

Humanism, Irony, and the End of Literature

This final chapter looks at *Diáspora(s)*'s and *Paideia*'s opposed ethical and aesthetic choices in depth. If *Paideia* can be regarded as the last humanist project of this generation, *Diáspora(s)* was the vanguardist alternative that emerged out of the failure of humanism. That is, *Paideia* represented the failure of the aesthetic representation of emancipatory politics, a failure that *Diáspora(s)* embodied and performed. Desire and repulsion were the two conflicting forces at the core of cultural production during the nineties. To understand the coalescence of the two forces at play, I call on psychoanalysis, for I am dealing with literature, a form of expression that defies rational logic. In recent decades, two different factors have plunged Cuba into a political crisis of disavowal. The first is the regime's inability to acknowledge the exhaustion of the socialist revolutionary process. The second is the acceptance of capitalism and its paradoxical and simultaneous denial (a disavowal, in psychoanalytic terms). The consequence of this double denial is, on the one hand, what Jorge Domínguez has called the state's "desideologización" (1997, 9). The authoritarian evolution of the current Cuban government largely results, according to Domínguez, from this disideologization of a regime no longer rooted in precepts such as those of the "New Man" and "voluntary labor." Rojas similarly takes up Domínguez's terminology when he affirms that "today the island's regime is no longer ideological, in the fashion of the totalitarian model, which implies a withdrawal from, or at least a weakening of, communist republicanism, potentially enabling the introduction of liberal and democratic principles" (Rojas 2003, 54). Unlike Rojas, I do not believe that the withering of

communism will give way to democratic reforms. Instead, I think that the retreat of communism is introducing neoliberalism through market reforms. The fact is that, ideologically speaking, the regime's politics were always defined according to an economist's model of socialism. As one observes in the brief political program Fidel Castro outlined in *History Will Absolve Me*, all the proposed reforms were economic. This program was conceived to attend to the needs of the people: the economy was logically the driving force of change. As a result, the nineties' economic crisis also triggered a severe political crisis.

The crisis is initiated by the lack of the primordial signifier or Law of the Father, that is, the end of socialism and by extension the end of sovereignty. To put it in Lacanian terms, the political crisis of the state points directly to the absence of a primordial signifier, that is, the law of the Father. This lack was neither accepted nor recognized, and this explains its striking similarity to schizophrenia. A defensive pathology caused by trauma, schizophrenia dissolves the differentiation between the imaginary and the symbolic. That is, the law remains within the imaginary without ever reaching the symbolic. The subject's ego is unable to symbolize the law, and the result is an empty law. While a schizophrenic's discourse seems logical to him or her, a different subject cannot make logical sense of it. The patient "symbolizes" everything, and we can also "understand" what he perceives. It actually matters little if his perception is understandable or not. The problem is that the schizophrenic perceives only an illusion. It is a perception that dialectical logic cannot decipher (Lacan 1993, 20).

Never symbolized, the law is thus empty. But by definition, a law cannot be empty, so "a fallen ego-ideal" takes the place of the primordial signifier. If the ideal ego is the ideal of perfection that the ego struggles to emulate, from the position of the ego-ideal, subjects see themselves through that ideal place. If we considered ourselves from a space of perfection we might see our own "normal" lives as vain, useless, and repulsive. We thus have a law (i.e., socialism) that strives to perfection but that is empty, because existing real socialism is disappearing, and no law (e.g., market socialism) has replaced it. This conjuncture provokes a schizophrenic logic of sorts, where the lack of law is filled with a useless and repulsive law (i.e., capitalism). The new Cuba of tourism, *jineterismo* (the "hustling" of tourists, including by selling sex), the black market, blackouts, and precariousness—all of these images were part of a dazzling chain, a new world order in which the island's political leaders were as much suffering subjects as organizing agents. For them, this new image of the nation was simply imaginary, weak, and fallen, an image they could not approach other than to erase it.

This impure socialism was symbolized by the corruption of Division General Arnaldo Ochoa and by the Interior Ministry (MININT) Colonel

Antonio de la Guardia. Immediately after signing the Angola peace accord in December 1989, the Cuban government entered the most serious internal crisis it had faced in thirty years, revealing the weakness of Cuban institutions, especially that of the Cuban Communist Party. In June, the government arrested Ochoa—a hero of the Cuban Republic, a veteran of the wars in Angola and Ethiopia and leader of the Western Army—as well as de la Guardia and twelve other high-ranking officers in the army and state security services. The fourteen military officers, who until then had enjoyed impeccable credentials, were accused of crimes of corruption against the state and drug trafficking. The subsequent arrest of General José Abrantes, interior minister since 1986, was the clearest indication of just how serious the crisis had become. Ochoa and MININT officers were officially accused of having used the Department of Convertible Currency to conceal illegal transactions with Colombia's Medellín drug cartel and were charged with having shipped a load of cocaine to Florida through the military port at Varadero. Judged by a military tribunal, Ochoa, de la Guardia, and their principal conspirators were sentenced to execution by firing squad. The other officers implicated were given prison sentences of ten to thirty years (Gott 2004, 286).

Some observers argued that the executions had political motives, claiming that Ochoa could have been involved in a nascent reformist movement within the armed forces. He had viewed the Soviet reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev favorably and would have been in a privileged position to promote similar efforts as leader of the powerful Western Army. General Rafael del Pino, a veteran of the Angola war living in exile since 1989, affirmed that Ochoa had been arrested to prevent an uprising against the regime. This political purge was mistrusted and viewed with incredulity by many, and if it had not been for the imminent economic crisis, it surely would have had more serious repercussions (Gott 2004, 286). For my part, I see the execution of Ochoa and other members of the government as the first symptom of a schizophrenic crisis. It was the first point at which the government, as the body of the nation, lost control and apparent stability. These images are part of the imperfect present of a socialism infected by a virus whose spread it had to entirely eliminate. The schizophrenic's most coveted ambition is to free him- or herself of all other voices that stand in the way of uniting with the divine. Whatever we make of the claims that Ochoa was executed for political reasons, it is clear that these colonels embodied the image of a capitalism that was being allowed on the island but that could be neither seen nor permitted.

The Diáspora(s) and the Paideia, the two cultural projects that interest us are paradigmatic examples of an era of profound ideological and aesthetic transformations. They have more in common with the visual arts of the

time than with literature, because as the former they are deeply invested in articulating an ideological critique. Yet if Paideia was the last humanist attempt at reforming cultural politics, Diáspora(s) was, as Walfrido Dorta has put it, the project of a non-messianic vanguard (Dorta 2013, 45). In other words, Diáspora(s) is caught in what appears to be at best a paradoxical situation. That is, on the one hand, its poetics seek a drastic formal disruption of previous poetic forms by rejecting lyricism and aestheticism, and civil poetry on the other hand. Yet, while their project is counterhegemonic, it is not driven by a messianic force, because it is not based on emancipatory goals. Although this formal upheaval is not at the service of a teleology, one cannot deny that there is a desire for disruption. The paradox to which I referred has to do with the simultaneous existence of a counterhegemonic desire with the refusal to reconquer a space of struggle. I have already discussed their vanguardist position in chapter 2 by arguing that their antisystemic view of the world did not translate into a systematic political agenda. Nor did it produce a prescriptive ideology, nor a systematic poetics. To sum up, their poetics are driven by two strong and antithetical impulses: the desire of disruption (deterritorialization) and a desire to reterritorialize without domination or conquest. In Deleuzian-Guattarian terms, these two irreconcilable demands are actually compatible, and in Diáspora(s) poetics, they formally coalesce as a poetics of irony. Paideia, however represents the last modernist project of the decade as well as the exhaustion of the Gramscian organic intellectual in his role as artistic mediator.

The members of Diáspora(s), on the contrary, display an absolute disbelief in the ethical possibilities of art. Their last works, in particular, bespeak a lack of political engagement. For them, literature is no longer a mode of denunciation; instead, it is pure performance. It is the witty *mise en place* of the joker's jest. But their literature is also marked by the constant *dédoublement* of irony. It is the disruption of an illusion, or of a linguistic code, as well as its own critique (what Gilles Deleuze calls "post-irony"). To illustrate the Paideia and the Diáspora(s) disparaging ideological attitudes regarding art, it is pertinent to look at Daniel Díaz Torres's film *Alicia en el pueblo de Maravillas* (*Alice in Wondertown*, 1990). Alice, the character performed by Thais Valdés plays precisely the role of the organic intellectual in a context characterized by the absence of a law or moral code of conduct. It presents, in other words, the same schizophrenic ambivalence that results from irony. Both attitudes are synthesized in a film symptomatic of the generation's ethical impasse.

Alicia en el pueblo de Maravillas is among the most controversial films of the nineties. Described by many critics as a glasnost film about totalitarianism and bureaucracy, *Alicia* was banned in Cuba after being awarded the jury's special mention at the 1991 Berlin Film Festival. After numerous

protests from a group of ICAIC filmmakers, the film opened in ten movie houses in Havana "only to be withdrawn after four days marked by disturbances in the cinemas" (Chanan 2004, 460). The film is a didactic and absurdist satire whose narrative flow is constantly interrupted by scenes from the characters' past. These flashbacks show the immoral actions that led the town's inhabitants to be exiled in Maravillas. Alicia, a cultural officer, chooses to go to Maravillas to support the town's cultural development. She soon finds out that the town is full of odd characters and that it is ruled by a despot, who is also the director of a sanatorium. Allegorically speaking, the sanatorium is where the sinners cure themselves of their immorality. They clean their counterrevolutionary ethos by drinking sulphurous bubbly water. Thus, the cure represents the subjection to the power of the despot. Like Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the film ends by suggesting that its story may all have been a dream. Indeed, the resemblances to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the dreamlike quality of the images induce us to believe that it is a nightmare, which actually resembles reality. Reality and unreality blend constantly, with everyday life in Havana shown to be as grotesque as it is in the town. The allegories and references to the Cuban regime and government become immediately clear, but the film's originality lies in its confusing *mélange* of different levels of discourse and truth.

As Díaz Torres wrote in defending his film, Alicia is a revolutionary character.¹ She is actually a cultural reformer who fights to transform the dull and propagandistic plays she is directing, until, like Carroll's Alice, she realizes that she can no longer recognize the truth: "For, you see, so many out-of-the-way things had happened lately, that Alice had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible." The famous line from the opening chapter of Carroll's book introduces us to the different levels of realities spatially symbolized in the film. As if opening a Russian nesting doll, Alicia advances gradually through a space that constrains and imprisons her. She first goes into the bus station, then gets into the taxi, and then enters the town from which there is no return. After she forces her way into the hotel room, another door opens as she stands in the dark. A Chinese cook exits his room and disappears, as Alicia contemplates in awe this first absurd and incoherent appearance. Once in the room, she notices that the stairway has been covered with a wall leaving her no way out. But although she cannot leave her room, others can get in. The armoire door opens by itself, and she sees her neighbor on the other side of the bathroom medicine cabinet. Once she has gone that far, Alicia has no choice but to believe in the new reality that she confronts. In this new space, there are three different narratives with their own truths, and Alicia is forced to believe one of them. First, the film presents Alicia's own narrative as an attempt

to rationalize what she sees and reform what she thinks is wrong. Second, it offers the truth of the townspeople, which their odd past actions always call into question. Finally, the film gives us the voice of the sanatorium's director, the despot, whose narrative is imposed on everybody else. He is the only character clearly portrayed as evil. Omnipresent, he appears as a devilish figure in the flashbacks as he tempts people to sin.

But whom do we believe? Whose truth should we follow? Even Alicia becomes unreliable when she begins to imagine that she was also sent to Maravillas for being a sinner. In the Manichean structure of the film, Alicia, is the good character, in her effort to bring back the right revolutionary principles and eradicate corruption. All the other voices say exactly the opposite of what they mean, and this is where the film's irony resides. This is why Rodríguez, one of the cultural officials, tells Alicia not to drink the curative water that the sanatorium director gives her. The film's irony is always set against Alicia's moral standard, which is what makes the film didactic. In other words, all the other characters act contrary to her. Their acts are measured against the right moral law that Alicia embodies.

Alicia's voice represents the Symbolic, whereas all the other voices come from the Imaginary. This is why their discourse is understandable to Alicia, but at the same time she finds it absurd and illogical. They represent the revolution's fallen ego-ideal, so their voice does not articulate a truth. It seems, then, that the film's moral lesson comes from Alicia's truth. But the end of the film shows that Alicia's reformism is not a political choice either. The only "truth" that the film proposes comes at the end, when Alicia tells us that her experience in Maravillas has taught her just one moral: "Con agua de globitos caliente y sin etiqueta no llegarás a la meta [Unlabeled hot fizzy water won't get you anywhere]." The film thus does not embrace reformism. Alicia's efforts at reform have been in vain. Although the people of Maravillas seem content with or resigned to their misery, the film shows us that to be caught up in one's own delusional logic is to be constantly confronted with one's own fallen ego-ideal. This is precisely what happens when the sanatorium patients discover that the water is full of excrement. As one of the characters tells Pérez, who has just taken a mud bath: "Pérez, you stink like shit." Pérez responds to the accusation by acknowledging it as fact: "I don't get your joke. You know that here we're all in it up to our eyeballs [aquí todos estamos cagados]." Once the patients realize the truth about the water, they flee the sanatorium. More than escaping a space, they are fleeing themselves for believing that their sentence and their cure are ethical. Jaded by the failure of reformism, Alicia chooses humor and *choteo* (joking), thus embracing her generation's apolitical nature. Humor prevails over ethics.

A similar choice operates in the poetics of authors such as Rolando Sánchez Mejías or Carlos A. Aguilera, as we will see in the following sec-

tions. A larger group of authors, however, crafted a revolutionary reformist project. This idea crystallized as a group called the Proyecto Paideia, whose disintegration in turn triggered the creation of the Proyecto Diáspora(s). The writing of the latter reflected and condemned the regime's biopolitical power, as we saw in chapter 3. It also developed a poetics of violence in reaction to the revolutionary tropes of violence and sacrifice. But Diáspora(s) does not cultivate a poetics aiming at rhetorically liberating society from the destructive forces that govern history. Diáspora(s)'s goal is not to support a state practice of terror that demands heroic sacrifices to maintain the law. But the group's poetic is not an attack on state power, either; nor is it a submission to it. At the representative level, violence can also work as an ironic rhetorical operation that reveals the struggle between the fallen ego-ideal and the ideal ego.

Humanism and Paideia

THE ORIGINS OF PAIDEIA

Proyecto Paideia, which I briefly described in chapter 2, was one of the eighties cultural projects that showed how the children of the revolution turned against their revolutionary progenitors. This period was defined by a shift in the cultural dynamics between intellectuals and the state. For the first time, the older generations were no longer interpellated by cultural processes. Younger generations took up the baton and became the crusaders of cultural opposition. The belief that processes similar to perestroika and glasnost could occur on the island led intellectuals to hope for changes in the cultural arena. Inspired by this sense of hope, a large group of intellectuals created Paideia, a project for cultural reform that, while remaining loyal to the revolution's emancipatory project, asked for more intellectual independence. Inspired by the Gramscian vision of the intellectual's active political role, these intellectuals proposed more involvement in cultural decision making and more ideological independence. How did Paideia come together as a group?² It is important to note that information about this group is scarce, and the activities of its members are mostly undocumented. The main source of information comes from a special issue about Paideia edited by Los Angeles-based Cuban poet Néstor Díaz de Villegas for *Cubista* online magazine. The issue includes critical accounts by the authors themselves, as well as scanned copies of some of the group's documents and letters. In his book *Proyectos poéticos en Cuba 1959–2000. Algunos cambios formales y temáticos* (*Cuban Poetic Projects 1959–2000: Some Formal and Thematic Changes*), Spanish scholar Jorge Cabezas Miranda has done a thorough and systematic work by processing all these documents,

and including some additional interviews with the writers. In what follows, I have tried to reconstruct the evanescent history of a group whose intellectual and political aspirations, partly censored, partly unrecorded, were disavowed by some of its members. This disavowal, more than any other active form of historical erasure, is the main reason for the group's having fallen into undeserved oblivion.³

The project, first called Grupo Espirajira, was first conceived in 1986, when it was immediately opposed by cultural officials in charge of neutralizing intellectual autonomy. The earliest document of the group is "Paideia: Proyecto General de Acción Cultural," a December 1988 unsigned manifesto expressing the desire to create an interdisciplinary cultural program with two different lines of inquiry: artistic creation and theoretical investigation.

Paideia se define como Proyecto General de Acción Cultural dirigido al uso de las Instituciones sobre la base de un programa único e integrado. Dicho programa establece dos direcciones básicas de trabajo, orientadas a la creación artística (literaria, plástica, cinematográfica) y a la investigación teórica (estética, semiótica, científicoliteraria y cinematográfica) y organizadas, respectivamente en dos Talleres: Poesis y Logos.

[Paideia is defined as a General Project of Cultural Action and is based on a unique and integrated program for the Institutions. The program establishes two basic working areas, organized in two separate workshops: one directed toward the artistic creation (literary, artistic, cinematographic), the other toward theoretical research (aesthetic, semiotic, scientific and literary, and cinematographic). Each workshop is to be respectively called Poesis and Logos.] (Proyecto Paideia 1988)

Paideia's goal was to obtain an institutional space to organize debates, workshops, and a series of lectures, which would end up being the Centro Cultural Alejo Carpentier.⁴ According to Fowler, it all began at Reina María Rodríguez's house with an informal meeting of young writers including Rolando Prats Páez, Ernesto Hernández Busto, Radamés Molina, Fowler himself, and Rodríguez (Fowler 2008). Before this, Rodríguez and Prats had organized a project with the same name, Paideia, but a very different focus, a creative and literary emphasis rather than the later project's stress on political and cultural reform (Real Arcia 2011). The idea for the first project was to create a television series about the lives and works of young Cuban artists. The purpose was to desacralize the intellectual ivy tower, to

which end the group filmed television documentaries that were subsequently lost.

The definitive Paideia project began its cultural activities on February 16, 1989, at the Centro Cultural Alejo Carpentier. Nine days later, Rodríguez and Prats wrote "¿Qué es el Proyecto Paideia?" ("What Is the Paideia Project?"), a mission statement of their activities at the Carpentier.⁵ There is actually an original formulation of the project dating from the month of December 1988, and the aforementioned version from 1989, goes through several revisions until the fifth version of October 19, 1989, entitled "Paideia V. Proyecto de promoción, crítica e investigación de la cultura" ("Paideia V. Critical, Promotional and Research Projects of Culture") (Proyecto Paideia 1989a).⁶ It is important to note that Paideia's cultural project always defined itself as a socialist program. As we will see, however, Paideia's socialism veered away from the Cuban hegemonic ideology. From February through July 1989, Paideia organized multiple conferences at the Carpentier, where its members discovered European post-Marxism. For example, they were introduced to the work of Louis Althusser, and several philosophers and historians, including Rafael Rojas and Emilio Ichikawa Morín, lectured about structuralism and Marxism. According to Pedro Marqués de Armas, the meetings were infiltrated early on by members of the Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (UJC) as well as by hardliners from Asociación Hermanos Saíz (AHS). The tension rose even more when Paideia members found out that the center had closed its doors to them. In July 1989 Paideia held its last "taller" at the Carpentier. The closure of the center to Paideia's activities prompted the August 4 meeting at the Carpentier, where the organizers read a version of the Paideia project. A few months later, on October 19, and as a result of the outcome of that meeting, they would draft "Paideia V" (Proyecto Paideia 1989c). It is important to note that the document created a big controversy among the artists present at the meeting, especially due to the introduction's provocative tone. As a result, the document was approved by consensus without the introduction, which was, among other things, a denunciation of cultural censorship. This was not the only case of censorship, as the state at that time was also silencing visual artists with art exhibit closures, including that of the September 1988 Castillo de la Fuerza exhibition. The introduction establishes the ideological position of the signatories of Paideia in nine different points. It first calls for an analysis of the revolutionary cultural policies with an understanding that the revolution should be taken as a process in constant evolution. The second point demands that the state recognize the organic role of intellectuals, and the third and fourth points disagree with the identification between political power and intellectuals,

and the latter with the people. In the following point, the introduction calls for a notion of culture understood in its multiplicity. The final points criticize the reductive use of the popular, the ideological fiction of the New Man, and the teleological understanding of history. Finally, the document also asks for a dialectical understanding of the relationship between art and ideology. With the help of Fowler, by then vice president of the AHS, the Paideia leaders were able to discuss their project again with cultural officials, including Hart.

These discussions, unfortunately, became acrimonious, and the effort failed to win the support of many members of the AHS. Cultural officials regretted their initial approval of the project, and Paideia did not even win the support of the UJC, whose leaders did not agree with the letter. Unable to do anything to convince either of the sides to change its views, Fowler left the AHS and Paideia. He also disagreed with the group's treatment of members with different opinions. Antonio José Ponte, for instance, was ostracized for not agreeing with Paideia's cultural tenets (Fowler 2008). Following Raúl Castro's "Llamamiento al IV Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba," the group wrote the "Tesis de Mayo," an undated document that Jorge Cabezas sees as a response to that political event, and which was drafted between March and May (Cabezas 2012, 236).⁷ According to Cabezas, in the "Tesis" members of the group "invoke the distinctive signs of their generation, to which different young artists of the period subscribe, including humanism, the ethics of dialogue, pluralism, the democratization of society, and the revitalization of culture" (ibid.). Paideia became increasingly political until in 1991 it renamed itself Tercera Opción (Third Option), led by Prats, César Mora, and Omar Pérez. In a new declaration in 1992, Prats insisted that this group had never been a political party but was rather "an independent movement of opinion with socialist roots"⁸ (Prats 1992).

The rest of the group dissolved in 1992 as pressures against it increased. The government was not intent on giving intellectuals any autonomy. After Paideia's disintegration, former members decided to move the debates from the public arena into their private homes, where participants mostly studied and discussed philosophy. Rodríguez recounts how the group began meeting regularly in the Almendares Park offices of the magazine *El Caimán Barbudo* (*The Bearded Alligator*) until it closed in the late eighties (Real Arcia 2011).⁹ They also gathered at the house of Ernesto Hernández Busto to discuss critical theory and philosophy and organize workshops that ranged from pre-Socratic philosophy to poststructuralism. Some examples were Marqués de Armas's lecture on the Generation of 1927 and Rojas's talk on José Ortega y Gasset. Hernández Busto, de la Nuez, Rojas, and many others left the country, leaving only a few members on the island (among them Atilio Caballero, Abelardo Mena, Ponte, Fowler, and Rodríguez).

PAIDEIA: A PROGRAM FOR CULTURAL POLITICS.

Although Paideia did not identify with Guevara's "New Man," they fought to advance a revolutionary cultural program. Yet at the same time, and probably influenced by the market reforms of the early eighties, postmodernism found its way onto the island. During the second half of the eighties, Alberto Garrandés recalls, European works made their way into these writers' hands one way or the other. They read and discussed works ranging on poststructuralism and post-Marxism, as well as by European authors who had barely circulated on the island (such as Paul Valéry, Jean Genet, Franz Kafka, and Fernando Pessoa).

Disappointed by the literary and ideological narrowness of the state cultural institutions that had formed them, the members of Paideia wanted to create their own cultural space, semiautonomous from the state, for intellectual exchange and creation. Their program, however, also shared some characteristics with Guevarian precepts, especially the common goal to unite intellectual praxis and theory. Like the New Man, Paideia intellectuals were "art soldiers." The revolution had taught them to consider culture as a key element for the ideological formation of citizens, and they used the same principle to propose a reform of the system that would open the public sphere: "Paideia es un proyecto abierto a la colaboración y participación activa de todas aquellas personas e instituciones de la cultura que hagan suyos su programa y sus propósitos [Paideia is a project open to the collaboration and active participation of all people and cultural institutions that subscribe to its program and proposals] (Proyecto Paideia 1989a.) Although they questioned the Guevarian understanding of the New Man, their premises were as melancholic as Guevara's had been. They no longer believed in the sixties differentiation between "bourgeois" culture and a materialist understanding of culture. But for them culture remained organically bound to the idea of *civitas*: "Convicción de que nuestro sistema educacional se engaña a sí mismo si sustituye al hombre real por la ficción ideológica del 'hombre nuevo,' . . . se impone progresivamente otro método de creación intelectual, *ontológico*, el cual basa su criterio dominante en el *ser* de la cultura, en contradicción con el *deber ser*. . . . La época demostrativa de la cultura cubana ha caducado. Y de la caducidad al carácter conservador sólo media la conciencia de un fin inminente [The conviction that our educational system is fooling itself if it replaces the real man [*hombre real*] with the ideological fiction of the 'New Man,' . . . another method of intellectual creation is progressively establishing itself, an ontological one that bases its dominant criterion in what culturally *is*, instead of what it *should be*. . . . The demonstrative era of Cuban culture is passed. And between its passing and conservatism the only mediator is the awareness of an imminent end]" (Proyecto Paideia 1989b).¹⁰ Culture

was still understood as a political and transformative praxis: "Contribuir a superar el concepto de la cultura y, en particular, de la actividad estética, como 'actividad de tiempo libre' . . . su penetración más orgánica en la actividad práctico-transformadora, como componente esencial de la práctica y no como dimensión lúd[i]c[r]a de la misma [To contribute to the concept of culture and, in particular, of aesthetic activity, as a 'free-time activity' . . . its more organic penetration into practice-transformative activity, as an essential component of practice and not as a ludicrous dimension of the latter]" (Proyecto Paideia 1989b).

Official cultural policies were still based on Fidel Castro's understanding of revolutionary art that he had discussed in his 1961 "Address to Intellectuals." Indeed, culture minister Armando Hart had just defended Castro's ideas during the UNEAC congress of 1988, the same year that Paideia emerged as a group:

Primero: hemos venido aplicando, de una manera consecuente, los principios enunciados en "Palabras a los intelectuales." Desde luego, no nos debemos llamar a engaño, hay que continuar profundizando en ello. Segundo: el método de masas, presente en la sustancia del pensamiento de Fidel, se promovió ampliamente, lo cual facilitó la acción cultural de las provincias y municipios de una forma y magnitud tales que, de hecho, se convirtió en un elemento innovador de enorme repercusión para el presente y el futuro.

[First, we have been applying, in a consistent manner, the principles articulated in "Address to Intellectuals." Of course, we should not deceive ourselves, we must continue developing this. Second, the method of the masses, substantially present in Fidel's thought, was widely promoted, thus facilitating the cultural action of the provinces and cities in such a way and to such a degree that, in fact, it has become an innovating element with enormous repercussions for the present and the future.] (Hart Dávalos 1988, 1-2)¹¹

Paideia was the first intellectual group to openly question the cultural politics in place since the early years of the revolution: "Inconformidad con el margen real de acción política permitido a artistas e intelectuales dentro de los límites de lo que se considera 'revolucionario' [Disagreement with the real room for political action granted to artists and intellectuals within the scope of what is considered 'revolutionary']" (Proyecto Paideia 1989b). The group also rejected the socialist understanding of "art for the masses": "Rechazo al uso reduccionista, paternalista y demagógico del concepto y de

la imagen del 'pueblo' y sus aplicaciones al campo de la cultura ('arte para el pueblo,' 'arte elitista,' 'gusto popular,' 'sensibilidad popular,' etc.) [Rejection of the reductionist, paternalist, and demagogic use of the concept and image of the 'people' and its applications in the field of culture ('art for the people,' 'elite art,' 'popular taste,' 'popular sensibility,' etc.)]" (ibid.). For these intellectuals, culture was a praxis of emancipation. In other words, the project's Gramscian mission was to redefine the ties between intellectuals and the state in a way that restored intellectuals' autonomy. Given the important mediation between the state and cultural institutions in Cuba, this became a fundamental goal of the group. The project clearly sought to reform institutional cultural spaces from within.

HUMANISM AND LITERATURE AS PRAXIS IN PROYECTO PAIDEIA

As I have noted, Paideia's project was inspired by poststructuralism, but, paradoxically, it was also a modernist project. For example, the concept of *paideia* (education of the ideal citizen) comes directly from Greco-Roman humanism, in which man's virtue came from education. As in revolutionary rhetoric, man becomes ethical through education and culture. As Prats states in his "Palabras de inauguración del Proyecto Paideia," this subject stands in opposition to the uncivilized, who can only become citizens through education:

La raza de Sócrates y de Protágoras, de Heráclito y de Parménides, de Platón y [de] Plotino—síntesis inicial y no célula pura del cuerpo que anhelamos—nos ha legado[,] en ese nombre, a la vez un proyecto y una clave. Proyecto porque ninguna sociedad de clases ha trascendido la división de la cultura, ninguna sociedad ha superado el viejo desgarramiento entre el púlpito y la plaza. Clave porque sólo en la unidad de la cultura podrá el hombre proyectar la figura y su imagen, la profecía y la pregunta sobre un plano indiviso, hecho de continuas comuniones.

[The race of Socrates and Protagoras, of Heraclitus and Parmenides, of Plato and Plotinus—an initial synthesis and not a pure cell of the body to which we aspire—has come down to us[,] with this name, as both a project and a key. A project because no society of classes has transcended the division of culture, no society has overcome the old conflict between the pulpit and the public square. A key because only through the unity of culture can man project the figure and its image, prophecy and the question of an indivisible plan, made up of continual communions.] (Prats n.d.)

Like revolutionary generations from the sixties and seventies, members of the Paideia also focused on the dialectics between culture and politics. They both asked how to create an intellectual project that could integrate culture and politics and sought a pedagogy. Unlike socialist realist critics from the sixties, they were no longer preoccupied by form. Yet, like those critics, they believed in the emancipatory role of culture. In addition, the three generations also followed the Marxian principle that understands work or culture (i.e., the transformation of nature) as an act unveiling the objective conditions of existence that eventually lead mankind to disalienation and freedom: "haciendo suya la definición marxista de la libertad como comprensión de las necesidades objetivas [making their own the Marxist definition of freedom as the understanding of objective necessities]" (Proyecto Paideia 1989a). Whereas socialist realism is more focused on economic conditions, the Paideia underscores in all its documents the humanist nature of its project. It also clarifies that its members do not have an anthropological idea of humanism. Indeed, in a recent essay about the group, Ernesto Hernández Busto points out their affinity with Martin Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism." Given the obvious Heideggerian criticism of Marxian humanism, and hence the possible contradictions in Paideia's understanding of it, I find it necessary to offer further insight into this issue.

Heidegger argues that we need to liberate ourselves from the "technical" understanding of thinking. This epistemological model comes from Plato's and Aristotle's conception of thinking as a "process of deliberation in service to doing and making" (Heidegger 1988, 240). Since thinking is always a process in the service of praxis, this means that thinking is merely theoretical. For Heidegger this model is part of the "technical" interpretation of thinking. The implication is that thinking for itself is not "practical" but only "theoretical." This is why thinking has always had to justify itself before the sciences. In this regard, Paideia's understanding of culture is not based on the Platonic or Aristotelian understanding of thinking. That is, for Paideia members the sciences and poesis should not be antithetical, and, therefore, thinking is not a process in service of praxis: "Situémonos para ello en una perspectiva gnoseológica-discursiva que tienda a trascender las antinomias, tanto epistemológicas como narrativas . . . entre el llamado pensamiento científico, teórico y sistemático, cerrado a su circunstancia formativa, por un lado, y el denominado pensamiento poético, unitivo y abierto, por el otro [We thus situate ourselves in a gnoseological-discursive perspective that tends to transcend antinomies, whether epistemological or narrative . . . between so-called scientific thought (theoretical and systematic, locked in its formative circumstance), on the one hand, and what is termed poetic thought (unifying and open), on the other]" (Proyecto Paideia 1989b). In other words, they understand thinking as a process involving and

accomplishing praxis and poesis simultaneously. But their theories differ from Heidegger's concerning ethics. As we know, Heidegger's ontological project consists of exposing the metaphysical nature of the question about being in the traditional philosophy originating from the Greco-Roman tradition. A non-metaphysical understanding of being is also non-teleological, and thus one that has no effect or result: "Thinking does not become action only because some effect issues from it or because it is applied. Thinking acts insofar as it thinks" (Heidegger 1988, 217). In other words, thinking about being should not be done with a goal in mind. This is why being cannot be considered from an ethical or ontological point of view: "The thinking that inquires into the truth of Being and so defines the human being's essential abode from being and toward being is neither ethics nor ontology" (ibid., 271). Thinking about being does not produce anything and does not create any action. It only pauses to let being unfold. In this regard, it is not causally related to praxis:

But now in what relation does the thinking of being stand to theoretical and practical comportment? It exceeds all contemplation because it cares for the light in which a seeing, as *theoria*, can first live and move. Thinking attends to the clearing of being in that it puts its saying of being into language as the home of *eksistence*. Thus thinking is a deed. But a deed that also surpasses all *praxis*. Thinking permeates action and production, not through the grandeur of its achievement and not as a consequence of its effect, but through the humbleness of its inconsequential accomplishment. (Heidegger 1988, 274)

In contrast, the members of the Paideia argue for an ethical humanism: "Un humanismo ético, aunque no antropologizante; polémico con respecto a su tradición, pero vigilante de sus enlaces históricos y sus retos sociales ante la praxis que lo circunda y lo determina y sobre la cual se quiere proyectar; práctico sin ser pragmático; centrado en el hombre histórico, pero gravitando desde su irreductible sustancia hacia la tenaz y renovable utopía de la integración y la libertad necesaria [A humanizing but not anthropologizing ethics; polemical with respect to its tradition but vigilant in its historical connections and its social challenges before the praxis that surrounds and determines it and onto which it wishes to project itself; practical without being pragmatic; centered in historical man but gravitating from his irreducible substance toward the tenacious and renewable utopia of integration and necessary freedom]" (Proyecto Paideia 1989b). Although they reject the anthropological interpretation of ethics, they still have a metaphysical

understanding of it. Like Heidegger, they favor displacing the idea of a foundational Cartesian subject. Against Heidegger, their understanding of thinking is still subordinated to a goal. Notwithstanding the metaphysical nature of their manifestoes, they established the conditions of possibility for an anti-metaphysical intellectual space, as I will show in the following paragraphs.

PAIDEIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Jorge Ferrer, one of the group's former members, argues in a recent article that the Paideia was politically insignificant. According to him, their project was too ambitious and had no impact on Cuban politics. What he does not realize, however, is that he is measuring the project's impact with the same utopian yardstick that he criticizes: "Todo proyecto colectivo . . . sólo consigue rebasar los vastos y nutridos dominios de la insignificancia, si su objetivo se cumple, si concita suficientes voluntades como para que se lo tenga por masivo, o si la fuerza a la que se opone lo aplasta con suficiente saña, como para que perviva en la memoria, siquiera como testimonio de un martirio [Any collective project . . . only succeeds in transcending the vast and well-nourished domains of the insignificant if its objective is achieved, if it brings together sufficient efforts so that it is perceived as massive, or if the force it opposes obliterates it with sufficient fury that it lives on in memory as testimony to a martyrdom]" (Ferrer 2006). Paideia was based on an emancipatory political project, and in that regard its understanding of culture was no different from that of official cultural institutions. Paradoxically, however, it succeeded in displacing its own narrative. I refer specifically to its breaking ground as a civil society movement of sorts. The years that immediately followed the fall of the Berlin Wall saw a renaissance in civil society discourse, especially in the social sciences. Indeed, Paideia's theoretical tenets were much more orthodox and in line with official policies than its real political interventions. The debates introduce the conditions of possibility to think about civil society in antihumanist terms. What is more, the project's failure to establish a semiofficial cultural movement is symptomatic of the limits of political humanism. In this regard, it affirmed itself as an epistemological vanguard. This also proved that the government was right to consider it as a "political party" of sorts, which is something that always remains ambiguous in recent characterizations of the group by former members. For example, Rafael Rojas argues that "Paideia no fue un movimiento o un grupo, sino un proyecto y un espacio de sociabilidad intelectual. Una propuesta, como decíamos, de política cultural autónoma, diseñada por un puñado de escritores y compartida, durante el brevísimo tiempo que duró, por la mayoría de la comunidad artística e intelectual de

La Habana, en la segunda mitad de los 80" [Paideia was not a movement or a group but a project and a space of intellectual sociability. A proposal, as we put it, for autonomous cultural politics, conceived by a handful of writers and shared, during its very brief lifespan, by most of Havana's artistic and intellectual community in the second half of the 1980s]" (Rojas 2006b). But what is the difference between these designations? Unlike Rojas, I think that the Paideia was both a group and an intellectual space, and that although it failed as a group, it successfully established an intellectual space. I believe that it is very important to distinguish the Paideia as a group, for two reasons: first, because this indicates its political character and, second, because this also acknowledges its key role in creating a civil society. In this regard, it is important to stress the political connotation of the movement, because this is precisely what established it as the first *conatum* of civil society.

In the early nineties, as a result of the partial entrance of capital into the Cuban economy and the establishment of foreign NGOs on the island, a theoretical movement emerged based on the belief that Cuban civil society was transforming or at least taking form. Scholars such as Hugo Azcuy, for instance, argued that the state's loss of economic power caused a recuperation of an autonomous social space (Azcuy 1995, 160). Many of these scholars, however, conceived of civil society in a Hegelian fashion as the mercantile society of needs. None of them conceived of civil movements as Gramscian enclaves of resistance that could eventually hegemonize a new historical bloc. In Gramscian terms, civil society is interpreted as the space where new social forces are generated: "We are still on the terrain of the identification of State and government—an identification which is precisely a representation of the economic-corporate form, in other words of the confusion between civil society and political society" (Gramsci 1971, 262). Yet, what made the Paideia even more iconoclastic was that the intellectual space it enabled called into question the same humanist principles that the group brandished, a space also present in the Gramscian concept of civil society that I have just outlined. In other words, the group both enabled the emergence of a civil movement that posited itself as a new hegemonic bloc and, simultaneously, was able to overturn its political nature with an even stronger intellectual agenda. That is, the Paideia was never a new hegemonic bloc, because the intellectual space it opened debunked the Paideia's status as a "group" fighting to establish a political praxis. The Paideia's understanding of "intellectual thinking" ceased being subordinated to a goal, as it was in the group's theoretical manifestos.

Paideia disintegrated under pressure from what Althusser would term ideological and repressive state apparatuses. The political disenchantment and impotence contributed to the creation of the Proyecto Diáspora(s),

and especially to the idea of writing a samizdat, as I showed in chapter 2. Irony was one of the ethical responses triggered by the group's political disempowerment and disillusionment.

Irony in the Proyecto Diáspora(s)

CHOTEO, IRONY AS PATHOS, AND BUFFO

The work of Virgelio Piñera and José Lezama Lima, both authors ostracized by the regime during the seventies, gripped the attention of the younger generation of eighties intellectuals. This was especially true for members of the Diáspora(s), for whom Piñera became an intellectual icon. It would not be excessive to say that Piñera was one of the strongest voices in *Diáspora(s)*. The presence of his voice was there, even when his writing was not. Its tone and texture, its pitch and gravitas characteristic of his caustic and ironic oeuvre, left an imprint on the Diáspora(s)'s work. Piñera was the only Origenista to whom *Diáspora(s)* devoted a dossier. Aguilera indicates that the journal particularly emphasized Piñera's playful and ironic nature, which in terms of national *costumbrismo* is also what Jorge Mañach called *choteo*:

De todos los Virgilio que conozco (el narrador, el que sorbía té por las tardes, el que cuchicheaba con Lezama) prefiero el que sentía asco. No hacía una persona o una comida, movimiento común a que suele reducirse el asco; sino el burlón, el tragaespaldas de feria, el personajito escatológico. . . . En este sentido, sus cartas también. . . . Cartas lúdicas, pedigüñas, gozadoras; que caricaturizan lo que están observando y *realifican* la ficción que perversamente se genera (crea) en ellas. Como si después de los cuentos, el teatro, los poemas . . . no quedara otra opción que la risita constante, eso que Gombrowicz llamaba el "sabroso culipandeo."

[Of all the Virgilio I know (the narrator, the one who sipped tea in the afternoons, the one who whispered with Lezama), I prefer the disgusted one. Not with respect to a person or a kind of food, as disgust is commonly reduced to, but rather the mocker, the county fair sword swallower, the scatological character. . . . In this sense, his letters as well. . . . Playful, demanding letters that take pleasure in life, that characterize what they observe and *realify* the fiction perversely generated (created) in them. As if after the stories, the plays, the poems . . . no other choice remains but the constant snicker, what Gombrowicz called "the tasteful dodge (*el sabroso culipandeo*).] (Aguilera 1999a, 26)

In other words, both the Diáspora(s)'s oeuvre and Piñera's belong to a long tradition of works that have cultivated the practice of *choteo* as a unique Cuban trait defining national identity. The difference, however, is that in the Diáspora(s) *choteo* is represented not as a national characteristic.¹² One can see various aspects of *choteo* at play in the Diáspora(s), but also many differences that distance the project's approach from that tradition and bring it closer to Piñera's dry and scathing humor. Mañach defines *choteo* as "tirar todo a relajo," a personality trait consisting in not taking anything seriously and laughing at any type of situation with a slightly teasing attitude (Mañach 1999, 50.) This is in general the journal's prevalent tone on most matters, but Mañach does not consider *choteo* intellectual or witty; for him it is a sincere, lightweight joke (*ibid.*, 51.) Conversely, irony, especially the type we find in *Diáspora(s)*, is "más o menos, una forma de simulación, de doblez, puesto que consiste en decir lo contrario de lo que se siente o se piensa. Pero el cubano es tan sincero—sincero hasta cuando miente, cosa que hace sin escrúpulos—que le repugna toda forma irónica de impugnación. Prefiere el choteo, que es la mofa franca, desplegada, nada aguda generalmente, como que no tiene hechura de dardo, sino más bien de polvillo de molida guasa, que se arroja a la cara de la víctima [more or less a kind of simulation, of doublespeak, since it consists of saying the opposite of what one feels or thinks. But Cubans are so sincere—sincere even when they lie, which they do without scruple—that they hate any ironic form of contestation. They prefer the *choteo*, which is a forthright jibe, openly displayed, generally nothing pointed like a dart but more like the powder of a ground-up ribbing (*molida guasa*) that is tossed in the victim's face]" (*ibid.*, 78). That is, a witty simulation, a Brechtian estrangement, as Rito Ramón Aroche suggests in his review of Lidzie Alviza's work (*Diáspora(s)* 7/8: 94). But *choteo* and irony also have commonalities, in that both can be described as Mañach does the former: "El *choteo* es un prurito de independencia que se exterioriza en una burla de todas formas no imperativa de autoridad [*Choteo* is an itching for independence that manifests in mockery of any nonimperative form of authority]" (Mañach 1999, 62). In other words, both irony and *choteo* indicate a lack of respect for authority and a desire to be above hegemonic power, or at least distinct from it. This irreverent disdain is precisely what *Diáspora(s)*'s ironic tone reveals, and it materializes as a scornful representation of cultural and political state power. This aspect of irony is also a legacy of Piñera. His poem "Lápidas [Tombstones]," for example, shows this ironic irreverence toward the most authoritarian and arbitrary power of all: death.¹³

¿A qué no me llamas por mi nombre?
Son inútiles tus burlas y tus ultrajes.
Ni siquiera llamarme viejo

y que la muerte me ronda.
 De nada vale decirme "carcamal," "baboso,"
 "reblandecido," "caquético" . . .
 Nada me ofendería, nada,
 aunque me llamaras "esqueleto rumbero"
 mi dignidad quedaría a salvo.
 Pero si llegas a llamarme por mi nombre,
 si llegaras a decirme Virgilio Piñera,
 entonces me ofendería
 porque esas lápidas pesan demasiado.¹⁴ (Piñera 1999, 28)

In "Lápidas" the poetic voice playfully personifies death and provokes it in an ironic fashion: "¿A qué no me llamas por mi nombre?" The irreverent tone of the question indicates fearlessness and a willingness to confront the ineluctability of death. Is there any ground to challenge death? By playing with the double meaning of *llamar* ("to call" and "to name"), the poem is pointing to the proximity between life and death, and to a new understanding of the latter. This poem, written in 1971, clearly alludes to Piñera's intellectual persona and to the ostracism that he suffered during the last decade of his life. After having been an early and enthusiastic supporter of the revolution, Piñera grew increasingly uncomfortable with the stifling cultural policies that took place from 1961 onward and fell into disgrace as a consequence of his muffled critiques.¹⁵ Barred from intellectual public life and publishing, Piñera became invisible well before he died. He was like the specter-like figure of his poem who is unafraid of death because, while physically present, he is already gone. This death in life has rendered death more familiar to him and less fearsome: "Son inútiles tus burlas y tus ultrajes / Ni siquiera llamarme viejo / y que la muerte me ronda." But what could be a tragic truth is actually expressed with a playful tone, whose irony is conveyed with the double meaning of "llamar."

The crux of the poem resides in that subtle ambiguity by which in the end death, like the gravestone to which the poem refers, renames us, as it happens, it individualizes us as when we are named (given a name) at birth. This name that we are given at birth symbolizes a new life, a full life, our presence and visibility in the world. The tombstone, in contrast, is what memorializes our life. It is the tribute to our memory and the way to acknowledge the importance of our (now former) existence. In the poem, the gravestone signals or produces an injunction to memorialize the poet's life: "Pero si llegas a llamarme por mi nombre, / si llegaras a decirme Virgilio Piñera, / entonces me ofendería." But it is this type of injunction to celebrate a life after death that the poet fears the most. It is this "renaming" that the poet rejects, "porque esas lápidas pesan demasiado." That is, he rejects the tribute to his memory as a writer, because it goes against his sense of

ownership of his experiences. When he was alive he was made invisible by others, but no one could take away his experience of life and the fact that he was actually present, at least to himself: "aunque me llamaras esqueleto rumbero' / mi dignidad quedaría a salvo." Once he is gone, however, he will only be alive through the memories that others fashion of him. What he fears is not that death is calling him but that it will rename him through memory by recreating his persona and the legacy of his thought.

Carlos A. Aguilera's work comes from the same tradition of political irreverence, but poems such as "Mao," for example, introduce us to a much more complex notion of irony. "Mao" recounts the extermination of sparrows during the 1958 Chinese Great Leap Forward. Sparrows were known for eating stocked grain, so the state involved Chinese citizens in their massive killing. The goal was to ensure a high agricultural productivity that would ultimately result in fewer imports of heavy machinery. This campaign turned out to be one of the most tragic events of the Maoist period, because the lack of sparrows brought with it a plague of locusts that caused the Great Famine and the deaths of sixteen to thirty million people. Because the campaign resulted in the opposite of what it was meant to achieve, its representation becomes ironic in Aguilera's poem.

enemigo radical de / y enemigo radical hasta
 que destruye el campo: "la economía burocrática del arroz"
 y destroza el campo: "la economía burocrática de la ideología"
 con sus paticas un-2-tres
 (huecashuecasbarruecas)
 de todo maosentido
 como señaló (o corrigió) históricamente el kamarada Mao
 en su intento de hacer pensar por enésima vez al pueblo:
 "esa masa estúpida
 que se estructura
 bajo el concepto fofo
 de pueblo"
 que nunca comprenderá a la maodemocratik en su movimiento
 contra el gorrión
 que se muta en
 vientreamarillo
 ni a la maodemocratik en su intento (casi totalitario) de
 no pensar a ese
 gorrión
 vientreamarillo.¹⁶ (Aguilera 1997, 22)

As a *mise en abyme*, "Mao" is actually an irony about an irony. Not only is it a poem about a historical event, it is also a reflection about irony itself. Line after line, the poem represents factual and antithetical events. For

example, there is a description of the sparrow massacre in a matter-of-fact form whose aim is to create a suspension of disbelief. But this actually is not what is intended, because immediately after that statement, the poem reveals its falsity by indicating that ideology, like economics, is a matter not of beliefs but strategic planning. The government claims that sparrows eat away the crops and their revenues, but it is actually a planned economy and a stale ideology that does this. The sparrow is a fragile bird and not a menace to the economy. It is fragile, yet "barrueco," original, different, unlike Mao's ideology. Mao despises the masses but uses them. His system calls itself a democracy when it is not one. In the following lines, the poem tackles the question of violence:

o repito ch'ing ming
 donde el concepto *violencia* se anula ante el concepto *sentido*
 (época de la cajita
 china)
 y donde el concepto *violencia* ya no debe ser pensado sino
 a partir de "lo
 real" del concepto
unsolosentido (como
 aclaró muy a tiempo
 el presidente Mao y
 como muy a tiempo
 dijo: "si un obrero
 marcha con extensidad:
 elimínenlo / si un
 obrero marcha con *intensidad*: rostros
 sudorosos con 1 chancro
 de sentido")¹⁷ (ibid., 23)

The line "o repito ch'in ming" refers to the April 5 Movement of 1976, when the state violently suppressed demonstrations in Tiananmen Square against totalitarian measures. These protests were held during the Ch'in Ming, a traditional Chinese festival honoring the dead. In totalitarian regimes, state power is stratified and articulated in the form of a Chinese box: "y donde el concepto *violencia* se anula ante el concepto *sentido* / (época de la cajita china.)" Rule is conducted through the establishment of a strong ideology that legitimizes power. Here ideology means reason and the supersession of violence, but that ideology is actually implemented through violence hidden under the concept of reason, as though each were a small box inside of a larger one. Reason in this regard is violence, not a means to a cause but rather the cause itself: "y donde el concepto *violencia* ya no

debe ser pensado sino / a partir de 'lo / real' del concepto / *unsolosentido*." Ironically, however, this type of thinking ("*unsolosentido*") is intensive, instead of extensive. If intensive thinking, in Deleuzian terminology, is the force that fuels the production of difference, it should not be equated to "*unsolosentido*" as the poem does: "si un obrero / marcha con extensidad: / elimínenlo / si un / obrero marcha con *intensidad*: rostros / sudorosos con 1 chancro / de sentido)." "*Maodemocratik*" is actually only the regime of one ideology, and thus one direction (*sentido*: one direction, one meaning, *ex* (Latin): outside, *tendere* (Latin): *estirar*): "y subrayando con una metáfora la *nofisura* que debe existir / entre *maodemocratik* / y *sentido*."¹⁸ That is, a worker who wants to deviate from the "un *sentido*" must be killed; he cannot veer off the path. On the contrary, if he remains on the path (according to state ideology), his process of production is intensive and could potentially create a system of differences. The irony of the poem consists in reversing this process. Instead of creating a system of differences, the worker produces a contagious ulcer (*chancro*) of meaning, that is, a foreign body that corrodes it from the inside ("1 chancro / de sentido"). "*Maodemocratik*" is an oxymoron; it creates the opposite of what it means. There is a fissure between tradition and lack of sense, that is, only one ideology can make the tradition, can make history, the rest is outside history:

"subrayando con una metáfora la *nofisura* que debe existir
 entre *maodemocratik*
 y *sentido*
 y subrayando con la misma metáfora la *fisura* que existe
 entre tradición y
nosentido: generador
 de *violencia* y
aorden / generador de
nohistoria y "saloncitos
 literarios con escritores
sinsentido"¹⁹ (ibid.)

This fissure generates violence and chaos, which at the same time generates "*sinsentido*" writers with no meaning and no trajectory. Aguilera evokes two senses of "un *sentido*" ("one meaning" and "one way") and plays with the word "*violencia*." According to the logic of the Chinese state, there is violence when there are different meanings, ways, or ideologies: "(si un obrero marcha con extensidad: / elimínenlo." That is, a worker who does not follow the regime's path must be exterminated, like the sparrow that would dare fly off freely. Yet, the real violence is actually committed by the state, which only permits its citizens to think in one way, thus imposing one

tradition and immobility. That is, by walking “inward” (toward “the way”), ideology can become contagious, like a venereal disease: “si un / obrero marcha con / intensidad: rostros / sudorosos con 1 chancro / de sentido.” Mao only speaks through metaphors (“subrayando con una metáfora”), and his political discourse is lyrical: “Y sin embargo hoy es famoso por su cerebrito verticalmente / metafísico / y no por aquella discusión *lírik* proletaria entre gorrión.”²⁰ His lyricism is a direct cause of the metaphysical and teleological nature of a political system of thought whose end goal is utopia. In other words, it is lyrical because it is literary, and it is literary because it is mostly articulated through metaphors. This is precisely the aestheticized representation of sixties politics that we studied in chapter 1. The poem thus offers a critique of such discourses and of their metaphorical force that goes so far as to equate violence and reason: “el concepto *violencia* se anula ante el concepto *sentido*.” This explains why a metaphor is actually an irony. What other rhetorical figure could dissemble as well as a metaphor? The poem is therefore a metapoetic critique of metaphors because of their potentially ironic use. Paradoxically, however, the poem itself is an irony of the same irony it is criticizing. In other words, the poem chooses to narrate history through irony. At the end of the poem, Qi the copyist of Mao’s history gets his finger chopped off, because he accuses Mao of manipulating history. This is how Mao “corrects” history:

“y como se vio obligado a corregir el (definitivamente)
civilista Mao al
coger un cuchillo
ponerlo sobre el
dedo más pequeño
del copista Qi
(en un tono casi
dialektik / militar
casi) decirle
“hacia abajo y
hasta el fondo
(crackk . . .)”²¹ (ibid., 24)

By “correcting” history with violence, Mao invents his last metaphor. That is, killing is not an act of violence, it is rather a “correction” of history. As a dissemblance, the art of correction is also an irony. The poem shows that violence is always represented as an irony, as something that it is not. From a metapoetic point of view, the poetic voice also chooses irony to narrate the tragic events that led to the Great Famine. If Mao writes history violently, the poetic voice chooses irony instead. Mao’s discourse is

essentially metaphoric: correction is violence under the guise of reason. The poem clearly attempts, however, to criticize the use of metaphors. We can observe this weariness in the story’s narration. The refusal to “metaphorize” the story is also an effort not to repeat Mao’s violent gesture. The criticism of metaphors is carried out through irony. The result is a poetic ironic form about political irony, and the first sign of this operation is articulated by the peculiar poem’s form, which is actually quite common in Aguilera’s poetry. It consists of form where punctuation marks replace words. Not only do punctuation marks replace words, they are also grammatically incorrect. Several linguistic elements are misused or abused: neologisms, incorrect spelling, improper word use, italics, absence of capitalization, slashes, parentheses, character numbers followed by dashes and written numbers, constant enjambments. This linguistic violence also points to a political violence. That is, it’s the linguistic representation of an ideology whose economic policies are fraught with violent practices. Punctuation marks can only be irreverently used, but their meaning remains the same. That is, punctuation marks have a grammatical function, but they do not have semantic meaning. When used improperly, however, their function does not change (paradigmatic axis), but the syntagmatic level of the sentence does.

For example, in the “con sus paticas un-2-tres / (huecashuecasbarruecas)” we find both puns and a sign: the number 2, which can be read as a pictogram that resembles the bird. The term “paticas” (“patas” or bird legs) echoes the Cubanism “pláticas” (chats), and “barrueco” (an irregular pearl) is the term from whence “barroco” originates. The line is thus ironically referring to the empty and convoluted arguments that justify the policies to exterminate the sparrows. The repetition of “huecas” (“empty”), joined with “barruecas,” produces an alliteration that evokes the bird’s pecking sound. Also, the semantical opposition between “huecas” and “barruecas” produces laughter instead of gravitas. In other words, there is not a *traslatio* of meaning as in metaphor. Instead, the punctuation marks add tone. In most cases, as in this example, this tone is one of buffo. Irony in the poem articulates buffo as a tonality. There is a lot of buffo in Aguilera’s work, and by extension in *Diáspora(s)*. According to Paul de Man, buffo is what Friedrich Schlegel calls the disruption of an illusion. It is, for example, what happens in *commedia dell’arte*. “[Buffo] is the aside to the audience by means of which the illusion is broken” (de Man 1996, 178). In the poem, metaphor as a rhetorical figure is displaced by irony as buffo. That is, in political discourse metaphors become ironic because they dissemble and “hide” violence. Instead, poems are ironic because they show dissemblance through the articulation of pathos, or buffo in Aguilera’s case. Buffo breaks the illusion that metaphor produces.

Of all the works we have seen, *Historias de Olmo* by Rolando Sánchez Mejías may most clearly show what I call the pathos of irony. The book is

a series of Beckettian microfictions about the “absurd” and illogical life of a character named Olmo. Drawing on Piñerian storytelling tradition, the book breaches formal conventions, including those of genre, length, and narrative flow. The reader’s expectations are constantly challenged. The absurdity of the stories lies more in the humor they provoke when explanations, space, or time no longer make sense, as in “Viaje a China,” for example: “Olmo se abrocha los zapatos, se va a China, vuelve de China y se desabrocha los zapatos [Olmo ties his shoes, goes to China, comes back from China and unties his shoes]” (Sánchez Mejías 2001, 82). The comic effect lies in the inconsequentiality and the incongruence of both actions. The actions of tying one’s shoes and traveling to China are made equally important, and there has been an alteration in the cause and effect between them. In *Historias de Olmo*, irony, as we have understood it thus far, is replaced by humor or *choteo*. In other words, what disappears in these stories is the traditional understanding of irony as a trope that posits a *sujet supposé savoir* or an external point of view. Gilles Deleuze argues that in traditional irony an ultimate law always establishes the rule that is broken: “Classical irony acts as the instance which assures the coextensiveness of being and of the individual within the world of representation” (qtd. in Colebrook 2004, 133).

Thus, in irony the subject is always represented as a disempowered victim. Irony reproduces a reality that deviates from an established norm, which is why it always resides in negativity and never empowers the subject. Irony thus conceived comes from the romantic interpretation of irony as an embodiment of the relation between the subject and the Absolute that is later interpreted as negativity in work from Hegel to Kierkegaard. To end the repetition of the negative impact of irony, Deleuze proposes giving up irony and finding an alternative in humor. Thus, for Deleuze irony as a trope must be replaced by something more active and less reactive, and for him that is humor. It is what Deleuze calls superior irony or postirony, a concept that “strives to think all the becomings that lie beyond the subject, all the points of view that lie beyond the grammar and logic of human representation” (Colebrook 2004, 137). Postirony tries to grapple with what we cannot say by delving into the forces that produce subjectivity, rather than with recognition. This is why “humor shows subjects to be collections of sounds, gestures, body parts, and signs devoid of any real sense” (ibid.). In *Historias de Olmo*, humor is also a reversal of irony. There is no subjectivity but rather a perpetual state of becoming as the result of the categorical collapse between bestiality, humanity, and entities.

For Deleuze, change can only occur by cultivating humor rather than irony. Unlike irony, humor does not set a moral standard because it breaks up notions of subjectivity. It no longer presents a point of view looking at us from above. It just disrupts logic, annuls ethics, and deforms bodies and

objects. In this regard it is closer to *choteo* and to Piñera’s notion of the absurd. This is precisely what “Dostoevski, libro primero, VII [Dostoyevsky, Book One, VII]” demonstrates:

A veces Olmo se esconde en las escaleras, saca un cuchillo y desde allí acecha. Que finalmente no mate una mosca no prueba que carezca de talento para matar. Olmo explica que Raskolnikov carecía de talento para matar. Dice: “Era un chapucero. En su obstinación por probar una idea había olvidado las reglas más elementales.” Y añade que sobre todo ignoró la regla principal: ¡Cuidado con mujercitas como Sonia!

[Sometimes Olmo hides in the stairway, takes out a knife, and waits. That he wouldn’t hurt a fly doesn’t prove he lacks talent for killing. Olmo explains that Raskolnikov lacked talent for killing. He says, “He was an amateur. He was so determined to prove an idea that he forgot the most basic rules.” And he adds that above all he didn’t know rule number one: Watch out for little ladies like Sonia!] (Sánchez Mejías 2001, 59)

This story trivializes Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* by erasing its moral content. It measures Raskolnikov’s crime not according to a moral standard but rather according to his “talent” as a murderer. Olmo’s interpretation has a more political twist. His idea, a clear reference to totalitarianism, is that ideas take over praxis, and the latter fails because the idea is no longer adjusted to reality: “He was so determined to prove an idea that he forgot the most basic rules.” But immediately, this more serious interpretation is trivialized with a misogynistic popular statement that Cubanizes the Russian novel’s context: “Watch out for little ladies [*mujercitas*] like Sonia!”

This type of humor takes us back to Mañach’s *choteo*, with which it shares a key characteristic, the irreverence for authority that we also saw in Piñera and Aguilera: “Un mero desorden no es cosa que tenga gracia en sí. El choteo no se la encuentra tampoco, pero se ufana ante una situación semejante *porque comporta una negación de la jerarquía*, que para ciertos tipos de idiosincrasia tropical es siempre odiosa. Todo orden implica alguna autoridad [Mere disorder is not amusing in itself. *Choteo* does not find humor in it either; instead it revels in such situations *because they entail a negation of hierarchy*, which for certain kinds of tropical idiosyncrasy is always despicable. All order implies some authority]” (Mañach 1999, 59). Unlike *choteo*, however, this type of humor is apolitical and nonnationalistic, which is what makes it so light: “Estas dos disposiciones espirituales nuestras—la ligereza y la independencia—han sido, pues, el caldo de cultivo del choteo [These

two spiritual attitudes of ours—lightness and independence—have thus been the breeding ground for *choteo*]” (ibid., 71). Most important, this humor has lost the negative connotations that Mañach attributed to *choteo*, because it actually represents *choteo*, but ironically. That is, as in the story “Alas, uñas, o pezuñas” (“Wings, Fingernails, or Hooves”), the narrator teases the reader into identifying with Olmo as the main character, while at the same time ridiculing him and his words. The story shows a categorical disintegration by discussing representation and reality:

Que parezca un mendigo, que sea un misógino, que confunda a los gatos, no dota a Olmo de profundidad. ¿La poesía en la vida se da por sí misma? Mejor virarse de espaldas mientras el banquero regala unos pendientes a su esposa preguntándose por la naturaleza de los acontecimientos.

Así es la vida. Mejor seguir de largo. Mejor virarse de espaldas mientras una mujer, en la cama, acaricia el omóplato de Olmo. ¿Con qué? Con una plumita. Ella le dijo: “Un cínico, eso es lo que eres . . .”

¿Pero qué vamos a hacer si la prosa no ama? Entonces Olmo le dijo. . . . ¿Cómo decir en prosa que Olmo la ama? ¿O que no la ama? Y ella, ella, ¿ama a Olmo? Ella le dijo, mientras se pintaba . . .

Veamos, no perdamos el punto de vista. Donde hubo un ala de ángel ahora hay un omóplato vacío. Donde hubo emoción ahora cuelga un bicho en una rama. Donde hubo amor ahora . . .

¡Pero esto se parece a la poesía! Prometemos que se repetirá pocas veces, por no decir jamás, jamás. Mejor volvámonos de espaldas. Visto en prosa, Olmo duerme. Como un bendito. Profundamente como la superficie de un lago duerme su alma. Le van creciendo alas, o uñas, o pezuñas.

Es un encanto—dice el narrador recogiendo la plumita de la cama.

[That he looks like a beggar, that he’s a misogynist, that he couldn’t tell two cats apart, doesn’t make Olmo deep. Does life’s poetry offer itself up on its own? We’d do better to turn our backs while the banker gives his wife earrings, and meditate on the nature of events.

That’s the way life is. Better to follow at a distance. Better to turn our backs while a woman, in bed, caresses Olmo’s shoulder blades. With what? A little feather. She tells him: “A cynic. That’s what you are.”

But what do we do if prose doesn’t love? So Olmo tells her . . . How do we say in prose that Olmo loves her, or doesn’t love her? And she, she, does she love Olmo? She tells him, as she puts on her makeup. . . .

Hold on. Let’s not lose our point of view. Where there was an angel wing there’s now an empty shoulder blade. Where there was emotion there’s now a bug hanging from a branch. Where there was love there’s now . . .

But this sounds like poetry! We promise that this will rarely happen again, or rather, never, never. Better to turn our backs. Seen in prose, Olmo lies sleeping. Like a saint. Deeply like the surface of a lake his soul sleeps. He grows wings, or fingernails, or hooves.

“He’s charming,” says the narrator taking the feather (*plumita*) from the bed.] (Sánchez Mejías 2001, 68)

The piece poses an amusing paradox regarding poesis (writing) and its relationship to reality as a subject matter. The narrator states that odd characters such as Olmo, as well as unusual events or love scenes, are not poetic subjects in themselves: “That he looks like a beggar, that he’s a misogynist, that he couldn’t tell two cats apart, doesn’t make Olmo deep. Does life’s poetry offer itself up on its own?” The comic element comes from the oddity and trivial, inconsequential (and thus realist) absurdity in all the events the narrator represents. In other words, “Alas, uñas, o pezuñas” criticizes realism, its mimetic function, and its objective analysis of reality. An objective analysis seeks to understand the real social conditions, and this is precisely what the narrator is telling Olmo, the writer, not to do: “Better to follow at a distance.” In other words, we cannot reproduce an objective image of reality, because there is not one objective point of view. This is why characters are confused and suddenly lose the point of view (“Hold on . . .”). But it is precisely because we lose the point of view, that reality comes together in a sudden poetic representation: “But this sounds like poetry!”

The paradox is that after having said this, the narrator comes up with a poem inspired by the events he has belittled before: “Where there was an angel wing there’s now an empty shoulder blade. Where there was emotion there’s now a bug hanging from a branch. Where there was love there’s now . . .” Once again, the poem has ranked poetry higher than prose: “How do we say in prose that Olmo loves her?” The piece ends, however, with a poetic fragment in prose: “Deeply like the surface of a lake his soul sleeps. He grows wings, or fingernails, or hooves.” The narrator is telling us that poetry and prose are indistinguishable. “Alas, uñas, o pezuñas” also

shows that poetry is not a social analysis of reality, and that life in itself is poetic. Poetry is actually as inconsequential, odd, alluring, and unpredictable as reality. Writing flows, like the river to which Olmo is compared, as the narrator picks up the "plumita" (or quill in Spanish), which is also the writer's pen.

IRONY AS PARABASIS OF ALLEGORY

Allegory becomes a fundamental and instrumental trope to create a utopian political discourse. This fact is so decisive that for the Cuban poetic imaginary, allegory and official discourse have always been indistinguishable. This is what some poets have interpreted as a "usurpation of the language." I am referring specifically to the *Diáspora(s)* group, whose members have expressed their wish to dismantle the trope of allegory. In "Olvidar a Orígenes [Forgetting *Orígenes*]," one of the most important texts of the group's journal, *Diáspora(s)*, Sánchez Mejías argues that all poetics are susceptible to being appropriated by political rhetoric: "Nunca hubo una escritura tan hermética o difícil que no haya podido ser 'leída' por los imaginarios de la política [There has never been a writing so hermetic or difficult that it cannot be 'read' by the imaginaries of politics]" (Sánchez Mejías 1997a, 18). Commenting on Paul Celan's poetry, Sánchez Mejías argues that history always precedes poetry. He also says that poetry cannot avoid the catastrophe of history, and by referring to Lezama Lima's "poetic extension," he condemns its allegorical nature:

Incluso si esas palabras bastaran para revivir todos los muertos, no alcanzarían a borrar el horror que circuló entre ellas en nombre de la Historia—esa misma Historia que les concedió la forma de Poesía. Por eso toda extensión poética se vuelve sospechosa. Toda imagen avanzando por una extensión debe sentirse amenazada por los huecos negros de la Historia. Y toda mente fajada con una extensión vacía debe saber reconocer en la blancura una posibilidad del horror.

[Even if these words were enough to bring all the dead back to life, they could not erase the horror that circulated among them in the name of History—that same History that bestowed on them the form of Poetry. As a result, all poetic extension becomes suspect. Any image advancing through an extension must feel itself threatened by the black holes of History. And any mind

tagged with an empty extension must be able to recognize in blankness the possibility of horror.] (Sánchez Mejías 1997a, 19)

By "poetic extension," Sánchez Mejías is clearly referring to Lezama Lima's frequent use of the word in its metaphysical connotation as that which extends itself beyond the letter and into the world. This quotation clearly actualizes Theodor Adorno's paradox between barbarism and civilization: after Auschwitz, poetry has become a barbaric act. A history that has created barbaric acts also fecundates the poetry that negates them. According to Adorno's reading, culture and barbarism have become synonymous; however, culture is subjected to another aporia, namely, the fact that it needs art despite its impossibility.

A poem by Marqués de Armas titled "Claro de bosque (semiescrito) [Forest Clearing (Semiwritten)]," from his most recent collection, *Cabezas (Heads)*, deals precisely with this issue. Marqués de Armas's poem is a reflection on the historical experience and its representation. The poem suggests that there is a mutual overdetermination between history and its representation. It also proposes looking at history in three different ways: as an experience, as an abstraction, and as a representation. In other words, the poem tries to understand the relationship between universality, particularity, and their representation, taking into account that they have a relation of mutual determination. Universality refers to history and its development, particularity to the experience of being, and representation is the unveiling of being. I will first comment on the representation of history in the poem. In "Claro de bosque (semiescrito)," the act of naming and the experience of historical catastrophe are in constant tension. This conflict is represented in the poem as the margin between the outside as experience and the inside as thought: "las puertas se abren hacia / dentro y / con horror infinito / hacia afuera los pensamientos"²² (Marqués de Armas 2002, 26). The poem discusses the impossibility of enunciating the historical catastrophe through the act of naming. "Claro de bosque" is a reflection on the conditions of possibility for the unveiling of being in a nonlinguistic or representational realm. The poem's "claro" is thus what Heidegger termed "Die Lichtung," or the unveiling of being: "las puertas se abren / hacia / dentro y / con horror infinito / hacia fuera los pensamientos/ pienso / en una escritura-intensidad / pero no es escritura la palabra exacta / (exacto es claro de bosque)."²³

Although this nonrepresentational desire is clear, the poem also argues that "el claro," or the clearing, can only happen in the form of a thought. The poem thus emphasizes the paradox behind such nonrepresentational desire: the clearing cannot be made of anything but words, since once it is expressed by thought, it is also already made of words. There is another

paradox, however, since language cannot express the experience of the clearing: “en algún punto o claro de bosque / calculado / (en la cabeza) / aunque el término punto también inexacto / y aún, todavía las rayas-excavan / cada uno de esos puntos dispersos”²⁴ (Marqués de Armas 2002, 26). There is an alternation between the event and the impossibility of its representation, making it clear that words no longer have a performative function. The materiality of language, which is represented by tropes, cannot express what the clearing could express. Materiality is also represented in the poem through reference to Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “molinillos-organillos en Mandelstam, / Nietzsche (¡que crujen!)”²⁵ (ibid.). The passage in Nietzsche to which this line refers also talks about the difficulty of representing thought with language; the materiality and power of language to represent are thus called into question (Nietzsche 2006, 173–74). At the same time, history resists writing because the event always questions its representation: “pero no es escritura la palabra exacta / (exacto es claro de bosque) / ni siquiera la que más se aproxima / ya que / ninguna palabra es tan intensa / para ser escrita”²⁶ (Marqués de Armas 2002, 26).

Let us discuss historical experience in the poem, or what I have also called particularity. The “cerebro desenterrado [disinterred brain]” that appears isolated in one of the poem’s lines—referring to a poem by Osip Mandelstam—points to the ineffability of history: “ninguna palabra es tan intensa / para ser escrita / en el horror infinito de unos caracteres de tierra / el cerebro desenterrado” (Marqués de Armas 2002, 26).²⁷ The poem alludes to the earth because these brains and thoughts are also related to a historical event that took place in the gold mines of Serra Pelada in Brazil. The mines are represented through the ravages of a globalized world that takes advantage of an underworld inhabited by dehumanized beings and that produces a history that cannot be narrated: “los caracteres se desprenden / al simple roce de las manos / así también la tierra / al borde de ciertos farallones o mantos de pizarra”²⁸ (ibid.). Yet, as I have already mentioned, the “cabeza” and “cerebro desenterrado” allude to another historical event that is mentioned in one of Mandelstam’s poems. The line “los campus (de ojos) y los campus (de cabezas)”²⁹ alludes to “Stalin’s Ode,” specifically the last lines, in which Mandelstam describes Lenin addressing the multitude: “The hillocks of people’s heads are growing more distant: / I am diminished in them, won’t even be noticed” (Mandelstam, cited in Coetzee 1991, 75). Scholars have traditionally interpreted these lines as pertaining to Lenin, but J. M. Coetzee explains that it alludes to Mandelstam’s private mythology. According to Nadezdha Mandelstam, this mythology includes a reference to Genghis Khan. Coetzee argues that the subtext of these lines is the narration of the resistance to Genghis Khan’s army, symbolized by the thousands of heads in a mound outside of the city’s ramparts, and that this analysis

extends to the last line of the last verse in “Stalin’s Ode.” The narration of two different historical events, one by Marqués de Armas and one by Mandelstam, bears a similitude since both recount those who are at the margins, those who have neither voice nor history.

I can now talk about history as a universal concept, that is, as a science or as a narrative that explains the study of past events. “Claro de bosque (semiescrito)” constitutes a critique of the Marxian epistemological tradition that has determined the interpretation of history in Cuba. The poem thus questions historicism as an epistemological model that is based on the interpretation of history as a scientific event. This critique becomes clear in the poem when the identity of the workers of Serra Pelada is described as a molecular existence in a shattered world. These men have amputated bodies, and it seems as if the writing of the poem, the soil of the mines, and these bodies had all been subjected to neurological surgery. In thus characterizing the historical event as a scientific event, “Claro de bosque” alludes to the supposed scientific nature of history, and also introduces the first ironic element in the poem: “así en las minas al aire libre de Serra Pelada / 400 kms al sur de Belén / donde los humanos (moléculas rientes de negror corredizo) han sustraído / en un corte sagital / la órbita de un ojo infinitamente horrible”³⁰ (Marqués de Armas 2002, 27). This poem, like the work of the Proyecto Diásporas generally, is also ironic, but in a very de Manian way. This irony, however, is also quite present in its most Schlegelian sense, that is, as self-reflexive poetry and as a paradox: “Irony is the form of paradox. Paradox is everything which is simultaneously good and great” (Schlegel 1971, 266). But, like Schlegel’s irony, the poem reveals the break between aesthetic representation and the world. As for Schlegel, for Diáspora(s) there is a fusion between poetry and philosophy. Schlegel wanted that poetry be “in touch with philosophy and rhetoric” (ibid., 175). For Paul de Man, irony is a disruption of the tropological system, in that it calls into question tropes such as allegories and metaphors and their ideological representation of the world. For Schlegel and for de Man, irony is about poetry’s inability to communicate. De Man describes irony as the interruption or the permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes. The parabasis of allegory refers to the interruption of two different codes in the same discourse. By “codes,” de Man refers to different types of stylistic elements (genre, subgenre, tone, etc.). The allegory of tropes has its own systematicity, and it is precisely this coherence, as well as the internal dialectics of the allegory, that irony interrupts (de Man 1996, 178). In Marqués de Armas’s poem two discursive codes coincide and interrupt each other: the poetic language and the scientific language. Neither can be defined without the other. Science gives a rendering of the physical world through observation and experiment, whereas poetry does not need an experimental justification

to be what it is. But experimentation always has limits because it refers to materiality but does not tell us what it means, and as such science is also metaphoric. Poetry evokes a physical or emotional reality with metaphors, but metaphoric language also has limits. The ineffability of reality exposes the limitations of language and opens up different possibilities of representation, one of which is accomplished through linguistic experimentation. The irony resides in the fact that the historical catastrophe cannot be interpreted as a scientific event but is not an unmediated event either. Irony only displaces the two codes to introduce a different representation of history.

This new representation of history needs to be defined through the relationship between thought and representation, a question that, as I have noted, is one of this poem's main driving forces. The relation between thought and representation is also what Heidegger calls the relation between *Denken* (to think) and *Dichten*, which literally means "poetry" or "the act of writing poetry." It is important to note that I am speaking of this Heideggerian distinction in light of Jacques Derrida's comments in his essay "Le retrait de la métaphore" ("The Retreat of Metaphor"). It is also necessary to explain Derrida's reflections on the metaphor to further understand the difference between *Denken* and *Dichten*. For Derrida it is impossible to interrupt the presence of the metaphor (Derrida 1987, 64). Etymologically speaking, the metaphor alludes to the vehicle, to transport. Metaphors are the vehicle of writing. This is why one cannot talk about metaphors without talking through them. Indeed, metaphors do not have a proper name; language itself is a metaphor. This explains the double meaning in Derrida's title. Every time the metaphor retreats, it always leaves the sign of a supplementary stroke, of a *re-trait* (retreat) in the *trait* (stroke) that it had left in the text. The rhetorical margin of this discourse is no longer determined by an indivisible simple line (ibid., 80). Derrida explains that for Heidegger *Denken* and *Dichten* always form a pair and go together. But they run parallel to each other and never meet, and, thus they can never be confused or translated by one another. The paradox is that in spite of these two distinct parallel paths, *Denken* and *Dichten* are so close to each other that at times they intersect and they cut across one another. When they cut across each other, they each mark the other. This cut does not create a wound; rather, it is a cut that opens up their difference, cutting back their own stroke and its supplement. This cut does not belong to either one, nor is it a common stroke, a general concept, or a metaphor (ibid., 87).

The relationship between *Denken* and *Dichten* is expressed in the last lines of "Claro de bosque": "en la intersección / el corte sagital del cerebro / de manera / que / la cabeza y el ojo / el ojo y la cabeza y / así los campus (de ojos) y los campus (de cabezas) / expresen la superficie / (ya, / exclusivamente extirpada) / sólo es, / exclusivamente, / el fondo de la mina"³¹

(Marqués de Armas 2002, 28). The language of the poem resists determination and adjectives. It is also full of "cuts" and "intersections" marked not only by the words that appear isolated in the poem but also because of the cuts (enjambments) in many of the lines. These cuts also represent the moments when *Denken* and *Dichten* overlap, and yet they do not belong to either of them. That is why the poem offers two alternative endings. On the one hand, it offers a scientific representation of the historic catastrophe related to the mine: "(ya, / exclusivamente extirpada)." On the other hand, it gives us an unmediated representation of the historical catastrophe by describing the mine as, "exclusivamente, / el fondo de la mina." What the poem finally reveals is that the *Lichtung* or clearing is also the moment of the "cut" that shows the difference between the scientific history and the unmediated history, or between thought and poetry. This moment does not belong to either one of them, yet it reveals the stroke and the supplement of both of them.

Marqués de Armas's work has abandoned an allegorical interpretation of reality and a scientific explanation of a historic finality, thus creating the "writing of disaster." Although the poem does not theorize about other plausible political answers, it does pinpoint the aporias of art and its representation. This theoretical gesture is a critique of both the aestheticization of politics and the subsumption of art by the market. Far from arguing that contemporary art is futile because it no longer articulates a political message, Marqués de Armas's work underscores the important ethical nature of the writing of disaster. This is not to say that this writing aims to establish a moral injunction as opposed to offering articulations of political utopias. On the contrary, by pointing to the complex relations among thinking, poetry, and history, Marqués de Armas's work lays out the conditions of possibility to go beyond the mimetic or utilitarian function of art and of the political itself.

Schizophrenia and the Proyecto Diáspora(s)

THE LIMITS OF THE WAR MACHINE AS A POLITICAL CONCEPT

The work of the Proyecto Diáspora(s) is characterized by a paradoxical political premise consisting in desiring both the law's presence and its absence. In Deleuzianguattarian terms, we could understand this paradox as the simultaneity of the flows of energy that configure the structure of power in their theory. This structure consists of the simultaneity of flows of both territorialization (imposition of the law) and deterritorialization (absence of the law). For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, these two forces always act together by creating a system that is constantly moving from one force to the

other and never acquires the nature of either. As I argued at the beginning of this chapter, the political circumstances of the nineties produced a law that is symbolically empty, and that is constituted by a fallen ego-ideal. In schizophrenic logic, the law always oscillates between two positions. It goes from the ideal ego as utopia to the fallen ego-ideal as repulsive. In fact, this logic is very similar to the Deleuzian-Guattarian imaginary that I have just described. That is, in both models the liberating (or utopian) forces and the coercitive (or repulsive) forces become undifferentiated. But a problem arises with this logic.

If liberating and coercitive political forces become undifferentiated, how are we to imagine a politics of resistance? It is true that the *Diáspora(s)* was not interested in a politics of resistance. Rather, the group's goal was to create a poetics of the war machine. In an interview with the group, Liliane Giraudon asks the following question: "En nuestra entrevista Rolando Sánchez Mejías habla de *Diáspora(s)* como 'una vanguardia enfriada durante el proceso,' una 'avanzada sintáctica de guerra.' ¿Podrían explicar ese concepto? [In our interview Rolando Sánchez Mejías speaks of *Diáspora(s)* as 'a vanguard that cooled off during the process,' a 'syntactical outpost of war.' Could you explain this concept?]" The authors respond by arguing that the journal is a war machine: "Algo de resistencia, por cierto, pero sin esas cantatas misionistas que calcan una pobreza mal entendida, reticente y tan poco moderna. En fin, una literatura que se despliega como maquinita de guerra sin caer en posiciones roñosas o partidistas [An element of resistance, certainly, but without those missionary hymns that sketch out a poorly understood, reticent, and quite unmodern poverty. In the end, (ours is) a literature that is deployed like a little war machine without falling into mean-spirited or partisan positions]" (Giraudon 2001, 58–59). The war machine, however, also articulates an undifferentiated flow of forces of liberation and coercion. Is it the case, then, that the *Diáspora(s)*'s politics are a reflection of a state politics subjected to the effects of an empty law? Although Marqués de Armas's work is clearly influenced by Deleuze and Guattari's theories, his poems point to the limits of their theoretical system.

Cabezas, Marqués de Armas's collection of highly conceptual poems, use the word *cabeza* (head) as a referent that thematizes thought and representation. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, these poems use botanic or organic imagery to talk about writing and thinking. *Cabezas* focuses on the physiological aspects of the brain, while referencing the ontological and epistemological dimensions of thought. In the following poem, for example, the fields are libidinally connected, like a rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari argue that a rhizome has many entryways, which allows one to access it from a deterritorialized space, and also from a constrained one such as an oedipal formation or a rigid territoriality that opens the way for a transformational operation.

fincas de 1914
de café criollo con seca/
deros de sol y
marmitas de crujiente lepra
movimientos
parcelarios
o neuro/
bióticos del terreno
pero adyacente y sin
solución de continuidad
(númen
voluptas) en la de/
vastada serranía³² (Marqués de Armas 2002, 35)

The poem takes us on a journey through a rhizomatic movement, as I will explain. The poem begins with the year 1914, an emblematic date for capitalist formation in Cuba, characterized by the centralization of production and capital accumulation.³³ At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Cuban sugar industry transformed as it transitioned from a slave economy to industrial manufacture.

The poem describes an abandoned and unproductive old *ingenio* soon to be replaced by the more modern *centrales*. With the *central* also came *colonos* or *campesinos parcelarios*, a new kind of farmworker specialized in cane production. In the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx explains that "campesinos parcelarios" [small-holding peasants] were part of the largest working class in Napoleonic France, impoverished and isolated subsistence farmers (Marx 1990b, 123). This class without class consciousness forms the expandable remnants of sacarocracy, a pathologized social body infected with leprosy and inhabiting a dry and unproductive coffee plantation soon to be transformed into a *central azucarero*, thanks to the new flows of capitalism coming from the United States.³⁴ Paradoxically, however, the poem has replaced a materialist and class-based rendering of society with its post-Marxian version because the text "is opposed in every way to the classical or romantic book constituted by the interiority of a substance or subject" (Deleuze and Guattari 1996, 9). Political subjectivity has no place in this representation of a reality made of machinic assemblages of free-flowing libidinal energy separated from any relation to its cause.

This is not to say that these flows depart from liberating forces. In fact, these forces are produced in the coercitive world of sacarocracy. Hence the paradox that the poem presents: the "serranía" is "de/vastada," both "devastada" (devastated) and "vasta" (vast, enormous). In other words, sacarocracy's ideology has left its imprint in the social and physical configuration of the fields. There are only two liberating forces in the poem: "(númen/

voluptas)” that transform the “serranía” into a “vast” space. Deleuze and Guattari argue that these flows (liberating and alienating) form what they call a “machinic assemblage.” Alienating or negative forces are represented as trees (ontologically grounding subjectivity), but liberating forces are represented by rhizomes. In the poem, the fields are affected by rhizomatic forces that have produced the vastness and the greenery of the “serranía.” These rhizomatic and positive forces are defined as “(númen/voluptas).” For Deleuze and Guattari, *numen* represents desire, and *voluptas* represents consumption. Desire and consumption (deterritorializing forces) coexist with the alienating forces of sacrocracy (reterritorializing forces). Paradoxically, liberating forces can be produced in deterritorialized or reterritorialized spaces. That is, forces can be liberating (deterritorializing) even if they come from a rigid territoriality (a tree), because they can be produced in a free space (line of flight) or in a space of subjection (territorialization). In political terms, this means that desire is everywhere and can be produced through negative or positive events. If desire can be produced in the coercitive space of sacrocracy, then we could posit that *numen* and *voluptas* come from the economy of sacrocracy. In fact, they cannot come from anywhere else, because as a social and economic space the fields have been determined and shaped by sacrocracy. The poem, however, represents these two forces in parenthesis, which indicate that we are trapped by the laws that create our desires. In other words, in the last instance the social configuration of the fields is determined by the repressive social forces of sacrocracy. The parentheses graphically enclose desire and consumption, indicating that they are repressed forces that strive to be liberated from the law that produces them. For Deleuze and Guattari, the political is conceived as a force or affect whose intensity and direction are successively transformed into territorializing and deterritorializing flows. The poem, however, shows that some of those flows still need to be liberated.

“Hueso de la raicilla [Pit of the Rootlet]” is another poem that calls into question the metaphoric nature of the war machine’s theoretical apparatus:

gris
 removido
 en cuál listón de tierra
 pones mi cabeza
 la rodante—cabeza—
 como artificio de letra falaz³⁵

The poem functions at three symbolic levels: the botanical, the epistemological, and the metapoetic. On the one hand, we have the botanical representation, which is the most literal one. The poem refers to the pit of

a fruit (*hueso*) as it germinates (*raicilla*). It could be, for example, an avocado pit, which is a very common Cuban fruit. The pit has germinated and is now ready to be planted and grow into a tree—the poem mentions the dividing lines between different plants as a “listón de tierra.” This explains the gray color of the pit and its transformation/removal (two senses of the adjective *removido*). On the other hand, the poem articulates an epistemology clearly represented by Deleuzian-Guattarian terminology. The “raicilla,” which is originally considered a rhizome, transforms the fruit into a radicle-system as it grows. It reterritorializes as it gets planted to develop into a tree. This also functions at the level of subjectivity, thoughts coming from the “cabeza” (subjectivity) to the nonsubjectivity represented by the “cabeza rodante.”

Much like *A Thousand Plateaus*, the poem describes different aesthetic and ideological regimes by drawing botanical comparisons. In their work, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish three types of epistemologies that correspond to different poetics and that they represent with botanical metaphors. First, the root-book, which comes from the Aristotelian and Platonic tradition (Deleuze and Guattari 1996, 5). In this genealogy, representation is a mimesis of nature that results in two different realities. That is, through representation nature becomes a dual reality (artistic and real or essential). The second mode of envisioning the world corresponds to the radicle-system or fascicular root. This system is no longer dual, because the center changes. But there is still an essence, and therefore the system is considered metaphysical. The authors exemplify this idea with James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, where the meaning of words is unstable and multiple but still constitutes an overall system, which in this case is cyclical. The radicle-system is still considered metaphysical as it differentiates between subjects and objects, which is no longer the case in their third mode of representation. The rhizome or their last epistemology undoes the duality and systemicity of the other two. It is a heterogeneous system without a center and infinite points of connectivity. Meaning is multiple and forms an assemblage where the categorization of the world into subjects and objects no longer applies: “There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root” (*ibid.*, 8).

The “hueso de la raicilla” is a rhizome which, unlike the radicle-system, is not rooted in metaphysics. It creates words with multiple roots that do not produce mimetic or systemic narratives, but, while the rhizome is unstructured and without attachments, the radicle gives access to a higher unity of meaning that encompasses all singularities (Deleuze and Guattari 1996, 6). The “rolling head” (*cabeza rodante*) is another Deleuzian-Guattarian metaphor that references their notion of “faciality” (*visagéité*). For them a head that is no longer attached to a body represents faciality, a notion that entails the production of alternative modes of organization (nonmetaphysical and

nonpsychological). In the poem the metaphysical mode of organization is represented by the "listón de tierra." The plant's bone (pit) is going to reterritorialize space by anchoring to the earth to grow a new tree. Thus, the rhizomatic nature of the bone will be transformed into a root.

Marqués de Armas's poem discusses the aesthetics of rhizomes that become radicle-systems. Bones grow roots as poetics grow rhizomatic literary assemblages, and, like bones, writing is nude and bare. This is also why these poetics do not create subjectivities, and this lack of subjectivity is represented as a "cabeza rodante." When the root of this ryzhome is planted, it reterritorializes the space and becomes a radicle-system that produces subjectivity (a "cabeza"). The same movement occurs in poetics where the word is displaced or trans-posed ("removido") into another word. Words reterritorialize the poetic space to become metaphors. We are interpellated by metaphors, which assign different subjectivities that identify us. Metaphors transform poetics "como artificio de letra falaz." That is, when metaphors are purely ornamental and not conceptual they produce false words that attract us with false appearances. This last line introduces the poem's irony at different symbolic levels. It first criticizes a trope by explicitly using the same trope (the metaphor "como artificio de letra falaz"). The irony at this level would be very simple, since it can only be interpreted as affirming the contrary of what it means. But this also implies that the poem clearly introduces a poetic voice or a subject that clearly establishes an ethical rule in reference to what is false (or "falaz").

It is now up to the reader to find out what creates falseness or fallacy. Is it that metaphors as tropes are always false and deceptive, or is it that false thinking creates deceptive metaphors? In "Hueso de la raicilla," however, the question takes on a different nature because of the ludic tone it introduces. The last line adds a new meaning to the poem, especially as we reconsider the meaning of "falaz." What is false and what is deceitful? Is it the poem itself and the type of thought that it conveys? In other words, is the poem not pointing to the limits of the Deleuzian-Guattarian tropological system? Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical system attempts to create an antimetaphysical space by creating a new vocabulary that neutralizes the ontological dualities identifying subjects, objects, and sciences. Marqués de Armas's poem, for instance, shows how their scientific terminology breaks with conceptual divides (subject/object, law/nature, etc.). But conceptually speaking, their method is purely rhetorical. It consists of borrowing scientific terms and reassigning them new meaning through a metaphorical process. By borrowing Deleuzian-Guattarian vocabulary the poem follows the same process of metaphorization, but it also questions this process. The poem is pointing to its own hermeneutic limit and simultaneously rejecting hermeneutics altogether.

Schizophrenia and the End of Literature: Juan Carlos Flores

LITERATURE OF DISASTER: ANTIHUMANISM—THE PARTING OF HISTORY IN LITERATURE

The end of literature as a project of social emancipation announces both the birth of postmodernity and the death of representational and allegorical writing. Under this new paradigm, literature reaches its limit once it can no longer fulfill the social function assigned to it by the ideological project of the 1960s governments of national liberation. Thus emerges a literature marked by defeat and by the historical experience of the utopian promise's failure. And yet this writing is not about this defeat but engendered by it. In this sense, literature has become what Maurice Blanchot has called a "writing of disaster" (Blanchot 1980, 25), that is, a literature that is no longer emancipatory, that has no goal and leads to no future. According to Blanchot, the writing of disaster occurs when words are no longer either weapons or means of action and the act of writing has thus lost its urgency and necessity. In this context, the nature of a writing until now marked by its imitation (*mimesis*) of reality begins to change. When the act of writing loses its relevance and its importance, one's relationship to writing begins to be transformed. This is the moment in which language ceases to be sacred. When language is no longer sacred, it is also no longer an offering and no longer a sacrifice in the common interest, as it is in allegorical representations. An antihumanist and antiheroic writing emerges that is no longer one with history. This writing, far from glorifying life and postulating itself as a triumph over death, tells us of the violence inflicted on the writing. But does this violence that gives birth and form to the writing come purely from an outside force to which the writing must submit or is it manipulated from the margins of what it is intended to be a resistance strategy?

This question highlights the main paradox that these poetics must confront. On the one hand, this writing appears to be a demystification of the project of a concluded modernity, representing furthermore an opening toward a deterritorialized space. On the other hand, it is a project constitutionally marked by the experience of an ideological defeat and finds itself facing the void left by that failure. If this project is so deeply marked by the experience of defeat, does this also mean that it also is condemned to this failure? Is there any chance that this writing is not in turn limited by the experience of defeat that engendered it? The poetry published in Cuba during the nineties by an entire generation of young writers raised by the revolution as the New Men imagined by Guevara was created under the ideological and aesthetic conditions that we have been discussing. Specifically,

the work of the poet Juan Carlos Flores is a writing of disaster built on a deconstructed syntax in which conventional notions of poetry as an aesthetic and ethical act have disappeared.

REPETITION OF HISTORY: CIRCULARITY AND IMMANENCE

As the poet Reina María Rodríguez has noted, Flores's writing has the same labyrinthine structure as the Alamar neighborhood in which it is created (Flores 2003, 8). Alamar may be the symbol that best explains the social architecture of Flores's poetics and the conception of history that appears in his work. A housing project in East Havana launched in 1971 as one of the Cuban Revolution's most ambitious social plans, Alamar was conceived as a utopian space that would bring together the different social principles on which the revolution was based, especially the socialization of private property and the chance to obtain housing in exchange for its real value, calculated in terms of labor rather than market value. This project was intended to remedy the shortage of housing for the most needy and promised to be distributed equitably among workers in the microbrigades that were in charge of building them. Intended to be completed in 1981, Alamar was to house 130,000 workers from the area's industrial centers and was to include day care centers, semiboarding schools, theaters, recreation centers, health centers, and new industrial zones (Schuman 1975, 14). At first, it was thought that the buildings would be four stories high, but later this was increased to twelve stories thanks to improved methods of prefabricated construction. This model was never completed as planned, however, and the Alamar complex became an exemplar of the gray style of Soviet architecture associated with socialist realism.

Like Alamar complex, Flores's poems have an apparently circular and symmetrical structure in which the lines—like the gray, Soviet-style buildings—impose themselves uniformly and monotonously. We can see this in the poem "Marina," from his collection *Distintos modos de cavar un túnel* (*Different Ways to Dig a Tunnel*): "El galeón (que bordea la costa) no es un galeón aunque parezca un galeón. / El galeón (que bordea la costa) no es un galeón aunque parezca un galeón. / 'El galeón' es la réplica de un galeón"³⁶ (Flores 2003, 29). In Flores's imaginary events recur similarly an infinite number of times. This movement of eternal return also takes us back, paradoxically, to the concept of revolution. Hannah Arendt explains that initially the word *revolution* referred to a recurring movement and not to a transformative turn as we currently understand it. The original Latin meaning of the word was later adopted in the natural sciences through the work of Copernicus, coming to designate the regular, cyclic, and recurring

movement of the stars (Arendt 2006, 32). That is, if we apply it in the political sense, the term indicates not a type of renewal but a form of government that repeats itself with the same force as that of the stars following their predetermined path through the sky (*ibid.*). In other words, this type of government does not entail what we mean today by *revolution*, a movement generated by a renewing impulse that in turn is related to the idea of freedom. Through preliminary negations and *mise en abyme*, Flores's poem suggests that the process of identification is condemned irredeemably to failure given the tautological nature of the reasoning it follows. The referent cannot be distinguished from the signified because the former always leads irrevocably to the latter, to the point of rendering the two indistinguishable.

Many of the poems, however, break the circular structure by introducing a sudden and unexpected change of rhythm, as for example in "El ciclista K [K the Cyclist]": "El ciclista K, otro de los segregados convertido en exegeta, todo el tiempo posible haciendo auto-stop entre ciudad y campo, o entre campo y montaña, sin encontrar solución al eterno problema, sin encontrar el necesario reposo del cuerpo negroide, otro de los segregados convertido en exegeta, todo el tiempo posible haciendo auto-stop entre ciudad y campo, o entre campo y montaña, sin encontrar solución al eterno problema, sin encontrar el necesario reposo del cuerpo . . . me ha contado que al mirar allá adentro algo raro notó"³⁷ (Flores 2003, 61). This poem, like many of the others in this collection, recounts an immobile locomotion through which maximal energy produces minimal travel. This inefficient economy can also be observed in the poem's discursiveness and the long time it takes to tell its story. And yet we should not confuse this verbosity with the linguistic profligacy so characteristic of the Latin American baroque, since although the latter tends toward the production of pleasure and *jouissance* as an alternative to capitalist consumption, Flores's logorrhea instead draws us into an antieconomy in which expenditure produces a consumption that does not transform. The expenditure that points toward a progressive loss of life by what it generates is interrupted in the poem by its coda: "me ha contado que al mirar allá adentro algo raro notó [he told me that after looking inside he felt something strange]." This final rupture of the monotonous and circular rhythm might make us think that some new source of production exists, but the only thing that is broken is the voice and the rhythm. A pause is produced, a transformation that is also a new path in the cyclist's routine. Suddenly three actions occur—looking, speaking, and feeling—and these seem to give the subject a certain autonomy. And yet, rather than a way out, these actions signal the entrance into a new labyrinth, another unknown that brings us again to the point of departure or to the end of a road on which we find ourselves already lost.

THE LAW AND THE ABSENCE OF THE PRIMORDIAL SIGNIFIER

This unproductive economy is also a source of violence generated by the governmental rationality's latest mechanisms of control. In Cuba we are witnessing simultaneous and apparently contradictory political and economic phenomena. If the arrival of the global market has put the island on the path toward economic liberalization, in the political arena the authoritarian model continues to reign. The great paradox is that the model of a society of control, generally associated with neoliberal economies and the utopian doctrine of laissez-faire, has been fundamental to the development of the regime's authoritarianism, such that the new implementation of mechanisms of control has been gradually displacing the functional mechanisms of the disciplinary society. While the disciplinary society model exercises its authority over the body based on the sovereign's prerogative over the right to life, the society of control exercises power based on a rationality that takes into account the population in its multiplicity, its opinions, its modes of behavior, its fears, and so on—all the factors, in other words, that can be controlled through education, political campaigns, or any other kind of state ideological apparatus (Deleuze 1992, 3–4). In the case that concerns us here, the model of sovereignty exercised as power of capture and subjection of life to political control is channeled through the social project of Alamar. In this sense, we can say that for the social unconscious Alamar is one of the utopian projects of the building of the revolutionary nation, when in reality the effect it produces is precisely the opposite: the subjection to political control through a model that seems to leave human consciousness no kind of autonomy whatsoever.

This type of political rationality creates dehumanized, Kafkaesque subjectivity represented as the animalized and monstrous inhumanity we see in the poem "La mofeta" ("The Skunk"): "Roedor de pequeño volumen, para protegerse de las agresiones de los diversos animales, de miembros y dientes más poderosos que ella, despierta un olor nauseabundo, debido a un curioso mecanismo glandular que se articula, en cuanto ella siente la proximidad de un asalto. / En el parque zoológico, cárcel o manicomio donde los animales internados pugnan por un poco de espacio, sobre el cual depositar comidas y heces, aún por entre las áreas destinadas a los mamíferos fuertes veo cruzar a la mofeta, y siento envidia, yo, que con indiferencia he visto cruzar a esos autos que aquí llaman de lujo"³⁸ (Flores 2003, 64). In this apocalyptic poem creatures are represented as numb and powerless beings. We are faced with what Agamben called bare life, that is, life that can be annihilated with impunity, because it is a life without value (Agamben 1998, 138). The poem ends by posing a false disjunction in a clearly ironic tone, proposing

a choice between bare life and nothingness. Why do I refer to the other possibility as nothingness? Because the other possible form of life is that of the consumer, perhaps the communist of the future. And yet the poem clearly makes us understand that the freedom to consume either does not exist or simply does not matter. Apart from this life that does not exist, all that remains is bare life, which therefore is not a choice but an imponderable (since by definition bare life cannot be chosen).

I would like to follow this analysis of Flores's work by returning to the question with which I began: Is the violence of this work a force immanent to the system that generates it and to the poetic representation of this system, or is there any possibility that its aesthetic and marginal representation might produce "an escape valve," as "Visto desde el suelo" puts it: "ex-civilistas, lastre abajo, atraviesan la ley, buscando algún tubo de escape" (Flores 2009, 26).³⁹ Can this law of subjection to political power be crossed through? The regime's political crisis that resulted from the collapse of the socialist bloc in 1989 is characterized by not only economic debacle but also by the absolute loss of ideological referents. The government's decision not to abandon the revolution's socialist doctrine quickly comes into contradiction with Cuba's penetration by global capitalism and with the regime's gradual disideologization, as reflected in the constitutional changes of 1992. As I have argued, all this means is that at a certain point, socialism becomes an empty signifier that points to the lack of primordial signifier and thus to the existence of a law void of content. To understand this better, we could draw a parallel with psychotic pathology, since in both cases what in Lacanian terms we call the primordial signifier—that is, the law of the Father—is rejected, and as a result this law constitutes itself in turn as the sign of an absence. For the state, this absence is that of a distinct socialist ideology that could have adapted itself to the new economic situation that came into force at the beginning of the nineties, as had happened in the former Soviet Union, but that would not have entailed the loss of the nation. If there is no law, this means that there is no frame of reference enabling a hermeneutic operation of the situation of power. In other words, if there is no law, everything is subject to the most absolute arbitrariness. It is impossible to know when and where the violence of power begins or ends. It is impossible to know the limits of violence with respect to the text, as we see in "Tótem," the poem that opens *Distintos modos de cavar un túnel*:

B-U-E-Y/ En el centro del poema / comidos los bordes del poema / con ojos de buey mira a la realidad / desde el centro del poema. / "—Doctor, las huellas de sus patas por los surcos eran el poema, donde caía el agua de su nariz abrían sus dedos,

sus cabezas las flores quemantes del poema—" / B-U-E-Y / Su cansancio es político / ya no se quiere levantar / no se quiere desposar / comidos los bordes del poema / con ojos de buey mira a la realidad / desde el centro del poema.⁴⁰ (Flores 2003, 19)

The totem functions in this poem as the sacred law that in this case is the poem itself, writing itself. The ox is also the totem and writing is represented as bare life, as that which can be annihilated with impunity, because it is a life without value. Although Flores's work takes the historical catastrophe as a point of departure, it lacks an ethical dimension. It is an aesthetics that thematizes the nonrepresentability of violence, as well as its own. Unlike *Diáspora(s)*, Flores's aesthetics does not seek to move us, and in this regard it has surpassed the vanguardist gesture of the former. Flores's poetics point to a different understanding of the political, understood in its revolutionary rendition as the classical Schmittian antagonism between friends and enemies. This is precisely where the power of this literature resides.

Afterword

This book has examined the different discursive formations of revolutionary utopia and its withering. The premise of this book is that we live in postideological societies that can no longer be analyzed through a Marxian understanding of social or economic structures. As I argued in the introduction, the concept of ideology no longer holds true. Other post-Marxist theorizations of the same concept, such as Louis Althusser's notion of ideology as the "real conditions of existence," also share a similar *mecanicist* understanding of the "real." Given the relativity of reality as a notion, as well as the need to take race, sexuality, or gender as mediating factors shaping ideology, the "real" is not a useful category. Above all, however, we are in need of a notion that can account for a fragmented (or nonessentialist) view of identity, especially taking into account the unconscious, and the impossibility of knowing which is the object of our desire. In this regard, since we can never really grasp the object of our desire, the notion of utopia is a clear substitute for what remains unknown and inaccessible. In addition, as Slavoj Žižek points out, we are no longer duped by the difference between exchange value and use value. The consequence, then, is that asking what is the goal of literature (political or otherwise) is pointless. It is more revealing, instead, to look at the fantasies that make up for that unknown, and this is why literature is so essential. It is not about having access to that desire; rather, it is about understanding fantasy as a narrative construction that conceals our desire, as an object that belongs to the Real, and that therefore resists symbolization. The book has analyzed these fantasies and narrative constructions, both at political and cultural