2022

Patterns Of Accumulation: Capital, Form, And The Spatial Composition Of The Mexican Novel (1962-2017)

Pavel Andrade

University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons, Latin American Languages and Societies Commons, Latin American Literature Commons, and the Latin American Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/5435

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/5435
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.
Patterns Of Accumulation: Capital, Form, And The Spatial Composition Of The Mexican Novel (1962-2017)

Abstract
This dissertation lies at the intersection of Marxist literary criticism, spatial literary analysis or geocriticism, and Mexican literary studies. Throughout the dissertation I interrogate the plausible concatenations of these fields for the study of the spatiality of the Mexican modernist novel of the second half of the twentieth century, a period marked by Mexico's transition from an industrial to a new-export oriented pattern of capital accumulation. I use the notion 'spatial composition' to theorize the conceptual relation between the novel's formal ordinations and the patterns that model the reproduction of capital under specific historical and geospatial conditions. I show that the formal solutions offered by the Mexican novel to the changing dynamics of capital accumulation provide a systematic account of how unevenness comes to be produced and reproduced within the world order of late multinational capital. The periodization advanced corresponds to literary modernism's consolidation as a cultural dominant in Mexico, a process that can be traced back to the long sixties. I argue that in the context of this long decade, Mexican literary modernism came to operate as a form of symbolic compensation for the exhaustion of the developmental program of the national-popular state. Each chapter studies modernist form against the backdrop of a momentous turning point in the consolidation of a new export-oriented pattern of capital reproduction in Mexico. Thus, each chapter considers how the modernist novel absorbed the antinomies produced by transition, displacement, and economic adjustment, and how self-consciousness and experimentation became imaginary lifelines in the face of socioeconomic decimation. While modernism's paradigmatic ascendancy continued to hold sway throughout the second half of the twentieth century, a series of narrative impetuses began to challenge modernism's literary predominance toward the turn of the century. These apertures would continue to develop as modernism transitioned into a cultural residual. I conclude by showing how the historicization of modernism provides formal codifications to apprehend the structural couplings of subjective and objective violence at the end of accumulation.

Degree Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Graduate Group
Romance Languages

First Advisor
Ericka Beckman

Keywords
Capital, Form, Mexico, Modernism, Novel, Space

Subject Categories
English Language and Literature | Latin American Languages and Societies | Latin American Literature | Latin American Studies

This dissertation is available at ScholarlyCommons: https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/5435
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Mentors, colleagues, friends, and family have contributed, directly or indirectly, to the development of this dissertation. Without their guidance and solidarity this investigation would not have been possible. Ericka Beckman’s threefold companionship as doctoral adviser, mentor in all things academic, and graduate chair in Hispanic studies has been an infinite source of encouragement and intellectual stimulation. Without her direction this project would lack many, if not all, of its critical orientations. Jorge Téllez’s generosity throughout the dissertation writing process and his overall support along the way have provided me with a bright example of sensible teaching and mentorship. I am deeply thankful to Emilio Sauri and Adela Pineda Franco, who freeheartedly accepted to be a part of this project. Their critical insight and intellectual empathy beyond their role as external readers has been an extraordinary gift.

At the University of Pennsylvania, I would like to thank the faculty members of the Graduate Group in Hispanic Studies: Ashley Brock, Román de la Campa, Odette Casamayor Cisneros, Marie Elise Escalante, Ignacio Javier López, Luis Moreno Caballud, and Michael Solomon. Toni Espósito’s generous advice and sincere pedagogical enthusiasm have been fundamental to my professional development. I am deeply grateful to the Hispanic Studies Graduate Student Group, whose camaraderie and intellectual companionship never failed to produce generative encounters. Daniella Sánchez Russo’s unfaltering friendship continues to be a limitless source of joy, critical speculation, and uninhibited happiness. Brianna Crayton was an irreplaceable ally and friend to whom I remain deeply indebted. Thanks also to Tina Behari, Suzanne Cassidy,
Kim Dougherty, Laura Flippin, Phil Miraglia, Ashley Truehart, and Jackie Zhan. Outside
the Department of Romance Languages, I would like to thank Michael Hanchard and
Kevin F. Platt, true models of academic excellence and interdisciplinary prolificacy. I am
forever grateful to Alexandra Brown, Devin William Daniels, Alex Millen, Ben Oyler,
and everyone else involved in the Variations Working Group for giving me the gift of
collective study and research. Also at Penn, I would like to thank Elizabeth Bynum,
Selma Feliciano Arroyo, Sebastián Figueroa, Samantha Gillen, Carlos Pio, and Alba Solà
Garcia. Ewa Matyczyk and Alec Stewart’s unexpected friendship helped me successfully
navigate the last year of the graduate program. The organizing work of GET-UP
(Graduate Employees Together at the University of Pennsylvania) and of many other
graduate student workers continues to be a source of inspiration.

Beyond Penn, I am grateful to Roberto Cruz Arzabal of the Universidad
Veracruzana, Regina Pieck of Brown University, and many other colleagues for their
complicity in sustaining the Mexican Studies Research Collective as a lively space for
collaboration in the field of Mexican studies. Víctor Sierra Matute of Baruch College and
Emily C. Vázquez Enríquez of UC-Davis are tireless mentors and friends without whose
guidance and generosity I would be lost. Giselle Román Medina of the Pontificia
Universidad Católica de Valparaíso has been a brilliant interlocutor and an inspiring
friend since we first met. Tamara L. Mitchell of the University of British Columbia, Tavid
Mulder of Brown University, and Sarah J. Townsend of Penn State University have
overwhelmed me with acts of generosity and intellectual kindness that I will treasure
forever.
The love of my parents, Jaime Andrade and Male Delgadillo, my brother, Luis,
and my extended family, is my primordial source of motivation. Emilia Cordero
Oceguera has been a part of my life for almost 18 years. I hold her friendship and counsel
dearest of all. Finally, my deepest admiration and love go to Deidre Rodríguez Rocha,
who remains my fiercest critic and with whom I am proud to walk, side by side, toward
life.
ABSTRACT


Pavel Ernesto Andrade Delgadillo
Ericka Beckman

This dissertation lies at the intersection of Marxist literary criticism, spatial literary analysis or geocriticism, and Mexican literary studies. Throughout the dissertation I interrogate the plausible concatenations of these fields for the study of the spatiality of the Mexican modernist novel of the second half of the twentieth century, a period marked by Mexico’s transition from an industrial to a new-export oriented pattern of capital accumulation. I use the notion ‘spatial composition’ to theorize the conceptual relation between the novel’s formal ordinations and the patterns that model the reproduction of capital under specific historical and geospatial conditions. I show that the formal solutions offered by the Mexican novel to the changing dynamics of capital accumulation provide a systematic account of how unevenness comes to be produced and reproduced within the world order of late multinational capital. The periodization advanced corresponds to literary modernism’s consolidation as a cultural dominant in Mexico, a process that can be traced back to the long sixties. I argue that in the context of this long decade, Mexican literary modernism came to operate as a form of symbolic compensation for the exhaustion of the developmental program of the national-popular state. Each chapter studies modernist form against the backdrop of a momentous turning point in the consolidation of a new export-oriented pattern of capital reproduction in
Mexico. Thus, each chapter considers how the modernist novel absorbed the antinomies produced by transition, displacement, and economic adjustment, and how self-consciousness and experimentation became imaginary lifelines in the face of socioeconomic decimation. While modernism’s paradigmatic ascendancy continued to hold sway throughout the second half of the twentieth century, a series of narrative impetuses began to challenge modernism’s literary predominance toward the turn of the century. These apertures would continue to develop as modernism transitioned into a cultural residual. I conclude by showing how the historicization of modernism provides formal codifications to apprehend the structural couplings of subjective and objective violence at the end of accumulation.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................ ii

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... v

Introduction ................................................................................................................... 1

On Periodization .......................................................................................................... 4

Stuck in the Post .......................................................................................................... 11

Spatial Composition .................................................................................................... 18

Chapter Outline ............................................................................................................ 22

Chapter 1: Thresholds .................................................................................................. 27

The Death of Artemio Cruz ......................................................................................... 29

Separation .................................................................................................................... 37

Enclosure ..................................................................................................................... 48

Curtains ....................................................................................................................... 58

The Lives of Artemio Cruz .......................................................................................... 65

Chapter 2: Patterns ...................................................................................................... 76

Beyond la Onda .............................................................................................................. 79

Acuérdate de Acapulco ............................................................................................... 89

Circularity ................................................................................................................... 99

Repetition ................................................................................................................... 106

Hallucinations ........................................................................................................... 114

Chapter 3: Dwellings .................................................................................................. 123

Crisis ......................................................................................................................... 125
Introduction

Without a world-view there is no composition.

Georg Lukács, “Narrate or Describe?”

Form is composed relationality.

Anna Kornbluh, The Order of Forms

This dissertation is, first and foremost, a work of Marxist literary criticism, whose defining concern I understand to be, as Roberto Schwarz has put it, “the dialectic of literary form and social process” (“Objective Form” 10), or, alternately, what Georg Lukács referred to in the preface to the English edition of The Historical Novel as “the social basis of the divergence and convergence of genres, the rise and withering away of new elements of form within this complicated process of interaction” (14-5). Such complicated process is the fundamental problem analyzed throughout this dissertation. Secondly, I consider this to be a dissertation in spatial literary studies, that is, a dissertation concerned with the study of the relations between literary form and the production of space. Spatiality studies have flourished in the aftermath of what many authors refer to as a spatial turn in the humanities and the social sciences, and while throughout this dissertation I engage with a wide range of spatial literary practices, my main concern here is the conceptualization of literary spatiality as an abstract moment in the social process of the production of space. In this regard, the central aim of this dissertation is, to paraphrase Edward Soja, the theorization of literary form as a summative conceptualization of capitalist spatiality (Postmodern 81n4). Only thirdly is this dissertation conceived as a work in Mexican literary studies, which is to say that
Mexican literature in general and the Mexican novel in particular have provided the literary raw materials to construct the theoretical problem at the center of this investigation. However, while the core concerns of this study would have been preserved in the absence of the Mexican distinctiveness of the literary materials I work with (here it makes no difference how such distinctiveness is construed), it is also the case that the symbolic resonances, citation practices, and formal explorations that produce such distinctiveness illuminate the dialectic of literary form and social process from a unique perspective, that is to say, they afford a specific critical interpretation of such interaction. The question then is not so much what the analysis of the Mexican novel of the second half of the twentieth century might tell us about the dialectic of literary form and social process, but rather what constitutive components of this dialectic become theoretically attainable only when studying it from a given perspective (national, dependent, peripheral, or semiperipheral in character), in this case that of the Mexican novel.

Along the pages of this dissertation, the reader (perhaps reader is a way too optimistically general proposition) will find various concerns that are minimally outlined or that turn up as purposeful recurrences, for instance, a certain inclination toward geometry, architecture, and the socio-spatial intersections of the built and non-built environments. Without being fully developed, these concerns sketch some lines of inquiry that I consider relevant to pursue a more integrated study of the relation between literary form and the social process of the production of space.

Finally, I conceive of disorientation as the general theme of this dissertation, the recurring motive that threads every chapter together. Disorientation stands simultaneously
as the phenomenological corollary to the process commonly glossed over as modernization, and a spatial metaphor for the aesthetic mode commonly referred to as modernism. This is, thus, a dissertation that inhabits the trenches of modernity—an idea I will return to in a moment.

Having established some basic parameters, it is now necessary to comment on their general implications for the focalizations of this study, which are national in scale. Commenting on the question of nations and the relationship of national literatures to each other during a talk delivered at the Franklin Humanities Institute at Duke University in 2008, Fredric Jameson offers what I consider to be a fundamental proposition to understand the scalar valence of the national in contemporary literary criticism:

The national is preeminently the place of the dialectical union of opposites, the space where the opposites coincide. The national is, thus, on the one hand, the space of the most abominable ethnic cleansing, of bigotry and xenophobia in their narrowest and most provincial forms […] to the point at which it seems almost obscene to undertake a celebration of nationalism in any form whatsoever today. Yet the national is also the figure for collectivity as such, whether we are talking about language, tribal or ethnic solidarity or any other form of group or communal spirit. Indeed class itself (social class), the one collective category which seems to achieve universality independently of any of those categories, has most often in all modern revolutions without exception, also been expressed in nationalist terms, or perhaps we might say that class solidarity in these revolutions has coopted and appropriated the nationalist impulses. At any rate it’s worth affirming, as over against the various individualist ideologies, that the very form of the group and the collective is always worth celebrating, is always positive, and this certainly holds for the great nationalist movements, although perhaps we need to add Deleuze’s proviso that the group or the national is always to be supported until it comes to power, until it achieves its nationalist ends, at which point it tends to swing back into its opposite, the tyranny of the majoritarian group, not so much over individuals as over the now minoritarian ones.
While this dissertation does not advance any sustained reflection on the question of nationalism in any of its forms (ethnic, civic, liberal, reactionary, etc.), it nonetheless understands the contradictory persistence of the nation-state under globalization to be the cornerstone of any strain of literary formalism that takes into consideration the scalar politics of the national. Against what Erica Benner has called “liberal post-nationalism” (241), this study understands the national as the preeminent space for the dialectical union of opposites, a markedly contradictory space that is uniquely functional and simultaneously noxious to capital’s global imperatives and, therefore, the space where the contradictions immanent to capitalism’s universal vocation are most thoroughly expressed. It is at the level of the national that the periodization advanced by this dissertation finds its analytical footings.

On Periodization

Every form of historicization implies an exercise in periodization. The years that bookmark this dissertation, corresponding to the earliest and latest novels studied, Carlos Fuentes’ *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962) and Fernanda Melchor’s *Temporada de huracanes* (2017), sketch the temporal boundaries of a specific period in Mexican history. The specificity of this period is composed by the aftereffects of Mexico’s transition from an industrial to a new export-oriented pattern of capital reproduction.

The notion pattern of capital reproduction was developed by Chilean sociologist Jaime Osorio as an integrative mode or unit of analysis that centers the forms the reproduction of capital assumes under specific historical and geospatial conditions: “En definitiva, *el capital va estableciendo patrones de conducta en su reproducción en*
**periodos históricos determinados**, ya sea porque privilegia determinadas ramas o sectores para la inversión, utiliza tecnologías y medios de producción específicos, explota de maneras diferentes o reproduce—redefiniendo—lo que ha hecho en la materia en otros momentos, produce determinados valores de uso y los destina hacia mercados—internos o externos—adecuados a sus necesidades, todo lo cual, difiere de cómo realiza estos pasos o cómo se reproduce en otros periodos” (“Patrón” 34-5). An analytical emphasis on reproduction (rather than on production or circulation in isolated form), necessarily centers the distortions, alignments, and protrusions resulting from capital’s historical partiality toward certain forms (circuits, roads) of valorization. These stresses produce discernible patterns that historicize the motions of capital across space and time, that is, they generate specific social and material conditions in the service of the self-valorization of capital. In Osorio’s formulation, “el patrón de reproducción de capital es una categoría que permite establecer mediaciones entre los niveles más generales de análisis y niveles menos abstractos o histórico concretos” (36). Finally:

El patrón de reproducción del capital expresa las distinciones cómo el capital se reproduce en un sistema mundial diferenciado entre centros imperialistas, semiperiferías y periferias dependientes, en las regiones y las formaciones sociales que los caracterizan, y considera las relaciones económicas (particularmente de apropiación-expropiación) que en diferentes momentos (y bajo diferentes mecanismos) establecen estas unidades […] La capacidad de historizar la reproducción del capital implica comprender las condiciones que hacen posible el ascenso, auge y declinación de un patrón o su crisis, al tiempo que considera los momentos de tránsito, donde un antiguo patrón no termina de desaparecer o constituirse en patrón subordinado y otro nuevo no termina de madurar o convertirse en patrón predominante. (37-8)

Before moving on to specify the transition from an industrial to a new export-oriented pattern, it is important to differentiate between economic policy and a given
pattern of capital reproduction. Economic policy is ‘one of the fundamental mechanisms’ available to capital to navigate the obstacles presented by its recurring passage through the spheres of production and circulation. Interest rates, tariffs, public expenditure, etc. all modulate the capitalist cycle in ways that favor or contradict the interests of specific class fractions and/or sectors. Thus, “en el nivel de análisis de un patrón de reproducción es necesario distinguir fracciones del capital y sectores […] Estas diferenciaciones son importantes porque la política económica no puede resolver las necesidades de reproducción de todas estas fracciones y sectores de igual manera” (Osorio, “Patrón” 58).

For the purposes of this study it is important to keep in mind there is a difference between the specific set of economic policies commonly bundled under the label of neoliberalism and the consolidation of a new export-oriented pattern of capital reproduction in Mexico: the latter’s gradual development creates the necessary conditions for neoliberal economic policy to become actively pursued by specific fractions or sectors of the Mexican ruling class—more often than not in accord with monopoly capital. Thus, it is the gradual transformation of the material conditions necessary for the reproduction of capital—a process determined by the law of value and mediated by class struggle—that produces the framework for the pursuit of economic policies more or less amenable to a given class fraction or sector, and not the other way around.

Taking all these variables into consideration, it is then possible to postulate the concatenation of three distinct patterns of capital reproduction in Latin American history: a primary-export pattern (patrón primario o agrominero exportador), an industrial pattern (patrón industrial), and what Osorio defines as a new export-oriented pattern of
productive specialization (nuevo patrón exportador de especialización productiva).

Between these patterns are two transitional phases that signal the moment when an
emerging pattern becomes dominant and a previously dominant one becomes residual.

Beyond the articulations intrinsic to the transition from one pattern to another, a
significant aspect to consider are the imbrications between the way these transitions
express themselves in a specific locality and the uneven flows of value and use-values
across the capitalist world system. “Un problema teórico y metodológico de la mayor
importancia es desentrañar los elementos que hacen posible que los cambios en los
centros imperiales propicien cambios en las economías dependientes, o, dicho de otra
manera, que ‘lo externo’ se ‘internalice’, y cómo las modificaciones en el mundo
dependiente repercuten en el mundo imperialista, o cómo ‘lo interno’ (visto desde la
periferia) se ‘externaliza’” (Osorio, “Patrón” 75). Analytically, this combined process
would have to be specified for a given socio-economic formation, which in the case of
this dissertation forces us to consider the specifically Mexican inflections of the transition
from an industrial to an export-oriented pattern.

“Luego de un periodo de interregno,” writes Osorio referring to this transition,
ha terminado por tomar forma en América Latina un nuevo patrón de
reproducción del capital, que en sus líneas generales puede caracterizarse
como un nuevo modelo exportador. Sin embargo, esta nueva economía
presenta diferencias con el modelo exportador que América Latina
conoció en el siglo XIX y a comienzos del siglo XX. Por ello
caracterizamos la nueva economía como un patrón exportador de
especialización productiva, que enfatiza el abandono del proyecto de
industrialización diversificada, pero que deja abierta la idea de economías
que pueden seguir industrializándose, sólo que en rubros específicos.
También permite comprender que la reinserción internacional puede
sustentarse en rubros agrícolas o mineros, no sólo industriales, y que en
cualquier caso, acentúa la vocación exportadora. (“El nuevo” 101)
Ruy Mauro Marini had already noted the characteristic ‘export vocation’ of this new pattern when, toward the end of his *Dialéctica de la dependencia* (1973), he argued that “se asiste en toda América Latina a la resurrección del modelo de la vieja economía exportadora” (75). Such resurrection, instigated by the contradictions, tensions, and distortions specific to dependent capitalism, is the historical event that I schematicize throughout this dissertation.

In Mexico, the transition to a new export oriented pattern of capital reproduction can be traced back to the 1950s, when an upsurge in popular mobilization and the subsequent authoritarian turn of the Mexican state forged a new power balance between labor and capital, where the former became more thoroughly subordinated to the latter. In the face of a new international division of labor and the exacerbation of the contradictions inherent in dependent industrialization, this process paralleled the exhaustion of the industrial pattern of capital reproduction and of its political incarnation, the so-called national-popular state. This was the point of departure for a strenuous transition that would culminate in a new socioeconomic paradigm following the end of the period known as the *desarrollo estabilizador* (1958-70). Reading this conjuncture in Mexican history as a transitional period allows us, on the one hand, to construct a broader understanding of the origins of neoliberalism in Mexico (Sánchez Prado 2019), on the other, it emphasizes the structural limitations to the import substitution industrialization program embraced by the Mexican state from the 1940s onward (Guillén Romo 2005). The outcome to this process will be “la puesta en marcha de un nuevo patrón de reproducción de capital, caracterizado como exportador de especialización productiva, a
partir de políticas económicas neoliberales, y la recreación de una nueva relación mando/obediencia y de comunidad estatal bajo el ideario de la democratización y el paso del súbdito al ciudadano como sujeto de un nuevo ordenamiento de la vida pública” (Osorio “Crisis estatal” 43). If this transitional period marks the exhaustion of the industrial pattern for the Mexican case, one of the main hypothesis guiding this dissertation is that, similarly, the new export oriented pattern of productive specialization, having become dominant throughout the 1970s and 80s, began to fracture in the aftermath of the so called Mexican Drug War (2006). Thus, from the 1960s onward it is possible to discern a cycle of ascension, expansion, and deterioration that has as its most significant milestones the years 1982 (Mexican debt crisis), 1994 (entry into force of the North American Free Trade Agreement, Zapatista uprising) and 2006 (declaration of the Mexican “war on drugs”). The much taunted crisis of the Mexican state, whatever such formulation might come to designate, is, in this sense, a crisis derived from the exhaustion of the export-oriented pattern of capital reproduction that has shaped the Mexican economy over the last 40-50 years.

One of the particularities of the use of the notion pattern of capital reproduction as a unit of analysis is that it forces us to assume an integrative perspective toward the study of social reality. Whereas disciplinary boundaries tend to preclude the epistemological affirmation of a social totality, the category pattern of capital reproduction forces us to confront the articulations and structurations of social life across seemingly disparate fields of human experience. Thus, in opting for the notion pattern of capital reproduction as a unit of analysis, this dissertation affirms an objective continuity across the extensive
aggregate of social life, that is, it assumes “that social life is in its fundamental reality one and indivisible, a seamless web, a single inconceivable and transindividual process, in which there is no need to invent ways of linking language events and social upheavals or economic contradictions because on that level they were never separate from one another. The realm of separation, of fragmentation, of the explosion of codes and the multiplicity of disciplines is merely the reality of the appearance: it exists, as Hegel would put it, not so much in itself as rather for us, as the basic logic and fundamental law of our daily life and existential experience in late capitalism” (Jameson Political 40). The notion pattern of capital reproduction operates as a form of mediation that allows us to conceptually articulate what are fundamentally indivisible but experientially dissonant phenomena.

We must now briefly consider the plausible invocations of the literary for the study of the patterns that historicize the motions of capital and vice versa, which is, in essence, a different way of formulating the question of the dialectic of literary form and social process. This question, indeed, calls for “an act of intercession, reconciliation, or interpretation between adversaries or strangers” (Williams, Marxism 97), in short, for an act of mediation. At its most basic, “mediation signifies the process by which two phenomena that may appear to be unrelated to one another can be shown to be vitally linked by means of a third term that expresses an important inner connection between them” (Foley 27). As an act of transcoding (Jameson, Political 40), mediation is a disputed practice and, therefore, a constitutively unfinished project. Mediation is the production of an interpretive standpoint. This dissertation constructs such interpretive standpoint by confronting the patterns involved in the literary formalization of social
space with the social implications of the reproduction of capital, that is, by asserting a formal interrelation between literary spatiality and the spatial configurations produced by the reproduction of capital under specific historical and geospatial conditions. Thus, one of the main theoretical threads guiding this dissertation is the mediated relationship between the spatial practice secreted by the emergence of a new export-oriented pattern of capital reproduction in Mexico and what I will refer to as the spatial composition of the Mexican novel. But before elaborating on these spatial articulations, it becomes necessary to say a thing or two about the modality of the novels I study and their relation to the question of modernity/modernization.

A note on terminology: Throughout the dissertation, I use the notion pattern of capital reproduction and the closely related pattern of capital accumulation indistinctly. However, it must be noted that the latter has been the object of alternate, if interrelated, theorizations (see Valenzuela Feijoo 1990).

Stuck in the Post

Toward the end of Fred Inglis’ reconstruction of Raymond Williams’ 1987 lecture, “When Was Modernism?,” the temporal discrimination that led to the canonization of modernism is discussed in the following terms:

After Modernism is canonized […] by the post-war settlement and its accompanying, complicit academic endorsements, there is then the presumption that since Modernism is here in this specific phase or period, there is nothing beyond it. The marginal or rejected artists become classics of organized teaching and of travelling exhibitions in the great galleries of the metropolitan cities. ‘Modernism’ is confined to this highly selective field and denied to everything else in an act of pure ideology, whose first, unconscious irony is that, absurdly, it stops history dead. Modernism being the terminus, everything afterwards is counted out of development. It is after; stuck in the post. (34-5)
The recently published transcription of Williams’ lecture, expands on the character of this ideological act: “the appropriation of ‘modern’ for a selection of what have in fact been the modern processes is an act of pure ideology. It attempts to relegate to a pre-history—or to irrelevant provinces in which these key modern processes have not yet occurred but may be hoped to be about to occur, or if they do not occur quickly enough may be helped to move on to occur—the notion that that is so” (Williams, “When” 217). Williams healthy skepticism toward the notion of a modern universality, a “universal alienation” (219) supposedly derived from the discovery of “fundamental, general human ways of seeing” (217), is at the center of this dissertation’s interest in the dislocation of a modernist aesthetic into the ‘irrelevant provinces’ of the capitalist world system, since, I argue, it is from such dislocation that a critical perspective might be gained in relation to modernism’s alleged universality.

To begin with, let us note that a spatiotemporal paradox emerges as soon as we bring into focus modernism’s historical dislocations. Peripheral modernism, we might say, is, by virtue of what Antonio Candido once called “our placental link to European literatures” (130), condemned from the outset to be a literary modality that is, simultaneously, stuck in the post, that is, stuck in the after to the here established by modernism’s canonization, and stubbornly relegated to a kind of pre-history in the sense annotated by Williams, a modality that appears to exist as a formal anticipation to the modern processes that are about to occur or are yet to come, and for which development and progress become shorthand throughout the first half of the twentieth century. “We never created original frameworks of expression,” Candido argues, “nor basic expressive
techniques; we never created such things as Romanticism, on the level of tendencies, or the psychological novel, on the level of genres, or indirect free style, on that of writing [...]. And when we in turn influence the Europeans through the works we do [...], at such moments what we give back are not inventions but a refining of received instruments” (130). One of the main arguments of this dissertation, structured around the modernist character of the novels studied, is that modernism’s dislocation across the global periphery, precisely by way of its ambivalent assimilation as something that is simultaneously belated and premature—belated in relation to the formal innovations of Anglo-Europan modernism and premature in relation to the modern processes experienced in the world system’s metropoles—allows us to interrogate the validity of the generalizations that conform modernism’s universality. Such is the conceptual aperture pursued throughout the dissertation in relation to the dialectic of literary form and social process, the component of the dialectic that, I argue, becomes attainable, if not exclusively at the very least paradigmatically, from the dislocated perspective of the global periphery.

In reference to the Peruvian avant-garde, Tavid Mulder similarly underscores the ways in which “the new is often achieved at the expense of relevance to the periphery” (372). Focusing on Mariátegui’s concern with the question of contemporaneity, Mulder notes that “The starting point for the periphery is the historical experience of its nonself-contemporaneity: the persistence of quasi-feudal relations, a relatively undeveloped industrial capitalism, the spatial juxtaposition of past (rural) and present (urban). Modernity in Latin America invariably appears as a pale shadow of a true modernity that
lies elsewhere” (378). As soon as the question is posed in these terms two possible solutions emerge, either peripheral modernism succumbs to modernity’s alleged universality, becoming a perennial, although ultimately failed, pursuit of contemporaneity, or it embraces the experience of nonself-contemporaneity as the objective result of the historical unfolding of “a system that is simultaneously one, and unequal: with a core, and a periphery (and a semiperiphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality” (Moretti, “Conjectures” 55-6). In the latter case nonself-contemporaneity becomes ratified as the specifically peripheral by-product of a singular modernity (Jameson 2002).

This dissertation follows this tension beyond the period traditionally designated for the study of the modern in Mexico, namely the postrevolutionary decades, a moment that, I would argue, corresponds to the historical emergence of modernism as a legitimate cultural mode. Here, Williams’ differentiation between the avant-garde and modernism proper proves useful to adequately situate the consolidation of modernism as a cultural dominant in Mexico. According to Williams, “the point that has to be made about the avant-garde which still makes it a distinguishable definition from modernism is that the avant-garde was never a cultural movement alone […] The avant-garde […] always proposed new methods in the arts but they also proposed them as means to or consequent upon very radical changes in society or, to be even more ambitious, in human nature, the apprehension of life itself” (“When” 206). Modernism, on the other hand, “becomes a statement out of the 1950s” (210), a retrospective generalization that is constructed around the notion that “language is not natural, that language is an artificial system”
In Williams’ argument, it is during the 1950s that modernism becomes equated to a distinct set of attributes, “the new emphasis on the unconscious, the denaturalization of language, the rejection of representation, the questionability of narrative, and with that the notion of the authentic work of art as self-reflexive” (“When” 210), as opposed to a larger, more general revolt against fixed forms. However arbitrarily defined, for the purposes of this study it is important to consider what pressures the retrospective generalization of modernism created for the national literatures of the periphery, which are now confronted with the task of not only inventing their own modern genealogy, but of adopting and refining the modernist instruments received from modernism’s hegemonic rationalization. Thus, on the one hand, Mexican literature is compelled to device a lineage that allows it to align itself with the trajectory of the new modern universal—which gives us Azuela as the father of Mexican literary modernity—while, on the other, modernism’s attributes (self-reflexiveness, denaturalization, the rejection of representation, etc.) become, de facto, the literary terminus of any work with truly cosmopolitan, i.e. modern, aspirations—which gives us Fuentes as the incarnation of Mexican cosmopolitanism.

The Mexican modernist novel of the mid-decades of the twentieth century becomes trapped between the pursuit of contemporaneity and the actualization of nonself-contemporaneity, between the imperative to move out from the purlieus of “international literary space” (Casanova 2004) and the continued inappositeness this imperative reproduces in relation to the pursuit of literary originality. The interpretive perils derived from this position have been at the center of many debates surrounding the
notion of a Latin American literary modernism. Referring to the so-called *generación del boom*, Neil Larsen observes:

*Early attempts to trace the new Latin-American literature to the influence of foreign models—in poetry, the surrealists; in prose fiction, that of Faulkner in particular—have, especially since the Cuban Revolution, tended to be de-emphasized in a more consciously nationalist or regionalist impetus to set forth the uniquely local sources of a literature that, if it does betray the superficial traits of outside influence, transforms the foreign element into a radically original compound. It is this complex, synthetic originality that, as this general line of thinking goes, lays proper claim to a modernity that would otherwise—if allowed to retain its privileged but alien metropolitan exemplarity—fall victim to its own intolerable unmodernity as a repetition. (Modernism 50)*

Such are the unstable parameters under which modernism becomes a cultural dominant in Mexico.

While the “regionalist and autonomizing construct” was able to bypass “the worst kind of mechanical, colonizing pseudoclassification” (Larsen, *Modernism* 50) by affirming Latin American literature’s ‘synthetic originality,’ it seems to me that once modernism is established as a cultural dominant, the at-times-generative-at-times-debilitating tension that stirred modernism’s bandwagon, became readily discarded as an all-too meaningful but equally bypass juncture in Latin American literary history. It is my contention that this particular form of canonization forces the Mexican modernist novel into an unforeseen impasse, one where the foundational opposition between the pursuit of contemporaneity and the experience of nonself-contemporaneity became enshrouded behind a newly found sentiment of fully achieved universality. What is important to emphasize is that as a result of this process, modernism became exceptionally incurious toward the ideological theme of modernity itself—what Larsen refers to as the “less
obvious ideological burdens” of modernity or what Williams denounced as a delusory modern universality. I argue that in the context of Mexico’s transition from an industrial to a new export-oriented pattern of capital reproduction, modernism thus came to operate as a form of symbolic compensation for the exhaustion of the developmental program of the national-popular state. Modernism became the salutary resolution to developmentalism’s barefaced insufficiencies.

I argue that the consolidation of modernism as a cultural dominant tended to mollify the critical apertures produced by the confrontation between social (local) experience and formal (universal) imperatives, i.e. the experience of nonself-contemporaneity itself. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the critical inconveniences that peripheral modernism had presented for the conceptualization of a modern universality, became flattened under the mandate of *occidentalization*: “No se trata de ser iguales a los europeos, sino de encontrar un modo propio de ser occidentales” (Volpi 74). It is one of the fundamental concerns of this study to interrogate the ways in which Mexican literature’s affirmation of a modern universality tended to overshadow what Carlos Blanco Aguinaga refers to as the “shameless imperialism” of the “pseudotheoretical modernist operation” (15). Reading literary modernism against the grain, this dissertation retraces the unremarked, overlooked symbolic fractures produced by the investment of the Mexican novel in the postulates of a modern universality, for it is in these fractures that the modern reveals itself as something produced, and its postulates as mere “*historical and transitory products*” (Marx, *Poverty* 119). This is, ultimately, why I consider relevant to rehearse a critique of the modernist novel in
Mexico today specifically, at a moment “when numerous schools of recent literary criticism have resigned both the aesthetic and the political purviews of Marxism” (Kornbluh, “We” 397), and when the indictment of the “so-called Enlightenment project” (Meiksins Wood 541) has galvanized literary scholarship around a well-intentioned if ultimately misplaced anti-modern sentiment.

To reapproach the modernist novel in the terms outlined above, i.e. as the symbolic resolution to developmentalism’s limitations, I argue, is a way to ascertain “those aspects of our current condition that overwhelmingly belong not to the ‘project of modernity’ but to capitalism” (Meiksins Wood 544). Centering peripheral modernism’s shortcomings in relation to the ideological projection of a supposedly modern universality, this dissertation advances the claim that the main obstacle for the affirmation of a truly modern universality is capitalism itself.

Spatial Composition

Having established the modality of the novels I study and their relation to modernity/modernization, we can now return to the question of the mediated relationship between the spatial practice secreted by the rise of a new export oriented pattern of capital accumulation in Mexico and, what throughout this dissertation, I theorize as the spatial composition of the Mexican novel.

As Jonathan Culler has argued, “More than any other literary form, more perhaps than any other type of writing, the novel serves as the model by which society conceives of itself, the discourse in and through which it articulates the world” (Culler 221). As it ‘articulates the world,’ the novel withstands the sense of incompleteness—what Lukács
referred to as the “transcendental homelessness” (Lukács, *Theory* 41)—derived from the modern dissociation of the realm of individual experience from the objective determinations of that experience. At a certain moment in the history of the capitalist mode of production, writes Jameson, “the truth of [the phenomenological experience of the individual] no longer coincides with the place in which it takes place” (“Cognitive” 347). One of the main motivations for privileging the novel form as the object of study of this dissertation is, precisely, its relational geometry regarding the experience of the individual and social causality. In Lukács’ early interpretation, “the novel seeks, by giving form, to uncover and construct the conceived totality of life” (*Theory* 60). Lukács continues: “the novel, in contrast to other genres whose existence resides within the finished form, appears as something in process of becoming […] As form, the novel establishes a fluctuating yet firm balance between becoming and being; as the idea of becoming, it becomes a state. Thus the novel, by transforming itself into a normative being of becoming, surmounts itself” (72-3). The novel becomes a vehicle to conceptually apprehend not so much the relation as the *production* of the relation between individual experience and social life. The novel is, thus, a totality that resists totalization, it’s whole a “speculative whole” (Kornbluh, *Order* 30). Patterned by a constant state of interrogation and reconnaissance, the novel formalizes a speculative totality out of what initially presents itself as experientially disperse.

Thus a new perspective of life is reached on an entirely new basis—that of the indissoluble connection between the relative independence of the parts and their attachment to the whole. But the parts, despite this attachment, can never lose their inexorable, abstract self-dependence: and their relationship to the totality, although it approximates as closely as possible to an organic one, is nevertheless not a true-born organic relationship but a
Lukács’ formulation of the novel as a balancing act between becoming and being is (unintentionally but nonetheless remarkably) echoed in some of the theoretical approximations that have marshaled the reassertion of space in the humanities and social sciences. Discussing what he terms the ontological trialectic of Spatiality-Historicality-Sociality, Edward Soja makes the case to revitalize “the long-submerged and subordinated spatiality of existential being and becoming,” as he goes on to celebrate Lefebvre for his “critical and inquisitive nomadism in which the journeying to new ground never ceases” (Thirdspace 82), or, we might say, in which the established new ground is abolished again and again. This dissertation espouses as one of its conceptual bases the affirmation of the balancing act between becoming and being as a mediation between the formal motions of the novel’s world-making and the social process of the production of social space. Furthermore, as Lukács’ formulation of the conceptual relationship between the parts and the totality already makes explicit, this balancing act is structurally upheld by a relational architecture of connectivity, independence, and attachment. Thus, a second aperture is bore between the novel’s formalizations and the social production of social space: “(Social) space,” writes Lefebvre, “is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity — their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. […] Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others” (Production 73). The relative order and/or relative disorder of
things and their interrelationships approximates the Lukácsian proposition of a new perspective of life emerging from the generative tension between the relative independence of the parts (disorder) and their attachment to the whole (order). Through this continued process of confrontation, which reproduces the indissoluble connection over and over again, historical perspectives are formed or become blurred, possible solutions emerge, abide, and ultimately recede to give way to new forms of coexistence and simultaneity, of relative independence and attachment, that is to say, of sociality.

Michel de Certeau similarly expresses: “A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities” (117, my emphasis). This dissertation conceives of the novel’s formal permutations as a polyvalent unity that models the process of composing. Mapping intersections and proximities, tracing formal patterns and articulations, the novel assembles a spatial order. Composition is immanent to the production of both the novel form and social space.

In her recent The Order of Forms, Anna Kornbluh brightly makes the case to “read for the systematic interrelation of multiple components of novelistic discourse, and for the conceptual dynamism produced in that reverberation […] my formalism of the novel is not a formalism of one or two factors, but of all the factors in integral connection” (13). Embracing Kornbluh’s formulation of a political formalism, this
dissertation poses the question of what conceptual relation might be established between the novel’s formal ordinations—the systematic, articulated, patterned interrelation of plot, setting, characterization, narration, etc.—and the patterns that model the reproduction of capital under specific historical and geospatial conditions—in this case, those of the emergence, consolidation, and dissipation of a new export-oriented pattern of productive specialization in Mexico. I term this conceptual relationship as spatial composition.

**Chapter Outline**

I began this introduction by stating *disorientation* as the general theme of this dissertation. The four chapters that follow are formalist variations on this theme. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, disorientation, I argue, diagrams the historical foreclosure of autonomous industrialization and the unmooring of the developmental aspirations (Benjamin 2018) of the national-popular state, giving spatial form to what Emilio Sauri has referred to as the “collapse of modernization,” or the advent of “developmentalism without development” (258). Each chapter studies modernist form against the backdrop of a momentous turning point in the consolidation of a new export oriented pattern of capital reproduction in Mexico. Thus, each chapter considers how the modernist novel absorbed the manifold antinomies produced by transition, displacement, and adjustment, and how self-consciousness and experimentation became imaginary lifelines in the face of socioeconomic decimation. As Jeff Wallace has argued, “the discourse on modernist fiction is fundamentally Janus-faced, looking simultaneously inwards, towards form and language, and outwards, towards the changing material circumstances in which fiction was being produced and
consumed” (15). In what follows, I trace the growing ideological contrariety between modernist form and the material circumstances in which the modernist novel came to be produced and consumed throughout the second half of the twentieth century. The displacement of the modernist novel into the position of a cultural residual is the historiographic resolution to this deepening discrepancy.

Chapter 1, “Thresholds,” conceptualizes the modernist novel of the 1960s as a transitional novel. Focusing on Carlos Fuentes’ _La muerte de Artemio Cruz_ (1962) I argue that a dialectics of enclosure and openness gives spatial form to Mexico’s transition from an agrarian to an industrial social order. I contend that Fuentes’ novel registers the gradual displacement of the spatial imagery of the Mexican Revolution and, in doing so, gives formal expression to the end of the class alliance that cemented the national import substitution industrialization project. I demonstrate that Fuentes’ novel makes sense of the world as it continually separates the external from the internal, the realm of the social from the realm of the individual, and popular from bourgeois interests. While literary scholarship has often interpreted Artemio Cruz as an emblem of the betrayal of the ideals of the Mexican Revolution, I propose to approach the novel’s main character as a personification of capital, a representative of a definite social class, whose life provides a narrative enclosure of Mexico’s peripheral modernization. I argue that in its spatial integrations, _La muerte de Artemio Cruz_ delineates the obstacles presented by economic dependency to the expansion of a national bourgeois order.

Chapter 2, “Patterns,” traces the emergence of counterculture and the spatial contrivances of urban narrative. I study José Agustín’s road novel _Se está haciendo tarde_
(final en laguna) (1973) to show how the countercultural novel of the late 60s and early 70s spatializes the collapse of national industrialization through its formal use of circularity and repetition, creating patterns that shape the experience of Mexican modernity according to newly found principles of consumer society. I focus on the port city of Acapulco as an emblematic site to narrate the limits to the developmental program of the Mexican state. I argue that the novel’s simultaneous approximation to Acapulco as a slice of Paradise and a raging inferno, although rarely explored in relation to the peripheral logic of Mexico’s capitalist modernization, captures the pressures exerted on the dependent world by the advent of late capitalism.

Chapter 3, “Dwellings,” studies the spatial logic of privatization through María Luisa Mendoza’s *El perro de la escribana* (1982). I argue that Mendoza’s novel filters neoliberal economic policy through the spatial arrangements of domestic life. I study the emergence of the private as a privileged domain for formal inquiry in the Mexican novel of the 1980s and consider how, in the immediate aftermath of the 1982 debt crisis and the rollout of neoliberal economic policy, the Mexican novel produces a strong reconfiguration of intimate space, a qualitative change linked to the consolidation of the private as the choice laboratory of the literary avant-garde. I demonstrate that Mendoza’s novel refashions the symbolic density of domestic space by collapsing onto it the tribulations of the national. I conclude by arguing that Mendoza’s novel traces a particular amalgamation between modernism and the private that, in a context of socioeconomic crisis and national dependency, for the first time formulated the household as a functional space to the representation of a self-centered order. In so doing,
El perro de la escribana theorizes interiority as a contradictory form: on the one hand, as a privileged domain for female political subjectivity, on the other, as a spatial code that mediates the production and reproduction of life in the wake of consumer society.

Finally, Chapter 4, “Openings,” turns to Daniel Sada’s Porque parece mentira la verdad nunca se sabe (1999) to show how the economic reconfiguration of the Mexico/U.S. borderlands in the immediate aftermath of the entry into force of the North American Free Trade Agreement weighs upon the literary cartography of the Mexican novel, particularly how the representation of the desert and the border as sites of socio-ecological devastation prefigures a new paradigm in the relationship between the environment and the global circulation of capital. I argue that Porque parece mentira’s formalization of the desert registers the specific patterns of combination and synchronicity that account for the peripheral character of Mexico’s neoliberalization. I approach the desert as a space determined by the negation of architecture, an unconfined space that carries the insecurity derived from an encounter with the unknown and the expectation of the not-yet-being. In its indefiniteness, the desert simultaneously operates as a site of primitive violence and primordial shelter, a repository of superfluity—wasteland, slum, station—and a bustling concourse for global exchange. As the spatial repository of this tension, I argue, the desert ceases to operate as a topological space. Read as a non-orientable space, the desert exhibits a structural polyvalence that opens it to dialectical interpretation. I conclude by showing how the lack of stable perspectival cues forces the desert’s orientation to oscillate between economic disaster and utopian possibility.
The conclusion turns to Fernanda Melchor’s *Temporada de huracanes* (2017) to argue that as a cultural residual, peripheral modernism provides formal codifications to apprehend the structural couplings of subjective, objective, and symbolic violence at the end of accumulation.
Chapter 1: Thresholds

Lo que vieron mis ojos fue simultáneo: lo que transcribiré, sucesivo, porque el lenguaje lo es.

Jorge Luis Borges, “El aleph”

A thesis: throughout the 1960s the Mexican novel saw modernism transition from an emergent to a dominant cultural practice. Announcing the consecration of a new form of sociality, this transition continued to push the spatial imagination of the Mexican novel away from the rural worlds of the latifundio, the plantation, and the hacienda, and into the buzzing streets and high-rise office buildings of the nation’s capital. Carlos Fuentes’ *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962) is perhaps the paradigmatic example of this transfiguration—although, as I will go on to argue, such metamorphosis is evident in many significant novels of the literary constellation of the Mexican 60s. Through a continued process of transgression, disavowal, and recomposition of boundaries (social, historical, geographical), Artemio Cruz’s life plots Mexico’s capitalist development throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Cruz’s ability to both demarcate limits and move across thresholds carries the historical dynamic of Mexico’s peripheral modernization into the order of form. The main contention of this chapter is that *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* registers the gradual displacement of the spatial imagery of the revolutionary war and, in doing so, gives formal expression to the end of the class alliance that cemented the national import substitution industrialization project throughout the 40s and 50s. Read as a transitional novel, *Artemio Cruz* provides an account of the unstable reconfiguration of national space during the late 50s and early
60s. I contend that Fuentes’ novel presents specific formal solutions to the problem of how to address the limits to the national quest for capitalist modernization. As Ryan F. Long has argued, from the 60s onward the Mexican novel exposes “the violent foundations of the integrative operations that grounded the authority of both state and novel” (2). While literary criticism has been keen on exploring the emergence of marginalized voices in the aftermath of what Long refers to as “the bankruptcy of the national-popular state model,” (2) little effort has been made to attend to the logic behind the simultaneous reconfiguration of the nation according to a new hegemonic set of class interests. One of the main concerns of this chapter, then, is to explore, from a spatial perspective, the collapse of the national-popular state in relation to the emergence of a new class formation in Mexico.

I begin my analysis by referring to three spatial sequences that run through Fuentes’ *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, all of which are iterations of the same spatial motif: the separation of the external from the internal. This process not only demarcates the outside world from the domestic, private sphere, the realm of the social from the realm of the individual, it also separates national, i.e. popular, from class-specific (in this case bourgeois) interests. I read the opposition between outside and inside in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* as the spatial expression of the emergence of a national bourgeois consciousness. In this sense, the spatial sequences that in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* enact the separation of the external from the internal can be said to perform an ideological process of enclosure: the domestication of the communal project of the
Mexican Revolution and its appropriation by the newly consolidated national bourgeois class.

*The Death of Artemio Cruz*

Carlos Fuentes, for a long time one of the most easily recognizable names in the Mexican and Latin American literary canon,¹ is capable of sparking controversy the same as galvanizing political opinion. Renowned for his cosmopolitan aspirations, Fuentes remained throughout his life in the frontlines of the war waged by Latin American modernism on provincial and national essentialisms. His universal appetite, however, was always assailed by the Mexican rootedness of his persona. Jorge Volpi captures it best when he writes: “En México, Fuentes es un cosmopolita que se pretende mexicano; fuera, es un mexicano que se pretende universal” (74). The disparity noted by Volpi is carried out in Fuentes’ work to the point of contradiction. According to Maarten van Delden, “in spite of Fuentes’s Borgesian emphasis […] on the right of the Latin American writer to handle a broad range of themes unrestricted by national borders, in practice his homeland Mexico has been Fuentes’s principal subject as a writer” (7). This is why one is more likely to associate Fuentes with his earlier work—heavily infused with national concerns—than with the high-modernist ambitions of *Cambio de piel* (1967) or *Terra nostra* (1975).² John Ochoa, depicting Fuentes’ controversial character, recalls that Fuentes “once said he owed the idea for *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* […] perhaps the most ‘Mexican’ of his novels, ‘to the North Sea and a beach in Holland’” (“Fuentes” 708). The anecdote suffices to give a sense of Fuentes’ *dramatis personae.*
La muerte de Artemio Cruz, generally considered the pinnacle of Fuentes’ first period as a writer,\(^3\) has given way to different, at times even conflicting interpretations. At the center of these debates lies one of the novel’s best known features: the formal and thematic tension between unity and fragmentation, a tension key to Fuentes’ claim to a modernist aesthetic. While the outcome of this tension varies in different readings of the novel, it has been well established that the opposition serves as a marker for the struggle over the concept of the nation, Artemio Cruz himself “an agonizing revolutionary who stands as a symbol of both the revolution and the Mexican nation reborn in its aftermath” (García-Caro 87). A couple of examples should suffice to give a sense of the range of interpretations afforded by Fuentes’ novel. In his reading of Artemio Cruz, van Delden suggests that the novel “is marked, underneath the appearance of rupture and fragmentation, by a strong reliance on notions of unity and identity and by a strain of utopianism that links the novel to a now supposedly superseded modernity” (40). Carol Clark D’Lugo, taking a different stance, considers that, throughout the novel, “the emphasis is on fragmentation at almost every conceivable level: among characters, among social classes, in the Mexican Revolution of 1910, in the city, in the nation, and within the text’s discourse” (105). While, for reasons that will become apparent, Artemio Cruz provides evidence to support both claims, tipping the balance in favor of either unity or fragmentation is not one of the objectives of my analysis. What interests me is the way in which the valence of these diverging interpretations, as well as the many possible intermediate positions, is rather symptomatic of the novel’s transitional character.
If *Artemio Cruz* affords opposite interpretations regarding the symbolic density of the national edifice, it is *precisely* because, as a transitional novel, it is caught up in the cross fire of a historical transformation. At stake are not only the political underpinnings of the national-popular state, the viability of an “imagined community” that encompasses all sectors of society—in this case under the benevolent, if oftentimes brutal, embrace of the state—but the effective struggle over the limits of a developmentalist project and its redistributive possibilities. Beyond sketching the demise of the national-popular state, *Artemio Cruz* produces a disputed space, a textual configuration of a period that as we, following Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, might put it, “comprises the most motley mixture of crying contradictions.” In *Artemio Cruz* the opposition between unity and fragmentation, realism and modernism, exteriority and interiority enacts the disputed nature of any historical conjuncture. As contradictory forces these elements confront each other in a fight to the death. From this perspective, the life of Artemio Cruz, shaped by a well documented set of contradictions, offers itself as a symbolic battlefield. Upon this battlefield a struggle takes place, not only over the construction of a national identity, but over the nation’s own history.

The celebrated journey of the novel through the Mexican history of the first half of the twentieth century is, however, perforce less a univocal account of the betrayal of the ideals of the Mexican Revolution—another trope in the analyses devoted to *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* and a common theme of the novels of the Revolution going all the way back to Azuela—than an attempt to shape the past in order to understand the crossroads posited by the novel’s present. This is, perhaps, the main point of contention,
the crux, to keep up with the novel’s semantics, regarding Fuentes’ own reading of the
Mexican state. Gerald Martin’s commentary on the novel’s purview of the Mexican
history helps illuminate this problem. For Martin, “[n]ever was a character more
explicitly judged, and yet rarely was the evidence more obviously ‘fixed’” (*Journeys*
211-2). In Martin’s reading, the dissolution of Artemio Cruz into myth reveals “what the
‘down-to-earth’ quality of liberal thought actually amounts to—namely that ‘ideals’ are
by definition unattainable” (211). Martin’s conclusion is peremptory: “Fuentes, in his
very effort at critical realism, falls straight into the trap of his own bourgeois idealism”
(211). According to Martin, in the historical reconstruction offered by Fuentes, the battle
is ideologically rigged inasmuch as the demise of the state that emerged from the
Revolution has already happened. By wrapping the main character’s life in the aura of
singularity, the novel avoids revealing its historical partiality. Martin’s observation helps
explain the reverse temporal order that renders Cruz’s life as moving from death to birth,
finalizing in their final junction. The novel’s architecture produces Cruz as the discrete
outcome of a historical process that can only be grasped once it has been ideologically
fixed. Thus, the novel’s structure confirms that the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only
with the falling of the dusk, that reflection only begins *post festum*.

The ideological nuisance introduced by Martin, for some perhaps easily dismissed
as an overstated indictment of Fuentes’ oeuvre altogether, runs counter to the dominant
strand of literary criticism that understands *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* to be a more or
less direct political indictment of the Mexican Revolution as seen from the vantage point
of the revolutionary triumph in Cuba.5 It also runs counter to the many interpretations
that see in Artemio Cruz a figure that cancels out, by way of incorporation or annihilation, the possible futures, the historical avenues opened up by the revolutionary war. Finally, it helps question the mainstream interpretation of the Mexican twentieth century that sees in the betrayal of the ideals of the Mexican Revolution the original sin of the Mexican ruling class, a foundational moment that, in the political history of the nation, has been commonly projected onto the figure of Francisco J. Múgica and his failed candidacy to succeed Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1940 presidential election.

In *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* the theme of betrayal is developed by recourse to the figure of the double. Every character that dies in the novel, as well as the three distinct narrative voices that structure it, have been generally read as doubling figures of Artemio Cruz. José Ramón Ruisánchez Serra, referring to the deaths that occur throughout the novel, posits that “Sea cual sea el destino del cuerpo sacrificado, siempre se trata en alguna medida de un doble de Artemio Cruz” (*Historias* 145), a mechanism he elsewhere describes as “repressive representation” (“The Cacique” 720). On this same topic, Lanin A. Gyurko notes that:

The physical disintegration of the protagonist as well as his spiritual dissolution, his incapacity to master himself by integrating ego and conscience, self-serving ambition and sense of social responsibility, are underscored in that throughout the narrative the three voices keep alternating, but always remain separate. *Each narrative voice, which constitutes an inner double of the protagonist, reflects a different aspect of Cruz's paradoxical character.* His anguished, dying self is expressed through the fragmented and chaotic style of the first-person monologue; his conscience and subconsciousness through the authoritative, convoluted style of the second-person narration; and his outer life of the past through terse third-person accounts. These diverse aspects of self are fused only negatively, at the end of the narrative, as all three condense and collapse, abolished by death (*Lifting* 48, my emphasis).
At play, once again, is the tension between unity and fragmentation, this time projected onto the figure of Artemio Cruz and reflected by the structure of the novel. Considering the relation between Cruz’s life and the novel’s framework, van Delden affirms that “the vicissitudes of the protagonist’s life are emblems of different stages in the modern history of Mexico. The hero’s psychological disintegration (captured in the tripartite structure of the novel) and his physical dismemberment (most vividly depicted in the concluding image of the surgeon’s scalpel slicing open Artemio’s stomach for the final, unsuccessful operation) point to the disintegration and mutilation of the nation as a whole” (153). I am here less interested in the relation between Cruz’s psychological disintegration and the well-known triadic sequence (first, second, and third-person narrative) that structures the novel, than in the way Artemio Cruz presents this relation as a consequence of “the vicissitudes of the protagonist’s life,” as the outcome of individual actions that could have been avoided, but were nevertheless carried out sans remorse, at times because of pride and ambition, at times because of anger, fear, or love. This particular reading constitutes another well developed trope in the analyses of Artemio Cruz, to a certain extent substantiated by Fuentes’ claim that “Artemio trata de reconquistar, por medio de la memoria, sus doce días definitivos, días que son, en realidad, doce opciones” (qtd. in Carballo 638).

In the opposite direction, however, the structure of the novel, the fixed repetition of yo, tú and él segments, serves the purpose of giving each episode in Cruz’s life its rightful place as part of a whole, bringing order to what is otherwise a chaotic exercise in reminiscence. The novel’s conclusion, too, projects a sense of unity in the revelation of
Cruz’ racial origins, a problem that I will return to shortly. As Gyurko notes, “[t]he formal
design of the narrative, its rigid triadic progression, constitutes an attempt to impose
narrative form upon the disorder of consciousness” (“Structure” 31). The process of
subjecting the past (in this case the personal past of the main character) to a rigid,
uniform structure, helps dissolve the fantasy of an elected individual path. Indeed, from
this perspective, a different outcome for any of the episodes in Cruz’s past seems less
than impossible, every act, every decision, a piece in what the novel constructs as a
perfect puzzle.¹⁰ The overarching structure that binds together Cruz’s life inevitably
conflicts with the novel’s presentation of his individual choices. Despite the fact that “the
second-person voice of conscience indicates that the responsibility for Cruz's fate is his
own” (Gyurko, Lifting 50), the novel allows for a high level of formal ambiguity when it
comes to drawing the line that separates fate from freedom. In Fuentes’ words: “En La
muerte de Artemio Cruz [la libertad] es, al mismo tiempo, azar, libre albedrío y
necesidad” (qtd. in Carballo 627). Gyurko sums it up when he establishes that the
“Fusion of contradictory times is a formal means of signifying a paradoxical fusion
between freedom and fate” (“Structure” 36). The overall effect is in line with what
Fuentes understands to be the key formal innovation introduced by the novels of the
Mexican Revolution. According to Fuentes, the latter “introducen la ambigüedad. Porque
en la dinámica revolucionaria los héroes pueden ser villanos y los villanos pueden ser
héroes. No sólo hay origen y permanencia fatal en el origen; hay, por fin, un destino en
movimiento […] En la literatura de la revolución mexicana se encuentra esta semilla
novelesca: la certeza heroica se convierte en ambigüedad crítica, la fatalidad natural en
acción contradictoria, el idealismo romántico en dialéctica irónica” (La nueva 15, my emphasis). Cruz’s destiny is, much like the destiny of the heroes of the novels of the Revolution, a destiny in motion, the range of this motion being limited by the forces acting upon it.

*La muerte de Artemio Cruz* presents the reader with a character that is the purported product of multiple oppositions. As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, the imbalance between the opposing elements in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* signals to the epochal change marked by the exhaustion of the capitalist modernization project commonly referred to as the national-popular state. As proven by the lengthy scholarship devoted to analyzing the contradictions that give Artemio Cruz its particular character, this fact alone would suffice to construct an interpretation of the novel as a transitional text. Nevertheless, to stop here would entail the risk of flattening out this transition and taking it at face value, it would open the door to the common misconception that if only things had played out differently, if only the ideals of the Revolution had been preserved, fate could have been overcome by freedom, and the class alliance that cemented the national-popular state would have been able to continue its expansion well beyond the structural limits imposed by Mexico’s economic dependency. In other words, it would open the door to the illusion that the foreclosed future that, in Fuentes’ novel, pushes Cruz’s reverie into the past was somehow, at some point, a historical path available for the country. “Deprived forever of a true future,” writes Gyurko, “Cruz must attempt to construct a future out of the mere shards of the past” (*Lifting* 49). In the novel, Cruz’s sentence is pronounced in one of the second-person
segments: “hacia atrás, hacia atrás, en la nostalgia, podrás hacer tuyo cuánto desees: no hacia adelante, hacia atrás:” (63). Cruz’s freedom is restricted to a backwards motion, the same liberty that allows him to manipulate his personal past, to bend the story of his life according to his private needs, prevents him, even physically, from affecting the outcome of his present. The price Artemio Cruz pays to engage in nostalgia is the imminence of his own death, the cancelation of any sense futurity: “En el tiempo presente de la novela, Artemio es un hombre sin libertad: la ha agotado a fuerza de elegir” (Fuentes qtd. in Carballo 639). While some critics see Cruz as “a man at the mercy of memory” in the sense that he “is not at will to choose what to remember” (Schiller 99), I believe it is more accurate to see Cruz as a man at the mercy of history. For is not Cruz, in more than one way, a victim of his own circumstances, the tradition of all dead generations weighing like a nightmare on his brains?

It is at this point that I turn to the spatial dimension of the novel to argue that, despite the interpretations that see in Artemio Cruz an emblem of the betrayal of the ideals of the Mexican Revolution, a figure of interruption, it is possible to approach Fuentes’ novel as a text that traces the reconfiguration of the nation according to a new hegemonic set of class interests, i.e. as a space in transition, and, therefore, as a novel that delves in nascency rather than annihilation. It is my claim that this transition is less a product of individual choices, of self-selected circumstances, than a consequence of the limits to Mexico’s national project of capitalist modernization. These limits, I argue in the following pages, are vividly captured by the spatiality of Fuentes’ novel.

*Separation*
La muerte de Artemio Cruz traces the string of vicissitudes in Cruz’s life all the way back to his birth on April 9, 1889. Despite its brevity (it is the shortest of the third-person segments), this closing section reveals the spatial logic that came to define Cruz’s life in its entirety. The scene opens at the moment Cruz is being expelled from Isabel Cruz’s womb: “colgando, detenido por los hilos más tenues” (314). Lunero, Isabel’s brother, awaits the newborn “con la vasija de agua hirviendo sobre el fuego, la navaja y los trapos listos” (314). In a sequence that emphasizes the act of separation Cruz is detached from his mother: “el pequeño cuerpo pegajoso, atado a Cruz Isabel, Isabel Cruz, el pequeño cuerpo separado al fin” (314). Lunero severs the umbilical cord, the last organic thread binding Cruz to Isabel: “Lunero cortó el cordón” (315). Only then, with death looming over his shoulder, does Cruz begin to live: “se acercaban las botas y Lunero detenia boca abajo ese cuerpo, le pegaba con la palma abierta para que llorara, llorara mientras se acercaban las botas: lloró: él lloró y empezó a vivir:” (315). The moment of Cruz’s birth is inscribed in the reversal of the order of Isabel’s name (“Cruz Isabel, Isabel Cruz”), the syntactic displacement marks the threshold beyond which completeness (wholeness) is transfigured into its opposite, separation: “atado a Cruz Isabel, Isabel Cruz, el pequeño cuerpo separado al fin” (my emphasis). The act of being born is, for Cruz, an act of differentiation, of becoming separate, discrete, alien. The navaja (pocket knife) that slices Cruz’s umbilical cord underscores the violence involved in this act, and will reappear in the form of the bisturí (scalpel) that slices open his stomach at the time of his death. From birth to death Artemio Cruz’s life is a product of separation. The cut serves a dual purpose, as an act of violence it tears Cruz apart from
his mother, as an act of demarcation it draws the boundaries between the two bodies. Demarcation will play a key role in every definitive instance in Cruz’s life, all of the third-person segments dealing, in one way or another, with loss, denial, repulsion or exaction.

Before moving on to analyze the role separation plays in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, we should consider its relation to the tripartite structure of the novel and, in particular, to the role fragmentation has been assigned not only as a literary device but as a literary end in itself, an argument often used to support the claim that *Artemio Cruz* partakes in a modernist aesthetic. Pedro García-Caro, following D’Lugo, argues, for example, that “The novel itself is not just a collection of fragments, but a novel about fragmentation” (97). On the other hand, with regard to the Mexican context, fragmentation has been generally read as a marker of the collapse of the national-popular state and its disintegration into the realm of the “post-national.” While I find this reading to be compelling in its portrayal of the end of an era (alternatively characterized as developmentalist, national-popular, corporativist, etc.), as a conceptual tool fragmentation falls short when used to analyze the principle of relationality that structures the novel and, by extension, the collapse of the state formation that emerged from the Mexican Revolution. While everything fragments into, separation is always a separation from. Separation bears the mark of its origins in the same way that Cruz’s eyes bear the gaze of his father, Atanasio Menchaca. In *Artemio Cruz* relationality operates behind the back of fragmentation, much like history operates behind the back of Cruz himself. The first, second, and third-person narratives that break down the novel into its triadic sequence do
not exist outside the relations established between each fragment and the novel as a whole: there is no possibility of existence for any fragment outside the totality produced by the novel’s structure in the same way that the structure of the novel arises only as a result of the relations established among all of its parts.\textsuperscript{14}

The contradictory nature of these conditions poses a challenge to clear cut characterizations of *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* as engaging in a modernist or realist aesthetic. Van Delden, tellingly, grounds his analysis of the novel in this very tension. In a passage worth quoting at length, he argues:

*La muerte de Artemio Cruz* is both a paradigmatic modernist text, with its nonlinear narrative and interiorist focus, and a culminating instance of the novel of the Mexican Revolution, with its broad historical and political concerns. By situating his novel at the intersection of these two literary modes, Fuentes to a certain extent enriches them both: his use of modernist techniques grants greater interest and complexity to a subject matter often treated in a straightforward, documentary fashion, whereas his historical and political concerns help Fuentes transcend the often narrowly subjectivist nature of modernist fiction. Yet there is also a loss in Fuentes’s translation of a modernist aesthetic into a Mexican context. For if an interest in the topics of time and consciousness is one of the elements that links *Artemio Cruz* to the modernist tradition, then it must be noted that Fuentes’s need to provide his novel with a clear political message—that the Mexican Revolution was betrayed by the greed and selfishness of its protagonists—in fact places clear limits on his exploration of these topics. (51)

In van Delden’s opinion, *Artemio Cruz* approximates both modernism and the novel of the Mexican Revolution (a placeholder for realism) without engaging any of these literary modes in full. This is both a gain (“to a certain extent enriches them both”) and a loss, although the loss operates in a single direction: the political aims of realism place “clear limits” on Fuentes’ engagement with a modernist aesthetic.
In a different context, Leonardo Lisi has developed this condition into a founding attribute of an “aesthetics of dependency.” According to Lisi, the aesthetics of dependency “presents the work’s constitutive parts as ultimately irreconcilable, but […] it insists that these parts must nevertheless be purposefully related. This mediation without unification occurs by formulating the principle according to which the work must be organized in terms incompatible with that work’s own representational and thematic structures, thereby making the purposeful relation of its parts depend on an interpretative perspective not coextensive with the logic of those parts themselves” (6, my emphasis).

He then goes on to add: “It [the aesthetics of dependency] generates neither pure fragmentation nor organic harmony but rather makes the process of trying to convert the former into the latter the focus of the work” (6). Lisi’s description fits the inconsistencies van Delden finds in Artemio Cruz like a glove. The incompatibility between the organization of the work and its representational and thematic structures also resonates with Schwarz’s characterization of the importing of the novel to Brazil, a process that, as he has made clear, is grounded in “the dissonance between representations, and what, upon consideration, we know to be their context” (27). The tension between modernist technique and political concerns that originates in the “translation of a modernist aesthetic into a Mexican context,” does not escape the systematicity underlying Schwarz or Lisi’s arguments, on the contrary, the frictions between the political concerns of Artemio Cruz and the modernist toolkit Fuentes impinges upon them produces an overall sense of artificiality, an incompatibility (Lisi) or dissonance (Schwarz) that becomes the preeminent formal attribute of the novel. It is my claim that, as an interpretative
perspective, separation allows to mediate the problematic relation between the modernist aesthetic embraced by Fuentes and the historical and political concerns that arise from the particularities of the Mexican context. In *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, I will argue, separation provides a spatial code, a language capable of bridging the gap between the formal attributes of the novel and the emergence of a new class formation in Mexico in the early 1960s.\textsuperscript{15}

We should immediately note, going back to our point of departure, that the life of Artemio Cruz begins at a specific moment in Mexican history.\textsuperscript{16} While Cruz’s familial history vanishes into the annals of the nineteenth century (Ludivinia, his grandmother, being born in 1810, “el año de la primera revolta” [294]), Cruz himself comes to this world amidst a storm propelled by the tides of modernity and the rise of industrial capitalism in Mexico. This transitional period, which spans the decades between 1880 and 1940, marks the historical tipping point of a process that stretches, much like the family tree of the Menchacas, all the way back to the last decades of the colonial period.

Offering a perhaps oversimplified view of this process, Enrique Semo considers: En México, la modernidad es el tránsito del Estado colonial al Estado independiente nacional; del rey de España a la República federal; del ritmo y el paisaje del jinete al del ferrocarril; del dominio cultural de la Iglesia y la escolástica al mundo laico y las ciencias; del despotismo tributario al modo de producción campesino; del mundo artesanal, al industrial; del desprecio racista del indígena, a su integración nacional asimilacionista; del dominio del liberalismo y el positivismo al nacionalismo revolucionario; del culto a lo francés al muralismo mexicano monumental. *Una modernidad siempre en movimiento*, llena de ambigüedades y de apariciones fugaces. Sin embargo, como en buen país subdesarrollado, *todo eso sucede en medio de un juego de espejos* en el cual el hábito adquiere faz moderna y la modernidad se esconde en la tradición. (27-8, my emphasis)
Artemio Cruz is, from the moment he steps into this world, trapped in this “juego de espejos,” a set of distortions and defacements that makes it impossible for him to determine if the image that is being thrown back at him is, in fact, his own. In a well-known passage of the novel, we see this logic unfold as Cruz steps through a set of revolving glass doors:

El automóvil se detuvo en la esquina de Isabel la Católica y el chofer le abrió la puerta y se quitó la gorra y él, en cambio, se colocó el fieltro, peinándose con los dedos los mechones de las sienes que le quedaron fuera del sombrero y esa corte de vendedores de billetes y limpiabotas y mujeres enrebozadas y niños con el labio superior embarrado de moco lo rodearon hasta que pasó las puertas giratorias y se ajustó la corbata frente al vidrio del vestíbulo y atrás, en el segundo vidrio, el que daba a la calle de Madero, un hombre idéntico a él, pero tan lejano se arreglaba el nudo de la corbata también, con los mismos dedos manchados de nicotina, el mismo traje cruzado, pero sin color, rodeado de los mendigos y dejaba caer la mano al mismo tiempo que él y luego le daba la espalda y caminaba hacia el centro de la calle, mientras él buscaba el ascensor, desorientado por un instante. (21-2, my emphasis)

While this passage has been regularly used to emphasize the role fragmentation plays in the novel,¹⁷ in Artemio Cruz, as I have already argued, relationality lurks close wherever fragmentation is at work. Ericka Beckman, pointing in this direction, notes that in this particular scene the aesthetic strategy of estrangement and doubling is given “a specifically peripheral inflection.” According to Beckman, “The everyday passage of the extremely rich from protected spaces of private property through, briefly, the immiseration of the street causes disorientation and estrangement; the mirrored images throw into relief, simultaneously, the contrast between gleaming opulence and poverty, and the unavoidable presence of the poor even in the most opulent barricades” (“Latin American Literature,” forthcoming). It is in the inevitability of such presence that the
appearance of fragmentation is overcome by an ominous intuition: that the mirror image of Cruz is not the one that glares in the reflection of the back door, but the *vendedores de billetes*, *limpiabotas*, *mujeres enrebozadas*, *niños con el labio superior embarrado de moco* and *mendigos* that pullulate outside the walls of the office building. Behind the illusion of a fragmented self, modernity’s revolving door, its game of mirrors, hides the social relation that produces both Cruz and the immiserated masses. The playfulness of the theme of the double, predicated throughout the novel, distorts the *actual* doubling of Artemio Cruz beyond recognition, it negates the condition needed for his individual existence: the historical process of separation of countless people from direct access to their means of subsistence.

This particular form of separation is the concrete social process that, throughout the novel, produces the class-specific interests that, as I will have the opportunity to point out, chain Artemio Cruz to his bed, crushing him under the full weight of his historical circumstances. Endowed with the spatial logic of separation Cruz becomes a vehicle of violence and an executor of demarcation, a dual vocation of which he himself is a product. Through this duality, *Artemio Cruz* too functions as a form of mapmaking (Tally, *Spatiality* 43), the novel makes sense of the world as it continually separates the external from the internal, the realm of the social from the realm of the individual, and popular from bourgeois interests. In the third person segment of January 18, 1903 we see this logic begin to unfold as Cruz is expelled from Cocuya, the coffee hacienda that has been a part of the Menchaca estate since Santa Anna\(^18\) gifted the land to Ireneo Menchaca: “las miles de hectáreas obsequiadas por el tirano gallero y rengo; apropiadas sin pedir permiso
a los campesinos indígenas que debieron permanecer como peones o retirarse al pie de la montaña; cultivadas por el nuevo trabajo negro, barato, de las islas del Caribe; acrecentadas con el cobro de las hipotecas impuestas a todos los pequeños propietarios de la región” (292). Cocuya is the product of the appropriation of indigenous lands, debt peonage, slavery, and financial speculation. These are the building blocks of the crumbling paradise Cruz is expelled from after an *enganchador* threatens to remove Lunero from his shack.

There are two aspects of this otherwise very significant segment that I would like to explore in some detail. The first one is how, in Cocuya, “el hábito adquiere faz moderna y la modernidad se esconde en la tradición.” By 1903 Cocuya has been reduced to its most basic form: a windowless house and a shack. In this microcosm the relations of production that dominated nineteenth-century Mexican society subsist in a condensed form: “Ahora, todo andaba cerca y en la hacienda angostada por los agiotistas y los enemigos políticos del antiguo amo muerto, sólo quedaban la casa sin vidrios y la choza de Lunero; y en aquella sólo suspiraba el recuerdo de los criados, mantenido por la flaca Baracoa que seguía cuidando a la abuela encerrada en el cuarto azul del fondo; en ésta sólo vivían Lunero y el niño y ellos eran los únicos trabajadores” (281). The deterioration of the hacienda runs parallel to the rise of liberalism in Mexico. Cocuya was set on fire “cuando pasaron por allí los liberales en la campaña final contra el Imperio, muerto ya Maximiliano, y encontraron a la familia que había prestado sus alcobas al mariscal jefe de las fuerzas francesas y sus bodegas a la tropa conservadora” (288). The destruction of this social order is the necessary condition for the capitalist development of the country to
“take-off,” even if, as Agustín Cueva has established, “parece claro que en el desarrollo de nuestro capitalismo agrario existe una especie de unidad en la diversidad dada por el hecho de que este desarrollo ocurre —salvo en contados puntos de excepción— de acuerdo con una modalidad que lejos de abolir el latifundio tradicional lo conserva como eje de toda la evolución” (80). The incorporation of a social order based on the latifundio into the modern configuration of Mexican capitalism becomes hidden in the same way Cruz’s origin is hidden in the color of his eyes. Through Cruz’s gaze the social relations of the hacienda will penetrate the most bulwarked corners of the Mexican bourgeoisie.

The other significant aspect I wish to analyze is the spatial composition of Cocuya, i.e. the simultaneous differentiation and combination of social spaces at work in the hacienda. In the fourteen years that span between Cruz’s birth and his departure from Cocuya, the spatial composition of the hacienda is polarized to the point where, as I have already noted, all that is left is a windowless house and a shack. Lunero’s shack is hidden behind “la nube pesada del convólculo que Lunero plantó hace años para disimular los adobes pardos de las paredes y enredar la choza en esa fragancia nocturna de flores tubulares” (281). I will circle back to the role the convolvulus plays in the novel, but for now, we should note the parallelism between the effort Lunero puts in concealing the shack, in securing its preservation as a curtained hideout, and Ludivinia’s self-confinement behind closed doors: “encerrada en ese cuarto azul con cortinas de encaje y candiles que tintineaban en la tormenta y que jamás se enteraría del crecimiento del muchacho a unos cuantos metros de su locura sellada” (285, my emphasis). The tinkling of the chandeliers resonates with Lunero’s candle-making as the “cortinas de encaje” do
with the convolvulus that swathes the adobe walls of the shack. The spatial gap between
the two spaces is bridged by the *india or flaca* Baracoa, who each week sells the candles
made by Lunero to secure the means of subsistence for Ludivinia and Pedro. Together,
Lunero and Cruz perform the “labores necesarias para ir pasando los días y entregarle a la
india Baracoa las piezas que cada sábado compraban la comida de la abuela y las
damajuanas del señor Pedrito” (281). Despite not having stepped into the house in more
than thirteen years (“esa casa a la que nunca, en trece años, había entrado” [287]),
Lunero’s candle-making provides the material sustenance for Ludivinia’s madness.

For fourteen years news from the outside world have been banished from the
house: “El incendio no había entrado hasta aquí. Ni la noticia de las tierras perdidas y el
hijo muerto en emboscada y el niño nacido en la choza de negros: las noticias no, pero sí
los presentimientos” (290-1). At some point, however, Ludivinia commits the sin of
transgressing the boundaries of her confinement: “Dejó que saliera Baracoa y entonces
violó todas las reglas, apartó las cortinas y frunció el rostro para avizorar lo que sucedía
allá afuera” (291, my emphasis). The act of parting the curtains sets in motion a sequence
that will tear down the spatial order of Cocuya, leading to its final demolition. As Lunero
is about to be forcibly removed from the hacienda, Pedro steps into Ludivinia’s room to
relay the news: “Se llevan al negro… que es el que nos da de comer… a usted y a mí…”
(295). At the same time, Cruz demands his right to step into the big house: “Quiero entrar
en la casa grande” (298). Finally, in a desperate attempt to prevent the ruin of the
Menchaca family name, Ludivinia demands that Cruz be brought to her presence:
“¿Querrás reconocer eso? Que comemos gracias a ellos. ¿Y no sabes qué hacer? […]”
que hubieran hecho tu padre y tu hermano: salir a defender a ese mulato y al niño, impedir que se los lleven… si hace falta, dar la vida para que no nos pisoteen… ¿vas a salir tú o voy yo, chingao?… ¡Tráeme al niño!… quiero hablarle…” (303). The destabilization of the spatial order of Cocuya will lead to the death of Pedro at the hands of Cruz, the humiliation of Ludivinia at the hands of the enganchador, and the final separation of Cruz from his idyllic ménage: “ira porque ahora sabía que la vida tenía enemigos y ya no era ese fluir ininterrumpido del río y el trabajo; ira porque ahora descubría la separación” (305, my emphasis). Torn apart from his mother at birth, Cruz once again falls prey to separation as he is forced to leave Cocuya.

The ripple effect of separation will come to define Cruz’s life in its entirety, his rage will continue to gain momentum as every crossroads in his future will push him farther away from the wholeness evoked by the uninterrupted flow of the river (and labor). By this continued process of separation Cruz will carve a place of his own within the Mexican social order. Alienating himself from the peasantry, the landowning class, the indigenous peoples, the church, the bureaucracy, etc. (the string of ‘betrayals’ in his life), Cruz will eventually find himself standing in front of all other classes and social groups. The specific role Cruz will come to embody—a role he will no longer have the ability to renounce—is that of the national bourgeois.

**Enclosure**

The process of separation that gives Cruz his place within Mexican society has as its counterpart a process of enclosure. The latter enacts the domestication of the communal project of the Mexican Revolution and its final appropriation by the newly
consolidated national bourgeois state. *Artemio Cruz* registers this ideological dynamic by engaging in a dialectics of enclosure and openness. The domestication of the ideals of the Mexican Revolution is enacted by the spatial reconfiguration of open landscapes, i.e. their ideological stabilization by way of enclosure.

The dialectics of enclosure and openness overlaps with the historical process of originary accumulation that filters through the pages of *Artemio Cruz* the same way that light filters through a lattice screen. Originary accumulation “is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production […] And this history, the history of their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire” (Marx, *Capital vol. 1* 875). Spoliation, expropriation, indentured servitude, and other “idyllic methods” of originary accumulation drive the spatial reconfiguration of the nation by transforming open, communal landscapes into “modern private property.” These processes fulfilled the necessary conditions for capitalist relations to take hold of the national economy, they “incorporated the soil into capital, and created for the urban industries the necessary supplies of free and rightless proletarians” (Marx, *Capital vol. 1* 895). It is not my intention here to rehearse the Mexican chapter of the history of originary accumulation, nor to engage in longstanding debates about its periodization, I am, however, interested in the way *Artemio Cruz* maps this process in its spatial logic. i.e. the way in which the separation of countless people from their means of subsistence runs side by side with the consolidation of enclosed spaces of representation throughout the novel.
By 1941 we see Cruz negotiating with a US investor a concession to exploit some sulphur deposits hidden in the “selvas del sur” (26). The conversation takes place before the presence of a geologist who unfurls a map of the zone in question stamped with a “mancha verde punteada de triángulos que indicaban los hallazgos del geólogo” (24). The scene ends with Cruz leveraging his position as a “front-man” into a $2 million broker fee. The project, an overall feat of modern engineering, would also allow Cruz to benefit from the logging of cedar and mahogany forests, an undertaking that Cruz’s partners are willing to leave entirely in his hands: “El norteamericano guiñó el ojo y dijo que los bosques de cedro y caoba también eran enormes y que en eso él, el socio mexicano, llevaba el cien por ciento de las ganancias” (24). The most striking aspect of the back-and-forth, however, is Cruz’s conscious resistance to being overrun by his US counterparts: “les dijo que podían explotar el azufre hasta bien entrado el siglo XXI, pero que no lo iban a explotar a él ni un solo minuto del siglo XX” (25, my emphasis). A tremendous amount of water has flowed under the bridge since Cruz was forced to leave Cocuya, and not without reason the segment dated July 6, 1941 is the first of the third-person sections to appear in the novel, making it the one spatially, if not chronologically, farther removed from Cruz’s birth. Overseeing this entire scene is the map that brings order to the chaotic exuberance of the “selvas del sur.” From an office building in downtown Mexico City, the boundaries of the tropical rainforest are being redrawn according to the spatial logic of commodity production and modern private property.

While the extractivist rationale behind the joint venture is faithful to the export-oriented pattern of capital accumulation that defined the Mexican economy during the
late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the spatial perspective of the novel has
shifted away from the production enclave and toward the metropolitan city. If, as
Beckman notes in relation to the rise of the commodity novel of the 1930s and 1940s,
Latin American novels of the previous decades linked “the overweening and oppressive
force of nature […] to a world outside the jungle that can be grasped only by way of the
ghostly stirrings of monetary exchange” (Capital 167), in Artemio Cruz this relation
becomes mediated by the city and its dominant class: the national bourgeoisie. Fuentes’
own opinion regarding the character of the Mexican bourgeoisie is revealing. In reference
to his first novel, La región más transparente (1958), Fuentes argued that “Es necesario
consagrar históricamente, acaso pese a ella misma, a la burguesía mexicana. […] una
clase que carece de autonomía internacional: se trata de la burguesía de un país
semicolonial, cuyo pleno desarrollo es frenado por la burguesía imperialista. Por esto,
pese a sus ambiciones tantas veces irresponsables y aun criminales, la burguesía
mexicana representa una esperanza para la mayoría de los países latinoamericanos,
encerrados aún dentro del marco histórico del feudalismo.” The city is the space where
the Mexican bourgeoisie attests its historical consecration: “La ciudad de México es la
sede de la nueva clase” (qtd. in Carballo 620). Fuentes’ eagerness to will the national
bourgeoisie into being is symptomatic of what Antonio Candido considered the
consciousness of underdevelopment in Latin American literature, “the phase of
catastrophic consciousness of backwardness, corresponding to the notion of
‘underdeveloped country’” (121). In this context the consecration of the national
bourgeoisie becomes—in theory if never in practice—a means to bypass the unevenness of the capitalist world system, a deceptive way out of underdevelopment.

The rise of the new class forces the spatial focus of the novel away from the traditional spaces of production—the jungle (as in Rivera’s *La vorágine* [1924]), the pampa (as in Güiraldes’s *Don Segundo Sombra* [1926]), the llano (as in Gallegos’s *Doña Bárbara* [1929]), or the mine (as in Arguedas’s *Todas las sangres* [1964])—to the city. The “Agrimensores” that by the end of Carpentier’s *El reino de este mundo* (1949) descended into the plain, are hereby summoned to the city by the rising song of the national bourgeois. In *Artemio Cruz* the personification of technical knowledge, the geologist that during the negotiation scene keeps moving “de la mesa a la ventana y de la ventana a la mesa” (25), now operates at a distance from the locale of production, engaging it only by way of its representation: the map. The scene becomes even more relevant when taking into consideration this is a novel published in 1962 reflecting on Mexico in the early 1940s. Again, the benefit of hindsight gives *Artemio Cruz* the ability to shape the past in order to understand the crossroads posited by the novel’s present. The tragic overtone of, for example, José Revueltas’s *El luto humano* (1943), a novel published roughly around the same time the conversation between Cruz and the US investors is taking place, has been revamped to, at least partially, highlight the positive role the Mexican bourgeoisie plays in defending national interests against the imperial inclinations of US capital. From the vantage point of 1962 the “betrayal” of the ideals of the Mexican Revolution becomes justified by the historical consecration of the national bourgeoisie, an event Fuentes esteems “una esperanza para la mayoría de los países
If Cruz is made to stand as a symbol of the Mexican nation re-born in the aftermath of the Revolution, his refusal to be exploited “un solo minuto del siglo XX” must be read as a marker of the degree to which the economic interests of the nation have become equivalent to the interests of a particular class. Only from the standpoint of the early 60s can the national-popular stance of the Mexican state be celebrated for its true historical significance: “Triunfó la revolución burguesa (Carranza, Cabrera, Calles); fue derrotada la revolución popular (Zapata, Villa)” (Fuentes, qtd. in Carballo 620). In this Fuentes shows more insight than many of his critics: the radical wing of the Revolution—next to its ideals—was not betrayed but defeated.

However we decide to interpret Fuentes’ political claim—whether as historiographic platitude or biased statement that tends to contradict some of the more overtly critical gestures of his novel—it remains relevant that the event that elicits the happy reunion between the bourgeois king, monopoly capital, and technological savvy in the corridors of the Mexican metropolis is still the incorporation of soil into capital and the separation of an increasing number of people from direct access to their means of subsistence. This historical process is the backdrop to Cruz’s ascent, and, as such, will continue to manifest itself at every “definitive instance” in his life leading to his apotheosis. Throughout the novel we learn of the “deferral” of the revolutionary promise of land redistribution (“era mejor que […] esperaran a que triunfara la revolución para legalizar lo de las tierras y lo de la jornada de ocho horas” [70]), the extermination of indigenous populations and the violent suppression of organized labor (“Así mataron a la tribu yaqui, porque no quiso que le arrebataran sus tierras. Igual mataron a los latinoamericanos.”
trabajadores de Río Blanco y Cananea, porque no querían morirse de hambre” [81]), the systematic theft of communal lands (“De cómo el gobierno les quitó las tierras de siempre para dárselas a unos gringos. De cómo ellos pelearon para defenderlas y entonces llegó la tropa federal y empezó a cortarles las manos a los hombres y a perseguirlos por el monte. De cómo subieron a los jefes yaquis a un cañonero y desde allí los tiraron al mar cargados de pesas” [190]), the spoliation of the church’s property (“Pues ahí donde lo ve, todo lo que tiene se lo robó a los curas, allá cuando Juárez puso a remate los bienes del clero y cualquier comerciante con tantito ahorrado pudo hacerse de un terrenal inmenso” [43]), the usurpation of arable lands (“Vamos entregándole esas tierras a los campesinos, que al fin son tierras de temporal y les rendirán muy poco. Vamos parcelándolas par que sólo puedan sembrar cultivos menores” [54]), the enforcement of modern private property and the separation of domestic from productive spaces (“Él había levantado la cerca que deslindaba la casa y la huerta, su dominio íntimo, de las tierras de labranza” [115]), the confiscation of empty lots (“el gordo le preguntó si deseaba algo y él le habló de algunos terrenos baldíos en las afueras de la ciudad, que no valían gran cosa hoy pero que con el tiempo se podrían fraccionar” [138]), and so on.

Cruz is the historical heir to these processes, its corroboratory outcome: “Artemio Cruz,” Don Gamaliel murmurs to himself the first time he meets Cruz, “Así se llamaba, entonces, el nuevo mundo surgido de la guerra civil, así se llamaban quienes llegaban a sustituirlo” (50). Compared to the magnitude of the forces set in motion by the historical process of originary accumulation, Cruz’s freedom plummets into the realm of coincidence. Cruz himself acknowledges this when, in one of the first-person segments
he confesses: “el hombre que agoniza se llama Artemio Cruz, nada más Artemio Cruz; sólo este hombre muere, ¿eh?, nadie más. Es como un golpe de suerte que aplaza las otras muertes. Esta vez sólo muere Artemio Cruz” (164, my emphasis). The death of Artemio Cruz is not the death of the new world that arose from the revolutionary war, the world that Gamaliel had, earlier on, made synonym to Cruz’s name, but, on the contrary, the death of a single man, an ordinary character that has strut and fret his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more.

The historical forces that provided the backdrop for Cruz’s ascent will therefore remain dispersed until the moment when, reflecting back on his life, Cruz finally becomes conscious of the role he has been called to perform in the history of the nation. It is no surprise this moment is the one chronologically most distant from his birth, and comes at a time in his life when he is no longer capable of making amends, when he can no longer get rid of his bourgeois mask because the mask has become his skin. The New Year’s dinner party at the Coyoacán mansion becomes the setting for the appearance of a definite national bourgeois consciousness. In Robin Fiddian’s opinion, the scene depicting the 1955 New Year’s Eve is “Fuentes’s most pungent satire of the mental set of the Mexican bourgeoisie […] This grotesque tableau, worthy of Hieronymus Bosch, portrays the collective greed, pettiness, vanity and mauvaise foi of those whom in another context the author deprecatingly calls ‘los de arriba’” (108). The party at the Coyoacán mansion takes place behind closed doors: “estos viejos muros, con sus dos siglos de cantera y tezontle” (253). The extravagant display of objects (“Tan rica, tan sensual, tan suntuosa era la posesión de estos objetos como la del dinero y los signos más evidentes
de la plenitud” [253]) contrasts with the earth-like quality of the walls, the latter closer to the adobe walls of Lunero’s shack than to the ornamental features of the Coyoacán mansion. In Coyoacán, Cruz gains consciousness of the fact that his fortune is the outcome of a decades-long process: “Todo lo que dominaba obedecía, ahora, sólo a cierta prolongación virtual, inerte… de la fuerza de sus años jóvenes…” (255, my emphasis).

This realization is expressed throughout the dinner party as Cruz congratulates himself on being able to tell apart the true origins of all the insiders that have come to gather around him: “podía recordarles sus verdaderos nombres… quiebras fraudulentas…
devaluaciones monetarias reveladas de antemano… especulación de precios… agio bancario… nuevos latifundios… reportajes a tanto la línea… contratos de obras públicas inflados… jilguero en giras políticas… despilfarro de la fortuna paterna… coyotaje en las secretarías de Estado… nombres falsos” (260). The spatiality of the scene is relevant when incorporated into the novel’s dialectic of enclosure and openness. In the immediately preceding tú section, in a passage that emphasizes the life paths Cruz decided not follow (“tú elegirás permanecer allí con Bernal y Tobias […] tú no visitarás al viejo Gamaliel en Puebla” [246], etc.), the second-person narrative that voices Cruz’s unconscious offers a synthesis of the spatial logic of the novel: “tú quedarás fuera, con los que quedaron fuera” (247). The separation of the external from the internal is now expressed as the separation of insiders, the select few who have been invited to the New Year’s party, from those who will forever remain outsiders, the myriad creatures that, bereft of everything in order to allow for the rise of the Mexican bourgeoisie, have been banned from the lavish interiors of the Coyoacán mansion.
It is only now, firmly installed inside the walls that separate the bourgeoisie from “all those who remained outsiders” (the peasants, the indigenous population, the proletariat, but also the landowners, the bureaucrats, the military, etc.), that Cruz’s image can be fully projected onto the annals of Mexican history. At last, sitting atop the Mexican pyramid, Artemio Cruz can reflect back not only on the processes that have provided the historical background to his life, but on the longue durée of Mexican history, from Pre-Columbian times to the present, and accurately situate himself as the endpoint, the particular outcome of this historical progression. The second-voice segment that, towards the end of the novel, sweeps through Mexican time and space provides the setting for the incorporation of Cruz into History. Perhaps the most lyrical segment of the entire novel, this tú section prefigures the neobaroque excess and the aesthetic of mestizaje that will become a prevalent technique in Cambio de piel (Ochoa, Uses 143-164). The section opens with a bird’s-eye-view of the nation’s landscape (“los desiertos rojos, las estepas de tuna y maguey, el mundo del nopal” [274]) and ends with a sequence that links the history of Veracruz to the history of the Mediterranean: “la media luna veracruzana tendrá otra historia, atada por hilos dorados a las Antillas, al Océano y, más allá, al Mediterráneo que en verdad sólo será vencido por los contrafuertes de la Sierra Madre Oriental” (278). The Sierra Madre Oriental, the place “donde los volcanes se anudan y las insignias silenciosas del maguey se levantan” (278), stands as the symbolic frontier of the Ancien Régime: “una frontera que nadie derrotará: ni los hombres de Extremadura y Castilla […] ni los bucaneros […] ni los frailes que cruzaron el Paso de la Malinche […] ni los negros traídos a las plantaciones tropicales […] ni los príncipes
que desembarcaron de los veleros imperiales […] ni siquiera los caciques de tricornio y charreteras” (279). Standing at the outer limits of his life, Cruz can look back and realize this was the threshold he blurred throughout his life, the historical frontier he crossed.

Cruz becomes, at last, conscious of his legacy: “legarás las muertes inútiles, los nombres muertos, los nombres de cuantos cayeron muertos para que el nombre de ti viviera; los nombres de los hombres despojados para que el nombre de ti poseyera; los nombres de los hombres olvidados para que el nombre de ti jamás fuese olvidado.” (277). The fantasy of a fulfilled destiny bursts into pieces, the bastard-cum-capitalist is forced to acknowledge that his were never the happy ages when the starry sky was the map of all possible paths (Lukács, Theory 29). The end of this segment spins the narrative back to the years of Cruz’s childhood in Cocuya: Cruz’s desperate attempt to salvage his most intimate memories from oblivion. Throughout his life, however, the same process that has led Cruz into the halls of the Coyoacán mansion has also gradually deprived him of his freedom by forcefully subjecting him to capital’s coercive laws of competition. Prey to the dialectics of enclosure and openness Cruz now finds himself pinned down to his seat, a single man at the mercy of history.

Curtains

Between the negotiation scene (1941) and the New Year’s party (1955) lie the years of Alemanismo, the period when Mexico “swapped revolutionary zeal for efficiency and pragmatism, and gave favor to industry, commerce, and foreign investment at the expense of ongoing social reform aimed at ameliorating the conditions of the nation’s poor” (Alexander 5). Piggybacking on the institutions created by the Mexican
state apparatus during the 1930s, Miguel Alemán and his cohort “ushered in the period of sustained economic growth from the 1940s through the 1970s acclaimed as the Mexican Miracle” (Alexander 3). The economic shift towards import substitution industrialization marks the end of the export-oriented pattern of capital accumulation that had prevailed in Mexico since the late nineteenth century. The years of Alemanismo represent a threshold in the history of the nation, they mark the sharp transition towards an accelerated industrialization and urbanization unbeknownst to national history. In his Viaje al centro de México (1975), Fernando Benítez recalls that “hasta 1940 la ciudad mantuvo sus límites. Diez años después la creciente industrialización atrajo a millares de inmigrantes y el valle cubrió su rostro agrícola, surcado de canales, con una máscara industrial de humos y de esmog” (23). Mexico’s industrialization irreversibly moved the national landscape away from the spatial and temporal imaginaries of the Mexican Revolution. In reference to the construction of University City (Ciudad Universitaria), Carlos Monsiváis noted that “[s]i en el Centro el uso del tiempo (la tradición como amuleto) es concluyente, en Ciudad Universitaria, a partir del uso pródigo del espacio, se manifiesta otro diálogo entre la arquitectura y la ciudad” (417, my emphasis). The “prodigal use of space” that Monsiváis understands to be one of the key aspects of Mexican architecture during this period, inaugurates a new urban language that tends to displace the spatial vocabulary provided by the Novel of the Revolution.

María Stoepen has already noted that “Es singular el contraste que en la obra se hace entre la posesión de objetos y el contacto con la naturaleza. Los momentos de intimidad personal del protagonista con Lunero, Regina, Lorenzo, se realizan en espacios
libres, en los que hombre y naturaleza crean una simbiosis de goce, de expansión personal” (56). The distinction between the world of objects and the world of nature is relevant to understand the spatial dimension of the novel and the logic behind Cruz’s gradual confinement. In their sensuous character, the objects that Cruz possesses—evocative of modernismo’s import catalogues (Beckman, *Capital* 42-79)—should remind us that these are not objects alone, but commodities that have been removed from the sphere of circulation. “Commodities are things, and therefore lack the power to resist man. If they are unwilling, he can use force; in other words, he can take possession of them” (Marx, *Capital* 178). Marx’s dictum proves handy not only to grasp the relation of Cruz to the objects that adorn Ludivinia’s dwellings, the Coyoacán mansion, or his house in Las Lomas, but to understand that Cruz, to the degree that he has come to take possession of these objects, has succumbed to “the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities” (Marx, *Capital* 165), namely that the commodity-form “is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things” (165). As the commodity-form subsumes all social relations under its guise, Cruz will continue to grow apart from the world of nature, from the open spaces where he cultivated his most intimate memories—ironically enough already traversed by the logic of commodity production.

In this sense Cruz’s estrangement from the outside world is a *conditio sine qua non* for his consecration as a capitalist, for his final transformation into “capital personified and endowed with consciousness and a will” (Marx, *Capital* vol. 1 254). This
spatial reconfiguration transforms the natural world of Cruz’s childhood and the open landscapes of the revolutionary war into the closed spaces of his domestic life, leading to his final agony in a hospital bed. As I will argue in the following chapters, the transformation according to which the open landscapes of the Novel of the Revolution become the closed spaces of bourgeois domesticity and everyday life, already points toward the spatial composition of the Mexican novel of the 1970s and 1980s.

Throughout *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, Cruz will gradually lose the ability to move at will across the threshold that separates enclosed from open spaces. In Cocuya, “la nube pesada del convolvulo” that separated Lunero’s hut from the outside world served as a thin veil that Cruz could traverse at will. The evocation of the scent of the convolvulus, therefore, serves not only as a marker of Cruz’s nostalgia for his lost childhood, but also of the loss of his ability to move freely between inside and outside, a continuum that mirrors the uninterrupted flow of the river where he and Lunero used to bathe. In Cocuya, the smooth transition from inside to outside is barely disturbed by the presence of the convolvulus. Such smoothness will rapidly degenerate as Cruz continues to consolidate his place atop the Mexican social order. By the time he finds himself lying on his deathbed, Cruz will no longer be able to even part the curtain to glance at the world he leaves behind him, let alone move beyond the limits of his hospital bed.

Long gone are the early days of the Revolution, associated in Cruz’s memory with the figure of Regina. In the opening lines of the segment dated December 4, 1913, Regina is evoked as being “desnuda, de pie, joven y dura en su inmovilidad, pero ondulante y suave en cuanto caminaba: a lavarse en secreto, correr las cortinas, abaniciar el brasero.”
Regina herself is a figure that mediates the spatial relation between inside and outside. Her undulating and soft movements link her to the endless flow of Cocuya’s river. In the act of parting the curtains she allows the outside world to penetrate the couple’s room, a gesture that will be negated to Cruz over and over again during his final agony. In the most primitive ways, Regina’s body becomes associated with nature: “ese cuerpo joven abrazado al suyo: pensó que la vida entera no bastaría para recorrerlo y descubrirlo, para explorar esa geografía suave, ondulante, de accidentes negros y rosados” (64). Despite the raffishness of the metaphor, it remains relevant that Regina is described in terms of landscape, as it discloses a prevalent gender dynamic centered around the representation of the woman’s body as land. Regina’s figure becomes a repository where nature and the ideals of the Revolution collapse onto each other.

According to Edmundo Valadés, “Quizás nunca se ha reunido en toda nuestra literatura un mural geográfico, tan solidario del hombre en sus afanes de justicia y libertad, como el que está presente en la novela de la Revolución” (13). Regina is a part of the “geographical mural” painted by the Novel of the Revolution. Her death, therefore, not only marks the defilement of the ideals of the revolutionary movement, an interpretation already available in the fact that Regina’s relation with Cruz is a product of rape, but the subordination of nature to the logic of private property (Marx’s incorporation of soil into capital). Cruz, who sees nothing but landscapes in Regina’s body, will defile Regina’s body by becoming a landowner: “Tierra. Tierra que puede traducirse en dinero” (140).

As Cocuya is evoked in Cruz’s mind by the smell of the convolvulus, so is Regina evoked by the smell of membrillo (quince). The two will appear side by side in a key, yet
often overlooked passage of the novel. Cruz, made prisoner by the villista forces of

*coronel* Zagal, asks his cellmate, Gonzalo Bernal *what can be seen* from the place where

they are about to be executed:

—¿Cómo es el lugar?
—¿Dónde?
—Donde nos van a fusilar. ¿Qué se ve desde allí?
Se detuvo y le hizo una seña para que el cabo le pasara el mechero.
—¿Qué se ve?
Sólo entonces recordó que siempre había mirado hacia adelante,
desde la noche en que atravesó la montaña y escapó del viejo casco
veracruzano. Desde entonces no había vuelto a mirar hacia atrás. Desde
entonces quería saberse solo, sin más fuerzas que las propias… Y ahora…
no podía resistir esta pregunta —cómo es, qué se ve desde allí— que quizá
era su manera de disfrazar esa ansia de recuerdo, esa pendiente hacia una
imagen de helechos frondosos y ríos lentos, *de flores tubulares* sobre una
choza, de una falda almidonada y un cabello suave, *oloroso a membrillo…*
(189, my emphasis)

Facing death, Cruz’s modest reaction is to turn to Bernal to ask *what can be seen* from the place where he is about to be executed. The somewhat simple question,

however, *disguises his anxiety of memory*. For Cruz memory is an anxiety of what

remains outside: the open spaces of nature, the leafy ferns and slow rivers he can no

longer return to. Cruz’s last wish is to be told about the landscapes that lie behind the
curtain, the landscapes evoked by the smell of the convolvulus and the quince, landscapes

that, in 1915, he is still certain to find when he steps in front of the execution wall. Cruz

will repeat the same gesture at different instances in his life, each time a little less

certain he will be able to *see* what is outside. Cruz’s request to Bernal will reappear as

his dying wish in many of the first-voice segments. His last genuine gesture, to reach for

the outside world, will be entirely ignored by everyone who sits around him as he lays
dying:
Han cerrado las ventanas. *Han corrido, con un siseo, las cortinas grises.* Han entrado. Ah, hay una ventana. Hay un mundo afuera. Hay este viento alto, de meseta, que agita unos árboles negros y delgados. Hay que respirar...

—Abran la ventana ...
—No, no. Puedes resfriarte y complicarlo todo.
—Abran… (117, my emphasis)

In a last effort to redeem himself, Cruz tries to reconnect with the outside world but he is no longer able to part the curtain. “*Corrieron las cortinas, ¿verdad?* Es de noche, ¿verdad? Hay plantas que necesitan la luz de la noche para florecer. Esperan hasta que salga la oscuridad. El convólculo abre sus pétalos al atardecer. El convólculo. En esa choza había un convólculo, en la choza junto al río. Se abría al caer la tarde, sí” (141). Trapped in a fool’s paradise Cruz laments that the closed curtains will prevent the convolvulus from bathing in the moonlight, just like he, trapped in his deathbed, is prevented from breathing the fresh air he once hit upon in Acapulco: “*Él apartó las cortinas y respiró el aire limpio*” (147). Curtains enclose the life of Artemio Cruz. His agony, his anxious stream of consciousness, is a long ode to the world he has been estranged from:

Yo y no sólo yo, otros hombres, podríamos buscar en la brisa el perfume de otra tierra, el aroma arrancado por el aire a otros mediodías: huelo, huelo: lejos de mí, lejos de este sudor frío, lejos de estos gases inflamados: *las obligué a abrir la ventana:* puedo respirar lo que guste, entretererme escogiendo los olores que el viento trae: sí bosques otoñales, sí hojas quemadas, ah, sí, ciruelos maduros, sí trópicos podridos, sí salinas duras, piñas abiertas con un tajo de machete, tabaco tendido a la sombra, humo de locomotoras, olas del mar abierto, pinos cubiertos de nieve, ah metal y guano, cuántos sabores trae y lleva ese movimiento eterno: *no, no, no me dejarán vivir:* se sientan de nuevo, se levantan y caminan y vuelven a sentarse juntas, como si fueran una sola sombra, como si no pudieran pensar o actuar por separado, *se sientan de nuevo, al mismo tiempo, de espaldas a la ventana, para cerrarme el paso del aire, para sofocarme, para obligarme a cerrar los ojos y recordar cosas ya que no me dejan ver cosas, tocar cosas, oler cosas:* (59, my emphasis)
The consecration of a new class, the new world order anticipated by don Gamaliel, has finally beaten Cruz into immobility. I believe this is one of the most powerful images of the novel, and one that has often escaped the analyses devoted to La muerte de Artemio Cruz. Cruz’s inability to change his situation, dramatized in his delirious agony, shows the actual degree in which he has become a personification of capital, a bearer of a definite social relation that now straps him to his bed with the force of a thousand suns. “Like all its forerunners,” writes Marx, “the capitalist production process proceeds under specific material conditions, which are however also the bearers of specific social relations which the individuals enter into in the process of reproducing their life. Those conditions, like these social relations, are on the one hand the presuppositions of the capitalist production process, on the other its results and creations; they are both produced and reproduced by it” (Capital vol. 3 957). Artemio Cruz is a presupposition and a result of the capitalist production process. The limits to his every action are now determined by same the social relation that propelled him to the top of the Mexican pyramid in the first place. Cruz now becomes a victim of his own circumstances. Only from the vantage point of the accumulation of capital does the pathetic image of a dying old man that repents and reaches for the outside world gains historical significance. Cruz can no longer escape the laws of capital accumulation, and even if he could, the world he reaches out for no longer exists, behind the curtain only humos y esmog are to be found. In the history of the nation, the death of Artemio Cruz marks the hour of the Mexican bourgeoisie.

The Lives of Artemio Cruz
So far, I have reflected on the ways *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* captures the gradual displacement of the spatial imagery of the revolutionary war. We are still, however, to work out the claim made at the beginning of this chapter that this displacement gives form to the end of the class alliance that cemented the national import substitution industrialization project throughout the 40s and 50s. In order to do so, it is necessary to take into consideration the role the Novel of the Revolution played as a vehicle for the mobilization of national discourses, and the extent to which this corpus became a cultural battlefield for the appropriation of the national imaginary that emerged from the revolutionary war.

Despite the controversies around the use of the term (Rutherford 1996, Olea Franco 2012), the Novel of the Revolution remains the preeminent literary vehicle for the institutionalization of the social order that emerged from the Mexican Revolution. As such, it is by and large a belated and protracted reflection on the outcomes, aspirations, and meanings of the revolutionary process. According to John Rutherford: “It was not until the mid-1920s that a conviction started to develop in Mexican intellectual and literary circles that it was time to abandon the sentimental, escapist fiction which was still fashionable, just as it had been during the Porfirian period, and to write novels that would confront the recent upheavals and address themselves to the realities of contemporary life” (217). This implies that, as part of the periodization I have been sketching throughout this chapter, the Novel of the Revolution came to fruition at the same time Mexico was moving toward the industrial pattern of capital reproduction that undergirded the popular stance of the Mexican state in the 1930s and 1940s. In this context, the uses
and abuses of the Novel of the Revolution became entangled with the struggle over the
centralization and corporatization of the Mexican state. Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, for
example, considers that “el proyecto hegemónico que emergía de esos años de intentos
estatales de institucionalizar la cultura […] se basaba en un nacionalismo fundamentalista
que apelaba a la idea de que sólo producciones culturales cuyas referencias directas
fueran la nación y la Revolución Mexicana eran legítimas” (188). Foregrounded by the
1924-1925 controversy around “virile” literature in Mexico, the Novel of the
Revolution ultimately provided the dominant cultural form of the national-popular state, a
genre capable of mobilizing the same national aspirations as those embodied by the
presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) and its de facto government program, the
1933 Plan Sexenal (de la Peña and Aguirre 289-350).

The rediscovery—one is almost tempted to say the invention—of Mariano
Azuela’s Los de abajo (1915, 1920) in 1925, ten years after it was originally published, is
revealing of the ideological underpinnings of the rise of the Novel of the Revolution.
Rafael Olea Franco suggests that “[e]n última instancia, la novela ganó su lugar en el
canon de la cultura mexicana no sólo por sus virtudes artísticas, sino sobre todo porque
uno de sus rasgos, su carácter eminentemente mexicano, concordó con el exacerbado
discuro nacionalista impulsado por los sucesivos gobiernos posrevolucionarios” (499).
On some level, the construction of Los de abajo as the foundational text of Mexican
literary modernity already points to the domestication of the communal project of the
Mexican Revolution and its appropriation by a newly consolidated national bourgeois
state. Sánchez Prado recalls in reference to Los de abajo that “among the changes that led
to the final version of the novel, mostly occupied in fixing issues related to the rushed nature of its original writing, two stand out: an intensification of phonetic mimesis in order to convey the popular (and thus perceived as uneducated) orality of lower-class characters and the crucial rewriting of the novel as thoroughly narrated in the past tense, when the original edition, written in the heat of conflict, had many passages narrated in the present [...] *a change of the novel’s ‘reality effect’ from the experiential sense of the present to the preterit’s connotation of established history*” (“Novel” 51, my emphasis). These changes provided the form needed for the consecration of *Los de abajo* as the cornerstone of Mexican literary modernity. The direction of these changes signals a shift toward the allegorization of the novel: from the experiential sense of the individual to the individual representation of a collectivity, i.e. the nation. The invention of *Los de abajo* as the foundational novel of the Revolution marks the transition from “the moment of ideological undecidability when it was written” (Sánchez Prado, “Novel” 50) to the stabilized, i.e. institutionalized version of the Revolution as imagined by the national-popular state.

The passage from a moment of “ideological undecidability” to one of national affirmation presents us with the possibility of conceptualizing the revolutionary conjuncture itself as a form of “non-abstract social synthesis,” a moment when the illusion of immediacy gives way to the historical necessity of mediation. According to Neil Larsen, “a pre- or non-exchange based, non-abstract social synthesis implies the possibility of a relation *Nr* [narrative]—*Cm* [community] in which the symbolic ‘distance’ is absent and the two terms are collapsible into each other, becoming in this
sense moments or aspects of the same social relation: $\text{Nr} \leftrightarrow \text{Cm}$” (176). Following Larsen’s cue, we can posit the process of institutionalization of the Novel of the Revolution throughout the 1930s and 1940s as the period when the symbolic distance between narrative and community in Mexican literature is being produced anew under the logic of a fully developed capitalist modernity. Although in need of further elaboration, the process I am hereby describing already allows us to better understand why the gradual displacement of the spatial imagery of the revolutionary war gives formal expression to the end of the class alliance that cemented the national import substitution industrialization project throughout the 40s and 50s. It provides the conceptual language to substitute the displacement of the spatiality of the Novel of the Revolution with the consolidation of class-specific, i.e. bourgeois, interests.

Going back to our analysis of the transitional novel, it is now possible to approach the 1960s as the period when the spatial codes of the Mexican novel account for the emergence of a new class formation in Mexico. It will, however, remain symptomatic of Mexico’s economic dependency that the irruption of the bourgeoisie on the national stage would occur when the conditions that opened the door for its consolidation have already started to wither away. The newborn class—as portrayed in Cruz’s persona—will almost immediately find itself struggling for economic survival. The assault waged by the bourgeois state on labor organization and popular movements throughout the 50s and 60s leading to the watershed year of 1968 is indicative not only of the limited potential of the national bourgeoisie as an emancipatory class but also of its structural weakness. The consecutive rounds of repression and increased authoritarianism that distinguish the
1950s already reveal the absolute limits to Mexico’s developmental aspirations. The underside to the consecration of the Mexican bourgeoisie is therefore the rapid expansion of a working class that, almost from the get-go, will be undercut from the benefits of capitalist modernization. The interstice in national history when the peasantry and the masses of “free and rightless proletarians” were to a certain extent incorporated to the nation-building project of post-revolutionary Mexico—a period that coincides with the rise of the Novel of the Revolution—will come to an abrupt end soon after the national bourgeoisie is able to stand on its own feet. This is the specific contradiction captured by the spatiality of the transitional novel.

The spatial reconfiguration traced in Agustín Yáñez’s La tierra pródiga (1960), Elena Garro’s Los recuerdos del porvenir (1963), Vicente Leñero’s Los albañiles (1963), Fernando del Paso’s José Trigo (1965), or Elena Poniatowska’s Hasta no verte Jesús mío (1969), produces a collection of mirror images of Artemio Cruz, a string of doubling figures reflected by the revolving door of Mexico’s literary modernity. The mirror images of Cruz that one can find in these novels (from local caciques to albañiles, from former peasants to domestic and railroad workers), fictionalize the consolidation of a socioeconomic order that distinctly subordinates national, i.e. popular, to bourgeois interests. As a conclusion to this chapter I will briefly refer to one of the aforementioned novels, Hasta no verte Jesús mío, as a text that, in its spatial composition, brings the transitional period to an end. For the sake of simplicity I will bracket here any reference to the novel’s testimonial character (Poniatowska 1978, Steele 1992, Sommer 1995) as well as the wider discussion on the relation between testimonio and literary
representation (Beverley, *Against 69-99*), in order to focus on the spatial patterns that characterize the novel.

I will begin by making a bold claim, one that is as likely of being dismissed as literary charlatanry as it is of shedding some light on the production of a new spatial pattern in the Mexican novel of the 1960s. The claim is this: *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* is, spatially, the last novel of the Revolution, the genre’s swan song, a novel that both participates in an institutionalized tradition and, at the same time, abolishes it as a whole. After *Hasta no verte* there is no longer any possibility, any room to imagine “non-abstract social synthesis” in Mexican literature; *Hasta no verte* shuts down the door on the cognitive aesthetic—to use Jameson’s (1988) term—foregrounded by the Novel of the Revolution. In the reading I am suggesting, *Hasta no verte* becomes the instance where the nation, the community imagined by the Novel of the Revolution, ceases to exist as a spatial continuum, the moment it becomes part of what Jameson refers to as “a multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities, whose frames range from the still surviving spaces of bourgeois private life all the way to the unimaginable decentering of global capital itself” (“Cognitive” 351). *Hasta no verte* dissolves the nation into the miscellanea of daily experience. I read Poniatowska’s novel as an affirmation of the “gap between phenomenological perception and a reality that transcends all individual thinking or experience” (Jameson, “Cognitive” 353). The metaphorical transition captures the character of the spatial reconfiguration the Mexican novel undergoes throughout the 1960s.
Rutherford refers to a passage from Gregorio López y Fuentes’ *Campamento* (1931) to emphasize the collective protagonist privileged by the Novel of the Revolution: “No hacen falta nombres. Los nombres, al menos en la revolución, no hacen falta para nada. Sería lo mismo que intentar poner nombre a las olas de un río y somos algo así como un río muy caudaloso” (quote). Jesusa Palancares, the main character of *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*, is the exact opposite to the nameless collectivity celebrated by López y Fuentes. Regardless of whether or not Palancares is able to elicit some kind of representativity, it is her heightened individuality that has led to a predominant reading of the novel as a Bildungsroman that subverts gender roles and gives rise to a subaltern/marginal discourse (Durán 2002, Parodi 2004, Thornton, 2006, Albin 2008, Arias Orozco 2017). Doris Sommer offers a compelling rebuttal of this kind of “unsolicited sympathetic reading” (“Taking” 916-8) by arguing that *Hasta no verte* prevents the reader from assuming any kind of ultimate knowledge about Palancares. For Sommers, Palancares’ “particularly positioned life defies easy universalizing and transcendent appropriations that would allow readers to assume some ultimate knowledge of her […]. What we get instead is prattle, interminable drone, with the result that the book bores many of us” (“Taking” 924). Sommer’s argument can be easily extrapolated to argue that by resisting universalizing ambitions, Poniatowska forces us to reconsider the legitimacy of the Novel of the Revolution as a form of institutionalized national discourse. However, what I want to suggest here as a way of bringing this chapter to an end, is that Palancares’ resistance to universalization is less a product of her “particularly positioned life,” i.e. of her heightened individuality, than of the unmappable reality that has come to frame it.
The contrast between Artemio Cruz and Jesusa Palancares is useful as a synthesized reflection on the spatial composition of the transitional novel. In _La muerte de Artemio Cruz_, Artemio Cruz is the name given to the world that emerges from the Mexican Revolution. Cruz’s personal history intersects at every crossroads with the history of the nation, mapping the former provides the historical coordinates to map the latter. Cruz is, in this sense, an *Übermensch*, his life gives meaning to life on earth. But Cruz is all too easily defeated by his own terrestrial imagination, he dies trying to piece his life back together, refusing until the end to engage in supra-terrestrial hopes. Whether or not Cruz is capable of endowing his personal past with meaning is irrelevant, what Cruz is no longer able to articulate is a sense of present. As he lays dying Cruz desperately attempts to chart his position in a map he no longer knows how to read.

Cruz’s final fall, his sudden transformation from a red-blooded capitalist into a decrepit old man, can be said to follow the loss of his capacity to map the world he himself has helped create. As a transitional novel, _La muerte de Artemio Cruz_ leads us through the passage that separates lived experience from reality. On the other hand, _Hasta no verte Jesús mío_ brings this passage to an end by firmly anchoring the life of Jesusa Palancares in a reality that can be no longer grasped in any kind of direct way. By repeatedly questioning the act of narration, Palancares subverts any attempt to make sense of her life: “Todo eso me lo contaron a mí, ahora quién sabe cuál sea la mera verdad” (78); “¿Qué me gano con decírselas? No me gano nada. No con que les cuente yo mi vida se me van a quitar las dolencias. Yo no cuento nada” (123). As Sommer indicates, “Jesusa’s book confounds the sophisticated reader by refusing to supply conquerable challenges; it
loses the reader in an arid monotone of indifferent telling” (“Taking” 934). However, I wish to argue that the sustained indifference of Palancares is not, in any way, strategic or performative—this is the point where I depart from Sommer’s interpretation—but rather that her indifference is the most accurate available representation of the discontinuous nature of the reality she inhabits.

A brief example should suffice to give a better sense of what I refer to by the discontinuous reality Palancares inhabits. Palancares arrives in Mexico City as she makes her way back to her native Tehuantepec, but after her belongings are stolen and she finds herself without any money, she is forced to remain in the city and is never able to complete her journey back to Oaxaca. As Poniatowska suggests, “Jesusa pertenece a los millones de hombres y de mujeres que no viven, sobreviven” (“Hasta” 7), Palancares is part of the “población flotante, desarraigada, compuesta por inmigrantes del campo y la provincia, que han cambiado su cultura tradicional por la televisión y por el radio” (“Hasta” 8). There is a remarkable chasm between the incidental nature of the events that, in Palancares’ account, lead her to settle in Mexico City and the process that Poniatowska glosses over, namely the rural-urban migration that throughout the 1930s and 1940s contributed to the rapid growth of Mexico City and propelled the development of informal settlements for the new urban working class. In Palancares’ account her confinement to the peripheries of the city results from a series of unfortunate events, her arrival in Mexico City preserves the appearance of an act of chance. Let us not forget Palancares gets stranded in Mexico City on her way back to Tehuantepec, amidst a return to origins—a gesture that is already present in the figure of Cruz reaching for the world
behind the curtain. The key difference between the two is that, for Palancares, there is no
curtain whatsoever, no threshold separating inside from outside. As he lays dying, Cruz
has to confront the fact that the world where he came from no longer exists. Palancares
will never have the opportunity to come to this realization. Upon her arrival to Mexico
City the world has, as it were, turned its back on her. The world Palancares inhabits has
become discontinuous. From this moment on Palancares’ lived experience is no longer
coterminous with reality: Palancares cannot tell anything although she is willing to say
everything; her life, full of sound and fury, has come to signify nothing. Palancares’
interjection takes on a different meaning: ¿Qué me gano con decírles? Yo no cuento nada.
Chapter 2: Patterns

Hot on the heels of *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962) came the publication of José Agustín’s short novel *La tumba* (1964). The coming-of-age story of Gabriel, the opening line in the high-octane saga of Mexican literature that—despite the rejection of the term by its main figures—came to be known as *literatura de la Onda*, announced the unapologetic invention of a new road for the Mexican novel that had little if anything to do with the thematic and political concerns of the literary tradition embodied by Fuentes. In Elena Poniatowska’s words: “Fuentes abre puertas y escoge la vía real, la gloriosa, la de los altos pinos, la puerta del cielo y la asciende vertiginosamente. Los otros no saben sino hundirse en los sótanos; los separos de la Procuraduría. […] En su caso, el hada madrina de Fuentes se convierte en madrastra” (*¡Ay vida* x-xi). On a different level, the emphatic rupture, heightened by the publication of Gustavo Sainz’s *Gazapo* (1965) and Agustín’s *De perfil* (1966), prefigured the large-scale reconfiguration of the spatial codes of the Mexican novel that followed the watershed year of 1968. Adela Pineda Franco rightly observes that “The Mexican student movement upheld concrete demands and, from this specific angle, it was short-lived. However, from a broader perspective, the movement was a transformative event, as it signaled the advent of a constellation of social and political struggles spanning from the late 1950s to the 1970s. In this regard, it was not an isolated phenomenon” (*Mexican* 133). While the urban narrative that flourished throughout the 60s already signaled to a spatial transition—as is made evident in the urban settings of Fuentes’ *La región más transparente* (1958) and Agustín Yáñez’s *Ojerosa y pintada* (1960)—it is the main contention of this chapter that only with the
historical foreclosure of the national project of diversified industrialization effected throughout the 70s did the newly found spatial composition of the Mexican novel become legible as part of a large scale reconfiguration of social space associated with the rise of a new pattern of capital accumulation in Mexico.

As we will have the opportunity to point out, the velocity of this turnaround, captured by the snapshot that superimposes the beginnings of la Onda to the transitional novel—Poniatowska herself tagging Jesusa Palancares to the likes of la Onda writers (¡Ay vida 167-213)—is symptomatic of the sharp turn the world capitalist economy took “in the immediate neighborhood of 1973” (Jameson, “Periodizing” 204). But perhaps more relevant to the problem at hand is la Onda’s coterminous enthusiasm to move swiftly away from the historical concerns of the transitional novel. The willingness to engage the history of the nation in, for example, Fuentes’ La muerte de Artemio Cruz, or Fernando del Paso’s José Trigo (1965), becomes unmistakably blurred, if not completely wiped out from the blissful repertoire of la Onda.\(^1\) This sudden transformation, characteristic of a newly found social sensibility, extends beyond the countercultural confines of la Onda and finds alternate expressions in a larger set of literary works that gave form to what Margo Glantz, following Carpentier, considered as the emergence of a novelística in Mexican literature (“Onda” 90). Throughout the 70s the nation-building arithmetic of previous decades became gradually displaced by an anxiety of the present. As Carol Clark D’Lugo has noted, “Onda writers accent their break with the past by privileging the present in their narrations, in clear contrast with the writings of Rulfo and Fuentes, in which the weight of Mexican history is omnipresent” (165). Throughout the
70s the Mexican novel’s engagement with history became increasingly oblique, giving way to a new balance between time and space. It is notable that this shift would occur at a time when a comprehensive examination of national history was being developed for the first time. According to Poniatowska: “Bien puede decirse que hubo en México, a raíz del 68, una suerte de revolución cultural porque más que una revolución política, el 68 fue — al menos así lo demuestran los resultados, un cambio en la forma, por ejemplo, de hacer historia. Por primera vez hay una versión exhaustiva del pasado de México; una investigación histórica que no ha habido en nuestro país en los últimos cincuenta años” (¡Ay vida 204). Why then does the Mexican novel in general and the *literatura de la Onda* in particular move away from the historical concerns that so clearly stood at the center of the transitional novel during the previous decade? What does this tension reveal about the epochal change marked by the collapse of the industrial pattern of capital reproduction (Osorio 2004), the end of the bourgeois project of capitalist modernization that grew out of the Mexican Revolution, and the foreclosure of the developmental aspirations of the Third World (Larsen 2001; Benjamin 2018)?

As a preliminary note it should be established that the so-called neoliberal turn that began to take shape in the early 70s was premised upon a set of violent undertakings aimed at securing the changes in social relations needed to confront the worldwide crisis of accumulation that began to unravel in the late 60s (Harvey 2005). As Jean Franco indicates, “The blatant intention of incorporating masses of Third World workers into a cheap labor pool accounts for the ferocity with which the guerrilla movements had to be suppressed, as well as the undermining of nationalist movements” (297). In Mexico, the
direct violence that allowed this transformation to take place, while originating back in the early 50s, reached its tipping point in the appalling episodes of the Tlatelolco massacre (October 2, 1968), the “Halconazo”—otherwise known as the Corpus Christi massacre—(June 10, 1971), and the U.S.-backed Dirty War the Mexican state waged against labor, student organizations, and urban and rural social movements and guerrillas throughout the 70s. Persecution and repression became the core elements of a state-led operation aimed at securing the social relations needed for the rise of a new pattern of capital accumulation in the country. Reflecting on the counterinsurgency measures implemented throughout Latin America from the 60s onward, Jaime Osorio establishes that these “fueron mucho más que medidas para hacer frente a la emergencia de brotes guerrilleros o de movimientos y gobiernos populares. Eran políticas de disciplinamiento y control social que alentaban la construcción de nuevas modalidades de reproducción del capital y de un nuevo Estado, neooligárquico, botín de unos cuantos grupos económicos poderosos. En esas décadas las sociedades latinoamericanas fueron objeto de una verdadera refundación en un contexto de transformación del sistema mundial capitalista” (Explotación 195). It is to this newly born social reality, and to the large-scale reconfiguration of social and urban space that it presupposed, that I will refer to in this chapter by turning to the spatial composition of José Agustín’s 1973 novel Se está haciendo tarde (final en laguna).

Beyond la Onda

As a literary group, la Onda has been usually ascribed the following characteristics: it marks a formal recusal from the modernist aesthetic that dominated the
literary landscape of the previous decades, it favors the present over the past, it is bound by youth and youth identity, it celebrates and assimilates popular language (word play, teen slang, double entendre, vulgar speech), it opens Mexican literature to the influence of film, rock n’ roll (“la nueva música clásica”), television, and the beatnik and hippie sub-cultures (“La Onda fue la versión mexicana del movimiento jipi” [Lara-Alengrin 41]), it incorporates, unabashedly and for the first time, the extensive use of English, it registers the urban experience and the everyday life of the emerging “middle-classes,” and it dwells in taboo and forbidden topics (most prominently sex, drugs, and homosexuality). Before turning to Agustín’s novel we should provide some commentary on these features and evaluate to what extent they are a useful starting point to conceptualize the social space of the Mexican 70s.

Perhaps the most controversial of these claims, the one at the core of the literary ninguno the works of Agustín & co. have been routinely subjected to, is la Onda’s recusal from a modernist aesthetic, a feature that, on the other hand, becomes the shining centerpiece (if not always a harmonizing one, as we have argued in Chapter 1) in the transitional novel’s design. This particular reading fits into the larger narrative that understands la Onda to represent a clean break from literary tradition, a moment of rupture that, in spite of its formal shortcomings, opens Mexican literature to new spaces and themes by turning its back on the erudite glossary, highbrow refinement, and experimental obstinacy of the Mexican literary corps d’élite, (perhaps the clearest example would be the contrast between any of the group’s novels and the polyhistoric monumentality of Fernando del Paso’s Palinuro de México [1977]). The hermetism of
those select few that coalesced around the figures of Emmanuel Carballo, Carlos Fuentes (who would become ambassador to France during the presidency of Luis Echeverría), and Fernando Benítez, in addition to the control they came to exercise over the Mexican cultural apparatus, became the basis for the derisory nickname of “la mafia,” as imagined by Luis Guillermo Piazza in his 1967 homonymous novel (Gunia 24-5). Agustín himself would later use the term to refer to the intellectual groups that gathered around the magazines *Plural* (founded in 1971 by Octavio Paz) and *Nexos* (created in 1978 and headed by Héctor Aguilar Camín) (*Tragicomedia* 2 pages). The result, not surprisingly, is that for all the laudatory fanfare garnered by the adolescent indifference and iconoclastic debauchery of *la Onda*, its corpus has been commonly relegated to the dustbin of realism.

By the late 60s and early 70s, the negative connotation of the term is meant to indicate a kind of formal regression, “a term of reproach and opprobrium” (Jameson, “Antinomies” 476) referred, in the last instance, to an outdated modality that privileges the outside world over the internal arrangement of the novel.

The accusation, in most cases fraught with disdain, can be traced back to Glantz’s distinction between *Onda* and *escritura* in her 1971 essay “Onda y escritura: jóvenes de 20 a 33”. In her essay, which gave birth to the label “literatura de la Onda,” Glantz continually touts the idea that the style of these writers constitutes a new type of realism, she alternately describes *la Onda* as “un nuevo tipo de realismo que apela más a los sentidos que a la narración” (98), “el advenimiento de un nuevo tipo de realismo en el que el lenguaje popular de la ciudad de México […] ingresa en la literatura directamente” (101), and a “realismo enclavado en la sensación” (103). At the other end of the literary
spectrum is what Glantz refers to as *escritura*, an umbrella term that would encompass "tendencias cuyo punto de convergencia sería la preocupación esencial por el lenguaje y la estructura" (106). According to Glantz, ‘‘escritura’ negaría Onda. La negaría en la medida en que el lenguaje de la Onda es el instrumento para observar un mundo y no la materia misma de su narrativa. Onda significaría en última instancia otro realismo, un testimonio, no una impugnación, aunque algunas novelas o narraciones de la Onda empiecen a cuestionar su testimonio” (105-6). Glantz sums up her characterization by establishing that “en las dos corrientes denominadas ‘Onda’ y ‘escritura’ pudiera verse lo que [Octavio] Paz reclama como crítica social o como creación verbal” (112). However, relegating *la Onda* to the task of documenting the social experience of the blistering modernization of the nation’s capital, even when tied to matters of alienation or the struggle against the growingly repressive apparatus of the Mexican state, is precisely what has led literary criticism to focus on those characteristics that, generally speaking, have been ascribed to it as the preeminent countercultural movement in the years leading to the student protests of 1968. To put it in Glantz’s terms, because *la Onda* is ultimately read as a form of social criticism and *not* as verbal creation, as a matter of documentation rather than of self-reflexivity, literary analysis has rarely moved beyond the realm of appearances to analyze the codification of social relations available in its literary form. Agustín himself upheld the notion that in the works of his cohort, “La esencia estaba en la apariencia, lo inmediato era lo eterno; lo local, universal, y la idea de cultura borraba fronteras y jerarquías” (“La onda” 10). The result, not surprisingly, has been a fairly descriptive account of the group’s most obvious technical innovations, a conclusion that,
indeed, “risks fetishizing novelty and mistaking appearance for essence” (Foley 2019, 149). Thus understood the realism imputed to la Onda can only be perceived as a weak form of realism, and its study as being far removed from the intellectual purpose of advancing any sort of ideological critique.

In a certain way, this question is tied to matters of periodization. More often than not la Onda is taken to be a literary precursor of the student movement of 1968; its uninhibited joyfulness, transgression of social norms, and thin-veiled critique of the national and social values upheld by previous generations (the so-called “brecha generacional”) have been commonly read as foreshadowing the rebellion against the authority of the Mexican state that reached its capstone in the Tlatelolco massacre.

According to this reading, what la Onda accomplished “in the literary realm […] so did the movement of 1968, in the political realm” (Brushwood 66). In many instances this explains why, when referring to la Onda, literary criticism has tended to focus on those novels published in the mid-60s, namely Agustín’s La tumba (1964) and De perfil (1966), and Gustavo Sainz’s Gazapo (1965), followed closely by Parménides García Saldaña’s Pasto verde (1968) and Margarita Dalton’s Larga sinfonía en D (1968). It has also led to periodizations that, by definition, do not extend past the early 70s. Carlos Monsiváis and Elena Poniatowska set the temporal limits of “la Onda” between 1966 and 1972 (Amor perdido 227; ¡Ay vida 176), and Agustín argues that “la literatura sobre la juventud escrita desde la juventud” (“La onda” 9) was a phenomenon that, for the most part, developed between 1964 and 1973. This periodization, needless to say, becomes impractical once we move past the historical conjuncture of 1968. Read as a form of testimonio, in the
aftermath of 1968-71 *la Onda* loses its import and rapidly devolves into a dated product, a window into the social milieu of the late 60s and early 70s but hardly anything else. This is probably one of the unintended consequences of the overuse of the label “literatura de la Onda,” which on the other hand has been the focus of continued criticism since it first came into being. Poniatowska, when writing about the *onderos*, suggests that “agruparlos en un solo movimiento para uniformarlos como si ninguno tuviera características propias resulta parecido a que las mujeres que escribimos nos llamaran ‘la literatura de la falda, o de la blusa, o de la bolsa de mano’ como si nuestras preocupaciones de amor, maternales o culinarias nos incorporaran automáticamente a una secta” (*¡Ay vida* 198). Agustín, likewise, complained that Glantz’s label ended up reducing the works of his cohort to the thematic combo of “jóvenes-coloquialismo-drogas-sexo-roncanrol,” and that Glantz erroneously bundled together “a gente que circulaba por carreteras distintas” (“La onda” 13). In addition, Agustín pointed out that the label “literatura de la Onda” mistakenly blurred the lines between the group of writers that began publishing in the mid 60s and the youth movement that, throughout the decade, came to be known as “La Onda.” In Agustín’s opinion, the label ultimately became a “vehículo para la descalificación tajante y militante de nuestros libros” (“La onda” 15), a derogatory marker used to patrol the limits between genuine (i.e. high) literature and pubescent gimmicks.

To be fair, critics have, to a greater or lesser extent, pointed out the stylistic overlap between *la Onda* and those highly artificial and aestheticized works that saw the light in Mexico in the late 60s. The similitudes between the formal experiments of Sainz
and Elizondo, for example, have been noticed in more than one occasion (D’Lugo 168-9; Glantz, “La onda” 119-21). Going further in this direction, Agustín has considered that “La novela juvenil no sólo inició al país en la postmodernidad sino que procedió a definir el espíritu de los nuevos tiempos” (Agustín “La onda” 10), a statement that, read as an addendum to Glantz’s characterization, would leave us with the antinomic (and dubious) configuration of a postmodern realism. Whether la Onda is better characterized as a new form of realism, an iteration of modernism proper, or the first step in the road to a Mexican literary postmodernity is beyond the scope of this study. However, a couple of precisions should be made in this regard. First, we should note that the most definite modernist gesture of la Onda is its relentless commitment to épater le bourgeois. None of the novels published in Mexico up to that point rivals with its scatological liberty and its determination to “uttering the formerly inadmissible” (Brushwood 60). As many critics have pointed out, la Onda exists on the margins because “la onda es la desaprobación del modo de vida de la sociedad” (García Saldaña, page). At least in this regard, a novel like La muerte de Artemio Cruz pales in comparison to the impertinency available in the pages of Sainz’s Gazapo or Agustín’s Se está haciendo tarde.

The second precision, closer to the concerns of this study, is related to what Fredric Jameson esteems as “the will to use and to subject time to the service of space” (Postmodernism 154). Throughout the 70s the Mexican novel, regardless of its groupings or stylistic affiliations, seems to turn away from the “deep memory” that absorbed the novels of previous decades and towards the transitory vitality of the present. The historical enthusiasm that in La muerte de Artemio Cruz articulated uneven temporalities
in order to stake a claim over the destiny of the nation withers before the standardization of time implicit in the use of the tape recorder, the diary, the cassette player, and the sound bite. We will have the opportunity to return to the problem of the standardization of time and its relation to the production of space, for now, it should be noted that, at least in part, this transformation seems to support Jameson’s claim that “if temporality still has its place, it would seem better to speak of the writing of it than of any lived experience” (Postmodernism 154). As we shall see, registering the passing of time produces overlaps, juxtapositions, and discontinuities that weight upon the linearity of the narration bringing it close to a standstill. The temporal margins of the story—limited to a single day in Gazapo and Se está haciendo tarde, or to a single “instant” in Farabeuf—are torn apart by the act of retelling, recording, verbalizing, fantasizing. I wish to characterize this process as a temporal saturation of space. From this standpoint the spatialization of time follows the logic of condensation, a change of state that tends to produce a particular texture in the sense annotated by Lefebvre.8

Building on these apertures, it is now possible to turn to José Agustín’s 1973 novel Se está haciendo tarde (final en laguna) to interrogate the stakes of re-introducing la Onda into a larger account of the spatial reconfiguration of the Mexican novel in the aftermath of 1968-71. In order to do so, I approach Agustín’s text not as a remnant of the countercultural effervescence of the late 60s, nor as part of the “literatura juvenil” that the label “literatura de la Onda” ultimately refers to, but as a text that, in its spatial composition, gives form to the social space that emerged from the dilapidation of the industrial pattern of capital reproduction in Mexico. This decade-long process would
eventually lead to the consolidation of a new export-oriented pattern of capital reproduction, and this, in turn, to the implementation of neoliberal economic policy proper by the early 80s (a subject that will be dealt with in Chapter 3).

José Agustín wrote *Se está haciendo tarde (final en laguna)* between 1970 and 1972, at the height of “la Onda.” The novel narrates the one-day journey of Rafael—a twenty-nine-year old initiated in the esoteric arts of tarot and coffee reading—from Mexico City to the port of Acapulco. Upon his arrival, Rafael rendezvouses with his dealer, Virgilio, who will guide him through the decadent landscape of Acapulco and finally to the Coyuca lagoon (the “laguna” of the title). Along the journey Rafael will befriend Francine, Gladys, and Paulhan, three specimens of the foreign fauna that roams the beaches of Acapulco in search of “el puro rol, el gran rolaqueo” (26). After a series of voluptuous episodes, the novel comes to an end in the middle of a delirium tremens induced by the consumption of psilocybin, with Rafael engaged in an act worthy of one of the saltiest pages of Quevedo.

As Raymond L. Williams has noted, *Se está haciendo tarde* “is a novel with little plot, practically no psychological development of its characters, and a paucity of description concerning the setting,” it recounts a series of “disconnected and discontinuous experiences [that] consist mostly of regular and self-indulgent consumption of drugs and American rock music from the late 1960s and early 1970s” (70). The novel has no chapter divisions, instead, it implements a series of visual strategies that punctuate the characters’ incessant banter. As Susan Schaffer indicates, “the novelist plays with the layout of the text on the page so that gaps, indentations flush
right or flush left and isolated phrases disrupt the linear quality of reading. These pictorial techniques culminate in the use of several blacked-out passages designed to signal the characters’ complete loss of sense perception in the closing scene of the novel” (139). In Williams’ opinion these “visual signposts […] interrupt and guide the reader through the narrative just as a poster interrupts a linear ‘reading’ of a wall or a street” (72). The destabilization of linearity is certainly one of the most captivating formal features of the text, and we will have the opportunity to return to it as part of our analysis of the role circularity plays in the spatial composition of *Se está haciendo tarde*.

Before we move on we should underscore that in the wake of Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Burroughs, *Se está haciendo tarde* has been generally read as a road novel, a journey in the dual sense of a road trip and a trip of the mind. According to Glantz, “la onda se mantiene lógicamente en onda mediante el movimiento. Los onderos son ‘rodantes’ […] En coche, en avión, a pie, a caballo, la onda se desplaza […] El viaje psicodélico, el de la marihuana, el del sexo, el que entrecruza sexo y baile y droga y bebida, se vuelve el viaje hacia adentro: así el viaje concreto se vuelve de pronto viaje inducido” (“La onda” 122). Standing at the brink of adult life, Rafael sets on a journey of self-discovery that will lead him through different states of mind in his search for self-identity and spiritual unity. The continued use of drugs (ranging from alcohol and marijuana to psilocibine) has been the usual starting point to analyze *Se está haciendo tarde*’s most salient formal features, given that, as Schaffer has noted, “Agustín seeks to reflect in the writing itself of this novel certain well-documented physiological effects produced by drug consumption, such as loss of time, space and body awareness” (138). But beyond Agustín’s intent to relate
the experience of intoxication, I wish to argue that *Se está haciendo tarde*’s visual strategies tend to give formal expression to a new temporal and spatial order founded on the consolidation of a new pattern of capital reproduction in Mexico.

*Acuérdate de Acapulco*

Atiborrado, incesante, acezante, humanidad en una nuez, Acapulco es un corazón, colorido arabesco sin fin, caleidoscopio que no se aquieta nunca, ni en lo que va de un instante al que sigue; corazón hinchado de hermosuras y putrefacciones, violencias y deliquios.

Ricardo Garibay, *Acapulco*

At first sight it would seem odd to choose a novel set in Acapulco where most of the characters are foreigners to refer to a period in Mexican history profoundly marked by the events of 1968 and, therefore, by the predominance of Mexico City as an urban setting. These are, by all accounts, the years when the centralism of the Mexican literary field—heavily scrutinized from the 90s onward—reached its peak, and when the Mexican cultural landscape came to be seamlessly administered from the nation’s capital.¹² These are also the years of the emergence of “sociedad civil,” whose preferred vehicle for literary expression is the urban chronicle. Moreover, *La Onda* in general and Agustín in particular are usually read as providing a literary portrait of the bourgeoning middle classes of the Mexican metropolis, what Glantz, in reference to the prototypical middle-class neighborhood in Mexico City, refers to as the “*narvartensis típico*” (“Onda” 98). But we must remember that from the late 1940s to the early 1970s, perhaps like no other place outside Mexico City, Acapulco underwent a series of radical transformations
closely linked to the developmental aspirations of the Mexican state. During these
decades the coastal city gained notoriety as an international tourist attraction and was
heralded as a token of Mexico’s successful quest for capitalist modernization. Large-scale
urban development and foreign direct investment altered the city’s landscape and created
a sharp contrast with its rural surroundings, where peasant movements and guerrillas
remained a constant throughout the period.

Throughout the 70s, as Elsa M. Gracida indicates in her account of Mexican
developmentalism, “La respuesta ante el autoritarismo —condensado en el campo
universitario en 1968 y 1971— se expresa en formas distintas. En unos casos predomina
el desaliento respecto a la razón de ser de las organizaciones estudiantiles, exhibido en la
desaparición o fractura de muchas de ellas, y en la emergencia de la contracultura. En
otras ocasiones surge la radicalización, cuyo principal efecto se observa en el ascenso de
la guerrilla urbana” (73). It is important to situate the emergence of the countercultural
movement and the advent of urban and rural guerrillas as parallel processes originating in
the rise of authoritarianism in Mexico. The repressive spiral can be traced back to the late
50s and the Mexican state’s response to the railroad workers strikes of 1958-1959, “the
most threatening grassroots working-class movements and the largest labor strikes since
those during the revolution of 1910” (Alegre 2014, 3). As I have already argued (Chapter
1), the authoritarian turn of the Mexican state signaled toward the structural limits of
Mexico’s national quest for capitalist modernization. Se está haciendo tarde hints at these
processes by way of an oblique reference to the armed struggle led by Genaro Vázquez in
Guerrero’s Costa Grande. Virgilio, glossing over his illegal dealings, admits:
Primero, cuando me prendí y empecé a dilerear a madres, a darle al canijo petróleo, me sentí un mesías regular; estaba pasando la onda a tochos, según pensaba yo, el aliviane por una feria. Pero si ahora estoy seguro de algo es que no se debe comerciar con estas ondas, ondas que prendan la mente […] Ésas son puras jaladeces, deberíamos hacer la revolución. Ratatatat, ¡abajo, perros, azotadores, evenenadores de la mente del pueblo! ¡Chinguen a su madre burfresas! Aguantaría la revolución, pero todos somos unos culeros y muy habladores. Yo al menos, en cambio Genaro Vázquez partiéndose la madre muy calladito, aquí cerca. Carajo, yo sí soy un culero: cobro un toleco por cartón de moranga o hasta un ciego por un sunshine si el aceite está escaso. La neta es que valgo madre, soy un pinche huevón, debería trabajar. Pero cómo, cómo cómo. (144)

The fleeting reference captures the overlap as well as the antinomies of the responses to the Mexican state’s authoritarian turn. The assassinations of Rubén Jaramillo (1962), Genaro Vázquez (1972), and Lucio Cabañas (1974) should, therefore, be read as a fundamental component in the process that allowed for the production of Acapulco as a national retreat, both in the sense of a recreational environment for the bourgeoisie and a psychedelic getaway to escape from the tribulations of the mind.13

By 1950 Acapulco already enjoyed a reputation as a slice of Paradise.14 Immortalized in the opening line of Agustín Lara’s 1946 waltz “María bonita” (a song dedicated to María Félix), Acapulco became the indisputable poster image of the economic success of Alemanismo. Backyard of the Mexican bourgeoisie, the port quickly became the playground of its U.S. counterpart. In 1953 John and Jackie Kennedy honeymooned in Acapulco and Elizabeth Taylor married there in 1957. Two years later Dwight Eisenhower stayed in the lavish Pierre Marquès hotel while visiting Mexico on official business,15 and in 1963 the port city became the setting for Richard Thorpe’s musical comedy Fun in Acapulco, with Elvis Presley (who did not set foot in Acapulco for the shooting) in the leading role. Raymundo Gleyzer keenly captured the Mexican
bourgeoisie’s infatuation with Acapulco in his 1970 documentary film México, la revolución congelada: beaming high-rise hotels and calm waves welcoming foreign investors, speculators, and corrupt government officials to see the divers of La Quebrada plunge into the waters of the Pacific Ocean.\(^\text{16}\) “Tropical, exotic, easygoing, sexualized, and debauched—this was Mexico for the middle-class and wealthier vacationers who could easily afford a week on the beach” (Sackett, “The Two” 502). But as we already know “Accumulation of wealth at one pole is [...] at the same time accumulation of misery [...] at the opposite pole” (Marx, *Capital vol. 1* 799), and the violent modernization of Acapulco into a newly found Garden of Earthly Delights was no exception.

As Dina Berger indicates “Acapulco was Mexico’s first planned resort destination” and its development “called for the general beautification of Acapulco, which meant destroying unsightly buildings in the historic district where working-class families lived. In 1947 President Miguel Alemán Valdés authorized the expropriation of lands around Acapulco Bay, lands awarded to peasant *ejidatarios* (beneficiaries of *ejidos*) a decade earlier to fulfill the revolutionary promise of agrarian redistribution” (2). This process is the background to a dramatically understudied scene in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, dated September 11, 1947. The scene narrates the romantic escapade of Artemio Cruz and Lilia to Acapulco: “Desde la mesa se veía la explanada del nuevo frente de Acapulco, levantado con premura para satisfacer la comodidad del gran número de viajeros norteamericanos a los que la guerra había privado de Waikiki, Portofino o Biarritz, y también para ocultar el traspatio chaparro, lodoso, de los pescadores desnudos
y sus chozas con niños barrigones, perros sarnosos, riachuelos de aguas negras, triquina y bacilos. *Siempre los dos tiempos, en esta comunidad jánica, de rostro doble, tan lejana de lo que fue y tan lejana de lo que quiere ser*” (151, my emphasis). The contradictions spun by the urban development of Acapulco—not least the exclusion from the city of peasant and local communities—gave way to a series of social uprisings and land invasions that reached their apex with the foundation of the *barrio* of La Laja in 1958 (Sackett, “The Two” 507). In a condensed form, the “comunidad jánica, de rostro doble” that surfaced in Acapulco revealed the unevenness of Mexico’s peripheral modernization. Because of these particularities Acapulco became a site of tremendous importance to narrate the urban and economic transformations of the country in the aftermath of World War II.

From this standpoint, the opening lines of *Se está haciendo tarde (final en laguna)*, for the most part taken to be a road novel infused with all the tropes that characterize the *literatura de la Onda*, can be read as a succinct historical account of this particular period in Mexican history:

> HACIA EL NORTE DE ACAPULCO, y dentro de sus límites, las playas Caleta y Caletilla forman una bahía muy pequeña. El mar allí es manso y benévolo. Las corrientes peligrosas se hacen sentir en mar abierto, entre las playas y una isla: Roqueta, donde se alza el faro de Acapulco.

Esta historia en verdad se inicia en Caleta, que con Caletilla vio momentos de gran prosperidad en la década de los años cincuenta. Grandes hoteles, turismo internacional, los cabarés de moda se ubicaron allí. Sin embargo, cuando empezó la década de los años sesenta las celebridades y el ruido se mudaron al sur de Acapulco. Nuevos hoteles, mejores cabarés y otra generación, aún más deshíbida, prefirió las olas agresivas de la playa Condesa, balcón a la Bocana, al mar abierto. En Caleta y Caletilla sólo vacacionistas de Semana Santa. Ecos de gritos. Botes anclados.

A principio de los setenta algunos turistas adinerados y su cortejo de aventureros y codiciosos volvieron a Caleta. Playa risueña de manso

In an uncommon gesture for la Onda novels, Se está haciendo tarde opens with a historical overview that explicitly frames the story of Rafael and Virgilio within the larger process of Acapulco’s urbanization, in particular the boom-and-bust cycle of the Península de Las Playas, the once-upon-a-time foremost tourist destination of the Acapulco Bay. It is not hard to imagine Artemio Cruz and Virgilio as antipodal figures standing at opposite ends of the period in question: Cruz, the herald of the national bourgeoisie, gloating before the modern façade of the port city; Virgilio, an augur of underdevelopment, highjacking the bourgeoisie’s cosmopolitan dreams.

By the early 70s Caleta has become an emplacement of decadence (“Allí ya no va a nadie”). The modern landscape that captured the imagination of the Mexican bourgeoisie has given way to an intricate system of dirt roads and dead-ends that lead the developmental aspirations of the Mexican state astray. Upon his arrival to Acapulco Rafael is forced to wander through a maze of “pequeñas calles todas con agujeros y pedruscos” (20). A local taxi driver struggles to find Virgilio’s home address and at the end of the trip Rafael laments having to pay “por la pesadilla de estar dando vueltas y vueltas por el mismo lugar” (20). When Rafael finally reaches “Calle del Mar 199, Mozimba” he is appalled by the pauperized condition of Virgilio’s quarters: “¿Y la casa de Virgilio? La veredita había terminado y frente a ella sólo había dos paredes
improvisadas con ladrillos y otras dos que atestiguaban la presencia de una vieja
construcción. Techo de palma. A la derecha un cubículo de ramas. ¡Ése es el baño! Ésta
no es casa, es la construcción de la decadencia, oh Dios, por qué por qué, no es posible”
(20). Mozimba is part of that “traspatio chaparro, lodoso” that developed in the shadow
of Acapulco’s fashionable seafront as local communities were displaced and rural
populations “poured into Acapulco looking for work” (Sackett, “Fun” 162). In many of
these squatter settlements the lack of sewage, potable water, and other basic infrastructure
created a particular form of residential differentiation (Harvey, Limits 383) that inevitably
challenged the Mexican state’s narrative of a successful capitalist modernization.

Mozimba, and more generally the periphery of Acapulco, followed a parallel
expansion to that of Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl and other slums and squatter settlements in
the outskirts of Mexico City, but the specific character of Acapulco as a site of
international tourist attraction endowed the seaport with features that tended to heighten
the unevenness of its urban development. The peculiar history of Acapulco, which
encompassed a long period of decay after Mexico’s War of Independence, ultimately led
to its violent transformation from an isolated way station with a conspicuous colonial past
into a buoying capitalist city in a very short period of time. In his characterization of the
big capitalist cities Bolívar Echeverría indicates that:

En principio, las grandes ciudades capitalistas constan por lo general de lo que sería la City o el centro de los negocios, el barrio residencial, el barrio bajo o de vivienda obrera y la periferia. La City es el núcleo, el centro donde durante el día se deciden los grandes negocios y en la noche se encienden los grandes centros de la diversión. Luego, alejado del centro, está el “barrio alto” residencial, aislado del bullicio, cercano a la naturaleza domesticada a la que se protege como el cinturón verde o el “pulmón” de la gran ciudad. Lindando con el centro, se encuentran los
“barrios bajos”, los asentamientos para obreros que, con sus interminables hileras de “cuarteles de arriendo” (*mietskasernen*), llegan a parecerse a las ciudades-campamento de las sociedades burocrático-teocráticas de Oriente. Finalmente, en la periferia —baja o alta como las favelas—, se encuentra el entorno árido o la zona devastada por el progreso capitalista, habitada por el ejército industrial de reserva y el lumpenproletariado.

(76-7)

Acapulco’s urbanization did not result in one of these prototypical big capitalist cities, but rather in a capitalist enclave that without fulfilling the big city’s role as a business center gave free rein to the intemperance of a major city’s nightlife; no residential “barrio alto” (although some high-end residencies became readily available) but large-scale hotel developments focused on providing temporary accommodations for the vacationing bourgeoisie and middle-classes; no green belt or domesticated nature but an infinite, untamed oceanic backdrop that served as a natural limit to the seafront’s development; no “barrios bajos” in the traditional sense either since there was no major industrial activity and therefore no organized industrial proletariat, instead, an entire population dependent, to a greater or lesser extent, on the service industry and tourism for an access to wages; and, finally, a massive urban periphery consisting of minimally regulated squatter settlements where state violence, land disputes, and social unrest became the norm rather than the exception. In its own way the spatial configuration of Acapulco produced another “herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (Anzaldúa 3). In this imagined borderland, the Costera Miguel Alemán, “a wide coastal boulevard, running the length of the city, [constructed] for the specific purpose of tourism development outside the old downtown” (Sackett, “Fun” 167), became a symbolic boundary between the clean, modern façade of Acapulco, decorated
by long scenic highways and their adjacent commercial and residential zones,\textsuperscript{18} and the labyrinthine network of dirt roads and alleys that “sparkled with effluent from the city’s rudimentary sewer systems” (Sackett “The Two” 501) connecting the periphery of Acapulco to its shoreline. Driving at full speed on the Costera, Virgilio, Rafael’s guide in his journey through Acapulco’s infernal landscape, mulls over the condition of the city in the following terms: “Pinches culeros del municipio: muy monina la Costera y monte adentro puros agujeros y gente cayéndose de hambre y niñitos de cuatro años con unas panzototototas de tantos animales, y yo prrrrmmm con este charger de pocabuela, valiéndome madre que se mueran de hambre de la Costera para adentro, pensando en que ojalá me vieran mis cuates los pasados” (117). The Costera is the border \textit{acapulqueños} are bound to cross each day as part of their descent into purgatory. As César Othón-Hernández has noted: “Las características topográficas del puerto lo convierten en un infierno excelente: una planicie rodeada por terreno montañoso y situada en el limite con el mar” (212). While true, at stake in \textit{Se está haciendo tarde} is the dual construction of Acapulco as a slice of Paradise \textit{and} the mouth of Hell, a prevalent motif in Agustín’s novel that has rarely been explored in relation to the peripheral logic of Mexico’s capitalist modernization.

The space where this duality becomes tangible is the Coyuca lagoon (whose name, incidentally, happens to be an anagram of Cocuya, the hacienda where Artemio Cruz was born). Glancing through the window of the taxi that first transports him to Virgilio’s quarters, Rafael is immediately taken aback by the beauty of the natural scenery: “El motor del taxi caracoleó y petardeó ruidosamente al subir, entre más piedras
y baches, hasta una intersección de cinco calles: una gran campana roja en una casa; y más allá de la falda del monte, el mar, inmenso; y en el fondo, la playa de Pie de la Cuesta: una línea dorada extendiéndose hasta el horizonte, con las olas rompiendo fuertemente con una blanca inmovilidad; una fila de árboles y palmeras inclinadas y la laguna de Coyuca, casi gris a esas horas, con las montañas azules a lo lejos. Rafael se asombró: la imagen era bellísima, reconfortante: tenía que ir allí, Dios mío, ese lugar es el paraíso” (19). By the end of the novel, after bouncing around the city and consuming several rounds of drinks, joints, and hallucinogens, the characters finally make their way to Coyuca only to see it become the setting of their most feverish nightmares: “Qué oscuridad engullendo todo, tragándose la laguna de Coyuca, su vegetación y sus embarcaciones. Eso era el paraíso, ¿cómo se transformó en este infierno? Corazón agrietándose” (237). No amount of inebriants or hallucinatory visions should make us lose sight of the change in the experience of place that has been effected. As representational space Coyuca undergoes a complete transfiguration from Paradise into Hell. Furthermore, this metamorphosis is presented as the corollary to the characters’ journey through Acapulco’s modern districts.

Coyuca’s dramatic transformation contrasts sharply with the characters’ lack of psychological development. It becomes plausible, then, to read the novel not only as a slippage from daydream to nightmare (another long day’s journey into night), or, as I have been insinuating, a back-and-forth between the illusion of development and the actuality of underdevelopment, but to understand the change effected in the experience of place as a direct result of the journey comprised by the modernization of Acapulco itself.
In other words, Coyuca’s metamorphosis from Paradise into Hell is but the lesson derived from the developmental aspirations of the Mexican state. Viriglio and Rafael charge at full speed through the highway of modernization (for is this not, precisely, what the Costera Miguel Alemán is!) only to find, at the end of the road, the enchanted oasis they have been chasing transmuted into a raucous, macabre, exitless den. The characters of *Se está haciendo tarde* find themselves trapped in this outlandish place both in a literal sense (once they step into the boat of a local *lanchero* they are surrounded by water) and in a symbolic sense: the novel does not provide any closure, its ending leaves us with Rafael lost in the middle of an unfulfilled promise, a hero’s journey into the great unkown who is denied the possibility of a return to the shores of Ithaca.

*Circularity*

Hallucinations aside, *Se está haciendo tarde (final en laguna)* is constructed in true spatial form. The novel affirms Michel de Certeau’s maxim according to which “Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice” (115). The characters in *Se está haciendo tarde* exist in motion, their displacement transforms the configuration of the space they traverse. In this regard, it is useful to note that while erratic, the trajectory followed by Rafael & co. cannot be said to be without purpose; even before the first page of the novel the Coyuca lagoon is announced as the destination of the journey (“final en laguna”), however, as the story develops, the arbitrariness of the characters’ movement tends to challenge the sequential order that arrives at the end of the story by way of a beginning and a middle. The opposing spatial attributes seem to reenact the tension de Certeau assigns to the map and the itinerary as the two elementary kinds of travel stories.
In the opening scene of *Se está haciendo tarde* Rafael glances at the Coyuca lagoon from a distance, his first image of the coastal landscape is a product of *seeing* rather than *going* (de Certeau 119). The resulting projection, which orders the topography of Acapulco according to a *here* and *there*, a point of departure and a destination, produces a univocal spatial arrangement upon which the characters’ actions begin to unfold. Nevertheless, the univocity of the map and its fixed spatial order become almost immediately disrupted by the characters’ gratuitous itinerary, their haphazard pilgrimage through Acapulco turns the scale in favor of the polyvalence of the path (according to the old adage all roads lead to Rome). By the time the characters arrive in Coyuca, having salvaged the distance that separated the *here* form *there*, the spatial arrangement upheld by the original projection has vanished. As de Certeau indicates, “What the map cuts up, the story cuts across” (129). A veil has been lifted, the *going* reveals the lagoon to be, much like the alienated city, “a space in which people are unable to map (in their minds) either their own positions or the urban totality in which they find themselves” (Jameson *Postmodernism* 51). What began as a search ends at a loss: “Yo sé que tú sabes, tell me what’s goin’ on, explicamel por favor, why can’t I understand anything!” (244) Francine exclaims in the final scene of the novel. Rafael’s reckoning with totality comes, likewise, at the expense of his deprivation of a sense of place: “en la radiancia absoluta donde nada existía y al mismo tiempo existía todo integrado en la unidad perfecta, en la totalidad” (242).

The loose structure of the itinerary contrasts with the directionality presupposed by Rafael’s displacement from point A to point B. In this regard the spatial composition of *Se está haciendo tarde (final en laguna)* resembles the diversion of the straight line
evoked in Wassily Kandinsky’s 1925 diagram Free Curve to the Point—Accompanying Sound of Geometric Curves—a curved line intersected by developing circles that challenge its fall by pressing against it with spiraling force. In Se está haciendo tarde the pull toward the endpoint of the journey is equally disturbed by circularity. The characters in Agustín’s novel find themselves circling back to the places from which they have departed, their meanderings produce circular patterns that force them to retrace their own steps, diverting from their original path in both hyperbolic and elliptic manner.

Let us recall Rafael’s first trip to Virgilio’s house: “El motor del taxi caracoleó y petardeó ruidosamente al subir, entre más piedras y baches, hasta una intersección de cinco calles: una gran campana roja en una casa; y más allá de la falda del monte, el mar, inmenso” (19, my emphasis). The five-way intersection and the memorable big red bell will reappear a few lines later as the taxi driver struggles to find Virgilio’s home address: “de nuevo se encontraron con la casa de la campana roja y Pie de la Cuesta en el fondo, con su belleza serena y primigenia” (19, my emphasis), and again almost immediately after that: “de nuevo una calle empinada y se hallaron en la intersección de calles la casa con la campana roja y con Pie de la Cuesta y la laguna de Coyuca en el fondo, como una visión pacificadora” (20). More than half way through the novel, in the middle of a car chase, Rafael finds himself once again confronted by the house with the big red bell: “Por último llegaron a una intersección de cinco calles, una gran campana roja en una casa esquinada y bajo el monte, el mar hendiendo los despeñaderos hasta la playa de Pie de la Cuesta, una hilera de vegetación y tras ella la superficie enorme, visionaria, de la laguna de Coyuca. ¡Por aquí pasé yo en la mañana y por aquí me perdí,
nos vamos a volver a perder!” (167) In a sleight of hand the bell has metamorphosed from a reference point to a premonitory indication that lets the characters know they are about to lose their way. As the persecution continues the party cannot avert driving in circles, the group keeps trying to escape from the labyrinth of unpaved roads only to find itself inevitably reemerging at the five-way intersection: “¡Va de nuez!, anunció Virgilio, viendo enfrente la casa de la campana roja y en el fondo, como visión paradisiaca, impasible, serena, la laguna de Coyuca y Pie de la Cuesta” (169). The scene, with minor variations, is repeated a couple of times before the characters are finally able break free and continue their race toward Pie de la Cuesta-Coyuca.

The circularity expressed in the persecution scene can be transposed to make sense of the variegated visual cues that exist in the novel. The text is earmarked by different elements that operate as so many other red bells, signposts to which the reader returns as the narrative continues to veer from a direct trajectory. From this standpoint, the “numerous innovative literary techniques [employed] to throw the reader off balance” (Schaffer 138) can be said to be embedded in the circular pattern that gives the novel its form. The parentheses, vertical bars, blackouts, indentations, italics, or the recurring verses from The Beatles’s “Everybody’s Got Something to Hide Except Me and My Monkey” (1968) that crop up along the text, help create a circular atmosphere that precludes the linearity of the story from becoming effectively established. Although the journey takes place in the course of a single day, the regular reappearance of these visual cues makes it difficult to situate the action at a particular moment in time. There is oftentimes a lack of clarity regarding the amount of time that has elapsed since the
characters began talking to each other or the exact locale where their conversations are taking place; every scene might as well have occurred at a different moment in time. The overall effect is the dissolution of temporality in favor of spatial simultaneity, a process that, even if dependent on the characters’ rolling inebriation at the level of plot, remains in line with the overarching architecture of the novel: “Vio la inmensidad de la playa y se vio caminando sin rumbo, desorientado, a la mitad del camino, creyendo que iba hacia algún lugar y en realidad estaba perdido, ridículamente perdido. Y por eso el tiempo se suspendió” (210). Rafael’s trip to Acapulco turns out to be a confirmation (rather than a resolution) of the anxiety that prompts him to leave Mexico City in the first place. In the first pages of the novel we learn that “Rafael persistía en una etapa extraña, en la cual muchas cosas quedaban sin sentido. Despertar sin saber dónde-quién-qué” (17). Rafael ends his journey at the exact same point where he started it. The psychedelic experience has not awaken him to a newly found clarity as to where-who-what. It is precisely because Rafael’s anxiety predates his arrival to Acapulco that it would be a mistake to understand his ravaging disorientation as resulting only from his experimentation with drugs. The root of his disorientation must, therefore, lie elsewhere.

Commenting on the history of social space, Lefebvre suggests that “The departure point for [a] history of space is not to be found in geographical descriptions of natural space, but rather in the study of natural rhythms, and of the modification of those rhythms and their inscription in space by means of human actions, especially work-related actions. It begins, then with the spatio-temporal rhythms of nature as transformed by a social practice” (117). While Acapulco’s landscape is far from being untouched when Rafael
descends upon its shores, the adjacency between the city and the ocean continue to
expose the dwellers of the bay area to something resembling the unmodified rhythms that
anteceded the production of social space. The ebb and flow of the tides, the perpetual
movement of the waves serve as a constant reminder of a time immemorial when life
moved according to the cyclical rhythms of the ocean: “Una increíble mezcla de sonidos:
el mar rugiendo su movimiento incesante, todas las olas son la misma ola./ Una ola
dentro de la misma ola” (120). Nature exists for the characters of Se está haciendo tarde
as a beyond (“En el fondo, el mar resplandecía” [203]), in this sense their destination is
not a place as much as an outside. The spatial composition of Se está haciendo tarde is
the result of the perceived contrast between the regularity of the cyclical movements of
the ocean and the artificial velocity of the characters’ journey. A certain nostalgia
undergirds Se está haciendo tarde’s movement towards nature, Rafael arrives in Acapulco
searching for some form of transcendence, a spiritual communion with the world. His
movement towards nature is formulated in opposition to the rigid order of economic
space and the artificial temporality of the machine. But as Anna Kornbluh reminds us,
“Mirages of Edenic identities, flowing energies, and deluging multitudes fantasize
freedom in formlessness. Yet formed, mediated relations are the truth of our social being”
(27). Therefore, the conclusion to the story will inevitably betray Rafael’s liberatory
expectations. In the middle of a drug-induced frenzy, lying on the beach at Pie de la
Cuesta, Rafael witnesses a machine emerge from the depths of the Pacific Ocean:
“Cuando las olas se alzaban dejaban ver una caverna oscura de la cual salían
construcciones derruidas, bóvedas altísimas, grandes engranajes, partes internas de
máquinas, ruedas, arcoiris solidificados [...] Todas las imágenes se sucedían con tanta velocidad e incoherencia que el tiempo se convirtió en algo sin sentido: no podía existir tal simultaneidad” (209). The image serves as a reminder of the degree to which nature has become instrumentalized. The perpetual movement of the waves, and with it the rhythm of nature reappears by the end of the journey as nothing but a system of machinery “set in motion by an automaton, a moving power that moves itself” (Marx, *Grundrisse* 692). The image reveals the movement of the waves to be closer to the mechanics of the cassette player or the motor vehicle than to any kind of primordial natural order. Rafael’s quest to find a way out of the alienating experience of modernity turns out to be betrayed by the mechanization of natural time and its logical corollary, the naturalization of the machine. The latter remits to the universal expansion of the commodity form and the real subsumption of labor under capital, both of which correspond with the historical transition of the industrial pattern of capital reproduction into its diversified stage.

Furthermore, circularity brings the spatial composition of *Se está haciendo tarde* closer to the experience of the generalized penetration of capitalist relations of production that marks the advent of late capitalism. As Ernest Mandel indicates, “late capitalism thus constitutes *generalized universal industrialization* for the first time in history. Mechanization, standardization, over-specialization and parcellization of labour, which in the past determined only the realm of commodity production in actual industry, now penetrate all sectors of social life” (387). The subsumption of everyday life to the rhythms of the mechanization of labor, I wish to argue, undergirds the formal treatment of
circulation and acceleration in the Mexican novel of the 70s in general and in *Se está haciendo tarde* in particular. Overtime, the pressure exerted upon everyday life by the acceleration of the cyclical motions of capital ends up inscribing a new social order in social space. The inscription of a new social order in social space is the process of the production of spatial patterns. The form of the production of spatial patterns is repetition.

**Repetition**

As form, repetition channels the standardization of time produced by the mechanization of the labour process. In *Se está haciendo tarde* this transformation finds its most accomplished formal expression in the use of sound and sound technologies. Undoubtedly one of the most enjoyable aspects of Agustín’s novel is its relation to music in general and rock music in particular. *Se está haciendo tarde* belongs to an order of literary works that Brian L. Price has referred to as “literatura mexicana de rock” (82). Agustín’s novel abounds in references to U.S. and British rock of the late 60s, something that, for the most part, brings together many of the works of *la Onda*. Agustín, famously, “sitúa sus historias en ambientes altamente musicales en donde se exploran las tensiones generacionales” (Price 85). In its own way, rock music opened the floodgates for anglophone popular culture to take over the soul of certain segments of the Mexican urban youth. It is not my intention here to explore the consecration of *rocanrol* in Mexican popular culture, nor to offer a synthesized account of its connection to the emergence of a countercultural movement in Mexico in the late 60s and early 70s. I am, however, interested in the ways the standardization of time reveals itself in rock music’s consumption and circulation, and in the role that can be assigned to sound and sound
technologies in the formation of a new spatial composition in the Mexican novel of the 1970s.

Before we move on to analyze the relation between sound technologies and the standardization of time in *Se está haciendo tarde*, we should indicate that in Mexican cultural studies, rock music has been generally read as an expression of the generational break that followed the bankruptcy of institutionalized national discourses and the subsequent emergence of an urban youth subculture that stood against the ossified power structures of the Mexican state apparatus. That rock music would become a privileged vehicle to mobilize this countercultural sensibility is no surprise given music’s affordances for the creation of affective communities. As Olaf Kaltmeier and Wilfried Raussert have argued, “Music frequently takes on a seismographic function and narrates to a larger public the presence of social crisis through the act of performance. Since music appeals to all human senses, it carries the potential to push affective politics and sensitize its audience to social conflict, crisis, and injustice” (5). The social and political crisis that materialized in the student protests of 1968 found in music a powerful instrument to voice the growing discontent of different sectors of the Mexican population—one has only to think of the popular songs and *corridos* that were reworked as chants during the days of the student protests, the emergence of the *canción de protesta* as genre, or the first attempts to create a *rock en español*. “La época” writes Agustín in relation to the campaign aimed at discrediting rock n’ roll, “especialmente intolerante, tenía a la represión como respuesta inmediata, natural, del sistema ante cualquier manifestación de inconformidad o rebeldía. Los mexicanos debían estar orgullosos de vivir en un país con
libertad, paz, justicia social, democracia, crédito internacional y crecimiento sostenido.

Ni remotamente se les ocurría que pudieran estar equivocados” (La contracultura 35). In this context rock music became an opening (among many others) for the “new generation” to challenge the social norms that structured everyday life in Mexico.¹⁹

This interpretation, while powerful, runs the risk of indulging in romantic fantasies about youth that remain oblivious to the social disparity and class-specific values ingrained in rock music’s production and circulation, many of which have been erased from accounts of the 70s to the point of presenting the Mexican youth as an entirely new (implicitly homogeneous) social class. Glantz, for example, argues that “Ahora se trata de los jóvenes, nueva clase social, nueva raza humana que se liquida en oleadas progresivas cada vez que una de sus generaciones alcanza la terrible edad de los treinta años” (“Onda” 94, my emphasis), and although she goes on to clarify that the notion of a Mexican youth cannot encompass the entirety of the country’s adolescent population (“¿cómo hacer ingresar en esta onda los pocos adolescentes lacandones que aún quedan, al mayor número de los jóvenes campesinos o hasta los de Ciudad Sahagún?” [“Onda” 94]), there remains in her essay the construction of rock music and more generally mass popular culture as a vehicle for certain segments of the population, namely the urban youth, to partake of a set of cultural practices that shape a new, uniform social experience. Jean Franco, likewise, referring to Agustín’s generation, underscores its ability to “textualize modernity by adopting the language of the international youth style” (296). Against this idea, Peter Wicke has noted that “rock music is so closely related to the social, class-specific experiences of its listeners that only becomes
comprehensible when considered as a medium for these experiences; detached from these it loses all meaning” (75), in other words, that there is no such thing as a “social no-
man’s-land of a classless youth culture” (Wicke 76) or a set of newly found values that homologize the experience of youth across economic, political, and racial boundaries, but rather an experience that can only be meaningful when mapped onto a particular matrix of exploitation and domination.

From this standpoint, the circulation and consumption of rock music, much more emphatically in a milieu structured by economic dependency, will remain tied to the differential access to sound technologies that overdetermine the acoustic practices of diverse subcultures, or as Jacques Attali has noted, “use-value in the music industry does not depend on the product alone, but also on the use-value of the receiver available to consumers” (103). The invention of the tape recorder and the cassette system—not without relevance for the emergence of testimonio as literary genre—brought about substantial changes in people’s relation to music both at the individual and collective levels. These changes, more often than not, precipitated an ongoing crisis of representation and referentiality. According to Jameson, “Technologies of the musical, to be sure, whether of production, reproduction, reception, or consumption, already worked to fashion a new sonorous space around the individual or the collective listener: in music, too, ‘representationality’—in the sense of drawing up your fauteuil and gazing across at the spectacle unfolded before you—has known its crisis and its specific historical disintegration. You no longer offer a musical object for contemplation and gustation; you wire up the context and make space musical around the consumer” (Postmodernism
299-300). The consolidation of a new sonic space in Mexico in the late 60s and early 70s helps us understand why a novel like *De perfil*, where rock music is predominantly consumed through “contemplation and gustation,” although set in one of the quintessential petty bourgeois neighborhoods of the nation’s capital, remains akin to the representational practices that spread out from the *hoyos fonquis* and *café cantantes* of Mexico City, while a novel like *Se está haciendo tarde*, where rock music is entirely consumed by way of the cassette and record player, produces a sound politics that stands much closer to the wired-up spaces of the Mexican bourgeoisie, even as the novel has in Virgilio one of the most accomplished literary portraits of that segment of the Mexican relative surplus population that “stands with one foot already in the swamp of pauperism.” In this regard it is somewhat interesting that there is no direct reference to Mexican rock music in *Se está haciendo tarde*, while the music scene in *De perfil* is mostly animated by local bands that write and perform in Spanish.

The point, however, is not to contrast the commercialization of rock music with the class-specific practices that mediate its circulation and consumption, but to offer a reflection on the role the latter play in the standardization of time and the production of space in the Mexican novel of the 1970s. “With the advent of modernity” writes Lefebvre, “time has vanished from social space. It is recorded solely on measuring-instruments, on clocks, that are as isolated and functionally specialized as this time itself. Lived time loses its form and its social interest—with the exception, that is, of time spent working. Economic space subordinates time to itself; political space expels it as threatening and dangerous (to power). The primacy of the economic and above all of the
political implies the supremacy of space over time” (95). In *Se está haciendo tarde* the cassette and the record player operate as so many other time-measuring instruments, the use of these technologies points to an epochal transformation in the experience of time. In Agustín’s novel the characters know time to pass only by virtue of the tracks they listen to, song names and lyrics filter through their dialogue to become one of the few, if not the only temporal marker the characters have at hand: “¿a qué horas se acabó Led Zeppelin II? ¿En In a Gadda da Vida? ¿Me habré tardado mucho en el baño?” (59) or else, “¡No no!, protestó Virgilio, ¡están a toda madre los Beatlecines! Además, ya se va a acabar!” (183). As a time-measuring instrument the record player propagates the logic of repetition. The record/cassette plugs the listener into a loop in which time is only subject of being measured by reference to the loop itself: “La música, To Our Children’s Children’s Children: Moody Blues, del departamento contiguo, volvió a repetirse desde el principio con mayor volumen” (90). As John Mowitt indicates, “in the contemporary musical world (and this is not restricted to the West) repetition now constitutes the very threshold of music’s social audibility” (214-5). Nowhere is this new paradigm more readily available than in the eternal return of the reprise from the Beatles’s “Everybody’s Got Something to Hide Except Me and My Monkey”: Your outside is in/ Your inside is out/ The higher you fly/ The deeper you go.

The recurrence of the verses underscores repetition as the structuring principle of a new form of sociality. Repetition affirms the artificial character of the standardization of time as it subjects the temporal register of the novel to the mechanics of the tape recorder. In *Se está haciendo tarde* sound technologies cut time (rewind, forward, stop,
play) in the same way that vertical bars [ ] interrupt the characters’ dialogue (a formal element that is already present in Agustín’s earlier novels). The continuity presupposed in repetition reveals itself as a form of interruption. This paradox becomes the foundation of a social order that affirms the primacy of economic space over lived time. In Se está haciendo tarde Rafael’s quest for an encounter with the Real is dissolved in the rip current of repetition. The overall effect is not devoid of irony, through the use of sound technologies Se está haciendo tarde introduces “repetition in a society that talks so much about change, silence in the midst of so much noise, death in the heart of life” (Attali 120). The record player transforms the consumption of rock music into a repetitive consumption. Rather than a road to transcendence the comfort derived from listening to rock music reveals itself as a form of acquiescence. Music becomes the perpetual background noise to the characters’ empty dialogue, each one a negative copy of the other. Going one step further, repetition formalizes the logic of mass production. In Playa Condesa, young people “oyendo el rock ininterrumpido que salía de los altavoces” (119); in the car stereo, “Rock electrónico: un continuum de sonido con muchas emociones sumergidas” (169). Here, as Attali indicates, mass music “has replaced natural background noise, invaded and even annulled the noise of machinery. It slips into the growing spaces of activity void of meaning and relations, into the organization of our everyday life: in all of the world’s hotels, all of the elevators, all of the factories and offices, all of the airplanes, all of the cars, everywhere, it signifies the presence of a power that needs no flag or symbol: musical repetition confirms the presence of repetitive consumption, of the flow of noises as ersatz sociality” (111). Repetition prevents music
from bearing any meaning: “Las voces de todos parecían salir de la música, a tal grado se hallaban integradas en la belleza, franjas de sol, pero, ¿qué están diciendo?” (82, my emphasis). Words and music become purposeless, linearity is interrupted, the characters are compelled to move around without being able to arrive anywhere, repetition propels expansion.

The structure of the novel, or lack thereof, the absence of chapter divisions or a coherent distribution of segments, blurs the specificity of any single one of its episodes. The fast-paced dialogue made up of short, often cut-off phrases, haphazardly gives way to lengthy, heavy, intractable paragraphs. As repetition spills over the landscape of Acapulco space becomes saturated, made uniform by the standardized logic of reproduction.

It is obvious, sad to say, that repetition has everywhere defeated uniqueness, that the artificial and contrived have driven all spontaneity and naturalness from the field, and, in short, that products have vanquished works. Repetitious spaces are the outcome of repetitive gestures (those of the workers) associated with instruments which are both duplicatable and designed to duplicate: machines, bulldozers, concrete-mixers, cranes, pneumatic drills, and so on. Are these spaces interchangeable because they are homologous? Or are they homogeneous so that they can be exchanged, bought and sold, with the only differences between them being those assessable in money — i.e. quantifiable — terms (as volumes, distances, etc.)? At all events, repetition reigns supreme (Lefebvre, *The Production* 75).

From this standpoint, the transformation of Acapulco into a repetitive space mirrors the spatial order introduced by the collective housing projects and large apartment complexes (*multifamiliares*) built in Mexico City from the late 40s onward as a solution to the housing crisis of the nation’s capital. In both literature and architecture, the novel and the apartment complex, literary and built form, density becomes a spatial
moniker for accumulation. Attali, in a different context, develops this idea under the notion of the *stockpiling of time*: “Repetition constitutes an extraordinary mutation of the relation to human production. It is a fundamental change in the relation between man and history, because it makes the stockpiling of time possible.” (101) Density brings the spatial composition of *Se está haciendo tarde* into a formal impasse; because density is suppressive, it negates motion and produces disorientation: “Spaces of high density convey an impression of solidity and stability. Within them, one feels almost embedded in a mesh; in extreme cases, one feels immobilized” (Janson and Tigges 84). Immobility and disorientation is in many instances what the characters in *Se está haciendo tarde* end up facing even as they race at full-speed down the highway toward Pie de la Cuesta. Repetition betrays the characters’ displacement as pure fantasy. The characters in Agustín’s novel are, from the start, moving along a road to nowhere.

*Hallucinations*

Si tienes ganas de volverte guerrillero

porque el sindicato se queda con tu dinero

olvidate de todo por un momento

y que viva el rocanrol.

Three Souls in My Mind, “Que viva el rock & roll”

The use of drugs and the experience of hallucination is perhaps the most well-known feature of Agustín’s novel. In referring to this issue after having elaborated on the spatial composition of *Se está haciendo tarde (final en laguna)* I hope to validate the claim made the beginning of this chapter, namely, that only with the historical foreclosure
of the national project of diversified industrialization does the newly found spatial composition of the Mexican novel become legible as part of a large scale reconfiguration of social space associated with the rise of a new pattern of capital reproduction in Mexico. To properly approach this problem it is necessary to take into account the correspondence between three interlocking crises: that of capital accumulation at the level of the world capitalist economy (Duménil and Lévy 2004, Harvey 2005), that of national liberation struggles and the politics of representation (Ahmad 1994, Larsen 2001, Benjamin 2018), and that of the “liberal-existentialist novel” of the Latin American Boom (Franco 1978). This, it goes without saying, is a problem that far exceeds the scope of this study, as it intersects with debates on the ideological dimension of the postcolonial turn as well as the viability of the notion of a Latin American (post)modernism. For the purposes of this chapter it is important to keep in mind that at the level of the socioeconomic formation of the Mexican 70s, the disavowal of the national as the appropriate terrain for emancipatory struggle will run into the particular amalgam of class interests entrenched in the Mexican state as a result of the Mexican Revolution. This historical specificity will inevitably weight upon the “collapse of nation-centeredness” (Larsen 48) in Mexico, making it less ‘sudden’ and therefore more ‘introspective’ and lethargic (one could argue the collapse will not occur until 1994, a year that already lies outside the temporal limits of the so-called Bandung Era, and well beyond the moment traditionally considered the starting point for the implementation of neoliberal economic policy in the country, 1982). This is so because in the Mexican context, throughout the 40s and 50s, “Campesinos, ejidatarios y comunidades agrícolas, y obreros industriales,
pequeña burguesía asalariada y burguesía industrial encuentran puntos de convergencia en sus demandas y condiciones de existencia. La comunidad estatal mexicana ganaba fuerza y se fortalecía alimentada por una heterogénea articulación clasista“ (Osorio, “Crisis” 37). Therefore, once the industrial pattern of capital reproduction reaches its limits and most Latin American countries fall prey to capital’s reaction in the form of military dictatorships—one of the many iterations of the ‘ends of nation’—Mexico is able to find cover in the revolutionary zeal of the Mexican state and bypass, at least in some form, the rebuttal of “both the generalized, historical crisis of the cultural nationalism of the ‘Bandung Era’ […] and the desire to move beyond it (Larsen 39)” but not, at any rate, the generalized crisis of accumulation and the ensuing changes in the international division of labor that will push the national economy towards a new export-oriented pattern of capital reproduction. Osorio, comparing the Mexican experience to the military dictatorships of the Southern Cone, argues: “En México ello no ocurrió porque a pesar de que los signos de ruptura de los pactos ya se hacían sentir desde décadas previas, el gobierno-aparato priísta se constituye (y proclama) en el legítimo heredero de la Revolución de 1910, proceso que –como hemos indicado– actualizó ‘un pacto’ que alcanzó fuerza en la etapa colonial, ‘que obligaba al señor a proteger a sus súbditos, y a éstos a ser leales a su señor’ proceso que no tiene parangón en alguna otra sociedad de la región, en términos de la fuerza con que dicho pacto soldó la relación mando/obediencia y la conformación de la comunidad estatal” (“Crisis” 39). The situation produced a political impasse similar to the one we encountered at the end of the previous section, this time under the guise of a corporatist state that managed to navigate the collapse of
developmentalism without having to entirely renounce to the mechanisms of social control that undergirded the national-popular state. As a result, an extreme incongruity emerged between the economic and political spheres, a symbolic chasm that would hamper the struggles over the ‘democratization’ of Mexican society for decades to come.

Transposed to the realm of cultural production, this impasse will inevitably reemerge as a revision of the political underpinnings of the novel form. Franco, commenting on the stakes of these debates for Latin American literature, aptly considered: “Is it possible that the devices of shock, simultaneity, the juxtaposition of disparate elements, all of which activate perception, may not always or necessarily be ‘revolutionary’ but may indeed be methods for breaking down deep-rooted attitudes which stand in the way of full acceptance of consumer society? Is there a difference between a revolutionary poetics and a poetics of modernization?” (286) This tension captures with full force the ambiguities available in a novel like *Se está haciendo tarde* (*final en laguna*), which are, in general, the same ambiguities of the youth rebellion of the late 60s. Revolution and modernization, I would like to suggest as a way to bring this chapter to an end, collide at full speed in *Se está haciendo tarde*, hallucination is the offshoot of the wreckage.

The blazing Dodge Charger the characters of *Se está haciendo tarde* escape in while a police car (a Volkswagen) chases them down the coastal highway to Pie de la Cuesta is an incontrovertible figure of the developmentalist imagination of the Mexican state. More generally speaking, the automobile is an unequivocal avatar of modernization, the paradigmatic example of mass production and the standardization of
labour processes at the base of Fordism. In the centers of the capitalist world economy, most notably the United States, the consecration of this regime of accumulation led to a way of life organized around mass consumption that would, for the most part, remain aspirational for the entirety of the Third World. It is therefore not surprising to see Jameson refer to the novel form and the automobile as two different components of modernization in the Third World: “the Third World is also (traditionally) a modernizing place, and the imported form which is the novel is fully as much a component of modernization as the importation of automobiles” (Jameson, “Antinomies” 476). Both components, however, will soon begin to break down, the novel in the form of the already alluded to crisis of representation and the antinomies of the realism/modernism debate, developmentalism in the form of foreign direct investment and the growing contradiction between the higher and lower spheres of consumption in the domestic economy (Marini 66-77). *Se está haciendo tarde*’s thin-veiled iconography cannot, in any sense, be abstracted from this particular context.

Reflecting on the capitalist modernization of Latin America, Franco annotates: “In the integration of new sectors of the population into capitalist economy, the dominant ideology took the form not only of the overt promotion of development but also of the subliminal messages which inculcated the desirability of modernization through media representation and lifestyles. Speed, mobility, and change were signifiers of the modern” (294). And, as we have already seen, speed, mobility, and change is everything *Se está haciendo tarde* claims to be. I think it is not only provocative but also productive to read *Se está haciendo tarde* as a text that explores the problems posed by the “desirability of
modernization” in Mexico, a situation that by 1973 is no longer conceivable to circumvent by way of a return to origins (as, for example, in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*). The capitalist modernization of the nation, much like Rafael’s interior journey, is a one way trip: “Pero ya entrados en drogas hay quir palante palante. Hasta el pasón siempre” (219). The more the characters keep moving, the more their journey loses its meaning and the less their chance to change its direction. Once inside the Dodge Charger, the characters of *Se está haciendo tarde* can no longer steer their course, they are impelled to keep driving even as the world around them begins to fall apart.

After this brief excursus it is now possible to confront the matter of hallucinations as part of the larger problem of the ends of nation and the transition to a new pattern of capital reproduction. It is symptomatic of this conjuncture that at the same time *Se está haciendo tarde* is being published, Ruy Mauro Marini, in the closing pages to the most accomplished account of Latin American dependency, *Dialéctica de la dependencia*, would venture that “se asiste en toda América Latina a la resurrección del modelo de la vieja economía exportadora” (75). Resurrection and hallucination can be read as parallel figures that emerge from the collapse of the industrial pattern; their relevance for literary form, I wish to argue, lies in their capacity to call into question the solidity of lived experience, what we might refer to as reality’s baseline. This approach opens up a path to suggest a symbolic continuity between Rulfo’s Comala—land of resurrection—and Agustín’s Acapulco—land of hallucination—despite the enmity that existed between both writers and their profound stylistic disparities: it is well known that Rulfo once referred to the *literatura de la Onda* as “literatura payasa” (Poniatowska, *¡Ay vida* 205), it is less so
that Agustín promptly returned the favor: “Les voy a comprar tequila. Rafael buscó la botella más barata. La encontró. Tequila Ruco Rulfo, Sayula, Jalisco. Caramba, éste parece siniestro, les va a hacer polvo el estómago. Siete pesos. En México este tequila debe de costar tres o cuatro pesos menos” (49-50). Beyond the generational feud, there remains in my opinion an entrancing resemblance in the overall effect produced by Rulfo’s and Agustín’s accounts of the Mexican purgatory. While Rulfo’s land of the dead unearths the dispossessed voices of the Mexican peasantry to call into question the dynamics of rural modernization (Beckman 2016), Agustín’s hallucinations dissolve the solidity of national discourses and reveal the limits to Mexico’s capitalist industrialization.

To use André Gunder Frank’s famed formula, hallucination in Se está haciendo tarde cannot but disclose the actuality of the “development of underdevelopment.” The overpowering force of the Dodge Charger, carrying with it the historical weight of the developmental aspirations of the Mexican state, begins to dissolve as the characters move away from Acapulco and surrender to the experience of intoxication: “A duras penas podía recordar que ese auto había significado mucho, ¿pero qué?” (208) The resulting figure is a form of exchange, a formal resolution to the antithetical relation between reality and hallucination. The characters’ disorientation will lead them to question the veracity of their own experience: “por qué continúa la alucinación, ¿eh?, ¿yo soy el que ve eso o alguien ve a través de mí?, quién soy, ¿eh?” (58). Adapting Franco’s question on the difference between a revolutionary poetics and a poetics of modernization we might ask: Is there a difference between the actuality of peripheral modernization and the
The psychotropic experiment casts doubt on the alternative projection composed by the modern landscape of Acapulco, both narratives produce full-blown hallucinations. In Barra de Coyuca, Francine heckles Virgilio: “Ahorita estás tan passed out que no te das cuenta de que estamos en mi departamento de la Costera, atizando. Nada de esto existe” (220). But what does this ultimately refers to? As the characters give into the experience of intoxication, the emancipatory project of capitalist modernization begins to lose its integrity, to the point where it becomes hallucination itself. Which of the two is more authentic? Which the pipe dream and which the kernel of truth? The question is not a rhetorical one, and is also not exempt from contradiction, given that, as we noted earlier, this is a situation that is no longer possible to circumvent. For the characters of Se está haciendo tarde the only solution is to continue to pile one hallucination on top of the other: “Pinche cielo, es el mismo pendejo cielo de siempre, sólo con más luz y alucinaciones. Estúpidas alucinaciones” (212). Meanwhile, Genaro Vázquez’s guerrilla continues to recede into the novel’s background. The liberatory impulse that drives Rafael to experiment with drugs is the same impulse that traps him in a hallucinatory maze, a rabbit hole where reality and irreality can no longer be separated from each other. The characters are left adrift, staring at the same eternal wave, waiting for development to arrive, or, as the song goes, esperando un camión en la terminal del ADO. The hallucinatory solution to the query of developmentalism aptly describes the problem at
hand: as the title of the novel suggests, by the time Rafael arrives in Coyuca it is already too late, the liberatory opening has passed, and the only possibility left is to betroth oneself to an illusion. The holding pattern prompted by hallucination blurs developmentalism’s historical limits, it prevents the characters of Se está haciendo tarde from discerning the reality from the dream. Hallucination conceals that development has arrived, fully-fledged, bearing with it all the contradictions of economic dependency.
In the introduction to *The Modernist Papers*, Fredric Jameson offers the following reflection on the dialectic between the private and the public: “in a society in which everything is ‘reduced’ in advance to the private and the personal, any instance on the public, the economic, the political, any injunction to ‘include history,’ has the value of an expansion of the meaning of cultural texts and not their reduction, and of an enlargement of their resonance, an increase of their complexity and the number of their symbolic levels, an enrichment in the contexts in which a given act or symbolic gesture or expression is situated and understood” (xi). This chapter is concerned with the formalization of this problem in Maríla Luisa Mendoza’s 1982 novel *El perro de la escribana*, a novel that saw the light in the context of Mexico’s debt crisis and which, through a complex relation between the personal and the economic, revisits Mexico’s modern history to account for the emergence of the private as a privileged domain for the politicization of life. In Mendoza’s *El perro de la escribana* the space of the house fulfills a dual function: on the one hand, it reduces (social) life to individual experience, on the other, if formulates the domestic sphere as an index of historical transition. In a high-modernist register, I argue, Mendoza captures the transformation of oligarchic idiosyncrasy into petty-bourgeois individualism. Mendoza’s novel produces the private as a privileged domain to explore the sharp turn the Mexican economy took in the early 80s, amidst a generalized socioeconomic crisis that moved the country irreversibly away from the diversified industrialization program that characterized the previous decades. By turning to Mendoza’s *El perro de la escribana*, then, I demonstrate that, in the aftermath
of 1968 and with particular force throughout the 80s, the Mexican novel refashioned the symbolic density of domestic space by collapsing onto it the tribulations of the national. In other words, that domestic space, as produced in Mendoza’s novel, can be read as giving form to the ideological procedures commonly associated with the so-called neoliberal turn.

First published in 1982, *El perro de la escribana* has yet to receive the critical attention garnered by Mendoza’s earlier *Con Él, conmigo, con nosotros tres* (1971) and *De Ausencia* (1974). In choosing to focus on *El perro de la escribana* to refer to the context of the Mexican 1980s, I hope to contribute to reevaluate Mendoza’s work by rereading the themes most commonly associated with her name, namely gender and subject formation (Foster 1985; Locklin 2005; Suárez 2011), through the lens of dependency. Likewise, I wish to argue in favor of a specific deformation prevalent in peripheral modernisms, a formal distortion of modernism’s self-reflexivity that stems from what Claudio Lomnitz describes as an “excess of historical invocation” (39) in contexts of national dependency. The uneven development of Mexican modernism, which, as I have previously shown (Chapters 1 & 2), finds itself continually battling the impending threat of a structural relapse into the ‘noxious ways’ of a realist aesthetic, seems to me to have undergone a profound mutation in the aftermath of 1968, a mutation ultimately defined by the consolidation of the domestic sphere as the choice laboratory of the literary avant-garde. In its own way, this shift echoes Franco Moretti’s observation that “Modernism appears once more as a crucial component of that great symbolic transformation which has taken place in contemporary Western societies: the meaning of
life is no longer sought in the realm of public life, politics and work; it has migrated into the world of consumption and private life” (246), if only with a caveat, namely that modernism here does not accompany but rather antecedes the great symbolic retreat into the domain of the private. The full range of modernist impulses that can be traced in the Mexican novel of the first half of the twentieth century, which quite often sought to impinge directly upon public life—remember, for instance, Carlos Fuentes’ eagerness to will the Mexican bourgeoisie into being—already entailed a disruption of modernism’s formal apparatus. This foundational impasse will continue to resurface as modernism maintains its status as a cultural dominant, forcing upon modernism’s phantasms a definite historical articulation.

Throughout this chapter I will argue that, while the meaning of life has indeed migrated into the domain of the private, an allegorical reverberation, a metaphorical dissonance stubbornly obtrudes modernism’s otherwise “basic political indifference” (Moretti 247). This is perhaps the reason why, in contexts of national dependency, modernism is readily available as, and indeed becomes, the literary language of crisis, the formal idiolect of contradiction.

Crisis

The crisis of 1982 has been commonly read as the last nail in the coffin of the Mexican national-popular state, yet it is also the case that the immediate response of the Mexican government to the crisis took the form of a full-blown nationalist rhapsody: the nationalization of the banks. The atavic gesture, almost immediately dissolved in the rising tide of neoliberal economic policy, stands as a powerful figure of cultural
nationalism’s contradictory development in the aftermath of 1968. Nationalization here stands in its own right as a form of contradiction, “a surprising and totally unexpected event” (Bartra 81) in the context of the rollout of neoliberal economic policy. As Roger Bartra has argued, in the midst of the historical process of the dilapidation of the national-popular state, “Suddenly awakening from long rhetorical dreams, nationalism reemerged” (86). The intrusion not only makes it hard to concoct a univocal account of the conjuncture marked by 1982, it likewise prevents the establishment of bright-line distinctions between a national and post-national moment in Mexican history, taken to be delimited by an unyielding neoliberal boundary.

The riddle posed by the resurgent nationalist ethos at the onset of the debt crisis—which, for the most part, will continue to obtrude upon the neoliberal fantasies of the emergent ruling technocracy, e.g. in the Miguel de la Madrid administration’s response to the 1985 earthquake or the launch of the Solidaridad program during the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari—can perhaps be better apprehended by conceptualizing 1982 as a turning rather than a starting point in the development of a new export-oriented pattern of capital accumulation, the qualitative difference referred to the consolidation of a new modality in the production of political legitimacy premised upon the ideological dissociation between the realm of economics and the realm of politics. The emergence of “a new political subject: the consumer-citizen” (Walker 105) provides a road map to understand how this dissociation unfurled throughout the “lost decade.” For the most part, the vicissitudes in the life of the consumer-citizen attest to the Mexican state’s disavowal of the diversified industrialization project that fueled the expansion of the
national-popular state throughout the 50s and 60s, to the point where, against the interests of lower income groups, “the state began to subsidize middle-class consumption in the 1970s” (Walker 108). In a sleight of hand, the so-called middle classes became the heir to the ideals of the Mexican Revolution as well as the embodiment of the developmental promise that lent the otherwise authoritarian Mexican state its political legitimacy.

In this context, it is no surprise that the consolidation of the “middle classes” as a privileged interlocutor of the Mexican state ran parallel to the instrumental use of credit in general and consumer credit in particular to smooth out the problems of realization posed by the limits to the industrial pattern of capital accumulation.\(^3\) Throughout the 70s and much more forcefully in the aftermath of the 1982 debt crisis, consumer credit became a regulating mechanism for economic life, a compulsory device that allowed the Mexican state to begin to shed its authoritarian guise in favor of mere economic violence.\(^4\) At the same time, the rise of the debt economy presupposed a shift from the emphasis put on the worker as bearer of the commodity labor-power to the worker as final consumer; from productive to non-productive labor;\(^5\) from the axis of the creation of value to the axis of its realization;\(^6\) and from manual to intellectual labor.\(^7\) This new balance expressed the contradictions specific to dependent industrialization, most notably the concentration of new technology and productive capacity in the luxury goods sector. This is not the place to rehearse a full account of this process, suffice it to say that, at a certain point, as Ruy Mauro Marini has argued, the strain put on realization by consecutive rounds of technological development will force the Latin American economies to figure out ways to “transferir poder de compra de la esfera baja a la esfera
alta de la circulación” (73). Sooner rather than later, “la compresión del nivel de vida de las masas trabajadoras pasa a ser condición necesaria para la expansión de la demanda creada por las capas que viven de la plusvalía” (74). The 1982 Mexican debt crisis stands as the direct outcome of and a catalyst to this process.9

From this perspective, the rise of “civil society” and the political consecration of the “middle classes” come to illustrate the degree to which the Mexican state in fact fulfilled the necessary conditions to build demand throughout the 60s and 70s, to, in other words, secure a “purely consuming” population akin to the proverbial “idlers, whose business it is to consume alien products and who, since crude consumption has its limits, must have the products furnished to them partly in refined form, as luxury products” (Marx, Grundrisse 608). The 1982 debt crisis allowed the Mexican ruling class to institutionalize the ongoing transfer of political and economic power from the working class and the peasantry to the urban middle classes. As Sarah Babb indicates, “by the time of the Salinas administration, organized popular interests were not playing a major role in the negotiation and formulation of government policy” (175). The magnitude of this shift would even prompt a restructuring of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI): “In May 1992, incoming party president Gerardo Borrego Estrada announced a reorganization of the PRI. The reform aimed to broaden the party’s support base to include the middle class and new urban neighborhood groups while reducing the relative weight of the labor and peasant sectors” (Teichman 137). In practice if never in theory, the middle class superseded all other traditional sectors in the corporatist structure of the PRI.
In no uncertain terms, this imbalance indicates the degree to which the middle classes replaced organized labor as the conspicuous creditor of the Mexican state’s developmental promise. The 1982 crisis was therefore not only a crisis in its economic dimension, it must also be understood as a crisis in both political and ideological terms. The loose quality of the category “middle class,” which so often lends itself to the empty discourse of vulgar economics—more interested in defining social types than classes, e.g. yuppies, compulsive buyers, alpha consumers—stands as an insignia of the contradictions embedded in the rise of a political order defined by a new form in the reproduction of domination and political legitimacy. Göran Therborn, in reference to the varying definitions of the “middle class,” points out that, “In today’s discussions, the middle class is overwhelmingly defined in terms of consumption, or rather consumer capacity, measured in dollars […] occasionally it is specified by some middling location on the national ladder of income distribution—but never by reference to its work” (65). Not surprisingly, this tendency, which is already prevalent in the Mexican context of the 1980s, implicitly writes off the question of class struggle in an attempt to present an evermore nuanced, supposedly comprehensive, stratification of society.10

While the very unspecificness of the notion of the middle classes is what seems to speak to the character of the politico-ideological crisis of 1982, this shall not prevent us from referring to the structural class determination that gives the different groups and strata roughly encompassed by the notion of the middle class their actual class status.11 This problem, as Nicos Poulantzas argued, is tied to “The considerable increase, throughout monopoly capitalism and its various phases, of the number of non-productive
wage-earners” (193). Poulantzas famously referred to these non-productive wage-earners (commercial and bank employees, office and service workers, clerks, minor civil servants) as the new petty bourgeoisie, given that, in his interpretation, they share with the self-employed simple commodity producers that make up the traditional petty bourgeoisie “economic ‘similarities’ which have common political and ideological effects” (206). Beyond the debate on whether or not these (sub)collectivities in fact constitute a single petty bourgeois class, the political and ideological effects studied by Poulantzas can help us illuminate the character of the conjuncture marked by the 1982 Mexican debt crisis.

Poulantzas ascribes four main ideological features to the new petty bourgeoisie:

a) “An ideological aspect that is anti-capitalist but leans strongly towards reformist illusions.” The demands of the new petty bourgeoisie “are basically bound up with the question of incomes […] What we are faced with here is the permanent fear of proletarianization […] as a result of the insecurity experienced at the level of earnings and in the form of a monetary fetishism.” (290) The competitive isolation of the new petty bourgeoisie “is the basis of a complex ideological process that takes the form of petty-bourgeois individualism” (291).

b) “An aspect that challenges the political and ideological relations to which these agents are subjected, but leans strongly towards rearranging these relations by way of ‘participation,’ rather than undermining them,” (291) i.e. demands for ‘self-management’ and ‘decentralization.’
c) “An ideological aspect that seeks to transform their condition, but which is bound with the myth of social promotion” and “equal opportunity” (292).

d) “An ideological aspect of ‘power fetishism’ […] this class has a strong tendency to see the state as an inherently neutral force whose role is that of arbitrating between the various social classes” (292). “The role of the state as an apparatus of class domination is seen as a perversion of a state whose authority is to be restored by ‘democratizing’ it” (293).

In short: petty-bourgeois individualism, careerism, demands for social mobility, equal opportunity, and democratization of the state apparatus, all tied together by an overarching fear of proletarianization. From this standpoint, it would not be difficult to argue that the 1982 debt crisis provided the material basis for the growing number of non-productive wage-earners in the Mexican socioeconomic formation to experience a sustained threat of proletarianization which, in turn, pushed the middle classes in the direction of a bourgeois class position. This was, in fact, a moment of heightened “class decomposition and restructuring” (Poulantzas 200) in the history of Mexican capitalism. The specific outcome to this process was the consolidation of a neoliberal common sense premised upon the ideological features of the new petty bourgeois class.

In reference to the traditional petty bourgeoisie, Lukács, quoting from Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire*, argued:

This class lives at least in part in the capitalist big city and every aspect of its existence is directly exposed to the influence of capitalism. Hence it cannot possibly remain wholly unaffected by the fact of class conflict between bourgeoisie and proletariat. But as a “transitional class in which the interests of two other classes become simultaneously blunted…” it will imagine itself “to be above all class antagonisms”. Accordingly it will
search for ways whereby it will “not indeed eliminate the two extremes of capital and wage labour, but will weaken their antagonism and transform it into harmony”. In all decisions crucial for society its actions will be irrelevant and it will be forced to fight for both sides in turn but always without consciousness. In so doing its own objectives—which exist exclusively in its own consciousness—must become progressively weakened and increasingly divorced from social action. Ultimately they will assume purely ‘ideological’ forms. The petty bourgeoisie will only be able to play an active role in history as long as these objectives happen to coincide with the real economic interests of capitalism. (History 59-60)

By 1982, after at least three decades of a low-intensity war waged against labor organization and under a renewed threat of proletarianization, middle-class consciousness too became “weakened and increasingly divorced from social action.” This allows us to doubly characterize the Mexican new petty bourgeoisie as a true “transition class,” in the sense that it both fully emerges from the disintegration of the industrial pattern and it will consistently deteriorate in the face of neoliberalization. This thesis would at the very least allow us to sidestep melodramatic ruminations on the ‘shrinking’ of the middle class that deal in empty nostalgia for an idyllic world gratuitously wiped out in the aftermath of 1982. To the contrary, the 1982 debt crisis delivered the objective social conditions for the new petty bourgeoisie to gain its own bearings and, as a matter of fact, “play an active role in history” by aligning itself with the real economic interests of the dominant and ruling classes as well as international monopoly capital. This new power bloc coalesced around the neoliberal ideology brought forth by the new export-oriented pattern of capital accumulation. As Judith Teichman explicates, “The goal of Mexico’s economic reform program, instituted in 1985 after the fall in petroleum prices on the international market, was to transform the highly protected Mexican economy, based on extensive state intervention and dependent on the exportation of petroleum, to
an open economy, *successful in the exportation of manufactured goods*” (127, my emphasis). Trapped between the threat of proletarianization and petty-bourgeois individualism, the Mexican middle class became a paranoid emissary of this newly minted economic reform program.

The deterioration of traditional corporatist forms (Teichman 131) became synonymous to and a necessary condition for the emergence of a new democratic consensus. In practice, this meant dismantling the sinecures and privileges that legitimized the national-popular state and replacing them with the electoral procedures of representative democracy. As Jaime Osorio indicates: “Del Estado paternalista y protector se debía pasar al Estado eficiente, y del súbdito al ciudadano. La legitimidad se alcanzaría ahora no por las prebendas estatales otorgadas a sujetos acostumbrados a pedir y esperar, sino por adultos políticos que conocen y deciden en consultas electorales transparentes, y que reciben desde el mercado los beneficios equivalentes a su esfuerzo y capacidad” (*Estado* 64). The transition from subject (*súbdito*) to citizen forms the ideological nucleus of the so-called *apertura democrática*. The tenets of representative democracy became the organizing principle of public life, eventually dissolving the structures of command and obedience that mediated class struggle during the era of the *desarrollo estabilizador*.

Ultimately, the 1982 debt crisis provided the context for a fraction of the Mexican bourgeoisie—already poised to become dominant in the wake of global capitalism and a new international division of labor—to break through the symbolic patina inherited from the revolutionary state. As Teichman suggests, “The depth of Mexico’s neoliberal reform program—the dismantling of the state, and the opening of foreign capital and trade
liberalization—challenged the most sacred tenet of the country’s revolutionary nationalist
mythology, which is the state’s leadership role in economic development as the defender
of the nation in general and of the interests of workers and peasants in particular.” The
decomposition of the Mexican state’s revolutionary myth was not, however, a definitive
task. Clientelism lived on, albeit in a form “more amenable to the neoliberal model”
(145) and developmentalism continued to infuse the hopes and aspirations of a wide
spectrum of groups and social classes.\textsuperscript{15} What was truly at stake was the depuration of
working class interests from the bourgeois fabric of the Mexican state. The result was not
without irony: “mientras en el campo económico-social se ponían en marcha agudos
procesos de expoliación, despojo, pauperización y exclusión, en el terreno político se
convocab a la inclusión bajo el imaginario de una sociedad en donde los individuos-
ciudadanos tomaban las riendas de las decisiones sobre la vida pública” (Osorio, \textit{Estado}
64-5). An ideological split was forced between the realm of politics—organized under the
principles of representative democracy, citizenship, and inclusion—and the realm of
economics—micromanaged by a new technocracy according to the principles of
austerity, deregulation, and relentless exclusion.\textsuperscript{16}

Control over the nation’s economy ceased to be understood as an attribute of
political power, and, therefore, economic violence (i.e. exploitation) ceased to be
recognized as a matter of political struggle. The result was the consolidation of a
profoundly reactionary imagination, fueled by a continued threat of unemployment and
immiseration. Everyday life became infused with petty bourgeois aspirations, in a way
similar to what Silvia Schwarzböck, in reference to the post-dictatorship era in Argentina,
refers to as a vida de derecha, a life curbed by a bourgeois sociability, “movida por el interés y el cálculo de beneficios” (57). The rise of petty-bourgeois individualism not only disrupted public but also private life, especially in urban areas. The recomposition of social dynamics asserted itself in multiple forms, reverberating across all spheres of social life. Space, and in particular intimate space—for is intimacy not a prerogative of the ‘free’ individual—became charged by the frictions between the assertion of a neoliberal common sense and a context of astringent economic dependency.

Having established the economic, political, and ideological character of the 1982 debt crisis, we can now turn to María Luisa Mendoza’s El perro de la escribana o Las piedecasas to consider how the spatial composition of the Mexican novel inscribes the heightened moment of class restructuring experienced in Mexico throughout the 1980s.

*Houses*

La maison ne sera plus cette chose épaisse et qui prétend défier les siècles et qui est l’objet opulent par quoi se manifeste la richesse; elle sera un outil comme l’auto devient un outil. La maison ne sera plus une entité archaïque, lourdement enracinée dans le sol par de profondes fondations, bâtie de «dur» et à la dévotion de laquelle s’est instauré depuis si longtemps le culte de la famille, de la race, etc.

Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*

The house, the spatial boundary between the domain of the private and the public, the architectural stronghold of the modern family, and the cornerstone of individual intimacy, lies at the center of María Luisa Mendoza’s *El perro de la escribana*. The novel
recounts the Piedecasas’ familial history through a series of lyrical vignettes that revisit the houses Leona Piedecasas and her family have inhabited. Each chapter is designated with an ordinal number and a noun referred to a form of dwelling: primera residencia, segunda mansión, tercera morada, cuarto hogar, quinta vivienda, sexto domicilio, séptima estancia, octava habitación, novena casa, décima nada. With the exception of the last section—which contains only an epigraph and two short phrases that indicate the temporal limits of the story (1693, 1981)—each chapter sets forth a poetic exploration of the Piedecasas household at a different moment in time.

It would be both impossible and impractical to present here an account of the archetypical function of the house and its role in shaping the ideals of intimacy, privacy, and individuality in the Western tradition. However, we should recall with Joost van Baak that, “as an anthropologically and culturally relevant image, the House is a complex of spacial, cultural and axiological concepts or representations of the world that also has the potential to bestow sense upon that world” (66). It is this ‘potential to bestow sense’ that allows to read the house in Mendoza’s El perro de la escribana as a spatial metaphor of the nation in the brink of the Mexican 1982 debt crisis. However, beyond the foundational attributes ascribed to inhabited space as “a starting point for the work of ordering the surrounding universe” (Leroi-Gourhan 322), we must simultaneously affirm—if we are to refer the spatial order of Mendoza’s novel to the heightened sense of class decomposition and social instability of the Mexican 1980s—the specific valence of the house as a spatial metaphor in the Mexican literary context of the ‘lost decade.’ From this perspective we might argue that the house, and more generally the private, became a
spatial domain for the Mexican novel to challenge the anxiety of the present that characterized the late 60s and early 70s (Chapter 2). It is in this sense that we can speak of a return to the past through the private, a tendency that, for the most part, is easily recognizable in a series of works published throughout the 1980s, among them, Elena Garro’s *La casa junto al río* (1983), Sergio Pitol’s *El desfile del amor* (1984), and Fernando del Paso’s *Noticias del imperio* (1987). We can now establish a provisional hypothesis in the form of a correlation between the emergence of the private as a privileged domain for formal inquiry in the Mexican novel of the 1980s and the politico-ideological crisis that followed the consolidation of a new export-oriented pattern of capital accumulation. From this standpoint, the house in María Luisa Mendoza’s *El perro de la escribana* can be said to perform a formal amalgamation between the conjuncture of the 1980s and the collapse of the national project of capitalist modernization that we have studied in the previous chapters.

*El perro de la escribana* opens with an evocation of the stately house in the Bajío (Guanajuato) where Leona Piedecasas, the first-person narrator and the gravitational center of the novel, spent her childhood and early adolescence. The baronial house’s “paredes raspadas y desvalidas” (11) stand against the barrage of “sol, y polvo, y lluvia” (11) since time immemorial. Leona’s reverie lingers on the “primaveral luz de niñez” (14) that bathed the house’s terrace and the European furniture that adorned the hall leading to the dinning room, “tan absurdamente francés o alemán o gótico” (14). The evocation of a bygone era lends a decadent undertone to the description. Of the sumptuous dinnerware that came all the way from Flanders, or Nancy, or Puebla “sólo queda la memoria o el
It is no surprise that this opening sequence evokes the same historical transition studied in Chapter 1. The Piedecasas hacienda and the Menchaca estate in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* belong to a social order dissolved by the rise of industrial capitalism in Mexico. However, while Artemio Cruz’s estrangement from the outside world runs parallel to the consecration of a national bourgeois order—therefore aligning, as we have already argued, the private with a definite bourgeois worldview—in *El perro de la escribana* the evocation of the Piedecasas’ estate, a eulogy to the world sacrificed in the altar of the developmental aspirations of the Mexican state, constructs the private as a symbolic passageway into the past that allows the narrator to evade the undecidability of the present. The symbolic retreat into the domain of the private takes the form of a weighty lament for the “casas entresoladas” that were torn down to allow for the construction of “escuelas activas […] sanatorios, sindicatos.”
Casa de cuartos ensartados, pisos de tablones encerados, techos altos con cielorrasos que tapaban las vigas enchapopotadas y que se desvencijaban cuando ya eran pandos de cal amontonada, de viejura. Casa de iluminaciones mañaneras ensordinadas por cortinas, colchas y sobrecolchas, carpetas, antimacasares, toallas, doseles y gobelinos y cuanto hay de tejidos suntuarios, superfluos e insustituibles, ponchos peludos, cojines engreídos, fundas acaracoladas, pies de cama estrañalarios o manteles beatíficos, que copeteaban los roperos para blancos, bajo llave, y que las familias pudientes guardaban bien planchados, almidonados, y sacarlos de vez en cuando diseminándolos por doquier para vestir la amplitud de las recámaras apenas pobladas con muebles necesarios, los que se miraban disminuidos dentro de los grandes cubos, apenas adornados unos con mínimos espejos, cubiertas de mármol, conchas incrustadas, digamos por decir, universo de madera y tela reflejado en los espejos de pared, el de la sala para que los huéspedes en onomásticos o tardes de recibir, bien sentados tomaran el cordial y las galletitas en la parafernalia de “la visita”, acuchilladora oportunidad para repartirse bajo la ley del Carreño la honra ajena desde la propia admonitoria. (24-5)

Whether or not Leona’s homage to the stiff-backed universe of her childhood can in fact be considered a form of restorative utopia—steeped in what Carlos M. Tur Donatti, in a different context, describes as an “inclinación por un romanticismo reaccionario y pasadista” (16)—is less relevant to our purposes than the way in which her ruminations reveal an active resistance to the historical outcome of the capitalist modernization of the country, i.e. how the house is made to stand as a shelter from the worldview consecrated by the rise of the Mexican bourgeois order.

Leona’s rememoration guides the narrative through a series of houses (the “Ojo de Agua” hacienda, the family house in Celaya, the house of “la calle Naranjo”, Santa María la Ribera, colonia Roma, an apartment building in Mexico City), each one smaller and less ostentatious than the previous one: “Cada vez las casas iban disminuyendo en valores visibles, contrayéndose sus aires interiores en la baja altura de los techos, la escasez de ventanales, balcones, celosías policromas en los comedores, ojos de buey, claraboyas,
tragaluces” (33). Leona’s recollections lend credit to Gaston Bachelard’s observation that “after we are in a new house, when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Immemorial things are. We live fixations, fixations of happiness” (5-6). It is easy to recognize the houses of *El perro de la escribana* as a province of the land of Motionless Childhood that double as a symbolic getaway from the “waves of disenchantment, bitterness and perplexity” (Berman 82) generated by the “tragedy of development.” Mendoza’s ornate style, which, as Rosario Castellanos once put it, is “Tan peculiar, tan propio de ella, que aunque apareciera sin firma se reconocería” (*Mujer* 167), stands as a formal barrier against the development of the novel’s plot just as the furniture and other decorations that cram the houses’ interiors stand as a material barrier against the passing of time: “Muebles rodantes de casa en casa, colocados con distintos ánimos para comidas aquí y allá, en caprichosos espacios, en las despiadadas medidas de los departamentos, llevados en vilo y a cuestas, muebles para enraizarse una existencia entera, creados en las talladurías con la mira antigua de las familias que a poseerlos iban hasta después de morir” (58). The house’s furniture appears to have roots of its own, each piece a cog in an entrenched network that bolts the Piedecasas’ house firmly to the ground. The effect is one of steadfast continuity,18 the house affirms an uninterrupted succession in the form of private ownership: “muebles propiedad privada de antepasados que hablaban de virtud y pecado en castellano sentados en ellos” (129). Property endows the Piedecasas’ house with a sense of stability that the outside world no longer warrants. At the same time, throughout the novel this stability becomes irreversibly fragmented to the point where, by
the end of the novel, we see the Piedecasas’ houses finally succumb to the impositions of modern times, whether demolished (89) or repurposed as a bank (135) or a hotel (136).

We will return to this question in the last section of the chapter, since it warrants some commentary regarding the imaginary character of the past Mendoza’s narrative strives to recuperate.

Mendoza’s intimate extravaganza, a peripheral offspring of Proust’s *À la Recherche*, delineates, in its lyrical yearning for things past, the contours of a moment where the nation, or that which the nation is made to stand for, is being “carried away by uncharted currents of uncertainty and unease” (Berman 103). Against the corporatist tradition of the national-popular state, the market fundamentalism that began to unravel in the late 70s and early 80s exposed the Mexican working and petty-bourgeois classes to a new form of uncertainty derived from the unmediated experience (unmediated in the sense of no longer having recourse to the intervention of the state) of being free in the double sense annotated by Marx. The ‘retreat of the state,’ or, rather, the state’s insufficiency to accommodate both the interests of the working class and the demands forced upon the Third World by a new international division of labor, could not be experienced as anything other than a form of orphanhood. No way back from the tragedy of development, no way out of the slaughterhouse of dependency. In this context, the house became the material affirmation of an imaginary safe space where nostalgia for ‘simpler times’ could be given free rein. Crisis, imminent as it was in the Mexican context of the late 70s and early 80s, produced its own form of escapism. If, as Marshal Berman notes, “Modern men and women must learn to yearn for change […] must learn
not to long nostalgically for the ‘fixed, fast-frozen relationships’ of the real or fantasized past, but to delight in mobility, to thrive on renewal, to look forward to future developments in their conditions of life and their relations with their fellow men” (95-6), what the retreat into the domain of the private in a novel such as Mendoza’s *El perro de la escribana* announces is a crisis of modern sensibility: “Antes uno se pasaba las horas sentado en la banca de fierro del jardín principal viendo pasar a los demás. Hoy ¡qué esperanzas! la gran bola te avienta, rueda e insulta, usa y ensucia” (126). Inside the house balance, order, tranquility; outside the house “the hostility of men and of the universe accumulates” (Bachelard 7) in a never-ending saturnalia of corruption, insecurity, and chaos.

At this point it seems that we have let ourselves run amok with the house as metaphor while failing to account for a certain temporal oddity in our formulation of the intimate as an emergent field in the Mexican novel of the 1980s, namely the belated character of *El perro de la escribana* in relation to the historical advent of modernism and its equally profound belatedness in relation to the consolidation of domestic fiction as literary genre. On the one hand, we should immediately point out the temporal dissonance present in the affirmation of a modernist aesthetic in a context that can already be described as one of neoliberalization, on the other it is equally necessary to underscore the profound “redefinition of desire” that a novel such as *El perro de la escribana* attests to, as well as its contribution to “producing the densely interwoven fabric of common sense and sentimentality that even today ensures the ubiquity of middle-class power” (Armstrong 5). If *El perro de la escribana* stands both temporally
and formally miles away from the “great domestic novels” of the nineteenth century, it is somehow also possible to recognize certain parallelisms between the Mexican context of the second half of the twentieth century and early nineteenth century Britain. For once, this was a context where reformism too became a way to bypass the political organization of the working class. Against the backdrop of the demise of the corporatist structure of the national-popular state, Mexico’s petty bourgeoisie found itself in a position to “step forward and offer themselves, their technology, their supervisory skills, and their institutions […] as the appropriate remedy for growing political resistance” (Armstrong 20). In the same direction, compared to the popular masses that animated the Mexican political imagination of the early and mid-twentieth century, the rise of petty-bourgeois individualism became the first instance in Mexican modern history where “a particular idea of the self […] became commonplace, and as gendered norms of identity determined more and more how people learned to think of themselves as well as others, that self became the dominant social reality; this was a moment “where political history obviously converged with the history of sexuality as well as with that of the novel to produce a specific kind of individual” (Armstrong 21). Tlatelolco was no Peterloo, but after Tlatelolco too “it was clear that the state’s capacity for violence had become a source of embarrassment.” As Nancy Armstrong indicates in reference to 1819:

If acts of open rebellion had justified intervention into areas of society that the government had never had to deal with before, then the use of force on the part of the government gave credence to the workers’ charges of oppression. The power of surveillance came into dominance at this moment, displacing the traditional uses of force. Like the form of vigilance that maintained an orderly household, this power did not create equality so much as trivialize the material signs of difference by
translating all such signs into differences in que quality, intensity, direction, and self-regulatory capability of an individual’s desire. (22)

The situation I am hereby attempting to describe is not meant to negate the private nor modernism as extant components of the Mexican novel prior to the conjuncture of the early 1980s, I am however trying to point to a particular amalgamation between modernism and the private that, in a context of socioeconomic crisis and national dependency, for the first time formulated the household as a functional space to the representation of a self-centered order, despite the fact that, as we will inevitably have to conclude, that very condition of dependency continued to pose structural challenges to such formulation. In its own right, this was a “moment when writing invaded, revised, and contained the household by means of strategies that distinguished private from social life and thus detached sexuality from political history” (Armstrong 24). This detachment, I wish to suggest as a subsequent hypothesis, is one of the historical phenomena that the spatial composition of the Mexican novel of the 1970s and 80s in general and María Luisa Mendoza’s *El perro de la escribana* in particular captures in its simultaneous formulation of interiority as a specifically female domain and the reproductive site of a specifically petty-bourgeois, i.e. an individually self-centered, worldview.²¹

*Interiors*

Not a penny could be spared for “amenities”; for partridges and wine, beadles and turf, books and cigars, libraries and leisure. To raise bare walls out of the bare earth was the utmost they could do.

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*
Before we move on to discuss the question of interiority, we should briefly acknowledge, with Neil Larsen, that at stake in any engagement with the notion of a Latin American *modernism* is the question of “what does it comprise, and in what ways has Latin American modernism (which is not to say *modernismo*) diverged from modernist orthodoxy?” (North 155). While in no position to offer a definitive answer to this question, I believe a conjunctural analysis of the transition between the industrial and the export-oriented pattern of capital accumulation that we’ve been tracing can offer some interpretive paths to approach this problem. Another way to pose the question would be to ask what lends a novel such as *El perro de la escribana* its literary credibility in the context of the Mexican 1980s. Perry Anderson’s commentary on Marx’s conception of the historical temporality of the capitalist mode of production might be of some assistance in this matter. As Anderson points out, Marx posits a “complex and differential temporality” (101) for the capitalist mode of production, one that expresses itself in the *curvilinear* development of the bourgeois order. Furthermore, “The most obvious way in which this differential temporality enters into the very construction of Marx’s model of capitalism is, of course, at the level of the class order generated by it” (101). This being the case, the question posed earlier might be reformulated as follows: what can the modernism embraced by an author such as María Luisa Mendoza tell us about the curvilinear development of the Mexican bourgeois order in the late 70s and early 80s. In other words, what specific trajectory does Mendoza’s modernism trace in relation to the historical development of peripheral capitalism?
Anderson’s “conjunctural explanation” of the rise of modernism provides us with some spatiotemporal coordinates to frame our own investigation. For Anderson, European modernism, understood as a cultural field, is overdetermined by three historical circumstances: the codified persistence of aristocratic and landowning regimes, the incipient character of the second industrial revolution, and “the imaginative proximity of social revolution” (103). According to Anderson, modernism “arose at the intersection between a semi-aristocratic ruling order, a semi-industrialized capitalist economy, and a semi-emergent, or -insurgent, labour movement” (105). How does Anderson’s triangulation compare to the period we are currently referring to, which roughly speaking spans the years between 1965 and 1980? Furthermore, what can be said of the modernist ambitions of the Mexican novel of the 1960s and 1970s when read against the withering away of modernism in Western Europe in the aftermath World War II? Anderson provides us with some clues when he makes passing reference to the “delimited constellations” that emerge in the context of the capitalist modernization of Third World, but any attempt to provide a robust answer to these questions would have to present a much more granular account of the specific class order that composed the “closure of horizons: without an appropriable past, or imaginable future, in an interminably recurrent present” (109) in each of these locations. In what follows I wish to argue that the modernist thrust in a novel such as *El perro de la escribana* allows us to formally recreate this closure of horizons in the brink of the 1982 debt crisis.
The transitional period we have been referring to indeed signaled the final demise of the Mexican aristocracy. Hugo G. Nutini offers a succinct overview to this process when he establishes:

Until the 1910 Revolution the aristocracy was universally known and recognized by all sectors of the stratification system. By the late 1940s that degree of visibility had shrunk considerably, but it was still recognized as the preeminent social class of Mexico City. Thirty years later, however, the aristocracy’s visibility had been drastically reduced to the upper-middle and upper classes, small segments of the population which were able to place the aristocracy as the social elite of the city and the former landed class of the country; and many aristocratic names still connoted their former exaltedness. (17-8)

The frictions produced by the dwindling of the landed aristocracy and the consolidation of a new plutocratic order in the decades following the Mexican Revolution constitute the historical integument that envelops the Piedecasas household in Mendoza’s *El perro de la escribana*. The dignified retreat into the domain of the private can therefore be read, from an aristocratic point of view, as the corollary to the abolition of the great landed estates, i.e. the upshot of the forceful removal of the landed aristocracy from public life. The formula, appealing as it is, would nevertheless be insufficient without a mechanism to correlate the downfall of the landed aristocracy with the rise of a petty-bourgeois, individually self-centered order. One could solve this ideological equation by way of the process of “expressive acculturation” (Nutini 4-22) that dominates the interactions between the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, and the petty-bourgeoisie within the hierarchical structure of the Mexican ruling class, a process that, as Nutini has pointed out, is heavily invested in the private sphere and the institution of marriage. Another possible solution, one closer to the ambitions of this study, would be to
fold the exhaustion of nationalism as the “determinate source of ideological energy in the
Third World” (Ahmad 68) into the radical restructuring of class relations prompted by the
abatement of the industrial pattern. The latter solution leaves us in a much better place to
approach *El perro de la escribana* as a “a symbolic move in an essentially polemic and
strategic ideological confrontation between the classes” (Jameson, *Political* 70-1). It also
allows us to sidestep homogenizing interpretations of neoliberalism and/or globalization
that implicitly do away with uneven development and imperialist exploitation as
functions of the capitalist world system, a problem that, while outside the scope of this
study, bears some attention given its manifold guises in contemporary academic
discourse.

To return to the question of the spatial composition of Mendoza’s novel let us
remember that, working its way through four generations of Piedecasas, *El perro de la
escribana* recaptures, out of necessity, Mexico’s transition from an aristocratic/feudal/
pre-capitalist to a capitalist social order. The novel cannot avert, and in fact must give
form to systemic change. What distinguishes the way in which *El perro de la escribana*
stages this transition is the novel’s own “moment of enunciation” (Rodríguez 53), the
particular juncture that allows Mendoza to formally recreate Mexico’s capitalist
modernization from a specific sociohistorical perspective. *El perro de la escribana*, as I
have already noted, upholds the domestic sphere as a spatial axis of social life.
Mendoza’s novel rehearses the rise of interiority by tracing the conversion of public into
private space, which is to say that *El perro de la escribana* produces interiority as a
spatial register through which the curvilinear development of the Mexican bourgeois
order acquires a certain legibility. Interiority, so to speak, serves as a plane where the history of the bourgeois order becomes ingrained, thus, the novel not only poses the question of gender in relation to nation, it rather metonymizes the social through the spatial order of the interior.

Tracing the idea of the home and its relation to the experience of intimacy and privacy, Witold Rybczinski observes that during the Middle Ages “privacy was unknown” (28), It was not until the Dutch seventeenth century that “The publicness that had characterized the ‘big house’ was replaced by a more sedate—and more private—home life” (59). The transition from public to private life allowed for a “sense of interior space” (70) to develop and family life to stand on a firm footing for the very first time. It is no surprise, then, that a novel so heavily invested in the private would mark this historical transition in its opening passages. The birth of Veneranda Oscura Piedecasas disturbs the spatial order of the Piedecasas’ ‘big house.’ The arrival of the premature baby and the death of tía Teresa force the doors of the “grandísima casa esquinera” (23) to be shut down, forever altering the spatial arrangement between inside and outside: “Decreto de plomo; horas de queda a trinos, zureos, cloqueos, cacareos, rebuznos, relinchos y ladrídos amados e insistentes al zaguán con el portón cerrado, clausura de la libertad, habladilla del pueblo que por primera vez se encontró el obstáculo en la casa de los Piedecasas, pues bien que hubo antes confianza para introducirse hasta más allá y en mitad del patio y a pregón pelado anunciar las limas, las habas, las nueces, los chichicuilotes, la leche y así […] Todo el trastorno y revorujamiento de costumbres por la verraquera llorona de aquel ser minúsculo sietemesino que había sido arrancado a la madre muerta” (22-3, my
emphasis). The scene establishes a generational gap between the old and the new, the resounding and the silent, the public and the private, i.e. “the internal world of the individual, of the self, and of the family” (Rybczynski 35). The birth of Venevene, one of Leona’s first cousins, forces a spatial demarcation between these two worlds, life has become encased, its meaning now ensconced behind closed doors.

Leona Piedecasas’ life is, from its early stages, an inner life, both in the sense of being spatially contained and steeped in self-consciousness. Private space produces the individual, it isolates the self from the social. The separation of inside from outside therefore links the emergence of interior life to the consecration of modern private property. A spatial hiatus emerges between interior and exterior that both contains and conceals, protects and belies the desires of the self. Leona Piedecasas’ childhood is in this sense an alienated, secluded, childhood. The ruin of her immediate family is hidden from the light of day: “Ocultamientos entre familias, tapadillos aleccionadores para que de la puerta en adelante nadie sepa la verdad de lo que ocurre siete estados bajo tierra, entre nosotros, in pectore, a somorgujo, a cencerro tapado, bajo mano, a hurtadillas, subrepticiamente la reserva de los aconteceres” (39). Leona is brought up behind closed doors, she is the product of the contradiction between outward appearance and internal dissipation. Her father, Eleazar Piedecasas, “vino a la capital de la provincia, retornó, volvió, hasta que el fracaso cuajara al grado de la necesidad de escapar por algún lado del apremio de lujos ya imposibles, pegados en el alma como lapas. Así el Distrito Federal y sus peligros se hizo necesario: bendito anonimato, sepa quiénes son y quién los parió” (37). The demands of the new world order force the Piedecasas away from the luxurious
interiors of their country houses and into the restrained comfort and anonymity of the big

The oscillation between countryside and city, province and capital, notoriety and anonymity, spatializes the transition from the export to the industrial pattern. Eleazar and his sisters stand at the cusp of this transition, their lifetimes are witnesses to the disintegration of the Piedecasas household. The demise, however, is a protracted rather than instantaneous one, the house, and more precisely interior space, offers the Piedecasas name the possibility of an afterlife. The domestic atmosphere of the Piedecasas’ home lives on through the internal arrangements of the house Eleazar and his family occupy in Mexico City. Leona, Eleazar’s daughter, is brought up between the “restos de aquellos orgullos [...] los patéticos restos de otros días” (37) that fill the interiors of the house of calle Naranjo. As Leona grows older the furniture deteriorates, but the baronial house continues to reverberate through the furniture’s prolonged disintegration: “están los muebles arrinconados, pegados a los muros, engreídos y humillados, bajo la sentencia de ir al ropavejero o al recorte de patas curvas de coronas regias, de altas panzas, para hacerlos rígidos y modernos, que los tiempos han cambiado y ni es necesario guardar en ellos tantas vajillas ni tantas cajas forradas de raso y llenas de cubiertos de plata” (57). Extravagance is reworked into austerity, lavishness is reformed into rigidity, once again tradition becomes hidden behind a modern façade.

The prolonged quality of the disintegration is what distinguishes Leona’s purview from the rest of the Piedecasas, what transforms her into a “cargadora de intimidades caseras” (38). Pupé and Venevene, Teresa’s daughters, are a counterpoint to Leona in this
respect. Teresa’s marriage to Regalado Oscura is symptomatic of the Piedecasas’
economic downward spiral, the union stands as a symbol of the covenant between landed
aristocracy and bourgeoisie, rent and surplus-value: “chinos libres los Oscura, pasajeros
de trasatlánticos a Europa y con oficinas de horario, bufetes alcahueteros bien situados,
sin manda, ciudadinos, de recorrer a caballo campos terregosos alineados de siembra”
(28-9). After Teresa’s death Pupé and Venevene are raised by Severino Oscura
(Regalado’s brother) and Amor von Sternanfelds, “amazona teutona,” (47) “sin hijos, y
pudiente ella, madrigal, miel, magnificente madre postiza” (41). The house of the
Oscuras is the space of the cult of things modern, where the etiquette and unwritten rules
of the ancien régime have been replaced by bourgeois fashion. At the Oscuras, Leona
comes into touch with a bourgeois sociability, exuded through French bakery, silver
dinnerware, folded napkins, and red wine tastings. The modern interiors of the house in
colonia Roma stand out against the provincial atmosphere of the Piedecasas house in
Celaya: “El pasillo iluminado desde la culebra de un tragaluz, arranca en el teléfono
Erikson y termina con el baño a la derecha, de tina a las volandas levitando en sus patas
de fierro, dos lavamanos con jabones de glicerina, y el excusado de cajón en alto y
cadena; y a la izquierda, enfrente, el cuarto de juegos evocado de sol en el futuro, con dos
ventanas de oro a mediodía y donde las niñas toman la merienda al atardecer, leen,
estudian y oyen a Leo contar sus inventos” (51-2). Leona does not fully inhabit tradition
nor modernity, she is trapped between these two worlds, both equally distant from her
own needs, wants, and desires. Her creative prowess, her development as a storyteller
(the “escribana” from the title) is a product of her being out of place.
Leona’s viewpoint can thus be read as expressing “the necessary antithesis between the bourgeois defense of progress and the romantic critique of capitalism” (Lukács “Marx” 119). This indefiniteness carries Leona into a certain form of existentialism, her adult life slips into a meaningless routine, trapped inside the walls of a narrow apartment building in Mexico City, with her childhood memories (and writing) as the only outlet for her individual frustrations. The economic decay legible in the characterization of Leona’s quarters as a “vivienda de las intapables pobreterías” (56) follows the spatial contrast between the natural light that filled the interiors of the Piedecasas houses and the artificial light that illuminates the grey interiors of the nation’s capital: “Leona saca el pie de entre las cobijas y toca el linóleum del piso. Sentarse en la oscuridad; lejos la ciudad retumba y es gris y se palpa casi en el tirabuzón del pozo de luz del edificio donde ya se enciende la luz del cuarto de Leo y muchas otras; chispas en paredes citadinas que envuelven larvas sentadas a la orilla de sus camas para salir a trabajar” (57). Mendoza’s spatial inquiry into modern everyday life reframes Heidegger’s question on dwelling for the Mexican context: “In today’s housing shortage even this much is reassuring and to the good; residential buildings do indeed provide shelter; today’s houses may even be well planned, easy to keep, attractively cheap, open to air, light, and sun, but—do the houses in themselves hold any guarantee that dwelling occurs in them?” (Heidegger 144) Conservative undertones notwithstanding, Mendoza’s affirmation of interiority is linked to a historical transformation that has irreversibly altered the relationship between self and space.
Interiority has been refashioned as a locus of dwelling, a site of nourishment and reflection. There is something telling about this particular form of escapism, since it exceeds its obvious deployment as a form of individual affirmation; something in excess to the formulation of the self as a space of habitation (“Hay en mí, Leona, estancias para simplemente dejar ir la vida y el cuerpo” [106]). The recourse to self-confinement (“Dentro de mí me guardo” [117]) ties Mendoza to an intimist literary tradition that dates back to Contemporáneos and, in particular, Gorostiza’s “Muerte sin fin”—a recurrent interlocutor in Mendoza’s work and the direct source of the title of Con Él, conmigo, con nosotros tres. But besides “the irrationalist and exclusive cult of vacuous refinement” (Lukács “Marx” 132) that one can easily identify in the lyrically charged pages of Gorostiza or Mendoza, the latter’s recourse to interiority activates a more primitive reading of the self, one closer to Bachelard’s observation that “Not only our memories, but the things we have forgotten are ‘housed.’ Our soul is an abode. And by remembering ‘houses’ and ‘rooms,’ we learn to ‘abide’ within ourselves. Now everything becomes clear, the house images move in both directions: they are in us as much as we are in them” (xxxvii). The affirmation of the self as an abode, a theme that gains an unexpected centrality in El perro de la escribana, opens the possibility to interrogate the interiorist focus of the novel as a vector of a larger historical transformation.

Reproduction

Beyond Mendoza’s fierce commitment to the affirmation of a female political subjectivity, her interrogation of the self in the context of an unfolding political, economic, and ideological crisis produces a privileged formal arrangement to analyze
what Freud would call “the tendentious nature of the workings of our memory,” (43) its displacements, effacements, and reclamations as a counterpoint to social history. Thus *El perro de la escribana* allows us to “move from direct and intimate experiences to those that involve more and more symbolic and conceptual apprehension” (Tuan 136). In other words, to analyze how, “In this ideologically fenced-off and narrow circle of private life, the social still comes to claim its own.” (Lukács “Marx” 130) Nowhere is this proposition more readily available than in the question of reproduction. As we have already established, the house and its interiors provide the architectural metaphor for an intimate rumination on tradition and social transformation. As an inhabitant, Leona Piedecasas is already a figure of reproduction, the possibility to sustain the memory of the Piedecasas family is tied, in a quite direct, material way, to her own sustenance as a living body. To abide, to dwell, to remember; the women of the Piedecasas family are “Tejedoras del tiempo” (84). A parallel affirmation between the occupation of a given space and the occupation of remembrance is put forth as the novel follows Leona’s transformation into an *escribana*—a rough equivalent to the notary public or court clerk, but semantically close to the figure of the scribe. The noun choice is significant in this respect, since the emphasis is already on reproduction—a clerk or scribe is a copier of manuscripts, someone engaged in repetitive tasks rather than on any significant form of creative activity.

In her study of *El perro de la escribana*, Blake Seana Locklin notes that “In the history of the Piedecasas family, Leona finds a reproduction of repression, which takes the form of an oppressive repetition of both spaces and roles” (135). The observation
juxtaposes the spatial sequencing of the novel with the gendered practices that have been handed down to Leona through countless generations of Piedecasas women. The novel’s spatial arrangements co-locate the oppression derived from social institutions (family, marriage, etc.) and the arduous development of Leona’s individuality. Thus, in its own way, Mendoza’s novel advances a formal interrogation of “how patterns of intimacy occur in relation to social power” (Wilson 31). Although not a widespread preoccupation of the criticism devoted to Mendoza’s work, I believe it is possible to approach the novel’s spatial composition as an invitation “to examine more carefully the ways in which the global and the intimate, typically imagined as mutually exclusive spheres, are profoundly intertwined” (Pratt and Rosner 1). Reproduction, I argue, extrudes the ambivalent position toward the private that characterizes El perro de la escribana—I shall refer to this question as one of intimate entrapments. The problem arises from the fact that Leona’s battle toward self-affirmation is a tributary of the very social structures that drive her individual degradation. In many instances of the novel Leona’s intimate struggles tend to foreground, albeit negatively, the often overlooked question of the relation between women’s oppression and class. Much of the scholarship focused on Mendoza’s work has fallen into the trap of what Lisa Vogel considers a “theoretical demarcation between women, the family, and the sex-division of labour, on the one hand, and social reproduction, on the other” (138). I argue that, in Mendoza’s novel, reproduction allows us to confront this gap in a way that clarifies the constrictions of Leona’s disaffection.
At the level of plot, *El perro de la escribana* presents Leona’s oppression as derived almost entirely from the sex-division of labour: “de pie ella al lado del escritorio de él que escribía números y la toma sin hacer ruido como si estuviera sumando los debes y los haberes de la entrepierna” (17). To say that *El perro de la escribana*’s purview is determined by the separation of sex from class, is to consider to what extent Leona’s refusal to participate in childbearing can, in itself, constitute a liberatory practice. “For Leona,” writes Locklin, “the key to her independence lies in her resistance to motherhood rather than her ultimately unsatisfying rebellions against other aspects of her family’s values” (140). From a social reproduction standpoint, Leona’s rejection of inherited roles is directed against the burden placed on women by the process of the “generational replacement through childbirth in the kin-based family unit” (Battacharya 73). However, as Vogel makes explicit,

In class societies, ‘one cannot speak at all of the family “as such”’, as Marx once put it, for families have widely varying places within the social structure. In propertied classes, families usually act as the carrier and transmitter of property, although they may also have other roles. Here, women’s oppression flows from their role in the maintenance and inheritance of property. In subordinate classes, families usually structure the site at which direct producers are maintained and reproduced; such families may also participate directly in immediate production. While women’s oppression in class-societies is experienced at many levels, it rests, ultimately, on these material foundations. The specific working out of this oppression is a subject for historical, not theoretical investigation. (135)

Leona’s battle to escape the confines of domesticity and reinvent herself beyond the limits of the family cannot be dissociated from the specific material conditions that shape her oppression qua woman, i.e. from “the specificity of women’s oppression in different classes in a given mode of production” (Vogel 139). The patriarchal
demarcations of Leona’s experience are formulated by the cyclical patterns that draw the Piedecasas women into predetermined roles: “Las hijas casadas iniciaban la cruz del matrimonio yéndose con sus maridos a aposentar en una de las haciendas que les correspondía, pero cada año, una u otra volvían a la casa de Celaya a dar a luz dentro de sus alcobas de sol” (25). From a class perspective, the cyclical motion that pulls the Piedecasas women back to Celaya every year neatly ties generational reproduction to the question of property. Their sporadic return to their ancestors’ home for the sole purpose of undergoing childbirth grounds their oppression in property\textsuperscript{25}: “Nuestras vidas tan distintas enlazadas por los tubos de la sangre […] por los cimientos de las casas que nos poseyeron. Casas de las Piedecasas” (97). The emphasis is not gratuitous, since property is precisely what generates the worldview that orders Leona’s individual drama.

Reproduction spins class meaning. Leona’s revolt against female oppression derives from her subordination to men in the context of the reproduction of property, but certainly not from women’s subordination to men in the context of the reproduction of labor-power.

Vogel develops this abstract distinction when she argues:

> In a particular society, shared experiences of and cultural responses to female oppression may produce a certain degree of solidarity among women across class-lines. While this solidarity has a basis in reality, and can be of serious political import, the situations of women in the dominant and exploited classes are fundamentally distinct from a theoretical perspective. Only women in the subordinate class participate in the maintenance and replacement of the indispensable force that keeps a class-society going—exploitable labour-power. (154)

Thus, while \textit{El perro de la escribana} advances the feminist struggle for the politicization of personal life, it remains necessary to recall with Michèle Barret that “The important truth encapsulated in the feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ should not
lead us to suppose that the politicization of our personal lives will of itself eradicate women’s oppression” (61). The observation leaves us on much better footing to consider reproduction as the form that shapes Leona’s intimate entrapments.

It has been well established that the separation between the private and the public has begotten patterns of sociability that oppose men to women in spatial form. The world of the Piedecasas is structured by these patterns, the family members’ departure from home, their stepping into the outside world, underscores this differentiated logic: “Ellas salían al oficio de casadas, ellos a la desesperanza” (26). The formula captures the spatial dynamic that structures Leona’s intimate entrapments. Biological reproduction is tantamount to social value: “Las mujeres que no casáronse para dar a luz otras mujeres, no valen ni así en mi gente; los míos nacieron para reproducir una especie ya en decadencia. Nunca para el vientre yermo o el placer solitario” (126). However, Leona’s explicit refusal to participate in this reproductive sequence does not entail a parallel disavowal of the private as the privileged domain for self-realization. This paradox constitutes the basis for an exploration of the historical determinations of Leona’s struggle: a struggle that is simultaneously a quest for self-affirmation and an unapologetic homage to the aristocratic world of Leona’s childhood. “Vamos siendo,” Leona laments “los—las—Piedecasas nada, barridos por la sobrepoblación. Gente y gente desconocida reproduciéndose y la alborada de la severa católica ciudad ilumina la inundación de excrementos, vómitos, basuras, botellas vacías sobre los escalones del teatro más bello del Bajío” (131). There is a profound, often overlooked, oddity in Leona’s intimate ambition to avoid the circumscriptions of domestic oppression while preserving the
private as the privileged terrain for the politicization of life. Beyond the argument on whether or not this is a fruitful struggle, I believe the spatial dispositions produced by Leona’s private inclinations point toward the closure of horizons I referred to in the previous section. In order to make this claim, which implies moving from the question of biological reproduction to the question of the reproduction of social life, it becomes necessary to articulate the problem of reproduction from a social perspective.

There is no definitive answer to the question of whether Leona’s separation from the aristocratic world of her childhood is better understood as a forceful expulsion or an elected exile. What the reader encounters is a lingering tension between individual concerns and historical transformation, a tension that can be productively explored through Elizabeth Povinelli’s formulation of the opposition between “autological subject” and “genealogical society,” i.e. the opposition between the “discourse, practices, and fantasies about self-making, self-sovereignty, and the value of individual freedom associated with the Enlightenment project of contractual constitutional democracy and capitalism” and the “discourse, practices, and fantasies about social constraints placed on the autological subject by various kinds of inheritances” (4). As a question of inheritance, Leona’s ambivalent sentiment toward the grandeur of her past can be better apprehended. Leona’s memory works as a filter that sifts social constraints from individual life. What history effaces, discourse tries to preserve, as in the names of “los perros canelos Dimes y Diretes” (22), “choznos de muchos otros de iguales nombres, muertos y enterrados en los jardines de sus casas donde vivieron y engendraron incontables generaciones de Dimes y Diretes mantenidos en familia como si de esa manera, con la estancia de consignas en
gritos de ¡no!, ¡sube!, ¡bájate!, regaños o querencias pronunciados todos frente a las jetas de los chuchos penchachos sacerdotes portadores de secretos familiares, se conservara la descendencia, la costumbre, la sangre intacta por lo menos en Dimes y Diretes ya que el apellido a punto debatiase en la vida real de las muertes, desapareciendo sin más, lo cual tampoco era importante” (34). The discursive nature of Leona’s autological quest, her spiraling descent into the depths of individual recreation, fully captures the closure of horizons that would mark the Mexican 1980s. “The events of 1982” writes Claudio Lomnitz, “were in the strongest sense a crisis of historicity. The ways in which people had framed the past and the future in the present were no longer operative for large segments of the population” (“Depreciation” 65). In this respect Leona’s individual drama can be said to be fully historical, a product of the ideological contradictions of her time.

Before closing this section, it is worth exploring the formal parallelisms between *El perro de la escribana*’s turn toward the interior and the implications of the 1982 debt crisis for the reproductive sphere. In Mendoza’s novel, Leona’s path to becoming an *escribana* is advanced in terms of the occupation of private spaces, as in the main character’s celebration of theatre and her ambition to “manejar el universo privado de un escenario donde corren todos los muros,” (97) or the recurring line “Dentro de mí me guardo,” (117, 122) or the projection of a set of carved doors as the last barrier protecting the Piedecasas house from “la peste del mal gusto” (129). The spatial demarcations that produce the private follow a similar pattern to the forms of sociability Lomnitz links to the depreciation of life in the Mexican 1980s. Commenting on the production of a new
idea of urban community, Lomnitz argues that, “On the topic of what constitutes proper precautions in the city, we have everything from the rise of vigilantism, to the emigration of people from the middle classes out of the city, to the exponential growth in the numbers of gated communities, multiplication of private police forces, depreciation of real estate in locations that are considered unsafe, increased height of walls, growing use of alarms, dogs, armed guards, and a range of security devices, decline in the use of taxis, and the growing importance of well-patrolled malls for the social life of teenagers” (Lomnitz, “Depreciation” 61). The rise of insecurity, crime, corruption, and other “plagues” at the onset of the 1982 debt crisis produced patterns of differentiation between the public and the private that actively reimagined the latter in petty-bourgeois key: as the locus of refinement, civility, protection, and, more importantly for the purposes of this study, democratic choice, in opposition to a perilous social outside. Ara Wilson already notes that “Intimacy emphasizes relationality” (47). Reading inside by outside, private by public, demonstrates the novel’s capacity to think intimacy in relational terms.

I began this section commenting on the reproductive character of the figure of the escribana, whose semantic resonances tie the novel’s political imagination to the question of the affirmation of a female subjectivity. Halfway between literary creation and administrative replication, the escribana, “Esta que escribe y hablo” (105), synthesizes women’s struggle for the right to speak in one’s own voice. Beyond the social limits that the novel builds around the act of writing, it is also necessary to ascertain that in the context of a literary tradition afflicted by what Emily Hind aptly refers to as “a masculinist tunnel vision” (73), the disruption of established norms and patterns of
literary world-making serves to reconsider and reimagine the contours and depths of the
social. “Escribir,” writes Sandra Lorenzano in reference to the relation between women
and literature in Mexico, “ha sido un modo de buscar un lugar diferente de aquel que nos
fue asignado, una manera de bautizar las infinitas posibilidades del deseo, un camino para
inventarnos lejos de catálogos establecidos” (351).\textsuperscript{27} At stake in a formalist reading of a
novel like \textit{El perro de la escribana}, then, is the capacity to think ‘desire’s infinite
possibilities’ in dialectical form, i.e. as a question of “the comprehension of the many
finites in the infinite” (Engels, \textit{Dialectics} 514).

\textit{Light}

Walls, buildings, windows, compose the many finites that shape \textit{El perro de la
escribana}’s desire for infinite possibilities. The novel’s disorderly plot, a formal
challenge to social articulations of patriarchal authority, is a clear point of demarcation
from the literary tradition embodied by \textit{La muerte de Artemio Cruz} (Chapter 1), the latter
being a novel that, as José Miguel Oviedo has argued, “is strictly symmetrical” (873). In
Mendoza’s \textit{El perro}, in contrast, rememoration creates patterns that flow seemingly
unrestrained, free from any structural imperative. A spatial antinomy emerges, however,
as soon as the dispositions of place demand to be illuminated. Leona’s reverie produces
anew the hallways, doors, and stairs that order the interior realms of the Piedecasas
houses. Desire’s infinite possibilities bounce against the corners that demarcate the
private; infinity becomes refracted, dimmed by its encounter with the spatial
arrangements of domesticity. Such interaction, I argue as a way of bringing this chapter to
an end, produces a unique counterpoint between the social and the private that hinders the artifice of Mendoza’s formless provocation.

Infrastructure has often been the vehicle to formulate the house as a space traversed by sociability, “connecting the private space of home with the wider urban geography, and suggesting the existence of material and immaterial, cultural and ideological, links between the different spaces of modernity, whether private or public” (Zink 31). The resulting image is one that corroborates Henri Lefebvre’s formulation of a “principle of the interpenetration and superimposition of social spaces,” according to which “each fragment of space subjected to analysis masks not just one social relationship but a host of them that analysis can potentially disclose” (88, my emphasis).

I argue that in Mendoza’s El perro de la escribana light takes on a similar function as that of infrastructure, it enacts the interpenetration between private and public spaces, it projects social life into the order of the intimate. “Our perception of light,” writes Alice Barnaby, “is always situated, it is always implicated in the sensuality of the world […] To study light is therefore to study relationships between things, places and people […] Neither the ‘thing’ nor out interaction with it is stable, apolitical or ahistorical. How we engage with light tells us much about how we value our society and ourselves” (1). Light provides contrast, sunlight’s incident angle can brush a given surface into a particular texture. More than a tactile quality, in Mendoza’s novel light produces patterns of illuminance that can only be described as historical. For instance, in a passage that finds the main character reflecting on the way sunlight interacts with windows and objects to produce historical conjugations:
A la búsqueda del sol perdido, a partir de adolescencias y penurias, en ventanucas mal situadas que lo dejaban vaciarse apenas adentro, de ladito, como criado pobre, caridad en carencias. El sol me llegaba desde el terreno baldío de junto a mi casa de los departamentos con renta congelada, ahora sí que solar el tierrero donde era antes una sólida gris compacta mansión porfiriana de un marqués vestido de charro y que paseaba a caballo todas las mañanas: echado el sol escurrido en los autos destartalados que reparan allí; sube no obstante, prueba, lame y embellece bardas garapiñadas, marquetas de alegría del mercado; entra a la recámara barriendo la magra inhospitalidad donde duermen mis hermanos Leo y Leónides, donde escribo al lado del vano abierto de par al sol. El sol en mis manos que escriben, antorchas las venas de mi abuelo que traigo, ayuntamiento gozoso del tiempo instantáneamente inmóvil —como es el pasado— y que trabaja en mí tanto. Sol, mi amor a tus remedos, chimeneas, braseros, teas, luciérnagas, el refulgente estallido de espejos en la centella del amor. El sol, propio y heredado reverberando el corredor con las horas y los zenzontles enjaulados, flamas de música, deseo desconocido, pira continua. El sol en las viviendas sucesivas, lumbrarias rentadas por horas, sesgado sol de temporada, desabrido, soslayado, como mirada oblicua de paso en plaza pública, antigua, y que tensa y endurece los pezones debajo de la blusa nueva, enlaza la cintura con el cincho de terciopelo, la jareta estrenada (84-85).

There is plenty of evidence here to suggest that light carries into the domestic sphere a historical provocation. The Proustian ritornello (“A la búsqueda del sol perdido”) doubles as an invitation to reflect on the impressionist use of light. As Luz Aurora Pimentel has argued, in Proust’s writing, “la luz adquiere un grado de materialidad tal que incluso es sujeto a personificaciones de todo tipo” (260). Mendoza’s personification of the sun as a “criado pobre” that steps into the room “de ladito,” poorly illuminating the room where Leona reminisces of brighter days, metonymically spills over into the rent controlled apartment building where Leona watches over the “tierrero” that has replaced the right angles of the now-gone “compacta mansión porfiriana,” and the improvised garage where “autos destartalados” are being repaired. Light penetrates in Leona’s room “barriendo la magra inhospitalidad” of her siblings’ quarters. The touch of sunlight on
Leona’s hands kindles the “antorchas” that she carries in her veins, and so on. Inside the room light produces reflections, both in the sense of the return of its waves from the interior’s surfaces (“el sol, propio y heredado reverberando el corredor con las horas”) and meditations. Modulations in light create a high contrast between past and present, incident angles of sunlight charge intimate space either positively (“embellece bardas garapiñadas”) or negatively. Light conjugates memory and history, producing iridescences that flare up the intimate with historical resonances. Mendoza’s style is constructed around this particular form of illumination.

The play of light in Mendoza’s novel might offer a spatial rejoinder to the question posed earlier in the chapter about the imaginary character of the past Mendoza’s narrative strives to recuperate. Commenting on Proust’s magnum opus Joshua Landy emphasizes “the notorious structure of the Proustian sentence […] a novel written entirely in distended, convoluted, barely legible blocks” (136). Read in consonance with Mendoza’s *El perro*, Landy’s characterization inevitably raises the question of the “compromise between foreign form and local materials” (Moretti, “Conjectures” 60), given that, as I have already argued, the affirmation of a Proustian/high-modernist aesthetic in the context of the Mexican 1980s inevitably pushes against the chronological boundaries of the Western tradition. Any engagement with Mendoza’s stylistic affinities cannot be read in isolation from this particular question. To attempt a provisional answer, it is necessary to turn our attention to the often neglected synchronism between the turn toward memory in the context of the global 1980s (Traverso 54-58), the consolidation of a new form of epistemological irrationalism (Osorio 2009)—captured by the Derridean
truisms *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*—the ends of teleology and “grand narratives,” and the rise of what Jean-François Lyotard famously termed “the postmodern condition” on the one hand, and the economic, political, and ideological crisis of 1982 on the other. These are the coordinates of the emergence of a new form of interaction between memory and history that Mendoza’s *El perro de la escribana* so thoroughly captures. As Enzo Traverso has argued, “The interaction between history and memory is grounded in a given *regime of historicity*: the experience and the perception of the past shaping a society at a particular moment” (57). The interplay between memory and history in Mendoza’s *El perro* specifies for a Mexican context the historical tipping point where remembrance no longer functions “as a key element of […] utopian imagination” (Traverso 71). The demise of the industrial pattern, ingrained with a stout teleology of progress and earmarked by the growing contradictions of “a corporatist development project that had become deeply dependent on foreign capital” (Thornton 193), provided the setting for the renouncement of Mexico’s revolutionary past as a possible site of utopia, a past that throughout the mid-decades of the twentieth century became subsumed under the developmentalist promise of an autonomous capitalist road out of underdevelopment (Chapter 2).

This crisis of historicity is echoed in *El perro de la escribana’s* disorderly temporalities. With her face pressed against a window Leona remembers “Lo que ya se fue y espero en la tarde viendo llover las aguas hoy, reales en mi vieja vejez de muchacha que recuerda la mañana tras la lluvia, cuando entran los futuros donde están él, tú y un perro” (79). The world that lies outside Leona’s window turns out to be not the portentous
realization of the promise of her childhood, but the corroboration of its falsity. From an immutable present Leona finds herself longing for the futuros she was able to contemplate through the windows of her childhood: “Como de costumbre la boca, la nariz y la frente las pego al cristal y las gotas parecen resbalarme encendidas por la cara. Y escucho los recuerdos de lo que voy a ser de grande” (75). In the same way that light charges the intimate with historical resonances, memory’s temporal passageways produce a set of allegorical reverberations that obtrude the idyllic harmony of Leona’s reverie, tying it to the country’s developmental frustrations. Thus, the interplay between memory and history weaves together “the permeable membrane of everyday life where the moment-to-moment affective shifts of subjectivity are fused with the historically variable rhythms of social life” (Hartley 221). Leona’s memory is, in the strictest sense, a memory of dilapidation, and despite the ideological underpinnings of her search for lost time, it is the construction of memory as an individual right, as emancipated from the collective aspirations of revolution, that speaks to the break in continuity presupposed by the transition from an industrial to an export-oriented pattern of capital accumulation.

Leona’s experience of the past is recreated in sotto voce: “Se puede recuperar el tiempo perdido si cierras los ojos y memorizas los pensamientos de las mujeres que te antecedieron y de los hombres que te habitaron en la sangre” (125-6). Sitting by the window of time Leona chooses to close her eyes and lose herself in thought. The world outside her window has ceased to be experienced as the actualization of the past. Herein lies the allegorical impulse of Mendoza’s El perro, a kind of diachronic disavowal that opens the novel to multiple meanings. Under this light, the case for interiority made by
Mendoza’s *El perro* can be reimagined as a symbolic struggle against the temporality of modernity, a form of involuted resistance: “La escala de Jacob, la escalera de tu primera vida; la pubertad, y la muerte de las cuatro tías Gomitas que vivieron detrás de la puerta que hoy miras, y que si abrieras, la boca del lobo sindical devastador te comería, Caperuza, porque ya no está el comedor balsámico, ni un segmento de su arborescencia, añicos de tu historia que en el temblor resistes allí, en el punto de partida de otro de tus refugios antediluvianos” (68). Revolution behind closed doors seems to capture best the contours of the new regime of historicity. Thus, Mendoza’s phantasmic restoration, her appeal to ‘antediluvian refuges,’ offers itself as a form of periodization, an experiment in novel articulations between systems of emotion, artistic language, and the stirrings of history.
Chapter 4: Openings

Some version of the opposition between materialism and idealism, body and mind, presence and absence, can be derived from the first and last scenes of Daniel Sada’s monumental *Porque parece mentira la verdad nunca se sabe* (1999). The 90+ (or so goes the story) character-600 page novel recounts the aftermath to the electoral fraud in the local elections of Remadrín, a desert town in the state of Capila. A swarm of narrative voices collates Remadrín’s recent history and the tragic events that transpire after a group of neighbors marches down on the state’s capital, Brinquillo, to protest the barefaced robbery of the ballot boxes. The robbery, carried out by an armed squad, is orchestrated by the state’s governor as a last resource to hold on to power. In response to the protest, state forces open fire against the crowd, ultimately disbanding the march and killing many. The dead bodies are loaded onto a truck that begins a journey around the state looking for the relatives of the deceased. The somber, unforgettable opening lines of the novel read: “Llegaron los cadáveres a las tres de la tarde. En una camioneta los trajeron—en masa, al descubierto—y todos balaceados como era de esperarse. Bajo el solazo cruel miradas sorprendidas, pues no era para menos ver así nada más paseando por el pueblo tanta carne apilada, ¿de personas locales? Eso estaba por verse” (17) From the outset, the novel enters an approximative mode that will come to define the entire narrative.¹ Who exactly asks if the bodies that just arrived belong to “local people”? The answer is actively delayed: “that remained to be seen.” In successive approximations, the novel will close in on that which “remains to be seen,” but the *truth* will continue to emphatically resist becoming known. Moreover, the novel’s opening sequence produces
the “shock of an unexpected encounter” (Jameson, Ancients 5), a startling image that, saturated with dreary undertones, prefigures the energies of neobaroque excess, limited only by bodily inertness (inertness that, as will soon become evident, does not benefit from the prospect of salvation). Six hundred pages later, bringing the novel to a close, a note, written on a piece of cardboard, first hammered into a door, is carried away by the wind and toward its final crucifixion: “entre siete espinas: ya no recado mas sí cual orla de una chumbera” (606). Here, in this desertic Golgotha, ornament will finally dissolve into substance; language will, “tono tras tono,” decay into sap. Between the two scenes lies the realm of emplotment, now constituted as a problem of reconciliation, as arrival metamorphoses into exodus, weight into lightness, stillness into motion, and so on. This is, in spatial terms, a problem of trajectory, of narrative roads that open themselves to contradiction, as if, in a spatial paradox, one could traverse the same road in two opposite directions simultaneously.

As such, this is ultimately a problem of narrative frameworks, of the formulation of a mechanism or motivation that allows to conjoin opposites in sound, internally coherent ways. Porque parece mentira [PPM] constructs such framework through the circuitous integration of poetic and practical language, an operation that, as a whole, contests, or rather expands “the laws of spending and economy of poetic language” (Shklovsky 161) in their own terms (more on this shortly). In Shklovsky’s own words, The goal of art is to create the sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing things; the device of art is the ‘enstrangement’ of things and the complication of the form, which increases the duration and complexity of perception, as the process of perception is, in art, an end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is the means to live through the making of a thing; what has been made does not matter in art.” (162; my emphasis)
Duration is the measure of complexity; the complication of the form its mechanism. Shklovsky’s emphasis on perception (vosprijátije), I argue, proves indispensable to approach a novel—and more generally a style—that has been routinely described as the epitome of exuberance. In formalist nomenclature, *PPM* operates as a deautomatizing machine, a device of deceleration and distortion that brings the novel close to the perspectival mechanics of anamorphosis. Before moving forward, let us recall that, as Bergson has unequivocally established, duration is not simply a matter of temporality, but rather a question of space proper. Thus, the enstranging effect of *PPM* is tied to the question of spatialization, which is itself a problem derived from the adaptation between unity and multiplicity: “we shall see that all unity is the unity of a simple act of the mind, and that, as this is an act of unification, there must be some multiplicity for it to unify” (Bergson 80). In *PPM* prolongation narrativizes the Bergsonian antinomy “one in intuition but multiple in space” (81). Following Bergson’s observation that “the very admission that it is possible to divide the unit into as many parts as we like, shows that we regard it as extended,” (82) I conceptualize *PPM*’s architecture—as illustrated in its fifteen periods, divided into a fortuitous number of chapters of irregular length—as a string of mathematical points, each of which “is separated from the following point by an interval of space.” (83) In what follows, I designate this ‘interval of space’ as an opening, simultaneously deployed as a spatial code that mediates the production of space in *PPM* and which, in the Mexican context of the late 1990s, produces a spatial contestation to the geopolitics of late capitalism (Harvey, *Spaces* 69-116).
Accompanying PPM's enstranging effect then, is a certain politics of division and discontinuity, an active resistance to unification which, in narrative terms, can be transposed as a resistance to plot as fixed form. “[W]hen we look at number in its finished state,” writes Bergson, “this union is an accomplished fact: the points have become lines, the divisions have been blotted out, the whole displays all the characteristics of continuity” (83). While a certain resistance to totalization, to narrative closure is symptomatic of PPM’s modernist armature, what rather interests me here is the way in which the novel’s emphasis on discontinuity tends to foreground the procedural character of formation, or, to return to Shklovsky, of the making of a thing, its process. Through its investigation into the convolutions of duration and distortion, PPM antagonizes the consummated unification of narrative, it contests the influence of fixation. The interval thus emerges as a site of variance, and there is a case to be made for a conceptualization of space in the novel as intervallic in nature—a case I will argue throughout this chapter. While a profound animosity toward composition, structure, and limits underlies PPM’s investments in the practice of undecidability—a practice that has been generally read as a discursive rebuttal of state power and its control mechanisms—I believe a reconceptualization of the novel’s spatiality is imperative if we are to jettison the formal straps of fragmentation in favor of the pursuit of new possibles.5

North Literature, in the meanwhile, began to care for dialects.

Viktor Shklovsky, “Art, As Device”
In 1988, responding to an invitation to contribute a piece to the annual art show of
the San Diego-Tijuana-based Border Art Workshop, Richard Lou developed *Border
Door*, a performance/installation that sat on the U.S.-Mexico border near Tijuana’s
International Airport for nearly two days before it was taken down—presumably by the
Border Patrol (Berelowitz 163). The installation consisted of a freestanding door with
134 detachable keys that hung from nails that had been hammered into the door’s south
side. After completing the installation, Lou visited the neighborhood where he grew up
and other popular neighborhoods in Tijuana, handing out keys as an invitation for people
to walk through the door. The artist recalls: “I handed out between 200 and 300 keys and
invited people to use my border door, to open it with a key and cross the border with
dignity. The keys on the door were for the people I couldn’t encounter… It really was a
way to counter the image of the undocumented migrant running through the night, cutting
through wire, being illegal” (qtd. in Berelowitz 164). *Border Door*, writes Guisela
Latorre, “was a sight to behold in the barren and foreboding landscape of the border
region, often described as no-man’s land, a place where people pass but never stay.”
Richard Lou’s *Border Door* emphatically produced an opening in the U.S.-Mexico
border, a safe passageway that cut across the coastal sage and chaparral ecoregion of
Baja California.

Tellingly, Richard Lou built *Border Door* so it could only be opened from the
Mexican side (Latorre). Perhaps inadvertently, the installation thus challenged the
architectural reciprocity between acts of opening and closing (Janson and Tiggs 207):
while powerfully capturing the formal possibility offered by the door’s frame for
“penetrating from the outside,” Lou’s invitation to the undocumented migrant to step into *el otro lado*, simultaneously precluded the possibility of “breaking out from within” (Janson and Tiggs 207). More could be said and has been said about Richard Lou’s *Border Door*, especially in relation to the separation of the public from the private. But for now, I want to hold on to the architectural problem posed by *Border Door* and try to align this question to the literary cartography of the so-called northern Mexican novel.

Despite the widespread use of the label *literatura del norte*, the murky boundaries of the Mexican ‘North’ have continually challenged the formulation of a stable corpus associated with the term “Mexican northern literature.” Debates about the appropriateness of the category have been manifold, with most authors using the term to refer, under unstable parameters, to the literature that originates in Mexico’s septentrional region6 and/or the collection of works that center the cultural geographies of Mexico’s northern territories. Interestingly, the architectural metaphor has found its rightful place among literary studies devoted to Mexico’s *literatura norteña*. Nora Guzmán, for instance, refers to Ricardo Elizondo as the “narrative architect of the Northeast” (147-67) and Lorena Piña Gómez writes about the “aesthetic architecture” of Élmer Mendoza’s *El amante de Janis Joplin* (319-29). The term *norte*, and the symbolically adjacent *desierto* and *frontera*, compose a triad traversed by profound spatial reverberations. However, as many authors and critics have repeatedly pointed out, despite the triad’s centrality in contemporary Mexican literature a *literatura norteña* or *literatura del norte* existed long before the twentieth century came to a close, although with few exceptions, such genealogy developed as an undercurrent in the open waters of the Mexican literary
system. In what follows, I use the term “northern literature” and the more ecologically driven *literatura del desierto,* to refer to the body of literary works that share a concern with the production of space and place that specifies the topographic transition between Mexico and the United States—where the toponymic signifiers simultaneously act as placeholders for the uneven geographies of the Third and First Worlds, underdevelopment and development, dependency and imperialism.

To return to the question at hand, the spatial predicament posed by Richard Lou’s *Border Door* in many ways echoes the historical crossroads produced by the industrialization of the U.S.-Mexico border, starting with the hydraulic engineering projects of the 1920s and 30s—such as the Don Martín dam and the irrigation systems that provided the setting for José Revuletas’s *El luto humano* (1943)—and continuing through the Bracero Program (1942-64), the Border Industrialization Program that replaced the latter in 1965, and the sustained construction of manufacturing and border town complexes in the 1970s and 80s. This long process reached its apex in 1994, with the entry into force of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Like Lou’s *Border Door,* which counterintuitively canceled the possibility of “breaking out from within,” the industrialization of northern Mexico was a one way road into capitalism. At the same time, the joint processes of urbanization and industrialization that altered the face of Mexico’s northern borderlands rapidly overturned the pattern of isolation that for the first 150 years after the independence (1821) stubbornly dissociated Mexico’s northern territories from the rest of the country. As it turns out, the rise of the maquila industry along the U.S.-Mexico border coincided with the deterioration of living...
conditions in Mexico City in the aftermath of the 1982 debt crisis. Commenting on the economic displacements experienced in Mexico throughout the 1980s, Claudio Lomnitz indicates that “As the primary center of an industry that was geared to the domestic market, conditions in Mexico City deteriorated dramatically, while Mexico’s northern and border areas prospered in relative terms” (“Depreciation” 50-1). As an era of privatization and structural adjustment set in, the industries that used to cater to Mexico’s domestic market—for the most part located in Mexico City’s peripheries—were gradually replaced by free-trade zones along the border. The once upon a time closed door of the Mexican economy, would soon become an allegorical opening in the context of a new international division of labor and the regional integration of North America.

These processes consolidated what Miguel G. Rodríguez Lozano refers to as “el aceleramiento narrativo de la frontera” (31). Significantly, the literary cartography of the Mexican novel of the NAFTA era retraces the spatial displacement entailed by the rise of a new export-oriented pattern of capital accumulation in the long journey north that many of its characters undertake. In Roberto Bolaño’s *Los detectives salvajes* (1998), a group of characters escapes from Mexico City and journeys into the vastness of the Sonoran Desert in search of the visceral realist poet Cesárea Tinajero: “Pasamos como fantasmas por Navojoa, Ciudad Obregón y Hermosillo. Estábamos en Sonora, aunque ya desde Sinaloa yo tenía la impresión de estar en Sonora. A los lados de la carretera veíamos a veces alzarse una pitahaya, nopales y sahuaros en medio de la reverberación del mediodía” (566). In Julián Herbert’s autofictional *Canción de tumba* (2011), the main character and narrator reflects upon his early childhood: “Viajé desde el sur profundo,
año con año, armado de una ardiente paciencia, hacia las espléndidas ciudades del norte” (78); he then adds: “Soy una bestia que viaja, hinchada de vertigo, de sur a norte. Mi tránsito ha sido un regreso desde las ruinas de la antigua civilización hacia la conquista de un Segundo Advenimiento de los Bárbaros: bon voyage; Mercado Libre; USA; la muerte de tu puta madre” (79). In Yuri Herrera’s Señales que precederán al fin del mundo (2009), Makina rides a bus that takes her “hasta el límite de la tierra;” the passengers “Atravesaron el país sin hacer ningún comentario sobre el paisaje” (36).

It is not hard to find an ecospatial orientation, a term Lowell Wyse has recently used to refer to “a way of comprehending place in simultaneously ecological and geographical terms” (2), in many of the novels associated with northern Mexico. In Daniel Sada’s PPM, a man steps into the desert to search for his missing children only to lose himself amidst a “panorama de cactus vigilantes” (27). Likewise, in the opening scene of Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz’s Mezquite Road (1995) a man reaches out for his binocular to inspect “de un extremo a otro, el horizonte, como si quisiera comprobar que toda aquella soledad desértica se hallaba, en ese momento, libre de intromisiones” (9). In the topographical imagination of the Mexican novel of the NAFTA era, north, desert, and border are spaces that authenticate the regional dimension of many narratives, they produce a sense of place that is closely tied to the particularity of the landscape. On the other hand, I wish to argue that these spaces simultaneously assert the physical and material experience of a given social order, namely global capitalism. This is to say that in their spatial and temporal patterns, north, desert, and border provide us with representational codes to interpret a world structured around what Sandro Mezzadra and
Brett Nielson refer to as “a proliferation but also […] a heterogenization of borders” (3), in short, a representational code to interpret the geopolitics of late capitalism.

In his 1954 essay “Building Dwelling Thinking,” Martin Heidegger already argued that “A space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary […] A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its *presencing.*” (152) From this angle, the U.S.-Mexico border, the Sonoran desert, the proverbial North, qua spaces, have been made room for, have been produced, signposted by circulatory rhythms, migration patterns, and commodity and value exchanges across vast, transnational geographic areas. Something *begins its presencing* in the abstract space that constitutes the U.S.-Mexico border, something other than, but inextricably linked to, the dotted line on the map (first traced between 1849 and 1855) and the fifty-odd border crossings between the two countries. No one like Gloria Anzaldúa captured the social density of this space when she wrote: “The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds.” Always already porous and simultaneously impenetrable, north, desert, and border are synchronous acts of opening and closing. Can literary form capture this spatial frame? Can Mexican northern literature formalize the threshold where something begins its presencing? While the instantiation of spatiality in Mexican literary studies has been mostly geographical, with attention to matters of place and territory, I believe that a certain invitation to engage in political formalism (Kornbluh 2019) is readily available in the spaces of representation of Mexico’s *literatura del desierto.*
According to Eduardo Antonio Parra, northern Mexican narratives possess three core attributes: “la omnipresencia del paisaje y el clima en los relatos, la proximidad geográfica de los Estados Unidos que trae como consecuencia los embates de la cultura norteamericana, y el lenguaje característico de los norteños “ (73). Perhaps these attributes can, to a certain degree, be extended to the bordering aesthetic of Chicanx literature; in the opening scene of Reyna Grande’s *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2006), for example, Adelina stands next to her father’s grave: “Adelina took a deep breath, then turned to look at the sea of shrub and cactus stretching out around her. The terrain seemed to never end” (2). On the Mexican side of things, Élmer Mendoza’s *Un asesino solitario* (1999), often considered the opening chapter in the saga of Mexican *narcoliterature*, has been consistently celebrated for its “deployment of regional linguistic forms and cultural themes” (Sánchez Prado, “Persistence” 359). While cartographically generative, the close attention to matters of place and territory that animates most of the literature produced in the symbolic vicinity of the Rio Grande has, for the most part, been used to center the situated knowledge that arises from the border region. Attention to topographic vastness, migrant paths, hybrid spaces, and transborder species has specified for the U.S.-Mexico border Saskia Sassen’s observation that “place is central to many of the circuits through which economic globalization is constituted” (177). Thus, the *literatura del desierto*’s focalizations (spatial, liminal, linguistic) already negotiate key aspects of globalization’s rationality.

Having established some basic elements of the *literatura del norte*, I now wish to briefly return to *PPM* and the question of the circuitous integration of poetic and practical
language, since it is here that a first intersection between the production of situated (vernacular) knowledge and the complication of the form arises. In reference to Sada’s style, Rodríguez Lozano argues:

Su arte de narrar, su prosa de un lirismo agobiante, lo colocan fuera de cualquier marco de referencia entre sus contemporáneos. La literatura de Sada, más que ninguna otra hecha por los nacidos en los cincuenta, es, en suma, de una exquisitiz verbal que no cualquier lector está dispuesto a enfrentar. Es en el lenguaje que emplea, lleno de regionalismos, neologismos, arcaísmos, en donde se marca la diferencia con los otros autores; es la utilización de la rima y el uso de endecasílabos, octosílabos, heptasílabos, alejadraninos, donde se localiza su propuesta estética. La posición de este autor frente a lo que escribe exige, de entrada, un lector atento, entusiasta tanto por el verso como por la prosa; se trata, en definitiva, de una literatura para unos cuantos, una literatura esteticista.”

Rodríguez Lozano places the integration of vernacular (practical) and poetic language as the element that separates Sada from other authors of the literatura del norte. 10 Parra, offering a general characterization of these narratives, points out that “Clima y paisaje son ineludibles en esta narrativa […] el ambiente los orienta hacia el realismo: gustan de contar lo que sucede en vez de someterse a la introspección para sacar a la luz su intimidad. Como el ámbito es fundamental, se infiere que en sus historias

predominan la acción dramática y el movimiento” (73, my emphasis). Through the integration of practical and poetic language PPM, then, defies the realist orientation of the literatura del norte. In Sada’s novel, what practical language sets in motion, poetic language decelerates. Poetic language hobbles dramatic action through a formal evacuation of intelligibility. This enstranging effect elevates the novel’s title to the status of a theorem.
The eccentricity derived from the juxtaposition between practical and poetic language endows *PPM* with baroque density. Núria Vilanova argues that Sada’s language “is rather baroque, formed by long, unusually organized sentences and unfashionable verb forms with a dash of old Spanish” (106). Likewise, Héctor Rodríguez de la O describes *PPM* as a “monumental muestra de arquitectura literaria barroca” (61). The complex embroidery of *PPM* pushes against the economy of language derived from the vernacular impostures of the *literatura del norte*. The enstranging effect produced by the juxtaposition breaks apart the economic aims of practical language (its impulse toward efficacy and the economy of form). *PPM* arrests motion through elongation:

“Trenzamiento pian-pianito, la anécdota que se engorda. Hilos que en busca de nudos—pretensión inoportuna—no los encuentran y aún siguen, seguirían los devaneos, surgirían datos de más, por frenesi o por capricho, hasta no imponer ensartes: a propósito ¿quizás?, y no obstante proseguir como fuera, por rebane, pero por la misma vía (256). As Rodríguez de la O has pointed out, “Prácticamente toda la novela hace uso de la digresión como estrategia narrativa. Una digresión, además, particular y densa en detalle, de una voz narrativa que gusta de la enunciación pormenorizada, enumerativa y acumulativa” (84). But such characterization leaves us once again facing a problem of unification (of number and quantity), and, as we have already established, this is, in essence, a spatial predicament.

*Desert, Border, Necker Cube*

Hay una truculencia secreta operando en la mayoría de los paradigmas para comprender la frontera; hay un budismo asesino, una contracultura
transnacional que saca provecho de estas visiones, que las está usando. Por eso, para recuperar la mirada fiel a la frontera, primero tienen que ser deconstruidos, identificados, la serie de discursos estéticos que la definen, las versiones en juego, para que, detrás de tales mitos, sea redescubierto la realidad política que los erige.

Heriberto Yépez, “Estéticas de los confines”

At the beginning of this chapter, I referred to the architecture of PPM as a string of mathematical points which led the novel to engage in a certain politics of division and discontinuity. This first approximation must now be revised and further developed by way of Deleuze’s well-known formulation of the baroque as an operative function which “endlessly creates folds” (227). Following Leibniz, Deleuze argues:

> a flexible or elastic body still has coherent parts which form a fold, with the result that they do not separate into parts of parts, but rather divide infinitely into smaller and smaller folds that always retain a certain cohesion. What is more, the labyrinth of continuity is not a line which would dissolve into independent points, like sand flowing in grains, but is like a piece of fabric or a sheet of paper which divides into an infinite number of folds or disintegrates into curved movements, each one determined by the consistency or the participation of its setting […]

Always a fold within the fold, like a cavern within the cavern. The unit of matter, the smallest element of the labyrinth, is the fold, not the point, which is never a part, but only an extremity of the line. That is why the parts of matter are masses or aggregates, as corollary to the compressive elastic force. The unfold is thus not the opposite of the fold, but follows one fold until the next. (231, my emphasis)

The opposition between the line (dissolving into independent points, “separable minima”) and the labyrinth (dividing into an infinite number of folds, disintegrating into curved movements), otherwise assimilated as the opposition between separability and
cohesion (elasticity), determines *PPM*’s conceptual articulations of the built and non-built environments, the highway and the desert.

A character speculates about the day of the massacre: “Eso no fue balacera, fue coheterío, y ahí les voy… El ejército probó unos cohetes muy modernos y lo hizo en un desierto, pero ¡ojo!, uno de los tantos que hay en Capila y, por lo mismo, de los tantos que hay cerca de una carretera…” (110) The characters of *PPM* move across the desert through a geometrical system of “carreteras solitarias.” The system traces a Cartesian grid that orients the characters across an otherwise nebulous landscape: “había por fin agarrado recta, de esas rectas carreteras que abundan en el desierto, por decir: casi infinitas, por no decir: demenciales” (495). The obstruction of the rule of order (law) implied by the perpetration of the massacre is spatialized by the obstruction of the highway that connects the inhabitants of Remadrín with the ‘outside’ world: “se cerró la carretera. El tráfico fue desviado muchos kilómetros antes, justo donde se bifurcan el camino a Fierrorey (por donde obligadamente debían circular los muebles) y el que va rumbo a Brinquillo y se prolonga hasta el sur. También por el otro extremo hubo una desviación, en Brinquillo, a las afueras, nadie podía utilizar la carretera que va hasta el mero Villa Dunas” (91-2). The truck that carries the dead bodies arises people’s suspicion precisely because it moves freely across the impassable highway: “cerrada la carretera desde ayer cómo explicar que ellos con su cargamento anduviesen circulando” (113). In contrast to the highway system’s infinite straight lines, *PPM* constructs the desert as infinitely porous, “that is spongy or cavernous without empty parts, since there is always a cavern in the cavern” (Deleuze 230). A character, fearing for his life, considers: “Debo
retirarme ya. Esconderme en una cueva, si es que encuentro por aquí... Debo situarme
bien lejos de esta horrible carretera... Si supiera manejar me arrancaría a Pencas Mudan
y me iría hasta el otro lado... Mmm... Debo perderme en el monte aunque sea por unos
días... Perderse, recomponer. Huir de la policía que no tardaría en llegar” (152). The
desert’s complex network of caves and mountain hills, shrubs and cacti, produces organic
hideouts, obstructions, and intermittences that ensnare the landscape of Capila.

The desert’s density, its representation as a space ‘without empty parts,’ sharply
contrasts with commonplace images of the desert as empty, barren, or vacuous. “The
most common conception of deserts and arid lands,” writes Diana Davis, “is that they are
barren, deforested, overgrazed lands—wastelands with little value” (1). Moreover, as
Natalie Koch explicated, “deserts are frequently narrated as ‘empty’ to justify their
transformation into toxic zones of extraction” (87). *PPM’s* neobaroque objectivation of
the desert is significant no only in itself, but as an exemplary incarnation of the *literatura
del desierto*’s ecospatial orientation (Wyse). Mexican northern literature’s invocation of
the desert as a narrative environment reformulates free-trade’s loosened mobility in
ecological terms, whether by approximating the desert as the terrain of accelerated
exchange (economic, cultural, etc.) or by composing it as a locus of determent. Gómez
Montero constructs this problem as one that is specific to all ‘literatures of the border’:
“En un *espacio* ‘vacío’ no hay poética, no hay literatura (a la manera de Bachelard): sólo
estando ‘lleno’ el espacio, el lenguaje—la materia prima de lo literario—comienza a
levantar una estructura literaria, en donde contexto y escritura se corresponden y se
influyen mutuamente. Así, construida a partir de la diversidad y de la lejanía (diversa y
‘lejana del ‘centro’), por un lado, y preñada de parentescos lícitos e ilícitos, la literatura de las fronteras (de cualquiera frontera) es siempre un híbrido que intermitentemente busca escapar de la madre, del origen: a veces intentándolo de manera consciente” (59). The spatial generosity offered by the desert and its symbolic proximity to the Mexico-United States border makes it, in many respects, consonant with the notion of cultural hybridity popularized by Néstor García Canclini in his *Culturas híbridas* (1990). Although I am not particularly interested in the valence of the desert as a hybrid space, the primacy of such interpretation in bordering matters warrants at least some commentary before moving forward.

“Rigidity means death,” writes Anzaldúa; hybridity (Deleuzian elasticity) means life, seems to be the aphorism’s implicit adjudication. In Latin American cultural studies, hybridity has been heralded as the solution to the problem of “la incertidumbre acerca del sentido y el valor de la modernidad” (García Canclini 14). Reference to hybrid circuits, cultural heterogeneity, and oblique powers is oftentimes used to specify the unstable relation between tradition and modernity, or, better yet, a kind of Latin American perennial ‘postmodern condition.’ For García Canclini, “concebimos la posmodernidad no como una etapa o tendencia que remplazaría el mundo moderno, sino como una manera de problematizar los vínculos equivocos que éste armó con las tradiciones que quiso excluir o superar para constituirse” (23, my emphasis). Spatially, hybridity/hybridization entails the disruption of the physical distribution of things (commodities, art works, historical records, etc.) produced by modernity: “El desarrollo moderno intentó distribuir los objetos y los signos en lugares específicos […] Sin embargo la vida urbana
transgrede a cada momento ese orden” (280). The result is, in Deleuzian key, a process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization: “la pérdida de la relación ‘natural’ de la cultura con los territorios geográficos y sociales, y, al mismo tiempo, ciertas relocalizaciones territoriales relativas, parciales, de las viejas y nuevas producciones simbólicas” (288). The spatial claim that the recourse to deterritorialization enables, or perhaps that interests me most in the context of the present study, is to move away from the supposedly idealized core-periphery model, “en el que las gradaciones de poder y riqueza estarían distribuidas concéntricamente: lo mayor en el centro y una disminución creciente a medida que nos movemos hacia zonas circundantes” (292). Hybrid spaces are, in contrast, inherently decentralized, or, in Renato Rosaldo’s effective characterization, spaces “marked by borrowing and lending across porous cultural boundaries, and saturated with inequality, power, and domination” (87). Hybridization would belie the ‘stability’ of cultural essentialisms and their homogenizing declarations. “¿Pero este discurso es creíble?” (45) satirizes Yépez.

In CLACSO’s recent Diccionario de términos críticos de la literatura y al cultura en América Latina (2021), Mónica Bernabé situates the term culturas híbridas alongside other notions—heterogeneidad, transculturación, mestizaje, entre-lugar, and zona de contacto—“empleadas para describir y explicar los cruces entre lo tradicional y lo moderno, lo hegemónico y lo subalterno, lo nacional y lo cosmopolita, lo oral y lo escrito, lo bajo y lo alto, el arte y la artesanía, lo mediático y lo folclórico, en suma, los progresivos y vertiginosos desmantelamientos de las divisiones sobre las que se asentaban las parcelas disciplinarias de las humanidades y las ciencias sociales” (155).
The rejection of oppositional criticism and disciplinary boundaries that marked the so-called ‘cultural turn’ in Latin American studies—a rejection often glossed over by way of an irenic reference to complication—simultaneously led to the “further, implied claim […] that ‘hybridity’ has some intrinsically radical or emancipatory efficacy” (Larsen *Determinations* 93). The latter position, as Larsen points out, became the basis for the epistemological decoupling of cultural analysis from the conditions of possibility and necessity produced by a specific historical context. This brief overview should not only allow us to better reflect on the general character of the approximations to Sada’s novel and their underlying relation to the workings of hybridity, but motivate us to construct the novel itself as a reflection on the markedly *historical* recomposition of Mexico’s ‘porous cultural boundaries’ in the context of the consolidation of a new export-oriented pattern of capital accumulation. Let us then return to the question of the desert in order to explore *PPM*’s echoes and disagreements with hybrid transfigurations.

Certainly, there are many instances where a hybrid function is at play in *PPM*’s neobaroque formalizations. “Para ser un buen espectador,” comments García Canclini in reference to the videoclip, “hay que abandonarse al ritmo, gozar las visiones efímeras” (285). However pertinent to describe *PPM*’s celebration of fragmentariness, something I will return to in the next section, it would be impossible to derive from it the conclusion that Sada’s novel produces a world that is an “efervescencia discontinua de imágenes, el arte como *fast-food*” (285), since, as we have already established, there is nothing easily digestible in Sada’s style nor in the novel’s convoluted structure, the latter demands from the reader a laborious search for continuity amidst recurrent “violations of the
chronological order” (Codebò 121). Similarly, it is not possible to affirm that Sada’s gargantuan hybrid lacks “paradigmas consistentes” or “referentes de legitimidad” (García Canclini 307), the novel itself a literary homage to the poetry of early modern Spain and its distinct meter and prosody, although it is also undeniable that the novel embraces “la copresencia tumultuosa de todos [los estilos]” (García Canclini 307), perhaps most notably in the closing segment where an overly practical id (marked in parenthesis and underscored) and an interceding super-ego (in parenthesis and italicized), battle over the oneiric sequence narrated by a disoriented ego (“¿DESDE DÓNDE ESTOY HABLANDO?” [573, 574, 575]). This sequence—engaged in a politics of citation that stretches back to Fuentes’s La muerte de Artemio Cruz and Rulfo’s Pedro Páramo—violently oscillates between the practical and the poetic to produce what we might call, using Bakhtinian terminology, an intentional or conscious hybrid.

So what does the desert and its folds have to do with such hybrid arrangements? For one, the desert, much like PPM’s system of citation, is an extended scenario where different temporalities confront and coexist with each other. This condition, masterfully ironized throughout the novel in the characters incredulous engagement with the telephone, the radio, and other electric appliances (“–¡Sí!, que radios y licuadoras, y aparatos como esos, incluidos los teléfonos y también los abanicos, tienen bombas escondidas” [273]), has, not surprisingly, been a foundational preoccupation of Latin American social theory since the very beginning. Here, the problem of combination—whose epistemological valence subsumes that of any form of hybridization—, indeed offers a generative opening to historicize the peripheral character of Mexican capitalism.
From René Zavaleta’s notion of abigarramiento to Agustín Cueva’s articulación de modos de producción, from Ruy Mauro Marini’s conceptualization of superexploitation as the defining attribute of dependent capitalism to debates around the capitalist or non-capitalist character of the region, Latin America social theory has consistently been confronted with the dialectical relation between separability and cohesion outlined above.

In PPM this problem is narrativized through the figures of Dora Ríos and Olga Judith, who mobilize different temporalities that end up collapsing onto each other:

\[
\text{Pero de las dos ¿quién fue?: Dora Ríos u ¿Olga Judith?, Menuda combinación en suspenso todavía, siendo que su parecido (deslíndese a Mario Pérez de la Horta, por supuesto), y contínúas en la noche, daba igual, por igualito, quien fuera, o ¿no?, o de vencida al retomar por asperges la pérvida semejanza el distingo se limita a \textit{dos épocas distantes que el azar enlaza y cuela:} primero fue Olga Judith, entonces fue la causante, y a su pesar, sin embargo, su perfecta imitadora a destiempo apareció, y eso sirve para esto: la premisa es bien que mal el cómo fue que la criada se hizo fantasma a su modo, más aún si se toma en cuenta que en Remadrín nunca antes existieron como tales, no al menos tan evidentes. De suyo, recomponiendo, la redundancia, si bien, viene a ser como un destrabe que a la fuerza se anticipa. (501, my emphasis)}
\]

Dora Ríos acts as a spectral redundancy of Olga Judith, a narrative fold that connects two different epochs, an image of what Bloch would call a non-synchronous contradiction.

To conclude this section, then, I wish to argue in favor of an interpretation of the desert and the border in PPM as spaces determined by this constitutive contradiction and, therefore, as paradigmatically peripheral spaces. Further, I argue that PPM’s formalization of the desert registers the specific patterns of combination and synchronicity that account for the peripheral character of Mexico’s neoliberalization. To do so, I wish to borrow from Ignasi de Solà-Morales the category of terrain vague, which
the Catalan architect uses to describe those *residual* spaces that are “internal to the city yet external to its everyday use”:

In these apparently forgotten places, the memory of the past seems to predominate over the present. Here only a few residual values survive, despite the total disaffection from the activity of the city. These strange places exist outside the city’s effective circuits and productive structures. From the economic point of view, industrial areas, railway stations, ports, unsafe residential neighborhoods, and contaminated places are where the city is no longer. (120)

de Solà-Morales continues:

Strangers in our own land, strangers in our city, we inhabitants of the metropolis feel the spaces not dominated by architecture as reflections of our own insecurity, of our vague wanderings through limitless spaces that, in our position external to the urban system, to power, to activity, constitute both a physical expression of our fear and insecurity and our expectation of the other, the alternative, the utopian, the future. (121)

Displacing de Solà-Morales’s characterization beyond the metropolitan and into the national, we might ask if the desert is not, similarly, a space determined by such negation of architecture, an unconfined space where the nation is no longer, a transitional space that carries the insecurity derived from an encounter with the unknown and the expectation of the not-yet-being. In its indefiniteness, the desert simultaneously operates as a site of primitive violence and primordial shelter, a repository of superfluity—wasteland, slum, station—and a bustling concourse for global exchange. “La frontera es,” wrote Monsiváis in 1977, “literalmente, el punto de confluencia entre el desastre económico y la prisa por salir de ese hoyo interminable, esta pobreza manejada por caciques y latifundistas y abandono federal” (“Prólogo” 3-4). In the context of global capitalism, the allusion to *caciquismo/cacique*, also a central concern of Sada’s novel (“Entendió el gobernador que no era un asunto fácil desprenderse de un cacique cuya...
influencia regional nadie podría discutir” [136]), points to “the extreme tension between an open facade and a closed interior, each independent and both regulated by a strange, preestablished correspondence” (Deleuze 239). The perspectival problem posed by this extreme tension is resonant not only with the question of combination outlined above (which could naturally be displaced to interrogate Mexico’s apertura democrática) but with the more abstract, formal question of non-orientability.

The desert becomes the spatial repository of this tension (“Pero, bueno, es que también dentro de las paradojas caben otras paradojas, cunden las contradicciones, y de resultas ¿qué más?” [117]), a space that is simultaneously outward and inner-looking, a space charged with ambiguity. The desert reproduces the non-orientability of the Necker cube. Formally, the desert ceases to operate as a topological space. Read as a non-orientable space, the desert exhibits a structural polyvalence that opens it to dialectical interpretation. Like a Necker cube, the lack of stable perspectival cues forces the desert’s orientation to oscillate between economic disaster and utopian possibility, two concomitant states that condition one another reciprocally. Disorientation becomes a temporal interval in a struggle for reorientation, the border vacillates between limit and horizon.

*Formal Intervals*

How does *PPM* engage with the tension between limits and expansion, with the apposition of territorial boundaries and futural space? Let us begin by revisiting the novel’s cartographic arrangements. Remadrín, Capila, and many other toponyms that appear in the novel, are either entirely fictional or artful variations of well-known names
in Mexican geography. The name Capila echoes the name of the northern state of Coahuila; Brinquillo, that of its capital, Saltillo; Fierrorrey, the industrial cityscape of Monterrey, and so on (Sobrinas-Sabinas, Torción-Torreón, Arras-Parras, Nuevo Airón-Nuevo León). In addition to this series, the name Mágico, an ingenious distortion of México into Magical, firmly situates the novel south of the U.S. border, in the vicinity of the Chihuahuan desert, which stretches across northern Mexico and into West Texas, New Mexico and Arizona to form the largest desert in North America. In the novel, the names of all the places located south of the border have been altered in one way or another, north of the border however, toponyms remain intact, and so the characters of *PPM* fluently refer to Austin, McAllen, Brownsville, or simply the United States or Canada. Some characters daydream about crossing the border, others are violently pushed toward it, in any case, in the spatial composition of *PPM* the world beyond the border becomes a latent apparatus that makes the transmuted spaces of Remadrín-Capila-Mágico stand in relation to a larger sociospatial order. The desert is the element that sutures both worlds together, simultaneously a passageway and a deterrent; a place—the material ground of situated knowledge—and a boundary, a dialectical act of opening and closing.

The consistency of this boundary contrasts with the muddled properties of Sada’s style. Codebò argues that “A mutual sense of inconclusiveness runs through the sentences (language), the characters’ lives (content), and the stories (narrative), stitching together every level of the novel into a coherent assemblage marked by impotence and disorientation” (118). The disorienting praxis that defines the novel as a whole (language, content, narrative) runs into a cartographic rigidity that is hard to miss and/or avoid.
Perhaps because the toponymic pattern can be easily construed as an all too obvious witticism or a genealogical strategy (Zavala, “Genealogía”), its formal implications have been commonly glossed over in favor of interpretations focused on the dreadful violence that transforms the world of Remadrín into a modern purgatory. Carolyn Wolfenzon, for example, comparing Sada’s Remadrín to Rulfo’s Comala argues that “El objetivo de Sada […] es mostrar un México apocalíptico donde ni siquiera queda una voluntad de diálogo posterior a la muerte. Ni hay un sentido filial ni comunitario […] El duelo rulfiano es reconstructivo mientras que la postviolencia de Sada no tiene ninguna promesa” (157). In this reading the overwhelming violence effaces any form of sociality. “Sada está sugiriendo,” Wolfenzon continues “un mundo impostado desde su origen, donde las utopías, si alguna vez se planearon, ya fueron olvidadas, un mundo donde no hay posturas políticas claras y donde las rivalidades se enfrentan a base de violencia” (165).

These interpretations notwithstanding, I believe a formalist approach to Sada’s novel might offer new, constructive answers to the question of how to build sociality in the face of human tragedy.

In the last section I referred to the desert in *PPM* as saturated space, space ‘without empty parts,’ infinitely receding onto itself. This formulation, intimately tied to the overall process of the production space and place, is ambitiously replicated by the novel’s syntax. In a decisively self-reflexive scene, Egrencito concludes after nine consecutive failed attempts to begin a letter to Romeo Pomar, the *alcalde-cacique* of Remadrín: ”¡Fuera los chulos remilgos! A cambio lo intempestivo, el acre sacudimiento para dejar que la tinta corriera sin ton ni son como por una llanura donde todo es puro y...
pobre; que se manchara de letras (hierbas, cactos y serpientes) lo virginal y briloso de una árida hoja en blanco” (130). The sonorous interjection jettisons the prim manners of letter-writing in favor of the unexpected, an inclination toward deformity, disfigurement, and excrescence. Freed from the shackles of convention the ink saturates the paper’s white surface with the forms of the desert: grasses, cacti, snakes. The peculiar transposition captures the unwonted aperture the so-called *literatura del desierto* produced in the fabric of Mexican literature in the late 1980s and 90s, the acrid convulsion that brazenly smirched the luster of high-modernism’s aesthetic refinement.

Through an intense use of punctuation, *PPM* produces as many other interferences (ink blots in both literal and figurative sense) that continually push the plot away from the reader. The use of the colon, semicolon and ellipsis effectively challenge the plot’s linear development\(^\text{15}\), contributing to its well known circular configuration (cf. Chapter 2).

I wish to define this aesthetic as one of scansion, caesura, and enjambment, three poetic figures that produce and reproduce syntactic intervals throughout the novel.

Scansion, the analysis of verse to show its meter, revolves around the separation of stressed and unstressed syllables. A pipe symbol (|) is typically used to single out the basic repeating rhythmic unit in a given line of verse. I am interested here in scansion as a form that dissolves meaning into rhythm, a graphic obstacle that hinders signification in favor of localized accentuation. Meanwhile, caesura, a rhetorical break in the flow of sound, serves here to pinpoint the conversational cadence of the dialogue, the murmurs, gossip, and chitchat that erratically sketch the novel’s anecdote but always fall short of completing its authentication. Finally, enjambment, the running over of a sentence from
one verse into another, is here used as a spatial code that mediates between a tumultuous narrative that sprawls across 600 pages of baroque superfluity and the geographic vastness of the desert that envelops Remadrín and its inhabitants. The overall effect is one of scintillation, of spatial outbursts that focalize with microscopic precision the social milieu of Remadrín only to immediately destabilize it by way of spatiotemporal leaps that prevent the novel’s plot from fully coming into focus.

*PPM* carouses in interruption: “Tras lo trágico, un enlace, pero antes, ¡alto aquí!, a manera de intermedio refrescante: unos minutos…” (87); “no está mal abrir aquí un paréntesis que sirva de enlace o acotación, antes de entrarle a lo dicho por el líder de Trevita” (394); “Y ahora vámonos de prisa como si ya, de una vez, diésemos un salto enorme a través de varios meses. Entonces pues, véase esto…” (128). Throughout the novel, Sada opens and closes narrative doors, elevates plot lines that suddenly disappear. An intricate maze of analepsis and prolepsis challenges continuity on a structural level; this motion is, in turn, mirrored by the grammatical unevenness that gives sentences and paragraphs an altitudinal, one is almost tempted to say three-dimensional modulation:

Gran trabajal contemplado: si con suavidad dicaz por los guachos esa noche. Si en otro sitio más amplio el pastel de los cadáveres, mismo que ya no sería: pastel no: por lo enlodado de aquel camión militar. Y el arranque, por lo tanto: otro chofer: más sumiso; ¡y con cachucha!: al igual que los compinches: no tres: sino quince fieles prestos… ¡Imagínense el reparto y con armas de lo peor!… Así la secundación del mueble que al «ahi se va» anduvo por carretera y por brechas exhibiendo—¡qué descuido!—al descubierto a: ¡momento!: como lo que viene ahora es detallado en extremo, lo mejor será contarla de manera telegráfica, así que: dos muebles; ida hacia… sur… ¿suroeste?; uno: atrás otro: igual ritmo; desvío a dieciséis kilómetros: desde donde hasta: bien noche; tramo: temporal: cerrado; radio: radios: ramillete—según—de órdenes, o sea: floración de una—según—; muy adentro del desierto: el alto: hacer una fosa: hacerla ellos: tardadísimo: chofer y compinches de antes: ¿tres?,

From the start, the octosyllabic meter (Gran | tra | ba | jal | con | tem | pla | do) establishes the rhythmic pattern (now dominant, now residual) that informs the whole segment. The sequence is punctuated by a series of interjections (“¡y con cachucha!,” “¡qué descuido!,” “¿tres?,” etc.) that cut in on the already convoluted/motley (abigarrada) narration. The sequence comes to a halt after the narrative voice pauses (“¡momento!”) and hinders the action through an explicative digression (“como lo que viene ahora es detallado en extremo, lo mejor será contarlo de manera telegráfica”). The string of words that follows, an uneven conflation of nouns, adjectives, expressions, exclamations, etc., drag meaning through the syntactic intervals that follow each colon and semicolon. The “telegraphic fashion” of the second half of the segment, strategically deployed to circumvent the labyrinthine protocols of something that is but cannot or will not be “detailed in extremity,” produces an undetermined account of the moment when a group of soldiers (guachos) overlooks the driver of the truck and his associates (compinches) dig a mass grave to bury the bodies. The truth about the act is lost in the fissures that the rhythmic notation creates—an operation exacerbated by the juxtaposition of the octosyllabic meter to the rhetorical scansion produced by the graphic repetition of the punctuation mark.

Akin to musical notation, punctuation continually dissolves meaning into rhythm, tone, and frequency. Oswaldo Zavala similarly considers that PPM “es una novela que
registra la imposibilidad de la representación. El relato permanece en la superficie del lenguaje, donde la relación de forma y ritmo de las palabras define cada aspecto del proyecto” (37). As meaning vanishes from the page, formal intervals begin to surface. Thus, scansion, caesura, and enjambment provide a notation of absence, of what cannot be told, the phantasmatic, the disappeared. The system of punctuation provides a rhythmical pattern that operates autonomously from the sequence of narrated events. The aesthetic of scansion produces formal intervals that dissolve the solidity of Remadrín-Capila-Mágico. “En el desierto es difícil esconder barbaridades,” (108) states one of the characters, however, the truth about the state crime that sets the novel in motion remains fundamentally obscured. Codebò has rightly noted that “Not a single story in Sada’s novel arrives at an actual end point. As the narrative leaves its characters either stranded in the middle of nowhere or back where they began, what readers experience is an uncomfortable sense of helplessness” (117-118). As if standing in the middle of a syntagmatic desert, what prevails throughout the novel is an infinite sense of disorientation. I argue that this experience is precisely what aligns a novel like Porque parece mentira with the material practices of globalization. Disorientation is what ultimately gives spatial form to the transnational order of late capitalism.

Disorientation and indefiniteness give way to intervalllic spaces. In a well known characterization of the intervalllic Alain Badiou argues: “In an intervalllic period [...] the revolutionary idea of the preceding period, which naturally encountered formidable obstacles—relentless enemies without and a provisional inability to resolve important problems within—is dormant. It has not yet been taken up by a new sequence in its
development. An open, shared and universally practicable figure of emancipation is wanting. The historical time is defined, at least for all those unamenable to selling out to domination, by a sort of uncertain interval of the Idea” (39). The interval is the terrain of the uncertain. Badiou continues: “During these intervallic periods, however, discontent, rebellion and the conviction that the world should not be as it is, that capitalo-parliamentarianism is in no wise ‘natural’, but utterly sinister—all this exists. At the same time, it cannot find its political form, in the first instance because it cannot draw strength from the sharing of an Idea” (40). It is in the failure to produce (create, build, rather than find) a political form that Badiou’s characterization of the intervallic interests me as a provocation to engage PPM’s aesthetic ruminations. While literary criticism has tended to foreground the novel’s commitments to excess, disorientation, and formlessness, it is nonetheless necessary to admit that an underlying preoccupation with consistency, while far from dominant, is, as I have already argued in relation to the novel’s cartographic arrangements, its periodical architecture, and the formal citation of the rhythmic structures of early modern lyric, similarly discernible. In all these instances rigidity, symmetry, and composition offer a formal counterpoint to the workings of dispersion.

Read as attributes of an intervallic order, these inner tensions open PPM to the question of futurity: “Pero había otra pregunta más indeterminada, abierta hacia el futuro e imposible, por ende, de cerrarse: ¿Trini... cómo poder asir lo que fue y podría ser más?...” (46) This open question resurfaces throughout the novel: “la enjundia para el futuro” (117); “la promesa de un futuro risueño y desenfadado” (145); “y ¡órale!, ¡a correr! Y sin maletas, ¡ni modo!, correr, ¡correr!... ¡tras el futuro!: fresca figuración: ¡su
nueva vida!” (336). The expediency of the characters’ imagined futures notwithstanding, the novel embraces the intervallic uncertainty derived from Mexico’s transition from an industrial to a new export-oriented pattern of capital accumulation, it inhabits the interspaces produced by a heterogeneous collection of individual wants in the absence of a collective framework to confront the despotic command of late, multinational capital.

**Countertopographies**

If we are to break out of the non-historical fixity of *post*-modernism, then we must search out and counterpose an alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the wide margin of the century, a tradition which may address itself not to this by now exploitable because quite inhuman rewriting of the past but, for all our sakes, to a modern *future* in which community may be imagined again.

Raymond Williams, “When was Modernism?”

Discontinuous expansions, leaps, intervals, point distinctly to the space of globalization, a space marked by “the suppression of distance […] and the relentless saturation of any remaining voids and empty places” (Jameson, “Cognitive” 351). Spatial disorientation is the imperial outcome of rhizomatic congestion. In the saturated space of global capital, the fundamental structures of social life dissolve into thin air, they become, in Jamesonian fashion, unmappable. What we are left with are discontinuous realities, freestanding worlds whose separateness cannot be conceptually overcome. In the face of disorientation, literary criticism and critical discourse more generally have embraced the local as a territorial anchor to resist the windstorms of globalization.16 This
being the case, an ever more nuanced approximation to place, to varying forms of situated knowledge has become a significant front in the struggle to salvage life (human and non-human, present and future life) from socioecological devastation. However, it seems to me that one of the unintended consequences of this spatio-analytical turn toward the local has been the simultaneous refusal of the social necessity and emancipatory possibilities of abstraction. To close this chapter, then, I wish explore the politics of abstraction by elaborating on the speculative prospects derived from the novel form’s countertopographical imagination. An inherently comparative project, a literary countertopography aims to construct, from the situated knowledge produced by a particular literary work, a conceptual springboard to abstractly apprehend capitalism’s structure and process.

Cindi Katz first used the term countertopography to designate the analytical operation by which the traces of globalization that are experienced in a particular milieu might be “made translocal and connected to other specific topographies affected by global processes in analogous ways” (1229). Katz makes the case to consider “the intersecting effects and material consequences of so-called globalization in a particular place, not to valorize either experience or the local, but, quite the opposite, to reveal a local that is constitutively global but whose engagements with various global imperatives are the material forms and practices of situated knowledge” (1214). The formulation poses with rare clarity one of the key predicaments for political organization, namely the risk of indulging in the complacent valorization of experience and the local, their romanticization, at the expense of understanding the constitutive relation between
material forms and practices of situated knowledge and capitalism’s global imperatives.

The centrality of place to late capitalism’s day-to-day operations, a question formulated earlier in this chapter in reference to the *literatura del desierto*, is similarly explored by Katz in relation to georeferencing and data processing, which attest “the integumentary nature of topographical knowledge to the imperial practices glossed as globalization” (1215). Thus, Katz concludes, “Homogenization is not the script of globalization so much as differentiation and even fragmentation” (1215). Katz’s countertoopographical approach seeks to upend globalization’s fragmented conventions, and this is precisely the kind of valence a literary countertoopography might have in its engagement with the modernist afterworlds of Mexican literature. “Thus, without romanticizing the local scale or any particular place, I want to get at the specific ways globalization works on particular grounds in order to work out a situated, but at the same time scale-jumping and geography-crossing, political response to it” (Katz 1216). This scale-jumping mechanism would delineate analytic ‘contour lines’ to apprehend capitalism’s procedures both at the level of their interconnections and iterations:

Topography is resolutely material. But there are productive metaphorical entailments of the idea as well […] Topography is associated not just with the description of place but also with measurements of elevation, distance, and other structural attributes that enable the examination of relationships across spaces and between places. The material social practices associated with globalization work in interconnection, such as when capital, labor, or cultural products move from one place to another, but they work iteratively as well: the effects of capitalism’s globalizing imperative are experienced commonly across very different locales, and understanding these connections is crucial if they are to be challenged effectively. Topographies provide the ground—literally and figuratively—for developing a critique of the social relations sedimented into space and for scrutinizing the material social practices at all geographic scales through which place is produced. (Katz 1229)
I would like to briefly consider the ‘productive metaphorical entailments’ of the topographical, as well as the figurative ground it provides to develop a critique of the production of place, since it is at the level of the figurative/metaphorical that the project of a literary countertopography might be said to operate. This, of course, should not be taken as a peremptory dismissal of the material social practices that shape the experience of globalization, but merely as an all too obvious reminder that no lived experience is immanent to representations of space themselves, that the problem at hand is one of interpretation and, therefore, one that is traversed by the persecutions of transfiguration and transcoding, i.e. of mediation.\textsuperscript{17} As Neil Smith suggests, “The material and metaphorical are by definition mutually implicated and no clear boundary separates the one discretely from the other. Metaphors greatly enhance our understanding of material space—physical space, territory—just as our spatial practices and conceptions of material space are fecund raw material for metaphor.” The point, however, is not to dissolve the latter into the former, but “to articulate the connections between material and metaphorical conceptions of space in order to understand the sources and potential of metaphorical power” (63). Thus, our metaphorical emphasis is simply meant to establish a point of departure to analyze the relation between the material spaces of everyday life and their literary representations, a relation that takes on the form of what Lefebvre called \textit{topias}: “isotopias, heterotopias, utopias, or in other words analogous places, contrasting places, and the places of what has no place, or no longer has a place—the absolute, the divine, or the possible)” (163-4). The abstract proportion (from the Greek \textit{analogia}) between material and metaphorical space reappears here as a speculative distance that
makes possible to establish relations of interconnection and iteration across levels of analysis.

The problem is in essence one of variation. “Variation,” wrote Schoenberg, “means change. But changing every feature produces something foreign, incoherent, illogical […] Variation, it must be remembered, is repetition in which some features are changed and the rest preserved […] Frequently, several methods of variation are applied to several features simultaneously; but such changes must not produce a motive-form too foreign to the basic motive” (8-9). Thinking through the countertopographical as a variational mechanism might also allow us an unexpected return to the problem posed at the very beginning of this chapter, namely that of the complication of the form. Reading counternaturally allows for a kind of analogy where literary topias, narrative variations of social space, become a spatialized form of enstrangement. “Art is the means to live through the making of a thing; what has been made does not matter in art.” (Shklovsky 162). A literary countertopography similarly does not concern itself with what has been made, but rather with the topographic elevation derived from the novel’s world-making operations, the analytic contour lines that give the novel’s space its altitude in relation to the ‘basic motive’ of social space.

The political prospect derived from Cindi Katz’s original topographical analysis is stated as follows:

My argument is that if the disruption of social reproduction in Howa and Harlem are two effects of a common set of processes, and I think they are, then any effective politics challenging a capital-inspired globalization must have similar global sensitivities, even as its grounds are necessarily local. This is different from a ‘place-based’ politics. It is not merely about one locale or another, nor is it a matter of just building coalitions between
such diverse places, vital as it is. Precisely because globalization is such an abstraction, albeit with varying forms, struggles against global capital have to mobilize equivalent, alternative abstractions. Built on the critical triangulation of local topographies, countertopographies provide exactly these kinds of abstractions interwoven with local specificities and the impulse for insurgent change” (Katz 1232).

Not exactly derived from the critical triangulation of local topographies, but rather from the variational proportion between social space and literary form, literary countertopographies similarly outline speculative paths to imagine different forms of sociality.

In a more recent defense of abstraction, this time coming from the field of literary studies, Anna Kornbluh suggests that “Form is not delimited but prismatic projection of other spaces […] political formalism affirms the constituting power of abstraction to make possible alternate, heterogenous, disparate social spaces […] integral forms make new relations possible. Abstractions also liberate” (106-7). The project of a literary countertopography embraces the compositional impulse of form as a vehicle for the production of alternative abstractions to the abstract logic of capital accumulation, abstractions analytically developed from the spatial composition of a particular literary work.

To conclude this chapter, I wish to return to Daniel Sada’s *PPM* to briefly interrogate what a countertopographical approach to the study of literary form might look like.

We left the characters of *PPM* standing in the middle of a syntagmatic desert, overcome by an infinite sense of disorientation. We established that the space of the novel, the world of Remadrín-Capila-Mágico, is determined, on the one hand, by the
geographic peculiarities of the desert, on the other, by a geometrical system of highways that, like a Cartesian grid, allows the characters to move across the desert’s topographic vastness. These two spaces become conceptually entangled in a key, self-reflexive scene of the novel, when an “enthusiastic cartographer,” named Hermenegildo Buenrostro, suddenly appears with a self-made map of Capila that he is adamant on selling to the state’s governor. Once sold, the map, supposedly comprising every single geographical feature of Capila, is to replace the “inexact,” “crooked” maps that are used across the state’s school system. Complementing the map is an almanac-like compendium with infinite information of the infrastructure, economic activity, and demographics of the region. This “costly document” contains all sorts of statistical data: the distance that separates each town from one another, the number and kinds of animals in every single village, the exact location of bridges (made of both concrete and timber), and so on. Hermenegildo’s cartographic aleph is a material record of everything that exists in Capila.

But the promise of omniscience embedded in the map and its accompanying document becomes quickly undone once Hermenegildo picks up a red pencil and draws a line, an “exact divisive stroke,” moving from east to west, that cuts the state into two “perfect halves.” The new line reorients the drawing in a way that belies the absolute knowledge presupposed by the map and the statistical notebook. While a series of towns already insinuated the line by way of their position on the map, the line itself, the axis that divides the state into two perfect halves is an imaginary projection that cannot be reduced to any one single element in the literary geography of the novel. However, once
this projection is incorporated into the map, the new axis becomes a constitutive part of
the spatial order of Capila, an element that distorts the topographic outline of the novel’s
world. As he contemplates the altered map, the buyer is suddenly able to project onto the
new space his past, present, and future, which he symbolically distributes from the lower
half of the drawing, to its center, to the promissory opening that lies to the “north” of the
red line.

The cartographer’s mischief upends the spatiality of *PPM*. The red line alters the
map’s composition, transforming the cartographic document into a roadmap leading not
into *el otro lado*, but into the future, the line reorients the world of Capila toward futurity.
The act of reorientation is magnified by the fact that, upon his arrival, our “enthusiastic
cartographer” asserts that “el mapa de Capila era apenas una muestra del caudal de mapas
creados a su modo, y por lo mismo, con absoluto albedrío, de ciertas partes del mundo”
(441). The prospect of a collection of maps that might be recomposed in similar fashion,
with absolute will, using metaphorical ‘contour lines’ that connect one locale to another,
mobilizing abstractions to imagine new forms of sociality, new worlds beyond the border,
is not only intuitively countertopographical, but also, it seems to me, deeply necessary in
the wake of the current ecological, reproductive, and humanitarian crisis that has pushed
the world into an unbeknownst threshold.

While the spatiality of *PPM* firmly situates life in a small town in Northern
Mexico within this planetary threshold, the novel’s countertopographical imagination
invites us to recompose this space into a historical possibility. The realization of such
speculative path, the production of the spatial boundary where a different world could
begin its presencing, remains part and parcel of the project of a literary countertopography.
Conclusion: Boundaries

The fact that boundaries lack sharp definition must not be allowed to blur the qualitative nature of the decisive distinction.

Georg Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat”

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that Mexican literature’s affirmation of a modern universality, that is, the Mexican novel’s formal adhesion to the aesthetic postulates of modernism, became the dominant narrative disposition in the context of Mexico’s transition from and industrial to an export-oriented pattern of capital accumulation, i.e. as the developmental aspirations of the Mexican state moldered under the weight of a new international division of labor, and as the deepening contradictions inherent in dependent industrialization exhausted the historical viability of the national-popular state. While the modernist impulses of earlier decades—from Azuela and Campobello to Rulfo, the early Yáñez, and Fuentes himself—captured the jubilant expectancy of an “emergent cultural practice” (Williams, Marxism 124), modernism’s redundancies only became unambivalent in the context of what Eric Zolov has referred to as a critical ‘long decade,’ spanning the years between 1958 and 1973 (2). Thus, throughout this dissertation I have engaged modernism not as the exhilarating subject of premonition and anticipation, but as a dominant configuration; as the normative dogma of literariness, of “universalized cosmopolitanism” (Deckard 353). While modernism’s paradigmatic ascendancy continued to hold sway throughout the second half of the twentieth century, a series of narrative impetuses began to challenge modernism’s literary predominance toward the turn of the century—including the Crack Group’s contradictory
engagement with the politics of commercialization and aestheticization (which could have been the subject of another chapter of this dissertation), the realist dispatches of Mexican crime fiction and the so-called literatura del norte, the countercultural extensions of Guillermo Fadanelli’s literatura basura, the realist/irrealist reformulations of Roberto Bolaño,¹ and the unique experimentalism of Cristina Rivera Garza. These apertures would continue to develop as modernism transitioned into a cultural residual.

At the risk of abusing Williams’ category,² to conclude this dissertation I wish to argue in favor of a historical correspondence between the Mexican disavowal of the aesthetic postulates of a modern universality, and the authoritarian reconfiguration of the Mexican state in the context of the global financial crisis. To begin with, let us recall Williams’ argument according to which “It is in the incorporation of the actively residual —by reinterpretation, dilution, projection, discriminating inclusion and exclusion—that the work of the selective tradition is especially evident. This is very notable in the case of versions of ‘the literary tradition’, passing through selective versions of the character of literature to connecting and incorporated definitions of what literature now is and should be” (Williams, Marxism 123). Although Williams uses the term to refer to a broader characterization of the process by which past cultural elements become incorporated into a dominant culture, I believe the figure is helpful to explore modernism’s cultural decline and its “reinterpretation, dilution, and projection” in the context of what Fredric Jameson has called “The surrender to the various forms of market ideology” (Postmodernism 263), a capitulation that, since the declaration of the so-called “Mexican Drug War” (2006), has had as one of its corollaries the increased use of subjective (direct, physical, political,
ideological) violence as a stabilizing supplement to the objective (systemic, economic) violence produced by the “self-engendering monster” (Žižek 21) of capitalism.

The Mexican state crisis has been punctuated by the violence of femicide and drug-trafficking, two parallel phenomena tied to the deepening project of economic deregulation and trade liberalization that rationalized the regional integration of North America. The apogee of the maquiladora industry and the abandonment of Mexican agriculture, are but two of the most salient features of the export-oriented pattern of productive specialization that drastically reshaped Mexico’s economy in parallel to the entry into force of the North American Free Trade Agreement. In reference to the border city of Ciudad Juárez, Melissa Wright argues that “As with the femicides, the principal targets of the violence associated with the drug trade come from the city’s working poor, whose productive labor established Ciudad Juárez’s reputation as a profitable hub of global industrialization in the era of the North American Free Trade Agreement” (707-8). Throughout the 90s, the forced displacement of entire populations and their demographic concentration in poles of economic activity tied to export production, gave way to ever more dramatic forms of what Mike Davis, following Clifford Geertz, has termed “urban involution,” defined as “spiralling labour self-exploitation (other factors fixed) which continues, despite rapidly diminishing returns, as long as any return or increment is produced” (27n90). The intensification of this cycle under the conditions of exploitation specific to dependent capitalism, has given place to a pattern of accumulation whose continued expansion depends on its capability to subject growing segments of the working class to living conditions that emphatically compromise their immediate
reproductive capacity. The inherent instability of this social order calls for punitive mechanisms capable of insuring that large portions of the population remain subjected to a situation of everyday death. Whereas the affirmation of a neoliberal common sense upheld the imaginary dissociation of subjective from objective violence—a natural conclusion to the ideological separation between the realm of economics and the realm of politics discussed in Chapter 3—the crisis derived from the exhaustion of the export-oriented pattern of productive specialization, I argue, has forcefully revealed the artificial character of such dissociation.

Mexican studies’ efforts to theorize literature in this context, have, for the most part, revolved around the affirmation of ‘necropolitics,’ ‘necropower,’ and ‘necrowritings’ (“always in plural” [10] writes Cristina Rivera Garza) as processes that gain centrality when fiction has become insufficient to capture the experience of everyday violence in Mexico. In Achille Mbembe’s now classic formulation, necropolitics and necropower “account for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead” (40). Such approximation has emphasized the experience of objective violence as the qualitative differential in today’s world. Rivera Garza, arguably one of the touchstones of this elaboration, articulates the problem in the following terms: “What does it mean to write, today, in such a context? What are the challenges for writing, when professional precariousness and gruesome deaths are the stuff of everyday life?” (2)
Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado offers a possible response when he considers “whether the novel-form remains a site to perform [an against-the-grain literary world-making] kind of utopian work” (“Writing” 145). The answer has been, more often than not, a negative one: “some of the most significant literary writing today […] has moved to post-fictional and non-fictional modes of writing due to a sense, I think, of *either the exhaustion or the insufficiency of the novel-form to deal with the intensities of Mexico’s necropolitical present*” (“Writing” 146, my emphasis). A similar opinion was advanced in 1969 by Carlos Fuentes when he referred to a “crisis internacional de la novela”, although, as we know, the formal stakes of Fuentes’ denunciation were quite different: “Lo que ha muerto no es la novela, sino precisamente la forma burguesa de la novela y su término de referencia, el realismo, que supone un estilo descriptivo y sicológico de observar a individuos en relaciones personales y sociales” (*Nueva* 17). What back in the 1960s appeared as a supersession of realism in favor of modernist form, reappears in the present as the supersession of the novel-form in favor of post- or anti-fictional writing. While the suggestive echoes make it easy to argue that this is, in fact, a transitional moment, a historical conjuncture that forwards the disintegration of a dominant mode of literary representation, what interests me most about the perceived insufficiency of the novel-form to *relay the experience* of objective violence (Mexico’s necropolitical present) are the implications of this argument to “the possibility of accounting for form at a moment when literature and culture are conceived primarily as isomorphic” (Di Stefano and Sauri).
The experiential emphasis of many recent literary and theoretical approximations to the Mexican context, has ultimately aligned the field of Mexican studies with what Anna Kornbluh has termed “anarcho-vitalism,” a methodological attitude that sustains “the culminating conviction that life springs forth without form and thrives in form’s absence” (Order 2). Against such formless inclinations, I argue that the historicization of modernism might provide formal codifications to apprehend the structural couplings of subjective and objective violence at the end of accumulation. I conclude by presenting a brief overview of this process by turning my attention to Fernanda Melchor’s 2017 novel, *Temporada de huracanes*.

Modernism as Cultural Residual

No obstante —oh paradoja— constreñida

por el rigor del vaso que la aclara,

el agua toma forma.

José Gorostiza, “Muerte sin fin”

The vast and rapid commercial success of Fernanda Melchor’s *Temporada de huracanes*—translated into German, Dutch, and English almost immediately upon publication—and its by now amply documented politics of citation, which stretches all the way back to the modernist aesthetic of the Latin American Boom—particularly to Gabriel García Márquez’s *El otoño del patriarca*4 (1975) and José Donoso’s *El lugar sin límites* (1969)—make it clear that, on the one hand, Latin American modernism continues to be projected onto the definition (to return to Williams) of what literature now is and should be, on the other, that despite the thematic synchrony that situates the novel
alongside other literary efforts to think through questions of gender and gender violence, corporeality, and grief, as form, Melchor’s novel cannot exist but against the isomorphic grain of contemporary Mexican literature.

The problem posed by *Temporada*’s extemporaneity has given way to characterizations of the novel as a “genealogical rarity” (Sánchez Prado, “Signification” 66), a “parodical reinterpretation of Magical Realism” (Di Bernardo), a particular form of “realismo sucio” (Domínguez Michael), or, quite plainly, a fusion (hybrid?) that “ofrece la oportunidad de escapar de esta machacona dicotomía” between “obras centradas en la estética, el lenguaje y sus procedimientos” and works that “privilegan el registro de la llamada ‘naturaleza humana’ y, en particular, el de los diversos horrores que se abaten sobre la sociedad” (Ortuño 54). The curious symmetry produced by characterizations of the novel as realist (through its use of vernacular language and the direct representation of violence) and modernist (through its resistance to narrativization, use of multiple points of view, recourse to fragmentariness, ambiguity, etc.) has, despite its obvious, and I would argue generative, implications for the analysis of “the rise and withering away of new elements of form” (Lukács), been generally overlooked in favor of content-based analyses that seek to confirm the novel’s pertinence to the context of the Mexican crisis, while tending to shy away from its contradictory celebration of formal un-originality. But beyond the emphasis put on the novel’s investigation into the workings of gender violence (the event that sets the novel in motion, as is well known, is the discovery of the dead body of La Bruja, a transgender woman) and other forms of brutality and immiseration, that is, despite the emphasis on the representation of individualized
experiences of subjective violence, the politics of form disclosed by the novel’s
genealogical singularity manifest the need to historicize the interrelation of subjective,
objective, and symbolic violence, and thus, might in fact be reread as an invitation to
“resist the fascination of subjective violence, of violence enacted by social agents, evil
individuals, disciplined repressive apparatuses, fanatical crowds” (Žižek 11) and other
*endriagos* (Valencia 2018). I argue that *Temporada* composes this invitation through a
formal contrivance that sets the style of the paragraph against that of sentence.

As it’s already been established, *Hurricane Season* is a polyphonic novel whose plot is sparked when a
group of children discover the corpse of La Bruja. A central plot point
(spoiler alert) is that La Bruja is a trans woman who provides subterfuge
to young men conflicted in their masculinities and queer desires. Melchor
structures the book around her murder, but the narrative structurally resists
the convention of noir and of detective fiction, rhizomatically navigating
the voices and perspectives of different people involved, and articulating a
never-coalesced narrative voice produced by the meandering across the
consciousness of individual characters. The novel is written in a prose
style that can only be properly described as furious: all the chapters are
written in a single, continuous paragraph characterized by punctuation and
flow that recreates oral narratives, alternating between first, second and
third person, full of vernacular expressions, calculatedly aggressive. The
action unfolds in a non-chronological way, focusing on the crime but
interspersed with many flashbacks. (Sánchez Prado, “Signification” 65)

On top of all (seven) chapters being written in a single, continuous paragraph, the
first six chapters progressively increase in length, heightening the difficulty of moving
from one paragraph to the next one. As the paragraph-chapters continue to expand, the
‘flow’ of oral narrative starts to look less like a literary end (the recreation of vernacular
language) than a means to produce an incremental structure where disparate narrative
voices dissolve into the smooth, geometric progression of a logarithmic spiral. As the
novel continues to develop from a one to a sixty-page long paragraph, histrionic excess, the “violenta habladuría que mantiene a los personajes con vida” (Robles Lomelí 438), laboriously crafted into every one of the sentences, is gradually repurposed into a collection of building blocks whose ornate difference becomes subordinated to their accretive function, i.e. to their involvement in the formation of a dense, compact structure whose solidity depends not on any individual sentence, but on the sweeping effect produced by the sentences’ associational form.

In an interview conducted in 2020, Sophie Hughes, the English translator of the novel, notes in reference to Melchor’s use of free indirect style that Temporada strikes “a balance between compulsive readability and stylistic novelty.” In her response, Melchor states that “For me it’s always a struggle to find the best way to tell a story; if the form is too simple, it bores me. If it’s too twisted, I worry the reader will throw away the book after a couple of sentences, so yes, finding balance is always a challenge.” The ‘balance’ Melchor refers to, and that strikes Hughes as one of the novel’s successes, points to the reappraisal and problematization of the realism-modernism debate in the context of an ongoing socioecological crisis, where realism’s “compulsive readability” (fueled by the urgent need to ‘confront’ reality, to tell a ’specific story’) collides with modernism’s dedication to “stylistic novelty” (the formal mandate to ‘make it new’). Thus, it would be wrong to see in Temporada’s modernist reaffirmation a mere product of repetition, a literary oddity that belongs to a different era, as such critical appraisal would inevitably lead to the conclusion that her modernism fails because it foregoes ‘originality.’ I argue that, on the contrary, the significance of Melchor’s candid celebration of stylistic
temperance (which can be mapped onto the sentence-paragraph couplet as described above), lies in its distinctly residual instantiation of a modernist aesthetic, that the efficacy of her modernism resides in its ability to disclose the problem of the historicization of form. Any attempt to approach the novel’s formal affinities with the aesthetic pursuits of the Latin American Boom, would necessarily have to account for the fluctuating function of modernism’s postulates under radically different historical circumstances, since formal repetition does not, in any case, yield historical equivalence. Following this line of inquiry, to conclude, I would like to suggest a somewhat sophistic characterization of Melchor’s novel, oversimplified to accommodate the opposition between a modernist sentence and a realist paragraph, where the former no longer operates as a dominant function and the latter subdues the former’s protocols of dispersion.

I believe this approximation might move us closer to providing an answer to how Temporada inhabits or, in fact, formalizes, the problem of mediation, which as Jameson writes in relation to Sartre, is the problem of “How do we pass […] from one level of social life to another, from the psychological to the social, indeed, from the social to the economic? What is the relationship of ideology, not to mention the work of art itself, to the more fundamental social and historical reality of groups in conflict, and how must the latter be understood if we are to be able to see cultural objects as social acts, at once disguised and transparent?” (Marxism xiv-xv). The interpretive schema that I suggest, would construct the novel as simultaneously realist and modernist, a text that, to use one of Jameson’s provocations, “uses and then questions the experimental” (“Antinomies”
The political claim of such formal proposition, would lie in the formulation of an interpretive function that allowed us to consistently move between the two poles of the equation, from the use of modernism’s experimental principles to their summary interrogation. This is precisely the kind of operation that Temporada de huracanes performs through the compositional dynamism established between sentence and paragraph.

The polyphonic character of the novel and the discursive disorientation that follows the declaratory agglomeration of narrative voices, lends itself to the modernist appetite for experimentation. Melchor uses the sentence as a vehicle to navigate the social fabric of La Matosa—a fictionalized town tied to the sugar cane and oil industries of the Mexican Gulf coast. The alternating point of view, unconventionally long sentences, and arbitrary temporal leaps produce a complex texture that binds together the social universe of La Matosa. Moreover, the narration’s velocity produces a constant state of agitation that mirrors the chaotic and disorderly subjection of the characters to the experience of everyday violence. For one of the characters in the novel, “el enemigo está en todas partes” (212). Next to the polyphonic narration, the recourse to digression produces a disorienting principle that forces the reader to restlessly move across the ‘seamless web’ of social life in a frictionless, unstructured way. The modernist sentence favors the psychologization of the narrative, to the point where echoing sibilances—what Jafte Dilean Robles Lomelí studies under the form of gossip—take over the rhythmic pattern of the novel, swiftly forcing the reader from one characters’ stream of consciousness to the other.
Temporada’s realist paragraph offers a formal counterweight to this kind of discursive ephemeralia, of desultory mishmash. The paragraph’s uniformity interrogates the decisive individualism of the sentence. First, second, and third person voices, alternating temporalities, are integrated into a narrative structure that brushes over their difference to produce an amalgam of even consistency. Discussing Henry James’ theoretical designations of the novel, Anna Kornbluh underscores the former’s drive to produce a “masonry of densification” (34). In their own way, the characters in Melchor’s novel are trapped within a similar configuration; the realist paragraph defines a template that accounts for the social structure in which Temporada’s characters too are “determinatively enclosed” (Kornbluh 35). Thus, Temporada formalizes mediation itself, the interpretive act of passing from one level of social life to another, of moving from the psychological to the social, to the economic, and viceversa. The point, of course, is not that the novel privileges one level of social life over the other, the economic over the psychological, or, to return to Žižek , the objective over the subjective or the symbolic, but, in fact, to underscore that the possibility to account for their interrelation is an attribute of Temporada’s active commitment to the possibilities of formalization and synthesis. The realist paragraph, I conclude, performs the work of abstraction, of modeling the social into a relational structure, of binding difference (the particular, the concrete) through systematization. By formalizing the procedures of abstraction, Melchor’s novel attests to the epistemological faculty of literary form.
Endnotes

Introduction

1. “Although it would be difficult, and misleading, to identify a particular date or moment when this occurred, a recognizable spatial turn in literary and cultural studies (if not the arts and sciences more generally) has taken place. One cannot help noticing an increasingly spatial or geographical vocabulary in critical texts, with various forms of mapping or cartography being used to survey literary terrains, to plot narrative trajectories, to locate and explore sites, and to project imaginary coordinates” (Tally Jr. Spatiality 11-12). See also Soja, Postmodern; Smith and Katz, “Grounding.”

2. “Lo fundamental a destacar es que el capitalismo reclama un sistema mundial, pero esa vocación sólo ha podido llevarla adelante sobre la base de establecer espacios-fronteras (los Estados-nación) que impulsan y al mismo tiempo limitan aquella vocación. Ésta es una contradicción inherente al capitalismo que hoy, en la mundialización, alcanza toda su expresión” (Osorio, Estado 135).

3. Brian Whitener similarly argues: “Frequently the 1980s and 1990s are read under the sign of neoliberalism, wherein neoliberalism signals both the restructuring of the Mexican state and the process of ‘opening’ or ‘liberalizing’ the economy. However, the decades of the 1980s and 1990s were not only the decades of liberalization but also the decades of a global turn toward finance and in Mexico of ongoing financial crisis. The historical argument that I want to advance is that we should see this period as the moment of the reformulation of the national popular state form, but at the same time as
the moment of the global rise of finance and forms of attempted financial accumulation, which sets off the national popular’s transformation.”

4. “Pero cabe hacer la pregunta: ¿qué define que en determinado momento predomine y se aplique una u otra corriente de política económica? La respuesta se encuentra en la economía y en la política. En la economía, en tanto distintos patrones de reproducción del capital reclaman políticas económicas diferentes; y en la política, en cuanto los requerimientos de los sectores del capital que se convierten en ejes de un determinado patrón, tenderán a buscar las mayores cuotas de poder estatal y de esta forma lograr la aplicación de las políticas económicas que mejor se ajusten a sus necesidades de reproducción” (Osorio, “Patrón” 58-9).

5. “A partir de interrogar cómo se reproduce el capital en tiempos históricos y espacios geoespaciales determinados, la apertura a otras esferas del campo societal—sean el social, el político, que han sido asumidos como cotos de caza de distintas disciplinas —, se hace ineludible” (Osorio, “Patrón” 33).

6. “The production of spatial configurations can then be treated as an ‘active moment’ within the overall temporal dynamic of accumulation and social reproduction […] Space […] is a material attribute of all use values. But commodity production converts use values into social use values. We then have to consider how material spatial attributes of use values—location in particular—are converted into social spaces through commodity production” (Harvey, Limits 374-5).

7. “History must be made to compensate, on the level of the superstructure, that which it withholds from life in its politco-economic dimension” (Larsen, Modernism 9).
Chapter 1: Thresholds

1. Sánchez Prado notes, not without reason, that “besides Carlos Fuentes and Octavio Paz, Mexican writers have been largely ignored both by literary publishers and world literature theorists all along” (Strategic 21).

2. Ochoa considers Cambio de piel “an attempt to change the scope of Mexican letters. It was certainly bigger than anything Fuentes had tried before and marked an ambitious departure from his inward-looking narratives of the previous decades” (Uses 143, my emphasis).

3. According to Carballo: “Aquí está ya, de cuerpo entero, Carlos Fuentes novelista mexicano y universal” (625).

4. Three examples to underscore the prevalence of this trope: according to Gyurko, “Throughout the work there is reiterated Cruz’s continued betrayal of the ideals for which the Revolution was fought and the continued death of idealists” (Lifting 62). Faris, in turn, indicates that La muerte de Artemio Cruz “might be said to fight for memory of the original ideals of the Mexican Revolution, forgotten and betrayed in later years” (47). D’Lugo, in a similar vein, considers that “[o]ne senses in Artemio Cruz both the solitude of the Mexican people and the failure of the Mexican Revolution” (111).

5. The novel, dedicated to the American sociologist Charles Wright Mills, was written, at least in part, in Cuba in the immediate aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, and is dated in Havana, 1960, and Mexico, 1961). Fiddian notes that, “[i]n a very real sense, Fuentes, as he writes from Havana, invites his Mexican readers to look at the achievements of their own revolution through the prism of the new Cuba of 1959-61”
Schiller considers that the aforementioned dates “evoke the hope for a different future inspired by the Cuban revolution” (102). According to García-Caro: “Fuentes appears to have written most of the novel in Cuba during the first year of the revolution, and yet his main target was clearly postrevolutionary Mexico, and the combined discourses of (institutionalized) revolution and nationalism” (89).

6. Analyzing the figure of the double in the novel, Ruisánchez maintains that “Artemio Cruz no se convierte en las personas que se han sacrificado por él en diferentes momentos de su vida, sino las convierte en Artemio Cruz […] Esta incorporación puede ser pensada usando un verbo caro al sistema que Artemio Cruz encarna: es una cooptación. En el sentido que adquiere el verbo en México, la incorporación de lo individual a lo corporativo oblitera cualquier diferencia. Para perdurar se debe devenir aquello que absorbe: asentir” (146).

7. Commenting on Regina’s death, Martin indicates that “Regina dies in this novel […] and thus suggests to us—in an achingly familiar theme of revolutionary reflections before and since—that the earliest days were best, that good times can never be repeated, and that something called the ‘original ideals’ of the Revolution have been betrayed and have died” (209).

8. Stoopen, commenting on the theme of love in the novel, notes that: “El acto de amor entre hombre y mujer ya no tiene un modelo arquetípico, no representa más la hierogamia entre cielo y tierra, tampoco puede recrear nuevamente la creación cósmica. Ha sido prostituido por los seres humanos porque es el producto de una violación, que se convierte en el verdadero arquetipo fundacional, dentro de la novela” (30). Sommer, in
the same direction, points out that “[t]he great Boom novels rewrite, or un-write, foundational fiction as the failure of romance, the misguided political erotics that could never really bind national fathers to mothers, much less the gente decente to emerging middle and popular sectors” (27-28). She then goes on to add, in reference to the relation between Artemio Cruz and Regina, that in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* “the foundational love affairs of romance are revealed as rapes, or as power plays that traffic in women” (29). Gyurko notes that “[a]lthough Cruz constantly searches for love throughout his life, it is significant, and very ironic, that one of the central themes of the narrative is not love but violation” (“Structure” 33).

9. Schiller, for instance, considers that on his last day, Cruz is “condemned to recognize that the choices he made were his and that he carries the full responsibility for the destiny he forged for himself, for he could have chosen differently” (97). Gyurko, analyzing the same situation, points out that “[i]t is ironic that although a series of alternate existences are posited for Cruz, some of which, if he had the opportunity to relieve his life, he might have chosen, these alternatives are not articulated until the very day of his death, when there is no longer any chance of their being actualized” (*Lifting* 61). García-Caro indicates that “[t]he twelve fragments in the third-person singular narrate twelve distinct days in the life of Artemio Cruz, accessed randomly, all sharing in common his moments of fortuna, moments in his life where he has been able to choose between alternative paths” (100).

10. “Structure,” notes Gyurko, “is all-important in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* […] here the structure is visible on the surface, like a literary exoskeleton, at times even
like a straightjacket over the narrative. Structure is not merely the vehicle for portraying Cruz’s character, it is the character of the protagonist” (“Structure” 30). Volpi, analyzing Fuentes’s style in reference to *Cambio de piel* (1967) notes that Fuentes “accede a una especie de totalitarismo narrativo: nada se deja al azar, el autor controla, sin tregua y hasta el final, las vidas de sus criaturas” (73).


12. For Stoopen, as for many other critics, betrayal is one of the key themes of the novel. In her opinion: “el protagonista de la novela no hace sino cometer una serie de actos de traición, resultado de su ausencia total de compromiso ante nada que no sea su desmedido deseo de poseer poder, riqueza, statu, vidas humanas… El hecho histórico que enmarca la vida del protagonista es el movimiento revolucionario de 1910. Hecho que pierde todo su valor de redención popular al ser presentado en la novela como el pretexto racionalizador del grupo victorioso para conquistar el poder en su propio beneficio” (20).

13. See, for example, García-Caro: “In Artemio Cruz’s case the dissolution of the character’s ego, even more apparent in the first-person narratives which stage a process of erasure and death *in crescendo*, also announces the dissolution of his class, and the final demise of the Mexican Revolution” (105).

14. “Thus a new perspective of life is reached on an entirely new basis—that of the indissoluble connection between the relative independence of the parts and their attachment to the whole. But the parts, despite this attachment, can never lose their inexorable, abstract self-dependence: and their relationship to the totality, although it
approximates as closely as possible to an organic one, is nevertheless not a true-born organic relationship but a conceptual one which is abolished again and again” (Lukács, *The Theory* 75-76).

15. “If a more modern characterization of mediation is wanted,” writes Jameson, “we will say that this operation is understood as a process of *transcoding*: as the invention of a set of terms, the strategic choice of a particular code or language, such that the same terminology can be used to analyze and articulate two quite distinct types of objects or ‘texts,’ or two very different structural levels of reality. Mediations are thus a device of the analyst, whereby the fragmentation and autonomization, the compartmentalization and specialization of the various regions of social life (the separation, in other words, of the ideological from the political, the religious from the economic, the gap between daily life and the practice of the academic disciplines) is at least locally overcome, on the occasion of a particular analysis” (*Political* 40).

16. “1889, año del nacimiento del protagonista, corresponde a la época del agravamiento de la crisis agraria, provocado por las leyes de colonización que fueron expedidas en 1875 y ampliadas en 1883, con el propósito de traer colonos extranjeros que desarrollaran con sus técnicas la agricultura; el resultado fue el sometimiento de los campesinos indígenas a estos nuevos amos y la creación de compañías deslindadoras que no hicieron más que empobrecer aún más a campesinos y pequeños propietarios en favor de unos cuantos terratenientes, ahora más poderosos y ricos” (Stoopen 112).

17. García-Caro, building on Gyurko, refers to this same passage to argue that “this story of fragmentation is not contradicted by the preterit tense of the third-person
episodes nor the powerful future of the second-person narratives […] The recurring splitting of Artemio’s image is directly facilitated by the many mirrors scattered throughout the novel. The two ‘Artemios’ splintered by the mirror apparently choose two different moral or political paths, the ‘real’ one inwards into the private space from where Artemio the individualistic ‘chingón’ can hide away from the victims of the economic system on which his fortunes rest, or the ‘possible’ social choice of solidarity outwards into the street where the army of disenfranchised ‘chingados,’ those Mexicans who literally ‘swarm’ around Artemio, struggle to survive” (106).

18. Semo offers a vivid description of Santa Anna’s hacienda in Veracruz: “Manga de Clavo, la hacienda en Veracruz perteneciente a los Santa Anna, abarcaba, según Frances Calderón de la Barca, unas 20 leguas cuadradas resguardadas por puestos de vigilancia bien ubicados y pertrechados. Numerosos carruajes estaban siempre a disposición de las visitas para llevarlas a donde quisieran. Si bien contaba con una espléndida vajilla francesa, fácil de empacar en caso de peligro, sus muebles eran pesados, rústicos y escasos como en todas las haciendas localizadas en las zonas afectadas por la guerra civil. En el mismo testimonio, Calderón de la Barca cuenta que una condesa amiga suya amuebló su hacienda con finos muebles importados en dos ocasiones, sólo para verlos robados o destruidos por asaltantes” (402).

19. I borrow the formulation of a dialectics of enclosure and openness from Hartoonian who, in a very different context, uses it to describe Mies van der Rohe’s glass architecture: “The glass architecture negates the dialectics of enclosure and openness” (48).
20. “History can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force” (Jameson, *Political* 102).

21. “On a threshold, one is neither inside nor outside. The threshold is simultaneously a place, a boundary, a transition, and an obstacle. By overcoming obstacles, one is aware of transgressing a boundary” (Janson and Tigges 331).

22. The debate was sparked by Julio Jiménez Rueda’s article “El afeminamiento en la literatura mexicana,” published in *El Universal* on December 21, 1924. Accounts of the debate and its implications for the evolution of the Mexican literary canon are widespread. See, for example, Glantz, “Nellie” and Sánchez Prado, “Vanguardia”.

23. The vexing relation of the Novel of the Revolution to official discourses has been very often regarded as a limitation. Sánchez Prado, for example, characterizes the novel of the Mexican Revolution as “an unremarkable genre of texts generally aligned to officialist ideology” (“Novel”, 48).
Chapter 2: Patterns

1. “Aunque la edad no sea fundamental respecto al valor creativo, es importante en cuanto a los temas centrales de la novela de «la Onda». En ella los jóvenes escritores presentan su propio mundo, el de los jóvenes, desde su propia perspectiva. Se sirven de su realidad y no recurren al pasado histórico como sus antecesores Yáñez y Fuentes” (Chiu-Olivares 19, my emphasis). Price considers, likewise, that “los autores de la llamada Onda ofrecieron a los lectores jóvenes un nuevo lenguaje literario urbano, que se oponía a los postulados estéticos establecidos por generaciones previas” (83).

2. Poniatowska, like no other, captures la Onda’s ostracism from the close-knit circle of the Mexican belles lettres when she writes: “Pertenezco a la generación de García Ponce, Sergio Pitol, Elizondo, Leñero, Juan Vicente Melo, Azuela, Margo Glantz, Julieta Campos, José de la Colina, Esther Seligson, Amparo Dávila, Inés Arredondo, María Luisa Mendoza, Fernando del Paso, Ulalume González de León y otros narradores cuyos modelos son Mann, Musil, Pavese, Proust, Joyce, Kafka, Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet y Butor (Juan García Ponce, por ejemplo, sacraliza a Klossowski), una generación que pretende utilizar un lenguaje que denote cierta poeticidad y buen gusto, que refleje las muchas lecturas, que sustente en su texto toda esa tradición literaria, una literatura intimista, en que no se utiliza, —¡o tan poco!—, el lenguaje coloquial. Sin duda, Elizondo viene de todas las corrientes más exquisitas y ‘literarias’ con mayúscula habidas y por haber; sin duda es Pitol un escritor del que se exclama: ¡qué bien escribe! Juan García Ponce apabulla por su capacidad de trabajo, la amplitud de su obra, su alcance. En nuestros muros culega la pintura que se corresponde y es de proporciones...
clásicas y abstractas: Soriano, Felguerez, Gironella, Von Gunten, Rojo. No escuchamos rock. Cuando escuchamos música es a Mahler, a Vivaldi, el Adagio de Albinoni. Sin negar el trabajo de mi generación, debo afirmar lo mucho que me importa José Agustín. Insolente y divertido, sabe hacer reír, y eso, en los últimos treinta años en México, se agradece (como se agradece a Jorge Ibargüengoitia ser el formidable humorista que nos devuelve la salud mental y nos hace más respirable este país a veces tan desolado)” (¡Ay vida 206).

3. Gunia refers to “una crisis de valores que estaba viviendo la sociedad mexicana, sobre todo las clases media y alta de los centros urbanos. Esta crisis se revelaba, en primer lugar, en el paulatino distanciamiento por parte de la juventud de las clases en cuestión de los principios y valores que hasta entonces habían guiado de manera incontestable su educación y formación” (20).

4. Brushwood considers that “The characteristics of the ‘onda’ narrative […] are an unmistakable augury of the student movement in 1968 that ended in the tragedy of Tlatelolco” (62). For Agustín, “nadie pone en duda actualmente que esa literatura juvenil anunció, preparó y dio forma al movimiento estudiantil de 1968, parteaguas en la historia del país.” (Agustín, “La onda” 9). D’Lugo notes that “Onda fiction in the mid-1960s, with its emphasis on youth, in a sense parallels Al filo del agua in that it immediately precedes or is on the edge of another storm, the student massacre at Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968” (166).

5. “The three novels present visions of adolescence of a young male in rebellion against his parents’ generation and in search of his own identity. His rebelliousness is
echoed within discourse largely through language, specifically the slang used both as a marker of difference used to shut out the adult world and as a badge of defiance employed to solidify camaraderie with one’s peers” (D’Lugo 164).

6. Gunia underscores “la artificiosa estructura narrativa de Gazapo o el empleo de algunas técnicas narrativas sofisticadas en la segunda versión de La tumba” (25).

7. In relation to la Onda’s “self-willed transitoriness,” Williams considers that “Like posters, their novels demonstrate neither the pretension nor the intention of becoming ‘classic’ objects of art” (68).

8. “The theory of space describes and analyses textures. As we shall see, the straight line, the curve (or curved line), the check or draughtboard pattern and the radial-concentric (centre versus periphery) are forms and structures rather than textures. The production of space lays hold of such structures and integrates them into a great variety of wholes (textures). A texture implies a meaning — but a meaning for whom? For some ‘reader’? No: rather, for someone who lives and acts in the space under consideration, a ‘subject’ with a body — or, sometimes, a ‘collective subject’. From the point of view of such a ‘subject’ the deployment of forms and structures corresponds to functions of the whole” (The Production 132).

9. As Lara-Alengrin recalls, “en el contexto mexicano de represión juvenil posterior al Movimiento del 68, José Agustín fue arrestado en posesión de mariguana y acusado injustamente de tráfico en diciembre de 1970, por lo que purgó una pena de siete meses en prisión en el llamado Palacio Negro de Lecumberri” (50).

11. Othón Hernández points out that *Se está haciendo tarde* can be read as an “actualización contracultural del mito heroico” (212).

12. Price points out that “en términos de la escritura contracultural predomina una lógica centralista que privilegia la producción capitalina sobre la de las áreas limítrofes” (87).

13. “Rubén Jaramillo’s movement had been active since the 1940s, oscillating between armed tactics and electoral reformism until the leader’s assassination, along with his family, in 1962 by the government. This state-sanctioned murder, known as the Xochicalco massacre, foreshadowed the dirty war to come throughout the country, particularly in Guerrero, where the government carried out a campaign of terror against guerrillas and civilians alike. In this state, two rural teachers, Genaro Vázquez and Lucio Cabañas, began to lead rural guerrillas after numerous attempts to negotiate with government authorities” (Pineda Franco, *Mexican* 149).

14. “Travel brochures promoting Acapulco in the 1950s and 1960s said it was a land of magic landscapes sparkling like jewels around the blue crescent of its bay. It was. They said the golden beaches glistened in the sun, while rocky cliffs dropped precipitously into the ocean. They did. They would describe the luxurious hotels, sultry sea air, swinging singles scene, and generally languorous lifestyle that readers could purchase by the day, week, or even a lifetime” (Sackett, “The Two” 501).
15. “The two most exclusice fashionable hotels were the Pierre Marquès and El Presidente. The former was located on a 167-acre site off by itself about eleven miles southeast of the bay. Built by oil magnate J. Paul Getty in 1958 (and subsidized by the Mexican government), it was managed by the Hotel Pierre of New York. It was there that U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower stayed when he met with Mexico’s President Adolfo López Mateos in 1959” (Sackett, “The Two” 505).

16. “For Gleyzer, there was a central paradox behind PRI populism. After 1940, PRI governments chose industrial and urban development over land reform, and empowered the middle and upper classes. At the same time, these same governments mythicized the impoverished peasant masses as the political subject of the Mexican people” (Pineda Franco, Mexican 142).

17. The decadent atmosphere of Se está haciendo tarde (final en laguna) has a direct antecedent in Juan Carlos Onetti’s El astillero (1961).

18. “The Junta Federal [de Mejoras Materiales de Acapulco] based this development on an urban plan drawn up by an architect named Carlos Contreras. Contreras was an important urban planner who had a lasting legacy on the landscape of Mexico City. He followed a general modernist formula. Contreras was concerned with traffic and the efficient operation of the city and redrew Acapulco to focus on the road network and zoning. He planned the amplification and prolongation of streets; the construction of large boulevards; and the destruction of buildings between those boulevards to create grand parks. He wanted to physically move neighborhoods that
blocked unifying development into larger residential zones and to create separate commercial, industrial, and governmental zones.” (Sackett “Fun” 166-167).

19. Through repetition, music becomes “an essential mode of sociality for all those who feel themselves powerless before the monologue of the great institutions” (Attali 100).

20. This being said, it is also undeniable that, in their literary efforts, *la Onda* writers, “han tratado de rescatar un lenguaje coloquial popular, y todos, consciente o inconscientemente, se han dado cuenta que la extracción de ese lenguaje es lumpen, el que emplean las capas más rechazadas de la sociedad, y esto los ha llevado a romper las barreras de la clase media y a sentir apego por los jodidos” (Poniatowska, *¡Ay vida* 175).

Chapter 3: Dwellings

1. Carlos Marichal, likewise, characterizes José López Portillo’s initial response to the crisis as “una serie de sopresivas medidas” (240).

2. “Even more interesting, in many developing nations, neoliberal reforms have been almost joyfully embraced by a new and internationally credentialed group of policymakers: technocrats with Ph.D.’s from foreign universities—usually American universities, and usually in economics.” (Babb 174) According to Poulantzas, the “relationship between bourgeois ideology and knowledge is, however, considerably reinforced in the stage of monopoly capitalism, marked as this is by the shift of dominance within bourgeois ideology towards the region of economics; this is where we come across the various theories of the ‘technocracy’” (239).
3. “The production process cannot be begun anew before the transformation of the commodity into money. The constant continuity of the process, the unobstructed and fluid transition of value from one form into the other, or from one phase of the process into the next, appears as a fundamental condition for production based on capital to a much greater degree than for all earlier forms of production. On another side, while the necessity of this continuity is given, its phases are separate in time and space, and appear as particular, mutually indifferent processes. It thus appears as a matter of chance for production based on capital whether or not its essential condition, the continuity of the different processes which constitute its process as a whole, is actually brought about. The suspension of this chance element by capital itself is credit” (Marx, Grundrisse 535).

4. The use of credit as a disciplining mechanism was not restricted to the urban middle classes. As Teichman points out, throughout the 70s, “The granting of credit became an especially important mechanism for exercising control over campesinos as credit institutions, such as BANRURAL, took over the organization of ejidal production. Hence, as the instrument for obtaining credit and other resources from state institutions and agencies, the ejido incorporated peasants into the state/party apparatus” (126).

5. “The productive or unproductive character of labour does not depend either on certain intrinsic characteristics, or on its utility. […] Thus what is productive labour in a given mode of production is labour that gives rise to the dominant relation of exploitation of this mode; what is productive labour for one mode of production may not be so for another. In the capitalist mode of production, productive labour is that which directly
produces surplus-value, which valorizes capital and is exchanged against capital” (Poulantzas 210-1).

6. “The circulation of capital realizes value, while living labour creates value. Circulation time is only a barrier to this realization of value, and, to that extent, to value creation; a barrier arising not from production generally but specific to production of capital, the suspension of which—or the struggle against which—hence also belongs to the specific economic development of capital and gives the impulse for the development of its forms in credit etc.” (Marx, Grundrisse 543).

7. “It must be stressed again that the content of this division and its terms can in no way be reduced to empirical criteria of the kind ‘those who work with their hands’ and ‘those who work with their brains’, those in direct contact with ‘machines’ and those who are not. The division is rather a function of the ideological and political relations that mark the places occupied by the agents” (Poulantzas 253).

8. Guillén Romo also asserts this conclusion: “El dinamismo del sistema tiene necesidad de una serie de mecanismos que permitan transferir una parte de los ingresos de las esferas bajas del consumo a las esferas intermedias. Los mecanismos para lograr esta transferencia de ingresos operan gracias a una intervención del Estado y, sobre todo después de 1973, a la inflación, que permite la transferencia de poder de compra de la esfera ‘baja’ a la esfera ‘intermedia’ del consumo, lo que puede implicar bajas de salarios relativas cuando menos para un sector de la población” (Orígenes 95).

9. According to Nora Lustig, “the salient feature of the 1980s is that, after several decades in which the country was moving toward a more even distribution of income, the
trend was reversed. Between 1984 and 1989, for example, the share of income that accrued to the wealthiest 10 percent increased by 15 percent (from 33 to 38 percent)” (46).

10. The rise of the middle classes accompanies the formation of a “line of thought […] that expressly attempts to refute the Marxist theory of social classes, and with it the theory of class struggle. It is generally based on, or at least tainted with, the general notion of a dissolution of class boundaries and the class struggle within present society, and this process is allegedly marked by a generalized ‘embourgeoisement’, i.e. by an ‘integration, of the working class” (Poulantzas, Classes 193).

11. “The middle classes, although nationalist, were religiously and politically conservative. In the coming years, they proved the most skeptical of pursuing relations with the emergent Third World, much less the Soviet Union, and constituted the strongest basis of support for deepening ties with the United States” (Zolov 86).

12. It goes without saying that “The petty bourgeoisie, in fact, given its place in the class determination of a capitalist formation, does not have in the long run any autonomous class position. The two basic classes are the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; the only real class ideologies, in the strong sense of this term, are those of these two basic classes, which are in fundamental political opposition. In other words, the only ideological ensembles that have a specific coherence and are relatively systematic are those of the dominant bourgeois ideology and of the ideology connected to the working class” (Poulantzas 287).
13. “From the viewpoint of their class place, the middle class subcollectivities are not positively but negatively correlated. They do not belong to any of the two fundamental classes of the CMP [Capitalist Mode of Production]. However, this negative feature does not constitute sufficient ground for including them in the same class” (Milios and Economakis 235).

14. Lomnitz notes that “the early crisis period is one of vertiginous insecurity and collapsing buying capacity (middle-class neighborhoods in 1983 organized strikes over property tax, payments, for instance)” (“Depreciation” 51).

15. “Public policy was able to contravene the most cherished notions of Mexican revolutionary nationalism because it held out the hope of allowing Mexico to join the developed world” (Teichman 146).

16. “Tensions between and enlightened leadership and an ignorant people have been a staple in Latin American history from the mid-eighteenth century forward, and indeed every era of intense modernization has sponsored its technocracy: *ilustrados* under the Bourbons, *científicos* under Díaz, *profesionistas* under Miguel Alemán, and *tecnócratas* in the period I am considering. All were apprehensive about popular culture and all sought to use the instruments of the state to reform the people” (Lomnitz, “Depreciation” 62).

17. See van Baak 2009, pp. 19-44.

18. “A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusion of stability” (Bachelard 17).
19. Landy notes that Proust’s style is marked by a “labyrinthine complexity at every level, chronological confusion, an overwhelming atmosphere of uncertainty,” (129) a description that one could easily apply to Mendoza’s own.

20. Discussing the lack of regard displayed by Mexican elites toward the needs of the popular class, Claudio Lomnitz argues that “The salience and visibility of necesidad, of popular needs, contrasts with the callousness of a government that has abruptly abandoned its prior paternal duties and left its people exposed to the inclemency of the market” (“Depreciation 63”)

21. Nancy Armstrong words in reference to her positionality are worth recuperating here in extenso: “To avoid the female strategy of self-authorization, I will be describing the behavior of an emergent class from a historically latr position which that class has empowered—from a position within that class and supported by it. I say this as a way of insisting that in constructing a history of female forms of power, I do not mean to appropriate a form of resistance but rather to reveal the operations of a class sexuality by which I have often found myself defined. At the risk of appearing dogmatic, I have at moments overstated my case and so violated the pluralistic ideology espoused by the best liberal element within my profession. I have adopted this tactic as a means of countering those who would emphasize woman’s powerlessness—and we are certainly rendered powerless in specifically female ways—and therefore as a means of identifying for critical consideration that middle-class power which does not appear to be power because it behaves in specifically female ways” (26).
22. “It traces, not a straight line ploughing endlessly forward, or a circle expanding infinitely outwards, but a marked parabola” (Anderson 101).

23. “This is the double bind of feminist theories of attachment; even as we claim and valorize women’s relational identities, we critique the cultures of sentimentality when attachments become ties that bind and limit rather than strengthen. Feminist theorists often emphasize the ways in which attachments guide individual choices, values, and desires, but they have also been skeptical of the limitations attachments can confer. As early as the work of Simone de Beauvoir, feminists have argued that emotional attachments can even cause us to feel loyal to conditions that enable our subordination and render women complicit in their own oppression” (Pratt and Rosner 7-8).

24. Wilson coins the term *intimate economies* as “a rubric for analyzing the ways that intimate and economic life, presumed separate, in practice overlap” (43).

25. “Women in the ruling class may also be subordinated to the men of their class. Where such subordination exists it rests, ultimately, on their special role with respect to the generational replacement of individual members of the ruling class. As the socialist tradition has argued, the issue, here, is property. If property comes to be held by men and bequeathed to children, female oppression becomes a handy way to ensure the paternity of those children” (Vogel 153-4).

26. “Experientially, the particular nature of domestic labour in industrial-capitalist society gives rise, for both women and men, to intense feelings of opposition between one’s private life and some public-sphere. The highly institutionalised demarcation of domestic labour from wage-labour in a context of male supremacy forms the basis for a
series of powerful ideological structures, which develop a forceful life of their own.

Isolation of the units of domestic labour appears to be a natural separation of women from men as well. Confinement to a world that is walled off from capitalist production seems to be woman’s time-honoured natural setting” (Vogel 160).

27. Suzana Zink uses a similar logic when commenting on the relation between women and built space in Virgina Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. According to Zink, Woolf “rewrites the oppressive private house into a space where the accumulation of unused energy can become generative of the creative and intellectual freedom expressed in the notion of ‘a room of one’s own’” (30).

Chapter 4: Openings

1. “El lenguaje literario nunca alude directamente a las acciones o a sus actores: el discurso *configura* las acciones y a los actores al moldear su silueta con una perífrasis en la que se alcanza definición y profundidad a cada golpe de palabra” (Zavala, “Genealogía” 28).

2. “La narración es siempre excesiva, el exceso está en la base de la novela, en el sentido de que se va siempre más allá de los límites usuales y mayoritarios de la producción novelística comercial en general, ya en términos de peripecia, ya en términos de discursividad narrativa” (Rodríguez de la O, 70).

3. As Rodríguez Lozano observes, “resulta interesante resaltar que, con todo, la prosa de Sada no llega a ser poética o lírica como ha apuntado por momentos la crítica literaria. Más bien es una prosa retórica en el sentido de que la métrica, la rima y los puntos van más hacia el ornamento y la persuasión, lo que provoca la desaceleración […]
y la repetición de un modelo de escritura, una narrativa con endecásilabos y octosílabos. Hablar de una prosa retórica como la presentada por Sada conlleva a un ritmo semántico que produce un encadenamiento repetitivo del discurso y hasta cierto punto crea la apariencia de un desfase entre la historia que se cuenta y el discurso en el que se apoya el autor, sobre todo por la discontinuidad” (63-4).

4. “Cada periodo tiene su propio grado de autonomía y diferencia en relación a los otros, como si en cada sesión el escritor variara la técnica de composición, asumiendo nuevos riesgos y posibilidades, buscando combinaciones sin precedentes” (Zavala, “Genealogía” 27-8).

5. “Form is not delimited containment but prismatic projection of other spaces. Structure is not transcendental determinativeness, but immanent agency. Law is not an emanation from nature or what exists, but an axiomatic writing that creates new possibles” (Kornbluh 106).

6. “Son considerados como autores/autoras ‘norteños’ aquellos que nacieron o radican en la región y que escriben desde la frontera, vivida por lo general como experiencia-límite. No es un espacio geográfico-cultural homogéneo […] Como ‘zonas geográficas’ se distinguen el noreste (con Monterrey), el norte (con Ciudad Juárez) y el noroeste (con Tijuana y Mexicali), articulándose el peso del medio ambiente a través de la escenificación, ante todo, de dos referentes: el desierto: con el Río Bravo o Río Grande, y la ciudad, siendo Tijuana en la narrativa el espacio urbano más frecuentado” (Gewecke 112).
7. “Buscar respuestas en los libros escritos por los críticos nos llevaría a pensar que sí existe una narrativa oriunda específicamente del norte, o de la frontera, determinada en su base por los accidentes geográficos. A finales de los años ochenta se le denominó la ‘narrativa del desierto’ y contaba con cinco nombres situados por encima de los demás: Gerardo Cornejo, de Sonora; Jesús Gardea, de Chihuahua; Ricardo Elizondo Elizondo, de Nuevo León; Severino Salazar, de Zacatecas; y Daniel Sada, originario de Mexicali, pero cuya narrativa refleja sobre todo la vida en los pueblos de Coahuila. Ellos, en especial Daniel Sada, continúan siendo ‘cabeza de grupo’, si no fundadores, por lo menos robustecedores de una tradición regional y, como su obra ha sido abordada con profundidad por parte de la crítica mexicana y extranjera seguramente resultarán conocidos para los lectores enterados de lo que sucede en las letras mexicanas” (Parra, “Lenguaje” 72).

8. “El norte de México no es sólo simple geografía: hay en él un devenir muy distinto al que registra la historia del resto del país; una manera de pensar, de actuar, de sentir y de hablar derivadas de ese mismo devenir y de la lucha constante contra el medio y contra la cultura de los gringos, extraña y absorbente. Derivadas también del rechazo al poder central; de la convivencia con las constantes oleadas de migrantes en los estados del sur y centro; y de una mitología religiosa—‘tan lejos de Dios’—que se manifiesta en la adoración a santos regionales laicos o más o menos paganos” (Parra 72)

9. “El entorno geográfico juega aquí un papel primordial: el desierto, la sierra, el mar, dejan su huella y la anécdota, de tal forma […] se ve alimentada por ese entorno de dureza, de resequedad, de aridez, que se revierte luego hacia el interior del individuo—
ése, que piensa engañado que él se hace a sí mismo—y lo hace un ser hosco, introvertido, tendiendo hacia la reflexión, metaforizando de continuo su vida diaria” (Gómez Montero 20)

10. See also Rodríguez de la O: “En lo que respecta a la lengua de la voz narrativa, resulta evidente que es una lengua que aunque hace uso de muchísimos términos regionales del habla del norte de México, también mezcla términos del sur de México y del centro, términos cultos y estructuras arcaizantes, dando como resultado lo opuesto de una lengua ‘real’; es decir, termina por ser una lengua completamente inventada, artificial, una especie de pastiche” (86).

11. See, for example, Wolfenzon: “jugando con las palabras, esa desmesura verbal que describo puede ser definida como un ‘desborde’: frente a la rigidez (física o mental) de la frontera, está el ‘desborde’ de las palabras” (149).

12. “What occurs in Sada’s novel is the fact that temporal inconsistencies, a lack of time markers, and uncontrollable anachronous prevent even the most sophisticated reader from interpreting the narrative as a chronologically arranged story” (Codebò 124).

13. Zavala, as many other critics, references Sada’s own account of his literary upbringing in relation to some of his stylistic singularities: “Su primera educación literaria explica el estudio barroco de su escritura, con una prosa estructurada en octosílabos—la métrica de los romances medievales y de los corridos mexicanos—como es el caso de su novela Albedrío (1988), pero también en endecasílabos y alejandrinos en libros posteriores” (“Genealogía” 26).
14. In his study of *PPM* Oswaldo Zavala describes Sada’s project as one of “heterogeneidad radical.” By recourse to fragmentation, Zavala approaches this scene as one where “la voz narrartiva se divide en tres versiones que se excluyen, se atacan y en el mejor de los casos, se corrigen” (“Genealogía” 39). He distinguishes between the three voices by referring to them as “trunca,” “acumulativa,” and “lépera”.

15. Wolfenzon notes that “Sada escoge el exceso de palabras: la acumulación, la exageración grotesca de expresiones, frases inventadas, signos de exclamation y puntuación donde no corresponde ponerlos (los dos puntos en la novela están en cualquier lugar de la frase y aparecen a cada momento) y oraciones extensas que dan la sensación de no tener fin” (149).

16. “All recourse to purity, indigenenity, or aboriginality—however useful strategically—should be subject to at least as much scrutiny as the easy romance with hybridity” (Katz 1213).

17. For Jameson, “most forms of contemporary criticism tend, as toward their ideal, toward a model of immanence […] this is to say that the phenomenological ideal—that of some ideal unity of consciousness or thinking and experience or the ‘objective’ fact—continues to dominate modern thought even where phenomenology as such is explicitly repudiated” (*Political* 282).
Conclusion: Boundaries

1. “If The Savage Detectives represents Bolaño’s reformulation of testimonio into a post-Boom form, the ‘collective testimonio,’ then 2666 can be understood as an equally insurgent attempt to reformulate the realist world novel in order to overcome the reification of earlier modes of realism and to register the changed historical situation of Latin America in the era of millennial capital” (Deckard 353).

2. “The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social and cultural institution or formation. It is crucial to distinguish this aspect of the residual, which may have an alternative or even oppositional relation to the dominant culture, from that active manifestation of the residual (this being its distinction from the archaic) which has been wholly or largely incorporated into the dominant culture” (Williams, Marxism 122).

3. “Indeed, the murders of women illustrate that the synthesis of abstract virtues such as free markets and efficiency with privatization and the abandonment of social-welfare programs results in despair and death” (Weissman 230).

4. In reference to El otoño’s avowed modernism, Gerald Martin points out that: “Each chapter of the novel begins with García Márquez’s usual obsession, the motif of burial, though the reader cannot be sure whether the body repeatedly found is that of the
tyrant or, indeed, if he is really dead. Thus the narrative ‘we’ of these sections—we the
people who found the corpse—proves to be conjuring up a world in retrospect through a
few short sentences on the first page of each chapter with variable details about the
discovery of the body, after which the narrative plunges into the labyrinth or whirlpool of
flashbacks relating the life of ‘him’, ‘the General’, which dissolves gradually into an
autobiographical ‘I’, the Man of Power. The labyrinth, as in all modernist works, is both
topic (life) and technique (the way through it). Thus the reader’s overwhelming
experience is one of uncertainty and confusion (in part the uncertainty and confusion of
the people, who can only speculate about the character and motivations of the mysterious
man who governs their destinies). The entire point of view, structure and even chronology
of the novel are determined by the confusion of a succession of narrators who are never
sure of anything but spend their time exploring the endless dilemma as to whether the
dictator does or does not control ‘all of his power’, which is perhaps the most reiterated
and the most disorienting concept of the whole novel—magnified enormously by the fact
that it is considered above all from his own point of view, which is at once stupid and
unreflective, hypocritical and self-serving, but also, as we have noted, demonically
intuitive and shrewd where power itself is concerned” (Cambridge 71).

---. *La contracultura en México: la historia y el significado de los rebeldes sin causa, los jipitecas, los punks y las bandas*. Editorial Grijalbo, 1996.


Lomnitz, Claudio. “Narrating the Neoliberal Moment: History, Journalism, Historicity.”


---. “The Depreciation of Life During Mexico City’s Transition into ‘the Crisis.’”


---. *De Ausencia*. Joaquín Mortiz, 1974.


Osorio, Jaime. “Crisis estatal y violencia desnuda: la excepcionalidad mexicana.”


---. *Explotación redoblada y actualidad de la revolución: Refundación societal, rearticulación popular y nuevo autoritarismo*. Itaca ; Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Xochimilco, 2009.


Poniatowska, Elena. *¡Ay vida, no meeres!: Carlos Fuentes, Rosario Castellanos, Juan Rulfo, la Literatura de la Onda*. Joaquín Mortiz, 1985.


van Baak, Joost. *The House in Russian Literature: A Mythopoetic Exploration*. Brill,


---. “When Was Modernism?” *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*,


