

POETICS OF TRANSFER: TRANSLATION, COSMOPOLITANISM AND
THE INTERMEDIAL IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY TRANSATLANTIC POETRY

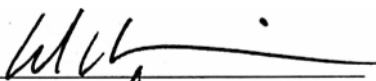
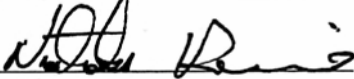
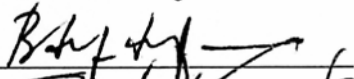
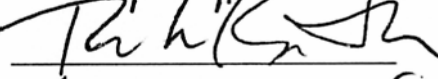
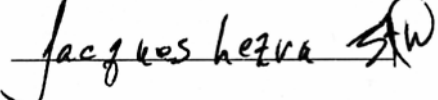
By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Poetics of Transfer: Translation, Cosmopolitanism and the Intermedial in Twentieth-

Century Transatlantic Poetry

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Professor William H. Galperin

This dissertation develops the notion of what I call ‘transatlantic poetic transfer,’ through which I analyze how differing models of cultural and linguistic hybridity are produced in the process of poetic composition by twentieth-century writers at both sides of the Atlantic. The concept of transfer refers to a carrying over, a transport, a displacement, or a transformation of an object, medium or event into a new form or configuration, thus constituting an extremely productive critical tool for the analysis of the work of poets located at the interstices of differing languages, traditions and media. My dissertation locates a tension or dialectic at the core of much of twentieth-century transatlantic poetry between a cosmopolitan impulse to transcend national, linguistic and disciplinary boundaries and a vernacular need to ground the poetic voice within a particular local culture. This dialectic informs my readings of poets whose work encompasses different strands of European and American modernism including Fernando Pessoa, Vicente Huidobro, Federico García Lorca and Ezra Pound, as well as the experimental poetry of a later generation of avant-garde poets also operating within a transatlantic framework: the U.S. poet Jack Spicer, the Brazilian artists Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, and the Caribbean writer Kamau Brathwaite.

Dedication

For Jamie & Isabela

Acknowledgements

During the last six years I have been extremely fortunate to be able to work with a group of extraordinary scholars, teachers and mentors who have not only shaped the way I think about literary and cultural studies, but who have ultimately helped me to develop as a person. This dissertation is essentially the result of my interaction with all the people I acknowledge here.

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that she is and a better mentor. At the Graduate School-New Brunswick I have to thank Alex Bachman for all her help throughout the years on every little administrative thing.

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Finally, I wouldn't be here without my family. All the gratitude and love in the world goes to my parents-in-law, John and Veronica Zorigian, for their hospitality, support, and especially for managing to take care so well of Jamie before I showed up. Jason and Chris, thank you for being the brothers I always wanted to have. All my family in Granada, Spain deserves the biggest acknowledgment of all mainly because they have not seen me that much since I came up with the idea of moving to Dublin in 1997. I finally know that there is nowhere like Granada by now, but I still miss you all every single day. My grandparents, Vicente II Infante del Castillo and Adelaida Fernández Ariza, *auténticas almas quijotescas*, are the most remarkable couple I have met in my life, 55 years together and counting. My mother, Teresa Infante, is the bravest woman in the world—and one of the smartest—and I owe her an essential part of who I am as a son, a father and ultimately as a human being. I hope I can make her extremely proud of her accomplishment as the amazing mother that she is.

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife and my daughter, Jamie and Isabela. They are my life, my source of inspiration, and my passion, so I don't need to thank you: I can only love you with my whole heart. *Os amo con todo mi corazón.*

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Introduction

One of the challenges of translation studies is that almost any act of linguistic communication, conceptual interpretation or cultural exchange can be analyzed as a form of translation. Following Antoine Berman's approach to translation studies developed in his groundbreaking *The Experience of the Foreign*, it can be argued that any attempt to produce a unified theory of translation runs the risk of extending the concept of translation to everything that could be interpreted as such, which ultimately "would result in depriving it [the theory] of all content" (183). While contemporary translation studies has developed as an academic discipline either by exploring translation's origins historically or by justifying the concept of translation theoretically, it is through the generation of what Berman refers to as "restricted" (183) theories of translation that translation studies can continue to have a major impact within the fields of literary and cultural studies, especially in the multicultural age of globalization. As Berman suggests, one of the plausible ways for translation studies to steadily grow and expand as a crucial field of research within the humanities and social sciences is precisely by conceiving translation "rather [than] as *subject of* knowledge, as origin and source of knowledge" (182).

My dissertation articulates just such an approach in which the concept of translation—specifically embodied now in the notion of transfer—provides a particular mode of critical inquiry into the ways in which the interlingual and transnational dimension of twentieth-century transatlantic poetry led to the emergence of forms of linguistic and cultural hybridity on both sides of the Atlantic. The concept of poetic transfer essentially refers in my dissertation to a carrying over, a transport, a

displacement, or a transformation of a poetic object, medium or event into a new form or configuration, thus constituting an extremely productive critical tool for the analysis of the work of transatlantic poets located at the interstices of differing literary traditions (romanticism, modernism, the avant-garde), languages (English, French, Portuguese, Spanish), and media (print, visual, and digital). Although I analyze the notion of transatlantic poetic transfer essentially as a series of particular formal relations established between different poets, languages and media, the notion of transfer itself as a poetic or formal system is complicated in my dissertation by its intrinsic relation to the realm of World history. My approach to the notion of transfer as a poetic form is thus indebted to the groundbreaking work of contemporary literary scholars such as Wai Chee Dimock and David Palumbo-Liu who see the circulation and conversion of literary forms and genres as completely dependent upon, shaped by and connected to contingent historical forces. As Palumbo-Liu has recently argued, the conversion of literary form when seen as a historical and transnational event—whether hemispheric, intercontinental or global—dramatically problematizes the notion of form itself:

The historical dimension enters into consideration precisely in that the fissures and gaps that trouble the conversion of Form are the products themselves of a tectonic shift in temporality and historicity that brings with it new ways of evaluating social and historical space and temporality. This is a formal problematic situated in an eminently worldly space and time, one that is characterized by migration, displacement, the reinhabiting of the modern world by new forms and ideologies. Under these circumstances, Form becomes freighted with the obligation to encase an as yet unsettled and indeterminate admixture of projected desire and repressed fear. (“Atlantic to Pacific,” 202)

Following the historical dimension of the function of literary form due to its modern location in an “eminently worldly space and time” just suggested by Palumbo-Liu—which evidently applies to the realm of twentieth-century transatlantic literature—

one of the main arguments of my dissertation is that the different modes of transatlantic literary transfer under examination operate not only at a poetic, linguistic, and intermedial level, but ultimately as critiques of modernity—as diverse as the different manifestations and experiences of modernity during the twentieth century at both sides of the Atlantic. Hence, foundational concepts of the Enlightenment—such as a teleological conception of history, the transcendental subject, and particularly the conception of language as a transparent medium of representation and purveyor of meaning—are variously challenged by the transferential and translational impulse in the work of twentieth-century poets writing within a transatlantic context. In this sense, my use of the notion of transatlantic poetic transfer to analyze the work of poets such as Fernando Pessoa, Vicente Huidobro, Jack Spicer, Augusto and Haroldo de Campos and Kamau Brathwaite not only aims at unveiling the particular poetic form taken by the transferential dimension of their work, but at the same time focuses on how that same transferential dimension ultimately constitutes a critical response to “the tectonic shift in temporality and historicity” that, as mentioned by Palumbo-Liu, is intrinsic to the experience of modernity during the twentieth century.

In this sense, and as Walter Benjamin would argue, the vital task inherent to the act of translation at this historical moment is no longer to establish semantic equivalents between different languages or cultures, but to provide a powerful critical tool able to transcend the fragmentary boundaries of particular languages and local cultures. I take Benjamin’s seminal theorization of the act of translation in his famous “The Task of the Translator” (“*Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*”) to constitute a symptomatic and central critical response to the kind of historical crisis connected to the notion of poetic transfer

that articulates my dissertation. In this sense, the crucial relation of Benjamin's take on translation and his philosophy of language with the critique of Western civilization famously carried out by the cultural critics Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* has been already suggested by the historian Martin Jay in extremely concise and relevant terms:

To Benjamin, formal logic was the barrier that separated the language of Paradise from its human counterpart. Man tended to overname things by abstractions and generalizations. It was in fact "the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his recreation of that work." Similarly, the function of the cultural critic was the recovery of the lost dimension of God's speech by hermeneutically decoding man's various inferior approximations. [...] Adorno and Horkheimer, although eschewing the consciously theological underpinnings of Benjamin's theory of language, did accept the notion that "pure" speech had been corrupted. (*The Dialectical Imagination*, 261)

As Jay suggests, Benjamin's conception of translation emerges in part as a response of the same "self-alienation of individuals" (23) that according to Horkheimer and Adorno had affected Western civilization during the first half of the twentieth century, and which was conceptualized by the two members of the Frankfurt School as an instrumental subjugation of existence: "The more completely the machinery of thought subjugates existence, the more blindly it is satisfied with reproducing it. Enlightenment thereby regresses to the mythology it has never been able to escape" (20). Hence, the act of translation entails for Benjamin an attempt to transcend both the merely communicative function of language, as well as the linguistic reproduction of meaning into some other realm of linguistic signification with "a special high purposiveness" (255) able to overcome the fragmentary condition of particular languages: "[...] a translation, instead of imitating the sense of the original, must lovingly and in detail

incorporate the original way of meaning, thus making both the original recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel” (260).

One of the key features of Benjamin’s conception of this “greater language” configured by the different fragments provided by particular languages is that it constitutes a “suprahistorical kinship” (256) that remains “hidden” and therefore unknown within a particular language until it is experienced and accessed as particular languages supplement each other through the act of translation: “Rather, all suprahistorical kinship between languages consists in this: in every one of them as a whole, one and the same thing is meant. Yet this one thing is achievable not by a single language but only by the totality of their intentions supplementing each other: pure language” (*reine Sprache*) (256). Therefore, the task of translation within Benjamin’s philosophy of language is to facilitate an experience of “pure language” that remains hidden and unknown within a particular language prior to its encounter with some other language.

Benjamin’s symptomatic attempt to arrive through the act of translation at a higher linguistic purposiveness able to overcome the alienation and fragmentary condition of Western civilization is aligned in my dissertation with a modern take on the notion of cosmopolitanism that has been conceptualized by the American sociologist Richard Sennett as “being engaged by the unknown.” Following the work on urban sociology by Georg Simmel, Sennett has specifically developed a notion of cosmopolitanism as being related to an encounter with a “force of alterity” with the following key implications:

The distinction between difference and alterity has to do with the possibility of classifying strangers in terms of difference versus the possibility of the unknown

other. What Simmel understood about this stranger, understood as a force of alterity, was that it had a profoundly provoking quality to it. As Benjamin would later argue, the notion of the unknown had a kind of force, a kind of power of arousal in crowds. [...] Thus, the quality of cosmopolitanism for these urbanists at the time had to do with the notion of being engaged by the unknown. (43)

One of the main ideas which will be explored in my dissertation is that the notion of being engaged by the unknown and of incorporating a “force of alterity” within the self—taking place both within Benjamin’s conception of translation and modern urban experience, as well as Sennett’s take on cosmopolitanism inspired by the work of Simmel—is not only endowed with “a profoundly provoking quality,” but it also constitutes an extremely productive event in itself. In other words, the spatio-temporal or historical encounter with an unknown force of alterity embodied in a strange or foreign body produces in fact a particular formal correlation between the self and the Other which is powerfully exemplified in the work of the poets examined in my dissertation. Hence, one of the main claims of this dissertation is that this particular formal correlation—which I conceptualize based on the notion of poetic transfer—happens to be traceable at a linguistic level within the poetic text.

Moreover, one of the key features of the notion of transfer as a poetic or formal correlation is that in its very articulation of the productive tension at its very core—between the self versus the Other, and the local versus the global—it can be related to various forms of intermediality. In my dissertation I take intermediality to constitute both the incorporation of visual and digital media within the poetic text, as well as the creation of an artistic medium located between different forms of traditional media. My use of the notion of the intermedial is indebted to the main critic who has defined the concept, the New York-based artist and member of the Fluxus avant-garde collective Dick Higgins:

“The vehicle I chose, the word “intermedia” appears in the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1812 in exactly its contemporary sense—to define works which fall conceptually between media that are already known” (*Horizons*, 27). Although Higgins uses the term borrowed from Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* to describe various artistic forms belonging to different historical periods—from opera to visual or sound poetry, and from happenings to ready-mades—Higgins’ conception of the intermedial is essentially part of his own theory of the avant-garde. Similar to the conception of the avant-garde as a critique of art as an institution developed by Peter Bürger, which I examine later in more detail, for Higgins the intermedial constitutes a critique of traditional media that generally emerges in avant-garde artworks: “But when one is thinking of the avant-garde of forms and media, one is often thinking of artists who, for whatever reason, question those media” (29). I use here the notion of the intermedial both in Higgins’ formulation of the term as opening up a new critical space between media—especially between print and visual media as explored by avant-garde poets such as Vicente Huidobro and August and Haroldo de Campos—as well as in its application in contemporary literary and cultural studies to refer in particular to the interrelation between print and digital media—a key feature of the poetic work of the Caribbean cultural theorist and poet Kamau Brathwaite.

As suggested previously, and apart from its intermedial dimension, the idea of poetic transfer is conceived in my dissertation as an event that is essentially spatio-temporal or historical, simultaneously constituting an inherently transatlantic and modern phenomenon. First, the productive tension articulated by the notion of transfer as a form of linguistic, cultural and intermedial translation can be considered to be a crucial part of

the transatlantic experience from its very origins. This need to translate lying at the core of the transatlantic encounter is powerfully stated by Julio Ortega in his essay

“Transatlantic Translations:”

The day after the conquest, the postcolonial world began in the scripts of translation. In partial versions and overlaid readings of events, the New World subject who had learned to speak and read in the language of the Old World was already an interpreter, and from that moment onward translation would define this modern subject of the Americas. (39)

Closely related to Ortega’s crucial conception of the transatlantic encounter between the New and the Old World as constituting an act of translation, there is a parallel dimension to this continuous cultural transfer associated to what Kamau Brathwaite has referred to as the universal problem of modern experience, or what he refers to as “the whole civilized complex of living in the post-Faustian, post-Freudian world” (*Roots*, 58). Therefore, translation also emerges within this same transatlantic spatio-temporal context as the necessary articulation and negotiation of Brathwaite’s conception of a complex that he characterizes as “the ‘modern’ problem of the individual personality vis-à-vis the group; and at the same time a collective effort which expresses the individuality of the group within the context of a wider society” (58). Both conceptual components of the notion of transatlantic transfer as a form of translation between the Old and the New World, as well as the negotiation between the self and the Other within the problematic temporality and historicity provided by modern experience pervade the work of the different poets examined throughout my dissertation.

In my first chapter I examine in detail how several theoretical models related to the notion of transfer associated to the German term *Übertragung* provide the basis for a poetics of linguistic, intermedial and cultural translation. These different theoretical

models of transfer or *Übertragung* include the seminal translation theories developed by Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin in the early decades of the twentieth century, the idea of ‘infinite versability’ conceived in early German Romanticism by Novalis and which constitutes an essential concept for the poetics of Jena romanticism, and finally the influential concept of transference developed within the field of psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud, Sándor Ferenczi, and Jacques Lacan. Based on these theoretical models, I take the notion of transfer to essentially constitute a formal relation between an original form and something other than itself which is determined by the potential for translatability of the original.

My second chapter explores the notion of transfer in the work of the modernist Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) by focusing on his relatively unknown *English Poems* (1921), a collection composed in English after Pessoa had been exposed to the educational system of the British Empire in colonial South Africa. I read Pessoa’s intensely erotic *English Poems* as a fetishized translation of the English poetic tradition—figured in the work of John Keats, William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser—through which Pessoa carves out not only his own space within the English poetic canon, but ultimately his hybrid version of the English language. Using various definitions of the fetish developed from Marx, to Freud and finally Giorgio Agamben, I examine how Pessoa manages to turn the English language into a simulacrum of itself through which he alternately masks and expresses his differing libidinal impulses (hetero- and homosexual) by effectively recreating his voice into a multiplicity of personae belonging to different aesthetic eras—among them classical Greece, Renaissance England, and modern Portugal. In this sense, Keats’s notion of “negative capability,” as an ability to

translate the poetic voice into different personae, is therefore key to my analysis of the series of heteronyms that come to define the *oeuvre* of this Portuguese writer and can be traced now to a tradition—specifically Romanticism—that Pessoa transfers into a distinctly modern idiom.

My third chapter analyzes the avant-garde poetics developed by the cosmopolitan Chilean writer Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948). Huidobro's *Creacionismo* was originally developed as an intermedial poetic project while he was associated with two rather different avant-garde groups in Paris (Cubism) and Madrid (*Ultraísmo*) during the late 1910s and early 1920s. Although it partly emerged as a poetic correlative to the avant-garde revolution brought forth by Cubist painters such as Juan Gris, and Pablo Picasso, Huidobro's *Creacionismo* is rooted in what, again, is primarily a romantic conception of the poetic word as endowed with an absolute potential of creation. Working with different approaches to avant-garde poetics developed by critics such as Peter Bürger and Martin Puchner, I focus on Huidobro's long prose poem composed in 1928 and published in Madrid as *Temblor de cielo* (1931) and in Paris as *Tremblement de ciel* (1932). In this chapter, I show how Huidobro's crucial bilingual poem—which has been generally shadowed by his masterpiece *Altazor* (1931)—narrativizes his avant-garde theory of poetic creation as a quest toward the aesthetic ideal of becoming that Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe have called, in reference to the poetics of the Jena romantics, the “literary absolute.”

The fourth chapter examines the English translations of the poetry of the Spanish writer Federico García Lorca (1898-1936) by the Californian poet and linguist Jack Spicer (1925-1965) in the latter's *After Lorca* (1957). I argue how in his attempt to

poetically correspond with the work of Lorca, Spicer unveils the transferential force inherent in the act of interlingual translation that would lead him to develop his so-called poetics of the “Outside” or “poetics of dictation.” Spicer’s avant-garde poetics, which became rather influential within the community of poets and artists known generally as the San Francisco Renaissance, implies a translational attempt to linguistically connect with an outside through which he could transcend the 1950s Cold War environment in which he wrote. As critics have noted, Spicer’s take on translation is similar to the theory of translation developed by Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) in his prologue to his own translations of Baudelaire’s *Tableaux Parisiens* where Benjamin conceives translation as the particular linguistic act through which an original work can fulfill its essential *intention* or potential for translatability by accessing the realm he refers to as “pure language” (*reine Sprache*). Placing Spicer’s work in dialogue with Benjamin’s theory of translation, I show how Spicer’s approach to translation in *After Lorca* differs from Benjamin’s theory by originally aiming to linguistically reproduce and expand the homoerotic libidinal impulse that Spicer specifically located in Lorca’s work. If Pessoa can be said to have fetishized the English language in his *English Poems*, Spicer fetishizes the concept of translation itself as the basis of a transferential poetics able to reproduce the impulse of the original *ad infinitum*.

My fifth chapter focuses on the Brazilian movement of concrete poetics developed by the brothers Augusto and Haroldo de Campos which revolutionized Latin American and World poetry during the 1960s. Here, I analyze the way Ezra Pound’s notion of the “luminous detail” at the heart of his modernist poetics is transferred by the de Campos brothers as the conceptual matrix of their visual poetics of *concretismo*.

Mirroring Pound's formulation of the "luminous detail" as a hybrid or complex poetic image constituting a self-sufficient critical fact able to justify a wide range of literary activities, the São Paulo-based collective incorporated Pound's "new method of scholarship" to essentially rewrite the literary history of the Latin American avant-garde. Pound's influence is particularly evident in the de Campos' critical study of the poetry of Joaquim de Sousa Andrade (1833-1902) entitled *ReVisão de Sousândrade* (1964), where they incorporate the work of the Brazilian romantic poet to the theoretical body of *concretismo* as the Latin American precursor of Pound's own poetics of *Imagisme*. Thus, the de Campos brothers effectively use Pound's version of Anglo-American modernism to mitigate the insularity of Brazilian literature, transforming an otherwise obscure chapter of Brazilian literary history into a seminal moment in the origination of the global avant-garde. In examining the parallels between the de Campos' neo-avant-garde revision of Sousândrade's work and Pound's original formulation of *Imagisme* I demonstrate that, despite the different historical and cultural contexts that determine their work, both cases display an analogous use of translation as a critical tool in order to constitute, or in this case reconstitute, a syncretic avant-garde that is alternately hybridized and transhistorical.

My final chapter traces the progression of the postcolonial poetry of the Caribbean cultural theorist and historian Kamau Brathwaite from its inception in the 1960s as part of his groundbreaking use of the notion of the Creole as the basis of Caribbean culture, to its culmination in digital and virtual form in his "Sycorax Video Style." I specifically focus here on the intersection of print culture and digital media that characterizes Brathwaite's poetry since the late 1980s. In his ongoing attempt to

articulate a vernacular voice for Caribbean culture, Brathwaite's later poetry involves an intermedial transfer between the oral and the digital that aims at bridging the accumulative temporality of history and the performative temporality of poetics.

Drawing on the work of postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy and Simon Gikandi among others, I show, then, how in its movement from the vernacular to the digitally mediated, Brathwaite's Caribbean poetics exemplifies the productive tension between the local and the cosmopolitan—a tension crucially defined by Sheldon Pollock as being mutually constitutive. I also show how this particular transfer amounts to a futile resistance to a cosmopolitanism that subsumes his radical embrace of the Caribbean vernacular along with the various forms of mediation, both old and new, on which it necessarily depends.

The notion of transatlantic poetic transfer developed in my dissertation opens up a space for the critical examination of the interlingual, intermedial and transnational dimensions of modernist and avant-garde poetics that still remain understudied within contemporary literary and cultural studies. At the same time, it reveals some of the very mechanisms through which modernist and avant-garde poetics circulate during the twentieth century, in particular between Europe and the Americas, ultimately pointing at the limitations of critical studies of modernist poetry and poetics that do not take into account the actual transferring dynamic at the core of this transatlantic circulation, as Martin Puchner has recently argued in the following terms:

The dynamic of moving and translating, of displacement or replacement points to the limitations of theories of modernism that depend on a more or less deterministic model according to which modernism is a response to the crisis of modernization. [...] The model of modernism as arising from incomplete and contested industrialization thus explains the emergence of a first modernism, but not the projection, refraction and adaptation of this modernism ever since. In

particular, it does not work as an explanation of the avant-garde at large, which respects neither origin, nor original language, which does not privilege fixed abodes and cultural frames and thrives on the instable and ephemeral even as it may fantasize about origins and headquarters. What needs to be added to this theory of uneven developments is the dynamic of modernism and the avant-garde *itself*, the fact that once there existed a radical modernism in Europe's semiperiphery, this modernism travelled and was distributed to a much wider range of places and locales, disrespecting prevalent modes of production. There formed, in other words, a kind of feedback loop between European and American modernisms. (*Poetry of the Revolution*, 174)

By providing a new theoretical framework based on the notion of poetic transfer for the analysis of twentieth-century transatlantic poetry, I offer a model that precisely can be seen to articulate the very “dynamic of modernism and the avant-garde” that according to Puchner is yet to be developed. Although the poetic of transatlantic transfer elaborated in this dissertation does not attempt to constitute a theory of the travelling dynamic of modernism as a whole, i.e. the “feedback loop” mentioned by Puchner, it does offer a theoretical model that unveils different poetic forms adopted by this transferring dynamic of cultural and linguistic translation, displacement, and replacement. At the same time, by focussing on the process of poetic composition as providing different articulations of this cosmopolitan dynamic of “moving and translation,” I emphasize how, in that very process, the writers studied in my dissertation generate different models of cultural and linguistic hybridity. While recent trends of scholarship analyze the notion of hybridity as the result of global economic, geopolitical and racial processes traceable in literary and cultural productions, my dissertation is concerned with the way hybridity is produced in the very act of poetic composition. Ultimately, I view twentieth-century transatlantic poetics not so much as a by-product of global culture, but

rather as opening up the transferential space in which hybridized voices emerge under a multiplicity of influences.

Chapter One

A Poetics of Transfer:

Übertragung (Translation—Transference— Translatability—Transfer)

Trans-fĕro, tŭli, lātum (also written *trālātum*), *ferre*, v.

a:

I. To bear across; to carry or bring over; to convey over, transport, transfer (syn.: *traduco*, *traicio*). II. Trop. A. In gen., to convey, direct, transport, transfer. [...] To avert from one's self. B. 1. To put off, postpone, defer, in respect of time. 2. Of speaking or writing. a. To translate into another language. b. To transfer to a secondary or figurative signification, to use figuratively or tropically. 3. To apply, make use of (for a new purpose, etc.). 4. To change, transform.

From Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*.

As the dictionary entry heading this chapter shows, in its Latin inception the term ‘transfer’ refers to a carrying over, a transport, a displacement, or a transformation of an object, event or series in relation to another spatio-temporal realm, entity or medium. Following the basic translational movement inherent in that definition, the term ‘transfer’ essentially denotes in this dissertation a formal mediation between different entities or series—more specifically those of subject/object, analysand/analyst, original/ translation, vernacular/cosmopolitan, history/poetics, textual/visual and print media/digital media. In this sense, a particular transfer between any of the binary pairs just mentioned can be seen to operate in terms of a formal correspondence whenever the translational movement inherent in their correlation involves the generation of a complex unit or dynamic spatio-temporal whole that enfolds one of the elements in terms of the other, ultimately

encompassing both. My exploration of the notion of transfer in this chapter is conceptually and linguistically based on the German word *Übertragung*. The main reason for using the term *Übertragung* as a conceptual basis for my examination of the notion of transfer is that the term itself appears in the four main theoretical frameworks that provide the conceptual basis for what may be conceptualized as a poetics of transfer: Sigmund Freud's original method of dream interpretation developed in his *Die Traumdeutung*—which I read as a fully-fleshed translation theory; Jacques Lacan's poststructuralist interpretation of Freud's theory of dream interpretation; Sándor Ferenczi's expansion of the notion of Freudian transference into his theory of introjection; and finally Walter Benjamin's translation theory developed in "The Task of the Translator." Following these four theoretical models interconnected both at a linguistic and conceptual level, the basic task to establish a poetics of transfer entails the examination of the different ways in which each theorist conceptualizes the basic form of a particular transfer as a mediation between different entities or events, as well as the different mechanisms that articulate the formal dynamic inherent in the particular transfer.

***Übertragung* (Translation): Freud's Task of Translation in *Die Traumdeutung* (and Lacan's Poststructuralist Reading of It)**

As generally acknowledged, the first moment within Freud's dense *oeuvre* where the concept of translation (both as *bersetzung* and *Übertragung*) takes a central position is *Die Traumdeutung* (1900) (*The Interpretation of Dreams*). Part of the revolutionary

aspect of Freud's early work on dreams is his recognition that all previous theories of dream interpretation were exclusively based on an interpretation of the manifest content of a dream, i.e. "as it is presented to our memory" (311). Freud thus contrasts his own analysis of dreams to the other two primary methods of dream interpretation that Freud is able to trace historically, i.e. a "symbolic" (129) dream interpretation, and what he refers to as a "decoding" (130) method. While the first mode of interpretation "considers the content of the dream as a whole and seeks to replace it by another content which is intelligible and in certain respects analogous to the original one" (129), the second alternative "is a kind of cryptography in which each sign can be translated (*übersetzt*) into another sign having a fixed meaning in accordance with a fixed key" (130). It is extremely important to stress here how both methods of dream interpretation prior to Freud's can be analyzed as being analogous to the two traditional modes that have articulated translation theory from classical antiquity, i.e. a literal or word-for-word translation, versus a figural or sense-for-sense translation. This classic dichotomy was famously established first by Cicero (106-43 BCE) in *De optimo genere oratorum*, and then reiterated by Jerome (347– 420) after him in his *Epistle 57 (Ad Pammachium de optimo genere interpretandi)*:

I render the text, not word for word, but sense for sense (*non uerbum e uerbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu*). [...] Cicero's authority will suffice for me; in the prologue to those orations he remarked: "[...] And I did not translate them as an interpreter, but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and the forms, or as one might say, the 'figures of thought,' but in a language which conforms our usage. And in doing so, I did not hold it necessary to render word for word, but I preserved the general style and force of the language. For I did not think I ought to count them out to the reader like coins, but to pay them by weight, as it were. (49)

Regardless of the position that either Cicero or Jerome adopts in relation to this crucial dichotomy in the history of translation—which gravitates one way or another around the tension between the disciplines of grammar and rhetoric—the main point here is that both alternatives are analogous to the methods of dream interpretation that Freud deems unsatisfactory for his purposes of dream analysis. The key issue at stake in Freud’s position is therefore that he is trying to overcome both the production of an interpretation based on the establishment of a symbolic analogy to the manifest content of a particular dream—that using Cicero’s analogy could be analyzed as a payment by “weight”—as well as in a decoding established through a sign-for-sign or word-for-word translation of the manifest dream content based on a pre-established “key”—in Cicero’s terms counting the words “out to the reader like coins.” Therefore, it can be argued that part of the groundbreaking nature of Freud’s project in *Die Traumdeutung* is to articulate, among many other revolutionary concepts, an alternative model of translation that tries to overcome the classical dichotomy between a sense-for-sense and a word-for-word method of interpretation.

It is in this very context where Freud’s original take on translation—as both *Übersetzung* and *Übertragung*—primarily emerges as the main critical tool through which he is trying to bridge the epistemological gap between the manifest and the latent content of dreams. In his study of dreams, Freud is able to theoretically articulate the fact that the manifest content of dreams is only the result of a series of transformations suffered by their latent content or the dream-thoughts, which in Freud’s theory implies the fulfilment of a particular (unconscious) wish censored and repressed by another psychological “force” or “system” (177), the dynamics of which at this early stage Freud has

not yet fully formalized. In chapters four and five of *Die Traumdeutung*, Freud refers to this series of changes suffered by the latent content respectively as “dream-distortion” (177), “displacement” (209), and “dream-distortion by displacement” (210). Here it can be noted that the notion of *Übertragung* emerges briefly in Freud’s preliminary description of displacement as a consequence of the transformation and transfer of the cathetic charge between different ideas, like “when a lovely old maid transfers (*überträgt*) her affections to animals” (210).

The ‘task’ of Freud’s dream analysis which “had no previous existence” (311) essentially consists hence in “investigating the relations between the manifest content of dreams and the latent dream-thoughts, and of tracing out the processes by which the latter have been changed into the former” (311). Freud’s theoretical development of his “new” task of translation is thus grounded on a prior and radically original discovery that allows this task to be actually carried out. It can then be argued that what Freud’s analysis originally unveils is actually what, following the use of the concept by Antoine Berman, I will refer to here as the translatability of dreams. In other words, during his thorough analysis of dreams in *Die Traumdeutung*—primarily his own—Freud acknowledges the fact that the stuff that makes dreams up is a translatable material that can be cathected with different levels of intensity by different psychical systems, and attached to the different images experienced by the dreamer. It is in his very attempt to conceptually articulate the translatability of dreams that Freud overtly turns, rather appropriately one must say, to the concept of translation:

The dream-thoughts and the dream-content are presented to us like two versions of the same subject-matter in two different languages. Or, more properly, the dream-content seems like a transcript (*Übertragung*) of the dream-thoughts into

another mode of expression, whose characters and syntactic laws it is our business to discover by comparing the original and the translation (*Übersetzung*). (312)

Contrary to previous methods of dream interpretation, Freud discovers that the subject matter of dreams operates through two different languages or modes of expression which are able to translate into each other at different levels. Freud's task is therefore neither to find a symbolic equivalent nor a sign-for-sign decoding of the content of dreams, but rather to discover the previously unknown "characters and syntactic laws" of the manifest dream-content's "mode of expression" as it relates to its latent dream-thoughts. Based on Freud's take on translation developed in *Die Traumdeutung*, it can be argued that the main problem with both previous models for dream interpretation—as well as with the two classical options for interlinguistic translation, one may add—is that they both ignore the translatability that Freud finds in the very space of expression that articulates the difference between the manifest and the latent content of dreams. Regardless of what a "symbolic" or "decoding" method of interpretation may produce, neither mode of interpretation is aware of the formal distance between the manifest content of dreams and its expressive medium that lies at the core of Freud's original method of dream interpretation. It is precisely this differential distance that constitutes for Jacques Lacan the space of signification that facilitates the transference displacement characterizing not only the structure of dreams, but ultimately the very structure of language:

Like the unnatural figures of the boat in the roof, or the man with a comma in for a head, which are expressly mentioned by Freud, dream images are to be taken up only on the basis of their value as signifiers, that is, only insofar as they allow to spell out the "proverb" presented in by the oeniric rebus. The linguistic structure that enables us to read dreams is at the crux of the "signifierness of dreams," at the crux of the *Traumdeutung*. (424)

From his poststructuralist perspective, Lacan is basically applying his own interpretation of Saussure's structuralist notion of the signifier to Freud's original discovery that dreams can be manifestly experienced in a form of expression—constituting both a grammar and a syntax—through which particular dream images distance themselves from their latent content in their process of formation and articulation. Hence, in chapter six of *Die Traumdeutung*, Freud produces a basic taxonomy of the grammatical and syntactical laws of dream formation that according to him govern this 'other' mode of expression that he refers to as the "dream-work;" namely its four mechanisms of condensation (*Verdichtung*), displacement (*Verschiebung*), considerations of representability (*Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit*), and secondary revision (*sekundäre Bearbeitung*). However, the extreme importance of Lacan's re-reading of Freud's conceptualization of the different mechanisms that articulate the dream-work lies not in the fact that he conceptualizes these processes as a series of linguistic structures—an idea already implicit in Freud's original conception of the mechanisms at work in dream formation. Rather, its primary relevance lies in the fact that Lacan conceives these processes as a series of figures of speech and an overall process of rhetorical displacement that articulate the language of the unconscious as discovered by Freud, and more importantly, the very process of signification taking place in discourse—symbolically embodied, as Lacan suggests here, in the discourse of psychoanalysis:

Periphrasis, hyperbaton, ellipsis, suspension, anticipation, retraction, negation, digression, and irony, these are figures of style (Quintillian's *figurae sententiarum*), just as catachresis, litotes, antonomasia, and hypotyposis are the tropes, whose name strikes me as the most appropriate ones with which to label these mechanisms. Can one see here mere manners of speaking, when it is the figures themselves that are at work in the rhetoric of the discourse the analyst utters? (433)

At the same time, Lacan conceives the overall process of displacement at work both in Freud's method of dream interpretation and in his own poststructuralist conception of discourse ultimately as a product of what he refers to as "the transference function of the signifier." Interestingly enough for the purposes of the current examination of the notion of *Übertragung*, Lacan conceptualizes this very transference function as a series of "formulas for connection and substitution" that are precisely associated to Freud's use of the term *Übertragung* to refer first to the process of translation he develops in *Die Traumdeutung*, and also to the event of interpersonal transference taking place during psychoanalytic treatment:

The three books that one might call canonical with regard to the unconscious—the *Traumdeutung*, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and *Jokes (Witz) and their Relation to the Unconscious*—are but a web of examples whose developments is inscribed in formulas for connection and substitution [...] which are the formulas which I give for the signifier in its transference function. For in the *Traumdeutung* it is in terms of such a function that the term *Übertragung*, or transference, which later gives its name to the mainspring of the intersubjective link between analysand and analyst, is introduced. (434)

The term *Übertragung* therefore constitutes a central term not only within Lacan's re-reading of Freud, but ultimately within Freud's overall discovery and analysis of the language of the unconscious. *Übertragung* thus constitutes the key term that articulates the process of dream formation as examined here in detail, as well as, as Lacan suggests, the interpersonal transference between patient and analyst taking place during psychoanalytic therapy. The actual mechanics of psychoanalytic transference are therefore key to examine the different conceptual implications entailed by *Übertragung* as a poetic or formal system.

***Übertragung* (Transference): Sándor Ferenczi's "Introjection and Transference"**

Sándor Ferenczi's essay "Introjection and Transference" (1909) primarily treats the actual mechanism of certain transfers of affect experienced by the analysand when confronted with the figure of the analyst during the course of the psychoanalytic treatment of neurotic patients. As acknowledged by Ferenczi, and as quoted at the beginning of his essay, the occurrence of this particular kind of transfer of affect was originally described by Freud as a 'transference' (*Übertragung*) in the postscript to his "Fragment of An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" (1905):

What are transferences? They are new editions or facsimiles of the impulses and phantasies which are aroused and made conscious during the progress of the analysis; but they have this peculiarity, which is characteristic of their species, that they replace some earlier person by the person of the physician. To put it another way: a whole series of psychological experiences are revived, not as belonging to the past, but as applying to the person of the physician at the present moment. (*The Freud Reader*, 234)

Freud's conception of transferences entails in this sense two parallel processes; first the temporal repetition during psychoanalytic treatment of a series of original impulses or fantasies; and second the spatial incorporation of the figure of the analyst—who remained foreign to the original impulse or fantasy—to its new form or "facsimile" taking place now during treatment. By connecting Freud's original conception of the transference, with some of its conceptual implications further developed by Ferenczi, I will analyze here how the psychoanalytic transference entails in formal terms the generation of a complex spatio-temporal whole through which the analysand can translate an original fantasy into a new version of itself that now incorporates a foreign object—embodied in the figure of the analysand—into its very form.

Ferenczi's own theoretical development of the notion of introjection accounts for the actual functioning of the transferences carried out by neurotic patients during psychoanalytic treatment. At the same time, and perhaps most importantly, in "Introjection and Transference" Ferenczi is also highlighting the transferential nature of neurosis itself, examining introjection as a transferring mechanism intrinsic to its functioning, as he puts it: "transference is a psychological mechanism that is characteristic of the neurosis altogether" (36). In order to ground his analysis of introjection, Ferenczi establishes a clinical distinction between neurosis and paranoia based on the formal structure of the transfer implicit in both mental disorders at the core of psychoanalytic theory. As Ferenczi argues, paranoia implies an outward transposition of unpleasant impulses, drives or fantasies; neurosis, on the other hand, entails an incorporation of external objects that end up internalized into the patient's "circle of interest" (48):

The neurosis stands in this respect in a diametrically contrast to paranoia. Whereas the paranoiac expels from his ego the impulses that have become unpleasant, the neurotic helps himself by taking into the ego as large as possible a part of the outer world, making it the object of unconscious phantasies. This is a kind of diluting process by means of which he tries to mitigate the poignancy of free-floating, unsatisfied, unsatisfiable, unconscious wish-impulses. One might give to this process, in contrast to projection, the name *Introjection*. (47)

For Ferenczi, this transferential inclusion of external objects can satisfy the unconscious impulses of the neurotic patient through an act of the imagination that 'dilutes' part of the poignancy attached to the impossibility of the sexual satisfaction of those same drives. This easing feature of introjection seems to explain the phenomenon that Ferenczi refers to as "the apparently motiveless extravaganza of affect, the excessive, hate, love and sympathy of neurotics" (36), since within the paradigm used by Ferenczi, those same affects constitute in fact transferences introjected by the neurotic in the

channelling of his or her unconscious impulses. Ferenczi refers to this excess of affect implicit in introjection as a “widening” (48) of the ego in which neurotics compulsively incorporate objects they can identify with in their “*passion for transference*” (45). One of the key features of neurosis highlighted by Ferenczi is that the “stimulus-hungry” patient is always seeking and ready to include external objects into the realm of the ego: “*Thus it is not that the stimulus-words evoke the complicated reaction, but that the stimulus-hungry affects of neurotics come to meet them.* Applying the newly coined word, one may say that *the neurotic “introjects” the stimulus-words of the experiment*” (51).

The importance of Ferenczi’s conception of introjection for the purposes of the present examination of the notion of transfer resides precisely in the fact that he unveils key implications regarding the very mechanics entailed in the notion of psychoanalytic transference (*Übertragung*) that remain latent and not fully explored in theoretical terms within Freud’s original conceptualization of the interpersonal correlation. In this sense, one of the most relevant aspects of Ferenczi’s conception of introjection is his consideration of the healing process as being carried out by the neurotic patients themselves. For Ferenczi it is not the stimulus-words used by the analyst that evoke the reaction as in other analytic situations, but rather the patients themselves who transfer those stimuli, consequently evoking the original impulse. Hence, within Ferenczi’s analysis of psychoanalytic therapy, the patient is no longer “the object of the administering procedure” (59) as in other mental disorders, but is treated as a “medium” between the analyst and the unconscious of the patient—the “naked mental physiognomy” (57) where “the real active agents” (60) of the neurosis are located. The

process of introjection emerges hence as a translation of an original transfer or “path” that is produced in the attempt on behalf of the analysand to maintain unconscious certain repressed impulses of a sexual nature. This particular conceptualization of transference leads Ferenczi to consider the analytic situation as a “kind of catalysis” (39) that provokes the patient’s particular transfer of affect: “The person of the physician has here the effect of a catalytic ferment that temporally attracts to itself the affects split off in the dissection” (40). Analysis facilitates in this way a re-enactment of childhood transferences in which the patient’s erotic feelings are now transferred “onto the objects that evoke those feelings.”

Therefore, a key feature of Ferenczi’s conception of introjection as a transference process is that it literally takes place, i.e. it constitutes a very specific spatio-temporal realm of mediation where the re-enactment of the imaginary transfer is essentially triggered on purely perceptual terms. In the case of the analytic situation itself, the catalytic ferment embodied in the analyst—now the main object evoking the erotic feelings of the analysand—precipitates a transference that necessarily gravitates around the specific features of his or her actual figure, which replaces that of the past love-object in the analysand’s re-enactment of the original sexual impulse. The actual mechanics of the symbolism of hysterical symptoms, or as Ferenczi terms it the “language of hysteria” (37) inherent to introjection is triggered by what Ferenczi describes as a series of perceptual ‘resemblances.’ According to Ferenczi, the transference is primarily facilitated by analogical traces that relate to childhood scenes where the patient presumably developed the sexual fantasies that originated the particular neurosis:

Ridiculously slight resemblances also: the colour of the hair, facial traits, a gesture of the physician, the way in which he holds a cigarette or a pen, the

identity or the similarity in sound of the Christian name with that of some person who has been significant to the patient; even such distant analogies as these are sufficient to establish the transference. (42)

Introjection is thus triggered through an analogical resemblance that, in fact, connects two divergent series at a spatio-temporal level, i.e. the past and now unavailable features surrounding the original impulse on the one hand, and on the other the perceptual features presently available in the spatial scene of psychoanalytic treatment—i.e. particular visual details associated to the “‘paternal’ air” (41) of the physician. In this sense, Ferenczi uses Freud’s term of “revenant” to describe the role of the analyst within the metonymic substitution intrinsic to introjection: “The physician is always one of the “revenants” (Freud) in whom the neurotic patient hopes to find again the vanished figures of childhood” (41). The transfer itself thus generates an anamnestic recognition, turning the present external object into a affectively charged figure, becoming in fact a mere trope (“revenant”) contained within the form of the neurosis due to its formal relation to the original sexual complex. Moreover, according to Ferenczi, all the neurotic patient needs in order to introject the analyst is a single item in or around the figure of the physician that is analogical to the source of the patient’s sexual fantasies in order to unconsciously incorporate the figure of the analyst as a whole into the imaginary realm of his or her ego. As Ferenczi suggests here, the “agent that sets free the pleasure” is this same “presentation by means of a detail” (42) that, as analyzed previously, constituted the main formal mechanism in the formation of dreams discovered by Freud in *Die Traumdeutung* since it “reinforces it from the unconscious; in all dreams also we find similar allusions to things, and events by the help of minimal details. The poetical figure “*pars pro toto*” is thus quite current in the language of the unconscious” (43).

Similarly to Freud's interpretation of the process of dream formation, Ferenczi's conception of introjection constitutes a translational and transference mechanism that is based on a certain imaginative abstraction of phenomenal detail recognised not in terms of that external phenomenal source that triggers the transferring process, but as something other than that same phenomena, i.e. as an immanent content formally related to it. The overall process of introjection seems to be grounded on a figural incorporation of details that operates through a combination of synecdoche and metonym. While synecdoche leads to the recognition of part-whole presentation that generates the temporal anamnestic recuperation of a past libidinous impulse through an analytic re-enactment of the original transfer, metonym leads to the spatial substitution of the figure within the patients's past complex for the actual figure of the analyst. Hence, similar to the transferring process that articulates the dream-work, the transfer mechanism of introjection entails a 'sensorial correlation' that departs from a literal experience of phenomena which in its very formal trajectory acquires a new significance as something other than itself. Applying the analogy of interlingual translation to Ferenczi's conception of introjection, it can be argued that the analyst is incorporated as a foreign object by the immanent impulse of the fantasy which constitutes the original force that is translated through introjection by the analysand. In other words, introjection can only take place due to the fact that the original impulse constitutes a translatable form that through its formal transfer can incorporate the figure of the analyst as a new 'facsimile' of itself. Ultimately, and similar to Freud's original use of the notion of *Übertragung*, Ferenczi's take on introjection is grounded on the conception of symptoms as translatable forms of expression.

***Übertragung* (Translatability): Jena Romanticism and Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator"**

Both Lacan's poststructuralist reading of Freud's take on translation in *Die Traumdeutung* and Ferenczi's formalization of introjection as the actual mechanism of the transference essentially conceptualize the term *Übertragung* in terms of a complex potential for translatability immanent to the original medium—the language of both dreams and hysteria respectively—that produces both its form of expression, as well as the spatio-temporal path towards its translation into a new version of itself. Thus, their recognition of the productive force immanent to this potential for translatability allows for a new model of translation and interpretation that is in radical contrast to the two traditional methods of dream interpretation and translation rejected by Freud in *Die Traumdeutung*—where the translation is established based on a symbolic analogy or a decoding key that are ultimately external to the very medium of expression of the particular dream or symptom, and determined not in terms of the form adopted by the medium of expression itself, but in terms of an external parameter used by the interpreter or translator. In other words, once the original has been either literally “counted out like coins,” or symbolically “paid like weight” as argued above by Cicero, there seems to be little room for the critical analysis of the actual form adopted by the potential for translatability of the original which, as examined here so far, is respectively unveiled by Freud, Lacan and Ferenczi.

In this sense, Antoine Berman's specific take on the idea of translatability as developed in *The Experience of the Foreign* as a relation between a work and its

linguistic medium is extremely helpful to clarify the actual nature of the potential of translatability that emerges from Freud's original formulation of *Übertragung*, both as the complex process of displacement and substitution between the dream-thoughts and the dream-content in the formation of dreams, as well as between analyst and analysand in the formation of the transference. Berman conceives translatability essentially as a relation between the work and its linguistic medium with the following key implications:

This relation [translatability] consists in the fact that the work, by the tension which simultaneously unites it to and separates it from language (or at another level: to the relation of belonging and distance that connects it to language), makes translation possible, demands it like a need on its own, and moreover makes it into an historical operation full of meaning—linguistically and culturally as well as psychologically. [...] It consists in the fact that a work, emerging as a work, is always positioned in a certain *distance* from its language. (126)

Berman's remarks on the concept of translatability in terms of the extremely productive tension and distance that a work experiences in relation to its language seem to support the idea that Freud's use of the notion of translation for his interpretation of dreams ultimately unveils the translatability—as a distance of a work from its language—of both dreams and the transference. At the same time, the fact that Berman's conception of translatability is developed in the context of his critical study of German Romanticism in general, and as a response to the work of the writers associated to the *Athenaeum* journal in particular, is by no means gratuitous. It is primarily in the work of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis that we find two key concepts that are clearly related to Berman's conceptualization of translatability as a relation between the work and its medium of expression. These two key concepts are first the notion of reflection, and second the idea

of “infinite versability”¹ as particularly used by Novalis, (“infinite versability of the cultured understanding” [Berman, 78]). As Berman argues, both concepts are inherently connected to each other in the critical and literary works of Novalis and F. Schlegel, as he argues here: “Infinite versability is the power to carry out the entire course of reflexive chains, the power that Novalis compared to the “voluptuous movement of a liquid in *The Disciples at Saïs*. It is also the ability to be everywhere and to be many” (78). Berman’s emphasis on the importance of the idea of “infinite versability”² within the poetics of Jena Romanticism is dependant on Novalis’s and Schlegel’s reconsideration of the concept of reflection after the upheaval produced by Kant’s Copernican revolution. In *The Critique of Judgment*, Kant conceives a reflective judgement as that in which “only the particular is given and the universal has to be found for it” (271). As such, reflective judgments occupy a space between the theoretical field of concepts or universals, i.e. pure reason, and the particularity of practical reason, becoming in fact, as Kant states, a “link between understanding and reason”(268): “Between the faculties of knowledge and desire stands the feeling of pleasure, just as judgment stands between understanding and reason” (269). The crucial aspect for the present discussion is that a reflective judgment constitutes the only option within Kant’s system to bridge the gap between the realms of *noumena* and *phenomena*, and therefore the possibility to articulate a unified totality within Kant’s philosophic system. Hence, the conception of reflection developed by Schlegel and Novalis departs from Kant’s groundbreaking formulation of aesthetic judgments (as reflective judgments), but aims at a higher or rather absolute level of

¹ Although the term ‘versability’ has been obsolete in the English language probably since its inception, it does appear in the OED. One of the two listed authorities in the only OED entry for this term is interestingly a line from Lawrence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, (V. xlii): “By the versability of this great engine, round which they are twisted, to open new tracts of enquiry.”

connectedness and a totalizing potential that could be expanded infinitely. More importantly, and parallel to the impact of Berman's conception of translatability, this same theoretical articulation of the concept of reflection in Jena Romanticism happens to be one of the key focuses of Walter Benjamin's well-known doctoral dissertation entitled "The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism" (1920):

Thinking that reflects on itself in self-consciousness is the basic fact from which Schlegel's (Friedrich) and, in large part, Novalis' epistemological considerations take their start. The relation that thinking has to itself in reflection is seen as the relation that lies closest to thinking in general; from it, all others are developed. [...] Reflection is the most frequent "type" in the thought of the early Romantics; passages confirming this statement occur among their fragments. (121)

Following Benjamin, we can add that the fragmentary and manifold work of Schlegel and Novalis not only confirms the centrality of their conception of reflection within their aesthetic and philosophical project, but moreover, constitutes the very realm where reflection both acquires its form and takes place. In this sense, not only their poetry, and fiction, but also their criticism and lectures constitute a privileged *topos* of reflection, since for the early German romantics, as Benjamin argues, "Art is a determination of the medium of reflection—probably the most fruitful one it has received. Criticism of art is knowledge of the object in this medium of reflection" (149). At the same time, due to the aforementioned inherent potential of "infinite versability" possessed by Schlegel's and Novalis's conception of reflection, the particular form of their fragmentary work constitutes in fact the manifest content of the absolute medium of reflection, taking us back again to the idea of translatability mentioned by Berman above. Benjamin brilliantly describes the relation of the conception of reflection to the idea of the absolute by the *Athenaeum* romantics in the following terms:

Reflection constitutes the absolute, and it constitutes it as medium. Schlegel did not use the term “medium” himself; nonetheless, he attached the greatest importance to the constantly uniform connection in the absolute or in the system, both of which we have to interpret as the connectedness of the real, not in its substance (which is everywhere the same) but in degrees of its clear unfolding. (132)

Both the idea of translatability as the distance between a work and its medium, and the absolute potential of reflection happen to be two of the key ideas that emerge in Benjamin’s own critical work on translation, “*Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*” (1923) (“The Task of the Translator”). Despite the fact that Benjamin’s essay has undoubtedly become the most reviewed, discussed, analyzed and thus relevant piece of translation theory produced in the last century, very few critics have remarked its close relation with Benjamin’s own work on Jena Romanticism. Of the few critics who have examined this crucial connection, it is extremely important to mention one of the fathers of deconstruction, Paul de Man. In his essay on Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator” included in *The Resistance to Theory*, de Man reveals an extremely relevant aspect of this connection which is crucial both for the purposes of this chapter, as well as to properly understand the very terms of Benjamin’s own translation theory:

Translation is also, says Benjamin, more like criticism or like the theory of literature than like poetry itself. It is by defining it in relation to Friedrich Schlegel and to German Romanticism in general that Benjamin establishes this similarity between literary criticism (in the sense of literary theory) and translation. (82)

The importance of Benjamin’s conception of translation as criticism, both in relation to the work of Schlegel and to early German Romanticism in general, is not only to establish a similarity between translation and criticism as argued by de Man, but also suggests that for Benjamin translation constitutes as a form a “determination of the

medium of reflection,” and hence is fully dependent on the translatability of the original: “Translation is a form. To comprehend it as a form, one must go back to the original, for the laws governing the translation lie within the original, contained in the issue of its translatability” (254). The conception of translation as a form is thus of paramount importance for Benjamin since, following the principles of Jena Romanticism, it constitutes an immanent potential inherent in the original that only “manifests itself in its translatability” (254):

We may call this connection a natural one, or more specifically a vital one. Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original—not so much from its life as from its afterlife (*Überleben*). (254)

Benjamin’s use of the term *Überleben*, translated into English by Harry Zohn as “afterlife,” is extremely relevant both in the original context of Benjamin’s argument, as well as for the purposes of this chapter. As Benjamin argues, the translation of an original is related to the original similarly to the way the determined “manifestations of life” are related to the “phenomenon of life,” in a relation that can only be established through the versability, or translatability at the gap between life and its *Überleben*. Jacques Derrida, and the English translator of his comments on Benjamin’s essay chose the term “sur-vival” to translate Benjamin’s *Überleben*, with the following implications: “If the structure of the work is “sur-vival,” the debt does not engage in relation to a hypothetical subject-author of the original text [...] but to something else that represents the formal law in the immanence of the original text” (183). Again, it seems that a very plausible candidate for that “something else that represents the formal law in the immanence of the original text” mentioned by Derrida is the idea of the “infinite

versability” of the medium of reflection theorized by the Jena romantics that, as I am arguing here, is theorized by Benjamin and Berman in terms of the translatability of the original. In this sense, and as suggested by Samuel Weber, translatability constitutes in fact a formal or relational “potentiality” of the original that can only be experienced after translation:

Translatability is not simply a property of the original work, but rather a potentiality that can be simply realized or achieved, and that therefore has less to do with the enduring life usually attributed to the work than with what Benjamin calls its “afterlife” or its “survival” (*Nachleben, Fortleben, Überleben*). [...] This is because translatability is never the property of an *entity*, such as a *work*, but rather of a *relation*. (“A Touch of Translation: On Walter Benjamin’s “Task of the Translator,” 74)

Therefore, as a form determined by the potential of translatability of the original, translation takes part of the Absolute which for the German romantics constitutes the ultimate medium of reflection. This notion of the Absolute as being accessed through translation is articulated by Benjamin in terms of his concept of “pure language” (*reine Sprache*), which he defines as “the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfilment of languages” (257). Benjamin’s notion of pure language constitutes a mode of universal “suprahistorical kinship” that is immanent to the intention of each particular language, and that can only be attained or realized through the overall conflation of different languages implied in the act of translation. Rainer Nägele, in his chapter on Benjamin’s essay included in *Echoes of Translation*, describes this very aspect of Benjamin’s “pure language” with the following words: “Pure language is not an abstraction, not a concept, but the most concrete Here and Now of an intersection between texts and between languages” (120). Thus, Benjamin’s conception of the task of the translator is precisely to liberate through the temporal intersection entailed in the act

of translation an absolute “pure language” from the linguistic elements that configure its actual form, i.e. as embodied in a particular language:

Rather all suprahistorical kinship of languages rest on the intention underlying each language as a whole—an intention, however, which no single language can attain it by itself but which is realized only by the totality of intentions supplementing each other: pure language. (261)

Similar to the way pure language for Benjamin encompasses a linguistic intention inaccessible to particular languages, the notion of the Work at the heart of the poetics of Jena Romanticism constitutes an Absolute which is “absent from the works,” as has been argued by Jean Luc Nancy and Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe. According to both French philosophers, the Absolute constitutes for Schlegel and Novalis a realm of universal harmony and completion that encompasses all individual forms within itself:

The genuine work, the absolute, harmonic, universal work, is a “life of the Spirit” in which “all individuals live,” according to the last of the *Fragments* (A 451), particularly as opposed to “the works of isolated,” and hence fragmented “poetry and philosophy,” whose very completion remains incomplete. The work in this sense is absent from the works—and fragmentation is always the sign of this absence. But this sign is at least ambivalent, according to the constant logic of this type of thought, whose model is negative theology. The empty space that a garland of fragments surrounds is a precise drawing of the contours of the Work. It suffices to take one further step—which consists in thinking that the Work as work, as organon and individual, is given precisely in its form—to understand simultaneously that the Work is beyond all “isolated” art, work of art, and that the “system of fragments” (A 77) is a precise drawing using the traits of its fragmentary configuration, of the contours of the Work of art, which are no doubt external but nonetheless its own *contours*, its absolute Physiognomy. (*Literary Absolute*, 47)

Following Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s analysis of the conception of the absolute Work by Schlegel and Novalis, it can be argued that Benjamin’s take on the act of translation allows for an encounter with the “stratum” of the Absolute of language through a radical transformation facilitated by the translatability of the original that

precisely moves it beyond itself. For Benjamin, this transformation of the original implies a turning of the “symbolizing into the symbolized” through which “all information, all sense, and all intention finally encounter a stratum in which they are destined to be extinguished” (261). Similarly, according to Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy the notion of the absolute work within the poetics of Jena Romanticism constitutes a realm of auto-poiesis that annihilates “all individualities and all works: “The Work must be nothing other than the absolutely necessary auto-production in which all individualities and all works are annihilated.” (*The Literary Absolute*, 56). It can thus be argued that within Benjamin’s theory of translation developed in “The Task of the Translator,” the translator becomes a version of the Ferenczian “catalytic ferment” that facilitates and channels the liberation of immanent ‘libidinal’ impulses of the absolute “pure language” which is “tied” to the “heavy, alien meaning” of its original form in a particular language.

Therefore, Benjamin’s conception of translation implies a turning of “the symbolizing into the symbolized,” which ends up constituting a ‘non-pure’ linguistic representation of an absolute potential for translatability of the original as “that which seeks to represent” (79) immanent to particular languages. Obviously, “that which seeks to represent” cannot be represented by a mode of translation concerned with conveying the actual content (i.e. meaning or information) signified by the original work since the potential of translatability of the original as a form does not have anything to communicate beyond its own translatability. This key aspect of Benjamin’s take on translation leads to a particular “demand for literalness” (78) that radically moves away from any communicative purpose: “From this very same reason translation must in large measure refrain from wanting to communicate something” (78).

Moreover, and as suggested previously, Benjamin's translation can only liberate 'pure language' through an exclusively literal 'perception' of the form of the intention implicit in the original text. In light of Benjamin's theory, the 'transparent' art of good translation (versus a bad or information-oriented translation) is fully grounded on a literal perception of the form of the original, that surprisingly enough, is conveyed figuratively by Benjamin using the visual terminology implicit in the optical perception of form:

A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully. This may be achieved, above all, by a literal rendering of the syntax which proves words rather than sentences to be the primary element of the translator. For if the sentence is a wall before the language of the original, literalness is the arcade. (79)

Translation, as described here by Benjamin facilitates a direct "gazing" into the otherwise unknown impulses of "pure language" similar to Ferenczi's conception of introjection that provided a direct 'gazing' into the transferential path taken by neurosis of the patient. In this way, Benjamin's linguistic task of the translator is in fact formally similar to the basic poetic form of transfer developed in this essay: it consists in the channeling of the "translatability" of the original text through a formal mediation not as itself, but rather as something other than itself, i.e. as a form determined by the set of impulses belonging to the immanent realm of "pure language." Therefore, Benjamin's notion of translatability concerns a particular quality of an original work that calls for its translation, and in which the impulses of "pure language" are manifest more clearly. Continuing with the Ferenczian analogy, Benjamin's task of the translator primarily implies a channeling of the translatability of a symptom as a form into a new version of

itself in an attempt to fleetingly lead it to its immanent and untranslatable form, i.e. the higher realm of “pure language.”

In translation the original rises into a higher and purer linguistic air, as it were. It cannot live there permanently, to be sure, and it certainly does not reach it in its entirety. Yet, in a singularly impressive manner, at least it points the way to this region: the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfilment of languages. The transfer can never be total, but what reaches this region is that element in a translation which goes beyond transmittal of subject matter. This nucleus is best defined as the element that does not lend itself to translation. (262)

***Übertragung* (Transfer): A Poetics**

As examined so far in this chapter, Freud, Lacan, Ferenczi and Benjamin focus on the different ways in which key formal and rhetorical mechanisms can transfer an immanent content only accessible through the translation or transference (*Übertragung*) of its original form. Essentially, the transfer constitutes the formal relation of an original form with something other than itself which is ultimately determined by the potential for translatability of the original. A poetics of transfer can in this sense be primarily described as the formal analysis of the different recurring modes in which the translatability of an original form manifests itself in other forms or media. At the same time, and following a definition by the American critic Charles Altieri, a poetics constitutes a logical system configured by a series of relational forms “between mind and nature” as Altieri argues: “Considered thematically, *a poetic* is a logical system in which the desired relationship between mind and nature determines many of the particular recurrent emphases” (*Enlarging the Temple*, 38). Based on the terms set by Altieri in his definition, it can be argued that the notion of transfer as a formal relation between

different events or entities is in itself a poetics, i.e. a logical system configured by a series of recurring mechanisms of translation, displacement and substitution ultimately determined by the productive tension established by the different correlated entities. In this sense, the notion of transfer as a formal or poetic system constitutes both a figural articulation of the relation between the self and the Other, as well as the actual spatio-temporal realm or *topos* where this relation takes place. This double aspect of a poetics articulating a relation to otherness while at the same time providing the very space for that mediation is emphasized by Palumbo-Liu in his examination of literary form and global literary exchanges in relation to the work of Henry James:

The “problematic” that emerges as the product of a “poetic” analytic revolves back with great logic, to precisely the issue that James outlines—how is otherness not only given form, but how can Form itself be both the allegorical *articulation* of the mediation of self and other, and at the same time be that mediating *space* that accommodates both. (207)

Following Palumbo-Liu’s remarks, and as I have developed in this chapter, the notion of transfer as a poetics constitutes both a trope and a topos for the kind of mediation precisely denoted by the term *Übertragung*. As examined above, especially regarding the use of the term by Freud, Lacan and Ferenczi, the transfer from a latent to a manifest content is articulated through a particular series of mechanisms of substitution and displacement that, as Lacan argued, ultimately constitute the very same tropes that articulate discourse. At the same time, this rhetorical articulation opens up the mediation facilitated by the transfer in spatio-temporal terms, i.e. the transfer itself as a form becomes the spatio-temporal realm where the mediation between the self and the Other literally takes place.

Moreover, the conception of the notion of transfer as a poetic system leads to the problem of the translatability of form that lies at the core of Walter Benjamin's theory of translation also examined previously. For Benjamin, it is ultimately due to the fact that the original constitutes a translatable form of signification that the transfer of particular languages into their Other embodied in the notion of "pure language" can be ultimately experienced—both as a trope and a topos of the transfer. This particular conception of translatability entails for Benjamin a movement beyond the life of the original that can only take place by fully understating the fact that as a form, translation is determined by its relation, distance and difference from its own medium. Therefore, translatability not only mediates between the original and the translation, but also between the original and its own immanent intention embodied in the absolute linguistic realm Benjamin refers to as "pure language." Ultimately, and as Palumbo-Liu argues here, it is essentially through form that the self not only figuratively constructs itself, but ultimately its relation to the Other:

And yet again, we find that the imaging of self cannot take place formlessly; rather, identity is converted into the coinage of form—it is Form that circulates in the visual, the sensual, the experiential fields of social, intersubjective life in the streets, in the boulevards. The difficulty is finding the Form that is commensurate to this imaging, for it is in the spatial distributions and figurations of Form that the Other is imagined, incarnated and animated. ("Atlantic to Pacific, 201)

However, as I am arguing here, the key point regarding the circulation of form across languages and cultures just suggested by Palumbo-Liu is that it is precisely the translatability itself of form that facilitates in itself the actual tropological and topological articulation of the imaging of the self and the Other. As examined in this chapter, the different selves who respectively discover, analyze and formalize the notion

of *Übertragung* as a poetics just examined in this chapter, (i.e. Freud *himself* as a dream interpreter, Lacan *himself* as Freud's interpreter, Ferenczi *himself* as the analyst of *Übertragung* within his theory of introjection, and Benjamin *himself* as the translator of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*) require the translatability of the forms they encounter not only to articulate *their* own relation to a previously unknown Other—manifested and experienced as a poetic or formal system—but also their own imaging of themselves as interpreters and translators of these various forms. In other words, in the attempt to access and illuminate the “hitherto inaccessible realm” of the Other, the figure of the translator or interpreter in the cases examined in this chapter manages to formally correlate *himself* through the complex poetic mechanism entailed in the notion of transfer. As Benjamin argued previously, this formal correlation of the translator or interpreter with the form of the transfer, as any other poetic correlation, can only be indirect, fleeting, and extremely tenuous, i.e. “the transfer can never be total.” Nevertheless, if the transfer manages to manifest itself—i.e. to adopt the kind of semblance each particular transfer produces in the respective attempts by Freud, Lacan, Ferenczi and Benjamin to arrive at a basic formalization of *Übertragung*—it is solely through the I of the translator or interpreter who manages to unveil the transfer as a poetics. A very precarious correlation indeed, but one that, as Rainer Nägele suggests here in relation to Benjamin's theory of translation, and as I have developed through the poetic of transfer outlined in this chapter, powerfully succeeds in productively illuminating the status of the self:

What is lost is irrevocably lost. The allegorical construction does not recover the lost sheep, but it illuminates the status of the I whose being is produced in the running after itself, after its elfish being. Between sheep and lost sheep, between analyst and a lost analysand, between a text and a lost reader, and always between

themselves, dialectical images and constructions may precariously take shape.
(290)

Therefore, it can finally be argued that the originality of Freud's, Lacan's, Ferenczi's and Benjamin's explorations of the notion transfer seems to have emerged in part from their radical openness to correlate their own reflective judgments with a previously unknown Other. As an intrinsically reflexive and translational movement, transfer not only incorporates the Other, but by producing in the process a series of "precarious images" helps the self imagine itself through the transferential movement that correlates both. As Shoshana Felman argues in relation to Freud's and Lacan's work—precisely correlated by the notion of *Übertragung* itself—the essential aspect of this reflexive movement of true originality is that due to its transferential nature it keeps subverting and displacing itself in its radically productive encounter with the Other:

True originality, in other words, is precisely the way in which a reflexive movement, in returning to and upon itself, in effect *subverts itself*—finds something other than what it had expected, what it had set out to seek; the way in which what is revolving, what returns to itself, radically displaces the very point of observation. This, at least, was the originality of Freud's discovery, and of Lacan's rediscovery—of Freud. (67)

Chapter Two

“His Lust’s Withholding:” Empire, Fetishism and Simulacrum in Fernando Pessoa’s *English Poems I-III*

The Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) started composing poetry in English at roughly thirteen years of age with a poem titled “Separated from thee...” (1901), while he was living at the colonial town of Durban in the Natal region of South Africa. At about the same time, Pessoa had already adopted one of his first transpersonal identities as Alexander Search, an early English entry in the very long heteronymic separation from himself that would gradually generate Pessoa’s extremely diverse *oeuvre*. In this chapter I will argue that Fernando Pessoa’s transpersonal tendencies—his decried impossibility to write in “my own personality”³—go hand in hand with his critically overlooked poetic production in English. More specifically, a key part of my argument will focus on the way the current of English poetry that Pessoa gradually absorbed during the early years of his life in South Africa functioned as a direct precursor to the heteronymic project that configures Pessoa’s radically idiosyncratic work. Ultimately, this chapter posits that the publication of Pessoa’s *English Poems* in 1921 should be reconsidered as a crucial event in the overall evolution of the work of perhaps the most seminal Portuguese author since Luís de Camões (1525-1580)—both in terms of

³ Pessoa’s own analysis—written in English—of his transpersonal tendencies is worth quoting in full: “My interest in Francis Bacon’s horoscope is due to several circumstances, of which the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy is only one. The chief interest arises from a desire to see what in Bacon’s horoscope registers his peculiar characteristic of being able to write in different styles (a fact which even non Baconians admit) and his general faculty of transpersonalisation. I possess (in what degree, or with what quality, it is not for me to say) the characteristic to which I am alluding. I am an author: and have always found impossible to write in my own personality; I have always found myself, consciously or unconsciously assuming the character of someone who does not exist, and through his imaginary agency I write.” (*Correspondência Inédita*), 92.

the display of his impressive bilingual ability to produce poetry in English, as well as the attempt to incorporate his own work to the canon of English literature.⁴

Pessoa in South Africa: A Portuguese Encounter with Englishness

The young Fernando Pessoa spent about nine years of his life in Durban, what is now the largest city of the KwaZulu-Natal province of the Republic of South Africa. Pessoa arrived to South Africa in 1896, together with his recently remarried mother to settle at Natal with his step-father, the commander of the Portuguese army João Miguel Rosa, then consul at Durban of Portugal. At the time of Pessoa's arrival to Natal, Durban was the economic and political center of a colonial state established and run by the British on Zulu territory since 1843, after Great Britain had taken over the Boer occupation of the Zulu kingdom approximately ten years earlier. Durban was then a small but highly segregated town run by a community of European settlers that governed a multiethnic society also constituted by recently arrived indentured Indian laborers, as well as a very large majority of Zulu natives.

One of the most relevant aspects of the historical circumstances that determined Pessoa's life in Durban is the fact that his education was shaped by the schooling system

⁴ Although some Pessoa scholars have recently emphasized the relevance of the fact that Fernando Pessoa formed himself as a writer through a bilingual interaction with the canon of Anglo-American literature during the early 1900s—among them should be mentioned the work of George Monteiro, *Fernando Pessoa and Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Literature* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000) and Maria Irene Ramalho Santos, *Atlantic Poets: Fernando Pessoa's Turn in Anglo-American Modernism* (Hanover: UP of New England, 2003)—only a few critics have actually stressed the importance of Pessoa's own English poetry. Two important exceptions are Jorge de Sena with his groundbreaking introduction and edition of Pessoa's English Poems in *Poemas Ingleses publicados por Fernando Pessoa. Obras Completas*, Vol. XI, ed. Jorge de Sena (Lisboa: Edições Ática, 1974)—and Georg Rudolf Lind, with his article "Oito poemas ingleses inéditos de Fernando Pessoa," *Estudos sobre Fernando Pessoa* (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1981) 385-425.

established by the British colonial government in the Natal region. As Robert Morrell argues in his socio-historical study of the colonial period in Natal, the establishment of a system of British education mainly aimed at forging a unified cultural identity for a diverse European population of white settlers:

The identity was forged around British cultural symbols and the English language. The schools, for example, were modelled on British public and grammar schools. The sports that were played were taken from Britain (cricket, soccer and rugby) or the empire (polo). German, Norwegian, Scottish and Irish settlers all gradually adopted the English language and became assimilated into the settler community. An important feature of settler identity was whiteness and its presumed association with civilisation and racial superiority. (“Colonialism and the Establishment of White Domination,” 53)

Based on Morrell’s remarks, it can be argued that as a member of the European settler community in Durban, the young Pessoa had to adopt the only identity available to him apart from his own Portuguese self, i.e. an ‘English’ whiteness. Thus, Pessoa’s British education in Durban not only enabled him to have an impressive command of the English language at an early age, but also provided the means to articulate an identity parallel to his native Portuguese self.⁵ The implications of this particular aspect of Pessoa’s Durban education are essential for understanding both the specific nature of the alternative identity available to Pessoa, as well as the way his assimilation of an imperial form of Englishness became a catalyst for the heteronymic system that informs Pessoa’s literary work.

⁵ As thoroughly demonstrated by João Gaspar Simões, Pessoa excelled academically at Durban High School, winning a series of prizes in English composition, among them the Queen Victoria Memorial Prize in 1904 for best English essay at Pessoa’s matriculation examination for admission to the University of the Cape of Good Hope. See João Gaspar Simões, *Vida e obra de Fernando Pessoa* (Lisboa: Livraria Bertrand, 1950). For a more recent study of Fernando Pessoa’s formation at Durban see also Alexandrino E. Severino, *Fernando Pessoa na África do Sul*. Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 1983.

Pessoa's English identity was nearly exclusively constructed through the main source of Englishness Pessoa had access to in Durban, i.e. English literature. In particular, Pessoa's Englishness was primarily configured by his readings of the work of canonical English poets, among them Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Byron, Shelley, Wordsworth and also, as discussed below in more detail, Keats and Spenser. As a crucial part of the British colonial ideology, the corpus of English poetry at the core of the academic discipline of English literature was fundamental for the education received by Pessoa at Durban. Although originally established at different cities in England through Mechanics' Institutes and Working Men's Colleges during the first half of the nineteenth century, English studies soon became a vital ideological tool to incorporate individuals to the socio-economic project of the British Empire. In this sense, it is worth pointing out that English literature was in fact part of the examination for the entrance to the Civil Service of the East Indian Company during the late 1850s, becoming instrumental for the ideological training of the government workforce, the settler communities, and ultimately the colonial subjects of the British Empire. Terry Eagleton has already made the important claim that the rise of English studies during the nineteenth century was essential in order to incorporate new recruits to what he refers to as an English "'organic' national tradition and identity:" "What was at stake in English studies was less English *literature* than *English* literature: our great 'national' poets Shakespeare and Milton, the sense of an 'organic' national tradition and identity to which new recruits could be admitted by the study of the humane letters" (*Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 28).

Following Eagleton's remarks, it could be argued that the literary works belonging to the canon of English studies originally experienced by Pessoa in South

Africa fully succeeded in recruiting the young Pessoa to that same “organic” English national tradition in a rather straightforward way. However, Pessoa’s extremely peculiar position within the colonial context at Durban both as a member of the white European settler community, and a subject of a British imperial ideology foreign to his native Portuguese background led him to establish an extremely paradoxical relationship with the specific form of Englishness he assimilated while living in South Africa.

Pessoa’s *English Poems*: An Imperial Cycle of Erotic Love

As I will analyze in the rest of this chapter, Pessoa’s most impressive poetic response to the specific cultural, linguistic and intellectual challenge brought forth by his assimilation of an English colonial identity was embodied in the two collections of English poems he published in Lisbon during 1921, respectively titled *English Poems I-II*, and *English Poems III*. The first volume contains “Antinous,” a long poem whose first version was composed around 1915 and published as an independent volume in 1918, as well as a series of classically oriented epitaphs titled “Inscriptions.” In *English Poems III*, Pessoa added “Epithalamium,” an earlier long poem composed around 1913, eight years after his permanent return to Lisbon in 1905.

One of the most prominent aspects of the publication of Pessoa’s two editions of his *English Poems* is perhaps that, except for his 1934 nationalistic collection of Portuguese poems titled *Mensagem*, these three poems together with an English collection of Shakespearian sonnets titled *35 Sonnets* (1918) constitute the only poetry collections that Fernando Pessoa published in life under his own name. It is also

important to point out the fact that the very period when he composed his published English poems, between 1913 and 1921, was precisely the time in Pessoa's life when his main heteronyms emerged. Alberto Caerio and his series of poems that configure *O Guardador de Rebanhos* appeared in March 8, 1914, as related by Pessoa, in what seems to have constituted for Pessoa an ecstatic kind of impulse, “numa espécie de êxtase cuja natureza não conseguirei definir” (*Obra em Prosa*, 96) [“in a kind of ecstasy of a nature that I will not be able to define”⁶]. At the same time, the heteronyms Ricardo Reis and Álvaro de Campos soon emerged in Pessoa's life as the two necessary disciples required by the paganism of Alberto Caerio. Some of Álvaro de Campos' key works like “Opiário,” “Ode Triunfal” and “Ode Marítima” appeared about the same time, and were published in the first two issues of the journal *Orpheu* in 1915. Álvaro de Campos was by far the most prolific heteronym of Pessoa's coterie, perhaps due to his more contemporary avant-garde aesthetic, and published profusely until Pessoa's death in 1935. As for the other two key heteronyms, some selections of the work of Alberto Caerio were published in 1925 in the journal *Athena*, while some of the work of Ricardo Reis was first published in 1928 in the journal *Presença*.

Another extremely relevant feature of the two long poems included in the 1921 editions of his *English Poems* is that Pessoa considered their composition to constitute part of a homogeneous series, more specifically a five-part opus of which only the first two sections ended up being published. According to the letter to his friend and biographer João Gaspar Simões where he discusses the composition of the *English Poems*, Pessoa was in fact planning to add three other long poems to what was supposed to amount to an “imperial” cycle:

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all translations included in this dissertation are my own.

Os dois poemas citados formam, con mais três, um pequeno livro que percorre o círculo do fenômeno amoroso. E percorre-o num ciclo, a que poderei chamar imperial. Assim temos: (1) Grécia, *Antinous*; (2) Roma, *Epithalamium*; (3) Cristianidade, *Prayer to a Woman's Body*; (4) Império Moderno, *Pan-Eros*; (5) Quinto Império, *Anteros*. Estes três últimos poemas estão inéditos. (*Obra em Prosa*, 464)

[The two poems mentioned constitute, together with three others, a small collection that covers the circle of the phenomenon of love. And it covers it in a cycle that I would call imperial. Thus we have: (1) Greece, *Antinous*; (2) Rome, *Epithalamium*; (3) Christianity, *Prayer to a Woman's Body*; (4) Modern Empire, *Pan-Eros*; (5) Fifth Empire, *Anteros*. The three last poems remain unpublished.]

Pessoa's English poetic cycle was therefore projected to follow five different manifestations of what he refers to as the 'phenomenon of love.' Starting from the homoeroticism of "Antinous," the cycle would expand into the heterosexual intensity of "Epithalamium," the Christian sublimation of Eros seemingly implied in "Prayer to a Woman's Body," in order to reach its erotic climax through its modern manifestation as "Pan-Eros" and its final culmination in "Anteros," the Fifth Empire of reciprocal love. On a primary level, Pessoa's conception of a cycle composed by "imperial" stages seems pervaded by the imperial anxieties of Portuguese and Brazilian history related to the phenomenon generally referred to as 'Sebastianismo.'⁷ Thus, as described by Pessoa, his English poetic cycle clearly builds up towards its culmination in the "Quinto Imperio" or "Fifth Empire" embodied by the poem "Anteros." For Pessoa, the final imperial triumph of "Anteros" would not only imply the messianic arrival of the mythic 'Quinto Imperio'—a recurrent theme within Portuguese history and literature since the sixteenth

⁷ 'Sebastianismo' refers to the myth within Portuguese history and literature of the messianic return of the young Portuguese king Dom Sebastião who died in the battle of Alcácer-Quibir in 1578, leaving the Portuguese throne temporarily in Spanish hands until 1640. The establishment of a Portuguese 'Quinto Imperio' through the mythic second coming of D. Sebastião constitutes a theme thoroughly explored in Pessoa's 1934 collection *Mensagem*. For a thorough study of the theme of Sebastianismo in Portuguese and Brazilian literature see António Quadros, *Poesia e Filosofia do Mito Sebastianista*. Lisboa: Guimarães, 1982.

century—but would also take place in a time contemporary to Pessoa’s life. In what seems to constitute a conflation of both his transpersonal tendencies and a modernist manifestation of Portuguese nationalism, Pessoa believed that the second coming of the Portuguese king Dom Sebastião—in the figure of a Portuguese poet born, like Pessoa, in 1888—would lead to the establishment of a new imperial epoch, more precisely the spiritual “*imperialismo de poetas*”⁸ [imperialism of poets] represented within Pessoa’s English cycle by his poem “Anteros.”

At the same time, Pessoa’s serial conception of his *English Poems* seems to be highly influenced by the different poetic “epochs” or “systems” proposed by Shelley in *Defence of Poetry* (1821). Following the succession of poetic ages developed by Shelley as part of his romantic poetics, the stages of Pessoa’s English cycle were supposed to be representative not so much of historical periods, but rather of poetic systems functioning as aesthetic totalities. Pessoa remarks this very aspect of his imperial cycle to Gaspar Simões in the following terms, “nenhum deles tem colocação precisa no tempo, mas só no sentimento” (464) [none of them has a precise location in time, but rather in feeling]. Therefore, the aesthetization of empires intrinsic to Pessoa’s projected cycle of English poems can thus be conceived as articulating a series of different aesthetic modes into which Pessoa could begin to translate different manifestations of his poetic voice.

Moreover, as projected by Pessoa, the cycle, following the structure of the heteronyms, clearly builds up towards the neopagan aesthetic of the “*Quinto Imperio*” or

⁸ Pessoa’s full statement goes as follows: “É um imperialismo de gramáticos? O imperialismo dos gramáticos dura mais e vai mais fundo que o dos generais. É um imperialismo de poetas? Seja. A frase não é ridícula senão para quem defende o antigo imperialismo ridículo. O imperialismo dos poetas dura e domina; os dos políticos passa e esquece, se o não lembrar o poeta que o cante.” (*Sobre Portugal*, 129) [Is it an imperialism of grammarians? The imperialism of grammarians lasts longer and goes further than the general ones. Is it an imperialism of poets? Be it. The phrase is not ridiculous except for those who defend the old ridiculous imperialism. The imperialism of poets lasts and dominates; that of politicians goes away and is forgotten if the poet that may sing it fails to recollect it].

“Fifth Empire” represented by the poem *Anteros*, and that is thoroughly explored in Pessoa’s 1934 *Mensagem*. The overall movement of the cycle therefore follows five different manifestations of Eros, moving from the playful homoeroticism of *Antinous*, the heterosexual intensity of *Epithalamium*, and the Christian sublimation of Eros seemingly implied in *Prayer to a Woman’s Body*, towards its erotic climax in its modern manifestation of *Pan-Eros*, and the arrival of the messianic *Anteros*, or the Fifth Empire of ‘reciprocal love.’ The clear esoteric aspect of Pessoa’s erotic cycle, and especially of its two final stages, is analyzed by Jorge de Sena in the following way:

Pan-Eros, como o nome indica, e referido ao “Império Moderno” (i.e. o mundo contemporâneo), é a dissolução e coexistência de todas essas fases, que precederá, no Quinto Império, o triunfo de Anteros. Este não é, [...], o “antiamor”, mas a divindade grega, que era irmã de Eros, e seu complemento não antagônico: ao amor *em si* correspondia o amor *além de si* (como explica Cícero em *De Natura Deorum*). Assim, da pansexualidade, se transitaria ao amor sublime de tudo e todos por tudo e todos. (33)

[*Pan-Eros*, as the title indicates, and used in reference to the “Modern Empire” (i.e. the contemporary world), is the dissolution and co-existence of all those stages that will lead, in the Fifth Empire, to the triumph of Anteros. This figure is not [...] the “anti-love,” but the Greek divinity, brother to Eros and his complementary and non-antagonistic side: to love *itself* would correspond love *beyond itself* (as explained by Cicero in *De Natura Deorum*). Therefore, from pansexuality, we would move to the sublime love of everything and everyone by everything and everyone.]

Although the overall cycle sounds fascinating, all we have access to right now is solely its first two stages as embodied in *Antinous* and *Epithalamium*. Perhaps the most relevant feature of both poems, as clearly acknowledged by Pessoa himself, is their overt sexual content—what Pessoa called the “*violência inteiramente inesperada de obscenidade*” [entirely unexpected violence of obscenity]. In this sense, perhaps the most glaring characteristic of Pessoa’s “*Antinous*” and “*Epithalamium*” is what the Portuguese

poet refers to as an ‘intense’ expression of erotic incidents. As acknowledged by Pessoa himself in the letter to Gaspar Simões already mentioned, Pessoa’s explicit obscenity plays a rather significant role in the composition of both of these two English poems belonging to his erotic cycle:

Antinous e Epithalamium são os únicos poemas (ou, até, composições) que eu tenho escrito que são nitidamente o que se pode chamar obscenos. Há em cada um de nós, por pouco que especialize instintivamente na obscenidade, um certo elemento desta ordem, cuja quantidade, evidentemente, varia de homem para homem. Como esses elementos, [...], são um certo estorvo para alguns processos mentais superiores, decidi, por duas vezes, eliminá-los pelo processo simples de os exprimir intensamente. (*Obra Em Prosa*, 464)

[*Antinous* and *Epithalamium* are the only poems (or even compositions) I have written that are clearly what can be called obscene. There is in each of us, the least instinctively familiar with obscenity one may be, a certain element of this order, in a quantity that evidently varies from man to man. Since these elements, [...], are somewhat of a hindrance for certain superior mental processes, I decided twice to eradicate them by the simple process of expressing them intensely.]

Taking into account Pessoa’s poetic production as a whole, this “violence of obscenity” inherent to *Antinous* and *Epithalamium* should not have appeared as that “entirely unexpected,” since after all, as Jorge de Sena beautifully points out, the work of Fernando Pessoa and his different heteronyms overtly and dramatically lacks any kind of sexual eroticism: “A obra poética de Fernando Pessoa, excepto nestes dois poemas em inglês, é como *a noche oscura do sexo*, o deserto da privação absoluta, “normal” ou “anormal, da afectividade erotica [...]” (31) [The poetic *oeuvre* of Fernando Pessoa, except for these two English poems, is like the *noche oscura* of sex, a desert of an absolute privation—“normal” or “abnormal”—of eroticism”].

Pessoa's own justification in the same letter to Gaspar Simões for the overt eroticism of these poems seems to point towards a rather Freudian attempt to avoid the repression of obscene thoughts through their poetic expression, in order to enable the proper mental exertion of what Pessoa refers to as "*processos mentais superiores*" (464) [superior mental processes]. In this sense, Jorge de Sena seems to agree with Pessoa in that the eroticism of "Antinous" and "Epithalamium" enables, through a poetic 'exorcism' of obscenity, the objective universality that Pessoa was trying to achieve through his heteronymic system of poetic production:

Era, ao mesmo tempo, exorcismar o "femenino" e o "masculino", para justificar a castidade e a disponibilidade heteronímica do ortónimo e dos heterónimos, dando a estes uma "universalidade" acima das circunstancialidades eróticas. (31)

[It implied, at the same time, the exorcising of the "feminine" and the "masculine," to justify the chastity and heteronymic availability of both the orthonym and the heteronyms, giving them a universality that rises above erotic incidents.]

Although de Sena rightly emphasizes the overall relevance of Pessoa's poetic exploration of erotic obscenity in "Antinous" and "Epithalamium" as exerting a crucial role in the overall functioning of his heteronymic system, it is evident that behind Pessoa's poetic obscenity there is much more than a mere 'exorcising' of erotic incidents. Among many crucial implications, perhaps the most evident issue at stake in "Antinous" and "Epithalamium" is Pessoa's own exploration of his own sexual ambiguity, or as the following statement shows, his explicit personal androgyny:

Não encontro dificuldade em definir-me: sou um temperamento femenino com uma inteligência femenina. A minha sensibilidade e os movimentos que dela procedem, e é niso que consistem o temperamento e a sua expressão, são de mulher. As minhas faculdades de relação – a inteligência, e a vontade, que é a inteligência do impulso- são de homem. (Obra em Prosa, 40)

[I don't find any difficulty defining myself: I have a feminine temperament endowed with a feminine intelligence. My sensitivity and the motions proceeding from it, which constitute my temperament and its expression, are those of a woman. My ability to relate myself to others—my intelligence and my will, which is the intelligence behind impulses, are those of a man.]

Pessoa's self-conscious perception of his own personal indeterminacy, manifested in this case as a form of bi-polar androgyny, and seen otherwise as a general inability to write as 'himself,' as stated earlier in this chapter, quite literally shaped Pessoa's overall literary production. The use of different masks—heteronymic, linguistic or aesthetic—therefore, appears for Pessoa as one of the most basic methods, or poetic modes, through which Pessoa can begin to translate his own fragmented perception of himself into some kind of polyphonic, and thus unified, aesthetic totality. As developed in sonnet VIII of *35 Sonnets*, the question of the self for Pessoa soon translates into a complex superposition of different masks:

How many masks wear we, and undermasks,
 Upon our countenance of soul, and when,
 If for self-sport the soul itself unmask,
 Knows it the last mask off and the face plain?
 The true mask feels no inside to the mask
 But looks out of the mask by co-masked eyes.
(*Poemas Ingleses*, 164)

Pessoa's "Antinous:" The Fetishization of the English Language

Pessoa's development of a polyphonic—and if we take into account his English poems, also bilingual—poetic system that is fully grounded in the poetic conception of the self or "soul" as an infinitely recurrent superposition of masks, or personae, takes us directly to the romantic poetics of John Keats. As Thomas McFarland argues in *The*

Masks of Keats, the English poet turned the use of poetic masks into powerful a method of poetic translation—i.e. the mask as a translation, or version of (any of) the poet’s voice(s)—offering in fact a powerful alternative to the romantic poetics of the self developed by William Wordsworth: “Unlike Wordsworth, Keats achieves his own greatness not through the truth-telling of a primary self, but through masks of a presented self speaking from the worlds of Camelot and Hellas” (18). Pessoa’s work can be seen as a direct heir apparent to Keats’ poetics of negative capability, in what constitutes on behalf of Pessoa a modernist reconfiguration of the self-less or objective poetical character that grounds the poetry of the English romantic poet.

Pessoa’s own mask of Hellas channels the first stage in the phenomenon of love that Pessoa planned to cover in his English poetic cycle. In “Antinous,” Pessoa is particularly exploring the form adopted by the manifestation of Eros within the voluptuously homoerotic paradigm implicit in the love relationship between the Roman emperor Hadrian and his young Bithynian *eromenos*. As Pessoa puts in the poem, “love is the presence and the mover” (96), and both the figures of Antinous and Hadrian are mere ‘bodies’ that articulate the particular configuration of erotic love that emerges in the poem. Pessoa locates the action of the poem right after the mythic death of Antinous—the naked body of the dead youth lying wet and cold on Hadrian’s couch. A terrible sense of irretrievable loss permeates an opening scene that is fully dominated by Hadrian’s deep sorrow:

The rain outside was cold in Hadrian’s soul.

The boy lay dead
On the low couch, on whose denuded whole,
To Hadrian’s eyes, whose sorrow was a dread,

The shadowy light of Death's eclipse was shed.
(Poemas Ingleses, 90)

The poem itself can be analyzed as an opportunity for both Hadrian and Antinous to partly redeem the condition of alienation and sorrow that irrevocably separates them from each other. This sense of alienation is associated in the poem with a sensation of coldness that takes a powerful shape in the striking first line of the poem. Pessoa's use of this particular sensation of cold as the actual mood of the poem disrupts the outside/inside dichotomy that separates Hadrian's soul and Antinous' dead body within the poem, managing to poetically redeem the alienating condition of their separation. According to Paul de Man, the redeeming power of the poetic evocation of coldness happens to be a crucial feature of John Keats's romantic poetry:

This state of frozen immobility, of paralysis under the life-destroying impact of eternal powers, becomes the obsessive image of human predicament that poetry is to redeem. [...] There hardly exists a single of Keats' important poems in which a version of this recurrent theme fails to appear, though the outward form may vary. It is most frequently associated with the sensation of cold, as if the cooling breeze of *I stood tip-toe* heralding the benevolent arrival of the gods had suddenly turned icy and destructive. ("The Negative Road," 34)

Both the redeeming "frozen immobility" that de Man associates with Keats's poetry, and the Keatsian use of poetic masks as a translation of the poetic voice unveiled above by McFarland clearly constitute two of the main features of Pessoa's "Antinous." Hence, Pessoa's adoption of his particular 'mask of Greece' in "Antinous" is not only Hellenic—due to the Greek roots of the love relation that turned Antinous into a cult homoerotic figure—but, as suggested here, it is at the same time extremely Keatsian. However, in "Antinous" Pessoa did not merely translate an expanded version of what can be considered a modernist variation on Keats's poetics of negative capability, but also

and more importantly, he translated a modernist version of a Keatsian Romanticism into his radically idiosyncratic version of the English language. Pessoa's English versification in "Antinous" thus emerges as a complex poetic amalgamation and displacement of the current of English literature he originally experienced during his school years at Durban. A crucial characteristic of Pessoa's peculiar English poetic diction is the increase of its formal complexity in key moments of "Antinous," as the following lines show:

He was a kitten playing with lust, playing
 With his own and with Hadrian's, sometimes one
 And some times two, now linking, now undone;
 Now leaving lust, now lust's high lusts delaying;
 Now eyeing lust not wide, but from askance
 Jumping round on lust's half-unexpectance;
 Now softly gripping; then with fury holding,
 Now playfully playing; now seriously, now lying
 By th' side of lust looking at it, now spying
 Which way to take lust in his lust's withholding. (98)

Pessoa's English tends to become extremely ambiguous and convoluted in moments like this passage from "Antinous." His syntax becomes slightly more repetitive, gravitating around specific words, as with the term "lust" above that culminates in the clause "which way to take lust in his lust's withholding" modifying the verb form "spying." This kind of syntactical expansion of English carried out by Pessoa is usually enhanced by the inclusion of kenning-like compounds that ultimately lead to the generation of bizarre word and clause formations in English, as in "lust's half-unexpectance." Thus, the extra linguistic value given by Pessoa to these specific terms produces a series of complex syntactical structures, (i.e. "now lust's high lusts delaying") that through their own formal 'convolution' acquire an autonomous status as independent

fragments that ultimately expand the boundaries of the standard form of the English language.

Obviously, the formal complexity of Pessoa's peculiar English diction is intrinsically connected to the overt eroticism displayed in the passage above. Pessoa's own justification here is extremely relevant and symptomatic of his complex relation both to his own sexuality and the English language. It is thus by no means coincidental that Pessoa's main attempt to incorporate eroticism into his poetry emerges as an effort to rather literally expel obscenity from the rest of his work, and that also this obscene process of erotic elimination is articulated by what ultimately amounts to a 'foreign' language rather than by his native Portuguese tongue. Therefore, the actual poetic form of Pessoa's English obscenity crucially provides the key to the complex mechanics of displacement at work in his *English Poems*. Based on Pessoa's obscene poetic logic for the composition of "Antinous" and "Epithalamium," the double process of linguistic and erotic displacement that pervades the passage from "Antinous" quoted above can be analyzed as constituting in fact a form of linguistic fetishization. Pessoa's process of fetishization in "Antinous" primarily implies what Sigmund Freud refers to as "*zum Ersatz des Objekts durch den Fetisch*" (19) [the replacement of the object by a fetish (250)] in his study of the unsuitable substitutes for the sexual object included in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. In this sense, it is relatively safe to conclude that Pessoa's use of the word "lust" in the passage from "Antinous" analyzed previously constitutes a substitute for the word denoting the male sexual object, i.e. the term 'penis.'

At the same time, this kind of linguistic replacement turns the fetishized word—"lust" in this case—into what Karl Marx defines in *Kapital* as "*ein sehr vertracktes Ding*"

(37) [a very queer thing] (440) that ends up altering the previous linguistic status of the respective term as “*ein ordinäres sinnliches Ding*” (37) [a common every-day thing (445)]. Similarly to Marx’s conception of “*der Waarenwelt anklebenden Fetischismus*” (49) [the fetishism inherent in commodities (459)], the linguistic fetishization carried out by Pessoa in his process of poetic production ends up affecting the ordinary status of the linguistic term itself. Consequently, this mode of poetic fetishization ultimately affects the form of Pessoa’s linguistic material causing a mysterious transformation of what, following Marx, can be referred to as the familiar or “every-day” condition of the English language.

Pessoa’s “Epithalamium:” Translation as Simulacrum

Pessoa’s second attempt to avoid the repression of obscene thoughts took the English form of “Epithalamium,” allegedly the second part of his imperial cycle of erotic love. In this poem—pervaded by a rather carnal form of heterosexual love—Pessoa penetrates with his ‘mask’ of Rome on the realm of a nuptial *fescennine*. More importantly, though, Pessoa’s “Epithalamium” is articulated by a parallel mode of poetic displacement to the fetishizing mechanism already analyzed in relation to “Antinous.” Pessoa’s “Epithalamium” constitutes, in fact, a fascinating case of poetic influence by being an extremely idiosyncratic version of Edmund Spenser’s *Epithalamium* (1595). Although Pessoa closely followed Spenser’s poem in his own version, he carried out a rather thorough erotic expansion of the marriage ritual portrayed by the English Renaissance poet. As the comparison of four similar passages from both poems reveals,

Spenser's *Epithalamium* ends up becoming a powerful vehicle for Pessoa's 'Roman'

treatment of the theme of heterosexual love:

Spenser's *Epithalamium*

And let them also with them bring in hand,
Another gay girland
For my fayre loue of lillyes and of roses,
Bound trueloue wize with a blew silke
riband.]

(41-44)

Her brest like to a bowle of creame
vncrudded
Her paps lyke lyllies budded,
Her snowie necke lyke to a marble towre
And all her body like a pallace fayre
Ascending vppe with many a stately stayre
To honors seat and chastities sweet bowre.

(175-180)

Open the temple gates vnto my loue
Open then wide that she may enter in [...]
Bring her vp to th' high altar, that she may
The sacred ceremonies there partake

(204-216)

Let no lamenting cryes, no dolefull teares,
Be heard all night within nor yet without:
Ne let false whispers, breeding hidden
fears,]
Breake gentle sleepe with misconcieued
dout.

(*Poetical Works*, 334-338)

Pessoa's "Epithalamium"

Garlanded round with roses and those leaves
That love for its love weaves!
Between her and the ceiling this day's
ending]
A man's weight will be bending.

(130)

The bridegroom aches for the end of this and
lusts] To know those paps in sucking gusts,
To put his first hand on that belly's hair
And feel for the lipped lair,
The fortress made but to be taken, for which
He feels the battering ram grow large and
itch.]

(140)

Open the windows and the doors all wide
[...]
That she would be a bride in bed with a
man]
The parts where she is a woman do insist
And send up messages that shame doth
ban.]

(130)

And let the night, coming, teach them that
use]
For youth is in abuse!
Let them repeat the link, and pour and pour
Their pleasure till they can no more!
(*Poemas Ingleses publicados por Fernando
Pessoa*, 152)

Pessoa achieves his erotic expansion of Spenser's *Epithalamium* by displacing and dislocating certain individual 'pieces' of Spenser's poem—both individual words like "girland," "love," "paps," or "roses," as well as various syntactical structures—as if the text of the English poet constituted a lexical mosaic that is reconfigured by Pessoa's

obscene poetic logic. Consequently, Pessoa's process of poetic reconfiguration clearly affects the status of the main epithalamic elements of Spenser's poem, among them the bucolic pastoral setting, the natural beauty of the female body, or the ritualistic journey in and out of the temple. While the central part of Spenser's poem is occupied by the "sacred ceremonies" of marriage, Pessoa's poem completely bypasses the important religious and social implications of Spenser's take on the nuptial ceremony ("No more, no more of church of feast, for these / are outward to the day [...]"), quickly moving towards the climax of sexual intercourse, that constitutes for Pessoa "the great day's true ceremonial" (140). Hence, in the hands of Pessoa, the constituent parts of Spenser's *Epithalamium* completely lose their Protestant ethos of purity and virtuosity, clearly gaining the sexual explicitness of Pessoa's 'intense' obscenity characteristic of his *English Poems*.

As shown here, while it is evident that Spenser's *Epithalamium* thoroughly saturates Pessoa's poem, the linguistic variations and erotic expansions of Pessoa's version somehow revert back, and enhance sexual elements that were partly latent, or at least not fully manifest in Spenser's poem. Therefore, perhaps the most crucial aspect of the process of erotic expansion and lexical reconfiguration in Pessoa's "Epithalamium" is that it becomes a 'translated' version of Spenser's poem that goes beyond the status of mere copy, ultimately constituting a simulacrum of Spenser's *Epithalamium*. The notion of simulacrum—as particularly developed by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze in *Différence et Répétition*—provides a rather valuable concept for the analysis of the peculiar intertextual relation between Pessoa's and Spenser's respective poems. While there is no doubt that Spenser's *Epithalamium* is engraved in Pessoa's poem, Pessoa's

simulacrum ultimately exerts a transformation of the poetic parameters that previously grounded the apparent originality and canonical stability of Spenser's poem. According to Deleuze, this crucial implication of the simulacrum lies on the differential element at its very core through which it is able to abolish the possibility of establishing a distinction between original and copy:

Car, par simulacre, nous ne devons pas entendre une simple imitation, mais bien plutôt l'acte par lequel l'idée même d'un modèle ou d'une position privilégiée se trouve contestée, renversée. Le simulacre est l'instance qui comprend une différence en soi, comme (au moins) deux séries divergentes sur lesquelles il joue, toute ressemblance abolie, sans qu'on puisse dès lors indiquer l'existence d'un original et d'une copie. (*Différence et Répétition*, 95)

[{...} By simulacrum we should not understand a simple imitation but rather the act by which the very idea of a model or privileged position is challenged and overturned. The simulacrum is the instance which includes a difference within itself, such (at least) two divergent series on which it plays, all resemblance abolished so that one can no longer point to the existence of an original and a copy.] (*Difference and Repetition*, 69)

Based on Deleuze's groundbreaking conception of the simulacrum, it can be argued that the simulating act intrinsic to Pessoa's "Epithalamium" radically challenges the privileged position of Spenser's poem over Pessoa's. The crucial point here is that the difference in diction and sexual explicitness between both poems fully disrupts the possibility of conceiving them as either original or copy or each other. Hence, if Pessoa's "Epithalamium" cannot be reduced to constitute a mere copy of Spenser's *Epithalamium*, Pessoa manages to abolish through his simulacrum the realm of resemblance in the intertextual relation between both poems. Following Deleuze, the actual manifestation of the differential element inherent in Pessoa's simulacrum can be interpreted as implying an act that affects at least two divergent series that, although intrinsically related, never

fully converge; Spenser's canonical English poetic diction on the one hand, and on the other Pessoa's own variations, changes and expansions of Spenser's *Epithalamium*.

It also is important to stress the fact that the differential element of Pessoa's English poetic diction characteristic of his *English Poems* is inherently connected to its "queer" fetishizing tendencies—using again Marx's description of the fetishism of commodities—analyzed previously in detail in relation to Pessoa's "Antinous." Similar to Deleuze's conception of the simulacrum, the fetish happens to be characterized by a paradoxical internalization of divergent series since, as argued by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, it constitutes in fact the "presence of an absence:"

In quanto presenza, l'oggetto-feticcio è sí, infatti, qualcosa di concreto e perfino di tangibile; ma in quanto presenza di un'assenza, esso è, nello stesso tempo, immateriale e intangibile, perché rimanda continuamente al di là di se stesso verso qualcosa che non può mai realmente essere posseduto. (*Stanze: la parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale*, 41)

[Insofar as it is a presence, the fetish object is in fact something concrete and tangible; but in so far as it is the presence of an absence, it is, at the same time, immaterial and intangible, because it alludes continuously beyond itself to something that can never really be possessed.] (*Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, 33)

Both Deleuze's conception of the differential element of the simulacrum, and Agamben's take on the fetish as alluding "continuously beyond itself" can be used to unveil crucial implications of the transferential mechanics of Pessoa's poetics of displacement that would arguably be lost in any critical study of the work of the Portuguese poet that ignores Pessoa's *English Poems*. As shown here, by simulating key features of Keats' poetry in "Antinous," as well as Spenser's poetic celebration of marriage in "Epithalamium," each of Pessoa's *English Poems* examined here emerges rather literally as an obscene attempt to substitute and replace the English literary

tradition embodied in the work of these two canonical English poets. Therefore, one can conclude that in both “Epithalamium” and “Antinous,” Pessoa is not only translating his poetic voice into different versions of himself as otherwise manifested in his series of heteronyms and poetic masks, but more importantly, translating canonical instances of the corpus of English literature into simulacrae of themselves.

At the same time, Pessoa’s attempt to incorporate his own poetry to the English literary tradition implies an attempt to reestablish and assert the peculiar form of Englishness inherent in his own British colonial identity mentioned previously. Due both to his paradoxical position within the specific colonial context of Durban, as well as his permanent return to Lisbon in 1905, it is evident that Pessoa’s own Englishness partly lacked a sense of fully belonging to the “organic national identity” that, as mentioned previously by Eagleton, originally lied at the core of the discipline of English studies. The use of the adverb ‘partly’ here is extremely useful to describe Pessoa’s paradoxical Englishness since, as argued in this article, Pessoa’s poetics of displacement and simulation is as synecdochal and metonymic as Freud’s conception of the fetish.⁹ Thus, the paradoxical incorporation of divergent series that structures both the fetish and the simulacrum happens to enact and display the very tension that articulates Pessoa’s own Englishness, since after all, it was an identity that ultimately constituted for Pessoa the presence of an absence. As such, one of the crucial aspects of Pessoa’s process of fetishization that pervades his *English Poems* is that, using Agamben again, it can be extended exponentially into an infinite series of manifestations of itself:

⁹ “The normal sexual object is replaced by another which bears some relation to it, but is entirely unsuited to serve the normal sexual aim. [...] What is substituted for the sexual object is some part of the body (such as the foot or hair) which is in general very inappropriate for sexual purposes, or some inanimate object which bears an assignable relation to the person whom it replaces.” (Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in *The Freud Reader*, Peter Gay, 249).

Proprio in quanto esso è negazione e segno di un'assenza, il feticcio non è infatti un *unicum* irripetibile, ma è, al contrario, qualcosa di surrogabile all'infinito, senza che nessuna delle sue successive incarnazioni possa mai esaurire completamente il nulla di cui è la cifra. (42)

[Precisely because the fetish is a negation and the sign of an absence, it is not an unrepeatable unique object; on the contrary, it is something infinitely capable of substitution, without any of its successive incarnations ever succeeding in exhausting the nullity of which it is the symbol.] (33)

Following Agamben's formulation of the infinite potential of the fetish for its own replacement and substitution, it can be argued that the set of sexual, imperial, linguistic and heteronymic series that configures Pessoa's work ended up being articulated by a complex process of poetic fetishization through which Pessoa could simulate—precisely as an attribute of himself—what he partly lacked, i.e. an English identity. Thus, Pessoa's own Englishness, his peculiar English diction, or the different empires that structure his projected cycle for his *English Poems*, can be analyzed simply as some of the (many) attributes with which Pessoa himself—the 'ele mesmo' (himself) used in Portuguese to refer to Pessoa's own poetic identity—was paradoxically endowed. However, as suggested by Agamben above, the potentially infinite incarnations of a fetishizing imagination can never succeed in exhausting the productive absence these series replace and signify. Hence, the different empires that articulate Pessoa's projected cycle of English poems to which both "Antinous" and "Epithalamium" belong can not only be seen as attributes of Pessoa himself, but also constitute different aesthetic masks of the extremely productive absence that Pessoa's process of poetic fetishization was never able to exhaust.

A rather relevant absence in Pessoa's work associated with the composition of his *English Poems* is the lack of any reference to the specific historical circumstances

regarding his own colonial experience in Durban.¹⁰ It is striking that in his overall literary work both in English and Portuguese, Pessoa noticeably ignored the actual details of the historical circumstances that, among other things, fully determined his own English identity. Paradoxically, though, the manifest absence of Pessoa's own relation to British colonialism in South Africa from his work happens to constitute a symptom that links Pessoa to the bulk of Anglo-American modernist literature related to what the postcolonial theorist Simon Gikandi has referred to as a "failure in the colonial space:"

There is, therefore, no better place to read this failure than in that unstable cognitary zone in which modernism seeks aesthetic solutions to historical problems and ends up displaying its style at the most blatant symptom of the very problems—the crisis in capitalism, fragmented subjectivity and imperial atrophy—that its aesthetizing strategy sought to keep out of the text. (*Maps of Englishness*, 161)

As argued in this chapter, Pessoa's *English Poems* powerfully stage within its complex textual realm parallel symptoms to the ones Gikandi ascribes to the colonial failure inherent in English modernist literature. Similarly to the cases of other Anglo-American modernist poets like T.S. Eliot, or Ezra Pound, to mention two obvious examples, Pessoa's polyphonic and bilingual poetic system of heteronyms, masks and empires constitutes as a whole a complex and compulsive aesthetizing attempt to arrive at a Great Work, or a Great Tradition that could mask a historically rooted crisis linked to the colonial failure mentioned by Gikandi. This same attempt to mask a failure associated with the British colonial and imperial project can be seen to be part of the reason why Pessoa's assimilation of different cultural, sexual, linguistic and literary

¹⁰ In his study of Pessoa's life in South Africa, Alexandrino Severino remarks the absence of any reference to Durban in Pessoa's work in the following terms: "Jamais em seus versos ou nos seus escritos em prosa apareceria qualquer referência direta à cidade que o abrigara durante nove anos" (32). [Neither in his verse, nor in his prose writings there is ever any kind of direct reference to the city that accommodated him during nine years]. See Alexandrino E. Severino, *Fernando Pessoa na África do Sul*. Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 1983.

identities as displayed in his *English Poems* ultimately resulted in a poetic identity as imperial as the Englishness Pessoa always embraced.

However, the main problem with Pessoa's *English Poems* in relation to this colonial "failure" is that they have never belonged to the literary corpus of English Studies that Gikandi critiques from his postcolonial perspective. Although Pessoa's *English Poems* clearly share the symptoms of the "crisis of belief in the efficacy of colonialism"(161) Gikandi specifically ascribes to English modernism, the fact is that they have never been considered 'English' enough to enter the discipline of English studies—regardless of what the institutional use of the term has been deemed to signify during the last two centuries. As developed in this article, part of the reason for the blatant exclusion of Pessoa's *English Poems* from a discipline and tradition where they clearly were meant to belong is primarily because of their destabilizing potential to abolish what Deleuze referred above as "the very idea of a model or privileged position" that still lies at the very core of the institution of English studies. At any rate, the impressive nature of Pessoa's fetishizing poetic imagination resides in the fact that, in the very process of constructing his own literary empire, Pessoa was able to displace and overturn the structural stability of the different identities he was able to assimilate and simulate, as Pessoa would say, in "his lust's withholding."

Chapter Three

The Translatability of Universal Poiesis:

Vicente Huidobro's *Creacionismo* in *Temblor de cielo* / *Tremblement de ciel*

The cosmopolitan Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948) briefly settled in Madrid during the fall of 1918 after having spent almost two years in Paris. While in France, Huidobro not only managed to master the French language, but also composed five collections of poetry,¹ founded the avant-garde journal *Nord-Sud* with the French poets Guillaume Apollinaire and Pierre Reverdy, and more importantly developed the main theoretical foundations of his very own form of avant-garde poetics, the so-called *Creacionismo*. Soon after his arrival in Paris in 1916, Huidobro had already befriended key members of the Parisian avant-garde, becoming a crucial member of a group of poets and artists that among others included the Cubist painters Juan Gris and Pablo Picasso, Max Jacob, André Breton, Tristan Tzara, Blaise Cendrars and even a young Ezra Pound.²

The arrival of Huidobro to Madrid in 1918 had, therefore, a major impact on the literary and cultural scene of the Spanish capital, since he essentially served as an invaluable cultural bridge between the thriving cosmopolitan capital of Europe during the first two decades of the century, and the capital of Spain—then utterly dormant and

¹ In 1917 Huidobro published in Paris *Horizon carré*, his first main collection in French. In 1918 and while living in Madrid he published *Ecuatorial*, *Poemas árticos*, *Tour Eiffel*, and *Hallali*—the last two also written in French.

² As Huidobro relates during an interview in Chile with Ángel Cruchaga during the summer of 1919, Pound apparently offered to translate Huidobro's *Horizon carré* into English: "Hay además un joven poeta inglés, Ezra Pound, que también ha deseado venir con nosotros y que iba a traducir a su idioma natal mi libro *Horizon carré* (*Huidobro y el creacionismo*, 64). [There is also a young English poet, Ezra Pound who also wanted to be with us and who was going to translate *Horizon carré* into his native tongue]. In the same interview Huidobro also mentions Pound's *Imagisme* as one of the most relevant avant-garde poetics at the time: "La de los "imaginistas", que es una escuela oriunda de Inglaterra, con ramificaciones en Estados Unidos y Canadá. [that of the Imagists, a school which originated in England, with groups in the United States and Canada].

provincial in comparison to Paris.³ Huidobro brought with him a first-hand knowledge of the main currents of avant-garde art, poetry and poetics completely absent from Spain prior to his arrival, as well as a wide array of relevant avant-garde figures escaping from the aftermath of World War I such as Sonia and Robert Delaunay, or the Polish painters Wladyslaw Jald and Marjan Paskiewicz.⁴ In Madrid, Huidobro quickly became the central and most influential figure of a group of poets and writers including Rafael Cansinos-Assens and Guillermo de Torre that eventually led to the emergence of the Spanish avant-garde movement *Ultraísmo*.

As acknowledged by the Basque poet Juan Larrea, who became a close friend and *creacionista* disciple of Huidobro during the early 1920s, the great impact of Huidobro both in Paris and Madrid stemmed in part from what Larrea refers to here as a radically new “entusiasmo del Nuevo Mundo” [enthusiasm of the New World] that sparked an unprecedented avant-garde artistic reaction in Spain:

Vicente Huidobro importó a Europa un entusiasmo juvenil, de cepa americana, que la literatura europea desconocía por completo. De ahí la brillantez incomparable de sus metáforas...Por medio del ultraísmo, nacido a su calor, ese su entusiasmo del Nuevo Mundo prendió en España y se propagó a toda la poesía nueva que directa o indirectamente le debe no poco. (359)

[Vicente Huidobro imported to Europe a juvenile enthusiasm of an American root that was completely unknown to European literature. Thus the incomparable brilliance of his metaphors...By means of *Ultraísmo*, born around his spark, his New World enthusiasm got in fire in Spain and propagated to all the new poetry that directly or indirectly owes him quite a bit.]

³ The rather depressing mood of the Madrid literary circles prior to Huidobro’s arrival is vividly described by Guillermo de Torre in the following terms: “Pues la rueda de nuestras evoluciones literarias, después del impulso novecentista, gira muy lentamente y en un silencio de maquinaria gastada. Sus engranajes se oxidan faltos de una vívida lubricación mental.” (Guillermo de Torre, “La poesía creacionista y la pugna entre sus progenitores,” in De Costa, *Vicente Huidobro y el creacionismo*. 130) [Since the wheel of our literary evolution, after the impulse at the turn of the century, moves extremely slowly with a silence of used machinery. Its mechanisms rust lacking a vivid mental lubrication].

⁴ See Guillermo de Torre, “La poesía creacionista y la pugna entre sus progenitores.”

Although his New World origins clearly played a role in the development and expansion of Huidobro's own strand of avant-garde poetics both in Paris and Madrid, Huidobro's own transatlantic condition is slightly more problematic than the "enthusiastic," idealized and exoticizing impression just stated by Juan Larrea. In this sense, the Chilean literary scholar Jaime Concha has emphasized the tension and compulsion at the core of Huidobro's transatlantic condition: "En Huidobro, el nomadismo es pulsión; sus transhumancias marinas proceden del fondo del deseo" (V.H., 63). [In Huidobro, his nomadism is a form of pulsion; his sea migrations originate from the depths of desire]. Hence, according to Concha, Huidobro's cosmopolitanism and constant transatlantic crossings articulate a problematic tension at the heart of his work between the real Huidobro—for whom "el viaje fue siempre desgarramiento, tensión, encruzijada" [journeying was always a rupture, tension and being at a crossroads]—and a "legendary" and "planetary" Huidobro for whom "el símbolo armonioso de las golondrinas es más bien un ansia y un anhelo, y no la proyección de su íntima verdad transatlántica. Es el vaivén, ése de las golondrinas purificado de todo; sin mar sin tierra, sístole y diástole de una circulación planetaria" (63) [the harmonious symbol of the swallow is more a desire and a wish, and not the projection of his inner transatlantic truth. It is the comings and goings of the swallow, purified of everything; without sea or land, systole and diastole of a planetary creation].

Although there is no doubt that the revolutionary and inspiring spark associated with Huidobro's *Creacionismo* is partly connected to his Latin American roots as stated by Larrea, the brilliance of Huidobro's metaphors reside in the radically creative force associated to the tension at the core of his complex transatlantic position just mentioned

by Concha—i.e. between a “real” Huidobro located between the New and the Old worlds, and an absolute or “planetary” Huidobro who tried to overcome his historically-grounded transatlantic tension through his own form of avant-garde poetics. In other words, the revolutionary dimension of Huidobro’s *Creacionismo* lies not so much in Huidobro’s own New World background and characteristic “enthusiasm,” but rather in the fact that *Creacionismo* constituted an avant-garde response to a personal, historical, geographical and cultural tension between conflicting forms of tradition and history.

In this sense, the rather problematic question of whether *Creacionismo* was originally conceived by Huidobro himself during his transatlantic wanderings—something which Huidobro always argued—or rather constituted an amalgamation of poetic and aesthetic ideas borrowed by him along the way from other avant-garde artists like Pierre Reverdy, Juan Gris or Guillaume Apollinaire among other members of Huidobro’s avant-garde collective is after all not that relevant for the purposes of this study. A key aspect of my argument in this chapter is that the actual power of Huidobro’s influential *Creacionismo* lies in the fact that as a poetics it became a radically new historical event in the hands of Huidobro which clearly belongs in its own right to what Peter Bürger has referred to as the “historical avant-garde.” Thus, as soon as he landed in Europe, Huidobro quickly turned *Creacionismo* into a fully developed set of theoretical principles, poetic works, manifestoes, and ultimately an avant-garde ethos and aesthetic theory that hadn’t existed as such until Huidobro himself branded *Creacionismo* as his *own* avant-garde poetics. Therefore, it can be argued that what Huidobro imported from the New World was not only a different kind of enthusiasm as argued by Juan Larrea above, but rather a new form of making history, literary or otherwise. A quick

sample of the tremendous impact—verging on religious fervor—that Huidobro’s avant-garde ethos had in the literary circles of Madrid in 1918 is explicitly stated here by the poet and critic Guillermo de Torre in a personal letter to Huidobro after his stay in the Spanish capital:

Sin embargo para su íntima consolación en los repliegues psíquicos intersticiales de nuestros corazones flotantes quedaba pulsátil una cordial estela de perceptiva irradiación lírica, dinámicamente creadora. Así al glisar de las horas las fragantes semillas que usted arrojó magnánimo, los módulos inéditos que usted descubrió ante nuestros trémulos espíritus atónitos han ido arraigando purificados en su devenir de evolutiva gestación triunfal. (Bajarlía, *La polémica Reverdy-Huidobro*, 52)

[However, for your intimate consolation, a cordial trail of a lyrical perceptual irradiation remained pulsating in the psychic interstitial folds of our floating hearts, dynamically creative. Thus, after the passing of the hours the fragrant seeds you magnanimously spread, the new modules that you discovered in front of our astonished, tremulous spirits have been taking purified root in their evolutionary becoming of triumphal gestation]

This very aura of astonishment and radical creativity that clearly pervades de Torre’s letter to Huidobro is extremely symptomatic of the reaction and response surrounding the reception of Huidobro’s work in Madrid during 1918. As previously mentioned, the newness of Huidobro’s *Creacionismo* inspired the creation of the new avant-garde poetics of *Ultraísmo* essentially developed by two of Huidobro’s friends in Madrid, the aforementioned Cansinos-Assens and de Torre. Although of brief life, *Ultraísmo* constitutes perhaps the only original Spanish avant-garde movement, having a major impact on the evolution of twentieth-century poetry in Spanish at both sides of the Atlantic, influencing the work of major poets as diverse as García Lorca, Gerardo Diego, Rafael Alberti and also Jorge Luís Borges, who after a brief period in Madrid imported the avant-garde poetics of *Ultraísmo* to Argentina. Interestingly though, while

Huidobro's work originally triggered an enthusiastic explosion of avant-garde activities in Madrid, the reception of his work was received slightly more critically in Chile.

Particularly relevant are the following comments by the Chilean literary critic Hernán Díaz Arrieta regarding the radical newness of Huidobro's *Creacionismo*:

El creacionismo es una cosa rara y difícil, algo como una nueva lengua literaria...Esto ya no es quitar los altares ni sustituir un culto por otro; es remover las columnas del templo, echar abajo los muros, arrasar la tierra y mirar—o querer mirar—desde un mundo nuevo, astros y planetas diferentes.” (“El creacionismo.” In De Costa, *En Pos de Huidobro*, 51).

[*Creacionismo* is a weird and difficult thing, something like a new literary language...It is not just about dismantling the altars, nor substituting a cult for the other, it is about removing the very pillars of the temple, tearing the walls down, destroying the earth and looking—or the will to look—from a new world at different stars and planets]

This aura of revolutionary change regarding Huidobro's *Creacionismo*—powerfully described by Díaz Arrieta as a radically creative way of looking at the universe—is intrinsically connected to what Peter Bürger has referred to as a “change in the means of artistic representation” that characterizes for him the historical avant-garde. In his rejection of Adorno's conception of the category of the new as a category of modern art developed in his *Aesthetic Theory*,⁵ Bürger argues that since the avant-garde did not aim at a “change in the means of artistic representation” but rather a “change in the representational system,” the category of the new as used by Adorno in his critical analysis of modern art ultimately does not apply to the historical avant-garde:

If we sought to understand a change in the means of artistic representation, the category of the new would be applicable. But since the historical avant-garde movements cause a break with tradition and a subsequent change in the representational system, the category is not suitable for a description of how

⁵ Bürger characterizes Adorno's conceptualization of the category of the new as a category of modern art essentially as “a necessary duplication of what dominates the commodity society” (61) that denotes for Bürger a “failure to precisely historicize the category of the new.”

things are. And this all the less when one considers that the historical avant-garde movements not only intend to break with the traditional representational system, but the total abolition of the institution that is art. This is undoubtedly something ‘new,’ but the newness is qualitatively different from both a change in artistic techniques, and a change in the representational system. (Bürger, 62)

Following Bürger’s remarks, it can be argued that the original critical response to Huidobro’s *Creacionismo*—whether positive or negative—was a reaction to the radical break with “the traditional representative system” characteristic of the historical avant-garde. In other words, if Huidobro’s *Creacionismo* was perceived as a revolutionary poetics by artists and critics at both sides of the Atlantic—despite the difference in the reactions of its reception—it is not because Huidobro’s poetics involved a change in the “means of artistic representation,” but rather because it was meant to constitute a radical break with the “traditional representational system” just suggested by Bürger.⁶ The kind of break with tradition entailed by Huidobro’s *Creacionismo* as an avant-garde movement has been precisely associated to the change of the system of representation produced by Cubism. Some Huidobro scholars such as René de Costa and Enrique Caracciolo-Trejo have thus conceptualized Huidobro’s *Creacionismo* essentially as a form of literary Cubism. As Caracciolo-Trejo suggests in what follows, due to his contact and friendship with key Cubist painters—especially with Juan Gris—Huidobro happened to be exposed to and greatly influenced by the main tenets of Cubism since its very inception:

⁶ It is precisely Bürger’s own distinction between the “means of representation” and “system of representation” that helps to define the rupture with tradition entailed by Huidobro’s *Creacionismo* as aiming at a “change of the system of representation: “During the course of the fifteenth century, a representational system developed in painting characterized by linear perspective and the uniform organization of the space of the painting. [...] Early in the twentieth century it loses its obligatory validity. Already in Cézanne, linear perspective no longer has the significance it still had for the Impressionists, who clung to it although they dissolved shapes and forms. The universal validity of the traditional system of representation had been broken.” (116)

Una vecinidad temporal y de amistad con algunos de sus exponentes más notables, pone a Huidobro muy cerca del Cubismo. En efecto, aunque el Cubismo nace como tendencia exclusivamente plástica, propone también una liberación de las leyes naturales. En su plano específico, niega la representabilidad fotográfica de la realidad, busca la unicidad de sujeto-objeto, elude el artificio de la perspectiva, presenta, simultáneamente, perfiles que se establecen desde puntos de observación móviles. [...] El cubismo propone entonces una “relectura” del mundo que los sentidos perciben y un nuevo lenguaje capaz de expresar esa experiencia. (44)

[A temporal vicinity and friendship with some of its most notable exponents places Huidobro extremely close to Cubism. In fact, although Cubism is born as an exclusively plastic tendency, it also purports a liberation from the laws of nature. On a specific level, it negates the photographic representability of reality, it looks for the univocity of subject and object, it eludes the artifice of perspective, and simultaneously presents outlines established from dynamic viewpoints. [...] Cubism thus proposes a “re-reading” of the sensorial world and a new language able to express this experience.]

Although Huidobro’s *Creacionismo* entails a critique of the traditional system of representation parallel to the one Bürger ascribes to Cubism⁷—“it calls into question the system of representation with its linear perspective that had prevailed since the Renaissance” (109)—the use of the label of ‘literary Cubism’ to characterize Huidobro’s *Creacionismo* clearly fails to account for the historical specificity and transatlantic tension at the very core of Huidobro’s influential avant-garde poetics examined here. At the same time, although the basic tenets of *Creacionismo* were mostly formulated parallel to the gestation of Cubism, Huidobro’s extremely idiosyncratic reconceptualization of the

⁷ Bürger incorporates Cubism within the different movements that configure his category of “the historical avant-garde” in the following terms: “The concept of the historical avant-garde movements used here applies primarily to Dadaism and early surrealism but also equally to the Russian avant-garde after the October revolution. Partly significant differences between notwithstanding, a common feature of all these movements is that they do not reject individual artistic techniques and procedures of earlier art, but rejected that art in its entirety, thus bringing about a radical break with tradition. In their most extreme manifestations, their primary target is art as an institution such as it has developed in bourgeois society. [...] Although Cubism does not pursue the same intent, it calls into question the system of representation with its linear perspective that had prevailed since the Renaissance. For this reason, it is part of the historic avant-garde movements, although it does not share their basic tendency (sublation of art in the praxis of life)” (Bürger, 109).

creative act at the core of *Creacionismo* ended up articulating his extremely diverse work as a whole, clearly going beyond the particular impact and influence of Cubism on his work, a claim supported by the following comments by the Basque poet Juan Larrea regarding Huidobro's poetry:

Las ambiciones substanciales de su poesía, según constan en sus manifiestos estéticos, y su afán de claridad orgánica y de precisión imaginativa, adquirido al contacto del cubismo de Gris, no pueden menos de dar fruto. Y sobre todo, su afirmación básica de que la razón verdadera del poeta es el acto de creación y que sobre ella descansa el peso de la poesía, es cosa que por mucho que se empeñen los poetas de pujos sentimentales, nunca podrá ser olvidado. (Bary, 24)

[The substantial ambitions of his poetry, as stated in his aesthetic manifestos, as well as his eagerness for organic clarity and imaginative precision, acquired through contact with Gris' Cubism cannot but be fruitful. And above all, his basic assertion that the true purpose of the poet is the act of creation and that on it rests the weight of poetry, is something that as much as poets of sentimental tendencies may try, will not be forgotten.]

In the rest of this chapter, I will examine in detail the way in which Huidobro's substantial poetic ambitions proved to be not only fruitful for the creation of an extremely original and influential avant-garde poetics, but also led to the production of a series of astonishing avant-garde poems that still deserve their full critical recognition. Through my analysis of the theoretical tenets of Huidobro's *Creacionismo* and their materialization in the bilingual poem *Temblor de cielo / Tremblement de ciel* I will show how Huidobro's work is crucial for the study of avant-garde poetry and poetics as an essentially transatlantic and intermedial phenomenon. Ultimately, I will argue how as a poetics of transfer Huidobro's *Creacionismo* unveils the very dynamics (as translation, displacement or replacement) that as argued previously by Puchner lie at the core of the avant-garde as a form of "radical modernism" (*Poetry of the Revolution*, 174).

Huidobro's *Creacionismo*: A Transatlantic Intermedial Poetics

As Huidobro states as early as 1912, one of the main purposes of his career as a poet was to reformulate the literary as a means of representation by recovering the creative potential of poiesis at the core of poetry: “El reinado de la literatura terminó. El siglo veinte verá el reinado de la poesía en el verdadero sentido de la palabra, es decir, en el de creación, como la llamaron los griegos, aunque jamás lograron realizar su definición.” (“El creacionismo,” *Obras Completas*, 672). [The realm of literature has ended. The twentieth century will see the realm of poetry in the true sense of the word, that is, that of creation, as the Greeks called it, although they never accomplished the realization of its definition]. As briefly and powerfully asserted here by Huidobro, *Creacionismo* essentially entails a poetic search to arrive at a form not so much of literary representation, but rather of the “true sense” of poetry itself as a creative act. Huidobro’s *Creacionismo* therefore responds to an avant-garde critique of literature as a traditional system of representation, and aims at replacing a tradition (i.e. that of the literary) by exploring the creative potential at the core of the poetic.

In order to properly understand what Huidobro means by conceiving creation as the true sense of poetry it is extremely important to stress the fact that *Creacionismo* constitutes poetry not as a generic form or manifestation of literature but rather as a new stage of its own logical development, “como continuación de la evolución lógica de la poesía” [as the continuation of the logical evolution of poetry] (De Costa, *En pos de Huidobro* 54). In other words, for Huidobro *Creacionismo* constitutes poetry as its own logical purpose, i.e. the formal manifestation of poetry itself as its own creative end:

En mi modo de ver el “creacionismo” es la poesía misma: algo que no tiene por finalidad, ni narrar, ni describir las cosas de la vida, sino hacer una totalidad lírica independiente en absoluto. Es decir, ella misma es su propia finalidad. (Cruchaca, “Conversando con Vicente Huidobro,” 63).

[I see *Creacionismo* as poetry itself: something which does not have as its purpose to narrate, nor describe the things of life, but rather to create an absolutely independent lyrical totality. That is, poetry itself is its own purpose].

By conceiving the creative or poetic potential at the core of poetry to constitute poetry in its essence, Huidobro is trying to reformulate the key moment in the institutionalization of the literary as conceptualized in Western culture—a seminal moment that originally took place during European Romanticism. As has been argued by Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, it is precisely during Romanticism in general—and as particularly conceptualized by early German romantics such as Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel—when literature as such emerges as something radically new: “They, in any case, will approach it explicitly as a new *genre*, beyond the divisions of classical (or modern) poetics capable of resolving the inherent “generic” divisions of the written thing” (*The Literary Absolute*, 10). Moreover, and following Huidobro’s remarks that *Creacionismo* constitutes the progression of poetry into its new logical form, it can be argued that the very productive principle that is used by the Jena romantics to establish literature as an intrinsically new (and modern) genre, is the same creative principle used by Huidobro in the second decade of the twentieth century to declare the death of literature as an institution, i.e. poiesis. The critical analysis of early German Romanticism carried out by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy is in this sense extremely useful to clarify this essential aspect of the present argument regarding Huidobro’s reformulation of poetry as medium, especially in relation to the notion of “poiesy:”

The absolute in literature is not so much poetry (whose modern concept is also invented in *Athenaeum* fragment 116) as it is *poiesy*, according to an etymological appeal the romantics do not fail to make. *Poiesy*, or in other words production. The thought of the “literary genre” is thus less concerned with the production of the literary thing than with *production*, absolutely speaking. Romantic poetry sets out to penetrate the essence of *poiesy*, in which the literary thing produces the truth of production in itself, and thus, as will be evident in all that follows, the truth of the production *of itself*, of autopoiesy. [...] Romanticism is the inauguration of *the literary absolute*. (12)

If according to Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy romanticism is the inauguration of the “generativity of literature” as an “infinitely new Work,” Huidobro’s *Creacionismo* is evidently meant to powerfully constitute its closing ceremony by declaring the exhaustion of this generativity of the literary, and providing a creationist medium for a new manifestation of the same productive principle of poiesis. In other words, while Romanticism conceives the literary as a productive realm where particular works can be related to an absolute Work of self-production due to the “infinite versability” of literature as a medium, the essential creative purpose of *Creacionismo* is to aim at articulating an absolute form of poiesis within a particular poetic form. Huidobro’s *Creacionismo* therefore tries to produce a poietic universality beyond any descriptive or communicative function of language able to incorporate within itself different linguistic elements. The creationist poem hence aims at producing a harmonious and unified poetic totality in itself by transferring diverse elements into its very form. As argued here by Cansinos-Assens, *Creacionismo* therefore operates by creating a series of poetic images in which differing elements are simultaneously fused together into a newly created medium:

La imagen creada es algo que no existe en la realidad, que se logra no amalgamando reminiscencias, sino uniendo en intuición vivaz atributos diversos e individuales que sólo pueden coexistir en la imaginación del poeta. De esta suerte,

se obtiene una doble imagen que se presenta fundida en una sola, simultáneamente a la evocación del lector, y en virtud de su duplicidad, autoriza para que al género de poesía que fructifica se le denomine simultaneísta o cubista. (“La nueva lírica [“Horizon carré,” “Poemas árticos,” “Ecuatorial”], 270).

[The created image is something that does not exist in reality, that is obtained not by amalgamating memories, but rather by uniting in vivid intuition diverse individual attributes that can only coexist in the poet’s imagination. In this manner, a double image is obtained which simultaneously presents itself to the evocation of the reader as being fused in one single image. By virtue of this duplicity, it can be justified to refer to this genre of poetry being fruitful now as simultaneous or Cubist.]

Following Cansinos-Assens’ analysis of Huidobro’s creationist technique, Huidobro’s *Creacionismo* can be conceptualized as the kind of poetic of transfer examined in this dissertation in which individual words suffer a displacement and a reconfiguration of their original or literal linguistic form into new poetic images that ultimately unveil the productive potential of their translatability. As a poetics of transfer, *Creacionismo* can thus be seen to articulate not only Huidobro’s literary practice—since it provides the basic rhetorical form for the figural correlation (i.e. trope) of different “individual attributes” as suggested by Cansinos-Assens—but also the very historical and geographical form (i.e. the topos) of his own transatlantic experience. Hence, *Creacionismo* constitutes an overall quest toward a poetic absolute that takes the “real” Huidobro across different and divergent histories, languages, nations and traditions through the very series of formal displacements and substitutions that articulate his poetic work. In this sense, Martin Puchner has precisely stressed in his recent study of manifestos and the Avant-garde the way these mechanisms of “displacements and replacements” also happen to articulate the form of Huidobro’s transatlantic journeys:

One might describe these travels as a combination of displacement and replacement, displacement from putative origins and their replacement by travels

and transient places. This effect of displacement and replacement is in fact intimately connected to the foundational force of the manifesto. [...] These manifestos respond to the experience of displacement by trying to create places, by replacing the lost with the new. (*Poetry of the Revolution*, 174)

Apart from the extreme importance of its inherent mechanism of displacement and replacement just mentioned by Puchner, one of the key features of *Creacionismo* is that it is an intrinsically intermedial poetic, a term taken here to basically denote the incorporation of various traditional linguistic and artistic media into the texture of the poetic object, as well as the creation of a new medium of signification located between traditional media. As suggested previously in this dissertation—both regarding the notion of the intermedial, as well as Huidobro’s attempt to declare the death of literature through *Creacionismo*—within the context of avant-garde poetics the intermedial ultimately constitutes a critique of art as an institution. Through *Creacionismo* Huidobro develops a series of intermedial strategies that clearly point toward both the denunciation of the shortages of the literary as a medium of artistic expression, as well as the creation of a new medium that aims at being pure, absolute and universal in itself. As I will briefly show here, this series of intermedial strategies consist of both the incorporation of visual elements in his poetry—which includes Huidobro’s famous attempt to incorporate the medium of film to his avant-garde poetic⁸—as well as his bilingual use of French and Spanish in the composition of some of his major poems.

As has been carefully shown by René de Costa,⁹ from his compositions of the early 1910s to his work produced in Paris at the end of the same decade, Huidobro’s

⁸ In the early 1920s Huidobro started working on his visual novel *Cagliostro*, subtitled a “Novela-Film,” which was first published in an English translation as *Mirror of a Mage* in 1930 and which won in 1927 a \$10,000 prize by the New York-based League for Better Motion Picture as the “book of the year with best possibilities for moving picture adaptation” (De Costa, *Vicente Huidobro: The Careers of a Poet*, 129).

⁹ See *Trayectoria del caligrama en Huidobro*. POESIA I, 3. Madrid, 1978.

creationist poetics aimed at incorporating the visual by basically composing different forms of calligramatic poetry. While some of Huidobro's early visual poems closely follow the pattern poems of the English poet George Herbert—in which the typographic form of the poem becomes a crucial component of its poetic meaning, such as “Triángulo armónico” (1912), or “La capilla aldeana” (1913)—during his first stay in Paris Huidobro moves to more complex and innovative forms of visual poetry. A great example of this new creationist form is Huidobro's “Paysage”—included in his seminal collection *Horizon carré* (1917)—in which the lines of the poem unfold as a series of different visual objects, constituting what de Costa refers to as “poema-dibujo” [poem-drawing]. The evolution of Huidobro's creationist experimentation with visual elements reaches a higher level of complexity in 1922, where in an exhibit of Huidobro's art the author introduces his “poèmes-peints,” a series of complex visual poems or poetic paintings such as “Kaleidoscope” in which the visual and textual elements of the composition produce a dynamic or hybrid whole functioning as autonomous intermedial pieces.

Another key aspect of the intermedial nature of Huidobro's *Creacionismo* is the use of the French language as a new medium for his poetry. Almost from his arrival to Paris in 1916, Huidobro started using French as the main language for his creationist compositions. As Gerardo Diego emphasizes here, apart from constituting somewhat of an offense to his ‘native’ or ‘putative’ literary tradition in Spanish, Huidobro's use of the French language constitutes a crucial manifestation of his overall attempt to arrive at an universal form of creative expression:

Huidobro sentía tan hondo la atracción de Paris y el arte moderno, que pasa en Montmartre y Montparnasse lo mejor de su juventud y que durante algunos años abandona su idioma natal, para adoptar el francés como lengua más bien esencial, universal o telegráfica, de sus poemas creacionistas. Este que a tantos

se le antoja pecado imperdonable, no lo es dentro de una estética, de una poética como la suya, en que el idioma sólo cuenta en lo que tiene de interior o creador, y no en lo fónico, castizo o sintáctico. (Gerardo Diego “Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948),” in De Costa, 20)

[Huidobro felt so deeply the attraction of Paris and of modern art that he spent the prime of his youth in Montmartre and Montparnasse. During a few years he abandoned his native tongue in order to adopt French for his creationist poems almost as an essential language, universal and telegraphic. This adoption which for so many has been deemed an unforgivable sin, is not such within an aesthetics and poetics such as his, in which language only counts in its inner or creative dimension, and not on its phonic, local or syntactical features.]

However, contrary to Diego’s characterization of Huidobro’s use of French as abandoning his native tongue, a key aspect of Huidobro’s use of French as a linguistic medium related to its implications of universality is the fact that it never ceases to be part of a bilingual, and as I am arguing here, intermedial practice. In other words, almost from his arrival in Paris in 1916, Huidobro embraced his own distance from the French language—Huidobro was by no means fluent in French on his arrival—as a productive space where *Creacionismo* could take root and flourish by allowing him to distance his poetic practice from its ‘putative origins,’ i.e. the Spanish language. It is precisely through his own translation and displacement of French as a new creationist medium that this ‘foreign’ language could constitute for Huidobro a universal realm of signification. Therefore, at the core of his poetic use of French lies a conception of the creationist event as being in itself absolutely translatable. As Saúl Yurkievich has argued, *Creacionismo* implies the poetic manifestation of an autonomous creative force that by being independent of its linguistic medium is thus universally transferrable:

Practica una poesía de viajeros políglotas, de trotamundos a escala planetaria. Insiste además en la naturaleza mental del fenómeno poético, creación autónoma que tiene una vida independiente del medio lingüístico que la transmite. La

poesía es, según Huidobro, completamente transferible de una a otra lengua. (*Fundadores de la nueva poesía latinoamericana*, 75).

[He practices a poetry of polyglot travelers, of planetary globetrotters. He insists moreover in the mental nature of the poetic event, as an autonomous creation endowed with a life independent from its linguistic medium. According to Huidobro, poetry is completely transferrable from one language to another.]

One of the key aspects of the transferability of poesis as a creative principle at the core of Huidobro's conception of *Creacionismo* just mentioned by Yurkievich is that it leads to a particularly problematic theory of translation. Within Huidobro's avant-garde theory of translation, the created poetic image is deemed to be universal regardless of the language used to express it since it constitutes a new kind of event in itself. Again it is important to stress the importance of the fact that, as suggested previously by Bürger regarding Cubism, the creationist object entails a change not in the means of representation but rather in the system of representation, i.e. it constitutes a radically new kind of medium of creation. As a created 'thing' the creationist event is for Huidobro as concrete and complete in itself as any other created object available in nature. This idea at the core of *Creacionismo* is emphasized by Huidobro in the short manifesto included as a prologue to *Horizon carré* (1917), "Faire un POEME comme la nature fait un arbre" [To make a POEM as nature makes a tree]. Moreover, the transferability of the creationist event is precisely expressed by Huidobro in what constitutes perhaps his most important theoretical analysis of the act of translation:

Si para los poetas creacionistas lo que importa es presentar un hecho nuevo, la poesía creacionista se hace traducible y universal, pues los hechos nuevos permanecen idénticos en todas las lenguas.
Es difícil y hasta imposible traducir una poesía en la que domina la importancia de otros elementos. No podéis traducir la música de las palabras, los ritmos de los versos que varían de una lengua a otra; pero cuando la importancia del

poema reside ante todo en el objeto creado, aquél no pierde en la traducción nada de su valor esencial. De este modo, si digo en francés:

La nuit vient des yeux d'autrui

o si digo en español:

La noche viene de los ojos ajenos

o en inglés:

Night comes from others eyes

el efecto es siempre el mismo y los detalles lingüísticos secundarios. La poesía creacionista adquiere proporciones internacionales, pasa a ser la Poesía, y se hace accesible a todos los pueblos y razas, como la pintura, la música o la escultura (“El creacionismo,” *Obras Completas*, 674)

[If what is important to creationist poets is to present a new event, creationist poetry becomes translatable and universal, since any new event remains identical in all languages. It is difficult and nearly impossible to translate a poetry dominated by the importance of other elements. One cannot translate the music of words, the rhythms of the verses which vary from one language to another; but when the relevance of the poem resides overall in the created object, this object does not lose any of its essential value in its translation. Thus, if I say in French:

La nuit vient des yeux d'autrui

or if I say in Spanish:

La noche viene de los ojos ajenos,

or in English:

Night comes from others eyes

the effect is always the same and the linguistic details are secondary. Creationist poetry acquires international dimensions, it becomes Poetry and it is accessible to all nations and races, as is painting, music or sculpture.]

As these words show, Huidobro’s basic theory of translation is articulated by the same logic that pervades his avant-garde poetics. In other words, it is a theory fully

dominated by a creative force that aims at producing a universal form of poesis. Hence, linguistic elements such as the tone or rhythm of the original are not only considered secondary, but more importantly are deemed fully extraneous to the creationist event itself. What is important for Huidobro regarding translation is that it unveils what he considers to be the transnational and translingual dimensions of the created image, itself a product of universal creation and not of the linguistic form this image may have in a particular language. In other words, it is not so much that Huidobro does not consider those linguistic details irrelevant for the act of translation—as he argues, they are in fact the main reason for the near impossibility of translation—but rather, that they are secondary or partly unrelated to *Creacionismo* as a poetics.

Translation is in this sense significantly relevant for Huidobro since it shows how the same creationist image can be produced in different languages, regardless of the fact that as poetic images they are linguistically different in each particular language. In a way, the intermedial space opened up by translation between different languages corroborates for Huidobro what he takes to be the universal identity of the created poetic object. Therefore, the essential aspect of the creationist image revealed by translation is precisely that it is absolutely translatable in any medium of representation since it implies a radical transformation of the poetic as a system of representation that is, at least for Huidobro, independent from its linguistic medium of expression. As a poetics of transfer, *Creacionismo* implies then a transformation of the original or traditional use of poetic language (in any language) as a literary medium by transferring particular words into new *created* images that become infinitely translatable poetic objects through this formal

displacement and replacement.¹⁰ This creationsit transformation of poetry as a medium previously determined by a single original language (i.e. Spanish or French in the case of Huidobro) into a creative realm of higher purposiveness now available to all languages can be deemed parallel to the transformation experienced by the original in the act of translation as “the unfolding of a special and high form of life,” conceived by Walter Benjamin in “The Task of the Translator:”

The relationship between life and purposiveness, seemingly obvious yet almost beyond the grasp of the intellect, reveals itself only if the ultimate purpose toward which all the individual purposiveness of life tends is sought not in its own sphere but in a higher one. All purposeful manifestations of life, including their very purposiveness in the final analysis have their end not in life but in the expression of its nature, in the representation of their significance. Translation thus ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the innermost relationship of languages to one another. (255)

Benjamin’s conception of the higher purposiveness available through translation—due to the fact that it serves the purpose of representing the “significance” of languages to each other—is parallel to the higher purposiveness that Huidobro sees at the heart of the created poetic image. Huidobro’s most sophisticated theoretical articulation of the notion of higher purpose at the core of *Creacionismo* is developed in a lecture entitled “La poesía” given in Madrid in 1921 and which was originally published as the foreword to *Temblor de cielo* ten years later. In “La poesía,” Huidobro essentially argues that there is a deeper or ‘magical’ mode of signification able to break up and displace the

¹⁰ This idea is also emphasized by Gerado Diego in one of his critical essays on *Creacionismo*: “Pero esta conducta, que puede parecer descastamiento aunque en rigor no lo sea, es consecuencia obligada de su concepto de la poesía como idioma universal, en el cual es indiferente usar una lengua u otra, porque en la imagen creada, su invención es válida en todos los organismos lingüísticos y resulta, en lo que tiene de creación, traducible.” (Diego, “Poesía y Creacionismo de Vicente Huidobro,” en De Costa, 216). [But this behavior, which may look like a form of uprootedness although in fact is not so, is a necessary consequence of his conception of poetry as a universal language, where it is indifferent to use one language or another since the invention of the created image is valid in all linguistic forms and, as a created thing, is translatable.]

merely communicative function of language. As suggested previously, the main objective of this quest toward a universal form of poetry is to elevate the reader into a realm of aesthetic experience that transcends the aesthetic experience provided by traditional literary representation:

Aparte de la significación gramatical del lenguaje, hay otra, una significación mágica, que es la única que nos interesa. Uno es el lenguaje objetivo que sirve para nombrar las cosas del mundo sin sacarlas fuera de su calidad de inventario; el otro rompe esa norma convencional y en él las palabras pierden su representación estricta para adquirir otra más profunda y como rodeada de un aura luminosa que debe elevar al lector del plano habitual y envolverlo en una atmósfera encantada. (*Temblor de cielo*, 7)

[Apart from the grammatical signification of language, there is another, a magical signification which is the only one that interests us. One is the objective language that is used to name things in the world without moving them beyond their status as inventory. The other one breaks this conventional norm and in it words lose their literal representation in order to obtain a deeper one, surrounded by a luminous aura that must elevate the reader beyond the realm of the habitual in order to enfold him or her in an enchanted atmosphere.]

Similar to Benjamin's critique of the communicative use of language in "The Task of the Translator," this deeper realm of linguistic signification is endowed with a higher purposiveness. In a way, *Creacionismo* involves a creative mechanism for encountering a realm of experience that is immanent to objective reality by essentially transforming the way the poietic as a creative force is named in language. This process constitutes not so much a transformation of the word itself, but rather its relocation through its association with other words into a newly created linguistic medium in which the poet, like Benjamin's translator, can establish communication between words that expresses their poetic essence in a brand new light. More importantly, this higher purposiveness immanent to language is conceptualized by Huidobro as providing an

infinite potential of certainty facilitated by the created word once it is located within the intermedial distance between “what we see” and “what we imagine.”

En todas las cosas hay una palabra interna, una palabra latente y que está debajo de la palabra que las designa. Esa es la palabra que debe descubrir el poeta. [...] Su vocabulario es infinito porque ella no cree en la certeza de todas sus posibles combinaciones. Y su rol es convertir la probabilidad en certeza. Su valor está marcado por la distancia que va de lo que vemos a lo que imaginamos. (*Temblor de cielo*, 7)

[Everything contains an inner word, a latent word that is beneath the word that designates it. That is the word the poet must discover. [...] Its vocabulary is infinite because it does not believe in the certainty of all its possible combinations. And its role is to turn probability into certainty. Its value is marked by the distance that goes from what we see to what we imagine]

The creationist poetic practice as conceived by Huidobro aims at unveiling that latent word beneath words that can only be found when relocated into the creative realm lying at the intermedial distance that separates objective reality and the imagination. This intermedial space can only be opened through the poet’s finding previously unknown correspondences between words that are formally correlated within the creationist poem into a series of complex poetic images. It is hence through the transfer and resonance produced by the poet in the process of poetic composition that the new form of poesis is unveiled, moving poetry closer to a state that for Huidobro can resemble in its purest form the language of Creation. The role of the poet at triggering this process of creation is emphasized by Huidobro in his avant-garde manifesto “Manifiesto de manifiestos:”

Yo agregaba entonces, y lo repito ahora, que el poeta es aquél que sorprende la relación oculta que existe entre las cosas más lejanas, los ocultos hilos que las unen. Hay que pulsar aquellos hilos como las cuerdas de un arpa, y producir una resonancia que ponga en movimiento la dos realidades lejanas. La imagen es el broche que las une, el broche de luz. (*Obras Completas*, 667)

[I insisted then, and I repeat it now that the poet is that who finds out the occult relation that exists among things most distant, the hidden threads that unite them. Those threads must be played as the strings of a harp, producing a resonance that puts in motion two distant realities. The image is the brooch that joins them, the brooch of light]

Temblor de cielo / Tremblement de ciel: The Absolute Poiesis of Creacionismo

Huidobro's original quest toward universal poiesis through *Creacionismo*, which as briefly described above was fundamentally established on theoretical terms between 1914 and 1918, developed into new poetic manifestations as he continued traveling between Paris, Madrid and Santiago de Chile during the 1920s. While the basic premise of *Creacionismo* essentially remained the same, i.e. the rearticulation of poetry as a medium, Huidobro's poetic practice evolved into a more complex form of *Creacionismo* that led to the composition of two long poems published in Madrid during 1931, *Altazor*—generally regarded to be his masterpiece—and the lesser known prose poem *Temblor de cielo* which was published in French the following year as *Tremblement de ciel*. More importantly, and parallel to Huidobro's historical and geographical progression across the Atlantic during the second decade of the twentieth century, *Creacionismo* experienced its own process of aesthetic development and transformation as suggested here by Gerardo Diego:

Juan Larrea, siempre clarividente, me decía en una carta muy de principios de nuestra fe creacionista, que el creacionismo era para él, y suponía que para Huidobro un sentido total y distinto de la poesía (el mismo Vicente confiesa que acaso ya no es poesía sino otra cosa diferente de lo que con esa palabra se ha entendido siempre), un arte distinto que tendrá tras de su primitivismo y clasicismo su romanticismo directamente deducido. Esto justamente es lo que sucede en la segunda etapa, entre 1925 y 1931, cuando Huidobro trabaja y concluye su *Altazor*, iniciado en 1919, y su *Temblor de cielo*, título tan chileno, en 1931. ("Poesía y creacionismo de Vicente Huidobro," 215)

[Juan Larrea, always clairvoyant, mentioned in a letter early in our creationist faith that *Creacionismo* was for himself, and he supposed for Huidobro too, a different sense of poetry as a whole, (Vicente himself confessed that it was not even poetry but something different from what has always been understood by that word), a different kind of art that after its primitive and classical periods would have its directly derived Romanticism. This is precisely what happens in its second stage, between 1925 and 1931, when Huidobro works on and completes his *Altazor*, started in 1919, and *Temblor de cielo*, such a Chilean title, in 1931.]

Diego's characterization of Huidobro's later period as a form of Romanticism is extremely relevant since it not only emphasizes the actual evolution of *Creacionismo* as a poetic, but at the same time denotes a series of formal features that distance both *Altazor* and *Temblor de cielo* from earlier manifestations of creationist poetry, which Diego defines as essentially being pure and classical poetic forms. While most of the critical work of Huidobro's poetry has focused nearly exclusively on *Altazor* as an avant-garde masterpiece, *Temblor de cielo* has been generally ignored by literary scholars at both sides of the Atlantic since its publication in 1931. In the rest of this chapter, I will analyze how *Temblor de cielo* culminates the romantic period of Huidobro's *Creacionismo* by narrativizing the quest for a poetic universality that as I have argued here lies at the core of his avant-garde poetic project which aims overall at the transfiguration of poetry as a medium.

Some of the features of *Temblor de cielo* that may have led Diego to ascribe it to *Creacionismo*'s later romantic phase happen to be described by the critic Antonio de Undurraga in the introduction to his anthology of Huidobro's work in the following terms:

No es *Altazor* el único poema largo de Huidobro. *Temblor de cielo* es el otro. En este texto, escrito en prosa, el hilo conductor es el amor, e Isolda, la mujer amada, una hermosísima creación huidobriana. Sin embargo, este hilo conductor no

parece muy visiblemente, pues todo el poema está bañado de una luz negra y por un incontenible presentimiento de la muerte. Los objetos no permanecen estables, sino que tienden a monstruosas transformaciones. (“Teoría del creacionismo,” 201)

[*Altazor* is not the only long poem by Huidobro. *Temblor de cielo* is the other one. In this text, written in prose, the main thread is love, and Isolde, the loved woman, an extremely beautiful Huidobrian creation. However, this thread is not that visible, since the complete poem is bathed in a dark light and an irrepressible premonition of death. Objects don’t remain stable, but rather tend toward monstrous transformations.]

As described by Undurraga, *Temblor de cielo* has a basic narrative thread established by the relation of a male poetic voice and the character Isolda (Isolde in the French version). While Isolda embodies a female principle of absolute beauty in the poem, the unnamed male poetic voice (which as it can be inferred, constitutes some poetic personification of the mythical figure of Tristan) is essentially an avant-garde version of the prototypical hero of medieval romance, in his case always on the move and on an overall epic quest across the cosmos to encounter his female counterpart. Although this seems to constitute the basic narrative pattern of the poem, the cosmic quest of the poetic voice is problematized by the “luz negra” [dark light] and the premonition of death that according to Undurraga pervade everything in *Temblor de cielo*. Perhaps the key notion that embodies the romantic features of *Temblor de cielo* as a creationist poem is the “transformación monstruosa” or monstrous transformation that according to Undurraga affects the logical stability of the objects in the poem. As I will argue in the rest of this chapter, in *Temblor de cielo* Huidobro carries out a ‘monstrous transformation’ not only of the myth of Tristan and Isolda as a narrative thread of the poem, but ultimately of *Creacionismo* itself as a poetics. In both cases this ‘monstrous

transformation' is essentially the result of pushing the creative principle of poiesis at the core of *Creacionismo* to its absolute extreme, i.e. as a form of annihilation and death.

Throughout *Temblor de cielo* the relationship between the poetic voice and Isolda is one of constant displacement and replacement, an impossible quest for an aesthetic ideal that keeps shifting and transforming itself, unexpectedly appearing and disappearing as the poem unfolds. Thus, the relation between the poetic voice and Isolda articulates the progression of the form of sexual love that constitutes one of the manifestations of the productive principle of poiesis driving the narrative thread, and ultimately the process of creation itself which constitutes the poem both thematically and structurally. Moreover, this creative principle of poiesis embodied in the relation of sexual love established between the poetic voice and Isolda is intrinsically related in the poem to various manifestations of death and annihilation. Although this paradoxical manifestation of the creative tension between sexual love and death that articulates *Temblor de cielo* can be clearly seen throughout the poem, the interaction between both extremes is particularly relevant in the following passage, excerpted here both in its Spanish and French versions:

¿Quién ha sido el asesino?

Ante el juez está el cadáver de la mujer como la momia de la más bella faraona.

Gritad, acusadores.

[...]

De pronto un alarido ensordecedor se eleva en los aires.

—A la guillotina. La guillotina, la guillotina.

Momentos más tarde, cuando ante la muchedumbre sedienta de sangre, el cuchillo fatal cortaba la cabeza de mármol del acusado, un inmenso chorro de luz manaba de su cuello interminablemente.

Al mismo instante hubo en el cielo un espantoso terremoto. Se rompían las estrellas en mil pedazos, se incendiaba los planetas, volaban trozos de lunas, saltaban carbones encendidos de los volcanes de otros astros y venían a veces a clavarse chirriando en los ojos desorbitados de los hombres. [...]

* * *

En medio de la catástrofe y de la confusión general unos brazos más poderosos que cien mares se apretaron en mi cuello.

—Isolda, ¿eres tú?

—Cuántos años lejanos el uno del otro.

—Se ha necesitado una hecatombe semejante para volver a encontrarnos.

—Tú, árbol de la sabiduría, con los ojos maduros en la puerta del sueño y ese andar de elefante con pies de ídolo.

—A ver tus senos. Muéstrame tus senos. (153) ¹¹

Qui a été l'assassin?

Devant le juge est placé le cadavre de la femme, comme la momie de la plus belle pharaonne.

Criez, accusateurs.

[...]

Soudain, une clameur assourdissante s'éleva dans les airs

—A la guillotine! La guillotine, la guillotine!

Quelques moments plus tarde, quand devant la foule assoiffé de sang le cocteau fatal trancha la têtê de marbre de l'acussé, un immense jet de lumière jaillit de son cou interminablement.

Au même instant il y eût dans le ciel un épouvantable tremblement. Les étoiles se brisèrent en mille morceaux, les planètes prirent feu, des fragments de lunes volèrent, des charbons rouges sauterent des volcans des autres astres et vinrent parfois se clouer pétillants dans le yeux désorbités des hommes. [...]

* * *

Au milieu de la catastrophe et de la confusion générale deux bras plus puissants que cent mers étreignirent ma gorge.

— Iseult, Iseult, c'est toi?

— Combien d'années nous avons été loin l'un de l'autre.

— Il a fallu une hécatombe semblable pour se rencontre de nouveau.

— Toi, arbre de la sagesse, avec les yeux mûrs à la porte du rêve, et cette démarche d'éléphant aux pieds d'idole.

— Montre-mois tes seins. (29)

¹¹ "Who has been the assassin?" In front of the judge lies the woman's cadaver like the mummy of the most beautiful female pharaoh. Shout, accusers. [...] Suddenly a deafening cry elevated through the air. "To the guillotine. The guillotine, the guillotine." Moments later, when in front of the blood-thirsty crowd, the fatal knife cut the marble head of the accused, an immense stream of light emanated from his neck endlessly. At that same time there was a horrifying quake in the sky. The stars shattered in a thousand pieces, the planets were set on fire, pieces of moons were flying around, burning coals were coming out of the volcanoes of other planets and at times came shriekingly to sink into the burst-out eyes of men. [...] In the midst of the catastrophic chaos and the general confusion two arms stronger than a hundred oceans grabbed my neck. "Isolda, is it you?" "How many years apart from each other." "There had to be a catastrophe such as this one for us to meet again." "You, tree of wisdom, with the ripe eyes at the threshold of dreams and that elephant swagger with the feet of an idol." "Show me your breasts. Let me see your breasts."

The tension between sexual love and death that pervades this passage opens up an intermedial space within the poem between the manifest and the latent, as well as the imaginary and the real that is based on the conception of the principle of poiesis ultimately as a translatable medium between both of its extremes. Hence, differing manifestations of death and chaos, (the beautiful cadaver of a woman, a maddening crowd, the brutal execution of the assassin turned into a cold marble figure), give way to the appearance of Isolda as the overpowering object of male desire craved by the poetic voice (“A ver tus senos. Muéstrame tus senos” / “Montre-mois tes seins.”) Therefore, it can be argued that the principle of poiesis at the core of Huidobro’s *Creacionismo* reaches in *Temblor de cielo* an absolute manifestation of itself by containing the extremes of creative love and deadly annihilation into the very form of the poem as a complete and total image in itself. As Huidobro argues in one of his manifestos, any poetry that he deems valid for his creationist purposes must move precisely toward this absolute limit or horizon “where extremes touch, where there is no contradiction:”

Toda poesía válida tiende al último límite de la imaginación. Y no sólo de la imaginación, sino del espíritu mismo, porque la poesía no es otra cosa que el último horizonte, que es, a su vez, la arista en donde los extremos se tocan, en donde no hay contradicción ni duda. (10)

[All valid poetry moves toward the ultimate limit of the imagination. And not only of the imagination, but of spirit itself, because poetry is nothing but the last horizon, that is, at the same time, the edge where extremes touch and where there is neither doubt nor contradiction.]

As shown above, the actual articulation of both extremes of poiesis within the poem is therefore extremely relevant. In a way, it is as if the death and love extremes of poiesis randomly emerged as the unconscious manifestations of each other, each appearing unexpectedly in a form intrinsically related to the other, and hence always

emphasizing the poietic distance—as the medium of creation itself—that communicates and relates them to each other. As has been suggested by Gerardo Diego, one of the key features of this romantic phase of Huidobro's *Creacionismo* is his attempt to incorporate the unconscious not through the surrealist technique of automatic writing, but rather by fully circumscribing it to the form itself of the poem as a complete totality.¹² \

The key trope facilitating the unity and constant translation between the two extremes of poiesis throughout the poem into new poetic images happens to be the creationist image that gives title to the poem, i.e. “temblor de cielo” or “tremblement de ciel:” “Al mismo instante hubo en el cielo un espantoso terremoto.” / “Au même instant il y eût dans le ciel un épouvantable tremblement.” [At the same time there was a horrifying quake in the sky]. Evidently, this poetic image aims at embodying within itself the complex tension of opposite forces that as I have analyzed here are at the very heart of Huidobro's *Creacionismo*, and that reaches in this prose poem its own absolute poietic limit, “donde los extremos se tocan.” Overall, the tension between heaven and earth embodied in that figure opens up an intermedial space in which extreme manifestations of poiesis can be constantly transferred into each other, facilitating the narrative progression of the poem as a new kind of poetic medium.

However, the poetic image itself of “temblor de cielo” or “tremblement de ciel” powerfully pushes us directly to the problematic question of the translatability of the creationist image that sustains the claim of universality of Huidobro's avant-garde

¹² “Quiso Huidobro ser un poeta y un poeta consciente y aun sobreconsciente. Su maxima incompatibilidad con el sobrerrealismo estriba no en la utilización de material inconsciente o subconsciente que él admite, que cuenta con él, sino en querer someterlo luego a la unidad y arbitrio de la inteligencia rectora.” (Diego, “Poesía y Creacionismo de Vicente Huidobro,” 214). [Huidobro wanted to be a poet—a conscious and even an unconscious poet. His ultimate incompatibility with surrealism lies not in his use of unconscious or subconscious material, which he accepts and counts with, but rather lies in his eagerness to subject this material to the unity and discretion of the governing intelligence]

poetics. Essentially, the main problem with this notion of translatability, as well as with Huidobro's theory of translation, resides in whether his claim of the universal translatability of the creationist image can be supported based on the fact that, as poetry, the creationist image ultimately exists in the original linguistic medium of its particular and fragmentary language. In other words, if "temblor de cielo," "tremblement de ciel" or 'sky quake' (my own infelicitous English translation of Huidobro's bilingual image) constitute in their own respective languages the same created object, they can only do so as poetic images that are intrinsically bound to and determined by the linguistic particularities (syntactical, grammatical, or semantic) of their respective linguistic media. This is perhaps part of the reason why Huidobro may have chosen the Spanish word "temblor" instead of the word "terremoto" to produce a creationist translation of the French "tremblement de ciel" in some of the passages of the poem—including its title in Spanish—while not in others, such as the line from the passage quoted previously ("Al mismo tiempo hubo en el cielo un espantoso terremoto"). Hence, although it can be argued that Huidobro manages to rearticulate poetry as a system of representation based on his rearticulation of poesis, the problematic translatability of the creationist image as it emerges in *Temblor de cielo / Tremblement de ciel* shows that despite its claims of universality, *Creacionismo* as a new medium is still bound to some of the particular linguistic features of the traditional medium he is trying to replace, i.e. what the Jena romantics originally referred to as 'literature.' While the creationist image does constitute a created object in terms of Huidobro's theoretical articulation of *Creacionismo*, the main problem is that it can only do so through the linguistic medium,

and more importantly as suggested by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, by the “absolute poiesis” of the literary.

Ultimately, Huidobro’s *Temblor de cielo / Treblement de ciel* aims at bridging the extremely productive tension between a subjective voice and an aesthetic object of desire—which is both powerfully creative and deathly. This drama enacted in the poem—which is partially inspired by Wagner’s own *Tristan und Isolde* as has been suggested by René de Costa—constitutes an essentially romantic drama, the drama of the poetic subjectivity struggling to articulate the relation between mind and nature through the creative power of language at the core of poetry and which, as Huidobro argues here, happens to be the drama at the heart of his own avant-garde poetics:

El poeta representa el drama angustioso que se realiza entre el mundo y el cerebro humano, entre el mundo y su representación. El que no haya sentido el drama que se juega entre la cosa y la palabra, no podrá comprenderme. El poeta conoce el eco de los llamados de las cosas a las palabras, ve los lazos sutiles que se tienden las cosas entre sí, oye las voces secretas que se lanzan unas a otras palabras separadas por distancias inconmensurables. [...] Allí coge ese temblor ardiente de la palabra interna que abre el cerebro del lector y le da alas y lo transporta a un plano superior, lo eleva de rango. (*Temblor de cielo*, 9)

[The poet represents the anguished drama that takes place between the world and the human brain, between the world and its representation. He who has not felt the drama played by the thing and the word will not be able to understand me. The poet knows the echo between the callings of things to words, sees the subtle links established between things themselves, hears the secret voices that communicate words separated by incommensurable distances. [...] The poet obtains there the ardent tremor of the inner word that opens the mind of the reader and gives it wings, transporting the reader to a higher plane, raising its rank.]

Based on Huidobro’s words regarding the task of the creationist poet, my main argument is clearly not that Huidobro’s poetry is romantic, but rather that Huidobro’s *Creacionismo* offers a radically avant-garde response to an essentially romantic (and

modern) problem. As I have shown in this chapter, by tapping into the poietic potential at the core of poetry, Huidobro manages to open a new manifestation of an infinite force of creation that lies at the core of literature as a medium. As argued by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, the autopoietic dynamic of poiesis exceeds any attempt to confine it within a particular work, ultimately unveiling an immanent productive force of becoming that keeps transforming its own medium of expression by constantly problematizing its distance from its form, or in other words, by revealing its infinite potential of translatability:

The process of absolutization or infinitization, the Process as such, *exceeds*—in every way—the general theoretical (or philosophical) power which it is nonetheless the completion. The “auto” movement, so to speak—auto-formation, auto-organization, auto-dissolution, and so on—is perpetually in excess in relation to itself. And this, too, in a certain sense, was noted in Athenaeum fragment 116: “the romantic kind of poetry is still becoming; that is real essence, that it should forever be becoming and never perfected. No theory can exhaust it, and only a divinatory criticism would dare characterize its ideal.” (*The Literary Absolute*, 92)

Finally, although through his avant-garde poetic project Huidobro managed to tap into the same poietic principle originally explored and theorized during early German Romanticism, his own utopic ideal of a new translatable medium of creation for all nations and races fails to articulate the very universality it promises. Part of the reason for this dramatic failure, which as argued here happens to constitute the main theme of *Temblor de cielo / Tremblement de ciel*, is that, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy argue, poiesis as the literary absolute aggravates the drama of the subject due to the fact that it “infinitizes” the “thinking of totality” (*The Literary Absolute*, 15). Ultimately, and due to its very inexhaustibility, the main power of the absolute potential of poiesis lying at the core of the literary is, as they suggest, the annihilation of “all individualities: “The Work

must be nothing other than the absolutely necessary auto-production in which all individualities and all works are annihilated” (56)—a tragic conclusion to the drama of the modern subject, but one that, as powerfully envisioned and acknowledged by Huidobro at the end of *Temblor de cielo / Tremblement de ciel* constitutes perhaps our only inescapable moment of absolute poesis:

Señoras y señores: la culebra de los naufragios se muerde la cola y se agranda, se agranda, hasta el infinito. Adentro de sus círculos estamos nosotros sorbidos por el abismo de la futura podredumbre, arrojando pus por nuestros ojos como espumas de playas. En tanto, los paisajes internos, sienten el vuelo de los árboles, nuestros oídos antes de despegarse y caer como hojas, alcanzan a oír el torbellino de las espigas que se ahondan. No hay esperanza de reposo. En vano el esqueleto detrás de su vidrio toma la actitud hierática del que va a cantar. La puertas internas de planeta se cubren los oídos con violencia como el enfermero que oye los alaridos de la terrible aventura en la última frontera. Nada se gana con pensar que acaso detrás de la muralla abstracta se extiende la zona voluptuosa del asombro. [...]

Así fue el discurso que habéis llamado macabro si razón alguna, el bello discurso de presentador de la nada.

Pasad. Seguid vuestro camino como yo sigo ahora.

Soy demasiado lento para morir. (172)¹³

Mesdames et Messieurs, la couleuvre des naufrages se mord la queue et s’agrandit, s’agrandit jusqu’à l’infini. Nous sommes là en dedans de ses cercles, aspirés par la abime de la future pourriture, rendant nous pus par nos yeux, comme écume des plagues. En même tempes les paysages internes sentent l’envolve des arbres, nos oreilles avant de se decoller et tomber comme des feuilles, parviennent à entendre le tourbillon des épis qui s’approfondissent. Il n’y a pas d’espoir de repos. En vain le squelette derrière sa vitre prend l’attitude hiératique de celui qui va chanter. Les portes internes de la planète se couvrent les oreilles avec violence comme l’infirmier qui entend les clameurs de la terrible

¹³ Ladies and Gentlemen: the snake of the shipwreckage bites its tongue and grows bigger, grows bigger into infinity. We are inside its circles absorbed by the abyss of the future putrefaction, spilling pus through our eyes like ocean foam. Meanwhile, the inner landscapes feel the flight of trees; our ears, before taking off and falling like leaves, manage to hear the whirlwind of the spikes that are sinking deeper. There is no hope for rest. In vain, the skeleton behind its glass adopts the posture of who is about to sing. The inner doors of the planet cover the ears with violence like the nurse who hears the terrible adventure in the last frontier. Nothing is gained by thinking that perhaps behind the abstract wall extends the voluptuous zone of amazement. [...] That was the discourse that you have called macabre without any reason, the beautiful discourse of the presenter of nothingness.

Go ahead. Follow your journey as I follow mine.

I am too slow for dying. (My translation).

aventure à l'ultime frontière. On ne gagne rien à penser que peut-être derrière la muraille abstraite s'étend la zone voluptueuse de l'étonnement. [...]

Tel fut le discours que vous avez appelé macabre sans aucune raison, le beau discours du présentateur du néant.

Passez. Suivez votre chemin comme je suis le mien.

Je suis trop lent à mourir. (59)

Chapter Four

Afterlife Correspondence:

Translation, Dictation and Tradition in Jack Spicer's *After Lorca*

A poet is a time mechanic not an embalmer. The words around the immediate shrivel and decay like flesh around the body. No mummy-sheet of tradition can be used to stop the process. Objects, words must be led across time not preserved against it.

Jack Spicer, *After Lorca*, 25

The San Francisco-based poet Jack Spicer (1925-1965) published in 1957 *After Lorca*, Spicer's first published poetic work that, as the title suggests, is inspired by the poetry of the Spanish writer Federico García Lorca (1898-1936). After a series of attempts to find his own poetic voice, as well as his vocation as a poet—Spicer refers to his early poems as meaningless “one night stands” (61)—Spicer produced in *After Lorca* one of the most seminal poetry collections belonging to the so-called San Francisco Renaissance. *After Lorca* emerged as Spicer's first successful poetic response to a long engagement with poetry, linguistics and poetics both as a member of the bohemian collective of poets based in San Francisco—a group originally formed in Berkeley during the late 1940s that included Spicer, Robert Duncan and Robin Blaser as its most prominent figures—as well as a promising young scholar of English literature and linguistics at UC Berkeley and the University of Minnesota. In what constitutes a crucial characterization of Spicer's San Francisco collective, Michael Davidson has defined the general ethos of the group of poets primarily dominated by the figures of Spicer and

Duncan in terms of a peculiar combination of aestheticism and insularity that fully pervaded Spicer's idiosyncratic poetics: "Not all members of the Spicer-Duncan circle were gay, but an important component of their self-conscious aestheticism was a defense against a hostile outside for which the creation of an insular fraternity was necessary" (*The San Francisco Renaissance*, 59).

Davidson's characterization of Spicer's group seems essential for understanding Spicer's poetry by stressing the way the intense aestheticism of the mainly gay collective of the Bay Area-based poets—an aestheticism that partly originates in a return to classically-oriented poetics inspired by the work of the German symbolist poet Stefan George¹—operates as a strategic defense from what, according to Davidson, was perceived as a "hostile outside." Among the outside historical circumstances that could be regarded as "hostile" for Spicer's circle it is worth mentioning the pressing and reactionary post-war social and academic institutions of the 1950s in the US pervaded by Cold War paranoia and homophobia, the sudden emergence of the Beat generation gravitating around the figure of Allen Ginsberg in their very own San Francisco terrain, as well as the growing literary relevance of alternative postmodernist poetics represented by the work associated to the Black Mountain College—Robert Creeley and Charles Olson—as well as by the New York School of poets, centered around figures like John Ashbery or Frank O'Hara that quickly became critically respected by the American literary establishment.

¹ Robert Duncan puts the early influence of the figure of Stefan George on Spicer and himself as follows: "When I first met him in the summer of 1946, he wanted to know first of all what I might know about the German poet Stefan George and his circle. The volume *Poems* with its introductory essay by Ernst Morwitz had been published in 1943, where—Spicer was right—I too had read the legend of the cult of Maximim, where a young boy in his death is enshrined in poetry that it is also the heart of the poet. [...] What is striking in Spicer's searching for what lay back of George's legend is not that George would ever be, as Rilke was, a model of the poet for Spicer, but that he was searching for his own self in poetry yet to be" (*One Night Stand and Other Poems*, x).

Paradoxically, and despite the defensive “insular fraternity” that according to Davidson characterized Spicer’s Bay Area collective, *After Lorca* constitutes an extremely original attempt to establish a poetic communication with the very specific outside—distant both in linguistic and spatio-temporal terms—embodied in the poetry of Federico García Lorca. Thus, contrary to the rather oppressive and “hostile” historical outside that surrounded Spicer’s San Francisco group of gay poets and artists, the figure of Lorca provided an ‘outside’ that could be easily incorporated within Spicer’s poetic “insular fraternity.” Lorca not only offered Spicer the figure of an artist tragically killed by fascist cadres during the Spanish Civil War in 1936 precisely for his condition as a homosexual poet, but also provided a modernist poetics that was extremely appealing to Spicer. As anthologized by Francisco García Lorca and Donald Allen in the 1955 New Directions edition of Lorca’s *Selected Poems* primarily used by Spicer during his composition of *After Lorca*,² Lorca’s poetry displayed a series of poetic features with a strong appeal for Spicer, among them a return to traditional medieval and Renaissance poetic forms in poems belonging to *Romancero Gitano* or *Poema del Cante Jondo*, an original take on surrealist imagery at work in compositions posthumously published in *Poeta en Nueva York*, as well as the radical embrace of popular culture that pervades Lorca’s overall *oeuvre*.

As I will analyze in the rest of this chapter, Spicer’s invocation of Lorca carried out in *After Lorca* constitutes in fact an attempt to establish through an act of translation a complex poetic correspondence with the body of Lorca’s work both able to reach beyond the constraints of historical time, and to dramatically expand the local boundaries of

² Lewis and Ellingham, “Spicer had begun, in Boston, to translate some of Lorca’s work, with a copy of the recent New Directions edition of the *Selected Poems* kept by his bedside” (81). Also, according to Clayton Eshleman, Spicer also used the 1955 Aguilar edition of Lorca’s *Obras Completas*.

Spicer's own "insular fraternity" inherent to his rather original conception of poetry and poetics. Apart from producing some of the most striking translations of Lorca's poetry composed in the English language, the result of Spicer's attempt to poetically correspond with Lorca did not only open a new poetic path for the development of Spicer's own poetics of dictation, but also generated one of the most groundbreaking books of poetry associated with the San Francisco Renaissance.

Transferring Lorca's *Duende*: Toward Spicer's Poetics of Dictation

As Spicer mentions in the fragment of one of his letters to Lorca quoted in the epigraph heading this chapter, *After Lorca* constitutes precisely the kind of poetic artefact that could turn Jack Spicer into the "time mechanic" able to mysteriously tap into the outside embodied in Lorca's poetry. It is in *After Lorca*, or rather, through *After Lorca*, that Jack Spicer successfully managed to lead "objects, words [...] across time" in the very act of poetic composition, opening the door to the emergence of the "Outside" that lies at the core of Spicer's own poetics of dictation developed soon after the publication of his 1957 poetry book. Thus, as a poetic totality, Spicer's *After Lorca* constitutes a complex poetic 'mechanism' configured by a series of translational pieces—including Spicer's relatively literal translations of key Lorca poems, Spicer's own original poems inspired by Lorca's work, as well as a series of fictional letters between Lorca and Spicer—which dramatize, exert and embody the very transformational leading of

“objects, words [...] across time” which, as he argues in *After Lorca*, was the essential purpose of Spicer’s first published poetry collection.

Moreover, Spicer’s conception of poetry as an overall leading of language “across time” first developed in *After Lorca* seems to be as relevant for the evolution of his own poetics as the syntactical apposition of “objects” and “words” within the same sentence quoted in the epigraph above. According to Spicer, words like “lemon” or “cocksuckers,” to cite two examples of key terms appearing in *After Lorca*, are endowed with a materiality parallel to the one possessed by physical objects, hence having a linguistic body that “shrivels” and “decays” within the continuous flux of time. Thus, since the natural decomposition of objects and words—that I will call here, following Spicer’s apposition, objects/words—is irrevocable, their leading across time through a poetic ‘transportation’ must inherently imply transforming them, not embalming them, into a new form or configuration as it evolves within the onward progression of historical time. Obviously for Spicer, the “time mechanic” in *After Lorca*, this ‘transportation’ as a leading across time of objects/words can only take place within the very process of poetic composition itself—a process that must necessarily imply a movement onwards from a previous configuration not only in terms of the inevitable transformation of Lorca’s original poetry already mentioned, but also in relation to the very progression of the poems themselves that configure Spicer’s *After Lorca*.

It is also important to stress here the fact that for Spicer, the poetic transportation of object/words across time takes place within the bound space of the book as the main textual dimension for his poetic practice. In other words, *After Lorca* only becomes the “time mechanism” that Spicer is aiming at through the translational reverberation of each

of its particular ‘pieces’ or constituent parts against each other within the overall textual unit provided by the book. As Joseph Conte has suggested in relation to Spicer’s poetics, the book operates as “a closed structure within which one poem asserts its position in resonance with the others; its place cannot be assigned by any external thematic progression” (107). Following Conte’s analysis, it can be argued that as a book-bound sequence of resonating pieces *After Lorca* cannot be but a serial composition. In this sense, Robin Blaser suggests in his groundbreaking essay on Spicer’s poetry entitled “The Practice of Outside” that Spicer’s conception of the serial poem as a book-bound unit provides an open “field” of poetic correspondences that links Spicer’s serial compositions to the basic structure of serial music by unfolding within a context larger than the one provided by the single poem in itself:

The serial poem is often like a series of rooms where the lights go on and off. It is also a sequence of energies which burn out, and it may, by the path it takes, include the constellated. There is further a special analogy with serial music: the voice or tongue, the tone, of the poem sounds individually, as alone and small as the poet is, [...], but sounded in series it enters a field. (278)

Within the “open field” provided by the serial form as suggested by Blaser, the use above of the adjective ‘translational’ to refer to the actual ‘pieces’—i.e. the poems and letters—that compose the series of poems of *After Lorca* is obviously in no way gratuitous. The translational aspect of the particular pieces of *After Lorca*, however, has nothing to do with whether the series of poems and letters that configure the collection are ‘actual’ translations of poems by Lorca or not,³ or whether the letters between Spicer

³ As Clayton Eshleman patiently shows in his relevant “The Lorca Working,” of the thirty four poems that compose the series, eleven are Spicer’s own poems, clearly written under the spell of Lorca’s ghost. Eshleman describes the “typical” Spicer translation of any of Lorca’s poems in the following rather vague terms: “the greater percentage of the poem is accurately, if uninventively, translated, with matches of

and what he conceives as Lorca's "ghost" are just part of a mere epistolary game, or a more serious attempt to dialogically theorize the translating process taking place in some of the poems included in the collection. Rather, the translational aspect of the serial pieces of *After Lorca* lies simply in the onward motion implicit in the transferring of objects/words over time being carried out by Spicer through the serial process of composition. Hence, it can only be through an onward process of 'translatio'—i.e. as "carrying or removing from one place to another, a transporting, a transferring" (Lewis and Short)—that Spicer's leading of objects/words across time can actually take place as an open resonating field of correspondences within the poetic realm of *After Lorca*.

At the same time, the open system of resonances in *After Lorca* is not only a result of the serial structure that articulates its form, but is also clearly dependent on the transferring resonance inherent to the linguistic movement between Lorca's poetry and Spicer's own compositions. Translation therefore emerges in *After Lorca* as the main mechanism that articulates the complex system of correspondences intrinsic to Spicer's poetic 'time machine' as developed in his 1957 poetry book. Overall, Spicer's translational project can be analyzed to unfold at least the following poetic events within its serial form: the relatively 'literal' translation of specific poems by Lorca, the composition of original pieces by Spicer that typologically resemble Lorca's poetry, the generation of a figurative correspondence with Lorca in the form of the letters included in the book, and ultimately the rather more esoteric anagogical communication with Lorca's spirit or as Spicer preferred to say, Lorca's "ghost."

mistranslation, some of which appear to be meaningful, some of which appear to be arbitrary" (33). Moreover, Eshleman's overall effort seems pointless mainly because Spicer is clearly not interested in producing faithfully equivalent translations of Lorca's poems, but rather, as I am arguing here, in leading Lorca's words across time. Donald Allen also points out in his introduction to Spicer's *One Night Stand and Other Poems* (1980) the list of original Spicer poems included in *After Lorca*.

The feminist translation theorist and legal scholar Lori Chamberlain has argued in her essay on *After Lorca* that the translations of Lorca's poems in Spicer's book are part of a particular take on the concept of translation that "prefigures" the more formalised poetic system Spicer would refer to as a "poetics of dictation." "What I want to argue about Spicer's poetics is first that the project of translation in *After Lorca* prefigures what he later calls a 'poetics of dictation'" (427). Thus, although "perhaps *After Lorca* is not *really* a book of translations," (427) as Chamberlain tentatively argues, the translational "time mechanics" inherent to its composition definitely shaped the kind of poetics that Spicer would develop during the rest of his career. As Spicer describes in one of his 1965 Vancouver lectures transcribed by Peter Gizzi in *The House that Jack Built*, this translational mechanism unfolding in *After Lorca* eventually became an autonomous mode of poetic composition that manifested itself through Spicer's own Lorca-inspired poetry:

ET: At what point did you allow these messages to take over or start happening in your poetry?

JS: It happened about halfway when I was writing *After Lorca*, when the letters to Lorca started coming and being dictated and the poems, instead of being translations, were dictated. Then I sort of knew what was happening. And when the final thing happened, in the poem, the business of the last letter, I really knew there was something moving it. (135-36)

The main point argued here is that this "something moving it"—whether it is Lorca's ghost, a Martian, a baseball or whatever Spicer wanted to call it—cannot be in itself but intrinsically translational or transferential, i.e. a translatable 'something' that leads to a particular transfer over time from one manifestation of itself into another. It is important to note, though, that Spicer saw this process not as a "prefiguration" of

dictation by translation as suggested above by Chamberlain, but more precisely as a process in which dictation gradually ends up replacing the act of translation. Despite the fact that the act of translation may be deemed to “prefigure” dictation, in the case of Spicer’s *After Lorca* the act of translation constitutes a process that gradually facilitates the emergence of dictation as it unfolds along the serial structure of the book. In other words, in *After Lorca*, Spicer arrives at the notion of dictation through a translational process of creative transfiguration of the linguistic ‘body’ of Lorca’s poetry that gradually opens the door to Spicer’s concept of dictation. Translation operates here as a series of resonating acts which end up constituting as a whole a system of poetic correspondences that reach beyond the realm of interlingual translation, ultimately facilitating the emergence of a transpersonal and translingual textual realm beyond the control of a single poetic voice that Spicer associates to the concept of dictation.

As mentioned earlier, Spicer’s notion of the poet as constituting a “machine” or a “time mechanic” implies the processing, transformation and distribution of certain mechanical ‘currents’ that as suggested here can be conceptualized ultimately as a transferential process. However, Spicer’s use of these two metaphors to describe the role of the poet under the influence of a dictating voice is in fact taken to operate rather literally by Spicer, constituting the main conceptual basis for Spicer’s own poetic project. As the following excerpt from one of his 1965 Vancouver lectures shows, Spicer saw the poet as a machine that processes different poetic currents, that either come from within the poet—in what Spicer sees as the painfully flammable poetics of Romanticism—or rather come from what Spicer refers to here as “the Outside:”

[...] instead of the poet being a beautiful machine which manufactured the current for itself, did everything for itself—almost a perpetual motion machine of emotion until the poet’s heart broke or it was burned on the beach like Shelley’s – instead there was something from the Outside coming in. (*The House that Jack Built*, 5)

Through his own poetics of dictation Spicer is clearly trying to theoretically formalize what seems to be an alternative to the poetics of the self that dominate English and American Romanticism—manifested more clearly in Wordsworth’s notion of the ‘egotistical sublime’—a poetics that Spicer saw as “a perpetual motion machine of emotion” that in its futile effort eventually ends up breaking apart or burning out. Within his own translational poetics of dictation, Spicer, however, saw the poet as a transferring mechanism that could channel and recast a particular poetic current, and that, through this translational transformation, could avoid the intrinsic time-bound decay implicit in the pathetically finite “beautiful machine” of the subjective poetics of Romanticism.

Moreover, Spicer’s conception of the role of the poet as a medium transmitting an alien signal happens to be connected to the notion of “*duende*” that Lorca originally theorized in relation to *cante jondo* or deep song characteristic of the Flamenco music autochthonous to the Andalusia region of Spain. Although Spicer himself did not formally explore Lorca’s conception of *duende* in any of his Vancouver lectures as related to his own poetics of dictation, the conceptual correspondence of Lorca’s theoretical articulation of *duende* with Spicer’s take on dictation is worth stressing in the context of *After Lorca*.

In his seminal lecture given in Havana and Buenos Aires in 1933, “*Teoría y juego del duende*” (“Theory and Function of the Duende”)—a lecture included, by the way, in Donald Allen and Warren Tallman’s equally seminal *Poetics of the New American Poetry*

(1974)—Lorca developed a groundbreaking theoretical analysis of the concept of *duende* that since its publication has exerted a major impact in American poetry.⁴ In this lecture, Lorca defines *duende* as a transpersonal “spirit of the earth” (he refers to it as both “demon” and “angel”) coming from the outside, and able to fully possess the artist able to communicate with it through her art. Thus, according to Lorca, *duende* constitutes an irresistible force or “mysterious power” who, as he suggests, “*commands*, and no one can resist his radiance because he moves his steel wings in the ambit of the elect” (93). The relation of the artist (singers, bullfighters, composers, poets, painters are some of the examples used by Lorca) to the *duende* is for Lorca one of a deep bodily and spiritual struggle, an arduous artistic search that is epitomized in the flamenco art of gypsy dancers and singers of Southern Spain. As Lorca describes in relation to the female Flamenco singer Pastora Pavón (otherwise known as *La niña de los peines*), the artist who ‘has’ *duende*—and who constitutes for Lorca “a living body as interpreter”(96)—needs to shed a part of herself and her skill in order to genuinely come to terms with this overpowering “spirit:”

La Niña de los Peines tuvo que desgarrar su voz porque sabía que la estaba oyendo gente exquisita que no pedía formas, sino tuétano de formas, música pura con el cuerpo sucinto para poder mantenerse en el aire. Se tuvo que empobrecer de facultades y de seguridades; es decir, tuvo que alejar a su musa y quedarse desamparada, que su duende viniera y se dignara luchar a brazo partido. ¡Y como cantó! Su voz ya no jugaba, su voz era un chorro de sangre digna por su dolor y su sinceridad, y se abría como una mano de diez dedos por los pies clavados, pero llenos de borrasca, de un Cristo de Juan de Juni. (“Teoría y juego del duende,” *Obras completas*, 39)

[*La Niña de los Peines* had to tear her voice, because she knew that she was being listened to by an *elite* not asking for forms but for the marrow of forms, for music exalted into purest essence. She had to impoverish her skills and aids; that is, she

⁴ For a detailed study of the impact of Lorca’s theory of *duende* in twentieth-century U.S. poetry and music see Nathaniel Mackey’s essay “Cante Moro.”

had to drive away her muse and remain alone so that the *duende* might come and join in a hand-to-hand fight. And how she sang! Now she was in earnest, her voice was a jet of blood, admirable because of its pain and its sincerity, and it opened like a ten-fingered hand in the nailed but tempestuous feet of a Christ by Juan de Juni. (*Poetics of the New American Poetry*, 95)

Similarly to Spicer's poetics of dictation, in which the poet is a mere medium that broadcasts an alien signal, Lorca's *duende* implies the channelling of a voice from the outside that takes over the artist affected by its dictating power. At the same time, this commanding force requires a counterintuitive "impoverishment" of artistic skills that is analogous to the emptying out of the self that Spicer developed regarding his notion of dictation as he argues here: "you can get so much out of yourself that you're almost as empty as a radio tube or a transistor" (*The House that Jack Built*, 77). There is no doubt that for Lorca this shedding of technique and skill under the spell of *duende* constitutes a deeply troubling phenomenon for the artist that is interestingly characterized here by Nathaniel Mackey as a "sound of trouble in the voice:" "One of the things that marks the arrival of *duende* in flamenco singing is a sound of trouble in the voice. The voice becomes troubled. Its eloquence becomes eloquence of another order, a broken, problematic, self-problematizing eloquence" ("Cante Moro," 182). Thus, a parallel "self-problematizing eloquence" to the one Mackey finds in *duende* can be traced in Spicer's poetics of dictation as it gradually emerges through the translations, poems and letters that configure *After Lorca*. Part of my argument in the rest of this chapter will be that this "eloquence of another order" mentioned by Mackey regarding *duende* is in the case of Spicer's poetic voice closely related to his call from the Outside to become a "conveyor of messages" (Gizzi, 85).

Although Spicer's poetic strategy of becoming a "conveyor of messages" may sound playfully metaphoric, it ended up constituting for Spicer a true artistic struggle, as suggested here by Robert Duncan: "There is no facility, nothing facile, about Spicer's amazing and cunning wit, about his feints and strategies—for they are struggles in earnest" (*One Night Stand and Other Poems*, xxxvii). Ultimately, Spicer's personal poetic struggle—a deadly struggle also strained by alcoholism that ended his life prematurely in 1965—has to do with the messages from the Outside he first started transmitting through his encounter with the afterlife of language embodied in Lorca's poetry. Jerome McGann has already acknowledged how Spicer's poetic project constitutes a rather problematic "impossible quest," an "immersion into the material resistance of language [that] is a literal descent into hell" (114). As I will argue in what follows, Spicer's impossible struggle embodied in his poetry was after all triggered in part through his attempt to transfer Lorca's *duende*—a hellish mysterious power that as Lorca described "blows insistently over the heads of the dead:"

El duende... ¿Dónde está el duende? Por el arco vacío entra un aire mental que sopla con insistencia sobre las cabezas de los muertos, en busca de nuevos paisajes y acentos ignorados: un aire con olor de saliva de niño, de hierba machacada y velo de medusa que anuncia el constante bautizo de las cosas recién creadas. ("Teoría y juego del duende," *Obras completas*, 48)

[The *duende*—where is the *duende*? Through the empty arch comes an air of the mind that blows insistently over the heads of the dead, in search of new landscapes and unsuspected accents; an air smelling of a child's saliva, of pounded grass, and medusa veil announcing the constant baptism of newly created things. (103)]

Lorca's "Unanswerable" Need at "Aquatic Park:" The Outside as Inside

Based on Spicer's particular take on the complex process of translation and poetic composition of *After Lorca*, the different poetic 'pieces' that configure the book can be analyzed to constitute a series of ambiguous poetic hybrids endowed with a body composed of elements belonging to both Lorca and Spicer. As acknowledged by Lorca himself in the introduction of *After Lorca* written twenty-one years after his death, throughout his book, Spicer generally tended to substitute rather randomly the original form of Lorca's poems into his own versions of his poetry in English:

In even the most literal of them Mr. Spicer seems to derive pleasure in inserting or substituting one or two words which completely change the mood and often the meaning of the poem as I had it written. More often he takes one of my poems and adjoins to it half of his own, giving rather the affect of an unwilling centaur. (Modesty forbids me to speculate which end of the animal is mine)." (*After Lorca*, 11)

Thus, by seemingly deriving "pleasure" in carrying out a series of transformations that alter the mood and meaning of Lorca's poems, Spicer is ultimately—whether this is willingly or unwillingly is hard to tell—turning the body of Lorca's poetry into his own, as centaur-like hybrids through which Spicer manages to effectively incorporate Lorca into the "insular" fraternity of poems that ambiguously coexist within the book-bound serial structure of *After Lorca*. More importantly, Spicer's particular characterization of the pieces that configure *After Lorca* as 'centaurs' here not only refers to the hybrid nature of the translational compositions in linguistic and poetic terms, but has also a clear sexual connotation that playfully asserts the homosexual bond between both gay poets. As I will show below in more detail, the sexual implications of the bonding and hybrid

nature inherent to the pieces that configure *After Lorca* play an absolutely crucial role in generating that translational poetic process that will become Spicer's poetics of dictation.

The book itself seems to be structured around the central presence of the "Ode to Walt Whitman." The pieces before the Whitman poem seem to be attempts to arrive at a proper functioning of the translational process that Spicer was experimenting with in his literal and figurative attempt to correspond with Lorca's work. A particularly good example of this 'early' stage of Spicer's translating mechanism in *After Lorca* is the poem titled after the Spanish poet Juan Ramón Jiménez, in which Spicer tampers with Lorca's original by substituting a few words like "seaweed" for "nardo" (literally a 'tuberosé'), and the insertion of the word "thumbs" in the third stanza and the metonymic replacement of "*dentro*" for "bones" in line nine:

JUAN RAMÓN JIMÉNEZ

En el blanco infinito,
nieve, nardo y salina,
perdió su fantasía.

El color blanco, anda,
sobre una muda alfombra
de plumas de paloma.

Sin ojos ni ademán,
inmóvil sufre un sueño.
Pero tiembla por dentro.

En el blanco infinito,
¡qué pura y larga herida
dejó su fantasía!

En el blanco infinito.
Nieve. Nardo. Salina.

(*Canciones*)

JUAN RAMON JIMENEZ
A Translation for John Ryan

In the white endlessness
Snow, seaweed and salt
He lost his imagination.

The color white.
Upon a soundless carpet made
Of pigeon feathers.

Without eyes or thumbs
He suffers a dream not moving
But the bones quiver.

In the white endlessness
How pure and big a wound
His imagination left.

Snow, seaweed, and salt. Now
In the white endlessness.

(*After Lorca*, 13)

Although the substitutions and variations from the original poem are evidently not that relevant in themselves, they do imply the kind of basic translational changes through which Spicer is gradually carrying out the first stages of his “leading across time” of those poetic pieces by the substitution of certain words from the original into terms that are not semantically equivalent in English. In this sense, the first series of poems prior to the Ode to “Walt Whitman” are similar kind of “unwilling centaurs” to Spicer’s “Juan Ramon Jimenez” translation that inhabit an ambiguous realm located between the separate bodies of Lorca’s poems, and Spicer’s own hybrid versions.

Spicer’s “Ode to Walt Whitman” is not only one of the most fluid translations of a Lorca poem included in *After Lorca*, but also perhaps the most powerful translation of Lorca’s “*Oda a Walt Whitman*” produced so far in English. Although the reasons generally given for the absolute centrality of this poem within Spicer’s *After Lorca* are extremely clear (namely, the paramount position of Whitman within American literature, the revolutionary nature of Lorca’s overtly gay poem, its ambiguous homoerotic content, the surrealist imagery used by Lorca, etc) they are arguably completely external to the actual movement of the translational poetics that Spicer himself is developing in *After Lorca*. In fact, apart from a few key substitutions like “pricks” for “*sexo*” and “cocksuckers” for “*maricas*”—which according to Eric Keenaghan constitute a linguistic shift into a “crass” and “sexualized street vernacular” that makes the “gay body lexically visible”(278)—Spicer’s version of Lorca’s poem is a nearly spotless, and extremely literal, translation of the original, as the following passages from Lorca’s “Oda a Walt Whitman” and Spicer’s “Ode to Walt Whitman” show:

Contra vosotros siempre, que dais a los
 muchachos]
 Gotas de sucia muerte con amargo
 veneno.]
 Contra vosotros siempre,
 Faeries de Norteamérica
 Pájaros de La Habana,
 Jotos de Méjico.
 Sarasas de Cádiz,
 Apios de Sevilla,
 Cancos de Madrid,
 Floras de Alicante,
 Adelaidas de Portugal.

¡Maricas de todo el mundo, asesinos de
 palomas!]
 Esclavos de la mujer. Perras de sus
 tocadores.
 Abiertos en las plazas con fiebre de
 abanico]
 O emboscados en yertos paisajes de
 cicuta.] (*Poeta en Nueva York,*)

Against the rest of you always, who give
 the kids]
 Drippings of sucked-off death with sour
 poison.]
 Against the rest of you always
 Fairies of North America,
 Pajaros of Havana,
 Jotos de Mexico
 Sarasas of Cadiz,
 Apios of Seville,
 Cancos of Madrid,
 Adelaidas of Portugal,

Cocksuckers of all the world, assassins of
 doves,]
 Slaves of women, lapdogs of their
 dressing tables]
 Opening their flys in parks with a fever
 of fans]
 Or ambushed in the rigid landscapes of
 poison.] (*After Lorca,*)

The higher sexual intensity in key moments of Spicer's version resulting from these apparently minor linguistic transformations—as in Spicer's decision to translate Lorca's "maricas" for "cocksuckers"—is thus extremely relevant and symptomatic of a crucial aspect of Spicer's translating strategy in *After Lorca*, as well as of Spicer's relation to the body of Lorca's work. One of the key factors regarding the higher sexual intensity of Spicer's translation—that as Keenaghan suggests, lexically emphasizes the visibility of "the gay body"—is intrinsically connected to the homosexual bond between the two poets mentioned earlier and the way Spicer aims to turn through translation the linguistic body of Lorca's poetry into his own linguistic body. In this sense, Spicer's "Ode to Walt Whitman" emerges as an outstanding translating effort to correspond with

what Spicer saw as Lorca's own homosexual "need," as Robert Duncan mentions in the following passage included in his preface to *Caesar's Gate*:

It seemed to us, to Jack Spicer as to me, in our conversations of 1946 and 1947 as young poets seeking the language and the lore of our homosexual longings as the matter of a poetry, that Lorca was one of us, that he spoke here from his own unanswered and—as he saw it—*unanswerable* need. (xxii)

Following Duncan's remarks, it can be argued that the "unwilling" centaurs that configure Spicer's *After Lorca* eventually managed to translate not only Lorca's poetry, but also what Spicer and Duncan saw as Lorca's own homosexual longings emerging as the "unanswered and [...] *unanswerable* need" that for Spicer pervaded the body of Lorca's poetry. As suggested by Duncan above, the recognition of this "need" in the body of Lorca's work ultimately constitutes the recognition of a form of desire—through its linguistic manifestation—that plays a crucial role in the complex relation that Spicer established with Lorca, and that ended up being a fundamental component of their respective struggle to seek a "language and a lore" for their own homosexuality. Obviously, this specific take on the figure of Lorca as "one of us" cannot be but based on Spicer's own conceptualization of Lorca's "unanswered and [...] *unanswerable* need," constituting a bonding form of desire that, as also suggested by Duncan, turned Lorca into a *de facto* member of Spicer's and Duncan's gay San Francisco fraternity.

Moreover, what Spicer took to constitute Lorca's "unanswered and [...] *unanswerable* need" was incorporated into his poetry through a process of translation that eventually triggered the basic translational mechanics of Spicer's poetics of dictation. In other words, if Lorca's poetry embodied for Spicer an "unanswered and [...] *unanswerable* need," it could only do so as a form of desire that had not been answered

and that could not be answered, fulfilled or satisfied in itself. As such, Spicer's attempt to correspond to this form of desire through the act of translation cannot imply the production of semantic equivalents able to correspond to the original form of this need in another language—what could be after all the determinate linguistic form of the Lorca's original “unanswered and *unanswerable* need?”—but rather implies a poetic struggle to expand the original need into a hybrid version of itself that gradually spans into a multiplicity of bodies and languages. Translation therefore emerges here as a process that does not provide a semantically equivalent answer to the original, but rather that transforms the very linguistic embodiment of an original “unanswered and [...] *unanswerable* need” dictated by Lorca's poetry and transferred or transmitted by Spicer into his own work. Robin Blaser refers to this conception of translation in fact as a “*task* and a *reparation*” that aims at the re-enactment of an incomplete work that is dictated through language:

The principle of translation in *After Lorca* proposes that one must re-enact life again, that it is the same that it was, but with a difference. Lorca's poetry corresponds to and with Jack's. [...] There is here an experience of *dictation*, now opening to all of us, beginning where the manhood leaves off—at the open end of what we are. [...] The curiosity will remain, and in one sense, the Work is always incomplete, because it contains the double men once again have met. The context I have drawn as meant to show this as *a task* and *a reparation* (310)

The gradual, but nevertheless complex, transition—and transmission—from translation into dictation carried out by Spicer and sketched here so far takes a decisive step in “Aquatic Park,” a pivotal point in Spicer's process of becoming a “time mechanic” as it unfolds within the book-bound series of *After Lorca*. “Aquatic Park,” apart from being one of Spicer's original poems in *After Lorca*—in fact the only one

dedicated to himself—was an extremely relevant San Francisco site for Jack Spicer, as Ellingham and Killiam describe with great detail here:

On San Francisco Bay at the foot of Van Ness Avenue, Aquatic Park was backed by the Ghirardelli Chocolate Factory, The Eastman Kodak Co. (demolished in 1987), Fort Mason, and the buildings of Fisherman’s Wharf. One major feature of the park is an art deco concrete structure (housing dressing rooms, a maritime museum, and—on the roof—banks of open benches). The Westernmost benches were favored by gay sunbathers. Another favorite sunning spot was the small green area between the bocce ball courts, the Sea Scouts pavilion and the water. Spicer repaired to the park every afternoon with his portable radio, his books, and his newspaper, and his friends and students joined him. This became a ritual for the rest of his life. (*Poet be Like God*, 101)

However, the main relevance of “Aquatic Park” within *After Lorca* obviously does not reside on the potential biographical implications of the San Francisco Bay location for Spicer. Rather, the great relevance of Spicer’s “Aquatic Park” within the poetic “mechanics of time” operating in *After Lorca* lies primarily in the fact that the poem appears in a book that up until then has been a rather consistent series of Spicer’s ‘centaur-like’ versions of Lorca’s poetry. It is important to stress here the fact that for Spicer the serial poem has a strong chronological structure, as Spicer argues in one of his Vancouver lectures, it “has to be absolutely chronological”(53). The emergence of the poem “Aquatic Park” must therefore “absolutely” follow the internal chronology of *After Lorca*, constituting a crucial event in its own internal textual history as a departure from literal translation into a new textual realm opened up by the previous series of translations, and that clearly moves into the new dimension of poetic composition that Spicer will refer to as “dictation.” Hence, the fact that Spicer’s own San Francisco Bay Aquatic Park, the place where he ritualistically socialized during a key period of his life,

ends up appearing in a poem written ‘after’ Lorca deserves further critical consideration in order to unveil the complex logic of Spicer’s time mechanics at work in *After Lorca*:

AQUATIC PARK
A Translation for Jack Spicer

A green boat
Fishing in blue water

The gulls circle the pier
Calling their hunger

A wind rises from the west
Like the passing of desire

Two boys play on the beach
Laughing

Their gangling legs cast shadows
On the wet sand

Then,
Sprawling in the boat

A beautiful black fish. (32)

It is precisely in Spicer’s self-dedicated “Aquatic Park,” where both the poetic ‘current’ that drives the scene, as well as the different elements that compose the poem seem to have been not literally translated but figuratively transferred from Lorca’s work. Thus, what Spicer took to be Lorca’s “need” previously suggested by Duncan clearly drives the scene of “Aquatic Park,” while the seaside landscape of the poem is populated

by the ‘same’ boys that were singing and showing their bodies in Spicer’s nearby “Ode to Walt Whitman,” with “their gangling legs” casting “shadows on the wet sand.” At the same time, the poem unfolds as a rather original temporal sequence established by the conjunction “then” in which the rising of a wind from the West, “like the passing of desire,” not only answers the “hunger” of the “Gulls circling the Pier,” but ultimately leads to the appearance of the indeterminate “beautiful black fish” at the end of the poem. Hence, the temporal mechanics of “Aquatic Park” turns this poem not so much into a hybrid “unwilling centaur,” but a ‘time mechanism’ in itself established through a series of striking ‘correspondences’ produced by Spicer in his struggle to transmit the “unanswered and *unanswerable* need” coming from the Outside of the poetry of Federico García Lorca.

Spicer’s “Aquatic Park” seems to mark a transition between the natural wind-like rising of the form of desire he and Duncan associated with Lorca’s poetry which Spicer originally tried to rearticulate through his own Lorca translations, and the emergence of a new mode of corresponding to the body of Lorca’s work. While the previous mechanism was articulated through relatively literal versions of the original Lorca poems, this new form of poetic correspondence leads to the appearance of truly original poetic ‘objects—such as the “beatifuyll black fish” of “Aquatic Park”—within the serial structure of his book. Thus, at this point in *After Lorca*, Spicer seems to have fully mastered the process of interlingual translation as discussed so far here, and starts moving his poetry much closer to the translational ‘mechanics of time’ at the core of his take on the concept of dictation.

Afterlives: Spicer, Benjamin and Translatability

By eventually unfolding in the second half of *After Lorca* a series of striking poetic correspondences with the body of Lorca's poetry—"Aquatic Park" being probably the best example—Spicer not only developed a transferring mechanism able to lead objects/words across time, but, as he argues in *After Lorca*, ultimately able to lead them like a powerful system of dictation across language:

But things decay, reason argues. Real things become garbage. [...] Yes, but the garbage of the real still reaches out into the current world making *its* objects, in turn, visible—lemon calls to lemon, newspaper to newspaper, boy to boy. As things decay they bring their equivalents into being. Things do not connect; they correspond. That is what makes it possible for a poet to translate real objects, to bring them across language as easily as he can bring them across time. (34)

For Spicer, the intrinsic time-bound decay of objects/words as the "garbage of the real" constitutes a process of material transformation that can be made visible if transferred across language through the act of translation. Such a transformative process is articulated upon the potential for transferability Spicer saw at the very core of language as a medium that can only be experienced through different but equivalent manifestations of itself. As such, Spicer's conception of the language of poetry as a transmitting medium able to bring objects/words across time not only provided him with a method to channel 'alien' poetic currents into his own poetry as displayed in *After Lorca*, but also allowed him to sketch a literary tradition parallel to that very same transferring mechanism. In his first Vancouver lecture of 1965, Spicer carefully located his own poetics of dictation within a very particular Anglo-American poetic tradition that according to him originated in William Blake, and that took different manifestations in

the modernist poetics of W.B. Yeats, and T.S. Eliot, as well as in contemporary poets to Spicer like Duncan, and Charles Olson. According to Spicer, this particular literary genealogy—which curiously does not include Lorca—provided a tradition that primarily took “poetry as coming from the outside rather than from the inside” (5). At the same time, and parallel to this notion of tradition that can be traced in his attempt to produce a short literary history for his own poetics of dictation, Spicer developed an alternative conception which is slightly harder to grasp. As suggested by Spicer in a letter to Robin Blaser dated June 1957, what Spicer was trying to achieve through his translations included in *After Lorca* was precisely to establish a “tradition:”

I enclose my eight latest “translations.” Transformations might be a better word. Several are originals and most of the rest change the poem vitally. I can’t seem to make anybody understand this or what I’m doing. [...] What I am trying to do is establish a *tradition*. When I’m through (although I’m sure no one will ever publish them) I’d like someone as good as I am to translate these translations into French (or Pushtu) adding more. Do you understand? No. Nobody does. (Ellingham and Killiam, 105)

As these comments to Blaser show, the tradition Spicer is specifically trying to establish in *After Lorca* is grounded on a conception of translation that thoroughly expands the original by “adding more,” as the different translations (or “transformations” as he preferred to call them) exponentially extend the original through its linguistic continuation into a multiplicity of languages. Translation thus becomes in the hands of Spicer a powerful linguistic and conceptual tool able to generate a very specific and idiosyncratic poetic tradition that, as Spicer confesses here to Lorca, constitutes a transpersonal system of linguistic exchange able to communicate the same basic poetic message: “It [Tradition] means generations of different poets in different countries patiently telling the same story, writing the same poem, gaining and losing something

with each transformation—but of course never losing anything” (15). Ultimately, the translational leading of objects/words across time and language in *After Lorca* comprises a tradition that by adding more to the original without “losing anything” ends up facilitating the linguistic manifestation of the afterlife of the original. In this sense, and as Lori Chamberlain has already acknowledged, Spicer’s poetics of translation has key points in common with the critical analysis of translation famously developed by Walter Benjamin in his seminal introduction to his own translations of Charles Baudelaire’s poetry produced in 1921:

As a receiver of messages from Lorca’s *duende*, Spicer’s task as a poet and translator is not to “represent” these messages but to “present” them, a point he makes repeatedly in the letters to Lorca. In Spicer’s own terms, he does not want to give us rotten lemons but fresh ones, in this sense, Spicer’s theory is strikingly similar to Walter Benjamin’s, as articulated in his “The Task of the Translator.” Benjamin also argues against a representational model for translation, proposing instead an organic model: the translation does not reproduce the original, but completes it providing for the continued life of the work (Chamberlain, 435)

For Chamberlain, what Spicer is trying to do in *After Lorca* is to organically present the messages he receives from the work of Lorca in a fresh and actualized form that “completes” those original messages facilitating their poetic afterlife. As profusely discussed within the field of Translation Studies during the last few decades, Benjamin’s own conception of a linguistic afterlife opened up by translation—as a “stage of continued life”—also has similar “organic” implications to the ones Chamberlain ascribes to Spicer’s poetics. As previously mentioned in this dissertation, Benjamin develops his notion of the afterlife of the original in one of the most quoted passages from his foundational essay on translation:

For in its afterlife—which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living—the original undergoes a change. Even words

with fixed meaning can undergo a maturing process. The obvious tendentiousness of a writer's literary style may in time wither away, only to give rise to immanent tendencies in the literary creation. What sounded fresh once may sound hackneyed later; what was once current may someday sound archaic. To seek the essence of those changes in meaning, in the subjectivity of posterity rather than in the very life of language and its works would mean—even allowing for the crudest psychologism—confusing the root cause of a thing with its essence. (“The Task of the Translator,” 256)

The conception of the afterlife of an original work developed here by Benjamin is therefore grounded on an organic conception of the change or transformation implicit in its translation. This organic dimension obviously emerges from the living condition Benjamin ascribes to the essence of language (“the very life of language”) as a system, as well as to the particular linguistic forms through which language is articulated. Although for Benjamin, the style of a particular author might “wither” in time, the work itself possesses its own translatable “immanent tendencies” that would operate in its translated afterlife. As pointed out by Chamberlain, the “maturing process” of words produced by their translation referred to by Benjamin above, as well as his conception of the historically grounded life of language is remarkably close to the material implications of the transfer across time and language implicit in Spicer's poetics of translation and dictation originally developed in *After Lorca*.

However, although Chamberlain does touch on a fundamental connection between Spicer's take on translation in *After Lorca* and Benjamin's theory of translation developed in “The Task of the Translator” there is a crucial difference between their respective conceptualization of the afterlife of the original. As argued above, for Spicer translation essentially constitutes a process that can go on indefinitely translating itself, constructing its own tradition by literally expanding the linguistic body of the original

into a potentially infinite series of manifestations of itself across time and language. On the other hand, for Benjamin, the original can only be translated once, reducing thus the potential lives of a translation to a single untranslatable life. This crucial aspect of his theory of translation is emphasized by Benjamin in the following terms:

The higher the level of a work, the more it remains translatable even if its meaning is touched upon only fleetingly. This, of course, applies to originals only. Translations, in contrast, prove to be untranslatable not because of any inherent difficulty but because the looseness with which meaning attaches to them. (“The Task of the Translator,” 262)

Therefore, the notion of translatability as a relation between original and translation appears here as one of the main aspects in which Spicer’s conception of translation differs from Walter Benjamin’s. While for Benjamin translatability is a relation determined by the specific form of the original—endowed with a certain high or low “level” that establishes its translatability in hierarchical terms as mentioned in the last quotation, i.e. the “higher” the level of the work, the higher its potential for translatability—for Spicer, translatability is an inherent property of language itself as a medium, regardless of the formal or semantic specificity of the original. As stated in the two quotes included above, Benjamin basically develops a notion of translatability that primarily depends on his conception of translation as a distinct linguistic form onto which the original meaning is necessarily attached more loosely. Although this “looseness of meaning” that Benjamin ascribes to a translation is the very linguistic feature that completely restricts its translatability, he regards this same feature to be endowed with the extremely productive potential to fulfil what he refers to as the original’s “great longing for linguistic complementation” (260). It is precisely this “great longing” of the

original that can potentially be answered by what Benjamin defines as a “real”

translation:

A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully. This may be achieved, above all, by a literal rendering of the syntax which proves words rather than sentences to be the primary element of the translator. For if the sentence is a wall before the language of the original, literalness is the arcade. (260)

Moreover, this longing for completeness immanent to the original—which implies the conception of the original as being an intrinsically incomplete linguistic form—associated by Benjamin with the notion of translatability opens an access to the realm of “pure language” (*reine Sprache*), a realm he describes as the “ultimate essence” of all linguistic forms. Eventually, translation, or rather the “real” translation that Benjamin favours, manages to give voice to what he refers to as the *intentio* of the original:

On the other hand, as regards the meaning, the language of a translation can—in fact, must—let itself go, so that it gives voice to the *intentio* of the original, not as reproduction, but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself, as its own kind of *intentio*. (260)

Benjamin’s notion of *intentio* constitutes a linguistic tendency for semantic completeness immanent to the original that is voiced whenever the language of a translation manages to “let itself go.” By letting go of the semantic dimension of the original, the language of the translation voices its own *intentio* not as an objectively equivalent meaning to the original, but rather as a linguistic form that harmoniously supplements the *intentio* voiced in the original. In this sense, and as argued by Samuel Weber, translatability constitutes for Benjamin “the never realizable potential of a meaning and as such constitutes a *way—way of signifying—*rather than a what” (“A

Touch of Translation: On Walter Benjamin's "Task of the Translator," 75). Benjamin's task of the translator consists hence in the linguistic liberation of the immanent intention of the original by producing a way of signifying that supplements the way of the original: "The task of the translator is to release in his own language that pure language which is exiled among alien tongues, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work. For the sake of the pure language, he breaks decayed barriers in his own language" (261).

On the other hand, Spicer does not seem to consider the particular original form of the source itself, i.e. the actual linguistic body of Lorca's work in *After Lorca* for example, to constitute a determining factor for the actual process of poetic transformation implied in his notion of translation. Accordingly, in his first Vancouver lecture, Spicer overtly dismisses the importance of the original form of his 'messages' with the following succinct statement: "The source is unimportant" (5). Spicer's main focus on translatability then lies on the poetic reconstitution of the linguistic body of the language of poetry itself as the decayed but haunting messages coming from the Outside, which in the case of *After Lorca* happens to be embodied in Lorca's poetry. Spicer clarifies this aspect of his conception of translation in *After Lorca* by stating that his main objective was to "get in contact" with Lorca, regardless of his knowledge of the Spanish language: "The fact that I didn't know Spanish really well enough to translate Lorca was the reason I could get in contact with Lorca" (138). The crucial point in relation to Spicer's statement is that the idea of getting "in contact with Lorca" has to be taken in this case not just as a manner of speaking, but rather, as a serious poetic strategy that pervaded Spicer's overall poetic production and that obviously denotes Spicer's characteristic

“eloquence of another order” that Mackey saw previously in relation to the notion of *duende*. Thus, the figure of Lorca as a ‘corresponding’ body in Spicer’s statement clearly means something more complex and more troubling than just merely getting in touch with Lorca, as Chamberlain stresses here:

Lorca—or the body of his work—is not regarded as an immutable, substantial presence, but as something subject to the laws of change: thus Lorca does not stand as the source of an inviolate text. Spicer, then, goes as a sort of grave robber to consult the ghost of Lorca and to reconstitute the body of the poems, not as individual poems, but as a language of poetry. (428)

To Chamberlain’s brilliant point, one can only add that what she takes to be Spicer’s attempted reconstitution of the body of a “language of poetry” through translation implies at the same time, and perhaps more specifically, an attempt to reconstitute what Spicer refers to as “the real” that manifests itself in the translatability of the language of poetry. As Spicer discusses again in his first Vancouver lecture, the “real thing” that manifests itself in language constitutes in fact an immanent ‘want’ which is endowed with the potential of translatability. More specifically, Spicer’s “real thing” is a form of desire that he describes as the “business of wanting coming from the Outside:”

But what you want to say—the business of wanting coming from Outside, like it wants five dollars being ten dollars, that kind of want—is the real thing, the thing that you didn’t *want* to say in terms of your own ego, in terms of your image, in terms of your life, in terms of everything. (*The House That Jack Built*, 6)

It is right in Spicer’s very attempt to convey the “real thing” as “the business of wanting” through his own poetry where lies the main reason for Spicer’s interest in developing a poetics grounded on the rejection of the poet’s individual subjectivity as the source for poetic composition. However, what Spicer was interested in organically ‘presenting’ through the pieces of *After Lorca* was not so much the reconstitution of the

body of certain original poems as a “language of poetry” as argued by Chamberlain above, but rather the reconstitution of the real “business of wanting coming from Outside” that Spicer originally found at the heart of the language of Lorca’s poetry.

Finally, it can be argued that Benjamin’s conception of “pure language” accessed through the “breaking of decayed barriers” of particular languages through the act of translation partly corresponds to Spicer’s notion of the “real thing” as an ultimate ‘want’ that transpires through his conception of translation as a bearing of the original across time and language into a new configuration. As in the case of Benjamin’s conception of a “real” translation able to release “pure language” in its harmonic relation with the original as its supplemental afterlife, translation facilitates for Spicer the unfolding of immanent tendencies of the original dictated through language that he ambiguously defines as the “business of wanting.” Thus, within the framework of poetic reconstitution implied in Spicer’s “real thing” that I have laid out here in relation to *After Lorca*, the actual words that this “business of wanting” adopts in its different poetic manifestations—whether belonging to Lorca or Spicer is after all meaningless here—are only relevant as they constitute the building blocks, or “furniture” as Spicer often liked to say, that facilitate the surfacing of the “real thing” into a determined linguistic form. This is perhaps what Spicer means with the following statement in one of his letters to Lorca included in *After Lorca*: “Words are what sticks to the real. We use them to push the real, to drag the real into the poem. They are what we hold on with, nothing else. They are as valuable in themselves as rope with nothing to be tied to” (25).

As analyzed in this chapter, the ‘after’ of Spicer’s “After Lorca” entails first, a temporal expansion of the original into a potentially infinite series of actualizations of

itself, second, a serial or sequential continuation of its linguistic form through different languages, and finally a complex transpersonal amalgamation of the different voices involved in the articulation of the potential for translatability of the original into a translational tradition which lies beyond the authorial control of the author or translator. Therefore, the crucial point of contact—albeit tangential—between Spicer’s poetics of dictation and Benjamin’s theory of translation lies specifically in a conception of the original as being part of an organic medium that keeps on living once it has been transferred into a different linguistic form through the act of translation. Ultimately, the afterlife of the original is conceptualized by both writers as the linguistic materialization of an immanent need or tendency facilitated by its translatability—i.e. the translatability of language as a medium in the case of Spicer, and the specific translatability of the original in the case of Benjamin.

Therefore, the relation between original and translation is conceived in both cases as a living relation that unfolds across time and language producing its own history and tradition. This basic conception of the original as an organic form is described in a parallel way by the cultural critic Theodor Adorno as a transformation of the aesthetic dimension of the artwork into a “living experience” produced by a “contemplative immersion” into the work. As Adorno argues, this transformation, which for him happens to be epitomized by the way in the work of the German poet Stefan George—relevantly an influence for both Benjamin and Spicer—eventually unleashes “the immanent processual quality” of the work itself:

Aesthetic experience becomes living experience only by way of its object, in that instant in which artworks themselves become animate under its gaze. This is George’s symbolist teaching in the poem “The Tapestry,” an *art poétique* that furnishes the title of a volume. Through contemplative immersion the immanent

processual quality of a work is set free. By speaking, it becomes something that moves in itself. Whatever in the artefact may be called the unity of its meaning is not static but processual, the enactment of antagonisms that each work necessarily has in itself. [...] It is as a result of their own constitution that they go over into their other, find continuance in it, want to be extinguished in it, and in their demise determine what follows them. This immanent dynamic is, in a sense, a higher-order element of what artworks are. If anywhere, then it is here that aesthetic experience resembles sexual experience, indeed its culmination. (*Aesthetic Theory*, 176).

Thus, for Adorno, the contemplative immersion into the aesthetic object—of which the act of translation can be deemed an excellent example—unveils a processual dimension at the very core of the work. In this sense, Adorno’s conception of the unity of the work as a process due to the intrinsic incompleteness of the particular artwork is clearly applicable to Benjamin’s theory of translation. At the same time, Adorno’s take on the “immanent dynamic” through which the work finds “continuance” into its afterlife by taking part in a “higher-order element” to which it ultimately belongs can be applied to both Benjamin’s “pure language,” and Spicer’s own version of the “real thing” that transpires through language. More importantly, Adorno’s description of the immanent dynamic that leads to the conception of the artwork as a living experience unveils a crucial libidinal aspect of that same process that is particularly important for the analysis of Spicer’s relation to the body of Lorca’s poetry. As suggested previously, Spicer’s translations of Lorca emerged originally as an attempt to correspond and get in contact with the homosexual “unanswered and [...] *unanswerable* need” that Spicer recognized in Lorca’s poetry. As such, it can be argued that Spicer’s own “contemplative immersion” into the body of Lorca’s poetry originally facilitated by the act of translation transformed an aesthetic experience into a “living experience” of that same body of work that ended up resembling “sexual experience, indeed its culmination” as argued above by

Adorno regarding the aesthetic experience of artworks. By letting Lorca's poetry communicate its own "business of wanting" through the translational mechanics examined at length in this chapter, Spicer managed not only to figuratively correspond with Lorca, but also to transform an aesthetic experience of his poetry into a living or "higher-order" experience that incorporated the body of Lorca's work as the afterlife culmination of its own immanent libidinal need.

As argued in this chapter, the potential of the act of translation to propel the original beyond itself establishing its "continuance" through an "other" in which, as argued by Adorno above, it wants "to be extinguished" constitutes the main force lying at the core of Spicer's translational poetics at work in *After Lorca*. It can thus be argued that within Spicer's poetic project, his role as a "time mechanic" ultimately facilitates and channels the liberation of immanent libidinal impulses of the "business of wanting" that, like in the case of Benjamin's "pure language," are "tied" to the "heavy, alien meaning" of the original. Thus, as in Benjamin's conception of the task of the translator, the translational transfer channeled by Spicer in his Lorca poems exposes and reconstitutes the immanent drive of the original by pushing it rather literally beyond itself. In this sense, Rainer Nägele's description of this drive of translation beyond itself—as exemplified in Benjamin's theory of translation—offers an extremely relevant perspective on the libidinal implications of the immanent dynamic that lies at the heart of the act of translation:

Benjamin's insistence on a position *über* (over, above) the abyss designates, as a position over the abyss, not a panoptic overview but rather the *über* of *Übersetzung* and *Übertragung* (translation, transport, transfer), which, as the translations of Eros will show, is also the position of Eros. Eros is the one who, in Hölderlin's translation, above all *übernachtet*; he spans the night as the

quintessential time-space of a “between” without limits. All delimitations emerge from it. (13)

Following Nägele’s remarks, Spicer’s poetry can be analyzed as primarily aiming to occupy this haunting spatio-temporal “between” he found at the core of language and that is unveiled by the act of translation. As conceived by Spicer in *After Lorca*, translation therefore constitutes a mode of contemplative immersion that not only transforms the original work, but that at the same time constantly pushes the very act of translation beyond itself. Ultimately, this dimension of language constitutes in fact an intermedial “between” or an “Outside” that for Spicer emerges rather literally as a form of dictation once the act of translation reaches its afterlife *after* translation.

Chapter Five

Transferring the “Luminous Detail:”

Sousândrade, Pound, and the Imagist Origins of Brazilian *Concretismo*

In 1964 the Concrete poets Augusto and Haroldo de Campos published *ReVisão de Sousa Andrade*, a critical study of the Brazilian Romantic poet from Maranhão, Joaquim de Sousa Andrade (1832-1902), a writer generally known within Brazilian literature simply as ‘Sousândrade.’ Despite the fact that *ReVisão de Sousa Andrade* was originally published in a small edition of five hundred copies—as a brief study and anthology of the work of the romantic poet—it constitutes an extremely relevant critical study within Brazilian literary history. In *ReVisão de Sousa Andrade* the de Campos brothers not only managed to recover for posterity a seminal romantic writer almost completely forgotten by literary scholars on both sides of the Atlantic during more than sixty years, but also successfully established a Brazilian precursor for the avant-garde Concrete poetics they developed during the 1950s and 1960s. Within the internal chronology of Brazilian *concretismo*, the critical revision of the work of Sousa Andrade carried out by the brothers de Campos can be considered to constitute a relatively late event, taking place when the poets associated with the group —namely Augusto de Campos (born in 1931), Haroldo de Campos (1929-2003) and Décio Pignatari (born in 1927)—were reconsidering their own historical relevance as an avant-garde collective both in terms of the global impact of their Concrete poetics, as well as specifically within the realm of Brazilian literature and culture.

In fact, *ReVisão de Sousândrade* was published twelve years after the initial burst of the *concretista* revolution carried out by the de Campos brothers and Pignatari in 1952 with the publication in São Paulo of the first issue of the journal *Noigandres* that quickly became the main artistic and literary venue for the different activities of the Brazilian Concrete movement. According to the members of the São Paulo-based group, their use of the term “Noigandres”—a word they borrowed from the poetry of Ezra Pound¹—epitomized the innovative and experimental ethos of their avant-garde collective, “[a palavra] foi tomada como sinônimo de poesia em progresso, como lema de experimentação e pesquisa poética em equipe” (*Teoria da poesia concreta*, 177) [the word was adopted as a synonym for poetry in progress, as a motto for team experimentation and research in poetics]. The work of Ezra Pound not only provided an inspiration for the experimental ethos of the Brazilian avant-garde collective, but as *ReVisão de Sousândrade* shows, it offered more importantly a seminal theoretical corpus through which Augusto and Haroldo de Campos could articulate their own avant-garde poetic project. As I will argue in the rest of this chapter, the critical revision of the work of Sousândrade was primarily carried out through a theoretical incorporation of both the Imagist poetics originally developed by Ezra Pound around 1912, as well as Pound’s particular conception of translation as a form of criticism. More importantly, their critical revision of the work of Sousândrade via the work of Ezra Pound constitutes a key intervention within the realm of Brazilian literary history since it facilitated the genealogical constitution of a genuinely Brazilian source for the avant-garde poetics of

¹ The Provençal term—whose meaning could never be fully ascertained by modern scholars—was rescued by Pound from the poetry of the French troubadours of the Middle Ages. As generally acknowledged, Pound incorporated the term from the Provençal poet Arnaut Daniel, using it in Canto XX of his magnum opus *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (“Yes, Doctor, what do they mean by noigandres?”[89]).

the de Campos brothers. In this way, their critical analysis of Sousândrade's work unveils the complex dynamics that articulate the theoretical project of Brazilian *Concretismo* as well as the complex relation of the Brazilian avant-garde movement with European and Anglo-American modernist poetry in general and with the work of Ezra Pound in particular. Ultimately, *ReVisão de Sousândrade* essentially constitutes a strategic attempt to rewrite Brazilian and Latin American literary history by the de Campos brothers that would guarantee a central position for their own poetic movement as part of the global Avant-garde historically dominated by the hegemonic forms of European and Anglo-American literary traditions.

Sousândrade's Epic Vision of America: *O Guesa*

Prior to the critical reassessment of the work of the nineteenth century poet by the de Campos brothers, Sousândrade was generally considered to be a marginal member of the second generation of Brazilian Romanticism (1853-1870), and had been received as a rather obscure author of minor relevance by contemporary critics. In the second edition of the seminal *História da Literatura Brasileira* (1903), the scholar Silvio Romero, despite acknowledging that Sousândrade remained a practically unknown figure, deemed his work to be worthy of some critical attention, especially due to the originality of Sousândrade's Pan-American scope as well as the formal complexity of his poetic diction:

Joaquim de Sousa Andrade é quase inteiramente desconhecido, o que facilmente se explica pela índole de seu poetar. É merecedor, porém, de atenção. Descubro-lhe alguns sinais característicos; primeiramente, de nossos poetas é, creio, o único a ocupar-se de assunto americano estranho

ao Brasil, um assunto colhido nas repúblicas espanholas; depois, é um poeta de forte elevação de idéias; mas de forma muitas vezes áspera e rude e quase ininteligível. (79)

[Joaquim de Sousa Andrade is almost completely unknown, something that can be easily explained by the nature of his poetry. He is worthy, nevertheless, of attention. Certain characteristic features can be found; primarily, I believe he is the only of our poets to dedicate himself to American themes foreign to Brazil, a theme borrowed from the Spanish republics; then, he is a poet of a lofty elevation of ideas, but in a manner most of the times rough and unpolished and nearly unintelligible.]

Based on Sousândrade's prior marginal position within Brazilian literary history, the revision of the work of Sousândrade by Augusto and Haroldo de Campos primarily aimed at recuperating a figure that had been relatively ostracized by previous Brazilian literary scholars like Fausto Cunha and Antonio Cândido in similar terms to the ones expressed by Silvio Romero in the remarks just quoted. As acknowledged by the de Campos brothers in *ReVisão de Sousândrade*, their revision constituted a complex and provocative critical effort to write—or rather rewrite—literary history arguing for the new centrality of the work of Sousândrade within Brazilian literary criticism:

Pode-se dizer que este livro criou um “caso” na crítica literária brasileira, propondo em termos deliberadamente provocativos, sem a tibieza cautelosa do escolasticismo acadêmico, a reavaliação do olvidado autor do *Guesa*, e répondo em circulação parte expressiva de seus textos de maior impacto estético, em especial a seção por nós batizada (a partir de versos do próprio poeta) “O Inferno de Wall Street.” (11)

[It can be argued that this book created a “case” within Brazilian literary criticism, proposing in deliberately provocative terms, and without the precautionary coolness of academic scholarship, the reevaluation of the forgotten author of *O Guesa* by bringing back into circulation a significant part of his texts with a bigger impact, especially the section baptized by us (based on verses from the author himself) “The Wall Street Inferno.”]

As a scholarly exercise with the strategic premise to shake the critical landscape of Brazilian literary history, *ReVisão de Sousândrade* included a comprehensive anthology of the work of the Brazilian Romantic poet through which the de Campos brothers substantiate the previously unacknowledged relevance and importance of both the content and the style of Sousândrade's poetry. Most of their attention is focused on Sousândrade's main opus *O Guesa*, a Pan-American epic poem of thirteen cantos that Sousândrade started composing around 1852 and on which he seemed to have been working for the rest of his life, although eight of the final thirteen cantos were composed while he was living in New York between 1871 and 1885. *O Guesa* has a rather complex publishing history that mirrors Sousândrade's cosmopolitan and peripatetic life on both sides of the Atlantic. As described in the groundbreaking bibliography of Sousândrade produced by Frederick Williams, a first edition of the first four cantos of the poem was included in the publication of his *Obras poéticas* (New York, 1874) under the title of *O Guesa errante* that was expanded with cantos V to VIII in two additions of 1876 and 1877. Sousândrade had moved to New York in 1871,² after having traveled extensively around the Americas and Europe, including a long stay in Paris where he allegedly took courses in Letters and Engineering at the Sorbonne. The final edition of his epic poem, now with the title of *O Guesa*, was registered in the British Museum in 1888 and published by the Moorfields Press in London at about the same time. Just a few years before, in 1885 Sousândrade had left the United States, and after a journey through Central America, Peru, Chile and Argentina, he returned to Brazil where he lived completely immersed in the political milieu of Maranhão, according to the Sousândrade

² In New York, Sousândrade wrote opinion articles as well as literary essays regularly for the Portuguese-language newspaper *O Novo Mundo*, owned and edited by another cosmopolitan expatriate from Brazil, the publisher and journalist José Carlos Rodrigues.

scholar Jomar Morães, as a “patriota abolicionista e republicano fervoroso” (16) [abolitionist patriot and a passionate republican] until his death in São Luis in 1902.

The thirteen-canto *O Guesa* describes the epic journey through the Americas, Africa and Europe of the Guesa, a sacrificial figure belonging to the culture of the Muyscas Indians who originally inhabited the great plain of Bogotá, Colombia. It is important to stress the fact that Sousândrade recovered the mythic figure of the errant Guesa from the work of the nineteenth-century German explorer and naturalist Alexander Von Humboldt, incorporating his groundbreaking ethnographic work in Central America as one of the main sources for his recreation of the Muyscan wandering protagonist of his epic poem.³ Sousândrade also drew some key elements for his composition of *O Guesa* from Lord Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1818). The key influence of Byron’s Harold is acknowledged in different moments of *O Guesa* by Sousândrade himself since the narrative structure of the epic is articulated upon the progress of a wandering hero who, like Harold, explores different regions of the modern world. Similar to the role of Harold in Byron’s romantic epic, the mythic figure of the Guesa occupies a key liminal position between the different forces that had shaped the series of American cultural and geographic realms he encounters in his Pan-American and transatlantic journey. In this sense, the intrinsic errancy of the Guesa—that takes him along the Andes, the Amazon, Brazil, West Africa, Europe, New York, Peru, and the Southern Cone—together with the complex conflation of American mythological and historical events in the poem provides a unique point of view through which Sousândrade was able to explore certain pressure

³ Sousândrade specifically quotes a passage from Humboldt’s *Vue des cordillères et monuments des peuples indigènes de l’Amérique* (1810) as an epigraph for *O Guesa*.

points of the American experience during the nineteenth century that transcends ethnic, national, linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Perhaps the most relevant passage of *O Guesa* is Canto X which contains the section of Sousândrade's poem that the brothers de Campos famously referred to as "O Inferno de Wall Street." In this passage—formally parallel to a previous section in Canto II in which the Guesa, still in the Amazon, takes part in the indigenous ritual dance of the Tatuturema—Sousândrade carries out a brutal critique of the rampant capitalism of the Gilded Age orchestrated from the financial capital of the United States and which was becoming the dominant force in the world economy during the second half of the nineteenth century. The hellish experience the Guesa encounters in New York, specifically depicted by the brothers de Campos in reference to Goethe's *Faust* as "a segunda *Walpurgisnacht* sousandradina" [Sousândrade's second *Walpurgisnacht*]—the first one taking place in Canto II—describes a series of grotesque encounters with figures belonging to different historical eras of the Americas that are collapsed into the fragmented textual realm of his epic poem. A brief sample of Canto X of *O Guesa* shows the radical formal complexity of Sousândrade's style in this passage, as well as the wide range of political and historical references included in this crucial canto of *O Guesa*:

(*Free-loves* meditando nas *free-burglars* bellas artes:)

– Roma, começou pelo roubo;
New York, rouba a nunca acabar,
O Rio, *anthropophago*;
= *Ophiophago*
Newark... tudo pernas p'ra o ar...

(W. CHILDS, A.M. elegiando sobre o filho de SARAH-
STEVENS:)

– Por sobre o fraco a morte asvoaça...
Chicago em chamma, em chamma Boston,
De amor Hell-Gate é esta frol...

Que John Caracol,
 Chuva e sol,
 Gil-engendra em gil rouxinol...
 Civilização...ão!... *Court-hall!* [...]

(COLUMBUS perdendo e VESPUCCI ganhando, pelas
 formas:)

–Em Cundin-Amarca, El Dorado,
 O Zak em pó de oiro a brilhar...
 = Amarca é América,
 Am-eri-ca :

Bom piloto assim sonda o mar !

(*O Guesa*, 243)

[(Freeloves meditating on the free-burglars Beaux Arts)

– Rome began through stealing;
 New York steals without end
 The River, *anthropophago*;
 = *Ophiophago*
 Newark...legs all up in the air

(W. CHILDS, A.M. in elegiac mode on SARAH-
 STEVENS' son:)

– Death hovers over the feeble
 Chicago in flames, in flames Boston,
 This flower from Love's Hell-Gate...
 That John the Snail,
 Rain and sun,
Gil-Engenders in *gil* nightingale...
 Civilization...to the...Court-Hall!

(COLUMBUS losing and VESPUCCI winning, in
 their ways:)

–In Cundin-Amarca, *El Dorado*,
 The Zak in shining gold-dust...
 = Amarca is America,
 Am-eri-ca:

A good pilot thus explores the sea!]

This brief excerpt of Canto X of *O Guesa* displays in a few stanzas the incredibly varied set of registers and themes incorporated by Sousândrade into his poem, including New York as the brutal and imperialistic capital of the United States that abuses the weaker

city of Newark; the hellish aura of burning fire surrounding main U.S. cities, or the self-profiting colonial exploitation of America by European conquistadors to name a few. At the same time, this variegated set of historical, geopolitical and economic references are incorporated into the poem through Sousândrade's thoroughly innovative juxtaposition of characters and events that intentionally disrupts formal conventions as well as the narrative flow of the poem, favoring a multidimensional collage of variegated scenes powerfully driven by the constant movement of baffling poetic images.

Interestingly though, the groundbreaking nature of Sousândrade's *O Guesa* is emphasized by the de Campos brothers not in terms of its clear connection with the European Romantic tradition—due in part to its connections to the work of Byron, Von Humboldt and Goethe as briefly suggested above—but rather in terms of what they deem to constitute Sousândrade's modernist tendencies, “em premonição mais uma vez á linha Pound-Eliot da poesia atual” (38) [in premonition once again of the Pound-Eliot line of contemporary poetry]. As I will analyze in the rest of this chapter, the key aspect of their characterization of *O Guesa* is that Sousândrade's revolutionary style essentially predates the formal innovations that characterize Anglo-American Modernism, partly bypassing the relation of Sousândrade's poem with European Romanticism. In this sense, the rediscovery of Sousândrade's work becomes an invaluable event for Augusto and Haroldo de Campos since it not only provided a poetics of an unparalleled modernity specifically within Brazilian and Latin American literature, but also an opportunity to articulate a brand new critical framework for Brazilian literary history.

The *Concretista* Revision of Sousândrade: A Poundian Invention of Literary History

Despite the unquestionable originality of Sousândrade's *O Guesa* as a revolutionary and formally innovative Pan-American epic poem, it is surprising that a poet practically forgotten for more than a half century would be deemed by Haroldo de Campos in his work *Ruptura dos gêneros na literatura latino-americana* (1977) no less than the “insulado patriarca latinoamericano da poesia de vanguarda” (24) [isolated Latin American patriarch of avant-garde poetry], as well as the “precursor dos rumos da vanguarda na poesia universal” (20) [precursor of the avant-garde currents of universal poetry]. As suggested by these two quotations, the overall revision of the work of Sousândrade by the de Campos brothers involves a two-fold intervention regarding literary history. First, it entails the conception of Sousândrade as the lost origin—now turned patriarch—of the Latin American avant-garde, providing at the same time a solid genealogical foundation for the *concretista* movement in Brazil. Secondly, the articulation of their own avant-garde genealogy based on their own revision of Sousândrade as their direct poetic source implies a legitimization of the universal impact of the poetics of Brazilian *concretismo* as an avant-garde movement that goes beyond the specific historical boundaries of Brazilian and Latin America culture of the 1950s and 60s.

As suggested previously, the main critical tools used by the de Campos brothers in their study of Sousândrade's work were provided by the modernist poetics developed by Ezra Pound. The incorporation of Sousândrade to the theoretical corpus of Brazilian *concretismo* is primarily carried out through a sophisticated critical study of

Sousândrade's work that continuously gravitates around poetic concepts originally developed by Ezra Pound during the first three decades of the twentieth century. In this sense, their analysis of Sousândrade's poetry in *ReVisão de Sousândrade*—both from a formal and thematic stand-point—constitutes an approximation to the poetry of the Brazilian romantic poet based on the main precepts of Pound's modernist poetics:

Mas não é só na ideação de um inferno financeiro que se assemelham Sousândrade e Pound. Aproximam-se, como já fizemos notar em outros pontos deste trabalho, por diversas características estilísticas: — como a técnica imagista, atrás examinada, e a dicção sintético-ideogrâmica, que ora abordamos, e que por sua vez envolve vários procedimentos: compressão da história, montagens de citações coloquiais ou literárias ou de *faits divers* da época, *pot-pourri* idiomático, enumerações críticas e fusões de *personae* [...]. (55)

[But not only is it in their conception of a financial hell that Sousândrade and Pound are alike. They resemble each other, as we have noted at other points in this work, in various stylistic features: like the imagist technique previously examined, and the synthetic-ideogrammatic diction being discussed now, and that involves various practices: the compression of history, the montage of citations from *faits diverse* of the time, colloquial and literary quotes, idiomatic *pot-pourri*, critical enumerations and the fusion of *personae*]

The specific case of imagism as a stylistic feature (“*tecnica imagista*”) shared by both Sousândrade and Pound is of special relevance here since, after all, imagism was a poetic concept originally invented by Ezra Pound roughly twenty five years after Sousândrade published his final edition of *O Guesa*. The notion of Imagism initially emerges in *Revisão de Sousândrade* as one of the two key formal features that together with its “*barroquismo*” [baroque] characterize Sousândrade's poetry according to Augusto and Haroldo de Campos. Apart from its baroque element—which the de Campos brothers analyze as an intrinsically Latin American characteristic conceived in purely aesthetic terms as an “*estilo abstrato*” (27) [abstract style] manifested in the use of conceits, pure metaphors, and foreignizing terms—Sousândrade's poetry is characterized

by what they refer to as its ‘imagist’ dimension—“linha imagista” (95). In their attempt to define the imagery characteristic of the poetry of the Brazilian romantic poet, the brothers de Campos use two key concepts that are intrinsically connected to Pound’s formulation of the notion of the poetic image, i.e. imagism and *phanopoeia*:

Ao lado do *barroquismo*, há a considerar na poética de Sousândrade uma componente por assim dizer *imagista*, voltada para um tipo de imagem visual menos erichada de intelectualismo e de *wit* e toda feita de impactos olho-coisa, luz-movimento. É um Sousândrade que lembra a *fanopéia* poundiana (“*the throwing of an image on the mind’s retina*”, “*the moving image*”) de poemas de *Personae* e de muitos *Cantares*. (28)

[Next to its baroque-ness, there has to be considered a component in Sousândrade’s poetics that may be called ‘imagist,’ which moves towards a kind of visual image less charged with intellectualism and wit, and fully composed of eye-thing and light-movement impacts. It is a Sousândrade that reminds one of the Poundian *phanopoeia* (“the throwing of an image on the mind’s retina,” “the moving image”) of poems from *Personae* and of many *Cantos*]

While Pound’s conception of Imagism emerges approximately around 1912, his notion of ‘*phanopoeia*’⁴ comes as a later addition to the critical body of terms Pound used to refer to his complex—and at times fragmentary—theoretical articulation of his concept of the poetic image. Therefore, the fact that Augusto and Haroldo de Campos describe one of the key ‘macroesthetic’ or stylistic features of Sousândrade’s poetry to be “*imagista*,” and, moreover, that this concept is exclusively defined in Poundian terms is extremely symptomatic of the overarching influence of Pound’s modernist poetics on Brazilian *concretismo*, as well as of the incorporating mechanics inherent in the theoretical articulation of their own avant-garde poetics. In other words, the way in

⁴ The concept of *phanopoeia* is part of the poetic taxonomy developed by Pound famously published in his article “How to Read:”

MELOPOEIA, wherein the words are charged [...] with some musical property [...]

PHANOPOEIA, which is a casting of images upon the visual imagination.

LOGOPOEIA, ‘the dance of the intellect among words’ [...] (“How to Read,” 25)

which Augusto and Haroldo de Campos invoke the Poundian concept of imagism to describe a key feature of Sousândrade's poetry also stresses the kind of critical integration which that very same invocation is trying to establish in relation to both Sousândrade's and Pound's poetry as two of the main pillars that sustain the avant-garde project of Brazilian *concretismo* as a literary movement with a global significance.

More importantly, as an attempt to rearticulate literary history, their invocation of Imagism can be analyzed to be operating in parallel ways to Pound's original formulation of his own avant-garde poetics. Pound originally fabricated the word Imagist, or rather in its French spelling form '*Imagiste*,' in 1912 as a term he applied to five poems by T.E. Hulme that Pound included in his collection *Ripostes*. He later used the term to describe some classically oriented poems produced by the American poet Hilda Doolittle and the English poet Richard Aldington that were edited by Pound and published by Harriet Monroe—per Pound's request—in the journal *Poetry* in 1913. Based on the quick success of Pound's concept of *Imagisme* as a foundation for a modernist poetics, he subsequently produced an anthology of Imagist poems titled *Des Imagistes* (1914) containing work by poets—including himself—he felt belonged to his newly developed movement. More importantly, a year before the publication of Pound's *Imagiste* anthology, he issued a series of poetic precepts under the title "A Few don'ts by an Imagiste" published in *Poetry* in March, 1913, in which he elaborated the three inaugurating Imagist precepts⁵ he had provided in relation to H.D. and Aldington's first Imagiste poems into a full-fledged poetics.

⁵ "1. Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective.

2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.

3. As regarding to rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of a metronome." ("A Retrospect," 3)

The main aspect of Pound's *Imagiste* project that must be stressed in relation to the *concretista* revision of Sousândrade is that it primarily constituted a rather powerful tool for the production of literary history. As argued by Martin Kayman, Pound's influential conception of *Imagisme* both as a literary movement and an avant-garde poetics ultimately constituted a "quasi-mythic" invention of literary history: "what Pound produced in Imagisme was a *literary history*—or rather, a fiction of literary history, and hence a history of quasi-mythic character" (63). At stake in Kayman's crucial analysis of Pound's invention of *Imagisme* is the need of avant-garde movements to produce and rewrite their own literary history, and to locate themselves as a crucial component of this newly minted or rewritten literary tradition. In light of Kayman's argument, Pound's famous modernist credo of "Make it new" comes specifically to mind here not so much as a call for a brand new modern poetics, but rather as a call for radical modernist remaking of literary history.

Parallel to Pound's strategy in his creation of *Imagisme* briefly outlined here, the de Campos brothers can be seen to be carrying out a similar invention of literary history around the figure of Sousândrade able to fulfill a foundational role for their own avant-garde poetics, as well as for their aspiration to be a part of the literary history of the Avant-garde as a global movement. Pound's own definition of criticism developed in "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" provides crucial insight into the kind of critical work that theoretically sustains the notion of Imagism, both as originally conceived by Pound, as well as in the invocation of the critical term by the brothers de Campos regarding Sousândrade:

Criticism is not a circumscription or a set of prohibitions. It provides fixed points of departure. It may startle a dull reader into alertness. That little of it which is

good is mostly in stray phrases; or if it be an older artist helping a younger it is in great measure but rules of thumb, cautions gained by experience. (“A Retrospect,” 4)

For Pound, criticism implies the fleshing out of a very particular form of reading experience based on the intellectual search for those “stray phrases” that “startle a dull reader into alertness” and that can be determined and captured into a specific frame of reference in order to be incorporated as “points of departure,” very likely toward more textual criticism. Pound’s own picture of criticism looks essentially like an autotelic textual experience that keeps generating new manifestations of itself as it searches for new “stray” objects that can be fixed as points of departure for the very kind of experience that generated them in the first place. Pound’s formulation of criticism implies then the searching, collection, and production of textual moments that startle the kind of experience precisely defined by Pound as criticism. This particular assimilating critical method in which a specific moment of experiential alertness can be fixed and incorporated as a poetic image into the overall body of criticism is otherwise referred to by Pound as the “method of the Luminous Detail” in his early essay “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris”(1912). Pound’s self-labeled “New Method in scholarship” (*Selected Prose*, 21) primarily focuses on the formation of a ‘modern’ literary history based on the articulation of a series of formal principles that are extracted by Pound through the critical incorporation of what he defines at different times as “the luminous detail;” “sources—of light, heat, motion;” “*virtú*,” and in a slightly more specific manner as “particular works or the works of particular authors” (24). Pound’s formulation of the “luminous detail” constitutes in essence a critical fact able to justify in itself a wide range of literary activities, ranging from his literary criticism, to his editing of the works of

various modernist poets, his controversial translations of Italian, Provençal and Chinese poetry, or his conception of Imagism as a modernist poetics. In this sense, the modernist scholar Carol T. Christ has argued that Pound's modernist poetics is grounded in a rather problematic positivist theory of history—literary or otherwise—that pervades his work and in which, as she describes, “significant facts are sufficient carriers of their own meaning:”

He [Pound] can extend the ideal of the self-sufficient image that had motivated his early poetry and provide nothing else than an objectively based theory of civilization and culture in a poetry that is decisively modern. A collage of appropriately selected images will carry their own significance, imply general laws. [...] Through this historical collage, Pound constitutes a universal cultural memory which knows itself by its difference from the very elements which compose it (*Victorian and Modern Poetics*, 126)

As analyzed so far, the critical apparatus surrounding the *concretista* revision of Sousândrade's work as embodying an “*imagista*” poetics effectively functions as a ‘luminous’ “collage of appropriately selected images” carefully searched, traced, compared and edited by the de Campos brothers. Therefore, as a scholarly project *ReVisão de Sousândrade* aims at providing a “self-sufficient image” of the work of Sousândrade that would turn it into a historical fact that could rewrite in itself the critical parameters of Brazilian literary history. Similar to the seminal role of the Provençal troubadour Arnaut Daniel within Pound's modernist poetics—also one of the main topics of Pound's “Osiris” essay—the figure of Sousândrade becomes in the hands of the brothers de Campos the kind of luminous detail able to provide an original Brazilian source for their own avant-garde poetics. Ultimately, the overall result of the critical revision of Sousândrade by Augusto and Haroldo de Campos is to present a luminous vision of Sousândrade as “o terremoto clandestino que ainda estremece a poesia brasileira

e reclama um lugar de pioneiro na poesia universal” (backflap) [the clandestine earthquake that still stirs Brazilian poetry and that demands a pioneering place in universal poetry].

Translation as Anthropophagic Introjection: The *Concretista* Conversion of Sousândrade into Pound’s Precursor

One of the keys to the incorporative dimension of the Poundian critical revision of Sousândrade by Augusto and Haroldo de Campos is their recuperation of the anthropophagic aesthetic theory developed by the Brazilian modernist writer Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954). As argued in his “Manifesto Antropófago” originally published in the first issue of *Revista de Antropofagia* in 1928, de Andrade’s concept of ‘*antropofagia*’ emerged as a Brazilian modernist reaction against any form of colonizing import of bourgeois ideology (“contra todos os importadores de consciência enlatada” (14) [against all importers of canned consciousness]. ‘*Antropofagia*’ therefore implied for Oswald de Andrade the annihilation of bourgeois consciousness through its bodily incorporation by what he referred to as the indigenous “instinto Caraíba” (15) [Caraíba instinct]: “Antropofagia. Absorção do inimigo sacro. Para transformá-lo em tótem” (18) [Anthropophagy. Absorption of the sacred enemy. In order to transform it into totem]. In this sense, the Brazilian scholar Benedito Nunes, in his introduction to the *Obras Completas* of Oswald de Andrade, suggests that the incorporative aspect of de Andrade’s anthropophagic theory ultimately implies the manifestation of a creative instinct that aims at the articulation of an autonomous intellectual identity, “englobando tudo quanto deveríamos repudiar, assimilar e superar para a conquista da nossa autonomia intelectual

(xxvi)” [incorporating everything we should repudiate, assimilate and overcome in order to conquer our intellectual autonomy]. The influence of the modernist work of Oswald de Andrade can therefore be considered fundamental for the materialization of the critical revision of Sousândrade carried out by the de Campos brothers. As suggested by Gonzalo Aguilar in his recent study on the Brazilian Concrete movement, *Poesía concreta brasileña* (2003), the incorporative aspect of their avant-garde poetics is precisely related to the recuperation of the work of the Brazilian modernist poet:

El concepto clave en esta incorporación fue el de antropofagia, pero no en el sentido amplio y cultural en el que se lo ha entendido posteriormente (y en el que los poetas paulistas también han tomado parte) sino en un aspecto muy específico: la capacidad de incorporar los materiales más diversos a la voluntad constructiva propia del concretismo. (116)

[The key concept in this incorporation was that of anthropophagy, but not in the wider cultural sense in which it has been later understood (and of which the São-Paulo poets also took a part of) but rather in a very specific aspect: the capacity to incorporate the most diverse materials to the constructive will of *concretismo*.]

Following the thesis proposed by Aguilar, it can be argued that the main connection between de Andrade’s anthropophagic impulse and the revision of Sousândrade produced by the brothers de Campos lies in the concept of ‘constructive’ incorporation. Thus, the overall work of Augusto and Haroldo de Campos may be regarded as a relatively straightforward continuation and expansion of the basic principles of the anthropophagic characteristic of Brazilian modernismo that attempted to arrive at the establishment of the intellectual autonomy of Brazilian culture through a series of constructive incorporations of diverse cultural products. Tracing the source of the concept of *antropofagia* in the Baroque origins of Latin American art and culture, the cultural critic Fernando Rosenberg provides a parallel argument regarding the historical

dimension of Brazilian *concretismo* as a continuation of Brazilian *modernismo* in the following terms:

For this influential poet and critic, [Haroldo de Campos] the Baroque initiates in Brazil a mode of operation characterized by polemic selection and incorporation from within the universal archive. *Modernismo* was the moment of self-consciousness and his own *concretista* poetic movement the continuation of this development. Despite the subversive intention of this strategy, it ends up confirming the universality of the archive it attempts to contest, which tends to be centered in the European literary tradition. (79)

The crucial conceptual moments in the teleological progression of this incorporative spirit are the notion of incorporation as “self-consciousness,” and its relation with the “universality of the archive” that, as he argues, is “centered” in the European tradition. However, contrary to the purely teleological progression of an incorporative spirit ultimately confirming the “universality of the archive” that, as suggested by Rosenberg, constitutes the mode of Brazilian “self-consciousness” inherited and expanded by Brazilian *concretismo*, I will argue that the critical revision of the work of Sousândrade analyzed here offers a slightly more nuanced perspective on the actual universalistic tendencies of the anthropophagic incorporation that characterizes the work of the de Campos brothers. The key question here is what kind of “universality” is confirmed by the *concretista* incorporation of Poundian poetics, and thus the specific way in which this universality relates to the incorporation of Poundian poetics in their critical study of Sousândrade.

The answer to this crucial question in the context of *ReVisão de Sousândrade* cannot be reduced to merely entailing an anthropophagic production of intellectual autonomy that exclusively confirms a European-centered “universality of the archive.” As suggested above by Aguilar, the ‘anthropophagic’ dimension of the incorporation of

Poundian poetics inherent in the de Campos' revision of Sousândrade is manifested primarily as an assimilation of diverse material to the 'constructive will' ("voluntad constructiva") of their avant-garde poetics. At the same time, and as mentioned previously, the constructive will of the de Campos brothers ultimately aims in *ReVisão de Sousândrade* at a radical rewriting of literary history at a local and universal level. In this sense, the figure of Sousândrade offered the brothers de Campos a Brazilian 'luminous' source who not only mastered "the archive" associated with European literature in his own right in the composition of a truly innovative Latin American epic poem, but more importantly that, as they demonstrate, also predated some of the key formal innovations of European and Anglo-American Modernism. Moreover, in their critical revision of Sousândrade, the anthropophagic constructive will of Brazilian *concretismo* also manages to incorporate Pound's modernist poetics in a rather paradoxical way as simultaneously being related to the universality of the archive connected to the European tradition, but also as constituting an inherent component of the "luminous detail" of Brazilian *concretismo* embodied in the poetry of Sousândrade. Thus, perhaps the most crucial significance of their anthropophagic incorporation of Pound's method is that the factual turbulence of their radical positivism manages to convert Sousândrade into the Brazilian and Latin American precursor of Pound's own *Cantos*:

Realmente os dois círculos infernais sousandradinos (o primeiro, no canto II, datado de 1858), fazem-no creador de uma posição precursora de importantes linhas de pesquisa da poesia atual, e em particular, temática e estilisticamente, dos *Cantares* de Ezra Pound. Nenhum dos antecessores de Pound, nem mesmo Robert Browning, poderia exibir algo tão chegado à concepção do autor de *The Cantos* como o "Inferno de Wall Street" do poeta maranhense (109)

[In fact, Sousândrade's two infernal circles (the first one in Canto II dated in 1858) make him a creator of a precursor position of important research venues of

contemporary poetry, and in particular, thematically and stylistically of *The Cantos* of Ezra Pound. None of the predecessors of Pound, not even Robert Browning, could have exhibited anything as close to the conception of the author of *The Cantos* as “The Wall Street Inferno” by the poet from Maranhão.]

The *de facto* conversion of Sousândrade into Pound’s precursor entails a new dimension of their constructive incorporation of Poundian poetics that not only confirms a Brazilian origin for some of the key formal innovations that articulate a crucial part of the avant-garde poetics of *concretismo*, but more importantly provides a Brazilian (and universal) precursor to Pound’s own modernist poetics of *Imagisme*. Therefore, one of the consequences of their conversion of Sousândrade into Pound’s precursor is ultimately the incorporation of Poundian poetics as having emerged originally in a clandestine chapter belonging to Brazilian literary history carefully unearthed by the de Campos brothers. The “luminous” conversion that initially emerges in theoretical terms through their Poundian analysis of Sousândrade’s poetic style culminates in a series of translations included in *ReVisão de Sousândrade* that fulfill a crucial role within the critical study carried out by the de Campos brothers. Needless to say, their use of translation as a tool to execute the incorporation of Sousândrade as a precursor of the poetics of Anglo-American Modernism is obviously influenced by Pound’s own conception of translation as a form of criticism, always on the lookout for more significant “luminous details” that could be incorporated within his own *paideuma*.⁶ This aspect of Pound’s translation theory is stressed by Ming Xie in the following lines from her study of Pound’s work as a translator:

⁶ Pound primarily develops his notion of *paideuma* in his essay “For a New Paideuma” (included in his *Selected Prose*). Pound defines *paideuma* as “the active element in the era, the complex of ideas which is in a given time germinal, reaching the next epoch, but conditioning actively all the thought and action of its own time”(284).

Thus translation is by necessity disruptive, distorting and transformative. Pound's acute awareness of the need for a cultural *paideuma* makes it imperative for him to graft and appropriate fragments from various traditions to form a new hybrid, a pattern of universal significance. ("Pound as Translator," 220)

Partly mirroring the appropriating ethos of Pound's take on translation, the main motivation for the translator is, as argued by Haroldo de Campos, "la configuración de una tradición activa [...], un ejercicio de intelección, y a través de él una operación crítica al vivo" ("De la traducción como creación y como crítica," 197) [the configuration of a living tradition, an exercise in intellection, and through it a live critical operation]. In this sense, the translations included in *ReVisão de Sousândrade* precisely imply the kind of 'live critical operation' that could simultaneously incorporate both Sousândrade and Pound to the critical body of Brazilian *concretismo* by providing a series of self-sufficient literary 'facts' in which diverse poetic images from Pound's *Cantos* look extremely similar to the poetic imagery of key passages from Sousândrade's poetry:

Pound:

Crescent of blue-short waters, green-gold in the shallows
(Foice de água azul-cambiante, verde-ouro nos baixos)
—Canto IV

Black, azure and hyaline
glass over Tyro
(Negro, azul e hialino,
onda de vidro sobre Tiro)
— Canto II

Sousândrade:

Em sempre-móvel íris, verde-neve
Azul jacinto e as abrasadas rosas
— *Guesa*, Canto X⁷

Dos areais o espelho te reflete

⁷ In always-moving iris, green-snow / Blue hyacinth and the fulgent roses. (My translation)

O nimbo áureo-diáfano-cinzento.
—*Guesa*, Canto VII⁸

Pound:

The valley is thick with leaves, with leaves, the trees,
The sunlight glitters, glitters a-top,
Like a fish-scale roof,
Like the church roof in Poitiers
If it were gold.

Beneath it, beneath it
Not a ray, not a slivver, not a spare disc of sunlight
Flaking the black, soft water;

(O vale é espesso de folhas, folhas, árvores,
O sol brilha em seu topo,
Como un telhado de escamas,
Como o telhado da igreja em Poitiers
Se fosse de ouro.
Sob, por sob
Nem raio, nem lasca, nem parco disco de sol
Franja a branda água negra;)

Sousândrade:

Os derradeiros fogos do ocidente
Jorram lâminas e ouro sobre a massa
Da viva treva, líquida, luzente —
O Rio-Negro susurrando passa
— *Guesa*, Canto II.⁹
Móveis noites d'estrelas que fagulham
— *Guesa*, Canto I.¹⁰

(*ReVisão de Sousândrade*, 28)

The specific use of translation by the de Campos brothers in their comparison of passages from both Pound's and Sousândrade's poetry just quoted goes beyond merely providing luminous flashes of the evidence—as Pound argues in relation to the series of

⁸ The flat mirror of sand reflects / the golden-diaphanous-ashgrey nimbus. (My translation)

⁹ The last fires of the West / cry plates and gold over the mass / of live darkness, liquid, luminous / The Black-River runs whispering. (My translation)

¹⁰ Moving nights of sparkling stars. (My translation)

translations included in his “Osiris” essay¹¹—of the similarities between Pound’s and Sousândrade’s poetry. The main point here is that the translations of Pound’s poetry by the de Campos brothers in *ReVisão de Sousândrade* ultimately imply the incorporation of a hybrid poetic image—paradoxically composed by both Pound and Sousândrade, and ultimately articulated by the de Campos brothers—into the theoretical body of Brazilian *concretismo* through an act of translation that, as Haroldo de Campos argues here, aims at the recreation of the original:

Para nosotros, la traducción de textos creativos será siempre *recreación*, o creación paralela, autónoma aunque recíproca. Cuanto más lleno de dificultades esté un texto, será más recreable, más seductor como posibilidad abierta de recreación. (“De la traducción como creación y como crítica,” 189)

[For us, the translation of creative texts will always be *recreation*, or parallel creation, autonomous although reciprocal. The more filled with difficulties a text may be, the higher will be its potential for recreation, and the more seducing as an open possibility for recreation].

In light of Haroldo de Campos’ comments on translation, the main point of translating Pound’s poetry in *ReVisão de Sousândrade* can be analyzed to aim not toward the production of a literal translation of the original, but rather toward the recreation of the intrinsic difficulties of Pound’s poetic imagery into Portuguese so that it could be contrasted with parallel passages from Sousândrade’s poetry, and thus incorporated within the Brazilian avant-garde tradition that same act of translation is articulating in this very process.

In this sense, their conception of translation as recreation seems to structurally operate within the context of *ReVisão de Sousândrade* as an anthropophagic mode of

¹¹ “Assume that, by the translations of ‘The Seafarer’ and of Guido’s lyrics, I have given evidence that fine poetry may consist of elements that are of seem to be almost mutually exclusive” (26)

poetic introjection. By introjection I mean here rather literally the concept succinctly defined by La Planche and Pontalis in *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (1967) as a “process revealed by analytic investigation: in phantasy, the subject transposes objects and their inherent qualities from the ‘outside’ to the ‘inside’ of himself” (229). Based on the concept of introjection as basically implying a figural incorporative mechanism of an external object within the self, it can be argued that the role of the de Campos brothers as translators entails the recreation of the inherent difficulties or peculiar imagery of Pound’s original imagery in order to be incorporated within the critical *corpus* of *concretismo*, since as they argue, these difficulties are intrinsically related to their own imagist interpretation of Sousândrade’s poetry. Thus, the translations of Pound’s poetry just quoted operate as a process of ‘anthropophagic’ introjection through which a particular symptom—here circumscribed to a kind of poetic image precisely defined by Pound as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (“A Retrospect,” 4)—is recreated in a brand new historical context as it pertains in this case to Brazilian *concretismo*. Moreover, the use of translation by the de Campos brothers is also connected to a second feature of the notion of introjection. Like in Sándor Ferenczi’s original formulation of introjection previously examined in chapter one, the interrelation between Sousândrade’s poetry, Pound’s original poetry, and their own translations of Pound’s poetry is sustained through a complex system of analogical resemblances in which two different external manifestations of the same symptom—as a poetic image in this case—are seen to be intrinsically alike and thus related to each other. Similarly, the transfer mechanism defined by Ferenczi as introjection gravitates around the experience of a ‘sensorial correlation’ that departs from the recognition of a series of

formal similarities between the new and a former symptom, hence acquiring a significance when the new symptom is incorporated as a prior ‘sensation’ of itself and thus correlated to its “original sources.” The main point here in relation to my use of the concept of introjection to analyze the translations by the brothers de Campos in *ReVisão de Sousândrade* is that through their translation of Pound’s poetry they are ultimately leading the imagistic symptoms of Pound’s poetry back to their “original sources,” which for their own *concretista* project happen to lie precisely in the poetry of the Brazilian romantic poet from Maranhão.

Following the analysis of the anthropophagic spirit of Oswald de Andrade by Benedito Nunes quoted above as an incorporative capability able to integrate “everything we should repudiate, assimilate and overcome in order to conquer our intellectual autonomy,” *ReVisão de Sousândrade* can thus be analyzed as a symptomatic work of a later phase of this very intrinsic struggle of Brazilian literature to produce a relevant literary history able to match other avant-garde movements that had previously renovated world poetry during the twentieth century. The important fact that Brazilian *concretismo* appears roughly four decades after the emergence of the European and Anglo-American Avant-Garde seems to stress the need to find a Brazilian precursor that could legitimize the historical relevance of their own vanguard position. Thus, as argued by the de Campos brothers, their revision of Sousândrade primarily implies an attempt to add a Brazilian chapter to the literary history of the Avant-Garde—similar to the incorporation of the poetry of Luís de Góngora by the *Generación del 27* in Spain, the recuperation of the English Metaphysical poets by T.S. Eliot, or of the Provençal troubadours by Ezra Pound: “Pode-se dizer que uma das características do movimento de renovação literária

que se consolidou neste século é a de ser ele acompanhado pelo redescobrimto de poetas e fases literárias boicoteados e obscurecidos pela rotina de uma tradição petrificante” (*ReVisão de Sousândrade*, 23). [It can be argued that one of the features of the movement of literary renovation that became consolidated in this century is that it was accompanied by the rediscovery of poets and literary periods that had been boycotted and obscured by a petrifying tradition].

Moreover, and as argued in the final section of this chapter, the anthropophagic incorporation of Poundian poetics in *ReVisão de Sousândrade* and the conversion of Sousândrade into Pound’s precursor constitute an overall attempt to establish the intellectual autonomy of Brazilian literature and culture in and of itself. The figure of Sousândrade is therefore crucial in this sense since it provides a truly Brazilian source through which the de Campos brothers are able to recreate a forgotten chapter of Brazilian romanticism as a luminous symptom of the poetics of the Latin American Avant-Garde. As I have shown here, this recreation is grounded on the theoretical articulation of a composite and syncretic poetics constituted by its various Latin American, Anglo-American and European components (among them Pound’s and Sousândrade’s poetry, Imagisme as an avant-garde poetics, and de Andrade’s notion of *antropofagia*) that ultimately configure the hybrid *corpus* of Brazilian *concretismo*.

Finally, despite the connections and similarities that exist between the formal revolution carried out by Sousândrade at the end of the nineteenth century—which can be described as being rooted in Sousândrade’s Pan-American and romantic cosmopolitanism—and the one carried out by Pound during the early decades of the twentieth century—which clearly emerges from an overpowering critical concern

regarding modernist literary history—it is important to remark one of the secondary effects of the *concretista* revision of Sousândrade. This relevant consequence is the general loss of the deeply revolutionary spirit of Sousândrade's Romanticism due to the nearly exclusive concern by Augusto and Haroldo de Campos to ground the modernity of Sousândrade on the formal innovations of his poetry which they ultimately view as a form of proto-modernism. Thus, two of the key features of Sousândrade's work that become lost in the *concretista* revision of his work is Sousândrade's lyric exaltation of the natural exuberance of South and Central America, and more importantly his radical lack of concern for theoretical considerations regarding poetic form. As Sousândrade suggests in the *Memorabilia* that introduces the 1876 publication of Cantos V, VI y VII of *O Guesa*, it was precisely his radical rejection of a formal concern for poetry, as well as his neo-pagan conception of the natural world of the Americas as the creative source for his poetic imagination that led to his groundbreaking poetry:

Deixemos os mestres da forma — se até os deuses passam! É em nos mesmos que está nossa divindade. Não é pelo *velho mundo* atrás que chegaremos a idade de ouro, que está adiante além. O bíblico e o ossiânico, o dórico e o jônico, e o alemão e o luso-hispano, uns são repugnantes e outros, se o não são, modificam-se á natureza americana. Nesta natureza estão as propias fontes, grandes e formosas com os seus rios e as suas montanhas [...] e é aí que beberemos a forma do original carácter literario qualquer que seja a língua diferente que falarmos. (*Poesía e prosa reunidas de Sousândrade*, 167)

[Let's leave the masters of form—even the Gods pass away! It is within ourselves that our divinity lies. It is not through the old world behind us that we will arrive at the golden age, which it is well ahead of us. As for the biblical, the Ossian, the Doric, and the Jonic and the German and the Luso-Hispanic some are repugnant and others, if they are not, modify themselves within the American nature. It is in this nature where the very sources lie, large and beautiful with their rivers and mountains [...] and it is there that we will drink the form of the original literary character regardless of the language we may speak.]

Perhaps, part of the reason for the disappearance of these two key elements of Sousândrade's own romantic poetics from the *concretista* revision of his work is that those very elements do not fully fit within the critical project through which he is incorporated by the de Campos brothers into the body of the Brazilian and Latin American Avant-Garde. This seems to constitute a symptom of the positivist method of scholarship ultimately used by Augusto and Haroldo de Campos that paradoxically chooses to ignore that which is not perceived as "luminous" in the Poundian sense of the term. Therefore, as in Pound's positivist method of criticism, one of the problems with *ReVisão de Sousândrade* is that it is exclusively grounded in the judgment of the critic to construct a poetic system able to satisfy the need for self-sufficient facts that could legitimize a poetic and aesthetic project. Wai Chee Dimock has emphasized the dangers of the kind of aesthetic judgment that lies at the core of Pound's critical system in the following terms:

Aesthetic judgment is most often, and most powerfully, a lone judgment. Its force is never generalizable, for that force is measured by its peculiar grip on one person, a grip that bears the imprint of one subjectivity, as it does no one else's. It is at this point, where an across-the-board "taste" turns into something much more luminous (and much more obsessive) for one particular person that aesthetic judgment can be said a vital mental event, an event that marks that person. (121)

Following Dimock's remarks, it can be argued that despite the fact that it provided for a radical reassessment of Brazilian literary history, the critical project of *ReVisão de Sousândrade* is solely grounded on the authority established through the same kind of aesthetic judgment that cannot be generalizable and that "bears the imprint of one subjectivity." As such, it is a theoretical project pervaded by an authoritarian form of criticism, i.e. it is exclusively based on the series of self-evident facts solely established

by the authority of the critic's judgment. A brief and self-evident quotation from Pound's essay on "Ecclesiastical History" (1934) provides a good sample of the authoritarian implications of the method of the luminous detail when applied beyond the realm of poetics or literary history: "Time when Church no longer had faith ENOUGH to believe that with proper instruction and argument the unbeliever or heretic could be made to see daylight. Invocation of authority to MAKE him believe" (61). The positivist self-evidence of the critical "method of the luminous detail" through which Pound attempts to re-write literary history, and the "daylight" that could be forced on the "unbeliever and heretic" that Pound mentions in relation to ecclesiastical history are intrinsically—and problematically—related to each other. In this sense, although the groundbreaking critical work of the de Campos brothers in *ReVisão de Sousândrade* clearly has the benefit of having effectively rediscovered the groundbreaking work of the Brazilian romantic poet for an audience contemporary to Brazilian *concretismo*, it can only do so through the invocation of their own authority to make readers believe in the self-evidence of the 'unparalleled' modernity of Sousândrade's poetry. Therefore, in their attempt to establish their own cultural autonomy—in the anthropophagic sense of the notion—the Brazilian Concrete poets ended up articulating a model of avant-garde literary hybridity that is ultimately grounded on Pound's authoritarian critical method, and as suggested by Carol Christ earlier, on "a universal cultural memory which knows itself by its difference from the very elements which compose it."

Finally, and as shown in this chapter, *ReVisão de Sousândrade* constitutes a crucial document on the literary history of the avant-garde since it unveils the complex mechanics of a theoretical project that although able to successfully articulate a hybrid

tradition for their Brazilian avant-garde poetics, it ultimately aims at producing belief on the “quasi-mythic” authority of the critic or artist. As such, the symptomatic chapters of the literary history of the Avant-Garde produced by Pound, and Augusto and Haroldo de Campos show how their projects are based on a set of critical parameters at odds with the idea of Enlightenment, or rather that demonstrates the all-pervading crisis of Enlightenment that is inherent to the Avant-Garde during the twentieth century.

Chapter Six

The Digital Vernacular:

Kamau Brathwaite's "Sycorax Video Style" as a Virtual Caribbean Voice

The poetic work of the Barbadian historian and cultural theorist Kamau Brathwaite (Bridgetown, 1930) has constituted from its inception the fundamental part of an intellectual project aiming at the articulation of an original Caribbean aesthetic. From his first published poetic work, *Rights of Passage* (1967), Brathwaite's poetry has documented his own intellectual search for a Caribbean form of expression that could embody the complex history of the folk culture of the West Indies in general, and of Barbados in particular. Brathwaite's attempt to establish a Caribbean aesthetic originally took shape as a radical response to a seminal question Brathwaite himself uttered in his early critical essay "Sir Galahad and the Islands" (1957): "The question therefore is: will the folk society on which the Islander is based be able to nurture and sustain him "home," or will he, too, turn away from his sources?" (*Roots*, 18). In its original context, Brathwaite's rhetorical question succinctly summarized the main cultural dichotomy that had structured the work of key Caribbean writers working during the 1950s—such as George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott and Eric Roach. The contradiction seen by Brathwaite between his notion of the Caribbean as "home," and the tendency of some Caribbean writers to move away from their "sources" primarily implied for him a tension between a return to the folk culture of the Caribbean, or a shift toward a position closer to the culture of the metropolis which, as Brathwaite argued, partly ignored the historical roots of the Caribbean.

By asking this crucial question early in his career, Brathwaite was not only documenting the two main aesthetic and historical paths taken by Anglophone Caribbean writers during the 1950s, but ultimately aiming at the possibility of an answer able to transcend the conflicting and problematic nature of this seminal dichotomy within Caribbean history and culture. Brathwaite specifically delineates his own proposed answer to this foundational question as a paradoxically utopian “return” of the postcolonial emigrant writer to the Caribbean:

The future development of West Indian writing depends upon the state of health of society in the West Indies. If society is in good health, our “central” writers (those based on the folk) will continue to find nourishment from their soil. To this not impossible utopia the emigrant would, no doubt, gladly return, bringing with him those metropolitan standards of taste and judgment that might help keep our Muses innocent of parochialism. (*Roots*, 27)

Brathwaite’s attempt to conceive an aesthetic that could articulate an essentially utopic return to Caribbean sources is partly determined by his own position as a migrant writer for whom a return to the Caribbean may be deemed as a necessary return to his own cultural “sources” and “roots.” As Brathwaite himself acknowledges, it was precisely due to the particularities of his own historical condition as a “roofless man of the world” that after his undergraduate education in England he ended up taking a position in Ghana in 1955—a job with the Ghanaian Ministry of Education he held for the next seven years of his life and which would completely mark the rest of his career:

Accepting my rootlessness, I applied for work in London, Cambridge, Ceylon, New Delhi, Cairo, Kano, Khartoum, Sierra Leone, Carcassone, a monastery in Jerusalem. I was a West Indian, roofless man of the world. I could go, belong everywhere on the worldwide globe. I ended up in a village in Ghana. It was my beginning. (“Timheri,” 38)

Brathwaite's proposed recommitment to the land and people of the Caribbean archipelago as a West Indian is intrinsically related to his conception of "rootlessness" as the essential West Indian condition. Brathwaite's view of the Caribbean artist as "emigrant" is thus solidly grounded on what he defines as an ancestral "spiritual inheritance of slavery" (30), primarily associated with the Middle Passage as the foundational event for Caribbean culture. This historical and "spiritual" heritage—literarily described by Brathwaite as "the migrant African moving from the lower Nile across the dessert to the Western Ocean" (30)—operates as an extremely powerful cultural matrix for the development of a genuine Caribbean aesthetic, ultimately considering the folk culture of the West Indies as the direct result of the "adaptation and transference" of African folk culture into Caribbean plantations.

Overall, this historical transatlantic cultural transfer from Africa into the Caribbean implies for Brathwaite a brand new rearticulation of African cultural forms primarily determined by the unique geo-political context provided by the Caribbean archipelago. As Brathwaite suggests, "African culture not only crossed the Atlantic, it crossed, survived, and creatively adapted itself to its new environment. Caribbean culture was therefore not "pure African," but an adaptation carried out mainly in terms of African tradition" (*Roots*, 193). In this sense, Brathwaite's proposed "return" back to the Caribbean as the foundation for a Caribbean aesthetic hinges on his groundbreaking critical reconceptualization of the notion of the "Creole" as a model of cultural hybridity—perhaps one of the most influential and relevant theoretical contributions of Brathwaite to the fields of Caribbean history and cultural studies. In his doctoral dissertation on the formation of Creole society in Jamaica, (published as *The*

Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820) Brathwaite defines his use of the term Creole as follows:

The word itself appears to have originated from a combination of the two Spanish words *criar* (to create, to imagine, to establish, to found, to settle) and *colono* (a colonist, a founder, a settler) into *criollo*: a committed settler, one identified with the area of settlement, one native to the settlement though not ancestrally indigenous to it. [...] In Jamaica, during the period of this study, the word was used in its original Spanish sense of *criollo*: born in, native to, committed to the area of living, and it was used in relation to both whites and slaves. It is in this sense that the word is applied in this book, with the overtone as may be heard, say, in present-day Puerto Rico, of ‘authentic’, ‘culturally autonomous’(xiv).

Based on Brathwaite’s own etymological definition of the Creole within the context of Jamaican society, the relation of the artist as migrant with the folk tradition that sustains Brathwaite’s project essentially implies a foundational recommitment to the West Indian land or settlement in search of a distinctly “Creole” aesthetic expression, positively defined by Brathwaite above as “authentic” and “culturally autonomous.” Thus, for Brathwaite it is only through a commitment to the local “sources” of “nourishment” that the Caribbean artist can eventually develop a genuinely Creole Caribbean aesthetic. In this sense, and as argued by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back*, Brathwaite’s theoretical articulation of the notion of the Creole in terms of a process of adaptation and transference able to radically alter previous cultural configurations is ultimately grounded on the spatial and environmental specificity of the Caribbean archipelago:

For Brathwaite, Creolization is a cultural action based upon the ‘stimulus response’ of individuals to their environment and, within culturally discrete white-black groups, to each other. [...] Thus Brathwaite’s concept of a distinctive ‘Sun aesthetic’ includes place as a dynamic factor in the contemporary Caribbean reality. (146).

While Brathwaite's work as a historian has documented in detail the multifaceted nature of this Creole transformation of African folk culture in the Caribbean (primarily in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica* [1971] and in *Contradictory Omens* [1974]), his attempt to articulate an original West Indian aesthetic is grounded on a migrant "need" that goes beyond the empirically-based form of knowledge generally provided by modern historiography. In this sense, Brathwaite has emphasized the aesthetic and rhetorical dimension of this characteristically West Indian 'need' as follows: "I want to submit that the desire (even the need) to migrate is at the heart of West Indian sensibility – whether the migration is in fact or by metaphor" (*Roots*, 7). Therefore, perhaps the most crucial aspect of Brathwaite's conception of migration as the foundational West Indian event is that it needs not only to be traced, located and documented in historical terms, but more importantly, that as a constitutive "desire" it must also be conveyed in an originally Creole West Indian aesthetic form. Peter Hitchcock has relevantly characterized Brathwaite's intellectual project aiming at powerfully affirming the cultural particularity of the Caribbean as a "voicing of history:"

Brathwaite's sense of Caribbean cultural specificity argues for a historically embedded internal distancing of colonial lore at the level of language, music, and memory. Brathwaite attends to the elaboration of that connection/disjunction by voicing a history, polemically and poetically. (*Imaginary States*, 65)

As briefly delineated here, Brathwaite's own "voicing of history" has articulated his work as a poet, historian and cultural theorist of the Caribbean for more than fifty years. In this sense, Brathwaite's ongoing aesthetic project has thus essentially constituted from the get-go a witness to his own search for a model able to transcend the Caribbean impasse embodied in the seminal question he stated in "Sir Galahad and the

Islands,” and that is powerfully conveyed in the following section from Brathwaite’s first collection of poetry, *Rights of Passage*:

Where then is the nigger’s
home?

In Paris Brixton Kingston
Rome?

Here?
Or in Heaven?

What crime
His dark

Dividing
Skin is hiding?

What guilt
now drives him

on?
Will exile never

end?
Will these spent

tears,
poor pauper’s pence,

earn him a little
solace here

bought if not given? [...]

(*The Arrivants*, 77)

Overall, Brathwaite’s poetic “voicing” of the Caribbean experience as the basis for his aesthetic project departs from the premise that the merely progressive synthesis of both terms of the key historical dichotomy of home/metropolis that structured Caribbean culture during the 1950s was ultimately doomed to a standstill. The problematic nature

of this potential cultural stasis for the Caribbean is emphasized by Brathwaite in *Contradictory Omen* as follows: “The optimistic expectation of dialectical ‘progressive’ synthesis/solution, therefore, leads to impasse; it is an aspect of Caribbean reality our model-makers will have to take account of” (63). As Simon Gikandi has argued, one of the critical mechanisms initially used by Brathwaite in his attempt to overcome the stasis inherent to this dialectical opposition is by confronting the historical roots of Caribbean identity:

Brathwaite begins with the assumption that black or Caribbean identity cannot be found in a reconciliation between the alienated self and its Euro-American figures of desire; rather than to seek to overcome this gap the self must come to terms with the history of its repression. (“E.K. Brathwaite and the Poetics of the Voice,” 23)

Brathwaite’s consideration of the potential synthesis of contradictory historical forces as ultimately leading to an alienating “impasse” for the West Indian writer is due to the fact that the notion of synthesis itself is the result of an imposed Western dialectical logic of history that he has determinately tried to challenge throughout his work. In order to counter this historically grounded “impasse” within the realm of West Indian culture, Brathwaite has gradually developed the foundations for his Caribbean aesthetic based on an alternative logic to Western Hegelian dialectical thinking he has called “tidalectics,” or “a tidal dialectic” (*Third World Poems*, 42). As a cultural logic not determined by the insular environment of the Caribbean, Western dialectics entails for Brathwaite a logic which is essentially alien to the Caribbean condition. The notion of “tidalectics,” as Brathwaite’s maritime alternative to a Western dialectic primarily aims at countering the teleological or progressive linearity of Western culture. Thus, as defined by Brathwaite himself in an interview with Nathaniel Mackey, the notion of “tidalectics” implies “the

movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic, I suppose, motion, rather than linear” (“An Interview with Kamau Brathwaite,” 14). In relation to the cyclical cultural logic implied in Brathwaite’s conception of tidalectics as “a dialectics with my difference” (14) Peter Hitchcock has suggested that it manages to open a spatio-temporal dimension for Caribbean cultural identification conceptually parallel to Paul Gilroy’s notion of the Black Atlantic:

The challenge of tidalectics, like dialectics, is to think simultaneously its time/space coordinates without sacrificing the specific nuance of either. This, of course, is something of Paul Gilroy’s approach to the Black Atlantic, which is a heuristic device in the “inner dialectics of diaspora identification.” Indeed one could argue that Brathwaite’s tidalectics is a poetic elaboration of the main tenets of the Black Atlantic, a conceptual space of identification that links blacks across the Atlantic by culture, politics, and history (although one of the reasons Brathwaite uses tidalectics is to separate his spatial imagination from the colonizing and racist consciousness of European dialectics, particularly, of course, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel). (69)

As suggested by Hitchcock, Brathwaite’s ‘tidalectical’ model aims at primarily providing an aesthetic realm or “conceptual space” that could articulate a reconnection with the African presence in Creole society, providing an answer to the problematic Caribbean impasse Brathwaite mentioned in *Contradictory Omens*. However, while Gilroy’s notion of the Black Atlantic constitutes in his own words “the rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation I call the black Atlantic” (*The Black Atlantic*, 4),¹ Brathwaite’s tidalectics is an exclusively Caribbean formation grounded on the specific environmental particularity of the Creole roots of West Indian culture. Although Brathwaite’s proposed tidalectics can be seen to entail a ‘rhizomatic’ “Literature of reconnection” (as he has argued, “a recognition of the African presence in

¹ “The specificity of the modern political and cultural formation I want to call the Black Atlantic can be defined, on one level, through this desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity.” Paul Gilroy, (*The Black Atlantic*, 19).

our society not as a static quality, but as a root living, creative, and still part of the main” (256)), Hitchcock’s conflation of Brathwaite’s tidalectics with Gilroy’s notion of the Black Atlantic² clearly ignores the Caribbean and Creole specificity of Brathwaite’s overall intellectual project, i.e. the fact that the “our” of “our society” he refers to above exclusively refers to Caribbean society. In this sense, Brathwaite is rather clear in his emphasis of the extreme importance of the local versus the international in his drive toward a Creole aesthetic, as the following words indicate:

[I]t is my contention that *before it is too late* we must try to find the high ground from which we ourselves will see the world, and towards which the world will look to find us. An “international” tradition by all means for those that wish it. *But a Creole culture as well.* And a Creole way of seeing, first. It is from this stone that we must begin.” (*Roots*, 79)

Paradoxically, Brathwaite’s attempt to partly counter the internationalist and cosmopolitan impulse of Caribbean culture during the 1950s and 60s through his proposed West Indian aesthetic—which essentially aims at relocating the “need” of migration back onto its “authentic” Creole sources through a ‘tialectical’ cultural logic—can only be expressed in non-parochial terms, as he argued above, “bringing with him those metropolitan standards of taste and judgment.” Thus, at the very core of Brathwaite’s conception of a West Indian aesthetic there is a problematic tension between the local source of “nourishment” (62) needed by the West Indian artist—conceptualized by Brathwaite as a “New World Negro cultural expression, *based* on an African inheritance” (62)—and, on the other hand, an equally necessary cosmopolitan aesthetic influence which constitutes “a superstructure of Euro-American language, attitudes and techniques” (62) in Brathwaite’s own words. Ultimately, if Brathwaite’s Caribbean

² “His nation language is not the language of a nation, but of an ocean: it is the discourse of the Black Atlantic” (Hitchcock, 73).

aesthetic can be analyzed as configuring “a conceptual space of identification” for Caribbean culture, it can only do so as a conceptual space that explicitly resists being cosmopolitan by being at the same time radically local. Thus, although Brathwaite’s primary cultural “stone” for the formation of his Caribbean aesthetic is grounded on a “Creole way of seeing” as analyzed here, it ultimately constitutes a vernacular mode of cultural perception and expression that is not only originally responding to the cosmopolitan tendencies of other Caribbean artists, (Naipaul and Walcott are two key Caribbean authors generally mentioned by Brahtwaite in this context), but that, at the same time, requires an “international” superstructure of “languages, attitudes, techniques” for its articulation. In this sense, it is extremely important to highlight the particular tension between the cosmopolitan and the vernacular within Brathwaite’s proposed West Indian aesthetic not as opposite cultural forces, but as Sheldon Pollock argues in his analysis of the dialectic between the vernacular and the cosmopolitan in the cultural context of South East Asia, as being “mutually constitutive” cultural forms:

These cultural forms are not just historically constituted but mutually constitutive, for if the vernacular localizes the cosmopolitan as part of its own self-constitution, it is often unwittingly relocalizing what the cosmopolitan borrowed from it in the first place. (“Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History,” 39)

Following Pollock’s brilliantly succinct analysis of the mutually constitutive dynamic between the cosmopolitan and the vernacular, it can be argued that the form of vernacular expression Brathwaite is trying to establish through his proposed West Indian aesthetic implies the relocalization of a cosmopolitan impulse that mirrors the relocalization of African culture at work in Brathwaite’s conception of the Creole in the context of Caribbean culture. As in the case of the transference and adaptation of African

culture into the Creole cultural forms historically developed in the Caribbean, Brathwaite's Caribbean aesthetic implies a creolization of constitutive cosmopolitan poetic techniques based on the local particularism of the Caribbean cultural logic he defines as "tidalectics." In this sense, Brathwaite's utopic configuration of a Caribbean aesthetic not only emphasizes the importance of the notion of the Creole as a foundational concept for Caribbean culture, but ultimately highlights the "mutually constitutive" interaction of the vernacular and the cosmopolitan. This mutual interaction leading to the constitution of the vernacular *vis a vis* the cosmopolitan also unveils a larger cultural implication regarding its emergence as a "critique of the oppression of tradition" analyzed by Pollock in the following terms:

[A]ffective attachment to old structures of belonging offered by vernacular particulars must precede any effective transformation through new cosmopolitan universals; care must be in evidence, a desire to preserve, even as the structure is to be changed. [...] It consists of a response to a specific history of domination and enforced change, along with a critique of the oppression of tradition itself, tempered by a strategic desire to locate resources for a cosmopolitan future in vernacular ways of being themselves. (47)

Applying again Pollock's magisterial work on the relation between the cosmopolitan and the vernacular to Brathwaite's project, it is important to stress the fact that the vernacular emerges as a reaction to an "enforced" cultural superstructure, as well as a new cultural form that could in itself function in a "cosmopolitan future." Brathwaite's project toward a Caribbean aesthetic can thus be read as first emphasizing the extreme relevance of the "old structures of belonging" he traces through his work as a Caribbean historian in order for those "vernacular ways of being in themselves" to provide the "stone" for a true transformation of the cultural logic of Caribbean experience.

Grounding the “West Indian Voice:” Brathwaite’s Vernacular Poetics of Nation Language

One of the key features of Brathwaite’s overall intellectual project toward the development of “a new species of original art” (*Roots*, 235) constitutes what I will refer to here as its incommensurability, i.e. the fact that it ultimately aims at a total manifestation of Caribbean culture. As perhaps the most essential constituent element of Brathwaite’s aesthetic project, Caribbean literature had to incorporate not only the complex series of historical and cultural dichotomies that structure Caribbean history, but more importantly, doing so in a way that could embody in itself the Caribbean as its total expression. This holistic aspect of Caribbean literature for Brathwaite is conveyed in some detail in an interview with the Caribbean poet and scholar Kwame Dawes:

When I talk about Caribbean literature I’m talking about literature which addresses and informs and comes out of what I call Caribbean Cosmology. The nature/natural of the Caribbean. Our sense of our space/time... The relationship of landscape to time, the movement of landscape and manscape in time and to time’s riddims; our sense of our history out of this and the details of that history, iconographically expressed. The paradoxes, violences, and futures of society; people’s relationships, integuments, physical, social and spiritual; the language we speak among each other and how this relates to Nature. (Dawes, 31)

As suggested here by Brathwaite, Caribbean literature must constitute a realm of total expression as a world view or “cosmology,” as well as a relationship of the Caribbean self to the realms of nature and history. Despite Brathwaite’s own recognition of the fragmentation and tension among the different historical forces that have shaped Caribbean culture into an essentially Creole form, it seems evident that his project toward a Caribbean aesthetic ultimately emerges as an attempt to arrive at a unified and coherent

expression of the Caribbean as a totality. The literary or poetic event is thus endowed by Brathwaite with the seminal power of articulating this aesthetic project as a whole, i.e. of providing a coherent and authentic form of expression for the Caribbean as an individuated culture of “local authenticity.” The Caribbean literary scholar J. Michael Dash has highlighted as follows the troublesome conceptual contradiction between the fragmentary nature of the Creole logic that pervades Brathwaite’s project with the idea of “wholeness and reintegration” toward which he is ultimately aiming:

The strength of Brathwaite’s ideas in the Seventies is tied to a seminal vision that privileges the creative confluence of contradictory forces and a poetics that requires a new sign system be invented to represent this vision of repressed tensions and unvoiced interactions. [...] The logic of this model would seem to push Brathwaite not towards an integrating text or a reestablishment of lost continuities, but towards an anti-essentialist concept of radical incompleteness. However, there is a tension between such a radically transgressive idea and another impulse that haunts his poetic imagination, that of wholeness and reintegration. (“Libre sous la mer - Submarine Identities in the Work of Kamau Brathwaite and Edouard Glissant.”, 193)

Paradoxically, and as suggested above, both the nature and the form of this coherence and unity sought by Brathwaite emerges as an indeterminate and ultimately incommensurable force, which happens to constitute an aspect largely missed by Dash in his critical view of Brahtwaite’s work as implying a somewhat essentialist idea of Caribbean completeness. As Brathwaite would candidly suggest later in his career, “I don’t know the nature of that coherence but one hopes that the coherence will be observable” (“Interview with Kamau Brathwaite,” 18). Hence, although there is no doubt that Brathwaite’s project aims at the very sense of “wholeness and reintegration” mentioned by Dash above, it constitutes a form of wholeness which does not have a determined unity or configuration, or as Brathwaite would famously put it in

“tidalectical” terms, “The unity is submarine” (*Contradictory Omens*, 64). Partly due to this “submarine” incommensurability of the impulse toward a complete cultural cohesion at the core of Brahtwaite’s conception of Caribbean literature just highlighted here, it can be argued that as a Caribbean poetics Brathwaite’s project for a Creole aesthetic primarily operates as a radical intellectual critique of the West Indian condition itself. Brathwaite’s critique essentially implies a reexamination and redefinition of the very terms that could lead to the conceptualization of Caribbean culture as an original historical event independent from its European sources. As argued here by Brathwaite, it is only through a critical reevaluation of the defining concepts of West Indian culture that the path for the revision of the Caribbean folk tradition as the source for a “literature of local authenticity” can be established:

Until, therefore, our definition of “culture” is re-examined in terms of its totality, not simply its Europeanity, we will fail to discover a literature of negritude and, with it, a literature of local authenticity. Likewise, the African presence in Caribbean literature cannot be fully or easily perceived until we redefine the term “literature” to include the nonscribal material of the folk-oral tradition, which on examination, turns out to have a much longer history than our scribal tradition, to have been relevant to the majority of our people, and to have had unquestionably wider provenance. (*Roots*, 204)

Perhaps the fundamental element of Brathwaite’s critique of Caribbean culture intrinsically related to the idea of “wholeness and reintegration” mentioned above by Dash is the rediscovery of the power of the “folk-oral tradition” as historically anteceding the “Scribal tradition”—which Brathwaite clearly identifies with European culture. Thus similarly to his conception of Caribbean history, Brathwaite uses the notion of a Creole “local authenticity” as the foundation for a genuine Caribbean literature. It is precisely within the Creole linguistic framework intrinsic to the Caribbean that Brahtwaite’s notion

of the “West Indian voice” becomes the absolute key to his tidalectical Caribbean aesthetic. Brathwaite conceives this “voice” both as a hybrid of European tongues creolized by the “folk-oral tradition,” as well as a foundational rebellious force potentially able to provide the basis for an authentic Creole aesthetic for Caribbean culture:

The West Indian voice is a complex of imposed “establishment” tongues (Standard English, French, Dutch, etc.) and the mainly submerged patterns of the “folk” – the peasants and illiterates who carry within themselves a transformed but still very real and essentially non European tradition of Africa, Asia and the Amerindians. (*Roots*, 115)

This “complex” of standard European tongues and “submerged patterns” of folk culture can be further analyzed in terms of its intrinsic syncretism resulting from the fused or amalgamated set of historical and linguistic forces suggested in Brathwaite’s notion of the “West Indian voice.” It is extremely important to emphasize that based on the ‘tidalectical’ logic at the very core of his project toward a Caribbean aesthetic the “West Indian voice” does not constitute for Brathwaite the kind of synthetic dialect that is defined here by Henry Louis Gates within the context of African-American culture:

Afro-American dialect exists between two poles, one English and one lost in some mythical linguistic kingdom now irrecoverable. Dialect is our only key to that unknown tongue, and its obvious relation and reaction to English it contains, as does the Yoruban mask, a verbal dialectic, a dialectic between some form of an African *antithesis* all the while obviating the English *thesis*. (*Figures in Black*, 172).

As opposed to Gates’ dialectical—and rather Hegelian—take on the Afro-American dialect, Brathwaite’s conception of the “West Indian voice” essentially entails a transformative and transferential conception of vernacularity in which specific verbal patterns of local sounds and rhythms are literally deemed to reenact and embody

themselves the experience of the Caribbean. Thus, in Brathwaite's linguistic model both of the "poles" mentioned by Gates in his definition of the Afro-American dialect are not synthetically but syncretically incorporated into the "West Indian voice" as a signifying totality. Contrary to the conception of the "source" language as an "unknown" and "irrecoverable" tongue, Brathwaite conceives this linguistic "source" to constitute a local form of West Indian expression that can—and more importantly which should—be recuperated for the purposes of a truly original Caribbean aesthetic. The notion of syncretism appears in this context as an extremely productive concept to describe the creole logic which, as suggested by Brathwaite, is inherent in the development of the "West Indian voice." Following the groundbreaking work of by the cultural theorist Antonio Benítez Rojo on the postmodern Caribbean condition, it can be argued that Brathwaite's "West Indian voice" constitutes a characteristically Caribbean "syncretic artifact," with the following theoretical implications:

A syncretic artifact is not a synthesis, but rather a signifier made of differences. What happens is that, in the melting pot of societies that the world provides, syncretic processes realize themselves through an economy in whose modality of exchange the signifier of *there*—of the Other—is consumed ("read") according to local codes that are already in existence; that is, codes from *here*. (*The Repeating Island*, 21)

Based on Benitez Rojo's conception of the syncretic cultural artifact within the context of Caribbean culture and history, Brathwaite's "West Indian voice" can be analyzed as a powerful signifier able to provide the Creole "stone" to ground his intellectual project toward a Creole Caribbean aesthetic. From this perspective, the "West Indian voice" as a "signifier made of differences" would be the product of the kind of syncretism proposed by Benítez Rojo resulting from a transferential "modality of

exchange” which reads “the signifier of *there*” based on local “codes from *here*,” since as Brahtwaite argues, it constitutes a local form of language which is “constantly transforming itself into new forms,” as well as “adapting to the new environment” (262). From this syncretic lens of constant transformation, transference and adaptation, the foreign condition that Brathwaite ascribes to the European “establishment” tongues amalgamated into the “West Indian voice” is always read and incorporated through the local folk codes that Brathwaite considers to be original—albeit “submerged”—to the West Indian experience. As argued here, the transferential tension between a local ground (here/folk) and global influences (there/Europe) at the core of Brathwaite’s conception of the “West Indian voice” constitutes an extremely productive syncretic and translatable force that facilitates the articulation of a vernacular system as the basis for his Caribbean aesthetic. In this sense, it is precisely due to the radical syncretism characteristic of the modality of exchange at the core of Brathwaite’s conception of the West Indian voice that the mutually constitutive relationship between the vernacular and the cosmopolitan mentioned above by Pollock emerges within Brathwaite’s project toward a Caribbean aesthetic.

Moreover, the transferential exchange between the local and the foreign at the core of Brathwaite’s “West Indian voice” facilitates his use of the concept as a signifier that constantly translates the local word into a form of cultural and spiritual power able to articulate in itself an original (as Creole in this case) system of signification that can universally and globally embody the experience of the Caribbean. This universality of the local word for Brathwaite—which he refers throughout his work as either “*nam*,” “*nommo*,” “the Word” or “name”—endows it with a primal and constitutive “secret

power” able to articulate a new system of signification for the Caribbean in itself: “We are dealing here with a local concrete force, a flow of power, and impetus that carries with it word, image and consciousness” (70). Ultimately, Brathwaite seems to assert the power of the “West Indian voice” precisely as such a syncretic artifact in which the local signifier can ultimately express and channel the totality of Caribbean experience and beyond:

“Nam” means so many things for me. “Nam” is “man” spelt back wards, man in disguise, man who has to reverse his consciousness...in order to enter the new world in a disguised or altered state of consciousness. “Nam” also suggests “root,” or beginning, because of “yam,” the African yam, “nyam,” to eat, and the whole culture contained in it. It is then able to expand itself back from “nam” to “name” which is another form of “nam”: the name that you once had has lost its “e,” that fragile part of itself, eaten by Prospero, eaten by the conquistadors, but preserving its essentialness, its alpha, its “a” protected by those two intransigent consonants, “n” and “m.” The vibrations “nmnmnm” are what you get at the before the beginning of the world. (“History, the Caribbean Writer and X/Self,” 33)

Therefore, and borrowing Brathwaite’s use of the term, it can be argued that his conception of the “West Indian voice” as local signifier that embodies “word, image and consciousness” ultimately implies a “groundation” of Brathwaite’s work as a Caribbean cultural theorist and historian. Brathwaite’s peculiar use of the notion of “groundation” or “groundings”—a key term of Rastafarian culture—appears in the context of his development of the notion of “nation language” in his article “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature” (1973):

In addition to sound-symbols, nation language sets up certain tunes, tones and rhythms which are characteristic of the folk tradition, and are often essential features of its expression. The overall space/patterns of this language, we might say, are controlled by a *groundation* tendency in which image/spirit is electrically conducted to earth like lightning or the *loa* (the gods, spirits, powers, or divine horsemen of vodum) [...] (*Roots*, 243).

As suggested by Brathwaite here, nation language as a vernacular linguistic system constitutes a submerged “total expression” (273) that provides a “groundation” of the “image/spirit” signified or channeled “to earth” by the very sounds and rhythms of the “West Indian voice.” In the seminal essay in which Brathwaite develops his theory of a Caribbean vernacular in more detail (“History of the Voice”), Brathwaite conceives “nation language” as a “submerged” linguistic form parallel to his definition of the “West Indian voice” and defines it as “the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and laborers” (260), as well as “the submerged area of that dialect that is much more closely allied to the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean” (266). Moreover, Brathwaite’s crucial use of the Rastafarian concept of groundation above to describe his own theory of nation language deserves further analysis. In Rastafarian culture, “groundation” or “grounding” implies a crucial religious ritual of Rastafarian culture, constituting one of the main media for the everyday transmission of Rastafarian experience as described by Ennis Barrington Edmonds here:

Grounding, in the context of the yards, takes place when a few Rastas gather to smoke ganja spliffs, or “to draw the chalice,” and to reflect on their faith or on any current or historical event that affects their lives. This is the more informal level of grounding, and it can take place anywhere and anytime without any prearrangement. However, for many, grounding is a daily activity, which takes place in the yards of leading brethren and elders. [...] These gatherings are somehow more formal, and in addition to ritual smoking and reasoning, drumming, chanting, and sometimes “speechifying” and feasting are often elements of the grounding. (*Rastafari: From Outcasts to Culture Bearers*, 74)

Thus, based on Edmonds’ detailed description, groundation can in fact be regarded as the performative and material manifestation of Rastafarian ideology, specifically in Althusser’s material conception of ideology, (i.e. “Ideology has a material

existence”).³ If according to Brathwaite the “space/patterns” of nation language imply a form of groundation, it can only do so as a medium which can perform in itself the historical and spiritual tensions at the core of Caribbean history, similarly to the way Rastafarian groundation performs in itself some of the key tenets of Rastafarian ideology. In this sense, Brathwaite’s conception of vernacular language as entailing a performative ‘grounding’ of Caribbean experience constitutes the very basis of Brathwaite’s Caribbean poetics. The performative nature of Brathwaite’s poetic voicing of Caribbean experience implied in his use of the concept of groundation is vividly emphasized here:

as the poem write, first the song arrive, its tune, its mourn, its riddim, and as it take its shape upon the page, so does its meaning – the limbo stick and the slave ship and the dance – its splay & sprawl, agony of contortion of body – *becoming a memorial* -- a kind of Rossetta Stone for all these centuries of *apparently* forgetting – of the way this voyage is. (Williams, 301)

Brathwaite’s work as a West Indian poet basically claims to perform in itself the very same process of “groundation” of the historical and spiritual experience of the Caribbean that he claims for his theory of nation language. In this sense, Brathwaite’s own poetry emerges as the aesthetic expansion of the same “West Indian voice” he has previously documented historically but that urgently requires its poetic practice—as a spiritual groundation—in fact “becoming a memorial” of the past, present and future of the Caribbean experience. Therefore, Brathwaite’s role as a Caribbean poet precisely becomes the complex process of unveiling different manifestations of the “West Indian voice” as the syncretic signifier that could effectively lead to the establishment of a

³ “His [the subject] ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject” (Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards and Investigation,” 243).

nation language for the Caribbean and which could provide in itself some sense of “coherence” and “unity” to Caribbean culture as whole.

Brathwaite’s Sycorax Video Style: A Virtual Caribbean Voice

Since the publication of his first collection in 1967 by Oxford University Press, Kamau Brathwaite’s poetry has undergone a progressive textual, visual and material transfiguration in his attempt to poetically “voice,” as suggested by Peter Hitchcock previously, what I have referred to here as the history of the “West Indian voice.” In his ongoing poetic search for the very sounds that could provide an original expression of Caribbean experience—ultimately conceived by Brathwaite as “a rhythm that approximates the natural experience, the environmental experience” (265)—Brathwaite has carried out a gradual process of decomposition of the traditional rhythm and meter patterns of English verse, as well as the standard syntax and grammar of the English language. This radical linguistic transformation has been described by the poet Nathaniel Mackey as an overall process of rupture that essentially aims at destabilizing the semantic and structural coherence of words.

The end result of this poetic reconfiguration of the English language is an extremely particular form of linguistic minimalism that ultimately opens up the path for the emergence of the essential Caribbean form of signification associated to Brathwaite’s conception of the “West Indian voice,” i.e. his notion of “naam,” “name” or “the Word,” as Mackey argues here:

Returning to the smallest particles of language, syllables and letters, he assaults the apparent solidity and integrity of words, destabilizing them (showing them to be intrinsically unstable) by emphasizing the points at which they break,

disassembling them and reassembling them in alternate spellings and neologicistic coinages. [...] Words are reopened, broken open, their semantic integrity unsealed by “shadows of meaning” that are played upon and thereby shown to permeate “the Word.” (“Wringing the Word,” 45, 48)

Overall, Brathwaite’s process of destabilization of the structural and conceptual consistency of words described here by Mackey can be analyzed as the textual embodiment of his notion of tidalectics in his attempt to disrupt the linear logic of European dialectical thinking he has been trying to counter throughout his work. Thus, Brathwaite’s textual tidalectics entails a syncretic amalgamation of the kind of linguistic ruptures mentioned by Mackey, aiming at fragmenting and dissipating the conceptual and formal coherence of the English and European cultural traditions through a performative strategy that keeps repeating and reiterating itself throughout his poetry. At the same time, this linguistic tidalectical process keeps recovering a series of originary cultural sources which resurface and recur throughout his poetry, ultimately leading to an overall procedure of rewriting in which various poetic tropes, images and full sections of poems are constantly revised, reincorporated and rewritten into new poetic compositions.

This tidalectical progression of Brathwaite’s poetry is at the same time parallel to the oscillation from the historical to the autobiographical taking place in his poetic work. Thus, while Brathwaite’s first trilogy (*The Arrivants*) deals primarily with the Middle Passage as the fundamental historical and spiritual event for the Caribbean—“it is history, it has happened” (*The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*, 18)—his second trilogy (*Ancestors*) places Brathwaite himself at the very center of his poetic project as a personal ‘groundation’ of Caribbean experience. As Brathwaite argues, while the first trilogy—composed by *Rights of Passage* (1967), *Masks* (1968) and *Islands* (1969)—

deals “with the communities that give rise to Caribbean peoples and their problems, the second trilogy—configured by *Mother Poem* (1977), *Sun Poem* (1982) and *X/Self* (1987)—treats “the grounding of that whole thing into person. It’s about my mother, it’s about Barbados, it’s about myself within the family context” (Mackey, “An Interview with Kamau Brathwaite,” 14).

However, the complex tidalectical progression of Brathwaite’s poetic project suffered a series of tragic blows that led to a standstill and ultimately a temporary silencing of his poetic voice. During a span of four years generally referred to by Brathwaite as his “Time of Salt” (1986-1990) he suffered the tragic loss of his wife Doris Monica Brathwaite in 1986 due to a virulent cancer, the destruction of all of his personal archive of Caribbean culture by Hurricane Gilbert in 1988, and finally his brutal assault at his Irish Town home by three Kingston gunmen in 1990. As described by Brathwaite himself, these series of tragic events marked the rest of his poetic production by ultimately leading to the ‘dreamlike’ emergence of the Sycorax video style (SycoraxVS) he would develop with his Apple computer—a now obsolete Mac SE/30:

I come to Sycorax during my Time of Salt: death of Zea Mexican 1986, loss of Irish Town Library of Alexandria 1988, murder by Kingston gunmen 1990...just look at the dread frequencies of these catastrophes. My writing hand becomes a dumb stump in my head... I mean I can’t write or utter a sound or metaphor. But Sycorax comes to me in a dream and she dreams me a Macintosh computer with its winking *io* hiding in its margins which, as you know, are not really margins, but electronic accesses to Random Memory and the Cosmos and the *Iwa* (Dawes, 37)

As Brathwaite confesses here, his “Time of Salt” undoubtedly constituted a painful period of poetic silence and crisis caused by what can be analyzed as a series of extremely tragic historical events. Indeed, it is as if the realm of history, or Caribbean history to be more precise, managed in a rather brutal way to temporarily silence

Brathwaite's attempt to articulate a history of the "West Indian Voice" through his poetry. It is precisely in the face of these new painful historical conditions of his Caribbean experience that the rhetorical force of Brathwaite's seminal question originally voiced in 1957 ("Will the folk society on which the Islander is based be able to nurture and sustain him "home", or will he, too, turn away from his sources?") regains the full uncertainty of its rhetorical undecidability during his "Time of Salt," transforming itself into a new key question that will mark the rest of Brathwaite's intellectual production:

[H]ow does my self now go forward into that wider community again, seeing it now from the point of view of a new personal baptism into unexpected areas of loss and hopeful reconstitution of all this once more into the psycho-natural elements of wind, water, metal fire, green history? (Mackey, "An Interview with Kamau Brathwaite," 14)

Although Brathwaite's own personal crisis during those four years can be interpreted as an inability of the Caribbean to adequately "nurture and sustain him "home," Brathwaite overtly refused to turn away from his sources after such a traumatic experience as suggested in the last quote. Instead, the sudden appearance of *SycoraxVS* as a new medium for his work provided Brathwaite the tool for a radical transfiguration of the mode of groundation of the very same "psycho-natural" sources of inspiration lying at the very core of his project toward a Caribbean aesthetic. As I will argue in the rest of this chapter, *SycoraxVS* offered Brathwaite a new medium to radically recast the two main components of his overall intellectual project toward a Caribbean aesthetic, i.e. the vernacular linguistic form he refers to as nation language, and the form of archival memory ultimately required for the production of historical knowledge. I will show in what follows how it is only through the radical material transfiguration of Brathwaite's own poetic practice—literally of "his writing hand" as he mentioned previously—into the

digital medium embodied by his SycoraxVS that Brathwaite's own history of "the West Indian voice" was able to continue to exist as a virtual reconfiguration of itself.

As the name of Brathwaite's visual style indicates, the main creative source recovered through his Mac SE/30 for the purposes of his Caribbean aesthetic after his "Time of Salt" was the figure of Sycorax—perhaps Brathwaite's key tidalectical "source" for his Caribbean aesthetic. Borrowing the figure of Caliban's mother from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Sycorax first surfaced in Brathwaite's *Mother Poem* as a powerful syncretic signifier within Brathwaite's dense poetic iconography—which gradually took on the maternal roles of womb, Barbados as homeland, and the Caribbean as mother nature, among many other significations. The actual moment of creative reconstitution that led to the symbiotic union between the figure of Sycorax and the digital medium of the computer as SycoraxVS is originally described in the section of *X/Self* (1987) titled "X/Self's Xth Letters from the Thirteen Provinces," which through the characteristic tidalectical progression and variations of his work later became "Letter SycoraX" published in *Middle Passages* (1993), as well as a key section of *Ancestors* (2001).

As *X/Self* relates Sycorax in the poem, the computer articulated a new form of writing that can be instantly accessed, altered, and rewritten ("yu na ave to benn dung over to out out / de mistake dem wid white liqid paper"), since it is not restrained by the material conditions traditionally associated to print. The digital textuality offered by the computer medium is also seen by *X/Self* in this passage as a liberating force for the purposes of Caribbean culture that could provide an alternative response to Caliban's antagonistic stance toward Prospero (& learn-in / prospero ling/age & ting / not fe dem /

not fe dem/ de way caliban / done but fe we / fe a-we/for nat one a we shd response if prospero get curse / wid im own / curser” (449). In this sense, the cursor of the computer as “prospero’s curser” offers a new creative positionality for Caribbean culture that radically transforms Caliban’s oppositional stance into a new potential poetic force able to carry out a productive rearticulation “for a we” of that same “curser”—now as the basis for a new “ling/age,” a tidalectical term which can be analyzed as constituting a language, a linguistic age, and even a nation language for the Caribbean. In this sense, one of the most productive cultural rearticulations provided by “prospero’s curser” is the fact that it allows Brathwaite to virtually turn the figure of Sycorax into the computer system itself. As Brathwaite relates in an interview carried out by Emily Allen Williams, “Sycorax by the way is my SE/30 Macintosh computer and “lives” in the computer” (299).

One of the most evident features of SycoraxVS is that it dramatically enhances the visual dimension of Brathwaite’s vernacular notion of “voice” due to its intrinsic intermediality. As Brathwaite relates to Dawes in their conversation referred to earlier, a key characteristic of SycoraxVS is its visual potential, “allowing me to write in light and to make sound visible as if I am in video” (37). In this sense, it is precisely through SycoraxVS that Brathwaite’s seminal statement regarding nation language—“What we *see* is in fact the speaking seeking voice” (244)—is finally able to literally become a visual force that fully pervades all of Brathwaite’s work since the appearance of his “video style.” Hence, in Brathwaite’s conception, SycoraxVS operates as a complex syncretic signifier which amalgamates the oral and the visual in the new medium offered by the digital computer, in his own words, a “weld of computer and visual orality –

scrollature – videlect – a kind of improvisatory hieroglyphic enactment – an expression of multiple representation” (*The Critical Response to Kamau Brathwaite*, 298). However, mirroring Brathwaite’s own conceptualization of SycoraxVS as a new medium for the groundation of Caribbean experience, most critics have emphasized the role of the computer precisely as the seminal syncretic signifier Brathwaite imagines it to be, instead of analyzing the way the digital medium itself allows Brathwaite to imagine Sycorax as such a syncretic artifact. A relevant example of such a critical response toward Brathwaite’s SycoraxVS is offered by the critic Elaine Savory here:

But by imagining the computer now as a medium which can help Caliban turn back towards his mother, Sycorax, by liberating him from some of the strictures of the written conventions of the English language text, Brathwaite has steeped into a space in which orality, the book and the screen combine to project an immediate sense of cultural identity and linguistic freedom. (217)

If Brathwaite’s SycoraxVS may be deemed to “project an immediate sense of cultural identity” associated with the way “orality, the book, and the screen” are intermedially combined as suggested by Savory above, my main point is that this is exclusively due to the digital nature of the new medium Brathwaite has been using since the late 1980s for his Caribbean poetics. As Graeme Rigby has already pointed out, this new syncretic form adopted by Brathwaite’s ‘welding’ voice is solely facilitated by his use of computing technology: “the Apple Mac has enabled Kamau to hold the very tool which shapes the image, to shape it himself in its minute particularities, to emphasize and sing the shapes as he creates them” (“Publishing Brathwaite,” 252). Although as a medium SycoraxVS clearly emphasizes the visual or sculptural dimension of his writing *as if* it were video, the fact is that SycoraxVS is not the result of the recording visual technology referred to as “video”—whether analog or digital—but rather of the digital

computing phenomenon generally known as word processing. In other words, although it has always been published in regular book format by a wide variety of publishers who have adapted or reproduced with some alterations the digital format of Brathwaite's SycoraxVS (usually as typecast or photo-offset versions of the original format), the format itself as produced by Brathwaite through his Mac SE/30 essentially constitutes a form of digital poetry. Although this important fact regarding Brathwaite's SycoraxVS may seem self-evident, Chris Funkhouser's succinct definition of the field of digital poetics is extremely useful for the analysis of Brathwaite's use of digital technology in his work: "A poem is a digital poem if computer programming or processes (software) are distinctively used in the composition, generation or presentation of the text (or combinations of texts)" (*Prehistoric Digital Poetry*, 22).

Therefore, due to the fact that it originally constitutes a form of digital poetry, the power of SycoraxVS as a "writing in light" able "to make sound visible" and to effectively rearticulate Brathwaite's poetic practice as a foundation of the "sources" of Caribbean experience is fully dependent on a crucial form of language that has been generally ignored regarding Brathwaite's SycoraxVS, i.e. the computer language of programming code. In other words, in order for Brathwaite's poetic performance to effectively become a "writin in lite" (*Ancestors*, 455) which can ultimately provide a conceptual topos of reconnection with the cultural sources of the Caribbean, Brathwaite's poetic voice must necessarily be translated into a new medium through the language of code. This form of translation of Brathwaite's "voice," or rather of his keyboard-typed words by computer coding is required in order for it to be processed by the computer processor and thus to visibly appear as SycoraxVS in the monitor of the

Mac SE/30. As N. Katherine Hayles has shown in her effort to bring the language of code to the foreground of literary studies in the third millennium, programming code constitutes a language that must necessarily perform itself before any human can interact with the computer:

Code that runs on a machine is performative in a much stronger sense than that attributed to language. When language is said to be performative, the kinds of actions it “performs” happen in the minds of humans [...]. By contrast, code running in a digital computer causes changes in machine behavior and, through networked ports and other interfaces, may initiate other changes, all implemented through transmission and execution of code. Although code originates with human writers and readers, once entered into the machine it has as its primary reader the machine itself. Before any screen display accessible to humans can be generated, the machine must first read the code and use its instructions to write messages humans can read. (*My Mother Was a Computer*, 50)

Following Hayles’ extremely useful analysis of the performativity of code, it can be argued that Brathwaite’s poetry as a groundation of the “sources” of Caribbean experience can only perform itself after the language of programming code has literally run its own performance. In fact, analyzed from the perspective of code, Brathwaite’s poetry can only exist as SycoraxVS once the poetic voice has been subjected to the performativity of the computer code which ultimately enables the mechanical processing of the poem’s words to be translated into the visual images that appear in the monitor of Brathwaite’s own Mac SE/30. One of the key theoretical implications of such a process of digitization of Brathwaite’s poetry into the language of code is that his vernacular voicing of the “West Indian voice” is ultimately constituted as a virtual voice. The virtuality of Brathwaite’s poetic “voicing” through his SycoraxVS is extremely relevant in two different ways. First, the process of digitization which converts Brathwaite’s poetry into bits of digital information carries out a literal de-vernacularization of his

notion of the “West Indian voice” since as code it becomes, as the new media philosopher Pierre Lévy has argued, a non-actualized linguistic form essentially “inaccessible to humans:” “Digital information (0s and 1s) can also be qualified as virtual to the extent that it is inaccessible to humans. We can only directly interact with its actualization, through some sort of display” (*Cyberculture*, 30). In this sense, the local and material dimension of Brathwaite’s nation language is radically delocalized, rather literally losing its material and signifying ground as a formalized linguistic medium into the virtual domain of the mathematical language of programming code. Secondly, the process of virtualization of Brathwaite’s voice into computer code can at the same time be interpreted as a process of deterritorialization, since as Lévy also argues here, digitization implies a *de facto* rootlessness of the information processed due to the fact that it is practically independent of “any spatiotemporal coordinates:”

Any entity is virtual if it is “deterritorialized,” capable of engendering several concrete manifestations at different times and places, without being attached to any particular place or time. [...] The computer codes written on diskettes or computer hard drives—invisible, easily copied or transferred from one node of the network to another—are quasi-virtual, since they are nearly independent of any spatiotemporal coordinates. Within digital networks, information is obviously physically present somewhere, on a given medium, but it is also virtually present at each point of the network when it is requested. (30)

The inherent deterritorialization of any virtual entity described here by Lévy is at the same time extremely relevant for the transfiguration of Brathwaite’s conception of history through SycoraxVS. In this sense, the digitization of his poetic voice in SycoraxVS also provides Brathwaite with a virtual form of archival memory and consequently a rootless repository for his own writing that mirrors what Brathwaite conceived as the essential rootlessness of the Caribbean condition. One of the key

practical consequences of this material transfiguration of Brathwaite's poetic practice into a virtual form was in fact to save those same Creole "sources" lying at the core of his Caribbean poetics from what Brathwaite considered to be the "reactionary" cultural conditions of Caribbean culture. As Brathwaite argued in the introduction to his "Time of Salt" long poem *Shar*, the unreadiness and inability to timely protect the cultural production of the Caribbean constituted one of his major concerns after his "personal baptism into unexpected areas of loss:"

You have to be concerned with the sources of a poet's life a people's inspiration and try to protect care for as best you can, those sources... We have to be concerned with the poet's health well being comfort. yes; but above all there are archives – that written memorialized recorded record of his / her life / hope / history / art. [...] As far as I can see our Caribb culture is too much a reaction – if not a reactionary plantation culture. We are not prepared to foresee to foresay to forestall to help in that real way. Instead we prefer/we proffer help – if help at all - **after** the accident **after** the death **after** the hurricane [...] (*Shar: Hurricane poem*, n.p.)

After the historical trauma inherent to Brathwaite's "Time of Salt," his MacSE/30 provided a form of archival memory that due to its intrinsic virtuality and deterritorialized form facilitated a brand new—and safe—ground for his "archives," as well as a new textual medium for his own "written memorialized recorded record." In this sense, as channeled through his Mac SE/30, Sycorax offered Brathwaite "electronic accesses to Random Memory" not only in a symbolic or metaphoric way as he mentioned previously, but more importantly in a strictly literal sense. In fact, the specific form of "Random Access Memory" through which he has been able to reconstruct his poetry is the rootless, random and virtual memory provided by the 32 KB of RAM of the Mac SE/30.⁴ The tremendous impact of SycoraxVS as a new archival medium for the virtual recording and storage of Brathwaite's sources can be assessed by the fact that he decided

⁴ Macintosh SE/30: Technical Specifications. <http://docs.info.apple.com/article.html?artnum=112170>

to rewrite, save and publish in his Mac SE/30 a big part of his previous work, as well as almost all of his work produced after the inception of his video style.⁵

However, apart from the practical consequences just described, one of the most important implications of the virtual transformation of Brathwaite's Caribbean aesthetic project through SycoraxVS is that the "deterritorialized" memory provided by the RAM card of his Apple computer has been incorporated as a new conceptual paradigm for his own tidalectical conception of his work. As Brathwaite describes to Emily Allen Williams, RAM becomes in fact the archival form of random memory that articulates his overall *oeuvre*:

EAW: Are you suggesting that the reader's view toward your work must first be chronological? Historical? It's not simple – is it? Toward understanding?

KB: Not, it's not that simple, but you've got to –

EAW: Go back to go forward?

KB: Yes... but more like random access memory really...the way that works...And you have to know what you have read before, and then read it in sequence...and in historical context. And still be able to make connections from any one part of the work to another. And not to confine it to poetry either. I mean, the history, the prose, the dreamstories, even the photography are all connected. (*The Critical Response to Kamau Brathwaite*, 305)

As Brathwaite suggests here, the form of memory provided by his Mac SE/30 has offered him a virtual temporality in which any point in time can be retraced and accessed instantaneously, allowing for the emergence of the tidalectical "sources" which implicate for Brathwaite the totality of Caribbean experience. At the same time, this virtual form of memory is able to save his creative sources from the historical conditions of Caribbean culture before the foundational "sounds" for a nation language can be materially lost or

⁵ Among other works composed in his newly minted SycoraxVS, Brathwaite recasted the set of historical experiences that determined his "time of Salt" in the highly autobiographical poetic works *Shar / Hurricane Poem*, *Zea Mexican Diary*, and *Trench Town Rock*. At the same time and during the 1990s, Brathwaite also recreated in SycoraxVS his Casas de las Americas Award winning collection *Black and Blues* (1976)—published by New Directions in 1995—and his aforementioned second poetic trilogy *Ancestors* published also by New Directions in 2001.

forgotten. Therefore, as analyzed here, the digital medium that constitutes Brathwaite's SycoraxVS provides a virtual reconstitution of his writing as a radically new form of groundation of the Creole sources of Caribbean experience. Moreover, it is finally in SycoraxVS that Brathwaite finds a digital language able to transfer his voice into the kind of rootless syncretic signifier that can coherently match the rootlessness and homelessness that Brathwaite sees as the essence of the West Indian condition.

Coda: Brathwaite's Nation Language and the Temporality of Translation

As shown in this chapter, Kamau Brathwaite has effectively adopted throughout his career a double role as a poet and theorist of nation language who both has documented the rhythms and tones of the "West Indian voice" as its premier historian and archivist,⁶ while at the same time has performed and articulated that same voice in his own poetry. Silvio Torres-Saillant has put this dual aspect of Brathwaite's intellectual project toward a Caribbean aesthetic in the following terms:

In his search for an authentic Antillean expression, Brathwaite has sought to piece together the history of the voice for his people, but he has also invested much energy and imagination in the task of inventing that voice. The repetition, recurrence, and recasting of ideas and verbal performances in many of his works suggest the urgency with which he has assumed the task of unearthing and creating. (*Caribbean Poetics*, 154)

The key aspect of this double position of cultural "urgency" that as he suggests is adopted by Brathwaite—which is by the way largely ignored above by Torres-Saillant—is the fact that "piecing together the history of the voice for his people" constitutes a

⁶ As stated in the introduction to Brathwaite's *Shar*, prior to its destruction by Hurricane Gilbert in 1988, his personal library at Irish Town was arguably one of "the most important archives of Caribbean literature and culture, [...] possibly one of the largest collections of Caribbean poetry in the world" (n.p.).

radically different heuristic action from the “task of inventing that voice.” Thus, in order to fully understand the tidalectical logic of Brathwaite’s attempt to establish an “authentic Antillean expression” it is extremely important to analyze the oscillation between history and poetics that completely structures his *oeuvre*—a movement always pervaded by its repetitive, recurring and circular form. In this sense, the location of Brathwaite’s overall work right at the juncture between the archaeological “unearthing” of history, and the poietic “creating” of poetics can be seen as an attempt to bridge the ambivalent split of two differing temporalities (one diachronic or historical, the other synchronic or performative) which is precisely emphasized by the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha as “the site of *writing the nation*.”

In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing the nation*. [...] The tensions between the pedagogical and the performative that I have identified in the narrative address of the nation turns the reference to a ‘people’ – from whatever political and social position it is made – into a problem of knowledge that haunts the symbolic formation of social authority. (*Nation and Narration*, 297)

The importance of the fact that Brathwaite’s overall work is situated right at the juncture of the two splitting temporalities that according to Bhabha constitute the site where the narration of nation is produced cannot be critically overlooked. As analyzed earlier in this chapter, in his attempt to establish a nation language for Caribbean culture Brathwaite drew upon the Rastafarian concept of groundation as a model for essentially welding the “piecing together” of history and the “creating” of poetics, and consequently the splitting temporalities of nation production each heuristic action entails. As suggested previously by Edmonds, groundation articulates an ambivalent mode of

temporality somewhat in between the merely “pedagogical” and the merely “performative,” using Bhabha’s terms, since it produces its own local form of history in the repetitive ritual through which it is enacted. Similarly, Brathwaite’s poetic take on groundation represents an alternative temporality for the Creole articulation of the local sources of Caribbean culture through which they are constituted historically. As a vernacular performance that aims at grounding a particular accumulative history of the Caribbean, Brathwaite’s poetry literally becomes a “memorial [...] for all these centuries of *apparently* forgetting.” More importantly, Bhabha describes this ambivalent temporality at the core of Brathwaite’s take on the conception of groundation as the “temporality of translation or negotiation”(26), with the following theoretical implications:

When I talk of negotiation rather than negation, it is to convey a temporality that makes it possible to conceive of the articulation of antagonistic or contradictory elements: a dialectic without the emergence of a teleological or transcendent History [...]. In such a discursive temporality, the event of theory becomes the negotiation of contradictory and antagonist instances that open up hybrid sites and objectives of struggle and destroy those negative polarities between knowledge and its objects, and between theory and practical-political reason. (*The Location of Culture*, 25)

As analyzed in this chapter, Brathwaite’s tidalectical Caribbean aesthetic constitutes precisely the kind of “dialectic without the emergence of a teleological or transcendent History” that Bhabha refers to regarding the “temporality of translation.” As Bhabha argues, the temporality of translation opens a space of transferential exchange as a negotiation of differing historical, epistemological, cultural and linguistic forces that ends up producing a hybrid topos which, in the case of Brathwaite’s poetics, becomes the basis for the constitution of a new vernacular culture. Therefore, and

referring again to Bhabha's seminal work on the task of nation writing, Brathwaite's development of a nation language for the Caribbean can be analyzed as a "contentious" acknowledgment and "inscription" of Caribbean culture as a national culture, ultimately constituting a form of what Bhabha defines as "minority discourse:"

Minority discourse acknowledges the status of national culture—and the people—as a contentious performative space of the perplexity of the living in the midst of the pedagogical representations of the fullness of time. Now, there is no reason to believe that such marks of difference—the incommensurable time of the subject of culture—cannot inscribe a 'history' of the people [...]. They will not, however, celebrate the monumentality of historicist memory, the sociological solidity or totality of society, of the homogeneity of cultural experience. The discourse of the minority reveals the insurmountable ambivalence that structures the *equivocal* moment of historical time. (*Nation and Narration*, 308)

Following Bhabha's argument, it can be argued that the power of Brathwaite's poetic groundation lies precisely in the way it manages to inscribe a non-teleological 'history' as translated by the "marks of difference" he ascribes to the Creole specificity of the "West Indian voice." Brathwaite's work reveals "the insurmountable ambivalence" that governs the temporality of translation articulated through his own poetic voicing of the differential particularity of nation language as the vernacular foundation for Caribbean culture. Thus, one of the most powerful characteristics of Brathwaite's work is his own struggle regarding the problematic tension inherent to the temporality of translation due to its location between the accumulative temporality of history on one hand, and the performative temporality of poetics on the other. A key consequence of the temporal tension inherent to his poetics is that it ultimately leads to the intrinsically modern "hurtful" anxiety expressed in the following explanatory note heading the footnotes to Brathwaite's *X/Self*:

The poetry of *X/Self* is based on a culture that is personal—i-man/Caribbean—and multifarious, with the leaning and education that this implies. Because Caribbean culture has been so cruelly neglected both by the Caribbean itself, and by the rest of the world (except for the spot/check and catch-ups via cricket and reggae), my references (my nommos and icons) may appear as mysterious, meaningless even, to both Caribbean and non-Caribbean readers. So the notes... which I hope are helpful, but which I provide with great reluctance, since the irony is that they may suggest the poetry is so obscure in itself that it has to be lighted up; is so lame, that is to have a crutch; and (most hurtful of all) that it is bookish, academic, ‘history.’ (*X/Self*, 113)

As this note suggests, Brathwaite’s poetic voicing of the history of the “West Indian voice” tends to move toward the archival knowledge of historiography—requiring footnotes and historical contextualization as suggested in the excerpt just quoted—while as an “inscription of the history of the people” it is based at the same time on the “multifarious” and incommensurable realm of the “personal.” Therefore, the “hurtful” result of the temporality of translation at the core of Brahtwaite’s project toward a Caribbean aesthetic is the fact that the heuristic difference between history and poetics as differing modes of articulating a nation language is ultimately lost within his work. As Bhabha mentioned previously regarding the hybrid space opened by the temporality of translation, it constitutes a negotiating discourse that ultimately manages to “destroy those negative polarities between knowledge and its objects.” In this sense, while Brathwaite’s conception of his poetic practice as a foundation does produce its own history, its ambivalent temporality gradually collapses the epistemological difference—and thus the split—between the pedagogical temporality of history, and the performative temporality of poetics. The end result of Brathwaite’s conception of nation language as a foundation of the sources of Caribbean experience is that as history of the “West Indian

voice” it can only continue to exist historically and poetically as a temporality solely grounded by Brathwaite himself.

As argued in the final section of this chapter, the emergence of SycoraxVS in Brathwaite’s work after the sudden silencing of his voice during his “Time of Salt” implies a renewed attempt to rearticulate an ambivalent temporality between history and poetics for the development of a nation language for the Caribbean. In this sense, the medium that channels—electronically now—the sources or the essential “image/spirit” of the Caribbean experience as SycoraxVS is not so much the “space/patterns” of nation language as voiced by Brathwaite himself, but rather as digitally translated by the language of computer code. Through SycoraxVS, Brathwaite’s voice ceases to be the medium itself that articulates the process of groundation, ultimately shifting the translating agency to the new medium articulated by programming code which rather literally ‘illuminates’ his voice. In this sense, SycoraxVS provides a new virtual temporality of translation which manages to avoid the kind of historical forgetting feared by the destruction of his “archives”—“**after** the accident **after** the death **after** the hurricane” (*Shar*, n.p.)—providing a digital form of memory in which, as suggested by Lévy above, “information is virtually present at each point of the network when it is requested.”

However, Brathwaite’s insistence both in using SycoraxVS as exclusively channeled through his Mac SE/30, as well as choosing the medium of traditional print media as the only format for its publication denotes a particularly distinctive attempt to subject the virtual temporality of translation inherent in SycoraxVS to Brathwaite’s own authorial control and historical positionality. While the generation of Apple computers

the Mac SE/30 belongs to was cutting-edge technology in the late 1980s, by the late 1990s it had already become completely outdated and technologically obsolete, even requiring, as Chris Funkhouser notes, “emulation programs to be viewed—if it is even possible to load the media (usually a diskette) onto the machine” (21). Therefore, being able to view and experience SycoraxVS as originally produced by Brathwaite himself is not only a challenge for publishers and readers, but a nearly impossible deed unless one has access to Brathwaite’s rather personal Mac SE/30. The traditional print format of publication Brathwaite has chosen thus reinforces his control over SycoraxVS as a syncretic signifier for Caribbean culture which can exclusively be experienced in its original digital format by Brathwaite himself, something that could be partly avoided if SycoraxVS was made available through the online digital medium provided by the World Wide Web since the late 1990s.

Ultimately, by subjecting SycoraxVS to his own authorial, editorial and interpretative position, Brathwaite ends up historicizing the digital syncretic signifier which has transfigured and regenerated his work so effectively. As experienced by readers of Brathwaite’s SycoraxVS, the medium itself in its printed form constitutes a mere visual record of its original digital form, completely losing its intrinsic virtual temporality and deterritorialized mode of archival memory. More importantly, Brathwaite’s decision to de-digitize SycoraxVS by exclusively publishing his work in traditional print format has not only done away with the intrinsic virtuality and rootlessness of the digital medium, but has also eliminated the productive positionality symbolically embodied in the computer’s cursor. It is precisely Brathwaite’s original recognition of this creative potential of the computer’s digital cursor as “prospero’s

curser” (*Ancestors*, 449) for the vernacular rearticulation of Caribbean culture analyzed earlier which is completely lost in the published version of *SycoraxVS*. After all, and through this virtual loss, *SycoraxVS* essentially becomes Brathwaite’s particular version of the “distinctive kind of written discourse” that, as the literary theorist and historian Hayden White has described referring to history, mediates “a certain kind of relation to the past” (*Figural Realism*, 1).

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Publications

Translated books

- 2003 *Una ola*. Translation into Spanish of John Ashbery's *A Wave*.
Barcelona: Lumen / Random House Mondadori. ISBN: 842641396X
- 2002 *Cómo viven los muertos*. Translation into Spanish of Will Self's *How the
Dead Live*. Barcelona: Random House Mondadori. ISBN:8439709439

Articles and reviews

- 2008 “Sex and the Luminous Interface:” The Digital Vision Machine in Julio Medem’s *Lucía y el sexo*. *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*. Vol. 9, Issue 1. Basingtoke: Routledge, March 2008, 75-87.
- 2005 “Modernismo” (2000 words). *Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Poets and Poetry*, edited by Jeffrey Gray, James McCorkle and Mary Balkun. Westport: Greenwood / Heinemann Publishing Group, December 2005.
- 2004 Review of Alejandro Riveri’s Fictions as Cognitive Artefacts: The case of J. L. Borges. *Variaciones Borges*. J. L. Borges Center for Studies and Documentation, University of Aarhus, Denmark. 18 (2004): 260-262.
- 2001 “Abominable Mirrors: On the Macabre Hyperfictions of Jorge Luis Borges”. *Variaciones Borges*. J.L. Borges Center for Studies and Documentation, University of Aarhus, Denmark. 12 (2001): 193-232.