

ABSTRACT

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ARTELETRA: THE POLITICS OF GOING UNNOTICED IN THE LATIN AMERICAN SIXTIES.

Jason A. Bartles, Doctor of Philosophy, 2014

Directed By:

Professor Laura Demaría
Department of Spanish and Portuguese

This dissertation focuses on the long 1960s in Latin America to ask about forms of political and ethical interventions that went unnoticed in the cultural debates of the era. Within the vast Latin American cultural markets of the sixties, I study four authors whose works were overlooked both critically and popularly at the time. Calvert Casey (1924–1969), a gay Cuban-American writer, worked and published in Havana from 1958 to 1965 when he went into self-exile. Juan Filloy (1894–2000), the Argentine “writer from three centuries,” returned from a thirty year editorial silence in the sixties. Héctor Manjarrez (1945) returned to Mexico City from London and began to publish only after the massacre at Tlatelolco. Armonía Somers (1914–1994), a female, Uruguayan writer of dark and erotic tales, was originally dismissed by many of her contemporaries for her provocative themes.

What unites these diverse authors is a common problematic, unique to them, which appears throughout their works—a practice I call “the politics of going

unnoticed.” Political philosophy from Plato to Rancière highlights the process of passing from invisibility to visibility within the public sphere. However, these authors imagine subjects who purposefully avoid the spotlight and still engage in dissensus. While reading the Latin American cultural archive against the grain, my analysis is guided by three questions: (1) How can a seemingly unimportant subject enact a radical critique while, paradoxically, going unnoticed by dominant institutions? (2) How do these authors promote an ethics that open dialogues among political adversaries in a democratic framework without relying on exclusive categories? And (3), what are the formal strategies they employ to reflect the politics and ethics of going unnoticed?

I contend that these authors imagine new possibilities for political action far from entrenched ideologies (e.g., Peronism, the Cuban Revolution) and violent acts of aggression or repression (e.g., the Tupamaros, the massacre at Tlatelolco). Moreover, they generate the conditions of possibility for agonistic, democratizing transformations of existing institutions and epistemologies that exceed exclusive national and identitarian boundaries.

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AMERICAN SIXTIES.

By

Jason A. Bartles.

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Advisory Committee:
Professor Laura Demaría, Chair
Professor Ryan Long
Professor Mehl Penrose
Professor Juan Carlos Quintero-Herencia
Professor Ernesto Calvo, Dean's Representative

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ARTELETRA al vesre...

How might the Sixties in Latin America be read yet again? It was a fascinating era of tensions, ruptures, and infinite possibilities, but it was also a period of violence and terror. Put in broad terms, what was opened as a moment of revolutionary fervor and celebration for some with the triumphant arrival of the *barbudos* from the Sierra Maestra in Havana, was closed with the massacres and disappearances of students, laborers, and so-called dissidents across Latin America who were not necessarily working to reproduce the Cuban Revolution in their own regions or to choose sides in the Cold War. Is it possible to return to the Sixties in Latin America without disillusionment after this closure and locate other openings whose potential has yet to be explored? Furthermore, what does it mean to read the Sixties today, from the perspective of the early twenty-first century? This era of hopes and dreams, of the belief that true change was not only possible, but already underway, today seems so distant. Are there texts from the Sixties still left to be read that might speak, albeit indirectly, to the contemporary world?

The works of Calvert Casey, Juan Filloy, Héctor Manjarrez, and Armonía Somers that comprise the corpus of this study have received minimal attention by scholars in and of the Sixties and by reading publics both past and contemporary. Only more recently have each of them begun to receive critical attention. The present work builds on this scholarship to further demonstrate the contemporary relevance of these authors and their texts. In their own ways, these writers imagine a quiet

rebelliousness that shies away from the spotlight, from overt political propaganda, and from choosing sides in the most visible political, ethical, and aesthetic debates of the era, while publishing untimely, but well-written texts with some of the most prestigious Spanish-language presses and cultural journals.

Born to a Cuban-American family in Baltimore, Maryland, Calvert Casey (1924–1969) lived in Havana between 1958 and 1965, writing for *Lunes de Revolución* and *Casa de las Américas*, before going into self-exile in Poland and Italy. He published collections of his short texts at Ediciones R and Seix Barral: *El regreso* (1962), *Memorias de una isla* (1964), *El regreso y otros relatos* (1967), and *Notas de un simulador* (1969). This is to say that he chose to live in the center of the revolutionary city and published in the centers of the cultural markets of the 1960s, documenting volunteers who labored in the Cuban countryside and discussing ways to improve Cuba's national theatre. Yet, he never occupied the Revolution's center stage—like Che Guevara or even Cabrera Infante—and some of his essays subtly register his unease with Castro's growing authoritarianism. After the founding of the UMAPs, Casey fled, fearing future imprisonment for being gay. He continued writing for a few years but tragically committed suicide in Rome in 1969. Since his death, a number of his friends and colleagues, as well as more recent critics, occasionally attempt to provoke a revival of his works; he has been the subject of special issues of the journals *Quimera* (1982) and *Gaceta de Cuba* (2009), but it is only well after the closure of the Sixties that he is being paid more significant attention.

From Río Cuarto, Argentina, Juan Filloy (1894–2000) is known as the “writer of three centuries” and the author of thousands of palindromes for which, according

to him, he holds the world record. During his life, he wrote more than fifty novels, almost half of which remain unpublished today. His first novel, *Periplo*, was published in 1930, and the last, *Decio 8A*, in 1997. Between the publication of *Finesse* (1939) and the re-edition in 1967 of *Op Oloop* (1934), he worked as a judge in Río Cuarto and refused to publish his works; however, starting in the 1960s he began publishing consistently. Among all of these short-story collections and novels with seven-letter titles—one of his many obsessions—I focus on *Yo, yo y yo* (*Monodialogos paranoicos*) (1971) and *Vil & Vil* (*La gata parida*) (1975), as well as his collection of palindromes and essays on the art of writing them, *Karcino. Tratado de palindromía* (1988). Most recently, his works are appearing in new editions in Argentina.

Born in 1945, Héctor Manjarrez lived in Belgrade, Paris, and London during the 1960s, and only returned to Mexico in 1971. Unlike the more well-known members of his generation and the previous one—the avant-garde writers of the *escritura* camp and of the countercultural *onda*—he was not part of the student protests that culminated in the massacre in Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968. Upon his return to Mexico, his first short stories, *Acto propiciatorio* (1970), and novel, *Lapsus* (*Algunos actos fallidos*) (1971), were published by Joaquín Mortiz. Since his debut, he has continued to publish prose and poetry with Editorial Era, including the informal trilogy that retrospectively imagines the 1960s and 1970s: *No todos los hombres son románticos* (1983), *Canciones para los que se han separado* (1985), and *Pasaban en silencio nuestros dioses* (1987). Though he won the Premio Xavier

Villarrutia in 1983 and his later works have been celebrated, his first two texts remain out of print and almost out of the purview of contemporary criticism.

Armonía Somers (1914–1994) is the pseudonym for the Uruguayan writer Armonía Etchepare. In 1933, she became a school teacher in Montevideo, gaining a solid reputation for her research in pedagogy. Her first novel, *La mujer desnuda* (1950), provoked an enormous scandal among the lettered elite of the Río de la Plata; they dismissed it as a poorly written pornographic text—based more on hearsay than on having read the novel which barely circulated at the time—and assumed the pseudonym was hiding a gay male writer. She continued writing and publishing short stories and novels with the prestigious Editorial Arca, including *Todos los cuentos. 1953–1967* (1967), *De miedo en miedo (Los manuscritos del río)* (1967), and *Un retrato para Dickens* (1969), among a number of other works over the following decades. In the 1960s, Ángel Rama began a revision of her reception, and since the 1970s, various waves of feminist criticism and studies on fantastic literature have set about to recover and study her dark and complex writings, particularly focusing on *Sólo los elefantes encuentran mandrágora* (1986). Currently, her archives are being organized by Cristina Dalmagro at the Université de Poitiers in France.

My decision to bring these four writers together in a study of the Sixties in Latin America is almost completely arbitrary. I mean this in a sense that is comparable to Foucault's genealogical methodology, by which the historian does not search for the origin or the truth, but rather constructs a contingent historical narrative built from "an unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers" ("Nietzsche" 146). These authors are from completely different generations; Filloy

was born fifty-one years before Manjarrez. They were born in, lived in, and wrote about very different regions of the Americas—North America, the Caribbean, and the Southern Cone. In terms of their aesthetic sensibilities, they vary drastically from one another; Casey’s texts are brief and fragmented, Filloy’s are highly structured, Manjarrez’s tend to drift between topics and narratives, and Somers’s draw from horror and fantastic genres. Thematically, they address a wide range of topics, from gauchos and Victorian literature, to atomic bombs and LSD. I know of no record of there being conversations between any of them or of them having read one another’s works. Their ideological positions do not necessarily cohere around any specific political party or movement.

These are authors whose works do not “belong together” in a traditionally canonical or proper sense. Yet the impropriety of this arbitrary decision to bring Casey, Filloy, Manjarrez, and Somers together serves as the condition of possibility by which I read the Latin American Sixties yet again from the early twenty-first century. This individual rereading is meant to join the critical narratives about the Sixties. Mine is not an apocalyptic gesture that would dismiss or discard them; this would serve only to recast the seemingly unimportant writers I study here as the new canon.

Instead, I propose to reread the Latin American Sixties in the way that one might reread Juan Filloy’s palindrome “ARTELETRA” *al vesre*. “ARTELETRA” is composed of two words in Spanish, “*arte*” and “*letra*,” meaning “art” and “letters, literature,” respectively. “*Al vesre*” is a phrase that comes from *lunfardo*, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century dialect or slang with Italian roots that

developed first among criminals and then gained popularity among the growing lower-middle classes in Buenos Aires and often appears in tango lyrics. Many of the words, like “zafar” ‘to get by’ and “trucho” ‘fake, shoddy,’ are commonly used today. “*Vesre*” is the lunfardo word for an informal linguistic game—similar but not equivalent to Pig Latin—in which the syllables of common words are reversed. For example, the word for coffee, “*café*,” become “*feca*.” “*Vesre*” is derived from the word “*revés*” ‘reverse’ by reversing the syllables “re” and “vés.” The word that names this game also plays the game it names; it reverses the word “reverse,” but not in the same way that a palindrome is a word that can be read perfectly the same in reverse. “ARTELETRA” and every other palindrome forms the same word when read from left to right and in reverse. If the palindrome alone were the metaphorical heuristic for rereading the Sixties, which it is not for me, then this would mean that I was simply inverting notions of propriety and impropriety or of the visible and the invisible. But inverting binaries only leads to the creation of new binaries. To read “ARTELETRA” *al vesre* is to reverse it imperfectly; it is an improper inversion and reversal. Instead of simply turning around and finding the same exact word in reverse, the idea is to jumble the syllables a bit and break the palindrome’s crystalline perfection and linear logic, thereby creating a completely different word.

Reading the Latin American Sixties *al vesre* is also, as others call this linguistic game, to read this era *al verse*. “*Revés*” can have its syllables flipped to form “*vesre*,” and this reorganization can slip even further by interchanging the “s” and the “r” to form “*verse*.” Curiously, “*verse*” is also a homophone for the reflexive verb meaning “to mutually see one another.” Thus, reading *al verse* can also be to

bring together this arbitrary selection of authors to allow them to face one another in a way that is not possible when authors are divided by national origin, generation, or aesthetic sensibility. Reading the Latin American Sixties *al vesre* and *al verse* creates a new option that is not necessarily better or worse than others. By imperfectly flipping things around, wandering a bit off course, and allowing different authors to see one another, I have fabricated a crossroads where these four authors can engage in dialogue with one another, even if such a conversation never took place in reality. This is my strategy for narrating the Latin American Sixties yet again.

By bringing Casey, Filloy, Manjarrez, and Somers into dialogue with one another, I have located certain commonalities between them that serve as the starting point for this study. Each wrote texts that received very little critical or popular attention in the Sixties, yet each published their works with some of the major Latin American and Spanish presses. They were not exactly marginal or totally invisible, yet they never passed into complete visibility in the center of the cultural markets like the Boom authors. Furthermore, many of their narratives imagine characters who actively intend to remain in such threshold spaces; this is to say that they are not simply waiting to transcend their specific place nor do they seek any predetermined end. This particular position is what I call “going unnoticed.” They are not invisible, but no one pays attention to them; they actively inhabit a space in which they are not perceived, but it is also possible that they will be perceived in the future.

The question that I ask at this point is: To what extent can those who go unnoticed still engage in politics? Political philosophy ranging from Plato to Rancière describes a political subject’s process of gaining access to the public sphere as a

passage from the darkness of the cave to the light of the sun, or from invisibility to visibility; this is the traditional distinction, as explained recently by Giorgio Agamben, between *zoē* and *bios*. However, these four authors imagine various political subjects who purposefully avoid the public spotlight but still make political demands, remaining somewhere in a dimly lit threshold like the one inhabited by Agamben's *homo sacer* in the state of exception. Therefore, how can seemingly minor or unimportant texts and subjects enact a radical critique of dominant cultural and political institutions while, paradoxically, going unnoticed within them? Moreover, to what extent does going unnoticed promote an ethics that creates the potential for dialogues between political adversaries in already crowded spaces without establishing new norms or universal categories? These are the questions that I explore in this study.

In each of the three chapters, I construct a dialogue among all four authors, while situating their texts within Latin America's ubiquitous but precarious cultural markets. In Latin America, these became an entangled space in which best-sellers, traditional and popular music, reasonably priced literary collections for mass consumption, and avant-garde experiments were sold alongside one another and, at times, were indistinguishable from one another. Chapter One, "The Itinerary of Errant Palindromes," unfolds the most visible cultural maps of the era—those focusing on the Boom writers, violent revolutions, and utopian dreams—within which these mostly anonymous protagonists begin to go unnoticed. I define "going unnoticed" as a means without ends; it is a temporary state during which these protagonists choose an alternative path through crowded spaces with no preconceived goal in mind. At

this point, reading Filloy's palindrome "ARTELETRA" *al vesre*, becomes a metaphorical heuristic for the ways in which these subjects can change their perspective by turning against the norm of reading from left to right. While going unnoticed, these authors' protagonists end up perceiving other subjects and texts that had always been present—like the word already written backwards into every palindrome—but that had been ignored in these spaces. Going unnoticed, thus, becomes an active strategy for reading cultural maps imperfectly and improperly against the grain.

A great deal of political thought today is premised on the idea of bringing visibility to marginal subjects; this, for example, becomes the definition of politics and of the political possibilities of literature and the arts for Jacques Rancière, and this is also the basis of most identity politics. However, those who purposefully go unnoticed complicate this process of granting institutional recognition to the formerly excluded, since these are subjects who are not exactly excluded or completely left outside. In Chapter Two, "The Politics of Going Unnoticed," I advance a theory whereby political gestures generate the conditions of possibility for dissensus within already crowded political spaces. I begin with Casey's unnoticed essays published in the major Cuban periodical *Lunes de Revolución* where he slightly errs from the party line; he claims to be a committed intellectual, but he laments the impossibility of not being committed. Meanwhile, Filloy's "Yo y los intrusos" becomes an ironic retelling of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" set in the provincial "deserts" of Córdoba, Argentina. Through this comparison, I show that it is just as easy to go unnoticed in a crowded, urban setting as it is in a rural location and that by the Sixties, if not earlier,

there is no true outside nor possible escape from modern political and economic spheres of influence.

After contextualizing Agamben's paradigms of modern politics within Latin America, I turn to Manjarrez's western/science fiction short story "Johnny" and Somers's horror novel *La mujer desnuda*. In these texts, I show how subjects who could be labeled as a *homo sacer*, or one who can be killed with impunity at the thresholds of a sovereign space, purposefully evade the public spotlight. Manjarrez's American cowboy, Johnny, seeks refuge from the law and the press given his dubious immigration status in Mexico. Somers's nude woman flees to the countryside from the repressive confines of her urban family home on her thirtieth birthday—the age at which unmarried women in Uruguay at the time were legally allowed to live alone. By not passing fully into visibility, those who go unnoticed create a space wherein dissensus, which previously had been blocked for them, becomes possible again.

Chapter Three, "The Ethics of Being Perceived," begins with Casey's short story, "La ejecución." This rewriting of Kafka's *The Trial* elaborates on the impossibility of contesting the logic of the sovereign. Recognizing this impossibility, Casey's protagonist chooses a path different than Kafka's K.; although it is not a successful solution, he decides to refuse to participate in the legal process. The protagonists who go unnoticed must eventually reemerge, thus allowing themselves to be perceived. I contend that this exposure takes the form of an ethical encounter between radically different subjects with competing demands separated across vast distances. Going unnoticed eventually has the potential to open a space for dialogues

among adversaries whose open communication had been blocked by violent demands and moralizing, normative boundaries.

Drawn from my reading of Filloy's *Vil & Vil* and Somers's *De miedo en miedo*, I argue that these ethical dialogues reject all forms of binary logic, thus removing boundaries that divide, for example, us from them, good from evil, or propriety from impropriety. Once these protagonists reemerge, it might be said that they have failed to remain unnoticed. Nevertheless, as I demonstrate in my analysis of Manjarrez's *Lapsus*, this failure becomes the guarantee of future renewal. While engaging their adversaries in dialogue, these protagonists fail in order to demonstrate their inability to arrive at a definitive closure of the public arena. This "failure," then, allows for greater inclusion and future disagreements in the crowded political arenas and cultural markets of the Sixties and of today.

From this contingent and arbitrary encounter among Casey, Filloy, Manjarrez, and Somers, my study intends to open up a space in which the Sixties can be narrated once more while still leaving open the possibility for others to do the same. Nevertheless, the narrative I construct here also has the potential to point toward new options that might be relevant to contemporary political, ethical, and aesthetic debates. Of course, this will be for the reader to decide. Overall, what I have learned in this study is that the texts and discourses of and about the Sixties still have so much to say, so much more than can be registered in this single project. By returning to the era with a bit of impropriety, it becomes possible to begin to perceive the fragments of seemingly unimportant voices and to cobble together creative, potential options for political and ethical thought from what they say. Without forcing these voices into the

light, where they are utterly exposed and easily reduced to a direct communication of simplified ideas, I engage them in an imperfect dialogue during which bits and pieces of their ideas and proposals can move in and out of focus without trying to reduce them to a singular, clearly identifiable political, ethical, or aesthetic program. The politics of going unnoticed, then, is but one way in which the dialogue among them can play out. This potential, errant dialogue is what follows.

Chapter 1: The Itinerary of Errant Palindromes

The Lapse of an Era

Much invaluable work has been done to show that to study the Sixties is to focus on an era that exceeds the ten-year span of a decade. To begin in 1960 would already be too late. In *Nuestros años sesentas. La formación de la nueva izquierda intelectual en la Argentina 1956-1966*, Óscar Terán demonstrates that the Sixties should not be read as a fixed temporal block. Terán uses the ungrammatical construction in Spanish, “los sesentas,” instead of the proper “los sesenta,” to highlight the plurality and extension of the era that exceeds the decade. In doing so, he traces Peronism, popular political movements, and the changing formation of intellectuals both in and out of the university in Argentina, from the mid-1940s through the presidency of Arturo Frondizi, as a necessary line of thought for understanding Argentina’s particular situation at the time.¹ Though his focus is on Argentina, it is possible to extend this notion of *los sesentas* as an era throughout Latin America. Borrowing this concept from Terán, Claudia Gilman explicitly refers to this period as an “época” or “era” in her study of international polemics in Latin America, *Entre la pluma y el fusil. Debates y dilemas del escritor revolucionario en*

¹ See Silvia Sigal’s *Intelectuales y poder en la década del sesenta* for an indispensable companion study to that of Terán.

² Cold War rhetoric, of course, has not completely disappeared either. Yet, the new dominant rhetoric surrounding terrorism is quickly replacing it; Beverley’s book, *Latinamericanism after 9/11*, despite his attempts to justify the title, appears to be

América Latina. This flexible, non-chronological approach allows her to analyze the contours of the most visible public debates that raged in Latin America about the appropriate roles for being both an intellectual and a revolutionary that today seem characteristic of the era. Furthermore, Fredric Jameson's essay, "Periodizing the 60s," examines a series of cultural, political, and economic concepts and historical events that have come to define the long sixties beyond the temporal limits of the decade on both ends.

I follow in this tradition of talking about the Sixties (with a capital "S") as an era that cannot be restricted to an explicit temporal frame. Instead, "the Sixties" for the purpose of the project refers to the lapse of time that spans, quite imprecisely, from the mid-1950s into the mid-1970s, from the military coup against Perón in 1955 to the military dictatorships of Uruguay in 1973 and of Argentina in 1976. It is a period in which the rural and urban guerrillas fighting against Batista came to establish a Soviet-style Socialist regime that successively cracked down not only on political dissidents but on all those who were considered to be out of line with the Revolution's values (e.g. critical artists, foreigners, and queer individuals, among many others). During this time in Mexico and in Argentina, popular protests by students and workers quickly escalated into state-sponsored violence against its own citizens. In Tlatelolco, on October 2, 1968, a peaceful student meeting, after months of massive protests in the capital city, turned into a state-sponsored massacre that brought an end to the movement. In Córdoba in May of 1969, a popular uprising of students and workers initiated the radicalization of the left against General Onganía's de facto government, which was weakened and overthrown over the following year.

This era is one that ends when the possibilities of carrying out utopian ideals disappear, be it after the Padilla Affair of 1971 at which time Castro's intellectual supporters publicly declared their break in solidarity with his regime, or after the establishment of CIA-backed military dictatorships that employed terror and violence as the means for squashing any remaining revolutionary zeal.

This is a hasty outline of the Sixties in terms of some of the most well-known historical events, and of course, these national histories cannot be easily compressed into a linear historical narrative for all of Latin America. I mean for it to serve only as a point of departure for mapping and reading this era in retrospect from the early twenty-first century. Often I struggle to find solid ground on which to anchor myself as I approach the entangled debates, polemics, and disputes of a period that seems to be so far in the past. This is not to say that fifty years is an enormous span of time separating today from the Sixties. However, from the perspective of a present characterized by the triumph of late capitalism, the entrenchment of neoliberal economic policies, cultural, political, and economic globalization, the turn to the left by many current Latin American governments, the resurgence of indigenous movements, the regime changes taking place in Cuba and Venezuela, and the technological innovations of the digital era, this distance seems untraversable.

As Alain Badiou outlines in *The Century*, there is a break that occurs around the 1980s, radically severing what he calls the short twentieth century that begins with the historical avant-gardes and World War I. Badiou's Century—of which the Sixties constitute a sort of climax, a desperate, yet enthusiastic last push to find man's new beginning in this century of novelty—is one that characterizes itself “as end,

exhaustion, decadence *and* as absolute commencement” (31). There is a desire to destroy the old world, a process carried out by successive wars that continually present themselves as the last, great war to end all wars, and create, in its wake, a radically new man and new society. However, continues Badiou, the contemporary world, since the late 1980s, is better characterized as a second Restoration, a period when revolution is generally considered “abominable and impossible” (26). Along these lines, the ideals that were once real possibilities in the Sixties appear as naive and impossible projects today. This Restoration, as Badiou calls it, is a present characterized by a laissez-faire approach to all obstacles that cedes final authority to economics and global financial markets: “Basically, the spontaneous philosophy of our ‘modernizing’ propaganda is Aristotelian: We must not do, but let be: laissez-faire. Just imagine the gap between such a stance and the conscience of all those who sang, beneath red banners, ‘the earth shall rise on new foundations’” (99). The neoliberal world order has taken root, and Badiou claims that the calls to overthrow this order no longer spark the same enthusiastic manifestos, protests, and revolts that took place around the globe in the Sixties.

Paul Virilio also has dealt with the characteristic traits of this contemporary period. In *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*, he develops a thesis regarding the progress of technology, the obsession with speed and movement, and not only a reading of the conditions of production, following the Marxist traditions, but also of the means for destruction that accompany Western societies and their war machines. As early as 1977, Virilio notes that social ideals, what he calls “the old national ethology,” no longer drive individual enthusiasm (*Speed* 121). This is a claim that he

further develops in *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*. According to Virilio, an individual's perception loses its focus—as a result of the relentlessly increasing speeds of communication, transportation, and military technology, and the constant bombardment of rapidly passing fragments of the real—and shifts toward automatized and epileptic states (32). Virilio's analysis is, of course, indebted to Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* in which the latter examines the assault of images and consumerist propaganda on the masses.

There is a certain continuity, in this sense, between the Sixties and the present that Badiou labels a "Restoration." Yet, the leap in speed and fragmentation that Virilio studies takes on a new quality, as made evident for him by science fiction narratives, which is that of "the incompatibilities existing between our presence in the world and the various levels of a certain anesthesia in our consciousness that, at every moment, inclines us to see-saw into more or less extensive absences, more or less serious, even to provoke by various means instantaneous immersions in other worlds" (85). This anesthetized state of consciousness is perhaps one of the most profound distinctions between the *laissez-faire* attitude toward politics, ethics, and aesthetics today, and the unceasing attempts to raise the political consciousness of the proletariat, the masses, or the colonized in the Sixties.

Concerning this same shift in the context of Latin America since the closure of the Sixties, Jorge G. Castañeda describes the political *status quo* of the mid-nineties:

For many years there has been both a reformist hope and resigned expectation in Latin America. For the enlightened right and center, the hope has focused

on the possibility of change without risk, of justice without violence or social and international confrontation. For the defeated or disenchanted radical left, the resigned expectation is rooted in the relativity of the lesser of two evils: as the idea of a revolution *hic et nunc* was discarded, a ‘sort of’ justice, a sort of change, a sort of independence and equality became increasingly attractive.

(Utopia Unarmed 129)

By the 1990s, according to Castañeda, revolutionary programs had given way to a highly subjective reformism in which “everyone brings along what he chooses, and finds what he or she wants on arrival” (129). He gives as an example the tense encounter between Régis Debray and his former comrades in the Cuban Revolution when he attempted to convince them to adopt a French brand of democratic socialism, now preferring elections and gradual reforms over the armed revolutions in which he had participated decades earlier.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, this narrative of complete disillusionment begins to break down with what has come to be known as the Left Turn or the Pink Tide in Latin America. In general, the Left Turn refers to the wave of democratically elected leftist or socialist governments throughout Latin America, beginning roughly with either the transition to democracy after dictatorship or the rise of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1999. Of the rapidly growing bibliography on this topic, Castañeda’s doctrine of the two Lefts has been most influential: “One [Left] is modern, open-minded, reformist, and internationalist, and it springs, paradoxically, from the hard-core left of the past. The other, born of the great tradition of Latin American populism, is nationalist, strident, and close-minded” (“Latin” 29). Among

the first (for Castañeda, the better) group are, as of 2008, “Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, parts of Central America, and, up to a point, Peru”; the latter can be found in “Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, and to a lesser extent, in Argentina, Colombia, and Paraguay” (“Morning” 132–133). But perhaps this division is too schematic. As John Beverley has noticed,

Behind the retrograde/modern, hard/soft Left dichotomy is a premise that the “market-friendly” good guys on the Left are those still willing to work within a framework conforming to the existing structure of international trade and markets, whereas the bad guys question that framework and are looking for ways to get out of it (by, for example, repudiating foreign debt).

(Latinamericanism 12)

At the same time, Beverley’s position is clearly motivated by his desire to laud this *marea rosada* since it appears to be consistent with his subalternism and, despite what Beverley dismisses as some of Chávez’s “authoritarian ‘tendencies,’” has appeared to him to be mostly democratic (11). I remain somewhat skeptical that this Left Turn or Pink Tide will bear all the utopian fruits it promises. Regardless of the position one takes on the topic, what is undeniable is that the generalized disillusionment of the 1980s and 1990s is ceding its ground to renewed investments in expanding democracy and equality throughout the Americas in a global political environment no longer completely dominated by Cold War rhetoric.²

² Cold War rhetoric, of course, has not completely disappeared either. Yet, the new dominant rhetoric surrounding terrorism is quickly replacing it; Beverley’s book, *Latinamericanism after 9/11*, despite his attempts to justify the title, appears to be trapped by this discourse in the U.S.

As it stands, Badiou's divide between the short twentieth century and the current Restoration is not as clean as he might have it, and perhaps these more recent developments in Latin American politics are signs that people are waking up from the anesthetized state that, for Virilio, characterized the late twentieth century. Either way, in contrast to today, the Sixties was an era in which radical change in the world appeared as a historical necessity and a guarantee; therefore, according to the logic of the era, it was worth the armed struggle necessary to achieve it. However, I do not return to the Sixties from a nostalgic perspective that invents an idealized past. Despite all the dreams of the Sixties, it certainly was not ideal or utopian. I cite only the Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción 'Military Units to Support Production' (UMAPs) in Cuba, the forced-labor camps to which many so-called counter-revolutionaries, including political and religious opponents and even men suspected of being homosexual, were sent to be indoctrinated in the beliefs of the Revolution through forced manual labor.³

In my view, the Sixties are, first and foremost, texts and, moreover, discourses in the Foucaultian sense (*Archaeology* 21–39). I have no lived experience of that era, having been born at the very end of the Cold War and having begun my work in Latin American studies well after Chávez was already in power and not long before Fidel Castro handed the reigns over to his brother Raúl. I do not plan to

³ See the controversial documentary, *Conducta impropia*, directed by Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal (Barcelona: Egales Editorial, 2008). For a measured criticism of the film's facile comparisons between the UMAPs and the violence of Pinochet's dictatorship or the Nazi concentration camps, see Ian Lumsden's *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1996). Despite this criticism, Lumsden clarifies, "These were terrifying times for many homosexuals, particularly those in entertainment, culture, and education" (70).

exhume the period's canonical discourses in order to revive them today through some sort of critical sorcery. Yet, I suggest that my point of departure not be read as disillusioned, since I was never personally invested in the projects of the Sixties. I accept Martín Hopenhayn's argument that the distinction between the "apocalyptic" and the "integrated" subject has lost its clarity in the twenty-first century (*No Apocalypse* 1–12). I neither find it likely that my research will engender a radical destruction of the global capitalist economy defined as an agent of pure alienation, nor have I resigned myself to neoliberalism's triumphant celebrations of its own, supposedly democratizing, effects. To go one step further, I also am hesitant to stake too much political weight in the successes of the most recent Leftist governments, even though I find myself sympathetic, at the very least, with their rhetoric in support of expanded democracy and increased economic equality. In returning to the Latin American Sixties, I propose nothing more than to provoke a mere opening in the multitude of perceptions that have come to organize the era so that one alternative narrative can be written here.

During the Sixties in Latin America, there was an effort both to develop and sustain a regional identity irreducible to the duality of Cold War logic and to establish international ties, while transforming major metropolitan centers into internationally recognized cultural hotspots. In *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin American in the Cold War*, Jean Franco confirms that the Cuban Revolution was capable of "mobilizing writers across national borders, publishing younger writers, and gaining the support and admiration of intellectuals ranging from Sartre to Sontag. Anti-imperialism and not Western culture set the agenda" (38). Latin America did not

fully engage in the dualistic debates of the Cold War, despite the fact that U.S. foreign policy approached the region from that perspective, dedicating diplomatic, cultural, and economic resources to combat the spread of communism in the region, until the Vietnam War distracted their attention. In my view, her analysis of mid-twentieth century Latin American culture and politics—especially concerning economic dependency and cultural imperialism—further complicates the non-dialectical opposition of the Two that, for Badiou, characterized the century and the Cold War from the perspective of the United States and Europe. To paraphrase Franco, the Sixties is the time in Latin America when writers turned toward anthropology and toward indigenous and African cultures as a way of reacting against realism; they created a specifically Latin American literature with the authority to stand on its own in the face of Western cultures, both as a form of dissent from post-Enlightenment rationalism and from the attempts to collapse literature into anthropology (169–173).⁴

No longer looking only to Europe or to the United States for political, economic, and cultural models, Latin American intellectuals turned their gazes partially inward after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. In *A Turbulent Decade Remembered*, Diana Sorensen analyzes major periodical publications that make up the “geography of discursive networks” and “of possibilities” in which circulated the cultural and political novelties of the time (142). Among the periodicals she studies

⁴ Roberto González Echeverría also studies this turn toward anthropology that begins around the 1920s. See *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998). He attempts to recast, in broad terms, the development of Latin American literature without following the trajectory of European and North American literary history.

are Argentina's *Primera Plana* and *Sur*, Cuba's *Mundo Nuevo*, and Uruguay's *Marcha*. Also in these networks were the now-canonical Boom narratives of Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Carlos Fuentes, to which she returns as an emblematic example "of the complexities of the continental and transnational exchanges brought about by post-1945 development" (165). Latin American cultural production in this era had reached new reading publics both locally and globally, but they ultimately left intact the gender systems that promoted almost exclusively male authors, revealing one of "the limitations of the revolutionary projects—be they political or artistic" (207).

Maintaining a patriarchal order, the rhetoric of the era upheld the idea of establishing family ties among Latin American intellectuals and writers. Claudia Gilman explains how this project of forming a univocal family was conceived as a kinship that would promote the artistic and political activities of their clan across the continent and around the globe: "Los nombres más importantes de la ciudad letrada latinoamericana se alinearon con Cuba y trataron, en adelante, de consolidar un discurso homogéneo, manteniendo las diferencias y discrepancias dentro del ámbito interno de las discusiones familiares, mientras fue posible" 'The most important names of the Latin American lettered city aligned themselves with Cuba, and they tried, from then on, to consolidate a homogeneous discourse, keeping their differences and discrepancies within the internal sphere of family disputes, as long as it was possible' (*Entre* 142). The Cuban Revolution became both the catalyst for developing a regional identity that would attempt to pry open the binary logic of the Cold War. Yet among the discourses studied by Gilman, this oppositional identity

could only be founded on the eradication of internal heterogeneity. At best, this “family” lasted until the Padilla Affair of 1971, at which point the majority of the Latin American leftist intellectuals and writers publicly broke all ties with Castro’s regime, with the infamous exception of García Márquez.⁵

This inward gaze and search for regional homogeneity should not be overemphasized. In *Fulguración del espacio. Letras e imaginario institucional de la Revolución Cubana (1960–1971)*, Juan Carlos Quintero-Herencia critically analyzes the revolutionary discourses that were institutionalized, particularly through the journal *Casa de las Américas*, and required constant intellectual reflection and participation. He claims: “Una de las figuras o motivos recurrentes de este encuentro de la palabra literaria con el fenómeno revolucionario es lo que denomino una suerte de epifanía de la visibilidad. El poder institucional revolucionario armará una suerte de régimen óptico que llevará a cabo toda una peculiar espacialización del orden de lo real en la isla” ‘One recurrent device or leitmotif of this encounter between the literary word and the revolutionary phenomenon is what I call a sort of epiphany of visibility. The revolutionary institutional power would create a sort of optical regime that would carry out a peculiar spatialization of the order of the real in the island’

⁵ The “caso Padilla” has been well-documented and analyzed in various studies. The multiplicity of texts in which authors publicly weighed in on the situation has been collected in Lourdes Casal’s *El caso Padilla: Literatura y Revolución en Cuba. Documentos* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1971). Heberto Padilla’s collection of poetry is also compiled alongside a selection of these public texts surrounding the affair in *Fuera del juego* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1998). For an analysis of the affair, see Martín Chadad’s essay in Marcela Croce’s *Polémicas intelectuales en América Latina. Del “meridiano intelectual” al caso Padilla (1927–1971)* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Simurg, 2006); and Claudia Gilman dedicates a chapter to the affair in *Entre la pluma y el fusil. Debates y dilemas del escritor revolucionario en América Latina. Nueva edición ampliada* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2012).

(18). This optical regime is one that institutes specific “relatos morales e históricos” ‘moral and historical narratives’ to which all those who appear under the revolution’s all-pervading and supposedly all-seeing light must subscribe (18). This is to say that the idea of a Latin American “family” and homogenous group of intellectuals is an invasive, even militarized demand placed on those subjects who “siempre se sabrán tocados por esta luz y obligadas a continuas definiciones y genuflexiones identitarias” ‘will always be aware that this light shines on them and that they are incessantly obligated to define their identity through acts of deference’ (19). As Quintero-Herencia’s analysis demonstrates, these highly visible spaces, debates, and discourses are never as monumental and homogenous as they purport to be, but rather the plurality of such an event is often forcibly homogenized and institutionalized under the harsh spotlight guided from a hegemonic point of view.

Furthermore, in *Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics: Argentine Art in the Sixties*, Andrea Giunta explains how the search for internationalism was not one that eschewed the centers of the Western, artistic world. On the contrary, she traces how artists came to confirm New York City as the new, global art capital, partially replacing Paris. Although Cuba began to attract writers and intellectuals after 1959, Giunta emphasizes that Havana “did not have enough appeal to divert artists from the route that led them to seek recognition in New York” (284). In turn, Argentine artists and institutions planned to develop Buenos Aires into the third point of a global cultural triangle. Despite the vibrancy of and enthusiasm for autochthonous projects, policies, and institutions, Giunta argues that this international spirit never fully replaced the desire for approval and recognition in the so-called center of the Western

world. At the same time, in their desperation to be incorporated into the international art scene, many artists and writers ignored or overlooked the propagandistic qualities of the Cold War policies that were promoting cultural ties between the United States and Latin America. The United States encouraged abstract expressionism as opposed to artworks with more explicit political content, and the Latin American artists who responded to this preference found themselves trapped by the ethnocentric critique that their expressionistic work was nothing more than a provincial variation of a universal style already mastered by other U.S. or European artists (189–241).⁶ In the end, neither Buenos Aires nor Havana were able to challenge the new cultural hegemony of New York City.

This lapse of time, the Sixties, has been mapped over and again. The general contours of that map remain intact, while its details come to be edited and highlighted, and various artistic and intellectual contributions come in and out of focus. Borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, I read these maps of the Sixties in Latin America as rhizomes, which they define in the following manner:

The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art,

⁶ In addition, as Jean Franco shows, Pablo Neruda was criticized for his participation in the PEN Club in New York, which was perceived as an affront to the Communist Party, and others, including Allen Ginsburg, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Nicanor Parra, came under attack for colluding with the United States (*The Decline* 97).

constructed as a political action or as a meditation. Perhaps the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways. (12)

To read the Sixties, then, as a rhizome which can be mapped, reworked, torn, or expanded, and entered from multiple points adequately describes the varied ways in which scholars have documented and interpreted its complex dimensions. The era can be approached from so many different perspectives: its periodicals and cultural markets; the Boom; the conjunction of politics and aesthetics; definitions of “internationalism”; Cold War foreign policy, dependency, and imperialism; constructions of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity; its protests, demonstrations, and violence; or its failures and subsequent disillusionment. Of course, these are only some the most visible landmarks of the Latin American Sixties today.

Joining this attempt to read the Sixties once more, I propose a different entry point, one to be added to the others while becoming entangled with them. My study begins with what I read as yet another map of the era that appears in Héctor Manjarrez’s novel, *Lapsus (Algunos actos fallidos)* ‘*Lapse (Some Slips of the Tongue)*.’ Manjarrez wrote this novel between 1968 and 1969, and it was published in 1971 by Joaquín Mortiz, a preeminent Mexican publishing house in the Sixties. The following extensive quote from this novel draws a peculiar map for the Sixties from Mexico, but one that is never radically different from those mentioned above. Meanwhile, this map provokes a rejection or a break from that cartography in the opening sentence that creates it:

y ahora lo único que sabes, Huberto, es que hay en el mundo ciertas cosas que rechazas, y daremos como ejemplo:

La prensa-liberal, el autor con su eterna Mamiya colgando estúpidamente, el steak and kidney pie, el arte por el arte, la novela comprometida, la solemnidad, la guerra del Vietnam, el sexo con condón, los suplementos dominicales a colores, los intelectuales De Izquierda, el nazismo, el Reader's Digest, la Plaga Emocional, las canciones yucatecas, las novelas de la Revolución Mexicana, la burocracia, la vulgaridad, los social-demócratas, los valores establecidos, los borrachos, los ghettos, la hipocresía, los políticos mexicanos, los nuevos ricos, las teorías de los políticos mexicanos, los nuevos ricos, las teorías de Teilhard de Chardin, la zarzuela, la miseria, el tequila, Dios, el naturalismo, el puritanismo, el comercialismo, el imperialismo, el cretinismo, los aforismos, el nacionalismo, el provincialismo, el bipartidismo, el fascismo, el liberalismo, la ópera, la virginidad, el sistemismo, las buenas familias, el hashishismo, el materialismo, el catsup, el conservadurismo, el té con leche, el PRI, la pintura mural mexicana, el LSDismo, la hambruna, el mexicanismo, la mexicanidá, los libros sobre el mexicanismo y la mexicanidad (y los antimexicanos), la explotación del hombre por el hombre, las masacres, la mint sauce, la comida inglesa en términos generales, los campos de concentración, el jdanovismo, el Establishment, el Establishment anti-Establishment, el macartismo, el machismo, el revisionismo, el dogmatismo, el oportunismo pequeño-burgués, el comunismo en un solo país, el realismo socialista, el baseball, el lujo desmesurado, la clase media, la segregación racial, el stalinismo, los escritores-profesionales, la baja presión atmosférica, los hombres gelatina, las

élites intelectuales, el academismo, el chauvinismo de gran potencia, el bigotito estrecho, los libros de viaje, el peligro BOOM atómico, los líderes y mesías, el genocidio, HP Sauce, chop suey, las mañanas, el calor extremo, Sociales, la pequeña burguesía, el snobismo, el conformismo, el silencio, el maniqueísmo, el tráfago *insensato* de la vida moderna, la falta de moteles y autocinemas en Inglaterra.

Y ni siquiera tienes la decencia de ser nihilista sino que todavía andas sonriendo en la calle como si pudiese haber un milenio tras lomita. (190–191)
'and now the only thing you know, Huberto, is that there are certain things in this world that you reject, and we'll give the following examples:

The liberal press, the author with his constant Mamiya hanging stupidly, steak and kidney pie, art for art's sake, engaged novels, solemnity, the Vietnam war, sex with condoms, the Sunday supplemental in color, Leftist intellectuals, Nazism, Reader's Digest, the Emotional Plague, Yucatecan songs, the novels of the Mexican Revolution, bureaucracy, vulgarity, the social-democrats, established values, drunkards, ghettos, hypocrisy, Mexican politicians, the *nouveau-riche*, the theories of Mexican politicians, the *nouveau-riche*, Teilhard de Chardin's theories, *zarzuela*, misery, tequila, God, naturalism, puritanism, commercialism, imperialism, cretinism, aphorisms, nationalism, provincialism, bipartisanism, fascism, liberalism, opera, virginity, systemism, good families, hashishism, materialism, ketchup, conservatism, tea with milk, the PRI, Mexican mural painting, LSDism, famine, Mexicanism, Mexicanness, the books about Mexicanism and

Mexicanness (and the anti-Mexicans), the exploitation of man by man, massacres, mint sauce, English food in general, concentration camps, Zhdanovism, the Establishment, the anti-Establishment Establishment, McCarthyism, machismo, revisionism, dogmatism, the opportunism of the petit bourgeoisie, Communism in just one country, Socialist realism, baseball, excessive luxury, the middle class, racial segregation, Stalinism, professional writers, low atmospheric pressure, spineless men, the intellectual elite, academicism, chauvinism, thin mustaches, travel literature, the atomic BOOM threat, leaders and messiahs, genocide, HP Sauce, chop suey, the mornings, extreme heat, personal announcements in the newspapers, the petit bourgeoisie, snobbism, conformism, silence, Manichaeism, the *senseless* fluctuations of modern life, the scarcity of motels and drive-in-cinemas in England.

And you don't even have the decency to be a nihilist, but you still walk through the streets grinning as if there could ever be a millennium just around the corner.'

Though I will return to this quote a number of times, as a first attempt at untangling it I begin with the verb that frames and founds this rhizomatic cartography—*rechazar*, 'to reject' and 'to turn down.' Huberto's knowledge is rooted in rejection; the only thing he knows is that there are certain things he chooses not to accept. Rejection, thus, becomes his first philosophy, the disruptive, but paradoxically creative, foundation of his worldview and his epistemology. These rejections that become knowledge are articulated within a text entitled *Lapse* that follows an errant

narrative form. Footnotes constantly disrupt and displace the plot and come to be more extensive, if not more important, than the body of the text itself.

“*Lapsus*” is the technical term used in Spanish to translate Freud’s “*Fehlleistung*,” or “parapraxis” in English; it is also a Latin word defined as “a slipping or falling,” “a span of time,” and “falling into error or away from dogma.” “Lapse,” for my purposes, is the best way to maintain this multiplicity of meanings. Furthermore, the phrase “*actos fallidos*” in Spanish is a good equivalent of what, in English, we commonly refer to as “a Freudian slip.” However, since Freud’s name is not explicitly referenced in the original title and this novel is one that slips in and out of more than just Freudian psychoanalysis, I prefer “slips of the tongue” to translate the subtitle. In this way, Huberto’s knowledge-producing rejections of the Sixties arise from an error, a slip, and a falling away from dogma that assumes the form of errancy, digression, and deviation, without ever completely leaving this rhizomatic map.

I read this quote as the manifesto by which Huberto deviates from the preformed itineraries already inscribed on the maps of the Sixties, producing something like a line of flight. For Deleuze and Guattari, the line of flight is a rupture that is also a part of the rhizome from which it breaks: “There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome” (9). For them, there are multiple lines that already exist in any rhizomatic cartography—some are imposed and others sprout up at random. Other lines of flight, nevertheless, always remain to be intentionally created: “Others can be invented, drawn, without a model and without chance: we must invent our lines of

flight, if we are able, and the only way we can invent them is by effectively drawing them, in our lives” (202). Huberto’s rejections radicalize this cartography as he errs; Huberto purposefully fails to follow the map without leaving it, and creates a different path as he wanders around toward an unforeseen horizon. His errancy is not a form of nihilism, one that would leave him devoid of all former and future meaning, nor does it appeal to the historical avant-garde’s rhetoric of apocalyptic destruction; rather, he attempts to produce a different itinerary, a line of flight, in order to create his own path through the voices and texts of that era to which he has already arrived quite late. This tardy arrival to the Latin American Sixties—both Huberto’s, Manjarrez’s and my own—becomes the condition of possibility for perceiving the state of the map and creating a different itinerary across it.

Going Unnoticed

Debidamente investigadas, una frase, una palabra oídas al pasar, una carta abandonada sobre una mesa o caída de un bolsillo, fragmentos de la conversación escuchada en el breve trayecto de un tranvía, un cruce en las líneas telefónicas, pueden darnos espléndidas claves, tantos son los que sufren desatendidos.

‘Duly researched, a phrase, a word heard in passing, a letter abandoned on a table or that slips from a pocket, fragments of a conversation heard during the brief journey on a streetcar or a cross in the telephone lines can offer us splendid clues, so many of which are left unattended.’

—Calvert Casey, “Notas de un simulador” (51-52)

In this epigraph, the anonymous narrator of Calvert Casey’s “Notas de un simulador” ‘An Impostor’s Notes’ (1969) understates the need to research abandoned, fragmentary, and almost unheard words, phrases, and texts.⁷ These bits of language slip in and out of perception as they get left behind or lost; they circulate briefly in public and private conversations but are of little importance to the passers-by who barely hear them. The happenstance interlocutors of these disconnected, fleeting, and

⁷ Many of Calvert Casey’s short stories have been translated into English by John H. R. Polt in *Calvert Casey: The Collected Stories* (Duke 1998). “Notas de un simulador” is translated there as “The Master of Life and Death,” but for stylistic purposes and because fragments of the original texts are occasionally missing in the translation, I provide my own translations of Casey’s works, and of those by the other three authors, throughout this study.

untimely ideas and conversations pay little attention to them. As potential witnesses, perhaps they have arrived too early or too late to the conversation of which they are not a part, or perhaps they only notice their seemingly quotidian, unremarkable aspects and subsequently ignore them. For any number of reasons such texts are left unattended, and anything they might communicate goes unnoticed.

Casey's narrator embodies the characteristics of these abandoned voices as he dodges in and out of the swirling lights and shadows of the city he traverses at night. Narrated in the first person, he recounts his surreptitious excursions throughout the city. He provides palliative care to the dying, whether they be homeless or abandoned in a hospital, and he observes them in their last moments, taking great care to remember their passage from life into death and detail their encounters in his writing. To avoid public suspicion, he tries to go unnoticed as he approaches these other characters. Going unnoticed for this narrator is not a matter of seeking isolation, but rather of stealth and camouflage, of writing and hiding in plain sight.

In section XVI of the text, not sure how to react to the hostility of Joaquín and his wife in the plaza where he was taking care of the dying young black man, the narrator returns to his apartment. The music from the street fair outside his building seeps into his refuge, distracting him. Instead of returning to the crowd, he climbs to the roof terrace where the noise from the fair did not reach: "Me sentí rodeado de silencio, calmado por la brisa apacible que venía del lado de la bahía" 'I felt surrounded by silence, relaxed by the gentle breeze that blew in from the bay' (*Notas* 80). The narrator, while hopping from one roof terrace to another and walking through the darkened outdoor corridors of neighboring homes, moves cautiously

beneath and between lit spaces. In a sense, he attempts to step out of the focus of that revolutionary light, what Quintero-Herencia calls the “optical regime” of the Cuban Revolution (18). He writes of this play of light and shadow not as a classic chiaroscuro with its sharp divisions, but as a swirling of various colors, shades, and intensities through which he passes: “una luz sucia” ‘a dirty light’; “la oscuridad era casi completa” ‘the darkness was almost complete’; “una luz amarillenta me tiñó las manos” ‘a yellowish light stained my hands’; “un fulgor remoto” ‘a distant flash’; “un brillo pálido” ‘a pale shimmer’ (*Notas* 80).

Also mixing with these shadows and lights is a similar description of the bursts of sounds and precarious silences that simultaneously flow through these spaces. The tranquil silence with which the scene begins is temporary, and he moves in and out of earshot of other sounds: “el inesperado silencio” ‘the unexpected silence’ when the fair music suddenly stops for a moment; “el lejano clamor de la ciudad” ‘the distant clamor of the city’; “Del pozo subían voces” ‘Voices arose from the well’; “Alguien tosió con una tos dura, una voz cantó; oí risas, más voces” ‘Someone let out a hoarse cough, a voice sang; I heard laughter, more voices’ (80). The narrator who goes unnoticed clumsily navigates a complex, shifting field of lights and shadows and of voices, noises, and silences. He jumps over low walls that separate the various, connected roof terraces, but he never passes from one clearly defined space of darkness, invisibility, or silence into another clearly defined space of light, visibility, and voice. Such sharply demarcated spaces of perception are not to be found in this novella and, in general, do not appear in Casey’s fragmented writings.

In all of the texts under consideration here, the underlying connection is the narration of a desire, attempt, or inadvertent experience of going unnoticed. This phrase, “going unnoticed,” requires some pause in order to unravel the various forms it may take. By no means does going unnoticed require concealment or stasis. One may just as easily go unnoticed sitting alone in the middle of the woods or a desert as walking anonymously through a crowded urban setting. Neither an origin nor a destination, it is a temporary state wherein one is not perceived or paid much attention by others, and this state can and will come to an end. Insofar as the “going” of the phrase “going unnoticed” necessitates some sort of spatiotemporal movement or duration, it names a process, a state of becoming, or a lapse of time during which a subject is not noticed and accrues potential energy. One may have gone unnoticed in the past, be going unnoticed currently, or go unnoticed at a future time or place. Even when this state comes to an end at a given point in time and space, the fact that one went unnoticed remains nonetheless significant.

While writing on “becoming-imperceptible” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari briefly mention this phrase: “To go unnoticed is by no means easy. To be a stranger, even to one’s doorman or neighbors. If it is so difficult to be ‘like’ everybody else, it is because it is an affair of becoming. [...] This requires much asceticism, much sobriety, much creative involution” (279). Going unnoticed takes the form of a becoming that moves between perception and imperception. By going unnoticed, one moves through what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as “zones of indiscernibility” in which only certain movements will be perceived while others will remain unobserved (280). The perception of

movement is always dependent upon the viewer's positional relation to the movement or rest of others: "Perception can grasp movement only as the displacement of a moving body or the development of a form. Movements, becomings, in other words, pure relations of speed and slowness, pure affects, are below and above the threshold of perception" (281). Movement is only perceptible from a specific threshold, a specific, relative position to that which is moving. To offer a simple example, while sitting on a moving train, the other passengers do not appear to be moving in relation to me, yet to someone standing on the station platform or watching the train from outside, all of the passengers including myself inside the train appears to be moving in relation to that viewer. As such, to perceive the movement of a body one must be situated in an adequate threshold of perception. In its simplest form, going unnoticed involves moving in such a manner as to be unobserved or overlooked by potential spectators who could perceive the unnoticed body if they were located in a different threshold of perception.

The connection between movement and perception is also, for Deleuze and Guattari, a matter of becoming. Avoiding metaphysical postulations about being, they define "becoming" as that which concerns the immanent relations of alliances that are set in non-linear motion within rhizomes:

Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree. Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation.

Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, “appearing,” “being,” “equaling,” or “producing.” (239)

In my analysis, the process of going unnoticed is not a taxonomy; thus, it refuses all rigid classification for establishing family ties, whether biological or fictional, as in the case of the lettered intellectuals of the Sixties in Latin America who temporarily aligned themselves with the Cuban Revolution. Instead, going unnoticed becomes a destabilization and an opening up of such categories. It cannot be reduced to imitation. It does not have an end goal of becoming like or becoming identical to something else, since at that point it would cease becoming and rigidify into being. In contrast, going unnoticed necessitates the continuation of this movement that evades the stasis of identification. Once one stops moving, the thresholds of perception change immediately; one stops going unnoticed and is perceived as similar or identical to something else. Going unnoticed, rather, is moving perpetually with no *a priori* end or goal in sight, with no particular destination, transformation, transcendence, or *telos*.

Moreover, there is no mask, no *persona*, and no pseudonym presented to a public as a purposefully distorted representation of one’s identity behind which one goes unnoticed. Whereas pseudonyms and masks create an epistemological barrier by blocking access to knowledge or veiling truths about one’s identity, the process of going unnoticed does not attempt to distort reality in favor of a falsehood. What goes unnoticed is the act, the subject, or the thing itself presented or represented as itself, even though no one pays attention to its taking place or to its existence. In fact, this movement is one that seeks to shy away from public recognition, and for this reason,

going unnoticed would be an unlikely tactic for identity politics. Finally, those who go unnoticed are corporeal subjects, not ghosts, phantasms, or disembodied spirits who glide invisibly through spaces; they have bodies that interact with the swirling lights and shadows, voices and silences that surround them. Going unnoticed is a material practice. Their physical bodies are visible in the sense that they are capable of being seen, and all of those who go unnoticed will be perceived eventually, as in the case of Rebeca Linke, the protagonist of Somers's *La mujer desnuda*, who walks around in the nude. Yet, they manage to create a temporary state during which little public light is shone on their bodies. When they pass by others, no one pays attention. When they speak out, everyone happens to ignore their voice. Still, they continue to move.

In studying the works of Casey, Filloy, Manjarrez, and Somers, I distinguish between two modes of going unnoticed. In the first mode, going unnoticed becomes the incidental fate of many of those who aspire to greatness, power, or prestige; getting one's works to a major press or gallery certainly does not guarantee public or critical success or even attention. Casey's works appeared in the journals *Lunes de Revolución*, *Casa de las Américas*, and the *Gaceta de Cuba*, and he published with the Cuban Ediciones R and, after his self-exile, with Seix Barral in Spain. Despite being praised by Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Italo Calvino, and María Zambrano, his works never enjoyed much renown in the Sixties, neither in or out of Cuba.⁸ Filloy

⁸ See Mario Merlino's introduction to *Notas de un simulador* (Barcelona: Montesinos, 1997), an incomplete collection of Casey's works, and Ilán Stavans's introduction to the English-language translations of some of Casey's fiction, *Calvert Casey: The Collected Works* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998). In Chapter Two, I address the issues with the various collected editions of Casey's works.

returned from his thirty-year editorial silence in the mid-1960s, publishing both with small presses in Río Cuarto and with Losada, a major press in Buenos Aires. His works were praised by Julio Cortázar at the time, who named him in *Rayuela*, yet he never rose to the status of someone like Macedonio Fernández during the era.⁹

Manjarrez spent most of the 1960s living abroad. When he returned to Mexico, he published his first two texts with the prestigious Joaquín Mortiz, was included in Margo Glantz's *Onda y escritura en México. Jóvenes de 20 a 33* (1971), went on to win the Premio Xavier Villarrutia in 1983, and continues to publish with Editorial Era today.¹⁰ Nevertheless, his first two texts are the only ones to remain out-of-print.

Somers was published by Editorial Arca in Montevideo, under the direction of Ángel Rama, the first critic to publicly praise her work. Though she was subsequently studied by prominent feminist critics beginning in the 1970s, responsible for the current revival of her works, the critics who reacted to her first novel, *La mujer desnuda* (1950), rejected her as a pornographic writer, attempting to *ningunearla*, turn her into a nobody.¹¹

There is no reason to believe that any of the authors under consideration here desired to have their works go unnoticed by reading publics, but as can be seen in

⁹ See Mempo Giardinelli's "Don Juan de las Siete Letras: Vida y Obra de Filloy" that appears as the introduction to Filloy's *La potra. Estancia "Los Capitanejos"* (Buenos Aires: Interzona, 2003) and has been reproduced in the online Suplemento Cultural of the newspaper, *La Nación*.

¹⁰ See the introduction to Christopher Domínguez Michael's recent edition of two of Manjarrez's short stories, titled *Héctor Manjarrez* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2011).

¹¹ For a summary of the reaction to this publication in 1950, see Cristina Dalmagro's *Desde los umbrales de la memoria. Ficción autobiográfica en Armonía Somers* (Montevideo: Biblioteca Nacional, 2009), particularly the section on the publication history of her works and how she purposefully isolated herself from the literary establishment of Montevideo (83–94).

retrospect, they inadvertently went unnoticed in the cultural markets of their time. This occurred despite having appeared in some of the most prestigious publishing houses at the heart of the Latin American and Spanish cultural markets responsible for the success of the Boom authors, in addition to having been translated into other languages and praised by some of the most prominent authors and critics of the era. In different ways, each author was a bit untimely or somewhat out of place despite their proximity to so many canonical figures and polemics. For example, Casey dedicated a handful of texts published in *Lunes de Revolución* to documenting the early years of Cuba's revolutionary government, the Playa Girón/Bay of Pigs invasion, and analyzing and translating for the theater with the idea of helping Cuba become a world-renowned center for the performing arts.¹² Still, these authors never became leading voices for any of the period's vibrant political or artistic movements, nor did they receive much public attention for their declarations of support for or disavowal of political projects when compared to the attention received by the Boom authors, Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, and even to José Donoso, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Juan Carlos Onetti, or Manuel Puig.

More than a description of the place of these intellectuals and their written works in the political debates and cultural markets of the Sixties—although it is inseparable from this position—the second mode of going unnoticed involves an intentional desire on the part of the various protagonists of these four authors to stay

¹² See the articles that Casey published in *Lunes de Revolución* between 1959 and 1961, for example, “Cuba: nación y nacionalidad,” “La Revolución Cubana llega a Oxford,” “Los caminos a Playa Girón. Fotos Mayita,” “1959-1961. El teatro en la Revolución,” “El buen teatro y el pueblo,” and “El teatro nacional hace historia,” and his translations of Constantin Stanislavski and Yevgeny Vakhtangov.

out of the public spotlight. These often anonymous protagonists actively seek out shelters, refuges, and closets, or attempt to write and hide in plain sight and to pass for something unworthy of further attention, albeit without masquerading as something or somebody else. Casey's many protagonists are closeted or secretive, both in terms of their sexuality and their general attempts to remain anonymous in public spaces. Filloy imagines, among others, a cave-dwelling writer and a quietly insubordinate military conscript. Manjarrez's American cowboy, Johnny, for example, attempts to assimilate into a Mexico of another century than his own. Somers's Rebeca Linke in *La mujer desnuda* and the anonymous man in *De miedo en miedo* seek quiet spaces where they encounter unexpected confidants in the countryside and in the city. I argue that this active gesture to go unnoticed is what connects many of the texts here and will be the primary focus of my analysis on the politics and ethics of going unnoticed as I bring these authors into a dialogue that exceeds their national contexts.

In both modes of going unnoticed, there is an intimate connection with that which is untimely or fails, whether this is the result of happenstance or actively achieved. For Deleuze and Guattari, untimely or failed elements are an expected, even necessary part of any assemblage in a rhizome:

And if there are in fact jumps, rifts between assemblages, it is not by virtue of their essential irreducibility but rather because there are always elements that do not arrive on time, or arrive after everything is over; thus it is necessary to pass through the fog, to cross voids, to have lead times and delays, which are

themselves part of the plane of immanence. Even the failures are part of the plane. (255)

On the plane of immanence, there is a flattening out that takes place; within any rhizomatic cartography, hierarchies and value judgments are suppressed, and these assemblages are composed of heterogeneous multiplicities. This can be seen in Huberto's map of everything he rejects and knows about the Sixties in which no one part is held above or below the others. In this flattened, heterogeneous plane, even that which is untimely or arrives as a failure can be located there. More importantly, these elements have the potential to open alternate points of entry into the rhizome "out of that which had been previously blocked" (Deleuze and Guattari 258). Not only can going unnoticed be a desire, a chosen line of flight within the rhizome, but the failure of inadvertently going unnoticed, of arriving too early or too late, can become that which allows one "to rearrange the overall assemblage" (259). In this sense, going unnoticed should not be read as a failed endeavor or as a purely passive undertaking; there is a potential energy stored in the movement of going unnoticed that can be unleashed in order to open up a new point of entry or to pass through a blockage.

I propose that the authors under consideration here be considered just as contemporary as their more visible, vocal, and timely cultural comrades. In Agamben's essay, "What is the Contemporary?," he discusses the relationship between that which is untimely and the contemporary: "Those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands" (11). This definition of what it

means to be contemporary—within any era—diverts its attention toward that which is not easily confused with the dominant trends of its own time. There is something anomalous, but not abnormal, about that which is contemporary. For Agamben, those who are contemporary are not only those who establish a relationship with that which is easily perceived, but those who know how to notice the darkness of their own time:

The ones who can call themselves contemporary are those who do not allow themselves to be blinded by the lights of the century and so manage to get a glimpse of the shadows in those lights, of their intimate obscurity. [...] On the contrary, the contemporary is the person who perceives the darkness of his time as something that concerns him, as something that never ceases to engage him. Darkness is something that—more than any light—turns directly and singularly toward him. The contemporary is the one whose eyes are struck by the beam of darkness that comes from his own time. (14)

The contemporary is the one who perceives the darkness, that which failed to arrive on time to the illuminated stage of any given era. Agamben clarifies that there is an activity involved in perceiving darkness: “Darkness is not, therefore, a privative notion (the simple absence of light, or something like non-vision) but rather the result of the activity of the ‘off-cells,’ a product of our own retina” (13). There is an active perception involved in seeing darkness. The contemporaries, therefore, do not get blinded or dazzled by the bright lights, but rather turn toward the shadows that swirl all around them in order to seek out the darkness that others struggle to perceive or simply let pass unnoticed.

In this sense, the anonymous narrator in Casey's "Notas de un simulador" could be called a contemporary of his era as he dodges in and out of the lights and shadows, the sounds, noises, and silences of his city. He achieves this by going unnoticed. The untimeliness of his actions, his evasion of the popular street fair, is precisely what allows him to produce a line of flight throughout the same space, but from a different threshold of perception. He goes unnoticed, he becomes untimely, and he becomes capable of perceiving that which also goes unnoticed in the nearby darkness.

While spying on a neighbor's house from its shadowy corridors, he stumbles across "una luz potente" 'a powerful light' coming from a bedroom. Under that light, an unexpected exchange takes place as the anonymous narrator notices a set of anonymous eyes noticing him. A sort of unequal symmetry takes place along the narrator's errant line of flight through the city; these anonymous subjects exchange glances—engaging in the type of ethical encounter I detail in Chapter Three—that begin to move from left to right and back again effortlessly:

Por el hueco abierto que remataba la ventana, unos ojos me miraban fijamente. Me desplacé un poco para observar mejor el interior. La mirada me siguió hasta que desaparecí de su campo de visión, para volver a desplazarse conmigo cuando volví a entrar en él. Las sábanas ocultaban unos pies. El resto de la casa, a oscuras, permanecía en silencio. Volví a mirar los ojos abiertos bajo los párpados inmóviles. (81)

Through an open hole at the top of the window, a set of eyes stared at me. I shifted a bit to better observe the interior. The eyes followed me until I

disappeared from their field of vision, but they moved with me when I entered it again. The sheets hid a pair of feet. The rest of the house, in the dark, remained silent. Again I looked at the open eyes under immobile eyelids.

These two sets of eyes mutually observe one another in their happenstance encounter along the narrator's errant itinerary. However, the eyes that seem to follow the narrator are practically dead eyes. The person who appears to be watching him is barely mobile, and the body's description closely resembles those of the other inanimate objects in the room, particularly the ceramic angel and photographs beside the bed. The narrator continues along his errant route, stumbles, and once more, without consciously intending to return to this spot, finds himself seeing these eyes watching him: "Cuando volví a asomarme al patio, tropecé otra vez con la mirada inmóvil bajo la luz cegadora" 'When I stepped onto the patio again, I stumbled once more into that immobile gaze coming from under the blinding light' (82). The blinding light is practically ineffectual, since the eyes it should be blinding remain open, staring at the narrator in the dark; instead, the light only serves to keep vigil over this person, not unlike the task carried out by the narrator who goes unnoticed throughout public spaces where he cares for the alone and dying inhabitants of his city.

Over the next day or so, the narrator intentionally returns and exchanges glances with this person whose eyes ultimately "parpardearon con un saludo de despedida" 'blinked in order to say goodbye' (84). The narrator had taken great care to not be noticed by anyone else while he observed this otherwise unnoticed person's last days in silent companionship. He began simply by wandering around in the dark

in order to escape the racket of the street fair, but he becomes capable of peering into the shadows and bearing witness to this lonely, dying person's last moments. He goes unnoticed and unintentionally begins to notice his contemporaries who go unnoticed in the darkness, and they notice him noticing them as he wanders back and forth like an errant palindrome.

Attending to Errant Palindromes

Writing new palindromes is not an easy task. There is a mathematical precision and an obsessiveness involved in constructing intelligible words and phrases that read exactly the same from left to right as they do in reverse.

“ARTELETRA” is one of the thousands of palindromes that Juan Filloy created over the course of his life. It combines the words “arte” and “letra,” or “art” and “letters, literature,” to form a palindrome in which the two words refer back and forth to one another.

In *Karcino: Tratado de palindromía* (*Karcino: A Treatise on Palindromes*), Filloy published his collection of palindromes that range from two to seventeen words long. In the final section, titled “ARTELETRA,” Filloy composes poems from his palindromes. The shorter ones are conceivably simpler to write and to notice as palindromes. Filloy offers the following examples in different languages: “NEVER EVEN”; “ROBA SABOR”; “AMOR ¿BROMA?”; “MADAM ADAM”; “BON SNOB”; “LUZ AZUL”; and “AMO IDIOMA”, among many others (*Karcino* 74–75). As they become longer, the task of writing them becomes more difficult, and the likelihood of them going unnoticed as palindromes increases among inattentive readers. A seemingly simple, yet unimportant phrase, such as “ACASO HUBO BÚHOS ACÁ” ‘perhaps there were owls here,’ if not written in capital letters to draw attention to itself might go unnoticed as a palindrome (81). Some can be read as poetic aphorisms, as in the case of a seventeenth century palindrome by John Taylor that Filloy references: “LEWD DID I LIVE & EVIL DID I DWEL” (49). Others may appear to be nothing more than quotidian language: “DENNIS AND EDNA SINNED”; or “NEVER ODD OR EVEN” (49). Or

as in one of Filloy's Spanish palindromes: "EUFEMIA, JAIME FUE... ¡EUFEMIA, JAIME FUE!" This translates simply as 'Eufemia, Jaime left... Eufemia, Jaime left!' (101).

Yet, others tend to catch one's attention, begging to be noticed as the ingenious constructions that they are. I have selected just three examples:

ES RE-MAL EROS EN ESO: RELAMERSE (105).

ACA, CAROLO ADONIS, AMO LA PALOMA... SI NO DA OLOR A CACA (183).

ADA, GORDA DROGADA, DI LOS NOCIVOS A COROLA CLAY. Y, AL CALOR OCASO, VI CONSOLIDADA GORDA DROGADA (195).

The following is my literal translation of these phrases; maintaining them as palindromes is, if even possible, beyond my skills:

'Eros is incredibly bad at one thing—taking pleasure.'

'Here, Carolo Adonis, I love the dove... as long as it doesn't smell like shit.'

'Ada, a fat drug addict, give what's harmful to Corola Clay. And, at twilight's warmth, I saw a strengthened, fat drug addict.'

A single reading will always leave the palindrome unnoticed as such, but the comedic strangeness of these expressions is capable of provoking a reader into giving them a second glance. By reorienting one's reading practices and reading in reverse, from a different threshold of perception, the palindrome can come into view as such.

The famous Sator Square is a well-known enigma of Western cultures. Filloy describes it as "uno de los *jeux d'esprit* más intrigantes de todos los idiomas" 'one of the most intriguing intellectual games of any language' (59). The following is the Sator Square as reproduced in Filloy's treatise:

S A T O R
A R E P O
T E N E T
O P E R A
R O T A S

The Sator Square is composed of four Latin words, “sator,” “tenet,” “opera,” and “rotas,” and the unknown word “arepo,” which is assumed to be a proper name but has no fixed meaning. The letters in this arrangement form a crystalline, closed structure when read from top to bottom and from left to right before being read in reverse as a multidimensional palindrome. Its earliest inscriptions have been dated to the first century AD, and they were found among Roman ruins and in Pompeii before the arrival there of Christianity. It has been an object of historical and theological speculation for centuries, since it also forms an anagram for the phrase “Pater noster” that can be spelled twice crossing at the letter “n”; this formation leaves as its remainder two As and two Os, which are often interpreted as the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. However, its appearance in Pompeii challenges this possible solution, and other interpretations attribute it alternately to pre-Christian, gnostic, Jewish, stoic, and even Satanic traditions (Sheldon 2003, 233–250).

Magical, miraculous, and metaphysical qualities aside, what is certain about this and other palindromes is that they challenge the reader’s hermeneutical skills. As Sheldon shows, there have been innumerable attempts at deciphering this potential cryptogram since the late nineteenth century by mathematicians, philologists, and theologians, but no one has yet to propose a widely accepted solution to the hidden

meaning they all assume it must contain.¹³ What I find curious is how different intellectuals can be so skeptical regarding scholarly interpretations of the Sator Square made by others, yet these same scholars uphold the generalized belief that this is a puzzle with a hidden solution that is simply yet to be deciphered, despite all of the contradictions present in each of these “solutions.” In the end, this may be nothing more than a clever word game into which so many readers have found so many meanings and uses.

It is not my intention to reignite a debate about hermeneutics nor to pretend to have arrived at a definitive uncovering of the meaning hidden in these and other palindromes and texts. Instead, it is the process of noticing that which is inscribed on the surface of the palindrome and the process by which these enigmas and games go unnoticed that interests me here. My contention is that Filloy’s palindromes—not unlike the voices heard in passing and the abandoned fragments of texts in Casey’s “Notas de un simulador”—need some tending in order to be recognized in all their complexity. Otherwise, they remain unnoticed only to be dismissed as trivialities unworthy of further attention that get left to wander in the darkness.

Filloy’s *Karcino: Tratado de palindromía* includes two elegant and playful essays on the art of constructing palindromes. In addition to being a seven-letter word—all of Filloy’s fifty-odd novels have seven-letter titles—the Greek word “*karcino*” has a particular relevance to palindromes. Filloy elaborates on his choice for the title in an interview with Mónica Ambort: “En griego, Karcino quiere decir

¹³ See Rose Mary Sheldon’s article, “The Sator Rebus: An Unsolved Cryptogram?” (2003). The author has compiled an annotated bibliography and summary of the state of the question surrounding the Sator Square.

cangrejo, animal que camina al sesgo formando zig zags, casi en la forma en que se leen los palíndromos” ‘In Greek, “*karcino*” means “crab,” an animal that walks sideways forming zigzags, which is almost the same way that palindromes are read’ (Juan 27). The Greeks were quite fond of palindromes and had various words or phrases to name them; Filloy extracts the symbol of the crab, as he explains, from one of these phrases: “*karkinike epigrafe*,” or “the inscription of the crab.” Another word used for “palindrome,” Filloy explains, is the Greek “*hysteroproteron*,” which is the same as saying “lo posterior y lo anterior” ‘the subsequent and the former,’ and the word “palindrome” is a derivative of “*palin dromos*,” which suggests that these are words and phrases that “corren de nuevo” ‘flow again’ (*Karcino* 16).

Regarding this movement that flows in multiple directions, Filloy describes an issue similar to the one I noted above in relation to the threshold of perception:

las letras son jánicas: presentan dos caras, una a la izquierda y otra a la derecha, manteniendo gestos, rictus y matices diferentes. Vale decir: una cara visible, orgullosa de expresar lo que ostenta; y otra cara secreta, exclusiva para iniciados en el culto esotérico de la palindromía. (13)

‘letters are Janus-faced: they present two faces, one to the left and another to the right, each with different gestures, sneers, and nuances. It’s worth saying: one face that is visible, proud to flaunt what it has to show; and another secret face, one that is exclusively reserved for those initiated into the esoteric cult of the palindrome.’

Filloy states that reading only in one direction unnecessarily limits what can be perceived. A strictly logical, rational approach from a head-on perspective will

always be confining and proscriptive; it will always limit one's perception to that which can be seen from only one threshold, whereas palindromes require a change in perspective in order to be noticed. In this way, Filloy proposes something similar to Slavoj Žižek's practice of looking awry: when a straightforward view produces nothing more than confusion and blurriness, Žižek suggests stepping off to the side and reorienting one's gaze in order to bring the unclear object into focus (*Looking Awry* 11). For both Filloy and Žižek, to read only from left to right or to look at something only in a straightforward manner is to read only that which is perceptible from and flaunts itself to that single point of view, while other subjects and objects remain out of focus or go unnoticed nearby.

Filloy is not content to have his vision and knowledge limited, and he starts writing backwards, concocting strange phrases that can be read from different directions. The first reading, from left to right, is the common and visible reading. The second, from right to left, is that which occurs when one arrives at an end, limit, or blockage and turns around, finding exactly the same letters in reverse. Nevertheless, this is not the same reading as the first; this reading is the one that confronts the "cara secreta" 'secret face,' which is not an invisible face, but the one already inscribed in the other that nonetheless goes unnoticed.

There is also a third way to read palindromes that still goes unnoticed in this dualistic reading:

La palíndromía, por lo mismo que es jánica, es bífida, bifronte. Partida en dos, la frase se comide en ser UNA, sin embargo; porque, si una parte orienta, no es que la otra desorienta. Su condición bifronte asume entonces la de su logos

unitivo; pues, al orientar con idéntico sentido lógico desde atrás, no implica que lo que orientó al principio se desoriente, ya que se cierra así la lectura doble de la misma locución. (19)

The palindrome, just as it is Janus-faced, it is bifid, bifurcated. Split in two, the phrase exercised restraint in order to be ONE, nevertheless; because, if one part orients, it is not that the other disorients. Its divided state takes on, then, a united logos; so, orienting with an identical, logical meaning in reverse does not imply that what oriented at the beginning disorients, since the phrase itself closes the double reading.

By reading ARTELETRA from the “L” toward the left and toward the right, the two-part, Janus-faced reading (from left to right and then from right to left) is completely and perfectly closed for Filloy. When referring exclusively to palindromes, he is correct to affirm that three detailed readings are necessary to unravel all the complexities of each one. Yet, I am not exactly interested in the ontological and epistemological stability that Filloy locates in his crystalline palindromes, those little words unto themselves that are closed off to play their autonomous games.

Filloy’s palindromes are linear and precise, being read from the defined beginning to the defined end and then back again, or from the exact center toward the two finite limits of the palindrome. However, his essays already provide the key for thinking of palindromes as a metaphor for opening up different readings in the face of a blockage or an obstacle that I will show to be compatible with Manjarrez’s and Casey’s errant itineraries. “Art” and “literature,” the words inscribed in “ARTELETRA,” rarely conform to mathematical conceptions of perfection, and at least

since the historical avant-gardes of the early twentieth century, they tend toward that which infinitely opens and unfolds as opposed to that which closes in on itself. Further, Filloy asserts that “[el] hábito de leer de izquierda a derecha” ‘the habit of reading from left to right’ of Western culture has rooted itself into our ways of seeing the world:

Vale decir que el lector se deja llevar por el rumbo de la mirada. De tal suerte, no va mentalmente contra la corriente escritural, no se empaqueta en ella ni se opone zurdamente al raciocinio. Esa propensión explica que pocas veces se detuvo a escrutar o auscultar el misterio implícito en las palabras del texto.
(25)

‘It is worth saying that the reader gets carried away by the course of his gaze. In doing so, he does not go against the scriptural current in his head, he does not stand his ground, nor does he clumsily refuse its reason. This tendency explains why he rarely stopped to scrutinize or probe the mystery that is implicit in the words of a text.’

Filloy proposes extending what he learned from writing palindromes into a metaphor for reading any text by stubbornly refusing the effortless rationality and imposed limitations inherent in any unidirectional practice. In standing one’s ground, turning around, and moving against the scriptural current, the thresholds of perception are immediately reorganized allowing one to see that which had gone unnoticed—in the case of the palindromes, the same phrase repeated in reverse.

Without a doubt, this metaphor of turning against the current has an affinity with Walter Benjamin’s assertion in “Theses on the Philosophy of History” that the

task of the historian is “to brush history against the grain” (257). Unlike the easy back and forth reading of a palindrome, Filloy’s fluvial metaphor suggests the difficulty of wading through moving water. Reading against this current in order to attend to that which goes unnoticed becomes as difficult as the task of writing palindromes; however, it also involves a certain level of imprecision and unpredictability. One’s perspective changes drastically while moving in the opposite direction within the same space, and the force of any current is bound to prevent the one wading against it from retracing the original path with precision.

Here is the crossroads where Huberto’s rejections and Casey’s protagonist’s errant paths stumble into ARTELETRA, one of Filloy’s many palindromes—what he likes to call, in one of his many lapses of humility, “frases filloyanas” ‘Filloyan phrases’ (*Karcino* 17). At this crossroads, ARTELETRA acquires an irreverence that exceeds the palindrome’s crystalline structure. Within this space, Filloy’s “andar palindrómico” ‘walking-like-a-palindrome’ (*Karcino* 17) can be transformed into what I call “*errar palindrómico*” ‘erring-like-a-palindrome,’ or the practice of attending to errant palindromes. It is not an *ex nihilo* invention or a unique innovation, but rather a shift, an awry glance, and a subtle change of perspective. To read “ARTELETRA,” to read art, literature, or any form of cultural production against the current as if one were reading a palindrome, is to wander off course, to become errant, and to propose a reading from an alternative perspective of that which had gone unnoticed despite being written on its surface.

In this way, Filloy’s treatise on palindromes gives way to a multiplicity of additional readings that work alongside and in addition to the already charted paths

through a given cultural map. Though this practice of reading against the currents arises from the crystalline structure of palindromes, it cannot be reduced to linear, rigid movements between a fixed origin and a definitive end. It is undesirable, even impossible, to fix the specific point and time at which a subject began to go unnoticed while moved through an era. Like the line of flight, the itinerary of the errant palindrome flows again along an uncertain path that cannot be reduced to a linear, rigid movement between a fixed origin and a predetermined end. Even when those who go unnoticed become perceived, this end should not be interpreted as a failure, but rather as having the line of flight cut off by another obstacle or blockage. As a result, a new errant palindrome will have to be created, even if by someone else.

The intersection of Huberto's errant itineraries, Casey's unattended voices, and Filloy's treatise on palindromes becomes a point of departure for sounding out the political, ethical, and aesthetic practices of their own works and of those by Armonía Somers. This crossroads becomes the place where I can begin to perceive something that went unnoticed in the major currents of the cultural markets. In turn, I propose to read the Sixties *al vesre*, like an errant palindrome, by looking past what that era was proud to flaunt in order to attend to a few more untimely, yet contemporary voices. By changing directions and reading in retrospect without neatly following other paths (e.g., literary generations, aesthetic movements, and national traditions), I open a space in which the texts of Casey, Filloy, Manjarrez, and Somers engage in an invented dialogue that, if it ever did exist, left almost no trace. These four authors were minor characters in the story of the Latin American Sixties for various reasons, and their voices did not always agree with, mimic, or simply identity

with those who spoke more loudly. It is here that I propose to chase after them and the characters they imagine like errant palindromes that continue to go unnoticed and beg to be perceived.

Engaging in Difficult Dialogues

Cristina Dalmagro has detailed the early reception of Armonía Somers's fiction in *Desde los umbrales de la memoria* (2009). The first reviews presented Somers as a hermetic, unapproachable, even bad writer. Emir Rodríguez Monegal dismissed her for demonstrating an "obsesión erótica" 'erotic obsession' and for creating "una prosa no muy transparente" 'a prose that is not very transparent' ("Onirismo" 14). According to Mario Benedetti, she might one day become a good writer, but she "obstinadamente insiste en ocultarlo" 'obstinately insists on hiding [her good writing]' ("El derrumbamiento" 115). It is not until a decade later that Benedetti recanted his first judgment of her works, finally seeing her as a praiseworthy Uruguayan writer.¹⁴ Only Ángel Rama publicly defended her as a part of what he calls the Critical Generation or the Generation of '45 within Uruguayan literature, whose most well-known writer is Juan Carlos Onetti. Rama praised the originality of her work, thus bringing credibility to it: "Todo es insólito, ajeno, desconcertante, repulsivo y a la vez increíblemente fascinante en la obra narrativa más inusual que ha conocido la historia de nuestra literatura: la de Armonía Somers" 'Everything is unheard of, foreign, disconcerting, repulsive and at the same time incredibly fascinating in the strangest narrative work that our literary history has come to know: that of Armonía Somers' ("La insólita" 1963). Nevertheless, his defense is still one that marginalized her works in comparison with his conception of the national literary tradition of the 1950s and 1960s by other female writers, calling

¹⁴ See the chapter on Somers, "Armonía Somers y el carácter obsceno del mundo," that appears in the expanded edition of Mario Benedetti's *Literatura uruguaya siglo XX* (Montevideo: Alfa, 1969).

her “un bicho tan fuera de serie que es imposible ubicarla con respecto a las restantes criaturas femeninas” ‘such an exceptional critter that it is impossible to situate her alongside the other feminine creatures’ (“Mujeres” 1966). Seen from today, it is clear that Rama’s interventions simultaneously praise Somers’s works for their uniqueness and relegate her to the margins along with the other “feminine creatures” who were writing in the Sixties. Nevertheless, the good press brought by Rama is what ultimately motivated the gradual reception of her works, mostly by feminist critics and by those studying fantastic literary traditions since the 1980s.¹⁵

In a dialogue with Miguel Ángel Campodónico—one of the few interviews to which Armonía Somers agreed—he asks her the following question: “¿Su literatura es hermética o abierta? ¿Qué hay de cierto en esta controversia?” ‘Can you comment on the controversy as to whether your literature is hermetic or open-ended?’ (Cosse 239). To which she responds:

Sí, concedo eso también, que mi literatura pueda juzgarse a veces como poco iluminada, y para algunos de difícil acceso. Confieso que a veces no comprendo que lo parezca, ya que por haber salido de mí tengo confianza de mano a mano con ella. Pero si alguna vez yo misma quedo atrapada en el cuarto oscuro de lo que he creado, un personaje, una situación, un desenlace, me doy a pensar que lo hice para salvar, para rescatar, para no inmolarse a

¹⁵ For a thorough summary of the reception of Armonía Somers’s works through the 2000s, see Cristina Dalmagro’s *Desde los umbrales de la memoria* (2009), particularly the chapter titled, “Armonía Somers/Etchepare: las huellas biográficas” (45–98). These articles by Monegal, Benedetti, and Rama, as well as many others, are documented in her exhaustive archival research on Armonía Somers; the bibliography she has compiled at the end of this monograph is indispensable for studying Somers. Dalmagro is currently organizing her archive, “Fondo Armonía Somers,” at the Université de Poitiers in France.

alguien o a algo en la excesiva luz del signo, y en la espantosa claridad que encierran todas las convenciones. (239)

‘Yes, I concede that my literature can be judged at times as being barely illuminated and that for some it is difficult to follow. I must confess that at times I don’t understand why it seems to be that way. Since it’s a product of my creation, I have an intimate confidence with it. Although, sometimes even I get trapped in a dark room that I have created, a character, a situation, an ending; I figure that I did it in order to save, to rescue, to not sacrifice someone or something to the excessive light of [linguistic] signs and to the atrocious clarity that all conventions lock up.’

Despite the varying value judgments made for and against Somers’s at times hermetic narratives, she engages in an aesthetic of opaqueness as a means of eschewing conventions. There is an unease for her in that which too easily reveals and flaunts itself, and she claims there is a certain heroic action in writing about saving these characters and situations from being excessively illuminated. There is an affinity between her aesthetic of opaqueness and Calvert Casey’s aforementioned novella “Notas de un simulador.” For these writers, some things are best left amongst the swirling shadows and pale lights of a era in order not to be sacrificed to plain language and exposed to established social codes.

Armonía Somers’s statement echoes, although without necessarily repeating, the opening phrase of José Lezama Lima’s *La expresión americana*: “Sólo lo difícil es estimulante” ‘Only that which is difficult is stimulating’ (49). There is a provocation in these words that challenge their readers to engage with their works as

if they wished to create a renewed shock by reviving the historical avant-gardes. This gesture takes place within Somers's novel, *De miedo en miedo (Los manuscritos del río)* 'From Fear to Fear (The River Manuscripts)' (1965), which is her least studied novel to date. The male protagonist who works in a book store begins to have frequent conversations with a female customer. Both remain anonymous to the reader. They continue to meet and engage in long dialogues that wander around all sorts of topics, from the boredom of their lives to escapist fantasies and memories of the past. In the following selection from this errant dialogue, the conversation turns briefly to a discussion of a non-existent novel the male protagonist imagines:

—¿Tú sabes cómo se escribiría una novela? Pero una novela para la que no se necesitara ser escritor ni nada de eso. Que se pudiera componer con otros elementos más a la mano de cualquiera, por ejemplo de dibujos mal hechos, cajones llenos de esas cosas que tanto significaron alguna vez y luego se hicieron basura. Trapo quemado de vida que se gastó diciendo buenos días a todo el mundo, gente fotografiada en el momento de perder el orgullo, con la boca, las uñas y los ojos agarrados del aire al errar un pasamanos. Y muchos materiales más....Quién sabe si con largos períodos en blanco, en los que se oyera como a las ranas de un pantano cada pequeño ser sin importancia en la explosión acompasada de su vida que nadie ha tomado en cuenta, pero que es suya y está llena de sus historias. Y que algunos solamente supiésemos traducir con el auricular bien ajustado.

—¿Y para leerla nosotros?

—Pues con sacrificio, como quien buscase una pequeña tuerca entre montones de chatarra. ¿Sabrías algo?

—De novelas de ese tipo nada en absoluto. (66)

‘—Do you know how to write a novel? I mean a novel that doesn’t require you to be a writer or anything like that. That could be composed of anything you have just lying around, like poorly done drawings, boxes filled with things that used to be really meaningful and later became worthless. A burnt rag of a life spent saying good day to everyone, people photographed in the moment they lost their pride, with their mouth, fingernails, and eyes grasping for air after missing [*errar*] the handrail. And so many other materials... Who knows, maybe with big white spaces, in which one could hear, like frogs in a swamp, each small, unimportant individual amidst the rhythmic explosion of his life that no one has ever considered, but that belongs to him and is full of stories. And that some of us only knew how to translate as long as the receiver was adjusted to the right setting.

—Then how could we read it?

—Only with a great deal of effort, like someone searching for a small screw in a heap of scrap metal. Do you know anything about that?

—About novels like that? No, nothing.’

When read alongside the interview with Campodónico, the novel begins to delineate its own aesthetic, a manifesto comparable to Manjarrez’s map, at this precise moment. Furthermore, this desire to create a narrative in which the reader’s

perspective can be reoriented toward seemingly unimportant individuals brings Somers's works into dialogue with those by Casey and Filloy.

The mundane, perennially bored male protagonist imagines a text made out of elements typically discarded or deemed unworthy of literary or artistic consideration; at the same time, this could be a description of Somers's *De miedo en miedo* itself. In the sections that compose his manuscripts that he throws into the river each night, the protagonist considers drawing instead of writing to tell part of his story about a priest. The drawing appears in the novel on the same page in which he claims enigmatically to have comprehended "el grandioso mensaje de la mala pintura" 'the grandiose meaning of bad paintings' (45). He also states that he has arrived at a low point in his life and considers committing suicide. His life could easily be described as small and unimportant, as one that goes unnoticed by everyone else even though it is full of the rhythmic explosions of life. The only one who hears these stories is the woman with whom he engages in these errant dialogues, but she inadvertently makes the ironic claim that she has no idea how to read or notice such stories and voices while she is in the process of doing just that.

This process of reading piecemeal novels and errant dialogues is described here as being more difficult to perceive than finding a small screw among scrap metal. When compared with Filloy's fluvial metaphors of reading against the current, Somers's metallic metaphor points to the incredible difficulty, and also potential danger in attending to what goes unnoticed. For comparison, the English idiomatic expression, "Like finding a needle in a haystack," describes the futility of a particular undertaking, yet the needle is quite different from the surrounding hay in the stack. In

contrast, Somers's metaphor imagines the difficulty of locating one specific screw among a pile of indistinguishable scrap metal, not to mention the inevitable cuts and scratches from digging through this rusty, jagged metal to which one would be subjected. This search for what goes unnoticed is precisely the activity in which the female interlocutor is engaged during their dialogue. She seems unaware that she is tending to stories that would otherwise go unnoticed. Their dialogue follows an errant itinerary along which otherwise unheard voices and stories come into focus and is built out of discarded and underappreciated elements.

At times the difficulty of reading Somers's novels lies in simply deciphering her hermetic prose; at others it lies in noticing that the simplest, most superficial dialogues—like the one written throughout this novel—generate the possibility for noticing the mundane, unattended stories that exist in the world. In sum, *De miedo en miedo* revives the avant-garde for its hermetism, its use of bad art, and its shock value, and in doing so, Somers recuperates some unattended voices in the heart of the Latin American cultural markets.

The Avant-Gardes of the Cultural Markets

The common project of the historical avant-gardes of the early twentieth century is generally theorized as a critique of the institutions of literature and art in their various manifestos, literary journals, poems, prose, and plays (Bürger, *Theory*). Bürger's theory has been critiqued for dismissing the possibility of neo-avant-garde artworks and maintaining a chronology of artistic innovation despite the avant-garde's rupturing of teleology (Foster, *Return*). In Latin America, the historical avant-gardes both critiqued the institution of literature and created new literature (Prieto, *Desencuadernados*). Furthermore, many of the Latin American historical avant-garde projects were celebrated and financed by national institutions as part of their pursuit of modernization (Giunta, *Avant-Garde*). Their destructions did not bring about the end of the literary establishment, but rather they provoked radical changes within the institution itself, shattering the idea that the work of art could be isolated from political and economic influences (Unruh, *Latin*).

In turn, the historical avant-gardes authorized a plethora of new techniques and possibilities for literature and art in general, many of which are derived from the formal innovations of photography, film, radio, and television—the technologies of mass reproduction and the culture industry (Benjamin, "Work"). At the same time, Beatriz Sarlo demonstrates that the sentimental narratives that circulated in Latin American periodicals between 1917 and 1927—the contemporaries of the historical avant-gardes—put into circulation older aesthetic forms, borrowed from *modernismo* or late Romanticism. She argues that the residues of outdated forms were still habitual resources for marginal areas of high culture (*Imperio*). Well before the transformation

of the art scene in the Sixties, the avant-gardes were entangled with new technologies and popular forms of culture as they appropriated past and present styles and sensibilities while being reproduced by and circulated throughout the expanding cultural markets.

By the Sixties, Latin American literature is irrevocably situated within cultural markets, but it does not follow that literature must be read as succumbing to the demands of those markets as postulated by the Frankfurt School and others. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer oppose high art (Modernism) to the culture industry.¹⁶ Habermas's *Transformation of the Public Sphere* builds from their analysis to argue that the public sphere is no longer conducive to a public, rational-critical debate now that it has been invaded by private interests and the culture industry (*Transformation*).¹⁷ In this sense, the Frankfurt School position relies too strongly on the broader early twentieth century trope that regards the masses as a homogenizing force that "crushes everything different, everything outstanding, excellent, individual, select and choice" (Ortega y Gasset, *Revolt* 10) and as irrational, petty, and superficial in their search for "vicarious experience and faked sensation," that is, for propaganda disguised in the mass-produced simulacra of the avant-garde (Greenberg, "Avant-Garde" 10).¹⁸ These critiques fail to adequately study the

¹⁶ For an analysis of Adorno's theories regarding the culture industry, see Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986).

¹⁷ For a summary of the various critiques of Habermas, see Nancy Fraser's "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere" in *The Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (New York: Columbia UP, 2009).

¹⁸ For an analysis of Ortega y Gasset's position, see Jesús Martín-Barbero's *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations*. (London: SAGE Publications, 1993). For an analysis of how the masses were feminized in

entanglements of avant-garde gestures and pop art, popular culture, and mass technologies that critically engaged one another in the Sixties.

In contrast, in *El valor de la cultura. Arte, literatura y mercado en América Latina* (2007), the editors, Luis E. Cárcamo-Huechante, Álvaro Fernández Bravo, and Alejandra Laera, propose that marketplaces be studied in the plural, and not as one hegemonic or totalitarian economic structure dominated by global cycles of supply and demand that function solely as propaganda for the masses. They assert that these markets in Latin America are both ubiquitous and precarious:

Por un lado, el mercado parece estar en todas partes y afectar todas las áreas de la cultura. [...] Por otro lado, se trata de un mercado débil y precario, ya sea por una estandarización altamente unificada de la producción como sucede en los casos con gran cantidad de consumidores, ya sea por la desproporción entre una baja tasa de consumo y el excedente de productos ofrecidos sin un claro criterio de intervención en las transacciones culturales. (13)

On the one hand, the market appears to be everywhere and to affect all areas of culture. [...] On the other, it is a weak and precarious market, either because of a highly unified standardization of production like what happens in the case of the majority of consumers, or because of the disproportion between a low rate of consumption and the excess of products offered without a clear criteria for intervening in cultural transactions.

Latin America, especially in José Martí, see Julio Ramos's *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth Century Latin America* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001). For an analysis of how these gender roles were reconfigured in twentieth century Latin American revolutionary movements, see Ileana Rodríguez's *Women, Guerrillas, and Love: Understanding War in Central America* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1996).

To enter into circulation, cultural products inevitably pass through the markets tied to the culture industries, but these precarious markets lack the ability to fully coopt every commodity and determine all value. While the means of production and circulation certainly leave their mark on literature as it enters and passes through the culture industries, the symbolic value of literature cannot be reduced to its use value or its exchange value in these markets. For this reason, the editors employ the term “*mercado cultural*,” or ‘cultural market,’ in order to study that which exceeds the horizon of consumption (11). The influence between literature and cultural markets does not have to be read as a unidirectional hegemonic force flowing from the markets to the texts, since these texts can always be read from multiple perspectives—like the palindrome ARTELETRA when read *al vesre*—that exceed the analyses of its sociopolitical or economic use value.¹⁹

In *Juegos de seducción y traición. Literatura y cultura de masas* (2000), Ana María Amar Sánchez explores how Latin American writers throughout the entire twentieth century have worked with or cited themes, styles, and entire works of popular or mass culture and how they have incorporated them into their fiction. Her particular interest is in talking about the use of popular forms as a mode of seduction, a way to lure in readers and provoke interest in their literature, even if they fail to produce the object of desire or if they never intended to produce it in the first place. As a result, according to Amar Sánchez: “En el presente ya no puede pensarse la

¹⁹ See Brett Levinson’s *The Ends of Literature: The Latin American “Boom” in the Neoliberal Marketplace* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001). He demonstrates how there are no pure spaces of radical or conservative economic values, nor are there clearly defined divisions between experimental or popular forms of culture. The Boom was, instead, the most visible example of how literary culture navigated the rise and expansion of the global, mass marketplace.

cultura como un sistema totalizador sino que se trata de un conjunto de discursos en conflicto, a menudo contradictorios, en lucha por legitimarse como formas privilegiadas de representación” ‘In the present it is no longer possible to think about culture as a totalizing system, but rather as an ensemble of often contradictory and conflicting discourses, fighting to legitimize themselves as privileged forms of representation’ (20). Instead of being scandalized by the mixture of avant-garde literature and the seductive forms of popular and mass cultures, I prefer to follow in the footsteps of Amar Sánchez to avoid the reductive binary that sets the two in an unnecessary, purely antagonistic opposition. Therefore, I situate the works of Casey, Filloy, Manjarrez, and Somers at the crossroads of avant-garde experimentation and the cultural markets. In this sense, I understand that the work of art is not autonomous, original, or unique, but rather entangled within complex webs of competing sensibilities.

To fully establish a dialogue between Casey, Filloy, Manjarrez, and Somers it seems timely to return to the extensive quote from *Lapsus* cited at the beginning of this chapter. Within Huberto’s rhizomatic cartography, there is a series of rejected, but related, objects and ideas: art for art’s sake, engaged novels, the Sunday supplemental in color, Reader’s Digest, the novels of the Mexican Revolution, the books on Mexicanism and *mexicanidadá* (and the anti-Mexicans), Zhdanovism, and travel literature. Obviously, these items relate to art, aesthetic theories, and a range of literary genres. What interests me, in particular, is the breadth of Huberto’s rejections, ranging from artworks that aspired to isolate themselves as autonomous objects, to explicitly political writings and the dogmatic prescriptions for carrying out such

writing, and from foundational, national, and anti-national literatures to travel writing, snippets of English-language literature, and the mass media. His rejections level the categorical divisions into which different forms of writing have been divided; distinctions such as that between high and low art, or between elite, mass, and popular cultures—as in Canclini’s formulation (*Hybrid*)—are erased. Huberto rejects them all, but he does not reject writing itself. He does so from within a fictional narrative in a way that prohibits his own text from being reduced to any one of these categories. By engaging in the reading pact that Huberto proposes here, *Lapsus* cannot be claimed only as an autonomous artistic object, a politically engaged novel, or a text that continues to build or reinforce a national patrimony; nonetheless, his errant ways never slip out of the realm of art or into a patronizing recuperation or appropriation of a lost or primitive popular culture, nor do they blindly celebrate the commodification of literature and mass reproduction.

Huberto flattens out the values and distinctions attached to all these categories in a narrative that was published and distributed (at least within Mexico) by a successful publishing house—Joaquín Mortiz—whose prestige at the time developed from its intrepid support of economically risky, avant-garde writers. Joaquín Mortiz was founded in 1962 by Joaquín Diez-Canedo. Building from twenty years of editorial experience at Fondo de Cultura Económica, he worked with Jorge Flores and Vicente Polo to take advantage of the favorable publishing environment in Mexico and establish a publishing house dedicated to Mexican literature (Anderson 8–9). From the beginning, Joaquín Mortiz celebrated innovative literature, including authors from both the *escritura* and the *onda* camps into which writers and critics

often divide Mexican literature in the Sixties, but which simply conformed different modes of writing avant-garde literature in the era when seen from today.²⁰ This careful selection of texts published by Joaquín Mortiz contributed to the consecration of a space in which more economically risky works could be published. In order to finance these inversions, the publisher created three series of informative and pedagogical texts for a more general public that “provided a solid economic annual return for the company but also reinforced its image as a cultural publisher without detracting from the literary reputation associated with the highly visible narrative lines” (Anderson 16-17). Manjarrez’s novel, *Lapsus*, for all of its slipping and sliding, its rejections and renunciations, might not have ever been published without such a structure in place.

In the case of Uruguay, Hugo J. Verani asserts that, despite the country’s economic crisis, “[a] partir de 1960 se dan por primera vez las condiciones esenciales para la labor literaria: surgen editoriales (Alfa, Arca, Banda Oriental) que promocionan el libro nacional y lo convierten en producto de alto consumo” “since 1960 the necessary conditions for literary work come about for the first time— publishing houses (Alfa, Arca, Banda Oriental) are formed to promote national books and convert them into highly demanded products” (*De la vanguardia* 33). Armonía Somers’s novel, *La mujer desnuda*, was published in the journal *Clima* in 1950, and republished in 1966 by Tauro, despite the scandal it provoked on both sides of the Río

²⁰ The “escritura” or “writerly” camp played with dense linguistic constructions (e.g., Salvador Elizondo and José Emilio Pacheco), while those of the “onda” or the “vibe” were more interested in capturing the slang and popular use of language by the urban youth (e.g., José Agustín and Gustavo Sainz). See the “Estudio preliminar” by Margo Glantz in *Onda y escritura en México. Jóvenes de 20 a 33* (1971) that includes Héctor Manjarrez as one of the “escritura” writers.

de la Plata for its overt eroticism. Her collected short stories, *Todos los cuentos. 1953–1967* (1967) and two novels, *De miedo en miedo* (1965) and *Un retrato para Dickens* (1969) were published by Arca. Arca and the weekly cultural journal *Marcha*, both under the direction of Ángel Rama, “desempeñaron un papel fundamental en la legitimación de criterios estéticos nuevos e instancias de consagración en la literatura de las décadas del 50, 60 y comienzos del 70” ‘played a fundamental role in bringing legitimacy to new aesthetic criteria and in generating recognition for literature in the 50s, 60s, and the early 70s’ (Dalmagro 79).

In fact, Arca published a wide breadth of material in the decade of the 1960s alone, including best-selling, canonical writers like Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez and Juan Carlos Onetti, as well as others who have gone on to be recognized as some of the most important Uruguayan writers. In addition to publishing some of Ángel Rama’s major essays, Arca made available new editions of Juana de Ibarbourou’s poetry, the complete works of Felisberto Hernández, and multiple volumes of Horacio Quiroga’s short stories, novellas, and previously unpublished materials. Other notable Uruguayan writers contributed to Arca’s impressive catalog, among them Eduardo Acevedo Díaz, Enrique Amorim, Mario Benedetti, Amanda Berenguer, Híber Conteris, and Teresa Porzecanski. The publisher also circulated editions of notable Latin American essayists: Eduardo Galeano, Tulio Halperín Donghi, Noé Jitrik, Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, and Augusto Salazar Bondy. As can be seen here, at least some of the cultural circuits of capitalist markets in the Sixties were not simply involved in distributing the commercially viable goods of mass production.

Furthermore, Ángel Rama argues a similar position in his essay, “El Boom en perspectiva,” at least in regard to publishing houses like Arca and Joaquín Mortiz in which the expanding networks of capitalist markets were also creating the opportunity to finance less commercially viable works, generate publicity for them, and create greater access to them and other texts, including educational textbooks and bestsellers. He calls these specific publishers “editoriales culturales” ‘cultural publishing houses’ in order to emphasize this excess to profit-driven models for capitalist marketplaces (66–67). The examples he gives of these cultural publishing houses include the following: in Buenos Aires, Losada, Emecé, Sudamericana, Compañía General Fabril Editora, Jorge Álvarez, La Flor, and Galerna; in México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Era, and Joaquín Mortiz; in Chile, Nascimento and Zig Zag; in Uruguay, Alfa and Arca; in Venezuela, Monte Ávila; and in Barcelona, Seix Barral, Lumen, and Anagrama (66). Overall, he argues that these cultural publishing houses, such as Fondo de Cultura Económica in Mexico and EUDEBA in Argentina, expanded and created new, intellectually rigorous and popular reading publics in Latin America, thus solidifying the necessary conditions for the success of the Boom writers (70).

In Argentina, a similar project was developed in Buenos Aires by Jorge Álvarez who, throughout the Sixties, published an impressive list of Argentine writers, including Rodolfo Walsh, David Viñas, Manuel Puig, and Ricardo Piglia. Then, his eponymous cultural publishing house expanded its purview to create the

first Argentine recording company for national rock music.²¹ While Juan Filloy did not publish with Jorge Álvarez, all of his texts are bound indisputably to Argentina's cultural markets and publishing houses. On the one hand, he has maintained some distance from them, notably during the twenty-eight year editorial silence between the publication of *Finesse* in 1939 and approving a new edition of *Op Oloop* in 1967, when he did not publish anything, but continued to write. There are still roughly twenty manuscripts that remain unpublished. At the time of writing this study, El cuenco de plata is publishing new editions of a great number of his works. On the other hand, Filloy did publish almost the same number of texts throughout the twentieth century (the last book published in his life, *Decio 8A*, appeared in 1997). Despite the distance he maintained at times from the center of the Argentine cultural markets in Buenos Aires (by publishing many of his works in the provincial city of Río Cuarto) and from the publishing houses of the Boom (by not publishing with Sudamericana in Buenos Aires or with Seix Barral in Barcelona), he published with Paidós and Losada, two major Argentine presses, the latter of which figures among Rama's list of major cultural publishing houses.

In Cuba, at least until 1961, the year in which cultural production was brought fully under the auspices of national organizations like the UNEAC and the ICAIC, the newspaper *Revolución*, its cultural supplemental *Lunes de Revolución*, and the publishing house related to it, Ediciones R, were willing to publish works by writers like Calvert Casey who did not always subscribe dogmatically to ideological positions, and they published many debates about the state of the Cuban Revolution

²¹ See the interview with Jorge Álvarez by María Moreno, "El idioma de los argentinos," published by the newspaper *Página/12* on March 11, 2012.

and its future.²² Of course, the rising influence of the Spanish publishing houses cannot be overlooked. While Sudamericana in Buenos Aires published Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*, Seix Barral in Barcelona published the majority of the authors now consolidated as part of the Boom: Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Mario Vargas Llosa, Manuel Puig, and José Donoso.²³ Although never considered one of the Boom authors, Calvert Casey also published with Seix Barral in the second half of the 1960s after his self-exile from Cuba, giving him, in theory, the same exposure to the mass reading publics that turned these other authors into worldwide bestsellers.

Published within these cultural markets, these four authors do not simply conform a neo-avant-garde or the second coming of the avant-gardes. In *Children of the Mire*, Octavio Paz explains the historical avant-garde as the end of a tradition dating back to Romanticism; he states, "The avant-garde is the great breach, and with it the 'tradition against itself' comes to an end" (103). The violence and radicalism of these works cannot be but an end to a particular project, against which he postulates "an *other* avant-garde," that of his own generation, one that rebels against the failures of the historical avant-garde since the mid-1940s (147). Paz goes on to explore the

²² William Luis has studied the context surrounding these cultural publishing houses and their eventual closure in 1961 in his book, *Lunes de Revolución. Literatura y cultura en los primeros años de la revolución cubana*. For a reading of the relationship between *Lunes de Revolución* and *Casa de las Américas*, see Juan Carlos Quintero-Herencia's *Fulguración del espacio. Letras e imaginario institucional de la Revolución Cubana (1960-1971)* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo, 2002). I return to the case of *Lunes* in more detail in chapter 2, where I explore Casey's public position in these journals in relation to his more explicitly political writings.

²³ For a history of Seix Barral and the ways in which the Boom authors navigated the competing interests between censorship and the desire to rebuild the Spanish publishing industry during Franco's dictatorship, see Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola's *The Censorship Files: Latin American Writers and Franco's Spain* (Albany: SUNY P, 2007).

mythical origins of Mexico in *El laberinto de la soledad*, while Jorge Luis Borges experiments with fantastic literature and detective fiction in *Ficciones*, and José Lezama Lima indulges in the excesses and accumulations of the Baroque in the journal *Ciclón* and later publishes his masterpiece, *Paradiso* in 1966. When Héctor Manjarrez begins to publish in Mexico, he comes not only after Paz's self-proclaimed neo-avant-garde, but also after the *escritura* and the *onda* writers. These examples are chosen from a densely populated literary field, and they are evidence of the attempt, after the so-called failure of the historical avant-gardes, to critique and to continue those projects in a renewed capacity that further entangles technology and mass culture with literary experimentation.

How, then, can that which goes unnoticed in the works of Casey, Filloy, Manjarrez, and Somers be meaningful from within the discourse on the avant-gardes if they circulated within the cultural markets and appeared well after the destructive tendencies of the historical avant-gardes and the subsequent provocations of the neo-avant-gardes? In *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, Hal Foster insists that neo-avant-garde artworks be studied not for their novelty or repetition, but as demonstrative of the “deferred temporality of artistic signification” (8). He argues that the transformations and ruptures enacted by the historical avant-gardes were not immediately apparent; only in retrospect was their impact felt, and it was not until the neo-avant-gardes that the historical avant-gardes were first comprehended. In sum, Foster notices a paradigm shift enacted by avant-garde works in which they overturn “any simple scheme of before and after, cause and effect, origin and repetition” (29). Neo-avant-garde works are those which comprehend, give

artistic significance to, and act on the failures of chronologically earlier avant-gardes; they reconfigure other avant-garde projects at their point of failure, but without the promise of emancipation or happiness inscribed in modernist aesthetic theories. In the wake of Foster's analysis, it no longer matters which avant-garde project came first and which second, third, or even fourth, as in the case of the quite untimely writers under consideration here. In studying the Sixties from today, establishing a chronological teleology of ruptures in constant succession holds little meaning for the analysis of twentieth-century literature and culture.

In "Los relatos de la vanguardia o el retorno de lo nuevo," Julio Premat claims, "Día a día, seguimos siendo modestamente milenaristas, postulando que todo está acabándose a cada momento, en pequeñas crisis apocalípticas" "Day by day, we continue to be modestly millenarianist, postulating that everything is coming to an end at every moment, in small apocalyptic crises" (58). The "we" in his statement is directed at past and contemporary artists, critics, and academics. For Premat, the problem today seems to be that the avant-gardes always already happened for us: "La vanguardia, siempre, 'ya fue,' pero sigue siendo, también para los críticos y no solo para los escritores, un vector de producción de teorías, pensamientos y textos. Una maquinaria de discursividad" "The avant-garde, always "already was," but it continues to be, both for critics and not only for writers, a vector that produces theories, ideas, and texts" (60). I would like to add that not only did the avant-gardes already happen, but for my own generation, the Sixties "always already was" as well. Perhaps this is why it is not surprising that, for Premat, the avant-gardes that resonate so well today are not the historical avant-gardes of the 1920s and 1930s but "la

vanguardia de los sesenta” ‘the avant-garde of the sixties’: “Al evocar el periodo se convoca, también, toda una efervescencia contestataria y se valoriza un *revival* posible de posiciones rebeldes multiformes” ‘Evoking this period is also to convene all of its non-conformist effervescence and to value a possible revival of multifarious, rebellious stances’ (61). It is in this vein that I return to the Sixties from within the discourses on the avant-gardes as being entangled in cultural markets to create an errant dialogue among these four authors; at this crossroads, it becomes possible that other options for political, ethical, and aesthetic thought relevant to today might arise.

I will now return to the last line quoted above from Manjarrez’s novel *Lapsus*. After listing everything he rejects, the narrator addresses Huberto directly, and the reader indirectly, as is always the case with second-person narration: “Y ni siquiera tienes la decencia de ser nihilista sino que todavía andas sonriendo en la calle *como si pudiese haber un milenio tras lomita*” ‘And you don’t even have the decency to be a nihilist, but you still walk through the streets grinning *as if there could be a millennium just around the corner*’ (*Lapsus* 191, my italics). The indecency of Huberto’s line of flight that takes on the qualities of an errant palindrome eschews nihilism despite all of his rejections. In my view, Huberto commits himself to carrying out this unfulfillable project of both going unnoticed and attending to that which goes unnoticed as if a future utopia could be possible. Huberto thus displaces the historical avant-gardes’ apocalyptic and anarchist tone, and he cultivates an open-ended, creative, and regenerative rejection of the institutions of art and literature and everything else that makes up his cartography of the Sixties. Meanwhile, his project’s impossibility comes to the fore through Spanish’s past subjunctive—“*como si pudiese*

haber,” as if there could be. There remains in this phrase a cynical optimism, a need to continue his own project, even though he is aware of its ultimate futility. He refuses to renounce his project in the face of pure nihilism, just as he refuses to give up his rejections even if they always already had been rejected by another before him. And he does so with a smile on his face.

Huberto’s avant-garde desires appear in a narrative that Héctor Manjarrez published in the heart of the Latin American cultural markets of the Sixties, alongside Calvert Casey’s appeal to pay attention to unattended voices, Juan Filloy’s errant palindromes, and Armonía Somers’s novel composed of heterogeneous elements. While these authors never engaged in any documented dialogue among themselves, I create my own errant itinerary to return to the Sixties and stumble into an invented crossroads where their works can establish a dialogue. By turning around at the beginning of the twenty-first century and reading against the currents of what the Sixties flaunted as its most visible characteristics, I open a different possibility for regarding the intersection of politics, ethics, and aesthetics in the Latin American cultural markets of the era.

¡SOMETAMOS O MATEMOS!

Filloy's palindrome, "¡Somemos o matemos!" is gruesomely perfect (*Karcino* 79). It can be translated as 'Let's subjugate or let's kill!' The "we" emphatically constructed in this phrase is one that is united by a violent mandate—to subjugate or to kill a "them" excluded from this "we." The exclamation points that surround this palindrome can be read as the signs of an enthusiasm to protect at all costs the unity and hegemony of the group enclosed in this discursive space. Though there is an explicit option here—we can subjugate or we can kill—the latter is little more than an extension of the former. One could quibble as to whether living in submission to a powerful, authoritarian order regimented as perfectly as this palindrome is a better or worse fate than being killed. What I find important here, rather, is the totalizing vision and demands made by the speaker of this palindrome around whom his allies gather as they prepare to dominate or eradicate their enemies. The only real opposition here is not between the choices named in the palindrome, but between the explicit "us" and the implicit "them." This sort of division and the violence that is justified to uphold it serves as an example of the political landscapes within which many of the protagonists I study may choose to go unnoticed. Instead of picking sides, they seek non-violent options for engaging in dissensus and disagreement through dialogue within a democratic framework.

Before choosing to go unnoticed, they will have to locate or create an errant itinerary that can loosen the perfection of this palindrome. Simply reading it in reverse may not be quite enough in this case. Instead of subjugating or killing, let's

turn to the novel *Un retrato para Dickens* 'A Portrait for Dickens' by Armonía Somers, published in 1969. (The "we" I invoke in this "Let's" is purely imaginary; the reader may prefer not to join along.) Like the majority of her fiction, this structurally and linguistically complex novel operates within the realm of fantastic literature, provoking a number of questions for the reader along the way. In particular, the writing in *Un retrato* illuminates various surfaces that appear to block introspection and impede access to certain ideas or forms of knowledge much in the way that Filloy's palindrome occludes any fracture in its closed rallying cry.

To begin, *Un retrato* breaks with the unity of the nineteenth century realist family romance that she cites in the example of Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*; Oliver, an orphan boy, is ultimately reunited with his family and his inheritance, while Somers's orphan girl is left raped and abandoned at the novel's end, grasping desperately for a sense of humanity. Many of the mysteries that arise toward the novel's beginning will ultimately be explained. For example, the reason the protagonist is in a police station as well as the connection between the three, seemingly disparate narrative threads is made clear within the final chapters. There are so many strange and fantastic elements at play in the novel's foreground that a number of other enigmas easily go unnoticed on its surface. In contrast to the mysteries that can be resolved, the truth blocked by these enigmas can never be attained, but focusing attention on them can become a means of prying open rigid totalities and binary oppositions.

In *Stanzas*, Agamben considers the classical figures of Oedipus and the Sphinx in order to demonstrate two models for approaching an enigma:

Every interpretation of signifying as the relation of manifestation or expression (or, inversely, of coding and eclipse) between a signifier and a signified (and both the psychoanalytic theory of the symbol and the semiotic theory of language belong to this type) places itself necessarily under the sign of Oedipus; under the sign of the Sphinx must be placed every theory of the symbol that, refusing the model of Oedipus, focuses its attention above all on the barrier between signifier and signified that constitutes the original problem of signification. (138–139)

The Oedipal interpretations are those that claim to find the meaning hidden within an enigma; they employ a hermeneutical strategy (e.g., psychoanalysis or semiotics) to reveal a true meaning to the light of knowledge. Interpretations under the sign of the Sphinx, in contrast, mark the opening within language. In his analysis of Aristotle and Heraclitus, Agamben explains that the enigmatic provides “a glimpse into the abyss opened between signifier and signified,” somewhere between “the *legein* (saying) and [...] the *kryptein* (hiding)” (139). Enigmas do not hide any meaning under the surface that is to be illuminated; rather, they signal the infinite distance that only imperfect and improper discourse can attempt to traverse. Similarly, going unnoticed is not something that hides or veils a truth to be revealed at some future instance. Somers’s enigmas can be read like a palindrome or the Sator Square; they may appear to hide a specific truth, but there is not necessarily a secret meaning tucked away in some fold that is awaiting the arrival of the most astute analyst, the cleverest hermeneutical exercise, or someone’s lucky guess in order to be revealed, illuminated, or otherwise brought into the light.

In *Elementos fantásticos en la narrativa de Armonía Somers*, Ana María Rodríguez Villamil engages in a structuralist analysis of the fantastic elements—from a primarily Todorovian framework—in *La mujer desnuda* and a number of Somers’s short stories. In the conclusion, she briefly mentions *Un retrato para Dickens* alongside other novels by Somers as additional examples of the fantastic:

La fusión de lo real y lo imaginario se da, entonces, al final de la novela. Si bien la contaminación se da también a lo largo de los capítulos supuestamente realistas, por la inclusión del loro Asmodeo. La ambigüedad creada por la contaminación de ambas esferas [...] se produce aquí al final. (190)

‘The fusion of the real and the imaginary is produced, therefore, at the end of the novel. Also, this contamination arises within the supposedly realist chapters because of the presence of Asmodeo the parrot. The ambiguity created by this contamination of both spheres [...] is produced here at the end.’

There is a sense in her analysis that the final chapter allows for a culmination, in which the two seemingly unconnected narratives of the novel come together, and in retrospect, Asmodeo the parrot can be read as their point of articulation from beginning to end.

The ambiguity that is produced in this final fusion, for Rodríguez Villamil, is the ambiguity that allows her to classify the novel as fantastic, an ambiguity that in the end is not all that ambiguous. Rodríguez Villamil attempts to overcome the criticism leveraged against Somers that her literature is dense and almost illegible, and her study is invaluable for contributing to the growing work of scholarship of an

unfairly ignored author; however, I contend that her brief reading of *Un retrato* verges on explaining all too well the enigmas of Somers's writing. Rodríguez Villamil insists that all of Somers's narratives find different formulas that "buscan la vía iluminativa es decir, la de la revelación, ya sea por la belleza o la fuerza de una imagen, ya por un sentido oculto que finalmente salta a la vista, ya por la irrupción de lo insólito" 'search for an illuminating path, that is, for a revelation, whether it be because of the beauty or the force of an image, because of the hidden meaning that finally bursts into view, or because of the irruption of the unusual' (192). She is correct to assert that certain mysteries are resolved or illuminated toward the end of the novel, often confirming the presence of the fantastic within Somers's writing. But not everything is quite this clear by the novel's end, nor do the vast majority of Somers's narratives allow the reader access to a tidy truth by their end.

Leaving certain enigmas unresolved in the novel does not have to be judged a failure on part of the writer, nor is it necessary to resolve these enigmas in order to contest the negative criticisms leveraged against Somers by her earliest critics. In *Idea of Prose*, Agamben argues that in order to avoid a closure, "it is important that representation stops an instant before the truth; this is why the only true representation is that which also represents the gap that separates it from the truth" (107). In fact, Somers's fiction abounds in syntactical structures and symbolic writing that is difficult if not impossible to interpret, and in this way, her writing avoids the type of metaphysical closure that seems to take place so easily in Filloy's violent palindrome "¡Sometamos o matemos!" Within the central plot of *Un retrato*, an anonymous orphan girl observes the strange world that surrounds her, and she tries to

decipher it from her juvenile perspective, what she calls “mi limitado margen de conceptos” ‘my limited range of concepts’ (41). She tends to draw attention to ideas and events she does not understand. However, she does not necessarily go about searching for explanations of everything, and the reader is limited to her first-person narrative. Even when the narrative changes over to that of Asmodeo, a caged parrot, the narrative is just as limited to what he can see and hear from his cage. Overall, the girl does not flee from these enigmas, what she calls “mensajes sin clave” ‘messages without a code’ (28). Rather, she chooses to confront them as impossibilities that can only be dimly illuminated on the text’s surface. This refusal to explain away their mysteries can even be politically productive.

For example, the little girl finds a recipe book that has seventy-seven recipes for *bizcochuelo*, a type of sponge cake. She reacts as follows: “Lo que quisiera saber es qué gusto tiene una cosa, una cosa que se puede hacer de setenta y siete maneras, y que se llama siempre bizcochuelo” ‘What I would like to know is what *bizcochuelo* tastes like, since it can be made seventy-seven different ways and always be called “*bizcochuelo*”’ (43). In one of the Documents inserted in the novel, there is a prologue from this recipe book titled “La verdad esclarece e ilumina” ‘Truth clarifies and illuminates.’ The Argentine—not Uruguayan—author of these recipes proclaims the greatness and purity of “nuestra Cocina Nacional” ‘our National Cuisine’ with no irony at all (30). His prologue is dedicated to clarifying how his recipes had been stolen, copied, and reprinted without his permission in other volumes of Argentine recipe books, and here—in a text that has been copied and reprinted in a novel—he intends to clarify the truth about the purity of his stolen, national treasures.

Overall, his prologue is constructed as the synecdoche of the nation, as a monument that flaunts the unique face of “our National Cuisine” for public consumption—the food is to be digested, the book, bought and read, the monument, viewed and praised. However, the little girl is not so easily convinced of this unity. She insists on confronting the enigma of the seventy-seven recipes for “our” National Bizcochuelo by turning against the current of this exclusive, political narrative. At first, her question seems naïve, since no one would question the idea of there being multiple variants of a recipe, no one except the little girl who knows the importance of scrutinizing what seems to be trivial. There are seventy-seven versions of something (of bizcochuelo, which serves as a synecdoche of the nation) that ignores its own plurality in order to construct itself as a unique, total, and true entity. The little girl is the one who knows how to illuminate this enigmatic surface on which the universalizing vision of the prologue’s author is revealed to be as particular and limited as her own perspective.

While reading the surface of this document in Somers’s novel, an abundance of spelling errors that do not exist in the rest of the novel become apparent. They are not errors made by the publishers of the actual novel; they are made on purpose only in these selections that are said to be copied exactly from the recipe book. There is a footnote that certifies that this document is a “copia fiel” ‘exact copy’ of the expanded second edition of the recipe book, a second edition that still has many mistakes despite being elevated as the National Recipe Book (33). These errors are very easily perceived. In adopting the little girl’s limited perspective and paying attention to her naïve questions, the imperfect surface that supplements a previous

edition that possibly had an even greater number of errors already announces a fracture in the supposedly deeper message about the unity of the nation.

The prologue's author intends to erase this multiplicity and these fractures with his single text on National Cuisine—exemplified by the bizcochuelo—and with a single subject—us—but he makes too many mistakes in his foundational gesture. In the face of the little girl, his only hope might be to appeal to his fellow countrymen with the rallying cry, “¡Somemos o matemos!” By paying attention to the innocent statements the little girl makes, the seriousness of her seemingly unimportant and naive questions can be perceived. She confronts her uncertainty and lack of clear knowledge (about the seventy-seven recipes for the same thing) and asks apparently simple-minded questions, but her questions are the ones that point to something strange that only a perspective attuned to that which goes unnoticed on the surface of a text can notice.

By reading these enigmas like the little girl in *Un retrato para Dickens*, by concentrating one's gaze on that which goes unnoticed on the surface of the text, it is possible to make out a political opening within a stage on which only the loudest voices fight for the spotlight by crying “¡Somemos o matemos!” In contrast, the little girl illuminates the enigmas that must be ignored for this consensus-building to take place. What Somers's enigmas demonstrate is that, at times, one has to know how to attend to that which goes unnoticed in order to open a moralizing consensus. Instead of being imperfections in Somers's fiction, these enigmas undermine the cookbook author's prologue in his attempt to produce a totality by exclusion and make possible an unnamed, imperfect alternative to Filloy's violent palindrome.

Chapter 2: The Politics of Going Unnoticed

This Sixties is frequently characterized as an era in which everything was political. Artists and intellectuals traveled to Cuba to publicly register their support for the Revolution. Students and workers took to the streets to demand radical transformations of their governing institutions and working conditions. Cold War politics situated Latin America at the heart of some of its most intense stand-offs as the United States and the Soviet Union sought to guarantee the supremacy of their respective regimes in the Western hemisphere. Regarding this perception that in the Sixties everything was political, Claudia Gilman proposes a more subtle description of the era. She concludes that “más adecuado sería afirmar que la gramática característica de los discursos [políticos] fue antes excluyente que acumulativa” ‘it would be more adequate to assert that the characteristic structure of [political] discourse is better described as being exclusive rather than accumulative’ (*Entre* 32). Instead of reading the Sixties as an era in which everything was political, as if everything were included in this all-encompassing politicization, she recalls that such totalizing narratives are always the result of multiple exclusions.

The Sixties was certainly consumed by impassioned, highly visible debates regarding, in particular, the politics of art and literature. Yet, alongside these debates about how to be a committed writer and how to best write about Latin America, so many other political gestures were left unattended. Those who upheld positions not wholly in line with these more visible and public stances were all too easily cast aside

as counterrevolutionaries or as ivory tower intellectuals, if they were paid any attention at all. Just as the art and literature that goes unnoticed is not outside of the cultural markets of the Sixties and, therefore, not permanently inaccessible to the consuming public, the politics of going unnoticed in the Sixties is not a politics set outside of the highly saturated public sphere and its conflicting discourses.

In this chapter, I turn to Calvert Casey's journalism, and short fictional texts by Juan Filloy, Héctor Manjarrez, and Armonía Somers in order to explore the politics of going unnoticed in the Sixties. These unnoticed texts and protagonists seek positions within the heated polemics that raged throughout Latin America about the role of art and literature, but they hesitate or openly disagree with certain widespread assumptions and categorizations. As I will show, they propose a form of politics that is not built upon the exclusive totalities of the Sixties that tried to produce or institute revolutions. The politics of going unnoticed opens a space within an already occupied place wherein dissent becomes possible by dissolving the facile schemes that structure and divide political spaces into a visible inside and an invisible outside.

A Double Negative in Cuba

Whenever I begin explaining my research to friends, colleagues, and new acquaintances, the most common immediate response is, “Calvert.... Who?” Whether they recognize the other authors or not, so many people are caught off guard by Calvert Casey’s anglophone name, which seems quite out of place for discussing the Sixties in Latin America. Of course, the underlying question here becomes: How could an author with such a striking name be worthy of study if his works have gone unnoticed during an era when the worldwide attention being paid to Latin American writing, or at least to the Boom writers, had never been more enthusiastic and far-reaching? It is precisely this fact, however, that makes Casey’s works the ideal focal point for asking what political importance can be attributed to going unnoticed in the Sixties. In his situation, just how does one simultaneously do politics while going unnoticed under the all-pervading light—the “optical regime” (Quintero-Herencia 18)—that was ushered in with the Cuban Revolution?²⁴ In order to answer this question, it will be necessary to examine how Casey situates himself as a committed Cuban writer who has traveled to the island in order to participate actively in the Revolution and in the construction of its new society, its new men, and its new cultural markets.

²⁴ Concerning this all-pervading light, Juan Carlos Quintero-Herencia examines the politics and discourses that sought to give historical weight to the Revolution in the Sixties by examining the institutional literary space of *Casa de las Américas*, its much larger connections to and influences over the complex web of the Cuban cultural industries and markets, and the competing ideologies that came into conflict. Casey’s short story “El regreso,” published in *Casa*, is studied in this context. See *Fulguración del espacio: Letras e imaginario institucional de la Revolución Cubana (1960–1971)* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo, 2002).

Calvert Casey published a number of short, inconsequential essays in *Lunes de Revolución*, the Cuban weekly cultural journal which appeared every Monday between March 23, 1959, and November 6, 1961. Casey was a frequent participant in this journal's activities during the brief two years it existed. This *suplemento literario* accompanied the Cuban newspaper, *Revolución*, edited by Carlos Franqui.

Revolución was founded under the auspices of the Movimiento Revolucionario 26 de Julio (MR-26-7), the group led by Fidel Castro that carried out the failed 1953 attack on the Cuartel Moncada against Fulgencio Batista and that later began the rural guerrilla warfare in the Sierra Maestra. Guillermo Cabrera Infante served as editor of *Lunes*, with Pablo Armando Fernández as assistant editor. The magazine's staff operated a radio station and a television channel which broadcast plays. In addition, Sonido R, a record company, and Ediciones R, a publishing house (where "R" stands for "Revolución"), were also organized under the auspices of *Revolución* and *Lunes*.

This intellectual circle became a major player in establishing the new cultural markets in the founding years of the Cuban Revolution. "During its publication history," explains William Luis, "*Lunes* was a new and innovative supplement, and unlike previous magazines that were limited to a particular literary current, ideology, genre, or region, it provided a home for writers and artists from a range of positions and locations" ("Exhuming" 257).²⁵ This point is worth highlighting, because *Lunes* is a good example of the degree to which free speech and even criticism of local

²⁵ The opening essays of William Luis's monograph, *Lunes de Revolución: Literatura y cultura en los primeros años de la Revolución Cubana* (Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 2003), provides most of the same information as his essay "Exhuming *Lunes de Revolución*." In addition to the history of *Lunes*, Luis's book provides a detailed index of each number of the journal to which I am indebted for facilitating my task of locating all of the essays that Calvert Casey only published there.

realities were permitted in Cuba. This remained true, at least, for the first two years of the Revolution, during which the exact shape that it would take in the future remained uncertain. Yet after the suspicious explosion of the munitions freighter, *La Coubre*, on March 4, 1960, then after the failed counterrevolutionary invasion of Playa Girón/Bay of Pigs in April of 1961, freedom of expression would no longer be a guarantee. This is to say that as early as 1961, a full decade before the Padilla Affair, cultural production already was being subjected to state censorship.

Lunes quickly found itself at the center of a heated debate regarding appropriate cultural expression in the Revolution after having aired on its television channel the documentary *P.M.* (1961), directed by Sabá Cabrera Infante and Orlando Jiménez Leal. *Lunes* defended the documentary against the criticisms of the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC). The ICAIC, controlled by the orthodox Marxists of the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP), was gaining favor with Fidel Castro over the MR-26-7, and the debate over *P.M.* formed part of a larger ideological struggle between the two groups over the control of cultural production on the island (Díaz Martínez 154). This debate prompted a series of well-documented conferences in the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí on June 16, 23, and 30, 1961, during which Fidel Castro read his notorious speech, “Palabras a los intelectuales,” and publicly pronounced the well-known phrase, “Dentro de la Revolución: todo; contra la Revolución ningún derecho” ‘Inside the Revolution—everything; against the Revolution there are no rights’ (n. pag.). Castro is quite direct about the demand for unity, while at the same time incredibly ambiguous in that he does not specify what does and does not pertain to the Revolution.

According to Quintero-Herencia, this text “puede ser leído como una poética de la representación del ‘buen terreno’ para la producción intelectual; este texto producirá un interior y una imagen de la institucionalidad que regirá la actividad del intelectual cubano” ‘can be read as a poetics that represents the “good sphere” of intellectual production; this text will produce an inside and an image of how Cuban intellectuals’ activity will be regulated institutionally’ (349). Thus, the topology of the Revolution acquires a legal and moral framework wherein what is inside has rights and is good; everything else is against—but not outside—the Revolution and therefore legally inadmissible and morally reprehensible. Within the Cuban Revolution, within the first, unidirectional reading everything is to be found; against the Revolution, or against the current of the Revolution’s ideology, there is nothing that would be granted the legal or moral right to exist within the sovereign space of the Cuban state. There are no acceptable neutral or ambiguous relationships to the Revolution after this speech, which clearly prohibits intellectuals from creating their own itinerary throughout this space.

Ultimately, *P.M.* was censored, and five months after these conferences *Revolución* and *Lunes de Revolución* were closed, officially due to a shortage of paper. The ICAIC became the State-sanctioned institution that would go on to approve or censure Cuban film and culture, while *Casa de las Américas* assumed control as the major cultural journal for the entire nation, and the Unión de Escritores

y Artistas de Cuba (UNEAC) and the Consejo Nacional de Cultural (CNC) were founded to ensure further unity in Cuban cultural production.²⁶

I continually come across references to Calvert Casey that offer his name as one more intellectual to have been in Cuba in the early Sixties and to have participated in the major cultural journals, including *Lunes* and *Casa de las Américas*.²⁷ Jean Franco's *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America and the Cold War*, for example, only mentions Casey in passing alongside Cabrera Infante and Severo Sarduy as examples of not explicitly committed writers who were able to get published in Cuba (97). Franco's claim is not incorrect, but a bit too general, and I will further elaborate on this below as I detail Casey's specific position in relation to the discourses and debates on the role of the writer in times of revolution. Another examples is Emilio Bejel's *Gay Cuban Nation* where he examines the works mainly by gay Cuban writers in which queer Cubans are narrated; Bejel demonstrates how queerness has been present in even the most canonical Cuban texts, ranging from José Martí to Severo Sarduy and Achy Obejas. However, Casey's works here only merit a few, brief sentences in which he appears anecdotally as a gay writer who committed suicide in 1969 (105). Although Bejel's exclusion of Casey's writings from the corpus of texts he studies may be due to the

²⁶ While the general proceedings of these conferences are well-known and frequently summarized, I have paraphrased this information from William Luis's previously cited works and from a more recent essay by Manuel Díaz Martínez, "La pistola sobre la mesa," that appeared in a dossier in the *Revista de Encuentro de la Cultural Cubana* on Castro's "Palabras," the conference at the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, and the fate of *Revolución* and *Lunes*.

²⁷ This is the case of both William Luis's and Manuel Díaz Martínez's previously cited works, although it should be mentioned that the purposes of their studies is not to explore any one writer's texts in particular, but rather to narrate the context of *Lunes de Revolución* and the conferences at the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí.

paucity of references to male homosexuality in them, there are a handful of texts in which the topic is explicitly present (e.g. “Notas sobre la pornografía,” in its uncensored version, and the posthumous short story, “Piazza Margana”), and many others in which a sensibility toward exploring sexuality and questioning gender roles is readily apparent (e.g. “El paseo” and “In Partenza”). While an initial reflection might assume that Casey’s works went unnoticed primarily because of his sexuality, I would argue that the lack of critical and popular attention paid to Casey when compared with other writers of the era should not be explained away as a case of generalized homophobia, although homophobia was prevalent in the Sixties.

There are a handful of quite insightful studies of Casey’s writings. Víctor Fowler-Calzada’s essay, “Casey’s Nineteenth Century and the *Ciclón* Project” focuses on Casey’s critical essays about nineteenth century Cuban writers that he published in *Ciclón*. Gustavo Pérez-Firmat’s chapter, “Mother’s Idiom, Father’s Tongue” from his book *Tongue Ties: Logo-Eroticism in Anglo-Hispanic Literature* studies Casey’s posthumous text, “Piazza Margana,” and his alternation between writing in Spanish and English. In the previously mentioned *Fulguración del espacio*, Quintero-Herencia analyzes the short story “El regreso” and its relation to the Cuban journal *Casa de las Américas*, in which the story first appeared alongside other texts. In “‘El regreso’ de Calvert Casey: una exposición en la playa,” Quintero-Herencia further situates this short story in dialogue with Jean-Paul Sartre’s essays on Cuba, collected in English as *Sartre on Cuba* (1961).

Beyond these, other essays dedicated exclusively to Calvert Casey are biographical in nature, and even then his participation in *Lunes* is often relegated or

not explored in depth.²⁸ There have also been a few well-organized, yet incomplete anthologies of Casey's fiction and essays in both Spanish and English translation; these collect mainly the stories that Casey had published at *Casa de las Américas*, Ediciones R, and Seix Barral. In addition to Stavan's previously mentioned anthology in English, these collections include Mario Melino's *Notas de un simulador* (1997); *Cuentos (casi) completos* (2009); and an edition of three of his short stories in *Tres relatos rituales* (1986). It would seem, based on these anthologies, that nothing of interest, or at least very few additional texts had been published by Casey in *Lunes*.

However, Casey wrote more than thirty texts exclusively for *Lunes* that have yet to be republished in any form. These include essays and criticism on Cuban music, theater, dance, and opera, translations of essays on modern theater and acting techniques, and journalistic writings based on testimonies from men who fought during the Playa Girón/Bay of Pigs invasion and from volunteers, like himself, who came from around the world to help build the Cuban Revolution. It is unknown why Casey never included these texts in his other book-length collections of fiction and essays, which are composed of materials that had been previously published in a

²⁸ The 1982 dossier on Calvert Casey that appeared in the Spanish cultural magazine, *Quimera*, which included essays by Cabrera Infante, María Zambrano, Severo Sarduy, Italo Calvino, Vicente Molina Foix, and others, provides mostly biographical anecdotes. Cabrera Infante's "¿Quién mató a Calvert Casey?" first appeared in this dossier and has become, with little critical reflection, the basis for a great number of biographical data often repeated as historical fact. I would caution reading this essay as little more than historical fiction, which has certainly been dramatized by Cabrera Infante who makes its "incerteza biográfica" 'biographical uncertainty' clear in the essay (45). In addition, Víctor Fowler's *La maldición: una historia del placer como conquista* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1998) provides a mostly biographical account of Casey based on these texts. Ilan Stavans has attentively collected Casey's biographical information in his introduction to the English-language translations of his short stories, *Calvert Casey: The Collected Stories* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1998).

variety of journals, nor why they have been ignored by his subsequent editors. In looking at the nature of these texts, what becomes clear is that Casey was invested in using his skills as a committed writer both to document lived Cuban reality in the early 1960s and to offer his intellectual labor as a sympathetic, constructive critic with the goal of improving Cuban culture and society, while also providing theoretical tools in translation that had been previously unavailable in Spanish.

I mention all of this because of the dearth of scholarship on Casey, in general, and especially with regard to his participation in *Lunes*. In my view, these texts must be further explored in order to comprehend how he positioned himself inside the Cuban Revolution before he fled the island in 1965 fearing imprisonment as a counterrevolutionary. In addition to his sexuality, what I will show is that Casey also began to declare a certain apprehension about conforming to the party line without reservations. Although the texts I study are among Casey's most explicitly political writings that outline and publicly declare his position as a committed intellectual within the context of *Lunes* and in dialogue with the other contributors to the journal, they are among the ones that have gone unnoticed more than any others over the past fifty years.

The first text that interests me, “Un ensayo oportuno” ‘A Timely Essay’ (1960), can be read as Casey's attempt to understand the current state of the intellectual in the time of revolution as well as to provide a plan of action for his contemporaries—the habitual topic of writers in the Sixties. The “timely essay” to which the title refers is a speech given by José Antonio Portuondo in 1938 that was republished in the anthology, *Los mejores ensayistas cubanos* (1959). The topic of

Portuondo's speech, titled "Pasión y muerte del hombre" 'Man's Passion and Death,' is the spirit of the revolutionary, Marxist man and, in particular, the role of the intellectual in relation to the masses. Portuondo begins by outlining the failure of intellectuals to connect with the masses since turning to irrationalism at the start of the twentieth century. Irrationalism, Portuondo explains, can be understood as a rejection of the Cartesian method, that is, a rejection of a strictly logical, linear, technical, and empirical approach to interpreting the world; however, he argues that this has led to the intellectual's complete solitude and isolation from the masses since World War I ("Pasión" 117–121). In order to combat this solitude, Portuondo proposes the intellectual be "heroicamente razonable" 'heroically rational' without handing himself over "al torrente de su tiempo que lo arrastra" 'to be swept along by the currents of his time' (121). This heroically rational intellectual, says Portuondo, must be humble and honest, while capable of recognizing his own limitations as well as his duty to continue learning and to search for other ways of perceiving the world. Furthermore, Portuondo believes intellectuals should "meterse desnudo en la pelea de los hombres y decirles con su voz lo que aprendimos, en los libros y en la vida, para que ellos lo hagan fructificar" 'jump nude into mankind's struggle and tell them in their own words what we have learned, in books and in life, so that they may put it into practice' (122–123). In a sense, Portuondo insists that intellectuals—with whom he identifies—must find a way to translate their knowledge into a language that can be comprehended and appropriated by the masses for the success of the socialist revolution, thus gradually overcoming the division between the two groups.

While reading this speech, which Casey feels Portuondo had written “para los hombres de 1960” ‘for the benefit of men in 1960,’ he updates Portuondo’s ideas from the 1930s by translating them for his contemporaries in order to formulate and publicly declare his own position in the debate about intellectual commitment (“Un ensayo” 13). Casey confesses his and other intellectuals’ sense of isolation and regret at not having participated directly in the armed struggle at the moment the Rebel Army triumphantly arrived in Havana: “El único sentimiento honrado que podíamos permitirnos al ver pasar a ‘los otros’, a los hombres anónimos de las ciudades y el campo, a los que hasta ayer considerábamos la incolora e inculta medianía, era el de remordimiento y un enorme complejo de culpa, bajo el cual aún vivimos” ‘The only honorable emotion that we could allow ourselves when we saw “the others” go by, the anonymous men from the cities and the countryside, the ones we had considered uncouth and uncultured nobodies until yesterday, was regret and an enormous guilty conscience, with which we still live’ (13). Casey opens with his own freely offered *mea culpa*—one that would not be demanded of him under the threat of further imprisonment as in the case of Heberto Padilla a decade later. He publicly confesses his own guilty conscience, employing the religious rhetoric that permeated Cuban revolutionary discourse, while simultaneously adopting the first person plural (e.g. “*Nuestra* primera tarea” ‘*our* first task’; “Mucho *hemos* adelantado en un año” ‘*We* have progressed a lot in one year,’ my emphasis) to situate himself firmly inside the Cuban Revolution (13).

Having lived much of his life in the United States, the need to publicly assume his Cuban identity becomes all the more apparent, since he could have been accused

of directly benefitting from the imperialism against which the Revolution was fighting. In fact, this gesture is comparable to Virgilio Piñera's attempts to "decir Presente" 'say Here,' as Quintero-Herencia has shown, like a schoolboy responding to the teacher's roll call in the public space of the Revolution (*Fulguración* 93–95). More than a political stance, Quintero-Herencia argues that this declaration is a moral stance as well: "La necesidad de probarse moralmente en un escenario público cifrado por la guerra es notable entre los comentarios de Piñera. Ese gesto defensivo anota una atmósfera 'moral' de reclamos y de afanes demostrativos dirigidos hacia la 'insuficiencia' política de la práctica literaria en lo revolucionario" 'The need to prove oneself morally in a public space encoded by war is notable among Piñera's comments. This defensive gesture makes note of a "moral" atmosphere full of demonstrating one's demands and ambitions against the political "insufficiency" of literature in the revolution' (94). The writers in the Revolution had to make up for their deficiencies by declaring their commitment and loyalty to the regime under the bright lights of the public sphere.

Of course, Casey did return to Cuba with the intent purpose of participating in the Revolution before 1959. Ítalo Calvino, for his part, asserts that Casey could have easily chosen to hold on to his "nacionalidad yanqui" 'Yankee nationality' yet he "vivía la revolución como una experiencia moral individual y colectiva" 'lived the revolution as an individual and collective moral experience' ("*Las piedras*" 55). Cabrera Infante recalls that the exact date of Casey's return to Cuba, as well as his place of birth, are not entirely known, but that these historical data are of little importance when considering his "Cubanness." Casey "hablaba habanero sin el

menor acento” ‘spoke Spanish as well as anyone from Havana without a foreign accent’, a Spanish that was “en realidad su lengua madre” ‘in reality his mother tongue’ (“Quién” 45). Thus, Casey must rehearse this gesture like Piñera because of his choice to be a writer in the Revolution more so than because of his ties to the United States; in 1960, his choice of profession seems to be more problematic than his national, and perhaps even his sexual, identity.

In the essay, Casey goes on to quote Virgilio Piñera as one who had critiqued the writers and intellectuals who, under Batista’s rule in Cuba, “optó por refugiarse en el barroquismo o en el hermetismo” ‘chose to take refuge in the Baroque or in hermeticism’ (13). While Casey does not name Lezama Lima directly, Piñera’s reference to the hermetically Baroque writer and the Cuban journal *Orígenes* is certainly alluded to in this phrase.²⁹ Indirectly, Casey declares himself to be an intellectual guilty of remaining neutral during the armed struggle, but he manages to keep his distance from those who might be slightly more guilty—assuming one can differentiate degrees of guilt—like Lezama Lima and other members of the petty bourgeoisie. Casey constructs a space for himself somewhere between those who sought refuge and isolation in the aesthetic and those who took up arms to combat Batista’s regime that subjugated Cuba to neocolonial powers. Yet, Casey knew all of this was not sufficient to earn the trust of the *barbudos*, nor did it meet the demands of some of the most public intellectual and revolutionary figures of the era: Fidel Castro, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ernesto “Che” Guevara, and Régis Debray. In what follows,

²⁹ For a more detailed reading of the debates surrounding the distinctions between the *Orígenes* group and the *Lunes* group, see Duanel Díaz, “*Orígenes, Lunes, Revolución*,” in *La Habana Elegante. Segunda etapa* (2005).

I have chosen to situate Casey within the discursive space created by these figures who articulated a definition of the role of the intellectual leading up to Castro's "Palabras a los intelectuales" in 1961.³⁰

Jean Paul Sartre's *What is Literature?*, published originally in 1947, has been studied in depth as a central text for understanding the relationship between writing and revolution in the Cold War era. Freedom, for Sartre, is the central topic and demand of all good writing, and every act of good writing is an engaged or committed act. For Sartre, in this writing there should not be any opposition between form and content nor between the personal and collective needs expressed therein:

Thus, in a society without classes, without dictatorship, and without stability, literature would end by becoming conscious of itself; it would understand that form and content, public and subject, are identical, that the formal freedom of saying and the material freedom of doing complete each other, and that one should be used to demand the other, that it best manifests the subjectivity of the person when it translates most deeply collective needs and, reciprocally, that its function is to express the concrete universal to the concrete universal and that its end is to appeal to the freedom of men so that they may realize and maintain the reign of human freedom. To be sure, this is utopian. (108)

³⁰ Debray's text, while published in 1967, is primarily an analysis of the armed struggle and the early years after its triumph, thus making his ideas relevant for this limited time span. For a more detailed analysis of the various positions taken in this debate ranging from Castro's "Palabras" to the polemic Padilla Affair in 1971, see Ana Serra's *The "New Man" in Cuba: Culture and Identity in the Revolution* (Gainesville, Fla.: UP Florida, 2007), particularly Chapter 2, "Body versus Mind: An Intellectual's Memoirs Expose His Negative Image."

Not only is this utopian, but his concern with concrete universals and the abstract pursuit of freedom develop within the immediate post-World War II context over a decade before the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. As such, this formulation of the state of literature and the goals of the revolutionary writer derive from Sartre's desire to conceive of a literature and a form of commitment that might lead to revolution. Ultimately, the political endgame of Sartre's existentialism would be a "democratic socialist society" that focused on the well-being of the working class (Aronson 45). As Aronson demonstrates, Sartre found inspiration in Camus which led to his advocacy of "the engaged but not starry-eyed or ideological writer, at once 'poet of freedom' and political activist" (55). But what is of more interest here is how these formulations of the role of the writer acquire a specific historical form after 1959.

In 1960, Sartre visited Cuba like so many other committed intellectuals of the time, and he published a series of essays based on his experiences there, which have been translated into English as *Sartre on Cuba*. Not unlike Casey's voluntary *mea culpa*, Sartre emphasizes the errors of his ways and thoughts before setting foot in Cuba. "I had misunderstood everything," Sartre declares. "What I took to be signs of wealth were, in fact, signs of dependence and poverty" (12). Referring to a speech given by Oscar Pinos Santos on July 1, 1959, he explains how the Cuban case taught him to reevaluate his prejudices by looking at the world upside down:

There is, said Pinos Santos, a sort of disease of the eyes called *retinosis pigmentaria* which manifests itself by the loss of lateral vision. All those who have carried away an optimistic view of Cuba are quite sick. They see directly in front, never from the corner of the eye. [...] "Retinosis." The word escaped

me. But for several days already I have misunderstood my profound error. I felt my prejudices vacillating. To discover the truth of this capital, I would have to see things upside down. (11)

Upon arriving at the island where Sartre's utopian aspirations from a decade earlier might materialize, he immediately narrates this experience as one in which everything he thought he knew would have to be reevaluated under the light of the Cuban Revolution. As Quintero-Herencia has shown, Sartre acquires a new, morally appropriate and historically correct position regarding the Revolution: "Al mirar 'correctamente' la Revolución, esta se presentará a sí misma translúcida ante su observador" "By learning to see the Revolution "properly," it will present itself as translucent before its observer" ("El regreso" 387). Any sense of optimism about Cuba would have to be completely eradicated once the economic realities structuring the country's dependence on foreign imperial powers were taken into consideration. These essays, thus, document Cuba's status as a dependent "semi-colony" and clearly articulate the United States' "economic imperialism" since Cuba gained independence from Spain (*Sartre* 26). As such, Sartre justifies the need for agrarian reform to return possession of the land to those who work it, following Marxist dogma, instead of allowing it to belong to the *latifundistas* who no longer lived in Cuba (69–79). He arrives at the conclusion that Cuba is not underdeveloped because of a national or geographical deficiency, but because of "a complex relationship between a backward country and the great powers that have maintained it in this backward condition" (81). As such, Sartre comes to see Latin America indirectly from the perspective of the dominant economic model during the era, Dependency

Theory. After seeing these realities from his new, upside-down perspective, Sartre's concept of intellectual commitment is reformulated not just as commitment to freedom and revolutionary thought in the abstract—ideas which still operate at the heart of Sartre's essays in 1960—but now as the defense of Cuba's freedom as a sovereign state and of its independence from the imperial powers that had subjugated it to foreign economic and political interests for centuries.

In the same year, Ernesto "Che" Guevara published his *Guerrilla Warfare* for the benefit of other revolutionaries who might learn from the Cuban experience when planning their own armed struggle. Without a doubt, for Guevara the guerrilla fighter—not the traditional intellectual—is the true vanguard of the revolution. However, in addition to military strategy and guerrilla tactics, Guevara underscores that "intensive popular work must be undertaken to explain the motives of the revolution, its ends, and to spread the incontrovertible truth that victory of the enemy against the people is finally impossible" (56). This apparently intellectual labor is not assigned to the traditional intellectuals. In fact, there is no mention of intellectuals in this treatise. Women combatants, however, can readily fill the role of guerrilla teacher, according to Guevara. While he does state that women should be allowed to fight and that they "can perform every class of combat task that a man can at a given moment," he dedicates most of the section on women to explaining the traditional gendered roles to which they are best assigned: deceiving enemy forces with tricks, performing civilian tasks such as cooking and sewing, teaching literacy, serving as a nurse, and at times as a doctor (111–112). Education, of course, is paramount to the

success of the armed struggle and the subsequent revolution, but it is a clearly gendered activity.

In a section titled “Training and Indoctrination,” after explaining how to teach new recruits to shoot a rifle, Guevara explains the need for indoctrination: “this is important because the men arrive without a clear conception as to why they come, with nothing more than very diffuse concepts about liberty, freedom of the press, etc., without any clear foundation whatever” (124). These vague concepts, while ideal for inspiring men to join the fight, are limited in securing the people’s dedication to the specific, concrete goals of the Cuban revolutionaries—namely, the fight against Batista and economic imperialism as explained above by Sartre. Thus, all free time should be dedicated to education in order to solidify the unity of the guerrilla fighters toward a common goal; they must learn the history of their country “with a clear sense of the economic facts that motivate each of the historic acts,” as well as “the national heroes” (124–125). The teachers should also be trained so as to agree upon a choice of texts, further ensuring a sense of national unity (125). Education, however, is a task to be carried out by other guerrilla fighters already within the armed struggle. Curiously, these teachers are not considered to be intellectuals, but rather a necessary component of the armed struggle, even if they are its feminine counterpart; this direct participation and contribution to the armed struggle exculpates them from the guilt that intellectuals like Casey, who never bore arms, felt the need to publicly confess.

There is something paradoxical in Guevara’s attempt to cleave unarmed intellectuals from the revolutionary process. In *El último lector*, Ricardo Piglia reflects on the photo taken of Guevara in Bolivia in which he is sitting in a tree and

reading and on another scene in which he waits to begin an ambush by reading a book while laying in a hammock (“Ernesto” 106–107). Piglia recalls that Guevara states his own “tendencia a aislarse, separarse, construyéndose un espacio aparte” ‘tendency to isolate himself, to separate himself by creating a separate space for himself’ (107). It is in this separate space where he spends his time reading, a space and an activity that shares an undeniable similarity to the paradigm of the ivory tower intellectual. It should be recalled that the journals that were found on Guevara’s body after being captured and killed in Bolivia include a long list of books that Guevara either read or planned to read, including books by G. W. F. Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, William Faulkner, Graham Greene, Rubén Darío, and Julio Cortázar, among many others (“Facsimil” n.pag.). In Piglia’s assessment, Guevara becomes yet another intellectual in a long literary tradition who desperately wants to know “cómo salir de la biblioteca, cómo pasar a la vida, cómo entrar en acción, cómo ir a la experiencia, cómo salir del mundo libresco, cómo cortar con la lectura en tanto lugar de encierro” ‘how to leave the library, how to pass into life, how to engage in action, how to go toward experience, how to leave the world of books, how to break with the act of reading as a space of enclosure’ (“Ernesto” 127). In this way, Guevara is caught somewhere between the ideal armed revolutionary that he appears to embody and the intellectual that he cannot quite shed from his own life who reads and writes incessantly.

Of course, a revolution on the scale of the Cuban Revolution would not be possible without any form of intellectual activity to guide its new institutions. Guevara discusses the coming of a new form of intellectual most adequate for Cuba

in his 1965 open letter “Socialism and Man in Cuba,” which he wrote to Carlos Quijano, director of the Uruguayan journal *Marcha*, and also published in *Verde Olivo* in Cuba. He explains:

To sum up, the fault of our artists and intellectuals lies in their original sin: They are not truly revolutionary. We can try to graft the elm so that it will bear pears, but at the same time we must plant pear trees. New generations will come who will be free of the original sin. The probabilities that great artists will appear will be greater to the degree that the field of culture and the possibilities for expression are broadened.

Our task is to prevent the present generation, torn asunder by its conflicts, from becoming perverted and from perverting new generations. We must not bring into being either docile servants of official thought, or scholarship students who live freely at the expense of the state—practicing “freedom.” Already there are revolutionaries coming who will sing the song of the new man in the true voice of the people. This is a process which takes time. (18)

Guevara appears resigned in front of the task of transforming the already existing, guilty intellectuals into true revolutionaries; the current generations were, to use Guevara’s term, “perverted,” a word with undeniable sexual connotations that would indirectly reinforce the link between the weak, effeminate intellectual (e.g. women were apt for becoming teachers) and the sexual “perversions” of gay men who would around 1965 be imprisoned in the UMAPs as counterrevolutionaries. Guevara’s rhetoric clearly borrows from the Catholic tradition while remaining metaphysically empty, yet it still carries within it a patriarchal, homophobic discourse that upholds

certain traditional gender roles as it constructs the role of the intellectual in the Revolution. Ultimately, Guevara encourages patience until more men like him are born. He expects the new generations, the new men which will grow out of the youth of the revolution, to fill this void and become a new type of revolutionary intellectual who will speak as one among the people, as men born of the Revolution, as a generation modeled on his own combined military and intellectual practices.

Furthermore, a major defining point for revolutionary thought in the Sixties is to reaffirm the originality of Castro's and of Guevara's actions and thoughts by differentiating their writings from the theoretical writings not only of traditional intellectuals, but also of other major revolutionary figures in the world. In *Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America*, Debray confirms this position in his study of armed struggle in Cuba and the regime's institutionalization after military victory. In a footnote, Debray clarifies that Castro clearly "drew his fundamental political inspiration from Martí" and allows room for "the ideas of Marx and Lenin" that structured his interpretations of Cuban reality (20). However, in the main text he insists that "it was only at the end of the war, when their tactics were already defined, that the rebels discovered the writings of Mao" (20). Given that Cuba by 1967, when Debray published this study, had become a model for many armed revolutionary groups across Latin America, part of Debray's task in demonstrating the originality of their ideas is to emphasize the need to develop military strategy and guerrilla tactics from experience in local realities as opposed to searching for foreign theoretical models to apply to local contexts.

By this formulation, the true revolutionary is the one who acts to create a true revolution, not one who theorizes politically or only speaks of his revolutionary intentions based on foreign models. Regarding this point, Debray explains Castro's mistrust of intellectual activity that pays more attention to theory than to experiential praxis: "Fidel once blamed certain failures of the guerrillas on a purely intellectual attitude toward war. The reason is quite understandable: aside from his physical weakness and lack of adjustment to rural life, the intellectual will try to grasp the present through preconceived ideological constructs and live it through books" (21). The scrawny, city-dwelling (queer or effeminate, I would add, in relation to Guevara's texts) intellectual, therefore, must learn to overcome his penchant for substituting physical action with pure ideology when it comes to "confronting imperialism with acts and not merely with words" (125). This assumption of the physical deficiency of intellectuals further supports the distinction between them and the guerrilla fighters in Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare*, since the guerrilla fighter must be of the strongest physical character, "indefatigable" and "able to endure extremities" without food, water, shelter, and often while wounded or sick (76).

In case there were any lingering doubts about the reasons to mistrust these intellectuals, in another footnote Debray summarizes his position on the role of the intellectual in the Revolution: "Let us speak clearly. The time has passed for believing that it suffices to be 'in the Party' to be a revolutionary. [...] In Latin America today a revolutionary is not defined by his formal relationship with the Party, whether he is for or against it. The value of a revolutionary, like that of a party, depends on his activity" (*Revolution* 104). In this manner, the role of the traditional

intellectual will ultimately disappear as each revolutionary individual will work to dissolve the differences between intellectuals and peasants or guerrillas by redistributing the division of intellectual and manual labor. Guevara's new men will not fall into these clearly differentiated categories, because they derive from bourgeois, capitalist structures of class division that are to be eliminated.

As I read "Un ensayo oportuno" in this context, Casey situates himself as a Cuban intellectual who must assume his personal guilt, shed the bourgeois upbringing that allowed him the privilege of becoming an intellectual in the United States while so many other Cubans barely subsisted under the country's neocolonial status, and invest all of his present and future efforts in the active creation of the Revolution. Alongside many of his contemporaries, Casey will not give in to Guevara's resignation, and he seeks a plan of action, without taking up arms, to at least partially suture the gap separating intellectuals like himself, on one side, from the Cuban people and the true revolutionaries on the other. In order to do so, Casey turns to Portuondo's concept of the "heroically rational" intellectual whose guiding characteristics must be "humildad y aprendizaje" 'humillity and learning' (13). Rereading Portuondo's ideas for 1960, Casey proposes that the Cuban intellectual's first task be "expresar en términos de razón el sentido de la Revolución [...] construyendo nuevas formas" 'to express in rational terms the meaning of the Revolution [...] by creating new forms' (13). Instead of turning to the past, Casey insists that intellectual labor must express the goals and highlight the accomplishments of the Cuban Revolution in logical terms that are universally comprehensible. Though intellectuals may not have participated in the armed

struggle, they may be useful for profoundly understanding the Cuban Revolution and finding ways to disseminate this knowledge in practical terms for the benefit of the Cuban people, particularly in its early years. For the purpose of clarifying this role, Casey concludes this brief essay with the following mission statement: “Aprender, formular las verdades de los hombres de pasión, servir, señalar los peligros, crear incesantemente, ayudar a mantener el frente ancho e irresistible de la Revolución: esos objetivos han de constituir la misión de los escritores en 1960 y en los años de la Revolución” ‘Learning, expressing the truths of passionate men, serving, pointing out dangers, creating incessantly, helping to maintain the wide and irresistible front of the Revolution: those objectives should constitute the writer’s mission in 1960 and in the years of the Revolution’ (13). The revolutionary writer, therefore, must be heroic, humble, and honest, and his labor has to be at the service of creating, expanding, and defending the Revolution. There is little doubt after reading this particular, brief essay that Casey is a publicly declared committed intellectual in 1960 who has devoted himself to the task of repenting for his past sins and actively working to become a true revolutionary.

Casey also participated in the occasional round-table conversations organized by *Lunes de revolución*, and I am particularly interested in the conversations with Pablo Neruda in December 1960, with Nazim Hikmet in June 1961 just before the conferences in the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, and with Nathalie Sarraute in September 1961 just two months before *Lunes* would close. Each of these invited authors advocates for artistic freedom, rejecting State-prescribed forms similar to Zhdanovism and socialist realism, which corresponds with the positions taken by the

Lunes group in general. In the conversation with Neruda, Casey asks if he thinks he has succeeded in overcoming “el problema de la comunicación oral con el pueblo en un alto nivel” ‘the problem of communicating verbally with the people at a high level’ (40). Casey’s preoccupation with communicating with the people without simplification takes precedence, and he seems to have found in Neruda a model for traversing that distance between the U.S.-born intellectual and the Cuban people. Neruda deflects the question, saying the people will have to answer as to whether or not he was successful. Instead, Neruda decries dogmatism in literature and in politics, which he defines as “una visión parcial de la vida y de los acontecimientos. Una visión única, determinada y que no puede ser alterada” ‘a partial vision of life and of events. A single, determined vision, one that cannot be altered’ (41). Neruda defends remaining open to an exploration of artistic expression as long as this expression is committed to engaging the people in dialogue—a vision which seems to be supported by Casey and the intellectuals of *Lunes*. In my view, it will be this commitment to remaining open to various forms of dialogue that will come to characterize the politics of going unnoticed. But for now I only want to make the point that such an open, unbounded exploration would become problematic, especially after Castro’s decree in 1961.

Nazim Hikmet, for his part, proposes that the group hold an amicable discussion on the topic of the role of the writer in the Revolution. Casey is the first to express his point of view: “Pienso que el escritor es testigo de su época. Entonces, uno ve, poniendo sobre los libros, sobre los cuentos, sobre los artículos, no importa dónde, todo lo que pasa a su alrededor, y contribuirá al desarrollo histórico y político

de su país; y también haciendo buena literatura ayudará a su país” ‘I think that the writer is a witness to his era. Therefore, he observes, placing in books, in short stories, in articles, it doesn’t matter where, everything that occurs around him, and he will contribute to the historical and political development of his country; and also by creating good literature he will aid his country’ (2). More than communicating with the people, Casey begins to define a content for his writing: Cuban reality. To this, Hikmet adds, according to his recent reading of José Martí, that the writer should also “educar” ‘educate’ and “propagar” ‘spread information,’ since “el rol del escritor no es solamente un rol objetivo, porque es necesario que él participe en el movimiento, subjetivamente también” ‘the role of the writer is not only an objective one, because it is necessary to participate in the movement subjectively as well’ (2). In agreement with Neruda, Hikmet declares that there cannot be one, dogmatic path for successful intellectual labor, but he draws certain limits to this notion of subjective expression. Some writers, he admits, will only have “una posición no neutra, pero en fin generosa” ‘a non-neutral, but ultimately generous position’ (5). Hikmet, however, does not accept the intellectual in the ivory tower as being sufficiently committed: “no creo que sea una posición digna de un intelectual que, en fin de cuentas, debe todo a su pueblo” ‘I don’t think it is a position that is worthy of an intellectual who, in the end, owes everything to his country’ (5). There will be, for Hikmet, a plurality of intellectual approaches to contributing to the Revolution; yet, these approaches will only be valid insofar as they actively and directly work toward the common goals of defending and expanding the Cuban Revolution from a non-neutral position. Commitment is absolutely necessary.

Despite the rivers of ink used to explain, defend, and debate the role of the revolutionary intellectual, and despite the generally accepted sound bites that are incessantly repeated in these highly visible debates, this role remains quite nebulously defined. Its outline is hazy, and there is no agreed upon rubric for adjudicating the revolutionary qualities of any particular work or act. By situating anti-dogmatism at the center of this debate, as many intellectuals struggle to do in these first years, they simultaneously defend their right to free, artistic experimentation and subject themselves to potentially harsh criticism and persecution dependent upon entirely subjective interpretations of their works. As long as these intellectuals had good faith in the Revolution's commitment to remaining anti-dogmatic, this would not be perceived as a problem. However, Castro's "Palabras a los intelectuales," for all its ambiguities, was the first warning that the official position regarding the role of the intellectual would not be so open to their latent bourgeois proclivities. The *Lunes* group was the first to come under attack. Calvert Casey, in particular, did publicly declare his commitment and his positions seem to be more moderate than those put forth by his contemporaries in these debates. Without meaning to deny the sincerity of his commitment, I also perceive that it was his publicly declared position that secured for him a certain amount of public trust and allowed some of his other, less directly committed ideas to go unnoticed.

Calvert Casey is listed as one of the participants in the conversation with Nathalie Sarraute—alongside Manuel Díaz Martínez, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Heberto Padilla, Edmundo Desnoes, and others—but each question, unlike in the previous conversations, is asked anonymously. This refusal to name names might be

explained as a hesitation on part of the *Lunes* group to be perceived as operating against the Revolution while inside it, since it was published after Castro's "Palabras a los intelectuales" in the last months of the group's operation. To clarify, this editorial change is not explained in the article. During the conversation, Sarraute repeats what has been a fairly common idea: focusing on concrete, local situations instead of universal theories and creating new forms to correspond with the new ideas and situations of the era (4). What particularly is of interest for my discussion of Casey is how Sarraute goes beyond just the concrete cases: "No me interesa la psicología convencional. Pretendo captar aquellas cosas, pequeños incidentes, muchas veces banales que están en el límite de la conciencia y que pueden ser lo más importante" 'I'm not interested in conventional psychology. I attempt to capture those small, often times banal things and incidents that are at the limits of one's conscience, which can be of the utmost importance' (3). This emphasis on that which is seemingly minor or unimportant, on that which is left unattended and goes unnoticed, becomes in my analysis a curious point of dialogue between Sarraute and Casey. For both, a writer can tell the story of that which goes unnoticed, of voices heard in passing and of the abandoned fragments of a text, and still be a committed intellectual.

At the very least, both Sarraute and Casey still conceive of a fruitful relationship between the writer and the Revolution while telling these stories. In making such claims, however, they may already be walking along an errant path of their own invention that has led them astray or potentially turned them against the Revolution. Of all the voices surveyed here on the role of the revolutionary

intellectual, these are the only two who promote a political commitment with the Cuban Revolution and with revolutionary ideology, while also defending the possibility of exploring that which is barely perceived both in public and in private. In fact, this dedication to what Sarraute locates at the limits of consciousness might come dangerously close to a defense of a European, bourgeois aesthetic obsessed with individualism or irrationalism that proves to be of little use for indoctrinating or raising the collective, revolutionary consciousness of the people; even if it were useful, it still might be too hermetic to engage in direct communication with the people, since the people—a group defined even more ambiguously than the *bizcochuelo* in Somers's *Un retrato*—are often spoken of as a group who can only understand simple, direct language with little to no complexity. Writing about that which goes unnoticed already appears in a hazy, indistinct zone on the threshold between commitment and autonomy.

In a sense, I have returned to this question of the political potential of writing about that which goes unnoticed. Casey, who declares a commitment to politics in Cuba, also writes a literature rooted in exploring these fragments of abandoned voices and texts. To what extent is his commitment, which was undeniably genuine, actually in line with the political demands placed on intellectuals at the time? There is a minor, errant moment in which Casey takes a slight detour from this publicly declared commitment to the Revolution. Published in *Lunes*, in “El Premio Nobel y la muerte” “The Nobel Prize and Death” (1960) Casey takes up the question once more. The purpose of this article was to intervene in the international polemic that reappeared in the press after the death of Boris Pasternak, the Russian author of *Doctor Zhivago*,

who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1958. Casey, in a rare moment of vehement disgust, condemns the foreign press as a “terrible ámbito desfigurador” ‘deplorable, distorting space’ and a “monstruo” ‘monster’ for having given such attention to a speculative debate about whether Pasternak truly deserved the Nobel Prize or whether, for the sake of Cold War politics, he was chosen in order to manipulatively promote him among the capitalist countries as a writer who was critical of the Soviet Union (24). In particular, Casey is appalled at the way a somewhat mediocre writer, quietly composing a respectable novel, “de pronto se ve violentamente impelido a la arena política mundial, sin él esperarlo, ni jamás pedirlo, pues tal cosa evidentemente repugna a su naturaleza” ‘all of a sudden finds himself violently thrown into the global political arena, without ever wanting that, and certainly without asking for it, since he evidently finds such things to be naturally repugnant’ (24).

This particular polemic is of little interest for my argument. Within Casey’s text, however, lies what I read as a slip of the tongue—recalling Héctor Manjarrez’s “actos fallidos”—during which Casey’s general timidity gives way to an unexpected, aggressive tone. At first, Casey cautiously retraces the line laid out for him by so many other committed intellectuals of his time, clearly situating himself within the limits of this group: “Para nosotros, comprometidos, la actitud pasiva, neutral, no comprometida, de Pasternak, es contraproducente, incluso dañina, pero la respetamos” ‘For us, the committed, Pasternak’s passive, neutral, uncommitted attitude is counterproductive, even damaging, but we respect it’ (24). Through this enunciation, “nosotros, comprometidos” ‘we, the committed,’ Casey once more reiterates his public standing within Cuba, but he only toes the line for the first half of

this statement. His caveat allows for the inclusion of an author like Pasternak whose neutral, counterproductive, and even damaging lack of commitment goes against the revolutionary struggle while remaining within this “we, the committed.” Casey’s brief text in 1960 employs a logic of inclusion of those who might also be antagonistic to one’s particular cause in stark contrast to the exclusive logic of Castro’s decree in 1961. Casey claims a certain authority to extend his individual voice as the one who can speak in the plural and invite Pasternak into the fold, supposedly with the tacit approval of his fellow committed intellectuals.

By declaring his respect for Pasternak’s isolation, Casey contradicts his own publicly declared position as a committed intellectual. With the same gesture, the attempt to be inclusive and respectful of Pasternak cracks the image of the committed intellectual, even with its ambiguous traits and hazy outline. He then continues along this errant path in the concluding, disjunctive paragraph of his essay in which he further slips into an emotional outcry against a cold, unjust, and painful world:

Pero lo terrible había sucedido. Un artista modesto, silencioso, que no aspiraba más que hacer su obra, buena o mediocre, limitada o de aliento, se había visto atrapado en medio de la furia, fríamente utilizado por unos, e injustamente alocado por otros. Los últimos años de su vida fueron quizás un ejemplo doloroso de que en nuestra época es imposible “El no comprometerse”. (24)

But something terrible had occurred. A modest, quiet artist, who only aspired to create his work, whether it was good or mediocre, limited or encouraging, found himself trapped in the midst of a fury, coldly used by some, and

unjustly driven mad by others. The last years of his life were perhaps a painful example that in our era it is impossible “To Not Be Committed.”

Casey never directly states that he would have preferred to live like Pasternak, modestly creating his work in silence. His choice to move to Cuba would suggest quite the opposite. But he could not remain quiet in the face of the foreign press’s brazen manipulations of a solitary writer’s works within the fury of the Cold War propaganda machine.

As a critique of imperialist propaganda, Casey’s vehement criticisms could be justified as a completely committed position as long as he distances himself from a figure like Pasternak; however, Casey authorizes the other unnamed, committed intellectuals to respect Pasternak. Recognizing the ambiguities of Pasternak’s position, since he never publicly declared his politics, Casey laments the “painful example” proving that such a solitary life and literature is now impossible, because it leaves one’s works too open to manipulative interpretations in the public sphere. The double negative with which Casey expresses the current state of affairs for intellectuals—the impossibility of not being committed—registers a closure in the public and the private spheres. It is no longer possible, Casey claims, to maintain an apolitical stance, even when living in a peripheral, isolated area. Being committed is now a demand, a requirement of the Sixties. And Casey finds this utterly painful and regrettable.

It would seem that his “original sin,” as Guevara would have it, has resurfaced. Casey has erred ever so slightly in his defense of Pasternak, and he subtly flees from the party line. Despite all his public confessions, he still relapses into his

condition as an intellectual who has yet to fully rid himself of his bourgeois sensibilities. But precisely because of his public confessions as a committed intellectual, which in 1960 were sufficient to at least generate a precarious trust between the *barbudos* and the intellectuals, his line of flight seems to go unnoticed. Casey's public declarations paradoxically allow him to be swallowed into the seemingly homogeneous mass of intellectuals in the Revolution; by taking a public stance like everyone else, he opens the possibility of going unnoticed in public. Inadvertently, since his commitment to the Revolution was undeniably genuine in its early years, Casey steps onto the public stage under the light of the Revolution and becomes indistinguishable as an individual, thus opening the possibility for his less explicitly committed writings to go unnoticed. Meanwhile, Pasternak's isolation has the opposite effect; in trying to hide in the periphery and avoid public, political statements, he attracts even more attention to himself. Ultimately, Casey's public image makes it possible for him to err-like-a-palindrome along a dissenting, political, and temporarily unnoticed itinerary and still be offered a job at Casa de las Américas after *Lunes de Revolución* was closed.

An Errant Allegory in Argentina

Quite similar to Boris Pasternak, and in stark contrast to Calvert Casey, Maximiliano Konsideransky lives alone in his inverted, subterranean tower located somewhere in the provincial lands outside of Río Cuarto, Argentina, and he refuses any and all external contact. The 2.7 meters (8'10") tall Konsideransky claims to be his own God, priest, faithful worshipper, temple, martyr, shoemaker, tailor, interlocutor, and onanist, all in one. His self-sufficiency is impressive, although no mention is made of how he procures foodstuffs given that he needs thirty percent more than the average man to survive, according to his own calculations. He resides alone in order to contemplate the outside world and the starry skies as he hides himself from all forms of social interaction.

Konsideransky is the main character in one of Juan Filloy's "monodialogues" entitled "Yo y los intrusos" 'Me and the Intruders' from the short story collection *Yo, yo y yo (Monodiálogos paranoicos)* 'Me, Myself, and I (Paranoid Monodialogues)' published originally in 1971.³¹ The narrative begins when a man arrives at Konsideransky's front door asking to see the inside of his house and, at the very least, for water for his mule. This provokes Konsideransky's extensive monodialogue in

³¹ These "monodialogues," as I have chosen to translate Filloy's neologism, "monodiálogos," constitute a rhetorical structure that I will explore further in the following chapter in its relation to ethics, that is, to interacting with others and to engaging in dialogue across unfathomable distances. While each of the seven monodialogues slightly varies in its number of speakers and interlocutors, the general structure is comprised of one person, always a man, who dominates the entire discussion while ignoring most of what is said by the rest. The monodialogues often end in an ironic turn of events that undermines the force of the speaker who will not cede to or even acknowledge the others near him, as will be the case in "Yo y los intrusos."

which he explains his state as “un hombre póstumo” ‘a posthumous man’ who must not be disturbed (129). Konsideransky tries to dismiss his visitor, a reporter with a bunch of new-fangled electronics, but when asked why he has created this refuge, he replies with the following sermon:

Ya no hay distancias ni discreción. Eso es todo. Antes el mundo ponía muros de distancia y discreción para proteger la intimidad. Ahora no. Siete infames intrusos se han lanzado al abordaje de la felicidad del hombre: el Miedo, la Moral, la Propaganda, la Política, el Cine, la Radio, la Televisión... Actúan sueltos o en pandilla, desquiciando, mortificando, o trucidando al ser inerme, al *zoon politikon* que pulula en campos y ciudades. Felizamente, ya estoy inmunizado a su influencia deletérea. ¡Libre! ¡Libre en la autonomía de mi soledad! ¡Libre en el goce de mis sentidos! ¡Libre de la despersonalización forzada que embiste por doquiera. (135–136)

‘There are no longer any distances or discretion. That’s why. The world used to create distance and discretion by putting up barriers to protect privacy. Not any more. Seven infamous intruders have launched an attack on man’s happiness: Fear, Morality, Propaganda, Politics, Film, Radio, Television... They act alone or in gangs, driving mad, tormenting, and reaving defenseless beings, the *zoon politikon* who mill around in the countryside and the cities. Fortunately, I am already immune to their deleterious influence. Free! Free in the autonomy of my solitude! Free to enjoy my feelings! Free from the forced depersonalization that charges from all directions!’

Konsideransky desires to isolate himself and create a semblance of freedom from these seven infamous intruders (once more, the obsession with the number seven in Filloy's works). However, his freedom is not that of Sartre and the other committed intellectuals, but rather a freedom gained by isolating himself in a purely autonomous state. He has dedicated his life to restoring the barriers that would allow him privacy, because he perceives the all-pervasive public sphere and the all-consuming biopolitical relations of the modern state of exception, not unlike those studied in Agamben's *homo sacer* saga, to which I will return.

This cave-tower is his *magnum opus*, the most recent iteration of an experiment in architectural design that could provide him with a refuge from the overwhelming politicization of his era. Previously, he had attempted to live in the Argentine Pampas, but he found them to be adorned with parrots ("orlas de loros") and was annoyed by the public cries of the roosters ("pregones de gallos") that invaded his desire for silence; then, he moved to "un promontorio en medio del mar" 'a promontory in the middle of the ocean,' but the flying fish seemed to be "espiando mi soledad" 'spying on my solitude,' not to mention the unrelenting waves "golpeando mis nervios" 'beating at my nerves' (137). Finally, he found complete solitude in the desolate deserts ("la desolación y el desierto") of Córdoba Province (133). Now standing at the entrance to his refuge and lecturing the reporter, he launches into a didactic sermon that turns his cave-tower into an allegory about the need for silence, isolation, and self-contemplation away from the seven infamous intruders—Fear, Morality, Propaganda, Politics, Film, Radio, Television. Since he talks without ever engaging with his interlocutor, Konsideransky does not realize that

the reporter is recording and transmitting everything he says back to a radio station in Río Cuarto to be disseminated around the country without his consent (152). His masterpiece will prove to be as porous and insecure as his former abodes, and as such, it will be divested of its potential to be read as a serious allegory.

Proposing “Yo y los intrusos” as an allegory of the cave-tower raises the question of its relation to Plato’s allegory of the cave in *The Republic*—a comparison through which I will show the errant path taken by Konsideransky’s allegory. Plato’s classic allegory is but one of three interrelated narratives by which Socrates illustrates the linear path from the darkness of the likenesses, shadows, and reflections, into the light of the Good that generates Truth. In the classic allegory, there are slaves chained in the cave who only perceive the shadows of objects being cast on the wall. One of these slaves is freed and drug up and out of the cave with difficulty. The harsh light of the outside sun blinds him at first, but eventually his eyes adjust and can peer into the light of knowledge represented by the sun. Finally, he is able to return to the cave and reveal the truth to the rest of the chained slaves who only see the shadows. Since they have no experience of the outside realm, he struggles to convince them of the Truth he now possesses; this is the struggle of the philosopher-king (240–245).

Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” narrates how the process of illuminating intelligence for the human mind permits the creation of a consensual community, that is, of a political order called the Republic. The light of the sun, as an analog for the Good, opens the path toward reason and logic, which will be at the service of the philosopher-king and the legislators as they reign over the Republic. This attempt to

illuminate the truth for those still chained in the cave is certainly comparable to the task set for the revolutionary intellectuals of the Sixties who sought to make their knowledge communicable to the people. Since Plato, visibility, light, and consensus building have been set at the heart of the political; without the light of the Good that all are able to perceive, the Republic cannot pass from becoming into being.

However, I am not interested in creating such a passage. Going unnoticed, as I have argued, is a form of becoming, a perpetual movement through various thresholds of perception that does not aim to pass clearly from invisibility to visibility or from the darkness into the light and then back to its origin. It is simply an errant passing, and its politics will arise along this dimly lit path. If Filloy's allegory is to be relevant to the politics of going unnoticed, it will have to take a detour from the Platonic text.

My reading of Plato's *The Republic* for its fictional elements—its analogies and allegories—cannot be dissociated from Jacques Derrida's revision of Plato without Platonism in his essay, "*Khôra*."³² Derrida turns his attention to Plato's *Timaeus*, showing it to be nothing less than a "general ontology" that "includes a theology, a cosmology, a physiology, a psychology, a zoology" (103). Its encyclopedic scope claims to situate all things, all "mortal or immortal, human and divine, visible and invisible things" (103). In order to achieve this comprehensive study, the *Timaeus* presents itself as a text that moves forward toward an end not

³² Derrida advances a related argument in "Plato's Pharmacy" about the impossibility of arriving at any origin outside of *logos*, and writing becomes more closely associated with myth than it does with knowledge or the truth: "And at the same time, through writing or through myth, the genealogical break and the estrangement from the origin are sounded" (74). The *pharmakon*, which in the *Phaedrus* is associated with writing, is both a remedy and a poison; it is necessary for seeking "the origin or cause of *logos*," but that external origin or cause can never be investigated outside of *logos*, that is, outside of writing (80).

unlike the unchained prisoner in the allegory of the cave: “Its encyclopedic end must mark the term, the *telos*, of a *logos* on the subject of everything that is” (103). In contrast, what interests Derrida is establishing that the Socratic dialogues written by Plato only succeed in taking the first of many “backward steps” whose *telos* is, in actuality, nothing more than a *mythos*, a fictional origin only accessible through writing (125). Plato’s *Timaeus* attempts to move forward, toward the light and the Good, toward an *a priori* end defined as the logical, rational order of all things. In contrast, Derrida claims that such a logical, rational order is only a mythical fiction employed to establish a foundational narrative for the Republic that masks an originary void. Derrida enumerates these short fictions from one to seven (a curious coincidence with Filloy’s obsession with the number seven). The first fiction is the dialogue in the *Timaeus*, and the second fiction, “the conversation of the evening before,” can be, without saying it must be, Plato’s *The Republic* and the *Politeia* (121).

In Derrida’s assessment, Plato’s writing serves not to achieve this encyclopedic account of all things, of their origin and their end, but rather it buries itself further into the retelling and rewriting of myths and fictions that supplement the lack of an origin and the lack of an end:

[The excess of irony] accentuates the dynamic tension between the thetic effect and the textual fiction, between on the one hand the “philosophy” or the “politics” which is here associated with [Socrates]—contents of identifiable and transmissible meanings like the identity of a knowledge—and on the other hand a textual drift [*dérive*] which takes the form of a myth, in any event of a

“saying” (*legomenon*), whose origin appears always undefined, pulled back, entrusted to a responsibility that is forever adjourned, without a fixed and determinable subject. From one telling to the next, the author gets farther and farther away. (124)

In returning to the originary texts of Western philosophy, that is, the texts that write the fictional origins of Western civilization, Derrida shows them to be incapable of reaching an origin or an end. As the text drifts and wanders toward the *mythos* which constantly pulls itself back, it ironically loses sight of its former *telos*, the attainment of the Good by reason and logic. Plato’s writing remains within a space between the origin and the end, between its *mythos* and its *telos*.

The possibility of transcendence from the visible realm to the intelligible realm, from becoming to being, gets lost in the space opened by this errant writing—the spaced called “*khôra*.” Derrida chooses not to translate the term “*khôra*,” because of its semantic density and the irregular ways in which it has been translated by others. He considers it to be a space or a receptacle that opens a gap or a chasm between *logos* and *mythos*, while articulating the link between them. *Khôra* never possesses what it receives nor does it have a referent in the world: “And in fact, *khôra* will always already be occupied, invested even as a general place, and even when it is distinguished from everything that takes place in it. Whence the difficulty [...] of treating it as an empty or geometric space” (109). *Khôra* opens up in an already occupied space, but it becomes different from that space even while sharing it; once this opening is located, Derrida is able to read it as the element that ironically undermines Platonism’s foundations. Derrida situates the Socrates who speaks in

Plato's *Timaeus* in this opening by assuming a first person narrative to speak in the place of Socrates, as if Socrates were speaking in Derrida's text and through Derrida's voice, to the philosophers and the politicians: "I address you from your place [*place*] in order to say to you that I have no place [*place*], since I am like those who make their trade out of resemblance—the poets, the imitators, and the sophists, the genus of those who have no place" (108). It is no longer clear if Derrida or if Socrates is speaking here. This Derrida-Socrates, I might call him, situates himself in the opening in an already occupied space in order to speak as if he were a poet on matters that can only be discussed by philosophers and politicians, that is by Plato's philosopher-king.

Where have we—Derrida, Socrates, Derrida-Socrates, Plato, and I—wandered? It seems we have stumbled into the *khôra*. In order to show the distance that Plato's *Timaeus* has traversed backward toward myth, Derrida simultaneously performs this wandering in his own text that now rewrites the Platonic text. In speaking from the place that opens in an already occupied space in the Platonic text—*khôra*—this Derrida-Socrates is capable of speaking a different politics than the one canonically read in that text. He locates an opening that engages in disagreement with the formerly closed and populated space. *Khôra*, this opening in an already occupied space, is what interests me as the place in which a politics of going unnoticed takes place.

But I have gotten ahead of myself in discussing the opening in an already occupied space as the politics of going unnoticed. For now, it will suffice to say, following Derrida, that Plato's analogies and allegories in *The Republic* come to be

just one of many errant steps that do not lead to an origin or a *telos*, and they do not produce a transcendence between becoming and being or between the visible and the intelligible realms. Derrida makes it possible to read Plato's texts outside of Platonism's linear logic, direct analogies, and referential allegories. Thus, the Platonic text, once Derrida is finished with it, becomes an errant fiction. He divests the allegory of its truth-bearing analogies and referentiality and turns it into a fictional text that drifts toward myth. While the man who is unchained from the cave wall can be dragged up and out of the cave to pass from one realm to the other, this becomes possible, Derrida claims, only within the fictional space of Plato's allegory.

At this point, I propose reading Filloy's "Yo y los intrusos" as an errant allegory of the cave-tower, as if it were a rewriting and an opening of Plato's text not unlike the one carried out by Derrida's text, but in this case without passing through Derrida (Filloy's short story was published in 1971, a contemporary of Derrida's 1968 essay "Plato's Pharmacy" and well before his 1987 essay "*Khôra*"). This errant allegory, in my view, underscores its own fictionality through irony; nevertheless, the errant allegory of the cave-tower counterintuitively recovers some of the referentiality lost in Derrida's reading of the Platonic text.

The cave-tower does not function as a prison for its inhabitants as in the Platonic text; this is Konsideransky's refuge from the outside world. This underground fortress, or temple to himself, he tells us, is built like an upside-down tower that he ascends by going further underground: "Me precipito para arriba hundiéndome en ella. Tengo mis raíces en el aire. Soy un árbol invertido" 'I plunge upward by sinking down into it. My roots are in the air. I am an inverted tree' (133).

As such, this cave-tower appears to be structured like one of Filloy's palindromes, and every palindrome already has on its surface a reading that potentially goes unnoticed and that is only perceived in reverse or, in this case, upside-down. The cave-tower is built around "la escalera caracol, por la cual subo y bajo yo, sube y baja mi pensamiento, lo mismo que un destornillador helicoidal. Sin moverme, es obvio, en ninguna faena inútil" 'the spiral staircase, along which both my thoughts and I move up and down, up and down, just like a helical screwdriver. Without engaging, of course, in a single useless task' (135). Here the potentially unnoticed irony can begin to be read. This obsessive back and forth movement is so obviously pragmatic for Konsideransky, but it is, of course, not so easily perceived as a useful task by everyone else. When read alongside the demands placed on intellectuals, even in Casey's essays, Konsideransky's cave-tower is simply an underground ivory-tower for his intellectual musings and his lack of political commitment. He spends his days and nights pacing up and down this spiral staircase, and his movements do not serve any purpose other than to stimulate his ability to think and to listen to the echoes of the rocks that surround him as he cultivates silence and solitude. He makes no gesture toward opening his reflections to anyone else, and he certainly is not volunteering his time to promote or document social change. These would be useless tasks for him.

At other moments in the narrative, Filloy's text becomes disjointed from the analogically didactic qualities of the classical allegory. First, the geometrical perfection of the spiral staircase along which Konsideransky moves up and down inside the inverted cave-tower seems to correspond perfectly with the crystalline structure of Filloy's palindromes; however, Filloy's short story opens with an

extended four lines of ellipsis, and it closes with an unnecessary ellipsis after an exclamation mark: “tu panegórico!...” (153). While the palindrome is a closed set of perfectly balanced letters that start and end at precise points, exactly like the lesson in Plato’s allegory of the cave, “Yo y los intrusos” is left open at the beginning and the end. The starting and closing points of the text become indefinite openings toward a before and an after of the plotline that complicate the closed, linear movement of the palindrome and the allegory of the cave. There is also an imbalance between the enormous ellipsis at the beginning of the story and the short one at the end that throws off the symmetry. The cave-tower is not one of Filloy’s crystalline palindromes, but rather, in my view, acquires the fluidity of an errant palindrome.

Second, the text ironically recreates the structure of testimonial literature. It begins and ends with Konsideransky outside of the cave talking to the reporter. The entire text is written as a long dialogue without the intervention of a third person narrator. As such, it can be interpreted as the transcription of the reporter’s recordings, which had been broadcast (“radiotelefoneada”) back to a station in Río Cuarto (152). Konsideransky’s story is recorded and broadcast as an eye-witness, first-person narrative of his life, his politics, and his surroundings. However, he represents the exact image of the bourgeois intellectual obsessed only with his individuality and his elitism. As such, Konsideransky is the last subject who would be considered the ideal subject of testimonial literature. According to Beverley’s classic formulation of the *testimonio* as a genre, the subject must be an underdog who struggles against the status quo, and the text should have an “efecto metonímico” ‘metonymic effect,’ that is, the individual who speaks should be speaking not as an

individual but as a voice for the entire community (12). Konsideransky, in contrast, speaks only for himself. He does not have the desire or the political urgency to seek the assistance of other intellectuals to tell the world about his story. Despite its formal similarities, this text in no way resembles the content frequently documented through *testimonio*, as in the case of the violence committed in this Sixties during events such as the Cordobazo and the massacre at Tlatelolco, or later, as a result of state terrorism and death squads. Since Konsideransky's biography and the details of his cave-tower are only available to the reporter by listening to the monodialogue, the reader of the recorded monodialogue is even one step further removed from it, only having access to the broadcast text. Yet, nothing in the text explicitly claims that the reporter does not believe Konsideransky's story. It is transmitted as a text that upholds a reading pact based on journalistic credibility. Testimonial literature similarly operates as the story of an apparently true, lived experience that could, at least in theory, be verified empirically.³³ In contrast, Konsideransky's cave-tower is a space whose existence can only be verified through his monodialogue, which is to say that it can never be verified empirically. Konsideransky's monodialogue unwittingly generates a fictional *testimonio* divested of its explicitly referential, verifiable content.

Third, Konsideransky is also drug up and out of the cave-tower similar to the the unchained slave in Plato's allegory. Konsideransky is compelled to open the belly-button shaped door when the reporter intrusively arrives at his refuge, but he

³³ It is not my intention here to add further commentary to the exhausted debate provoked by David Stoll's *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview P, 1999), in which he claims to disprove certain aspects of Rigoberta Menchú's testimony, ultimately reminding readers of any text's narrative construction.

comes out of the cave to find, not the realm of the intelligible and the light of the sun, but that which forms his ideal world: “la desolación y el desierto” ‘desolation and desert’ (133). The exterior world surrounding his cave-tower appears to him to be completely empty. Since his name, “Konsideransky,” as he explains to the reporter, is etymologically related to *considerare*, which means “contemplar atentamente las estrellas” ‘to contemplate the stars attentively,’ this deserted landscape is the perfect space where he can contemplate the stars in the night sky while completely alone (138). His end goal, contemplating the stars in the night sky, falls one step short of contemplating the sun in the Platonic text, another minor deviation from Plato’s allegory of the cave.

Finally, Konsideransky never reaches Plato’s ideal end point, and his return to the cave-tower will not be a journey that seeks to free the other prisoners chained to the wall; he returns only to complete solitude. But his solitude is belied by a simple detail that he neglected to take into account when constructing his refuge. There is a road that leads through the mountains, directly to his cave-tower. The reporter at one point notes that he was able to ask for directions by another man who lives in the province. The road that leads to the cave-tower serves as the one remaining trace of the line of flight taken by Konsideransky into the Argentine “desert”; his home is almost completely isolated and would have been practically impossible to find. However, Konsideransky seems to have read the nineteenth century narratives of the Argentine provinces as a deserted landscape too literally, and he neglected to erase the trail leading to his home. In this way, he further embodies the image of the ivory-tower intellectual; in contrast to Guevara’s definition of an avant-garde leader,

Konsideransky blazed a new trail but intended to be the only one to walk down that road.

The supposedly isolated space in which he chose to construct his hermetic cave-tower is an already occupied space. The Argentine deserts were, of course, already populated by indigenous civilizations, and their land was violently conquered by 1879 during the *Campaña del Desierto* (Halperín Donghi 143). By the mid-twentieth century when this story takes place, numerous cities and ranches stretched across the country's interior. It is only Konsideransky, and not Filloy, who believes that the provinces are a deserted space. Ironically, it is the trace Konsideransky left, the path leading to his front door, that leads the reporter directly to his refuge.

Whether he desired it or not, Konsideransky's trail created a path that other's could follow when he went wandering into the Argentine provinces. Whereas the literal reading of the cave-tower as allegory would suggest a real desire to construct such a refuge, turning against the current of Konsideransky's literal enunciations by reading the text's irony allows it to be transformed into an errant allegory. This allegory does not serve as a direct analogy for Konsideransky's explicit ideas and desires; rather, it serves as an allegory for what is only suggested through irony—that there is no such desolate desert, no isolation, and no transcendence made possible even with the construction of a cave-tower in the Argentine provinces.

What, then, is the politics of this errant allegory? *Yo, yo y yo* was originally published in 1971, and there are many parallels to be drawn with the cultural and political landscape of Latin America in the Sixties. The reporter in "Yo y los intrusos" is perplexed by Konsideransky's selfish desire for total isolation and

opulence, “no habiendo guerras a la vista ni otros riesgos inminentes” ‘since there are no foreseeable wars or other imminent dangers’ (135). The reporter’s statements about the relative peace and stability of the times suggest he is caught up in the euphoria and utopianism of the era, since any serious reporter would find it difficult to describe any historical period as relatively peaceful. The collection of short stories was published only two years after the Cordobazo of 1969 and takes place in the outlying regions of Córdoba Province, a time and a place that could barely be described, especially in retrospect, as one without past, present, or foreseeable violent conflicts and confrontations. Certainly, the reporter should have been aware of the imminence of Cold War politics throughout all of Latin America, whether it be in the form of the Cuban embargo or of the CIA’s intrusions into almost every country of the region. The reporter, more realistically, seems to be among those who unquestionably championed the need for intellectual commitment during the Sixties and radically opposed any form of autonomous, isolated, or socially useless form of intellectual activity. In my view, this reporter could be among those who contributed to the disfiguring and monstrous foreign press that Casey vehemently attacks in his essay on Boris Pasternak.

Ultimately, the reporter’s statement is not justified at any moment in the text; in contrast, Konsideransky uses this naïve claim to launch into the sermon that I began to quote at the beginning of this section. His sermon continues far beyond what I quoted and serves to disprove the reporter’s claim, offering an extensive list of the ideologies and power brokers that motivated his search for solitude:

—¡Libre en este bastión de protesta perenne contra la trivialización de la vida, contra la fragmentación de la especie, contra el amor mecanizado, contra la descomposición moral, contra la regresión psíquica, contra la nivelación general!

—¡...!

—¡Libre de los grupos de presión y de los grupos de interés! ¡Libre del imperialismo de los poderes de hecho! ¡Libre del gobierno invisible de la plutocracia universal! ¡Libre de la tercera cámara, que constituyen las fuerzas armadas! ¡Libre del cuarto poder de la prensa; del quinto, del clero; del sexto, de los sindicatos; del séptimo, de los estudiantes; del octavo, de los burócratas; del noveno, de la ciudadanía aborregada por los partidos; del décimo, del cretinismo ambiente!....

—¡...!

—...¡Y libre también de usted! Sí, de usted... Le traeré agua a su mula para que se vaya de una vez.

—... (136)

‘—Free from this bastion of perennial protest against the trivialization of life, against the fragmentation of the species, against mechanized love, against the breakdown of morals, against the socialization of the spirit, against psychic regression, against a general leveling out!

—...!

—Free from pressure groups and from interest groups! Free from the imperialism of the powers that be! Free from the invisible government of the

universal plutocracy! Free from the third chamber, which is made up of the armed forces! Free from the fourth power, the press; from the fifth, the clergy; from the sixth, the labor unions; from the seventh, the students; from the eighth, the bureaucrats; from the ninth, the citizenry subdued by political parties; from the tenth, the all around cretinism!...

—...!

—...And free also from you, sir! Yes, from you... I will bring some water for your mule so that you may leave once and for all.

—...’

The rigorously structured rhetoric of Konsideransky’s sermon to the reporter—who only responds with emphatic silences—belies its seeming improvisation. This is the speech of a man who has rehearsed these words over and over again in the isolation of his cave-tower while lying in wait until he could ambush someone with his monologue. He undermines the reporter’s optimism about the future by listing all of the political forces that collaborate, albeit indirectly, to subdue the citizenry, while struggling violently among themselves to establish hegemony over the others. His list recalls that of Huberto’s rejections in Manjarrez’s novel *Lapsus (Algunos actos fallidos)*. Read in conjunction with Huberto’s rejections, Konsideransky’s sermon expands this map wherein he traces the pressures and power brokers of his time from which he seeks refuge. For him, the world is becoming too mechanized as “the powers that be” attempt to create masses of trivialized human beings with no genuine emotional connections between them. These power brokers, which he organizes into ten groups that include the State, the military, the Church,

labor unions, and students, certainly correspond to the major competing voices that came into visible political conflict in the Sixties. Despite the rhetorical differences between them, both Manjarrez's and Filloy's texts create a line of flight away from the pressures and powers that they map, and in doing so, they leave a textual trace of their rejections. Konsideransky rejects these powers, and his search for freedom takes place along his meandering path through the Argentine provinces. He opens a line of flight along which he attempts to go unnoticed, thus registering his disagreement with the political and cultural organization of the era. Yet, the path he takes in order to go unnoticed is not an invisible, solitary path; it can be followed, albeit it with difficulty, by others.

Konsideransky desires to go unnoticed by the seven deadly intruders—Fear, Morality, Propaganda, Politics, Film, Radio, Television. Recalling the structure of the palindrome, whose third reading is that which takes place from the center toward the left and right simultaneously, what orients this list, the Janus-faced idea placed exactly in its center, is nothing other than Politics with a capital "P." According to Konsideransky, to the left are the evils that condition human behavior (Fear, Morality, Propaganda); to the right are the media through which those evils are put into circulation (Film, Radio, Television). Qualifications and judgments aside, Politics becomes the organizing axis, the driving force behind Konsideransky's desire to go unnoticed.

Konsideransky seeks an alternative to the particular political organization of his world by going unnoticed, and in doing so, he engages in a politics of his own. In a final displacement of the Platonic text, the exterior world does not serve as an

analog for a higher realm in Filloy's text; it simply provides the fictional isolation for Konderansky's interior monologues deep inside his cave-tower where he cultivates his own political movement: "el yomismo" (146). A first translation of "yomismo" might be "Me-ism," the movement focused on the benefit and development of the only person in the political movement. "Yo mismo" also translates literally as "I myself," and it emphasizes the isolation and proclaimed self-sufficiency of such a movement. Konderansky clarifies that he has developed this neologism as an alternative to being called an "anarquista" 'anarchist' (146). Further, I see this as an attempt to differentiate himself from any other already named political philosophy, at least in name, whether it be socialism, communism, liberalism, libertarianism, or even Peronism, Leninism, Trotskyism or Maoism. While he only speaks of "yomismo" as a political movement, this word also invokes the endless "-isms" created to name the aesthetic movements of the historical avant-gardes (e.g. *creacionismo* and *ultraísmo*). Ironically, his aesthetic sensibilities seem more in line with those of the hermetic ideal of pure art and autonomy cultivated by Latin American *modernismo* than by the self-proclaimed apocalyptic ruptures of the avant-gardes.

Of course, the pun created by turning the phrase "yo mismo" into the homophonic name of Konderansky's own politics and aesthetics by combining the singular first person pronoun with the suffix "-ismo" furthers the ironic effect of the text. He believes he is making his own, individual party, which he would share with no one: "no divido con nadie mis ideas políticas" 'I don't split my political ideas with anyone' (146). He does not say "no comparto mis ideas" 'I do not share my ideas,' but "no divido" 'I do not divide' them with anyone. The verb "compartir" 'to share'

does not seem to be a part of his extensive vocabulary. To share would be to include others in his movement, which does not interest him. To split his ideas would be, even worse, to break the unity of his individualism, of himself. Yet, any “-ism” always implies a program or a manifesto that, in theory, can be adopted by others. In choosing “yomismo” over something like “Konsideranskismo,” a term which could make it more uniquely his, he unwittingly names his political movement in such a way that it can be easily appropriated by someone else. In fact, anyone in the world could adopt “yomismo” as the name by which they try to give their personal politics a more substantial weight. Thus, Konsideransky is not to be taken seriously, and I prefer to read the politics of yomismo ironically, as yet another impossible and unviable political movement for the Sixties. What this errant allegory represents via irony is, in its own way, the lesson learned by Calvert Casey: In the Sixties, it is impossible to not be committed.

In the end, the cave-tower is neither the Platonic cave nor the intellectual’s ivory tower, but the space of an errant allegory that opens up in the already occupied fictional deserts of the Argentine provinces. The politics of going unnoticed is not Konsideransky’s yomismo. His cave-tower can be read as one that makes claims about a politics in the Sixties, but only when read as an errant allegory, as one that states its claims through irony. Ultimately, Konsideransky’s defense of isolated intellectual practices and autonomous art becomes a comic proposition. The politics of going unnoticed, then, is not the creation of such an autonomous, individual political movement. Even Konsideransky cannot guarantee his position as yomismo’s only leader and member, especially after the story of his secret cave-tower and his

secret political party is broadcast nationally by the reporter. Not only is it impossible to not be committed, as Casey regrettably explains, but as Filloy's errant allegory suggests through irony, it is also impossible to locate an autonomous space for both politics and aesthetics in the Sixties. The countryside is no longer a refuge from the political city. With these negative outlines in place, I can now turn toward defining the politics of going unnoticed as a gesture that opens a place for disagreement within an already occupied and inescapable space.

The Politics of Going Unnoticed

It is not surprising that by the Sixties a breakdown of the strict divisions between the city and the countryside had become irreversible given the recognizable expansion of the public sphere into all aspects of private life. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas explores the process by which these theoretically divided spaces came to overlap one another by the mid-twentieth century. First, he explains how the Greeks conceived of the public and the private spheres as autonomous realms:

In the fully developed Greek city-state, the sphere of the *polis*, which was common (*koine*) to the free citizens, was strictly separated from the sphere of the *oikos*; in the sphere of the *oikos*, each individual is in his own realm (*idia*). The public life, *bios politikos*, went on in the market place (*agora*), but of course this did not mean that it occurred necessarily only in this specific locale. The public sphere was constituted in discussion (*lexis*), which could also assume the forms of consultation and of sitting in the court of law, as well as in the common action (*praxis*), be it the waging of war or competition in athletic games. (3)

While Habermas notes that this political order “rested on a patrimonial slave economy” from which it was never truly autonomous, Greek thought characterized the public sphere as separate from the private sphere (3). The public sphere was the realm in which the unrestrained masters of a household came together to discuss matters of public or communal concern: “Only in the light of the public sphere did that which existed become revealed, did everything become visible to all” (4). In this

sense, politics was conceived since the earliest Greek formulations as those matters which came into the light of the public sphere—within the *polis* where economic exchanges occurred in and around the *agora*—in order to be subjected to debate for the good of the community.

Neither dependent upon presence in the city, nor seeking full visibility in the public sphere, the politics of going unnoticed would be meaningless within this classic framework. However, as is well known, Habermas continues to trace the transformation of the public sphere through the twentieth century. In sum, he examines how the Greek division between the public and the private spheres loses its clarity; the two spheres come to infiltrate one another as the market economy grows and globalizes, as the State continues to intervene into private business transactions to ensure their success, and as the masses enter into political conflict and negotiate the competing messages circulating in the media and the culture industries (141–146). What interests me is not Habermas’s intent to revive a rational-critical debate in the public sphere, but how the classic Greek divisions between private and public do not adequately describe social, economic, and political relationships in the twentieth century.

If the countryside is no longer a refuge from the political city, and if the public-private divide no longer adequately describes social functions, then the question I want to ask is the following: To what extent can one engage in a political gesture while going unnoticed in a crowded, urban center or in pseudo-isolation in the countryside? In what ways does going unnoticed become a more effective strategy for engaging in dissent than in clamoring for a voice under the bright lights of the

political arena? In what follows, I answer these questions by building a definition of politics as a means of engaging in dissensus within an overcrowded and saturated political environment like that of the Sixties in Latin America. This politics will be founded on three irresolvable paradoxes drawn from contemporary political theory: 1) democratic pluralism only functions as a never-ending tension between bids for liberty and bids for equality; 2) those who go unnoticed engage in politics without acquiring full visibility or a clear voice; and 3) the modern state of exception has become the rule that guides Western biopolitical relationships wherein the law is suspended in order to guarantee the future of the law.

In *The Democratic Paradox*, Chantal Mouffe contends that liberalism and democracy are the two competing logics that constitute the unresolved paradox at the heart of contemporary, radical democratic politics. She characterizes this politics as “the dichotomy between the liberal emphasis on individual rights and liberties and the democratic emphasis on collective formation and will formation” (85). In contrast to those who insist on consensus building as the only possibility for democracy, Mouffe claims that every agreement already foregrounds an exclusion.³⁴ Any choice that includes some (“us”) and excludes others (“them”) is already a political choice that constitutes a power relation.³⁵ Mouffe’s theory for a pluralist democratic politics does

³⁴ See Chapters One and Two of *The Democratic Paradox* where Mouffe goes into greater detail of her critique of the “deliberative democrats” like Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls who locate consensus-building as the foundation of their political thought.

³⁵ This argument is further detailed in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London and New York: Verso, 1985).

not seek to resolve this paradoxical tension. Instead, she proposes a politics that relies on difference and pluralism as the condition of possibility for democracy:

Envisaged from an anti-essentialist theoretical perspective, on the contrary, pluralism is not merely a *fact*, something that we must bear grudgingly or try to reduce, but an axiological principle. It is taken to be constitutive *at the conceptual level* of the very nature of modern democracy and considered as something that we should celebrate and enhance. This is why the type of pluralism that I am advocating gives a positive status to differences and questions the objective of unanimity and homogeneity, which is always revealed as fictitious and based on acts of exclusion.

However, such a view does not allow a total pluralism, and it is important to recognize the limits to pluralism which are required by a democratic politics that aims at challenging a wide range of relations of subordination. It is therefore necessary to distinguish the position I am defending here from the type of extreme pluralism that emphasizes heterogeneity and incommensurability and according to which pluralism—understood as valorization of all differences—should have no limits. I consider that, despite its claim to be more democratic, such a perspective prevents us from recognizing how certain differences are constructed as relations of subordination and should therefore be challenged by a radical democratic politics. There is only a multiplicity of identities without any common denominator, and it is impossible to distinguish between differences that exist but should not exist and differences that do not exist but should exist. (19–20)

Pluralism of values, difference, and disagreement, then, become the foundation of a radical democratic politics in the sense that democracy is the space in which these differences can engage in debate about the contingent organization of power relations and the changing values of liberty and equality without defining *a priori* who should and should not count as a political subject or community.

Pluralist democratic politics should be seen as a paradox that does not need to be resolved through consensus building or the construction of a homogeneous totality; such a choice to transcend this point of conflict and bring about the end of any debate is the political choice to close democracy itself. However, Mouffe clearly draws a line between pluralism, as defined here, and the sort of postmodern celebrations of all differences that end in a defense of relativism. She insists on upholding this difference to avoid arriving at a political process in which “relations of power and antagonisms are erased and we are left with the typical liberal illusion of a pluralism without antagonism” (20). Mouffe cautions against a form of multiculturalism in which the differences among identity groups are essentialized without giving recourse to the ways in which such differences have been historically and contingently structured via power relations of exclusion and oppression. When such antagonism is erased from these power relations, a new consensus is constituted in which pluralism becomes the name that purports to celebrate cultural differences while simultaneously denying such differences a political voice in the debates on the meaning of liberty and of equality. Rather, in order to guarantee a pluralist democratic politics, the antagonism, difference, and dissent that constitutes this

paradox must be upheld in order to guarantee the future of the democratic process.³⁶

To exclude such antagonism is to relegate these differences outside of the space of democracy—even as they are being celebrated or tolerated—where they will seek other means of registering their dissent. Only by guaranteeing the possibility for dissent does democracy have the potential to remain open to all.

Previously, I defined going unnoticed as a precarious, errant movement; one may begin to go unnoticed on purpose or it may be the result of happenstance that one ends up going unnoticed. In either case, going unnoticed involves moving throughout a complex milieu of swirling lights and shadows, of noises, sounds, and voices wherein it becomes impossible to distinguish the strictly visible from the strictly invisible and the intelligible voice from the unintelligible noise or sound.

Furthermore, those who go unnoticed can be perceived at any moment when someone else changes their own threshold of perception by turning around as one must in order to read a palindrome. At this point, the politics of going unnoticed must be located within a space no longer conceived as an autonomous public sphere, and it must be a radical democratic politics that recognizes difference, dissent, and antagonism as its conditions of possibility. By opening and unfolding the political space within which such differences and antagonisms can effectively be weighed against one another, they will continue to be able to challenge instances of hegemony and other power relations among individuals and communities.

³⁶ In the following chapter on ethics and the formation of a political community, I will explore how Mouffe theorizes the transformation of antagonism into agonism by which an enemy is transformed into an adversary within a radical democratic politics.

In this context, the second irresolvable paradox arises when considering specifically a politics that arises from the practice of going unnoticed. Since the classic Greek formulation, the creation of a political subject has been defined as the process of acquiring visibility and a voice within the public sphere. Jacques Rancière's writings, in a way, have become emblematic of such a definition of politics most recently. In many ways, his arguments regarding democracy and politics are compatible with Mouffe's. Both understand dissensus and disagreement as the only foundation for a democratic politics. Therefore, the institutions through which consensus is reached (e.g., parliament or congress) and those through which such agreements are guaranteed and enforced (e.g., police and armed forces) are not the institutions that engage directly in politics. Mouffe uses the term "the political" to name instances of dissensus and antagonism and the term "politics" to refer to the consensus-building practices of various institutions. Rancière distinguishes them as "politics" and "police," respectively (Mouffe, 101; Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* 25). The difference between them on this point is basically a difference of terminology. When I use the phrase "the politics of going unnoticed," I am referring to acts of dissensus and disagreement, not to the practices of consensus-building institutions.

Their arguments diverge, however, at the point at which Rancière characterizes the process by which an individual or a community becomes political by engaging in dissent. In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancière explicitly links his definition of politics as dissensus with what he sees as the necessary visibility of any political act: "Politics consists in reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible which

defines the common of a community, to introduce into it new subjects and objects, to render visible what had not been, and to make heard as speakers those who had been perceived as mere noisy animals” (25). This passage, via dissensus, from invisibility to visibility or from noise to speech is consistently upheld as the definition of politics throughout his work, and it stands today as the most recent iteration of the classical Greek formulation by which politics derives from visibility.³⁷

By now it is clear that this specific passage cannot be the case for the politics of going unnoticed. The two examples of going unnoticed I have provided in this chapter so far cannot be read as political practices that are simply in the process of moving from an invisible to a visible position or vice versa. Casey’s subtly deviant claims about the impossibility of not being committed were practically ignored given his publicly declared position as a committed intellectual. Filloy’s narrative about the search for an isolated refuge in the provinces is radically undermined by the arrival of the journalist who simply followed the public road leading directly to Konsideransky’s front door. The politics of going unnoticed, paradoxically, is not a politics that privileges such a passage into the public light nor a retreat into complete darkness. I would argue that no such clearly delimited spaces truly exist today. Yet, it still remains a politics that begins, like Huberto in Héctor Manjarrez’s *Lapsus* (*Algunos actos fallidos*), with rejection, that is, with dissensus and disagreement. This rejection opens an errant path that these protagonists follow with no *a priori* end in mind as they go unnoticed like a screw among a heap of scrap metal, as described by

³⁷ Rancière repeats this definition of politics almost verbatim in both *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009) and *The Politics of Literature* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), for example.

the protagonist in Somers's *De miedo en miedo (Los manuscritos del río)*. Like this metal screw that is almost indistinguishable among all the other bits of jagged, rusted scraps of metal in the heap of which it is a part, those who engage in the politics of going unnoticed can be paid attention, but they can also be discarded, excluded, or abandoned at any moment with the other scraps. By permitting there to be a politics of that which goes unnoticed in addition to those who make that transcendental passage into visibility, those who are overlooked and can be discarded at any moment for their apparent triviality or irrelevance maintain the potential to engage in dissent, to disagree with their own exclusion and abandonment even as they remain only partially visible or refuse to fully participate in a political system that has or still does exclude them.

In many ways, Agamben has been the one to argue for the need to reconfigure the binary thought that has served for so long as the central organizing logic of politics, or more specifically, of biopolitics in the Foucaultian sense. Continuing in this tradition, Agamben takes up what he sees as the loose ends left by Foucault's unfinished volumes of *History of Sexuality*. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben bluntly reorients the point of departure for thinking politics: "There is no clearer way to say that the first foundation of political life is a life that may be killed, which is politicized through its very capacity to be killed" (89). He continues:

Every attempt to rethink the political space of the West must begin with the clear awareness that we no longer know anything of the classical distinction between *zoē* and *bios*, between private life and political existence, between

man as a simple living being at home in the house and man's political existence in the city. [...] There is no return from the camps to classical politics. In the camps, city and house became indistinguishable, and the possibility of differentiating between our biological body and our political body—between what is incommunicable and mute and what is communicable and sayable—was taken from us forever. And we are not only, in Foucault's words, animals whose life as living beings is at issue in their politics, but also—inversely—citizens whose very politics is at issue in their natural body. (187–188)

Agamben thus shifts focus from binary distinctions—to which must be added those of inclusion and exclusion, inside and outside, and visibility and invisibility—to the human body that may be killed insofar as it is a body that is always already involved in a political order.

This order is what he calls “the state of exception,” and his primary example is that of the camp, but he argues that it has become the norm for political organization even when such camps are not present. This body that can be killed is what he calls “bare life.”³⁸ It is not simply Aristotle's *zoē*, the animal-like human being who has yet to enter into public life or the political sphere, the one who remains invisible. It is also not a body that can be granted different statuses depending on its

³⁸ “Bare life” is the translation of Agamben's phrase, “*nuda vita*,” as proposed by Daniel Heller-Roazen in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. In *Means without Ends: Notes on Politics*, translated by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, they prefer the phrase “naked life.” I will follow Heller-Roazen's translation, but it is worth noting the two possibilities, since the former connotes a certain simplicity and being divested of legal status, whereas the latter highlights the lack of covering or protection and being utterly exposed.

position in different private and political spaces. Such a human being no longer exists who could be located outside of a political order; the purportedly different political spaces—the city, the house, the countryside, and the camp—have become indistinguishable. Agamben insists that this has been the case for centuries, but that it comes into clarity during the twentieth century.

In Agamben's analysis, this form of bare life, which is irrevocably tied to a political order, takes the form of the *homo sacer*—the life which can be killed but not sacrificed, the body or, better yet, the person who may be abandoned by the law in the state of exception. Once abandoned, he or she may be killed without there being any guarantee that this killing will be punished by a juridical order, since the law does not apply to the state of exception; his or her killing constitutes, “neither capital punishment nor a sacrifice, but simply the actualization of a mere ‘capacity to be killed’” (114). The prime example of a *homo sacer* offered by Agamben in this introductory book to his *homo sacer* saga is the Jewish person killed in the Nazi concentration camps. The Jewish people were not killed as human beings who must be protected by the law, “but exactly as Hitler had announced, as ‘lice,’ which is to say, as bare life” (114). Once they are situated in the state of exception and abandoned by the law, the Jewish people and any other unsacrificeable bare lives are legally permitted to be killed “to an unprecedented degree” by our age (114). This is to say that World War II was not the only or even the most recent example of the normalization of the state of exception, but rather that the state of exception is the foundation of modern biopolitics, and what was once theorized as the exception has now become the rule.

In other words, sovereign power is irrevocably tied to the form of bare life that it attempts to exclude in its originary political act at the threshold of its power in the state of exception. Thus, the spatial binaries of political discourse are collapsed into a zone of indistinction, which prohibits the facile structuring of that which is inside or outside of a particular judicial order or sovereign state. Whereas in classical thought the *homo sacer* could be simply sent into exile, physically outside of the state, such a no-man's land no longer exists today. The threshold has been carved out of the state's own territory in the form of camps, which by now serves as the paradigm of biopolitics, as one particular example that points toward a more generalized practice that is carried out with variations in different concrete contexts.

In the second installment of the *homo sacer* saga, *State of Exception*, Agamben expands his research to a genealogical exploration of Western constitutional traditions in which he finds variants of the state of exception as the foundation of modern constitutional states. He chooses "state of exception" as the syntagma to discuss what in German theory is termed "*Ausnahmezustand*" or "*Notstand*," "state of necessity," in the Italian and French traditions is called "emergency decrees" and "state of siege," as in "*etat de siège fictif*," and in Anglo-Saxon theory, "martial law" and "emergency powers" (4). Building from Agamben's analysis, Marina Franco and Mariana Iglesias have shown that the phrases "estado de sitio" 'state of siege' and "medidas prontas de seguridad" 'prompt security measures' have been used in Argentina and Uruguay, respectively, to name this type of juridical practice (92).

The state of exception becomes the third foundational paradox of the politics of going unnoticed. In the state of exception, Agamben continues, the constitutional distinctions between legislative, executive, and judicial powers are dissolved and concentrated in the hands of the sovereign. In theory, these emergency powers are only invoked in times of great emergency. During this time, the sovereign must act quickly by suspending the law, paradoxically, in order to guarantee the future of the law. However, the state of exception “shows its tendency to become a lasting practice of government,” and has proven itself to become the rule of Western government, particularly in the Atomic Age (*State* 7–9). While exploring specific examples of different Western constitutions, Agamben finds that they share the same paradoxical characteristics by which they “remain prisoner in the vicious circle in which the emergency measures they seek to justify in the name of defending the democratic constitution are the same ones that lead to its ruin” (8). The state of exception never plays out as the benevolent salvation of the democratic order it claims to be.

Before returning to the specific cases that interest me in Latin America in the Sixties, it is worth noting that the state of exception is not simply limited to a space easily demarcated as a threshold or clearly identifiable as a camp. Rather, the state of exception has become the zone of anomie that, for Agamben, concerns all modern biopolitics:

The state of exception is not a dictatorship (whether constitutional or unconstitutional, commissarial or sovereign) but a space devoid of law, a zone of anomie in which all legal determinations—and above all the very distinction between public and private—are deactivated. [...] The state of

exception is not a “state of law,” but a space without law (even though it is not a state of nature, but presents itself as the anomie that results from the suspension of law). (50–51)

Any and all acts committed under the state of exception, Agamben explains, are acts committed with no relation to the law except for having been abandoned by the law while still making recourse to its force. He uses the syntagma “force-of-law” to refer to this violent, killing force which claims to protect and uphold the law while operating as that same law’s exception in order to produce the law as the norm:

This means that in order to apply a norm it is ultimately necessary to suspend its application, to produce an exception. In every case, the state of exception marks a threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without *logos* claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference. (40)

As the threshold in which inside and outside become indistinct, the state of exception is the juridical space wherein the *homo sacer* may be killed as the exception without being sacrificed in an act of pure violence that is outside of all law, order, or *logos*. Subsequently, the norm, that is, the law, is brought into being by its opposition to this exception, which has by now become the rule.

Agamben’s focus is a form of being-in-the-threshold that defines the *homo sacer*. What is interesting in his formulation of politics, for my purposes, is not so much related to a literal threshold in the terms of liminal, in-between, or marginal spaces and the subjects who inhabit them willingly or by force. Agamben’s threshold is more of a conceptual space than a geographical space given the indistinction it

generates between city and countryside, house and camp, public and private, visibility and invisibility, and democracy and dictatorship. Like Derrida's *khôra* which opens a place in an already occupied space between *logos* and *mythos*, this threshold is neither an empty nor a geometric space.

I earlier showed that going unnoticed in the Sixties is not an act that takes place exclusively at the margins of political spaces nor in between different political spaces; people go unnoticed just as easily near the perceived centers as they do in any other space. In fact, going unnoticed is not dependent upon a relation to either a margin or a center, concepts which are practically impossible to define in the wake of the debates surrounding the ideas of modernity and postmodernity in Latin America.³⁹ Rather, in my view, going unnoticed becomes a political practice available to those nude subjects, or bare lives, who manage to find a way to slip out of the sovereign's gaze, who go unnoticed within the state of exception wherein they could be killed since they have been abandoned by the law. Those who go unnoticed engage in politics by opening a place for disagreement within a highly saturated and inescapable political space. Those who go unnoticed are not, or at least are not yet, the subjects who are killed or interned in camps, but as I will show, they find themselves in incredibly vulnerable positions that often do lead to their death or imprisonment without having been proven guilty of any discernible crime. In many cases, after

³⁹ See Hermann Herlinghaus and Monica Walter *Postmodernidad en la periferia. Enfoques latinoamericanos de la nueva teoría cultural* (Berlin: Langer Verlag, 1994); John Beverley, Michael Aronna, and José Oviedo, eds., *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America* (Durham: Duke UP, 1995); Beatriz Sarlo, *Una modernidad periférica. Buenos Aires, 1920–1930* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, 1999); and Hermann Herlinghaus, *Renarración y descentramiento. Mapas alternativos de la imaginación en América Latina* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2004).

perceiving the precariousness of their legal status within the state of exception they choose to go unnoticed.

In what follows, I briefly return to Casey in Cuba and Filloy in Argentina to contextualize my previous readings of their works within this political framework. Agamben's analysis of the organization of political spaces is perfectly well suited to read the construction of sovereignty of many mid-twentieth century Latin American states—as long as it is historicized and allowed to be altered within these particular contexts—outside of which there is not a form of no-man's land, but always another sovereign power. The sovereign can no longer send an abandoned *homo sacer* into exile but creates an internally inscribed state of exception. In Cuba, the labor camps euphemistically known as the Military Units to Aid Production (UMAPs) served this purpose for excluding socially suspect and potentially counterrevolutionary subjects, while still maintaining a form of political control over them through internment. These exclusions were not just rhetorical, but more importantly, they were corporeal, delimiting the spaces and acceptable actions and thoughts of all those living in Cuba.

Despite his rhetoric of constructing the new man for a new society, Guevara's discrimination of queer subjects is well known, particularly from Juan Goytisolo's anecdote, studied by José Quiroga, in which Guevara hurls one of Piñera's books across the room of the Cuban Embassy in Algiers shouting, "How dare you have in our embassy a book by this foul faggot" ("Fleshing" 168). Of course, the institutionalized homophobia of the radical left—a homophobia that was certainly not limited to Cuba by any means—has been well documented beyond the more famous

cases of the literary intellectuals.⁴⁰ Such homophobia was clearly evident in the biopolitical organization of the UMAPs in Cuba where many men perceived as being gay were imprisoned alongside others who were similarly labeled as counterrevolutionaries. Once interned, they were forced to carry out hard labor that was meant to educate them in the ideals of the Revolution and transform them into Guevara's new men.

According to Cabrera Infante, it was out of fear of being sent to such a camp that Casey went into exile. Casey was one of the few who had even heard about the existence of such camps right away, supposedly from personal connections of his own. After the closure of *Lunes de Revolución*, Casey accepted a job at Casa de las Américas. Cabrera Infante relates how Casey, who did not try to hide his sexuality, had confessed his fears of these camps to Emanuel Carballo, a Mexican writer who was invited to Cuba by Casa de las Américas. The next day, Carballo reported back to Haydée Santamaría, then director of Casa, and at that point, fearing internment, Casey began planning his self-exile (“¿Quién?” 49). Despite his public statements regarding his hesitancy to be a committed intellectual and his association with the *Lunes* group, the fact that he was never jailed or interned, but given a job at Casa seems to suggest that his actions generally went unnoticed at the institutional level. However, this very public confession about his fears of being interned alongside other gay men in the

⁴⁰ See Ian Lumsden's *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuban and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1996), particularly the chapter titled “Institutionalized Homophobia” (55–80). Also, the controversial documentary *Conducta Impropia* (1984) directed by Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal (the latter was also the co-director of *P.M.*) collects interviews with various intellectuals, many of whom were gay or lesbian, who were interned in these labor camps because of their perceived sexuality.

UMAPs seems to be the moment at which he was no longer certain of his ability to remain unnoticed. He took advantage of the translation of his short stories into Polish to apply for permission to travel to Poland and eventually settled in Italy, never to return to Cuba. From this point on, his writings, which include “Notas de un simulador” that I analyzed in the previous chapter, take a notable turn toward characters who similarly try to go unnoticed without giving up recourse to political action. Some characters become highly paranoid while trying to do so, and many others are ultimately jailed and killed, but not before having engaged in some sort of political disagreement. I explore these stories more in depth in the subsequent chapters.

In the case of Argentina, throughout the entire period that spans the triumph of Perón in 1946 to the start of the dictatorship in 1976, the political landscape of the country shifted dramatically and in numerous directions. In *Intelectuales y poder en la década del sesenta*, Silvia Sigal maps the reactions of the Peronists to the Cuban Revolution during the era. The initial reactions to the Cuban Revolution in Argentina equated the fall of Fulgencio Batista to the overthrow of Juan Domingo Perón, and as such, many Peronists and leftists were immediately reticent to support Fidel Castro. Nevertheless, Sigal traces the varying readings of the Cuban Revolution between 1959 and 1961 that come to identify Castro with Perón, and as a result, “Cuba devino puente entre izquierda, nacionalismo y peronismo” ‘Cuba became the bridge between the Left, Nationalism, and Peronism’ (201). What is curious about this new, retrospective reading of Perón after the Cuban Revolution is that it transforms Peronism, for some, into its Argentine analog and acquires characteristics that it never

had, “forjando la metáfora: el socialismo nacional y el peronismo revolucionario” ‘forging the metaphor: national socialism and revolutionary Peronism’ (202). Of course, this rereading of Peronism by the Peronist youth during the 1960s provoked a discrepancy between Perón himself, who moved to the right, the older generation of Peronistas, and the youth’s new, revolutionary Marxist direction made most visible by the Montoneros.

However, there were other major movements in this era that were not Peronist. Mónica B. Gordillo demonstrates that in the year 1969, in particular with the Cordobazo and the Rosariazo, the non-Peronist worker protests transformed into “rebelión popular” ‘popular rebellion’ that resulted in the downfall of General Onganía’s government in 1970 (348). Only later did the Montoneros, who did not exist at the time of the Cordobazo, begin to engage in acts of urban guerrilla warfare. It must be recalled that the workers, who were not associated with the Montoneros, generally rejected those tactics: “las estrategias armadas aparecían como ajenas a su experiencia y necesidades de trabajadores” ‘armed strategies seemed anathema to their experience and their needs as workers’ (366). Any consideration of the social protests and armed guerrilla groups in this era must take care to distinguish between the different demands and tactics of these heterogenous groups, not all of which were invested in Peronism.

Detailing the political landscape from 1973–1976 in particular, Maristella Svampa shows that in 1973, the Peronist Héctor Cámpora is elected President and appears to make room for “la Juventud maravillosa” ‘the wonderful Youth’ within Peronism (8). However, upon Perón’s return that same year the situation changes

drastically with the massacre at Ezeiza and Perón's speech in which the same youth were cast aside as "imberbes" 'immature, beardless' and "estúpidos" 'stupid, foolish' (19).⁴¹ Despite all of the conflicting and rapidly changing ideologies, Svampa recalls that Perón's return appeared to most groups "como condición necesaria para cualquier transformación social y política, y aún aquellos sectores que no tenían ningún interés en 'peronizarse', consideraban que sólo su retorno haría posible la pacificación nacional" 'as the necessary condition for any social and political transformation, and even those sectors who did not have any interest in "becoming Peronists" considered that his return was the only chance for national peace' (5). In my view, in the same way that there was no outside of the Cuban Revolution after 1961 in Cuba, it can be said that there was also no outside of Peronism after 1969 in Argentina. What I mean is not that there were no other alternatives or dissenting groups in Cuba or Argentina. There were plenty. My point is that the Cuban Revolution and Peronism came to occupy such highly visible political spaces in their respective countries that it becomes difficult to perceive spaces that seem completely isolated from them, spaces that in some way do not have to at least provoke some sort of disagreement with them before turning to other options. It is in this sense that I agree with the statement that everything had become political in this Sixties.

⁴¹ The entire drama surrounding the reappearance of the Peronistas to the political arena, Perón's return to Argentina, those who dismiss Perón's ideological turn to the Right with the "teoría del cerco" 'siege theory' that assumes that Perón was being poorly advised by those around him, the violence committed by the Montoneros in order to spark a revolution, and the violence committed under Perón's orders to eliminate this "internal enemy" is not only complex, but difficult to historicize objectively. See the collection edited by Daniel James, *Violencia, proscripción y autoritarismo (1955–1976)* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2003) in which the essays by Gordillo and Svampa appear.

In “El estado de excepción en Uruguay y Argentina. Reflexiones teóricas, históricas e histriográficas,” Franco and Iglesias demonstrate how this era is often studied as a series of alternations between democracy and dictatorship. There were two interim, pseudo-democratic regimes during which Peronism was proscribed from the electoral process—Arturo Frondizi (1958–1962) and Arturo Illia (1963–1966)—followed by the victory of the Peronist Héctor Cámpora in 1973, Perón’s return that year, and his third electoral victory after which he became President until his death in 1974. Interrupting these governments, there was a series of *coups d’etats* in 1955, 1962, 1966, and 1976 (104–107).

Drawing from Agamben’s analysis of the state of exception, Franco and Iglesias detail the difficulty in sustaining a clear division between democracy and dictatorship during this period in Argentina. First, they show how Argentina’s first Constitution from 1853 already included within it version of the state of exception—“el estado de sitio” ‘the state of siege’—that could be implemented in the case of external attack or internal commotion. They explain that, under Perón in the 1940s, there were already important antecedents to the various laws and “security” measures that would allow the suspension of the state of law; these became ever more prevalent over the next three decades (104). Then, as Cold War pressures came to affect the decisions made by the Armed Forces and the constitutional governments, exceptional measures were seen as the necessary solution to combat both the return of the proscribed Peronists and any other revolutionary ideological positions, in particular the urban, guerrilla *focos* since the mid-1960s. All of this, Franco and Iglesias contend:

implicó la identificación entre defensa nacional y seguridad interior y se instaló una concepción bélica del mantenimiento del orden interno que suponía la existencia de fronteras ideológicas y un conflicto de nuevo tipo (‘la guerra revolucionaria’) planteado por el enemigo comunista. (105)

‘led to the identification between national defense and internal security, and a bellicose conception of maintaining internal order became ingrained after assuming the existence of ideological fronts and a new type of conflict (“revolutionary war”) brought out by the communist enemy.’

In 1974, Perón established the *Ley de Seguridad* (Security Law), which was used to combat Marxism, both internal and external to Peronism. These exceptional means were framed by the increasing militarization of the country, in part as a response to the existence of the armed guerrilla movements, which indirectly aided the Armed Forces in appearing as the legal and legitimate response to a threat against national security and in justifying the brutal repression with which they crushed both Peronism and the leftist opposition in 1976 (106). Thus, the importance of reframing the binary opposition between democracy and dictatorship becomes apparent in considering the various “security measures,” Presidential decrees, and military operations that characterize what can be called the Argentine state of exception in the Sixties.

Given this historical context, I find it quite tempting to draw the parallel between Maximiliano Konderanksy, the fictional character, and Juan Filloy, the writer. Filloy lived and worked as a judge in Río Cuarto, a city in the province of Córdoba, during a period of prolonged silence between the publication of his first works in the 1930s and when he returned to publishing in the 1960s. Nevertheless,

Filloy continued writing in isolation, but chose to wait until the 1960s to make his manuscripts public.⁴² His short story, “Yo y los intrusos,” could almost come to be seen as an idealized, fictional autobiography of the life Filloy might have preferred to live—in an almost unlocatable cave-tower in the Argentine countryside far removed from the “Politics” that Konsideransky places in between the intrusions of “Fear, Morality, Propaganda” and “Film, Radio, Television” (135–136). Had this been a literal allegory, this Politics with a capital “P” could have been a direct reference to Peronism. But there is one major difference between Filloy and Konsideransky. Konsideransky ultimately fails to isolate himself in what he had considered to be the ideal, architectural solution for achieving individual autonomy. He unleashes a caustic series of insults when he realizes that his monodialogue to the reporter had been recorded and transmitted to a radio station for national dissemination without his consent. He threatens to attack the reporter and destroy his equipment, but realizes the futility of such an attack. Instead, Konsideransky calls him “hijodeputa” ‘sonofabitch,’ “imbeciloide” ‘mongoloid,’ “gransodomita” ‘big sodomite,’ “vómitonegro” ‘blackvomit,’ and “semendespárrago” ‘esparragusemen,’ among many other inventively offensive phrases. Konsideransky’s fears about the intrusions of the mass media, as it turns out, were well-founded.

In contrast, Filloy comes out of his isolation and self-imposed editorial silence of his own will. In 1967, he approves a new edition of *Op Oloop*, and since 1971, with the publication of *Ignitus* and *Yo, yo y yo (Monodiálogos paranoicos)* he begins

⁴² See the documentary, *Ecce homo: una autobiografía de Juan Filloy* (Hallandale, Fla.: Patagonia Film Group, 2008), the last interview with Juan Filloy in which he recounts his own biography and publishing history.

publishing regularly until his death in 2000. When read ironically, “Yo y los intrusos” becomes an allegory for the need to return to a political space in the Sixties by creating an opening, not unlike what Derrida analyzes in “*Khôra*,” within the binary logic that structured intellectual positions in the Sixties—either one was committed or one was in an ivory tower. Filloy’s return to publishing in the heart of the Argentine cultural markets in the era is also a political opening; in his fictional account of *Konsideranksy*’s attempts to go unnoticed, he writes an errant allegory, one that must be read like a palindrome *al vesre*, to propose a different form of Politics in the Sixties. In my view, this gesture opens a place within the highly saturated political space completely occupied by all of the various Peronista groups, their so-called internal enemies, the endless list of various Leftist groups, including Marxists, Leninists, Trotskyists, and Maoists, and their political adversaries in the Armed Forces and elsewhere. And this is without needing to establish a new –ism or identity group that will then seek visibility among all of these already visible groups. Significantly, Filloy’s political fiction was publishable in the midst of the state of exception that had become the norm in the era, though he would be interrogated briefly by the police in 1976, but ultimately let go, for the novel *Vil y Vil* that was immediately censored under the new regime. As I have said before, going unnoticed is also a precarious and temporary situation, and in Chapter Three I focus my attention on *Vil & Vil* and the ethical ramifications for the politics of going unnoticed that arise once those who went unnoticed become perceived.

An American Cowboy in Mexico

Héctor Manjarrez published his first book in 1971, *Acto propiciatorio*. The first short story in this collection, entitled “Johnny,” appears to be a Western from 1940s Hollywood. The protagonist is the nineteen year old cowboy, Johnny Miles. Not without coincidence, John Miles (1923–2006) is the name of a minor American actor who played the cowboy, Johnny Miles, in the Western film *San Antonio* (1945), featuring Errol Flynn and Alexis Smith. Among a number of Hollywood films in the 1940s, Miles also had a minor role, again as a cowboy, in the short film, *Star in the Night* (1945). Without a doubt, Manjarrez’s text references these classic Westerns, but like Filloy’s reference to Plato’s classical allegory, Manjarrez’s text will take an unexpected turn.

Johnny, the protagonist, is on his first pursuit of bandits who have just looted his family’s ranch. Shots are fired, and men fall off their horses. The narrative is positioned for the inevitable triumph of justice by the clearly recognizable good guys:

Lenta pero ineluctablemente, disminuye la distancia que separa a los truhanes en fuga de los rancheros sedientos de justicia y venganza, de esos hombres que vieron sus propiedades quemadas y arrasadas, sus mujeres vejadas, sus hijos vapuleados, su dignidad denigrada por la banda más temida de todo el Far West. (10)

Slowly but ineluctably, the distance diminishes between the fleeing rogues and the ranchers, now thirsty for justice and vengeance, who saw their property burned and laid waste, whose women were harassed, whose children

were beaten, and whose dignity had been denigrated by the most feared gang in the entire Far West.

There is no ambiguity allowed by the clichéd, opening framing of this narrative in which the good guys are quickly catching up to the bad guys. Manjarrez appropriates the generic conventions of the Western and 1940s Hollywood, but quickly he pries them open in order to transform the simplified narratives of good versus evil, or us versus them.

In what follows, I contend that such simplified narratives are the same ones used to justify recourse to the state of exception, and I demonstrate that Manjarrez's "Johnny" can be read in part as an allegory for the ways in which such legal exceptions appear in the specific case of Mexico in the Sixties. More than an allegory for political violence, "Johnny" sidesteps the most visible and tragic events—particularly, the massacre of students at Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968—in order to go unnoticed within these debates and therefore open a different path for the political and cultural milieu of Mexico in this era.

Before the distance separating good from evil can be closed, something unexpected happens. Johnny's horse is injured, and he loses his grip on the reins. He falls to the ground, which is curiously described as being "suave y tibio" 'soft and warm' (13). The opening twist in this plot—reminiscent of a *Twilight Zone* style of science fiction—is that Johnny has crashed through a Mexican family's television screen. This family had been watching an unnamed Western movie starring Johnny Miles. Through their television—one of Konderansky's infamous intruders—Johnny, a fictional cowboy from the nineteenth century United States, has literally

burst into the living room of a family in mid-twentieth century Mexico City. Luckily, Johnny speaks perfect Spanish, because the Zendejas family had been watching the dubbed version of the Hollywood film from which he materialized (24).

That soft and warm ground on which he landed turns out to be the bed to which the Zendejas family has moved Johnny while he recovers from the crash. Not unlike the immobile body that Casey's narrator observes under the blinding light in "Notas de un simulador," Johnny wakes up with a light bulb shining in his eyes, exposing his body to the others: "A través de sus párpados cerrados, una luz intensa, anormalmente intensa, lo hiera, y él se pregunta si ya transcurrió la noche y si eso es el sol" "Through his closed eyelids, an intense, an abnormally intense light, hurts him, and he wonders if the night already has passed and if that is the sun" (13). His first conscious experience of this new life is one in which he is entirely exposed under a private spotlight in the Zendejas family's house. This light is not a heavenly glow that might shine at dawn after the triumph of good over evil at the end of a Hollywood film or after the passage into the intelligible realm of Plato's allegory. It is a harsh, piercing light that causes him pain and subjects him to scrutiny by complete strangers. Johnny is unquestionably vulnerable under this private light. However, after a few days he adjusts to the technological advances that separate his present from his past and the harshness of this electric light seems to fade. For a moment, it seems as if this American cowboy in Mexico is no longer so vulnerable and exposed.

Johnny becomes a national sensation in the news as everyone publicly speculates about the veracity of this probable hoax:

Los diarios habían proclamado y refutado su existencia y se había dividido en dos campos agriamente separados; mas el hecho de que un buen número de las publicaciones serias, y aun bastantes de las menos serias que habían tenido que negar su letigimidad porque sus rivales la habían pregonado antes, señalara que era estricta y científicamente imposible que Johnny Miles hubiese llegado, de carne y hueso, a la sala de los Zendejas, no ejercía más que una influencia deleznable en la mayoría de la gente, para quien la lógica y la verosimilitud científica carecían de peso súbitamente. (19)

‘The newspapers had proclaimed and refuted his existence and they had divided into two bitterly separated camps. A good number of the serious publications declared that it was strictly and scientifically impossible that Johnny Miles had arrived, in flesh and blood, in the Zendejas’s living room. Many of the less serious ones had to deny his legitimacy because their rivals had announced it previously. But this proved to be of little influence to the majority of people for whom logic and scientific verosimillitude suddenly lacked importance.’

Johnny has been converted into the center of a public spectacle that has two clearly divided camps, separated only by their journalistic rivalry, not by facts. Both camps place Johnny at their point of contact, debate, and struggle for journalistic supremacy, a struggle to be the good, true reporters in the face of the false ones. In this way, Johnny comes to occupy a position in the media not unlike that of Boris Pasternak, as described by Casey, in the flurry of Cold War politics that diluted the international press’s response to his Nobel Prize in Literature.

Because of this attention, the Zendejas family thinks Johnny could become a true celebrity, situated “entre aquellos raros individuos de quien se habla—y quizá entre aquellos que viven después de su muerte” ‘among those few individuals who people talk about, and perhaps among those who live after their death’ as in the cases of “Bolívar, Aquiles, James Bond, Washington, Hidalgo, Marilyn Monroe, Don Quijote, Hamlet, l’Ange Heurtebise, et. al.” (20). The public spotlight has constructed and celebrated these national heroes, celebrities, and fictional characters in a non-hierarchical conglomeration that has flattened out all the distinctions between them.

In contrast, Johnny prefers to find a way to go unnoticed by the public spotlights. The narrator explains that this was not the life for him: “Pero Johnny no se interesaba en estas cosas. Les explicó que prefería quedarse con ellos, con esa familia que lo había tratado tan bien, pues básicamente era él un ser pacífico, hogareño, hasta un poco tímido” ‘But Johnny was not interested in those things. He explained to them that he preferred to stay with them—with the family that had treated him so well—because he was pretty much a peaceful, somewhat timid homebody’ (21). Johnny desires to step away from the harsh lights that shone over him in both the private and the public realms.

His ability to simply blend in to Mexican society, however, becomes further complicated when legal experts begin considering his status as an immigrant in the country. How should his case be approached, they wondered: “¿conflicto de leyes? ¿estancia en el país sin haber obtenido una tarjeta de turista? ¿inmigrante sin papeles de inmigrante que nunca pasó por la frontera? ¿inversionista americano de Hollywood? o ¿beatnik indeseable y carente de moral?” ‘(A legal conflict?

Residency in the country without having obtained a tourist card? An undocumented immigrant who never crossed the border? An American Hollywood investor? Or an undesirable and morally questionable beatnik?)' (20). Read from the United States today, this seems like an ironic turn of events in which the man from the United States is now the subject of legal scrutiny concerning his residency in Mexico, but Manjarrez's text is more complicated than just an inversion of worlds or binaries. These legal questions are, in my view, the most pressing questions that need to be resolved in Johnny's case. Not only must his status as an immigrant be resolved, but more broadly, his biopolitical relationship to the Mexican State must be determined. In the meantime, he remains a legal exception. Though these questions underscore how vulnerable Johnny has become, they are also the ones that the text registers parenthetically; they occupy a minor status within the public discourse, almost as if they were meant to be ignored.

Just like all the other issues concerning Johnny's sudden appearance, his legal status quickly was forgotten, "cuando el espionaje relegó al western" 'when Westerns were set aside in favor of the spy genre' (20). Johnny was an extraordinary curiosity who suddenly became highly visible in public, but such visibility is often fleeting. The news cycle moved on to other cases, and the public turned their attention to a new genre. Nothing was ever resolved in the public, journalistic debate nor among the legal experts. Johnny's situation was simply set aside in favor of the next new thing. Instead of pursuing a Frankfurt School critique of the mass media and the culture industry, which I demonstrated to be quite imprecise when considering the cultural markets of the Sixties in Latin America, I propose to follow the errant path taken by

the Western genre in this short story, which is no longer a simple Western, in order to ask about Johnny's biopolitical relationship to the Mexican state.

Johnny has become a legal exception and the questions surrounding his residency in Mexico have been abandoned. As I showed with the cases of Cuba and Argentina above, Agamben's paradigm of the state of exception can be helpful in studying the biopolitics of a particular sovereign state when adequately contextualized and historicized. In Mexico, the state of exception can be said to have become the norm by which the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) guaranteed its sovereignty as the sole viable political party over a seventy-one year span.

In *The Mexican Exception: Sovereignty, Police, and Democracy*, Gareth Williams analyzes the authoritarianism of modern Mexico from Independence to the supremacy of the PRI in the twentieth century. His aim is to study exceptionality in Mexico from the perspective of those who did not compose the state apparatus's unifying vision (11). Curiously, Williams critiques Agamben for having emptied out "the historical specificity of modern biopolitics" in favor of a metaphysics of exceptionality, and thereby sidesteps Agamben's *homo sacer* saga while employing a Foucaultian framework for his analysis (10). This is a critique that I am hesitant to accept. Though the first volume in the series, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, certainly tends toward the theoretical, this book is little more than the introduction to the subsequent volumes that acquire a rich and dense historical specificity. The opening chapter to *State of Exception*, the second book in the series, explores modern European constitutions and, in my view, provides the necessary grounding to the theoretical exodus of the first volume. What is certainly not present

in Agamben is an analysis of the state of exception in Latin American contexts, but as in the case of the work done by Franco and Iglesias that I quoted above, and indirectly with Williams here, Agamben's work opens different possibilities for thinking about sovereignty, biopolitics, and legal frameworks in specific cases in Latin America. What should be clear throughout the rest of this chapter are the ways in which this paradigm, which cannot be equated with Platonic universal Ideas that are only realized imperfectly as deviations from a model, acquires different and concrete historical textures when situated within particular national or regional traditions.

Regardless of his theoretical positioning, Williams studies exceptionality and biopolitics in modern Mexico and provides a nuanced exploration of the specificity of the Mexican case. The guiding characteristic of the Mexican state, Williams argues, has been the search for unity and consensus by authoritarian means:

Mexican modernity was inaugurated on the whole by the post-colonial quest for a police state capable of creating the good order and sovereign mastery that would allow for the implantation and extension of bourgeois rule. The quest for the unity of economic and political domination is the lasting inheritance of both the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz and the Mexican Revolution of 1910–1920. (11)

It is well known that the PRI (initially founded as the National Revolutionary Party in 1929, then became the Party of the Mexican Revolution in 1938, before finally adopting in 1946 the name it still has today) consolidated power in its hands immediately after the Mexican Revolution. It did not lose a Presidential election until

2000. As Williams asserts, “By the late 1950s it was clear that the PRI was not really a political party at all. It portrayed itself as a universal state and, as such, as the police horizon for the essential suppression of the political” (124). In this way, the PRI was not engaged in the dissensual gestures of politics, as I defined it above, but rather it became the consensus-building institution that guaranteed its own sovereignty through exclusive and violent measures.

As an example, Williams provides a quote from Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, President from 1964 to 1970 during the height of student and worker protests that culminated in the massacre at Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968. Díaz Ordaz decrees: “I must repeat: No one has rights against Mexico” (125). His decree is directed against anyone regarded as a threat to his political party’s sovereignty. Despite Mexico’s antagonistic relationship with Cuba in the period, Díaz Ordaz’s decree, as I see it, is equivalent to Fidel Castro’s infamous claim in 1961: “Inside the Revolution—everything; against the Revolution there are no rights” (n. pag.). The political landscapes in Mexico and Cuba were radically different in this era, yet in both cases recourse to the state of exception becomes the norm for maintaining power. “No one has rights against Mexico” and “against the Revolution there are no rights” are not just empty threats. Whereas in Cuba the UMAPs became the space in which those who had no rights were abandoned by the law, in Mexico Articles 145 and 145bis of the Mexican penal code became the legal framework by which the PRI justified its right to jail anyone suspected of promoting “social dissolution” between two and

twelve years for carrying out political propaganda, inciting rebellion, or threatening national sovereignty.⁴³

These articles of social dissolution were incredibly broad and vague, as are Castro's decree and Perón's campaign against the "internal enemy." Therefore, as Williams shows, they are open to interpretation and manipulation by state authorities under "a veneer of legal legitimacy" (*Mexican* 118). It is at this point in Williams's argument that his concrete focus on Mexico coincides with Agamben's reflections on the state of exception, even as he claims to sidestep Agamben:

In pure exceptionality force without law gives rise to the law of force [what Agamben calls "force-of-~~law~~" even though Williams does not quote him here]. Law beyond the law becomes the only law, and the exception becomes the norm [This is Agamben's central claim about the state of exception].

Through Articles 145 and 145bis, the sovereign remained the law behind the law, that is, the only law, while at the same time hiding his de facto exceptionality behind the socialized mask of jurisprudence. As such the force of sovereign exceptionality was embodied in and through the articles of social dissolution. (118–119)

⁴³ The following excerpt of Article 145 is quoted by Gareth Williams in *The Mexican Exception*: "A prison sentence of two to twelve years will be given to any foreigner or Mexican national who in spoken or written form, or by any other means, carries out political propaganda among foreigners or Mexican nationals with a view to spreading the ideas, programs or plans of action of any foreign government that might perturb public order or affect the sovereignty of the Mexican state. Public order is perturbed when those acts determined in the previous paragraph tend to produce rebellion, sedition, tumult or riot. National sovereignty is affected when those aforementioned acts endanger the territorial integrity of the Republic, impede the functioning of its legitimate institutions or propagate among Mexican nationals disrespect for their civic duties" (201 n.3).

Without a doubt, Articles 145 and 145bis are the specific legal apparatus that can be associated with the state of exception, legitimizing and carrying out legal bans in the Mexican context. Anyone subjected to this law—including all of those imprisoned during the 1958 rail workers' strike and those massacred during the peaceful gathering at Tlatelolco in 1968—can be seen as Mexican examples of the *homo sacer*, of the bare lives who can be killed or imprisoned after being abandoned by the law.

The bibliography documenting the events leading up to the massacre at Tlatelolco is extensive, and in fact, this tragic day understandably became the subject of a great deal of intellectual production in the immediate years following it. The bibliography on Tlatelolco has become the most visible portion of late 1960s and early 1970s Mexican culture.⁴⁴ This event, as Bruno Bosteels summarizes in *Marx and Freud in Latin America*, “would not only be the name of the place where state power exhibited its intrinsically excessive nature, as always brutally superior to the situation at hand, but it would also be the anchoring point for the tenacious search for a different ‘we,’ or a different subjective figure of equality, capable of putting a limit on the errancy of the state” (193). This is to say that the marches and protests of the Sixties in Mexico were primarily the search for another form of belonging to the political organization of the country, particularly by the youth at the time who knew that the PRI was structured like a pyramid, which one must climb and only hope to reach the peak much later in life, if at all. Yet, the PRI saw any attempt to alter its

⁴⁴ See Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America* (165–166 n.14), for a comprehensive bibliography on Tlatelolco. Here I list only a few of these texts that had appeared by the time Manjarrez started publishing in 1971: Octavio Paz, *Posdata* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1970); Carlos Monsiváis, *Días de guardar* (Mexico City: Era, 1970); Elena Poniatowska, *La noche de Tlatelolco* (Mexico City: Era, 1971); and Luis González de Alba, *Los días y los años* (Mexico City: Era 1971).

hierarchy as an attack on its hegemony and made violent recourse to the state of exception legally permitted by Articles 145 and 145bis to ensure its continued hegemony. Bosteels proposes reading the politics of the student movement outside of the traditional narratives of success and defeat, and instead, he proposes recognizing the students' ability to open a space in which they produced a delinking from society (169). Politics, Bosteels argues, "takes off from the opening of a gap or breach in that imaginary whole called society" (170). In a sense, this is the same type of politics that I have been describing indirectly all along, a politics that opens a gap or breach in the community's consensus.

Certainly, the students' and workers' politics surrounding Tlatelolco did not go unnoticed. In contrast, Héctor Manjarrez's story about an American cowboy in Mexico, and his early works of fiction in general, did go unnoticed. However, I contend that by going unnoticed they open a different gap within the cultural milieu of the Sixties in Mexico that the one opened by those who openly protested. In my discussion of *Lapsus (Algunos actos fallidos)*, I showed how his character Huberto rejects everything in the Sixties, including nationalist and anti-nationalist literatures, categories within which the highly visible bibliography on Tlatelolco would certainly fit. For the students, the literature they wrote documenting the horrific events were certainly nationalist, whereas for the PRI, any support of the student movements was certainly anti-nationalist, and vice versa.

Alongside this blockage in the definition of the Mexican Nation, Héctor Manjarrez conspicuously avoids writing about Tlatelolco. Manjarrez lived and studied in Belgrade, Paris, and London in the Sixties only to return to Mexico in 1971

(Domínguez Michael 3). He obviously did not participate in the Mexican student movements. In an interview, Manjarrez explains his relationship to the short stories of this collection: “al ver el producto ya pulido y terminado entré en una crisis espantosa, ya no podía hacer nada, estaba paralizado, podía creer igualmente en la revolución o en la contrarrevolución. Todo era tan difuso y ambivalente” ‘upon seeing the polished, finished product, I had a tremendous crisis. I couldn’t do anything, I was paralyzed. I could believe just as easily in the revolution or in the counter-revolution. Everything was so cloudy and ambivalent’ (“Resquebajamiento” 261). Then, after learning of the massacre at Tlatelolco while abroad, he had been writing the novel *Lapsus*: “Empecé a escribirla en 1968, pero de mayo a octubre de 1968 habían sucedido tantas cosas, que simplemente me era imposible seguir haciéndolo” ‘I began to write the novel in 1968, but so many things had happened between May and October of 1968 that I found it simply impossible to continue writing’ (262–263). In this context, it is not surprising that his first publications are not dedicated to either glorifying or demonizing these events; he claims to have found it impossible to know exactly how and where to align himself, his politics, and his fiction.

In this same interview, Manjarrez says that “Johnny” “no me satisfizo” ‘did not satisfy me’ (261). Nevertheless, as I read it today, this seemingly unsatisfactory or irrelevant short story opens a place within the overcrowded space of explicitly political narratives regarding Mexican culture and politics in the Sixties. The short story “Johnny” has gone unnoticed in the shadow of the highly visible, critical bibliography on Mexico in the Sixties, particularly of the post-Tlatelolco

bibliography. Nevertheless, “Johnny” can be read for rejecting the bounds of the nationalist versus anti-nationalist debate. By appropriating and radically transforming the clichés of the Hollywood Western, it dismantles the moralizing discourses that easily oppose heroes to bandits or, in the terms of Mexican politics in the Sixties, of the Mexican Nation in peril to the rebellious students who must then be killed or imprisoned. Without taking a moral stance on one side of the debate or the other, “Johnny” acquires the potential to be read as a text about a character who attempts to go unnoticed quite unsuccessfully once he becomes an unprecedented example of a *homo sacer* in Mexico.

Public interest in Johnny’s status fades, because no one is interested any longer in the Western; however, “Johnny” is no longer a classical Western, but a text that has taken up the Western at its point of failure and renovated it for a new public through an avant-garde gesture by which outdated forms are reclaimed and recycled within the cultural markets of the Sixties. In this way, “Johnny” can be understood within the framework developed by Ana María Amar Sánchez wherein writers use popular forms as a mode of seduction, a way to lure in readers and provoke interest in their literature, even if they fail to produce the object of desire or if they never intended to produce it in the first place (*Juegos*). Manjarrez’s Western gets a make-over precisely at the moment when Johnny crashes through the Zendejas family’s television. The Western is not transformed into the increasingly popular James Bond-style spy genre that replaces the Western within the text and that gained real traction in Sixties, but with a somewhat unclassifiable form of science fiction that draws from the much more popular tradition of Latin American fantastic literature.

Once Johnny leaves both the private light and the public spotlight, he appears to be free to move out of the city onto the Zendejas family's ranch in the Valle de Anáhuac. In leaving the city, the *polis*, he unwittingly becomes a form of classical exile, a figure who, Agamben recalls, was situated at the center of a debate "between those who conceive exile to be a punishment and those who understand it to be a right and a refuge" (*Homo Sacer* 110). This ambiguity results from the dual meanings of the word "banned," which "in Romance languages originally meant both 'at the mercy of' and 'out of free will, freely,' both 'excluded, banned' and 'open to all, free'" (110). Johnny has been abandoned by the debates about his legal status in Mexico, and he has also gone into a figurative exile from the city where he carelessly experiences a new sense of freedom in the countryside. In the Valle de Anáhuac, Johnny corporally reacts to his new surroundings: "su cuerpo era una mezcla de excitación y placidez, de calma completa y nerviosismo, y su cuerpo bebía por cada poro los humores del campo; cohabitaban en él una febril actividad de los sentidos y un reposo sensual de su cuerpo entero, en perfecto y precario equilibrio" 'his body was a mixture of excitement and tranquility, of complete calm and nervousness, and through his pores his body imbibed the humors of the countryside; he was cohabited by the feverish activity of his senses and the sensual repose of his entire body, in perfect and precarious equilibrium' ("Johnny" 24). All of the descriptions of Johnny in the Valle de Anáhuac, an unstable reminder of his former life in the frontier lands of the Far West, involve a state of being and its potential antithesis; he is no longer the embodiment of the good who will triumph over evil, but becomes a living oxymoron that dissolves any sense of purely oppositional emotions and sensations

once he leaves the public spotlight. Yet, the narrative describes how such a pleasant and peaceful mixture of emotions relies on a delicate balance that can be easily upset. In fact, Johnny has not simply been excluded from the city, outside of the reach of its force of law; this zone of indistinction that he inhabits becomes, in my reading, none other than the modern the state of exception that no longer distinguishes between private and public, city and countryside.

Johnny was looking for independence, but he overlooks his own vulnerability as a form of bare life and mistakes his abandonment by the law for a naïve sense of freedom from public scrutiny. Once outside the city, he falls in love with the Zendejas's daughter, Mariana, and she becomes pregnant before they make their relationship public and marry. At this point, the same good guys versus bad guys binary logic from the beginning of the text reappears at the end to incite the tragic consequences that all such facile constructs carry within them. Gonzalo Zendejas, Mariana's father, had come to see Johnny as his adopted son, but when he finds out that Mariana is pregnant, he describes Johnny as "ese vípero que se encuentra en nuestro nido" 'that viper living in our nest' (34).⁴⁵ Driven by rage and a sense of impotence, Gonzalo does not know how else to resolve the situation other than by returning to the conventions of the Western genre and recasting Johnny as the villain. Along the course of this narrative, Johnny is transformed from the hero saving his family and their ranch, to a public spectacle, to the living oxymoron during his stint in

⁴⁵ Recall that in 1971 in Argentina there was a second Cordobazo more commonly known as the Viborazo, meaning "an attack by a viper." The Governor of Córdoba announced his intent to end the uprising saying that he will "cortarle la cabeza a la víbora venenosa que anida en Córdoba" 'cut off the head of the venomous viper that has created a nest in Córdoba' (quoted in Gordillo 372).

the Mexican countryside where he became a sort of adopted son to the Zendejas family, and finally to the man who has dishonored the Zendejas's family name and denigrated Gonzalo's only virginal daughter. He has traversed the barrier separating the hero from the villain.

Gonzalo is compelled to kill Johnny due to an obligation beyond his physical control, since killing Johnny is the only way he thinks his honor will be restored. Gonzalo shoots him twice, and Johnny lands again on the soft and warm ground of the Zendejas's family house as his blood pools on the floor. One might expect a twist ending reminiscent of Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1890) in which the protagonist's actions were in fact just his dying thoughts before finally passing away after landing on the ground during the pursuit of the bandits in the nineteenth century narrative. Or perhaps the ambiguous end to Jorge Luis Borges's "El Sur" (1944) in which it is impossible to decide if the protagonist, Juan Dahlmann, died in the city hospital or if he died in a knife fight in the Argentine Pampas. In contrast, Johnny the hero only temporarily escapes death or serious harm as the hero in the first narrative to end up being murdered by Gonzalo as the despicable outlaw who is indistinguishable from the fleeing rogues Johnny had been chasing at the beginning of the text. Ultimately, the narrative appeals more closely to Julio Cortázar's "Axolotl" (1956), in which the protagonist finds himself literally switching from one side of a division, a binary, or an identity group, to the opposite one. The short story ends abruptly with no further exploration of this murder that seems unjustifiable by modern moral standards in the Sixties, but the early modern generic convention of restoring honor with bloodshed reclaims its place in the

present. Clear temporal distinctions between the ancient and the modern become just as muddled in this narrative as the genres to which it appeals, and the contingent divisions between hero and villain that so easily become inverted in this text disprove any attempt to construct such a binary division as universal.

Furthermore, Johnny is not killed by the hands of the State, but by another citizen, who would most likely be subjected to a criminal trial had this story not ended at the moment of Johnny's death. It is at this point that I insist on the need to return to those parenthetical questions that were literally bracketed in the story and never resolved. Without having reached a conclusion about his legal status, Johnny has no guaranteed rights or protections. He literally occupies the position of an outlaw—of someone outside of the law—from the moment he bursts into the Zendejas's living room until when he is killed by Gonzalo. I do not mean that he is an outlaw like the fleeing rogues. He is an outlaw in the sense that the *homo sacer* is an outlaw, a bare life who has been banned and abandoned by the law. Johnny became accustomed to the harsh electric lights that first exposed him, and once the public scrutiny faded, he seems not to have considered the potential consequences of his exposure to a legal system that refused to resolve his status. As a form of bare life who has been abandoned by the law, as a *homo sacer*, Gonzalo could kill him and potentially not be accused of having committed a criminal act, because as Agamben states, "in the case of *homo sacer* a person is simply set outside human jurisdiction without being brought into the realm of divine law" (*Homo* 82). This "zone of indistinction between sacrifice and homicide" is the state of exception inhabited by the *homo sacer*, in this case by Johnny. However, this space is still intimately tied to

the political sphere of sovereignty: “The sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life—that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed—is the life that has been captured in this sphere” (83). Johnny, in my reading, represents the life that has been captured by the state of exception. Gonzalo, therefore, is theoretically exempted from a criminal case, since the body he killed was already a legal exception, banned and abandoned by the law.

In killing Johnny, Gonzalo closed the opening by which Johnny thought he had found a temporary sense of freedom in the Valle de Anáhuac. But this is not the opening that makes up the political gesture of this text. This opening in the Valle de Anáhuac was purely illusory. On the one hand, “Johnny” is partially an allegory for the legal and political structures that allowed for the massacre at Tlatelolco to take place. But, on the other, “Johnny” also exceeds this particular allegorical interpretation. Manjarrez steps outside of binary oppositions from the very start by writing a SciFi-Western instead of an explicitly political text. “Johnny” can go unnoticed by the reductive antagonisms that classify one group as nationalist in the face of another. The politics of this text takes place in the entangled exploration of popular genres—the Western, the spy genre, fantastic literature, and science fiction. By appropriating the conventions of the American Western, “Johnny” opens a place already occupied by such facile binary oppositions. The narrative moves beyond the binaries of good versus evil, of us versus them, of the Mexican State versus those protesting its authoritarianism. “Johnny” dismantles the possibility for such universal categories by demonstrating how easily such an inoffensive homebody like Johnny

can slip from one side of the binary to the other and, therefore, be murdered. Finally, “Johnny” opens the possibility for engaging in a more nuanced understanding of the competing and conflicting interests that always exist in the public sphere, especially when it becomes almost impossible to choose between predetermined, often reductive positions with which one feels uncomfortable identifying. This opening toward new possibilities, without necessarily creating a new, highly visible and powerful political party, -ism, or identity group is precisely the gesture by which those who go unnoticed can still engage in politics.

A Nude Woman in Uruguay

Uruguay was known as the Switzerland of South America in the first half of the twentieth century, ever since the Partido Colorado's candidate, José Battle y Ordóñez, had become President. The country's strong, two-party democratic institutions were considered to be a stark contrast to its surrounding neighbors, Argentina and Brazil, who had engaged each other in war in the nineteenth century for control of the Banda Oriental, as Uruguay was known in Spanish, or the Cisplantina, as it was known in Portuguese. By the end of World War II, Uruguay was praised internationally for its economic growth and stability, which were dependent upon the regulations made by the Welfare State (Iglesias 132).

Despite the apparent peace and stability of twentieth-century Uruguay from an international perspective, this model of democracy in South America also made frequent recourse to the state of exception—known in the 1830 Constitution as “medidas prontas de seguridad” ‘prompt security measures’ in case of external attack or internal commotion—since the beginning of the century (Iglesias 132).⁴⁶ Between 1946, the year in which Battlismo consolidated its power under Luis Battle Berres, and 1973, the year in which the Armed Forces began the dictatorship known euphemistically as “el Consejo de Seguridad Nacional” ‘The National Security Council,’ the prompt security measures were increasingly invoked as a political strategy oriented toward maintaining the sociopolitical order dominated by the

⁴⁶ Mariana Iglesias records eighteen cases in which the “medidas prontas de seguridad” were invoked in Uruguay in each of the following years: 1902, 1903, 1904, 1906, 1909, 1910, 1914, 1917, 1919, 1920, 1932, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1942, 1943, and 1945 (“La excepción” 142).

Partido Colorado and the Partido Nacional. This two-party centered state felt the need to reaffirm its centrality and superiority over “cualquier colectivo social —tanto patronal como asalariado— que pretendiera erigirse en representante de intereses sociales específicos por fuera de instancias controladas por ellos” ‘any social collective—be it by the employers or by the workers—that would try to establish itself as the representative of specific social interests outside of the proceedings they authorized’ (Franco 148).

Although presided by two parties, and not just one as in the case of Mexico’s PRI, the Uruguayan state similarly invoked the “prompt security measures” in order to guarantee the transition between the two parties to the exclusion of any others. With the growing tensions of the Cold War, the “threat” invoked in order to justify recourse to this Uruguayan variant of the state of exception became Communism and later the armed urban guerrillas, the Tupamaros. Abril Trigo recalls that in Uruguay the Cuban Revolution “destapó los demonios y los echó a andar por las calles de nuestra gris Montevideo” ‘took the lid off the demons and set them walking through the streets of our grey Montevideo’ (*Caudillo* 186). As he shows, the idea of revolution brought to the surface many tensions that were hidden behind the apparently peaceful, two-party democracy, and it is in this context that the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional-Tupamaros attempted to alter the status quo by making frequent reference to Uruguay’s nineteenth century civil wars. The Tupamaros, Trigo writes, “le lleva a recordar [a los detentadores del *statu quo*] que la guerra civil fue el recurso habitual del pueblo uruguayo en la primera mitad de su vida independiente. Que los mismos partidos tradicionales, hoy vocingleramente

pacifistas, fueron los protagonistas de aquellas ‘patriadas’ en las cuales nacieron” ‘remind [those who unlawfully uphold the status quo] that civil war was the habitual resource of the Uruguayan people in the first half of its independent life and that the same traditional parties, which today are so garrulously pacifist, were the protagonists of those revolts in which they were born’ (205). The Tupamaros, in this sense, evoked a strange mixture of national history with a revolutionary present as they rebelled against the traditional parties, but they would not succeed.

For Trigo, the Tupamaros appeared to be attempting “salvar los restos del naufragio” ‘to salvage the remains of a shipwreck,’ that of the sinking Uruguayan state, more than provoking a more profound revolution (206). By July of 1970, the violence had escalated, and on April 15, 1972, the recently elected Juan María Bordaberry declared a state of internal war—a state of exception. As Thomas C. Wright explains, approximately six hundred Tupamaros were captured and one hundred killed by July 15, 1972, but the counterinsurgency measures were not dropped, leading to labor unrest, political protests, and allegations of military involvement in death squads and brutal treatment of prisoners. In reaction to this popular unrest, and not just to the existence of urban guerrilla cells, “Bordaberry acceded to the gradual militarization of his government until the culminating coup of June 1973, when he closed congress and municipal governments and began to rule by decree with a military-civilian cabinet” (101). Under this more generalized state of exception, which by 1973 was no longer shrouded in democratic robes, the Tupamaros were quickly eliminated by the militarized state that remained in power until 1985.

In detailing the instances of recourse to the state of exception in Cuba, Argentina, Mexico, and Uruguay, I would like to clarify two points. First, it must be recalled that the state of exception and the *homo sacer*, as they appear in Agamben's analyses and as I bring them into the present argument, are to be understood not as a homogenous, theoretical concept or Platonic Idea that can be applied equally to different circumstances. Rather, they are paradigms. In *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, Agamben clarifies this point:

Homo sacer and the concentration camp, the *Muselmann* and the state of exception, and, more recently, the Trinitarian *oikonomia* and acclamations are not hypotheses through which I intended to explain modernity by tracing it back to something like a cause of historical origin. On the contrary, as their very multiplicity might have signaled, each time it was a matter of paradigms whose aim was to make intelligible a series of phenomena whose kinship had eluded or could elude the historian's gaze. (31)

The paradigm is not a purely theoretical concept or a metaphor, but rather a singularity that neutralizes "the dichotomy between the general and the particular" and its historicity "lies neither in diachrony nor in synchrony but in a crossing of the two" (31). The paradigm is an example drawn from a specific, historical case of which it never ceases being a part, and from this singularity, it acquires an exemplarity that can be useful in pointing to concepts that had previously evaded the historian's gaze (31). For this reason, when they are invoked, these paradigms must be contextualized and allowed to take on new or different characteristics as they play out differently in other places and times. In my view, these paradigms are useful

insofar as they allow me to turn around and read against the scriptural currents that have come to narrate the Latin American Sixties.

Second, my goal is not to create a teleological historical trajectory as if the facile recourse to the state of exception in isolated events during the era necessarily led to the hardline Communism of Cuba, the massacre of students by the State in Mexico, and the dictatorships in Argentina and Uruguay. These were not historical necessities, but they were also not isolated, anomalous events. The historians of the state of exception in its singular forms in Western democracies have demonstrated the potential for authoritarianism, military intervention, violence committed by the State, and the suspension of the state of law as a constitutive attribute of Western democracies. Historically, these security measures are rationalized within different legal frameworks as the paradoxical guarantee of the law by suspending the law.

With a bit of temporal distance from specific uses of the state of exception, however, the justifications for recourse to the suspension of the law tend to be motivated more by the attempt by an individual, a party, or a collective of governing bodies to secure sovereignty, both political and moral, than by the need to protect the constitutional foundations of a nation-state. It seems unlikely that gay men in Cuba posed a serious threat to the sovereignty of the Cuban Revolution, and the students and workers protesting in Mexico, Argentina, and Uruguay, who were frequently the subjects abandoned by the law, are not so easily reduced to the equivalent of the rural and urban guerrilla fighters who aimed at provoking a Cuban-style armed revolution that escalated throughout the 1970s. In retrospect, even the presence of such guerrilla groups fails to justify the long term and extremely violent, oppressive regimes of the

1970s and 1980s. It is at this point that Agamben's claim that "the state of exception has by now become the rule" comes into focus within the Latin American context that does not figure into his analysis (*State* 9). If the state of exception is a generalized practice taking on specific contours in particular contexts, as these historians have shown it to be, then this means that the space of modern biopolitics has been transformed into a threshold or a zone of indistinction. Anyone inhabiting this threshold can become at any moment a *homo sacer*, a body that can be killed once it is abandoned by the law.

Before the oppressive regimes of the 1970s and 1980s came into power by force, the authors I study here were already erring along their own lines of flight by provoking other political gestures during the Sixties. However, I would caution against reading any of the political gestures I have been studying as if they were somehow capable of foresight regarding the failures of the revolutionary projects. Their errant itineraries are not, in my view, an attempt to avoid these particular failures. The narrative of the failure of the Sixties is only possible in retrospect, and I have yet to find anything in these texts that suggests a clear prediction of the future. With that said, the politics of going unnoticed enacted by Casey, Filloy, Manjarrez, and Somers takes the form of disagreements with the more visible and audible politics of the era. In particular, they all write of characters who, when read in the light of Agamben's paradigms, become a sort of *homo sacer* looking for a way out of the state of exception or for a way to disagree with modern biopolitical organizations by going unnoticed within them. Both Casey's essays and Filloy's ironic character Konsideransky suggest a desire to go unnoticed from the politics of their times, while

both recognize the impossibility of locating an autonomous space outside of the state of exception. Manjarrez's cowboy, Johnny, fails to recognize his precarious position within this threshold space, but by reading the elements of the text "Johnny" that go unnoticed once he leaves the spotlight, his status as a *homo sacer* becomes evident. With this context in mind, I will turn to my final example of the politics of going unnoticed—Rebeca Linke in Somers's novella *La mujer desnuda*.

La mujer desnuda was first published in 1950 in the journal *Clima*, but it was not made popularly available until 1966 when it was republished by Arca. The reason for this, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, is that Somers was outright rejected and *ninguneada* as a serious writer for having written a supposedly pornographic novel. In one of the few interviews she granted, Somers explains that the National Library purchased almost all of the copies of the first edition of *La mujer desnuda*, and the director of the Library had sent them around the world: "Es decir que *La mujer desnuda*, realmente, no se difundió en Montevideo, la revista [*Clima*] fue para ciertas élites y la separata fue adquirida por la Biblioteca. De tal manera, la novela siguió siendo un mito, porque se hablaba de ella pero muy pocos la conocían" '*La mujer desnuda* really never circulated in Montevideo. The journal [*Clima*] was for the elites, and the separate edition was acquired by the National Library. For that reason the novel continued to be a myth, because people talked about it, but only a few had read it' (Risso 255). Only a few people read the novella when it first appeared, and it went almost completely unnoticed outside of the national context, as is the case with all four authors.

In this novella, it is Rebeca Linke, the nude woman and protagonist of the text, who attempts to go unnoticed as she pries open a political place for herself. The novella begins with the following sentence: “El día en que Rebeca Linke cumplió los treinta años, comenzó con lo que ella había imaginado siempre, a pesar de una secreta ilusión en contra: la nada” ‘The day of Rebeca Linke’s thirtieth birthday began with what she had always imagined, despite a secret, conflicting illusion: nothing’ (*La mujer* 15). The day seemed to be of little importance, one in which nothing out of the ordinary would occur; the narrator describes the day as “apenas como un aburrido bostezo de verano igual a tantos” ‘barely like a bored yawn in the summer indistinguishable from the rest’ (15). But this tranquility would not last for long.

The fourth paragraph on the first page registers a second beginning for the novella: “Todo empezó así, entonces: que ella fuese retrocediendo inconscientemente en un escenario vulgar y desapareciera de la vista. Había llegado quizás el momento preciso en que cada uno deba vivir su acontecimiento propio” ‘Everything began as if unconsciously she had begun to step out of the spotlight of her normal surroundings and disappeared from sight. The precise moment, perhaps, had arrived at which everyone must experience their own event’ (15). There is an uncertainty in these actions; the narrator hesitates to tell them as fact, and the narrator’s words also become slightly confused with the thoughts of Rebeca Linke. The narrator frequently slips in and out of Rebeca Linke’s consciousness, at times narrating her thoughts as if they were shared by the narrator, at times commenting on the events of the story as if from an omniscient perspective. In this second beginning, Rebeca Linke begins to

create an opening in her life. She almost automatically steps out of the spotlight and disappears from sight; that is, she begins to go unnoticed of her own volition.

By the end of the first page of the novella, Rebeca Linke is suddenly at the small house she had purchased on a ranch in the countryside. She then, through the narrator, recalls her journey there on the last train during the night. It is not until almost the end of the novella that she further details her flight from her parents' home on the night of her birthday party. She explains to Juan, a man who falls in love with her and tries to protect her later in the story, what she was thinking:

Creo que empezó así, en la fiesta de mis treinta años, hace pocas noches. Que yo diera en mirar a los demás en la forma cómo serían otros treinta después, con las voces cascándose, el pellejo colgado que ellos se estiran a veces con los dedos para crearse un segundo de ilusión, el sexo con los verbos ya sin conjugar, y el miedo de morir desprevenidos al acostarse cada noche. (95)

'I think it started a few nights ago during my thirtieth birthday party. I was looking at everyone else thinking about what the next thirty years would be like, with their cracking voices, their hanging skin that they pull back sometimes to give the illusion of youth, their genitals no longer conjugating verbs, and their fear of dying unexpectedly as they go to bed each night.'

Rebeca Linke was going through an early mid-life crisis, so she decides to abruptly change her life now that she is no longer considered a minor and can legally abandon her parents' home as an unmarried woman. María Rosa Olivera-Williams has shown how the Uruguayan Civil Code in operation in 1950 constructed an eternal dependency for all women, considering them to be "'incapacitada' para abandonar la

casa de sus padres si no se había casado —sujeto que no había alcanzado la mayoría de edad— hasta los treinta años” ““incapable” of abandoning their parents’ home, unless they get married, until they turn thirty and legally come of age’ (“Lo femenino” 32). Rebeca Linke wastes no time. She had already bought the little house on the farm so that she could leave that very night, and she runs upstairs during her birthday party, takes off all her clothes, stares at her nude body, and then puts on an overcoat before running to catch the last train.

Once she arrives at the little house, she removes her overcoat and falls into a sort of trance under the moonlight that filters through the blinds in stripes of light and stripes of shadow, creating prison-like bars that simultaneously cover and expose her nude body. The resemblance between Rebeca Linke’s symbolic prison bars in her cave-like house in the countryside and the prisoner chained inside the cave in Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” cannot be overlooked, but as in “Yo y los intrusos” by Filloy, this narrative is not a simple reconstruction of the Platonic text. The prisoner in Plato’s allegory is unchained by some unnamed source. Rebeca Linke’s struggle for freedom will be much less abstract. She remembers that she has a small dagger, “una obra de arte” ‘a work of art,’ tucked inside a book that would be apt “para decapitar a una mujer prisionera” ‘for decapitating a female prisoner’ (*La mujer* 18). This small work of art will become the means by which she first carves out a tiny opening, beginning her political gesture.

Rebeca Linke has fled from her family home, but she still feels trapped and needs to find a way around this blockage. The novella takes a grotesque, fantastical turn:

La mano que quiere alcanzarla [la daga] no puede. Derriba el vaso con agua de la mesa y queda allí como una flor congelada. Es entonces cuando la daga va a demostrar que ella sí sabe hacerlo, y se desplaza atraída por las puntas de unos dedos. Claro que hacia una mano que está adherida a un brazo, que pertenece a su vez a un cuerpo con cabeza, con cuello. Una cabeza, algo tan importante sobre eso tan vulnerable que es un cuello... El filo penetró sin esfuerzo, a pesar del brazo muerto, de la mano sin dedos. Tropezó con innumerables cosas que se llamarían quizás arterias, venas, cartílagos, huesos articulados, sangre viscosa y caliente, con todo menos el dolor que entonces ya no existía.

La cabeza rodó pesadamente como un fruto. Rebeca Linke vio caer aquello sin alegría ni pena. (18)

‘Her hand wants to reach the dagger but it cannot. She spills the glass of water on the table and remains there like a frozen flower. It is then that the dagger will demonstrate that she [or it] does know how to do it, and it slides, attracted by the tips of her fingers, clearly toward a hand attached to an arm that belongs to a body with a head and a neck. A head, something so important resting on something so vulnerable as a neck... The blade penetrated without effort, despite her dead arm, her hand without fingers. It struggled against innumerable things that perhaps could be called arteries, veins, cartilage, joints, viscous and warm blood, against everything except the pain that no longer existed.

Her head rolled heavily like a fruit. Rebeca Linke saw it fall without happiness or sorrow.’

Rebeca Linke desires to cut off her own head while nude, and in doing so, she attempts to sever all ties to her past and divest herself of even the clothes she brought with her from her former life.

Incapable of carrying out this act on her own, the dagger acquires a form of life, or at least of movement. The narrator here achieves a grammatical ambiguity with regard to the antecedent of a pronoun, a stylistic trait to which Somers adeptly makes recourse throughout her work, challenging the reader to return to her phrases multiple time to decipher who or what is being referenced. The dagger is said to demonstrate that “ella” does know how to cut off Rebeca Linke’s head. This “ella” can both mean “she” in reference to Rebeca Linke and “it” in reference to the dagger, a grammatically feminine noun. The dagger simultaneously shows Rebeca Linke how to cut off her own head and that it is capable of cutting off her head for her. I contend that the only justifiable reading of Somers’s ambiguities is to leave both possibilities intact. The rest of this gruesome description of the blade slicing through her neck maintains a closely impersonal tone, one that alternates between Rebeca Linke’s somewhat disembodied point of view seeing her own actions and an objective, third person description of the events, which also might be the point of view of the now animate dagger itself. The prose here attains the perspective of an errant palindrome. The reader’s attention is alternately demanded by the narrator, Rebeca Linke’s point of view, and the perspective of the now animate dagger. These three perspectives are also practically indistinguishable; one phrase may be read in multiple ways depending

on who or what is the grammatical antecedent and on how the reader interprets the narrative voice.

At the same time, Rebeca Linke is ensuring a radically different perspective and a different place for herself in the world. Once this act was committed, either the narrator states or Rebeca Linke thinks:

Se hacía, pues, impostergable volver a lo anterior, tornar a echarse el pensamiento encima, construir de nuevo el universo real con las estrellas siempre arriba y el suelo por lo bajo, según esquemas primitivos. En eficaz maniobra, la mujer decapitada tomó su antigua cabeza, se la colocó de un golpe duro como un casco de combate. (21)

‘Returning to the previous situation, jumping back into her thoughts, building once again the real universe in which the stars are always overhead and the ground under foot, according to primitive preconceptions, none of this could be restored. With an efficient maneuver, the decapitated woman picked up her former head and abruptly put it on like a combat helmet.’

The decapitation was not a final, suicidal act. She pulls her head back onto her shoulders, and the wound seals itself almost immediately. It takes her a few moments to fully recover her senses, but this moment marks a definitive break with the past. Rebeca Linke refuses to return to the “primitive preconceptions” that ordered her former life. She recognizes her new position in the world once her eyes painfully regain their capacity to see, and she quickly realizes how much she prefers her “nuevos ángulos” ‘new perspectives’ (20).

On the surface, it seems Rebeca Linke has overreacted. She turned thirty years old, had an early mid-life crisis, removed all her clothes (except for an overcoat that allows her to take the night train without drawing much attention to herself), moves to a house in the countryside, and cuts off her own head. Lucky for her, she inhabits a fantastic world and survives this ordeal, still able to put her head back on her shoulders. Somers, like Manjarrez, appeals to the fantastic genre, but she mixes her tales with a bit of horror and mystery. Setting all judgments aside about her life choices, Rebeca Linke's thirtieth birthday is all that was needed to send her down this line of flight into the countryside. As Deleuze and Guattari state, "We can be thrown into a becoming by anything at all, by the most unexpected, most insignificant of things. You don't deviate from the majority unless there is a little detail that starts to swell and carries you off" (*Thousand* 292). Clearly turning thirty was sufficient to send her on this errant path along which she now desires to go unnoticed as she continues moving away from her past. Such a seemingly minor event, a birthday party or more likely the birthday itself, is all it took to provoke this small, but radical political gesture.

In contrast to Plato's prisoner, but not unlike Maximiliano Konsideransky, Rebeca Linke leaves her house and sets out into the darkness of the night. In the previous chapter I quoted from Agamben in his essay, "What is the Contemporary?," to show that to be contemporary person must perceive the darkness of their own time, and not solely be blinded by the lights that shine the brightest. In this sense, those who go unnoticed can become the contemporary of an era despite its lack of recognition; by going unnoticed, one acquires the potential to grasp the complexity

that hides in the darkness without needing to bring it into the light. Regarding Rebeca Linke, her birthday is the moment at which she perceives this darkness hiding behind the apparently mundane, normal life she and her family had been living; she is no longer blinded by the lights of her era and becomes contemporary at the moment she perceives her former position as that of an unwitting prisoner who must break her chains and divest her body of the shrouds placed on it.

In other moments of Agamben's writings, the need to perceive the darkness also acquires political potential. In the essay, "On Potentiality," Agamben studies Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and *De anima* to consider the relationship between *dynamis* and *energeia*, potentiality and actuality. In Agamben's reading of Aristotle, *energeia* or actuality corresponds to the light, whereas *dynamis* or potentiality corresponds to darkness. When one sees, one actualizes one's potential for sight, that is, for the perception of light: "when we do not see (that is, when our vision is potential), we nevertheless distinguish darkness from light; *we see darkness*" (180–181). In this perception of darkness when light is absent, there is still the potential for sight even though one is not actually seeing at the present moment. Rebeca Linke comes to see the darkness of her situation, the nothingness that takes over the day of her birthday and convinces her to make a radical break. Furthermore, Agamben claims that potentiality "is not simply the potential to do this or that thing but potential to not-do, potential not to pass into actuality. [...] The greatness—and also the abyss—of human potentiality is that it is first of all potential not to act, *potential for darkness*" (180–181). This is a tricky area in Agamben's essay. Potentiality is both the potential to act and the potential to not act; it is the ability to do something and the ability to

refuse to do something, at the same time. I say it is tricky, because there are two ways to read each side of this potential to do and to not do. Agamben states that potentiality “is such a terrible experience, which borders on both good and evil” (181). One remains capable of doing both good and bad acts, and one can also refuse to do good or refuse to do evil. The terms “good” and “evil” seem quite out of place as moral absolutes within Agamben’s larger work, but he never labels any particular action as being good or evil. In contrast, his intention here is to show that the space of potentiality is the threshold in which the decision to be both good and evil remains open; it is a space in which decisions can still be made. If this space were to foreclose the possibility of choosing evil over good or vice versa, then there would be no possible choice, no actual state of potentiality. Potentiality, then, is this opening of a threshold in which decisions can be made, an opening without content that serves only a means for acquiring the potential to make decisions without predetermining the outcome of those choices. In my view, Rebeca Linke creates such an opening when she cuts off her own head. I will return to this point in a moment.

First, Agamben clarifies why guaranteeing potentiality must also guarantee impotentiality. In “On What We Can Not Do,” he explains that “Deleuze once defined the operation of power as a separation of humans from what they can do, that is, from their potentiality” (43). In this definition, power is that which renders human activity, in the form of its potentiality, impotent. To this, Agamben adds another operation of power that also affects “impotentiality” or “what they cannot do, or better, can not do” (43). For Agamben the loss of impotentiality is more “insidious” than the loss of potentiality, because “those who are separated from their own

impotentiality lose, on the other hand, first of all the capacity to resist. And just as it is only the burning awareness of what we cannot be that guarantees the truth of what we are, so it is only the lucid vision of what we cannot, or can not, do that gives consistency to our actions” (45). Each human being is incapable of certain actions; one may or may not have the capacity to be a great painter or a great machinist or a great aviator. These incapacities are simply facts and, although unfortunate, once faced, it is possible to come to terms with the limits of one’s talents and skills. Impotentiality, for Agamben, is not related to the limits of one’s abilities or skills in this sense. Impotentiality is the final component of real potentiality; it is the capacity to not do something, to refuse or to resist an action that one is physically capable of doing. To not do something because one is physically unable to do it is not the same thing as refusing to do an act that one could physically complete. I will chose an extreme, arbitrary example to make this point more clear: there is a difference between, on the one hand, not killing another person because I did not have bullets for my gun and, even if I did, I know I have horrible aim and would probably not be able to kill them and, on the other, refusing to kill another person when those bullets were loaded in the gun in my hand that I am skilled at shooting.

For Agamben, denying someone the potential to resist an action is more insidious than simply taking away their ability to complete an action. The potential for resistance and refusal is a necessary component of any truly open space, and it is this type of dissent and disagreement that gives this opening its political potentiality. The politics of going unnoticed, finally, is the dissent made possible in the space opened up by going unnoticed, by moving among the swirling lights and shadows of

an era wherein various elements are left unattended. It is not necessarily the act of tending to those elements, but rather opening up the space in which they can register their dissent and recover their potentiality, their capacity to do, to not do, and to resist or refuse.

Rebeca Linke creates and inhabits a space of potentiality when she moves to the little house in the countryside where she decapitates herself. She is both physically capable of this gruesome gesture and of refusing to do it, but she puts up no resistance even when the dagger seems to acquire its own agency. I use the word gesture in the sense that Agamben gives it in “Notes on Gesture,” as a means without ends: “if producing is a means in view of an end and praxis is an end without means, the gesture then breaks with the false alternative between ends and means that paralyzes morality and presents instead means that, *as such*, evade the orbit of mediality without becoming, for this reason, ends” (57). Rebeca Linke makes a choice to carry out this gesture that has no discernible end goal made clear in the text. The reasons she flees her home and carries out this gesture are known, but she never states her goals for what she plans to do after enacting this gesture. It is not meant to lead her anywhere in particular.

First, this is not a story about suicide, nor do I wish to psychoanalyze her actions as a call for help or as a cry for attention; readings like this often stem from a veiled form of misogyny. On the contrary, Rebeca Linke actively desires to go unnoticed. Second, I want to resist the potential referential reading pact that can easily accompany non-realist genres; in other words, I am attempting to refuse to connect her fantastical actions to a more realistic referent outside of the fictional text.

Instead, I am interested in this act as a gesture, as a means without ends. “The gesture is, in this sense,” Agamben writes, “communication of a communicability. It has precisely nothing to say because what it shows is the being-in-language of human beings as pure mediality” (59). Rebeca Linke’s gesture does not say any referent in my reading of it. Rather, it shows its potentiality. It opens a space in which one can decide to do or to not do something.

In “Notes on Politics” in the same volume, Agamben defines politics as follows: “*Politics is the exhibition of a mediality: it is the act of making a means visible as such.* Politics is the sphere neither of an end in itself nor of means subordinated to an end; rather, it is the sphere of a pure mediality without end intended as the field of human action and of human thought” (116–117). Politics, then, is that which opens up a means without end. It is the opening of a space of potentiality, comparable to the opening in an already occupied space that Derrida calls *khôra* and to the guarantee of disagreement in Mouffe’s formulation. In opening such a space, politics in this sense does not exclude; rather, it creates the possibility for ever more dissent and disagreement without conditions or ends within an already occupied space characterized by the normalization of the state of exception.

Rebeca Linke’s political gesture, which she enacts while going unnoticed in her little shack in the countryside, is one that becomes visible only in the published text. It goes unnoticed within the narrative, and in fact, the other characters, particularly Juan, do not believe that she actually committed this gruesome, realistically impossible act. In exhibiting this means without ends, while going unnoticed in the story and in a story that goes unnoticed, she reveals a political

gesture alone in the dark. With only the few bars of moonlight filtering through the window blinds that dimly illuminate only portions of her body, she stands with her head replaced on her body in stark contrast to the bodies exposed under the electric bulbs in Casey's "Notas de un simulador" and Manjarrez's "Johnny." Even the narrator rhetorically asks what the purpose of this gesture could be: "¿Pero y qué más daba? Un estado sutil de felicidad malogrando las comparaciones, eso era todo" 'And what of it? Nothing more than a delicate state of happiness wasting comparisons' (*La mujer* 21). She really has no plan in sight. This brief moment of happiness, these means without end, is all there is.

At this point, the narrative lingers on her last seconds inside the house: "Hasta que la mano, retardándose algo más de lo común sobre las cosas, consiguió abrir la puerta luego de un crispamiento largo sobre el pomo" 'Until her hand, lingering somewhat longer than usual on things, was able to open the door after slowly turning the knob' (21). Her political gesture—severing all ties with her past, literally and metaphorically—provided a brief respite that seemed to resemble something like freedom. There is a blank space in the text, what I read as the visual opening within the narrative itself, separating the moment she turns the knob from the moment she steps outside of the house. But there is no freedom; Casey's essays, Filloy's character, Konderansky, and Manjarrez's Johnny all made this evident. There is no outside of the biopolitics of the state of exception, just as there is no outside of the cultural markets in the Sixties.

When Rebeca Linke opens the door and steps nude onto the prairie, she briefly observes her body, the lines in her hands, and the sensation of walking

barefoot on the ground. Suddenly, she notices something else: “La vigilaban miles de ojos ocultos, la trituraban miles de dientes. [...] Pero le pareció, de pronto, que el bosque la había identificado, que la estaba espiando” ‘Thousands of hidden eyes were watching her, thousands of teeth were biting at her. [...] But it seemed, suddenly, the woods had identified her, they were spying on her’ (23). In fact, the rest of the novel follows her meandering itinerary through the woods and around the outskirts of the sleepy town in the area. She stumbles into a log cabin in the forest, where she provokes a sleeping man. Rebeca Linke laughs at him because of “los cerrojos en que viviría aun sin creerse prisionero” ‘the shackles in which he was living without even realizing he was a prisoner’ (33). This man is like one of the prisoners still chained inside the walls of Plato’s cave, but she has a moment of superiority in which she feels freed from those very shackles and unsuccessfully attempts to wake him from this dream state.

However, her so-called freedom does not last for long. Once the townspeople hear of this monstrosity—a nude woman walking through the woods and threatening their sense of decency and morality—they set out to track her down and murder her with no sense that such violence is prohibited by law. Once her political gesture fails to go unnoticed, she becomes yet another *homo sacer*, another bare or nude life banned and abandoned by the law. Not long before she is killed, the narrator explains the townspeople’s violent reaction:

En cuanto a la mujer, aquel desnudo les había recordado con demasiada insistencia lo que ellos se cubrían. La criatura desvestida tras el desasosiego que arrojara en sus lechos, les acababa de traer el terror de sus almas en

descubierto, el soñarse pesadillescamente con sus rencores al viento, con sus pequeñas miserias sin cortinado espeso. (108)

‘As for the woman, such nudity had reminded them with too much insistence of what they were hiding. The undressed creature generated a sense of unease in their beds. She had just pulled down the heavy curtains that veiled the terror in their souls, ending their nightmarish dreams and airing their resentment and their misery.’

Rebeca Linke’s political gesture, once noticed by this community that quickly transforms into a torch-wielding mob, exposes everything this community had been ignoring—its miserly living conditions and the resentment and pain that accompanies such a life. Their violence is a reaction to having the lid taken off their demons, not unlike what Abril Trigo describes as the reaction caused by the Cuban Revolution in the Uruguayan imaginary.

In order to return things to the way they were, this community decides to eliminate the “creature,” that nude woman in Uruguay who irreparably exposed what they had all been hiding and can serve as their scapegoat. With such a violent act, the mob closes the opening created by Rebeca Linke. They kill her, and the final image of the novel is that of her bruised, nude body floating facedown through a river. In the end, she truly was a *nuda vita*, a bare, nude life, who jumped nude into mankind’s struggle to tell them what she had learned. This is the same “heroically humble” gesture that Calvert Casey’s inspiration, José Antonio Portuondo, proposed as the best representative of intellectual activity in the era. But sharing these lessons is not as simple as the revolutionary intellectual might have imagined.

In this context, the communal decision to kill Rebeca Linke can be read as the biopolitical decision enacted by a sovereign power to invoke the state of exception for the purpose of eliminating any political actor that seeks to disagree with their organization. Yet, it must be recalled that the decision to violently eradicate Rebeca Linke's nude body did not have to be the decision made in this case. Making recourse to the state of exception is never a historical necessity, but rather an individual decision, a historical contingency that could have been different. The state of exception forecloses the communal space to any actor who seeks to open it through dissent. Rebeca Linke's political gesture was only possible as long as she went unnoticed. The violence by which the common of this sleepy community was upheld in no way correlates to the minor acts by Rebeca Linke who simply tried to open a space in which disagreement could be made possible.

Before her death, the narrator explains the following about Rebeca Linke: "Odiaba desde siempre las moralejas, rechazaba las conclusiones finales y los mitos que las generan en un mundo que de pronto se abre en volcán, en aluvión de lodo, en silencio de sombra que anda en busca del cuerpo desintegrado" "She always hated morals and rejected final conclusions and the myths that give rise to them in a world that suddenly opens like a volcano, like a torrent of mud, like the silence of a shadow that goes about looking for its disintegrated body" (119). Rebeca Linke's politics of going unnoticed proposes a different reaction and a different type of decision making. In reaction to the world that is suddenly thrust open, like the townspeople's world when confronted by the nude woman, Rebeca Linke rejects the narratives that attempt to justify the violent actions that would return the spewing ash and flowing mud to its

former place or to quickly talk over the silence of that disembodied shadow. That which goes unnoticed can all too easily remain unnoticed and be overpowered by that which is brighter, louder, stronger, and multitudinous. It is out of an awareness of their precarious state of going unnoticed that Casey subtly hints about his hesitations about the need to be a committed writer. Konsideransky's exposure and the deaths of Johnny and Rebeca Linke all validate Casey's hesitation. However, the politics of going unnoticed, the opening of a means without ends and of a potentiality to do and to refuse to do, points toward the horizon that Huberto, despite all his pessimism and rejections, walks toward with a smile. Instead of a morality of final conclusions, the politics of going unnoticed opens toward an ethics of pluralisms, dialogues, and the potential to make decisions without predetermined ends and without ever fully closing off a political space. In this sense, the politics of going unnoticed will generate the conditions of possibility for the ethics of being perceived that I explore in Chapter Three.

NO CORROBORO, BORRO CON...

Filloy's palindrome "No corroboro, borro con..." can be translated literally as 'I do not corroborate, I erase with...' (*Karcino* 85). In a first left to right reading, this appears to be an unfinished sentence. With what does this speaker erase something when he refuses to corroborate? The answer is irrevocably lost. The trailing ellipsis takes the place of words that would upset the symmetry of the palindrome if they were present. This phrase remains a palindrome that can be read as well from right to left, since the ellipsis itself does not count as part of the word according to Filloy's rules: "no se computan grafías de signos, acentos y puntuación" 'graphical symbols, accent marks, and punctuation are not calculated' (9). Only the actual letters of the words are considered part of the palindrome. Yet, the ellipsis is not exactly like other forms of punctuation in that its purpose is to stand in the place of something that has been removed from a text, signalling to the reader that the absent words have been declared irrelevant by the writer within that particular context. In this palindrome, the ellipsis is the tool for erasing seemingly unimportant information that would prohibit it from being a palindrome. At the same time, a second left to right reading of the palindrome becomes possible. The ellipsis itself—as opposed to the words erased by an ellipsis—can be the object of the preposition "con" 'with.' With what does this speaker erase something when he refuses to corroborate? He erases with ellipses.

I would like to situate Filloy's palindrome here at the threshold between politics and ethics, between my chapters on the politics and the ethics of going unnoticed. The first half of this palindrome, "No corroboro" 'I do not or will not

corroborate,' takes the form of a dissensual affirmation. The speaker refuses to provide data that would bolster someone's argument, and this refusal can be both a political gesture—defined as disagreement—and an affirmation of the speaker's potentiality—defined as the ability to do, to not do, or to refuse to do. The second half of the palindrome, "borro con..." 'I erase with...', serves, for my purposes, as a description of the means without ends by which the speaker engages in politics. This means is simultaneously the seemingly unimportant information that is erased by an ellipsis and the ellipsis itself. The seemingly unimportant—the fragments of conversations heard in passing, recalling Casey's example in "Notas de un simulador"—is what goes unnoticed and what requires attention. This means without ends, going unnoticed, is an action purposefully carried out by the speaker who refuses to agree by erasing with ellipses, by choosing to label certain words as unimportant and letting them slip out of the perspective of the reader. The ellipsis serves as the tool for opening a place that had been occupied by other words wherein an ethics will acquire its potentiality.

There is a text by Casey, "A un viandante de 1965," in which I also begin to perceive this ethics.⁴⁷ Similar to Filloy's palindrome that can be read in two different ways just within the left to right reading, Casey's text can be read as a list of questions and statements, and it can also be read as a poem:

¿A qué teléfonos llamaste y nadie respondió?

⁴⁷ Casey published "A un viandante de 1965" in the *Gaceta de Cuba* in 1965 before going into self-exile. The *Gaceta* was founded by the Unión de Escritores y Artistas Cubanos (UNEAC) in 1962, the same year that *Revolución* and *Lunes de Revolución* were closed after the debate surrounding *P.M.* that the UNEAC instigated. It should be noted that the *Gaceta de Cuba*, founded by the UNEAC, published a dossier on Casey in 2009.

¿A qué puerta tocaste que conducía a la nada?
¿Qué ojos buscaste con la mirada vidriosa que tan bien conozco?
¿Qué cuerpos no reconociste con la pupila del obseso?
Sales de las tinieblas para perderte en las tinieblas.

.....

Desde lo oscuro verás cerrarse la puerta.
Tu último paso será tu último gesto.
Si encuentras a quien buscas y te detienes, rodarás muerto a sus pies.

Septiembre 18, 2778

(Merlino, *Notas* 159)

‘Which telephones did you call and no one answered?
At which door did you knock that led you nowhere?
Which eyes did you look for with your glassy stare that I know so well?
Which bodies did you not recognize with your obsessive pupil?
You leave the darkness only to get lost in darkness.

.....

From the darkness, you will see the door close.
Your last step will be your last gesture.
If you find who you are looking for and stop, you will wander at a standstill
around his feet.

September 18, 2778’

The text is organized into verses, yet it produces no consistent rhyme scheme. There are certain formal resemblances, as in the structure of the first two questions, and the

verses beginning with “desde” and “tu último” share an internal rhyme between “verás” and “será” that creates a metrical rhythm within the otherwise free verse structure. However, none of the verses produce a clear enjambment; each ends with a rotund period or question mark.

According to Agamben, “the possibility of enjambment constitutes the only criterion for distinguishing poetry from prose” (*The End of the Poem* 109). He explains that this is because poetry is the space in which it is possible to produce an opposition between a “metrical limit” and a “syntactical limit” or between a “prosodic pause” and a “semantic pause” (109). The end of the verse is, simply, the point at which the meter and rhyme can produce a pause, but this is not necessarily the same location as the semantic pause that comes at the end of a sentence or at the end of the final stanza. Distinguishing poetry from prose is not a matter of whether or not enjambment actually takes place, but rather whether “this opposition is, at least virtually, possible” (109). For Agamben, poetry is the potentiality of enjambment, the potentiality of opening a threshold space in which the syntactic and semantic limit is not reached. In strictly formal terms, “A un viandante” would appear to preclude the potentiality of enjambment in this first reading, despite its division into verse on the written page, precisely because of the clear union between its metrical and syntactical limits at the end of each verse.

Why, then, would the writer bother to produce line breaks between each sentence? This decision could be dismissed by judging the text from within the moralizing terms of a traditional aesthetic theory as an arbitrary rhetorical device made by an insignificant poet. However, I am not interested in making moral and

aesthetic judgments of this sort. The formal structure of this text points toward something that nevertheless goes unnoticed in the threshold space where enjambment has the potential to occur, similar to the way that Filloy's ellipses signal the erasure of seemingly unimportant words and make the opening through erasure possible. The first two verses begin with objects (the telephones and the door) that permit one to establish a connection with another person or another space. Yet, these verses end in a negation of that possible connection; no one answers the phones, and the door opens onto nothingness. The question marks that close these two verses mark the closure of any metrical enjambment, but the images produced at the point of metrical and syntactical closure create two openings—the telephone line that can communicate with another but does not and the void behind the door where another person could be but is not. The ends of these verses open up a space in which dialogue with an other becomes possible even if it does not actually take place.

In *The Idea of Prose*, Agamben provides more detail about the importance he gives to enjambment; he situates the “constitutive core” of poetry “at the end, at the *versura* point” (40). This *versura* is “the Latin term for the point at which the plough turned around at the end of a furrow” (*End* 111). Moreover, he argues: “[The *versura*] is an ambiguous gesture, that turns in two opposed directions at once: backwards (*versus*), and forwards (*pro-versa*)” (*Idea* 41). This *versura* or turning point takes place at the end of a verse of poetry, allowing the reader to move in two directions at once, in the same way that the reader of a palindrome can move backwards and forwards across the surface of the text.

Both in the ellipsis at the end of Filloy's palindrome and in the versura at the ends of Casey's verses, the erased words, the missed encounters, and the empty spaces can go unnoticed, and they can be perceived by those who pause and turn around at these ends. However, even the perceptive reader will find it impossible to fill in these gaps with information provided by the texts, since the words and subjects to which they point have been erased from the texts by these same gaps. In the same way that the enigmas in Somers's *Un retrato para Dickens* refused any final solution, a hermeneutics could only take place by guessing what had been erased and arbitrarily filling in these ellipses and gaps, as Agamben shows, under the sign of Oedipus.

Instead, the reader is left to wander like the lover in "A un viandante" from darkness into darkness, never into the light of knowledge. The potential for dialogue that opens at the ends of these texts will be a dialogue as difficult and imperfect as the one that takes place between the poet and the lover who speak across an untraversable temporal gap between the twenty-eighth century (announced in the date at the end of the poem) and the twentieth century (announced in the title). In the third to last verse, the lover's errant itinerary in the dark comes to a standstill; the door closes without him ever fully passing through the temporal threshold that separates them. In the final verse, the poet foresees the end of his lover's itinerary as the end of his gestures, and he warns him that any actual encounter with the desired object will only result in a wandering ("rodarás") standstill ("rodar [en] muerto") that is also a death ("muerto"). This end never takes place in the poem. If a complete and perfect communication between them comes to fruition, their wandering will come to a final standstill.

The end of the poem only points to this future end, a future that can be both the lover's future from the twentieth century and also the poet's future from the twenty-eighth century. A perfect and complete encounter and a definitive end will never take place across the untraversable spaces opened in the various ends within this text, but without these openings there is no potential for dialogue at all. Instead of silence and instead of a dead standstill, the poet and his lover maintain the potential for dialogue across these empty spaces by moving back and forth across this text wherein the ends serve as *versura*. These ends that open onto nothingness where the poet and the lover can turn around again and again are not ends at all, but rather the conditions of possibility for future movement and dialogue. Neither the ellipsis in Filloy's palindrome nor the empty spaces in Casey's text are perfect or the only possible solutions to engaging in politics and speaking across such a vast distance, but they both transform the ends of their texts into turning points at which politics and dialogue renew their potentiality instead of closing in on themselves. This potential for dialogue is what I refer to as the ethics of the politics of going unnoticed.

Chapter 3: The Ethics of Being Perceived

If the Sixties is an era in which everything became political, it was also an era like so many others in which violence served as the means for achieving specific political ends. In “Living in Revolutionary Times,” Greg Grandin concludes that “the learning curve of state repression has steadily increased throughout the twentieth century and, except in the cases of Cuba in the late 1950s and Nicaragua in the 1970s, was always a step ahead of movements seeking social and political transformation. But it took a radical and great leap forward in the 1960s” (4). His analysis goes on to study, broadly, the changing theories that have attempted to uncover the root causes of both social violence and state repression, of both revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence. This is not, however, a clear opposition situated along a definitive, causal chain. Violence is frequently theorized by revolutionaries like Guevara as the necessary opening for radical social change; in the face of the military power of the institutions they seek to challenge and overcome, violent opposition quickly appears as the only realistic chance of success.

Yet, as Jean Franco demonstrates in *Cruel Modernity*, the clearly gendered, violent discourses and practices of revolutionary groups is not only external:

The red thread of violence runs through Marxist thinking from the Paris Commune onward. It binds many different left-wing movements from Leninism to the anticolonial struggle as theorized by Fanon, and by Mao’s *Little Red Book*, with its catchy slogans [...]. But the enemy was not only

external. There was the danger from within, from weakness and error that must be eradicated. (120)

This is an important point. Violence is theorized by such revolutionaries as the means to an end, and this future end, in their thinking, justifies violence in the present.

However, those who join the revolution can become the target of that same revolution's violent means at any moment when such revolutionaries are judged as weak or potentially injurious to the cause. Franco refers explicitly to the case of Roque Dalton, the revolutionary poet par excellence who was executed by his own comrades in El Salvador (128–133). Calvert Casey and the *Lunes de Revolución* group, as intellectuals who had pledged their allegiance to the Cuban Revolution without having fought as guerrillas, for example, were especially susceptible to this internal threat of violence.

The far-reaching effects of the Cuban Revolution cannot be underestimated, but the *foco* theory of guerrilla warfare was not the only model for revolutionary change that it inspired. As Grandin summarizes:

The [Cuban] revolution was consequential not just in that it was the first in Latin America to fully understand itself as “world historical” and thus try to “externalize” itself, fracturing Latin America's already debilitated Old Left and spawning and supporting imitators throughout the Andes and Central America in the 1960s and the Southern Cone in the 1970s. It was also consequential because, especially after the disaster of *foco* theory in Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia, and Guatemala, it quickly gave rise to movements that tried to transcend the theory's limitations. (31)

Various groups sought potentially less violent and even non-violent means of social change. Grandin cites Liberation Theology, Chile's Popular Unity coalition that democratically elected Salvador Allende as President, and the coalitions being formed in Central America during the 1980s that appeared as the promise of a truly new form of social change. Lamentably, in retrospect, all of these now make up part of the list of the failed revolutionary projects of the Sixties. Regardless of the extent to which violence was employed for their ends, it was through the unbelievably cruel measures of state sponsored violence, backed most notably by the CIA with its rigid Cold War logic, that these projects were defeated and their supporters annihilated (Grandin 3–5). As such, there is no direct correlation between the degree of violence employed by revolutionaries and the degree of violence by which counterrevolutionaries respond or make pre-emptive strikes.

All of this is to say that politics was a violent undertaking in the Sixties, regardless of one's engagement with violent means. When violence, whether it be revolutionary or counterrevolutionary, becomes the blockage that impedes politics—defined as the potential for dissent—then the need to explore the ethics of the politics of going unnoticed begins to unfold. Whereas violence was theorized and practiced as the predominant means toward a particular end—both creating a revolution for radical social change and stopping such change from taking place—the practice of going unnoticed is a means of engaging in dissent with no *a priori* ends in sight. The highly politicized spaces within which those who go unnoticed embark on an errant itinerary are now characterized as being full of violent threats. Those who go unnoticed slide against and across the lines of thought that viewed revolutionary and

counterrevolutionary violence as the only conditions of possibility for transcending capitalism or for eliminating the red threat. In what follows, I will detail the ways in which going unnoticed opens the possibility for dialogue along its errant route, and how this exposure that is the end or the failure of the practice of going unnoticed is irreducible to the narratives of the failure of Leftist politics in the Sixties. Instead, the failure brought about by the exposure of those who had gone unnoticed and are now being perceived impedes the creation of any new hegemonic project and guarantees the possibility for future dissent as others then go about going unnoticed or developing other political and ethical practices of their own.

The Repetition of Violence

Calvert Casey's short story, "La ejecución" 'The Execution,' begins with an epigraph from Franz Kafka's *The Trial*: "¿Y el proceso comienza de nuevo? — preguntó K. casi incrédulo—. Evidentemente —respondió el pintor" "And the case begins all over again?" asked K. almost incredulously. 'Certainly,' said the painter." (Casey, *El regreso y otros* 193; Kafka 159). At this moment in Kafka's novel, K. is speaking with the painter who explains the intricate details and possibilities of the legal system that has ensnared K. In particular, what can begin all over again is the process of ostensible acquittal; if K. is acquitted in this scenario, he would be free temporarily, only to be arrested and put on trial again. As K. suspects, the artist clarifies that this is an unending process: "The second acquittal is followed by the third arrest, the third acquittal by the fourth arrest, and so on. That is implied in the very conception of ostensible acquittal" (160). This option appears to be the most likely scenario in which K. could be acquitted of the crimes of which he knows nothing, but it is also the option that never leads to a final and permanent verdict. In the end, K. is killed upon being found guilty of an unnamed crime. And Casey's short story begins by going back to this infinite cycle of arrests and verdicts that can only come to an end with an execution.

"La ejecución" was first published as the final short story in *El regreso y otros relatos* in 1967 with the Spanish publishing house, Seix Barral. This new collection is an expanded edition of *El regreso*, which he had published in 1962 with the Cuban publishing house, Ediciones R. Casey returns to the short stories of *El regreso* and adds to them a story that returns to Kafka's *The Trial*. Also, Casey wrote a brief

review of Kafka's *The Castle* in *Memorias de una isla*, titled "Kafka," in which he declares that there is "una literatura antes de Kafka y otra después de él" 'a literature before Kafka and another one after him' (77). In addition to the epigraph, the plot of Casey's narrative generally repeats that of *The Trial*. In Casey's text, Mayer is arrested in his home one evening, taken to a police station to declare his innocence or guilt, thrown in jail, put on trial, and executed in the final paragraph. However, "La ejecución" is not a simple copy of *The Trial*, nor is it a farcical repetition of what was at first a tragedy. Casey's text is not a radical departure from or an ironic undermining of Kafka's novel in the way that Filloy and Derrida rewrite Plato. I propose to read Casey's Mayer as someone who learned from Kafka's K. that it is futile to participate in a legal apparatus built to take away the accused's potentiality. Instead, Mayer enacts his potentiality by refusing to participate in the process altogether.

As if the title and the Kafkian epigraph were not enough to determine the unfortunate fate of Mayer, the first sentence announces his impending arrest: "Una hora antes de que se produjera la detención, el teléfono sonó" 'One hour before his arrest, the telephone rang' (193). When Mayer answers the phone, no one responds; he only hears silence coming through the telephone line, until he hears that "colgaban suavemente" 'they carefully hung up the phone' (194). The scene repeats itself a few minutes later, and Mayer assumes this is some sort of prank phone call. Upon hearing them hang up again, he goes back to his solitary evening that the narrator describes as his "veladas a oscuras" 'evening events in the dark' (195). Like many of Casey's protagonists, Mayer also prefers to be left alone in the dim light where no one can easily see or bother him: "Para aprovechar estas horas había cubierto con papeles

opacos los cristales por donde podía filtrarse la luz de la calle” ‘In order to enjoy this time of day, he had covered the windows with opaque paper that could filter the street light’ (195). In the softly lit room, Mayer goes back to his nightly routine.

The phone rings for a third time. He answers, but this time he does not say anything. He listens for any sound, “tratando de penetrar el silencio” ‘trying to penetrate the silence’: “Pero el más absoluto silencio reinaba en el lugar desde donde llamaban” ‘But the most absolute silence prevailed from where they were calling him’ (196). Across the telephone lines, only silences are being transmitted between an unknown other and a seemingly unimportant protagonist who has suddenly become the focus of Casey’s fiction. The silence being communicated across the telephone lines, especially when read alongside Casey’s other narratives, begins to acquire an extraordinary importance, signalling a sudden shift in his life. While listening to the silence, Mayer looks around his room: “Sin que pudiera precisar qué exactamente, creyó notar que algo había cambiado de modo imperceptible en los objetos que le rodeaban” ‘Unable to specify what exactly had happened, he believed to notice that something about the objects that surrounded him had changed in an imperceptible way’ (196). The silent phone calls subtly, almost imperceptibly penetrate Mayer’s home like the filtered street light. He begins to sneak around the room on his tip toes so as to not make any more sounds, but the silence acquires a new, threatening dimension:

Sus ojos exploraron la oscuridad. De nuevo le asaltó la idea, fugaz e inexplicable —aquello no dejaba de ser una broma— de que todo era diferente, de que cada objeto, cada libro de su minúscula biblioteca, cada uno

de sus muebles mal pintados y feos, había sufrido un cambio profundo y que lejos de sosegarle como antes, lo amenazaba de una manera vaga pero formidable. (198)

‘His eyes explored the darkness. Again the fleeting, unexplainable idea struck him (still this seemed to be a prank) that everything was different, that each object, each book in his tiny library, each poorly painted, ugly piece of furniture, had undergone a proud change. Far from soothing him like before, it was threatening him in a vague, but formidable way.’

This possible prank has begun to alter his perspective. The silent caller now appears as a threat to him, and he is correct to begin to worry. Very soon after noticing this imperceptible change while peering into the darkness—like Agamben’s contemporaries—three police officers knock at his door, arrest him, and take him to the police station. The silent telephone calls were, in the end, a sign of what was already underway—Mayer’s arrest and prosecution after being framed for a crime.

Up to this point, Kafka’s novel seems to have been resituated within Casey’s fictional universe that is populated by unnoticed protagonists and seemingly unimportant details that subtly, yet radically transform a space or a character’s perception. Casey purposefully calls attention with the epigraph to the ways in which his narrative recalls and rewrites from the Sixties a novel by Kafka that is contemporaneous with the historical avant-gardes. In this sense, Casey’s short story can be read in the context of the neo-avant-gardes that Hal Foster analyzes in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. To return to his argument, Foster claims that there is a “deferred temporality of artistic signification”

(8). This is to say that the ruptures and transformations enacted by the historical avant-gardes were not immediately apparent; rather, it was not until the neo-avant-gardes of the mid-twentieth century that their significance was better comprehended. By returning to these historical avant-gardes, writers and artists in the Sixties, for example, can reconfigure their chronological predecessors at their point of failure—their institutionalization—but without the promise of emancipation or happiness inscribed in modernist aesthetic theories.

Casey's narrative does not rewrite the ending in which Mayer is set free; both K. and Mayer die in the end. In my view, Casey returns to *The Trial* at the point at which K. fails to realize his lack of potentiality within the legal apparatus that has already decided to convict and kill him. The narrator in Kafka's novel explains K.'s attempt to remain alert while preparing his defense: "He accepted it as a fundamental principle for an accused man to be always forearmed, never to let himself be caught napping, never to let his eyes stray unthinkingly to the right when his judge was looming up on the left—and against that very principle he kept offending again and again" (164). K. thinks he knows what he must do to succeed, but as the privileged reader who knows that he will fail to be acquitted, K.'s attempts only to sustain the illusion that there is a possible way out of this situation. K.'s major failure may be said to be his inability to comprehend that his potentiality—the ability to do and to refuse to do—has been irrevocably blocked. Despite all his attempts, K. is radically prohibited from doing or refusing to do anything to save himself.

In contrast, Mayer does not attempt to fight his accusers. When he is asked to sign a confession that had been written for him by a police officer, he does not even

read it first: “Mayer firmó rápidamente donde se le indicaba” ‘Mayer signed quickly where they indicated’ (201). He makes no attempt to fight these claims, and he even worries about the well-being of one of the guards. Whereas K. insists on the need to remain vigilant, Mayer finds the silence and darkness of his jail cell to be comforting. Trying to recreate his nightly routine from his jail cell, he covers the small window with a blanket “hasta obtener una oscuridad casi completa” ‘to make it almost completely dark’ (201). In his cell, “se acostó y se quedó profundamente dormido” ‘he laid down and fell into a deep sleep’ (201). Instead of repeating K.’s frantic itinerary through back alleys and courtrooms in the attics, Mayer tries to get some rest and relaxation in his jail cell. He later learns that his signature has been forged on a thick stack of documents, and that these were the proof being used to accuse him of a crime. He never publicly claims that these are forgeries, nor does he defend himself in court. His only worry seems to be to leave the glaring lights of the offices in the jail to return to his dark cell: “El resplandor del salón le había producido un vivo ardor en los ojos” ‘The room’s brightness caused a sharp burning sensation in his eyes’ (207). Once more, the electric bulbs harm the protagonist. It is as if he knows all too well how futile K.’s efforts were, how vulnerable K. had become under the harsh lights of the enigmatic legal apparatus that had ensnared him; Mayer seems to know he is living a repetition of those events in another time and place and that there is no way out of this cycle. Since fighting the system is futile, his only potential political gesture, a highly imperfect solution, is to reclaim his potentiality by refusing to participate earnestly in the legal process that has already banned him to a jail cell and abandoned him there.

The debates that attempted to define the political role of literature and culture in the Sixties is by now a commonplace, if not clichéd, theme. In *Entre la pluma y el fusil*, Gilman summarizes the contours of these polemics. On the one hand, there was the paradox that intellectuals were expected to be the “portavoces de una vaga pero extendida urgencia de transformación social” ‘mouthpieces of a vague, but broad need for social transformation’ while simultaneously developing a literature and a marketplace that would be able “constituir una verdadera literatura latinoamericana” ‘to constitute a true Latin American literature’ (30). Somehow, literature should be capable of both giving rise to anticapitalist revolutions—or bolstering the revolutions once they take place—and create new markets for selling and circulating literature. On the other hand, Gilman explains that these intellectual debates sought “movilizar una fuerte voluntad normativa” ‘to mobilize a strong, normative will’ (31). The various round-table discussions like the ones I analyzed that took place in *Lunes de Revolución* with Pablo Neruda, Nazim Hikmet, and Nathalie Sarraute can be seen as examples of the types of debates by which radically different intellectuals sought to come to an agreement on exactly what their role should be. However, according to Gilman, this would prove to be an impossible task in general: “La institución de un programa común fue imposible y la eufórica cohesión inicial de un bloque de escritores finalizó con la constatación de que eran más sus desacuerdos que sus consensos” ‘The institutionalization of a shared program was impossible, and the initial euphoric cohesion of a group of writers ended up proving only that their disagreements outweighed their agreements’ (31). The “acuerdos provisorios” ‘provisional agreements’ with which the era begins, break down into “violencia

polémica” ‘violent polemics’ (32). Julio Cortázar, for example, dismisses from Paris the revolutionary potential of the Peruvian writer and anthropologist José María Arguedas. In Cuba, many of the writers from the *Lunes* group, including Casey, leave the island, and when considered in retrospect after the Padilla Affair, this seems to have been an intelligent decision.⁴⁸

Literature in the Sixties was to be a literature that explicitly declares its ideological position as it contributes to the visibilization of Latin America’s aesthetic modernization. However, going unnoticed is a politics and an ethics that errs away from these normative debates on the role of literature, while taking place within these debates, just like Casey at first errs slightly from the party line, while proclaiming his place within the Cuban Revolution. By the time “La ejecución” was published, he had fled from Cuba and its moralizing, normative demands on both his writing and his sexuality. Even as Casey goes into exile, his texts remain within the threshold characterized by the swirling lights and shadows within which his protagonists still move. From this space, his writing acquires a political and ethical role by breaking with the failed, violent, and normative debates on the role of writing in the era.

The point at which Mayer refuses to contest the charges falsely brought against him is also the point at which Casey’s text returns to Kafka’s narrative—part of the historical avant-garde—and transforms it after understanding the way in which K. had lost his potential after being abandoned by the law. Mayer comprehends what happened to K.; Casey repeats the avant-garde and draws conclusions from it,

⁴⁸ See Marcela Croce, ed., *Polémicas intelectuales en América Latina. Del “meridiano intelectual” al caso Padilla (1927–1971)* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Simurg, 2006) for a selection of primary texts and analyses of the Cortázar-Arguedas polemic and of the Padilla Affair.

offering a different reaction to the situation, even if he could not offer a different ending. Instead of attempting to dismantle the legal apparatus or to find a loop hole by which to secure his freedom—as in the apocalyptic gestures of the historical avant-garde that sought to destroy institutions—Mayer simply refuses to participate in the system. This is his political gesture, his means without ends. Mayer awaits his execution by creating a temporary refuge so that he can sleep and pace in the darkened jail cell where the harsh lights of the jail’s offices and the courtrooms cannot reach him.

Though this particular short story ends with Mayer’s death and his failure to truly break out of this legal apparatus’s cycle of arrests and verdicts, his political refusal to participate points toward the ethical potential of the politics of going unnoticed. It will be necessary to read other texts by Casey, Filloy, Manjarrez, and Somers to further develop the ethics that becomes possible when one stops going unnoticed and finally opens a gap within this type of unending cycle of violence that is justified through an exceptional legal apparatus that has become the rule. What I argue is that this ethics takes place when those who go unnoticed open themselves to being perceived by an other while simultaneously refusing to participate in any violent, normative struggle for hegemony.

Monodialoguing Together

Posología: El lector no debe ‘administrarse’ más que un monodialogo por día.

‘Dosage: The reader should not “take” more than one monodialogue per day.’

—Juan Filloy, *Yo, yo y yo (Monodialogos paranoicos)* (10).

Juan Filloy’s *Yo, yo y yo (Monodialogos paranoicos)* opens with an “Exordio” ‘Exordium’ by which he frames a description of the short stories that comprise this collection. The narrator warns against overdosing on monodialogues, Filloy’s neologism for the rhetorical structure that links the seven short stories of this collection. While each monodialogue slightly varies in its number of speakers and interlocutors, the general structure is comprised of one person, always a man, who dominates the entire discussion while ignoring most of what is said by the others, when not directly insulting them or ordering them to do as he wishes. There is no real dialogue here, only a dominant speaker and his interlocutors who must submit to his authority. These monodialogues do not and cannot play an active role in the politics of going unnoticed. However, by reading the irony that undermines the authoritarian logic of the monodialogue, an alternative to this moralizing and violent struggle for power can be imagined. This alternative is what I call the ethics of being perceived.

The monodialogue takes place somewhere between the solitary monologue and the communal dialogue when a character like Maximiliano Consideransky is interrupted during his solitary walks up and down his spiraling cave-tower. Other characters are present, like the reporter and his mule, but they exercise little to no influence over the stream of thought spoken out loud by the male speaker. The dominant speaker rambles on, always for long paragraphs, while his interlocutors are

never given the opportunity to say more than a few sentences. When they make requests to speak, if they are not blatantly ignored, they are shut up:

—Pido la palabra.

—La tengo todavía. No me interrumpa. (“Yo y la madre patria” 32)

‘—Allow me to speak.

—I have the floor. Do not interrupt me.’

And if they assert themselves, they are often insulted:

—Si usted se empeña, iré. Que decidan mis compañeros. A mí la fiesta me gusta. La frivolidad es la espuma de lo profundo. Lo afirma un pensador local.

—Cretino. ¿Qué sabe ese cretino? A lo mejor es un tipo de esos que confunden trivialidad con superficialidad.

—Yo también la confundo. Ergo....

—Ergo, usted también es un cretino. Lo superficial es siempre algo muy serio. (“Yo y los subterráneos” 109)

‘—If you don’t back off, I’m leaving. Allow my friends to decide. I like the party. Frivolity is the foam floating above a great depth. A local intellectual says as much.

—Idiot. What does that idiot know? At best he’s one of those who confuse triviality with superficiality.

— As do I. Ergo....

— Ergo, you’re an idiot, too. The superficial is always very serious.’

In other instances, the interlocutors' reactions are transcribed in the text as nothing more than ellipses, at times shown to be an emphatic silence with exclamations points:

—... (“Yo y los anónimos” 77)

—¡...! (“Yo y el arquitecto” 16)

As a rule, the interlocutors are only allowed to participate within the monodialogue when they ask questions that allow the dominant speaker to continue or to clarify his thoughts; only the interlocutor who appeases the dominant speaker is respected within the monodialogue's asymmetrical power relations.

In this sense, the monodialogue can be compared—in contrast to those who engage in open dialogues—to Foucault's definition of the polemicist,:

Questions and answers depend on a game—a game that is at once pleasant and difficult—in which each of the two partners takes pains to use only the rights given him by the other and by the accepted form of the dialogue.

The polemicist, on the other hand, proceeds encased in privileges that he possesses in advance and will never agree to question. On principle, he possesses rights authorizing him to wage war and making that struggle a just undertaking; the person he confronts is not a partner in the search for the truth but an adversary, an enemy who is wrong, who is harmful, and whose very existence constitutes a threat. (“Polemics” 111–112)

The polemicist develops a moral framework by which the other must be brought over to the side of the polemicist or otherwise eradicated, since any opposition constitutes a threat to the polemicist's power. It is not haphazard that the monodialogue in “Yo y

los intrusos” concludes with Konsideransky shouting insults at the reporter and threatening to do him serious harm. The power dynamic in the monodialogue, like that of the polemic, easily leads to violent action against an other who has been degraded through the moralizing discourse of the dominant speaker.

The exordium at the beginning of this collection, with its concluding dosage recommendations—only “take” one monodialogue per day—highlights the monodialogue’s adverse side effects. Administering too many of these monodialogues, the narrative voice of the exordium suggests, will only cause you harm, especially when “taken” or read in quick succession. In this sense, these texts have become something like Derrida’s *pharmakon*, the writing which is simultaneously a “poison” and a “remedy” (“Plato’s” 98). In engaging in too many monodialogues, one can literally overdose on this written drug, this violent power play between unequal antagonists. Even to observe such violence as an impartial reader might cause a great deal of harm. However, the remedy may also lie within this poison.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas theorizes the discursive interactions between a self and an other, which I paraphrase here in broad strokes. There are two general approaches to establishing this interaction, both of which require language. The totalizing approach is the one that “reduces the other to the same” (42). To totalize an other is to approach an other and attempt to eliminate the other’s alterity, to swallow up the other by annihilating anything that stands out as different from the self. The totalizing self “approaches the other not to face him, but obliquely [...] and across all its artifices goes unto the Other, solicits his yes” (70).

The dominant speakers in Filloy's monologues approach their interlocutors in this way. Konsideransky, for example, aggressively defends his particular values and point of view as the only ones worthy of attention, and he simultaneously attacks the values and opinions held by the others. If they do not concede to his authority, they are demoralized as improper and inauthentic agents of a lesser or evil will.

In contrast, "infinity" is the concept Levinas employs to reveal the untraversable distance that always separates a self from an other and demonstrates that every other is irreducible to any self. This distance does not mean that there is no means by which a self and an other could relate to one another. Levinas insists that language can serve as this medium for the infinite, but only in certain circumstances: "Mediation (characteristic of Western philosophy) is meaningful only if it is not limited to reducing distances. For how could intermediaries reduce the intervals between terms infinitely distant?" (44). An infinite distance can never be traversed, and for Levinas the ethical relationship is the face to face interaction that recognizes the impossibility of fully reaching the other, of speaking for the other, and of reducing the other to the self's experience and knowledge. Language can be the remedy, in the form of dialogue, if it limits its function to that of an imperfect medium that allows for a self and an other to approach one another face to face.

In this context, writing for Derrida and language for Levinas can alternately be used as a poison that reduces the other's alterity through violence and as a remedy that allows for dialogue between a self and an other. These two modes of conceiving of writing and of language can be aligned with the two modes I proposed for reading "Yo y los intrusos"; there is both a literal and an ironic reading. In the literal reading,

the monodialogue, in this sense, can stand as a supplement for the debates surrounding the proper place of literature in the revolution and of writing in the Sixties. The dominant speaker becomes the sovereign who only speaks via decree, like Gustavo Díaz Ordaz and Fidel Castro when they claim that no one has rights against Mexico and Cuba, respectively. The sovereign, in this sense, is the legal and moral judge. He can morally degrade the other by appealing to absolute universal categories in order to ban the other as an agent of evil who subsequently can be abandoned by the law like Agamben's *homo sacer*. Writing and language in this monodialogic sense serve only to poison and exclude the other. In the ironic reading, in contrast, the monodialogue can also come to supplant this violent, moralizing power play and point toward a remedy. When the ironic reading of "Yo y los intrusos" demonstrates that all of Konsideransky's propositions are impossible within the cultural landscape of the Sixties, then the text opens itself to the possibility of there being an alternative political and ethical relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor. This alternative will be characterized by its respect for the infinite distance separating any and all of the participants in a dialogue, but for now I have only provided a negative example of this ethics.

I must clarify one point. To state that Konsideransky's monodialogue in the case of "Yo y los intrusos" is not what I mean by ethics does not mean that the reporter's strategies are necessarily better or ethical. The reporter also uses language as a means for totalizing Konsideransky's biography when he records, transmits, and disseminates his invasive interview around the country without Konsideransky's consent. My argument is not premised on an inversion of the ordering of dominant

and subaltern subjects, nor will it be my intention to label certain subjects as good and others as bad. This would be yet another moral judgment that has no place in the ethics I study here. The monodialogue, therefore, is one of many ways in which language is used for totalizing purposes, and those who find themselves on the subordinate side of the monodialogue are not by default the ethical counterweight to the dominant speaker's violent means for achieving a particular end.

Distinguishing between morals and ethics is tricky, since almost everyone who uses these terms defines them differently. They are frequently used as synonyms, and their connotations vary drastically from one context to another. When teaching the distinction between morals and ethics, my undergraduate students tend to associate morality and moral values with religious, national, or other forms of identity-based appeals for appropriate behavior; they understand "ethics" as the buzzword of the business world as it establishes a variety of codes of conduct for its employees. I think this is a good yardstick for measuring common sense understanding of such terms today. For my purposes, however, this common sense distinction names more or less equivalent practices by which one group tells its members and others how they ought to behave. In philosophy, rulebooks for behavior are studied and developed under the umbrella term, "normative ethics," which encompasses three main subfields: 1) virtue ethics,⁴⁹ which emphasizes virtue or

⁴⁹ Virtue ethics is founded primarily upon the works of Aristotle, especially his *Nicomachean Ethics* in which he explores virtue of character as that which guides moral action. In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes postulates mankind's "state of nature" as the proclivity toward violence and war, the opposite of the virtuous character. In his wake, David Hume insists, in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, on the innate goodness of humankind, thus reviving the possibility of virtue ethics in the eighteenth century.

moral character as the foundation for good actions; 2) consequentialism,⁵⁰ which focuses on the outcomes of actions; and 3) deontology,⁵¹ which determines duties and obligations (Hursthouse n.pag.; Sinnott-Armstrong n.pag.; Alexander and Moore n. pag.). Despite their specific perspectives, each of these three branches is concerned with establishing the boundaries by which virtuous or moral actions are defined. This outline, although hasty, can serve as a guiding map for a variety of ethical theories that do not interest me at present; as a shorthand, I prefer to label all such theories and rulebooks under the term “morals.”

In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophical investigations target precisely this type of morality through genealogical and etymological explorations that critique moral values by calling into question their “intrinsic worth” (155). Instead of accepting the concept that good actions are universally so, Nietzsche claims that “the origin of the opposites *good* and *bad* is to be found in the pathos of nobility and distance, representing the dominant temper of a higher, ruling class in relation to a lower, dependent one” (160). His argument is that

⁵⁰ Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, as the founders of utilitarianism, stand as the classical figures of consequentialism. Bentham’s *An Introduction to the Principles of Moral Legislation* underscores mankind’s search for pleasure over pain, while Mill’s *Utilitarianism* seeks to establish a sort of hierarchy among those pleasures. For both philosophers, moral actions are those which bring about the greatest pleasures for the greatest good; the consequences of actions, not the virtue of character or the intentions of the moral agent, are what determine the ethical value of an action.

⁵¹ Kant’s “categorical imperative” is the classic example of deontology; moral action is a duty, an imperative, that must be carried out, and it is categorical insofar as “my maxim should become a universal law” (*Groundwork* 14). In contradistinction to the previous two branches, Kant’s is not founded on the innate, virtuous character of the agent, nor does it depend solely on the outcome of an agent’s decisions, since neither the immediate nor the long-term effects of any actions can ever be known at the moment one makes a decision. For Kant, only the moment one makes a decision can be judged morally.

the concept of “the good” was not something attributed to oneself by an outsider’s perspective, but rather an internally applied term by which a ruling class legitimized its claim to power. In order to sustain this argument, he explores the etymology of the word “good”: “The basic concept is always *noble* in the hierarchical, class sense, and from this has developed, by historical necessity, the concept *good* embracing nobility of mind, spiritual distinction” (162). Similarly, the Greek aristocracy “speak of themselves as ‘the truthful’” (163). He continues by showing how that which was “common,” “plebian,” or “base” similarly developed into synonyms of “the bad,” while the aristocratic values historically constructed as “the good” became more or less the same values assumed as moral and virtuous by the priestly caste (162–167). While he ultimately reduces the question of moral values to class distinctions, Nietzsche’s analysis lays the groundwork for interpreting “the good” and “the bad” not as universal categories, as thinkers from Plato to Kant have argued, but rather as historically contingent values that structure a society through the belief that one’s own community *is* good, while those who oppose this group *are* bad or evil. According to Nietzsche, the good is nothing more than that which an individual or society declares as its will, and the bad or evil is that which opposes this individual or collective will to power.

Nietzsche’s philosophy can be said to have cleared the ground for the type of genealogical work later carried out by Foucault and Agamben. In “What is Enlightenment?,” Foucault proposes an ethos of what he understands to be a common philosophical project in the twentieth century—understanding what the Enlightenment is and what relationship it has with notions of modernity. He argues

that one must consider one's historically determined relationship to the Enlightenment, but without being “‘for’ or ‘against’ the Enlightenment”: “one must refuse everything that might present itself in the form of a simplistic and authoritarian alternative” (313). Once the supposedly universal categories of, for example, good and evil are determined to be historically contingent, it becomes possible to refuse to participate in making such moral choices. Instead of adopting an attitude of rejection—of casting aside what is labelled “bad” or “evil”—he proposes adopting a “limit-attitude” that can move beyond the “outside-inside alternative” or beyond any other simplistic and authoritarian binary, whether they be political or ethical in nature (315). This brings Foucault to his well-known genealogical and archaeological methods for studying what is historical and contingent without pretending to rise to the level of a universal perspective. This refusal to name, divide, and cast aside as if from a universally true moral standpoint serves as a necessary attitude for the ethics of being perceived.

Nietzsche's philosophy also underlies, albeit indirectly, Ernesto Laclau's essay on the empty signifier in its relationship to the theory of hegemony he developed with Chantal Mouffe.⁵² The empty signifier is “a signifier without a signified”; this is to say that it is neither equivocal (i.e., arbitrary and thus simply interchangeable in different contexts) nor ambiguous (i.e., underdetermined or overdetermined and thus floating about because it has yet to be properly fixed) (Laclau “Why” 36). The empty signifier does not signify any actual concept or thing. Nevertheless, it demarcates the true limits of a hegemonic order, and these limits

⁵² See Mouffe and Laclau, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. (London: Verso, 1985).

“presuppose exclusion” and are “always antagonistic” (37). This is a very dense essay, but I believe its main tenets can be synthesized quite well. The empty signifier is the term inscribed around a group of differential identities by a particular individual in his will to organize them as a community over which he will have power. Once this exclusive boundary has been marked by the empty signifier—examples of which include “revolution,” “freedom,” “religious values,” or “patriotism”—this particular individual secures his hegemony by insisting on the universality of his ideological and moral values. His values are easily set in opposition to all those who remain excluded from this individual’s sovereign space.⁵³

Those who are included in this space come to share a common identity, valued as good, and in agreement with Nietzsche, Laclau explains that what “is beyond the exclusion delimiting the communitarian space—the repressive power—will count less as the instrument of particular differential repressions and will express pure anti-community, pure evil and negation” (42). By emptying such signifiers of all content, the hegemonic individual assumes a universal position of power over the “we” (“we, the revolutionaries,” “we, the free,” “we, the morally good”) inscribed within the limits of these empty signifiers as opposed to the “them” who are excluded and negatively valued as “our” evil enemy. Previously, I showed how Casey struggled to situate his defense of Pasternak within a similar communitarian group delimited by

⁵³ In Filloy’s *Vil & Vil*, the narrator calls attention to other instances of signifiers that, in the Sixties, no longer have the same, everyday meaning as they did in the past: “Deber-Honor-Patria: palabras símbolos. Se impone una semántica nueva para modificar y actualizar conceptos perimidos. El sentido común no los acepta como otrora integrando una heráldica de abnegación y heroísmo” ‘Duty-Honor-Homeland: symbolic words. A new semantics is being imposed to modify and update antiquated concepts. Common sense no longer accepts them as in bygone days as the heraldry of self-sacrifice and heroism. (138).

the phrase “we, the committed,” which now stands out as an empty signifier. It was absolutely necessary for intellectuals living in Cuba in the Sixties to proclaim their position within this group and have that position recognized by others; only such recognition would allow these potentially bourgeois intellectuals to be both ideologically and morally inscribed within the sovereign space of the Cuban Revolution.

From this, there are three conclusions to be highlighted. First, Laclau further opens Nietzsche’s insistence on class distinctions as the primary foundation of moral values; Laclau’s theory of hegemony and empty signifiers allows for the moral claims of what is good (“us,” the proper) and what is bad (“them,” the improper)—otherwise known as normative ethics—to be interpreted within a broader context that also includes exclusions based on gender, sexuality, race, and any other mode of ideological identity, as they intersect with and reinforce class distinctions. Second, these theories demonstrate that moral values are not autonomous, intrinsic to individuals, or universal; they constitute a necessary component of securing the hegemonic status of any individual who exercises his will to power. Third, from here it becomes clear that there is a definitive connection between the way in which both hegemonic orders and moral communities constitute one another through language and violence. Whether it is through Laclau’s empty signifiers or the monologues in Filloy’s writing, language can function as the poisonous, totalizing tool that orders exclusions and legitimizes claims to universality.

With that said, it will now be possible to better clarify the terms “politics” and “ethics” as I understand them here. “Politics” in the present study is not a synonym

for “will to power” as in Nietzsche or for “hegemony” as in Laclau. Instead, I defined politics in the previous chapter as a gesture (borrowing from Agamben’s definition as a means without ends) that produces an opening for dissent and disagreement within a democratic framework (borrowing in part from Rancière’s *The Politics of Aesthetics*, but mostly from Mouffe’s *The Democratic Paradox*). Similarly, for my purposes “ethics” will not be the equivalent of any “morality” or “moral code,” nor anything that resembles a “normative ethics” built on empty signifiers.

Instead, ethics will have no such moralizing or universalizing point of departure. In *The Coming Community*, Agamben makes this claim for ethics by building on Foucault’s refusal of universal thinking:

The fact that must constitute the point of departure for any discourse on ethics is that there is no essence, no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that humans must enact or realize. This is the only reason why something like an ethics can exist, because it is clear that if humans were or had to be this or that substance, this or that destiny, no ethical experience would be possible—there would be only tasks to be done. (43)

The ethics that develops alongside the politics of going unnoticed is not an attempt to constitute an exclusive distinction between good and bad actions, between the proper and the improper, between the norm and the exception, or between us and them. Nor does it intend to prescribe a path of action that must be followed in all circumstances. Rather, I will show it to be an attempt to guarantee the conditions of possibility for an inclusive political space wherein dissent and disagreement among individuals and communities can take place by opening every exclusive, political and moral binary.

Before continuing to my analysis, I would also like to address the recent attempts to dismiss or discredit what has been labeled “the ethical turn” in literary and cultural studies. The most visible voice in this debate has been that of Jacques Rancière in the final chapter of *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, titled “The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics.” In my view, Rancière engages in a fairly reductive reading—without direct quotes—of Agamben’s theory of the *homo sacer* and the state of exception; he makes the generalized claim that Agamben’s critics frequently make by insisting that for Agamben “All differences simply disappear in the law of a global situation” (120). Rancière’s complaint is that Agamben is one of many voices that insist on turning to past catastrophes, in particular to the Holocaust, and therefore he says Agamben creates a new consensus that “erases the difference between henchmen and victims, including even that between the extreme crimes of the Nazi State and the ordinary everyday life of our democracies” (120).

I find this synthesis to be purposefully misleading and one that makes no attempt to grapple with the real complexity and nuanced nature of Agamben’s thought. Opening a threshold space between binaries does not so easily erase the differences between the henchmen and the victim, for example. Previously, I elaborated on the historical specificity that Agamben’s theory acquires and on his methodology of employing paradigms; in what follows, I expand on just how this supposed erasure of differences between the good guys and the bad guys is not for the sake of leading to a generalized consensus, not for the sake of erasing the real violence and trauma of catastrophic events, nor does it require a relativistic stance on

morality.⁵⁴ Rather, his thought takes up Nietzsche's questioning of such consensual categories of good and evil and allows me to think through other possibilities for ethics today. More than simply defending Agamben's theories, ones that certainly should not be accepted blindly, when I turn to ethics to think through the politics of going unnoticed, it is not for the sake of simply returning to a past trauma or catastrophe or establishing a consensus about the expediency of literature for denouncing or mourning that past. This would be to engage in what Rancière disdains as the ethical turn (130).

Instead, I prefer to think of Simon Critchley's somewhat ambiguous maxim that "If ethics without politics is empty, then politics without ethics is blind" (*Infinitely* 13). This is to say, as I understand it for my purposes here, I find it productive to consider a crossroads of politics and ethics. On the one hand, this allows me to consider an ethics that does not simply become a universal theory of virtuous behavior. On the other, the politics of going unnoticed—defined here as a practice of engaging in the same sort of democratic dissensus that Rancière, but not only Rancière, desires—can acquire an ethical consistency that refuses any moralizing consensus-building and that negates any isolation of individual ambitions that show no regard for others. Thus, a consideration of the ethical consistency of such a dissensual politics is without a doubt necessary. To adequately define what I mean here by "ethics," then, will require a bit more work. In what follows, I turn to

⁵⁴ More than in *Remnants of Auschwitz*, the only book to which Rancière's essay refers, Agamben's writings on ethics take place and gain a much more nuanced set of details in *Potentialities*, *Nudities*, *Means without Ends*, *Opus Dei: An Archaeology of Duty*, and *The Coming Community*.

three novels, Filloy's *Vil & Vil*, Somers's *De miedo en miedo*, and Manjarrez's *Lapsus (Algunos actos fallidos)* to carry out this task.

Opening Pandemonium

Juan Filloy's *Vil & Vil: La gata parida* (1975), published originally by the Macció Hnos. Editores in Río Cuarto, Argentina, lies at the temporal extreme of the works I study here. According to Mónica Ambort's interview, Filloy had already attempted to publish it in 1968, but did not find a publisher until 1975, a year before the military coup that established the "Proceso de Reorganización Nacional" in 1976 (163). For this reason, I situate it within this study of the Sixties. After the coup in 1976, Filloy was arrested and interrogated about its contents. He was eventually released after convincing the military officers that the ideas expressed in the novel were only those of his fictional characters, not his own, which he has since said was a lie (Ambort 163–165). Told from the perspective of a conscript, the novel follows a General who plots and executes a military coup against the government. Each chapter, divided into three sections, begins with a brief dialogue with the General. The second section of each chapter takes the form of the conscript's first-person narrative by which he provides contexts for those dialogues and advances the plot. The third section's more experimental structures read like excerpts from the conscript's journal, although this is not confirmed in the text; regardless, it is a less plot-driven, free-form space for reflection, whereas the first two sections maintain a consistent structure throughout the novel.

In the "Nota previa" 'Preliminary Note,' Filloy claims that his novel is "de anticipación" 'one that looks to the future':

Cronológicamente, sin embargo, está situada en una época tan cercana a nuestra actualidad que parecen confundirse. Quien quiera confundirse que se

confunda. [...] Por el curso que llevan las cosas en los países latinoamericanos, esta novela acontece a menudo y, forzosamente, variando detalles y circunstancias, acontecerá. (6)

Chronologically, however, it is situated in an era so close to our own that they appear to get mixed up. May whoever wants to confuse them feel free to do so. [...] Given the course of events in Latin America, this novel occurs frequently and, by changing a few details and circumstances, it necessarily will occur in the future.

The course of events to which he refers are the series of military coups ranging from the one that removed Juan Domingo Perón from power in Argentina in 1955 to the one against Arnulfo Arias in Panamá in 1968; this list, under the title “Historia reciente” ‘Recent History,’ appears on the previous page, in addition to the various references to Pinochet’s dictatorship made within the novel. In retrospect, it might be tempting to read this novel as one that foretells the coming of the terrorist state in Argentina. Filloy was certainly well versed in Latin American history and current events and able to see that his own country, which had already suffered various military coups during his lifetime, was headed along a similar path once more. For a man obsessed with patterns and repetitions—the palindromes, the seven-letter titles—it is no surprise that he noticed such clear historical patterns.

Nevertheless, *Vil & Vil* is much more than a vague premonition about future events. The General, like any leader of a military coup, is not a stranger to using violence as a means for victory; he insists on the need to “imponer la decencia” ‘impose decency’ (63), and he openly declares that “contra oposición, opresión”

‘against opposition, oppression’ (248). Once again, the sovereign decrees that violence will be employed as the solution for eliminating political opposition. However, the plot does not suggest the degree of violence that the events of 1976 entailed, nor does it foretell of the thousands of disappearances. Rather, in my view, this novel is successful insofar as it takes account of the generalized state of exception operating throughout Latin America in the era, and in the face of an impending, evident threat, it narrates the strategy by which an almost unnoticed military conscript imagines a potential line of flight away from the General’s power struggles.

The novel focuses on the antagonism between the narrator, who interrupted his studies at law school to fulfill his mandatory military service, and the General for whom the narrator works as secretary and chauffeur. Their public interaction can be characterized as the General’s attempt at ordering him and all others to do as he pleases. In Levinasian terms, it can be said that the General’s “universal thought is an ‘I think’” (*Totality* 36). The General exemplifies the universal ambitions of an individual point of view. He is the clear authority whose will may not be questioned, and he is only interested in conversing with others insofar as they help him achieve his own goals. The novel begins with the following dialogue between the two men:

—A ver, ese melenudo piojoso, que se apure.

—Grrmgrr...

—¡Cómo! ¿Qué dijiste? A ver, repetí lo que gruñiste, si sos macho.

—Znnsmmx...

—¿Pensás sobrarme, entonces? Desgraciado de mierda, te voy a romper el culo a patadas. (*Vil* 7)

‘—You, with the lousy, long hair. Hurry up.

—Grrmgrr...

—What! What did you say? Let’s have it. Repeat what you just grumbled if you’ve got the balls.

—Znnsmmx...

—You think you’re better than me? You fucking moron, I’m gonna kick you ass.’

These brief dialogues are further instances of the monodialogue. The first section of each chapter repeats the monodialogic structure wherein the General is the dominant speaker and all others, including the narrator, are forced to accept the General’s authority or face his wrath.

As the conscript later claims, “El diálogo es imposible en la escala militar. El diálogo implica paridad natural entre dos personas. [...] En la escala militar siempre hay un superior y un subalterno. El superior, por su propio status, no desciende ni condesciende a conversar amistosamente con inferiores” ‘Dialogue is impossible between military ranks. Dialogue implies a natural equality among two people. [...] In the ranks, there is always a superior and a subaltern. The superior, given his status, does not descend nor condescend to converse politely with inferiors’ (24). The General is particularly aggressive and has little patience for his interlocutors whom he frequently interrupts and insults. The monodialogue is his preferred rhetorical strategy for asserting his authority and imposing his will on others and eventually on the entire nation. However, in contrast to the monodialogues in *Yo, yo y yo*, the subordinate conscript is the narrator of this novel; his is the privileged perspective,

while the General's monologues are always the shortest of the three sections in each chapter. The conscript, who otherwise would be of so little historical importance within this plot to overthrow the government, always has two sections after the monologues in which he resists the General's attempts to flatten out his will and reduce it to his own. The conscript's perspective becomes another example of a voice that could so easily have been left unattended in the era, yet Filloy wrote a novel that exposes this particular voice.

The conscript would oppose the General's monologic authority, but given his circumstances, he has to reign in his antagonism. Early on, he says, "Deseo que ni siquiera se sospeche de mí" 'My goal is that they don't even suspect anything of me' (18). This attempt to not become the target of suspicion is part of the survival tactics that he has adopted, since he says he does not instinctively know how to behave in the military. He describes these tactics as a "capacidad teatral" 'theatrical ability' and recommends the following to his fellow conscripts: "lo principal que hay que hacer en el ejército es simular corrección. Cuanto más fiel la simulación del cumplimiento del deber, mejor" 'the most important thing one can do in the military is feign correctness. The more loyal one is to pretending to comply with one's duties, the better' (27). There is no doubt in his mind that "correctness" is simply the term the military's high command uses to signify unreflective obedience; as such, he does not actually aim *to be* correct or proper, but only *pretends* to be so. Appearances, not truth, are all that matter within the monologic relationship he has with the General.

Further, his use of the verb "simular" 'to feign, to pretend' strikes me as important within this dialogue of unnoticed texts I have been constructing, since it

shares a root with a word used in the title of Casey's "Notas de un simulador." The difference is that, in Casey's text, the narrator does not feign proper behavior; he simply attempts to avoid the public light, by going unnoticed, so that he can accompany people who would otherwise die alone. The only thing he pretends to be is a medical professional, but he does not actually hide his true intentions. In contrast, the conscript's performance of propriety is not an instance of going unnoticed, since this practice as I defined it is not the creation of a public mask or persona used to veil an underlying truth; the conscript is simply developing a survival tactic to imperfectly get by in the face of the General's ominous monologues.

The narrator opposes the General from the very beginning; he was drafted into the armed forces while preparing for a civilian life. This opposition is firmly cemented when the conscript accidentally overhears that the General is planning a coup against the democratically elected government: "Sin querer, capté *ese fragmento de conversación telefónica*" 'Accidentally I caught *that fragment of his telephone conversation*' (33 my italics). Indeed, this is almost verbatim the suggestion that Casey's narrator makes in "Notas de un simulador": "fragmentos de la conversación escuchada en el breve trayecto de un tranvía, un cruce en las líneas telefónicas, pueden darnos espléndidas claves" 'fragments of a conversation heard during the brief journey on a streetcar or a cross in the telephone lines can offer us splendid clues' (51–52). Filloy's novel duly attends to an otherwise unimportant voice, that of the conscript who, in turn, manages to pay attention to a fragment of a telephone conversation that he hears in passing and records in the sections of his narrative wherein he can begin to register his dissent.

The conscript hears the following: “Sí, claro. Preparamos la revolución porque la fuerza armada sin el poder no sirve para un corno. Le falta acción coercitiva. Carece de acción y dominio. No corta ni aprieta. Es como una tenaza a la cual le faltara uno de sus brazos...” ‘Yes, of course. We are preparing the revolution, because armed force without power is useless. It needs coercive action. Otherwise, it lacks action and dominion. It doesn’t cut or squeeze. It’s like a pair of pliers that’s missing one of its needles...’ (33). Since the narrator cannot do much about this plan that he accidentally overhears, he is limited to registering his dissent through writing. He challenges the General’s use of the term “revolución” ‘revolution’ to name his military coup by showing that it functions, in Laclau’s terms, as an empty signifier by which the General rallies the other interest groups around his particular will to total power. The conscript writes: “Alterar la costumbre de la esclavitud, por meras mudanzas de amos y patronos, de carteles y monopolios, es cipayismo cien por ciento. Fuera de la francesa, la norteamericana, la rusa y la china, no ha habido otras revoluciones en el mundo” ‘Altering the habits of slavery by simply changing owners and masters, cartels and monopolies, is politics in the service of foreign interests one hundred percent. Other than the French, the U.S., the Russian, and the Chinese, there have not been other revolutions in the world’ (220). The conscript highlights that the General is unable to see how he is simply operating within the same neocolonial structures of dependence on foreign interests against which a real revolution would fight; he is not, like Guevara or Sartre, ideally promoting a radical change in those power structures other than inserting himself at their highest national seat. At the same time, the Mexican and the Cuban Revolutions are also curiously excluded from this

list of true revolutions, since the conscript has no sympathies with the PRI's institutionalization of their solitary will to power nor with Castro's increasingly authoritarian state.

The conscript's relationship with the General, just like the reporter's relationship to Konderansky, cannot be reduced to one of the revolutionary hero versus the authoritarian villain in the way that the *barbudos* of the Cuban Revolution mythologized their opposition to Batista and U.S. foreign interests. Nor is this the case of Johnny, from Manjarrez's eponymous short story, in his fight against the bandits. As I interpret it, the repetition of the adjective in the title, *Vil & Vil*, literally announces the repulsive qualities of both the General and the conscript. Neither may claim moral superiority over the other. The General is a cruel, power-hungry man who does not hesitate to use force and violence to achieve his goals. The conscript, after all, was going to school to be a lawyer, and he has an affair with the General's wife; despite my own sympathies with his opposition to the General, he is not exactly the shining image of a philanthropic hero. Each is labeled with an equivalent descriptor, "vile," thus balancing out in moral terms the asymmetrical power relationship that their military titles create. Ultimately, the title announces that in this novel two mutually repulsive and antagonistic interests collide.

In *Paratexts*, Gérard Genette has studied how paratextual elements like the title constitute a "threshold" that "operate between text and off-text," framing a text for its readers and potentially influencing their reception of it (2). It is clear that Filloy as the author has judged these two characters in moral terms by calling them both "vile." Filloy can be said to have situated himself as the dominant speaker of a

monodialogue by which he morally condemns all of the characters and situations in his own novel. Both the General's and the conscript's claims to goodness, propriety, and authenticity are denied. It may seem counterintuitive to cultivate an ethics from a text in which vile, evil characters abound, and of course, I do not mean that such amoral individuals are the only ethical ones. That would be ridiculous. What I propose is to reject Filloy's monodialogic strategy and ignore his moral judgments. An ethics of the sort I imagine here can only take place when moral judgments are set aside so that no individuals can be banned or abandoned. This ethics can only arise when no self legitimates his or her claims of moral superiority over any other. These are the conditions of possibility for the ethics of being perceived.

To return to a discussion I began in the previous chapter, in "On Potentiality" Agamben defines "potentiality" as an opening for both darkness and light, for both good and evil: "To be capable of good and evil is not simply to be capable of doing this or that good or bad action (every particular good or bad action is, in this sense, banal). Radical evil is not this or that bad deed but the potentiality for darkness. And yet this potentiality is also the potentiality for light" (181). If both darkness and light are not guaranteed as potential actions or decisions, then there is no action or decision to be made, but only forced compliance with a mandate. This is the position in which the subaltern conscript finds himself when he is forced to comply with the General's monodialogic demands. When caught inside a monodialogue, the interlocutor has lost his or her potentiality. The question, then, becomes one of recuperating this potentiality for the interlocutor, regardless of how he or she has been morally judged by the dominant speaker.

In Agamben's *Coming Community*, a text that offers a constructive supplement to the deconstructive *Homo Sacer* saga, this opening of potentiality becomes an ethical opening toward a radically inclusive community. The coming community is not one of saints or of evildoers; these moralizing value distinctions have no place here. In the chapter titled "Taking Place" he elaborates a definition of the ethical opening:

Ethics begins only when the good is revealed to consist in nothing other than a grasping of evil and when the authentic and the proper have no other content than the inauthentic and the improper. This is the meaning of the ancient philosophical adage according to which "veritas patefacit se ipsam et falsum." Truth cannot be shown except by showing the false, which is not, however, cut off and cast aside somewhere else. On the contrary, according to the etymology of the verb *patefacere*, which means "to open" and is linked to *spatium*, truth is revealed only by giving space or giving a place to non-truth—that is, as a taking-place of the false, as an exposure of its own innermost impropriety. (13)

Agamben's appeal to universals like "good," "evil," and "truth" seems to betray his preference for thresholds and genealogies, but they are better understood in the wake of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* as particular, moralizing categories by which a community defines itself and casts aside its others. Ethics, for Agamben, takes place when and where a space opens up for both "the light" and "the darkness," for what is called "true" and what is called "false," for what is valued as "proper" and what is valued as "improper," and for "us" and for "them." A place must be guaranteed for

both, because those labeled as “the darkness,” “false,” “improper,” or “them” are not universally so, but only described as such by those who desire to cast them aside and legitimize their exclusion. For this sort of ethics, these are no longer terms that oppose one another through binary logic, including one and excluding the other as if such a distinction were a universal truth; neither is cut off and cast aside. And how could they be cast aside since there is no longer an outside, no longer a no man’s land outside of the generalized state of exception? Like actually existing potentiality, the ethical opening is the opening that guarantees a radically inclusive space with no *a priori* moral value judgments or ideological ends. In other words, ethics opens and takes place in the space—characterized as the state of exception—where both the vile General and the vile conscript can face one another outside of the monodialogic structure and without a universal, paratextual judge determining who is good and who is evil or vile.

The ethics of being perceived does not take place by simply inverting the power relationship between the General and the conscript and showing the latter’s fictional agency. This would only amount to turning the conscript’s written text into an inverted monodialogue wherein the subaltern conscript acquires power to speak—a power that is rather meaningless at the end of the day. The conscript can write his rebuttal to the General, but the General still has the upper hand—the men with guns—within their world.

In addition to the rhetorical strategy of the monodialogue, the General makes use of a physical, violent strategy for securing his power, which is announced in the novel’s subtitle—*la gata parida*. The game, which literally translates as “the birthed

cat,” is a clear struggle for hegemony via brute force similar to “king of the hill.” The verb “parir” ‘to give birth’ also means ‘to come up with, to create (an idea).’ Its usage in the phrase “la puta que te parió” ‘son of a bitch’ and other vulgar phrases is certainly a connotation floating around in the name of this game. In a rare moment, the General becomes giddy with nostalgia, and he claims that children from the provinces like himself “inventan sus juegos” ‘invent their own games,’ unlike their less virile counterparts who grow up in the capital, which is ironically the national seat of power he now conspires to take. Here he explains how to play “la gata parida”:

En un banco [...] nos sentábamos tantos muchachos como cabíamos. Los que no cabían estaban alertas, esperando turno para sentarse. Porque el juego consiste en hacer caer a los de la punta, a fuerza de empujar con el cuerpo, los hombros y las caderas. Lo principal es mantenerse sentado en el banco, resistiendo los empellones para no ser desplazado y caer. Es un juego de machos que excita el amor propio. Porque cuando cae alguno, los que esperan, o el mismo caído, ocupan ese lugar libre en la otra punta del banco y prosigue la pechada hasta volter al del extremo. De izquierda o derecha, lo mismo da. Lo importante es ubicarse y conservar enérgicamente el puesto. ¡Es de lo más divertido! (42)

‘As many boys as possible would sit on a bench. Those who didn’t fit had to remain alert, waiting for their chance to grab a seat. The game consists of making those on the ends fall off with force by pushing with your body, your shoulders, and your hips. The goal is to stay seated on the bench, holding

strong when you're pushed so you don't get moved and fall off. It's a masculine game that engenders self-esteem. Because when someone falls, those who are waiting, or even the guy who falls, grab the open space at the other end of the bench and the fight continues until you knock someone down from the other side. From the left or the right, it's all the same. What's important is claiming a space and energetically conserving it. It's so much fun!'

This clearly gendered game links masculinity with violence and the ability to stand one's ground, all the while encouraging a heightened individualism that respects only the self's will.

Now commanding a national military, the General makes use of the same strategies he developed while playing this game as a child to knock down all those who are in his path to securing power and, once achieved, he will stand his ground by any means available to him. His claim carries even more political undertones when he declares with enthusiasm that you have to knock down your opponents from the left and from the right without hesitation or concern for their well-being. There is no political ideology worthy of his commitment other than self-preservation and self-love. Perhaps the General could call this grown-up version of "la gata parida," by taking a lesson from *Konsideransky*, "yomismo," the political party committed only to its sole member's self-interest.

Within the last third of the novel, the General triumphs and legitimizes his military coup over the radio by invoking the state of exception "en defensa de la salud de nuestra democracia" 'in order to protect the longevity of our democracy' (258).

Agamben's *Homo Sacer* saga, in consonance with Filloy in the "Nota previa," demonstrates that the state of exception has become the political norm as the aporia that is inscribed within the constitutions of Western democracies. Within the novel, however, it is clear that the General is not committed to a democratic politics. He is only committed to the two main strategies—the monodialogue and "la gata parida"—by which he successfully realizes his will to total power over the military and national political institutions.

Facing the reality that he has no means of counteracting the General, like Casey's Mayer who knows it is impossible to win his court case, the conscript desires to retreat as far away as possible from him; in the days just before the military coup, he even considers desertion, only to find himself confronted with the chaos of fear and a loss of moral certainty:

Nunca había estado metido en un laberinto. Sabía lo que es la línea recta y lo que es la rectitud. Ya no. Me cruzan y entrecruzan mil senderos endemoniados. No soy dueño de mis designios. He perdido mi capacidad de optar. Pero esa luz de la deserción me está alumbrando. (237)

'I had never been stuck in a labyrinth. I always knew which is the straight path and what rectitude is. Not anymore. A thousand wicked paths cross back and forth over me. I no longer have control over my plans. I have lost the ability to choose. But the light of desertion is shining on me.'

The conscript is not faced with a decision between the high road and the low road, a moral decision he claims to have been able to make successfully in the past; for the first time he finds himself confronted only with thousands of vile options in the midst

of this cursed labyrinth. In this sense, there is no choice to be made; there is no good option to be found among the winding paths laid out in front of him. The only option he can hope for is to flee this labyrinth entirely, but as he says, he is not capable of choosing, because every choice is equally vile. He has lost, to use Agamben's terms, his potentiality and his impotentiality, that is, his ability to make a choice and his ability to refuse to participate in the General's hegemonic game. He will not desert the military; instead, he continues to serve the General and to carry on his romantic affair with the General's wife. It is for reasons like this that the conscript is not exactly a hero and can be labeled paratextually as "vile."

Given the state in which the conscript finds himself trapped and his impossible desire to thwart the General's struggle for power, it is not surprising that his reaction is to dismiss all political action in a sweeping generalization about Latin America: "Todavía no existe vida democrática en las naciones latinoamericanas. La democracia recaba continuidad en el proceso de su perfeccionamiento. [...] Al desplazamiento por la fuerza, sigue una transición azarosa... hasta otra nueva conjura o asonada lo desplaza" 'Democratic life still does not exist in the Latin American nations. Democracy demands continuity in order to perfect itself. Displacement by force is only followed by a random transition... until another conspiracy or mob displaces it' (228). Behind his reductive pronouncements still lies a certain teleology of developmentalism and modernization. I would like to move beyond this point. The narrator makes no effort to prove his claim, and it is not one I am interested in defending. Instead, I want to consider the claim that politics in Latin America, or anywhere in fact, is nothing more than a grotesquely violent version of "la gata

parida” wherever the state of exception and absolutist, authoritarian forms of hegemonic rule run rampant. What becomes clear is that the conscript is making an appeal for a more radical form of democracy to come into existence, and this imagined democracy would operate otherwise than in the form of the General’s monologues and disturbing childhood games in his will to totality.

In a way, Chantal Mouffe’s democratic theory also feels around in the dark for a path toward a radical democratic politics still to come. In *The Democratic Paradox*, she critiques the deliberative democratic theories of Rawls and Habermas for their inability to grapple with the pluralism of values within the public sphere of democratic debate. While the deliberative democrats both accept a pluralism of values in name—which is more than can be said of the General in Filloy’s novel—Mouffe shows that “they need to relegate pluralism to a non-public domain in order to insulate politics from its consequences” (92). This is to say that for deliberative democracy to come into being, antagonism must be left at home. In contrast, Mouffe contends for the need to develop a more realistic democratic theory:

Such a search should be recognized for what it really is, another attempt at insulating politics from the effects of the pluralism of value, this time by trying to fix once and for all the meaning and hierarchy of the central liberal-democratic values. Democratic theory should renounce those forms of escapism and face the challenge that the recognition of the pluralism of values entails. This does not mean accepting a total pluralism, and some limits need to be put to the kind of confrontation which is going to be seen as legitimate in the public sphere. But the political nature of the limits should be

acknowledged instead of being presented as requirements of morality or rationality. (93)

This is to say that one should not only be granted access to democracy if and only if one subscribes to the moral values of that system or if and only if one can eliminate all affective influences from the political decisions one makes. Mouffe calls for a democracy that can be inclusive, within some limits that she does not at present specify, of even those whose values do not completely match those of contemporary liberal-democracy. She also insists that there is no way to eliminate power from politics and society: “power is constitutive of social relations” (98). The question for democratic politics, then, “is not how to eliminate power but how to constitute forms of power more compatible with democratic values” (100).

At this point, I would like to call attention to what I see as the ethics of her democratic model; instead of creating an exclusive, moral community for democracy or a utopian vision of a society without power relations, Mouffe seeks a democracy that resists the will to totality: “The democratic character of a society can only be given by the fact that no limited social actor can attribute to herself or himself the representation of the totality and claim to have the ‘mastery’ of the foundation” (100). Instead, democracy must accept the ineradicable and irreducible antagonism brought out by the pluralism of values. To do so is to reconfigure the friends versus enemies structure of hegemonic power struggles: “the aim of democratic politics is to construct the ‘them’ in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an ‘adversary,’ that is, somebody whose ideas we combat but whose

right to defend those ideas we do not put into question” (102).⁵⁵ She does not attempt to eliminate different social identities nor to relegate their differences to an idealized private space, but rather she contends for the need to allow such pluralism to engage openly in political power struggles.

More specifically, her theory insists on transforming these struggles from antagonistic struggles to agonistic ones: “*Antagonism* is the struggle between enemies, while *agonism* is a struggle between adversaries” (102–103). From my perspective, Mouffe’s agonistic democracy at this point merges well with Levinas’s ethics that seeks a face to face encounter between a self and an other that does not attempt to totalize the infinite distance between them and with Agamben’s coming community that seeks an opening for potentiality, for both the proper and the improper, for us and for them. It is within such a space that the conditions of possibility for dissensus and disagreement can take place within the ethical framework I propose here.

Within the experimental third section of his unnoticed text, the conscript opposes the General’s two violent strategies for asserting his will to total power and proposes a radical alternative to them. His writing becomes the only possibility of producing a line of flight within that demonic labyrinth. As he searches for an alternative space in which ethics can take place, he necessarily errs off the General’s course of military action for the following reason:

⁵⁵ I quoted from Foucault above who, in the English translation, uses the term “adversary” as a synonym for “political enemy.” Mouffe specifically separates these two words.

La vida es demasiado bella para que se la malogre. Los caracteres varoniles cruzan indemnes las penurias que impone el servicio militar. Pero los caracteres delicados padecen verdaderos quebrantamientos, y tropelías éticas de todo género acaban por nulificarlos. [...] El afán de aplastar la personalidad para gregarizar al individuo no puede admitirse como meta de ninguna disciplina, porque involucra la peor traición al progreso de la especie. (*Vil* 182)

‘Life is too beautiful to waste it. Virile personalities cross unharmed through the misery that military service imposes on them. But the more delicate ones suffer true breakdowns, and all sorts of moral abuses end up annihilating them. [...] The desire to squash an individual’s personality in order to make them sociable can not be admissible as the goal of any discipline, because it involves the worst treason against the progress of the species.’

I have translated “tropelías éticas” as ‘moral abuses’ to not confuse the ways in which I have chosen to divide the two terms for my own purposes; the type of violent acts and abuses carried out by the military, according to the conscript, serve only to flatten out any individualizing characteristics in order to force the young conscripts into submissive obedience. This can only be described as another form of violence justified by an appeal to military morality. What I would call ethics, as it errs away from this morality, is what the conscript opens in the sentence that continues from the previous quote: “Mi desesperación es casi un pandemónium. Creo ya estar en él:” ‘My desperation is almost a pandemonium. I believe I am already in it.’ (182). He cements his opposition while introducing an ethical opening—the pandemonium, that

is, the hellscape populated by all sorts of evil demons and lesser gods—that will take place within the already occupied space of the wicked paths that cross back and forth over the conscript within the vile labyrinth of military morality.

The definition of this pandemonium follows the colon I quoted above; it is an eleven page dialogue in which the voices of historical and fictional leaders from antiquity to the twentieth century shout, insult, joke, quibble, and demand to be heard. Among those names who speak in this pandemonium are: from Latin America, San Martín, Rosas, Liniers, Martín Fierro, Doctor Francia, Iturbide, Benito Juárez, Porfirio Díaz, Pancho Villa, Victoriano Huerta, Bolívar, Solano López, García Moreno, Sandino, Martí, Guevara, Castro, Vicuña Mackenna, Neruda, Allende, Pinochet, Battle y Ordóñez, Baltasar Brun, Getulio Vargas; from Spain, Torquemada, Fernando VII, Unamuno, Primo de Rivera, Millán Astray; and so many others, including Atila the Hun, Ghengis Khan, Julius Cesar, María de Medicis, Alexander the Great, Robespierre, Napoleon, Pepe Botella (Joseph Bonaparte), Ivan the Terrible, Woodrow Wilson, Stalin, Mussolini, Himmler, Clausewitz, Einstein, Mao, Trotsky, Ho Chi Minh, Sartre, Goethe, Freud, Bernard Shaw, T.S. Eliot (183–193).

Such a pandemonium is a historical impossibility, but it opens up along ARTELETRA's errant path in the experimental section of the conscript's writings. Those who take part in this dialogue do so as evil demons or lesser gods; they are all just as vile as the General and the conscript who also speak in this pandemonium. This dialogue ends with the following open-ended words of El Viejo Pancho (the nickname for the gauchesca poet José Alonso y Trelles) and Martín Fierro:

El Viejo Pancho: —Todo puede suceder

‘tando la tormenta armada.

Martín Fierro: Yo he visto rejucilar

y después no pasar nada... (193)

‘El Viejo Pancho: “Anything can happen

Once has begun the storm.”

Martín Fierro: “I’ve seen lightning strike

And then nothing more.’

No one voice dominates this space; no one is physically removed from it either.

Throughout, the friendships and enmities between these actors are not erased, but rather they are given the space in which their agonistic struggles can play out. Like the discourses and ideologies that many of them generated, they are not restricted to dialoguing with the others from their own historical era or geographic region. Martí responds to Guevara; Marx, to Einstein; and Bolívar, to Primo de Rivera, for example. What tool is better than language, in Levinas’s words, “to break the continuity of being or of history” (*Otherwise* 195). In the face of this powerful rupture through discourse, even the General who is typically so skilled at turning conversations into monologues and at standing his ground in “la gata parida” loses his hegemonic grip within this radically open, rhizomatic dialogue that ends with the equal possibility of both a future storm and a future tranquility.

Pandemonium serves as a potential model for democratic dialogue as it generates the conditions of possibility for dissent and disagreement among adversaries. The struggle for power is not removed as in an unrealizable, utopian dream in which everyone holds hands and gets along, but it also ends without any

particular individual rising above the rest to secure his hegemonic will to totality over the others. The conscript's pandemonium, then, exposes the ethical form that, in my view, can arise from the politics of going unnoticed. This practice errs off prescribed, moral paths by creating an unnoticed itinerary, but ultimately those who go unnoticed will be perceived when they create this alternative form of democratic dialogue.

Exposing Dialogues

In my previous analysis of Somers's *La mujer desnuda*, I demonstrated that Rebeca Linke's political gesture, a means without ends, begins from her desire to go unnoticed and takes place along her errant line of flight into the countryside; her flight, her self-decapitation, and her attempt to put herself back together, both literally and psychologically, in the face of moralizing and universalizing blockages constitute the politics of going unnoticed in the novel. Since going unnoticed is always a temporary state, there comes a moment in which she must open herself to being perceived once more by others, a moment in which the ethical potential of this politics becomes possible. Rebeca Linke's experience of what seems like freedom only lasts until she steps outside of her shack and onto the prairie. There she is immediately confronted with thousands of eyes and teeth that appear to keep vigil over her every move. As these vulnerable characters alter the thresholds of perception in which they previously went unnoticed, they open their own versions of what the conscript in Filloy's novel experiences as "pandemonium." When Rebeca Linke steps across the threshold of her shack, she takes up another errant path along which she can be perceived by the surrounding world. In this way, the political opening made possible by going unnoticed becomes quite literally an exposure of the nude, vulnerable body in an ethical encounter or dialogue with others as an alternative to, although not a utopian elimination of, the violence that characterizes the state of exception.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Nuria Calafell Sala has studied what she calls an ethics of the ex-centric in Armonía Somers's literature, which privileges the erotic and mystic elements of her

The ethics of being perceived takes on different, although compatible characteristics in the works of these four authors. This act of opening oneself to exposure through dialogue in Armonía Somers's *De miedo en miedo (Los manuscritos del río)* does not rely on the creation of a pandemonium as in Juan Filloy's *Vil & Vil*. The novel, whose title translates as *From Fear to Fear (The River Manuscripts)*, was first published by Arca in Montevideo en 1965. Set in an unnamed, French-speaking city, the novel shares a certain existentialist affinity with Albert Camus's *The Fall*. The anonymous, first person narrator of Somers's novel writes his interior ramblings and copies snippets of his journal (the pages of which he tosses in the river every night) as he navigates the humdrum events of his daily life and the incessant fears that drive his obsessive-compulsive behaviors. Through his memories of past and invented interactions with other women, he mentally escapes his boredom and distracts himself from his fears. However, his most important line of flight takes place during his real and imagined errant dialogues with an anonymous woman who one day comes into the bookstore where he works and continues to meet with him on various occasions, only to talk.

Their first encounter was brief, and almost became their only one, but the narrator was impressed to see that the woman kept her handkerchief sealed inside an envelope in her purse; he knew they shared at least a fear of germs. Given the scope

works as brought together through a primarily psychoanalytic framework. In addition, her study focuses mostly on two of Somers's later works, *Viaje al corazón del día* and *No todos los elefantes encuentran mandrágora*. It shares little with my own approach, despite both of our attempts to construct an ethics from Somers's works, in particular for focusing on the "ex-céntrico," which means in Spanish both "eccentric, odd" and "peripheral, outside of the center." See *Armonía Somers. Por una ética de lo ex-céntrico* (Vigo, España: Editorial Academia del Hispanismo, 2010).

of the city, he recognizes how difficult it would be to find her: “En una ciudad llena de cuevas de la que cada cual sacará su cabeza a la mañana, ella se me acababa de perder como la pequeña piedra de un anillo, en esa forma tan insidiosa de dejarnos con el aro vacío” ‘In a city filled with caves from which everyone pokes out their head each morning, I had just lost her like one loses the stone from a ring, deceitfully leaving only the empty hoop’ (*De miedo* 17). As she walks out of the bookstore, he is left only with the absence that takes the form of her former presence. Since he does not know very many details about her, he decides it is best to forget her: “Pero uno no se echa en busca de pequeños fragmentos incapaces de recomponer el todo” ‘But you don’t got about searching for small fragments that are incapable of recreating the whole’ (17–18). His obsessive-compulsive instincts leave him resigned to ignore those seemingly unimportant details that he does remember—her voice, her smile, her handkerchief—since a more complete and totalizing encounter, something more like the perfect palindrome, could not be formed from them.

Recalling Casey’s narrator’s suggestion in “Notas de un simulador,” this is precisely Somers’s narrator’s mistake, one which he gradually rectifies as he opens himself to less certain and totalizing encounters both with his own desires and with this unknown woman. He begins writing fragmented journal entries to record his most profound thoughts, which at times become repugnant reflections on murder and suicide; again, the characters in these narratives are not necessarily heroes, divine creatures, or guiltless victims. His fear of having these thoughts revealed to anyone else drives him to throw his manuscripts in the river once he is finished writing, and

in the process, he comes to appreciate a sort of piecemeal acquisition of an imperfect knowledge that he notices in the river:

Es decir que yo, que he tenido siempre tanto miedo de morir por inmersión, comencé a guardar más de mí en aquel fondo lleno de ahogados azules que por encima. [...] La vida había sido un acontecer lineal, como una novela fuera de moda dividida en capítulos. Pero el río, siempre hambriento de mí, quería mis pedazos, fueran o no consecutivos. (19–20)

This is to say that I, who have always been very afraid of drowning, began to safeguard more of myself in those depths full of blue, drowned bodies than above them. [...] My life had been a linear event, like an old-fashioned novel divided into chapters. But the river, always hungry for more, desired pieces of me, whether or not they were in order.

He begins to understand the ravenous desire to approach and listen to the words of another person even when those are only bits and fragments of ideas tossed around in a random order. This is an emergent appreciation of the narrative modes made possible by the avant-gardes in their attempt to smash various institutions and conventions that by the Sixties are being published within the cultural markets. Simultaneously, it is an opening toward the type of incomplete, errant dialogues that he comes to have with the woman in which their lines of communication always exceed what is said out loud.

The man and the woman meet on a number of occasions. While they reveal some of their most intimate thoughts to one another—particularly the narrator to the woman—there is always a distance between them. The narrator describes a pause in

one of their early encounters: “*Nos quedamos* [nosotros] unos minutos más como suspendidos de un hilo, *incapaz* [yo] de resistir si alguno de los dos no disminuía la tensión de algún modo” ‘*We stayed a few minutes longer as if suspended by a thread, being incapable myself of holding out if one of us didn’t reduce the tension in some way*’ (23, my italics). A subtle, almost imperceptible shift between subjects, a characteristic that frequently appears in Somers’s syntax, manifests itself here; the sentence begins in the first person plural by which the narrator is capable of describing what he and the woman are experiencing, but it quickly jumps mid-sentence to his limited, interior experience. Only he is incapable of maintaining this dialogue; he does not speak for the woman, thereby allowing the distance between them to show itself.

Such an opening to being perceived by others constitutes the foundation of Levinas’s ethical theory: the encounter takes place between a self and an other—in this case between the narrator and the woman—in which they expose their faces to one another in an asymmetrical relationship and remain separated by an infinite distance. This exposure of “the face” only allows for a glimpse of the other: “The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face” (50). This face to face encounter is not a direct line of communication, but rather an attempt to converse with another person without the need to reduce the other person’s alterity to the same of the self; it is to approach the other like the narrator imagines the river approaches his own piecemeal and discarded manuscripts.

In fact, once the narrator accepts this infinite, untraversable gap separating himself from the woman, he notices that they both experience an insatiable desire to

continue their dialogues: “Mi costumbre de mostrarle las entrañas y su desesperación por revolverlas y encontrar símbolos, nos empezó a fanatizar, a impedir el curso hacia adelante de la vida” ‘My habit of showing her my guts and her desperation for digging around in them and finding symbols began to obsess us, to block our path forward in life’ (*De miedo* 34). He says, “Me había acogotado una ansiedad mortal de aclaración, de desciframiento” ‘A mortal anxiety to clarify, to decipher had me in a stranglehold’ (36). But like ARTELETRA, the Sator Square, and other enigmatic palindromes, there is no true meaning to be totally clarified or deciphered; there will always remain an excess to what is capable of being said across this distance through language. The voracity of their mutually exposing encounters leads the woman to suggest that they break their conversations into even smaller fragments. Even these tiny bits of language seem to say so much more than either can comprehend.

First, she says, “Creo que no podrías entregármelo todo por completo” ‘I think that you won’t ever be able to hand everything over to me completely’ (34). Then, in a curious symmetry with Filloy’s recommendation in the “Exordio” to *Yo, yo y yo*, she thanks the narrator for having divided one of his stories about a priest into smaller “doses”: “[La historia sobre] Tu sacerdote no me dejó dormir [...]. Has hecho bien en administrármelo por dosis” ‘The story of your priest kept me awake all night [...]. I’m glad you administered it to me in doses’ (49). Finally, when he begins to spiral from his fears and unanswered existential inquiries, she points out to him the difficulty of even knowing what he is talking about, but reassures him that this is part of his “infinity”: “No sé de lo que estás hablando, pero se trataba también de tu infinito” ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about, but it also has to do with your

infinity' (70). Their dialogues attempt over and over again to establish lines of conversation, but they will never fully reduce the infinite distance that separates them. They fail to completely reveal their own interiority to the other and to fully comprehend the other's interiority, gradually settling for exposing only smaller and smaller fragments of their experiences, which they still find overwhelming. Yet, it is precisely their eagerness to pay attention to these fragments of conversations that allows them to continue exposing their faces to one another, thus opening and reopening the potential for dialogue.

Whereas Levinas frequently writes from the perspective of the same—e.g., the other's "irreducibility to the I" (*Totality* 43)—Somers's novel exceeds an interpretation that would identify the man speaking in the first person as the same and that would identify the woman, his interlocutor, as the Other. The man's interiority is inaccessible to the woman; this is not due to his totalizing will to power as in the monodialogue, but to his "infinity," his and every subject's irreducibility to a singular essence. Although he speaks in the first person, she is the one to point out his irreparable alterity to her, his "infinity." In my view, this prevents an attempt to read this structure as if the interlocutor, an anonymous woman, is a way of conjugating the Other as Woman, that is, as Man's radical alterity. Nor is it simply an inversion of binary values wherein the Other becomes Man as Woman's radical alterity. Rather, each of them demonstrates a certain distance from knowing him or her self and from knowing the other person.

When read alongside *La mujer desnuda*, the anonymous man in *De miedo en miedo* becomes a sort of "nude man" whose journey allows him to err from

prescribed paths and moral duties toward a radical divesting of himself in the face of this woman and all the readers of the parts of his fragmented narrative—the novel itself—that are not thrown into the river. The parallel between the two novels does not appear to be accidental, since he says: “Sentí [...] que nos habíamos puesto al desnudo interiormente como bajo un relámpago” ‘I felt [...] that we had shown our interiority in all its nudity as if under the flash of lightning’ (74). Later, he feels as if he has lost all of his blood, not unlike the anemic Rebeca Linke after cutting off her own head: “Sentí durante algunos segundos que había quedado anémico, debilitado por mi hemorragia definitoria” ‘I felt for a few seconds that I had ended up anemic, weakened by the hemorrhage that defines me’ (90). Without the fantastic elements of *La mujer desnuda*, the narrator here experiences the same bloodletting and nude exposure to the world as Rebeca Linke. Both the nude woman and the nude man reveal themselves; both can be constituted as someone’s other, and both will find it impossible to fully know themselves.

In this way, these characters are not so easily elevated as universal representatives of their respective genders as in a gesture toward some form of identity politics. The politics of going unnoticed, and the ramifications it has for an ethics here, does not allow for the type of visibilization of the exposed subject or of the identity group; the subjects who go unnoticed attempt to open up a dialogue with others—or with the others within themselves—by refusing to assimilate the other to the self and by constantly exceeding any line of communication that might try to identify the self with any other. Yet, this is not to say that this ethics does not have implications for feminist, queer, and other forms of subaltern critique. Building from

Levinas, Agamben's essay, "The Face," demonstrates the politics of the face: "The face is at once the irreparable being-exposed of humans and the very opening in which they hide and stay hidden. The face is the only location of community, the only possible city" (91). The face both hides and reveals; it can turn away from the other's gaze, or it can stare the other in the eyes, exposing itself. "Exposition," Agamben affirms, "is the location of politics. [...] Human beings thus transform the open into a world, that is, into the battlefield of a political struggle without quarter" (93). By exposing their faces, those who go unnoticed open the potential for these impossible-to-fulfill dialogues to take place in an already occupied space and, by extension, for sustained dissent and disagreement that can allow for a radical democratic politics to come.

Thus, these subjects engage in the construction of something like what Agamben calls the coming community, a community that is always coming and becoming, moving and changing as the individuals who conform it continue to dialogue and disagree with one another. This exposition is not a revelation or an illumination to the light of the polis's center stage, but "the possibility of taking possession of impropriety as such, of exposing in the face simply your *own proper* impropriety, of walking in the shadow of its light" (98). By opening this form of dialogue, by exposing one's impropriety to the world along the dimly lit paths that traverse the swirling lights and shadows of their era, they engage in politics. The ethics of being perceived is not an opening that will remain free from all values and struggles, but rather is the precise location in which politics becomes possible as

humans engage one another in a pandemonium of face to face encounters that are opened by writing and language in an already occupied space.

If the exposition of the nude face is not capable of ever fully illuminating itself or communicating directly with an other, what form does this conversation take? The narrator describes this flight into language at one point as provoking “aquella ruptura en la que el pensamiento se hacía carrera sobre las vallas, lanzándome a sintaxis liberadoras” ‘that rupture by which my thought went racing over hurdles, launching me toward a liberating syntax’ (*De miedo* 54–55). The hurdles he successfully jumps over are bits of banal conversation with his wife who ignores his attempts to converse with her as he does with the other woman. This liberating syntax allows him to narrate invented conversations with that other anonymous woman even when she is not around. Instead of paying attention to the details of the mortgage he is about to take out with his wife on a new home, he imagines which of his fears and dark desires he and the woman might discuss. Whether part of the real or imagined dialogues with her, they constantly slip and slide from one topic to another, fragmenting their discussion, returning to previous conversations, and starting narratives that only make sense in retrospect when more details are revealed in a future “dose” of the story.

In Chapter One, I mentioned that this man wants to write a novel made up of random, quotidian objects, expressions, and gestures. When he feels he no longer even knows where to begin their dialogue within this text, the woman recommends the following: “Tú eliges algo que te haya quedado inexpresado, sin poderlo comunicar a nadie. Y lo vamos desplazando como si estuviésemos solos” ‘Choose

something that you've always left unsaid, something you couldn't communicate to anyone. Then we'll toss the ideas around [literally: displace them] as if we were alone' (67). They do not plan to fully state exactly what he was unable to express, but they attempt to throw it around, displace it, and pass it back and forth across the gap separating them, shifting and slipping around on the surface of the ideas, allowing their conversation to always exceed what is actually said.

Going unnoticed, opening an errant line of flight for politics, and being exposed within an impossible dialogue with an other in the construction of a democratic community can now be linked to what Levinas calls "saying" in *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*. As opposed to the said that only states an essence as if it were a fact or a piece of easily transmittable information, saying is the condition of possibility for the unending communication of the other's alterity: "Saying is communication, to be sure, but as a condition for all communication, as exposure. [...] The unblocking of communication, irreducible to the circulation of information which presupposes it, is accomplished in saying" (48). Insofar as it unblocks communication and exposes the other's alterity, saying requires a temporalization other than succession and regression, other than "a linear regressive movement, a retrospective back along the temporal series toward a very remote past" (10).

In my view, this ethical saying can be set along the path opened by the errant palindrome. Against the current of a temporally structured reading of the avant-garde, as Hal Foster makes possible in *The Return of the Real*, and against Plato's linear allegories, as both Filloy and Derrida make possible in "Yo y los intrusos" and in

“*Khôra*,” respectively, the flight of the errant palindrome goes unnoticed and passes back over that which was going unnoticed. This flight opens the conditions of possibility for saying, for exposing the unattended fragments and their attempts to communicate dissent and disagreement through a language that always remains irreducible to what is said and always exceeds any attempt at totalization or essentialization. Their exposed language is never revealed under the harsh lights of the public sphere, but instead remains only dimly lit among the shadows and lights of the era. This is the saying that the narrator and the woman go about exposing in their dialogues before deciding to end their brief, errant encounters and to go their separate ways. At the woman’s insistence, they turn their faces away from one another, thus closing the lines of communication temporarily opened in their dialogues. The question that remains concerns the extent to which this opening and exposure to others is a failure for those who desired to go unnoticed.

The Potential of Failure

In retrospect, the Sixties in Latin America could quite easily be considered as an era of profound failures in the face of the one spectacular and seemingly insurmountable success—the transition from the modern national State to a transnational market logic that took place during the various dictatorships and authoritarian regimes (Thayer 96 n. 2). These failures are numerous. The Boom failed to suture the gap between, on the one hand, the foundational gestures by which it celebrated its own cultural modernity on a global scale and, on the other, Latin America's more general technological underdevelopment and neo-colonial status (Avelar *Untimely* 31–37). Buenos Aires, Havana, and Mexico City failed to secure their status as a global center for Western art in the eyes of Europe and the United States, since Latin American artists were often dismissed either as providing nothing new or innovative that had not already been achieved in Paris or New York City or as being too provincial or local for international tastes (Giunta 240–241). The Cuban Revolution failed to maintain its international support by even Leftist intellectuals in the wake of the Padilla Affair (Gilman 265–278). Those who nonetheless remained committed to armed revolutions—ranging from Guevara's campaigns in the Congo and in Bolivia where he died, to the urban guerrilla cells, among them the Tupamaros in Uruguay and the Montoneros in Argentina—failed to recreate the military success of the Cuban Revolution in other countries (Halperín Donghi 338–360). These are, of course, just a handful of the most visible and well-known failures of the Sixties in whose wake arose the many triumphant discourses about the ends of literature and of

ideology.⁵⁷ In many regards, these are the failures of political and cultural paradigms that sought to transform the world through grandiose and often violent revolutions. They failed on their own terms; they sought different means in order to achieve their differing, but preconceived end goals.

In contrast, the politics of going unnoticed is only a means without ends; even if it eventually engages in an ethical opening of overly saturated political spaces, this was never an end goal it set for itself from the beginning. At the same time, going unnoticed is always a precarious state in which those who go unnoticed are always perceptible in the sense that they are capable of being perceived by an other. In order to engage in the sort of ethical communication of a saying that I detailed above, they must be perceived in the face of an other. The failure of the politics of going unnoticed is not an unfortunate outcome but rather the necessary conditions for this ethics to take place. The phrase “the potential of failure” is defined here as the likelihood and inevitability of failure for those who go unnoticed, as the possibility that arises from such a failure, and even as the desire or the necessity of such a failure in order to keep the future open to other ethical, political, and aesthetic interventions.

In all the texts analyzed so far, the climax of each plot leads to the ultimate failure of the protagonists. Those who go unnoticed fail by being perceived; afterward, they are often jailed or killed, not unlike the *homo sacer*. Maximiliano Consideransky’s cave-tower is penetrated by the media. The conscript in *Vil & Vil* fails to stop the General’s coup. Rebeca Linke is murdered by the masses she startled

⁵⁷ See, for example, Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* (New York: Routledge, 1996) in which he critiques Francis Fukuyama’s discourse on the ends of history as well as the facile appropriations of such discourses by Western media to celebrate their own triumph, particularly in the 1990s.

with her nude body. The anonymous narrator in Casey's "La ejecución" is executed by the police after being accused of a crime he probably did not commit. Johnny, the cowboy, is killed by Gonzalo, the man who had earlier rescued and sheltered him. Yet, failure for those who go unnoticed is not just the unfortunate outcome of their endeavors; their entire enterprise is one surrounded by failures along every step of the way.

In *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz conceives of failure in contemporary performance by queers of color who engage in future-oriented projects; here he provides an insight into the way I understand the failure of those who go unnoticed. He defines failure as "not so much a failure to succeed as it is a failure to participate in a system of valuation that is predicated on exploitation and conformity" (*Cruising* 174). Following Muñoz's definition of failure "as active political refusal" (174), the failure of those who go unnoticed is only unsuccessful when interpreted from within a normative, moralizing framework that clearly delineates the distinction between the proper and the improper, the timely and the untimely. This failure is an active refusal to participate in exploitative or universalizing projects.

Going unnoticed was already in the first place a failure by those who arrived too late, by those who traced less timely but still contemporary itineraries through the already occupied cultural cartographies of their era. The next failure of those who go unnoticed takes place as a refusal—or a rejection, as Huberto prefers in *Lapsus*—to subscribe to such normative demands. Instead of moving in a Platonic fashion from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge and the good, these subjects begin by arriving late only to go about erring and wandering along their own unnoticed

lines of flight that pass through the swirling shadows and lights of their era. As a part of the political gesture of going unnoticed, they go about opening a space for dissent, thus becoming exposed to the vigilant eyes and violent obstacles they previously desired to evade. By being perceived, they may be said to have failed to remain unnoticed; however, staying unnoticed, as opposed to temporarily going unnoticed, would vacate their political gestures of its ethics, of its potential to create an opening toward pandemonic, errant, or even other forms of dialogue not studied here. Therefore, this failure becomes the condition of possibility for enacting the ethics of being perceived.

Casey committed suicide in 1969; despite this detail that otherwise might tempt one to engage in an autobiographical reading of his more depressing fictions, he curiously leaves a dim glimmer of hope or potential for future dissensus toward the end of some of his texts. The incarcerated narrator in “Notas de un simulador,” for example, writes his account of what he was doing creeping around the city at night with the hope that some day someone might stumble across his version of the events. Whereas the juridical system wrongly accused him of murder and the mass media promptly circulated this story, he writes so that future readers might read against the current of this information in order to see him as the philanthropic caretaker he claims to be. He explains:

A las toneladas de papel y los ríos de tinta que narrarán mi caso, impreso junto a otras deformaciones de la verdad para que lo lean millones de ojos extrañamente ávidos de novedades, sólo puedo oponer estos párrafos que redacto con dificultad a la mala luz que llega hasta donde trabajo. Los

obstáculos son tremendos pero sé que alguna vez llegarán estas líneas a conocerse. Esperemos. (90)

‘To the tons of paper and the rivers of ink that will narrate my case, printed alongside other deformations of the truth so that they may be read by the millions of eyes that are surprisingly eager for novelty, I can only object with these paragraphs that I write with difficulty under the poor light that reaches where I work. The obstacles are enormous, but I know these words will come to be known. Let’s hope.’

The spirit of Casey’s critique of the international press in the case of Boris Pasternak returns here. By considering this critique from the perspective of Levinas’s differentiation between the saying and the said, I view his condemnation of the mass media as a rejection of the media’s attempt to communicate easily consumable bits of information that give the appearance of complete truth and easy access to the total knowledge of an other, or in the case of the narrator of “Notas,” to the total knowledge of an other’s alleged crime. In opposition to this communication of a said, Casey’s narrator writes his own version by which he attempts to communicate a saying that is filled with gaps and misunderstandings that cannot be assimilated by the mass media or the legal system. Under the poor light of his jail cell—not the total light of knowledge—and by his own, externally unverifiable account, he offers an alternate and incomplete version of what he was doing when he attempted to go unnoticed around the city. Not only does he open up the closed narrative that condemns him publicly, but he also states with utmost certainty that his private words written from a jail cell will come to be known in the future. Despite his failure and the

unlikeliness that he will be exonerated, he remains hopeful that at the very least his version of the story, the trace of an unverifiable past, will be disseminated to future readers. He locates, to borrow a phrase from José Esteban Muñoz, “a kernel of potentiality” after and despite this failure (*Cruising* 173). That is, he refuses to give up, he fails to fail while waiting in prison, thus opening up the potential to continue moving, erring, and engaging in dialogues, at least through his writing.

This future-oriented gaze and persistence despite failure brings me to my final reading of the long list of everything that Huberto rejects in Manjarrez’s novel, *Lapsus (Algunos actos fallidos)*. At the end of this cartography of refusals and disagreements with the various positions and declarations that became public in the Sixties, the narrator concludes with perplexity that Huberto is not a nihilist: “Y ni siquiera tienes la decencia de ser nihilista sino que todavía andas sonriendo en la calle como si pudiese haber un milenio tras lomita” ‘And you don’t even have the decency to be a nihilist, but you still walk through the streets grinning as if there could ever be a millennium just around the corner’ (190–191). Huberto’s rejections are not an outright destruction but an active political refusal that nonetheless keeps walking toward some unknown horizon, despite the negativity, moralizing violence, and obstacles to political dissent, with a big grin on his face. In addition to opening up a line of flight by going unnoticed, his errancy also guarantees the perpetuation of these openings by refusing to permanently close them. Like Casey’s protagonist who keeps writing, Huberto continues walking along his errant paths despite his failure to have guaranteed his safety or to have secured a utopian future. “Utopia,” as Muñoz states, “can never be prescriptive and is always destined to fail” (*Cruising* 173).

An acceptance of failure as a necessary component of any future-oriented thought is indispensable for the ethics of being perceived. This ethics seeks to open a space for dialogue between subjects who are separated by an infinite, untraversable distance. The political gesture of going unnoticed attempts to open a space in which they can come into agonistic dialogue with one another through a language that does not communicate a said or seek to reduce the other's alterity but through a language that attempts to communicate a saying. Such a saying is always incomplete and imperfect; therefore, it is always a failure and a refusal to communicate in a totalizing manner.

As Simon Critchley has demonstrated in *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, "Ethical dialogue should not result in the annulment of alterity, but in respect for it" (13). In his more recent study, *Infinitely Demanding*, he takes this conclusion even further by defining ethics as "commitment or fidelity to an unfulfillable demand," that is, a commitment to the demand to respect the irreducible alterity of another subject (11). Critchley's commitment is not the type of commitment demanded of intellectuals in the Sixties who must write for the end goal of producing or securing the revolution. This commitment is to uphold what Derrida has termed the promise of a democracy to come:

So when I speak of a 'democracy to come,' I don't mean a future democracy, a new regime, a new organisation of nation-states (although this may be hoped for) but I mean this 'to come': the promise of an authentic democracy which is never embodied in what we call democracy. This is a way of going on criticising what is everywhere given today under the name of democracy in

our societies. This doesn't mean that 'democracy to come' will be simply a future democracy correcting or improving the actual conditions of the so-called democracies, it means first of all that this democracy we dream of is linked in its concept to a promise. The idea of a promise is inscribed in the idea of a democracy: equality, freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of the press—all these things are inscribed as promises within democracy.

Democracy is a promise. ("Politics" n. pag.)

With this in mind, what those who go unnoticed demonstrate with their final failures is their acceptance of this impossibility to ever fully communicate through dialogue and their simultaneous commitment to continue erring along new lines of flight that can open up new avenues for future, imperfect dialogues even after being blinded by the harsh lights of the political arena. The ethics of being perceived imagines ways in which this promise of a future democracy can come, ways in which it has the potential to come.

At this point, I read *Lapsus* as a novel that radicalizes the ethical potential of the politics of going unnoticed by taking this failure to its extreme. The subtitle, (*Algunos actos fallidos*), which I translated as "some slips of the tongue" in the psychoanalytic sense could be rendered literally as "some failed acts." The second translation of the title calls attention to how the narrative continually slips from one storyline to the next and fails to render a cohesive, linear plot. This failure, once more, is not just a lack of success but an active refusal to create a closed narrative that would neatly resolve its protagonists' dilemmas in a perfectly timed denouement. The supposed starting point of the novel—whose expository details are spread around

with no clear order in the first chapter and displaced throughout extensive end notes not unlike the bits of text thrown into the river by Somers's male protagonist—is the simultaneous plane trip by Huberto Haltter and Humberto Heggo from Mexico to Paris with a layover in New York City. The narrator, in the first of his many end notes, clarifies the obvious meaning that fails to hide in the protagonists' names: “En efecto, querido lector: Alter y Ego” ‘Precisely, dear reader: Alter and Ego’ (227). The similarity of their first names, only distinguishable by the letter “m,” further contributes to the obvious psychoanalytical influences that appear in the subtitle; the two protagonists seem to operate as a sort of split subjectivity who together might be read as a substitute for the narrator, as a projection of the writer's desires, or as two of the alternate identities of the narrator who suggests he may be a schizophrenic. I hesitate to be clearer about these details, because the narrative leaves them quite unclear, often suggesting ideas that are later contradicted through a narrative voice whose identity is difficult to pin down.

Nevertheless, Huberto and Humberto appear in most cases as separate characters in the novel being seen or observed by the narrator who is also a protagonist; with a bit of attention it is not completely impossible to distinguish between the two while reading. The first chapter and its endnotes help maintain this distinction. Huberto is a young, ex-student of architecture who only seems to wander from one activity to the next with no clear purpose; Humberto is a balding, middle-aged architect who is bored with his wife, his family, and his job and chooses to leave it all behind. Their middle-class, bourgeois lives are filled with apathy and boredom, and they certainly refrain from getting involved in any form of revolutionary politics

when not outright rejecting them and everything else in the Sixties. Their literal flight out of Mexico, therefore, seems not to be driven explicitly by the type of imminent violence as in the cases of the other characters studied in this chapter.

The final two chapters of the novel turn around and comment on what came before them, reading against their errant itinerary. Huberto and Humberto in the penultimate chapter get a chance to write about the novel and the author-narrator in their own composite voice. They describe him as follows: “Como todos los autores, es un ser: totalitario, petulante, prepotente, despótico, que quiere apantallar” ‘Like all authors, he is totalitarian, conceited, arrogant, tyrannical, and wants to impress’ (214). Despite the narrator’s constant displacing of the plot and the characters, they still accuse him of communicating a *said*, of attempting to construct a totality in his errant novel. Their main target, however, is the third to last chapter that suggests “el happy end” ‘a happy ending’ for the protagonists (213). To counteract this placating conclusion, they create a Questionnaire at the end of the penultimate chapter to facilitate the task of the reader to not only interpret but more importantly to “Interrogarlo TODO” ‘Interrogate EVERYTHING’ (216). The Questionnaire, in my view, is a way to anticipate and belittle many predictable interpretations of the novel, for example, as “protesta” ‘protest’; “para probar que ya no se puede escribir novela” ‘as proof that one can no longer write a novel’; as “chiste” ‘a joke’; or even as a way to avoid censorship (217–219). More importantly, the questionnaire unfolds the previous chapter’s attempt to quickly wrap up the novel in a way that could leave the reader feeling content about the outcome of these events. Just before this questionnaire that is also extremely limiting in that it provides preformed answers,

they suggest that an alternate response to the novel or interpretation-interrogation of it would be to write another novel: “Carajo, hasta puede escribir una novela con más preguntas, o con las respuestas si así es de chingón” ‘Damn, you can even write a novel with more questions or with the answers if you’re such a big shot’ (217). In this chapter, Huberto and Humberto, the potential alter egos of the author-narrator-protagonist, drive the novel off its course along another errant path, failing to reach any happy conclusions.

But this is not the last errant path. The final chapter errs yet again from these rejected conclusions and their proposed questionnaire leaving the novel irreparably open-ended. This chapter is narrated from Céline’s point of view; she was the flight attendant in the first chapter who then became both Huberto and Humberto’s lover in Paris. Now, in the final pages of the novel, she becomes the narrator and claims that neither Huberto nor Humberto actually went to Paris but rather that both returned from the United States on the next flight to Mexico, failing in their attempt to really flee their boring, bourgeois lives. According to her, Huberto was assaulted in the airport and offered a free return flight to Mexico by the airline, and “él lo aceptó de inmediato” ‘he accepted it immediately’ (221). Humberto also boarded the plane; Céline offers the following explanation: “Creo que porque su mujer le había llamado urgentemente por teléfono” ‘I think because his wife had called him urgently’ (221). This ending is the literal end of their line of flight at which they turn around and return to where they began; their points of departure and arrival are clearly marked. Céline has the last word in the novel, and if she is to be believed, then none of the events of the novel actually took place; the random, fantastical, and unbelievable

errant itineraries of the two protagonists and the narrator through Paris, London, Vietnam, Huberto's transformation into a dog, a tropical island where Humberto becomes a tribal leader, and their experience with LSD would be nothing more than a fictional narrative within the novel's fictional world.

At once, Céline's narrative provokes a rereading of the entire novel in reverse, one that even rereads Huberto and Humberto's rereading of the novel's failed, happy ending. Upon further interpretation-interrogation, Céline's narrative, other than occupying the final fragmented space of the novel, does not necessarily have any more authority than Huberto and Humberto or than the author-narrator-protagonist. Her particular opening of the novel closes off their previous errant itineraries as a space of pure fiction. When all of these rejections and refusals to accept a particular version of the narrative come together as a fragmented, failed whole, the novel becomes one that is incapable of closing its boundaries and arriving at a consistent conclusion. It literally fails to end in any coherent manner, thereby committing to the impossible demand to open and reopen spaces for past, present, and future errant itineraries by others who go unnoticed or by others who enact quite different political gestures. In the end, failure regenerates the potential for future dialogues and the for the politics of going unnoticed to be able to uphold its ethical commitments.

...reves la ARTELETRA

I began by asking what possibilities there are for returning to the Sixties in Latin America, for seeing them again. ARTELETRA has been the word and figure that allowed me to see the Sixties again in a different, dimmer light. Reading ARTELETRA *al vesre* and *al verse*—in an imperfect reversal and in a way that allows for a different, contingent arrangement of texts and discourses to face one another and engage in dialogue—has served as the heuristic for reading against the currents of the cultural maps of the era. Without ever leaving the space of the Latin American Sixties, I adjusted my eyes to what I began to perceive right there on the surface—a cast of mostly anonymous protagonists spread throughout the works of Casey, Filloy, Manjarrez, and Somers who go unnoticed within the cultural and political landscapes of their fictional worlds. Some go unnoticed by chance, like most of the narratives in which they appear, but many of them actively choose to stay out of the spotlight. In general, they seek an alternative to the high-stakes debates, reductive antagonisms, rigid moral demands, and violence justified to obtain political and economic ends that characterize not only the Sixties, but many historical eras, including today.

What I claim to have located is how this refusal to participate in a political landscape by going unnoticed within it can generate the conditions of possibility to reconfigure that inescapable space. If my analysis is correct, then it follows that one does not have to seek visibility in the public sphere in order to engage in politics. This is not to dismiss all of those who do seek visibility within juridical frameworks as if they were inadequate forms of political participation; to gain visibility is no simple

undertaking. Nevertheless, I contend that these four very different authors, each in their own way, have imagined and created alternative forms of political participation in the midst of an era when almost everyone and every minority group was vying for visibility. The protagonists they created stay in the shadows when everyone else rushes onto the stage. They choose not to fight and shout their way into the spotlight. By going against the crowd, they stumble and begin to perceive a different type of political arena that opens the potential for dialogue without violence.

Without a doubt, there is something of a utopian ethos to this desire to imagine models for non-violent political spaces in the Sixties; in this way, these texts appear to be very much of their own time, to be contemporary texts. However, they never fall into the illusion that a perfect, conflict-free, truly utopian political space will come about simply by going unnoticed and later being perceived. Knowing that their utopia will never come and that their individual desires are never universal ideals sets them apart from those who would use violence to obtain a hegemonic position in the political arena. Going unnoticed, as I have said many times, is not a means to an end. Going unnoticed opens a space in which it becomes possible to imagine alternatives that have the potential to be successful and may just as easily end in failure.

The politics and ethics of going unnoticed would be truly irrelevant, and not just seemingly unimportant, if these gestures were nothing more than a historical anomaly from an era that today seems as distant as the Other in Levinas's ethical theory. Going unnoticed is not by necessity limited to the Sixties in Latin America, the time and place in which I was able to perceive it. On the contrary, the

untimeliness of going unnoticed is what makes it all the more contemporary in both senses of the word. The contemporary, for Agamben, is the one who can peer into the darkness of his or her era; being contemporary is not a matter of bringing visibility to the otherwise invisible, but allowing one's eyes to be "struck by the beam of darkness that comes from his [or her] own time" ("What" 14). The contemporary is also that which is present today, the one who returns to the unlived experiences of the present regardless of whether they are archaic, recently historical, or modern: "It is in this sense that one can say that the entry point to the present necessarily takes the form of an archaeology that does not, however, regress to a historical past but returns to that part within the present that we are absolutely incapable of living" (17). Those protagonists who go unnoticed in the Latin American narratives of the Sixties are not only present today, but perhaps only today does it become possible to perceive them and their political and ethical gestures once the highly visible debates of that era recede into the past.

After the failures of the Sixties, after the political spotlight shifts from the Cold War to neoliberalism, globalization, and the Left Turn, after the ringing in our ears from the Boom fades, some of the unnoticed can be perceived. Some of the unnoticed of the Latin American Sixties whose potential for perception endured these past fifty years finally can pass into actuality today. The politics and ethics of going unnoticed, despite its contemporaneity, failed to be perceived in the past, but perhaps these gestures still can point toward possible alternatives within the contemporary landscape today. They may be successful in moving us toward that unforeseen horizon of a democratic dialogue to come. They will fail to ever see that moment

materialize into a static regime, but this was never their goal. Nevertheless, after these failures the potential to generate alternate imaginaries of the Sixties and for today remains within that incessant movement of those who go unnoticed.

What I have learned from those who go unnoticed is that every time one arrives at an end or an obstacle, it is possible to turn around, to look at ARTELETRA from a new perspective, and to seek an alternate itinerary, while keeping a smile on my face just like Manjarrez's Huberto keeps grinning despite all his rejections. There is a certain cynical optimism to this approach. By going down another path, my threshold of perception can change, and my ability to plot out a different narrative and to imagine a new horizon becomes possible. Perhaps what is needed today is to shake off the disillusionment of those who saw their political projects fail in the Sixties and to take up once more the type of utopian thought I described above. Perhaps it is time to ask what other futures, instead of dwelling in the tragedies of the past, are possible today. I will end, then, by asking once more the same question with which I began: How might the Sixties in Latin America be read yet again?

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