* of “the better world”, into a savage persecution, a steeplechase that, so far, has resembled more the silent movies directed by Mack Sennett than the valiant enterprise progressists have wanted to portray in their love songs to technology. Progress is for go-getters, whereas totalities are for come-waiters. Progress, one of the major “achievements” of the 18th century process of secularization, does not tolerate delays, less so does it tolerate waiting. This does not mean that there is no hope. On the contrary, progress is all made of hope, but hope is never emptied of representations, particularly of representations of the future, how the future (we are hoping for) should look like. Waiting, by itself, is emptied of all representations of the future; you wait for, well, you do not even know what—this sounds too religious-like, too “faithsy” (sorry, but if “artsy” is a common adjective

⁷¹⁷ On the exploration of this “transformation” and its relation to suicide, see GCI’s “Between History and Nothingness” in *Mea Cuba*.

nowadays, I see no reason as to why faith cannot have a banal qualifier of its own)⁷¹⁸. The problem with totalitarianisms is that totality (or the secret to it) is in the hands of a very small group in which, typically, there is *only one* who has absolute access to this secret that should, ideally, tell us what are we waiting for—an “only one” who is usually called “Maximum Leader”⁷¹⁹ or “Royal Highness”⁷²⁰ or “The Supreme”⁷²¹ etc. The secular God of totalitarianisms, incarnated in the figure of the leader, also moves in mysterious ways.

As we have seen in chapter 3, this yearning for a worthy teleology cost Cuba a continuous state of revolution that was initiated with the independence and was then followed by one *coup* after another. Cuba has been eternally entering into its final stage. Even Fidel Castro, in the first interview he conceded to Ed Sullivan, said “*this* will be the last dictatorship in Cuba”; we never knew if he was referring to Batista’s or to his. The construction of a nation, with its ulterior construction of a national pride, usually construed as nationalism, demands from its flock constant “ontological proofs of their faith” (Rojas, *Isla sin fin* 227). This is one of the main reasons why Eugenics peaked within the first part of the Twentieth Century, because the possibility of transforming the transmission of a tradition (a whole cosmology and set of practices, you may call it “a culture” if you want) into a collective immanence imprinted in what was thought as all

⁷¹⁸ On the difference between *esperanza* [hope] and *espera* [waiting] from the viewpoint of progress-secularization vs. religious-advents, see Rojas, *El Arte de la Espera* 146.

⁷¹⁹ One of Fidel Castro’s favorite nicknames.

⁷²⁰ In Spanish, *Su Alteza Serenísima*, which is how Antonio López de Santa Anna, a Mexican petit dictator (he held office more than ten times, but never managed to stay in it for more than one straight year) and the protagonist of one of the most turbulent political times in this country (which is to say quite a lot) that culminated with the “sale” of all of Mexico’s northern territories to the U.S. In addition to declaring himself “lifelong dictator” every time he held office (a declaration that must sure have sound like a joke by the sixth or seventh time), he used to ask (require, better said) that everybody should address him with this very epithet.

⁷²¹ Unfortunately nothing to do with *Motown*, but more with *mort-town*, this refers to the Paraguayan dictator, José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia (who held office, almost devoid of all “foreign influence”, for nearly 25 years) who called himself thus, and, consequently, everybody else had to.

living organisms' essences made referents (i.e., the gene) appeared as the very possibility of materializing the "national spirit" into every single human being (who was part of this community, and worthy to be so, of course). It was as if all national destinies (that is, *the* worthy teleology) could be imprinted into every person's genes even before the person could start her interaction with her surroundings. This proved a failure that brought us many perverted exercises which we should not mention here so as not to unsettle our stomachs. It should suffice to say that within this period of time (that spanned all the way till the second half of the 20th century) many "new" humans were confectioned, and every "newness" was so determined according to a recycled *telos* (remember Che Guevara's "New Man"? I do too, unfortunately).

Thus, the organization of a group (or of anything that lives, particularly if we admit that the principle of life is organization) as a function of a *telos*, preferably a glorious one, comes with many mirages. Returning to Cuba, it is still said that the "*Cuba Moderna*" [Modern Cuba], a trope that appears since the very first programs of this country even before its independence⁷²², was the pinnacle of Cuba's entrance into the career for progress and was interrupted by the radical catalyst supposed by the 1959 revolution. The idea of progress is what could be understood as the natural offspring of Hegelian historicism⁷²³. Progress was this motion towards absoluteness ignited by History (with Hegel, every "H" must be capitalized), which gradually spawned the assumption that every movement forward (the only *real* possible movement) in time was going to be for the best, that the future can just get better and better. This, for instance, has been behind

⁷²² This trope can be found in texts that go from José de la Luz y Caballero to José Martí and then go all the way to Jorge Mañach and even to quite moderate scholars such as Rafael Rojas.

⁷²³ See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is of particular interest to see the well-known and most celebrated passage of the dialectic of the "Master and Servant". For a thorough critique of this stage of Hegel's dialectics, which is behind Hegel's conceptualization of "the Absolute", see Honneth, mainly part 1.

many of the scandalous misunderstandings of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution⁷²⁴. This is where the so-called "faith in progress" comes from—an utter oxymoron⁷²⁵. Even if the "better and better" of progress has no precise shape, its leading our course to follow determines a most distinguishable teleology, a most clear finality; its blueprint (that of the "New Order" that the "True Revolution" shall bring⁷²⁶) has been more or less programmed by the absolute certainty of an absolute unification of all mankind into a common *telos*; now, what this "common *telos*" (contained in this "absolute unification") looks like is not for us to know; we should just have to logically (and teleologically) assume that since it is absolute, and thus the final step of a progressive process of bettering, it must be the best of the best.

We have already spoken about Cuba's own inferiority complex within all this progress at which it, as an independent nation, arrived rather late. We have also said that for some Cuban historians, this inferiority complex was compensated with a delirium of grandeur. Part of this delirium manifested in the *telos* that this nation set for itself, as they thought of themselves as the secular version of the "chosen people", with a "glorious fate" to fulfill⁷²⁷. This "glorious destiny" has been exploited by virtually every politician that has held office since this country is independent from Spain. However, as it comes, politics does not operate in the deepest layers of our humanities; it never reaches our *preseences*. It is because of this that human communities and singular persons have

⁷²⁴ Notably, behind Herbert Spencer's translation of Darwinism into the social sciences (something that Darwin himself rejected in his time, hiding none of his quarrels with "Mr. Spencer"), but it has also been behind many of our more popular assumptions that "evolution" means "better and better". On the foundations of what has gotten the infamous (and infectious) name of "social Darwinism", see Spencer, *On Social Evolution*, particularly volume 1. For some context on Darwin's quarrel with Spencer, see Darwin 20-21. On a paramount critique on this very (and most infectious) stream of Darwinism that has gone all the way to "Darwinitis" (a very, very dangerous disease), see Tallis, with particular attention on chapter 4.

⁷²⁵ See, for instance, Jorge Mañach's use of this "faith" as erecting a national spirit. See Mañach, *Historia y Estilo* 65.

⁷²⁶ As is noticeable in Mañach 99.

⁷²⁷ A critique to this trope can be found in Sorel 51.

shown themselves to be much more flexible and adaptable to changes than it was first envisioned by our social scientists⁷²⁸. This is also why so many people can change their creeds, their political views, their ideologies (if there still is such a thing)... in sum, their *telos* and, most importantly, their views as to what should the *telos*, the destiny of a large group of people (from a family to humanity as such), be. And this is what is so difficult about teleologies, that they cannot conflict without eliciting a need, almost an obligation to dominate others (however covert these obligations may be). And this is what irritates other people so much. Nobody wants to receive lessons on *telos*, which, supposedly, rule and shape convictions, beliefs, assumptions, projects, etc. This is what has been behind every colonialist's agenda and behind every form of indoctrination and conversion and all kind of conquests. As I have already argued in the previous chapter (with Fernando Ortiz) this domination is only achieved by means of violence, but it never really penetrates the innermost depths of our humanity; the processes of *transculturation* and of *mestizaje* occur whether we like it or not, and even if it only occur in relatively small degrees, these are usually not insignificant: Is "Canada" an English or a French word? Oh, it is a native one, right!

Nonetheless, just because this *telos* does not penetrate our innermost cores and we are always already plastic, flexible, able to adapt to changes (whether we like them or not), this does not mean that this *telos* cannot do a great deal of harm and determine many, many lives—or their ends thereafter. Millions of people have died in the name of a *telos*. Millions and millions of people have been murdered, tortured, terrorized by other people

⁷²⁸ Here, I am referring mainly to the father of Sociology (if for artificial insemination): Auguste Comte, who was one of the first who translated the whole language of biology into that of politics (as the space wherein social relations were organized), and who hence believed that this, politics, determined to a great degree who we are—the reason for which he (but this was more of a common place at that time, well, to be frank, even today) envisioned his whole theory on the basis of "more advanced civilizations" in relation to better developed political systems ("positive systems", which thereby were more productive and also produced better individuals, whose main belief would be in humanity itself, that is, in the progress of humanity). For a more detailed account, see Comte 348-359.

who had a different *telos*. Pan-movements are as contagious as utopias (*telos* with imaginary geographies)—and just as damaging. Of what we are speaking here is of a form of negative *spreadssion* that results in a cultural metastasis⁷²⁹, which manifests as wars, genocides and just every imaginable kind of violence. We very well know that to resort to this *telos*, to this future that must be fulfilled, to the fate that must be accomplished, when having an argument (or when developing one) through which someone finds a justification as to why you or anybody else is obliged to do what you (or...) do, is nothing but a piece of cheap demagoguery. We know that “history does not absolve us”⁷³⁰; not you, not anybody else.

In the Twentieth Century, this metastasis occurred on many fronts, one of which (perhaps the main one) was the media. The media served as the main channel through which any form of *telos*, in the guise of “dreams”, was exported and, ultimately, contracted by people of very different cultures and in very different contexts. It was therefore not strange to see many, many immigrants who felt enraged, betrayed to the point of fury, absolutely unforgiving toward their host countries (USA is an all-time favorite) when

⁷²⁹ For this metaphor of “metastasis” in relation to globalization, see Baudrillard 93. On Pan-movements and some of their harms, see Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, chapter 8.

⁷³⁰ I am paraphrasing here Fidel Castro’s (in)famous words. The legend goes that he declaimed these inspired sentence after being sentenced to serve time in prison because of the assault to the Moncada Barracks (among other charges). Batista, who was more benign with this youngster (who, in all reality, wanted to avoid the bad press of killing him and the other conspirators; but who also underestimated them—a big, big mistake), only sent him to prison and later gave these rascals a truce through which they were able to flee the country (first to the U.S., then to Mexico) and organize what would become the rebel movement at the *Sierra Maestra*; the movement that would finally overthrow Batista. There is a popular joke in Cuba that brilliantly sentences Castro’s blabbing: “history may absolve you, but geography condemns you”.

these were not able to live up to their dreams⁷³¹. Legions of immigrants exchanged their broken illusions for a long-time resentment against their not-quite-much-host-countries.

Just as happens with utopias, these kind of “dreams”, of *telos* embodied in “glorious fates”, an “evolved humanity”, etc., confuse symbolization with materialization—something that most religions make very clear. In the *Abakuá* religion, for instance, cutting down a *Ceiba* (a most magnificent, powerful tree) is not to attack, to violate what the *ceiba* stands for, what it symbolizes (or represents, but this latter is a much weaker word), but rather cutting down the divinity dwelling therein; for the *ceiba* does not symbolizes divinity; the *ceiba materializes* divinity⁷³². What this divinity *is* (not what it stands for) is a secret, just as the very *telos* to which all *Abakuás* aspire: this is the very source of mystery, and mystery is only for the initiated, for those who go beyond belief, for those who *become* the materialization (the incarnation?) of this creed to which they approach. Mysteries, secrets cannot, by necessity, be known or shared; they can only be approached *in faith*. To “sell” this mystery, to deal with this secret (to trade with the approach to it, not with what the mystery *actually is*) comes at the price of high betrayal; for you are not betraying values or ideas, not even people, but this very mystery that, automatically, loses all meaning, and consequently, you lose (at the very least) your *faith* (if not your head or your state, or both). All traditions were there begotten, in faith. This is why the purity of a tradition is inversely proportional to its popularity. No true tradition can be popular; when this is so, we are speaking of collective (multitudinous sometimes) practices. Their popularity, however, does not necessarily is in detriment of the faith, for the faith can be renovated and take on different meanings, and start other traditions.

Faith should never be confused with belief, even less so with a blind one. Faith is not blind, and is not handicapped in any other way. Faith is the certainty of a contentless

⁷³¹ See, for instance, the way in which Boym eloquently speaks about some [Russian] immigrants [coming to “America”] who were never able to forgive the U.S. for not living up to the “American Dream”. See Boym 332.

⁷³² For a more in-depth explanation on this process, see L. Cabrera, *El Monte* 188.

form, a form devoid of content: such as the future, such as its promise. Faith is the originary intuition of knowledge. For any kind of knowledge to arise, there must be meaning, and meaning cannot come about without faith. Meaning, in its beginnings, is all form and no content. Meaning is no end. No *telos* but only life can come from meaning, for meaning imprints this originary force, this primordial power through which we render our surroundings meaningful. Faith, by necessity, cannot withhold a *telos*, but only a mystery, a secret in the form of a promise that unfolds to us as we live our lives—and as we meet our deaths. Faith with *telos* is like futures with agendas and lives with projects: it is its politicized version. This is, unfortunately, today's popular understanding of this word, faith, which to some ears (scientists or otherwise) still sounds extremely offensive. Yet this kind of faith we are speaking about here is closer to what we understand to “luck”, a most beautiful synonym for “fate”, for the kind that is worthwhile, of whose contents we know not.

This is what truly happens with writing. We may have a project, all the pieces categorized and all the concepts in place; all the quotations, readings, rationales, conceptual frameworks in shape; all the primary, secondary and supplementary literature and main arguments and secondary arguments and supplementary arguments in order; all our methodology in rule; all our hypotheses, theses and counter-arguments clear—but then you start to write, and all these immediately blend in the background, over which words emerge and flow, and slowly but steadily *new* readings, quotations, rationales, concepts, categories, theses, arguments... are generated most naturally—definitely more naturally than everything that was thought in advance. And it is all these *newly* emerged material the one that really excites you, the one that you find really worthy, the one that inflames your pores and overwhelms your senses, that takes your breath away—you know, just like life. Think about it, remember those moments, experiences, instants you fondly hold in your memory; now frankly think how much of them did you plan in advance, which of them went just as you planned. We respond to our luck, but we cannot plan it; we cannot say: “you know, today I'm going to be very lucky, as I had conceived of a program that

cannot fail”. It may sound as if we were our luck’s servants; yes, maybe, but sometimes, when we are really lucky, we are our luck’s lovers.

So, faith in meaning is conceived, and fecundated in our imaginations. There is *poiesis* because there is faith. Having faith thus means dissolving in what you *are doing while you do it*. Programs, plans, they all help to agree and create consensus; to organize our activities and to produce our practices; but they do not help us performing. To perform is to dissolve ourselves in the meaning we incarnate therein.

Since we do not have referents for so many “things” that articulate our realities (not even for the very articulations of our languages; i.e., prepositions, conjunctions, etc.), since we lack any referent as to time and, more particularly, to the future; we can only have faith in them and dissolve in the references we create to render them present. Faith is our most primordial power and it is in us if we turn it into a powerful skill or into an overriding handicap. “The trick of faith. The trick: we have no name for” (“The Author in Truth” 148), writes Helene Cixous, all dissolved in her writing—soaking wet. The path is not rendered into a destination itself, that is an easy cliché for *caminantes sin destino* [walkers with no destination], hippies and vagabonds: all better in fiction. The path is rendered into a *source* of destinations: plural, many—for the only that is *one* is the one that is common to us all (not only humans, but all living beings): death. To live does not entail primarily to die, but to age; and all ages are plural. *So*, again, we learn through faith the secret of aging and the mystery of how to age.

Faith, in this vein, cannot be held for *a* work (masterpieces notwithstanding), for this would give it a referent and would rather become a mundane belief, a hope, even a *telos*. Therefore, given that politics is a kind of work, faith cannot be held for politics. Faith in work opens the door to idolatry; you know, forms overwhelmed by the contents there invested, like the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” or Justin Bieber. It is true, we have *poiesis* because of faith, but it is a faith in *poesy*, in this “pure arbitrariness”, which

could be equally translated as “sheer chance” or “utter luck”, from which all organization (and therefore everything knowable) originates. As long as there is poetry, there will be faith; and as long as there is faith, there will be a future (or more).

If “there is time” for us (nowhere taking place, but making it possible for everything to take its place), it is because there is faith, and therefore, because there is *poiesis*. Our first and most important production is time: human time (fictional, mythical, historical... *poietical*). Times change, we know that, but not *time* as such. Time has no tenses (or none we can prove); there is no past, present or future, nor there is a “to come”, a “that came”, a “has come”—nothing of the like. What change in times is our relation to them, that relation that occur due to all the changes our interactions with our surroundings have had across the *ages*, ours, and across generations, ours too. These changes bring with them a dislocation in our relation to time that produces a breach between those who came after this dislocation and those who harbored a different conception before: a generational breach. Do you remember (if you were born before the 1980’s) when a minute was really something very insignificant? when we said that anything that took “a minute” was supposed to be very fast? Now, can you stand in front of the monitor of your computer while a web-page is charging for more than 20 seconds? When this happens, we start complaining about the slowness of our hard-drive or of the connection or of the server or of whatever we think we can hold responsible for this “eternal” delay. It is not strange that within the idea of “progress”, our relation with time (and with the times) has sped up, increasingly up to the point in which 1 second is a somewhat measurable experience (as when a laptop developer says that it takes “less than two seconds” for their new product to boot). Improvement, as we just discussed, is the main paradigm as to what the future is supposed to bring in progress; speed is the main indicator of this improvement.

We have learned that for GCI, this idea of progress was present before he collided with absolute unresponsiveness. We know that his surrogate in *TTT*, Silvestre, was looking for the “absolute” with his friend, Arsenio Cué, whose driving romps in *La Rampa* aimed at

this conversion of time into space via speed. This was also the main motivation behind GCI's Kowalski in *Vanishing Point*. Our relation to time occurs *via* space. If Einstein, and Mincowski before him, were right about the unification supposed by time-space constituting a four-dimensional physical reality, our experience to time continues to be *mediated* by space, and by our actions and interactions (our experiences) in and with it. So far, this unification has not been incorporated as a practice. We continue to perform this unification through myth, through the transformation we perform of time into times unfolded on a historical timeline and poured in a structural template to which we have referred as fiction. History (progress and speed aside) always refers to a singular past, since this *mythopoeitic* unification in myth is exactly what we do with our everyday lives, as was shown in chapter 6 with all our discussion about our tracing-memories. GCI went from this speedy time of progress (with its most logical outcome: paralysis) to the time of myth, of history, wherein he learned to yearn for a particular past, for a particular history, for particular places and times. Instead of having as his guide this perennially dislocated universal time of progress (as a constant target), this *absolute* unification with space-time, GCI learned to be nostalgic for *singular* times, for *singular* spaces, and transformed this nostalgia into a creative power to *bring* those times *back* through his rituals of invocation/evocation that translated into a whole recreation of a particular Cuba in a particular moment in history: his. Both the time of progress and the time of nostalgia share the assumption that time passes by and what is left behind cannot be repeated. But the time of nostalgia, when well-distinguished from that of progress, does not yearn for the improvements of the future, but rather longs for the articulations that are irreversibly lost as times change, and as those times are left behind.

For those who cannot assume this change of times, or who cannot assume that past times were not necessarily worse (for the progressive pessimists) or less great (for the progressive optimists) than the current in which they live; for those who cannot assume this dislocation, there is a term available for at least three or four decades: *chronocentrism*. According to the media theorist Jib Fowles, in his 1974 article, "On

Chronocentrism”⁷³³, this term could be defined as: “the belief that one’s times are paramount, that other periods pale in comparison. It is a faith of the historical importance of the present” (65); that is, another term (a better one indeed) for historical megalomania, or yet another layer to ethnocentrism. This chronocentrism, for instance, was behind the whole logic of “heritage” that has so profoundly penetrated our political agendas for the last fifty years or so. This is the logic in which museums, memorials, monuments, etc., describe a line that presumably explains why our present times (freedoms, rights... conquests) are so neat and thus it marks a line to discriminate to *what* exactly we owe such historical gains⁷³⁴. In this case, rather than waiting or chasing (constructing, etc.) the *promised telos*, we find ourselves in a (rather naive) celebratory position that acts *as if* we were already reaping its products. To be sure, since a future pregnant with a *telos* makes for faithless times, no progress (and no totalitarianisms in any of its guises and orders, whether nationalisms, fascisms, etc.) could exist if we were not led to believe that many of the improvements promised by this *telos* are *already available* to us. Yet, no progress (and no totalitarianism) could *continue* if we were led to believe that *all* those improvements are already available to us. We must keep working, searching so that we can, someday, sometime, arrive at this glorious *telos* we are already able to envision by those improvements that are already available to us. In short, no progress (and no

⁷³³ The coinage of this term has been more or less officially attributed to the economist John Powelson, who used it in his *Centuries of Economic Endeavor*, where he refers to “chronocentrism” as “an undue emphasis on the present”. This book, to the best of my knowledge, was published in 1994; whereas Fowler’s article, as said, is from 1974. Fowler’s work was published in the journal *Futures*, in the section “Futures Essay”, a section “in which ideas and topics that indicate potential considerations for future research may be discussed”. His use of the term is similar to Powelson’s (or the other way around). However, Fowler writes as if he were coining the term himself. So, to this, we shall at least give him, if not the certainty of the coinage, at least the primacy of the date.

⁷³⁴ See Boym 15. For an extensive account of memorializations in the context of cognitive sociology and the construction of a “Sociobiographical Memory”, see Zerubavel, mainly chapter 1.

totalitarianism either) can exist without a teleological time, but it cannot exist either without a dose of chronocentrism⁷³⁵.

A wrong kind of authority we sometimes accord to ourselves (as critics or otherwise) is that of passing judgment over a writer's deeds (and misdeeds), ideas, conceptions, opinions, etc., on the basis of the criteria we have developed in our current times. This authority is ethically wrong because it is chronocentric; however, it is also epistemologically wrong because it judges without understanding, as it obviates this dislocation opened by the change of times; it treats the writer as if s/he had the same knowledge, the same understandings, the same epistemological frameworks we have today to interpret our reality the way we do. For instance, I have often heard that GCI was a bigot or a sexist due to some comments he makes about women or about homosexuals or black people. Nothing could be further from the true. If we get to his life, we find that many of his closest friends were homosexuals, that he was a fervent advocator for stopping the covert segregation in Cuban politics (he often times denounced how Fidel Castro's government was mainly constituted by white people), and most of his closest collaborators were women (starting with Miriam, but also his main translator, Suzanne Jill Levine, and, more importantly, the only person with whom he shared his signature, Rosa María Pereda, with whom he edited the collection *Mi Música Extremada*, a book that recontextualizes many of his pieces [literary or otherwise; i.e., articles] to showcase the importance that music has in GCI's work). Yet, GCI expressed many opinions that were typical of his times (in relation to issues that for today's liberal societies are more than touchy), and even though I may disagree with some or many of them (as happens with his opinions about homosexuality as being an outcome of the environment, or the way in which he treats some women in his narratives), I find myself consistently grateful that he was sincere enough to express them without trying to pretty them up, particularly

⁷³⁵ This is extraordinarily explained by Rosa María Menocal. Although she does not employ the neologism (i.e., "chronocentrism"), she discusses to perfection the principles that dwell behind it. See Menocal 23.

in the 1970's, when many of these opinions were clearly unpopular. I think it is part of my *ethos* as a reader (and a scholarly one, for that matter) to try to understand the context in which these opinions were formed and uttered before passing judgement on them—but, much more importantly, before judging GCI himself; since, even if I did not make this judgement explicit (as is the *ethos* of most literary criticism), there is no way in which the feelings arisen by this judgement will not transpire in my text (as is notable in most literary criticism) and, more importantly, I would be falling into a most objectionable wrong myself, that is, hypocrisy.

I believe that most of the principles with which we have been working here depend on a different conception of time, and more particularly of the future time—a creative rather than a teleological time. This creative time is constituted through the constant interaction (even superimposition, juxtaposition, as we saw with *Holy Smoke*) between *inter* and *intratextuality*, between what we read (in the broad sense discussed since the first chapter) and what we suffer (in the very broad sense it has been discussed all along this work).

What a chronocentric does not know how to reckon with is, in these terms, age; and, consequently, death is a continuously denied, deferred, deluded part of the improvements the future stores for us. Writing is, first of all, the possibility to fictionally explore ages; past and yet to come. Therefore, this possibility opens a pathway through which we accept the irrevocable deterioration of our own bodies as they age, to fictionally explore this body as it ages, in the way in which we explore other bodies as they age, aged and will age. By writing, we explore times, always other, always as they were, could be, will be, could have been. And this exploration opens the possibility to de-center our own *chronos*, our own temporal sense of order, our own ordering of time and space; and to question our myths, our fictions through the creation of other myths, of other fictions. We start exploring other times and we end up creating an-other time. A time all for itself: the time of the author.

We have discussed that exile supposed a very important motivation for GCI's nostalgia and for the transformation of this into a creative source: his past became the inexhaustible resource of his literature. "Alexander Herzen, a celebrated nineteenth century Russia émigré, said that for those living abroad the clocks stop at the hour of exile", Svetlana Boym reminds us (327). In GCI's case, the clock literally stopped his catatonic body for a period that seemed, for the writer, eternal; his tracing-memory stopped its tracing task. When he looked at the clocks around him: "London Time", "Cuba Time", "Havana Time", "Gibara Time", "Brussels Time", "Madrid Time", he was not able to recognize the numbers and the clocks' hands were as if melted, as in Salvador Dalí's paintings; the only time that GCI could recognize was the "Exilic Time", which pretty much consisted in a stopped watch. He had to wound his tracing-memory again. And so he did. He created concentric circles wherein many times juxtaposed, peacefully coexisted, constantly brought about new cycles that could only be accorded to someone who finds himself "outside of history", a true *cronista*: "In [GCI's] writing, the successive cycles end up resembling each other, which confer them a repetitive and obsessive character ... / Cyclic time always starts with repression, then with the celebration of a new era and conclude with disappointment or betrayal" (*La memoria frente al poder* 145), says Jacobo Machover. This cycle could be held for most of his literary work, with the exception of, as we saw in the last chapter, *Holy Smoke*, in which another end (tacit and discrete in all his other books, but equally present) comes to the fore: *transculturation*, *mestizaje*, mutual change.

We find here a self-transcending memory, a memory that transcends the self and invents (in its copula with imagination) another time, a time that outlives the self, the person, and that remains as the time of the author; the "once upon a time" that informs his work. A most important aspect of this time in GCI is the way in which the signifier, the word, is set out as the only true referent. The many ways in which he reminds us: "remember, this is a text" (many of which we saw in chapter 6), also show us that his memories are coming into being in the form of words, and that these latter have rules of their own, one

of which is to dislocate the remembering self from the self that is remembered. However, another very important rule is in relation to the very process of writing and reading, which is subjected to “endophoric” rules (i.e., grammar) and “exophoric” ones (e.g., typing). As we get immersed in his text, he takes us often to the surface with this reminder, as he lifts the curtain “to show the wizard at work, he can no longer create a one-dimensional version of his life: he knows he must also give an account of the way he uses the machinery ... to produce his text” (42), observes Geisdorfer Feal. This puts us in a face to face relation with the author, as we can perfectly determine (with no suspension of disbelief to assist us in our reading) the irremediable dislocation between the “Time of the Writer”, the “Time of the Author”, the “Time of the Work” and the “Time of the Reader”. It is impossible for the reader not to become self-conscious of her own time, the one that passes as she reads, that reinserts her into her most mundane activities as the writer constantly reminds us he is there inserted, even at those times (especially at those times) in which he is most dissolved in his writing.

In time we feel those dislocations, those changes occurring from time to time—in other times. This time of the author we visit thus becomes a part of ourselves, if only partially, if only temporally. It is not movement that we appreciate, it is not movement *in* time, but time itself, but time as created and as being created by an-other, by its author. And this time transcends our memories; it incorporates a different rhythm, a different pace and space for our dwelling selves. Time is the skin of being, the one that is turned into flesh by the author and is thus made available for us to touch. Our tracing-memories touch, contact, interact, and create, in this interaction, a different temporality, a different rhythm, pace and space for our selves to dwell. Now our histories converse, now our pasts dialogue and our futures are converted—the promise of the future feels the strongest while its secret feels the safest. Our faith feels reinvigorated whenever our times get to touch another’s, and whenever they do so in complicity and love.

By creating a time of our own we learn how to say “come” to other times; we learn to welcome them at the margins of our lives, in their flesh; we learn to leave these times behind as we age; we learn to finish our lives as we finish our works. And here, in what we leave, we say “come”, even though one is never sure if this will come about. Maybe no one shows up. The task of the writer is not to create his readers, but to create those conditions to welcome them—whenever they find it best to show up. This is the house for the traces we leave: this time. This is the time that outlives the writer, and the time in which the author is born. All authors outlive their writers. Authors are, constitutionally, survivors. In this time we leave our voices, each, singularly, and in this time they are preserved to their fates: growing, aging, dying—for no author is immortal, for no work is eternal, for no time is timeless; they only live longer, that is all.

The time of the author thus obeys the rules of predication: GCI is and can be predicated in GCI’s time—even if (especially because) Guillermo Cabrera Infante is dead since February of 2005. This time is infused in his voice that sings it, infused in his style that singularizes it, infused in his self that signs it. New books are published with GCI’s name on the cover, even when he no longer signs (physically) anything at all. “Socrates socratizes or Socrates is Socrates is the *way* Socrates is”, predicates Emanuel Levinas (*Otherwise than Being* 41, emphasis in the original). This *way* occurs in the time created by this person to exist *as* himself: Guillermo Cabrera Infante Guillermo Cabrera Infantes. Now one, now many. If time is the skin of being, words are the writer’s pores; it is in words that time keeps being absorbed and perspired to the extent of becoming one’s time; the time of one’s life: all these because time has finally reached a meaning in our lives—we stop living by it and start living with it. The time of the author transcends beginnings and ends; it is not concerned with dying, nor is it preoccupied with birth: it finds itself already born and already alive. The time of the author’s only concern is aging—and because of this we write. We do not, nonetheless, avoid death; we do not deny it; we know about it, and actually embrace the freedom it provides; for every death is the birth of a possibility, for every death leaves a free space, a place unoccupied and for you to

take it. “The work does not endure over the ages; it is. This being can inaugurate a new age” (*The Space of Literature* 202), states Maurice Blanchot. Hence, the aging of the work, and consequently the author’s aging, is in relation to this “new age” the author finds as it is written and constituted within this time created for him/her (as for his/her whole “body of work”). This “new age” does not entail a “new beginning”, for the author dwelling there already comprehends that nothing is for the first time; that everything is already preceded by something other than itself; that what emerges is original in the sense of being originated, but not in the sense of “first timeness”, of a before itself; and because the author comprehends this, s/he is able to leave this time alone after the writer’s demise, and for the reader to come.

8.6.1 Summary 54

This section deals with an in-depth examination of the concept of faith within the tenets of the “promise of the future”. Faith transcends trust in its lack of referent, which is where, by necessity, faith emerges. Faith is the certainty of the future as such, in its ever-actualizing promise: as the contentless form that makes possible the existence of every possible form. It is faith that, in this manner, keeps the future open, and that never cages it inside a monolithic *telos*. This distinction is also important in order to distinguish between representation (what something stands for) and signification and re-signification (what a thing is and what the thing is thought to be), as this latter is necessarily creative. It follows then that faith is behind every creative act, for the only creative future is the one that is not closed by a created *telos*. The creative future, the one that is constantly materializing, actualizing itself, bears no symbolization and no representation. Faith is, in this sense, the very condition for any possible new knowledge, for any possible re-signification, and thus for any possible meaning. It is thus argued that a life without faith cannot be a meaningful life, and even less so can it be meaningfully lived. The concept of incarnation is taken again, now within the context of “materialization”. It is upon these principles that it is possible to argue that every person learns about his/her finitude through faith, that is, it is thus that a person learns about age and how to age, as the future

inevitably brings age as it materializes. Age is, in this fashion, the materialization of the future in one's bodies. Age, in this sense, entails a different relation to time and to its passing. What this materialization ultimately engenders is the creation of another time, which is called: the time of the author. This time is the most singular approach that the writer has created with time (past, present and future) in order to explore other ages and other eras. The result is a singular form of time that only belongs (and is only possible) in and to the texts of the author. This time outlives the self that invents it (i.e., the writer), though it homes him/her; it also transcends the style that composes it (i.e., the writer's style), even though it houses it. It is in this time that the author emerges and where the author lives.

8.7 "Here at last"

So we have been speaking about and with a non-teleonomic time; we have been speaking about and with a time which is always in a process of self-production; a time that is never completely constituted. This, not being completely constituted, this infinitude, is what allows for self-production. In their groundbreaking 1972 *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, the Chilean biologists, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, called these self-productive unities/systems: *autopoietic* systems. Maturana himself admitted that this term was coined after his reading of Aristotle's *Poetics*, and after his understanding of *poiesis* as production, as making⁷³⁶. As he and his colleague were looking for a term that would define living-systems (they were, at that time, studying the cell) outside of the paradigm of reproduction, they found in Aristotle's employment of the term a most fortunate neologism; for they arrived to the conclusion that what really characterizes a living system is its autopoietic capacity; that is, its capacity to produce itself for as long as it is alive. In the celebrated preface to this book, written by Anthony Stafford Beer, the British scholar explains the Chilean biologists' position as follows: "The standpoint of description [of any unity] from the 'outside', i.e., by an observer [any human being],

⁷³⁶ In Moeller 12.

already seems to violate the fundamental requirement which Maturana and Varela posit for the characterization of [living] systems –namely, that they are autonomous, self-referring and self-constructing systems—in short, *autopoietic* systems” (v, emphasis in the original).

I am listening to the alarm bells already: “we have gone all this way criticizing every approach to autonomy only to get to it once again?” Perhaps, but I will need to ask you for your patience as to see *which kind of autonomy* is the one we are advocating for. Stafford Beer continues: “Maturana and Varela propose a theoretical biology which is topological, and a topology in which elements and their relations constitute a closed system, or more radical still, one which from the ‘point of view’ of the system itself, is entirely self-referential and has no ‘outside’” (v). So, this is the first thing we have to accept, that there is no outside for an autopoietic unity to observe itself. Let us remember Jacques Derrida’s overwhelming sentence: “there is nothing outside the text” (*Of Grammatology* 165). These words have reverberated in many, many eardrums and have been taken as a literal sentence: “we are condemned to live in texts”, and therefore as polemicist non-sense⁷³⁷. What is usually overseen by these alarmist critics is that Derrida was not suggesting that there was no reality, but rather that no reference could be made to it without language, and that, since there is no reality without context, there could not be contexts without texts. These words were not enclosing us in the prison of language; they were rather suggesting our freedom through the realization of our limits. This realization of our limitations has always been most unwelcome through the ages; and now, within this paradigm of progress at its peak (if such a peak is ever reachable), limitations are contrary to breakthroughs, and therefore only present us a challenge to overcome them. Maturana and Varela are also suggesting a limitation, that of the autopoietic system to get outside itself; and therefore, that of the autopoietic system to describe itself; this is to suggest that all our descriptions are limited, for if we form no part of an autopoietic system, we have no access to its organization, and hence we cannot do an interpretation

⁷³⁷ For an example of these alarmist criticisms, see Fionola 197-200.

of it without opening it, destroying it, and permanently changing (when not just disintegrating) the system (unity/entity). This also means that if we have access to this organization (by forming part of its environment, which allows the “structural coupling” through which interaction occurs), we are already forming an autopoietic system that we cannot describe as we are part of it. This “topological biology” thus means that every autopoietic unity (system/entity) does not only occupy a space, but it mainly *creates* that space through the inevitable interaction with it and hence, primarily, *creates* an interiority from which there is no outside. But let us move a little more slowly.

If we more or less follow these tenets, we can gather that the autonomy of which Maturana and Varela speak is not the one we have been criticizing all throughout this work; it is not an autonomy entirely posited in human consciousness and unequivocally manifested in human will (intentionality or otherwise)—but precisely the contrary. The autonomy we are speaking about here is *independent* of our wills. Everything that lives (all “living systems”) is organized. Without organization there is no life. Organization transcends structure in the sense that organization occurs within “the relations between [the] components [that] define a system as a unity” (Maturana 151), whereas a structure “refers to the actual components and the actual relations which these must satisfy in the constitution of a given unity ... The structure of a composite system determines the space in which it exists and can be perturbed but not its properties as a unity [which are determined by its organization]” (152). In our terms (and according to what was discussed in chapter 5), the structure would be like the actual environing depth taking place in space, whereas the organization would be the *environed* depth, what is left *inside*, interacting in such a way that it constitutes what the unity is: “whenever the organization of a unity changes, the unity changes ... whenever the structure of a unity changes without change in its organization, the unity remains the same and its identity remains unchanged” (152). How this organization works, how these self-producing systems (i.e., the cells or the neurons) keep producing themselves whether we will it or not and stop

doing so in spite of our wishes and whims: this is the autonomy we are speaking about here.

So, self-referential and self-producing do not mean narcissistic, solipsistic or self-interested; for these latter concepts depend on consciousness of oneself as oneself. Our organization (the way *our* lives organize themselves and keep replicating this organization for as long as we live) is not something of which we participate at any rate—not consciously at least. Our organization will not change if we dedicate more effort to our yoga classes or if we study really, really hard or if we work harder and harder; it *may* change (as when, for instance, we *produce* cancerous cells) by many factors that *may* be in relation to changes in our structures (some due to our life-styles, many others occurring independently of them). Beyond, outside our structures (and therefore, obviously, beyond our organizations) there is the in-between: the “neither me nor you but both” that simultaneously separates and binds one and other. Language, within Maturana and Varela’s theory, “arises ... from the reciprocal structural coupling of at least two organisms with nervous systems” (149). Given that, as far as we know, the same a fig tree than a spore has (however “primitive”) a nervous system, language is initiated in this in-between *via* the living organism structures, while it emerges all the way from their organizations. All structures, consequently, express their organizations. And, therefore, interaction occurs (and “perturbation”, what we have called throughout this work *affectation*) by means of this expression that, also, is beyond our wills: we interact whether we want it or not, and, more importantly, all interactions “modify their [the participating unities] relative states in terms of reference to the larger systems in which they are embedded” (151). We just cannot not be affected; we just cannot not *suffer* in life, for life occurs *in* affectation. Autonomy, in this manner, does not mean isolation.

If we keep following this trail of thought, all structures are plastic, whereas all organizations remain invariant. Now, if we have really kept following, we know that *our* organization cannot be described: *what* is that organization about is nowhere for us to be

cognized. We get to know *what* it expresses in and through our structures (and structural couplings) but we cannot know *what where* these expressions come from looks like. Still, according to what we have been discussing so far, there would be an important limitation to Maturana and Varela's theory, that is, that *time* is defined in an autopoietic system *only* through the "interactions" and "states" of and in the structure. This, as we have previously explained, is like approaching time *through* the motions occurring therein and due to them. In their topology, time does not play such a significant role as space. For us, time has been conceptualized as a (and within its) flux *wherein* our tracing-memories are incorporated and *through* which our myths and fictions are brought forth. For us, organization does not occur only in space, but also in time. In this fashion, organization would sound a little bit like the immanence of which we spoke about in chapter 5, like our *preseences*. If we understand that the space of organization is this original, environing depth enclosed by all these related components, then we may comprehend that the body (as organized) and the self (soiled in our *preseences*) constitute our singularities as autopoietic systems. When we put time into the equation (hand in hand with space), the "changes" or "modifications of state" point at the possibility of development—which, as we have seen, does not entail just *any* kind of change, but a very particular one. We said that the development of our *preseences* was what singularized our expressions, for it supposed the development of our styles; and we called the process of this "singular expressions" affecting others (a process through which a style was spread) *spreadssion*. Then, if it is true that no external observer is possible for this organization, the creation of an-other system in reproduction (an *allopoiesis* that becomes *autopoietic*) is possible, this is what we have conceptualized thus far as the author; a process we can refer to as: *authorpoiesis*.

How does an author keep producing him/her/itself? First, we should ask *when*, as the *where* we have it clear (in the work), and we will respond: in the time of the author. Once we have sorted this out, we can attempt an explanation as to how this process occurs. As was said earlier, the work (the book in this context) is, all on its own, an inert object; it

requires a reader as much as it required a writer before. This, was said, is equally true for the author—there is no author without a reader (and vice versa). Well, this is the way through which the *authorpoietic* system operates: the environing depth produced by the convergence between the writer and the reader, where the former leaves the author that the latter finds, and where the reader *activates* this author left by the writer as s/he converses with him/her/it, and as s/he is affected (sometimes her/his structures converted) by him/her/it—just as it/her/him is irrevocably affected by this conversation, which becomes an autogenetic depth wherein the *voice* that expresses the author keeps reproducing itself.

We have spoken in these very terms about the *ethos* of work and meaning and... life. The work should produce more work, meaning more meaning, etc. The author, in this sense, should produce more authors. Yet, because I do not like (unrecognized) animism, and the author, the work, even meaning, are *made* things, artefacts in all their extent, I do not mean to suggest that these autopoietic systems, and this *authorpoietic* one, operates in the same way as all living systems do, because it does not—it just *materializes* our own autopoietic powers; but does not replicate them. Our *poietic* (*mythopoietic* or otherwise) powers are mainly powers to organize our surroundings in relation to ourselves and ourselves in relation to our surroundings. In the in-between that intermediates between(?) everything that is and everything that is not, we find other depths, free spaces in time where we can *infuse ourselves* in order (and *in order*) to create a life-like thing, a thing wherein we leave the traces, the sprouts emerging from our very *preseedences*, our styles that are left imprinted in the way the work is organized, in its very organization. This organization traverses all the work from its beginning to its end; it requires its finitude so as to arise in all its splendour: endings are the beginnings left behind. Each reading becomes a beginning coming after the end, and each reader actualizes the author left therein so that it/he/she starts its *authorpoietic* process—a process that is, in all truth, a conversation from self to self.

It is for these reasons that this process is, in principle, *allopoietic*; insofar as it starts by producing something other than itself (the author). Yet, this “something other” is not completely other; it is as other as one’s voice, which, when uttered, travels outside our bodies and smashes into other bodies (eardrums, skins, pores, membranes, etc.). What is truly other is the work. Yet the author cannot be without the work. Let us say then that the work is what is made, *allopoietically* produced, and that the author is, instead, issued from the writer, just as her voice, and thus that, if it cannot be said to be *autopoietically* produced, we can perfectly say that it is *authorpoietically* begotten.

This organization imprinted in the work transcends all structures and, when authorship stands, can bear up any kind of change in its structure. Let us put as an example the most radical form of structural transformation a literary work can endure: translation. In principle, we can say that if the author is imprinted *in* the work’s organization, and that if every change in the organization entails a different thing altogether, then all translations are changes in the structure of the work, but not in its organization. This could be held for the interacting languages, as all translations (as was said in the previous chapter) imply a certain degree of transculturation and *mestizaje*. Both the similarities and the differences in the source and the target languages constitute a mutuality that, in addition to “perturbing”/affecting both languages, they also “perturb”/affect the work as such; and thus the relation to the author left therein. We said already that this is the case, and we said that it could go to the point in which the translator becomes a *transeditor* of the target text. As we all know, editors are supposed to understand, comprehend the author (or the writer’s voice if you prefer) to such an extent that it is her/his job to create all the conditions through which the author is thus expressed in the writer’s text. This authorship, this author infused in the text hence materializes the text’s organization—which keeps its process of self-replication anytime a reader (of any sort, from the most specialized, i.e., editor, translator, critic, scholar.... to the least informed) opens one of the author’s books. By this time, by the time the book is finished in its authorial organization, this thing is no longer in the hands of the writer; it rather passes to the voice of the author

who will keep *authorpoietically* singing it, replicating-referring-producing itself for as long as there are readers in *this* world. And since the word is the author's world, this word must remain a free word.

So, when, where and how does *authorpoiesis* occur? In the realization of the in-between in *poiesis* (aka the work), in the time of the author and through the actualization of her/his/its voice by the hands of the reader. Hence, in terms of autonomy, there is always a relation of mutuality, of togetherness in *authorpoiesis* with this free word, which is a free self, a self set free through an always already free signifier. *Authorpoiesis*, unlike *autopoiesis*, is *in* the world of made-things, occurs *in* an artefact, and, as all creations, it emerges as the created place wherein the *with* of togetherness can be manufactured. “The first feature of the creation of the world is that it creates the *with* of all things: that is to say, *the world*, namely, the *nihil* as that which opens and forms the world” concurs Jean Luc Nancy (*Globalization* 73, emphasis in the original); and we have nothing but to concur with him. The *with* is the actualization of the in-between via *poiesis*. We do not *make* life; life is not an artefact of our manufacturing. Subsequently, we cannot create *autopoietical* systems. These are living systems, of which we are part, but none of which we have engineered (and, let us keep our faiths that we will not delude ourselves to continue thinking we might). *Authorpoiesis* is self-creating in the sense that it contributes to the developing of the self by the creation of a space of *withness* through which we can bear witness to its growth. It is self-creating in the sense that this space of *withness* becomes a channel through which self-expression (style and voice) replicates the conditions for self-development⁷³⁸. The in-between is the space wherein *auto* and *allo*

⁷³⁸ This term, “self-development”, sounds in these days, however, like cheap solutions to become a winner in less than it takes to read a book or to become a happy person in less than you can eat a chicken soup—or your soul for that matter. It is unfortunate what has happened to this term. Do I need to take the time to re-conceptualize it? Hope that with what we saw in the fifth chapter in relation to our immanence and the development of it through the development of our voices and styles (expression), which is concomitant to the development of our selves, to their growth in singularity, will be sufficient as to such

continue their fluent interaction, their fusion (confusion) and fission that ultimately opens the possibility for infusion—for no singularity can e-merge without this in-between of convergence. “It is humanity producing itself by producing objects”, Nancy insists (39); and these objects (artefacts, the creation of referents never devoid of reference, the artefactualization of meaning) are what primarily express our *authorpoietic* power.

What a difficult concept this is, power. Another unfortunate twist of centuries of misuse has turned our vital energy, our productive capacities, our creative potential, our *authorpoietic* faculties into a ludicrous synonym with domination and, when less radical, with control. No such thing. Power, in the way we have finally brought it about in this work, refers to this very autopoietic virtue of life—of life producing life. In our living together, this capacity, which humanely translates into the *authorpoietic* production of artefacts, already makes us responsible for what we do, for what we leave and for what we bear witness to (what others have left). This is a form of ethics that cannot be severed (not even mildly distinguished) from poetics, from our power (and thus our responsibility) to freely create *authorpoietic* systems. This is a form of *poethics* that can only come about in *wit(h)nessing*; in sincerely bearing witness to ourselves for others⁷³⁹. Power, as we have been saying (or at least hinting) since the first chapter, can never be unilateral, as it suffocates in unilaterality. Power cannot be actualized in unilaterality because, even though autonomous, autopoietic, no autonomy can stand a lack of heteronomy; because, we said, autonomy does not mean isolation; because, we explained, autopoiesis has nowhere to go on its own. A self-replicating system left all to itself (if

a re-conceptualization. If that were not the case, maybe we should use the “laws of attraction” to unlock “the secret” as to how we can get rid of all this banality.

⁷³⁹ I refer here to the neologism (*poethics*) coined by the poet Michel Deguy in his 1978 *Jumelages/Made in USA* and as was profoundly reinterpreted by Dorota Glowacka through her concept of “*poethics of disappearing traces*”, in which the witness is of central importance to bring about those traces that are always already at the brink of extinction (like those drowned screams of so many victims of the Holocaust—Glowacka’s main concern). For a more in depth explanation of the re-signification of Deguy’s term see Glowacka 8-10. Also, for an account of the use of the term “Wit(h)nessing” (as applied by the Israeli-British artist Bracha L. Ettinger) see 187.

such a thing were imaginable) would be like a dying echo. Because, if it is true that reproduction (that is, differentiation through bringing another life in togetherness; i.e., begetting offspring) is not constitutive of a living system (according to Maturana and Varela) but their autopoietic capability of self-production (for any living system will continue living whether it/s/he reproduces or not), reproduction (as Maturana does not hesitate to admit) is paramount to the maintenance of life⁷⁴⁰. In *authorpoietic* systems, power should produce power in others, should *give others* the power that they, in turn, infuse in their reading (in the broad sense etc.). If a living system is autopoietic, power is not. Power produces more power only if it is infused in the *with* created in-between ourselves, only if it is shared. If a living system is autopoietic, life is not; for life is not without power. If a living system is autopoietic, human life is not; it is *authorpoietic*.

The transformation, the deep-seated “perturbation” we feel in our structures as we enter into a conversation with the author that we leave (when writing) or activate (when reading) may end up transforming the very *organization* of our myths, of our fictions and of our life-stories at large. Had I not entered into this conversation with GCI eight years ago, this text would have never come about, I would have not spent five years of my life developing a research centered on my reading his work; and therefore, with absolute certainty I can say that my life, today, would have been different. About this difference, I can only speculate, maybe work on it in another text, or elsewhere; it is a content of which I know not. I know where I am today—and when, as I write these words. I thus recognize myself today; I know who I am today and, to a greater extent, who I was before—I may even know a little bit who I am going to be. But I should not fatigue the reader with these trifles; this is of no importance for what we are doing here together, as you watch me slowly reaching a final stop. All in all, the myth of GCI, I trust, is not the same it was before; it will never be the same—in its structure I mean; as GCI, the author, will be the same for as long as we read him.

⁷⁴⁰ See Maturana 150.

For GCI, language is its own telos; for him, the author is important only to the extent in which he keeps igniting language's autotelic devices of existence: the Spanish language, the English language. Dilogy, Diaphora, Punning (Anagrams, Paronomasia, Homophony, etc.), Parataxis, Alliteration, Anaphora... they are all capitalized because they are all part of his organization as an author—and, as readers, we become part of this *authorpoietic* system and we, therefore, cannot but describe (sometimes) its structure; yet, there is just no way we can get to describe this organization. We can try to re-create it; to perform a replication through allowing ourselves to be imbibed by and in it so that we can replicate this system in the form of responding to it; so that we can contaminate our own selves, voices and styles with his through *spreadssion*; so that we can *spread* the word—now his, now mine, now ours; so that we can open the chance to our *preseedences* to develop by listening to this other voice: yours. What I believe I have been doing here is opening an *erotic* domain of intimacy between the three of us so that we can move our structures, so that we can open them to find out (this, of course is not something you consciously know, but rather something you intuitively *get*; as in, “now I get it!”) what in our organizations is compatible and so we can reproduce (now in differentiation) *our selves, our voices, our styles: intertextually*. Here we are, if differently, three responsible: GCI who left an author, I who write another one and you who read it. In this responsibility we share a *trusting* domain of mutuality, where you read, where I write, where GCI authors; a domain of privacy where we learn about each other, where we confide some secrets and yearns and memories and dreams, where we imagine, for a second (or a third), ourselves together, dwelling the same story: *intratextually*. Who says I now? “if the answer to the question ‘who is asking?’ should be stated ... from the first a ‘me who...’ but in fact ‘me who am known to you’, ‘me whose voice you find in your memories’ or ‘me who can situate myself in your history’” Levinas joins in (*Otherwise than Being* 27)—who? we, the three herein involved. Through this compatibility and this mutuality we transcend self-organization and we organize ourselves together; authors of our lives, authors in our lives, authors through our lives, authors with our lives, authors here and now: Here we are—still.

There we go—now.

This is my last sentence. Is this your last word?

8.7.1 Summary 55

It is within the context of a non-teleonomic time that the concept of self-production is introduced, more specifically, the concept of *autopoiesis* as developed by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. This concept applies to all living organisms that, insofar as living, are in a constant process of self-production, which means an infinite (in the sense of not-yet-completed) process until the organism's death. This *autopoietic* capacity is intrinsic to every living being, as it is its capacity to produce itself for as long as it is alive. There is no outside for an *autopoietic* system to observe itself, even less so to describe itself. This *autopoietic* process can only be observed as it occurs; as the organism produces more of itself. This "more of itself" refers to the organization of the organism, as it is argued that the principle of all life is organization. So, as long as an organism is alive, this organism continues to organize itself by producing those elements (components, constituents, etc.) that constitute its organization. Language, in this sense, is what allows structures (the relations among constituents) to interact with each other and organizations to contact other organizations; that is, language is what allows organisms to communicate with each other. Language, in this context, is not restricted to verbal (oral and/or written) language, but to every possible means of affectation (communication and expression) that may appear in-between organisms. It is said that if the temporal variable were introduced to Maturana and Varela's theory, "organization" could be compared with what was conceptualized as *preseedence* (immanence, envired depth, etc.) in the fifth chapter and structure could be compared with what has been conceptualized as the body (everywhere expressive) so far. The author would be in this context the reproduction of the human organization (self [immanence]—style [expression]) into another system, that is, the text. The organization of the text, as it is enacted by the reader, is hence called *authorpoiesis*. In other words, self-expression and self-creation converge at the creation of an author that is everywhere apparent in the organization of the text; an organization that is enacted every time the text is read. The author, this organization, is what gives a text an identity over time, or, as it is also called,

self-constancy. When this process occurs, the reader becomes another author, as it is said that just as a work should produce more work, meaning more meaning and life more life, an author should produce more authors. This is *authorpoiesis*.

CHAPTER 9 DISCUSSION

So there was more to say for Guillermo Cabrera Infante.
So there is still more to say in here.

9.1 Never is there a last word

As it turns out, just a month after I wrote the last sentence of this dissertation, I received a call from afterlife, which, in the case of a writer (mainly a dead one), is a call from his published work. It turns out that in November of 2013 a new book by GCI was published and shelved in libraries and virtual bookstores. The book, *Mapa dibujado por un espía* [Map drawn by a spy], was still warm from the print press, but it was burning hot for more mundane reasons: this was a book written with bare guts, an angry sense of sadness and a sad sense of anger. This book burnt my fingertips the first time I opened it; it is a book to be read with gloves. Contrary to the writer, who reportedly had the habit of sitting naked in his chair to write⁷⁴¹, the reader should protect her/himself in order to read this book; for this is a book of mourning in the dark, GCI's very account of his days in limbo.

I mentioned in the thesis that there was a book that GCI was writing about the three months he spent held up in Havana by the “revolutionary” authorities after he came back to mourn the sudden and most asinine death of his mother: she died due to complications of an acute otitis media. After all, as GCI did not hesitate to say: “No one dies of an ear-ache” (*Mapa dibujado por un espía* 31). This kafkean kiss of death became the harbinger of more and more bizarre events that would follow and unfold in front of GCI's very eyes, living in his own flesh the experience of slowly becoming a fearful intellectual in a place that steadily was dispensing with him.

Although we cannot be sure as to how long was GCI writing this book, and how much time he devoted to this enterprise, it is likely that this project was abandoned at

⁷⁴¹ As reported by Miriam Gómez in the article of *El País* that deals with the publication of this book. See *El País*, November 4, 2013.

some point and that he did not take it up again till the day he died. In this thesis, we refer to this book with the title that his biographer, Raymond D. Souza, uses to refer to it: *Ítaca vuelta a visitar* [Itaca re-visited]. We learn in the editorial note of *Mapa*, written by Antoni Munné, the editor of his collected works, that there were, indeed, two tentative titles for this work: *Ítaca vuelta a visitar* and *Mapa dibujado por un espía*. Apparently, GCI toyed with both titles and wrote a first version to which he (as was his habitual *modus operandi*) added fragments and more fragments. As Munné explains, GCI marked some of these fragments with the title *Ítaca* and some others with the title *Mapa*. In the end, GCI gathered all the fragments as the first draft of the book and sealed it in a closed envelope that would remain untouched till the end of his life⁷⁴². According to Souza, GCI was still working on this book after his nervous breakdown in 1973, in which he was working so as to “exorcise some memories of the past” (Munné 8). According to Munné’s (and it seems, Miriam’s) hypothesis, the book was likely written, as it were, in one stroke in 1968 and was left untouched, waiting to be re-worked, till the writer’s passing. For what I am able to gather, I tend to agree with this last hypothesis. It is difficult to know whether GCI re-opened this envelope after 1968, but it is true, as Munné says, that the tone of his memory about some people there mentioned seems to be decidedly before they fell from grace in the writer’s eyes (i.e., Lisandro Otero or Roberto Fernández Retamar). Yet, my feeling comes not only from the tone GCI employs to refer to some people about whom he writes; the tone of his memories at large seems too fresh, too visceral, and, why not, often times too angry to think it plausible that GCI had nearly 8 years of distance (and a post-nervous breakdown state) from the events he is narrating therein. But let me speak a little more into detail as to why I believe that Munné’s hypothesis may be more accurate.

It is true that, as Munné says, this is a sad book⁷⁴³, perhaps the saddest and most atypical book that GCI ever wrote. However, if it is true that this may be the most atypical book that GCI ever wrote, it is not-so true that it is a style-less book, as Munné

⁷⁴² See Munné 8-9.

⁷⁴³ Ibid 9.

also points out⁷⁴⁴. This book looks so fresh, so close to GCI's wounded heart that he had to speak of himself in the third person. He had to use his *cronista's* voice to speak on behalf of his own self as he was not able to completely own that strange person he saw at the midst of those outlandish circumstances. In this book, GCI even dares to mention his own name (always in the mouths of his interlocutors), without ever bothering in ideating ways to conceal it. The paradoxical thing is that he, "Guillermo", sounds stranger than ever. "He" is a stranger in this book, and "he", as his own *cronista*, tries to tell how it was that process in which he was gradually becoming the stranger he dreaded to become: a timid intellectual, a Machiavellian aspirant that was more resembling to an apprentice of Josef K. (that is, a bureaucratic appendix), an alienated, unmotivated, threatened thinker that would ultimately (and untimely) exchange his thoughts for some small securities and for very little gratifications. Humour features in this book in dribs and drabs and GCI's most prominent stylistic features (i.e., paronomasia, alliteration, etc.) are also scarce and scattered in the book. It could not have been otherwise. This may help to explain why the writer later on, when he spoke about this book (as *Ítaca*) said he could not find the right tone to re-work it and to finally transform it into a finished literary work. This is to such an extent that Munné himself does not hesitate in warning the reader that this book is first and foremost an extraordinary testimony of a time in Havana that is lost for many people, and it is only secondly a book whose literary virtues stand on their own. This is true, also to some extent. If it can be hardly denied that, literarily speaking, this is an irregular book (sometimes overwritten, plenty of times underwritten, with characters that are left in hanging and underdeveloped situations), it can also be difficult to contest that the writing strategies employed in this book, atypical to GCI as they are, work and cohere in a most fascinating way. The use of the third person was just spoken about, but there is more.

As was seen in the thesis, *eros* is a major feature in GCI's life and work. *Mapa* is no exception. We learn here that GCI, far and apart from Miriam (as she stayed in Belgium, for she became both the anchor and alibi [or part of it] of his escape), starts a doomed but not less intense, passionate and, ultimately, beautiful relationship with

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid 11.

another young woman: Silvia. This relationship starts late in the book, but it occupies a central position in it, and, as was a custom in GCI's writing, becomes indissolubly intertwined with all the other events (politics, family, parenthood, writing, peeping, etc.) unfolding in his life. Just as there is no GCI without women, there is no (and this is most important) GCI without love—even at his angriest. The relation between the receding absence of his mother, Zoila (with the fading relapse of her ghost in GCI's memories), is beautifully contrasted with the ebbing presence of Silvia in his life, as the only thing that, besides writing (something that was dying in him with every day he spent in Havana), could infuse his fate with life and joy. Also, the analogical death of Zoila and Havana (as Zoila was the person behind the Cabrera Infante family moving to the city) is remarkably crafted. This is a book of death, but of an untimely death, which is what marks the difference with GCI's other books, that slowly dealt with finitude, as was discussed within the thesis. Zoila's untimely demise is projected over Havana's unbearable agony; her timeless passage into the atemporal regions of limbo.

This is a sad book indeed. And this is why I strongly advise the reader to handle it with gloves, because this is a book to be read compassionately, but never sympathetically: this is not a book to be contaminated with. I felt extremely sad as I read this book, and it was the kind of sadness you feel when you are in front of a loved friend or relative whose downfall is as evident as it is inevitable. It becomes imperative to understand the distance that grows from one's love in order to distinguish his fate from yours. The person that is emerging in front of you is one you would never had made friends with, but is still a person you love; so you listen much, speak few and share even less. It is hard to share anything with someone who is going nowhere, because there is nothing to share—only too much to give. If so you give, you start to go precisely there, nowhere too, and then what was there to give vanishes just as well. This is not a book to be read with one's skin, at least not with my skin. An ear I lent alright. I listen to GCI, to his anger, to his visceral disappointments, to his gastric desolation, to his impulsive despair, and I feel sad, but never desolated, let alone despaired.

Mapa dibujado por un espía is the book of a *cronista* slowly becoming a spy of his own city, of his own life and, all in all, of his own self; it is a cartographical project of loss. This is GCI's account of a process during which he was gradually losing himself, his self, and slowly but surely, his own voice. This was Itaca turned into a labyrinth, with the Minotaur assuredly taking over this increasingly convoluted city. This was Ulysses getting lost at his return to a place he could not recognize and that recognized him not; a Ulysses owing more to Joyce's glaucoma than to Homer's blindness: a Ulysses slowly lost from sight. After reading this book, we can be more certain about some of the issues that led GCI to catatonia, as we find a person whose voice is increasingly silenced in public, agreeing with what he knows he disagrees, disagreeing with what he knows he agrees, condemning what he would praise and praising what he would condemn, never sure who shares his opinions in secret, never sure who can betray him, never sure who he can trust: never sure. This is a loss that cannot be recovered, and GCI was at the brink of it. After all, coming back from madness because of an irresponsible, arbitrary, abusive access to one's voice is always possible; and we know it was for GCI. But finding one's voice once again after willingly losing it, after that long form of alienated content that is often called "conformism" has finally dried it out, this, if not impossible, is, at least, quite toxic, for the voice one is likely to find is the corpse of a sprout—and we all know what happens when we insist in waking up the dead: they end up eating everything that stands alive.

So this *Mapa* is a map of nowhere, and it shows us how to get there really, really fast. We know that it hurt GCI quite a lot to open this book, and this was not because the ordeal that is here related. What was probably most harmful for the writer was to recreate that person he obviously fails to recognize, even when he is able to find him familiar every now and then. What was probably most damaging for the Habanero writer was to recreate the ruins of a city he obviously fails to forget, even when the other city, the one he will keep remembering for the rest of his life, is at the background of these ruins he found in 1965. It is quite justifiable to understand why GCI likely never re-opened this envelope; just as understandable as it is that he never threw it away. It was very important

for the writer to give a place in his work to this terrible experience, perhaps as important as it was for him to never really finish it as a work. The fate of the text was similar to what the text reluctantly harbors: the limbo. Here we find the limbless space that knows no time and finds no end. The only possible end is to go away, to turn the end out, forever ignorant of its own turnout. As it happens, it does turn out; the end does show up in the guise of one little word, three fine letters and one subtraction: *FIN*.

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