THE SUBJECT IN QUESTION: SUBJECTIVITY IN THE FICTION OF JOSÉ REVUELTAS, HILDA HILST, AND CLARICE LISPECTOR

Derek Beaudry

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Supervisor of Dissertation

_____

Román de la Campa

Edwin B. and Lenore R. Williams Professor of Romance Languages

Graduate Group Chairperson

_____

Michael Solomon

Professor of Romance Languages; Graduate Chair

Dissertation Committee

Jorge Téllez, Assistant Professor of Romance Languages, University of Pennsylvania

David E. Johnson, Professor of Comparative Literature, Associate Dean of Graduate Education, University at Buffalo

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ABSTRACT

THE SUBJECT IN QUESTION: SUBJECTIVITY IN THE FICTION OF JOSÉ REVUELTAS, HILDA HILST, AND CLARICE LISPECTOR

Derek Beaudry

Román de la Campa

The dissertation "The Subject in Question: Subjectivity in the fiction of Hilda Hilst, Clarice Lispector, and José Revueltas," examines the ways in which the works of these three twentieth-century Latin American writers question notions of a unitary individual and collective subject. As critics have noted, the issue of defining a national identity has been a recurring preoccupation in Latin American literature, as well as in Latin Americanist thought. These articulations of national identity posit a centered subject, expressed as an essence or as a plurality that nonetheless shares essential national traits. Furthermore, modern political, juridical, as well as economic institutions assume a human subject that is a conscious, centered ego. Contemporaneous with the development of these institutions, however, is a current in western philosophy in which the figure of this subject comes under scrutiny, especially following the publication of Immanuel Kant's three Critiques in the late 18th century. I identify the fiction of Hilst, Lispector, and Revueltas as various responses to the Kantian challenge, as they foreground a disjunction between notions of a centered subject and the experience of self that is divided or fissured. The methodological approach to the analysis of these works couples the reading of philosophical thought, which attempts to reckon with the implications of Kant's critical philosophy, with close readings of the literary texts. This

dissertation responds to two currents of thought. First, it engages with the ongoing discussion in humanistic and scientific discourses regarding the status of the subject and subjectivity. Second, it responds to a sense of an impasse in certain areas of the Latin Americanist humanities that call for alternatives to both the neoliberal and national popular models of political and economic organization in Latin America. A subject that is not centered signifies a shift in the way that we conceptualize our understanding of identity, citizenship, ethics, politics, and community. Such a change may contribute to envisioning more just societies in Latin America and beyond.

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Preface

As with any dissertation project, *The Subject in Question: Subjectivity in the fiction of José Revueltas, Hilda Hilst, and Clarice Lispector,* grew out of an intuition that proved fruitful and led to the pages that the reader finds here. In the case of this dissertation, the intuition concerned the various articulations of national and continental collective identities that have occupied post-colonial Latin Americanist thought. No matter how inclusive concepts seek to be in their efforts to represent the multitude that dwells within the territorial boundaries and diasporic communities of Latin America, there is always a remainder, an exclusion that calls for a reformulation of this collective subject. In my view, this condition calls not for a series of more inclusive, quantitative adjustments to better fit objective conditions, but rather a qualitative change in the way that the collective subject is conceptualized. This change would consequently entail a revaluation of the ways that we understand the individual subject as well.[1]

Besides the autobiographical circumstances that led me to these writers, what do José Revueltas (1914-1976), Hilda Hilst (1930-2004), and Clarice Lispector (1920-1977) share, in addition to being more or less contemporaries? To my knowledge, Revueltas did not read the work of the Brazilian writers; likewise, Hilst and Lispector were unfamiliar with the Mexican author. Hilst and Lispector did know each other

[1] As I would come to find out, I was not the first person to have this hunch. In just one paradigmatic example, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe build their idea of hegemony on the assumption of the irreducible heterogeneity of the social that resists any sort of category or definition. See Laclau and Mouffee (2001).

personally. In fact, as I was working on the chapter on Hilst's fiction, I had the opportunity to visit her former home, *Casa do Sol*, where the author lived from 1966 until the end of her life. When I suggested a relation between the works of the two writers to Hilst's longtime friend and collaborator, Olga Bilenky, she bristled. I was told that though Lispector and Hilst were on friendly terms, their work had nothing in common. Several years on, I respectfully insist on an integral relation in the work of these three writers, and my dissertation examines the ways that the fiction of Revueltas, Hilst, and Lispector foreground and question notions of a unitary individual and collective subject. The experience of this sort of subject has been conceptualized in terms of an identity, a fixed or delimited entity. The authors featured in this dissertation foreground that which exceeds these boundaries, or that which is lived in between the putatively natural categories of, say, subject and object, human and animal, male and female. The excessive elements are not merely the accidental properties of an essential identity, but rather they indicate what is most intimate to the experience of self, and, as a result, call for a reflection regarding how we think about subjectivity.

This dissertation responds to two currents of thought. First, it joins the ongoing discussion regarding the status of the subject and subjectivity that occurs in a number of approaches in the humanities, such as ecocriticism, animal studies, gender studies, queer theory, and new materialism. These approaches take as their point of departure the assertion that though the centered subject appears to be natural and therefore universal, it is, in fact, a historically-bound concept with its own genealogy, its own constructed nature that differs with other models of self, in other times and places. An additional aspect that these varied articulations share is that the way that we experience

self in the world as a centered subject and its implications for how we think and act in the world, more often than not, produce negative effects. This dissertation also addresses a sense of an impasse in certain areas of the Latin Americanist humanities that find both the neoliberal and national popular models of political and economic organization in Latin America unsatisfactory. I agree with this assumption and think that there is a need to formulate alternative forms of social organization. The relevance of this dissertation rests on the claim that rethinking the ways that we understand individual and collective subjectivities forms an integral part of alternatives that would work to deepen the democratic values of equality and freedom.

Given that the idea of the subject forms a central element of this dissertation, some elaboration of key concepts is in order. The notion of what I will call a centered or unitary subject refers to the understanding of subjectivity derived from the tradition of Western metaphysics in its modern form, whose contours are generally periodized to emerge with the work of René Descartes. In lieu of rehearsing the different positions on the subject throughout modern philosophy, I will provide some representative synthesis, which will provide sufficient articulation of core assumptions on which the evaluation of my readings of the literary works may be based. The centered human subject is constituted by predetermined, substantial properties, at the center of which is the cogito, an ego, a mind, or a consciousness that is autonomous from the body in which it dwells, as well as from the bodies of others and the physical world in general. Nonetheless, this subject inhabits a world, a determinate space, that it perceives through the mind in an unmediated way. The temporal realm is also apprehended by the subject as it presents itself to it as a division between past, present, and future. The ontological

conditions of possibility for this subject is an origin from which being unfurls in the form of a certain order that entails laws that have been given by a divine figure or are immanent to existence, over which a subjects gain an increasing mastery over time. In other words, there is a transparency between thought, language, and the world that is being perfected as one lives and perceives this reality. According to these laws, human existence possesses an end, or a *telos*. In its modern form, this element denotes a Judeo-Christian eschatological current, in which human existence is haunted by a sense of lack or a lost sense of plenitude that gives way to a future recovery of this plenitude. The eschatological end of human existence has assumed various theological and secularized forms, such as the Jewish or Christian messiah figures, as well as the Hegelian and Marxist philosophies of history.[2]

The figure of a subject that possesses an essence and a certain destiny has informed the understanding of the political, economic, and cultural realms of post-independence Latin America, up through the national popular state and on to the neoliberal era. But the centrality of the subject is not unique to Latin American countries. The general adoption of the post-Westphalian state form from the seventeenth century onward assumes a sovereign subject that functions as the legitimate and unitary ruler in the form of the state. This sovereign is enacted on a further assumption of an individual that is subjected to this power. The individual is a member of a collective subject, which in the modern state, takes the form of the nation. As Étienne Balibar explains, the idea of nation presupposes a subject with a history and

[2] See, Jacob Taubes (2009) for a detailed genealogy of eschatological thought in Western theology and philosophy.

sense of destiny: "the history of nations, beginning with our own, is always already presented to us in the form of a narrative which attributes to these entities the continuity of a subject. The formation of the nation thus appears as the fulfillment of a 'project' stretching over the centuries, in which there are different stages and moments of coming to self-awareness" (86).

The field of literature has played an important role in nation building efforts (Bürger 425-426). In Latin America, the project of articulating a national identity has been a preoccupation on the part of elites and even predates independence from Portugal and Spain. In the nineteenth century, Julio Ramos explains that literature "designated the place (at times fictitious) where models of subjectification, necessary norms for the invention of citizenship, and symbolic boundaries were projected. Letters had sketched the imaginary map of nation-states on the road to consolidation" (xxxvi). Despite the often fractious relationship between the state and the field of literature in the twentieth century, an additional and related preoccupation of literary production and criticism has entailed the effort to define national and continental literary traditions, which presupposes a unitary subject. Efforts to define this essential subject in the political and literary realms have always encountered problems, an alterity that exceeds these articulations. The fiction of Revueltas, Hilst, and Lispector not only draw attention to these excesses in terms of groups or individuals that are excluded from expressions of national identity, but more importantly, they call into question the very possibility that such any sort of centered subject may exist in the first place.

This point brings me to a working understanding of the second critical term that I will employ throughout this dissertation, what I will variously call the divided,

decentered, or fissured subject. Coextensive with the ascendancy of the nation-state form is a gradual yet significant - many have called it a copernican revolution - current of thought in modern western philosophy in which the conditions of possibility of the centered subject are effectively challenged, particularly in the work of philosophers like David Hume and Immanuel Kant. In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant elaborates an epistemological skepticism that puts in doubt the ability of the subject to know the world without mediation, or what he refers to as the thing-in-itself. He argues that there exists a divide between noumenon - the thing-in-itself - and phenomenon, that is, a perception of the world that is irreducibly mediated by a spatio-temporal apparatus located in human consciousness. Kant's critical philosophy introduces an irreducible gap between the subject and the real that will preoccupy subsequent philosophers, who will variously attempt to refute, extend, and explore the implications of Kant's work, several of whose works I will read alongside the novels that I consider in the chapters that follow. The impact of Kant and post-Kantian philosophy can be perceived in European literary modernism of the early twentieth century. I contend that the effects of this critique of the subject in artistic modernism can also be found in Latin America, forming a part of the postcolonial inheritance, along with the political, juridical, and economic institutions adopted by Latin American nations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

One particular current of post-Kantian thought, which the work of the three writers under discussion here embody, adopts a mode or approach that is said to deconstruct the ontological assumptions on which fundamental concepts, such as the Cartesian subject, depend for their truth as actually existing in the world. This is not to

say that Revueltas, Hilst, and Lispector explicitly affirmed a commitment to a post-Kantian, deconstructive mode of thinking. Though I do not ignore biography or authorial intention as necessary elements in literary studies, my analyses of the fiction of these writers seek to displace these factors and focus on close readings of the primary texts. The interpretations that result from such an approach will at certain moments diverge with biographical information as it has been assembled by the writers themselves and critics, especially in the case of Revueltas. One can affirm without too much controversy, however, that these three writers were engaged with philosophical questions, which is evidenced in the explicit intertextual references to philosophical thought in their fiction and in their discussions of this thought in their non-fiction writing and interviews that they gave throughout their lives. If we can speak of some minimal authorial intention on the part of Revueltas, Hilst, and Lispector, it is to foreground philosophical reflection in their work. The status of the subject forms an important and recurring question in these reflections.

As with the centered subject, I will give a working definition for the decentered subject in an attempt to both adequately express in my own words the numerous post-Kantian reflections on the centered and the divided subjects. The discursive and material realm of politics, law, and culture share an essential presupposition of a centered subject. Though the existence of something personal in the form of a discrete ego or consciousness is self-evident, one only needs to apply some pressure for an excess to become apparent that leads to a subject that is both ego or consciousness and its other. If we are to articulate a decentered or divided subject, we must avoid relying on substantialist notions of an ideal subject, while at the same time eschewing

immanent explanations that end up advancing a mechanical determinism. In other words, how to account for subjectivation (the personal) and various forms of subjection (the impersonal), and the nettled, often blurred relations between the two, in the composition of self? A model that assumes both the personal and impersonal presupposes its own ontology. In contrast to the centered subject of metaphysics, there is no origin that pre-determines the existence of individual entities whose names and properties humans are able to comprehend; there is only absolute difference of matter and forces of movement and extension, to which thought and language attempt to organize into form. In other words, the symbolic realm of language is only an approximation that will never achieve transparency between thought, language, and the real. One particular way to think of a divided human subject, which hews to what we find in the fiction of the three authors featured in the chapters that follow, is Gilbert Simondon's notion of individuation. The self, or what Simondon calls individuation, arises from pre-individual being. Paolo Virno groups pre-individual being into three categories: "a generic biological endowment," "historical-natural language" into which one is born, and the "prevailing relation of production." (2004, 76-77). Elizabeth Grosz explains that "the pre-individual is not static or inert but fundamentally dynamic. It generates forces which act upon each other, which generate tensions, points of excess, the development of a tipping point or forms of emergence, forms of becoming that coexist at best uneasily. These points of instability are the sites around which individuality may emerge" (39). Individuation is the metastable resolution of these conflicting, diverse forces into singular arrangements, and as a result, they are never the same from one person to the next (Simondon 1992, 300). The individuated self

never reaches any definitive closure because of individuated self's own constitutive exposure to the impersonal or pre-individual; however, the latter never exhausts the expression of the individuated self because of the disposition of this self to react to and organize the impersonal flows that traverse it. There is a unity, then, but it is given in an interminable process of becoming. Simondon calls this "perpetuated individuation" in which "*the living conserves within itself a permanent activity of individuation"* (italics in the original 2009, 7). Similarly, Virno argues that individuation never completes itself in the form of a centered subject but is rather experienced as a tension between the individuated and impersonal, pre-individual realm. "The *subject* consists of the permanent interweaving of pre-individual elements and individuated characteristics; moreover, the subject *is* this interweaving" (italics in the original 2004, 78).

Though the work of Revueltas, Hilst, and Lispector deconstruct the figure of the subject, they carry this out in distinct ways, which I will briefly detail now as a sort of preview of the chapters that follow this introduction. In the first chapter, I concentrate on two of Revueltas' novels, *Los días terrenales* (1949) and *Los errores* (1964). One aspect that underlies a good deal of the criticism of Revueltas' work is the way in which the author's fiction was often at odds with his political commitments throughout his life. In the chapter, I argue that this tension can be attributed to a questioning of the ontological assumptions that inform both communist and liberal theory and practice of Revueltas' era. In particular, I will focus on the ways in which this deconstructive impulse can be seen in the treatment of the subject, which is

represented as constitutively divided, at times even effaced. Both novels reflect on ontological explanations that may account for a divided subject. *Los errores* posits a gap between thought and action, as well as thought and the real, that produces unexpected and often tragic outcomes. In *Los días terrenales*, the subject is marked by a sense of a lost plenitude that both the communist militant and dissident characters of the novel attempt to recuperate. The novels additionally carry out a deconstruction of unitary notions of the subject in the staging of a contradiction between a centered ideal subject of the communist party of Mexico and the Soviet Union and the lived experience of the characters of the stories. This contradiction is dramatized in the stories of the characters of both novels. In *Los errores*, for example, the characters Mario and Lucrecia attempt to will a significant change in their lives, what the narrator repeatedly calls a "supreme act," that fails to come to fruition.

The novels feature characters who are political militants and ask the question how one's actions may be considered ethical and politically effective. These novels address assumptions of a centered subject in the ethical and political realms as they relate to subjection to the sovereign authority of the party on the part of the individual, the question of motives and intentions of the subject, and the logic of ultimate ends that guides political actions. Sovereignty is depicted as a political theology without any immanent or transcendent ground. In terms of motives and intentions, the model of the militant is based on a conscious and rational subject who possesses access to stable truths on which their thoughts and actions are based. What the novels demonstrate, however, is an ethico-political subject that is divided by unconscious drives and desires at odds with a will to think and act in line with any sort of truth. In the novels, the belief

in a philosophy of history that leads to a predetermined end or final reconciliation provokes an auto-immunitary crisis that gives way to a logic of sacrifice, which paradoxically betrays the very beliefs that a group, such as a political party, is fighting to actualize in the world. In the worst cases, sacrifice extends to the adherents of these truths, as is the case in Stalin's Soviet Union, to which the novels of Revueltas make frequent critical references. The novels offer two alternatives in terms of action only to turn a deconstructive modality on them, thereby putting in doubt their viability. I conclude the chapter by considering the tragic denouements in many of Revueltas' novels. Despite the primarily negative work of the deconstructive approach, I point out that in *Los días terrenales* and *Los errores* one may find a glimpse of an affirmative content that signals what a politics and ethics might look like beyond a centered subject.

Chapter two addresses the fiction of Hilda Hilst, specifically the three novels that critics have called the Pornographic or Obscene Trilogy, which consists of *O caderno rosa de Lori Lamby* (1990a), *Contos D'escarnio/textos grotescos* (1990b), and *Cartas de um sedutor* (1991). These novels are known for their explicit and often obscene representations of sex. After receiving a good deal of critical attention for her poetry, but little attention from a wider reading public, Hilst claims to have written these novels - along with the rest of her fiction - in order to gain more readers. But the style and content of the novels belies these statements, as they are characterized by a form of literary modernism that does not lend itself to widespread consumption of her work. In the chapter, I argue that the novels of the Pornographic Trilogy signify a change in the ontological assumptions in the work of Hilst.

If in Hilst's earlier work we find a desire to achieve communion with a divine figure, the Trilogy marks the death or absence of God. The novels turn their attention to the earthly realm and seek to think through the implications of this death as it concerns the individual and collective subject. Given the absence of an origin that determines meaning, the notion of a human subject that is able to perceive this transcendent or immanent order is put in doubt. The subject in these works is caught between a desire for and the impossibility of attaining a transparency between thought, language, and the world. What is left in the place of a divine figure is an originary difference that gives way to an unending becoming. The death of God denotes a change in the way that the collective subject or community is conceived as well. In the novels, there is no destiny that human existence is in the process of realizing. As a result, the notion of a centered collective subject that achieves a communion in the present or future is denied.

The Pornographic Trilogy reflects on this condition by way of a deconstructive mode that foregrounds limits and their transgression. In the graphic representations of sexual taboos and their transgression, the novels show limits to be formed on base or earthly concerns rather than any transcendent laws. As they concern sexuality, limits denote an effort to reckon with and regulate sexuality in the interest of social order, which is demonstrated in many moments of the novels to be racist, patriarchal, and heteronormative. But this movement between limits and transgression does not endeavor to overcome these limits; it is rather to make clear that these limits are historically constructed and that given this condition, there exists the possibility - never guaranteed by any philosophy of history - that they may change. The novels also work

through the death of God on the formal level, which is elaborated in the attention to narrative voice, authorship, and genre. In the areas of voice, authorship, and genre, there is a movement in which the ostensibly clear delimitation of these elements become blurred as the narrative progresses.

The death of God could lead to a tragic sense of life, which we find in other works by Hilst. But the trilogy expresses an affirmation, evidenced in the comic element that characterizes a good deal of the deconstructive mode found in the novels. The comic signifies not a salve for the essential finitude of human existence but an acknowledgement of this condition. Furthermore, in the comic there is call for a community whose ground is a being-in-common, that is, the sharing of a finite and singular condition without the hope of a communion in a collective unitary subject.

And finally, in the third chapter, I consider Clarice Lispector's novels *A paixão segundo G.H.* (1964), and *Água viva* (1973). Like Hilst, the work of Clarice Lispector is often associated with God, particularly as it is related to Jewish and Christian mystical traditions. The association with mysticism, and religion more generally, is often made with reference to an epiphanic event that the protagonists of Lispector's fiction undergo. Other critics have explored the philosophical content of these events and read them as Sartrean existentialist dramas or post-structural thematizations of the disjuncture between language and the real. I assume this philosophical perspective but affirm that the events related in the two novels entail a change in the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the protagonists.

More specifically, the event reveals the univocal character of being. Univocity is the idea that being derives from one impersonal substance that does not stand outside or beyond this being in the form, for example, of a divine creator. This one substance is made up of difference rather than some originary and unitary identity. The existence of univocal being that the events reveal in the two novels affect the way that the characters experience self or subjectivity. In *A paixão segundo G.H.,* there is what the eponymous narrator calls the human part of her self, which alludes to the western metaphysical tradition, at the center of which is the conscious subject. This human or humanized attunement to the world is brought to its limits by what GH calls the inhuman realm that she encounters in the event, which is one of various metaphors put to use to signify a univocal being that is impervious to capture by sovereign reason and power. GH variously describes this experience as shaking her human foundation, her human formation, and her civilization. These figures of structures being shaken or destroyed suggests a sovereign subject whose essential ground or foundation is put in doubt. GH explains that this is due to the fact that the world does not correspond to the subject's claims of mastery over life. As a result, the human, its thought and actions, are cast as superimposed on life and thus holding an illegitimate claim to power over life. The inhuman or univocal is a force that is evoked in the novels as an impersonal, indifferent, and neutral force that changes her understanding of time and space, as well as her relation to the natural world.

The existence of univocal being that the event reveals in the two novels also produces ethical aporias that the texts attempt to confront. Despite the fact that the inhuman is greater or more real than the human in *A paixão segundo G.H.*, an effort is

required to open oneself to this realm. There is, in other words, a disjunction between the human and the inhuman that GH will attempt to overcome. In order to achieve this, G.H. proposes a form of ascesis that seeks the dissolution of the ego (the human) in order to more fully affirm life (the inhuman). This process faces a certain impasse, however, in that it is an act that requires will, decision. But it is a will toward passivity, a will not to will. Is it possible, though, to exist as a human and not will? Is this dissolution of the ego achievable only in death, or in the infrequent ecstatic moments of the events that the narrator experiences? There is a shift in perspective in *Água viva* that denotes a different approach to the problem of self and univocal being. If *A paixão segundo G.H.* demands a negation of self that would overcome the gap between humans and univocal being, what results in *Água viva* is an acceptance of the peculiar human condition that is suspended between the human and univocal being. In *Água viva*, this interval between the human and the univocal is what the narrator calls "a vida oblíqua." It is an art of living that attempts to bring a sense of wellbeing that would alleviate a fear of human mortality.

There is still one important issue to address before moving on, which entails providing an argument for the reading that I will present below. In other words, what is the point of thinking about the subject, particularly concerning the fiction of Revueltas, Hilst, and Lispector? If in the past, this question required a justification for literary analysis as it concerned questions of the production of a national literary history, it seems that the tendency in recent years is to argue for the value of literary studies in terms of its relevance vis-à-vis the extra-literary realm. Both forms of

authorization are nothing new, however, as they are an iteration of the perennial questions concerning the purpose of art: is art meant to edify, to instruct? Or, does it exist to entertain and provide solace? In its contemporary form within the Latin Americanist humanities, the extra-literary refers to the ethical or political implications of one's reading of a particular work as they relate to the social conditions (politics, economics, culture, etc.) of Latin America or a particular country in the region. What can a novel or a poem from the past or present tell us about the moment in which we find ourselves? The imperative to read literature and cultural production in general with these concerns in mind signifies an interest in the contemporary, which is understood not as a mere description of any self-evident conditions but rather a oppositional relationship with the present. What kind of critique of the state of things or alternatives to the status quo does a work offer or evoke? "Contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it, and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it" (Agamben 2009, 41). The authors that I discuss here were contemporary in that their work deconstructed the centered individual and collective subjects at a time in which an essential national or continental identity was a primary concern in the political and artistic realms.

Likewise, my reading argues for the value of the divided subject in a moment in which the search for identity in humanities predominates, albeit less on national grounds. Indeed, the enactment of neoliberal economic agendas in the region following, or, in some cases, preceding the debt crises of the 1980s, have posed challenges to the territorial and juridical sovereignty of Latin American states. These policies signify the increasing influence of economic logic in the political realm. One particular

phenomenon that emerges from this period and affects the state is the appearance and growing sway of parastate actors, principally organized crime groups and paramilitary militias, that challenge the state's sovereignty, particularly in countries like Brazil and Mexico. These circumstances by no means signify that the state or national sentiment are in the process of disappearing. Nonetheless, factors such as challenges to state sovereignty, as well as innovations in the realm of technology, environmental crises, and migratory flows make it difficult to conceive of a national subject as in the past. The efforts to suture heterogeneous groups into the national subject and in this way elicit loyalty to the state have attenuated. In his work *Exhaustion of Difference* (2001), Alberto Moreiras reasons that in addition to these factors, categories of identity and difference lose their descriptive and critical force due to post-structuralist and postmodern theoretical work that interrogates the epistemological certainties of Western thought on which notions of identity and difference are based, as I have detailed above in regards to the centered and divided subjects (11-17). As a result, we find a decline in the identification along national lines and the rise of various identitarian and regional demands - based on race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality - for autonomy and recognition.[3] In the intellectual realm, this drift away from the national has produced important work that details the ways that, from independence onward, an elite criollo leadership has attempted to shape and portray national culture and identity as an organic or predestined process of unification. These critical analyses show the radical heterogeneity that characterizes the continent. The various iterations of national

[3] For a detailed treatment regarding the emergence of identity politics in the realm of concrete politics and its study in the Latin Americanist humanities and social sciences in the North American academy, see Charles Hale (1997).

and continental identity are, then, imaginary and contested discourses that attempt to subsume this heterogeneity in the interests of capitalist development, or, in some cases, revolutionary alternatives to this development.[4] At the same time, the emphasis on non-national identities as an alternative to national identity may paradoxically reinforce the mechanisms that produce the oppression against which marginalized groups fight.

Identity categories, such as race and gender, bear on conceptions of centered and decentered subjects and are tied to the ways that modern state and market power are distributed, which I characterize as biopolitical. The notions of biopower and biopolitics are principally associated with the work of Michel Foucault. In a series of lectures at the Collège de France that began in 1975 and in the first volume of his *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault points to a change in the techniques of power in the West that begins in the eighteenth century and signifies a shift, from power as the sovereign right to take life, to biopolitics, which works to generate and regulate life: "One might say that the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or to *disallow* it to the point of death" (1978, 138). Under biopolitical mechanisms, power works to "incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it." In other words, it is "a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them" (1978, 136). Foucault further distinguishes biopolitics from the ancient model as a "power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls

[4] See for example, Peter Wade (1997) and Nicola Miller (1999).

and comprehensive regulations" (1978, 137). If the maintenance of life was outside of the grasp or interest of sovereign power, biopower is meant to penetrate all aspects of this life, signifying "the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques" (1978, 141-142). In addition, the biopolitical character of the state facilitates the development of the capitalist mode of production, which "would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes" (1978, 141). It is important to note that biopolitics does not solely concern the state but entails a commingling of the state and market dynamics to produce its effects.[5]

An additional characteristic of biopolitical power is its nexus to the identity categories of race, gender, and sexuality. In the series of lectures that were later published in English under the title *Society Must Be Defended* (2003), Foucault particularly focuses on the relation between biopolitics and race. He traces the beginning of modern discourses on race to a current of historical narratives that contested the histories of sovereign power by demonstrating the conflicts between different races that undermined the ability of sovereign powers to rule (2003, 69-75). If in these histories race signified groups with different political interests, the understanding of race begins to take on biological valences in the nineteenth century and forms an essential element in the employment of state power, in which conflict signifies a struggle for existence. It is "a struggle in the biological sense: the

[5] Immanuel Wallerstein and Etienne Balibar (2011) also address the links between the state and capitalism, as well as the identity categories related to race and gender. See, especially chapters 2, 14, and 15

differentiation of species, and the survival of the fittest" (2003, 80). Additionally, Foucault explains that society is no longer made up of opposing groups but of one race, which is "threatened by a certain number of heterogeneous elements which are not essential to it." In this way, the state serves to protect the one race from harmful or extraneous groups. "The State is, and must be, the protector of the integrity, the superiority, and the purity of the race" (2003 80-81). In this role as the protector of racial purity, the state legitimizes its power as the entity that can protect against the corruption of internal and external threats. A part of this apparatus is the state's ability to exercise the power to wage war and kill those that it perceives as its enemies. This is a paradoxical claim, Foucault points out, since this right contradicts the state's role in reproducing life. The use of race as a biological-medical category serves to justify the death of so-called inferior races in order to ensure a healthier life for the superior race. According to Foucault, racism constitutes the essential precondition that justifies this killing, which includes murder "but also every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion in, rejection, and so on" (2003, 255-256).[6] Biopolitics, then, is not solely concerned with promoting life. As critics have pointed out, modern techniques of power that promote life also entail the sovereign's prerogative to take life, to kill.[7]

[6] See, Ann Laura Stoler for a discussion on the intersections of sexuality, race and biopolitics (1995) and Jemima Repo (2016) for an analysis of the relation of gender and biopolitics.

[7] Both Giorgio Agamben (1998) and Achille Mbembe (2003) have convincingly made this point on the role of sovereign power in biopolitical order.

One cannot deny the potent materiality of identitarian subject categories, particularly in the everyday lives of groups who have been historically marginalized. The mechanisms of interpellation in the political, economic, juridical, and cultural realms continue to have determinative, negative effects. In contrast, identity politics demand recognition by way of an affirmative articulation of these categories, overturning the racist, sexist, and homophobic assumptions that have informed hierarchies that produce stratification according to identitarian categories. At the same time, however, there are still other ways in which identitarian demands for recognition may lend themselves not to greater freedom but to more efficient forms of control through cooptation by the market and the state.

In an incisive essay, Wendy Brown illustrates some of the ways that identity politics may paradoxically reproduce the dynamics of oppression against which it fights. Brown is writing from a North American context, but what she describes is a certain logic that emerges in liberal democratic and capitalist societies in general. Two factors give way to what she calls politicized identities: the "failure of liberal universalism to be universal," along with "the increasing individuation of social subjects through capitalist disinternments and disciplinary productions." Brown argues that identitarian claims are then "oriented toward protest against exclusion from a discursive formation of universal justice" (393). What goes overlooked is the criteria or the context in which this call for justice is inscribed, which, for Brown, is characterized by liberal democracy and a capitalist mode of production. This "formulation of justice (...) ironically reinscribes a bourgeois ideal as its measure." In other words, identity politics necessarily excludes a critique of capitalism. "They

[identity politics] necessarily rather than incidentally abjure a critique of class power and class norms precisely because the injuries suffered by these identities are measured by bourgeois norms of social acceptance, legal protection, relative material comfort, and social independence" (394). The problem with this position is not that the claims of injury are inconsequential but that they naturalize the very conditions that produce these injuries in the first place: "alienation, commodification, exploitation, displacement, disintegration of sustaining, albeit contradictory, social forms such as families and neighborhoods" (Ibid).

In a recent essay that relates these questions to the Latin Americanist humanities, Eugenio Di Steffano and Emilio Sauri point out a similar disavowal of class by way of an overwhelming focus on exclusion and domination. "The problem with the emphasis on domination in Latin American studies, however, is that in leaving questions about the same system's mode of production aside, it has tended to render the structure of capitalist *economic* relations barely visible" (emphasis in the original 29). The making invisible of exploitation, the primary cause of domination, is a structural effect of neoliberal apparatuses that ensures its longevity (5, 30, 33). In contrast, the authors argue that if we could only understand the structure of neoliberal order, make it more visible, then this would produce a greater, more effective resistance to this order. Though I agree that identity politics precludes an analysis of neoliberal order, whose effects must be detailed in terms of a mode of production, Di Steffano and Sauri do not account for the state as a crucial factor in the production of social order. In fact, though it is never explicitly averred, the logic of their argument suggests a base-superstructure, or, at least, determination in the last instance, understanding of

causality. Again, I Insist on the state-market relationship, and biopolitics offers a model to think about the complex dynamics between these entities, particularly as it affects individual and collective subjects in terms of subjection and subjectivation.

Related to this state-market relationship, one further aspect to consider as it concerns the question of the subject and mechanisms of power is how biopolitics constitutes a historical conjuncture that produces a shift from a disciplinary society, which attempts to wield its control over individuals principally by means of institutions (schools, prisons, factories, hospitals), to what Gilles Deleuze called societies of control (1992). The latter may be considered not so much a shift from disciplinary power as an "intensification and generalization of the normalizing apparatuses of disciplinarity that internally animate our common and daily practices." The difference is that "in contrast to discipline, this control extends well outside the structured sites of social institutions through flexible and fluctuating networks" (Hardt and Negri 23). If the power effects of disciplinarity were fitful and static, biopolitical power works "as a control that extends throughout the depths of the consciousness and bodies of the population - and at the same time across the entirety of social relations" (Hardt and Negri 24). In this way, the biopolitical mechanism of power achieves normalization within everyday life, in habits of thought and action, as its effects increasingly take place on the corporeal and noncognitive levels. Despite its seeming ability to subsume all aspects of life under its control, there is something that always escapes, something that exceeds this mechanism, what Miguel Vatter describes as a "surplus of life" (2009).[8] This excess

[8] Vatter reviews three works concerning biopolitics in which he identifies a common thread around the notion of surplus. One notion of surplus concerns an affirmative surplus of life, which he especially perceives in the work of Roberto Esposito.

may be found in the aspects of the experience of self that escape the centered subject, as Revueltas, Hilst, and Lispector dramatize in their fiction, and allows for a critique of the biopolitical apparatus, as well as a way to resist its capture, and to think and practice different forms of life.

However, the connection between ethics and politics and notions of a divided subject seem limited to the personal or private realms. Indeed, efforts to make politics in the institutional sense correspond to theoretical reflection and lived experience of a decentered subject strike me as doomed to fail in the face of brute material conditions. I argue, then, for a double movement that, on one hand, engages politically with the current material conditions of state and market; and the second movement carries out a radical critique of the state of things and explores the implications of the divided subject. The former is premised on the recognition that the state and market as they exist now are not going away any time soon, but the possibilities exist to address pressing issues, such as economic inequality. This movement involves neither a commitment to the status quo, nor the refusal to take part in politics until social conditions are radically transformed. What this signifies is the promotion of discrete proposals that would further democratic values of equality and liberty within existing social conditions by way of creative, bricolage tactics that avoid being absorbed by the political and economic logic of the status quo as much as possible. Alain Badiou argues for a similar practical engagement with the state on issues, such as the legal status of immigrants in France, rather than, say, working for the fall of the state: "We include the state within our political field, to the extent that, on a number of essential points, we have to work more through prescriptions against the state than in any radical

exteriority to the state" (2001, 98). As far as politicized identities are concerned, for example, my objective here is not simply to oppose one to the other - identarian claims to the decentered subject. In terms of lived experience, they both possess a material force in thought and practice. In terms of critique and practice, there is a certain utility in the tactical use of identity, along the lines that thinkers like Gayatri Spivak proposed, when it can avoid biopolitical subjection.[9]

The second movement represents a retreat from this status quo and the exploration of how the divided individual and collective subject may contribute to alternative forms of life that not only deepen democracy but also produce more sustainable conditions for all beings on this planet. This experimental aspect evokes efforts like Autonomia Operaia in Italy and the Situationist International in France, among many others. If biopolitical power effects are produced in everyday habits of thought and action, then I maintain that the ethical and political response to this state of things may be found on this level as well, in which the lines between private and public become (or always already were) blurred. The emphasis on the excess of any centered subject may be a productive tactic to elude capture by state and market mechanisms. These authors suggest that the direction for thought and action may in many cases be a refusal to take part in the dynamics of identarian politics, even as subjects in resistance, as these subjects are inexorably caught up in relations of power of the biopolitical state and market. Thought and action, then, take the figures of

[9] For an explanation for what Spivak calls strategic essentialism, see the essay "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in Spivak (1998).

exodus, rather than participation; invisibility, rather than visibility.[10] In these forms of ethical and political retreat, there may be a space for another model of the self to emerge and the possibility for experimentation in collective subjects that promote "new democratic forms of social organization and political action in horizontal, nonhierarchical networks" (Hardt 3).

Part of the second movement involves a deconstructive work. One fruitful avenue for this negative labor would be looking at the ontological grounds on which biopolitical power is founded, which is intimately tied to a model of the centered subject that is paradoxically divided. Giorgio Agamben has detailed that in classical Greek thought human life is conceptualized as both *zoē* and *bios*. This understanding is inherited from classical western philosophy and is still very much a part of the historical *a priori*. *Zoē* refers to the natural or biological life that is common to both humans and animals, while *bios* concerns that which is properly human, what some philosophers referred to as qualified life or the good life. This good life is achieved by a process through which humans overcome or master the realm of *zoē*, their animal nature. In this way, there is an exclusion of *zoē* from *bios* that ends up being an inclusion in which *zoē* is subordinated to *bios* (1998, 1-4).

In different terms but with the same dynamic of exclusive inclusion in mind, Roberto Esposito finds the continuation of this subject in Christian theology and Roman law and likewise argues that this subject is still very much with us in the figure of the person or persona. In Esposito's terms, this separation occurs between the

[10] See, Paolo Virno (2002, 2004) for an elaboration on the notion of exodus; See, Smith et al (2015) for a discussion on the tactic of invisibility.

personal subject and animal nature that make up the human as well as the hierarchical ordering of the person over the animal: "In this way subjective right, rather than being inherent to the entirety of the human being, applies only to the upper part, which is rational or spiritual in nature, exercising its dominion over the remaining area" (2012, 11). In other words, "to be the owner of a body, the persona cannot be coextensive with it; in fact, the person is specifically defined by the distance that separates it from the body" (2012, 13). It is in this separation between *bios* and *zoē* that we find a hierarchy take shape in which some groups are able to achieve this personhood, while others find themselves at a lower stage in this process or are excluded from taking part in *bios* or personhood altogether. The dispositif of the person functions as a "mechanism of social discipline," that determines the status of beings according to the degrees of personhood and animal nature that inheres in them (2012, 9). Here, we find again the double nature of the biopolitical in its promotion of life and the sovereign's right to kill that has implications for living beings in general. To each level of "personalization" or "depersonalization" "there corresponds a different right to determination, and even preservation of one's life (...) The person-hood deciding machine marks the final difference between what must live and what can legitimately be cast to death" (2012, 13).

The breaking up of this apparatus or dispositif involves its deconstruction as well as a rethinking of the relation between *bios* and *zoē* in which these two are not separate and opposed but caught up in immanent and changing relations of equality with each other. This implies not overcoming biopolitics but rather an affirmative biopolitics, a politics of life that does not engender the violent and destructive logic of

modern biopolitical power. The decentered subject is understood as an endless becoming that involves the interweaving of the personal and impersonal discussed above. This experience of the decentered subject points to the ways that this relation is not one of mastery, *bios* over *zoē*, or the subject over the material world in general, but a self in which the personal and impersonal mutually inform each other. Agamben states it this way: "The subject would neither be the conscious subject, nor the impersonal power, but what holds itself between them" (2004, 124). In this dissertation I look to the ways that Revueltas, Hilst, and Lispector think through the implications of a decentered subject and the possibilities that such a thought signifies for the ways that we understand ethics, politics, and community.

Chapter 1: Blind Knot: The Divided Subject in *Los días terrenales* and *Los errores* by José Revueltas

There are arguably few Latin American writers whose lives have inspired more critical speculation than José Revueltas (1914-1976). Critics have particularly focused on his lifelong political activism. The political trajectory of Revueltas begins at the age of fifteen, when he joins the *Federación de Jóvenes Comunistas.* As a result of his allegiance to various communist parties, Revueltas was imprisoned on at least four occasions. He was also expelled three times from the very same communist parties for which Revueltas was persecuted by the Mexican state. These excommunications were due to fallouts with party leadership over his perceived ideological deviations, especially in the two novels that I will consider in this chapter, *Los días terrenales* (1949) and *Los errores* (1964). In addition, attention has been paid to his move away from the parties and gravitation towards the student movement of 1968 in the last part of Revueltas' life. Without a doubt, besides writing fiction, the life of Revueltas was consumed by the theoretical and practical aspects of politics.[1] Revueltas' lifetime, moreover, began and ended with momentous events in modern Mexican history, as the critic Edith Negrín has pointed out: he was born during the revolution in 1914 and died in 1976, less than a decade after the events of 1968 (1999, 13).

Regarding the reception of his fiction, Revueltas faced a backlash with the publication of *Los días terrenales*. The most public and extensive criticism came from the

[1] In the *Obras completas,* Revueltas' political and theoretical writings make up nearly half of the 26 volumes.

Marxist critic Enrique Ramírez y Ramírez, who, in an article titled "Sobre una literatura de extravío," accused Revueltas of subordinating realism to harmful ideas, variously identified as individualism, mysticism, nihilism and existentialism, calling the last a "philosophy of decadence" (344). Revueltas responded by trying to recall the novel from circulation. He also wrote several pieces of self-critique. Following the publication of *Los días terrenales*, he published two novels, *En algún valle de lágrimas* (1957) and *Los motivos de caín* (1958), neither of which explicitly take on the themes and questions addressed in *Los días terrenales*. During this period, in 1961, Revueltas also published an essay to mark the twentieth anniversary of the publication of his first novel *Los muros de agua* (1941). The essay ostensibly concerns this first novel but is more preoccupied with explaining his philosophy and method of fiction that he called "dialectical materialist realism." His elaboration of this realism in the essay works to bring his life and literary work together. Indeed, he ends the essay by affirming that his literary work and his Marxist-Leninist militancy are complementary practices (2013, 20). *Los errores*, however, restates the criticism of the party, both in the Soviet Union and Mexico, but in more vociferous terms. The starting point of my investigation is a question or puzzle that has continued to animate critical work on the fiction of Revueltas: how to explain the apparent contradiction between Revueltas' political activism and his literary work? Throughout his life, Revueltas insisted that he had remained a faithful communist. And yet, in his fiction, one finds that this trenchant critique of the communist party leadership of his day is not so much premised on a non-dogmatic stance to politics or the thinking about politics; nor does his censure pertain to a limited group of rogue actors, who have betrayed the truth of communism. I argue that the actions of the party leadership,

particularly under Stalin's leadership, compel Revueltas to reflect on the ontological assumptions on which communist thought and politics are based. It should be said that this critique does not presume the superiority of liberalism and a capitalist mode of production that has informed a good deal of critique of communism in the mid to late twentieth century; rather, it calls into question the centered individual and collective subject that is presupposed in notions as varied as the communist New Man, the Mexican national subject, and economic liberalism's notion of the *homo economicus.*

Critics have sought to explain the tension between Revueltas' life and fiction by positing a combination of often antagonistic influences in his work, producing a dialectical relation that serves to generate the fiction. The poet and critic Octavio Paz points out the paradoxical copresence of Christianity and Marxism in the Revueltian oeuvre. It is Revueltas' ability to keep in permanent dispute these two lines of thought and to suffer for being an independent thinker that makes Revueltas a heroic figure, worthy of being considered a great Mexican writer (xx). In a similar way, the critic Edith Negrín addresses the difficulty in Revueltas' work in her book *Entre la paradoja y la dialéctica* (1995). She asserts that it is in his fiction that Revueltas is able to both affirm and question his beliefs (1995, 14, 233). This affirmation and challenge take the form of various paradoxes that appear in his work and effectively generate the narratives. Rather than an opposition between Christianity and Marxism, Negrín argues that it is a dialectical relation between existentialism and Marxism that informs the fiction. For Negrín, this theoretical tension in Revueltas' fiction expresses a human condition that is tragic in its finitude (1995, 156).

Philippe Cheron takes up this tragic human condition and argues for a dialectical relation, which serves to generate Revueltas' fiction. Cheron reads the author's literary work alongside the thought of Michel Foucault's notion of disciplinary society. He focuses on the predominance of prison in the fiction of Revueltas. The major claim that Cheron makes in his work *El árbol del oro* (2003), is that incarceration is not merely a frequent theme in the work of Revueltas but the central figure that structures the entire oeuvre of Revueltas (296). Following Foucault, he points out that every disciplinary control engenders a concomitant resistance. As a result, there is in the narratives of Revueltas a constant tension between imprisonment and the desire to escape (212). Cheron goes on to call this tension the "dialectic of imprisonment" (286).

Ignacio Sánchez Prado (2007) points out the growing tension between what he calls Revueltas' political practice and his literary practice. We begin to see this tension in the novel *Los días terrenales,* in which an internal debate is dramatized in the interaction between the two protagonists of the novel (153). It is in his literary work, Sánchez Prado goes on to argue, that Revueltas shows his true political orientation, that is, an ethical concern for the poor of the world that takes priority over any theory or dogma. In fact, the literary work of Revueltas weakens both Marxist Leninist and Mexican nationalist ideologies (154). The student movement of 1968, affirms Sánchez Prado, was an event that reconfigured the social, literary, and cultural spheres in Mexico (167). It also signified that Marxism was no longer the privileged discourse of the left (168). Revueltas' participation in the movement and his later fiction evince a keen awareness of the impact of this event. Sánchez Prado argues that the period marks the end of the historical left and

the advent of a more liberal left. Revueltas played an important part in defining the ethos of this new left. In Revueltas' later fiction, and in the work of intellectuals like Carlos Monsiváis and Roger Bartra, one finds that their work privileges "la libertad, encima de los dogmas, el compromiso político encima de las teleologías históricas" (173).

Marxist critics view their work on the fiction of Revueltas as a recuperative effort, in opposition to what they see as a hegemonic and erroneous reading of Revueltas' fiction that is informed by a thinly veiled anti-communism. These critics argue that the ambiguity in Revueltas' work contains a coherent, albeit idiosyncratic, articulation of a Marxist theory and practice. For Evodio Escalante, there is a clear systematization at work in Revueltas' fiction that adheres to key Marxist categories (2006, 26). Escalante sets out to expand on the notion of what he calls the "dialectic of degradation" and "pauperization" in the fiction of Revueltas. He contends that these terms describe a dialectical movement that inexorably moves towards extinction and forms the core of the Revueltian fiction machine (2006, 19-20, 34). Escalante acknowledges that, as a result, Revueltas' work is characterized by a deep pessimism. But he chastises those critics whose humanist prejudices prevent them from perceiving the Marxist message in the fiction of Revueltas. In fact, for Escalante, the pauperization or degradation that the characters endure forms a dialectical force that moves towards an inexorable liberatory end. The syntheses that constitute the unfolding of history are not always ascendant, but rather take many forms, including a descendent, degrading form. Degradation and pauperization signal an eventual overcoming of capitalism (2006, 67). Similarly, in his intellectual biography of Revueltas, Jorge Fuentes Morúa (2001) sets out to trace the influence of Marx in the work

of Revueltas and closely follows Escalante's analysis.

Bruno Bosteels is another critic whose recuperative efforts seek to establish a definitive reading of Revueltas' body of work that is in harmony with the political activism of the author, thereby wresting his literary work from a bourgeois humanist hermeneutic. In an essay on the novel *Los errores*, Bosteels argues that though the novel contains a call for ethical reform directed at the communist party, one should not understand that this critique puts in doubt Revueltas' fealty to communist thought and politics. What underlines Bosteels' methodological approach to the author's work is a form of biographical criticism. Early on Bosteels chides critics who do not pay proper attention to Revueltas' political activism: "*Los errores* se leería entonces como una denuncia de la política comunista, denuncia no menos feroz o tajante por pertenecer al espacio de la ficción – siempre íntimamente ligada, como bien se sabe aunque no siempre se aplica debidamente como principio de lectura, al mundo del activismo político de Revueltas" (124). Though Bosteels concedes that *Los errores* lends itself to a reading like the one that I am developing in this chapter, or like that of Sánchez Prado's mentioned above, he attributes this element to a sort of cognitive lapse on the part of Revueltas. Afterall, if Revueltas swore his loyalty to communist thought and politics, then readers ought to interpret his fiction with this conviction in mind. As Bosteels insists, "sin duda alguna, aunque su novela puede leerse de esta forma, nada hubiera horrorizado más al eterno comunista que fue Revueltas" (143).

Though critics may not agree on the precise terms, they are in accord regarding a dialectical element in the fiction, something that Revueltas encouraged, as we see in the

1961 essay for the anniversary marking his first published novel. Revueltas' notion of dialectical materialist realism is based on his assertion that existence is governed by a system of laws: "la realidad tiene un movimiento *interno* propio, que no es ese torbellino que se nos muestra en su apariencia inmediata, donde todo parece tirar en mil direcciones a la vez." As a result, there is an imperative that the fiction of politically committed writers such as Revueltas represent this movement, which is moving towards a final synthesis: "Tenemos entonces que saber cuál es la dirección fundamental, a qué punto se dirige, y tal dirección será, así, el verdadero movimiento de la realidad, aquél con que debe coincidir la obra literaria" (2013, 19).[2] Nonetheless, I contend that the ontological assumptions in Revueltas' two novels under consideration here differ greatly from those of dialectical materialist realism. The latter assumes a world that possesses laws, whose origins and the properties that are engendered by these laws, are available to human thought and language. What we find in *Los terrenales* and *Los errores,* however, is a world with an unknown origin and hence the lack of substantial ground on which any sort of eternal truth may be based. This condition is evinced from the position of a human subject that is not centered but fissured. Revueltas' fiction expresses an epistemological skepticism that bars a transparent relation between thought and language and the world. This does not give way to the chaos that Revueltas refers to in his essay, but any necessity in the literary worlds of the two novels is determined by contingent and changing

[2] In this same essay, Revueltas claims that Mexican literature had still not gone farther than psychoanalytic representations of human reality, an adequate but lesser mode of apprehension that misses a still more essential level of dialectical laws that constitutes the real (2013, 20). Interestingly, the two novels draw on some of the fundamental insights of psychoanalysis that relate to questions of subjectivity, and in this way trouble the very dialectical laws that Revueltas aims to represent in his fiction.

conditions rather than eternal laws. Crucially, as a result, human existence is without a fundamental direction that leads to an ultimate synthesis, absolute knowledge, or the end of alienation. The subject in these novels is one that is divided between the rational and irrational, as well as the conscious and unconscious. This subject, however, does not belong to a Sartrean existentialism, as some critics have claimed.[3] Sartre's conceptualization of subjectivity is still informed by a cartesian understanding of the subject, while it seems the aim of Revueltas' fiction to deconstruct that very understanding of subjectivity.[4] This difference between Sartre and Revueltas' thought is further evinced in Sartre's objections to notions of the unconscious, which plays an important role in Revueltas' fiction.[5] I contend that it is this figure of the divided subject which angered Revueltas' fellow travellers, as well as that which produces the tragic human condition that critics like Negrín and Cheron point out. The deconstructive mode of thought at work in these novels brings the assumptions of a centered subject to their limits and as a result affects how we understand the categories of politics, ethics, and community. In this way, the ethico-political demand expressed in Revueltas' work is to rethink these categories in a way that attempts to be more faithful to the lived experience

[3] In addition to Negrin, see, for example, Jaime Ramírez Garrido's *Dialéctica de lo terrenal: ensayo sobre la obra de José Revueltas* which attempts to reconcile existentialism with marxism in Revueltas' fiction. Certainly, there is an affinity between Revueltas' fiction and existentialist thought, which has more to do with the work of Martin Heidegger and others than with that of Jean-Paul Sartre. In a recent essay, Evodio Escalante calls attention to a Heideggerian current in Revueltas' *Los errores* that he detects in the syntagma *ser ahí,* which occupies an important part in the beginning of the novel. *Ser ahí,* Escalante reminds the reader, was used to translate one of Heidegger's key concepts, *daesin,* in the Spanish translation of the philosopher's work *Being and Time*. Escalante concludes the essay perplexed: "¿Qué significa la atención al ahí del ser en esta novela que, aunque escrita por un marxista, no puede escapar a los ecos del existencialismo heideggeriano?" (2014, 206)

[4] At one point in his essay "Existentialism is a Humanism," for example, Sartre makes clear the debt to cartesian subjectivity: "As our point of departure, there can be no other truth than this: *I think therefore I am*" (Italics in the original, 2007, 40).

[5] See, for example, in the first part of *Being and Nothingness* in which Sartre deems psychoanalytic theory, and the idea of the unconscious, a form of bad faith (1993, 50-54).

of this divided subject.

The figure of disjunction or division is emphasized in the doubling or dualistic form of the plot structures of both novels. *Los días terrenales* takes the form of a debate between the two communist militant protagonists, Gregorio and Fidel, former friends who have become divided over their ideas concerning the party's doctrine. Gregorio has been assigned to work on a clandestine mission in an indigenous village in Veracruz. He is a militant with ideas that are at odds with the party's doctrine and as a result faces expulsion and possibly death at the hands of the party leaders. His case is worsened when the village leader finds the body of a local militia leader, Macario Mendoza, floating in the river at the beginning of the novel. The reader learns that Mendoza had planned on killing Gregorio, but was himself murdered by Epifania, a prostitute from the village. This incident jeopardizes the secrecy of the party's mission in the area. Fidel is a dogmatic party leader, who oversees the mission in Veracruz and files a complaint with the party against Gregorio. The novel's critique of the party is dramatized in Fidel's marriage to Julia and their daughter Bandera, who dies of a treatable sickness because Fidel fears that a trip to the hospital will expose the couple's clandestine status and put in jeopardy their mission on behalf of the party. The novel takes place between the incident in the village and the fate of Gregorio at the hands of the party leaders that takes up the last chapters of the novel.

In terms of structure, *Los errores* is a double narrative, composed of two largely discrete stories that take place alongside each other. The first occurs in a poor neighborhood in Mexico City, at the center of which are Mario and Lucrecia, a petty thief

and a prostitute who are lovers. In the second, a group of clandestine communists are planning to stage a general strike, which a fascist group in the pay of the state is conspiring to defeat. Though the two narratives remain separate for the most part throughout the novel, I argue that they are, nonetheless, thematically linked, something which is intimated in the epilogue, titled "*Nudo ciego*," which includes the dénouement of both plots. The blind knot serves as an emblematic figure in both stories, indicating the condition of a fissured subject to which the characters are equally exposed, though they are unaware of or blind to this condition.

The narratives of these novels include passages that reflect on the ontological conditions that produce this divided subject. Early in *Los errores,* this intention is announced in the thought of one of the characters, Jacobo Ponce, a dissident intellectual from whose ideas the novel derives its title and bears the provocative thesis that marks Revueltas' novel. Ponce elaborates an epistemological skepticism that posits a constitutive disjuncture between thought and action, as well as language and the real. In an often quoted passage, which forms a sort of excursus in the novel, Ponce puts forward his notion of the human as an erroneous being that begins in the following manner:

> El hombre es un ser erróneo (…) un ser que nunca terminará por establecerse del todo en ninguna parte: aquí radica precisamente su condición revolucionaria y trágica, inapacible. No aspira a realizarse en otro punto – y es decir, en esto encuentra ya su realización suprema –, en otro punto – se repitió – que pueda tener una magnitud mayor al grueso de un cabello, o sea, ese espacio que para la eterna eternidad, y sin que exista poder alguno capaz de remediarlo, dejará siempre sin cubrir la coincidencia máxima del concepto con lo concebido, de la idea con su objeto (2014, 67).[6]

[6] Ponce's conception of the *ser erróneo* bears a likeness to Theodor Adorno's negative dialectic. In the introduction to his important work, *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno explains that "the name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that the objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a

This is to argue that language and thought are unable to reflect the world. In a recent article, Evodio Escalante swerves from his earlier Marxist reading of Revueltas' work discussed above and indicates this radical stance. He states that Revueltas, in the guise of his *alter ego* Ponce, becomes "un disidente no sólo del marxismo oficial, sino del marxismo a secas" (2014, 198).

This condition of erroneous being is further developed when Ponce's explanatory digression continues in the form of a fanciful thought experiment. As Ponce speculates about erroneous being, his reflections are interrupted by a traffic jam outside the window where he sits. The noise of honking cars is directed at a large truck that is blocking the flow of traffic. Ponce imagines himself as a rational extra-terrestrial from another part of the universe, who travels to earth to understand the "action of being" as it can be inferred in the traffic jam outside Ponce's window (2014, 74). After several observations, he finds that though humans possess consciousness but it is a flawed one, another figure of the divided human subject: "A todas luces parecía tratarse de una conciencia enferma y tal vez, en el fondo, malvada. Era una conciencia rabiosa, enloquecida, febricitante y violenta, en lucha contra su propio ser en el tiempo, contra su propia unidad" (2014, 78). As for reason, it exists in humans, but the timing of its appearance in the existence of humans is late and therefore fatefully limited: "la [razón] de los seres terrenales habría aparecido mucho tiempo después del momento oportuno para que pudiera esperar algo de ella. Debía tratarse, sin duda alguna, de un planeta tardío" (2014, 79). According to Ponce,

remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy (…) It indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived" (1973, 5).

the condition of humans is determined by chance and not a predetermined, destiny, that precedes human existence. In similar terms, Giorgio Agamben states that "the mystery of the human being is not the metaphysical one of the conjunction between the living being and language (or reason, or the soul) but the practical and political one of their separation." The ground for ethical and political thought and action is this gap, one in which "the becoming human of the human being will never be achieved once and for all, will never cease to happen," rather than a current or future conjunction (2015, 208).

The centrality of Ponce's ideas is further signaled in an etymological examination of the syntagma "error." Most commonly at present, the word "error" refers to the "holding of mistaken notions or beliefs" (OED), and equally, to a "concepto equivocado o juicio falso" (RAE), as voiced in the critique of the communist party throughout the novel. But more important, "error" derives from the Latin *errare* which describes a roaming or wandering, which characterizes the movement of perpetual becoming that the split between language and being produces in the thinking of Ponce. Moreover, "error" is related to *errorem,* or nominative error, that is, an inability to name the subject of a verb of a given sentence, implying a disjuncture between the subject and their actions, as we see dramatized in the cases of the characters of the novel, which I will discuss presently.

One may find in the fiction of Revueltas a further attempt to provide an ontological explanation of sorts for this notion of a gap between language and being that Ponce develops in *Los errores*, which in the novel is tied to the relation between thought and action and the question of origin. The existence of an origin that is available as an object of knowledge is a necessary ground on which a harmony between thought and action can occur. The two stories that make up *Los errores* concern characters who are wanting to

effect what the narrator repeatedly calls a "supreme act," in which an act made by a conscious, centered subject will produce results that coincide with the intentions of the agent of that action. The situation of Mario Cobián, who the reader encounters in the opening scene of the novel, provides an exemplary case. He is hiding out in a cheap motel, where he is preparing to rob Don Victorino, a moneylender in the neighborhood. The set-up is familiar: Mario is planning to pull off this robbery so that he and his girlfriend Lucrecia can leave Mexico City and start a new life as the owners of a store or bar in northern Mexico. As a part of Mario's scheme to rob Don Victorino, he plans on disguising himself as a travelling salesman. Though there are other ways to avoid detection, the choice of disguise intimates that Mario is attempting more than an improvement of his material situation; he is seeking a total break with his former life by means of what the narrator calls a "supreme act," which will allow him to cast off his old self and become somebody new: "aquel acto supremo y definitivo que lo hará cambiar su vida. Se iba a convertir en otra cosa, iba a cambiar de rumbo" (2014, 16).

As the narrative progresses, however, we find that the characters' supreme acts repeatedly produce unexpected outcomes. An explanation for this element of contingency in *Los errores* may be elucidated by referring to one of Revueltas' later stories, "Hegel y yo," as it addresses in more detail what one of its protagonists calls an "acto profundo" and its relation to the absence of an origin that would allow for a predictable relation between thought and action. The story takes place in Lecumberri prison (where Revueltas wrote the story), and the *Hegel* of the title is the narrator's cellmate. As the narrator attempts to understand how he has ended up in prison and estranged from his girlfriend, *Hegel* interrupts his ruminations to explain that the answer to this question resides in an

originary act. Origin, derived from *archē*, denotes a beginning as well as a command, a determinative ground that is the condition of possibility for a transparent relation between thought, language, and the world. It is an enigmatic act, *Hegel* explains, because on one hand nobody has any memory of it: "es tan antiguo que no se guarda memoria de su comienzo, nadie sabe de dónde arranca, en qué parte se inicia o si no se inicia en parte alguna"; this act, in effect, does not exist: "el acto profundo no tiene principio, no ha comenzado jamás…" (2013, 20) Nonetheless, something like a memory of this act is inscribed in a part of the self that is presubjective. He tells the narrator that this act "está inscrito en tu memoria Antigua, en lo más extraño de tu memoria, en tu memoria *extraña*, no dicha, no escrita, no pensada, apenas sentida" (Ibid). Though it is unknown, one's memory compulsively endeavors but fails to remember this originary act. It is both integral and heterogeneous to one's self: "Tú eres quien le pertenece, con lo que, por ende, dejas de pertenecerte a ti mismo" (Ibid). Attempts to assign to it a proper name and coherent narrative, are limited to nominalist explanation: "no hacen sino borrar sus huellas y falsificarlo, erigiéndolo así en un Mito más o menos válido y aceptable durante cierto periodo: Landrú, Gengis-Kan, Galileo, Napoleón, el Marqués de Sade o Jesuscristo o Lenin, da lo mismo" (2013, 21). In the world of Revueltas' fiction, the origin is a paradoxical absent presence, a necessary ground for thought and action that is at the same time impossible to apprehend.

Los dias terrenales expresses this hiatus between language, thought, and the real in different terms, introduced in the initial scene of the novel in which a communal fishing venture takes place. Gregorio is present and, as he observes the villagers, he is spellbound by a sort of revelation in which he has access to an originary, pre-subjective existence:

"En el principio había sido el Caos, mas de pronto aquel lacerante sortilegio se disipó y la vida se hizo. La atroz vida humana" (2000, 13). The sensation disappears almost in the same instant that he experiences it. He tries to will it again but fails. It eludes him, yet the lack of the sensation imbues and changes his perception:

> Noche, tinieblas, rotundo vacío. Todo igual. Lo negro, lo impenetrable, sí, pero distinto sin aquella ansiedad de hacía unos minutos puesto que esa negación del color, esa insólita ausencia de cosas vivas, de la noche, de pronto se había vuelto humana, de pronto abrigaba cosas monstruosamente humanas que había roto para siempre la presencia de algo sin nombre, profundo, esencial, y grave que estuvo a punto de aprehender y que hoy escapaba sin remedio (2000, 14).

There is a momentary awareness of something that is intimate and yet out of reach, a sense of plenitude. The distance separating Gregorio from this state makes him aware of a sense of lack, which gives way to a desire to recover or gain access to this experience. The desire to overcome this lack and regain a lost sense of wholeness is shown to be the force that conditions the thoughts and actions of both protagonists.

For communists like Fidel and another young communist, Rosendo, their belief in the coming revolution, and their actions that they believe will bring this event into the world, are symptomatic of the desire to recover a lost sense of wholeness. In one passage of the novel, Rosendo, in language that replicates the socialist realism that Revueltas spurned throughout his life, expresses his desire for this final reconciliation:

> más allá de todo lo visible estaba el misterio del infinito, que es el misterio más amado entre todos los misterios porque el hombre será su dueño cuando sea libre. Esta idea causó una viva emoción en Rosendo. Imaginaba el advenimiento de una especie de tierra prometida, que era a la par la imaginación de algo inconcreto, muy puro y transparente (…) y también la imagen del trabajo alegre, del esfuerzo optimista y generoso, en medio de hombres sanos y rectos (2000, 124).

Fidel expresses a similar belief in one of the various debates with Gregorio: "Los hombres

pueden ser todo lo miserable, ruin, y bajo que usted quiera, pero (…) ya dejarán de serlo cuando se transforme la sociedad" (2000, 115). In response, Gregorio denies the possibility of transformation and considers Fidel's conviction as one of many fables that promise to overcome the condition of lack: "¿iban a ser esos hombres de la sociedad futura mejores que los contemporáneos? Absolutamente no. Serían iguales dentro de normas distintas (…) es decir, iguales respecto a una moral nueva donde el mal y el bien tendrían nombres distintos" (2000, 190). Though Gregorio catches a glimpse of a sense of wholeness in the first sequence of the novel, he argues that there is no way to mend this gap, given humans' finite condition. In the heat of another argument, Gregorio states his understanding of the finite condition of humans: "El hombre es la materia que piensa. ¿Comprendes? La materia consciente de que existe, es decir, consciente también de que dejará de existir (…) En esto, en la conciencia de esta extinción radica la verdadera dignidad del hombre" (2000, 170). However, Gregorio is not immune to this same desire that Rosendo and Fidel experience, as we discover in the last chapters of the novel. Gregorio finds himself in a limit situation that allows the novel to affirm the existence of an irreducible gap that is only overcome in death.[7]

In addition to the sections devoted to the ontological conditions that engender a divided subject, part of the deconstructive strategy in both *Los días terrenales* and *Los*

[7] One of Revueltas' biographers, Álvaro Ruiz Abreu, makes a similar point, arguing that there is in Revueltas' work a nostalgia for a lost unity (54). This is apparent in the presence of indigenous and Christian myth and symbolism in the author's fiction. What these signify, argues Ruiz Abreu, is the search for and discovery of some sort of national identity. Revueltas is enlisted as an avatar of *lo mejicano, la mexicanidad* (47). In the same essay, however, Ruiz Abreu characterizes Revueltas' work as marked by permanent doubt (45) and essentially anarchic (51), two qualities that hardly lend themselves to the certainties of nationalism.

errores includes the staging of a confrontation that pits the notion of an ideal centered subject - espoused by the communist party leaders - against a sense of subjectivity that emerges in lived life that troubles this conception of subjectivity. In *Los días terrenales,* Gregorio assails Fidel's abstract notion of humanity when they meet for the first time:

> Porque usted (…) tiene una imagen acabada, concluida, casi se diría perfecta del hombre. Es más, si se le arrebatara, usted consideraría que su vida ha perdido toda la razón de vivirse (…) Pero se olvida que ese hombre en el que usted cree y por el cual lucha sin descanso (y no sin romanticismo también, es preciso que lo reconozca) no es otra cosa que un hombre aún no comprobada por la experiencia, sino apenas un hombre construido en el laboratorio (2000, 114).

Gregorio's notion of a lived subject points to a singularity that exceeds this universal being: "en tanto que usted conoce al hombre, ignora casi en absoluto lo que son los hombres vivos que lo rodean, y pretende entonces manejarlos como entidades abstractas, sin sangre, sin pasiones, sin testículos, sin semen" (Ibid). A similar critique is illustrated in *Los errores* in a passage that confronts a fundamental disjunction between the party's notion of a transcendent subject and lived human experience. In a speech at a party tribunal that is deliberating on whether to expel a party leader, Olenka Delnova, the dissident, Eladio Pintos, expresses this opposition in the following: "¿De dónde se sacaban estas conclusiones obtusas, mecánicas, frías, donde ante todo lo primero que se ignoraba era la existencia del ser humano? ¿O alguien abrigaba la enloquecida idea de que el socialismo y el comunismo podrían reducirse a un helado esquema de cifras y ecuaciones inexorables y sin alma?" (2014, 145-46). The passage is focalized on the dissident Olegario Chávez, who is present in the audience and is compelled to stand and applaud upon the conclusion of the speech, which is noted by the party leaders.

The novels' response to the party's notion of subjectivity is developed in *Los*

errores in the passages concerning Mario and Lucrecia, which dramatize the gap between thought and action, as well as thought and the real, that Ponce's erroneous being asserts. What we encounter as the narrative unfolds are subjects whose thoughts and actions are conditioned by a tangle of reason, the unconscious, desire, and memories of past traumas. To once again pick up the opening scene of the novel that takes place in the motel, Mario is standing in front of a mirror assessing his disguise. This moment is a prelude to the action that will follow in the narrative, whose outcome lies beyond the calculation of the protagonists, and thereby announces the gap between the decision, the act, and the incalculable outcomes of this act: "dentro de algunos momentos, comenzarían todas las cosas, sin que ya nadie pudiera detenerlas, una detrás de otra, sometidas a su destino propio" (2014, 13).

The double of Mario and his image in the mirror initially reflects a sense of a unitary subject that then becomes perturbed as Mario observes himself. Regarding the experience of reflection, Martin Jay observes that "although the two images may be apparently identical, there is always a surplus, an invisible otherness, that necessarily disrupts their specular unity" (505).[8] The experience of self-relation assumes a clear distinction between the interior of self from which one perceives and acts in an exterior world. But we see that in this moment, as well as in a repeated sequence with Lucrecia, auto-affection (self-reflection) always involves a hetero-affection (other-reflection), in two senses: there is the other of the unconscious in this scene and throughout the first

[8] The critic Christopher Domínguez Michael also considers the preoccupation with mirrors in Revueltas. Looking in a convex mirror intimates a disjuncture: "Pero al rechazar este espejo-que-sólo-refleja, Revueltas resume su obsesión por los espejos cóncavos, que registran y devuelven una imagen negativa, una mueca perturbadora" (74).

story. As Mario gazes at himself, he senses that his actions do not entirely belong to him: "Con todo, los gestos que el espejo había repetido no lograron disipar la sensación impune (…), donde las cosas previstas, calculadas, que iban a ocurrir y que él realizaría, de cualquier modo no eran suyas, o no suyas por completo" (2014, 14). Furthermore, the narrative voice alternates imperceptibly between omniscient narration and free indirect discourse, and in this way becomes a sort of unstable subject as well. The second sense of otherness is found in the way in which the living present is continually traversed by the past and the anticipation of the future, as is demonstrated in this scene in which Mario's consciousness is a continual oscillation between the present, the past that he wishes to repress, and the future that he is sure awaits him after the robbery.

This same chapter reveals what is for Mario an event about whose influence he is unaware and engenders fateful consequences. In one of the few moments that the narrator comments in the first person, the reader's attention is called to Mario's physical characteristics, which bear a strong resemblance to his mother. The narrator describes these traits as belonging to him and not belonging at the same time, indicating, again, an inner alterity. "He aquí, empero, unos rasgos: aunque tampoco suyos, tampoco pertenecientes en forma estricta a su persona (…) puestos ahí por un pasado anterior a su propia vida, anterior a su nacimiento: los rasgos del rostro de su madre" (2014, 14). The reader is given to understand that Mario's mother is no longer alive but haunts Mario. Again, the subject in front of the mirror is assumed to be a moment of auto-affection and is revealed to be another sort of hetero-affection. The memory of his mother is integral to the action he will carry out: "Ella lo acompañaría, ella lo protegería con su presencia

invisible e íntima" (Ibid). There is an oedipal ambivalence that we find towards the end of this moment in front of the mirror that is linked to something that happened when Mario was a child, whose repressed memory forces its way into his consciousness.

The narrator explains that this event begins with a young Mario who wants to produce another supreme act that would be an expression of his sovereign will. One day Mario climbs up on the roof of the neighboring tenement building and fires a pistol at the water tower of the building where he lives, causing a commotion among the neighbors. Sometime later Mario returns to the roof, but instead of shooting at the water tower, he impulsively fires into an apartment. After pulling the trigger, the passage narrated in the third person but focalized on Mario describes him as languidly reclining, "como después de una larga jornada amorosa" (2014, 19). As neighbors begin to gather in the apartment where Mario fired the pistol, he remains on the roof, feeling a "cierta especie de delirio abismal y dulce," comparing himself to a god or to a magician who "hace surgir de la nada cosas increíbles y maravillosas" (2014, 20). When Mario finally makes his way to his apartment building, the account becomes opaque, but the reader gathers that Mario has unintentionally shot and killed his mother. The bedroom into which he assumed he was shooting becomes his mother's bedroom. Mario enters his apartment to find his mother in her bedroom, sitting with her back to him, motionless. Mario recalls a noise that came from her body that sounded as if it were filling an imaginary cup. As an adult, Mario associates this noise with his girlfriend Lucrecia: "La propia Lucrecia era parte de ese ruido, estaba inodada en aquella especie de conjura, en todos esos turbios y siniestros manejos fisiológicos" (2014, 22). Mario's plans to rob Don Victorino and start a new life

with Lucrecia are conditioned by the relationship between he and his mother, rather than his sovereign will to bring about a supreme act.

The awareness of a fissured subject is emphasized in the varying use of names throughout the narrative that refer to the protagonist as both Mario and El Muñeco, the name by which he is known in the neighborhood where he lives and works. In one passage, the narrator relates the interaction between Mario and the front desk manager of the motel in which Mario is recognized, or interpellated, as a traveling salesman. At this point the costume is much more than disguise; it confirms what the narrator calls Mario's doubling or division. The sentence that fittingly concludes this sequence is made up entirely of fragments and conveys a self that exceeds one's proper name and requires supplementation: "Reflejado en el espejo como un simple agente de ventas, pero también de este lado, donde estaba el Mario Cobián real, irreflejable y secreto, aquel conjunto de hechos, situaciones y relaciones que era El Muñeco" (2014, 16). There is, moreover, the two antithetical lexical pairs in the sentence that evoke both transparency (*reflejado*, *real*) and opacity (*irreflejable*, *secreto*) that exist uneasily beside each other.

But who is Lucrecia? Though she is a central character, she appears only in the middle of the narrative. Before that moment, the reader learns of her through the perspective of Mario and her fellow prostitutes. Part of Mario's convoluted scheme to rob Don Victorino involves leaving a large valise, which contains his accomplice Elena, in the office of the loan shark and returning for it later when Don Victorino closes his storefront for the day. Mario has a few hours before he goes back to pull off the robbery and decides to find Lucrecia and tell her about his plans. When he does not find her in the

usual places, he grows increasingly desperate and we see again the dissonance between actions and their intended outcomes prefigured here: “El plan no se desarrollaba conforme a lo previsto, sino que tomaba sus caminos propios” (2014, 114). As Mario searches, the reader is introduced to Lucrecia, who we come to learn is preparing to escape from Mario by leaving Mexico City.

In this introductory scene Lucrecia is standing in front of a mirror shortly before she leaves the city to start a new life in Veracruz. In addition to the figure of the double, the narrative is marked by repetition, as is evidenced in this passage and its likeness to the opening scene of the novel. Both Lucrecia and Mario stand before a mirror just before they attempt to accomplish their supreme acts of will. However, the doubling does not imply sameness but rather the difference that exists in the figure of the double. What leads each character to this point is an overdetermined number of factors. When Lucrecia observes her image, she appears as a stranger to herself: “En conjunto, un rostro sugerente, extraño, cuyas expresiones resultaban siempre imprevisibles para Lucrecia (…) Hoy se veía fatigada, sin voluntad, a la deriva, pero no se advertían su desesperación ni su pánico interiores. Aunque también la parte que correspondía al espejo era real: una vaciedad completa, un desgano, un desfallecimiento de suicida” (2014, 130). By leaving Mario and her life behind, Lucrecia is another character attempting a supreme act, a forceful break, which constitutes what the narrator calls a form of suicide with the hope of rebirth (Ibid).

There is also a marked compulsion to repetition in Lucrecia’s life, which is indicated in the metaphor that the narrator uses to describe Lucrecia’s sense of being in the world as that of living in a prison. Though not physically imprisoned, she feels that

the string of abusive men with whom she continually becomes entangled resemble the circumscribed and isolating experience of prison cells. We are meant to understand that this repetition is tied to the trauma of being effectively abandoned by her parents, though they were present in Lucrecia's life. The figure of prison is one of repetition and difference: "El padre borracho, Ralph, la miseria, otros hombres, prostíbulos: distintas celdas de esa única larga cárcel que era el haber nacido a la vida." (2014, 133). At one point we learn that Lucrecia was involved with Mike, a boy that she adopted after he was abandoned by his parents. Lucrecia's relationship with the boy reinforces the incestuous relationship between Mario and his mother. As the narrator relates, "Mario amaba su madrecita santa del mismo modo en que Mike a Lucrecia, con los mismos sucios y ardientes deseos, como si la matara" (2014, 136). Both cases evoke a subject that is divided by taboo desires.

As the reader finds out, and perhaps suspects from the beginning, very little turns out for the characters in *Los errores* quite like they plan it. Each of the two stories in the novel present a sort of empirical case in which the intentions of the acting subject and the outcomes of action are at odds. Jacques Derrida elucidates this incongruity in which a knot of various elements gives way to chance: "a decision has to be prepared by reflection and knowledge, but the moment of the decision, and thus the moment of responsibility, supposes a rupture with knowledge, and therefore an opening to the incalculable – a sort of 'passive' decision." It is difficult to anticipate how the various elements of "reason and its other, the calculable and the incalculable, the necessary and the aleatory will be distributed in the arrival of the future" (2001, 61). The contingent outcomes of action

suggest a future that is incalculable, which is emblematized in the repeated image of characters that tremble or fall to their knees at moments of dramatic pivots in the first story. Don Victorino, the hardened former *porfirista* soldier, secretly trembles in anticipation of his future death (2014, 61). In the same way, the prostitute *La Magnífica* begs one of Mario's lovers, *La Jaiba,* to allow her to run away from Mexico City with Mario (2014, 189). And finally, Mario falls on his knees before the militants whom he confuses for police agents looking to arrest him (2014, 186).

The contingent nature of action is also embodied in the denouement of the first story in which a certain necessity prevails, but one that adheres to chance rather than any eternal principle or law. Mario eventually finds Lucrecia and beats her for trying to leave him. As he leaves her apartment, Mario believes that he has killed her. The robbery goes terribly wrong and Mario's plans are ultimately thwarted. His accomplice, Elena, kills Don Victorino. Mario in turn murders Elena and attempts to make off with the money. As he is looking for a place to count the money, Mario encounters two of the communist militants from the second story, whom he comes across in an earlier scene, and mistakes for the police. Believing that they are aware of the robbery, as well as the murder of his accomplice and Lucrecia, Mario pleads with them to let him go. He turns over the money to the bewildered militants and flees, seeking to hide out with one of the prostitutes. Mario, however, is betrayed by another prostitute for what she believes is the murder of Lucrecia. In the end, Mario is not able to leave the capital, but obtains a form of legal employment when he is blackmailed into being a police informant. We find that Lucrecia survives Mario's attack, and resigns herself to a life with Mario.

This concern with action is further developed as it relates to the conditions through which one's acts are considered ethical and politically effective and is focused on the communist militant characters in both novels. Again, this is a question of the status of thought, language, and action as they relate to the real. Specifically, it concerns notions of truth, which serve to guide ethical and political action for the centered subject. If we consider the ontological coordinates detailed in Revueltas' fiction, then the existence of any stable, eternal truth is put in doubt. This assertion has implications for some essential assumptions of a centered subject vis-à-vis action in the ethical and political realms, including the status of sovereignty, the question of motives and intentions, and the logic of ultimate ends that guides political actions or means to achieve those ends. What the narrators of *Los días terrenales* and *Los errores* repeatedly point out is that what informs the action of the ethico-political subjects that populate the novels is not simply the force of a truth or the perceived unfolding of a destiny, but also calculation, violence, the unconscious, and a sort of thanato-politics, moving towards death rather than some final reconciliation in life. Here I contend that in Revueltas' fiction ethical concerns do not inhibit or cancel politics, as Bruno Bosteels insists, but rather they trouble the ground of a centered subject as it relates to both ethics and politics.

In one instance, the ethical political act is subjecting oneself to the truth of the party as an appointed and sovereign authority. Straying from or criticizing the party line, as Revueltas was accused of on many occasions, calls for censure, excommunication, or worse. In other words, the content of the norms and prescriptions of a given truth are not what compels; what bears the force is the body - individual or collective - that emits or

declares such a truth. As a result of calling the unitary subject into question, the novel also impugns the grounds on which the party is considered legitimate and thus authorized to represent the other party members who subject themselves to the authority of the party. If there is no access to truth or if the predestined role of some specific figure is absent, the legitimacy of the party is in question. Both novels deem the party's claim to sovereign power as a secularization of a theological concept that replaces the party, or any human figure, for the figure of God as absolute authority. In the novels, the critique is framed in terms of an equivalence between the party and the voice of God, as well as references to party leaders as "inquisitors" and to party doctrine as "red theology." At one particularly emphatic moment in *Los errores*, Chávez says:

> Creer que se tiene la razón y la verdad en virtud de un sistema de revelaciones divinas, del que se nos habrá hecho gracias quién sabe por qué ni a cuenta de qué preferencia especial. 'La voz del partido es la voz de Dios.' (…) Pero esta creencia, esta convicción, no representaba, ni con mucho, una actitud inofensiva (…) Había algo aún más tremendo y desazonante en todas sus implicaciones (2014, 270).

What is unsettling in this assertion for Chávez, is that this thinking engenders a logic of sacrifice in which the party's actions are permitted, no matter how abominable they are, if it furthers the revolutionary destiny. What ensures power for the party in the novel is neither a truth nor predetermined ends, but the force of violence. To be sure, the novel foregrounds the calculations, the expulsions, and the assassinations carried out by the party in Mexico and the Soviet Union, in particular the case of a communist from Mexico, Emilio Padilla, who was imprisoned in the Soviet Union and later died under mysterious circumstances; and Olenka Delnova, a militant who is expelled from the party and then disappears. The party attempts to cover over this condition by prohibiting any talk of these

party members, but their names are evoked throughout the novel, along with some of the victims of the Trials of Moscow, in the form of involuntary memories in the consciousness of Chávez. These figures form a spectral presence that puts Chávez's loyalty to the party in doubt.

If the heteronomous direction of action illustrated in the individual subjection to the party as sovereign power is rejected, the novels offer an alternative in the autonomous ethico-political subject, which is then shown to be problematic. In this model, the ethical and political imperative is that one's acts work to realize a particular truth in the world and thereby have an effect on social order or social change. This assumes disinterest in the motives or intentions of the subject. In other words, the truth compels one to act without ulterior motives, such as the desire for recognition or the possession of power. Action is understood as a form of a gift that is offered without the expectation of reciprocity. *Los días terrenales,* however, draws attention to the militant's motives for their actions and shows them to be part of an ongoing struggle for advantage in a sort of game of moral one-upmanship and for position in the party hierarchy. As in the case of Mario and Lucrecia, the reader finds that the unconscious desires and drives exceed the centered subject whose motives are indifferent to the truths that inform ethical and political actions. This conflict is illustrated through an omniscient narrator that shrewdly reveals a libidinal economy at work behind the revolutionary ardor of the characters.

Fidel is most often scrutinized in the novel. When Fidel receives the letter that Gregorio sends from the village, detailing the murder of Mendoza, he very dramatically expresses his disgust at the situation. But Fidel's indignation is motivated by a sense of

moral superiority that Fidel attempts to hide from his wife, Julia (2000, 37). Indeed, Fidel's degree of devotion is tied to the sense of moral superiority that he feels. In another scene, he observes a modernist painting in the home of a wealthy communist sympathizer and the narrator describes that in Fidel "había la conciencia profunda, conmovedora, sorprendente, de sentirse superior, muy por encima de esas formas de mirar la vida" (2000, 175). In the same way, Gregorio claims that the stridency of Fidel's accusations are not inspired by Gregorio's betrayal to the cause but rather as a way to rationalize his persecution of Gregorio, which is compared to what an inquisitor must feel as he sees the effects of torture on his victim (2000, 92).

It is not only Fidel, however, whose actions are called into question. The notion of sacrifice as self-abnegation is highlighted in a long reflection by Bautista, another communist militant, who, like Gregorio, is facing a crisis of faith in the communism of the party. In a scene that takes place in a setting that is charged with symbolism, Bautista and Rosendo find themselves walking in the middle of the night through a garbage dump on their way to hang posters up at a factory. Bautista finds himself confronted with memories that come unbidden to his consciousness. Bautista looks with shame on his past and compares it to the objects that were once coveted and cherished by those who possessed them but are now considered unwanted junk. The narrator tells us that the trash "se había convertido en un símbolo de todas las cosas, tan amadas en otro tiempo, que él jamás hubiese querido considerar hoy como inmundicia y miseria" (2000, 132).

In particular, he recalls a moment when he was given some money that belonged to the party by a militant that was about to be arrested. He spent three days looking for a

fellow party member to whom he could deliver the money. During that time, he himself was without money, and instead of spending some of the party money on food, he went hungry. He remembers with pride the praise that he received for his sacrifice when he finally encounters a fellow party member. At the same time he is afflicted with a sense of guilt about the self-dramatic way in which he acted, trying to win the approval of his comrade: "cómo había ensayado él mismo, histrónicamente, con hipócrita astucia, su aparición ante ellos: el aire doliente fatiga con que se dejó caer en una banca y la fingida y despreocupada calma con que hizo referencia a su ayuno" (2000, 122).

If any sort of stable truth is inaccessible to human thought and language, and if ethical and political action is traversed by calculation and the demands of the unconscious, the novels advance yet another alternative to action. In this instance the ethico-political act is a response to an encounter with a human other. This calls for a form of ethical casuistry that responds to a demand from this other that precludes unconditional principles, as well as any calculation for personal gain. In his *The Gift of Death*, Derrida asks "on what condition is responsibility possible? On the condition that the Good no longer be a transcendental objective, a relation of objective things, but the relation to the other, a response to the other; an experience of personal goodness and a movement of intention" (1995, 51). This gift-like orientation towards action is provocatively posed in *Los días terrenales* as it relates to the possibility that the sacrificing of a human life could be considered an ethically virtuous response to the other. This sort of sacrifice is first staged in the death of Fidel and Julia's daughter and then in the death of Macario Mendoza at the hands of Epifania. Like the party leaders in *Los errores*, Fidel is characterized as a

bloodless zealot, capable of committing atrocities against his fellow party militants if it is deemed necessary for the sake of the revolution. The reader first encounters Fidel as his baby daughter, Bandera, is dying of malnutrition while he finishes a disciplinary report regarding Gregorio for the central committee. He refuses to seek medical attention for his daughter, because he is worried that it will expose him and his wife Julia to the authorities. Fidel and Julia's daughter dies. Soon after, he admonishes Rosendo for feeling saddened by the death of Bandera: "nosotros no debemos tener tiempo para lamentarnos de nada. Nuestra tarea es luchar sin tregua. Ésa es nuestra única verdad" (2000, 67). With the little money they possess, Fidel decides to use it to pay for the printing of a clandestine newspaper rather than for the costs of a funeral and burial of his daughter. When Bautista objects, Fidel argues that the burial can wait: "la que puede esperar es *ella,* porque está muerta" (2000, 73). He is variously described by the narrator as "un cura rojo" (2000, 38), "un sacerdote de una pavorosa religión escalofriante" (62), and by Julia as a "santo abominable" (2000, 71).

It is through the character of Bautista that the novel directs its contempt for Fidel's actions. Bautista recalls the scene in which he and Julia want to take the corpse of Bandera, which he calls the "breve mártir involuntario sin ataúd," and bury her. Fidel intervenes and refuses to allow them to take her away, "interponiéndse con miedo de que le arrebataran el cordero de su sacrificio, su ofertorio pascual." He is compared to Abraham, who obeys God's command to sacrifice his son Isaac: "Decisión y palabras de un padre, de un Abraham que inmolase algo querido y doloroso ante quién sabe qué dioses horrendos" (2000, 118). This recalls the logic discussed above in which the content of

some truth is not the motive for action but rather the figure that commands the subject to act. The presence of religion in the form of the patriarch of the abrahamic religions is one more equivalence that the novels make between religion and the party dogma, as the secularization of theological ideas. His idolatrous adherence to the ideal serves as one more way to build up his feeling of moral superiority. Bautista contrasts the ideal to lived experience when he senses that Fidel's actions have violated a taboo and relates that he experiences, "una especie de oscuro rechazo, igual a esas oposiciones que experimenta el alma contra el incesto, contra lo excesivamente fuera de lo normal" (2000, 119).

Opposed to Fidel's act, the reader is presented with what appears to be a heroic sacrifice. This is not carried out by Gregorio, as the reader may expect, but rather by Epifania, who kills Mendoza before he can get to Gregorio. She asks for nothing in return from Gregorio. In a brief scene, she reluctantly appears to Gregorio only to admit to him that she killed Mendoza (2000, 94). But how might we articulate the distinction that is being made in the novel in which the sacrifice of Epifania is heterogeneous to that of Fidel? What seems to be the distinction made in the novel is that Epifania's act is a response to the other, beyond calculation; while the latter act of Fidel is related to an idealist principle of the subject - as Gregorio puts it "esos datos históricos, biológicos, sociales, evolutivos, atávicos, digamos también éticos (…) de los que pueden deducirse con la aproximación más honrada posible lo que es el hombre" (2000, 114). In addition to a sense of moral superiority, Fidel's sacrifice is caught up in the same economy of exchange that ties his actions to the reward of future redemption and his heroic role in bringing this event to fruition. This division between the two types of sacrifice are not so clear cut, though, when it becomes clear that Epifania is in love with Gregorio. Rather

than present an alternative horizon for ethico-political action, the novel seems intent on revealing an inexorable bind in which ethical and political action imagined as a gift and as a response to the other is rendered impossible. Derrida makes a similar point in another essay: "For there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, countergift, or debt. If the other *gives* or *owes* me or has to give me back what I give him or her, there will have not been a gift" (1992, 12). The giver and receiver of the gift would need to go outside of the circular economy of exchange of giving and receiving, but this is impossible. Even in acknowledging or perceiving something as a gift, it is annulled (1992, 13).

This bind is similarly illustrated in Gregorio's startling response to Epifania's act of love. We learn in the penultimate chapter of the novel that after finding out who killed Mendoza, Gregorio goes to Epifania and asks to have sex with her, even though he knows that she is infected with syphilis. She does not want to infect him, but she eventually relents. It is only when Gregorio visits a clinic towards the end of novel, and after the infection has developed, that the encounter between the two is revealed. The narrator explains that Gregorio views his deed as an "un acto de amor, de agradecimiento, de desesperación. Tal vez, sin embargo, algo muy próximo al suicidio también. Con ese contagio consciente y deliberado, Gregorio se limpiaba, hacía un sacrificio de su sexo, un acto afirmativo de renuncia" (2000, 202). After the revelation that he experiences in the opening sequence of the novel, Gregorio attempts to think through the implications of what he experienced, that is, the implications of a finite existence and a sense of lost plenitude. The narrator further details that this sacrifice "le servirán para adquirir el indicio, experimentando en cabeza propia acerca del destino de sus semejantes" (Ibid).

Renouncing sex will help him in this endeavor, since sex is an act that, even if momentarily, allows one to experience a sense of plenitude. Gregorio is also aware of the fateful tie between sex and death in that it is only in death that we may fully experience the plenitude of which we only catch a glimpse in sex: "de súbito, la semejanza, la identidad del acto sexual con la muerte se le hicieron claras e indudables" (2000, 203). Furthermore, the same passage signals the paradoxical relation between how the same act is an affirmation of both life and death: "una voluntad hacia el ser, hacia el existir, pero también hacia el no-ser" (Ibid). In the final chapters of the novel, we find that Gregorio's sacrifice will draw him closer not to life in its finitude but towards this lost sense of continuity that can only be experienced without interruption in death.

Though there is an ambivalence between the cases of Fidel and Gregorio, the party's actions are deemed far more dangerous, as the emphatic condemnations of the party in the novels indicate. The reason for the difference in judgment has to do with the idea of ends and bringing the world in line with a truth. This is clear in *Los errores* and the way that it links the act of sacrifice to a philosophy of history that ends in final redemption. The cases of Delnova and Padilla, as well as the Russian victims of Stalin's trials, indicate an immunitary mechanism at work that attempts to maintain the integrity of an order against perceived internal or external threats. But it is possible for this mechanism to produce an auto-immunitary crisis in which the beliefs, institutions, traditions, and, worse, the members of a particular order are sacrificed, presumably in order to preserve the very same order. The novel suggests that this crisis is particularly deadly if the order is organized around the eschatological belief in a final reconciliation,

in which the crisis becomes a veritable thanato-politics, oriented towards death. *Los errores* presents just such a crisis at work within the party, which is indicated by Chávez, who asks whether the twentieth century "será designado como el siglo de los procesos de Moscú o como el siglo de la revolución de octubre" (2014, 223). The response in the novel marks an attempt to conceptualize this crisis that takes the form of an opposition between two types of political subjects. The party leaders constitute the first type, principally the characters Patricio Robles and Ismael Cabrera, who are regarded as priestly figures that betray Marx's thought by turning it into a dogma. They and others like them are referred to in one passage by a barrage of epithets: "oportunistas y arribistas y poetas y 'compañeros de ruta' y burócratas y clérigos y paranoicos y gendarmes del espíritu (…)" (2014, 235). The second type of political subject is the saintly communist, embodied by Olegario Chávez, Jacobo Ponce, and Eladio Pintos, who remain faithful to a non-institutionalized understanding of Marxism and suffer at the hands of the inquisitorial party leaders. The latter group accuses the saintly communists of willfully ignoring the necessary sacrifices demanded in the struggle to bring about the revolution and are therefore considered as betraying the shared communist destiny.

Chávez opposes the logic or necessity of sacrifice. As the novel proceeds, however, the opposition between priest and saint becomes ambivalent and thus complicates the duality of the two figures. The priest and saint figures are both oriented towards a philosophy of history that reaches its terminus in redemption, though they may not agree on the means through which their thoughts and actions as political subjects realize this destiny. Both assume a centered subject and, crucially, a belief in an unfolding destiny.

Indeed, an essential identity between saint and priest is revealed in Chávez himself.[9] Towards the end of the novel, there is a confrontation between the communists and the anti-communist league before the beginning of the general strike. Despite his criticism of the party, Chávez participates in the strike. Two incidents occur in the course of this sequence. In the first, he foils the party's plan to assassinate another dissident in the confusion of the strike. In this act, Chávez interrupts the sacrificial logic of the party. The second event that takes place is puzzling but significant. In what appears to be an accident, Chávez shoots and kills a fellow militant, believing that he is firing at Nazario Villegas, the leader of the anti-communist league. The narrative, now focalized on Chávez, becomes confused in a way that is comparable to the scene in which Mario shoots his mother. Contrary to the narration of the events, he claims to have killed his partner on purpose:

> ¿Por qué él, un hombre como él, Olegario Chávez, había podido llegar a ese extremo increíble, absurdo, de anulación propia, de dogmatismo fanático que le permitiera aceptar la comisión del más inicuo y cobarde de crímenes, la muerte de un camarada desprevenido (…) Algo se le dijo, en algún sitio del que no tenía memoria, acerca de este crimen *necesario* (…) Pero no, por Dios, tal crimen no era necesario, ningún crimen era necesario (2014, 250).

He prevents one murder but carries out another, both ordered by the party leaders. For all his opposition to the party, he is somehow convinced to participate in the assassination. The reader is not privy to Chávez's reasoning before the incident, but it seems plausible that what leads him to accept the party's plan is the shared conviction of the promise of final reconciliation and his role as an agent of this event. Chávez is captured by the police,

[9] Alberto Moreiras points out this relationship between saint and priest: "Perhaps the problem is that saintliness is always already priesthood to start with; that there is no saintliness without priesthood (…) There is no internal betrayal of saintliness by priesthood because every concrete saint, every earthen vessel of sainthood, has already made a pact with onto-historical priestliness" (2005, 3).

who ignore the murder of the militant and falsely charge him with the killing of Don Victorino as a part of an anti-communist media campaign. When the police take Chávez away, he offers no resistance. After he is captured, the party denies that he belonged to the party, and thus he constitutes one more necessary sacrifice. In addition to Chávez's fate, things do not turn out for the communists like they had planned: many of the party members are killed or imprisoned in the unfolding of the events that are meant to commence the strike. We are not given any more details regarding what occurs after the protagonists' disastrous outcome.

The relation between auto-immunitary crisis and eschatology is especially present in *Los días terrenales.* In addition to allowing himself to become infected with syphilis and not seeking treatment until the infection has advanced, Gregorio is aware that a march from Puebla, to Mexico City, to which he has been assigned to lead by Fidel, will be ambushed by the police. Despite his being at odds with the party throughout the novel, Gregorio complies with Fidel's order, and in the middle of the inevitable clash between the marchers and the police, he is kidnapped by undercover agents. In this last chapter, we are taken back to the scene in which the police ambush the march and Gregorio is detained. The narrator observes that Gregorio pays close attention to the faces of the agents of the state and the marchers and points out an equivalence between these putatively opposed groups, explaining that both have the faces of executioners. This identity between the two groups embodies the same opposition that we have seen throughout the novel between the finite, lived human experience and the infinite, the ideal. The narrator describes the faces of the marchers as showing "una esperanza atroz en el

alma, una esperanza criminal, los rostros estremecidos de cosas eternas, sin relación alguna con la vida, sin ningún lazo con lo terrestre" (2000, 216). Likewise, looking at the faces of the police, the narrator says, "estaban locos, locos a pesar de sus hijos, a pesar de sus mujeres, a pesar de sus hogares" (Ibid). There is another sacrifice in the startling image of a mother whose child appears to have been killed by the police. She proudly parades him through the marchers: "La mujer avanzó entre la multitud, negro navío con el rostro triunfante en lo más alto de las olas, siempre con el niño arriba" (2000, 218). In the face of the mother, and even the child, is the face of the executioner.

Why would Gregorio willingly allow himself to be exposed to this danger? Like Fidel, Gregorio is riveted to this desire for a lost wholeness, but he seeks it by entirely different means than Fidel and the party militants. His desire is announced in the first scene of the novel in his anguished attempts to regain a sense of that momentary crossing into a pre-linguistic realm. He then pursues this desire in the sexual encounter with Epifania, which leads him to his willing imprisonment and likely death represented in the final chapters of the novel.

It is in the final sequence of the novel in which Gregorio has been captured by the police for leading the march and is confined to a cell with no light that he undergoes a sort of revelatory event, what the narrator calls "un aprendizaje extraordinario" (2000, 207). I contend that allowing himself to participate in the march is the expression of a death drive that pushes him to fulfill his desire to experience a lost continuity in death. This final chapter is composed of a recapitulation of many figures and themes that appear throughout the novel and functions as a coda that brings them together in this brief but

dense chapter. As he waits for his torturers or executioners, we are brought back to the opening scene with another glimpse of the prelinguistic existence that he experiences again in the cell: "en el principio fue el Caos, no el desorden, el Caos, simplemente una etapa anterior a la experiencia, en donde nada ni nadie se había comprobado a sí mismo" (Ibid). Gregorio is straddling a point between life and death, which he relates to the anguish and ambivalence that marks the moment when an infant begins to gain an awareness of themselves as separate from their mother and a subsequent loss of wholeness (Ibid). The experience of the pre-linguistic state is evoked by the narrator's expressions of the inability of language to name, which in one moment is compared to a dream: "cierto aspecto del sueño, el nombrar las cosas en un idioma secreta y desconocidamente personal, en ningún tiempo escuchado ni siquiera por uno mismo y por ello sin posible traducción" (2000, 208).

Accordingly, imminent death also brings to his consciousness the experience of being inside his mother's womb. In the dark cell, he imagines "las paredes cálidas de su madre, sus tejidos inmensos. Ella era el infinito y la muerte" (2000, 209). Here it is clear: regaining the lost wholeness that one experiences in the bond between mother is only possible in death. In another momento, Gregorio recalls that as he is having sex with Epifania, she becomes his mother: "Aquella prostituta había sido por un instante, en virtud de una cálida y misteriosa transfiguración (…) su propia madre" (Ibid). As with his birth, he is brought closer to death, what he states, again, as "la condición, el destino, la historia de todos los seres humanos" (2000, 210). Gregorio is pulled by the same desire as Fidel. He follows this desire to its ultimate consequence, which is death.

As is often the case in the fiction of Revueltas, the protagonists of the two novels face a tragic end and the novels avoid any hint of a movement towards some final reconciliation. As I have detailed above, some critics argue that there is indeed a dialectic unfolding towards a determined redemptive end that does not necessarily involve a linear progression. Still others, such as Enrique Ramírez y Ramírez, argue that the two novels give way to passivity or a form of mysticism. Similarly, Revueltas' erstwhile friend Pablo Neruda writing about *Los días terrenales* declares in grandiloquent terms: "Por las venas de aquel noble José Revueltas que conocí circula una sangre que no conozco. En ella se estanca el veneno de una época pasada con un misticismo destructor que conduce a la nada y a la muerte" (9). I affirm that the endings in these two novels by Revueltas give way neither to a quietism nor to a rejection of politics. Together with the other elements that I have detailed in this chapter, they are concerned with the presuppositions of a centered, conscious subject. To think at the limits of the category of the centered subject as it relates to our understanding of the relation between thought and action, as well as language and the real, suggest important implications for politics and ethics.

Still, critics like Ramirez y Ramirez and Neruda raise some important doubts regarding the deconstructive thrust of the novels: how are thought and language possible without some connection to the real? And, how is action possible without some thinking of truth and ends? Revueltas' aim is to think of a politics and ethics that considers an aporetic relation between, on the one hand, the necessity in language and thought for representation of the real; and on the other hand, the impossibility that any representation will reflect the real. The deconstructive mode that these novels employ does give way at

certain moments, if only obliquely, to an affirmative thinking, which is particularly evidenced in the final scene with Chávez in *Los errores.* After Chávez is arrested by the police, the reader is left with his confession of guilt for a murder that he did not commit, and this paradoxical fragment that concludes the chapter: "Pero, con todo, la lucha no terminaba, ni terminaría jamás. El socialismo y el comunismo eran el porvenir de los hombres. Era preciso proseguir el combate sin descanso. Sí, pero…, ¿en qué dirección…?" (2014, 252). The conviction of an unconditional destiny of socialism and communism appears alongside the idea of a fight that will never end, evoked in the temporality of the grammatical tense, as well as in the adverb "never." The juxtaposition of these heterogeneous notions calls attention to an element that underlines thought and action beyond any sort of deconstruction of presuppositions, what Derrida variously calls the "emancipatory promise," and "the promise of justice," that is, the desire that animates the militant characters in *Los días terrenales* and *Los errores*. In a reasoning that evokes Chávez's enigmatic words, Derrida calls for an opening or an "access to an affirmative thinking of the messianic and emancipatory promise as promise: as *promise* and not as onto-theological or teleo-eschatological program or design" (1994, 75). The ethics and politics of a divided subject do not call for the rejection of this desire but a change of relation to it, from destiny to promise. A promise in contrast to program here means a commitment to something that cannot be named in a formula or a set of laws. This is to say that it is not about bringing the world in line with some eternal truth, but an orientation to a sense of justice that is related to the singular that marks lived experience and always exceeds the categories of difference and identity.

The notion of a conflict without end also refers to community. If the politics of the centered subject imply a collective that will give way, in the present or the future, to a community based on a fusion of its members, producing a unitary collective identity, the two novels discussed in this chapter suggest a notion of community as a being-in-common without such a millenarian bond. Roberto Esposito elaborates on this understanding of community: "community refers to the singular and plural characteristic of an existence free from every meaning that is presumed, imposed, or postponed; of a world reduced to itself that is capable of simply being what it is: a planetary world without direction, without any cardinal points" (2009, 149). This notion of community does not necessarily prevent the auto-immunitary crises like the one that *Los días terrenales* and *Los errores* dramatize. But the novels are more interested in thinking of a politics that reduces rather than overcomes these often deadly crises. These two novels could be said to prefigure Revueltas' eventual move later in his life away from the various communist parties and towards the more experimental politics that he associated with the student movement in Mexico.

Chapter 2: Limit and Transgression in Hilda Hilst's Pornographic Trilogy

Hilda Hilst (1930-2004) led a varied career as a poet, playwright, and novelist. She turned to fiction later in life, after publishing nine books of poetry and eight theatre pieces before the publication of her first book of novellas, *Fluxo Floema,* in 1970. Following this inaugural publication, she continued to write and publish poetry but dedicated much of her attention to fiction, writing eleven short novels. Though Hilst has not received wide recognition of her work, she is perhaps best known to the Brazilian public for a series of novels that she wrote in the 1990s, which critics have called the Pornographic or Obscene Trilogy. The trilogy will be the focus of this chapter and is composed of the novels *O caderno rosa de Lori Lamby* (1990a), *Contos D'escarnio/textos grotescos* (1990b), and *Cartas de um sedutor* (1991).[10] These novels received this label for their explicit and often obscene descriptions of sex. Despite her relative obscurity for the reading public, Hilst was well known in the Brazilian literary establishment, consistently garnering critical praise and literary awards, including the prestigious *Prêmio Jabuti*, which she won on two occasions. Hilst's lack of readers has been explained by her refusal to work with editors from large publishing houses. According to Hilst, however, few editors showed interest in her work and those that did handled the publication and distribution of her work poorly (2013, 145, 149, 167-168). Hilst also attributed the lack of attention to the socio-economic conditions of Brazil: "eu acho que é assim: são 30 milhões de analfabetos, mais ou menos 70 milhões de pessoas com uma vida miserável – isso é nosso país (…) o que acontece é

[10] These novels have been referred to as the Pornographic Tetralogy, since a book of Hilst's poems, *Bufólicas* (1992), has at times been considered as part of a pornographic period in Hilst's writing. In a recent omnibus edition titled *Porno Chic* (2014), the novels are referred to as the obscene trilogy, while the book of poems is included in the edition, along with a previously unpublished fragment, under the rubric "other porno texts."

que elas estão preocupadas com outras coisas" (2013, 99). What we know is that Hilst's fiction was originally published with the small presses Massao Ohno, Paulicéia, and Siciliano in limited print runs. The editions were artisan productions that featured the drawings and paintings of friends such as Olga Bilenky, Millôr-Fernandes, and Pinky Wainer. More availability of her work came close to the end of Hilst's life, when, in 2001, the critic Alcir Pécora began organizing her works for the publishing wing of the conglomerate Grupo Globo. The preoccupations with the ties between literature and the market, as well as between writer and the reading public, are thematized throughout the Pornographic Trilogy and form objects of analysis in this chapter.

Hilst explains the motives for writing the novels of the Pornographic Trilogy variously as a marketing ploy (2013, 139), a diversion at a difficult moment in her life (2013, 140), and as a political act (Hilst qtd. in Destri 33). These explanations are like what Hilst said about her decision to write novels. She claimed to write commercially minded work that would make her more accessible to a wider reading public. One may detect irony in Hilst's declarations, given that her fiction demonstrates an affinity for a hermetic literary modernism and often directs its satirical wit at popular genres and the readers who consume them.[11] Rather than attempting to be more accessible to the public, then, it seems that Hilst demanded that readers make a greater effort to understand her. In fact, when one interviewer pointed out the perceived difficulty of her work and asked whether she would like to be read by more people, Hilst responded: "Olha, realmente não. Hoje, não. Não

[11] Hilst's novels are often compared to European modernist authors but they also possess an affinity with Brazilian modernism, particularly the writer Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954). This relation, to my knowledge, has not been noted a great deal in the critical literature. One exception is an essay by Nilze Maria de Azeredo Reguera that draws a connection between the two writers along the line of the comic or ludic. See, "De Oswald de Andrade a Hilda Hilst: o lúdico na literatura brasileira do último século."

quero ser lida por pessoas que não me compreendem" (2013, 169). The element that Hilst ostensibly thought made her work more accessible was the graphic sex that is abundant in the pornographic trilogy. But this claim may also have been made with tongue-in-cheek since the novel's inclusion of sexual taboos, often in a comic frame, do not so much excite as shock the reader. The first novel in the trilogy, *O caderno rosa de Lori Lamby,* especially caused alarm, as it broaches pedophilia, child sexuality, and bestiality - all in the span of 87 pages.

The theme of sexuality throughout the pornographic trilogy, and throughout Hilst's other work, has received a good deal of critical attention. Mechthild Blumberg situates Hilst's fiction in erotic literature, as an affirmation of female sexuality (121-123). Similarly, Luciana Borges attributes the lack of readers of the trilogy, in part, to a will to subvert the notion of passive female sexuality that is supposed in mainstream erotic literature (218, 222). For Eliane Robert Moraes, the pornographic in the Trilogy signifies an effort to regain the transgressive power of sexuality in the face of its banalization in Brazilian society (2008, 414). It is also in response to a tendency in Brazilian literature of the 1980s that overwhelmingly privileged the perspective of white, middle-class, heterosexual males (2008, 415). Differing with these interpretations, Alcir Pécora states that the erotic and pornographic in Hilst's trilogy have little to do with female pleasure or sexual stimulation (19-20). He argues that the thematization of sexuality forms a part of a political satire and points out a recurring epithet that denominates political organization in Brazil as a pornocracy (28). The critic Sonia Purceno agrees with this assessment, situating Hilst's work in the political situation in Brazil at the time of the publication of the

Pornographic Trilogy (90).[12] I contend that these aspects play a role throughout the novels and are assembled around philosophical concerns. Indeed, Hilst's claims to write popular fiction belie an engagement with philosophical thought throughout her work. The Trilogy marks a significant change in the ontological assumptions that underlie Hilst's writing.

The philosophical content in Hilst's work has not gone unremarked by critics, many of whom discuss Hilst in relation to what is alternately called the erotic, obscene, and pornographic. In a good deal of this critical work, Hilst is tied to the thought of the French writer and philosopher Georges Bataille (1897-1962). This association between Hilst and Bataille is not simply a critical flight of fancy. There are indicators in Hilst's work that demonstrate an interest in Bataille that include epigraphs in several of her novels, as well as intertextual references in the narratives themselves. In *O caderno rosa de Lori Lamby*, for instance, the protagonist Lori mentions finding Bataille's (referred to as *Batalha*) novel *The Eye* on her father's bookshelves, next to volumes by Henry Miller and D.H. Lawrence. Furthermore, Bataille's fiction and non-fiction figure prominently in Hilst's private library in *Casa do Sol*, the home where she lived from 1966 until her death. Critics have focused their attention on the relation between Hilst and Bataille's work around the erotic, the obscene, or the grotesque and its relation to the sacred. In Hilst's work, the sacred relates to the ability or failure of humans to achieve communion with God. For these critics, in fact, God is central to the work of Hilst. This critical angle is encouraged by Hilst herself.

[12] Purceno attributes Hilst's erotic or pornographic work as satiric commentary of political conditions in Brazil leading up to the publication of the first novel of the pornographic trilogy: "A segunda metade da década de 1980, no Brasil, foi marcada por muitas mudanças políticas e económicas. Entre 1985 e 1990 tivemos eleições indiretas para a Presidência da República, a promulgação da nova Constituição, cinco planos econômicos falhos e eleições diretas para a Presidência da República" (90). In the novel *O caderno rosa de Lori Lamby*, Purceno points out that the novel attributes the problems of the political situation to underlying assumptions regarding notions of a collective subject and as a result directs its obscene content towards "os pontos de referência de uma pretensa identidade social" (92).

In one instance, she relates the erotic to blasphemy as a means to provoke God to be present to Hilst (2013, 91). And in another interview, she explains that the central preoccupation in her work concerns God: "Posso blasfemar muito, mas o meu negócio é o sagrado. É Deus mesmo, meu negócio é com Deus" (qtd. in dos Santos Santana, 84). These critical analyses draw primarily on Bataille's work *Eroticism* in which he develops the provocative idea that the ostensibly separate realms of religious experience and sexual eroticism are intimately related (15). Both represent attempts on the part of humans to momentarily recover a sense of plenitude, or continuity, that has been lost and for which humans long.[13]

Though Bataille does not seem concerned with the existence of a divine figure, critics of Hilst's fiction have drawn on Bataille's insight regarding the association between the sacred and the profane realms. In one instance, the critic Patricia dos Santos Santana claims that in Hilst's book of poetry *Do desejo* (1992), and throughout her work, one finds the thematization of the sacred and the profane as forming part of a drama in which humans attempt to communicate with God. Relying on Hilst's interpretation of her own work, dos Santos Santana argues that the obscene in Hilst's work is a means through which she provokes God to reveal itself to Hilst. This attempt at communication with a divine figure is met with silence, indicating the absence of God from the world (84). The influence of Bataille's thought, explains dos Santos Santana, may also be perceived in the notion that social codes, including religious doctrine in the work of Hilst serve to distance humans from the transcendental. A break with these elements of social order, however, produces

[13] Bataille explains the condition of humans as one of a sense of discontinuity: "we are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity. We find the state of affairs that binds us to our random and ephemeral individuality hard to bear. Along with our tormenting desire that this evanescent thing should last, there stands our obsession with a primal continuity linking us with everything that is" (1986, 15).

the possibility of communion with the divine figure (86). Similarly, Jo A-mi reads Hilst's novel *A obscena senhora D* (1982) as one character's effort to experience contact with the "ecstasy of the infinite," which is linked to communication with God (293). As with dos Santos Santana's analysis, the obscene attempts to provoke an encounter with God. The equivalence between the obscene or grotesque and the sacred serves to discount any definition of God, a being which is ultimately unnameable (296). The novel dramatizes the possibility and the ultimate failure to achieve contact with the divine (297). In one more example, Higor Sampaio's essay on Hilst's book of poetry, *Poemas malditos, gozosos e devotos* (1984), provides a more detailed reading of Bataille's *Eroticism* that initially avoids associating the sacred with God. In Hilst's work eroticism is one form by which humans seek to experience a lost sense of continuity (178-180). However, Sampaio goes on to relate the sacred with a divine figure after all: the profane attempts to bridge the gap between humans and God (181). In Hilst's work one finds a dialectic in which the transcendent plays a key role. Indeed, Sampaio states that her work is characterized by "a tensão entre alto e baixo, sublime e grotesco, transcendência e materialidade" (186).

If the work that these critics cite evince a concern with the relation between humans and the transcendent realm, the pornographic trilogy signifies the death of God, a definitive break with any effort to achieve communication with the divine. Eliane Robert Moraes identifies three periods in Hilst's poetry, theatre, and fiction. According to Robert Moraes, in Hilst's early poetry, one finds an attention to an immaterial sublime, which includes the notion of God: "não é de estranhar que essa busca do sublime tenha se orientado com frequência na direção de um Deus eterno…" (1999, 4). When Hilst begins writing fiction, however, this interest in the sublime loses its primacy (1999, 3). An exploration in Hilst's

fiction of what Robert Moraes calls the low or the material world gives way to a second phase, producing an impasse that puts human access to the transcendental in doubt. Such an impasse is manifested in a challenge that is directed towards a figure, an other, that was once occupied by an abstract notion of a deity (1999, 5-6). This period is characterized by a nostalgia for a lost sense of plenitude and at the same time an awareness of a fundamental void or nothingness at the center of existence (1999, 6). What comes of this impasse is a third phase, characterized by the death or absence of God (1999, 8). Here, Robert Moraes indicates not so much successive periods as currents that continue throughout Hilst's work.[14] There are two directions: in the first we find the anguish in the face of an absent God that the critics above discuss; and in the other, there is what Robert Moraes calls an exit into tragicomedy, which is exemplified in works like the Pornographic Trilogy (Ibid). Robert Moraes explains that the absence of God produces a void and as a result language is no longer able to represent the real, but only reveals human finitude. One finds in the formal elements of Hilst's fiction that the author "vai colocar a linguagem a prova de um confronto como o vazio no qual o eterno confunde-se irremediavelmente com o provisório e a essência desvala por completo no acidental (1999, 6).[15]

In this chapter, I focus on this phase or tendency in Hilst's work and the ways in which the novels of the Pornographic Trilogy think about the experience of self, following the death of God. In these novels, we find a self that is caught between the desire for and the impossibility of transparence between language and the world. This disjunction puts in

[14] This preoccupation with the limits of language can be seen as early as Hilst's first published work of fiction, *Fluxo e foema*. See for example, Willian André's essay on Hilst's story "O unicórnio"; Tatiana Rodrigues Franca points out similar themes in Hilst's novel *A obscena senhora D*.

[15] In a more recent work, Reginaldo Silva Oliveira follows Roberts Moraes' periodization of Hilst's work. See especially, pp. 118-125.

doubt the notion of a centered subject, which presupposes a world ordered by laws and the ability of humans to know and master those laws. In this way, the Trilogy represents a turn to the earthly realm, specifically to the ways that we imagine individual and collective subjects. What we find throughout the novels is a deconstructive movement that shows that figures of a centered self are informed not by some ideal or predestined order but rather by material, and in some cases, base concerns. Not only does the death of God bring with it the dissolution of the centered individual subject; it also troubles the idea of community understood as a group of individuals who realize a communion that brings them together as a unified subject, promised at some moment in the future. In addition, the novels turn their deconstructive modality on the notion of social order informed by the agenda of neoliberal economic organization that was taking place when Hilst was writing the trilogy, as we find in the exploration of these dynamics related to the production and circulation of literature in such an order. This is not to argue that the novels represent a turn away from community in an isolating gesture of passive nihilism; what emerges in the novels is an awareness of a shared finitude out of which arises an understanding of community as a being-in-common that avoids the antipodes of isolation and communal fusion. Hilst's link to the work of Georges Bataille will elucidate this concern with the subject and community.

According to Bataille, the phenomenon of eroticism is not concerned with the transcendental realm but rather derives from human civilization, or what he calls the restricted economy. Bataille argues that social order arises from an awareness of human mortality. Attempting to stave off the awareness of death, humans began to organize themselves in groups (1997, 249-250; 313-315). The integrity and the longevity of this social order depends on work (1986, 30-31). In order to ensure the continuation of work,

there is the coextensive development of instrumental reason, given that "work demands the sort of conduct where effort is in a constant ratio with productive efficiency. It demands rational behavior where the wild impulses worked out on feast days and usually in games are frowned upon" (1986, 41). Besides instrumental reason, work necessitates the enactment of taboos, as they attempt to contain the violent tendencies of humans that disrupt work and generally increase the likelihood of death (1986, 30). In other words, "taboos are there to make work possible" (1986, 68). There are numerous taboos concerned with sex, which is one arena in which the aggressive animal nature of humans manifests itself. Indeed, the attempt to shed this finite animal nature through social order gives rise to eroticism: "He emerged from it [animal nature] by working, by understanding his own mortality and by moving imperceptibly from unashamed sexuality to sexuality with shame, which gave birth to eroticism" (1986, 31). Taboos and their transgression form a part of eroticism. Bataille also contends that taboo and the transgression of some taboos is an ahistorical, universal dynamic that form part of sociality: "organized transgression together with the taboo make social life what it is" (1986, 65).

In his essay concerning Bataille's thought "A Preface to Transgression," Michel Foucault elaborates on this complex relationship between limits and transgression: "The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows" (1980, 34). Limit and transgression, then, are not about a simple opposition that will resolve itself, but a continual part of finite being (1980, 35). Following Bataille, Foucault explains that limits and transgression are related to sexuality. The experience of sex makes us aware of our

limited condition. It is that "which marks the limit within us and designates us as a limit" (1980, 30). Through eroticism we momentarily sense a lost continuity and thus become aware of our discontinuous condition. Indeed, without wanting to formalize this experience, Foucault describes what he calls the "philosophy of eroticism" as "the experience of finitude and being, of the limit and transgression," (1980, 40). How would one articulate this experience in thought and language, though? In the same essay, he states that it is "a form of thought in which the interrogation of the limit replaces the search for totality and the act of transgression replaces the movement of contradictions" (1980, 50).

In the same way, the deconstructive movement in Hilst's trilogy entails a relation between limit and transgression, whose dynamics are central to the thematic and formal elements of the novels. The recourse to the transgression of sexual taboos throughout the novels, for example, elucidate limits that are not in the process of disappearing and point to the base - as opposed to ideal - foundations of order. This notion of limits and transgression is developed throughout Bataille's work and will help understand what underlies Hilst's literary world, particularly as it relates to the subject. As Rebecca Comay explains, Bataille conceives of a fundamental ambivalence that characterizes human sense of self and which then becomes repressed with the restricted economy of work. There is a "defensive splitting of an 'original' ambivalence (malefic *and* beneficent, attraction *and* repulsion, sacred *and* mundane)" and a development into "the more efficient conceptual bifurcations of morality and reason (good or bad, heaven or earth, desire or repulsion)" (69-70). The peculiar position of the human self, caught between ambivalence and order, troubles notions of a centered subject. In his essay "The Big Toe," Bataille explains this condition:

> with their feet in mud but their heads more or less in light, men obstinately imagine a tide that will permanently elevate them, never to return, into pure space. Human life entails, in fact, the rage of seeing oneself as a back and forth movement from refuse to the ideal, and from the ideal to refuse (italics in the original, 1985, 20-21).

In the same essay Bataille elaborates on this back and forth movement: "Man willingly imagines himself to be like the god Neptune, stilling his own waves, with majesty; nevertheless, the bellowing waves of the viscera, in more or less incessant inflation and upheaval, brusquely put an end to his dignity" (1985, 22). In an essay from the same period, Bataille conceives of what he calls base materialism that draws on this undialectical movement. This is not a rigorous materialism necessarily, but rather an approach or procedure that is deconstructive. Benjamin Noys unpacks Bataille's characteristically unsystematic notion of base materialism:

> The 'logic' of base materialism is that whatever is elevated or ideal is actually dependent on base matter, and that this dependence means that the purity of the ideal is contaminated. The dependence of the ideal or elevated (the 'high') on base matter (the 'low') and the contamination that this produces is systematically denied by the ideal, which splits off base matter as whatever is disgusting, vile, subhuman, etc. (500).

This notion would seem to entail a mere inversion of the realms of base and the ideal. But this is not what Bataille's work has in mind. Noys attempts to clarify this matter: Base matter is a third term "that undercuts the opposition of high and low without, on the other hand, becoming a dialectical synthesis of the opposition (…) it is a force of disruption rather than a dialectical operator" (502). This is neither a return to a previous state of human existence, nor does it lead to a final synthesis. As with Bataille, Hilst does not envision a reconciliation, but rather finite human existence lived within the interminable play of limits and transgression.

In the remainder of the chapter, I will trace the attention to limits and transgression that drives the formal and thematic elements in the Pornographic Trilogy. In the first part, I show this gesture at work in the comic and pornographic representations of transgressions of sexual taboos in the three novels. I then proceed to discuss two images of writing in these novels. On the one hand, there is the writing of the bestseller, which effectively denies the condition of finitude and limits and embodies a larger trend towards neoliberal forms of economic and political organization; on the other, there is the writing that bears witness to the attempts and failure to find a language that possesses transcendent meaning. Both images of writing are eschewed, and in their place, another writing practice emerges, which is perceptible in the formal elements of the Trilogy itself. Following this line of thought, in the last section of the chapter, I will focus on the formal games contained in Hilst's trilogy, which foil the ability of the reader to identify a clear narrative voice or narrator-author, troubling assumptions regarding notions of expression and voice. Related to these games is the proliferation of genres that mark the novels, which works to challenge notions of the book as a totality that possesses organic limits and a clear god-like author. In the novels, the play of genres also shows the limits of genre to be determined more by the exigencies of the market rather than any natural form of organization. The troubling of the narrative voice and notions of the book are further ways in which the trilogy attempt to think through the implications of the death of God. To conclude, I will turn my attention to the role of the comic in the aesthetics of the novels. It is in the often-undervalued realm of the comic that we find a thinking of community that attempts to overcome the limits of either individuals isolated by their finite condition and the belief in a communal fusion of a unitary collect subject.

The inscription of Hilst's Trilogy in pornographic literature is not merely an attention-grabbing tactic to garner more readers, as Hilst insisted. Though there is little agreement as to what constitutes pornography, for the sake of my argument I will limit my scope to what Susan Sontag describes as "a minor but interesting modality or convention within the arts" (205). In pornographic literature, Sontag explains, sexuality is an experience that divides the subject: "What pornographic literature does is precisely to drive a wedge between one's existence as a full human being and one's existence as a sexual being – while in ordinary life a healthy person is one who prevents such a gap from opening up" (222-223). The Pornographic Trilogy drives a similar wedge in its explicit representations of sexuality and a willful enumeration of transgressions of sexual taboos that is alternately comic and scandalous. As a result, Hilst's novels are not interested in arousing its readers but calling attention to the base that disrupts the putatively natural limits of social order. In Hilst's literary world, manifestations of language in the realms of economics, law, politics, and morality belie efforts to reckon with and regulate sexuality, rather than a language that would communicate transcendental laws.

The attention in the novels to genitalia and the anus are central taboos around which the novels displace notions of a heterosexual, masculine subject and is marked by a certain parodic representation of psychoanalytic theory. On the lexical level, the importance of these figures is expressed in the abundance of names for genitalia and the anus, as Alcir Pécora points out (20-21). In *Cartas de um Sedutor*, there is a fixation on the anus in particular. The first half of the novel includes a series of twenty letters that belong to the aristocratic writer of popular fiction, Karl. The letters are addressed to his sister Cordelia, whose letters of reply are filtered through Karl's readings. With a combination of fondness

and jealousy, Karl's letters recount the incestuous love affairs that have taken place in his family in which oedipal dynamics play themselves out in comic exaggeration between the siblings and between the children and their parents. When the novel begins, Cordelia has cloistered herself and her son - whose father may be Cordelia's father - in a convent. Karl is attempting to convince her to live with him and resume their love affair.

Explicit allusions to Freud in Karl's letters include multiple references to Daniel Paul Schreber (1991, 21-22, 27-28, 32, 59-60). Schreber was a German judge who was committed to an asylum on two occasions and wrote a memoir, which was an object of analysis for Freud, contributing to the development of his notion of the oedipal complex and the phenomena of paranoia. Schreber is an emblematic figure in the Pornographic Trilogy for several reasons. In his memoir, he claims to possess knowledge of God and the world that has been hidden from humans. Schreber refers to this as a fundamental language that would close the gap between language and the world, which evokes the central philosophical preoccupation of Hilst's Trilogy. The anus plays an essential role in Schreber's privileged position, as God transmitted this language through sunbeams that reached Schreber through his anus. But more important, Freud attributes Schreber's illness to a latent homosexuality, which is tied to psychosexual dynamics between Schreber, his brother, and their father.[16] In *Cartas* this configuration is analogical, forming a triangle between Karl, Cordelia, and their father. Besides seducing his sister, Karl recounts his relations with a female servant in his household. But his enthusiasm in the letters is reserved

[16] In his "Psycho-analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia *(Dementia Paranoides),"* Freud discusses the theme of homosexuality related to Schreber throughout the text.

for his sexual conquest of a guileless heterosexual mechanic named Alberto, which Karl recounts to Cordelia with cynical relish.

Karl also narrates to Cordelia the sexual adventures (or misadventures) of his friends in which the anus is a sexual fetish. The fetishist is female in this case, challenging assumptions in psychoanalytic theory that only men possess fetishes, and one of several instances that foreground the taboo of female sexuality throughout Hilst's trilogy. In Karl's letters he tells Cordelia about Krauss and his lover Amanda, who Karl refers to as the "little butthole," due to her insistence on licking Kraus' anus. Kraus reacts to her demands with laughter and rebuffs her advances. Fed up with Krauss' refusals, Amanda traps Krauss in a room and attempts to pin him down, provoking the death of Krauss by excessive laughter. Krauss' former polo teammates seek to avenge his death by forcing Amanda to lick their anuses immediately following a match. The sexual violence of the team exerted on Amanda gives way to an unexpected outcome: Amanda is only too happy to comply with her punishment. Incredulous, Karl reports to his sister: "Acreditas que ela saiu sorrindo? Assim como se estivesse embriagada. Tomou um porre de pregas!" (1991, 56). In Hilst's novel, the female character is punished for her putative sexual deviance, but neither dies nor repents of her transgressions and is one of several figures whose characterization places them on the margins of the norms that inform subjectivities within a particular social order.

The attention to the anus persists in *Cartas* with Karl's rival, Stamatius, or Tiu. Karl and Tiu attended the same boarding school and were on friendly but antagonistic terms. As with Karl, Tiu lived a comfortable life, but he later abandoned his family and his home to become a writer. When the novel begins, he and his lover Eulália live on a beach and survive by gathering the castoffs and food scraps from trash bins. His decision to write was

not inspired by some exalted image of writing, but rather begins with a sort of realization that comes to him while he was dining with Karl in his home and looking at a painting of Karl's family. Tiu explains: "Eu comia as lagostas, olhava a aquarela e pensava: e pensar que tudo vai ser esfrangalhado pela minha rodela" (1991, 101, 102). Later he expresses the same awareness of this peculiar position of humans, this movement between the heavens and earth: "Penso em todas as tripas. Na cloaca deste embrulho que é o corpo. Bela máquina, dizem os fantasistas. E aí te lembras do pacote de merda que é o teu corpo. Do entulhaço. Do fétido de estar vivo" (1991, 101). For Tiu, this is not a defeatist position, leading to passivity, but the starting point of an ethical commitment following the death of God. Tiu muses to Eulália: "se todo mundo lembrasse do que lhe sai pelo cu, todo mundo seria mais generoso, mais solidário, mais..." (1991, 136).

Like the figure of the anus, there is an obsessive focus on the taboo of describing genitalia in the pornographic trilogy. It is in *Contos D'escarnio* that this attention is most evident, and to comic effect. The first section of the novel is a type of sexual bildungsroman as told by the middle-aged narrator, Crasso. He recalls his experiences with several lovers but one of them, Clodia, effectively becomes a protagonist of the narrative. Crasso and Clodia meet in a church, where Crasso takes refuge to repent of his promiscuity. Crasso learns that Clodia is an artist who solely paints vaginas. In one passage that takes the form of an enumerative ekphrasis, Crasso marvels bemusedly over Clodia's various paintings, transgressing the taboo of describing female genitalia in any detail and juxtaposing the ostensibly high art of the Italian renaissance with Clodia's sexually explicit paintings:

> As pinturas de Clódia eram vaginas imensas, algumas, de densidade espessa, outras transparentes, algumas de um rubi-carmim enegrecido mas tênue, vaginas estendidas sobre as mesas, sobre colunas barrocas, vaginas

> dentro de caixas, dentro dos troncos das árvores, os grandes lábios estufados iguais à seda esticada, urnas feito fornalhas, algumas tristes, pendentes, pentelhos aguados, ou iguais a caracóis, de um escuro nobre. A variedade de clitóris era inigualável: pequenos, textura de tafetá brilhoso, mínimos, cravados de ínfimos espinhos ou grandes, iguais a dedos mindinhos, duros de sensualidade e robustez. Pintava dedos tocando o clitóris. Ou dedos isolados e tristes sobre as camas. Ou um único dedo, tocando um clitóris-dedo. Dizia ter se inspirado no dedo de Deus da capela Sistina. Aquele do teto (1990b, 35-36).

This attention to genitalia is repeated in the narrative, when Clodia asks a writer friend, Hans Haekl, to give titles to her paintings, whose macaronic language alludes to musical terms used in European classical music that again places the high and the low side by side: "pomba-ladina, pomba-aquosa, pomba-dementada, columba trevosa, columba vivace, pomba carnívora, pomba-luz, pomba-geena, molto trepidante, molto dormideira etc." (1990b, 38). Clodia becomes obsessed with painting penises after Crasso poses for her. In fact, her introduction to the narrative takes the form of a cautionary apostrophe to the reader in which men and women are warned of Clodia's habit of asking them to present their genitalia to her when she meets them for the first time.[17] This custom eventually leads to an encounter with the police when they catch her making her request to a mendicant in the street and subsequently commit her to a mental hospital. Clodia's experience in the institution does not entail regulation of her sexuality but its irrepressible flourishing in the company of her fellow female patients.

[17] Here, I cite a passage from this poem, which extends to over half a page in the narrative: Ó conas e caralhos, cuidai-vos! Clódia anda pelas ruas, pelas avenidas, olhando sempre abaixo de vossas cinturas! Cuidai-vos, adolescentes, machos, fêmeas, lolitas-velhas! Coloca vossas mãos sobre as genitálias! A leoa faminta caminha vagarosa, dourada, a úmida língua nas beiçolas claras! Os dentes, agulhas de marfim, plantados nas gengivas luzentes! Cáustica Clódia atravessa ruas, avenidas e brilhosas calçadas. Ó, pelos deuses, adentrei vossas urnas de basalto porque a leoa ronda vossas salas e quartos! Quer lamber-vos a cona, quer adestrar caralhos, quer o néctar augusto de vagina e falos!" (1990b, 33-34).

Clodia's fixation on penises is expressed in the theatre now, as we find in the play that Clodia and the other patients stage, which continues to foreground the taboo of female desire and satirizes the notion of a Brazilian national identity.[18] The narrative assumes the form of a playscript that bears a resemblance to Aristophanes' play *Lysistrata* and concerns a town in which the men have left for a battle and the women patients, who adopt names such as Jocasta and Lucrecia, are sexually deprived.[19] In the play an oracle predicts the birth of a new country called Brazil whose advent will be announced by the gods with disembodied penises, as big as manioc ("doces mandiocas nascidas no areal"), falling from the sky and offered freely to the women so that they may pleasure themselves. (1990b, 64-67). The oracle then presents the women with a vision of this new country, evoking a delirious spectacle that draws from a repertoire of standard figures and objects of a putative Brazilian national culture, which is made clear in a stage direction note that describes the scene: "(Começa a descer do alto do palco uma grande roda de carroça igual a uma bandeja. Ao redor da roda, cacetas como luminárias. No centro da roda, garrafas de cachaça. E lindas

[18] Regarding the notion of national culture or identity, I am thinking of Roger Bartra's apt formulation of national culture in his work *Jaula de Melancolía*. He is referring to the Mexican context, but it may be applied in the case of Brazil as well. Far from representing some sort of essence of a people, national culture is made up of "un manojo de estereotipos codificados por la intelectualidad, pero cuyas huellas se reproducen en la sociedad provocando el espejismo de una cultura popular de masas" (16). It is this interaction between the discursive and the material realms that generates a sort of circular causality that produces the illusion of an essence and which Hilst parodies in the novel.

[19] Greco-Roman names are a motif in *Contos* and *Caderno*. At the beginning of *Contos*, Crasso explains how his mother chose his name after reading a popular history of Rome, one more instance of the satirizing of popular genres: "Minha mãe me deu tal nome porque tinha mania de ler Historia das Civilizaçôes. E se impressionou muito quando leu que Crasso, um homem muito rico, romano, foi degolado e teve a cabeça entupida de ouro derretido por algum adversário de batalha e conceitos" (1990b, 9). In the novels, there is a network of allusions that serves as a cipher for Hilst's inscription of the Pornographic Trilogy in a comic tradition. In *Contos*, we find the reference to the comic playwright Aristophanes, as well as to the name Clodia, whose mention ties the novel to Hilst's *Caderno*. In *Caderno*, Lori's father makes a reference to the Roman poet Catullus, many of whose poems are dedicated to a Lesbia, believed to be the pseudonym for his married lover, Clodia (1990a, 63). As with Hilst's novels, Catallus' work is known for its humor, allusiveness, and its use of various genres. In a similar manner, the same passage contains a reference to the Roman poet Martial, whose *Epigrams* offer biting satirical commentary on life in the Rome of his time, much in the way that Hilst's novels are directed towards social order of modern Brazil.

mulatas. Sambando, naturalmente)" (1990b, 66). A further direction note bolsters this allusion to modern Brazil: "As mulatas descem da bandeja, invadem o palco aos gritos de "Viva o Brasil" várias vezes. O palco está em festa. Seleção de futebol, samba, música muito frenética" (1990b, 67). In a final number, sung by all the women, the lyrics make the triumphant claim that their country has the hardest phallus on the planet, which elicits shouts of "long live Brazil" (Ibid). This scene plays out a symbolic reversal in which women are at the center of the founding of Brazil while men are reduced to objectified bodies, foregrounding the patriarchal sexual politics that inform modern imaginaries of nation. National culture here is not the manifestation of essential qualities but rather the product of gendered and racialized discursive articulations.

Sexuality and the sociopolitical are also taken up in the first novel of the Pornographic Trilogy, *O caderno rosa de Lori Lamby.* The novel is told in the first-person by an eight-year-old girl whose parents prostitute her to older men, uncomfortably bringing into relief the taboo of pedophilia. What is more disturbing is that Lori enjoys her sexual encounters and writes in explicit detail in the language of a child about these encounters in a diary, the pink notebook referred to in the title of the novel. The novel is also a frame story to a short narrative that includes bestiality between a mule and an adolescent girl. What is the function of limit and transgression here? The novel may be read as a critique of consumerism and hyper-sexualization. Lori not only enjoys her encounters, but she is also happy because she gets paid for them, which will allow her to buy the things that she sees on television, including a Xoxa doll and everything that Lori sees on Xoxa's television program (1990a, 14). She is entranced with what she sees on television and writes to one of her customers that she has drawn figures of He-Man and Xoxa on the cover of her

notebook (1990a, 57). The references to cartoons and Xoxa allude to the actress and model Xuxa, who hosted a popular children's television show during the 1980s and 1990s and starred in the notorious film *Amor, estranho amor* in which Xuxa has graphic sex with a much younger boy. Xoxa (or, Xuxa) serves as a metonymic figure of the market in the novel. In what may be a moralizing gesture, the relation between an amoral market logic and sexuality produces monstrous results, as is the case with Lori. Equally, the novel could be read as a critique of a "pornographic society" whose social codes generate perverted excesses, "a society so hypocritically and repressively constructed that it must inevitably produce an effusion of pornography as both its logical expression and its subversive, demotic antidote" (Sontag 207). Here, limits and transgression are on full display.

Towards the end of the novel, however, the reader learns that Lori appears to have been copying text from a notebook that her writer father is keeping. She also confesses to watching the pornographic videos and reading pornographic magazines that her father is using to research a novel that his editor is pressuring him to write. Like Hilst, Lori's father is a writer who is respected by critics and fellow writers but lacks a substantial readership. This turn in the circumstances of the characters allows for an alternative reading pertaining to the field of literature in the neoliberal marketplace. Carlos Alexandre da Silva Rocha argues that the relation between literature and the market is thematized throughout the trilogy and suggests Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's critique of what they term the culture industry in which the content and style of literary works are reduced to the homogenizing dynamics of the market.[20] Though the novel does articulate the relation

[20] For Adorno and Horkheimer's argument, see especially "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception."

between literature and market in ways that call to mind notions of the culture industry, it is more concerned with the ways in which the market, along with other factors, determine economies of visibility within the field of literature, conferring popularity to some writers while relegating others to obscurity. In this way, the novel argues that readership is not so much ensured by notions of genius or other ideal images of writing, but more on base and contingent circumstances. One way in which the novels illustrate this dynamic is through the characterization of the reading public as comically obsessed with sex and incapable of reckoning with the experience of limits and transgression, being and finitude. Lori's father is an increasingly marginalized writer who attempts to assimilate his work to what his editor thinks will gain him a wider readership by writing pornographic literature. In a questionable and hyperbolic turn in the narrative, Lori's diary entries are the result of the fiction of Lori's father, who, we are meant to understand, is the true prostitute being pimped out by his editor Tio Lalau.

The case of Lori's father is one instance of a recurring element throughout the novels in which the writer protagonists of the trilogy represent two images of writing that are in tension throughout Hilst's novels. The first image is that of the best-seller novels. Tio Lalau in *Caderno* and other editors without names hover over the writer protagonists, alternately cajoling and haranguing them to get in line with the demands of the market for products with predictable and entertaining stories.[21] One editor reminds Tiu in *Cartas* that readers may tolerate characters that think, as long as they do not stray too far from the prurient: "'pode pensamentear um pouco, negão, mas sempre contornando a sacanagem'"

[21] Hilst commented in an interview about the encroaching market and its effects on the reading public: "as pessoas estão se imbecilizando cada vez mais. A futilidade, o desejo do consumo está dominando o mundo" (2013, 169).

(1991, 114). The first image of writing is embodied in the pornographic trilogy by Lori in *Caderno,* Karl in *Cartas,* and Crasso in *Contos*. Similar to Tiu's editor, Karl explains the formula for this first type of writing, which serves to distract readers from a sense of finitude: "O negócio é inventar escroteria, tesudices, xotas na mão, os caras querem ler um troço que os faça esquecer que são mortais e estrume" (1991, 111). Karl expresses his contempt for serious writers as marginal figures, perversely at odds with the demands of the market: "Com pouquíssimas exceções, os escritores em geral são nojentos!" (1991, 15)[22]

In Hilst's novels, this first image of writing is ascendant. At the beginning of *Contos,* Crasso explains why he decided to try his hand at writing: "sempre sonhei ser escritor. Mas tinha tal respeito pela literatura que jamais ousei (…) É tanta bestagem em letra de forma que pensei, por que não posso escrever a minha?" (1990b, 10). We find that Crasso, like Karl in *Cartas*, becomes a well-known author. By the end of *Contos*, Crasso is travelling between Europe and North America to promote his work. The eight-year-old Lori in *Caderno* inspires Tio Lalau's approbation and reasons to her father that writing is a part of a common-sense transaction: "Eu só queria muito te ajudar a ganhar dinheirinho, porque dinheirinho é bom, né papi?" (1990a, 78).

But Hilst's novels do not oppose this first image of writing with another that assumes an author figure as the solitary genius, unbeholden to the demands of the market;

[22] Karl's tirades include unsavory anecdotes about writers, which places them on the margins of an increasingly professionalized field of literature. In one passage, he singles out French decadent poets, including their families: "A lista de tarados é enorme. Rimbaud, o tal gênio: catava os dele piolhos e atirava-os nós cidadãos. Urinava nos copos das gentes nos bares. Praticamente enlouqueceu Verlaine. (E a mãe de Verlaine? O que querem dizer aqueles fetos guardados nos potes de vidro em cima da lareira? Mãe de escritor também não é fácil. Seriam irmãozinhos de Verlaine?) Outro doido" (1991, 56).

nor do they recall some idyllic period, prior to the neoliberal state-to-market phenomena, in which writers were shielded from the exigencies of supply and demand by the patronage of the national popular state. Tiu in *Cartas,* Lori's father in *Caderno* and Hans Haekel in *Contos* are anti-heroes who persevere in squalor and neglect and bear witness in their writing to the impossible, that is, "what can't be grasped in any way, what we can't reach without dissolving ourselves, what's slavishly called God" (Bataille ctd. in Boting, 10). At one point Tiu in *Cartas* explains this task, "Minha vida tem sido um sair de todos os buracos (…) e eu tentando apenas inventar palavras, eu tentando apenas dizer o impossível" (1991, 99). There is an imperative to keep writing, despite the impossibility of closing the gap between language and the real in the absence or death of God: "Vou perguntando mas não espero respostas, quero continuar perguntando mas sabendo que não vou ouvir vozes, nem Daquele lá de cima que há muito viajou a caminho do Nada" (Ibid). The second image of writing testifies to the existence of limits of language without the possibility of any heroic overcoming of these limits. The writers attempt to reach for transcendence and fail and in this way evoke once again the image of humans in Bataille's "Big Toe" essay. The character of Tiu dramatizes this condition well. In each of these cases, the second writing ends in silence, not more writing but less. Tiu writes towards the end of the novel, "Vou me devotar ao silêncio" (1991, 100).

There is a third image of writing that emerges in the trilogy's formal elements, which effectively perform a writing practice that reckons with the implications of the death of God by way of the play of limits and transgression as it relates to the narrator-subject and the work-object. The condition of beings-in-language, in which language is not a reflection of the world, calls into question notions of expression, particularly around the

first-person author-narrators that characterize the three novels. In various ways, each of the narratives begin with what appears to be an identifiable voice that subsequently becomes ambivalent as the story proceeds. We find that the narrators do not so much wield language as an expression of self as much as they are articulated by the various discourses, registers, and genres found in the novels. The *I* of the first-person narration in each of the novels come to signify not a unique, centered locus of expression but a functional symbol in an impersonal system of language.

Caderno is an exemplary instance of this movement in which the certainty of voice erodes as the narrative progresses. Towards the end of the novel, it is revealed that Lori is not the author of the diary entries that we have been reading. After Lori's parents discover her pink notebook and decamp to a sanatorium to recover from the shock, she writes them a letter in which she explains that what we have been reading until this point has been copied by Lori from a notebook, labeled "shit" in which her father had been taking notes for his new novel. Must we, then, modify our assumptions regarding the narrator, from the first-person voice of Lori to a fictive narrator, created by Lori's father, who nonetheless perversely appears to have named the protagonist after his own daughter? It is not that simple, as we read in Lori's tortuous *mea culpa* that tacks between revealing and then revising her account of her writing process, thus rendering the narrative voice that we have been reading impossible to identify.

Lori writes that she snuck into her father's office and read his notebook. Unable to resist taking some credit for the writing, she explains that she only copied certain parts of the story of the protagonist and wrote most of the narrative herself. But several sentences later she admits that she made some changes to those selected parts from her father's

notebook, claiming to have improved upon the original text by making it more realistic, since her father was writing about a child of the same age as Lori: “mas fiz mais diferente, mais como eu achava que podia ser se era comigo” (1990a, 79). The reader is unable to distinguish where the two voices begin and end, particularly since we do not have access to her father’s notebook. Following this claim, Lori backtracks and explains that most of what is contained in her notebook is derived from her own imagination and that she only copied the letters that the protagonist writes in her father’s novel in progress. Lori maintains that she invented the character of Abel, the receiver of the letters. This character was included in her notebook not to fill a gap in the narrative, but simply because she took a liking to it: “Porque Caim e Abel é um nome do catecismo que gostei” (1990a, 79). Later, Lori confesses that she also copied the story in the black notebook, but then clarifies that she transcribed it from memory, since she could only read the notebook in short periods of time during her furtive trips to her father’s office.

In either case, copied or written from memory, Lori demonstrates that she understands little of what she is writing, but is rather skillful at deciphering the conventions of a genre to create the story. She explains that she learned how to write the pornographic story not only from her father’s notebook but through the erotic novels that she finds on her father’s bookshelves – “o Henry, e aquele da moça e do jardineiro da floresta, e o Batalha que eu li o Olho e A mãe” (1990a, 81). She also gathers information from the pornographic magazines and videos that her father consults for the writing of his novel. The editor Lalau reads Lori’s notebooks and professes his admiration: “Isto sim é que é uma doce e terna e perversa bandalheira!” (Ibid). Lori makes a note to herself to look in a dictionary for the definition of the word “perverse.” These asides regarding the meanings

of the words that she encounters and overhears are recurrent throughout the narrative. In the end, the shocking content of the novel becomes not an expression from either Lori or her father but an impersonal cobbling together of conventions and clichés. In this way, the figure of the narrator and the author moves to the edges of the narrative and loses expressive authority.

Similarly, in *Cartas de um sedutor,* the question of the assumed narrator becomes ambivalent as the narrative progresses. The novel ostensibly concerns the story of two writers, Karl and Tiu, who were once friends but who have become rivals. There are several elements that indicate Tiu to be the narrator-author of the story. The novel begins with a short preamble in which we are introduced to Tiu and Eulália. In the scene, Tiu is experiencing writer's block and Eulália suggests that he write about her life, ideal material for a social realist narrative, thus fulfilling an archetypal Brazilian writer-figure and all of the assumptions regarding language that this genre entails: "escreve de mim, da minha vida antes deu te encontrar, da surra que o Zeca me deu, da doença quele me passou, da minha mãe que morreu de dó do meu pai quando ele pôs o fígado inteirinho pra fora, do nenê que eu perdi, do Brasil ué!" (1991, 9). In another satirizing swipe at national culture, Tiu whistles the Brazilian national anthem and thinks to himself as he and Eulália are having sex, "sou um escritor brasileiro, coisa de macho, negona. Vamos lá" (1991, 10). Karl's letters immediately follow this passage.

As with the introduction to Karl's letters, the section that includes the letters ends unexpectedly. The first lines following Karl's narration intimate that what we have been reading was written by Tiu, who is a writer expressing his frustration with one of his characters: "Eu, Stamatius digo: vou engolindo, Eulália, vou me demitindo desse Karl

nojoso" (1991, 72). The narrative then moves away from Karl and alternates between Tiu's short fiction stories and what appears to be an objective narration in the present tense of everyday life of Tiu and Eulália. Late in the novel, however, the devil appears to Tiu and the readers' assumptions regarding the authority of Tiu's narration are thrown into doubt. Quoting William Blake, the devil delivers a reading of Tiu's writing in which he explains that Eulália is in fact a fictional character that Tiu has created and constitutes both a form of an ego ideal and an object of the male gaze. The limits between Tiu's fiction and his supposed objective narration are blurred. Additionally, the notion of voice as an expression of a centered self is impugned, as fictional creations are attributed to the work of desire and the unconscious: "Tu achas que Eulália tem cara de ganido? Undoubtedly. Materializaste o teu ganido da vida e é tão pungente que nasceu mulher. E nasceu como querias ser: pobre de espírito. E como te vês: uma sensualidade cristalina. E certa piedade, certo deboche, e finezas no coito porque no fundo tens medo que tudo descambe para a morte" (1991, 116).

Following the devil's estimation of Tiu's writing, Tiu admits to the reader that Eulália is fictional and even congratulates himself on his characterization of her: "Penso: verdade que construí meu ganido-mulher-diante-da-vida de um jeito pungente e delicado, submisso e paciente" (1991, 119). Might Tiu be an unreliable narrator who is possibly going mad? At the end of the penultimate section of the novel Tiu writes: "vou engolindo Eulália. Vou me demitindo. E vou ficando muito mais sozinho. Restarão meus ossos. Devo polir meus ossos antes de sumir" (Ibid). This passage suggests not an unreliable narrator but speaks to the experience of writing in which Tiu's ostensible voice as the author-narrator disappears into the impersonality of language. This passage brings to mind Roland Barthes response to the question from whom a particular line from Balzac's story

"Sarrasine" is derived: "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (142). The title of the last section of *Cartas*, "Novos antropofágicos," indicates this condition. Though this refers to the taboo of cannibalism in the stories that follow, the repeated metaphors of eating and digesting also signify the overdetermined ways that the influence of other writers works its way in to an individual work, troubling the criteria through which we understand literature that include notions of originality and authorship, which presuppose the centered subject of the author.[23] The narrative marks the increasing effacement of the author-narrator, indicated in the absence of markers that signal titles or authorship, in contrast to the previous stories that make up the narrative, which were clearly marked. Moreover, the last chapter of the novel is composed of a similarly anonymous poem whose link to the rest of the novel in terms of form and content is undecidable, as it adopts another literary genre and since the voice is not readily identifiable with any of the characters in the novel.[24] This

[23] In addition, the title of this section invites allusions to Oswald de Andrade's "Anthropophagy Manifesto," often read as an effort to articulate a national identity that is able to account for the influence of both the universal and the local, Europe and Brazil. Instead, I argue that this can be related to the troubling of a centered, autonomous individual and collective subject. Hilst, along with de Andrade and Mario de Andrade, form part of what Haroldo de Campos calls an anti-tradition, opposed to "ontological nationalism" (243). Referring to Mario de Andrade's *Macunaíma* but apt for the Manifesto and for Hilst's work, he states that in this anti-tradition we find "o des-caráter, ao invés do caráter; a ruptura, em lugar do traçado linear" (237); for a recent and trenchant analysis of the "Anthropophagy Manifesto" along these lines, see Adam Joseph Shellhorse's *Anti-Literature*, especially chapter 3.

[24] I will cite the short and enigmatic poem that marks the end of the novel in full:
Era telúrico e único. Sonhava. Sonhava adeuses
e sombras. Sonhava deuses. Era cruel porque
desde sempre foi desesperado. Encontrou um homem-
anjo. Para que vivessem juntos, na Terra,
para sempre, ele cortou-lhe as asas. O outro matou-
se, mergulhando nas aguas. Estou vivo até
hoje. Estou velho. As noites bebo muito e olho as
estrelas. Muitas vezes, escrevo. Ai repenso aquele,
o hálito de neve, a desesperança. Deito-me. Austero,
sonho que semeio favas negras e asas sobre
uma terra escura, às vezes madrepérola (1991, 139).

apparent lack of connection between the poem and the novel points to notions of a work conceived of as an organic unity, tied to an identifiable author and genre or genres, which is thematized in *Contos d'escarnio/textos grotescos*.

Contos begins with the narration of Crasso, who announces that he is writing a memoir about his amorous adventures. When Clodia is sent to a mental hospital, however, the novel effectively shifts from the perspective of the narrator-author to a combination of stories, genres, and authors, several of whom are anonymous. One of the narrative strands that marks the second part of the novel is concerned with the character Hans Haekel, a writer and friend of Clodia and Crasso, who commits suicide because, according to Clodia, he insisted on writing serious literature. In an effort to help his deceased friend gain recognition as a writer, Crasso sets off for the town where Hans grew up in order to recover Hans' unpublished manuscripts. We find that Crasso's reasons for his trip are motivated by a sense of jealousy, when Clodia announces, upon returning from the asylum, that she wishes to be in an open relationship and duly takes up with another man. The reader finds five stories by Hans transcribed into the text of *Contos*. Interspersed among these stories, there are two stories by Crasso and letters to Clodia in which he details his stay in Haekls' hometown. It is unclear what Crasso plans to do with the manuscripts. Is he an editor, or is he merely organizing the texts? At one point he laments Hans' death and explains that his friend attempted to write a pornographic children's story that was rejected by various editors. Immediately following the letter is a story attributed to Crasso in which a mother

and her young son carry on an incestuous relationship. The reader is uncertain about whether Crasso is taking credit for Hans' work. To be sure, the novel contains stories that are authored by Hans. But perhaps Crasso makes certain changes that he believes would bring Hans' texts some fame. Rather than merely organizing his friend's manuscripts, Crasso is a scribe or an overbearing editor who takes liberties: emending here, suppressing there without the dead author's interference.

Contos also troubles modern notions of authorship and the work. In the second part of the novel, we find the inclusion of several texts, some of which are announced with titles and authors, and several lack any indicator, suggesting anonymous authorship. In fact, taken together the novel resembles more a miscellany book than a novel, Crasso's narration forming just one piece among many disparate texts. The first of these texts that begins the second part of the novel is a recipe book entitled "*Pequenas sugestões e receitas de Espanto-Anti Tédio para senhores e donas de casa"* with an anonymous author (1990b, 46-53). Following the recipe book is the play, also without a clear author since Crasso is not present at the staging of the play and the playscript is not included in one of Clodia's letters to Crasso, which also make up a group of texts. There are two other theatre pieces written by residents of the mental hospital.

Related to the questions of narrative voice and authorship, we find that the novels employ what Pécora calls an "anarchy of genres" in which various genres appear alongside each other in the same text (10, 24). This characteristic is most evident in *Contos*. Pécora enumerates the generic forms found in the second novel of the pornographic trilogy:

> se compõe sucessivamente como romance memorialístico; diálogos soltos intercalados à história; imitação de certames poéticos à moda das antigas

> academias; apóstrofes aos leitores, maltratados como ignorantões; apóstrofes aos órgãos sexuais personificados, como apropriações bizarras de lugares-comuns do discurso pornográfico; contos e minicontos com autoria distribuída a diferentes personagens do livro; crônicas políticas; comentários etimológicos e eruditos; crítica literária etc. (14-15).

Pécora's list makes clear the challenge of classifying the trilogy as novels. This aspect of Hilst's work recalls the author's protests at her lack of readers. The bricolage of genres proves to be resistant to classification in terms of both the market and the literary canon, which hardly contributes to making her work accessible to a wider reading public. As I have argued throughout this chapter, however, the novels pursue objectives other than greater popularity. The generic designation of novel for Hilst's trilogy appears to be merely an expedient that complies with legal and economic ends, pointing once again to the nexus between literature and the market. In addition, it is not by chance that the three novels principally draw on the diary (*Caderno*), epistolary (*Cartas*), and memoir (*Contos*) genres, which assume a clear first-person voice, thus making all the clearer the blurring of the locus of enunciation that the novels carry out, as I discussed above. Along related lines, the novels focus their deconstructive modality on the idea of book or work that is unified and thus able to be classified. Indeed, the proliferation of genres performs a textual enactment of an originary difference, which conditions efforts to articulate identities through any sort of classificatory scheme. In other words, the identity is secondary and only an approximation to the primordial difference from which life originates.

This play of genres in Hilst's novels suggests the relation between what Jacques Derrida calls the law of genre and the counter-law of genre, and in this way embodies the experience of limit and transgression following the death of God in the formal elements of the novels themselves. Derrida explains that genre is a necessary aspect of writing: "every

text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text" (1980, 212). Derrida poses a question, however, that puts the notion of genre as a category with clear demarcations in doubt: "what if there were, lodged within the heart of the law itself, a law of impurity or a principle of contamination?" (1980, 204) This aspect forms a paradoxical counter-law that is essential to the law, as it "constitutes this very law, renders it possible, conditions it and thereby renders it impossible" (1980, 205). In other words, the aspects of a particular genre are determined by a differential relationship with another genre or genres that constitute a limit and a trace, "a participation without belonging," within genre that allows for their articulation but shows them at the same time to be a function of language rather than the representation of a natural order (1980, 206).

Hilst's work makes the trace of the impure explicit in the Trilogy. The novels intensify what occurs in every text by contaminating the novel with other genres that work to indicate the limits of the novel. The novel and other genres are at tension throughout the trilogy, as when the boundaries between fiction and the ostensible objective narrations blur in *Cartas de um sedutor* and *O caderno rosa de Lori Lamby*. Moreover, in Hilst's trilogy the genre of the literary novel is contaminated by so-called low or popular genres, particularly when the writer protagonists of high literature attempt to write what they believe to be popular fiction, as I discussed previously. In addition, the presence of the transgression of sexual taboos that appear in the generic inscriptions of the epistolary or diary genres foregrounds the sexual and gender politics that inform the conventions of the genre.[25] Equally, the writers of the best-sellers, like Karl and Crasso, inevitably bring into

[25] Related to the epistolary genre and questions of gender and sexual politics, see for example, Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook's *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters.*

their texts references or aspects of what is considered high literature, as in Karl's discussion of Daniel Paul Schreber.

To conclude, I would like to take up the element of the comic in Hilst's trilogy, which is the primary mode through which the play of limits and transgression troubles notions of a centered individual and collective subject. Critics describe the comic in the novels as a reaction to the absence or death of God. Blumberg, for instance, considers the comic an escape-valve that mitigates the disappointment in the face of the death of God (125). Similarly, Oliveira Silva calls the "buffoonery" of this last phase a refuge in a world bereft of the presence of the divine (121). And Robert Moraes characterizes the comic turn in Hilst's work somewhat ambivalently as an exit (1999, 8). This evaluation, however, separates the comic from the very philosophical questions raised throughout Hilst's trilogy. I contend that the comic is not an escape but rather it intimates an ontology whose implications present an alternative to the centered individual and collective subject. The play of limits and transgression signifies an origin at the center of which exists a divine figure or some other unifying ideal that would order existence to some predetermined end; in its place, there is an originary difference whose only end is interminable becoming. If limits are necessary to make meaning of our world, their transgression points to an excess that attempts to escapes these limits. This excess signals the singularity that characterizes human existence, an impersonal and overdetermined relation of factors (e.g. desires, drives, memories) that make up one's lived experience and that no articulation will ever be able to represent.

This notion of ontological difference could produce a tragic inclination on existence, resulting in isolation of human individuals and thus a negation of community.

The comic indicates that this is not the case in Hilst's trilogy, suggesting instead an acknowledgement of finitude and an attempt to think of a community that is based on a shared condition of singularity. In the play of limits and transgression, the comic unworks limits, which gives way to an awareness of a condition that is beyond any particular work or project of community. Elaborating on what he calls the "inoperative community," Jean-Luc Nancy explains that "community necessarily takes place in what Blanchot has called 'unworking,' referring to that which, before or beyond the work, withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do either with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension" (31). As a result, community is a being-in-common, a paradoxical bond that occurs in the condition of a singularity that precludes communion. The comic is apt, as it foregrounds the ways in which singularity interrupts or suspends limits. Alenka Zupančič argues that the comic is a form of realism, since it represents the "incongruence of the reality of desires and drives with all those outlines that determine our supposedly realistic reality. The realism of comedy is the realism of this incongruence" (218). Though it troubles the limits of social order it nonetheless demonstrates an inclination to community, given that the comic relies on some sort of relation between humans in order to produce its effect of laughter. In the case of Hilst's Trilogy, one finds the laughter that Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen calls - referring to the work of Bataille - "a roar of irreconciliation" (148). If Hilst expresses anger or lament at the finite condition of humans in other works, there is something affirmative that can be read in the trilogy, which attempts to think of an understanding of self and community that negate neither singularity nor the possibility of togetherness in a sharing of a common finitude.

Chapter 3: Oblique Life: The Self Between the Human and the Inhuman Realms in *A paixão segundo G.H.* (1964) and *Água viva* by Clarice Lispector

The fiction of Clarice Lispector demonstrates an interest in the figure of a divine authority, associated with the Judeo-Christian understanding of a monotheistic God. As was the case with Hilda Hilst, we will see that this thematization does fit easily into established religious or spiritual traditions, but serves, nonetheless, as a useful point of departure in this chapter. This association with the transcendent realm that critics have made is evident in the recent biography of Lispector *Why this World* (2012) by Benjamin Moser. Following the conventions of the literary biography, the events of Lispector's life directly influence her fiction. Lispector was raised in a Jewish family that had immigrated to Brazil from the Ukraine in the early twentieth century to escape the pogroms that occurred during the civil war that would end with the establishment of the Soviet Union. Moser explains that Lispector's family was religious, but from a young age Lispector began to doubt the existence of God, particularly after her mother's death (105). Following her father's death, Lispector openly speaks of the nonexistence of God (106). This belief coincides, for Moser, with a general sense of the absence or the death of God felt among the European Jewish diaspora, even before the Holocaust. (Ibid). But in the case of Lispector this sentiment does not end with a renunciation of God, Moser argues. Lispector continues to reflect on the existence of a divine figure, given that she possessed not only "an extraordinary spiritual vocation" but also "the linguistic power to express it" (108). In fact, throughout the biography, Moser inscribes Lispector's fiction within the tradition of Jewish mysticism.

According to Moser, it is this vocation as mystic and shared personal circumstances that explains Lispector's interest in the thought of the seventeenth century Jewish-Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (109). Moser's claim here is curious, since Spinoza was not considered a Jewish mystic. In fact, as a young philosopher, Spinoza was served a writ of *cherum*, officially excommunicating him from the Jewish community and was forced into exile for the atheistic current that was perceived in his work. Whether the two are alike or not, there is evidence in Lispector's archive that shows that she was a dedicated reader of Spinoza. One finds, for example, that some of the passages of Lispector's first novel *Perto do coração selvagem* (1943) are taken verbatim from annotations in her copy of an anthology of Spinoza's work (Moser 110). In addition, the novel contains direct citations from Spinoza that are part of the writings of one of the characters of the novel. Though Spinoza's thought constitutes an essential influence in Lispector's fiction, I argue that this is due neither to personal affinities nor to a mutual inclination towards mysticism; both Spinoza and Lispector deny the existence of God, at least as the divine figure is understood in Judeo-Christian thought.

Though the influence of Spinoza can be traced throughout Lispector's oeuvre, it is in her later works that the Spinozoist current is most developed, in particular the two novels that I will consider in this chapter, *A paixão segundo G.H.* (1964) and *Água viva* (1973).[26] The philosopher and critic Hélène Cixous calls *Perto do coração selvagem* "an originary work" and explains that "what may appear as hyper-elaborated in texts towards the end of her life is already there, in its uncultured state, but already mature, already through and through" (13). The specific through-line in Lispector's two novels that is related to Spinoza

[26] I will hereafter refer to *A paixão segundo G.H.* as PGH and *Água viva* as AV.

concerns an exploration of a metaphysics that understands being as a vital, inorganic force that is in relation with the organic, material world. This force is not determined by any ultimate unifying end and does not correspond to representational knowledge. Rather, it produces an endless becoming, which is understood through the notion of univocity, which I will discuss presently. One of the ways that this inorganic force is referred to in Lispector's novels is as life. This notion of life can be seen, for example, in the original title of *Água viva*, *Além do pensamento: Monólogo com a vida*. The two titles are not as dissimilar as they may appear, as both may refer to the same vital force of being. Though in Brazilian Portuguese "água viva" typically signifies jellyfish, Lispector was thinking of another less used meaning that denotes a spring or a fountain (Moser 318). In fact, the fountain is a recurring figure in the novel. Nonetheless, Moser notes a fittingness of the reference to jellyfish as it relates to the aesthetic elements of the novel: "for a work without plot or story, the hint of an invertebrate floating is especially apt" (318). I would add that both titles are apposite due to the philosophical orientation of the novel and the central theme of univocity, that is, an originary force that is formless and as a result gives way to a stream or flux of becoming.

Still, if there is a Spinozist current throughout the fiction of Lispector, why choose these novels in particular? I consider the two together given the intensity with which both novels address metaphysical concerns that affect notions of subjectivity. The critics with whom I will engage in this chapter have noted this focus and have grouped these two novels together as well. As Camillo João Penna points out, this attention to the metaphysical gives way to a similar aesthetics in both novels, which are marked by a paucity of elements such

as story, plot and characterization (78).[27] They cannot entirely do without some of the traditional conventions, however. Both are narrated entirely in the first person. The reader is not supplied with information about the character of the narrators, but some details are intimated in oblique, brief mentions: both narrators are artists who work in the plastic arts, sculpture in PGH and painting in AV. We also know that the narrators belong to the upper-class of Brazil. In addition, the minimal narrative structures of the two novels are comprised of letters to former loves and involve the narration of an event that they experience which brings about a radical change in the ontological and epistemological coordinates of the narrators, affecting the narrators' understanding of a centered, conscious subject. Finally, the two novels share a reflection on the ethical implications of the event that they experience. In PGH, the narrator develops a demanding process through which the sense of self is diminished in order to allow for a fusion with life. This process, which I will call an ascesis, is ultimately only possible in death, or in the fleeting moments of the epiphanic event that the narrator undergoes. I read AV alongside PGH because it forms a sort of resolution or alternative to the ethical imperative of the latter novel. In AV, there is an acceptance of a separation between humans and life. The expression of univocal being, of life, in the narrator's writing is a form of philosophical therapeutics that reconciles the

[27] If in PGH the narrative was minimal, Cixous notes that "Agua viva is a text that disobeys all organizing laws, all constructions, and that goes very far" (15). In a study of Lispector's final novel *A hora da estrela* (1977), Adam Joseph Shellhorse argues that the lack of literary elements constitutes an anti-literary mode of writing. This contrasts with what Shellhorse calls the "Latin American literary regime of representation." By this, he refers to the ways in which literature has been written and read as the privileged medium that is able to represent and to integrate the heterogenous populations into the modernizing nation-state. "In short, the literary becomes inexorably linked to the state. And literature is assigned the task of expressing the 'spirit' of the nation…" (22). The "anti-literary line," of which Lispector's fiction is exemplary, "subverts the traditional idea of literature and the Latin American literary state model: it does not encode texts or cultures in essentialist framings but breaks down structures in their ideological moorings…" (23).

narrator to this condition and brings her and potentially the reader a greater sense of wellbeing.

The association with mysticism, and religion more generally, is often made with reference to the recurring element of an epiphanic event that the protagonists of Lispector's fiction undergo, which leads to a transformation in the way that a character understands themselves and the world. As the critic João Camillo Penna argues, the focus on these events and their association with the mystical or religious realms have become something of a critical common place (68). This relation to the fiction of Lispector is due to the ecstatic nature of the events, as well as the frequent references to God in the texts. Critics have also pointed out for the similarities in the language of Lispector and mystics like Santa Teresa de Ávila and Meister Eckhart.[28] Discussing the novel PGH, Kenneth Krabbenhoft agrees with this assessment, but adds that the ritual of the eucharist is an integral part of the narrative (56-57). Though Richard Mazarra and Lorri Parris note the influence of existentialism in Lispector's fiction, they find a closer tie with religion, which is particularly evidenced in the passages that relate the mystical episodes that many of the protagonists experience.[29] In this chapter, I will show that though the events that the narrators undergo share similar characteristics with mysticism, they are a transformative experience that compels the narrators toward a closer relation with an immanent univocal being, rather than a transcendent realm of a divine figure.

The relation with mysticism is put in doubt by the Lispector's texts themselves. In AV, the narrator is searching for what to call an experience she had just finished relating. After dismissing the word trance, which is often associated with mysticism, she alights on

[28] See for example, Naomi Lindstrom (1999).
[29] See, Richard Mazarra and Lori Parris (1985).

the word beatitude and searches for the definition in a dictionary. She is not satisfied with the first entry and continues to quote the second entry, which denotes religion and mysticism, and which is equally unsatisfying: "Também não gosto da continuação no dicionário que diz: 'de quem se absorve em contemplação mística.' Na verdade: eu não estava de modo algum em meditação, não houve em mim nenhuma religiosidade" (1998, 88-89). In PGH, the protagonist-narrator recounts that one day she decides to clean the room that was occupied by a maid, who recently left G.H's employment. As she is going about her work, she is struck by the light in the room, which differs from the rest of the apartment. She then finds an enigmatic picture on the wall that the maid had drawn. The event finally begins when she encounters a large cockroach pausing by the door frame of a closet, which she tries to kill by crushing it between the door and the frame. She is disgusted by the sight of the dying insect, but at the same time drawn to its uncanny presence. Attempting to leave the room, she trips and falls, finding herself face-to-face with the moribund cockroach, which produces the event that G.H. will then narrate to her silent interlocutor.[30] At one point, G.H. explains that she experienced a sense of ecstasy, but hastens to add that it does not involve a contact with the divine realm: "Tenho apenas esse êxtase, que também não é mais o que chamávamos de êxtase, pois não é culminância. Mas esse êxtase sem culminância exprime o neutro de que falo" (2009, 161).

There are other critics who have discussed this event but move away from religious interpretations. Terry Palls argues that the event in Lispector's fiction comprises a literary device of epiphany through which Lispector explores the question of the essence of being

[30] Many describe the event as beginning with the encounter with the cockroach. The narrator explains that the maid's drawing on the wall is another element that is related to the same event. Joyce Anitagrace (2014) makes the argument that the drawing is central to the narrator's experience.

(63).[31] Indeed, in Lispector's work, "the individual's response to the meaning of experience, and his search for the 'essence of being,' becomes a matter of central importance" (66). There are still other critics who would agree with Palls' assessment and explore the specific philosophical content of these events. I assume this critical perspective but disagree with the specifics of this work, which has often linked the fiction of Lispector to the existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. One such example that is representative of this perspective is the work of the critic Earl Fitz.[32] In the first of Fitz's two monographs regarding Lispector's work, Sartrean existentialism plays a decisive role in his analysis.

Fitz draws on Sartre's early work in which he posits that being is without transcendent meaning and ultimate ends. Humans are caught up in the facticity of their circumstances, but are ultimately free, without any ties to a divine, preordained destiny. The ethical imperative in Sartre's conception of human life is to coordinate thought and action in such a way to overcome one's facticity. This overcoming is the way that each person uses their freedom to forge a number of acts that can be said to define an individual life. The converse of this virtuous exercise of freedom is for one to choose bad faith, which involves adopting any sort of system of beliefs that imputes transcendent meaning to being and with it predetermined, unchanging ethical principles, thus denying one's freedom. The notion of bad faith is key for Fitz, who argues that the existentialism found in Lispector's work is tied to ethics (1985, 35). According to Fitz, Lispector shares with Sartre the notion of nothingness and freedom: "Like Sartre, Lispector understood that we are indeed

[31] For a helpful discussion regarding the notion of epiphany, related to the fiction of Lispector, see Penna, pp. 69-77.

[32] For other critics who discuss Lispector's fiction in relation to Sartre, see also: Robert Anderson (1985), Mazarra and Parris (1985), Maria Elisa de Oliveira (1989), Barbara Mathie (1991), and Rodrigo Guimarães (2011).

'condemned to being free'" (1985, 39). He relates the two by way of the question of consciousness and the phenomenological apprehension of the physical world. In Lispector's fiction, this is tied to the imperative of Sartrean freedom: "The ultimate intent or effect of this constant phenomenological tension between a consciousness and the world of objects it perceives is to allow her protagonists to get beyond themselves, momentarily (…) from the psychological prisons in which their conventionally used language and their 'inauthentic' social existences place them" (1985, 38).

Indeed, Fitz argues that Lispector's fiction involve existential dramas in which the epiphanic event obliges characters to decide between accepting their freedom or continuing to live in bad faith: "Lispector forces her characters to confront the truth about themselves and their place in the universe" (1985, 37). Accordingly, the division between the characters' lives before and after the event reveal a division between "false modes of existence" and "authentic ones" (1985, 23). In discussing specific novels, he organizes the lives of the characters before their event or experience as so many instances of "false modes of being" (1985, 85). In his description of AV, for example, he concludes that the narrator achieves freedom (1985, 91).[33] Fitz's concern with tying Lispector's work with notions of bad faith and authenticity obscures the way in which her work differs from Sartrean existentialism, at least in the two novels that I will discuss here. The difference lies in the understanding of the relation of humans to being, which is tied to an understanding of subjectivity. This distinction between the two thinkers will also engender an ethical imperative that differs from the one that Fitz imputes to Lispector. Benedito Nunes also

[33] Mazarra and Parris (1985) make a similar claim: They cite Lispector's novel, *A maçã no escuro* as a case in which the protagonist chooses to continue in bad faith. Conversely, in the novel *Uma aprendizagem ou o livro dos prazeres,* the protagonist exemplifies the existentialist heroine that bravely resolves to persist in freedom.

perceives a difference between Lispector and Sartre that takes place around how both thinkers conceive of the subject in their respective work. In Lispector's fiction, "a subjectividade, e portanto a experiência interior, perderão o privlégio ontológico que o existencialismo propriamente dito lhes outorga" (101).

The difference lies in reasons like those presented in the first chapter in which I discussed the critical tendency of relating the fiction of José Revueltas to Sartrean existentialism. In Sartre's thought, a subject is understood as a cartesian cogito that is ultimately separate from the physical world. Indeed, Sartre borrows Descartes' well-known formulation when he states with a programmatic thrust that "As our point of departure, there can be no other truth than this: *I think therefore I am"* (2007, 40). In this way, Sartre's subject is able to transcend the material situation in which it finds itself (its facticity) and thus avoid the fall into bad faith, forging instead its own project. Again, this position is bolstered by Sartre's resistance to the idea of the unconscious because it would diminish freedom to act in the world. If in Sartre's thought, the ethical imperative is to act above or on the world, in Lispector's two novels the subject is called on to accept and become attuned to its essential imbrication in what is called life and the world. The notion of freedom does figure in Lispector's novels. But there is a lack of free will, at least as it is understood by Sartre. It is a paradoxical freedom in that it is neither a mechanistic conception of subjectivity in which humans are meant to return to some animal-like state; nor does it imply some notion of unfettered spontaneity; the relation of life and world involves beings that are inexorably tied together in a contingent, changing web of relations, which creates a certain necessity but not one based on any predetermined laws. In one moment of AV, the narrator expresses this relation: "Oh, como tudo é incerto. E no entanto

dentro da Ordem" (1998, 64). Freedom is found for the narrators of the two novels in their ability to accept this necessity, which as a result decenters subjectivity and involves ethical implications that differ from questions of Sartrean freedom and bad faith.

In addition to Nunes, other critics have remarked on an understanding of subjectivity in Lispector that troubles the comparisons to Sartre's philosophy. Michael Marder points out that in PGH the assumptions of a centered subjectivity break down, as the boundaries between an ostensibly autonomous interiority and the outside world become blurred. For Marder, the protagonist and narrator, G.H., experiences the world as it sees itself beyond the limited perspective of centered human subjectivity. The event that she undergoes provides her with "nothing less than the way everything, including the seemingly inanimate world, experiences, or will have experienced everything else" (380). Still, other critics have also acknowledged this change in the understanding of subjectivity and relate it to an encounter with animal life. Irving Goh, for example, makes the claim that PGH involves an attempt to think through or to "live on after desisting from all human subjectivity and vision" (114). The event involves a transformation in which GH rejects what Goh refers to as human vision and makes a subsequent "turn toward animal optics" by way of an encounter with the cockroach (Ibid). This turn will allow for an opening to what Goh calls "living neutrality," which he understands as a rejection of predications, preconceived ideas, and stereotypes regarding others. Such a change of human subjectivity can give way to "a life free from all of the human conditions of institutional authority, legality, morality, labor, rational consciousness and so on, can be invented by following the animal" (121).

Marder, however, argues that the event requires something other than a move towards an animal optics. As he explains, in Lispector's novel "it is not enough simply to switch perspectives, as though one were putting on a different set of clothes, empathetically imagining oneself (essentially the same 'self') in the shoes of another creature" (376). Rather, the event involves an understanding of the vital force of life: "a step back is required to what Lispector calls 'infinite flesh,' [*uma carne infinita*], the breathing of life itself devoid of selfhood and of a human form, no longer humanized, no longer delimited in manageable chunks we know as 'objects' or 'events'" (376). Marder argues that Lispector's novel details an existential phenomenology in which G.H. becomes a "medium for the world's relation to itself." (380). Though Marder's reading is compelling, I contend that it does not account for the way that both novels under consideration here are concerned not with being a medium for the world, but rather with an understanding of human being that is tied up in this world. This is an understanding that moves away from the centered subject, though not completely removed from an experience of self in the world. Following Fernanda Negrete and João Camillo Penna, I argue that the events related in these novels involve a shift in how the narrators understand being. More specifically, they detail a change from equivocal being to univocal being. In equivocal being, explains Claire Colebrook, "only one being truly is, while other beings are dependent, secondary, either not truly substances or different types of substance." In this way, "mind is elevated above matter; original is elevated above copy" or God above its creation (295). In contrast, Colebrook continues, with univocity "there is not some transcendent being which *then* creates or grounds different beings, beings that can only be said to be only by analogy. Each being is fully real and is so because it just is the expression of the divine substance,

which is nothing outside of its expressions" (296). This one substance is life as a vital force that ties all forms together, what in both novels is also referred to as the "vital knot." Lispector's novels attempt to describe what they experience as a change in ontological and epistemological coordinates that moves from equivocal to univocal being. There are some questions that need to be unpacked concerning univocal being before moving on to the novels.

One of the contemporary philosophers who has most sought to develop notions of univocal being articulated by earlier thinkers, such as Duns Scotus, Spinoza, and Friedrich Nietzsche, is Gilles Deleuze. Towards the beginning of his work *Difference and Repetition,* he boldly states that "there has only ever been one ontological proposition: Being is univocal" (1994, 35). Univocity signifies the one substance from which being unfolds: "A single voice raises the clamor of being" (Ibid). However, that one substance is made up of infinite difference. Deleuze elaborates on this distinction:

> the essential in univocity is not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said, in a single and same sense, *of* all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities. Being is the same for all these modalities, but these modalities are not the same. It is 'equal' for all, but they themselves are not equal. It is said of all in a single sense, but they themselves do not have the same sense. The essence of univocal being is to include individuating differences…" (1994, 36).

In this notion of univocal being, the categories of identity and difference used to order the world lose their explanatory power. What sort of thought and language are viable in the face of being that produces differentiation? Deleuze does not entirely abandon these categories but calls for a reversal in the binary between identity and difference. If in equivocal being, difference serves only to bolster a pre-given identity, then univocity sees any identity as resulting from difference (1994, 41). This gives way to what Deleuze calls orgiastic representation: "When representation discovers the infinite within itself, it no

longer appears as *organic* representation but *orgiastic* representation: it discovers within itself the limits of the organized; tumult, restlessness and passion underneath apparent calm" (italics in the original 1994, 42). In other words, infinite difference is what engenders thought and language, rather than the perception of transcendent identities. But what does this representation look like that is able to avoid categorical thought and language?

If being is infinite differentiation, then this poses difficulties for thought and language. One of Deleuze's most incisive critics, Alain Badiou, raises this issue regarding univocal being. Badiou explains that in univocity "being cannot be bound to any category, to any fixed disposition of its immanent distribution. Being is univocal insofar as beings are never classed or distributed according to equivocal analogies" (2000, 192). If the world is permanent opening and language implies a closing, the problem is that one

> must simultaneously inscribe into closed and disjoined actual beings their belonging to the great virtual totality. However, he must also annul this inscription so that the neutrality of being does not find itself distributed into categories. The closed must carry the sign of the open, must itself acts as this sign. Otherwise, how are we to elucidate the very possibility of thought? How are we to understand that we sometimes find ourselves compelled to 'disclose' our actuality? The sign of the open, or of totality, is that no closure is complete (2000, 197).

This question brings to our attention the status of the relation between thought, language, and the real and univocity in Lispector's two novels under consideration. If the notion of a centered, conscious subject is in doubt, then how do the novels go about discussing or thematizing a decentered subject? In the work of José Revueltas and Hilda Hilst there is an irreducible gap between thought, language, and the real. Several critics take this critical stance as it concerns the work of Lispector as well. Nunes, followed by Fitz and Maribel San-Juan, contend that this is central to the author's fiction. In his second work on Lispector's oeuvre, Fitz finds in post-structural theory a more adequate framework to

evaluate the philosophical, aesthetic, and political aspects of Lispector's fiction (2001, 2). The disjuncture that separates thought and language from any real is central for Fitz's understanding of post-structural theory.[34]

To be clear, in Lispector's novels there is an impasse that would seem to buttress this argument. In PGH, the first chapter is a prelude in which G.H. tells her interlocutor that she is unable to describe what she has experienced (2009, 9). She will nonetheless endeavor to put in language her experience: "não tenho uma palavra a dizer. Por que não calo, então? Mas se eu não forçar a palavra a mudez me engolfará para sempre em ondas" (2009, 18). She is aware of the need for supplementation before the inadequacy of language: "Será preciso coragem para fazer o que vou fazer: dizer. E me arriscar à enorme surpresa que sentirei com a pobreza da coisa dita. Mal a direi, e terei que acrescentar: não é isso, não é isso!" (Ibid) Later in the novel, the narrator wonders whether language will be able to reach or touch the thing-in-itself: "Pois a coisa nunca pode ser realmente tocada (…) A coisa para mim terá que reduzir a ser apenas aquilo que rodeia o intocável da coisa?" (2009, 138) She concludes this reverie with the affirmation that language precludes a transparency between humans and the real: "O nome é um acréscimo e impede o contato com a coisa" (2009, 140).

AV expresses this dilemma in a similar manner. In the course of the novel, the narrator alludes to a previous event that she undergoes and to which she attempts to describe. The narrator writes of a transfiguration, which signals a radical change in the appearance of the world as she experiences it (1998, 21). This change in appearance is at once clear, revealed to her as "uma visão lunar e lúcida" (1998, 24). But this same vision

[34] See, Nunes (1989) and San-Juan (2012).

is beyond representation and refers to life as the vital force that inheres in all beings: "não é um recado de ideias que te transmito e sim uma instintiva volúpia daquilo que está Escondido na natureza íntima das coisas" (1998, 24). In the search for identity between language and its object, transparency between the two is stubbornly out of reach: "A palavra apenas se refere a uma coisa e esta é sempre inalcançável por mim (...) Procuramos desesperadamente encontrar uma identidade própria e a identidade do real. E se nos entendemos através do símbolo é porque temos os mesmos símbolos e a mesma experiência da coisa em si: mas a realidade não tem sinônimos" (1998, 80). In this way the dilemma that Badiou presents regarding the notion of univocal being and language is made clear. If life is nothing beyond itself, then it cannot express its being in language that stands apart from it.

Though the narrators of both novels express this gap between thought and language with the real, I argue that in Lispector's novel there is an attempt to go beyond this conception, which we do not find in the fiction of Revueltas and Hilst. If in the work of the latter two writers there exists an irreducible and negative disjuncture, Lispector's work attempts to imagine an alternative metaphysics, which takes the form of univocal being. The narrators of her novels recognize the lack of transparency between thought, language, and the real, but resolve to describe their visions as much as language allows. This gap signals something affirmative, something positive and as such an alternative ontology. Cixous notices this attempt to find an adequate approximation in the novel AV: "To say something always betrays something. What is tragic is that the word separates" (16). But Cixous argues, the novel attempts to capture without appropriation. "There is a perpetual phenomenon of overflowing in the text. Agua viva deserves that one dare to let oneself

overflow but, at the same time, not to be afraid to border it" (16). Indeed, in AV, the narrator expresses the need for artifice through which a "delicate reality" surges up or is allowed to appear (21). Language and writing in this case is a tactic and she uses the metaphor of fishing: "Então escrever é o modo de quem tem a palavra como isca: a palavra pescando o que não é palavra" (1998, 21). There is chance here, which neither guarantees nor forecloses the possibility of glimpsing the real. In AV, the narrator clarifies that what she is doing in writing is not an act of imagination but creation, which contains the possibility of capturing the real: "criar não é imaginação, é correr o grande risco de se ter a realidade." "Até criar a verdade do que me aconteceu." But she then qualifies this when she affirms that what she writes does indeed attempt to represent and that the proper form is fragment: "Ah, será mais um grafismo que uma escrita, pois tento mais uma reprodução do que uma expressão" (1998, 19).

How, then, do the narrators think and write about what they experience? At the beginning of PGH, the narrator signals a troubling of a centered sense of subjectivity when she describes what happens to her as a disorganizing force in which she loses a sense of herself (2009, 9, 10). The event shakes the fragile human construction of an autonomous subjectivity: "perdi durante horas e horas a minha montagem humana" (2009, 11). Her sense is also expressed as her "formação humana" and her civilization, which is destroyed in the event (2009, 12, 14). As she attempts to understand what has happened, she intimates what has produced this sense of division: "o mundo havia reivindicado a sua própria realidade, e, como depois de uma catástrofe, a minha civilização acabara: eu era apenas um dado histórico" (2009, 68). This reference to the world suggests centered subjectivity and an exterior force that impinges on her sense of autonomy.

In these images, there is an opposition or a duality that emerges that concerns subjectivity and univocal being. Cixous points out what she calls the doubling that occurs in AV as it relates to "the shattering of the subject": "what is being described here is the doubling and the division of the subject (30). In G.H's recounting, there is, on one hand, what she refers to as the human realm or humanization; and on the other hand, there is what she terms the inhuman, which is one of various metonyms for univocal being and is something that exists within her but had been subsumed or "domesticado" (2009, 16). This part of her, she comes to realize, is something essential through which she lives: "Vi, e me assustei com a verdade bruta de um mundo cujo maior horror é que ele é tão vivo que, para admitir que estou tão viva quanto ele." It is expressed as the inhuman given that it opposes the personal, the centered subject: "Terei que alçar minha conciencia de vida exterior a um ponto de crime contra a minha vida pessoal" (2009, 20). G.H. is forced into contact with the vital, univocal being: "Eu estava saindo do meu mundo e entrando no mundo" (2009, 62). She comes to recognize that she is part of this when she senses it within herself, "a vida em mim" (2009, 52, 64). With this recognition, she also finds that the human as centered subjectivity is separate from life: "a pior descoberta foi a de que o mundo não é humano, e de que não somos humanos" (2009, 68). After her initial shock, G.H. comes to embrace this inhuman: "Quero o inexpresivo. Quero o inumano dentro da pessoa" (2009, 158). At the end of the novel, G.H. announces that her existence is defined not by the personal, but by her belonging to life, to univocal being: "Minha vida não tem sentido apenas humano, é muito maior – é tão maior que, em relação ao humano, não tem sentido" (2009, 179).

In an effort to describe what the narrators perceive in the event and elaborate on a conception of univocal being, the novels employ various figures, including metaphors that evoke an originary force that is infinite. As Nunes points out, one of the most prominent of these figures in PGH is the cockroach, since its existence precedes human life. In this way it serves as a symbol for life that is beyond human life (60). In the same novel, expressions that signal a pre-human and pre-subjective realm abound. G.H. explains that she perceives "um grau de vida tão primeiro" (2009, 22). At another point, she refers to the vital force of life as "a vida, pré-humana divina" (2009, 100). And elsewhere, G.H. senses this essential force of which she is a part and describes it as "a primeira vida em mim" (2009, 163). She recurs to images of an originary whole from which she draws her life: "eu estava vivendo da tessitura de que as coisas são feitas" (2009, 101). Later she explains that she wants to arrive at the source from which humans have turned away. The figure of a fountain is repeated throughout the narrative. In one instance she declares that "foi dessa fonte que começou a nascer era aquilo que depois foi se distorcendo em sentimentações a tal ponto que o núcleo ficou sufocado" (2009, 161). Likewise, in AV, the fountain forms a part of the metaphorics of the novel. The narrator explains that in her writing and her painting she is seeking "a coisa mais primeira, beber água na nascente da fonte" (1998, 17). The force that gives all beings existence is repeatedly expressed in birth and maternity. At the beginning of the novel she expresses a desire to return to life that precedes rational thought and describes it in this way: "já estudei matemática que é a loucura do raciocínio - mas agora quero o plasma - quero me alimentar diretamente da placenta" (1998, 9). She also writes of becoming aware of this fundamental life as entering the "ancestral caverna" which is the "útero do mundo" (1998, 15). Univocal being is expressed as both inorganic

but vital to organic life when she writes of her experience as a contact with "o invisível núcleo da realidade" (1998, 22).

These repeated metaphors correspondingly signal a level that precedes language and thought. In AV, the narrator frequently explains that what she is trying to express is the background, that which comes before thought, the "atrás do pensamento" (1998, 29, 33, 44). A sensation of being behind thought is compared to a new reality to which there are neither corresponding thoughts nor words and thus it occurs in secret: "estou entrando sorrateiramente em contato com uma realidade nova para mim que ainda não tem pensamentos correspondentes e muito menos ainda alguma palavra que a signifique: é uma sensação atrás do pensamento" (1998, 47). The narrator claims that even farther back than the before-thought one finds music: "Bem atrás do pensamento tenho um fundo musical" (1998, 46). Music occupies an important place in AV, as a form that is more able to express the univocal than thought or language. This belief in the expressive power of music is indicated in the epigraph of the novel, a citation from the Belgian abstract painter Michel Seuphor, which speaks of a form of expression that is able to go beyond representation: "tinha que existir uma pintura totalmente livre da dependência da figura - objeto - que, como a música, não ilustra coisa alguma, não conta uma história e não lança um mito." Allusions to music recur in the novel. In one moment, the narrator compares her writing to the improvisation that one encounters in jazz music. (1998, 23). And in one of many lyrical passages, the narrator exclaims that the vital life within her resounds as a piece of chamber music: "Que música belíssima ouço no profundo de mim. É feita de traços geométricos se entrecruzando no ar. É música de câmara. Música de câmara é sem melodia (...) O que te escrevo é de câmara" (1998, 47). Here, Lispector draws on an established current in modern

art and philosophy that privileges music as an expression of that which exceeds thought and language. Jacques Rancière explains that "since Schopenhauer, it has embodied the idea of the anti-representative art which expresses a power of affection exceeding the forms of identification of situations and emotions provided by the representative arts. It has become the art of the unnameable (...) the global affect that penetrates the bodies without being identifiable or nameable." (249). Indeed, music, along with painting, constitutes a central metaphor in the novel's approximation to univocal life.

Even more telling, the narrator associates the vibration that music produces with the vibration of the world, the vital flow. She explains that when she listens to music, she rests her hand on a record player and perceives the vibrations, which then flow from her hand to the rest of her body. These vibrations, she tells the reader, are the very vibration of being: "assim ouço a eletricidade da vibração, substrato último no domínio da realidade, e o mundo treme nas minhas mãos" (1998, 11). Language is able to express vital being but only in minimal sounds, which she relates again to music: "o substrato vibrante da palavra repetida em canto gregoriano" (Ibid). The narrator likens her search for expression as a search for a language that is spoken but does not signify anything: "Sílabas cegas de sentido" "vibração sem significado" (Ibid). The narrator then explains that that which is most intimate to her and forms the origin of music is the sound of a beating heart, another figure that represents a vital source, from which we draw life: "Mas ainda mais atrás há o coração batendo. Assim o mais profundo pensamento é o coração batendo" (1998, 46). In one of the few passages in which the narrator describes her immediate surroundings she relates that as she is writing she hears a group of people playing an assortment of percussion instruments coming from a neighbor's home. The sound of drums transports the narrator

to what she calls the "o outro lado" and "uma vida latejantemente infernal" (1998, 20). She is fearful of this experience and attempts to escape it. Even after she hears the music, which she describes as a hammering, she hears the hammering inside her, it comes from within: "estou sendo o incessante martelar em mim." She again wishes to escape, but she cannot. The sound that she hears is a part of her, "o outro lado de mim me chama. Os passos que ouço são os meus" (Ibid). Taken together, the dense combination of images suggests univocal being, of which she and all beings form a part.

If univocal being signifies that all beings are made up of one primordial substance, then this produces what Badiou calls an "equality of being" that puts being ultimately beyond thought and language (2000, 195). Most important to this notion of univocity is that there is no divine figure that stands above creation. In Lispector's work, God is identified as the very same univocal substance. This is expressed most explicitly in PGH. In one passage, G.H. explains that she can perceive an equality between the cockroach, the narrator, and God: "Eu talvez já soubesse que, a partir dos portões, não haveria diferença entre mim e a barata. Nem aos meus próprios olhos nem os olhos do que é Deus" (2009, 80). God is not separate from but is life, the real: "O divino para mim é o real" (2009, 169, 170). This change in the understanding of being as univocal affects subjectivity. There is a sense of self that perceives, but not as an autonomous subject that stands above the world. As with the divine figure, human beings are part of the one substance of univocity. This produces a confusion among the protagonists, troubling the way that they have understood subjectivity and their relation to the world. In PSGH, the narrator expresses a difficulty in perceiving what she experienced as a centered subject because she senses that she is indistinguishable from the world around her: "não compreendo o que vi. E nem mesmo sei

se vi, já que meus olhos terminaram não se diferenciando da coisa vista" (2009, 14). Perception in this moment is not of an individual but as a being that is part of the same one substance. In this formulation, she loses any sense of self; she was pure vision, just looking: "É que eu não estava mais me vendo. estava era vendo" (2009, 62). In AV, the narrator expresses this sense of perception as "a vida vista pela vida" (1998, 14, 19). This equality of vision, this indistinction is signaled in PGH, when G.H. concludes one of the chapters as a sort of summing up in which she details a mutual vision among all beings: "O mundo se me olha. Tudo olha para tudo, tudo vive o outro; neste deserto as coisas sabem as coisas" (2009, 65). Indeed, the novel ends with an awareness of an exteriority that does not allow any sort of pure interiority of the subject: "O que não sou eu, eu sou (...) pois 'eu' é apenas um dos espasmos instantâneos do mundo" (2009, 178). And in this compact expression life and the narrator become indistinguishable: "a vida se me é" (2009, 179). In AV, we find a similar dissolution of centeredness, the exterior becomes interior and she loses a sense of autonomy, becoming part of the world: "Eu me ultrapasso abdicando de mim e então sou o mundo: sigo a voz do mundo, eu mesma de súbito com voz única" (2009, 24). The loss of the sense of the personal is often associated with voice. Similarly, proper names lose their ability to differentiate between beings: "eu me ultrapasso abdicando de meu nome, e então sou o mundo" (2009, 47). Again, there is a moving away from a centered subjectivity and towards a sense of self that is in intimate relation with life, which was previously exterior to the narrators.

If univocity is one substance that produces infinite difference, then there are no predetermined ends or forms to which movement is headed. The infinite difference of univocity gives way to impersonal singularities that precede and are a part of the individual

but which at the same time are indifferent to personal identity. As a result, references to an impersonal or indifferent and neutral predominate in the two novels. The impersonal is the character or attribute of the univocal, the presence of the outside as part of self. G.H. writes of embracing the "alma impessoal" (2009, 122). Indifference in PGH, troubles distinctions between good and evil. In its most forceful articulation, G.H. claims that God, the figure that in Judeo-Christian thought is assumed to issue a moral code is in itself indifferent, beyond good and evil: "e eu encontrava o Deus indiferente que é todo bom porque não é ruim nem bom, eu estava no seio de uma matéria que é a explosão indiferente de si mesma" (2009, 127). It is important to note the equivalence between God and life here. Accordingly, in the same passage, life is described as indifferent: "A vida está tendo a força de uma indiferença titânica. Uma titânica indiferença que está interessada em caminhar" (Ibid). Indifference here is not something immobile but suggests the force of univocity's infinite difference as signaled in life's inclination towards movement.

In AV, the impersonal makes up an important part of the novel's lexicon as well. The impersonal is often juxtaposed with a figure that is its opposite, as when the narrator borrows from the language of marketing to claim that she does not have a lifestyle, but rather has achieved the impersonal (1998, 47). Throughout AV, the English third-person singular "it" is associated with this impersonality. The narrator describes her openness to impersonal life by writing, "Basta-me o impessoal vivo do it" (1998, 66). At one point, she finds consolation in the existence of the force that she calls the "it": "Mas há também o mistério do impessoal que é o 'it.'" What comforts her is that this force is a part of her, evoking again the divided subject made up of an antagonistic relation between the personal and impersonal: "eu tenho o impessoal dentro de mim e não é corrupto e apodrecível pelo

pessoal que às vezes me encharca: mas seco-me ao sol e sou um impessoal de caroço seco e germinativo" (1998, 30). Despite the overwhelming presence of the personal, she is able to perceive the inhuman, univocal being of which she is a part. At times, the impersonal possesses her and she loses all sense of the personal, as when she relates a moment when she experiences once more an event in which she is immersed in univocal being and relates the loss of her sense self as becoming a musical vibration: "Eu sou puro it que pulsava ritmadamente" (1998, 38).

As in PGH, the narrator is concerned to fold God into the same univocal substance, linking the "it" to the divine figure as when she states that "o it vivo é o Deus" (1998, 30). Again, there is an equivalence that brings together that which is separate in equivocal being: "o Deus é o mundo. É o que existe" (Ibid). In the univocal conception of being, God does not stand outside the world, but is the world. The narrator also explains that the impersonal is the nothing (1998, 31). In these various descriptive statements that refer to the "it", a logic emerges: "it" is variously equivalent to the impersonal, the nothing, God, and life. Each of these common nouns signify not discrete entities but are rather the same univocal whole. This equivalence between these figures is reinforced in the end of the novel when the narrator recalls a dream in which she explains that "tudo voltou para o nada, voltou para a Força do que Existe e que se chama às vezes Deus" (1998, 95).

In addition to the use of impersonal and indifference to represent univocal being, the novels employ the figures of the neutral. G.H. explains that beyond the human lies a "living neutrality" which she encounters within herself in the event that she experiences in the maid's bedroom: "eu abandonava minha organização humana (...) para entrar nessa coisa monstruosa que é a minha neutralidade viva" (2009, 97). The figure of a living, vital

force inheres not only within the narrator but in all beings and is neutral in that they do not assume predestined forms, since they come from the one substance: "O neutro. Estou falando do elemento vital que liga as coisas" (2009, 99). G.H. turns again to biological images of basic units of life, tying them now to neutrality: "O neutro é inexplicável e vivo, procura me entender: assim como o protoplasma e o sêmen e a proteína são de um neutro vivo" (2009, 101). The neutral is also incorporated in the numerous variations on the opposition between the human and the inhuman. In one case, G.H. describes univocal being as the neutral that threatens her sense of centered subjectivity and from which she attempts to escape: "O neutro era a minha raiz mais profunda e mais viva (...) Para escapar do neutro, eu há muito havia abandonado o ser pela persona, pela máscara humana" (2009, 91-92).

In a similar manner, the neutral appears in metaphors that draw on the sense of taste. The act of seasoning food is one more metaphor that evokes the mechanism of centered subjectivity that covers up a life that is neutral, that is, without taste. "Eu antes precisava de tempero para tudo, e era assim que eu pulava por cima da coisa e sentia o gosto do tempero" (2009, 154). Salt is one of these substances: "Para o sal eu sempre estivera pronta, o sal era a transcendência que eu usava para poder sentir um gosto, e poder fugir do que eu chamava de 'nada' (...) E o neutro era a vida que eu antes chamava de o nada" (2009, 84). Similarly, reflecting on her life before the event, she explains how she avoided the neutral as someone who refused to eat without the addition of condiments: "Era como se antes eu estivesse estado com a paladar viciado por sal e açúcar (...) e nunca tivesse sentido o gosto primeiro. E agora sentia o gosto do nada" (2009, 101-102). She refers to the various elements that make up the human body as vital material without taste, including her blood (2009, 89) as well as her eyes (2009, 91). Along with salt and sugar,

language, understood as a transparent reflection of the world, comprises just one more condiment through which one denies life, here described as the nothing, which is also neutral. She confesses that even after the event, she is still in the habit of understanding language as capable of reflection: "Ainda estou viciada pelo condimento da palavra" (2009, 161). For the narrators of both novels, language falls short in its ability to capture life; nevertheless, the novels are not so much interested in pointing out this disjuncture gap as much as exploring the potential for language to at least give an approximation of that which ultimately lies beyond thought and language.

Thus far, I have largely focused on abstract or immaterial language used in the novels to describe univocal being. Metaphors of taste discussed above, however, allude to the strong presence of the material world that forms a significant part of the metaphorics of the novels. The representation of space is one more example of this evocation of univocal being. But it is important to note that there is little concern for a realistic depiction of space. In other words, the novels are not concerned with evoking a sense of the space that the narrators or other characters of the stories inhabit, which would prove convincing to readers and thus authorize the narratives as true to life or authentic. As with the figures of the impersonal, the indifferent, and neutrality, space is significant as it relates to the events that the narrators experience. In PGH, the space of the maid's room produces a physical and mental reaction in G.H. that leads to the glimpse of univocal being. When G.H. enters the room to clean, she finds that the maid, Janair, had left the shades and windows open. G.H. is struck by the bright light, which has faded the color of the walls and the few pieces of furniture in the room. The immediate impression this leaves on G.H. intimates what will soon occur: "Na minha casa fresca, aconchegada e úmida, a criada sem me avisar abrira

um vazio seco" (2009, 37). She explains that she is overcome with the impulse to fill the room with water, thus driving away the unnerving sense of dryness: "E então jogaria no quarto vazio baldes e baldes de água que o ar duro sorveria, e finalmente enlamearia a poeira até que nascesse umidade naquele deserto (...) Depois jogaria água no guarda roupa para engorgita-lo num afogamento até a boca - e enfim veria a madeira começar a apodrecer" (2009, 43). Despite her intentions to bring moisture to the room, she is unable to drive this oppressive sense of dryness away. The condition of the room, the combination of extreme heat, the picture on the wall, and the cockroach produce a move from a moist, humid place that is the rest of her apartment to the desert of the bedroom: "Do mundo enfim úmido de onde eu emergia, abri os olhos e reencontrei a grande e dura luz aberta" (2009, 53). We will see this opposition throughout between moisture and dryness, light and darkness, recur in both novels. In PGH, moisture signifies the human realm, while the latter two indicate the inhuman. Interestingly, in AV, the images of moisture and water will come to signal life, the univocal and a sense of peace on the part of the narrator in relation to this life, in sharp contrast to the extreme discomfort which G.H. endures.

The event in PGH is often attributed to the encounter between G.H. and the cockroach. But it seems that it is just as much the experience of being in the room, which she explains creates a sort of mirage, but hastens to add that this optical illusion is not one of an oasis: "pois não fora a miragem de um oásis que eu tivera, mas a miragem de um deserto" (2009, 48). This image of a desert appears so frequently in the novel that it seems as if the story took place not in the maid's bedroom but amid a barren landscape. Like the inhuman, the desert describes the immaterial force that appears to be exterior but which she subsequently discovers within her when she hears its call: "eu estava no deserto. Como

te explicar? (...) Era um deserto que me chamava como um cântico monótono e remoto chama" (2009, 59). Indeed, the opposition between the human and inhuman appears once more, when G.H. explains that the human has functioned as an escape from the desert: "Ao me ter humanizado, eu me havia livrado do deserto" (2009, 92). The desert is described as divine primary life and as the nucleus of life (2009, 59). In another instance, the desert is where she goes to find life: "Aquele deserto onde eu entrara, e também nele descobria a vida e o seu sal" (2009, 76). In another passage G.H. explicitly relates the desert and the neutral: "Eu estava experimentando naquele deserto o fogo das coisas: e era um fogo neutro. Eu estava vivendo da tessitura de que as coisas são feitas" (2009, 101).

But why would the image of the desert be employed as the central spatial figure to refer to G.H.'s experience? It is in the desert's character as a place that is defined by erosion and weathering that evoke a clearing in which so much of the human realm is wiped away. In the desert's starkness, as a place in which there was once moisture, there is a movement from human to inhuman, a transformation. Given these qualities, the desert is also a place in which it is difficult to sustain life. The event that G.H. endures is a shock that is not without physical suffering that she describes with the physical condition of a human in a desert when she complains of a dry mouth (2009, 54), nausea (2009, 56), and chapped lips (2009, 91). Surviving in a desert requires a radical adaptation, which touches on the ethical quandary that the narrator in PGH is left with that I will discuss in in the last section of the chapter.

In addition, the desert is an apt figure, as it is a dramatic manifestation of the constant change that time produces on the material world. Both novels engage with the way in which humans experience time and the existence of a universal time. Part of the

event that the narrators experience involves a change in the way that they perceive time. In the novels, this experience of time is an apprehension of universal time, and in this way, humans are equally exposed to this universal time, along with other beings. This universal time bears two characteristics that are expressed in the novel: time as duration and time as becoming. Both qualities embody the notion of univocal being as life that issues from one substance. In AV, the narrator announces that, in her writing, she is attempting to capture the present as a discrete instant that one is able to describe. However, the ability to apprehend this moment continually eludes her grasp: "E quero capturar o presente que pela sua própria natureza me é interdito: o presente me foge, a atualidade me escapa, a atualidade sou eu sempre no já" (1998, 9-10). The narrator also finds that time understood as a succession of discrete instants or units that are countable in space poses a problem for her sense of self: "divido-me milhares de vezes em tantas vezes quanto os instantes que decorrem, fragmentária sou eu e precários os instantes" (1998, 10). As she reflects on how she experiences temporality, the notion of a clearly individuated subjectivity becomes more difficult to define: "À duração de minha existência dou uma significação oculta que me ultrapassa. Sou um ser concomitante: reúno em mim o tempo passado, o presente e o futuro, o tempo que lateja no tique-taque dos relógios" (1998, 22). Here, the time of her life is represented as a duration, which troubles the thinking of her self as a discrete entity. Though the narrator perceives her past, present, and future, they are not organized on a line but exist within her in a simultaneous manner that suggests an interpenetration of these spatial units and thus a flow that is part of a whole. She understands that what she is trying to capture is not time as instants, but the character of time as duration: "Mais que um instante, quero o seu fluxo" (1998, 16). Though this understanding of time is not

immediately available to consciousness, one is able to gain a sense of duration in intuitions, glimpses that occur in certain moments. In the act of sex, for instance, one experiences time as duration: "Só no ato do amor (...) capta-se a incógnita do instante que é duramente cristalina e vibrante no ar e a vida é esse instante incontável, maior que o acontecimento em si: no amor o instante de impessoal joia refulge no ar…" (1998, 10). Here again, the narrator refers to instants, which are sensed not as quantifiable but qualitative multiplicities.

The figure of duration is repeatedly expressed as a simultaneity of quantitative divisions of time. In reflecting on the difficulty of describing the instant the narrator of AV attributes this challenge to the simultaneity of time (1998, 39). G.H. also explains that what she experiences in the event is a sense of temporality as infinite and without clear temporal distinctions, "destino infinito, feito só de cruel atualidade" (2009, 121). In another instance, she signals the change in her understanding of time with an explicit reference to quantitative and qualitative multiplicities: "Minhas antigas construções haviam consistido em continuamente tentar transformar o atonal em tonal, em dividir o infinito numa série de finitos, e sem perceber que finito não é quantidade, é qualidade (...) por mais longa que fosse a série de finitos, ela não esgotava a qualidade residual do infinito" (2009, 141). By the end of the narrative, she claims that she has come to accept time as what she calls "a atualidade simultânea" (2009, 179). Likewise, in AV, the narrator senses the simultaneity of time and attributes the effort to divide it up in spatial units as a desire to counteract mortality: "Contar o tempo é apenas hipótese de trabalho. Mas o que existe é perecível e isto obriga a contar o tempo imutável e permanente. Nunca começou e nunca vai acabar, Nunca" (1998, 52).

This understanding of the past, present, and future as coexisting in consciousness is most strikingly evoked in a passage of PGH in which G.H. recounts a "visual meditation," as she looks out the window of the maid's bedroom, which forms part of her experience of the event. At the beginning of the event, she describes the room as forming part of a minaret. This develops into an enumeration of imagery from the ancient Middle East that she perceives in the present. In one of the few moments in the novel that she references her actual physical location in modern Brazil, she describes the appearance of this ancient past commingling with or superimposed on the landscape of Rio de Janeiro: "entre os cimentos dos edifícios, vi a favela sobre o morro e vi uma cabra lentamente subindo pelo morro. Mais além estendiam-se os planaltos da Ásia Menor" (2009, 105). She compares what she calls "the empire of the present" to the Dardanelles strait located in present-day Turkey (2009, 105). In the terraces and through the windows of the apartments that she can see from the bedroom she catches sight of people and compares them to Assyrian merchants (2009, 105-106). It is through the cockroach as an index of the ancient past in the present that G.H. sees "a vastidão do deserto da Líbia, nas proximidades de Elschele (...) Diante da barata, eu já era capaz de ver ao longe Damasco, a cidade mais velha da terra" (2009. 113). She claims that what she glimpses is "a pré-história de um futuro" (2009, 107).

In their interest in time and temporality, the novels range from the narrators' experience of the present, to the past, as well as to the future. The notion of a future is related to ends, particularly whether humans possess any sort of destiny. At one point, G.H. bluntly states that the only destiny or end is death: "O mistério do destino humano é que somos fatais" (2009, 124). She declares that if any mission or destiny exists, it is unknown

to humans: “Tão secreta é a verdadeira vida que nem a mim, que morro dela, me pode ser confiada a senha, morro sem saber de quê (...) toda vida é uma missão secreta” (2009, 175). The future is often tied to happiness and hope, which are nurtured by the thought of a redeemed, or, at least, improved future. During the experience of the event, her conviction in this notion of the future weakens: “eu estava pouco a pouco abandonando a minha salvação humana.” After the event she disavows the understanding of the future as imminent salvation: “eu quero a atualidade sem enfeitá-la com um futuro que a redima, nem com uma esperança” (2009, 82). In fact, following the event she feels a happiness that is absent of hope tied to redemption, “uma alegria sem redenção, nao sei te explicar, mas era uma alegria sem a esperança” (2009, 72). She resolves to be without this sort of hope and eschews any spatialization of time: “Pois a atualidade não tem esperança, e não tem futuro: o futuro será exatamente de novo uma atualidade” (2009, 80). In AV, the narrator describes herself as “um objeto sem destino. Sou um objeto nas mãos de quem? tal é o meu destino humano” (1998, 86-87). Here, she adopts the opposition between subject and object and reverses the designation in which she is not the willing, centered subject, but rather the supposedly passive object.

The understanding of time as a duration that does not conform to numerical divisions is not always consistent, however, particularly as it concerns the future. In the penultimate chapter of PGH, there is an outline of a philosophy of history, when G.H. speculates that at some point in the future, humans will return to their inhuman origins: “Seremos a matéria viva manifestando diretamente, desconhecendo palavra, ultrapassando o pensar que é sempre grotesco (...) Seremos inumanos - como a mais alta conquista do homem. Ser e ser além do humano (...) é uma totalização é será a verdadeira humanização

pela qual ansiamos. Estou falando da morte? não, da vida" (2009, 172). But if time is thought of as movement that gives way to never ending change, then we are left with a lack of completion or of stable forms. Despite the speculative ruminating on the part of G.H. detailed above, what predominates in the novels, and is more in line with the understanding of univocal being, is not destiny but a never ending becoming in which beings do not reach a finished state or state of equilibrium but are marked by change that only ends in death.

We find this sense of becoming expressed in Lispector's two novels. The narrator of AV announces that she is interested not in subjects and objects that appear to possess clearly delimited boundaries but the continuous change that takes place: "quero não o que está feito mas o que tortuosamente ainda se faz" (1998, 12). This sense of creation and change is expressed as metamorphosis as well. Describing the method of writing that informs the narrative, the narrator goes on to explain that "fixo os instantes de metamorfose e é de terrível beleza a sua sequência e concomitância" (1998, 13). Like metamorphosis, the process of mutation, which produces change on the level of form or nature of a being, appears in another moment: "Nasce no ar a primeira flor. Forma-se o chão que é terra. O resto é ar e o resto é lento fogo em perpétua mutação. A palavra 'perpétua' não existe porque não existe o tempo? Mas existe o ribombo" (1998, 37). We have the denial of numerical or spatialized time here. In addition, there is the allusion of the classical elements of Greek philosophy, particularly pre-Socratic philosophy, which sought to define the one primordial element from which the rest of creation issues.[35] Throughout, the narrator is referring to all beings as subject to this mutation, but in one instance notices how this

[35] In particular, Heraclitus argued that being is derived from perpetual change and believed that fire was the primordial element. "This world, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made; but it was ever, is now, and ever shall be an ever-living Fire, with measures kindling and measures going out" (qtd. in Russell *A History of Western Philsosophy,* p. 43).

perpetual change informs her sense of self. She evokes the image of a kaleidoscope with its multiple pieces of glass, which momentarily coalesce in different configurations and then dissolve with the arbitrary rotation of the cell: "Mas sou caleidoscópica: fascinam-me as minhas mutações faiscantes que aqui caleidoscopicamente registro" (1998, 34). This figure of the kaleidoscope to describe subjectivity as becoming accordingly informs her method of writing. Indeed, the form of AV is marked by a lyrical succession of images in ever changing combinations that are bound by the expression of univocal being.

Though the narrators refer to becoming in these general terms, there is an interest in the relation between animals and humans that constitutes an exemplary manifestation of continual change in time and that consequently precludes clear boundaries between two beings that have been considered as related but essentially distinct. The figure of becoming-animal as Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of becoming-animal is apt here. Being is expressed not in fixed forms like human and animal but in the interstices of these categories, a constant that never assumes a fixed position. They explain that "a becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification (...) To become is not to progress or regress along a series (...) What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes" (237-238). This middle is expressed in Lispector's novels in relation to animals first as an ambivalent combination of admiration and fear. In AV, for example, the narrator admits that contact with animals is a disquieting encounter: "Arrepio-me toda ao entrar em contato físico com bichos ou como a simple visão deles." Then, she admits to an admiration for their being one with universal time as duration: "Os bichos me fanstasticam. Eles são o tempo que não se conta." At the same

time, however, there arises a feeling of repulsion produced by a sense uncanniness, as that which is both familiar and unfamiliar to her: “Pareço ter certo horror daquela criatura viva que não é humana e que tem meus próprios instintos embora livres e indomáveis” (1998, 48). Later, she confesses a secret wish to have been born an animal: “Não ter nascido bicho é uma minha secreta nostalgia” (1998, 52). What she admires and wishes she possesses is not so much animal form or a life as an animal as an unmediated connection to life. G.H. explains that the animal possesses what she calls an “atenção-vida,” which allows it to be a part of univocal being: “essa única barata é o mundo” (2009, 123). Similarly, G.H. explains that the cockroach is closer to God, that is, life, continuity: “Uma barata é maior que eu porque sua vida se entrega tanto a Ele que ela vem do infinito e passa para o infinito sem perceber, ela nunca descontínua” (2009, 126-127). This suggests that the animal is not separated from univocal being, as is the case with humans. It is thought and language that puts humans at a distance from this being. But it does not separate them entirely.

Indeed, in the novels the boundaries between human and animal are not clearly defined for the narrators. G.H. states that what is most intimate to her sense of being is, in fact, the animal: “É que eu olhara a barata viva e nela descobria a identidade de minha vida mais profunda” (2009, 56). In another passage, she declares that she is more animal than animals themselves: “Estou agora ouvindo o grito ancestral dentro de mim: parece que não sei quem é mais a criatura, se eu ou o bicho. E confundo-me toda (2009, 49). This confusion refers to a troubling of clear definition that would distinguish human from animal. She recognizes in this moment the ease with which she has access to this becoming-animal: “eu é que me animalizo. Não é difícil e vem simplesmente. é só não lutar contra e é só entregar-se” (2009, 49). The narrators come to understand in the events that they undergo that one

way in which becoming manifests itself in this middle position is between the extremes of animal and human.

This in-between or becoming is not limited to the human relation with animals; it is also expressed as it regards plant life. In AV, the narrator explains that she is led to attuning herself to the movement of trees' bodies: "Meu impulse se liga ao das raízes dos árvores" (1998, 42). And in another passage, the narrator resolves to write about flowers so as to become closer to univocal being: "Agora vou falar da dolência das flores para sentir mais a ordem do que existe" (1998, 56). She is drawn to plants after experiencing an extraordinary connection to a rose that she bought one day. The beauty of the flower strikes her, and a relation develops between her and the flower: "Uma relação íntima estabeleceu-se entre mim e a flor: eu a admirava e ela parecia sentir-se admirada" (1998, 51). The narrator communicates with the flower, but in a way that is beyond human language: "eu olhava a flor e transmitia-lhe em ondas a minha energia" (Ibid). The bond between the two is so clear that even the maid that works for the narrator is aware of it without the narrator remarking on this connection. Concluding this anecdote, the narrator compares the relation between her and the plant as that which humans and animals possess. The rose "tinha tanto instinto de natureza que eu e ela tínhamos podido nos viver uma a outra profundamente como só acontece entre bicho e homem" (1998, 51-52). These series of becomings that extend beyond the animal world is one more suggestion of the one substance of univocal being that allows for an interrelation of beings that representational thought and language often fails to discern.

This notion of becoming-animal and becoming-plant involves an attunement to life. The events that the novels relate not only call for a shift in the thinking of ontological

and epistemological coordinates, from equivocal to univocal being; they imply an ethical dimension as well, which initially takes the form of a dilemma that the narrators face following the experience of the event. In both novels, the event that the narrators experience ends, and they return to everyday life. In the wake of the event, the narrator of AV is left wishing that she could forget what she experienced: "Estou triste. Um mal-estar que vem do êxtase não caber na vida dos dias. A êxtase devia se seguir o dormir para atenuar atenuar a sua vibração de cristal ecoante. O êxtase tem que ser esquecido" (2009, 92). The overwhelming vision of univocal being that appeared without any sort of effort has seemed to have disappeared from her immediate consciousness. Similarly, G.H. expresses a fear that, despite what she experienced, she will nonetheless turn away from the impersonal and back to the personal: "A identidade me é proibida, eu sei. Mas eu vou me arriscar porque confio na minha covardia futura, e será a minha covardia essencial que me reorganizara de novo em pessoa" (2009, 98). She confesses that she is afraid that she will fall back on "idolatria" that betrays what she has glimpsed in the epiphanic event (2009, 178). However, she also feels a confidence that is beyond her efforts to remain faithful to what she lived. "Talvez eu agora soubesse que eu mesma jamais estaria à altura da vida. Eu não alcançaria jamais a minha raiz, mas minha raiz existia" (Ibid). In both novels, the ecstatic moment of the event cannot be sustained, but it produces a division in the sense of self, between what is variously referred to as the human and the inhuman, as well as the personal and the impersonal. The dilemma, then, is how does one live in the face of this irreducible division of the self?

PGH takes up the moral question of how one is to live, as G.H. attempts to overcome a certain understanding of morality that she associates with the human realm.

The division of the self that the event produces concerns a separation from previously held beliefs: “Estava me libertando de minha moralidade, e isso era uma catástrofe sem fragor e sem tragédia” (2009, 85). We gather from a certain line of questioning on the part of G.H. that this notion of morality is based on the adherence to eternal principles, laws, and conventions. She asks whether “o problema moral consigo mesmo é conseguir sentir o que se deveria conseguir? Sou moral à medida que faço o que devo e sinto como deveria?” (2009, 85-86). She signals here a disjuncture between morality and life in which moral thought and action is unrelated to life and unnaturally imposed on a subject. She discounts this understanding of morality as off the mark: “De repente a questão moral me parecia não apenas esmagadora, como extremamente mesquinha.” Instead, she arrives at another formulation, which is puzzling: “a solução tinha que ser secreta. A ética da moral é mantê-la em segredo. A liberdade é um segredo” (2009, 86). It is not a secret in the sense that she possesses an esoteric truth that is unavailable to the uninitiated; rather, a secret suggests the univocal notion of life as the production of infinite difference which consequently calls for a sort of phronesis in which moral or ethical behavior is decided in concrete situations rather than based on unchanging laws. This form of morality does not prevent a sense of guilt that the human notion of morality imposes. As a result, any sort of ethical or moral must attempt to overcome this sense of guilt: “Embora eu saiba que, mesmo em segredo, a liberdade não resolve a culpa. Mas é preciso ser maior que a culpa. A minha ínfima parte divina é maior que a minha culpa humana” (Ibid).

Once again, we find a dualistic subject that is divided between the human and what G.H. calls the divine or the inhuman. Even though the inhuman is greater or more real than the human, an effort is required to open oneself to this part of one’s self. In order to achieve

this G.H. proposes a form of ascesis that seeks the dissolution of the ego in order to more fully affirm life. The process through which G.H. will achieve this is what she will term "depersonalization" and "deheroization," This moral or ethical imperative is signaled in the epigraph of the novel, in which the art historian Bernard Berenson estimates that "A complete life may be one ending in so full identification with the nonself that there is no self to die." G.H. explains the process of depersonalization as an effacement of subjectivity itself: "Caminho em direção à destruição do que construí, caminho para a despersonalização" (2009, 173). And shortly following this passage, she states in less figurative language that this ascesis probes the limits of just how much of one's self may be stripped away while still allowing for one to exist: "A destituição do individual inútil - a perda de tudo o que se possa perder é, ainda assim, ser. Pouco a pouco tirar de si (...) como quem se livra dela própria pele, as características" (2009, 174). If there is some sense of limits here, in the final pages of the novel, G.H. seems to return to a life that is emptied of any self, when she writes of the endpoint of this ascesis: "despessoal, sem voz própria, finalmente sem mim" (2009, 177).

In any case, the process of the diminution of self results in a greater connection to life. Indeed, "deseroização" is concomitant with the increase of life that comes from univocal being: "A deseroização de mim mesma está minando subterraneamente o meu edifício (...) Até que me seja enfim revelado que a vida em mim não tem o meu nome" (2009, 175). The recurring images of structures that are breaking down and a subsequent formlessness concerns the primordial one substance that univocal being signifies. In another instance, G.H. is deliberating on how to describe to her interlocutor what she experienced, agonizing over giving form to what she calls "substância amorfa" and "carne

infinita" (2009, 12). She resolves not to give it form and thereby misrepresent univocal being: "É que eu tenha a grande coragem de resistir a tentação de inventar uma forma" (2009, 13).

The ascesis that the novel advances involves not only opening oneself to life but also being able to perceive this same life in others and as a result extends the ethical stakes beyond the solitary ascesis of depersonalization: "Assim como houve o momento em que vi que a barata e a barata de todas as baratas, assim quero de mim mesma encontrar em mim a mulher de todas as mulheres" (2009, 174). This is an ethical imperative that is based not on the personal qualities of an individual but the impersonal force, that is, the one substance to which all beings belong. G.H. creates another term for this process, exteriorization, that signals a diminution of interiority on which notions of a conscious subject are founded: "A maior exteriorização a que se chega. Quem se atinge pela despersonalização reconhecerá o outro sob qualquer disfarce: o primeiro passo em relação ao outro é achar em si mesmo o homem de todos os homens. Toda mulher é a mulher de todas as mulheres" (2009, 174). Understood in this way, depersonalization is the condition of possibility for ethical conduct in relation to others.

On closer examination, these reflections pose a problem more than a clear path for G.H. and implicitly ask whether the implications of depersonalization are feasible and offer any ethical horizon for G.H. We are able to perceive an intimation of a doubt in descriptions cited above, but it particularly comes to the fore in the use of another signifier that G.H. employs in her reflection upon the ethical dimension of the event, "desistência," which denotes a giving up or abandoning of something. For G.H., it is paradoxically something that has been achieved: "a este só se chega quando se experimentou o poder de construir,

e, apesar do gosto de poder, prefere-se a desistência. A desistência tem que ser uma escolha" (2009, 176). This is a giving up that requires will, decision. But it is a will toward passivity, a will not to will, which is opposed to a will to construct, as we find in the metaphors, such as civilization and buildings that G.H. draws on to refer to the human realm. The latter concerns the centered subject that is tied up with power over the world and over others. But is it possible to exist as a human and not will? Is this dissolution of the ego possible only in death, or in the infrequent ecstatic moments of the events that G.H. describes? These are the questions that underlie G.H.'s reflections following her experience of the event and which are not resolved. We may read AV, however, as a response to this difficulty.

For the narrators of both novels, the event produces a change of perspective that involves an imperative to go beyond what the narrator in PGH calls the human or humanized form of life in which there is a negation of life understood as univocal being. But if in PGH, the ethical imperative involves a difficult ascesis that seeks to bridge the gap between the human and the inhuman, AV suggests a different direction for thought and action that involves not the absolutizing process of depersonalization but moves towards a more modest care for the self. In the novel, writing and art that express univocal being emerge as a middle ground between the event and everyday life. And it is through these forms of expression that the narrator is able to accept a finite existence. Rather than demanding a radical negation that would overcome the gap between humans and univocal being, what results is an acceptance of the peculiar human condition that is tied up in univocal being and yet somehow separate from it.

This suspension between the human existence and life is what the narrator calls "a vida oblíqua." The narrator makes the familiar distinction between her life before the epiphanic event and how this same event has transformed the way that she thinks about being: "Antes só via através de cortes retos e paralelos. Nao percebia o sonso traço enviesado. Agora adivinho que a vida é outra" (1998, 68). What comes with this vision is not to give oneself to a fusion with life but to the divided condition: "Tenho que dar o mergulho de uma só vez, mergulho que abrange a compreensão e sobretudo a incompreensão" (Ibid). In terms of the relation between thought, language, and the real, she accepts the separation: "Bem sei que há um desencontro leve entre as coisas (...) há desencontro entre os seres que se perdem uns aos outros entre palavras que quase não dizem mais nada." But again, this is not a separation that we find in Revueltas and Hilst; it still affords a near or approximate understanding: "Mas quase nos entendemos nesse leve desencontro" (1998, 70). There is an attempt to give this condition a sense of necessity: continuous contact with vital force of univocal being would be too much to bear for humans. Indeed, this oblique life is "a única forma de suportar a vida em cheio, pois um encontro brusco face a face com ela nos assustaria" (Ibid). In contrast to PGH, which wishes to close the gap, the narrator of AV explains that we must remain at a distance: "Nós somos de soslaio para não comprometer o que pressentimos de infinitamente outro nessa vida de que te falo" (Ibid). We find a recurrent back and forth in which this condition is signaled: "Realizo o realizável mas o irrealizável eu vivo é o significado de mim e do mundo e de ti não é evidente" (1998, 71). This is expressed in her lack of unmediated connection to life in which she catches glimpses of univocal being from time to time: "Há uma coisa que me escapa o tempo todo. Quando não escapa, ganho uma certeza: a vida é

outra" (1998, 72). In another instance, she doubts whether she is connected to life, but she is resolved to this lack of certainty: "Eu não tenho enredo de vida? Sou inopinadamente fragmentária (...) Minha história é viver" (1998, 73). As with the view of the future discussed above, the narrator of AV finds neither human nor inhuman reconciliation or destiny: "Recuso-me porém a qualquer missão. Não cumpro nada. apenas vivo" (1998, 72).

But this does not produce anguish or pain; in fact, what we find in the narrative of AV is a greater sense of happiness. The human or personal in the novels betrays a symptom of a fear of life as becoming without ultimate ends that ends in death. In AV, the narrator rages against this finitude and expresses envy towards animals for their being a part of life and unaware of their condition: "Quem? quem tem misericórdia de nós que sabemos sobre a vida e a morte quando um animal que eu profundamente invejo - é inconsciente de sua condição?" (1998, 93) But she refuses to be sad and instead resolves to be happy: "Denuncio nossa fraqueza, denuncio o horror alucinante de morrer (...) e respondo a toda essa infâmia com a alegria" (Ibid). She mentions salvation, but not in the eschatological sense of a final reconciliation; it is a measured sense of well-being that she achieves: "A minha única salvação é a alegria (...) recuso-me ficar triste. Sejamos alegres" (1998, 93). At the same time, she refuses the false comforts of the human realm. It is in life that she finds well being: "Amor impessoal, amor it, é alegria" (Ibid). For her it is impersonal being, "viver é isto: a alegria do it" (1998, 94).

This happiness that marks the novel can be seen in the differing metaphorics of the two novels. As I detailed above, PGH is permeated with the space of the desert. In addition to the desert, there are frequent allusions to what she experiences in the event as a hell, as when, for example, she writes that "eu via que o inferno era isso: a aceitação cruel da dor,

a solene falta de piedade pelo próprio destino, amas mais a ritual de vida que a si próprio" (2009, 120). In contrast, in AV, we find the evocation of moist and soft textures in extended poetic passages that emphasize not dryness and absence of life but the overflowing of life and her identification with these images: grutas (1998, 15), fontes (1998, 30), pântanos (1998, 41). Similar to these figures, there is a passage that is a lyrical paean to the visual beauty of flowers (1998, 56-59). We also find the presence of brilliant colors, strikingly different from the stark monochromatism of PGH. In one passage, the narrator compares life to an overflowing of precious stones: "E que se rebele, esse nervo de vida, e que se contorça e lateje. E que se derramem safiras, ametistas, e esmeraldas no obscuro erotismo da vida plena: porque na minha escuridão en treme o grande topázio, palavra que tem luz própria" (1998, 19).

If in PGH, there is a sense of being trapped, almost a prisoner of the event that G.H. undergoes, in AV the thematization of freedom or liberty predominates. It is a freedom that is not achieved by will but by chance: "Só algumas pessoas escolhidas pela fatalidade do acaso provaram da liberdade esquiva e delicada da vida (...) Essa liberdade fugitiva de vida não deve ser jamais esquecida: Deve estar presente como um eflúvio" (1998, 69). The use of "eflúvio," denoting a pleasant aroma or perfume contributes to the overall sense of well-being. Liberty is tied to the impersonal becoming, as opposed to a Sartrean freedom: "É que não sei aonde me levará esta minha liberdade. Nao é arbitraria nem libertina. Mas estou solta" (1998, 33). There is freedom in becoming without any destiny. This sense of freedom brings her closer to the nature of life, which is free: "Minha liberdade pequena é enquadrada me una à liberdade do mundo" (1998, 25). It does not imply a pure spontaneity; indeed, there is necessity, but not one expressed in transcendent laws, ideas. This necessity brings

peace of mind: “A que me levara minha liberdade? (...) Mas vou e rezo e minha liberdade é regida pela Ordem- já estou sem medo” (1998, 65).

To conclude, if Lispector’s fiction is concerned with a figure of God, as some critics argue, in the two novels that I have discussed here, it is to think of existence without this figure understood as an origin that allows for transparency between thought, language, and the world. The novels face an impersonal, neutral origin that produces difference rather than sameness, identity. At the same time, they preclude its characters from fusion with this univocal force. In addition, the human realm is troubled, shaken but somehow irreducible. AV comes to propose a model for the subject in which “a life is always made up of two phases at the same time, personal and impersonal. They are always in relation, even if they are clearly separated” (Agamben 2004, 124). It is an art of living that is attuned to the everyday or banal mysticism of the fleeting encounters with or glimpses of the impersonal (Agamben 2004, 117-118). The subject may be irreducibly tied up with power, and subjectivation so often becomes subjection to power that encroaches on all aspects of everyday lives. But an attention or inclination to that which evades the human, power, allows for moments of exodus and perhaps new forms of life.

Conclusion

The fiction of José Revueltas, Hilda Hilst, and Clarice Lispector demonstrate an interest in philosophical themes, including the experience of self. In their varied ways, these authors effectively deconstruct the centered subject, which continues to be the principal model for how we conceive of self and of collective life. The nation has embodied this unitary collective subject, as it assumes a fusion or communion between a group of people that are born within particular territorial boundaries, share a common culture, as well as a political system in which the state form plays a central role. The critique of the subject in the work of Revueltas, Hilst, and Lispector allows for a questioning of the putative unity of the nation, which makes evident, not only the fundamental heterogeneity that marks the population within the nation-state, but also that any sort of national identity constitutes imaginary discursive articulations that are premised on exclusion, violence and selective history. The circumstances in Latin America over the last 30 years have transformed the state's relations with the mode of production and its ties to the nation, which has brought the status of national culture and national identity to the foreground. This has produced various debates and small shifts in which the grounds of citizenship and rights are contested and, in some cases, redefined. One of the more conspicuous changes in this historical conjuncture is the adoption of plurinational models of the nation-state in Bolivia and Ecuador, as a result of the assertion of indigenous identity. In theory, at least, plurinationalism confers a greater degree of autonomy for indigenous communities and thus the ability to decide on the role (if any) of the state and the market in their forms of life.

The deconstructive logic in the novels that I have considered here, however, radicalizes this line of critique and puts in doubt the very possibility of a unitary individual and collective subject, whether that be based on nation, ethnicity, race, etc. The reason for this is related to the ontological assumptions that these works share. If metaphysics depends on an understanding of being in which an origin confers transcendent or immanent meaning to existence, which the centered subject perceives and understands, in these novels there is no transparency between human thought and language and the world; there is rather an originary difference to which humans attempt to impute meaning and thus order.

As a result, what we have found in the novels considered above, is a self that is constitutively fissured and not on its way to resolving this condition. The ego is inexorably related to an unconscious and its attendant phenomena of desires and drives. In addition, if the centered subject is posited as a rational human that overcomes its animal nature, the boundaries between human and animal - and in some cases, the vegetative - are continually blurred. In this way, reason and what could be called unreason uneasily commingle. The divided subject is hardly an autonomous being but exists in relation, which entails factors such as the state and market, as well as subject categories, such as nation, race, and gender that make up social order and to which individuals are subjected, willingly or unwillingly. Within this order, there is an experience of self that exceeds these subject positions. And finally, we find a human existence that is without any end or destiny, and yet there exists in the characters of the novels an enduring desire for the realization of some event that would bring about equality and freedom for all.

There is no programmatic thrust in the novels that I have considered here. Nonetheless, I have proposed throughout a minimal desideratum that may be found in the

authors' works, such as the hope that there would be less of a distinction between *bios* and *zoē,* and between lived experience and politics. In these works, the fulfillment of equality and freedom is tied to the degree of respect for the divided, singular subject. But how would this respect concretize itself? The divided subject does not seem to lend itself to any sort of ethico-political commitment in the given circumstances. As a result, it is relegated to the private realm, so that we would assume or perform various subject positions in our public lives and cultivate the divided subject in the realms of therapy, art, or religion.

Indeed, in the introduction, I go through various contortions to articulate a relation between theorizing a divided subject and the ethico-political implications for action. But this difficulty may have more to do with the operative assumptions of the relation between theory and practice in my intellectual handwringing than any notion of the divided subject. The assumption that theory has some direct relation with practice is wishful thinking that contradicts the notion of a decentered subject. Theodor Adorno proposes a different relation between theory and practice that avoids two poles of thinking that is helpful here: "A consciousness of theory and praxis must be produced that neither divides the two such that theory becomes powerless and praxis becomes arbitrary, nor refracts theory through the archbourgois primacy of practical reason…" Adorno argues for a notion of thinking as a practice: "Thinking is a doing, theory a form of praxis" (2005, 261). But this is not to privilege instrumentality or a slavish adherence to a supposed real situation. In fact, Adorno reasons that theory may be most effective when it strikes a distance from the concrete and thus "emphasizes the aspects that might be able to lead beyond the given constraints of the situation." Indeed, distance may allow for an opening to transformative action that had remained concealed: "Through its difference from immediate, situation-specific action,

i.e., through its autonomization, theory becomes a transformative and practical productive force" (2005, 264).

The thought and lived experience of the divided subject does not require any sort of comprehensive actualization in social relations. This notion of thought and practice assumes an application that would engender predictable results. But the future is necessarily undecidable; the novels that I have discussed dramatize this very well. A calculable future would render ethico-political thought and action a mechanical exercise. Following Adorno's thought, the decentered subject is both distant from and intimately related to the concrete, to praxis. It is distant in its deconstructive logic that it brings the centered subject to its limits and shows lived experience as a becoming that is produced by the tension between the personal and the impersonal realms that is never resolved. But this pointing out the limits and the constitutive tension may give way to a creative action, that is, action outside of the apparent limits and thus unexpected, even transformative, like the destructive-creative work of theory, or of literature, for that matter.

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