The Peripheral Metropolis: The City, Montage and Modernity

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Mulder's dissertation, "The Peripheral Metropolis: The City, Montage and Modernity," developed out of his comparative project. His dissertation draws on archival research in Berlin and Buenos Aires that was generously supported by Brown Graduate School and the Joukowsky Summer Research Grant. At the time of the dissertation's completion, Mulder was completing revisions on "Contradictions of Contemporaneity: José Carlos Mariátegui's Critique of the Avant-Garde," an article-length version of the dissertation's first chapter. It will be published in *Modernism/modernity.* As part of the Deans' Faculty Fellowship, Mulder will be appointed Visiting Assistant Professor at Brown University, and in Spring 2019 he will teach "Torn Halves of Modernism" in the Comparative Literature Department.

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Introduction

In *La cabeza de Goliat* (Goliath's Head, 1940) Martínez Estrada, reflecting on Buenos Aires, asks if "the aesthetic of the city corresponds more to the album than to the book?" (88)[1]—that is, does the city embody a continuous, self-contained narrative or does it assume the form of a discontinuous series of photographic images? On the one hand, Martínez Estrada feels compelled to construct a story that would weave together the history of Buenos Aires; on the other hand, he recognizes that the experience of city demands a form of fragmentation, an approach that "sees it from all sides," as if in a cubist painting (24).[2] In keeping with this bifocal approach, *La cabeza de Goliat* is itself an extended meditation on Buenos Aires, but the book is composed of brief, essayistic sections that rapidly change focus and develop points more suggestively than exhaustively. Martínez Estrada conceptually works through a formal dynamic that this project calls "montage"—a conceptual and aesthetic form that mediates continuity and discontinuity, fragmentation and totality, modernism and what is typically considered modernism's opposite, realism.

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[1] "La estética de la ciudad, ¿corresponderá al álbum más que al libro?" My reading of this passage owes a great deal to Laura Demaría's discussion in *Buenos Aires y las provincias: Relatos para desarmar.* Demaría critiques the way Silvia Rosman, another interpreter of Martínez Estrada, gives priority to the album over the book. Demaría's point is to insist on the ambiguity, complementarity and ultimately unresolved character of the question. She articulates the dilemma nicely: "Por la primera mirada, la ciudad sí queda cartografiada en el fragmento del álbum de fotografías que destaca Rosman y con esta lectura concuerdo; pero, si se acepta la inscripción en el ensayo de una segunda mirada que acaricia voluptuosamente a la ciudad, el álbum ya no puede narrarla. La mirada que muestra ya no es una ciudad ensimismada sino en relación con las provincias, necesita del libro para construir una 'gran narrativa' que una los fragmentos y dibuje los contornos de esa Buenos Aires que les da la espalda a las provincias. Desde esta seguna mirada centrífuga, la fragmentación del 'álbum' es reemplazada por la continuidad del 'libro.' En consecuencia, la supuesta disyunción de la pregunta da paso a una complementariedad entre 'álbum' y 'libro,' en una narrativa paradójica que conjuga en tensión los dos elementos" (73).

[2] "Así se lo desgaja de su real situación, y aunque para muchos sea ésa la manera normal de mirar la metrópoli, conviene verla por todos los lados."

For Martínez Estrada, this form of montage bears an inextricable relation to his specific object of investigation. Insofar as he seeks to represent Buenos Aires, Martínez Estrada cannot decide one way or the other whether to produce a book or an album. Rather, the problem is its own solution. Buenos Aires is itself defined by this tension between continuity and discontinuity; it is at once part of Argentina and divorced from it. Martínez Estrada both argues for the underlying identity of Buenos Aires with the Argentine pampa and outlines a process whereby this continuity turns into an asymmetry and ultimately an irremediable split between European-oriented metropolis and rural hinterlands. In his earlier *Radiografía de la pampa* (X-Ray of the Pampa, 1933), Martínez Estrada recasts Domingo Sarmiento's "civilization or barbarism" formula for the fate of nineteenth-century Latin American nations. Rather than invert the formula, privileging nature and rural life over urban society, Martínez Estrada insists on their underlying identity: "What Sarmiento did not see is that civilization and barbarism were the same thing, like centripetal and centrifugal forces of a system in equilibrium. He did not see that the city was like the country and that within the new bodies were reincarnated the souls of the dead" (256).[3] This emphasis on continuity, however, passes into a dialectic of continuity and discontinuity—book and album—with Martínez Estrada's image of Goliath's head. "[A] phenomenally large head usually indicates mental excellence," but in the case of Buenos Aires, "We start to realize that the head was not too big, but that the entire body was malnourished and poorly developed. The head sucked the blood of the

[3] "Lo que Sarmiento no vio es que civilización y barbarie eran una misma cosa, como fuerzas centrífugas y centrípetas de un sistema en equilibrio. No vio que la ciudad era como el campo y que dentro de los cuerpos nuevos reencarnaban las almas de los muertos."

body" (30).[4] Or, as Martínez Estrada phrases it later in the book, "The formation of Buenos Aires has been produced from a centripetal, not an expansionary, movement" (64).[5] The disproportionate size of Buenos Aires derives not simply from an inherent dynamic but also from a parasitical relationship with the provinces, draining the countryside of its vital forces, and this asymmetrical relationship develops to the point that the city breaks with and turns away from the countryside. This rupture leads Martínez Estrada to formulate an image that recurs throughout *Radiografía* and *La cabeza de Goliat*, namely that of the city as a "decapitated but living head" (*Radiografía* 37). Martínez Estrada thus presents Buenos Aires as a city torn asunder in two directions. Focusing on the west, for instance, where "the houses of Buenos Aires spill over into the pampa" (74),[6] the city bleeds into the countryside, the two becoming almost indistinguishable. But focusing on the east, the city's port, Buenos Aires appears eminently modern and urban, oriented toward Europe and cut off from the provinces of the interior.[7] Buenos Aires is a city that is at once rural and urban, continuous and discontinuous with the nation.

The photographs of Horacio Coppola, whom I will discuss in more detail in chapter 3, similarly insist on this essential duality of Buenos Aires. Indeed, Martínez Estrada's reference to an "album" is likely an allusion to Horacio Coppola's 1936

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[4] "Antes el problema no nos inquietaba y más bien era motivo de recóndito orgullo; porque tener una cabeza fenomenalmente grande suele ser indicio de excelencia mental, para el que calcula por metros … Empezamos a darnos cuenta de que no era la cabeza demasiado grande, sino el cuerpo entero mal nutrido y peor desarrollado. La cabeza se chupaba la sangre del cuerpo."

[5] "La formación de Buenos Aires se ha producido por un movimiento centrípeto y no de expansión."

[6] "El oeste sigue siendo la más rural de las zonas metropolitanas, o la más cívica de las zonas del llano, según se considere que Buenos Aires desborda sus casas hacia la pampa, o que ésta entra, por el subsuelo, hasta el estuario. Es una franja de sutura del país con la urbe."

[7] Martínez Estrada relates this distinction between east and west to the Florida-Boedo literary debate, which I will discuss in chapter 3.

collection of photographs, an album that was commissioned for the fourth centenary of the foundation of Buenos Aires.[8]

I. Desde Avenida del Trabajo y Lacarra (1936), Horacio Coppola

II. *Nocturno (1936), Horacio Coppola*

On the one hand, Coppola's images established the modernity of the city. They offered "the first modern gaze on Buenos Aires," presenting "a modern Buenos Aires that still today has the capacity to appear contemporary to us" (Gorelik, "Images" 109). The jagged skyline and chiaroscuro of "Nocturno," to take one example, could easily be mistaken for Manhattan. On the other hand, Coppola turns his camera on the edges of the city, what Borges called the "orillas," as I will discuss in more detail in chapter 3. In

[8] The entirety of *La cabeza de Goliat* could be considered a pessimistic alternative to the celebrations of Buenos Aires in 1936.

"Desde Avenida del Trabajo y Lacarra," for instance, the pampa appears integrated into an expanding city of geometric, modern housing. The images, juxtaposed in this way, present incommensurable urban spaces, and yet at the same time they are both photographs of Buenos Aires for Coppola. As Adrián Gorelik has argued, Coppola's photographic project was informed by a classicism that insisted on an "essential order," allowing "him to portray the traditional houses as if they were modern objects and the most modern and thriving parts of the city as if time never touched them" (112). That is, the two sides of Coppola's Buenos Aires are neither identical nor incommensurable. The reversal of one into the other—the rural into the urban, the urban into the rural—makes Buenos Aires into a contradictory unity, into a peripheral metropolis,[9] a social space whose peculiar juxtapositions embody the unevenness of global modernity and highlight its mediation by the decentered, abstract form of domination characteristic of capitalism.

The picture of the city presented in Martínez Estrada and Horacio Coppola contrasts sharply from the one that often arises in the works of metropolitan writers. Take John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), for instance. The tragic character Bud Korpenning, upon arriving in New York City, persistently searches for "the center of things" (16). Bud's suicide a few chapters later suggests that this center cannot be reached, but, nevertheless, the assumption remains in *Manhattan Transfer* that "the center of things" is situated in New York City, or rather, that New York City is the center. The metropolis appears to constitute the center of a centripetal force with an expanding radius. Alternatively, Buenos Aires, as described by Martínez Estrada, contains this

[9] Beatriz Sarlo uses the term "peripheral metropolis" to refer to Buenos Aires in the twenties and thirties. See Sarlo, "The Modern City: Buenos Aires, The Peripheral Metropolis." This essay presents a condensed version of Sarlo's account in *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires, 1920 y 1930* of urban culture in interwar-Argentina.

centripetal movement, but the city does not appear to embody the axis of this force. One does not migrate to Buenos Aires to find "the center of things"; the center appears to be located elsewhere.

This structural difference between Buenos Aires and New York City is related to their positions in the global capitalist economy: Manhattan can appear as the center because it is more centrally located in the international division of labor; Buenos Aires, conversely, occupies a more interstitial location between the metropolis and global countryside. This contrast closely resembles the situation that Fredric Jameson famously describes in "Modernism and Imperialism." In that essay, Jameson addresses how modernist works struggled to map the reorganization of international and national space in the age of imperialism. In contrast to the relatively self-contained space of a national economy, imperialism for Jameson means that "a significant structural segment of the economic system as a whole is now located elsewhere, beyond the metropolis, outside of the daily life and existential experience of the home country," and the modernist concern with the loss of meaning, Jameson argues, derives from this experience (157). And yet, this loss of meaning is consistent with the sense that the metropolis constitutes the center of modernity. As the structure of the economy has become increasingly diffuse, the experience of a self-integrated metropolis depends on what Jameson calls a "strategy of containment," a form of repression or mystification that leads to a sense of a "vaster, unrepresentable space," even as the metropolis remains the center of the knowable space (160). That is, to the extent that the global capitalist economy is increasingly shaped by abstract, supranational forces, the experience of the city as a centered, self-integrated formation can only be sustained by mystifying the forces that determine the structure of

national social space. For Jameson, the exception to this situation is Joyce's Dublin. Paradoxically, Dublin, precisely because it cannot be taken as the center of modernity, enables the formation of a more complete map of the totality. This "exceptional situation" entails the "overlap and coexistence between these two incommensurably realities"—that of the metropolis and the periphery—; "a national situation which reproduces the appearance of First World social reality and social relationships … but whose underlying structure is in fact much closer to that of the Third World or of colonized daily life" (164). If the metropolis revolves around absence, the sense that it is the center of a world that cannot be adequately represented, the example of Dublin offers a formal solution to this problem insofar as it entails the presence of both constituents of the imperial world-system.

The Latin American peripheral metropolis similarly internalizes the unevenness of capitalist modernity, but it differs from the Dublin Jameson finds in Joyce to the extent that it is not embedded in the same way in the structures of imperialism. That is, the relation of formally independent Latin American nations to imperialism cannot be adequately conceived in terms of the direct, concrete domination of colony by metropolis.[10] The duality of the peripheral metropolis means that, like Dublin, it incorporates the "incommensurable realities" of First World and Third World, city and country, but it also retains something of the absence characteristic of the metropolis. This

[10] This polemical point relies on a distinction, on which I elaborate via Moishe Postone in the final section of this introduction, between abstract and concrete domination. Colonialism and formal imperialism refer to forms of concrete domination—that is, the domination of one group of people by another group of people. Abstract domination refers instead to the domination of people by abstract imperatives, abstractions of their own making. I would argue that in capitalist modernity this abstract domination is fundamental and needs to be grasped prior to the concrete forms it takes. Colonial relations in modern, global capitalism—not in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, I should clarify—should be understood as instances of this abstract domination, not vice versa.

absence in the historical experience of the peripheral metropolis's duality derives from the position of the city in the global capitalist economy, as the social space that mediates the transfer of raw materials to the center of capitalism and the movement of capital into the periphery. Whereas in colonial Ireland this movement of raw materials and capital maps clearly onto the imperial relation, in the peripheral metropolis it is mediated by the abstractions of a global capitalist market. The Buenos Aires of Martínez Estrada and Coppola, along these lines, embodies a unity of opposites—its indistinguishability from the pampa and its modernity—while at the same time it fails to become a complete microcosm, referring instead to what lies outside itself, to the broader structure of modernity. The peripheral metropolis, accordingly, internalizes the contradictions of capitalist modernity in such a way that it calls for a map composed not only of concrete locations—imperial nations and colonies—but also of the abstract domination characteristic of capital, those abstract imperatives that have no experiential counterparts in either the periphery or the metropolis.

This project examines the peripheral metropolis as a figure for the contradictions of capitalist modernity and montage as a way of turning those contradictions into artistic, formal structures. The project draws on a global framework, but I concentrate on the Mexican poet Manuel Maples Arce, the Peruvian essayist José Carlos Mariátegui, and the Argentine novelist Roberto Arlt: writers active in the 1920s and 1930s, a crucial turning point in the history of modern Latin America and its cities. From the 1880s to the interwar period, Latin American societies relied heavily on export economies, sending raw materials and agricultural goods from the countryside to the centers of the global capitalist economy, while importing capital goods and increasingly seeing foreign capital

invested in their industries. The Latin American city played a crucial role in this arrangement, often serving as the link between the periphery and the metropolis. As the interwar crisis intensified, the viability of the export model became increasingly tenuous. Global trade dropped briefly but dramatically in the immediate aftermath of WWI, as European nations struggled to rebuild, and then more persistently in the thirties with the Great Depression. As the price of primary products fell, agricultural production, previously the engine of Latin American economic growth, contracted and was no longer profitable enough to sustain employment or national development.[11] As a result, migration from the countryside increased substantially, leading to massive population growth in the cities, even though these cities were not supported by an expanding, self-reproducing pattern of growth that could absorb the influx of people.

The writers examined here associate the peripheral metropolis with the most advanced technologies and architectural forms, with Latin America's inextricable embeddedness in global modernity, and with the disconcerting intimacy of the backward countryside. As these writers describe it, the peripheral metropolis appears to be defined by the sort of reversibility Martínez Estrada highlights with regards to Buenos Aires: at one moment, the city appears capable of being mistaken with modern cities at the center

[11] Tulio Halperín Donghi writes, "the economic catastrophe of the 1930s seemed strictly the result of an accident that took place in the centers of international finance, but in retrospect one can identify signs of exhaustion appearing within Latin American primary-export economies themselves during the 1920s. In some cases, like that of sugar, a previously booming export business had lost virtually all its former vigor … The volume of international trade was declining enough to place the very notion of a world market in question, and entire national economies could be dragged down by the collapse of their external markets" (208-9). With regard to Argentina's export economy, Romero emphasizes the severity of the post-WWI crisis: "the First World War—much more than the crisis of the 1930s—a stage in the history of the Argentine economy came to an end" (42). The collapse of the price of agricultural goods was not restricted to the periphery. Hobsbawm explains that despite the recovery of the 1920s "some of the producers of raw materials and foodstuffs, including notably North American farmers, were troubled because prices of primary products turned down again after a brief recovery. The roaring 1920s were not a golden age on the farms of the U.S.A." (90).

of global capitalism; at another moment, it fails to fully distinguish itself from the surrounding countryside. Montage, with its ability to articulate and preserve the differences between, say, a book and album, is uniquely suited to represent the peripheral metropolis, suggesting that the apparently incommensurable elements in the Latin American city are internally related elements of a contradictory whole.

The Problem of Peripheral Modernity

This brief sketch of the peripheral metropolis and montage anticipates how my project intervenes in modernist studies. The peripheral metropolis suggests a conception of modernity that is intrinsically contradictory, a unity of opposites in virtue of its relationship to the totality of capitalism. This insistence on contradiction offers a way to reframe and dissolve the antimonies frequently confronting the modernist studies: how to maintain a global conception of modernity without effacing the differences between center and periphery.

Modernist studies have expanded far beyond the previously narrow canon of works, recognizing as modernist not only a set of artists in a handful of advanced nations but also artists in the periphery, works from a broader historical periodization, and experiments across the high/low divide.[12] This "expansionary impulse" carries with it a reconsideration of modernity itself. In order to ground this expanded conception of modernism, new modernist critics have consistently argued that modernity needs to be understood as a truly global phenomenon, not something constricted to the US and

[12] For the programmatic statement on the trope of "expansion" in the "new modernist studies," see Mao and Walkowitz.

Europe.[13] And yet, while the expansionary impulse rightfully dispels the illusion that modernism exists only in the center of modernity, it threatens to obscure its structural unevenness. One would be hard pressed to deny that modernity in the core differs from modernity in the periphery in some significant ways, but once both are called modernity it becomes difficult to determine the specific nature of those differences. Taking my cue from the way montage articulates a totality based on contradictory relationships and the sketch of the peripheral metropolis outlined above, I argue in this project that a more adequate concept of modernity must be grounded in the contradictions of capitalist social forms: between use-value and value, abstract and concrete, between emancipatory potential and actual domination, and a historical dynamic that simultaneously generates the new and the same. I will elaborate below, and in more detail throughout the project, on how this conception of capitalist modernity, by insisting on internal contradictions, can account for dramatically different historical experiences of modernity while retaining a global conception of modernity, avoiding the need to appeal to exteriority.

Typically, modernist studies, confronted with the apparent incongruity of a global conception of modernity and the glaring differences between core and periphery, seeks to resolve this predicament by insisting on a singular or alternative modernities or by making a distinction between modernity and modernization. Both are responses to the same underlying problem, but I will focus on the attempt to separate modernity and modernization: experience and aesthetics, on the one hand, and socio-economic processes, on the other hand. In part, this apparent solution is suggested by historical

[13] This global redefinition of modernity usually takes two forms: either an insistence on transnational cultural flows or a world-system divided between a core and periphery. For an overview of "global modernism" and these differing interpretations, see Wollaeger.

experience in the periphery, by the impression that places like Latin America have produced great modernist artworks even though in socio-economic terms they remain underdeveloped, incompletely modernized. As Néstor García Canclini explains, "The most frequently reiterated hypothesis in the literature on Latin American modernity can be summarized as follows: we have had a thriving modernism with a deficient modernization" (81). If modernism cannot be taken as the cultural expression of modernization, in accordance with standard wisdom, then it seems that the periphery requires that modernity and modernization be disarticulated.[14] Nicola Miller, for instance, argues that, in order to avoid Eurocentric assumptions, critics must "try to understand modernity *in relation to* modernization without reducing it to modernization" (6).[15] While critics are certainly right to draw attention to the absence of a direct, unequivocal link between advanced economic conditions and modernist works, the nature of that link becomes highly ambiguous once the distinction between modernity and modernization has been made.

The notion of peripheral modernity has been one significant attempt to conceptualize the apparent disarticulation of modernity and modernization, and by

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[14] In effect, this move entails something like maintaining the Marxist distinction between base and superstructure while dissolving the link between these levels.

[15] Neil Lazarus, discussing the work of Fredric Jameson, conceives "modernity as representing something like the time-space sensorium corresponding to capitalist *modernization*" (232). For Lazarus and Jameson, the point of distinguishing between modernity, as experience, and modernization, as socio-economic process, is to grasp how the totality of capitalism can be lived in irreducibly different ways. And yet, this distinction, pushed a little further, has also been used to support precisely what critics like Lazarus and Jameson have been trying to oppose, namely theories of alternative modernity, which insist on the power of pre-modern cultural forms to give rise to distinct forms of modernity, and decolonial approaches, which strive to locate spaces outside of modernity. For instance, Jorge Coronado, working along the lines of alternative modernity more than the decolonial option, displaces these categories such that modernization is used "to invoke the arrival and eventual eruption of foreign cultural concepts and artistic production in emphatically local cultural scenes," whereas modernity designates the "absorption or reformulation" of these foreign cultural concepts (3). The distinction between modernity and modernization, as we will see from a different angle below, is fundamentally indeterminate.

linking it to the contradictory social forms of capitalism, I seek to construct a more concrete concept of peripheral modernity. Beatriz Sarlo uses the term "peripheral modernity" to describe the peculiar social and cultural formations of Buenos Aires in the 1920s and 1930s.[16] Sarlo draws particular attention to the ways in which economic modernization in Argentina was carried out by the nation's oligarchy, meaning that new technologies and capitalist social relations often coexisted and fused with traditional cultural patterns. The paradoxical combination of "defensive and residual elements, alongside progressive programs" (Sarlo, *Una modernidad* 23), which intensified with massive immigration and migration from the countryside, gave rise to what Sarlo calls a "culture of mixture" (32).[17] Mary Louise Pratt has drawn on Sarlo's initial formulation of peripheral modernity, using her historical work to outline "a global and relational account of modernity" that is at once "an empirical and a conceptual project" (35). That is, Pratt strives not to reify center and periphery as unrelated static entities, but rather to conceptualize core and periphery in terms of a mutual relationship that is global in scope. Moreover, Pratt insists on shuttling back and forth between the empirical and the conceptual, the descriptive detail of history and the explanatory power of theory. Pratt identifies two "existential and epistemological conditions" that specify peripheral

[16] See *Sarlo, Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires, 1920 y 1930.*

[17] For instance, one could feasibly assert that the combination of residual, dominant and emergent elements describes all versions of modernity. What is it about this combination that specifically grasps the character of peripheral modernity? Along these lines, critics often attribute the apparent need for specifically Latin American forms of thought to the fact that Latin American societies are defined not by a homogenous cultural identity but by mixture, mestizaje, hybridity, heterogeneity, or some other synonym for difference. I find the invocation of difference to be wholly inadequate. Difference is not specific to the periphery. An explanatory framework is needed to demonstrate what distinguishes this difference from the forms of difference one might find in center. Moreover, a theoretical framework is needed to demonstrate the historical roots and ongoing reproduction of what I would simply call the "duality" peripheral social formations. When critics provide an explanation for the forms of difference they describe, they often point to colonialism or "coloniality," but I would argue that this approach hypostasizes an historical moment and insufficiently grounds it in terms of ongoing social reproduction and the most powerful contemporary social forces, namely capitalism.

modernity: "(1) the condition of *imposed receptivity* and (2) the *copresence of modernity's 'selves' and 'others'*" (35). The former suggests that peripheral subjects are not condemned to simply imitating the dominant cultural forms of the center; rather, "The peripheral social formation has power to determine *how* but not *whether* [foreign influences] are received" (35). The latter indicates the "historical situations in which the European-identified subjects of modernity" share "a social and spatial order … with modernity's others" (35), an experience of duality that will surface in various guises throughout my project. Pratt rightly argues that the question of peripheral modernity must be addressed on global terms from simultaneously conceptual and empirical perspectives, but I will strive to show that the conceptual aspect of this project requires a more explicit account of the capitalist basis of peripheral modernity.

To a certain extent, the concept of peripheral modernity fails to achieve its stated purpose—that is, the goal of clarifying the peculiarity of modernity outside the core—but this conceptual impasse points to an underlying dilemma inherent in modernity. Insofar as peripheral modernity is conceived in terms of the disarticulation of modernity and modernization, the concept suffers from a fundamental indeterminacy that undermines its explanatory power. Carlos Alonso, for instance, relies on the same disarticulation, but he draws conclusions that are contrary to those of Sarlo and Pratt.[18] As Alonso articulates the distinction, "The intellectual/aesthetic category of modernity would therefore be an abstraction that could be wielded by anyone, irrespective of context, while

[18] Alonso argues that Sarlo's concept is ultimately self-defeating. Sarlo aims to articulate the specificity of urban modernity in Buenos Aires, dispelling the illusion that its modernity is simply an imitation or copy of European or American modernity. But Carlos Alonso demonstrates that this concept undergoes a reversal insofar it is "inescapably caught in a dialectics of restoration through the affirmation of the opposite" (*Burden* 25). That is, by marking off its distance from metropolitan modernity in order to articulate a *sui generis* cultural identity, Sarlo ends up bolstering the illusion that the metropolis remains the original form of modernity.

[modernization] represents a moment in the economic development of Western societies that presupposes an asymmetric relationship in which some can make an effective claim of participation, while others cannot" (29-30). But Alonso insists that "the seeming autonomy of the two concepts is an illusion" insofar as modernity "is beholden to its negation of the material conditions from which it springs" (31). In other words, because modernity entails an intellectual or aesthetic compensation for the social effects of modernization, modernity becomes meaningless once it is detached from its corresponding social situation. Accordingly, Latin American modernity, Alonso explains, has "to contend with the absence of its material antagonist in its midst, or more precisely, with its phantasmatic presence as the always distant and assumed reality of the metropolis" (32). Writing elsewhere, Alonso concisely summarizes his argument: "that Latin America did not experience modernity as a historical reality … *was*, nonetheless, the essence of Latin America's historical experience of modernity" (Alonso, *Regional Novel* 22).[19] The disarticulation of modernity and modernization thus yields contradictory results: on the one hand, it opens space for a uniquely Latin American form of modernity; on the other, it amounts to an unconscious acknowledgment of the lack of modernity, a sort of shadow cast by a true modernity elsewhere.

In short, in surveying the literature on Latin American modernity, we are faced with an antinomy: on the one hand, Latin America is already modern, albeit with peculiar, specifically "peripheral" characteristics; on the other hand, Latin America is defined precisely by its distance from modernity. Using another recent iteration, we

[19] It is important to note Alonso's emphasis on "experience" here. That is, he privileges the "empirical" side of Pratt's call for an empirical and conceptual project. I will seek to show below how the historical experience of modernity's absence in the periphery can be conceptually shown to be an intrinsic part of capitalist modernity.

might reformulate this antinomy as an opposition between multiple, alternative modernities and a singular modernity. The problem, I would argue, turns out to be its own solution. The split between modernity's presence or absence in Latin America, its multiplicity or singularity, is not a conceptual barrier to understanding the true essence of modernity; rather, the split is objective insofar as it points to the intrinsic unevenness of modernity. Slavoj Žižek reframes the question along these lines, arguing that the "recourse to multiplication" in theories of alternative modernity "is false not because it does not recognize a unique fixed 'essence' of modernity, but because multiplication functions as the disavowal of the antagonism that inheres to the notion of modernity as such," that is "the way it is embedded in the capitalist system" (34). Modernity, accordingly, must be conceived as what Žižek calls a parallax, in terms of an inherent "gap" that does not appear as such but only in the shifting back and forth between "a multitude of entities" and "the antagonistic opposition of two terms" (36). That is, the inherent contradictions of capitalist modernity mean that, by privileging one aspect or another, it can appear in one moment as a unitary phenomenon in virtue of its relation to its opposite, and in another moment as radically disjointed, as fragmentation and difference. Or, to return to the distinction with which we started, the disarticulation of modernity, as aesthetic idea or experience, and modernity, as socio-economic process, should be understood not in terms of the autonomy of levels, real or illusory, but in terms of the way it points to the inherent contradictions of global capitalist modernity and its historical dynamic.[20] In this framework, modernity and modernization are both

[20] To put this issue differently, the disarticulation of modernity and modernization conflates explanation and description. Critics employs this distinction in order to explain the peculiarity of peripheral modernity, but it would be more accurate to understand this split as a vivid description of the uneven development of capitalism. What is still needed is an explanation of why modernity assumes the form of a disarticulation of

disarticulated and bound together, intimately linked precisely on the basis of the non-identity running through each insofar as they are moments of the contradictory totality we call capitalism.

Modernist studies confront the challenge of formulating a global conception of modernity while accounting for peripheral formations without appealing to exteriority. The idea of alternative modernities or the disarticulation of modernity and modernization fail to achieve this goal. Alternatively, it is by conceiving of modernity in terms of capitalism that we can dissolve the problems facing modernist studies. In the final section of this introduction, I will expound on the dialectical categories of the Marxian critique of political economy, categories that enable us to conceptualize capitalist modernity as a contradictory social form. This initial section briefly demonstrated, and subsequent sections will elaborate more fully, how montage and the peripheral metropolis, by highlighting the constitutive and dynamic character of contradiction, can provide theoretical, social and aesthetic resources for conceiving the peculiar dynamic whereby modernity, as a global phenomenon, can assume the appearance of its opposite. The peculiarities of peripheral modernity, in other words, derive not from an incomplete

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modernity and modernization in the periphery. In order to explain this uneven development, we must, I argue, turn toward the dialectical categories of the Marxian critique of political economy. That is, the challenge of examining modernity lies in taking modernity seriously while acknowledging that, on its own terms, it is an inadequate concept. Its inadequacy, I am arguing here, can be partially compensated by understanding the intrinsic link between modernity and capitalism. Fredric Jameson reaches a similar conclusion in *A Singular Modernity*. Jameson seems to want to do away with the concept of modernity, because of its utterly ideological character, in favor of the concept of capitalism, but he recognizes that, insofar as modernity refers to the way we experience capitalism, "that the notions that cluster around the word 'modern' are as unavoidable as they are unacceptable" (13). The analysis of modernity is thus "constitutively frustrating" because "like the pane of glass at which you try to gaze even as you are looking through it, you must simultaneously affirm the existence of the object while denying the relevance of the term that designates that existence" (13).

modernity, from forces outside modernity, but from modernity's inherent, contradictory dynamics.

The Metropolis

Because the metropolis is often taken to be one of the purest expressions of modernity, it has become a crucial point of reference for modernist literature and art. The metropolis represents the new, whereas rural areas represent tradition and the past. But this conception of the metropolis relies on a one-sided conception of modernity that operates by classifying things into either modern or non-modern. The peripheral metropolis, alternatively, might be called a pure expression of modernity not only because it contains skyscrapers, new technologies and other concrete markers of modern life but also because its peculiar combinations can be seen to embody the dual character of modernity, its contradictory historical dynamic. In this section, I will review seminal theories of the metropolis, arguing that its apparently most modern, urban characteristics—like the experience of "shock" or the abstraction inherent in the money form—must also be understood in terms of the unevenness of global capitalism, its division into cities and countryside. The conceptual figure of the peripheral metropolis, along these lines, suggests that its incongruous juxtapositions are not symptoms of the incomplete modernity but internally related elements of an irreducibly contradictory capitalist modernity.

Georg Simmel, in his famous essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903), formulated what has perhaps become the foundational definition of the metropolis: "The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the

intensification of nervous stimulation which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli" (175). That is, Simmel inaugurates an approach to the metropolis based on its phenomenological aspects, an approach continued by Walter Benjamin in his account of "shock" in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." But the central focus of Simmel's essay ultimately lies in the fact that the "metropolis has always been the seat of the money economy" (176). That is, excessive stimulation should not be taken on its own terms; rather, it must be related to the abstract character of money—what Marx called "exchange-value"—which, in "its colorlessness and indifference," invariably "hollows out the core of things, their individuality, their specific value, and their incomparability" (178). The abstraction of the money form refers not simply to a mental generalization but also to a real social process that shapes the metropolis, remaking it in accordance with the dictates of capitalist accumulation, not the satisfaction of qualitative human needs. And because of its purely quantitative character, the money economy tends toward indefinite expansion, a drive that Simmel grasps in the idea that it "is not only the immediate size of the area and the number of persons" in the city that matters but the metropolis's character as "the seat of cosmopolitanism" insofar as it surpasses the "visible expanse" of the city (181). Subjectively and objectively, the "horizon of the city expands" at the same time that "wealth develops" (181). That is, Simmel shows that the metropolis demands an account that not only does justice to the city dweller's experience of excessive stimuli, but that also relates this metropolitan subjectivity to a philosophical account of the abstraction of money and thus to the social basis of the metropolis.

Raymond Williams complements Simmel's largely philosophical focus on abstraction by linking the metropolis to the global division of city and country. In

"Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism" Williams points out that the urban motifs so common to modernist literature—the encounter with strangers, the isolated individual in the crowd, the mystery of the city, new forms of unity and diversity—were already prevalent in early-nineteenth century Romanticism. In terms of modernism, what needs to be accounted for is not these urban motifs but "the new and specific location of the artists and intellectuals of this movement within the changing cultural milieu of the metropolis" (44). And these phenomena in turn derive from the changing place of the city in modernity. Through the formation of a truly global capitalism by the early twentieth century, largely via imperialism, the city turned into a metropolis, a social space "beyond both city and nation in their older senses" and constituted by "the magnetic concentration of wealth and power in imperial capitals and the simultaneous cosmopolitan access to a wide variety of subordinate capitals" (44).[21] To the extent that wealth and culture accumulate in the metropolis, the city appears to be the center of a global system. But, as Williams argues more explicitly in *The Country and the City*, this social space does not derive from the city as such, but from the city's relationship to the global countryside, from the movement of abstract capitalist value and concrete goods from one part of the world to another. Thus Williams's famous comment that "one of the last models of 'city and country' is the system we now know as imperialism" (279). Williams, in other words, presents a slightly different, but complementary, portrait of the metropolis. Rather than the center of an ever-expanding

[21] In a certain sense, my project takes up Williams's insight that the account of modernism and the metropolis "involves looking, from time to time, from outside the metropolis: from the deprived hinterlands, where different forces are moving, and from the poor world which has always been peripheral to the metropolitan systems" (47). But instead of examining the "hinterlands" proper, the putative outside of the metropolis, I opt for the peripheral metropolis for the way it embodies the inherent unevenness of modernity.

radius, as we find in Simmel, he sees the metropolis as a more-than-national social space that is one significant location in a global division of labor that has no center properly speaking.

In this project, I examine Latin American writers who mediate the insights of both Simmel and Williams. Maples Arce, Mariátegui and Arlt are similarly concerned with the city as a social space inextricably linked to money, imperialism and the abstract social forces of modernity. Their writings indeed contain the thematic of the excessive stimuli, or shock, of the metropolis but they tend to subordinate this phenomenal question to more structural problems. Their works thereby suggest, as I will show throughout the project, that the abstraction of exchange-value leads to contradictory tendencies in the metropolis: on the one hand, it makes the metropolis appear to be the center of global modernity; on the other hand, this abstraction increasingly detaches itself from any concrete locations, including the city, challenging the very possibility of locating a center. I use the concept of the peripheral metropolis to formulate this contradiction insofar as it is both a center and not a center, urban and rural. The peripheral metropolis combines disparate realities, internalizing the unevenness of modernity, but it also highlights its relationship to a global division of labor which must be grasped in abstract terms.

Fredric Jameson, as we saw above, saw something similar in Joyce's Dublin, and the affinity with Dublin serves to pinpoint more historically concrete characteristics of the peripheral metropolis, namely its contradictory combination of massive migration and weak industrialization. The peripheral metropolis of the twenties and thirties in Latin America—Mexico City, Lima and Buenos Aires—anticipates, in an albeit attenuated fashion, features of contemporary megalopolises. Mike Davis has written that "social

theory" typically "believed that the great cities of the future would follow in the industrializing footsteps of Manchester, Berlin and Chicago" (10). But, in fact, "most of the cities of the South are more like Victorian Dublin" insofar as the "global forces 'pushing' people from the countryside … seem to sustain urbanization even when the 'pull' of the city is drastically weakened" (10). This dynamic gives rise to the peculiar phenomenon of "urbanization without industrialization," the principal characteristic of this "planet of slums." Like Victorian Dublin, the peripheral metropolises of the twenties and thirties were similarly characterized by rapid increases in the urban population and a weak industrial basis. The historical reasons for this situation in the twenties and thirties are, of course, very different from the historical reasons for the growth of slums in the past half-century, but the peripheral metropolis presents similarly dramatic contrasts, conflicts and contradictions.[22]

The Argentine historian José Luis Romero attributes the contrasts of the peripheral metropolis to the historical shift from the "bourgeois city" to the "massified city." In looking at the twenties and thirties, this project examines the hinge between these paradigms, and, in this way, the Latin American city embodies not only the realities of the metropolis and the periphery but also this ongoing historical shift. The paradigm of the "bourgeois city," for Romero, lasts roughly from 1880 to 1930, the height of the export economy in Latin American history. Romero relates the rise of the "bourgeois city" to this economic arrangement by showing that "certain substantial transformations

[22] I am motivated, in drawing this parallel with Davis's account of contemporary megalopolises, by the desire to avoid the impression that the peripheral character of the peripheral metropolis derives from a lack of modernity, an incomplete modernization. Davis's argument suggests, instead, that the peculiarity of these slums is a function of dynamics intrinsic to modern capitalism. What is at stake, in other words, is a conceptualization of the contradictory historical dynamic at the heart of capitalist modernity.

… in the economic structure of almost all the Latin American nations … reverberated specifically across the capitals, the ports, across the cities that concentrated and oriented the production of some products in high demand in the world market" (247).[23] Because of the position of Latin American nations in the global capitalist economy, providing agricultural goods to the metropolis for the consumption of increasingly urban populations and raw materials for industrial production, the crucial function of the peripheral metropolis lies in its commercial activities. And since the city looked toward the world market, the physical transformations of Latin American cities in this era often borrowed from European metropoles. Every nation had its "Haussmann," an urbanist dedicated to modernizing the "historical center, both to widen its streets and to establish smooth communication with recently built areas," and to constructing "monumental public buildings … extensive parks, grand avenues, modern public services" (274). Mexico City's Paseo de la Reforma, for instance, was modeled on the Champs-Élysées in Paris.[24] During times when the global economy was growing rapidly and demand for raw materials was high, domestic markets developed in Latin American nations and, along with these markets, a burgeoning middle class. And yet, this pattern of growth and development was relatively isolated within each nation. Romero writes, "The economic expansion fueled from outside was reflected in the centers that maintained contact with

[23] As this quote intimates, the export paradigm meant that the port held a key function in the social structure of Latin American nations. In the case of Argentina, Buenos Aires is both the capital and the port, but in Peru and Mexico the capital and main port do not coincide: Lima vs. Callao, in the case of Peru; Mexico City vs. Veracruz, in the case of Mexico. Although this project is not focused specifically on this disjuncture of political and economic power, I will address at certain moments how this disjuncture generates peculiar problems that are often related to the idea of "urbanization without industrialization."

[24] The Paseo de la Reforma was designed and initially constructed during the French invasion of Emperor Maximiliano. It is noteworthy that the Paseo de la Reforma project was not abandoned after the French occupation. In fact, Porfirio Díaz continued to develop the boulevard, making it into a sort of linear reconstruction of Mexican history for the anniversary of Mexican independence in 1910. On this history, see Tenorio-Trillo 3-42.

the outside, and it accentuated the difference that already existed between them and the rest of the cities. It was as if two worlds were growing apart, one modern and the other colonial, but these worlds also coexisted" (282). The system relied heavily on agricultural production in the countryside, but the gains from such an arrangement were largely confined to the cities, the centers of commercial activities. And when the prices of primary products plummeted in the wake of WWI, throughout the twenties and during the Great Depression, the effects were felt across the city and countryside.[25] "The crisis of 1930," in Romero's pithy formulation, "visibly unified the Latin American destiny" (319).

The "massified city" derives from this situation, from the failure of the export economy. Romero describes the historical experience of this shift: "Suddenly it seemed that there were many more people" (319). This impression reflected not only the appearance of proletarianized masses but also the fact of massive migration from the countryside to the city. As the prices of primary products dropped, unemployment in the countryside rose dramatically, driving people to the city in a pattern that has only intensified in subsequent decades. For Romero, this migration amounted to a veritable "offensive of the countryside against the city" (321), a sort of return of the repressed. If the gap between city and countryside widened even though the export paradigm ultimately depended on agricultural production, the crisis of this model involved a situation in which city and countryside folded onto one another, albeit in an antagonistic

[25] The "roaring twenties" did not extend to agricultural production. The prices of primary products remained low throughout the twenties because of the devastation of the war but also because of increased competition from the United States. On these grounds, I would argue against seeing the Great Depression as a radical rupture. It was, without a doubt, significant, but it was primarily the intensification of a tendency that had already begun to be felt after WWI, and after the collapse of the brief period of economic expansion and urban development in the twenties, the inadequacy of the export model could no longer be denied.

manner. Romero locates this shift, for instance, in the replacement of a "compact society with a divided one, in which two worlds were set against one another" (331). Whereas the "bourgeois city" was defined in part by an emergent middle class that aspired to the norms and standard of living of the oligarchy, the "massified city" involved stark contrasts and disagreements concerning norms. In the physical organization and appearance of the city, this "divided society" assumed the form of "the juxtaposition of isolated, anomic ghettos" (322). If Romero finds in the "bourgeois city" an increasing gap between the cities linked to the world market and "colonial" cities and rural areas left outside this economic dynamic, this gap has been internalized in the "massified city." The peripheral metropolis is thus constituted in its very core as a non-self-identical whole, more of a collage than a unified expression of national identity.

Montage

The previous discussion suggests that in the periphery montage or collage cannot be reduced to a mere artistic technique in this situation. Rather, this artistic form grasps the historical experience and reality of contrasts and juxtapositions in the social space of the peripheral metropolis. Roberto Schwarz, in his discussion of Oswald de Andrade's modernist poetry, famously elucidates this link between modernist form and peripheral modernity, and he does so in such a way that clarifies the peripheral situation by placing it in its global context, not by resorting to factors outside modernity.[26] Schwarz draws

[26] This is the crucial insight that informs all of Schwarz's work. As he explains it in the preface to *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism*, he, along with others reading Marx's *Capital* in São Paulo, "reached the daring conclusion that the classic marks of Brazilian backwardness should be studied not as an archaic leftover but as an integral part of the way modern society reproduces itself, or in other words, as evidence of a perverse form of progress" (*Master* 3).

attention to how Oswald's poetry consistently involves "the juxtaposition of elements characteristic of colonial Brazil with those of bourgeois Brazil" (110). This juxtaposition is built into the "raw materials" themselves; it "could readily be observed in the day-to-day life of the country, long before it became an artistic effect" (110).[27] This duality—of capitalist and apparently pre-capitalist social forms—describes Brazilian social reality and sets the terms for peripheral modernism. Since this juxtaposition is not arbitrary or contingent but follows a socio-historical logic, montage likewise must be conceived not as mere artistic fragmentation but as a way of turning this duality into a conceptual, sensuous form. As Schwarz notes, the objective of this modernist construction lies in "exposing the structure of the historical out-of-phaseness" (111). In effect, montage entails reframing the contrasts found in the peripheral metropolis of São Paulo to assert the internal relation of this duality, not to insist on their mere contiguity. Oswald's poetry, in staging this internal relation, thus dissolves the illusion that the "colonial" aspect of Brazilian society is a mere sign of backwardness, a historical remnant without a fundamental function in the present.

But it is also at this point that problems arise for Schwarz. By highlighting their compatibility, Oswald's poetry leads to an "emptying out of the antagonism between the colonial and (backward) bourgeois elements" (118). Moreover, this "suspension of the conflict and its transformation into a picturesque contrast, where none of the terms is negative" (118) contributes to the construction of a modern Brazilian identity that is also

[27] Or, to quote Nicholas Brown's gloss of Schwarz's argument, "here the raw materials are never quite random … In semiperipheral cultural production this kind of juxtaposition is more or less immediately given geopolitical content, since the very texture of everyday life of the semipheriphery consists in the absolute contemporaneity of the residual and the emergent (the integration of Brazil into the world economy via the coffee industry, for example, both maintained quasi-feudal social relationships in the countryside and required a certain level of industrial development in the cities)" (*Utopian* 192-3).

premised on quasi-feudal social relations, namely coffee plantations producing for the global market.[28] Insofar as Oswald's poetry suggests that the tension between colonial and modern elements is a false problem—because they are both symptomatic of Brazil's peripheral mode of integration into global capitalism—it marks an advance over one-sided conceptions in which modernity is externally opposed to tradition, colonial relations, etc. But the transformation of negativity into "picturesque contrast" contributes to a national imaginary that erases social antagonism.[29] The duality of the peripheral metropolis appears not as an originary condition but as the historical result of Brazil's relation to capitalist modernity, but it also effaces internal tensions by becoming the basis of national identity.

Negativity, however, inheres in the formal juxtaposition of these elements. Schwarz concludes his discussion by suggesting that Oswald retains negativity through his characteristic use of irony and humor. We could extend this observation to montage's ability to both preserve and transform the meaning of pre-existing elements.[30] That is, Oswald's ironic montage, like the peripheral metropolis, stages the juxtaposition of clashing elements and evokes something, a formative meaning or element, that is not present within the poem. The Peruvian Martín Adán's kaleidoscopic novel *La casa de cartón* (The Cardboard House, 1928) relies on this literary dynamic, and a brief

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[28] "*We could say that Oswald's poetry was chasing the mirage of an innocent progress*" (Schwarz 121).
[29] "Changing the angle, we can see how the modernist taste for pure presence pushed the dimension of the relation between people onto a secondary level, suppressing, in a certain sense, their conflictive and negative sides. We have also seen the correspondence between this aesthetic and the conservative progressivism of the cosmopolitan coffee bourgeoisie" (Schwarz 123).
[30] Montage and irony share an emphasis on the indeterminacy of meaning. Think of the way that in irony one says one thing but means something else. I have in mind Romantic irony, which, as Andrew Bowie explains, "requires the negation of the assertion, but not in favor of a determinate contrary assertion" (69). Montage involves a similar dynamic insofar as it highlights the pre-existing meaning of elements and their posited meaning, which derives from the relationship of elements in the artwork.

discussion of the novel will serve to sum up the present section on the peripheral metropolis and concretize its link to montage, the focus of the following section. The formal structure of the novel is articulated in the image of the poet's life as "a hole dug with the hands of a truant child in the sands of a beach" (84). The high tide batters the hole away, "but another truant child digs me again at the other end of the beach, and I cease to exist for a few days, during which time I learn, always anew, the joy of not existing and the joy of resuscitating" (84-85).[31] Like the ironic juxtaposition of colonial and bourgeois elements in Oswald's poetry, which uncovers both their identity and difference, this image centers on a thing that turns into its opposite, always with the possibility that it will return to itself, a hole that is washed away and dug once again. This formal dynamic applies to the novel's location, as well. *La casa de cartón* unfolds in Barranco, a resort town south of Lima that in the twenties was in the process of being incorporated into the expanding city. The novel's lyrical narrator is thus situated in a liminal situation, but he finds himself confined to the city and thus incapable of adopting the position of the countryside: "I was born in a city, and I don't know how to see the countryside" (68).[32] Moreover, the narrator renders the city's limit as a temporal palimpsest, suggesting that the presence of the countryside is likely to pass into non-existence like the hole on the beach:

> At the end of a very urban (*urbanísima*) street, the countryside begins abruptly. From the cabins with their little patios and palm trees and mounds of bellflowers, the broom bushes fall on the hillocks of spongy earth, over the adobe walls, across the monotonous blues of the sky … Here, in patches on this hard and spongy ground, lie the city's future houses with their tarred roofs, delicate plaster window frames, living

[31] "Mi vida es un hoyito cavado en la arena de una playa por las manos de un niño novillero … Me deshace el pleamar, pero otro niño novillero me cava otra vez en otro punto de la playa, y yo no existo por algunos días, y en ellos aprendo siempre de nuevo la alegría de no existir y la de resucitar" (87).
[32] "Nací en una ciudad, y no sé ver el campo" (73).

> rooms with Victrolas and love secrets, perhaps even with their inhabitants. (79)[33]

Instead of the porous border that we find in Martínez Estrada's account of Buenos Aires, Adán presents an abrupt juxtaposition. And yet, the city's outside also prefigures its future, an urban destiny superimposed over a rural present. When read in light of the image of the hole dug by the truant child, this image does not simply evoke the endless expansion of the city since the logic of the novel is one of things disappearing and reappearing. The countryside—first a physical presence, then an abstract one—becomes a figure for the city's stubborn negativity, the juxtaposition of incongruous elements and internal contradictions that prevent it from becoming a unitary whole, regardless of how much of the rural surroundings are urbanized. The image, in other words, has a montage character insofar it enables the mediation of opposites and insists on their non-identity. Montage, that is, is suited to turning the uneven social space of the peripheral metropolis into a critical artistic structure that posits the inner relation of opposites and retains a form of negativity that cannot be reduced to one of its elements.

In modernist studies, montage typically appears as a cinematic category, denoting a specific editing technique or literature that seeks to reproduce cinematic effects. More broadly, montage seems to be synonymous with the familiar trope of modernist fragmentation. While cinema certainly contributed to making montage into a self-conscious artistic category, in the 1920s and 1930s the notion of montage formed a

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[33] "Al acabar la calle, urbanísima, principia bruscamente el campo. De los ranchos con sus patiecitos y sus palmeras y sus matas de campanillas se cae en las matas de retamas, en los montículos de tierra fofa, en las tapías de adobe, en los azules monótonos del cielo … Piaras de asnos en una parda nube de polvo, cargan adobes todo el día de Dios. Aquí, en este suelo fofo y duro, a manchas, yacen las casas futuras de la ciudad, con sus azoteas entortadas, con sus ventanas primorosas de yeso, con sus salas con victrola y sus secretos de amor, quizá hasta con sus habitantes—mamás prudentes y niñas modernas, jóvenes calaveras y papás industriales—" (81).

constellation of different, albeit interrelated, artistic practices.[34] I will elaborate below on various theories and practices of montage, but, briefly put, montage could be said to encompass three tendencies in the interwar moment: first, the cubist attempt to represent the same object or event from multiple perspectives; second, the collage dynamic of tearing elements out of their original social contexts and rearranging them in order to produce new meaning; third, a form of dialectical thinking that proceeds through the articulation and development of contradictions.[35] In this project I draw on all three of these meanings, but I pay particular attention to the way montage operates not in terms of mere fragmentation but as a conceptual and aesthetic category mediating totality and fragmentation. Along these lines, Peter Bürger, in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, argues that although montage serves to destroy the organic artwork, in which the parts express the whole and the whole is expressed through the parts, it continues to express a "total meaning," albeit one whose "unity has integrated the contradiction within itself. It is no longer the harmony of the individual parts that constitutes the whole; it is the contradictory relationship of heterogeneous elements" (82). This description of the formal logic of montage shares an affinity with the structure of the peripheral metropolis. In this way, as I already suggested above in the discussion of Schwarz and Adán, montage does not simply amount to an artistic technique. Rather, montage has a realist

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[34] I would make the case for a longer history for montage, one that stretches back to the fragment and the Romantic conception of language in which meaning is not fixed but can be transformed through rearticulation in new contexts. On early German Romanticism, see Bowie 28-89. Bowie does not directly link Romanticism to montage, but I don't believe it is a stretch to say that Romantic philosophy anticipates many of the ideas surrounding montage, especially those of the German critical theorists—Benjamin, Adorno, etc.—who were decisively influenced by Schlegel, Novalis, and others.

[35] The idea of a dialectical montage, of course, comes from the Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein. Due to limitations of space, I cannot go into the details of Eisenstein's theory of montage and how it constitutes a form of dialectical thought. I would simply like to point out that Eisenstein conceived, but never realized, a project in which he would make a film adaptation of Marx's *Capital*. Formally, the project would have been indebted to Joyce's use of montage in *Ulysses*.

character in the periphery insofar as it formally represents the constitutive duality of the peripheral metropolis.[36] Finally, I argue that montage provides a form for dialectically thinking through the contradictions of modernity, highlighting how it can appear, in virtue of its inherent non-identity, at one moment as a unitary whole, externally opposed to tradition, etc., and at another moment as multiplicity or fragmentation.

Montage has often been associated with the metropolis, and the reconstruction of this link will help elucidate the extent to which metropolitan modernism and peripheral modernism overlap and diverge. The Italian historian of architecture Manfredo Tafuri in *Progetto e utopia* (Architecture and Utopia, 1973), for instance, makes the metropolis and montage into the fundamental categories of his account of the avant-garde. For Tafuri, the avant-garde proper emerges when the Baudelairean paradigm, based on "the search for the eccentric" and "authenticity"—that is, what lies outside the false, commercial logic of modernity—exhausts itself and passes into the model of an industrially organized city, "objectively structured like a machine for the extraction of surplus value" (81).[37] Whereas the former is premised on finding an example of exteriority, the latter assumes that the logic of capitalism has been totalized in the city. Tafuri thus builds on Georg Simmel's claim that the metropolis is the "seat of the money economy," suggesting that when Simmel says, "All things float with equal specific gravity in the constantly moving stream of money. All things lie on the same level and

[36] The question of montage may seem most immediately applicable to questions of identity in Latin America. Fernando Rosenberg suggests that "identity" in Latin America frequently "was conceived as a collage" based on "assembling different components with no final resolution of the internal tensions" (3). Fernando Ortiz, for instance, made the *ajiaco* stew, with its combination of indigenous and European ingredients, into a metaphor for Cuban identity. See Ortiz, "Factores humanos."

[37] Walter Benjamin had already drawn a link between modernism, the city and industrial production, leading to his account of "shock," but Tafuri has developed this point into a more systematic theory of the "dialectic of the avant-garde."

differ from one another only in the size of the area which they cover," it appears "we are reading here a literary comment on a [Kurt] Schwitter *Merzbild*" (87-88). Moreover, it is not incidental, Tafuri argues, "that the very word *Merz* is but a part of the word *Commerz*" (88). Tafuri, in other words, identifies a structural homology between the universal logic of money, which disregards the particularities of any object, and montage, which detaches fragments from their original context and rearranges them according to a logic that is indifferent to the original contexts. Money, as the underlying social situation of the avant-garde, simultaneously gives rise to abstract universals and to a chaos of uprooted particularities without mediation. To a large extent, the two poles of the avant-garde dialectic correspond to the contradiction of the money form. The constructivist tendency, in *De Stijl*, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, etc., emphasized the abstract dimension of money with its universal language of colors and shapes, conceived as formal structures opposed to empirical chaos. The alternative tendency, seen most dramatically in Dada, embraced chaos and the destruction of tradition (95).[38] In either case, montage plays a fundamental role: as an effect of the universal, social logic of money, or as an artistic rendering of the historical experience of urban chaos. In short, montage bears an intrinsic relation to the metropolis insofar as it embodies the uprooting at the heart of the modern,

[38] "*De Stijl*—and for that matter Russian Futurism and the Constructivist currents—opposed Chaos, the empirical, and the commonplace, with the principle of Form. And it was a form which took account of that which concretely impoverishes reality, rendering it formless and chaotic. The panorama of industrial production, which spiritually impoverishes the word, was dismissed as a universe 'without quality,' as nonvalue" (Tafuri 93). Or, as Tafuri phrases it in a different section of the book, "The two poles represented by Expressionism and the *Neue Sachlichkeit* again symbolize the inherent division in European artistic culture. Between, on the one hand, the destruction of the object and its substitution by a process to be lived as such, effected by the artistic revolution of the Bauhaus and the Constructivist currents, and, on the other, the exasperation of the object, typical of Expressionism's ambiguous eclecticism, there could be no give and take" (110). In Tafuri's argument, modernist architecture enters the scene as a way of overcoming the opposition, even though its utopian aspirations will ultimately be rendered obsolete by the transformation of capitalism in the twenties and especially in response to the Great Depression.

industrial city and stages how urban reality is shaped by the abstraction of the money form.

Alfred Döblin's modernist novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* deserves mention here because of the way it embodies both sides of Tafuri's dialectic of the avant-garde and for its experiments with montage and the city novel. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* has been called the great novelistic example of Expressionism, but it also draws heavily on "the New Objectivity" (Neue Sachlichkeit) that thrived in interwar Germany, the "matter-of-fact" attitude concerned with facts untouched by the artist's subjectivity.[39] That is, Döblin's novel oscillates between the "empirical chaos" characteristic of Expressionism or Dada, on the one hand, and the "principle of form" and order, on the other hand. Beginning with the former, with the "shock" of metropolitan experience, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* stages this chaos by making Alexanderplatz, the city's transportation nexus and veritable center, into the novel's thematic and formal principle. In "The Crisis of the Novel," a brilliant review of Döblin's work, Walter Benjamin explains that Alexanderplatz "is the site where for the last two years the most violent transformations have been taking place … where the innards of the metropolis … have been laid bare to a greater depth than anywhere else" (*SW 2.1* 302). The chaos of Alexanderplatz reflects the chaos of the story's main character, Franz Biberkopf, whose desire to lead a decent life runs aground

[39] Prior to *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Döblin dabbled in reportage. In *Two Friends and Their Poisoning* (1924) he drew on court testimonies to objectively reconstruct the story of two women who planned and carried out the murder of the married woman's husband. The principal evidence in the case, however, were the extensive letters in which the two women, Linke and Bende, conceived the plan. For Döblin, this fact brought to light the uncertain foundations of reportage, which, as Devin Fore explains, "is a genre that presumes the event to be anterior to language" ("Döblin's Epic" 173). In this case of Linke and Bende, however, the event emerges out of language, the consciously literary language of the letters. This realization led Döblin along a trajectory that culminated in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, a work that explores the dissolution of identity in the metropolis's confusing barrage of mass media. Journalism models this process of constitution, since it is "the collective written form that was commensurate with the industrial information society in which Döblin lived" (188).

on the uneven terrain of modern Berlin. Franz leaves Tegel Prison and encounters a metropolis in a constant process of demolition and construction. Having spent four years in the sensory-deprived environment of the jail cell, he cannot absorb the overwhelming stimuli. Walking disoriented through the street, Franz fears that the "sliding roofs" (Döblin 6)—a recurring motif in the novel—will fall off the houses and flatten him. In this way, Franz could not be more unlike Baudelaire's convalescent who, having recovered from illness in the tranquil countryside, returns to the city and takes joy at seeing everything as if for the first time. Instead, the city foregrounds the chaos of the metropolis and its impact on the subjectivity of city dwellers.

And yet, the novel suggests that this chaos, the "shock" of the metropolis, derives in fact from urban, capitalist planning. Urban chaos, in other words, constitutes a necessary product of attempts to impose order on the city. Martin Wagner, the city planner of Berlin from 1926-1933, suggested that Alexanderplatz would have to be completely rebuilt every twenty five years to accommodate the ceaseless expansion of traffic.[40] It is hard to imagine a comment that expresses more overtly what David Harvey calls the "perpetual struggle" of capitalist urbanization, where "capital builds a physical landscape appropriate to its own condition at a particular moment in time, only to have to destroy it, usually in the course of a crisis, at a subsequent point in time" (Harvey 83). But, if Alexanderplatz constituted the traffic center of Berlin, the city was also being rationally redesigned into distinct districts with different functions. "[F]rom the concentration of urban functions in a small geographical area," urban planners deliberately shifted "to a clear separation of urban functions according to rational

[40] On Martin Wagner, see Frisby 264-302.

principles and functionalist ideas" (Hake 33).[41] Döblin deliberately evokes this separation of urban functions in the famous opening of Book II, which provides a sort of panorama of the metropolis as "Franz Biberkopf Enters BERLIN" (30) while interspersing icons from the city map of the different districts of the Berlin. That is, Book II begins with an image of a rational metropolis organized along functionalist principles, but this section of the novel is also the one most heavily laden with montage, suggesting that the chaos is the necessary result of this rational functionalism.[42] In other words, the montage of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* does not involve the projection of subjective anarchy onto inert reality; rather, it derives from objective tendencies in the metropolis, namely, its dialectic of order and disorder.

Tafuri's account of the avant-garde usefully foregrounds the relation between montage and the abstraction inherent in the capitalist metropolis, but his account will prove inadequate to address how montage represents the duality, the incongruous juxtapositions, of the peripheral metropolis. That is, Tafuri ultimately relies on a one-sided conception of modernity that leads to the sort of problems we encountered in the first section of this introduction. In this project, I seek to hold together Tafuri's insights into the relationship between montage and the capitalist metropolis with the conception of montage as a dialectical category mediating the contradiction of totality and fragmentation. As I will show in subsequent paragraphs, the latter conception of montage

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[41] Along these lines, Klaus Scherpe argues the Berlin Alexanderplatz displaces earlier novelistic oppositions of individual and urban masses, or city and countryside, and replaces them with a metropolis defined on immanent and functional terms: "The oppositions between country/nature and the city, between the individual and the masses, are leveled, even annihilated. The 'city' is newly constructed as a 'second nature' in terms of the dynamic flow of its commodities and human movements, which appear to take place according to self-sufficient and complementary patterns in space and time" (167).

[42] Book II is the most indebted to Joyce's *Ulysses*, specifically the Aelous chapter.

constitutes a sort of subterranean vein in the writings of German critical theorists Georg Lukács, Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer.[43]

The famous "realism debates" of the 1930s, for instance, were normally framed as an opposition of totality and fragmentation—the former equating with realism; the latter with modernism—, but at various moments in these debates montage surfaces as an aesthetic form staging a dialectical mediation of these opposites. Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch disagreed precisely about the adequacy of the term totality. For Lukács, capitalism itself constitutes a totality, and he thus insists on realism for its ability to "understand the correct dialectical unity of appearance and essence" ("Realism" 33). That is, the superiority of realism lies in its ability to articulate a world in which individual actions become legible as the expression of a unitary historical process. Accordingly, Lukács reduces the experience of fragmentation to an inverted expression of an underlying unity. Bloch, responding directly to this point, asks instead, "What if authentic reality is also discontinuity?" (22). Perhaps, Bloch suggests, the fragmentary character of Joyce's *Ulysses* reveals not only subjective experience but also something fundamental about the social situation of a decadent capitalism. Montage initially seems to fall on the side of Bloch's modernist fragmentation, but we will see that it would be more accurate to say that it constitutes a dialectical category that arranges a dynamic, albeit antagonistic, relation between totality and fragment.[44]

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[43] Bertolt Brecht and Theodor W. Adorno could also be included in this discussion of interwar theories of montage. I decided to exclude Brecht and Adorno because Brecht's theories are more well-known, whereas Adorno's thoughts on montage are quite complicated and would probably require a separate article.

[44] The case could also be made that a conception of montage is consistent with Lukács's preference for narration over description. Lukács rejects the predominance of description in naturalism and modernism because of the tendency to reify the immediate appearances of social relations. Insofar as montage insists on establishing relationships between parts, it could be seen as a way of restoring historical movement to reified facts—a sort of modernist variant on realist narration.

For instance, in *Heritage of Our Times* (Erbschaft dieser Zeit, 1935) Bloch articulates a more rigorous defense of modernism specifically in terms of montage. Whereas in the essay cited above, Bloch makes vague allusions to the current crisis of capitalist society, in *Heritage of Our Times* Bloch grounds his discussion in a theory of contemporaneous and non-contemporaneous contradictions, which I will examine in more detail in chapter 2. Put briefly, Bloch argues that the present historical situation must be conceptualized as a framework in which contradictions immanent to capitalism become linked to a series of non-contemporaneous contradictions—for instance, peasant rejections of modernity. *Heritage of Our Times* thus revolves around the question of dialectical inheritance, the possibility of reworking elements of the past and capitalism for a utopian future. Using this framework, Bloch examines contemporary artistic tendencies in a section entitled "Upper Middle Classes, Objectivity and Montage," which discusses Expressionism in terms of montage and opposes it to what he calls "Objectivity," a reference to *die Neue Sachlichkeit*. Bloch treats montage and Objectivity dialectically, as direct manifestations of capitalism's rationality and decadence, but also indirectly as potential materials for a socialist society. Bloch argues that Objectivity imitates and aestheticizes the abstract rationality of capitalist modernity, especially in its attention to surfaces and technology. It thus positions itself against any evocation of "spirit" and embraces reification, which "is polished up as if it was in order, indeed order itself" (198). Accordingly, Bloch argues that Objectivity "corresponds to the 'capitalist planned economy'" (199). When viewed directly, this image of order becomes an occasion for "distraction." This "shining veneer" (202) is overexposed, so to speak, since its dazzling, polished surface actually occludes the underlying chaos and exploitation of

capitalism. The coherence of Objectivity is, in short, one-sided and thereby distracts from what is fundamentally at stake in the age of transition.

In Bloch's account, montage emerges as the dialectical opposite of Objectivity. If objectivity presents the distracting image of order, montage dispels any pretention to totality. Or, to use Bloch's language, "if Objectivity was façade of the foreground, then *montage of this kind* ends as castle-restoration of the background" (203). Montage takes as its point of departure not the one-sided ideologies of the plan but the raw materials of the chaotic age of transition. The old context is "decomposed," its "[p]arts no longer fit together," meaning they "can be mounted in a new way" (202). Bloch refers to the context and result of this historical process as "hollow space" (203), a phrase that captures strikingly how the parts cease to have a necessary relationship to one another in their placement in the whole. This "hollow space" is the proper terrain of montage and its combinations. Viewed directly, as an end in itself, montage becomes an occasion for "intoxication and irrationality" (203), for a pleasure taken from the perception of disorder. But indirectly, "the montage of the fragment out of its old existence is the experiment of its *refunctioning* into a new one here" (207, my emphasis). Bloch here equates montage with what Brecht called "refunctioning" (*Umfunktionierung*), the process whereby the most advanced capitalist techniques—the radio, for instance—are extracted from the context in which they serve capitalist ends and can be resituated for the purposes of critique. Within this dynamic, montage rearranges the ruins of the past and present, which acquire new meaning in the process. In other words, Bloch suggests, without ever stating it explicitly, that montage is a figure of the task that he sets himself in *Heritage of Our Times*: the dialectical inheritance of the non-contemporary within the

framework of contemporaneity. Such a framework does not reduce the totality to mere fragmentation; instead, it recasts the totality as constitutively uneven, meaning that montage emerges not as an inverted, illusory appearance but as a strategic mode of representing contradictions.

Siegfried Kracauer similarly invokes montage to think through "the epistemological plight of finding a world formed by a totalizing social logic that remains visible only as a set of effects," namely fragmentation (Blanton 809). In *Die Angestellten* (The Sallaried Masses, 1929), a study of white-collar workers in interwar Berlin, Kracauer presents neither a linear narrative nor a systematic sociological study. Rather, the work is premised on the idea that "Only from its extremes can reality be revealed" (25) and on the notion that "Reality is a construction" (32). Accordingly, Kracauer associates the form of his work with a "mosaic": reality "is by no means contained in the more or less random observational results of reportage; rather, it is to be found solely in the mosaic that is assembled from single observations on the basis of comprehension of their meaning" (32).[45] On these terms, both reportage and the mosaic are composed out of discontinuous fragments, but if reportage might be understood as arbitrary fragmentation, the mosaic, or montage, refers to a conscious construction that imitates and critiques the social logic of capitalism. In this way, Kracauer's mosaic closely resembles Martínez Estrada choice to leave unanswered the question of "album" or "book," and Coppola's presentation of Buenos Aires in terms of the discontinuity of highly modern, urban

[45] The next line, "Reportage photographs life; such a mosaic would be its image" (32), more explicitly links *Die Angestellten* to Kracauer's work on photography. It also recalls Bertolt Brecht's famous critique of Albert Renger-Patzsch's *Die Welt ist schön*, namely that a photograph of a factory tells us nothing about the social reality of capitalism. On the parallels between Kracauer and Brecht's accounts of photography, see Giles 73-75. Moreover, the idea of an "image" evokes Benjamin and Adorno's theories about historical and dialectical images, namely the idea that an image constitutes a way of overcoming the tension between universal concept and empirical particularity.

images and quasi-rural photographs. Steve Giles usefully characterizes Kracauer's mosaic as the attempt to combine the Russian futurist project to "make things visible by making them look strange" and the expressionist idea of "making visible essential relationships which are otherwise inaccessible to everyday perception" (70). That is, through this combination, Kracauer replaces the metaphysical substratum of expressionism with the invisible social forms of capitalism, and he strives to evoke reified social relations not by adding something to empirical materials but in virtue of the mere arrangement of these materials, making them look strange. Although Kracauer does not link montage to Bloch's concern with inheritance, they both envision montage as a way of conveying the idea of a totality that is constituted by contradictory relations and thus experienced in the form of fragments.

Walter Benjamin also relies on montage in his methodological reflections, most notably in *The Arcades Project* (Das Passagen-Werk). In one of his brief, telegraphic notes, Benjamin expresses an idea for which the project has become famous: "This work has to develop to the highest degree the art of citing without quotation marks. Its theory is intimately related to that of montage" (458). That is, the work would consist entirely of quotes whose meaning would derive not from the subjective activities of the author but from the mere juxtaposition of historical fragments of the nineteenth century.[46] Critics have typically emphasized the link between Walter Benjamin's theory of montage and "shock," illustrating Benjamin's affinity with Surrealism. But what distinguishes Benjamin from Surrealism is precisely the fact that "shock" is only one side of the dual-

[46] "Method of this project: literary montage. I needn't *say* anything. Merely show" (Benjamin, *Arcades* 460).

character of montage.[47] Benjamin envisions the goal of montage in terms of "the dissolution of 'mythology' into the space of history. That, of course, can happen only through the awakening of a not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been" (458). "Shock," in other words, refers to the initial moment that breaks down the mythical appearance of historical continuity. In order to be successful, this "shock" must be complemented by the process of "awakening," the formation of historical knowledge. Benjamin's notion of the dialectical image foregrounds this historical, cognitive dimension of montage, its ability to demystify both the appearance of progress and the idea of historical decline.[48] Montage does not, therefore, imply the replacement of continuity with fragmentation. Rather, the idea, as Susan Buck-Morss explains, is that "the image's ideational elements remain unreconciled, rather than fusing into one harmonizing perspective" (*Dialectics* 67). For Benjamin, in other words, montage and dialectical images amount to an attempt to arrange materials in such a way that they express underlying historical contradictions. Benjamin articulates the historical dynamic at the heart of the dialectical image in the following manner: "It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation: in other words, image is dialectics at a standstill" (462). That is, the dialectical image entails not a historical perspective in which the past explains the present or vice versa, but a frozen moment in which the contradictions are exposed, not overcome in a movement of historical progress. Out of the figures examined here, Benjamin seems

[47] In this sense, the structure of Benjaminian montage resembles the two moments of the Kantian sublime.
[48] Benjamin, of course, does not provide any sort of succinct definition of dialectical images. Susan Buck-Morss formulates perhaps the clearest synthesis of this term: "the dialectical image refers to the use of archaic images to identify what is historically new about the 'nature' of commodities" (*Dialectics* 67).

to come closest to the equation of montage with fragmentation, since he insists heavily on the role of montage in exploding mythic continuity, but Benjamin, like Kracauer, envisions montage as a form of representation, and, like Bloch, he links montage to the contradictions of history.

Benjamin's theory of dialectical images also raises questions about the historical experience of time in modernity, making possible a provisional outline of how the social significance of montage differs in metropolitan and peripheral modernism. As we have already seen, the dialectical image incorporates "shock" not as an end in itself but as the initial step in generating historical knowledge. For Neil Larsen, montage in Latin America deals even less with "shock," offering instead a way of thinking about the structure of social space in the periphery. That is, Larsen argues that Benjamin's formulation of montage as "dialectical images" is inadequate for Latin America's peculiar form of historical consciousness. Since montage, as articulated by Benjamin, involves the present "dreaming of its future with images from the past," Larsen holds that this imagination presupposes a present—the modernity of Paris, for instance—that "never doubts its own *self*-contemporaneity" (*Determinations* 133). Metropolitan modernity assumes that the past exists unproblematically in the past, but in Latin America "past and present continue to inhabit the same space" (133). As we saw in the discussion of Roberto Schwarz's reading of *modernismo*, peripheral social space is defined by its duality, by the co-existence of past and present, pre-capitalist and capitalist, colonial and modern elements. Larsen elaborates on this point by drawing on Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Civilization and Barbarism*, which provides the paradigmatic expression of this spatialized history in which "the past had a *location*: it was the *pampa*," that is, the

Argentine countryside (133). That is, the past and present map onto the division between countryside and city, but, as I discussed in relation to Romero's notion of "massified cities," the city increasingly internalizes the countryside throughout the twenties and thirties. Social reality in Latin America, in other words, already assumes the form of montage, an incongruous juxtaposition of past and present, the non-contemporary and the contemporary, what Larsen calls "the historical experience of the non-self-contemporary" (140). Accordingly, whereas montage in the metropolis proceeds from a unity and seeks to uproot that unity through "shock" in order to imagine the future, montage in the periphery begins with "a condition of disparity" and becomes "a formal means for imagining or projecting the space of historical experience as a *unity*" (134). That is, Larsen argues that montage has a more immediately realistic character in Latin America insofar as it reframes the duality of social reality, not in terms of an originary condition but as the result of a single, yet contradictory, historical process.[49] Seen in terms of montage, a whole constituted by contradictory relationships, peripheral modernity appears not as an arbitrary juxtaposition of the modern and its opposite, of elements without inner relation, but as a duality that expresses the intrinsic unevenness of capitalist modernity.

[49] I should mention that Larsen is careful to note the limits of this conception of montage because it amounts to a sort of aestheticization of history: "even a 'dialectical image' is, in the end, no proof against an anti-dialectical conception of the real—as concrete *totality*—thus pictured or imagined. A history which must *supplement* its own presumed 'laws' with a promise of emancipation still views this emancipation itself as an ultimately irrational occurrence, for the notion that history could administer to itself the 'shock' that would propel it out of its own impasse and into a utopian future is, itself, profoundly ahistorical … The resort to montage has made it possible to imagine Latin America as historically integral with itself but only on an isolated phenomenological plane. Up to this point the *structure of social action* itself remains static, even if now viewed from an ironizing, aestheticizing perspective" (135-6).

The Contradictions of Capitalist Modernity

In the final section of this introduction, I argue that the impasses involved in conceiving modernity can be overcome by relating them to the contradictions of capitalism. In this way, my project builds on the work of, among others, the Warwick Research Collective (WReC). In their book *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*, WReC insists on "de-linking [the concept of modernity] from the idea of the 'west' and yoking it to that of the capitalist world-system" (15). Capitalist modernity, in their account, designates a totality that is "singular" but not unitary insofar as "capitalist development does not smooth away but rather *produces* unevenness, systematically and as a matter of course" (12). Because this unevenness is constitutive of modernity, it does not exclusively describe the relationship between center and periphery; it also marks each social space internally, referring to the division between city and country, divisions within the city, etc.[50] The capitalist world-system is defined, in other words, by what WReC calls, following Ernst Bloch, the "contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous."[51] WReC thereby develops a global framework that emphasizes both the unevenness of the periphery relative to the center and unevenness within national social space. This "amalgam of archaic with more

[50] "'Modernity' does not mark the relationship between some formations (that are 'modern') and others (that are not 'modern,' or not yet so). So it is not a matter of pitting France against Mali, say, or New York City against Elk City, Oklahoma. Uneven development is not a characteristic of 'backward' formations only … Modernity is neither a chronological nor a geographical category. It is not something that happens—or even that happens *first*—in 'the west' and to which others can subsequently gain access; or that happens in cities rather than in the countryside … Capitalist modernization entails development, yet—but this 'development' takes the forms also of the development of underdevelopment, of maldevelopment and dependent development. If urbanization, for instance, is clearly part of the story, what happens in the countryside as a result is equally so. The idea of some sort of 'achieved' modernity, in which unevenness would have been superseded, harmonized, vanquished or ironed out is radically unhistorical" (12-13).

[51] WReC uses the translation "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous" of the German *die Gleicheitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*. I typically utilize "contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous" because the "contemporary" will be a central topic in the second chapter, and this translation resonates more directly with José Carlos Mariátegui's work, especially *La escena contemporánea.*

contemporary forms," which for Leon Trotsky was constitutive of uneven and combined development, becomes in WReC's account "a central—perhaps *the* central—arc or trajectory of modern(ist) production in literature and the other arts worldwide" (6). Along these lines, with modernism "as a formal mediation of uneven development," Ericka Beckman has recently examined rural literature in Latin America not as an instance of backwardness but in light of the way "rural zones have long been subject to the painful contradictions of" capitalist modernization (816). My project similarly addresses the link between modernism and the contradictions of capitalist modernity, but focusing in turn on how modernist works mediate these contradictions as they unfold within the peripheral metropolis, a social space that illustrates both the global unevenness of periphery relative to center and the unevenness within national space, i.e. combined development.[52] Moreover, I seek to complement the work of WReC and Beckman by highlighting the relationship of unevenness to the dialectical categories of the Marxian critique of political economy: use-value, exchange-value, the abstract and the concrete, etc. In contrast to the standard categories used in discussions of modernity and modernism, which involve either/or classification or external opposition—for instance, modernity or modernization, modern or traditional—these dialectical categories grasp the dual character of capitalist social forms and the contradictory historical dynamic of modernity.

[52] My approach has also been informed by Mariano Siskind's caveats about what we might call the "idealist fallacy" and the "romantic fallacy" of world literature. As Siskind explains, "the two major threats that still loom over the discipline" of world literature are "on the one hand, the postulation of world literature as an even playing field in which an idealistic sense of parity among the literatures of the world becomes possible—in other words, world literature as an equalizing discourse that rights the wrongs of cultural imperialism and/or economic globalization; on the other, the *expressive* logic according to which works convey the historical or aesthetic experience of their cultures of origin and, therefore, become part of the corpus of a world literature comprised of a plurality of global particularities" (352).

The dialectical categories of Marx's critique unfold from his analysis of the commodity: this apparently simple, but upon closer inspection, mysterious thing. Insofar as it is a physical, sensuous thing, the commodity is a use-value; it has various uses that satisfy human needs. But the commodity also appears as an exchange-value, the contingent "qualitative relation, the proportion, in which use-values of one kind exchange for use-values of another kind" (Marx, *Capital* 126). Use-value and exchange-value are mutually exclusive—the former is qualitative, the latter is quantitative; if I want to exchange a good, I disregard its use, but its exchange-value bears no relation to its usefulness. And yet, the commodity exists only as a unity of these opposites. Marx subsequently shows that the contingent proportions of exchange-value "are all expressions of an identical social substance, human labor" (138). That is, exchange-value constitutes the form of appearance of value, Marx's category for a historically specific form of social mediation in which qualitatively different forms of human labor are equated through their products, the concrete specificity of those labors being abstracted away from in favor of the quantitative, temporal dimension of abstract labor. In Marx's account, the social character of labor—the fact that people produce for one another—can only be expressed in capitalism in the abstract, quantitative terms of exchange-value. As capitalism's fundamental social form, value thus refers to an impersonal, "quasi-objective form of social interdependence" (Postone, "Critique" 58).

Marx's *Capital* is a critique of political economy because these categories—use-value and value—do not refer, as they do in classical political economy, to abstract economic entities but to capitalism's fundamental, historically specific social forms. Georg Lukács highlights this point when he writes, "the problem of commodities must

not be considered in isolation or even regarded as the central problem in economics, but as the central, structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects" (*History* 83). In his discussions of capitalist modernity, [53] the Mexican-Ecuadorian philosopher Bolívar Echeverría likewise insists that the tension between use-value and value should not be conceived as a mere analytical distinction, but rather as a real, dynamic contradiction between two forms of social reproduction:

> there is a logic of use-value, a logic of the natural form of the reproduction of wealth, which has its own peculiarities. It is a concrete logic that attends to the qualitative consistency of life and things. And there is a logic of value that produces and destroys itself in order to expand. This logic is completely different from the other because it is based on disregarding and leaving aside all the qualitative aspects of use value and concentrates exclusively on the quantitative aspect of accumulation or alienation of socially necessary labor time. (171)[54]

Capitalist modernity is defined by this fundamental antagonism between use-value and value, between concrete, qualitative social life and the abstract imperatives of accumulation. Moreover, Marx demonstrates that capitalism distinguishes itself by the way it replaces "regimes of personal dependence" in non-capitalist societies with "the domination of all by abstractions of their own making" (Murray 30). That is, capitalist modernity involves not only a split between concrete use-value and abstract value but

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[53] For Bolívar Echeverría, modernity and capitalism are not strictly speaking identical. Insofar as it is rooted in the expansion of human capacities, modernity predates capitalism. Capitalism takes hold of this expansion of productive capacities—what he calls "neotécnica" (neo-technique)—and subordinates it to the quest for surplus-value. While Echeverría does not appear to leave room for the existence of something like a non-capitalist modernity (which would be different from an anti-modern attitude) within capitalism, he insists on the continuing potential for a non-capitalist modernity. Echeverría's account avoids many of the pitfalls of attempts to separate modernity and capitalism or arguments for "alternative modernities."

[54] "Marx señala que aquí hay una contradicción porque hay una lógica del valor de uso, una lógica de la forma natural de reproducer la riqueza que tiene sus propias peculiaridades, es una lógica concrete, que atiende a la consistencia cualitativa de la vida y de las cosas y la lógica del valor que se genera y se destruye para incrementarse. Ésta es una lógica completamente diferente de la otra, que parte de despreciar o dejar de lado todos los aspectos cualitativos del valor de uso y se concentra exclusivamente en el aspecto cuantitativo de la acumulación o enajenación de la sustancia valiosa del tiempo de trabajo socialmente necesario."

also the domination of the former by the latter. Structurally, in other words, the value dimension of capitalist modernity constitutes what Moishe Postone calls an "abstract form of social domination—one that subjects people to impersonal structural imperatives and constraints that cannot be adequately grasped in terms of concrete domination (e.g., personal or group domination), and that generates an ongoing historical dynamic" (4).[55] The domination of concrete use-values by abstract social forms, however, does not entail that the former is reducible to the latter. Because the abstract imperative of accumulation requires labor and the transformation of concrete use-values to fulfill its ongoing drive for self-expansion, capitalist modernity has an irreducibly dual character and must be understood as fundamentally contradictory, constituted by the antagonistic relation between distinct forms of social reproduction.[56]

It remains now to specify the different forms taken by this irreducible duality in the center and the periphery. In the account of capitalist modernity I have so far developed, abstract domination and the contradiction between use-value and value are

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[55] Historically, this tendency towards abstract domination intensifies over time: the "tendency," as Neil Larsen puts it, "for capital in its real abstraction to break free from certain specific political—and in this sense, representational—relations and structures that were the condition of its initial autonomy and, thereby, to take on the attributes of a superordinate social agency with no fixed political or cultural subjectivity" (*Modernism* xxiv).

[56] A good illustration of this approach can be found in Slavoj Žižek's "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism." In this article, Žižek challenges the tendency to see universality (or abstraction) as a mere veil for particular interests: "The particular cultural background or roots which always support the universal multiculturalist position are not its 'truth,' hidden beneath the mask of universality—'multicultalist universalism is really Eurocentric'—but rather the opposite: the stain of particular roots is the phantasmatic screen which conceals the fact that the subject is already thoroughly 'rootless,' that his true position is the void of universality … The true horror does not reside in the particular content hidden beneath the universality of global Capital, but rather in the fact that Capital is effectively an anonymous global machine blindly running its course, that there is effectively no particular Secret Agent who animates it" (44-45). Žižek's argument involves a periodization that might suggest that this abstraction applies to the historical epoch beginning toward towards the end of the twentieth century, but this abstraction should be understood as implicit or latent in the logic of capital from the very beginning. And we might say that Latin American intellectuals in the twenties and thirties were in a position to grasp this abstract form of domination because, in the context of inter-imperial rivalries, it was difficult to reduce domination to concrete terms—that is, to the domination of one nation by another.

logically prior to center and periphery. Accordingly, center and periphery can be understood as different inflections of these fundamental contradictions. Put briefly, metropolitan experience tends to involve a self-identical national structure premised on the illusory separation of concrete aspects of capitalist society from its destructive, abstract aspects, whereas peripheral experience entails the aspiration to synthesize a duality, a prior social disarticulation. With regards to the former, Moishe Postone points to how "the dialectical tension between value and use-value in the commodity requires that this 'double character' be materially externalized" ("Anti-Semitism" 109) in money and commodities, resulting in a false "antinomy" whereby concrete and abstract aspects—i.e., qualitative social life and money—appear not as two dimensions of the same contradictory whole—namely, the commodity—but as separate, externally opposed, social forms. Metropolitan experience, as a result, tends to externalize the abstract, destructive qualities of capitalism, while the concrete aspects appear to have "indelibly national characteristics" (Larsen, "Race" 16). Through the apparent separation of use-value and value, the metropolitan national subject arrogates the "good" aspects of modernity while attributing the "bad" aspects to external, foreign forces. In the periphery, conversely, as Neil Larsen has argued, the concrete aspects of modernity cannot be so seamlessly equated with the national subject because capitalist modernity "appears, objectively (and, in a certain sense, *accurately*) to come from without, as an initially direct consequence of metropolitan/European colonization" (17). Accordingly, Larsen takes as emblematic of the peripheral situation Roberto Schwarz's idea that Brazilian social life is characterized by a duality, by "forms of inequality so brutal that they lack the minimal reciprocity ('common denominator') without which modern society can only

appear artificial and 'imported'" ("Brazilian Culture" 15). That is, because the "*structurally* national makeup of modern social subjectivity" in the periphery "is, *from the beginning*, disarticulated and estranged," Larsen argues that it is "less vulnerable to the false antinomy," that is, the false externalization of the abstract from the concrete aspects of capitalist modernity (Larsen 17). Insofar as it appears to come from without, modernity presents itself as a unitary, abstract phenomenon, in contrast to the peripheral experience of its own "non-self-contemporaneity," to evoke the phrase I earlier borrowed from Larsen to describe the duality of the peripheral situation. The peripheral structure of consciousness must thus "explain and rationalize the *prior, center/periphery disarticulation of such modernity* as the principle form in which global capitalist 'development' … is itself socially experienced *from* the periphery" (18). But, at the same time, the peripheral structure of consciousness involves a different type of inversion insofar as it posits one aspect of the national subject as separate from modernity: its duality, its "*internally differentiated*" character, being what distinguishes it from the metropolis (18). That is, the duality of peripheral modernity, its lack of national self-identity, appears as a symptom of the incompleteness of modernity, the experience of modernity coming from without, even though, as we saw in Schwarz's discussion of pre-capitalist social relations on Brazilian coffee plantations, this duality of peripheral social space actually constitutes an integral moment of modernity as a global framework.[57] Just as montage serves to reframe this duality, revealing how it is the result of a single,

[57] "The operations of a self-perpetuating, subject-less law of self-valorizing value would, in this case, determine a variant form of social abstraction—and hence a correspondingly variant form of fetish-awareness—capable of disarticulating the formal unity of national society itself, and preventing the reified consciousness of the social form coalescing around a single, self-reproducing natural germ of locus" (Larsen, "Race" 15).

historical process, the dialectical categories demonstrate the inner relation of opposites, the way that the peripheral nation's non-self-identity actually derives from its relation to a global, albeit contradictory, modernity.

These dialectical categories also serve to socially ground the peculiar historical dynamic of capitalist modernity. Against the long-held belief that modernity involves a linear, progressive teleology, many critics have recently insisted that the modern "new" necessarily entails the "same," a dynamic that these critics paraphrase with Ernst Bloch's formulation, "the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneity." While this phrase vividly grasps the paradoxical character of historical time in modernity, it stops short of explaining what features of capitalist modernity give rise to this dynamic of the new and same, now and old, contemporanaeity and non-contemporaneity. Moishe Postone, paraphrasing a complicated question, argues that the "peculiarity of value as a social form of wealth whose measure is temporal" is that "increasing productivity increases the amount of use-values produced per unit of time, but results only in short-term increases in the magnitude of value created per unit of time. Once that productive increase becomes general, the magnitude of value falls to its base level" (Postone, "Critique" 59). Postone shows, that is, how the pursuit of surplus value leads to the "new"—to transformations of the labor process and social life more generally—but insofar as value is a social average, the new quickly becomes the same. "The result," he writes, "is a sort of treadmill dynamic" ("Critique" 59), or what he also calls the "dialectic of transformation and reconstitution": "the ongoing transformation of social life in capitalist society, as well as the ongoing reconstitution of its basic social forms" (*Time* 300).[58] Capitalist modernity

[58] I cannot fully reconstruct here how Postone grounds this dialectic of transformation and reconstruction in the contradiction between use-value and value, but I will briefly point to the distinction he makes between

implies not only enthusiasm "about everything solid melting into air, about how everything is acceleration" or the impression "that the more things change the more they remain the same," leading to a "featureless desert of the present," but "both at the same time" (Postone, "Interview" 504).

I will elaborate in subsequent chapters on how this treadmill dynamic, the mutual dependence of new and same, assumes different forms in the metropolis and the periphery, but I want to briefly suggest here that the peripheral metropolis—because of its duality, the way it simultaneously encompasses the urban and rural—could be considered the spatial expression of the treadmill dynamic. Fredric Jameson makes the link between the "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous" and the rural/urban divide when he writes that the world of modernism is "a world that is still organized around two distinct temporalities: that of the new industrial big city and that of the peasant countryside" (*Singular* 142).[59] Harsha Ram argues that whereas metropolitan modernism tends to locate this dynamic within a national frame, meaning that "the gap between the European city and the rural hinterland—Milan and the Mezzogiorno, if you will—

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two aspects of this dialectic, namely "historical time" and "abstract time." "Historical time" refers to the transformation of labor and social life, including the increasing productivity of labor in terms of use-values. As a result, "historical time" entails a linear, progressive movement that can retroactively be divided into historical periods. In short, "historical time" corresponds to the "new." "Abstract time" corresponds to the "same." It denotes the cyclical, repetitive character of homogeneous units of time (minutes, hours, etc.). "Abstract time" thus should be understood as constituting a perpetual present. For Postone's discussion of these terms, see *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, 286-306.

[59] I will examine Bloch's formulation of the "contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous" in more detail in the second chapter. Like Jameson, I take this "contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous" to be a crucial factor in the modernist moment. I do object, however, to Jameson's suggestion that "artistic or aesthetic 'modernism' essentially corresponds to a situation of incomplete modernization" (*Singular* 141), with the implication that postmodernism corresponds to a situation of complete modernization. Jameson rightly points to the Green Revolution and the culture industry as evidence of the expansion of capitalism, but the question of completeness or incompleteness gives the impression of a homogenous conception of capitalism, failing to do justice to capitalism's ongoing production of unevenness and difference. I envision the expansion of capitalism not only in terms a linear movement outwards, progressively engulfing what lies outside, but also in terms of a dialectical relationship between capitalism's abstract and concrete dimensions, where the former is global in concept from the moment of its historical genesis even if the latter remains confined to specific geographic locations.

functions as a diminished substitute for modernity's larger geographies" (318), peripheral modernism foregrounds the global dimension of this dynamic. The peripheral metropolis, as we have already seen, is immediately global insofar as it is constituted by the relationship between the global countryside and the centers of capitalist accumulation. In the peripheral metropolis, that is, the treadmill dynamic not only assumes a spatial form in the juxtaposition—and internal relation—of incongruous elements, of new and same, but also acquires a global dimension.

Finally, I would like to conclude by suggesting that another consequence of this contradictory historical dynamic is that capitalist modernity constantly generates emancipatory possibilities, via increases in productivity, even though these serve to reconstitute and reinforce the value form, the quasi-objective manner in which labor mediates social life. This is, in Bolívar Echeverría words, "the basic absurdity of modern life," the paradoxical fact that capitalism constantly expands humanity's productive capacities—thereby generating the possibility of diminishing the necessity of human labor—even though in capitalist modernity "human beings can only produce and consume goods, create and enjoy wealth, that is, only are capable of reproducing themselves, to the extent to which the process of production and consumption of goods serves as the basis of a different process that is superimposed on it, which Marx calls the 'valorization of value' or 'capital accumulation'" (597).[60] My project demonstrates the

[60] "El absurdo básico de la vida moderna está en que los seres humanos sólo pueden producir y consumir bienes, crear riqueza y gozarla o disfrutarla, es decir, sólo están en capacidad de autorreproducirse, en la medida en que el proceso de producción y consumo de sus bienes sirve de soporte a otro proceso diferente que se le sobrepone y al que Marx denomina 'proceso de valorización' o 'acumulación de capital.'" Bolívar Echeverría's comments here are, to a certain extent, a paraphrase of Marx's comments in the *Grundrisse* on the "moving contradiction": "Capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labor time to a minimum, while it posits labor time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth. Hence it diminishes labor time in the necessary form so as to increase it in the superfluous form; hence posits the superfluous in growing measure as a condition—question of life or death—for the necessary. On

inadequacy of one-sided conceptions of modernity, insisting instead on the need to conceive the contradictory relation between new and same, emancipatory possibilities and domination, at the heart of capitalist modernity. The writers examined in this dissertation—Maples Arce, Mariátegui and Arlt—are intimately attuned to modernity's peculiar historical dynamic. Unlike some of their contemporaries, who strive to locate remnants of a past untouched by the new, these writers share a commitment to modernity—often expressed in terms of their focus on the city—at the same time that they express their dissatisfaction with modernity. In acknowledging this tension, Maples Arce, Mariátegui and Arlt demonstrate how capitalist modernity generates a possibility of pointing beyond itself without being able to realize that possibility.

The first chapter, "Piecing Together the City and the Countryside: Mariátegui and the Unevenness of Contemporaneity," argues for the centrality of formal, aesthetic concerns to the essayist José Carlos Mariátegui's social thought. I show how Mariátegui relies on principles of montage to represent the contemporary moment, to think through the dilemmas of avant-garde poetry in Peru, and to conceptualize political possibilities attentive to the divide between city and country in Peru. The chapter examines the affinities of Mariátegui and Ernst Bloch with regards to their theorizations of montage and the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous, what I have called the treadmill dynamic of capitalist modernity. Whereas contemporaneity is taken for granted in the frame of the metropolitan nation, in the periphery non-contemporaneity appears as the

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the one side, then, it calls to life all the powers of science and of nature, as of social combination and of social intercourse, in order to make the creation of wealth independent (relatively) of the labor time employed on it. On the other side, it wants to use labor time as the measuring rod for the giant social forces thereby created, and to confine them within the limits required to maintain the already created value as value" (706).

dominant form, despite being mediated by contemporaneity and its relation to global modernity. As a result, Mariátegui argues that avant-garde poetry in Peru can only aspire to contemporaneity—to be "up to date" with the European avant-gardes—at the cost of ignoring the historical experience of the periphery's duality, its non-self-contemporaneity. This conception of montage, as an internally divided totality, also informs Mariátegui's critical analysis of Peru as a society not only split between city and country but also traversed by antagonisms within each term, and this contradictory logic structures his political project for a united front constituted not by a putative Peruvian identity but by the attempt to reframe the apparent incommensurability of urban masses and indigenous peasants into a political form capable of practically overcoming this opposition.

The second chapter, "*Estridentópolis*: Architecture and Revolution," focuses on the architectural imagination of Manuel Maples Arce, the founder of *estridentismo*, a futurist, avant-garde movement that saw itself as the artistic counterpart of the Mexican Revolution. In Maples Arce's poetry, the modern metropolis appears as a collection of revolutionary technologies and use-values. Moreover, insofar as Maples Arce grounds his cosmopolitan politics and aesthetics in the abstract character of the metropolis, he suggests that the concrete and abstract aspects of modernity do not stand at odds but support one another. And yet, despite this futurist enthusiasm, his poetry progressively exhibits anxiety about the city as an abstract, alienated social form, and this anxiety was the basis of the Maples Arce's brief affinity and collaboration with John Dos Passos. I then demonstrate how Maples Arce and his fellow Stridentists sought to overcome this contradiction by positing the construction of a future, avant-garde city: Estridentópolis.

This chapter also clarifies the trajectory of Maples Arce's approach to the city and modernity by comparing his poetry to the work of the Mexican architect Juan O'Gorman, who embraced and ultimately abandoned functionalist architecture as the solution to qualitative social needs in post-Revolution Mexico City.

The final chapter, "Roberto Arlt's Urban Montage: Forms of Combination in the Peripheral Metropolis," turns toward Buenos Aires and examines montage as the articulation of formal principles of realism and modernism in Roberto Arlt's *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*. Arlt's novels are largely put together from readymade materials in Buenos Aires—overheard conversations, urban characters and circulating ideas—and this collage aesthetic points toward the novels' fundamental structuring opposition of distortion and factual forms. Through journalistic techniques, footnotes, fascist fantasies and "metaphysical lies," Arlt suggests that the contemporary moment is constituted by a kernel in which illusion and fact collide and intermingle. I argue that this peculiar combination of documentary materials and deceit, realism and modernism, derives from Arlt's focus on the urban center of Buenos Aires. Unlike his contemporaries, who emphasize either the classical harmony of the city center or the tranquil, atemporal character of the semi-rural suburban areas, Arlt's novels are informed by Buenos Aires's chaotic urban center, a location in which capitalist modernity is composed of the combination of extremes, the new and the same, and a cynicism that subsists in the way the metropolis replaces relations of personal dependence with a personal independence mediated by objects and abstractions.

Chapter 1: Piecing Together the City and the Country: Mariátegui and the Unevenness of Contemporaneity

As the story goes, metropolitan modernism was fundamentally preoccupied with "making it new." Although the "new" is certainly operative in peripheral modernism, it often competes with a different problematic, namely contemporaneity.[61] In the mid-1920s, a number of Peruvian avant-garde poets began to self-reflexively engage with avant-garde techniques, seeking to make their poetry up-to-date, to synchronize their works with contemporary modernity and recent artistic experiments in Europe. As Michelle Clayton as argued, the avant-garde project of becoming "up-to-date" led in two directions: on the one hand, a modernization project consisting of imitating "Western-shaped forms of the modern"; on the other, the concern with contemporaneity, attempting

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[61] The "contemporary" has also become a privileged concept in thinking about how to periodize recent, post-post-modern literature, so to speak. As a concept, however, the "contemporary" in this context remains somewhat underdeveloped. Héctor Hoyos and Marília Librandi-Rocha, commenting on a special issue of *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* dedicated to the contemporary, exaggerate this point when they write, "Our simple, yet compelling point of departure was the observation that 'the contemporary,' as a critical category and an object of study, is often taken for granted or entirely omitted from academic discussion" (97). The "contemporary" owes some of its current popularity to the way it is can be invoked to replace inadequate periodizing terms—like postmodernism—without specifying a new content. There is, in other words, a qualitative gap between viewing an historical period retrospectively and the view from within an ongoing historical formation. The past can be known, but we can only speculate on the meaning of the present because it has not yet reached its conclusion. Julio Premat makes a similar point by focusing not on the forward-facing side of the contemporary but on its backward-facing side. For Premat, the contemporary, insofar as it names "the elusiveness of the flow of time turned into conceptual material," entails "not only sharing a time, but seeing in this now, which has already passed away before being interrogated, that which, as a characteristic, would define it" (201). That is, the meaning of the contemporary can only be defined on the basis of the now, but the now constantly passes away. Whether it is viewed from one side or the other, the contemporary appears elusive. It is inherently inconsistent because it indicates the excess of periodization over itself and the openness of a historical moment—not only that a given historical moment has not yet arrived at its telos but also that any such telos is only retroactively operative, not the hidden force directing all events from the outset. Having said that, the contemporary, despite its inconsistencies, cannot simply be dispensed with; rather, it should be understood as a necessary solution to the problem of periodization, that fact that one cannot not periodize. Although I do not engage directly with the critical discussions of contemporary literature, this chapter could cast light on the contours and character of contemporaneity by looking at moments that are no longer contemporary and places where the contemporary seems to be denied. I would also like to point to *Literature and the Global Contemporary*, edited by Brouillette, Nilges and Sauri, as a significant exception to the tendency to take the contemporary for granted. The importance of this collection lies in the fact that the contributors do not treat the contemporary as simply a question of the phenomenological experience of time but also as a global, historical phenomenon related to the changing structure of modern capitalism.

to place "its productions *alongside* Western forms rather than following after them" (*Poetry* 29).[62] Alberto Hidalgo, one of the central figures of the Peruvian avant-garde, found inspiration in futurism, and his poetry puts into relief the implications of this commitment to modernization over contemporaneity.[63] Take, for instance, his "Telegrama simplista":

> The rain puts umbrellas / over the heads of citizens. / Gazes slip on the floor, / ignorant of balance. / The threads of the conversations / and are left wet and balled up on the sidewalks. / The wireless telegraph is useless. / The rain is a Morse apparatus / on the glass of the windows: / tac, tactac, tac, tac. / The sky and I exchange news / by means of water wires. (84)[64]

Hidalgo's poem may not be a radical example of Marinetti's words-in-freedom, but its futurist orientation is clearly expressed in the way the poem is structured around a modern machine: the telegraph. Its futurism, in other words, lies not in the violent celebration of modernity but in the way it takes technology for granted, naturalizing Morse code by equating it with the rhythm of rain drops. Raúl Bueno has persuasively shown how this futurist gesture differs from similar avant-garde techniques in the

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[62] Clayton elaborates on the second option: "Images of contemporaneity, when projected from a space that saw itself as both peripheral and suffering from time lag, risked reifying hierarchies of global culture; but they could also highlight alternative options that dismantled those hierarchies. Forms of the modern that drew upon European models—such as the literary bohemia that developed in Peru's major cities in the early 1910s—could themselves seem outdated alongside modes of everyday life in parts of the country less overtly inflected by modernity" (*Poetry* 29). The peripheral modernists I examine in this chapter are particularly interested in the sort of reversals Clayton mentions at the end of this passage, moments when the non-modern appear more contemporary than what is apparently "up-to-date," moments in which the non-modern acquires a sort of "super-contemporaneous" supplement that points beyond the present.

[63] Alberto Hidalgo's *Simplismos: poemas inventados* (*Simplisms: Invented Poems* 1925) and *Ubicación de Lenin: poemas de varios lados* (Lenin's Location: Poems from Various Sides, 1926) and Serafín Delmar's *Radiogramas del Pacífico* (Radio Messages from the Pacific, 1927) were just a few works from the burgeoning field of futurist-inspired poetry.

[64] "La lluvia pone paraguas / sobre las cabezas de los ciudadanos. / Las miradas se resbalan al suelo, / ignorantes del equilibrio. / Los hilos de las conversaciones se humedecen / y quedan en las aceras sus ovillos mojados. / El telégrafo sin hilo es inútil. / La lluvia es un aparato Morse / sobre los vidrios de las ventanas: / tac, tactac, tac, tac. / El cielo y yo cambiamos noticias / por intermedio de los alambres de agua."

metropole. European artists were already familiar with advanced technology and began to feel discontent with modernity. These artists thus sought to "decontextualize" the machine "to produce alternative functions" (27). But the machine could not produce the same aesthetic effect in Latin America because, as Bueno argues, the most advanced technology was only partially integrated into the immediate conditions faced by these avant-garde artists. Latin American futurist poets thus aimed to "contextualize" the machine "with hopes of generating [its] primary effect: produce, transport, change; in short: to modernize the material life of the nations" (27). Futurist poetry in Peru, in seeking to incorporate the materials of modernity and to make this poetry up-to-date, prompted questions about how art in the periphery mediates its relationship to contemporaneity.

These avant-garde gestures struck the Peruvian essayist José Carlos Mariátegui (1894-1930) as superficial attempts to make poetry resonate with the present. Mariátegui, that is, does not reject avant-garde poetry on traditionalist grounds. Rather, he detects in this attempt to be "up-to-date" the pursuit of technique for the sake of technique, the modernization of poetry rather than an engagement with the peripheral situation and the contradictions of art's socio-historical materials.

This chapter tracks Mariátegui's reflections on the problem of the periphery's contemporaneity with the metropolis and its non-self-contemporaneity, namely its disjuncture between city and countryside, coast and sierra. Mariátegui is best known for his Marxian analysis in *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality, 1928) and for having founded the Peruvian Socialist Party, but he also produced sophisticated essays on art. Mariátegui's broad

interests make him appear as an unsystematic thinker, but it is precisely because of the apparently unsystematic character of his writings that we need to turn to aesthetic questions, namely montage. I utilize montage to describe what Alberto Flores Galindo calls Mariátegui's "agony," the "tension" he experienced between "avant-garde art and *indigenismo*, between the West and the Andean world, between the vindication of heterodoxy and the exaltation of discipline, between the national and the international, between Mexico (the native side of Latin America) and Buenos Aires (the port towards Europe)" (*La agonía* 11-12). Moreover, aesthetic and formal concerns are integral moments to Mariátegui's social thought. In using the concept of montage as a way to link the aesthetic and social, I seek to do justice to Mariátegui's repeated references to his "inorganic" writings and his claim in the *Siete ensayos* that his "aesthetic conception is intimately linked (se unimisma) in [his] consciousness with [his] moral, political and religious conceptions, and, without ceasing to be strictly aesthetic, it cannot operate independently or differently" (204).[65] Fundamentally, the aesthetic form of montage enables Mariátegui to articulate the contemporaneity of the periphery's non-self-contemporaneity[66] and outline the possibility of its overcoming. For Mariátegui, in other

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[65] "Pero esto no quiere decir que considere el fenómeno literario o artístico desde puntos de vista extraestéticos, sino que mi concepción estética se unimisma, en la intimidad de mi conciencia, con mis concepciones morales, políticas y religiosas, y que, sin decar de ser concepción estrictamente estética, no puede operar independiente o diversamente."

[66] I am alluding here to what recent theorists of global modernism have called the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous or the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous. Fredric Jameson and the Warwick Research Collective use the phrase "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous." This phrase is a translation of the German *die Gleicheitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*, which might be literally translated as the "same-time-ness of the non-same-time-ness." The English word "contemporary," in my estimation, tends to emphasize a more qualitative experience of sharing a time, whereas simultaneity seems to imply a more quantitative, spatialized relation of times. Along these lines, Michelle Clayton writes that contemporaneity "might seem a cognate to the concept of simultaneity so central to the European avant-gardes," the modern experiences made possible by "new transportation and communication technologie such as steamships, railways, film, radio, and modern newspapers" (*Poetry* 278). "But in Peru's case," according to Clayton, "the concern was not with speed of circulation but with organizing national space" (278). For the purposes of this paper, I will treat "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous" and the "contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous"

words, the contemporary cannot be taken to imply a homogeneous horizon because it includes its opposite within itself. Montage designates such a contradictory totality, forestalling the attempt to appeal to exteriority by formally enacting how a dialectic of apparently incommensurable elements—like contemporaneity and non-contemporaneity, urban and rural—are turned into an internal dialectic.[67] Moreover, as this chapter will insist, it is not that montage describes a pre-existing uneven and combined development in global capitalism; rather, Mariátegui uses montage as a mediating principle that makes intelligible contradictory social forms and yields modes of thinking that would not be possible independently of its formal, aesthetic formulation.[68]

Whereas most critics have insisted on national identity or difference, Mariátegui's thought draws attention to what we might call, borrowing from Hegel, the identity of identity and difference found in montage and the peripheral situation. Moreover, by

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as identical, but I utilize in this paper "contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous" because the "contemporáneo" is the word used by Mariátegui and the phrase used in the translation of Ernst Bloch's *Heritage of Our Times.*

[67] In "Three Names of the Dialectic," Jameson makes a distinction between an internal dialectic and a dialectic of incommensurables. Whereas the internal "dialectic strongly emphasizes the interrelationship of the two phenomena, thus avoiding the problem of heterogeneous multiplicity, only to be confronted by a second danger, namely the possibility that difference might vanish altogether in some premature identity. In the case of the dialectic of incommensurables, however, the problem is the reverse: radical difference is certainly very strongly underscored in the concept of incommensurability but with the risk that the two phenomena thus contrasted may simply drift away from each other into the teeming variety of inert multiples" (25). The trick consists of holding together and shifting back and forth between both types of dialectic in order to avoid reification. In the case of this chapter, the city/country division in Peru exists as a kind of dialectic of incommensurables, but I want to argue that Mariátegui seeks to reframe the problem as an internal dialectic. That is, Mariátegui's politics seek to foreground, not efface, the antagonism of modern Peru in order to formulate the conditions under which this contradiction could be really resolved, namely socialism.

[68] I mean to evoke here Roberto Schwarz's argument in "Objective Form" that form is a "mediating principle, which organizes the elements of fiction and of reality at a profound level, and is part of both" (22). Such a conception of form, Schwarz argues, avoids the common problem in literary criticism "that in attempts to relate fiction to something external to it (human psychology, social and economic worlds), only one of the two juxtaposed entities has a structure. In consequence, internal necessity will exist only on one side—either that of art or that of reality—while the other side is treated as a source of interesting information supporting its logic. This procedure does not produce new knowledge, for the unstructured side will necessarily say what is said on the structured and thus end up simply illustrating it" (26).

reconstructing the way he consistently seeks to acknowledge incommensurabilty while reframing it in terms of a contradictory totality, Mariátegui's thought starkly contrasts with current decolonial approaches, which appeal to various forms of exteriority, making incommensurability into an end in itself.[69] By attending to Mariátegui's use of montage, we appreciate not only how aesthetic commitments shape his thoughts on social questions but also how, in opposition to one-sided assumptions, national concerns become irreducible parts of the international scene, of a contradictory totality.[70]

Dialectics in the Periphery: Regionalism, Centralism and Lima

The beginning of the twentieth century occasioned intense reflections on the history of Peru and, by extension, its future directions. However, these reflections took divergent, even incommensurable, directions: Hispanist interpretations, on the one hand, and *indigenista* revisions, on the other. Exemplifying the former tendency, José de la Riva Agüero (1885-1944) wrote some of the most influential historical accounts of Peru at the time. Riva Agüero imagined a continuity of Hispanic culture from Spanish

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[69] In *Decolonizing Dialectics*, George Ciccariello-Maher alludes to Jameson's distinction between a dialectical of incommensurables and an internal dialectic, opting for the former instead. Ciccariello-Maher writes, "If radicalizing dialectics to the very point of incommensurability runs the risk of moving beyond dialectics entirely, it has the virtue of bringing into the dialectical purview oppositions that are too often obscured" (10). This move helps to clarify my disagreement with decolonial approaches. Rather than entertain the possibility of moving from a dialectic of incommensurables to an internal dialectic, the decolonial option involves pushing incommensurability to the point that totality—even a contradictory totality—disappears entirely and passes into a multiplicity of unrelated elements and exteriority. I would argue that oppositions lose their force if they don't stand against the background of some form of identity or totality. Politically, the decolonial move leads to the affirmation of exteriority without the ability to pinpoint contradictions—that is, points of utopian possibility—at the heart of capitalism. Mariátegui's point, as I reconstruct it in this chapter, is not to ignore incommensurability. Indeed, the idealist move involves giving a real contradiction a merely conceptual solution. Instead, Mariátegui's dialectical gesture entails reframing or shift in perspectives in order that the contradiction can be formulated in such a way that we can envision the terrain in which it can be *really* resolved.

[70] Mariátegui was committed to interpreting national questions, but he was resolutely internationalist in his approach, and nothing could be further from the decolonial strategy of delinking than the following comment, written in 1929: "In the struggle against foreign imperialism we are fulfilling our duties of solidarity with the revolutionary masses of Europe" (Mariátegui, *Anthology* 272).

colonization through independence to its breakdown in the nineteenth century with the introduction of modernity. As Jorge Coronado explains, Riva Agüero argued that "Peruvian society had been cast onto the sea of foreign influence by modernizing forces" and therefore must "return to its Hispanic roots in order to survive the instability of modernity" (104). Modernity, in other words, appeared incompatible with Peruvian culture since the nation was itself conceived in terms of a past origin in Hispanic culture. While the *indigenistas* similarly looked to the past to find an origin for Peru, they saw the persistence of Hispanic culture as evidence of the very failure of modern nationhood. Manuel González Prada (1848-1918), the father of *indigenismo* in the late nineteenth century, attributed Peru's defeat in the War of the Pacific (1879-1883) to the fact that the indigenous masses, who formed the majority of the Peruvian army, had been systematically excluded from the nation and thus felt no commitment to the war effort. Accordingly, González Prada argued that the Peruvian nation had to be wrested not from foreign modernizing influences, as in Riva Agüero, but from the oligarchical trinity—governors, priests and judges—and reconfigured on the basis of indigenous culture. Despite making claims on the same Peruvian nation, the Hispanists and *indigenistas* proposed irreconcilable interpretations of the history of Peru that were incapable of being subsumed within a single narrative.

I reference this dispute between Hispanists and *indigenistas* in part to reconstruct the historical and intellectual context in which Mariátegui developed his thought, but also to suggest the extent to which the deep-seated division between coast and sierra—Hispanic or cosmopolitan city vs. indigenous countryside—underlies interpretations of the Peruvian nation in the twentieth century. Mariátegui, as I will show in this section,

argues that insofar as the social structure of Peru is constituted by this tension between coast and sierra, Peruvian reality must be grasped in terms of a dialectical identity of identity and difference, not in terms of identity or difference alone. Ángel Rama's path-breaking concept of "narrative transculturation" illustrates the tendency to assume a pre-existing identity while also insisting on the relevance of this rural/urban divide. For Rama, since the literature of the 1920s—be it cosmopolitan or critical-realist—was primarily urban in character, it was attuned more to foreign influences than local culture. But a specific form of regionalism emerged in response to these urban and cosmopolitan literary tendencies, one that did not constitute a simple return to previous regionalisms. For Rama, "regionalism had to," in order to "preserve its traditionalist message … [,] adjust that message to the aesthetic conditions forged in the cities" (15). Transculturation names this dynamic process. In place of a straightforward loss of one culture and the acquisition of another, transculturation describes a threefold process: "pick up what modernity has new to offer, revise the contents of regional culture in that new light, and use both sources to cobble together a hybrid that can keep on transmitting the received heritage" (16). This critical regionalist literature, for Rama, neither indulges in the cosmopolitan fantasies cultivated in the city nor seeks to avoid all foreign/modern influences. In its negation of urban modernity, which Rama associates with non-national forces, transcultural narrative gives more adequate literary form to Latin American identity.

If Rama's theory of transculturation is premised on a pre-existing identity, Antonio Cornejo Polar's equally influential concept of heterogeneity insists on the centrality of irreducible difference to Latin American and Peruvian history. This

disagreement stands out in Rama's and Cornejo Polar's opposing interpretations of the figure of the migrant. For Rama, the migrant brings together two transcultural processes: one that takes place in the city, between non-national forces and urban culture; and a second one that occurs between this urban culture and that of the regional hinterlands. Having posited a duality, Rama seeks to resolve it and claims that the "two processes were often resolved into a single one due to the migration of most young provincial writers to the major cities" (21). The figure of the migrant thus illustrates Rama's presupposition that literature expresses a pre-existing identity. This romantic paradigm, however, seems strained in the context of Latin America where the nation is spontaneously experienced as abstract and even imposed from without, not as something emanating from within popular culture. Accordingly, Antonio Cornejo Polar proposes that the figure of the migrant highlights not the underlying identity of the Peruvian nation and its literature, but rather the fact that they are that constituted by irreducible tensions. Cornejo Polar's concepts of heterogeneity and migrant discourse are "constructed around various asymmetrical axes that are somehow incompatible and contradictory in a non-dialectical manner" ("Heterogeneidad" 841).[71] Although Cornejo Polar rejects dialectical language, we might say that migrant discourse involves a dialectic of incommensurables, positing rural and urban as fundamentally unrelated and incapable of synthesis.[72]

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[71] In *Escribir en el aire*, Cornejo Polar uses the concept "heterogeneity" to refer to "two or more social-cultural universes" and to the "forms of expression" that emerge out of their "diverse and opposing relationships" (*Writing in the Air* 5). In an earlier work, he argues that Peruvian literature cannot be understood as the expression of a pre-existing coherent identity; rather, it must be conceptualized as a "contradictory totality" (Cornejo Polar, *Formación* 192).

[72] Cornejo Polar's reference to "non-dialectical contradiction" relies on a false, albeit popular, interpretation of dialectical thought. Adorno, Jameson and Žižek, among many others, have convincingly insisted on the negativity of Hegelian (not to mention Marxist) dialectics. For instance, In "The Three Names of the Dialectic" Jameson writes, "what has inevitably to be said is that this very opposition is itself dialectical: to resolve it one way or another is the non-dialectical temptation; while the deconstruction of

Although Cornejo Polar more adequately acknowledges the constitutive character of the antagonism of coast and sierra, his rejection of the dialectic seems to hypostasize the duality of Peru, making its non-self-contemporaneity into an originary condition. What both Rama and Cornejo Polar have failed to grasp, in other words, is the way Mariátegui, through his dialectical conception of montage as a contradictory totality, sees the relationship between coast and sierra in light of Peru's relationship to global modernity and insists that this irreducible tension both constitutes the Peruvian nation and prevents it from achieving closure.[73] Moreover, the contingent relations of montage enable Mariátegui to think of the political possibility of reframing this opposition in order to overcome it in practice, turning what appears to be a dialectic of incommensurables into an internal dialectic in which coast and sierra can be linked on the basis of their own respective non-identity.

The history of Lima and the Peruvian sierra in the early twentieth century elucidates the context in which Mariátegui stresses the divisions internal to Peru's urban modernity and to rural society. Though nowhere near as large as Mexico City or Buenos Aires in the 1920s, Lima underwent an intense period of modernization during the *oncenio* (1919-1930), the eleven-year presidency of Augusto Leguía. The population of the city more than doubled in the first decades of the twentieth century, from 140,884 inhabitants in 1908 to around 280,000 in 1931 (Elmore 38). The growth and transformation of Lima at the time were partially due to Leguía's quasi-reformist

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each side of this alternative, rather than leading to the self-destruction of the dialectic as such, ought to offer a perspective in which the problem becomes its own solution" (4).

[73] To put it another way, neither the urban novels of Mario Vargas Llosa nor the rural novels of José María Arguedas express Peruvian national identity; instead, the national refers to the non-self-identical tension that gives rise to divergent forms of literature.

government, which sought, in rhetoric at least, to break with the nation's oligarchical class—the *civilistas*—and initiate a modern future for Peru. Although successful to a very limited degree in combatting the *gamonales*—Peru's quasi-feudal landowning class—Leguía's government primarily effected a shift in economic power from one set of landowners and export capitalists on the northern coast to a different group of landowners and capitalists on the southern coast of Lima.[74] The city itself expanded toward the south, eventually incorporating Miraflores and Barranco.[75] In large part, Leguía's urbanization projects were fueled by a massive increase in US investments after the opening of the Panama Canal, from 10% of total investment in 1900 to 74% in 1924 (Klarén 243). Broad avenues were never built in Lima and the city was never subjected to a totalizing urban project like other post-Haussmann cities, but Leguía's modernization had a major impact on the capital. "By the 1930s, Lima had definitely acquired a new physiognomy" (Aguirre and Walker 101).[76]

But the expansion of Lima at this time was perhaps more spectacular than substantial. It was one instance of Peru's repeatedly frustrated experience with urbanization. Peter Elmore has argued that the failure of urbanization in Peru was epitomized in the demolition of the walls surrounding the colonial center of Lima in 1870 (35-36). These walls, which were initially erected to stop pirates from raiding the heart of

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[74] See Kristal 177-80. For a useful overview of the contradictions of the Leguía government as it relates to Mariátegui, see Moore 29-43.
[75] Barranco, a resort town in this period, provides the setting in Martín Adán's *La casa de cartón* (1928).
[76] Guillermo Rodríguez Mariátegui, one of Leguía's urban engineers, articulated Leguía's role in these changes in more elevated language: "Leguía! And like the Napoleonic eagle that flew from bell tower to bell tower, from Cannes to Paris, Leguía's tenacious spirit, inherited from his Basque forefathers, irradiated torrents of progress from the capital to the hamlet that thrust Peru forward, and whose momentum we still leisurely enjoy" (131). I am not sure if José Carlos Mariátegui was related to Guillermo Rodríguez Mariátegui. José Carlos was distantly related to Leguía, so I suspect that Guillermo Rodríguez could have come from that side of the family.

Spain's colonial administration in South America, were removed in order to make room for Haussmann-like modernization and the expansion of Lima beyond its colonial limits. This initial modernization project, however, would prove to be short-lived. The War of the Pacific ended in 1883 with the occupation of Lima by Chile and left the Peruvian capital in ruins. As Peru's defeat brought urbanization projects to an abrupt halt, the uncertain fate of the city fueled the growing awareness of the fragility of the nation—as a political agent, as a cultural identity, as a socio-economic formation within global capitalism. *Indigenismo* emerged as the most significant intellectual response to this moment of anxiety. As Rama has argued, *indigenismo* was, despite its investment in the figure of the *indio*, largely an urban phenomenon, a response to the incomplete modernization of Peru's urban center and social hierarchies. The artists and theorists of *indigenismo* typically were not indigenous people but middle-class mestizos, and for Rama the call to vindicate indigenous culture served as a vehicle for the expression of the middle-class's frustration with a stagnant urban culture in Lima, with a culture dominated by an entrenched, traditional oligarchy.[77] In this way, *indigenismo* and its critique of the oligarchy do not simply index the dominance of Lima over the rest of the country; they

[77] See Rama, chapter 3. Rama goes so far as to argue that Mariátegui's Marxism was an expression of his position as a middle-class mestizo. Mariategui's insistence on realist literature and economic factors, Rama argues, have nothing to do with the vindication of indigenous peasants; rather, they constituted a bourgeois, modernizing project seeking to displace the oligarchy. See Rama 103-6. At a very high level of abstraction, Rama is right to point to the way Marxism in the twentieth century, when it assumed a decidedly materialist, positivist, determinist character, often worked to facilitate the transition from feudalism to capitalism, not as a challenge to capitalism. But there are a number of problems with this account, especially as it relates to Mariátegui. Coronado astutely criticizes Rama's attempt to retrospectively judge Mariátegui's modernism by the peculiar form of modernization that took root in subsequent decades (30-1). I would also argue that Rama's class terms do not adequately elucidate social structures in Peru. While it makes sense to speak of a rising middle-class in opposition to an aristocratic oligarchy in 19th-century Europe, the distinction between oligarchy and bourgeoisie tends to collapse in twentieth-century Latin America. Postcolonial studies in general illustrates some of the ways in which critics, and Marxists in particular, have overemphasized the political role of the middle-class or bourgeoisie, leading these critics to exaggerate the differences between "East" and "West."

are also expressions of the failures or impasses of urban modernity in Peru. Put differently, *indigenismo* emerges out of the transition from what José Luis Romero calls "bourgeois cities" to "massified cities." Whereas the former, as the centers of merchant capital, flourished from the growth of Latin America's export economies, enabling these cities to be remade in accordance with the bourgeoisie's desire for luxury and private spaces, the latter were characterized above all by the presence of more people, migrants who sought opportunities in the city but soon found they were superfluous in a global depression and in a city whose meager economic growth made employment scarce.[78] *Indigenismo* thus registers not the unquestioned supremacy of the coast over the sierra but an urban crisis, which is itself the reflection of a deeper crisis in the global economy and the periphery's reliance on commercial activities within industrial capitalism.

The superficial character of Lima's modernization was not lost on Mariátegui, who reflected on the city in the "Regionalism and Centralism" section of his *Siete ensayos*.[79] Mariátegui begins the text by acknowledging the recent, dramatic changes in the Peruvian capital: "The new neighborhoods, the asphalt avenues, car rides at seventy or eighty miles, easily persuade the *limeño*—beneath his epidermic and cheerful skepticism, the *limeño* is much more incredulous than he appears—that Lima is in a rush to follow the path of Buenos Aires and Río de Janeiro" (*Siete ensayos* 190).[80] On the one hand, Lima is undergoing rapid modernization. On the other, Mariátegui argues that this urban expansion lacks a genuine social foundation. "The growth of the surface of Lima,"

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[78] See Romero, chapters 6 and 7.

[79] Many of these comments already appeared in the newspaper *Mundial* two years earlier with the title "El porvenir de Lima" (The Future of Lima).

[80] "Los barrios nuevos, las avenidas de asfalto, recorridas en automóvil, recorridas en automóvil, a sesenta u ochenta kilómetros, persuaden fácilmente a un limeño—bajo su epidérmico y risueño escepticismo, el limeño es mucho menos incrédulo de lo que parece--, de que Lima sigue a prisa el camino de Buenos Aires o Río de Janeiro."

Mariátegui writes, "exceeds the growth of the population. The two processes, the two terms do not coincide. The process of urbanization is advancing on its own" (191).[81] This mismatch points to the peculiar position of Lima within the social structure of Peru.[82] Whereas most modern cities have been fueled by industry or trade, Lima is primarily a political or administrative unit.[83] Lima is the capital of the nation, but Callao is the major port. And, at the time, industry remained relatively weak, not sufficient to drive the city's growth. Because of this insufficient socio-economic foundation, Mariátegui casts doubt on the image of a rapidly modernizing Lima, of the city's future: Lima "is the capital today, but will it be the capital tomorrow?" (198).[84] Lima, in short, needs to be understood as a peripheral metropolis, an unstable combination of rapid modernization and underdevelopment.

When Mariátegui discusses the capital of Peru, he frequently invokes Buenos Aires, comparing the two in order to highlight Lima's underdevelopment. "Regionalism and Centralism" makes references to London, Berlin, New York and Vienna, but the peculiarity of Lima is most fully revealed by contrast with Buenos Aires. Whereas European and American cities expanded in large part as a result of finance and industry, Latin American cities like Buenos Aires retained a more fundamental relation to the export of raw materials. Mariátegui cites the work of César Falcón—his close friend and

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[81] "la superficie de Lima supera exorbitantemente al crecimiento de la población. Los dos procesos, los dos términos no coinciden. El proceso de urbanización avanza por su propia cuenta."

[82] In this account, Lima appears bigger than its population. In subsequent decades, this situation will be reversed: there never seems to be enough space for the population is constantly moving from the countryside to the city. The main point, however, is that Mariátegui identifies that this disjuncture of the size of the city and its population will mark the city throughout the twentieth century.

[83] "The development of a city is not a question of political and administrative privileges. It is, rather, a question of economic privileges" ["el desarrollo de una urbe no es una cuestión de privilegios políticos y administrativos. Es, más bien, una cuestión de privilegios económicos"] (*Siete ensayos* 191).

[84] "Es la capital hoy, pero ¿será también la capital mañana?"

co-founder of the journal *Razón* before going into exile in 1920—who shows that "the reasons for the stupendous growth of Buenos Aires are fundamentally economic and geographical reasons. Buenos Aires is the port and market of Argentine agriculture and livestock. All the great commercial routes in Argentina flow into it" (*Siete ensayos* 192).[85] Lima, conversely, has neither the same geographical advantages nor does it fulfill a comparable economic function in the nation. In the Latin American context—that is, the peripheral situation—cities play specific roles determined by the role of merchant capital in accumulation and their mode of incorporation into global capitalism. Lima thus demonstrates the fragility of the foundations of the Latin American city, whereas the rapid expansion of Buenos Aires, made possible by the boom in Argentina's export economy, illustrate how this tenuous foundation can give rise to a temporary bubble. The ongoing expansion of Lima in the past hundred years makes Mariátegui's skeptical assessment of Lima's future seem patently wrong, but he does identify what has become a persistent problem for Latin American cities: namely, the absence of socio-economic structure that could absorb the growing population.

The modernization of Lima was partial at best, and it certainly did not translate into the comprehensive development of the nation. Insofar as its growth was based largely on foreign investment and not sustained by its own economic foundations, the modernization of Lima appeared promising but proved to be unstable; it could hardly sustain itself, much less the rest of the country. The writer Abraham Valdelomar claimed in those years that "Lima is Peru." During these divisive times, this sentiment could be

[85] "las razones del estupendo crecimiento de Buenos Aires son, fundamentalmente, razones económicas y geográficas. Buenos Aires es el puerto y el mercado de la agricultura y la ganadería argentinas. Todas las grandes vías de comercio argentine desembocan ahí."

variously interpreted as the idea that Lima was the heart of Peru's Hispanic culture or as the idea, in the words of Peter Elmore, "that the city not only lived with its back to Peru, but at its expense" (62). Lima was simultaneously praised as a "colonial Arcadia," a myth at which Salazar Bondy took aim in his *Lima, la horrible* (1964), and derided for its lack of connection to the rest of the nation. And yet, it would be a mistake to think that urban intellectuals lived in complete ignorance of the sierra and its conflicts. Even though the *indigenistas* were typically urban subjects whose aesthetic proposals and political demands were shaped by the impasses of urban modernity in Lima, they were often intimately informed about peasant rebellions, which were increasing in frequency. Alberto Flores Galindo claims that around fifty revolts occurred in the southern Andes between 1919 and 1923 (*In Search* 167). The rebellions were typically sparked by indigenous peasants' opposition to *gamonalismo*. Like feudal landed property, *gamonalismo* rejected wage labor in favor of "local power: privatization of politics, fragmentation of authority, and control over a town or province" (Flores Galindo, *In Search* 153). In the context of the late nineteenth century, as Peru was progressively integrated into global capitalism through its export economy, *gamonalismo* appeared increasingly anachronistic, as a feudal remnant that hindered the nation's progress. As Flores Galindo explains, "gamonal was a Peruvianism coined in the nineteenth century that likened landowners to parasitic plants" (153). Its non-contemporaneity notwithstanding, *gamonalismo* was not simply a residue of the feudal colonial system but an integral element of Peruvian society that had been reconfigured by its position within capitalism. Flores Galindo attributes the continued existence of *gamonalismo* to the paradox of a modern nation whose liberal institutions were based on the exclusion of that

masses: "The state needed gamonales to control the indigenous masses excluded from voting and other liberal democratic rituals and whose customs and language greatly differentiated them from urban residents" (154). The city and the countryside—the centralized state and quasi-feudal landed property—cannot, in other words, be conceptualized as strictly speaking incommensurable—that is, devoid of relationship—because of this mutual dependency.

Insisting on the mediation of coast and sierra, Flores Galindo follows Mariátegui's lead. To appreciate the contours of Mariátegui's insights into this mediation, we should register their distance from his early reflections on the coast and sierra. On July 28, 1918, the day of Peruvian Independence, a young José Carlos Mariátegui left behind the national celebrations, the "fiestas patrias," in Lima. In the text, "¡28 de Julio!," he evokes the joyous atmosphere in Lima—"the illuminated city, jubilant and wrapped in flags, … a verse of the National Anthem on the lips, … a cup of champagne in the right hand" (*Invitación* 106-107)[86]—but, as Mariátegui shows through juxtaposition, this national pride does not extend outside the capital. In fact, this is precisely what draws Mariátegui to the sierra. Mariátegui does not lament the lack of "fiestas patrias" in the sierra; rather, he yearns for what is absent in the city. He writes, "We are here as travelers, as pilgrims and wanderers, because for a long time our soul has been in need of solitude, our eyes in need of multiple panoramas and our heart eager to feel a little more bohemian, more nomadic and vagrant than normal" (107).[87] Mariátegui thus articulates

[86] "la ciudad iluminada, embanderada y jubilosa, ni con una estrofa del Himno Nacional en los labios, ni con una copa de champaña en la diestra."
[87] "Estamos así, de viajeros, de peregrinos y de caminantes, porque desde hacía mucho tiempo nuestra ánima andaba menesterosa de soledad, nuestros ojos necesitados de panoramas múltiples y nuestro corazón deseoso de sentirse un poquito más bohemio, más trashumante y vagabundo que de costumbre."

the disparity of city and country in the romantic framework of urban alienation.[88] He feels compelled to escape the artificial, foreign culture of Lima and to experience renewal in the midst of nature. And yet, Mariátegui finds that he is irrevocably divorced from organic, rural life. Even from "the cold and steep heights" of the Andes, he cannot "talk to the city about what [he] finds interesting but only about what interests [the city]" (*Invitación* 107).[89] He also discovers his own inability to communicate outside the boundaries of Lima when he attempts to talk to locals, in search of a non-urban perspective on Peru. This is "the city's revenge": "We believe we have left her behind. And in reality we remain in her the same as before" (107).[90] In this text, which reflects Mariátegui's early romantic sensibility, the urban, cosmopolitan intellectual imagines rural life as an ideal form that embodies what the city lacks, but he ultimately recognizes the impossibility of obtaining this putative completeness.

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[88] Mariátegui's early romantic sympathies are also on display in an article he wrote on the Lord of the Miracles Procession, a festival and cult commemorating the miraculous survival of the wall of a Catholic church during a massive earthquake in 1655. In that article, Mariátegui writes, "The Metropolis that progress has transformed, curtailed, and jaded is driven back, inhibited, and concealed for a moment so that the believing, regal, and colonial metropolis may emerge, vibrate, and pulsate" ("Lord of the Miracles" 115). In *Los heraldos negros*, published in 1919, César Vallejo expresses a similar discontent with urban life. "Idilio muerto" (Dead Idyll), for instance, evokes the disarticulation of city and country and overlays cosmopolitan and indigenous connotations onto the opposition. The lyric subject asks, "What will she be doing this hour [*esta hora*], my sweet Andean Rita," but this voice locates itself in the "now" [*ahora*], in the exotic, yet urban, space of "Byzantium" (*Complete Poetry* 99, translation modified). Whereas the Andean Rita is described with a genuine sense of time, in the hypothetical present, using her hands productively, and facing the outside world "at the door," the lyric voice notes that Byzantium "asphyxiates" him, "[his] blood / dozes, like thin cognac, inside of [him]" (99). Located in an exotic city and even in a different form of time, the poet appears irrevocably detached from the Andean Rita. The poem thus reveals the city to be a space of overwhelming stagnation, in contrast to the simple and dynamic Andes. As Michelle Clayton argues, Vallejo, in "[p]ositioning his own present-tense unproductiveness—in a literary bohemia in the city of Trujillo—against the daily activities of a lover in his sierra hometown," implies "that it is not urban modernity but the Andean region that is more alive to change" (*Poetry in Pieces* 29-30). And yet, the title, "Dead Idyll," suggests that this utopian image of rural life no longer exists, at least not for the poet. Clayton explains that it "is not the Andean itself" that is dead "but the possibility of the poet's idyllic reinsertion in it. Ultimately, however, this logic doubles back on itself: the exclusion of the modern poet from the world is revealed as a consequence of the latter's own stagnation within ritual" (30).

[89] "Ni siquiera desde la altura riscosa y fría podemos hablarle a la ciudad de lo que nos interesa a nosotros sino de lo que interesa a ella."

[90] "Y ésta es probablemente la venganza de la ciudad. Nosotros creemos habernos apartado de ella. Y en realidad seguimos en ella lo mismo que antes."

In the early twenties, Mariátegui shifts away from such an attitude and even seems to conclude that the city cultivates revolutionary attitudes, in contrast to the countryside's tendency toward reactionary impulses. After spending three years in European cities, including Rome, Paris and Berlin, Mariátegui writes in "La urbe y el campo" (The City and the Country, 1924) that "[w]hile the city educates man in collectivism, the countryside excites his individualism" (*Invitación* 246).[91] This observation evidently emerged out of the events Mariátegui witnessed in Europe in the early twenties: the failure of the Turin communists, the emergence of fascist rural fantasies in Italy and Germany, the civil war in Russia. The urban orientation also indicates Mariátegui's turn toward Marxism, which traditionally has privileged the role of the urban working class in revolutionary struggles. In this theoretical framework, the city, insofar as it brings the masses together and cultivates social consciousness, creates the necessary conditions for socialism, whereas "the countryside loves tradition too much" and sets individual ownership of property as its ultimate goal (245). Mariátegui replaces here the romantic alienation of the first article with an emphasis in the second on the incongruous political commitments of the interwar period, and he reverses his previous judgment, seeing the city as the necessary site of revolutionary change.

Mariátegui's principal advance in "La urbe y el campo," however, does not reside in the shift from countryside to city but in the dialectical reversal of these terms. Mariátegui mentions, for instance, the case of Italian fascism. Even though its imagery derives from the countryside, in opposition to the corrupt, "red" cities, and its base of support was ultimately rural, "fascism," he writes, "was born in Milan, in an industrial

[91] "Mientras la ciudad educa al hombre para el colectivismo, el campo excita su individualismo."

and opulent city" (*Invitación* 246).[92] The anti-urban sentiment also surfaces when Mariátegui mentions Spengler, for whom "the last phase of a culture is urban and cosmopolitan" (247).[93] The apocalyptic tone continues when Mariátegui refers to the popular impression that "the city will be reabsorbed by the innumerable, anonymous countryside" (248).[94] Mariátegui does not accept this impression of the supposed decadence of the city, but he is drawn to it because it exhibits a chiasmus that he will enact himself. The countryside appropriates the innumerable anonymity that would seem to be proper to the city, and the city, no longer an expanding monster, becomes a passive entity. This reversal articulates Mariátegui's point that the crucial distinction is not between city and country but within each term: "To speak of revolutionary city and reactionary province would, however, entail accepting a classification that is too simple to be exact. In the city and the country, society divides into two class" (246).[95] Mariátegui ultimately insists on the mutual mediation of the urban and the rural, seeing their interdependence and incommensurability as results of the contradictory internal dynamic of capitalism.

In his *Siete ensayos* Mariátegui further develops this approach to city and countryside and refines it in light of the specificity of the Peruvian situation, namely the tension between regionalism and centralism.[96] Although the opposition of regionalism

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[92] "fascismo nació en Milán, en una urbe industrial y opulenta."
[93] "la última etapa de una cultura es urbana y cosmopolita."
[94] "la ciudad será reabsorbida por el campo innumerable y anónimo."
[95] "Hablar de ciudad revolucionaria y provincial reaccionaria sería, sin embargo, aceptar una clasificación demasiado simplista para ser exacta. En la urbe y en el campo, la sociedad se divide en dos casos."
[96] Mariátegui's thoughts on the city and the countryside closely parallel those of Antonio Gramsci. Mariátegui and Gramsci met during the famous Livorno Conference in which Gramsci and others broke from the Socialist Party and established the Communist Party of Italy. It is tempting to imagine that they were more closely connected what the historical record indicates, but it is important to appreciate how their thoughts developed out of overlapping contexts. On Gramsci and Mariátegui, see Terán and Flores Galindo, *La agonía de Mariátegui*. For a more recent comparison that looks at Gramsci and Mariátegui

and centralism appears as the overarching political dispute of nineteenth-century Latin America, Peru included, Mariátegui explains that it is a false problem, one that cannot be solved on its own terms. In true Marxist fashion, he insists this conflict can only be elucidated when it is "displaced from the exclusively political plane to a social and economic plane" (*Siete ensayos* 173).[97] When viewed in this way, regionalism appears not as a defense of local, popular traditions, but as a justification of the interests of the *gamonales*. And yet, centralism depends on the same *gamonales* in order to erect its centralized structures and liberal policy of export for a world market. Mariátegui's dialectical approach allows him to state that "one of the vices of our political organization is, without doubt, its centralism" (173)[98] and, at the same time, that "decentralization … would increase the power of *gamonalismo* against a solution inspired by the interests of the indigenous masses" (178).[99] In other words, Mariátegui rejects what in "Some Aspects of the Southern Question" Antonio Gramsci calls the "magical formula" of mere decentralization, of breaking up political and economic power without addressing the overarching socio-economic structures of the nation.[100] Or, perhaps more accurately,

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from a decolonial perspective, see Mignolo. See Harootunian (chapter 3) for a very competent and comprehensive comparison of Gramsci and Mariátegui.

[97] "se desplaza del plano exclusivamente politico a un plano social y económico."

[98] "Una de los vicios de nuestra organización política es, ciertamente, su centralismo."

[99] "la descentralización … aumentaría el poder del gamonalismo contra una solución inspirada en el interés de las masas indígenas."

[100] As Gramsci explains at the beginning of the text, critics had claimed that Gramsci and *L'Ordine Nuovo* advocated a "magical formula": to "divide up the great landed estates among the rural proletariat" (*Pre-Prison* 313). Gramsci does not deny his support for land reform, but he insists that this formula is not sufficient onto itself. In part, the redistribution of land often fails to accomplish its stated goals because of the poor quality of the land and the lack of access to technology. Accordingly, Gramsci insists that the Turin Communists "wanted this distribution to take place within the context of a general revolutionary action on the part of the two allied classes, under the leadership of the industrial proletariat" (315). The possibility and necessity of this alliance derives from the interconnection of north and south, in contrast to the prevailing idea that "the South is the ball and chain that is holding back the social development of Italy" (316).

Mariátegui indicates that decentralization would be a necessary, but insufficient, step in the struggle to vindicate the indigenous masses.

The conflict between centralism and regionalism ultimately boils down to a disagreement between a quasi-feudal aristocracy and a nascent national bourgeoisie, even though this disagreement conceals their mutual dependence. Recasting the opposition, Mariátegui writes, "Peru must opt for the *gamonal* or for the Indian. This is its dilemma. There is no third way" (189).[101] In effect, Mariátegui divides regionalism into two, revealing its internal inconsistency as a political proposal, its falsity and its truth. And, as the "dilemma" implies, this negation of regionalism opens up the possibility for a mass-based politics. Mariátegui address his discussion of the dilemma to an urban audience, seeking the support of progressive intellectuals and the urban proletariat to form an alliance or united front with indigenous peasants. In calling for a united front and claiming that the opposition between regionalism and centralism is a false problem, Mariátegui by no means ignores the tension between the coast—Lima, above all—and the sierra, between the heterogeneous regions that make up contemporary Peru. I will elaborate on Mariátegui's politics in the final section when I discuss his disagreements with Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, but the preceding account demonstrates that the political alliance Mariátegui seeks cannot hope to overcome the differences between coast and sierra through political organization alone, or through the affirmation of Peruvian identity, without addressing and transforming the nation's fundamentally unequal social structures.

[101] "El Perú tiene que optar por el gamonal o por el indio. Este es su dilema. No existe un tercer camino."

How to Represent the Contemporary: Mariátegui's Essayistic Montage

What sort of revolutionary political options were available in Peru in the 1920s, in a country composed of indigenous communities, capitalism, a pseudo-modernizing government and the seemingly ineluctable presence of feudalism? This is perhaps the principal question guiding Mariátegui's work. But this political problem cannot be separated from aesthetic and representational problems, namely how to simultaneously represent the national situation and the international conjuncture as overlapping, yet distinct realities. Mariátegui insists time and again that national reality only properly comes into view through and within a global perspective on the present. In the famous last line of his *Siete ensayos*, he writes, "By the universal, ecumenical roads we have chosen to travel, and for which we are reproached, we move closer and closer to ourselves" (300).[102] On the one hand, he insists on what the *Siete ensayos* refer to as a cosmopolitan phase in which influences are selected, thereby paving the way for a phase of national expression. On the other hand, this passage suggests that the articulation of national reality is an ongoing process, one that will always take place in reference to the global framework. Accordingly, Mariátegui in his first book, *La escena contemporánea* (The Contemporary Scene, 1925), sought to reconstruct the global coordinates of the present moment.

After Augusto Leguía came to power in 1919 through an election and—when he did not believe that the oligarchy would honor the election—a coup d'état, he sought to rid the nation of some of its strongest critics and thus encouraged, with stick and carrot, Mariátegui and others to leave Peru. Mariátegui left for Europe in 1920 and spent the

[102] "Por los caminos universals, ecuménicos, que tanto se nos reprocha, nos vamos acercando cada vez más a nosotros mismos."

next three years living in Italy, France and Germany, writing articles for newspapers back in Lima and immersing himself in radical politics and avant-garde art. Upon returning to Peru in 1923, Mariátegui set himself the task of reconstructing the present conjuncture for a national audience. He began giving a series of classes at the recently established Popular University in Lima on what he called the "History of the Global Crisis." *La escena contemporánea*, published two years after these classes, is largely a collection of previously published articles and amounts to a synthesis of these conferences on the global crisis insofar as the book deals with the same fundamental topics of the interwar period: the emergence of fascism, the crisis of democracy, the challenges facing socialism, antisemitism and the "message of the Orient." In this first book and in subsequent articles, Mariátegui outlines the contours of the contemporary moment in terms of a proliferation of crises—economic, political, social, etc. And, insofar as the contemporary is constituted as a totality in crisis, the representation of the contemporary must register these asymmetries and internal inconsistencies in a form that resembles montage. Ernst Bloch, as we will see, similarly drew on the formal logic of montage in his attempt to formulate an account of the contradictions of the contemporary moment. But Bloch and Mariátegui approach the contemporary from different positions: the former in terms of a national context in which the contemporary is immediately given; the latter from a peripheral position whose lack of contemporaneity is the product of global unevenness.

Despite the desire to provide a systematic overview of the "contemporary scene," Mariátegui suggests that the present moment does not permit such cohesiveness. Even though it still constitutes a totality, the contemporary moment cannot be reduced to a

uniform essence. In a note that introduces *La escena contemporánea*, Mariátegui explains:

> these hasty and fragmentary impressions do not claim to form an explanation of our epoch. But they contain the primary elements of a sketch of this epoch and its tempestuous problems, an interpretive essay or rehearsal of what I may dare to attempt in a more organic book. I do not think that it is possible to apprehend in a theory the entire panorama of the contemporary world. It is not possible, above all, to fix its movement in a theory. We have to explore it and know it episode by episode, facet by facet. Our judgment and our imagination will always feel lagging with respect to the totality of the phenomenon. As a result, the best method to explain and translate our time might be a method that is a little bit journalistic and a little bit cinematographic. (*La escena* 11)[103]

These rich sentences delineate a constellation of mutually related concepts—contemporaneity, contradictory totality and montage—that need to be unpacked "facet by facet."

Let us begin with Mariátegui's acknowledgment that *La escena contemporánea* does not amount to an "organic" work. He makes the same point at the beginning of the *Siete ensayos*. [104] By framing his books as non-organic, Mariátegui insists that he not only writes about the avant-gardes but incorporates their artistic principles into his form of

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[103] "no pretenden estas impresiones, demasiado rápidas o demasiado fragmentarias, componer una explicación de nuestra época. Pero contienen los elementos primarios de un bosquejo o un ensayo de interpretación de esta época y sus tormentosos problemas que acaso me atreva a intentar en un libro más organico. Pienso que no es posible aprehender en una teoría el entero panorama del mundo contemporáneo. Que no es posible, sobre todo, fijar en una teoría su movimiento. Tenemos que explorarlo y conocerlo, episodio por episodio, faceta por faceta. Nuestro juicio y nuestra imaginación se sentirán siempre en retardo respecto de la totalidad del fenómeno. Por consiguiente, el mejor método para explicar y traducir nuestro tiempo es, tal vez, un método un poco periodístico y un poco cinematográfico."

[104] In the introduction to the *Seven Interpretive Essays*, Mariátegui explicitly links the "non-organic" character of the book not to the conditions of production but to his temperament: "My work unfolds according to the desire of Nietzsche, who did not love the author committed to the intentional, deliberate production a book, but the one whose thoughts formed a spontaneous and unintentional book. Many book projects visit me on sleepless nights; but I know beforehand that I will only realize the ones that an urgent, vital demand orders of me" ["Mi trabajo se desenvuelve según el querer de Nietzsche, que no amaba al autor contraído a la producción intencional, deliberada, de un libro, sino a aquél cuyos pensamientos formaban un libro espontánea e inadvertidamente. Muchos proyectos de libro visitan mi vigiia; pero sé por anticipado que sólo realizaré los que un imperioso mandato vital me ordene"] (13).

presentation. And while the logic of montage in Mariátegui hardly resembles the explosive fragmentation of Dada and Surrealism, it certainly involves the attempt to embody a unity based on contradiction. The idea of an "organic" work calls to mind Peter Bürger's account of the historical avant-garde and its self-critique of art. Bürger recasts Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory as a theory of the constructive logic of montage, identifying thereby an opposition between the organic work of art, which implies a self-contained structure based on the "necessary congruence between the meaning of the individual parts and the meaning of the whole," and the constitutive incompletion of montage, in which "the parts lack necessity" and are "'emancipated' … from a superordinate whole" (80). Bürger forestalls the conclusion that the meaning of avant-garde art can be reduced to its disparate parts. Montage continues to express a "total meaning" but its "unity has integrated the contradiction within itself. It is no longer the harmony of the individual parts that constitutes the whole; it is the contradictory relationship of heterogeneous elements" (82). The inorganic character of montage, in other words, is not synonymous with fragmentation; rather, it embodies totality and difference through its emphasis on contradictory relations.

The "inorganic" character of montage, however, does not simply present itself to Mariátegui as one formal option among others, as a technique confined to the realm of art; rather, it seems to be the aesthetic form dictated by the structure of the contemporary moment. Mariátegui explains in the introduction that "it is not possible to apprehend in a theory the entire panorama of the contemporary world" (*La escena* 11). He suggests that whereas previous historical epochs may be viewed as a panorama, as a continuous and delimited object viewed from without, the contemporary scene appears constitutively

incomplete because it is viewed from within. Moreover, Mariátegui emphasizes again and again that the interwar moment complicates the possibility of an exhaustive account not only because of the position of the subject within it but also because the object itself is defined by crises, a totality that is contradictory in essence. In this way, the chapters of *La escena contemporánea* all bear on the present moment, but the chapter on fascism, for instance, is neither reducible to the chapter on democracy nor does one follow from the other. Rather, the chapters assemble, in the manner of a montage, a constellation of distinct perspectives on the present crisis, suggesting that the contemporary conjuncture must be conceived not as a self-identical object but as an internally inconsistent totality that necessitates irreducible perspectives.

As the quotes from the introduction of *La escena contemporánea* exhibit, Mariátegui is searching for an adequate mode of presentation, and he invokes modern media in order to delineate or constellate the form he intends to elaborate in this book. In the space of little more than a page, Mariátegui refers to the essay, film and journalism. Montage, of course, bears a metonymic relationship to film, and it is precisely this aspect—film's ability to piece together radically disparate images, places and temporal sequences—that inspires Mariátegui to align his work with cinema.[105] But montage is by no means specific to film. The newspaper presented on a single page local and international events, written reports and photographs, advertisements and serious news, without any overarching explanatory framework. Moreover, just as a film was the result of cutting and pasting individual shots, the newspaper was assembled from heterogeneous

[105] Writing in the first half of the twenties, Mariátegui's point of reference was silent film, whose sharp juxtaposition of visual and written elements became less prominent with the emergence of more seamless narrative film.

sources. While the newspaper was the principal medium in which Mariátegui published his own writing, he frequently alludes, as we will see below, to film to identify the formal logic of montage.

In terms of its formatting, *La escena contemporánea* was a relatively traditional book; it lacked the visual dynamism of film and the newspaper. But the unevenness of its language and object suggested to Mariátegui that his "method" was "a little journalistic, a little cinematographic" (*La escena* 11). Clayton rightly argues that these modern media exemplified for Mariátegui "ways to think and speak about the national in the context of the international" ("La escena" 232). The use of modern media indicates that the passage from national to international, or vice versa, could not be conceived as a seamless transition or that it should be conceived as a transition in the first place. Mariátegui quickly forestalls this temptation by referring negatively to a different—now historically more distant—medium: the panorama. Mariátegui may have had in mind the *Kaiserpanorama* (Imperial Panorama), a stereoscopic medium that enjoyed a brief resurgence in the early twenties in Germany and became one of Walter Benjamin's objects of fascination.[106] Like Benjamin, Mariátegui only briefly mentions the panorama,

[106] The *Kaiserpanorama* was a circular structure with numerous viewing stations, showing different images so that people would shift from one station to another. August Fuhrmann invented the *Kaiserpanorama* in the 1890s, and it spread throughout Europe during the early part of the twentieth century. The Imperial Panorama owes its name to the way it provided an opportunity to see the distant lands under imperial rule. It presented "unreachable places full of paradisiacal allusions," and these "wish-images of and for a society in transition" came to "substitute for the empire's failed colonization and war efforts" (Kieslich 283). One of the sections of Benjamin's *One-Way Street* carries the title "Imperial Panorama: A Tour through the German Inflation." Despite the name, the panorama only frames this section. Benjamin does not discuss the medium directly; rather, he seems to invoke it ironically. Whereas the Imperial Panorama exhibited exotic places and stood as a testament to Germany's imperial conquests, the section of *One-Way Street* highlights the crisis within Germany. This "tour" of the crisis involves a subtle dialectic of continuity and discontinuity. Benjamin seeks to uproot the idea that "the crisis is the exception," insisting instead that crisis has become "the real stable factor" (Kieslich 290). And it is precisely this reversal, whereby crisis becomes permanent, that enables the possibility of perceiving the true possibility of escaping the permanent crisis. The "Imperial Panorama" section, in other words, revolves around the interruption of montage and ironizes by contrast the panorama as a sort of montage turned against itself, "creat[ing] illusion by fusing

but he invokes its illusory continuity in order to highlight the discontinuity of his own mode of presentation, and by extension, the historical situation itself. Mariátegui thereby draws on modern media not only in order to think the national in the context of the international but also to insist on the incommensurability of national and global perspectives.

Beyond the analogies with more immediately modern media—film and journalism—Mariátegui consistently refers to his works as "interpretive essays," a literary genre that embodies the formal and thematic concerns elucidated above.[107] Unlike a fully worked out, definitive treatise, the "ensayo" refers to a rehearsal or successive attempts. That is, the essay is self-reflexively aware of its own incompletion and provisional status. For Montaigne, the essay was uniquely suited to skeptical philosophy and it enabled him to entertain contradictory and incommensurable ideas. In "Of Repentance" Montaigne reflects on skepticism and concludes, "I may indeed contradict myself now and then; but truth, as Demades said, I do not contradict" (610). The essay, in other words, is the form that articulates the paradoxical idea that truth is itself

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the elements so artfully that all evidence of incompatibility and contradiction … is eliminated" (Buck-Morss 67).

[107] The essay's philosophical and formal commitments are perhaps best articulated in Adorno's account of how the essay form departs from the principles of the Cartesian method. In *Discourse on Method* Descartes identifies four principles: 1) "*clara et distincta perceptio* and absolute certainty"; 2) "the division of the object into 'as may parts as possible, and as might be necessary for its adequate solution'"; 3) to begin with the simplest problems and then ascend to the most complex; 4) "exhaustive enumerations" (Adorno 14-15). The essay, conversely, embraces doubt, refuses the illusion of discrete, self-sufficient objects, dives headfirst into complexity, and rejects the idealist pretension to exhaustiveness. The relationship between the essay and montage can also be seen in Adorno's early essay "The Actuality of Philosophy." Against the idealist tradition's aspiration for totality, Adorno argues for an interpretive, essayistic philosophy that draws on the example of Benjamin's *Origin of German Tragic Drama*. It is difficult not to image that Adorno has montage in mind when he writes, "If true interpretation succeeds only through a juxtaposition of the smallest elements, then it no longer has a role in the great problems in the traditional sense, or only in the sense that it deposits within a concrete finding the total question which that finding previously seemed to represent symbolically. Construction out of small and unintentional elements thus counts among the basic assumptions of philosophic interpretation; turning to the 'refuse of the physical world' (Abhub der Erscheinungswelt) which Freud proclaimed, has validity beyond the realm of psychoanalysis" (127-8).

contradictory. Mariátegui similarly utilizes the essay to formalize the idea that the contemporary moment demands a skeptical attitude, not a finished theory, because its essence is contradiction. The essay, in fact, enjoyed a peculiar popularity in Latin America in the early twentieth century.[108] The skepticism and self-reflection implied by the essay provided Latin American intellectuals with a meaningful distance from the positivism and materialism associated with Europe and North America. Pedro Henríquez Ureña's *Seis ensayos en busca de nuestra expresión* (1928) is, for instance, one of many examples of how the essay became the privileged medium in which to explore the contours of a Latin American identity that had yet to be defined. While Mariátegui's interpretive essays clearly belong to this Latin American tradition, his interest in cultural identity is always accompanied by a focus on the tensions of the international situation and its political implications.

And yet, the essay, with its intrinsic relationship to skepticism, proves to be an uneasy bedfellow with politics. Alberto Flores Galindo recounts that in June 1929 Mariátegui sent Julio Portocarrero and Hugo Pesce to represent the Peruvian delegation at the first conference for the Communist International in Buenos Aires. The Peruvian delegation gave Victorio Codovilla, the director of the conference, a copy of Mariátegui's *Siete ensayos*. According to Flores Galindo, Codovilla was suspicious of the uncertain and provisional character of the essay, preferring instead a pamphlet that Ricardo Martínez de la Torre wrote on the Peruvian workers' movement in 1919 (*La agonía* 27-8).[109] Whereas a pamphlet seeks to inform the reader of a problem and provide

[108] On the essay in Latin America, see Stabb.

[109] "A Codovilla le incomodaba, le resultaba insoportable, un libro en cuyo título se juntaran las palabras 'ensayo' y 'realidad peruana.' Ensayo implicaba asumir un estilo que recordaba a los escritos de autores burgueses y reaccionarios como Rodó o Henríquez Ureña, aparte de implicar un cierto tanteo, un carácter

readymade solutions, the essay poses questions and exposes contradictions in the contemporary moment, tracing the outlines of a solution whose details would have to be specified not in a literature but in political action.

To be clear, the essay does not involve a mere shift from totality to fragmentation. Rather than an external opposition, in which these terms sit comfortably on opposite sides without mutual determination, Adorno holds that the "essay has to cause the totality to be illuminated in a partial feature … without asserting the presence of the totality" ("Essay" 16). In a similar vein, Mariátegui explains in the introduction of *The Contemporary Scene* that "our judgment and our imagination will always feel delayed with respect to the *totality* of the phenomenon" (*La escena*, 11, my emphasis). This appears to be the familiar materialist tenet that reality determines consciousness, meaning that ideas will always be a reflection of pre-existing reality, but in the context of the introduction it is clear that Mariátegui is also insisting on the idea that the totality—the contemporary scene, capitalism, etc.—cannot be represented as such. The category of totality is maintained, not rejected in favor of pure fragmentation, but the totality can only be made to appear through a montage of its parts.[110] Moreover, since the totality is not a single

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provisional en las afirmaciones, y evidentemente un hombre como Codovilla así como no podía admitir un error, menos toleraba la incertidumbre: los partidos o eran comunistas o no lo eran, se estaba con el porletariado o con la burguesía, no podía haber nunca otras posibilidades. La realidad estaba nítidamente demarcada, de manera que se debía hacer una u otra cosa; la línea correcta no admitía discusión, los 'ensayos' quedaban para los intelectuales" (27-8).

[110] This is, of course, a point that Fredric Jameson has made again and again. To take one recent example: "No one had ever seen that totality, nor is capitalism ever visible as such, but only in its symptoms. This means that every attempt to construct a model of capitalism—for this is now what representation means in this context—will be a mixture of success and failure: some features will be foregrounded, others neglected or even misrepresented. Every representation is *partial*, and I would also stress the fact that every possible representation is a *combination of diverse and heterogeneous modes of construction or expression*, wholly different types of articulation that cannot but, incommensurable with each other, remain a *mixture of approaches that signals the multiple perspectives from which one must approach such a totality and none of which exhaust it. This very incommensurability is the reason for being of the dialectic itself*, which exists to coordinate incompatible modes of thought without reducing them to … one-dimensionality"

thing that expresses itself in each of its elements, but is constituted by contradiction or a fundamental non-identity, each part and each perspective will embody that contradiction in unique ways. The totality, in other words, does not make each fragment identical; rather, it is the contradictory dynamic that makes each fragment irreducible to the others. The differences between those fragments only begin to make sense when viewed as part of a totality.

Ernst Bloch, writing a decade later, similarly turned to montage to formally represent the social juxtapositions of interwar Germany. Despite being an imperial metropolis, Germany remained in many ways an underdeveloped country in 1935. "[U]nlike England, and especially France," Germany, Bloch writes, "had managed no bourgeois revolution up to 1918," making it "the classical land of non-contemporaneity, i.e. of unsurmounted remnants of older economic being and consciousness" (*Heritage* 106). In *Heritage of Our Times* (Erbschaft dieser Zeit, 1935),[111] Ernst Bloch uses montage to theorize the contradictions of the contemporary moment: the consolidation of Nazism, the failure of the Communist Party and Social Democracy to stop the rise of fascism, and the broader context of Germany's late, rapid and uneven industrialization in the early twentieth century. Bloch introduces the concept of the "non-contemporaneous" (*Ungleichzeitigkeit*) to describe the peculiarities of the social structure of Germany in relation to Western Europe, namely the paradoxical idea that, as Bloch writes, "Not all people exist in the same Now. They do so only externally, through the fact that they can be seen today" (97). The contemporary, for Bloch, refers to the most recent developments

(*Representing* 6-7, my emphasis). Montage, in my account, names this dialectical coordination of "diverse and heterogeneous modes of construction."

[111] David Durst provides a more thorough account of Bloch's theory of the contradictions of simultaneity in "Ernst Bloch's Theory of Nonsimultaneity."

of modern capitalism—the metropolis, monopolies, the factory, new technologies, etc.—whereas the non-contemporary most obviously designates rural communities and the peasantry but also subjective forms, such as the yearning for an organic connection to the land. Accordingly, Bloch conceives of the present moment as an age of transition, characterized by, to borrow Raymond Williams's terminology, residual feudal relations, a dominant capitalism and an emergent socialist future. The age of transition, in other words, cannot be conceived in terms of either a gradual, linear development or in terms of an absolute break with a previous historical framework. Rather, Bloch saw the contemporary moment in Germany as a complex, stratified formation, one whose political possibilities could only be delineated by a "multi-temporal and multi-spatial dialectic" (115).

While much of *Heritage of Our Times* consists of aphoristic pieces or *Denkbilder*, the philosophical core of the book lays out in a more systematic manner the coordinates of the various contradictions in the present conjuncture. Bloch's argument is often glossed with the phrase "the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous,"[112] and while this phrase clearly grasps Bloch's insistence on the importance of non-contemporaneity, it misses the extent to which he foregrounds contradictions internal to contemporaneity. Bloch makes a distinction between contemporaneous contradictions—the contradictions internal to capitalist modernity as they developed in the present moment—and non-contemporaneous contradictions—the contradiction between, on the one hand, forms of

[112] "The simultaneity of the non-simultaneous" is not actually a phrase that Bloch uses. It comes from an inversion of "the non-simultaneity of the simultaneous," a concept in *The Problem of Generation in European Art History* (1926), written by the art historian Wilhelm Pinder. Pinder was one of Germany's most influential art historians at the time, so it is likely that Bloch was familiar with the book. On Pinder and Bloch, see Schwartz.

monopoly-industrial capital and modern reason, and, on the other, traces of previous modes of production, subjectivity and social organization. Bloch further identifies subjective and objective aspects of each contradiction. On the one hand, the non-contemporaneous manifests itself subjectively in various ways, ranging from "a merely muffled non-desire for the Now" to "*accumulated rage*" (*Heritage* 108). At the heart of the subjectively non-contemporaneous lies a discontent with the empty, formal rationality associated with modernity and capitalism. Objectively, on the other hand, the non-contemporaneous exists in the form of the "continuing influence of older circumstances and forms of production"—that is, "*declining remnants* and above all an *unrefurbished past* which is not yet 'resolved' in capitalist terms" (108). Despite the fact that capitalism had already become a global system by the early twentieth century, pre-capitalist social formations continued to exist and had not yet been remade in capital's image, so to speak.[113] But, as will become clear, Bloch suggest that these "declining remnants" and previous modes of production are not self-sufficient: that is, they cannot be explained on their own terms.[114] Neither independent nor fully incorporated into capitalism, the "unrefurbished past" presents a partial image of negativity, of an alternative to the present. In objective terms, the contemporaneous contradiction refers to the familiar Marxist idea of the tension between productive forces and the relations of production, or between capitalists and the potential for socialism. Subjectively, the contemporaneous

[113] The principal example of the non-contemporaneous is, of course, the peasantry, but Bloch also insists that young people and the impoverished middle-strata are susceptible to becoming part of the non-contemporaneous because they lack a fundamental position in the capitalist structure of reproduction and because of their nostalgic attitudes toward the past.

[114] In Marxist terms, we might say that the non-contemporaneous contradictions have been formally, not really, subsumed under capital. Formal subsumption refers to when capital extracts surplus-value from forms of production without transforming their technical or organizational basis of production, as in the case of real subsumption.

contradiction plays out in the ideological struggle between the revolutionary class-consciousness of the proletariat and the technocratic worldview of the bourgeoisie. All together, these contradictions make the social field not only into an articulated ensemble of forms of life, but also into a dynamic historical moment in which past and present are combined, sometimes uneventfully, other times explosively.[115]

For both Mariátegui and Bloch, the juxtapositions of montage are structurally analogous to the chaotic process of dissolution characteristic of the age of transition.[116] Mariátegui repeatedly returns to the idea that historical forms are no longer bound by their past meaning, meaning that the present has the structure of montage, a contradictory amalgam that radically alters the meaning of past elements included therein. This thesis is perhaps most clearly articulated his brief text on Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* (1924), included in *La escena contemporánea*. The main target of Trotsky's fascinating

[115] To be sure, when these concepts are presented in the form of a mere list, they explain little; their interpretive value depends on how they relate to one another and thereby illuminate the social relationships and struggles in the present. Along these lines, Bloch makes three points that merit attention and implicitly reappear in my discussion of Mariátegui. First, Bloch insists that the non-contemporaneous is defined by its position relative to an internally inconsistent contemporaneity. Bloch writes that in the present context "capital uses the non-contemporaneously contrary, if not disparate element to distract from its strictly present contradictions" (*Heritage* 109). The non-contemporaneous, in other words, no longer has intrinsic meaning. Contemporaneity provides the necessary framework and point of departure. Accordingly, even though the latent meaning of the non-contemporaneous appears at odds with the formal rationality of capitalism, its determinate character in a given moment depends on its mode of articulation within contemporaneity. But the contingent character of the "muffled non-desire for the Now" or "accumulated rage" points not to its insignificance but to the urgency of political struggles that would engage and align with the non-contemporaneous. The subjectively non-contemporaneous can just as easily become a source of resistance as a form of support for present forms of domination and exploitation—as was the case with fascism. The terrain of the subjectively non-contemporaneous, Bloch argues, is precisely where the Communist Party failed and fascism triumphed. This situation leads to the second point, to Bloch's characterizations of the present as a stalled historical process. Fascism represents an attempt to stop historical movement, leading Bloch to evoke images of "dust." History has not fractured into a multiplicity of histories; rather, it remains in the same place, without circulating air to break up the stagnation. Finally, Bloch argues that genuine contemporaneity—as opposed to "inauthentic" contemporaneity, which seeks "being merely up to date"—requires a "super-contemporaneous" supplement (195). That is, Bloch argues that what is at stake in contemporaneity, understood as "the prevented future in the Now" (113), is not only the present but also the future. Contemporaneity, in short, must embody the possibility of its own negation.

[116] For more on Bloch's theory of montage, see my introduction.

book are the attempts to construct a proletarian culture in Soviet Russia. While advocates of proletarian culture imagined that a new art was being formed out of the revolutionary struggle, Trotsky argued that a new art and culture would be the result of a new society that has not yet come into existence, not the expression of the proletariat—which would cease to exist as such in communism. Trotsky thus argued, not dissimilarly to Bloch, that contemporary art must seek not an absolute break with the past but to appropriate and reconfigure already existing techniques and artistic forms. This thesis leads Mariátegui to find in Trotsky the formulation of "an optimistic outlook of the future of the West and of Humanity,"[117] in contrast to Spengler's diagnosis of "the total decadence of the West" (*La escena* 94). Decadence, in Mariátegui's reformulation, thus comes to imply not simply decline or indulgence but a surplus of meaning insofar as, in a parallel to montage, parts no longer possess a necessary, purely functional relationship to the whole. That is, Mariátegui insists on the inextricability of decadence and what Brecht called "refunctioning," the redirecting of an existing technique to produce emancipatory effects. Decadence and refunctioning appear here, and in many of Mariátegui's writings, as irreducible appearances of the same object, of the same contradictory historical dynamic. The loss of tradition and the collapse of established meanings also present a unique opportunity to reassemble these fragments and thereby enact "a renaissance of spiritual and moral values that have been oppressed by capitalist methods and organization" (94).[118] Detached from any organic connection to its original context and resituated in a

[117] "una previsión optimista del porvenir del Occidente y de la Humanidad."
[118] "un renacimiento de valores espirituales y morales, oprimidos por la organización y los métodos capitalistas." Mariátegui provides a different formulation of the decadence thesis in the chapter "The Message of the Orient." He writes there, "now that the skeptical and relativist West discovers its own decadence and predicts its next twilight, it feels the need to explore and to better understand the Orient" ["hoy que el Occidente, relativista y escéptico, descubre su propia decadencia y prevé su próximo tramonto, siente la necesidad de explorer y entender mejor el Oriente"] (*La escena* 190-191).

context constituted by extremes, the surplus meaning of an element can assume disparate forms: revolutionary at one moment, decadent at another.

If decadence is one of the markers of the montage structure of Mariátegui's thought, then, as we already saw above, cinema is another.[119] He was struck, for instance, by the "cinematographic scenes" in Blaise Cendrars's *L'Or* (Sutter's Gold, 1925) (*El artista* 114).[120] Mariátegui includes in his article on Cendrars a long passage from *Sutter's Gold* in which Cendrars employs paratactic construction to convey the disjointed experience of New York City:

> The port of New York. All the shipwrecked ones from the Old World disembark there. The shipwrecked one, the disgraced, the discontent, the free men, commodities. Those who have had setbacks; those who have risked it all on a single card; those who have been tormented by a romantic passion. The first German socialists, the first Russian mystics … Since the French Revolution, since the Declaration of Independence, in full growth, in full development, New York has never seen its docks so continuously invaded. The immigrants disembark day and night and in each boat, in every human shipment, there is at least one representative of strong race of adventurers. (qtd. in Mariátegui, *El artista* 111-112)[121]

In addition to this montage construction, New York embodies at the local level, with its immigrants and its port, the novel's truly global scale. Mariátegui claims that "no scene is excessive" (114)[122] in *Sutter's Gold* not because each part expresses the singular meaning of the whole, as in an organic work, but because the novel seeks to articulate a global

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[119] *La escena contemporánea* does not pay much attention to contemporary art, focusing instead on political and social issues, but Mariátegui's concerns in that book continue in his writings on the avant-gardes, which have been collected in *El artista y la época*, *Signos y obras* and *Peruanicemos al Perú*.

[120] The cinematic, montage character of Cendrars's novel was not lost on Sergei Eisenstein, who wanted to make a film adaptation of *L'Or*.

[121] Mariátegui was drawn to similar passages in Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*. Mariátegui briefly stopped in New York during the long trip in boat from Lima to Europe, and the emphasis on these passages in Dos Passos and Cendrars suggests that he was fascinated by the chaotic, montage-like juxtaposition of people in the metropolis. Uprooted from tradition and organic communities and placed in the "empty space" of the city, these people marked the historical possibility of internationalism, which Mariátegui signals by quoting the moment in *Manhattan Transfer* in which deported immigrants sing "L'Internationale." See Mariátegui, *Signos* 152-159.

[122] "ningún cuadro sobra."

dimension. And this globality is not achieved through the imposition of an overarching plan but through the linking of disparate parts, as in cinematic montage. *Sutter's Gold* thus exhibits Cendrars's insistence on simultaneity. Building on the futurists' conception of simultaneity as a way to convey speed and motion by overlapping successive figures, Cendrars produces, as Marjorie Perloff has explained, "spatial and temporal distortions" with the effect of conflating "present and past" (8-9). The thrust of Mariátegui's review further insists on Cendrars's conception of simultaneity not only of past and present but of different places in the world. The cinematic character of *Sutter's Gold*, in other words, consists in the way the global dimension appears not as a unitary whole but as a mosaic of fragments whose simultaneity is more than arbitrary.

Mariátegui and Bloch, therefore, are united by the thought that montage is a formal medium through which to reflect on the contradictions of the contemporary, a moment characterized by extremes, the dissolution of past forms and open-ended reconfigurations. It is important to note, however, that *La escena contemporánea*, despite its global pretensions, does not contain any section on Latin America. Mariátegui offers analyses of political figures like Wilson, Mussolini, Nitti, issues including the collapse of liberal democracy and the rise of fascism, and commentary on socialist and anti-colonial struggles in India and China. He seems to imply that the contemporary scene does not encompass recent developments in Latin America, like the University Reform movement or the Mexican Revolution. The absence of sections on Latin America could be explained plausibly by what Mariátegui saw as a need to inform a national audience about events outside Latin America—or at least to provide a radical, Marxist account of recent events in the unfolding historical crisis. But the absence cannot be attributed solely to this

circumstantial reason. Rather, the deeper reason comes into view when we consider the differences between Mariátegui's and Bloch's accounts. Bloch's work takes for granted the contemporaneity of the German situation; his task consists of demonstrating the urgency and persistence of the non-contemporaneity, which, if it is ignored rather than engaged, may lead in the direction of fascism. For Mariátegui, the contemporary cannot be taken for granted in the same way; the periphery, instead, appears condemned to non-contemporaneity. The starting point for the peripheral is the historical experience of its non-self-contemporary: the persistence of feudal relations, a relatively undeveloped industrial capitalism, the spatial juxtaposition of past (rural) and present (urban). Modernity in Latin America invariably appears as a pale shadow of a true modernity that lies elsewhere. And yet, as we will see below, Mariátegui did not settle on the familiar idea that Latin America existed outside modernity or that modernity in peripheral situations simply lagged behind a Western modernity. Rather, Mariátegui suggests that the peripheral experience of the non-self-contemporary was an integral component of the global contemporary scene.

Peripheral Modernism and the Impasses of Contemporaneity

In "Pasadismo y futurismo" (1924) Mariátegui laments the fact that the dominant attitude in Peru is one of *pasadismo* or "pastism."[123] This text thus seemingly confirms the impression given by *La escena contemporánea* that Latin America falls outside the domain of the contemporary. This *pasadista* orientation, Mariátegui explains, is an extension of what he and Luis Alberto Sánchez had already identified as the prevailing

[123] Things don't seem to have changed by the mid-1960s. In 1964, Sebastián Salazar Bondy wrote, "As though the future and present lacked any substance, Lima and its denizens wallow in the past" (149).

sense of melancholy in Peru: "A bored, grey hypochondriac tends not only to reject the present and give up hope on the future but also to turn towards the past" (*Invitación* 258).[124] The *pasadista* disposition, in other words, does not merely consist in the appreciation of the past; its attitude toward the past necessarily translates into the negation of the present. This is what distinguishes *pasadismo* from historicism, according to Mariátegui. Whereas *pasadismo* involves the uncritical rejection of one temporal term in favor of another, historicism refers to how the "capacity to understand the past supports the capacity to feel the present and be concerned about the present" (259).[125] Having made these conceptual distinctions, Mariátegui relates this discussion to traditional interpretations of Peruvian history, like that of José de la Riva Agüero. Rather than turn to the region's indigenous history, the Hispanists believe that "love for the colonial viceroyalty" is "a distinguished, aristocratic, elegant sentiment" (259).[126] For Mariátegui, this obsession with a bygone colonial past is completely disproportionate to that period's accomplishments. It has not left anything behind, he writes, "except a buggy, a dilapidated mansion, some latticework and various superstitions" (259).[127] In short, the immediate form of historical consciousness in Peru stands far removed from modernity, as it would have been experienced at the time in the metropolis. Mariátegui finds himself confronted not only with the absence of contemporaneity but also with its refusal.

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[124] "Un hombre aburrido, hipocondríaco, gris, tiende no solo a renegar el presente a desesperar del porvenir sino también a volverse hacia el pasado."
[125] "La capacidad de comprender el pasado es solidaria de la capacidad de sentir el presente y de inquietarse por el porvenir."
[126] "El amor al virreinato le parece a nuestra gente un sentimiento distinguido, aristocrático, elegante."
[127] "sino una calesa, un caserón, unas cuantas celosías y varias supersticiones."

Accordingly, contemporaneity appears in "Pasadismo y futurismo" as something for which one must struggle: as an aim, not a given. Mariátegui even appears to assume a futurist stance at certain moments in the text. He responds, for instance, to the nostalgic lament that Lima—its familiar colonial buildings and structures—is disappearing and being replaced by modern buildings in which new, foreign influences prevail over the national past. This was the sentiment articulated in José Gálvez's *Una Lima que se va* (1921), a title that Mariátegui invokes in this article. "The regrettable thing," for Mariátegui, however, "is not that Lima is disappearing but that it has not disappeared more quickly" (*Invitación* 259).[128] This is Mariátegui's futurist wager: that modernity will sweep away the stubbornly resistant colonial forms whose most enduring expression is Lima. But it is also clear that Mariátegui does not wholeheartedly endorse this futurist attitude, the belief that modernity will spontaneously displace the past, as appeared to be the case in the US and certain parts of Europe.[129] In this peripheral situation, contemporaneity would have to be something like a revolutionary political goal. Hence the article's slogan-like ending: "The past is our enemy. It is the future's turn to give us unity" (260).[130] The peripheral experience of social duality, of its non-self-contemporaneity, would have to be overcome by realizing contemporaneity and, as we will see below, going beyond it.

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[128] "Lo lamentable no es que esa Lima se vaya, sino que no se haya ido más de prisa."
[129] Of course, the enthusiasm about modernity in this period was greatly exaggerated when compared to its social significance, even in Europe and the US. As Arno Mayer has argued in *The Persistence of the Old Regime*, industrial capital and the modernizing bourgeoisie were still relatively small and weak prior to the second World War. Agricultural production and aristocracy political power continued to dominate in this period. Jameson refers to Mayer's work when he makes his "hypothesis that what we call artistic or aesthetic 'modernism' essentially corresponds to a situation of incomplete modernization" (*Singular* 141).
[130] "El pasado nos enemista. Al porvenir le toca darnos unidad."

The quasi-futurist orientation grasps one aspect of Mariátegui's thought. Another aspect emerges when he insists on reaching back to the past, albeit to a different past than that of his Hispanist contemporaries. In "Nationalism and Avant-Gardism" (1925) Mariátegui emphatically states, "the most Peruvian, the most national of contemporary Peru, is the feeling of the new generation … our avant-garde's demand is the vindication of the Indian" (*Invitación* 319-20).[131] In part, Mariátegui formulates a political proposal directed at the present conditions of indigenous peasants: the demand to eliminate *gamonalismo* and oppressive political structures in the Andes. But he is also making the *indigenista* argument that Inca civilization should be conceived as an intrinsic component of the Peruvian nation, not as something that merely existed prior to it. Fully aware that the position could be easily misunderstood, Mariátegui explains that "*indigenismo* does not dream of utopian restorations. It feels the past as a root, not as a program" (321).[132] Mariátegui does not seek to turn back time and reconstruct Peruvian society on the basis of the *ayllu*—the indigenous communal form—, but he does envision the possibility that this non-contemporaneous historical form may mobilize current revolutionary struggles.

This alternation between forward- and backward-looking perspectives should not be attributed to confusion or intellectual ambivalence. Rather, it derives from a social situation that does not experience itself as contemporaneous with itself, that does not experience itself as flowing clearly from the past and moving unambiguously towards the future. In the periphery, contemporaneity assumes a paradoxical form. If for Bloch the contemporary designates the current state of the historical process, Mariátegui, in seeking

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[131] "lo más peruano, lo más nacional del Perú contemporáneo es el sentimiento de la nueva generación … la reivindicación capital de nuestro vanguardismo es la reivindicación del indio."
[132] "indigenismo no sueña con utópicas restauraciones. Siente el pasado como una raíz, pero no como un programa."

to be contemporaneous, find himself compelled to imagine a torsion whereby the past becomes the most present. Although Bloch addresses a very different situation, he does provide some conceptual tools for unpacking this paradox. There is, Bloch writes, an "inauthentic" form of the contemporary that consists of "being merely up to date" (*Heritage* 195). Authentic contemporaneity, on the other hand, requires what Bloch calls a "super-contemporaneous" (195) supplement because contemporaneity is not simply the present but "*the prevented future contained in the Now*," that is, a dynamic whereby the present generates possibilities that point beyond itself and simultaneously prevents these possibilities from being realized (113). Mariátegui, working within a peripheral situation, can only affirm this "super-contemporaneous" moment via a peculiar detour through past forms. He could have merely insisted on the contemporaneity of Latin American social reality with respect to the metropolis, on the idea that they are qualitatively identical, if quantitatively different. But this stance would have been inauthentic because it would disregard the structural unevenness of global modernity. Imagining "this period as a battle for contemporaneity rather than a struggle over modernization," Mariátegui's turn to contemporaneity entailed "viewing the entirety of the West as passing through an open period for experimentation, rather than reinforcing the impression of a peripheral nation rushing to catch up with metropolitan advances" (Clayton, *Poetry* 31). Mariátegui recognizes that the experience of non-self-contemporaneity is precisely the form that modernity and contemporaneity assume in the periphery and thus cannot be overcome by simply asserting the periphery's simultaneity with the metropolis. Accordingly, authentic contemporaneity for Mariátegui involves appropriating a distant past that, precisely

because of its apparent distance from the present, enables the sort of rupture that would realize the "prevented future contained in the Now."[133]

In light of these comments, which demonstrate Mariátegui's paradoxical approach to the question of the contemporaneity in the periphery, it becomes clearer why the Peruvian futurists struck him as misguided. As I mentioned in the introduction, Mariátegui rejected what he saw as the futurists' fetishization of technique for the sake of technique and new language. The poet César Vallejo made the same point in "New Poetry" (1926). Writing from Paris, the center of the international avant-gardes, Vallejo takes aim in at futurist-inspired poetry whose "lexicon is made up of the words 'cinema,' 'jazz-band,' 'motor,' and in general all terms of science and industry. It doesn't matter whether or not the lexicon corresponds to an *authentically new* sensibility. It's the words that matter" ("New Poetry" 205, my emphasis). Mariátegui similarly insists on the superficial character of certain avant-garde art. In "Arte, Revolución y Decadencia" (1926), Mariátegui writes: "We cannot accept as new an art that does not give us anything but a new technique" (*Invitación* 359).[134] Mariátegui suggest that futurist poetry is predicated on a fetishized view of modernity that abstracts technology from its social forms, not on a peripheral situation in which modern technologies are unevenly distributed and have not been fully assimilated into human life. Rather than focus on new technology, the most concrete, tangible expressions of modernity, contemporary poetry,

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[133] By "appropriating the past," I have in mind something different from Lois Parkinson Zamora's notion of a "usable past." Zamora points to the observation made by various writers that Latin America lacks a past or history. The past, in other words, is not given; it must be discovered or invented. For Zamora, a "usable past" becomes a necessary condition of cultural identity in Latin America. It provides a sense of historical continuity and, through Baroque tropes, a sense of inclusion. The appropriation of the past does not yield a sense of continuity; the point is precisely to effect a rupture with the past and present. It is also not about establishing cultural identity but about actualize those potentials that could lead to emancipatory ends.

[134] "No podemos aceptar como nuevo un arte que no nos trae sino una nueva técnica."

Mariátegui argues in "Arte, Revolución y Decadencia" (1926), must be understood in terms of the fundamental social forces in the interwar moment. "In the contemporary world," Mariátegui writes, "two spirits coexist, those of revolution and those of decadence" (359).[135] Mariátegui carries over this distinction from his previous work on the contemporary scene, but what is striking is that he does not simply group contemporary artistic tendencies into revolutionary and decadent groups. Rather, he insists that "decadence and revolution, as they coexist in the same world, coexist also in the same individuals" (360).[136] For Mariátegui, this dialectic of revolution and decadence is the problem that modern art constantly seeks to resolve, to give form to, but insofar as the problem lies beyond the sphere of art, it invariably returns and prompts new directions in art. Decadence surfaces in the collapse of a single artistic style and in the multiplication of schools, but revolution, as the other side of this coin, refers to this "transition" which "heralds and prepares a new order" (360).[137] The inherent contradiction of the contemporary moment operates as a generative impasse: it is the motor behind the various artistic tendencies, but it cannot be resolved within the limits of art.

Despite Mariátegui's revolutionary rhetoric and Vallejo's innovative poetry, Mirko Lauer concludes that their contributions to the debate on Peruvian avant-garde poetry are ultimately conservative. Lauer writes that they "showed signs of a deeply anti-technological spiritualism … that advocated for the human in the face of a technique perceived to be dehumanizing" (28). The language of Mariátegui and Vallejo's critique,

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[135] "En el mundo contemporáneo coexisten dos almas, las de la revolución y la decadencia."
[136] "La decadencia y la revolución, así como coexisten en el mismo mundo, coexisten también en los mismos individuos."
[137] "preludia y prepara un orden nuevo."

indeed, suggests an affinity with the tendency to reject positivism and material progress in the name of Latin American identity and spiritual values. But Mariátegui's socialism and Vallejo's radical poetry discredit any attempt to characterize their work as anti-modern. The force of their arguments resides less in the search for authentic culture than in their ability to see through the one-sided, distorting perceptions of modernity. Not anti-modern, but critical of modernity. Along these lines, Cornejo Polar proposes that their shared "fear is rooted in the knowledge that there was a large gap between the obvious social backwardness of the Andean nations … and the manifestations of modern art" (*Writing* 117). When avant-garde poetry celebrates technology or imagines its seamless integration into a Latin American setting, it disavows this constitutive gap and becomes an ideological alibi for modernity. For Vallejo and Mariátegui, the futurist poetry of someone like Alberto Hidalgo implies that modernity can simply be taken on by an act of will, misconstruing the contradictions at the heart of modernity, namely the dynamic whereby an inadequate modernity, in light of its putatively real form in the metropolis, is precisely the form modernity assumes in the periphery and thus cannot be overcome through more modernity.

Ultimately, Mariátegui's attention to contemporaneity and avant-garde poetry implies a framework in which peripheral modernism revolves around the artistic mediation of the contradictions of peripheral contemporaneity and modernity. Mariátegui's insights, I would argue, can be extended and rendered more explicit by drawing on Nicholas Brown's account of the structural possibilities for peripheral cultural production.[138] In the periphery, unlike in the metropolitan situation, the most

[138] It should be noted that Nicholas Brown's account is largely a synthesis of Adorno and Roberto Schwarz.

advanced forms are not immediately given. An artist can "ignore" this unevenness "and continue to produce 'authentic' works in regional traditions," but because of the global character of cultural production, this almost invariably leads to commodified exoticism (Brown, *Utopian Generations* 184). Or an artist may again ignore the unevenness and "imitate … metropolitan forms," at the risk of being unmistakably "derivative" (184). Brown also identifies two possibilities for an art based on the recognition of this unevenness. "The first option is to 'join the game,'" to attempt to outdo metropolitan artists on their own terrain, and thus "to escape, in the restricted realm of art, the restrictions imposed by the peripheral situation" (184). Alternatively, the artist may "begin from the fact that impoverishment at the periphery and wealth at the center are aspects of a single process," and thereby give form to "the symptoms of the geopolitical order" (184). Vallejo and Mariátegui clearly oppose this avant-garde attempt to "join the game" for the way it misconstrues modernity and suggests that art can offer a compensatory route to modernity in Latin America. The task of art seems to be more negative: not to overcome the problem, but to outline the problem in its formal structure. The logic of montage offers a powerful formal framework for exploring these contradictions, in particular the (in)authenticity of contemporaneity in the periphery. Montage, insofar as it embodies paradoxical reversals, can be used to suggest that modernity in the periphery cannot be simply affirmed or refused from outside since its inherent inconsistency means that it is already present and constantly displaced.

In his use of montage, Oquendo de Amat's *5 metros de poemas* illustrates how peripheral modernism could formally mediate, without compensating for, its non-self-contemporaneity. On first approximation, these poems would seem to confirm

Mariátegui's concerns about the avant-garde's fetishization of technique. The book is assembled in the form of an accordion, each page, excluding the first and last, is attached to another page on each side, making the work into a long, folded and continuous strip.[139] In this way, *5 metros de poemas* evokes cinematic montage.[140] With its accordion construction, the book of poetry resembles the cutting and pasting of individual shots in film editing. This affinity with film is further reinforced by the inclusion of a ten minute "intermission." In addition to its filmic resemblances, *5 metros de poemas* includes various calligrams. The calligram, as developed most famously by Apollinaire, involves arranging words to visually embody an object—like the Eiffel Tower, a horse, the sun. Oquendo de Amat seemingly experiments with new techniques for the sake of new techniques, but montage in *5 metros* also becomes a way of aesthetically formulating and resolving the social problem of the periphery's non-self-contemporaneity. *5 metros* is constituted precisely by the tension between traditional and modern elements, between the countryside, or sierra, and the city, or coast.

For instance, the first poem, "aldeanita" (little village girl), invokes rural settings, domesticity and natural symbols:

> Silk village girl
> I'll tie my heart
> to your braids like a ribbon
> Because in this fragile cardboard morning
> (to a fine emotional wanderer)
> You gave the water glass of your body
> and the two coins of your new eyes.[141]

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[139] Octavio Paz's Blanco (1972) has a similar accordion design.

[140] Oquendo de Amat was known for his obsession with film, spending the little money he had on tickets, and he even developed plans to edit *Celuloide*, a journal devoted to film (Coronado 80). Oquendo de Amat's uncle owned a cinema in Lima.

[141] Aldeanita de seda
ataré mi corazón
como una cinta a tus trenzas
Porque en una mañanita de carton

Many of the poems in *5 metros de poemas* follow the pattern of "aldeanita," invoking rural settings, domesticity and natural symbols.[142] This poem is written in free verse, but its images would not be out of place in courtly lyric poetry. The village girl becomes a figure of something soothing (silk, a glass of water), and, since the poetic voice ties his heart to her braids as a memento, it is easy to imagine that she is the lost object of desire so familiar to lyric's poetry. As a result, "aldeanita" seems inconsistent with the extremely modern and radically experimental nature of *5 metros de poemas*.

At the other thematic extreme of *5 metros*, the poems formally embody chaotic urban scenes. Oquendo uses calligrams in these city poems to evoke advertisements, skyscrapers and other tangible features of the metropolis. While these poems highlight disorder, Álvaro Campuzano Arteta has also convincingly argued that cities lose their burdensome weight in Oquendo de Amat's *5 metros*. He points, for instance, to the line "*The traffic / writes / a love letter*" ["*El tráfico / escribe / una carta de novia*"] as evidence of the playful reversals of the city's oppressive environment. Arteta writes: "Nothing is functional or utilitarian in the cities that emerge in the frozen images, like evanescent photographs, in the middle of the surface of the pages of *5 metros de poemas*" (306). Arteta is certainly right, but, by virtue of the logic of the paradox that informs *5 metros*, he only grasps one half of the structure. The cities in *5 metros* are both concrete prisons of commodification and spaces of freedom. In "new york," for instance, the paradigmatic expression of capitalism's temporal regime of domination and incessant

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(a este bueno aventurero de emociones)
Le diste el vaso de agua de tu cuerpo
y los dos reales de tus ojos nuevos.

[142] These poems carry titles like "madre" (mother), "campo" (countryside), "jardín" (garden), and they return to images of the moon and the sky.

speed-up, “TIME IS MONEY,” exists side-by-side with an image that evokes deceleration and the possibility of free-time: “The factory smoke / slows clocks down” [“El humo de las fábricas / retrasa los relojes”]. This juxtaposition of opposites grasps the peculiar dynamic at the heart of the technological city: increasing productivity in the factory should theoretically slow down time, freeing up moments for non-work activities, but the capitalist form of temporal determination, expressed here in upper-case letters, remains and intensifies. The poem “new york,” in other words, does not simply evoke urban motifs; it pushes these motifs to their extremes, revealing the tension inherent to the modern metropolis.

From the perspective of a poem like “aldeanita,” this utterly modern and urban poem might seem out of place, perhaps, to use Mariátegui’s language, the result of Oquendo’s interest in new technique for its own sake. But, as Michelle Clayton argues, “there is little in the collection that justifies taking the ‘local’ poems as more *authentic* than those that focus on modern cities or on foreign views” (“Modes” 105). Because of its “very form, which unfolds like a filmstrip and thereby tethers together its disparate contents,” *5 metros* insists that “the Andean idyll subsists” within “a broader experience of modernity, and that to separate them out is to do violence to the reality of a context increasingly organized by and within global” modernity (2015). As a result, the inauthentic pertains not to Oquendo’s experimental use of technique or to the presence of modern, urban settings, on the assumption that these concerns are foreign to the peripheral situation. Rather, *5 metros* implies that these seemingly incommensurable elements are intrinsically link, meaning that it would be inauthentic to separate the urban and the rural aspects of the poems, even if they appear to contradict one another.

The socio-aesthetic problem of *5 metros de poemas,* in other words, derives from the question of how to relate the incommensurable elements. Responding to this question, Jorge Coronado concludes that the poetic subject here is a "migrant" who "finds himself trapped in the agon between the ubiquitous representatives of … two powerful, though unequal, forces—traditional culture and modernization—whose fate is indistinguishable from his very own" (84).[143] By framing Oquendo de Amat's work in terms of the figure of the migrant, Coronado brilliantly identifies the irreducible tension in *5 metros de poemas* between urban and rural, contemporaneity and its opposite. However, the figure of the migrant raises certain implications that ultimately misconstrue the character of Oquendo de Amat's poems. Even if the migrant, in Cornejo Polar's interpretation, precludes harmonious resolution, it implies a sequential narrative revolving around the biography of an individual who moves from one location to another. But this sequential interpretation is belied by the poem's use of simultaneity.[144] The "cultural components" indeed find themselves in a state of "total separation" (Coronado 88), but this separation is itself the result of and the form assumed by the internal contradiction of simultaneity.[145]

We get a glimpse of how this peculiar simultaneity works in *5 metros* when we turn to the enigmatic first line of the book: "open the book like pealing a fruit."[146] But

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[143] Biographically, this is true. Oquendo de Amat was born in Puna and then migrated to Lima. The disjuncture of coast and sierra would have been a visceral reality for him, not merely a conceptual or aesthetic problem.

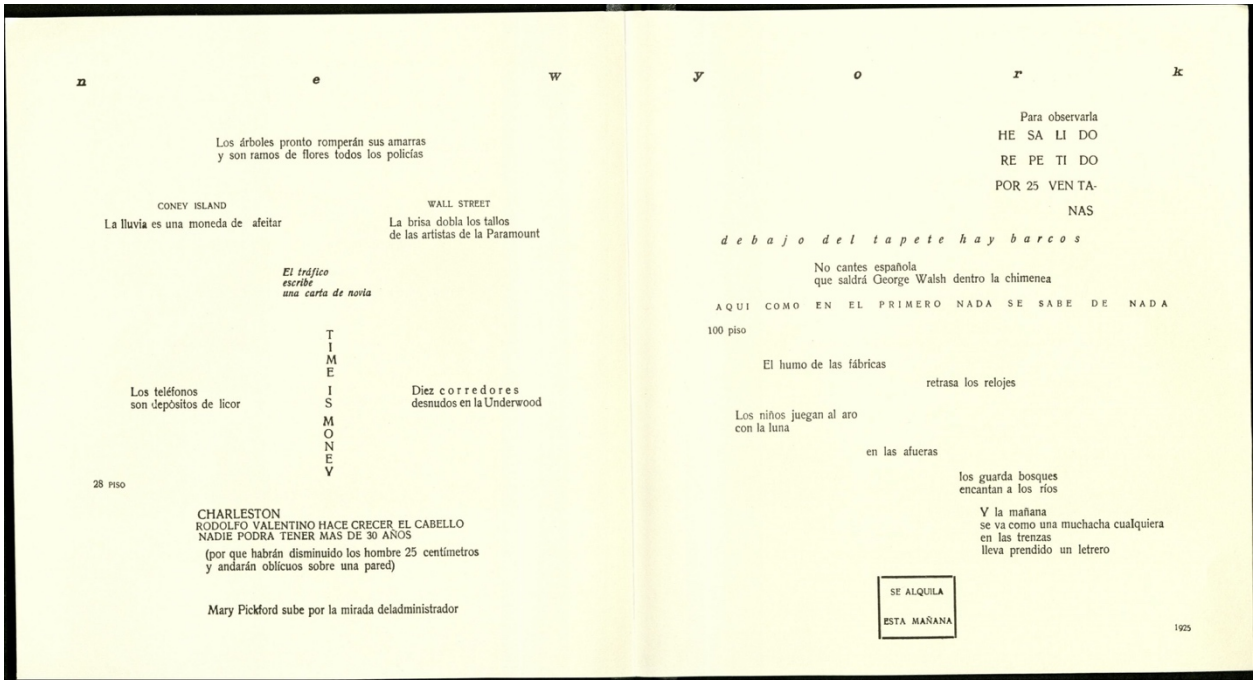
[144] Coronado's impulse to narrativize Oquendo de Amat's poems can be seen in his brief summary of the poem: "*5 metros* insists, in a first instance, on the lament in the face of modernization (this being a form of modernity itself), then attempts to create a hybrid, and finally opts for a total separation of the cultural components in question" (88).

[145] Clayton similarly argues that the attempt to make *5 metros* "cohere in to a kind of *Bildungsroman*" assumes that "the Andean space remains effectively untouched by modernity" and that "there is no cross-contamination between the poems on domestic and on modern themes" ("Modes" 111-2).

[146] "abra el libro como quien pela una fruta."

what kind of fruit? If it were an apple, then the skin would be removed with a knife in one more or less continuous strip. Other fruits, like an orange, cannot be pealed in this manner; the skin is removed piece by piece, in fragments. By not specifying which type of fruit, Oquendo de Amat forces us to consider both options simultaneously, even if they are mutually exclusive. This paradox points to the montage structure of *5 metros*. It is both a continuous strip and discrete pieces of paper. As a montage, the work does not overcome the non-identity of the two options, reducing them to a single, underlying essence, but rather makes that non-identity into its principle of organization. It acknowledges the dialectic of incommensurables but also reframes it so that it can be posited as an internal dialectic.

This type of paradox emerges forcefully in the city poems because they take the form of calligrams. Because their simultaneity confounds the standard movement from left to right, from top to bottom, calligrams are inherently difficult to read.



III. Photograph of "new york,"5 metros de poemas, Carlos Oquendo de Amat, courtesy of the author

In “new york” and “amberes” this difficulty is compounded because the titles stretch across two pages, prompting a question: is the poem a single calligram or two? Do we read the verso first, the recto second, or both at the same time? As with the idea of pealing a fruit, it seems that we must pursue both options. The simultaneity of “new york,” in other words, simultaneously includes its opposite, sequentiality, and negates it. Oquendo uses calligrams, in other words, not simply to be “up-to-date,” to imitate recent experiments in avant-garde poetry.

Instead, the calligrams foreground how Oquendo de Amat’s transforms the aesthetic technique of simultaneity into contemporaneity, the question “of organizing national space” (Clayton, *Poetry* 278) and the mediations of its internal divisions by the relation of the periphery to global modernity. Oquendo thus turns the social logic of the periphery—the incongruity of rural and urban, the non-self-contemporaneity of Peruvian social reality—into the formal structure of his literary work. Nicholas Brown explains that “[i]n semiperipheral cultural production this kind of juxtaposition is more or less immediately given geopolitical content, since the texture of everyday life on the semipheriphery consists in the absolute contemporaneity of the residual and the emergent” (192-3). Along these lines, montage operates in *5 metros* not simply as an aesthetic principle, restricted to the province of art. Oquendo uses montage in *5 metros* to formally represent these juxtaposition, constructing a whole articulated on the basis of the non-self-identity of its elements. A whole composed by piecing together the city and the countryside.

Politics of the United Front: Piecing Together Coast and Sierra

Just as Oquendo de Amat makes the tension between city and countryside into the structuring principle of *5 metros*, refusing to turn this opposition into an unconditioned binary without relation, Mariátegui in his political writings seeks to acknowledge the apparent incommensurabilty of rural and urban while striving to reframe this contradiction, articulating the two terms on the basis not of their identity but their non-identity. Moreover, the insistence in montage on contingency suggests a political form that must be disarticulated from the attempt to represent a pre-existing national essence. The dialectical logic of montage, I argue, leads Mariátegui to embrace a united front politics, a provisional arrangement of heterogeneous social forces (urban proletariat and rural peasantry) that are not subsumed into a single entity, but rather remain independent within the organization. In this final section, I reconstruct Mariátegui's montage form of politics from his writings on the possibility of a Latin American political project, with an emphasis on his disagreement with Víctor Haya de la Torre, the founder of APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana).

As Oscar Terán suggests,[147] the deepest affinity between Gramsci and Mariátegui derives from their shared commitment to the idea of the united front during a moment in which this organizational strategy was frequently abandoned by their contemporaries.[148] Gramsci, for instance, concludes that the question of rural and urban in Italy raises the

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[147] "This adhesion to the united front—anachronistic for the program of the Comintern—had however a company as illustrious as marginal would become the figure of Gramsci within the same 'third period'" (Terán 106). The "third period" refers to a Stalinist period in the history of the Comintern during which Social Democrats were considered "social fascists." On Mariátegui and the united front, see also Flores Galindo.

[148] Despite the assumption that Gramsci outlined different political strategies for the West and the East—the war of position and the war of maneuver—Peter Thomas has shown that the united front was Gramsci's "fundamental orientation" (212), an internationalist perspective made possible by the unity of the capitalist state-form. See Thomas 197-241.

issue of "hegemony," the need for the proletariat to obtain "the consent of the broad peasant masses" (*Pre-Prison* 316). The need to obtain consent implies that the division between urban masses and rural peasantry remains, that it must be acknowledged, not ignored through the facile presumption of a common identity. City and countryside remain to an extent incommensurable perspectives, but their mutual inconsistency enables a hegemonic project of the united front. Similarly, Mariátegui, in his writings on regionalism and centralism, delineated the tensions internal to the coast and the sierra, seeing in this non-identity the possibility of an alliance of urban workers in Lima and indigenous peasants.

The insistence on internal divisions and on the mass-based united front played a crucial role in perhaps the defining political moment of 1920s Peru: the split between Mariátegui and Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre.[149] As one of the leaders of the University Reform movement in Peru, Haya de la Torre was partially responsible for opening university education to Lima's working-class population. But Haya de la Torre's continuing activism in the twenties made his relationship with the Leguía government increasingly strained, leading to his exile to Mexico in 1923. Shortly thereafter, Haya de la Torre founded APRA, the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance. Despite being exiled in Mexico, Haya de la Torre was incredibly successful at uniting the Peruvian Left, including Mariátegui and his companions, behind APRA's struggle against imperialism, for continental solidarity and economic nationalism. The direction of APRA, however, shifted dramatically in 1928 when Haya de la Torre announced his "Plan de México."

[149] In my opinion, the best discussions of Mariátegui's disagreement with Haya de la Torre are still the ones contained in Alberto Flores Galindo's *La agonía de Mariátegui*, chapter 4, and Oscar Terán's *Discutir Mariátegui*, chapter 5.

Without any broad discussion of this proposal, Haya de la Torre turned the alliance into a political-military party oriented toward political power, be it through the election of Haya de la Torre to president or by violently seizing power. Mariátegui saw these political goals and the lack of discussion as evidence of Haya de la Torre's *caudillismo*. Haya de la Torre responded to Mariátegui's criticisms and accused him of being an ineffective intellectual whose socialism was a foreign ideology without any organic connection to the reality of Latin America. Although he did not believe the timing was quite right, Mariátegui decided to found the Peruvian Socialist Party to counter what he saw as APRA's misguided political strategies.[150]

Mariátegui's peculiar position in this debate, caught between APRA and the Communist International, cannot be understood without recognizing his emphasis on a mass-based united front. In "Punto de vista anti-imperialista" (Anti-Imperialist Point of View), a paper written by Mariátegui and presented by Julio Portocarrero in 1929 at the First Latin American Communist Conference in Buenos Aires, Mariátegui clearly articulates his disagreements with APRA and his alternative proposals. The fundamental premise of APRA, Mariátegui explains, is its anti-imperial orientation. Insofar as it was defined by revolutionary nationalism and populism, APRA conceived itself as the party of a Latin American race, of the progressive national bourgeoisie and the masses. Despite Haya de la Torre's rejection of the Soviet Union, this conception of the party effectively entirely coincided with the Comintern's argument about the needs of the party in semi-

[150] Against the objections of the Communist International, Mariátegui preferred to call his party "socialist," as opposed to "communist," in order to avoid political persecution—he had been arrested in 1927 on grounds that he was a Soviet spy, even though he had no official links with the International at that time—and to make the party more adequate to a mass base in Peru. After Mariátegui's death, the party's name was quickly changed to the Peruvian Communist Party.

colonial nations, in situations in which bourgeois-liberal tasks supposedly had to be achieved before the struggle for socialism could begin. Mariátegui holds that the "economic status" of Latin American nations "undoubtedly is semicolonial," but, in contrast to both APRA and the Comintern, Mariátegui asserts that the political implications must be different because "the national bourgeoisie," in Peru at least, considers "imperialism as the best source of profits" (*Anthology* 265-6). That is, the national bourgeoisie, even in its weakness, should not be considered a reliable ally. Mariátegui begins, in other words, by drawing a division within the nation, the group that APRA falsely believes to be united in its opposition to imperialism. As a political proposal, anti-imperialism is misguided because it mystifies and displaces the contradictions within Latin American social structures into a purely external opponent: anti-imperialism "does not annul antagonisms between classes, nor does it suppress different class interests" (268). APRA's political and economic goals largely coincide with what became the dominant paradigm in Latin America in the mid-twentieth century. And it is perhaps no surprise that many of Peru's futurist poets were some of APRA's most fervent supporters, since, as Nicholas Brown argues, "peripheral vanguardism"—the attempt to overcome the limitations of the peripheral situation in the realm of art through a compensatory modernity—is structurally equivalent to "nationalist import substitution"—the attempt to develop domestic industry and thus avoid dependency—which "is the more or less spontaneous strategy of the anti-imperialist bourgeoisie" (186). Alternatively, Mariátegui makes a simple, yet profound, reversal of an APRA slogan: from "We are leftists (or socialists) because we are anti-imperialists" (*Anthology* 268) into "we are anti-imperialists because we are Marxists" (272). That is, the recognition of

internal antagonisms, not the antagonism towards an external enemy, constitutes the point of departure for a mass-based united front. And, insofar as it is a front, not a party, the united front does not claim that its constitutive components—urban masses and indigenous peasants—are identical. Instead, the direction of the party follows from the unfolding of this non-identity in the organizational structure. The political project, for Mariátegui, does not involve a putatively given national identity standing against external forces, but the piecing together of different forces—urban workers and indigenous peasants, Latin American and international masses—on the basis of a fundamental rift running throughout nations and the global contemporary scene.

Mariátegui also briefly addresses the possibility of a continental—that is, Latin American—cultural front in his response to the so-called "intellectual meridian debate." This debate ignited in 1927 when Guillermo de Torre, the Spanish avant-garde poet, published an article titled "Madrid, Intellectual Meridian of Spanish America" in *La Gaceta Literaria*. Minimizing any regional or cultural differences, de Torre emphasizes the continuity between Spain and Latin America, and on this basis, he proposes that Madrid could serve as the center of this cultural formation. To most of his Latin America contemporaries, this proposal amounted to little more than a pathetic attempt to reassert Spain's imperial legacy. Juan De Castro, for instance, observes that de Torre's article reflected "the implicit nostalgia for the colonial literary and cultural system" within "much of Spanish intelligentsia" (34). The contributors to the Argentine magazine *Martín Fierro*, despite being close to de Torre in terms of avant-garde poetry, playfully ridiculed the idea that Madrid could be their cultural north star and insisted on the need for the autonomy of Latin American culture. Mariátegui, in his article "La batalla de *Martín*

Fierro" (The Battle of *Martín Fierro*, 1927), points out the irony of claiming Madrid as the intellectual meridian when the proto-fascist Primo de Rivera had limited cultural freedom in Spain. Mariátegui admits that Madrid continues to be the center of Spanish-language publishing. It is, in other words, the literary market for Latin America and Spain. But this commercial role should not be confused with the leadership of the intellectual meridian. Against de Torre's insistence on cultural continuity, the sort of assumption that underlies Haya de la Torre's APRA, Mariátegui claims that "[o]ur peoples still lack the consistency necessary to agree on a single headquarters. Spanish America is still an *inorganic* thing. But the ideal of the new generation is precisely to give it unity" (*Temas* 117, my emphasis).[151] Latin America, like its individual nations, is an inorganic thing because it is marked by various internal divisions, not just between regions, between indigenous and Hispanic cultures, but also between city and country. Mariátegui goes on to suggest that Buenos Aires may play the role of intellectual meridian through and at the end of the struggle to give Spanish America unity. But Buenos Aires can only be considered a potential intellectual meridian because there is not yet a common identity that could recognize itself in this cultural center; this potential, accordingly, would depend on its role in articulating the contradictions of capitalist modernity in Latin America and joining elements on the basis of their negativity.

In the shifting discussion of coast and sierra, Lima and Buenos Aires, Mariátegui demonstrates the necessity of an international perspective when considering the rural/urban divide. There is an almost exact homology between Mariátegui's judgment on

[151] "Nuestros pueblos carecen aún de la vinculación necesaria para coincidir en una sola sede. Hispanoamérica es todavía una cosa inorgánica. Pero el ideal de la nueva generación es, precisamente, el de darle unidad."

the inconsistency of Peru, divided between Lima and the Andes, and his conclusion that "Spanish America is still an inorganic thing." The appeal of Buenos Aires thus derives from its potential role in mediating national and international perspectives. As we have seen, the national structure of consciousness in the periphery appears non-self-contemporaneous with respect to the modern, integrated nations of the center, so the periphery invariably invites comparison. Mariátegui, always aware of nuance, tracks these differences by moving from the global contemporary scene, to Peru, to Argentina. At all levels—the national, the continental and the global—he finds "inorganic things," unevenness, contradictions and asymmetrical relations. Chief among these is the relationship between city and countryside, which renders national formations inconsistent and cuts across nations. As Raymond Williams famously wrote, "one of the last models of 'city and country' is the system we now know as imperialism" (279). The relationship between the city and the country, in other words, is constitutive of the global capitalist order, but it is also what prevents it from achieving closure, from becoming a consistent, unitary whole. Moreover, as Mariátegui and Gramsci insist, it opens the possibility for the international perspective of a united front, which pieces together and articulates disparate elements without reducing them to a single essence and in such a way that their incommensurability is formally preserved and recast at the same time. In short, the logic of montage informs Mariátegui's provisional thoughts on a politics overdetermined by the urban/rural divide, on an internationally inflected politics in a peripheral nation where the nation itself is not given.

Chapter 2: *Estridentópolis*: Architecture and Revolution

After being exiled by the Peruvian government in 1923, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre relocated to Mexico on the invitation of José Vasconcelos, the Secretary of Education. Before his return to Lima in 1931, Haya de la Torre traveled extensively, but he always returned to Mexico, where he, along with other Peruvian exiles, founded APRA. In 1929, he visited Xalapa, "a remote city in Mexico," where he came across:

> a futurist poet who made verses about skyscrapers, enormous intense factories, gigantic blimps, underground trains, etc., but who knew nothing of that … I asked him why he did not write verses about the cows, the beauties of his village, the Indian, etc., and he told me that he was a revolutionary and needed to write about industrialism and describe the revolution just as he dreamed it … I knew other poets in larger villages who spend their time thinking about demolishing a rudimentary industrialism or a colonial capitalism while rejecting the word "anti-imperialism" for being unworthy of their fantastic conceptions of the incipient reality in which they live. From those poets writing verses or articles, poems or theorizations, may some saintly doctor of psychopathology deliver us. (qtd. in Flores, "Dialogues" 307)

Although he does not mention names, Haya de la Torre is almost certainly talking about Maples Arce, the founder of the avant-garde movement *estridentismo*.[152] The Peruvian politician concisely articulates what critics have identified as the principal tenets of *estridentismo*: its obsession with modern technology; its vehement rejection of nationalism and anti-imperialism in favor of a cosmopolitan attitude; its futurist orientation. Moreover, by underlining the gap between Maples Arce's futurist imagination and the picturesque reality of a peripheral Mexican town, Haya de la Torre echoes the dismissive attitude toward *estridentismo* that prevailed throughout the twentieth century. From APRA's anti-imperialist perspective, premised on rural imagery

[152] Tatiana Flores has suggested that this encounter with Haya de la Torre may explain why ¡30-30!, an off-shoot of *estridentismo*, was inordinately critical of the Peruvian politician.

and a Latin American identity, Maples Arce's project—with its interest in technology and the increasingly global character of modernity—had to appear as inauthentic and foreign.

And yet, if the terms of APRA's politics are put into question, *estridentismo* will likewise be cast in a different light. At roughly the same time as Haya de la Torre's visit to Xalapa, such a critique of APRA was articulated by the Cuban communist Julio Antonio Mella,[153] who was also living in Mexico in the late twenties. Mella's article, which was published in Mariátegui's journal *Amauta*, highlighted and parodied the romantic character of Haya de la Torre's politics by transposing APRA into ARPA, meaning "harp."[154] Mella thus suggests that Haya de la Torre's anti-imperialism, in evoking a humble rural lifestyle, entails a pseudo-concrete standpoint outside modernity. Since Aprista politics conceives modernity only in terms of concrete domination (imperial nations vs. semi-colonial ones), it implies that the concrete reality of the countryside and Latin American could be extracted from its domination by the abstract, quantitative dimension of global capitalist modernity. If modernity is reduced to its concrete aspects, Maples Arce appears indifferent to the periphery insofar as he insists on

[153] Mella was romantically involved with the photographer Tina Modotti, who frequently collaborated with the *estridentistas* in the mid-twenties. Modotti and Mella's relationship occurred during the late twenties, a few years after *estridentismo* disbanded, but Modotti likely spoke to Mella about her time working with these Mexican futurists.

[154] See Mella, "La lucha revolucionaria contra el imperialismo." By calling Haya de la Torre's politics "romantic," I intend to evoke Bolívar Echeverría's discussion of the "romantic ethos." For Echeverría, a "historical ethos" refers to "modes of engaging with the inherent contradiction between use value and value" (Sánchez Prado 46), that is, the social practices that naturalize or make bearable the tension between the qualitative aspects of social life and the abstract, destructive imperatives of self-valorizing value. The "romantic ethos" denies the antagonism of use-value and value, focusing on the concrete and qualitative aspects of social life as if they were left untouched by capitalism or could be realized through the abstract imperatives of accumulation. In Echeverría's own words, "en oposición al ethos realista, para el romántico esto ocurre no porque la 'forma natural' o concreta de la vida humana sea reducible a la forma capitalista, sino por el contrario, porque la forma capitalista es una configuración histórica especial, una manera peculiar de realización de la 'forma natural' o concreta" (Echeverría 184). Using Echeverría's terms, my argument in this chapter is that *estridentismo* began as a romantic movement, even though it slowly developed a more critical account of the underlying contradiction of capitalist modernity. Haya de la Torre's anti-imperialism, conversely, failed to make this shift, remaining fundamentally romantic.

a material reality that was still rare in Mexico—e.g., enormous factories, underground trains, blimps. Haya de la Torre, accordingly, dismissed *estridentismo*'s aim to "describe the revolution just as he dreamed it," to focus not on the actuality of the peripheral situation but on "the incipient reality in which they live." But, as I argue in this chapter, this process of abstraction does not lead the *estridentistas* away from reality; rather, they identify abstract forms that subsists in the concrete, the "incipient" dynamic that informs the material reality of Mexico, the contradictory and abstract form of domination that characterizes global modernity and generates the peculiarities of the peripheral situation.[155] The *estridentista* project does not entail the description of the empirical reality of Mexico; it articulates the abstract and contradictory principles that determine modernity. I thus argue that the *estridentistas* do not simply prefigure the concrete aspects of modernity—underground trains, skyscrapers, etc.—that would become increasingly prevalent in subsequent decades of the twentieth-century. If *estridentismo* remains of interest today, the reason lies less in its exaggerated revolutionary pronouncements and more in its attempt to work through the relationship in capitalist modernity between concrete, qualitative use-values and abstract, self-valorizing value, suggesting that these forms of social reproduction are antagonistic and inextricable, a tension that the history of a metropolis like Mexico City demonstrates all too well.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Mexico City hardly resembled the peripheral metropolis it would be fifty years later. Before the Mexican Revolution, the city was still what José Luis Romero calls a "bourgeois city": a relatively stable, traditional space

[155] Marx similarly suggested in the *Grundrisse* that the concrete derives from abstraction. The concrete, he writes, "is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse"—that is, it is "a result, not … a point of departure" (101).

based on shared norms. But, as I will explain in more detail below, the modernization of the city took off rapidly, albeit unevenly, after the Revolution, and the urban population exploded as migration from the countryside increased unabated. Since colonial times, Mexico City was defined by contrasts, experienced most palpably in the superimposition of colonial structures over indigenous ruins. The city's constitutive clashes intensified in the twentieth century as these colonial structures found themselves abutting construction sites for modern buildings, often unearthing Aztec fragments in the process. Mexico City was, in other words, a dramatic montage of old and new. The *estridentistas* embraced the city over the countryside, but they paid little attention to these picturesque contrasts. They imagined a global metropolis that was a refraction, more than an empirical reflection, of Mexico City. And by formally constructing this social space, the *estridentistas* palpably articulate the abstract, contradictory dynamic at the heart of capitalist modernity. The *estridentista* city—what they called *Estridentópolis*—is defined not by this contrast of old and new, but by a montage that derives from the contradictions intrinsic to modernity: concrete use-values that satisfy human needs vs. the runaway self-expansion of abstract value, or capital. And these contradictions, more than the tension between old and new, have driven the transformation of Mexico City into a chaotic peripheral metropolis, have generated the intractable, catastrophic problems it now incessantly confronts.

This chapter discusses the *estridentista* conception of modernity and the city by focusing on its architectural imagination—that is, the imaginary construction of functional social space. Although the *estridentistas* were not practicing architects, their avant-garde project consistently invoked images of modern constructions and principles

that were consistent with functionalist architecture. Luis Carranza argues that in post-Revolution Mexico "the project of architecture was taken up by a large non-architectural component of cultural producers," most notably the *estridentistas*, artists who were "searching for the means to influence the masses" (4). Dissatisfied with self-contained aestheticism and academicism, the *estridentistas* found in architecture the model for an art that not only engaged with social life but also decisively shaped it. But if architecture outlined the possibility of realizing the avant-garde project of fusing art and life, it also dramatically exemplified that art could neither harness modernity for its own ends nor extricate itself from its contradictions. The trajectory of the functionalist architect Juan O'Gorman is particularly instructive in this regard. After building houses and schools inspired by Le Corbusier, O'Gorman became dissatisfied with functionalism because, in the context of post-revolution Mexico, it ceased to be an architecture oriented to social needs and became a means for an entirely different end, namely, the expansion of profit.[156] Theodor Adorno, in a discussion of functionalism, also grasped the nature of this contradiction. It is no accident, he explained, that modern architects only produced "a small portion of their work," since "the same society which developed human productive energies to unimaginable proportions has chained them to conditions of production

[156] Architecture presents a sort of limit case in the question of aesthetic autonomy. Nicholas Brown has argued in recent years that although we are justifiably concerned with labor and production in capitalism, commodification in art is primarily a problem of the market. "The real subsumption of the work of art under capital," Brown writes, is an "illusion well-grounded in appearances" in the sense that artistic labor is not really subsumed: that is, industrially reorganized to produce relative surplus value. In terms of art, the problem with exchange and markets is the "subtraction of normativity," the replacement of aesthetic judgments with preferences ("What We Worry About When We Worry About Commodification"). For Brown, in order to assert its autonomy, the artwork must become an end in itself, effectively negating its immediate usefulness as a means to an end outside itself. It is only in doing this that the artwork demands normative judgments. But, as Adolph Loos argued, purpose is precisely the medium of architecture. Since architecture, as Adorno explains, "is in fact both autonomous and purpose-oriented, it cannot simply negate men as they are. And yet it must do precisely that if it is to remain autonomous" (14). Paradoxically, Juan O'Gorman's refusal of the aesthetic value of architecture in favor of function and human needs may be the basis of its autonomy, that is, of its universal, normative force.

imposed upon them" (14). Modern architecture thus illustrates what Bolívar Echeverría calls "the basic absurdity of modern life," that is, that "human beings can only produce and consume goods, create and enjoy wealth, that is, only are capable of reproducing themselves, to the extent to which the process of production and consumption of goods serves as the basis of a different process that is superimposed on it, which Marx calls the 'valorization of value' or 'capital accumulation'" (597).[157] In this chapter I will compare *estridentismo* and Juan O'Gorman not only to highlight the architectural concerns of the former, but also because O'Gorman's commitment to and rejection of functionalism clarifies how *estridentismo*, in simultaneously celebrating and critiquing modernity, works through qualitative forms of material wealth in modernity and their subordination to an alienated social process.

In the next section, I will trace the history of Mexico City in the revolution, with its tension between urban and rural groups, and I will review the role the nation's capital played in constructing the modern nation in the early decades of the twentieth-century. The challenges facing this peripheral metropolis will be illustrated through the debate between neo-colonial and functional architecture in the post-revolution moment. I will then shift to a reading of the manifestos to underline the tension in *estridentismo*'s dual commitment to art as an aesthetic end in itself and as a means to further the Mexican Revolution. This contradictory project manifests itself in Manuel Maples Arce's *Andamios interiores* (1922). In this book of poetry, Maples Arce articulates a form of montage based not on an empirical description of the city, but, on the one hand, on the

[157] "El absurdo básico de la vida moderna está en que los seres humanos sólo pueden producir y consumir bienes, crear riqueza y gozarla o disfrutarla, es decir, sólo están en capacidad de autorreproducirse, en la medida en que el proceso de producción y consumo de sus bienes sirve de soporte a otro proceso diferente que se le sobrepone y al que Marx denomina 'proceso de valorización' o 'acumulación de capital.'"

permeability of interior and exterior spaces and, on the other, on the forms of abstraction in the city that enable a cosmopolitan attitude and what Maples Arce calls poetic "equivalence." By insisting on abstraction and modern technology, the *estridentista* architectural imagination departs sharply from the neo-colonial architecture that was dominant in the twenties, and it anticipates the functionalism that would coalesce in the late twenties and early thirties. This functionalism culminates—and collapses—in the work of Juan O'Gorman. Functionalism, for O'Gorman, was suited to addressing the social needs for housing and education in post-revolution Mexico because it embodied the principle "maximum efficiency for minimum effort,"[158] but he ultimately became dissatisfied with its transformation into an automatic process subordinated to the search for profit, to the abstract self-expansion of capitalism. Seen retrospectively through the fate of O'Gorman's functionalism, Maples Arce's *Urbe*: *Super-poema bolchevique en 5 cantos* (1925) appears to be concerned with the alienating, destructive direction of modernity and the metropolis as they become an abstract form of social domination devoid of human features, a quasi-automatic process that cannot be made to serve social needs. In *Urbe*, Maples Arce ends up presenting a critical account of the metropolis that resonates with the work of John Dos Passos, who, not incidentally, translated *Urbe* in the late twenties. I conclude the chapter by reflecting on how *Estridentópolis*, the *estridentistas'* plans to construct an avant-garde city, constitutes an attempt to overcome the impasses of the *estridentista* conception of urban modernity by pushing its

[158] O'Gorman used a number of variations on this formulation: effort, cost, and labor. I will use "maximum efficiency for minimum effort" because it seems to be the one most frequently used by O'Gorman and because I think it comes closest to encompassing the other two, but O'Gorman's dissatisfaction with functionalism should already be clear in the formula, namely how minimum cost and minimum labor would be compatible with what Marx calls the increasing organic composition of capital—that is, the increasing proportion of constant capital (machinery, technology, etc.) to variable capital (living labor).

architectural imagination to its maximum point of concretion, but this project ultimately entails a definite withdrawal from the present and what might be useful in that moment. In short, this chapter argues that *estridentismo* begins by wholeheartedly affirming modernity, believing that the dynamism of modernity could be harnessed to propel the Mexican Revolution forward, to satisfy human needs, and to cultivate a cosmopolitan humanity. In effect, the *estridentistas* imagined that you could have modernity without capitalism. But it is precisely this affirmation of modernity that led the *estridentistas* to grasp capitalism's internal contradictions and historical dynamic. The torsions of the *estridentista* architectural imagination thereby exhibit how capitalist modernity constantly generates a potential to satisfy social needs at the same time that it subordinates this potential to the abstract imperatives of valorization.

Mexico City and the Revolution

"Whereas Mexico City in 1920," writes Rubén Gallo, "was a sleepy town pockmarked by the repeated assaults of rifle-wielding caudillos, by 1940 it had become a bustling metropolis full of contrasts" (*Mexican Modernity* 22). By 1920, the insurrections of the Mexican Revolution had come to an end, and president Álvaro Obregón, who ruled from 1920 to 1924, began to stabilize the post-revolution government and reconstruct the country, thereby setting the terms for the future of the nation and capital. In the twenties, modernization and industrialization accelerated, intensifying the contrasts between technologies and capitalist social relations, on the one hand, and colonial physical and social structures, on the other hand. The modernity of the city, in other words, derived from a montage-like juxtaposition of new and old. The "display of modernity" in Mexico

City was "metonymic," whereas that of a city like Buenos Aires, as we will see in the next chapter, was "synecdochal" (Foster 140). If the urban center of Buenos Aires appeared to demonstrate in the early twentieth century a "pure modernity" because of the relative absence of historical remnants, the modernization of Mexico City made itself palpable through its juxtaposition with colonial structures and indigenous ruins. Moreover, the revolution intensified the metonymic character of Mexican society in these years by highlighting what Horacio Legrás calls the "precedence" of "elements of contiguity … over previous forms of relationship based on hierarchies" (3). With these montage-like contrasts and forms of contiguity, Mexico City constituted a peripheral metropolis that internalizes the unevenness of modernity, and although these contrasts of old and new do not define *estridentista* montage, this dissonance was, as I will show in this section, the necessary condition of the debates over neo-colonial and functionalist architecture and the emergence of *estridentismo*'s futurist project.

The events of the Mexican Revolution contributed to Mexico City becoming a modern metropolis, but they also put that modernity at odds with itself. The population of the city grew rapidly from 541,516 in 1900 to 729,153 in 1910, and then to nearly one million in 1921 (Davis 26).[159] Moreover, in the twenties, "radiotelegraphy was introduced in the communications system, as well as the first direct commercial flights in transportation, the use of the telephone and cinema became generalized, and the automobile displaced the horse-drawn carriages and mule-driven trams, bringing the first traffic jams to Mexico City" (Aguilar Camín and Meyer 77). But this population growth, a defining feature of any metropolis, was not exactly a function of the industrial

[159] The numbers vary depending on how the city is defined. Olsen says that the population increased from 471,066 in 1910 to 615,367 in 1921 (4).

foundations of the city; rather, it was largely due to the migration of rural populations to the city in order to escape fighting in the countryside in the 1910s. And since the territorial size of the city remained the same in this decade, population density shot upward, creating severe housing problems.[160] The portion of workers in agricultural production dropped and the urban population increased, but these developments were not straightforward effects of modernization. "Mexico was still" living and dying, Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo write, "according to the patterns of a predominantly rural society" (73). This is what made Mexico City a peripheral metropolis. It was a rapidly expanding, increasingly technological social space, but these transformations were largely a result of what had been happening in the countryside.

Indeed, the Mexican Revolution was principally a rural phenomenon. It started in the countryside in 1910 when the landowner Francisco Madero called for a rebellion against the dictator Porfirio Díaz. Rather than radiate out from the city, the revolution, as the historian Alan Knight writes, "originated in the provinces, established itself in the countryside, and after years of a costly war was finally able to conquer an alien and sullen capital" (2).[161] The pivotal, but by no means definitive, moment thus came in 1914, when the peasant forces of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa, coming from Morelos and Chihuaha respectively, took control of Mexico City. Zapata and Villa would not stay in the capital, and would soon be replaced (or murdered) by other figures in the revolution, but when the fighting stopped and the dust settled, "political support in Mexico City

[160] "[D]ensity increased from 486.01 inhabitants per square kilometer in 1910 to 610.97 in 1921, principally in the shantytowns in the eastern and norther sections of the city" (Olsen 4).
[161] Insofar as this language suggests an invasion of alien territory, it represents the flipside of the language of internal colonialism. This concept was meant to demonstrate how relationships between regions within Mexico closely resembled the relationship of an empire and its colonies. Accordingly, the reversal of this relationship, in the Mexican Revolution, takes the form of an invasion, even though the city and country exist within the same nation.

proper" became "absolutely critical" to the project of constructing a post-revolution government (Davis 22).[162] This meant, as Diane Davis has shown in great detail, prioritizing the reconstruction of the city to address the scarcity of housing and transportation problems. Housing was a major problem because, as I mentioned above, the population of Mexico City jumped between 1910 and 1920 without a corresponding expansion of the city limits or an increase in construction projects. This situation put pressure on transportation services, and the *tranviarios* (trolley workers) were some of the most militant workers in the city, a fact that was not lost on Maples Arce, whose poems and manifestos are littered with references to trams, perhaps alluding to the revolutionary *tranviarios*. In effect, by prioritizing those issues common to inhabitants of the capital in order to shore up political support, "national political dynamics were now subordinated to local ones," namely the urban development of Mexico City (Davis 25). But if these political developments reflected an inequality with respect to the countryside and the peasantry, this inequality would also find its way into the city. The landlords who fled the countryside during the revolution settled into the newly established *colonias* west of the *centro histórico,* bought large plots of land in the city, and effectively became urban landlords. Accordingly, throughout the twenties, the "cityscape" came to display "the steady concentration of power in the hands of a ruling clique" (Olsen 30). That is, as the revolution passed into post-revolution, the city, to a certain extent, developed at the

[162] Indeed, although Carranza and Obregón were suspicious of the political sentiments of Mexico City's inhabitants, they relied on this urban base of support in their struggle against Villa and Zapata, the more radical, peasant-oriented segments of the revolution.

expense of the countryside, but it also internalized the antagonism of rural and urban that characterized the revolution.[163]

Just as Mexico City remained the center, albeit an internally divided one, of the political and economic structures of post-revolution Mexico, the capital also became the locus of different interpretations of the revolution and of the modern nation. Indeed, as many commentators have argued, the Mexican nation cannot be said to truly pre-exist the revolution. Instead, it is principally a byproduct of revolutionary struggles and subsequent attempts to construct an ideology based on indigenous, colonial and revolutionary motifs. The capital played a crucial role in this invention of nationhood. As Legrás writes, "Mexico City was asked to represent Mexico to the eyes of Mexico itself" (27). Although the revolution forcefully exhibited what Legrás calls the "extension" of Mexico, its immense variety of cultures and regions, meaning that it had to abandon "the centuries-old prejudice that Mexico City was all there was to Mexico" (31), the conviction remained that to speak of Mexico City was to speak of the nation. What the revolution meant for the nation, however, was far from simple. The revolution simultaneously challenged oligarchical control of the country and pursued modernization. These commitments overlap, but they were not always identical. "Mexico City's built environment indicates," according to Elizabeth Olsen, that "it was impossible to conduct both [projects] at once" (xv). In terms of the city and architecture, the debate over the direction or meaning of the revolution amounted to a question of continuity and

[163] The prevailing opinion has been that the inhabitants of Mexico City were strongly opposed to the revolution, especially the "barbaric horde" of peasants following Zapata and Villa. This is not entirely accurate, as Horacio Legrás has recently argued: "The portrait of a capital oblivious to the revolt and dismally beholden to its European linings is as colored by myth as the story retold so many times of Obregón's defacement of the city. Mexico City did not preserve its identity through the tumultuous years of revolutionary upheaval. It was both challenged and changed. It underwent an educational process out of which it emerged, by and large, a different city. As usual, purification was by fire" (32).

restoration or modernization, with the philosopher and Secretary of Education José Vasconcelos and neo-colonial architects on one side and functionalists on the other.

According to the neo-colonialists, the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz—with its oligarchical modernization, imitation of French styles and Haussmannian urbanization[164]—represented a departure from Mexican culture and national history. The revolution opened up the possibility of restoring an authentic Mexican culture by appropriating the colonial architecture of the *centro histórico*.[165] That is, the neo-colonial style—with its intricate ornamentation—was premised on conceiving "the revolution in opposition to the dangers of capitalist modernization" (Legrás 78). Moreover, this architectural style attenuated some of the uncertainty of the post-revolution period to the extent that it "was able to project order upon a society newly recovering from the destruction of civil war" (Olsen 6).[166] José Vasconcelos, in his philosophical and political work, insisted on neo-colonial architecture, along with the murals of Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, as an intrinsic element of the spiritual and aesthetic education of the nation. Vasconcelos "was consciously trying to restore the golden age of New Spain, a time when he felt that the moral and cultural values of Mexica had been at their highest point" (Méndez-Vigata 66). The fundamental ingredient of this golden age, for Vasconcelos, was the racial composition of colonial Mexico. The Mexican people, he argued constituted the "cosmic race," a synthesis of all existing races that was destined to

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[164] Paseo de la Reforma, for instance, was modeled on Haussmann's transformation of the Champs-Élysées.
[165] "It was well before the revolution, in the formative decades of the Porfiriato, that the colonial downtown of Mexico City appeared to the Mexican elite as an inheritance that they could neither refuse nor engage … How could this past be reconciled with the pulsating modernity that was also a defining trait of the emergent social order?" (Legrás 77).
[166] "The neo-Colonial would prove a reassuring message to those conservatives who feared the Revolution and the full imposition of the Constitution, as well as to those progressives who believed that the key to Mexico's future was a recovery of its past" (Olsen 7).

inaugurate a spiritual stage of civilization. Neo-colonial architecture, with its intricate combinations of indigenous motifs and Renaissance forms, embodied Vasconcelos's "syncretic notion of the people it was meant to serve" (Carranza 55). At the end of his essay *La raza cósmica* (1925), Vasconcelos explains how the SEP building (Secretaría de Educación Pública) articulated the link between his philosophical account of history and race and neo-colonial architecture:

> On the panels at the four corners of the first patio, I had them carve particular civilizations that have most to contribute to the formation of Latin America. Immediately below these four allegories, four stone statues should have been raised, representing the four great contemporary races: The white, the red, the black, and the yellow, to indicate that America is home to all and needs all of them. Finally, in the center, a monument should have been raised that in some way would symbolize the law of the three states: The material, the intellectual and the aesthetic. All this was to indicate that through the exercise of the triple law, we in America shall arrive, before any other part of the world, at the creation of a new race fashioned out of the treasures of all the previous ones: The final race, the cosmic race. (39-40)[167]

Indeed, in Vasconcelos's grand project, this neo-colonial architecture would make Mexico City into what he called "Universópolis," the metropolis of the Latin American continent. It was precisely because it evoked historical continuity, in opposition to modernity, that neo-colonial architecture could fulfill this function for Vasconcelos and others.

Functionalism, conversely, entailed a radical rupture with the colonial past. Whereas neo-colonial architecture evoked a national past, functionalism made its wager on technological innovations—like reinforced concrete—and global modernity.

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[167] Vasconcelos admits in this passage that in the finished building the Renaissance forms outweighed the indigenous elements. This was most likely because the neo-colonial style was highly decorative and thus prohibitively expensive for a nation recovering from war. For a detailed discussion of the SEP building and how it expressed Vasconcelos's philosophy, see Carranza, chapter 2.

Moreover, the prohibitive cost of neo-colonial style and its ornamentation was ill-equipped to address social needs in a peripheral nation struggling to recover from a decade of civil war. In the early thirties, Narciso Bassols became the new head of the Secretary of Education, and his tenure entailed a decisive shift towards secular, socialist education and functionalism in architecture. Beyond the issue of cost, neo-colonial architecture was incompatible with these goals.[168] The insistence on modernization and functionalism, however, struck many as inauthentic since its abstract, geometric, international forms appeared indifferent to Mexican culture. When confronted with indigenous ruins or the colonial architecture of the *centro histórico*, functionalism would have seemingly responded that "little of this past should be preserved and that it was the duty of the revolution to break with tradition in favor of new concepts and especially new materials" (Legrás 77-78).[169] For functionalists like Juan O'Gorman, the colonial past and cultural identity mattered little when compared to the needs of the masses. And yet, as I will discuss in more detail below, the development of functionalist architecture became inseparable from a shift away from public funding and towards the investment of private capital. Although it seemed to be the most rational solution to the nation's needs for housing and education, functionalism turned into a tool for capital accumulation because of its ability to increase productivity. In the wake of the revolution, in other words, Mexico City found itself torn—at the level of politics, cultural memory and

[168] Bassols must have concluded that the "colonial cloister was not a suitable structure to house the socialist classroom" (Olsen 85).

[169] According to Legrás, this impasse between functionalism and neo-colonialism would only be overcome in the work of Mario Pani, the first Mexican architect who built a housing complex in the style of Le Corbusier and oversaw the architecture of Ciudad Universitaria, which combines the international style and indigenous motifs.

architecture—between a persistent colonial past and the abstract imperatives of capitalist modernity.

The unevenness of Mexico City's modernity, its peripheral character, seemingly distinguishes *estridentismo* from Futurism and other avant-garde movements in Europe.[170] But this impression rests on a false presupposition, since Futurism paradoxically thrived precisely at the peripheries of modernity, namely in Italy and Russia. As early as 1924, in his book *Literature and Revolution*, Leon Trotsky recognized that underdeveloped economic conditions were a constitutive, not accidental, fact about Futurism insofar as "the backward countries … reflected in their ideology the achievements of the advanced countries more brilliantly and strongly" (112). The unevenness of global modernity, the distance separating the metropolis and the periphery, thus led not to attenuated forms of modernism, but rather to more extreme versions. As Marjorie Perloff has indicated, "Futurism found [its] roots in economically backward countries that were experiencing rapid industrialization—the faith in dynamism and national expansion associated with capitalism in its early phase" (36). Of course, similar conditions did not give rise to futurist movements in other parts of Latin America. Few Latin American artists saw rapid industrialization and urbanization with as much enthusiasm as the *estridentistas*. The Mexican Revolution apparently occasioned a distinct conjuncture in which modernization appeared as a phenomenon that could be harnessed for human needs by those visionaries capable of articulating futurist projects.[171]

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[170] On the affinities of *estridentismo* with Italian and Russian Futurism, see Gallo, "Arce, Marinetti and Khlebnikov."

[171] José Carlos Mariátegui, reflecting on the different trajectories of Italian and Russian Futurism, emphasized the crucial dependence of the futurist imaginary on political conditions, a dynamic summed up,

Poetic Equivalence, Montage and Abstract Space

In *El movimiento estridentista* (The Stridentist Movement),[172] the poet Germán List Arzubide polemically describes the situation of the Mexican writer in the early 1920s, in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution:

> Having triumphed, the *maderista* revolution did not find in writers, journalists and poets anything but severe opposition, aggressive at certain moments and at other moments disdainful. All of these writers spent thirty years kneeling to the dictatorship, and it pained them that the people were the ones who came to teach them the proud posture of man. (5)[173]

In List Arzubide's account, the Revolution struggled for and defended the human values that writers were supposed to represent. Writers were ashamed that they had been rendered obsolete by the masses, and, as a result, they turned against the Revolution. List Arzubide exaggerates the extent to which the literary establishment resentfully opposed the struggles of the masses and peasantry, but he grasps the urgency that he and other artists felt to develop an avant-garde movement that would fulfill the goals of the Revolution in the cultural and artistic terrain. For *estridentismo*, this project entail not attention to indigenous culture, which was central to the work of the muralists, or to the

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for Mariátegui, in the anecdote that Massimo Bontempelli felt like a communist in 1920, but a fascist in 1923. "Los futuristas rusos se han adherido al comunismo: los futuristas italianos se han adherido al fascismo. ¿Se quiere mejor demostración histórica de que los artistas no pueden sustraerse a la gravitación política? Massimo Bontempelli dice que en 1920 se sintió casi comunista y en 1923, el año de la marcha a Roma, se sintió casi fascista. Ahora parece fascista del todo. Muchos se han burlado de Bontempelli por esta confesión. Yo lo defiendo: lo encuentro sincero. El alma vacía del pobre Bontempelli tenia que adoptar y aceptar el Mito que colocó en su ara Mussolini. (Los vanguardistas italianos están convencidos de que el fascismo es la Revolución)" (Mariátegui, *El artista y la época* 19-20).

[172] List Arzubide wrote two versions of *El movimiento estridentista*. The first was published in 1926, shortly before the dissolution of the avant-garde movement. The second version was published in 1967. I am referring here to the second, less experimental and more retrospective, version.

[173] "Triunfante la revolución maderista no halló en los escritores, periodistas y poetas, sino una ruda oposición en ciertos momentos agresiva y en otros desdeñosa. Los escritores tenían, todos, treinta años de estar en cuclillas ante la dictadura y les dolía que el pueblo les viniera a enseñar la postura altiva de los hombres."

conditions of the rural peasantry—land reform being a central objective of the Revolution, culminating in Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution—but an insistence on the metropolis and modernity, on technologies of transportation, communication and urban architecture. By articulating a radically modernist vision, *estridentismo* sought to extend the Mexican Revolution into the domains of art and culture. This commitment manifested itself in "a public art, rooted in the daily life of the metropolis with its factories and workers, cars and trolleys, cinemas, jazz bands and flappers, shop windows and electric signs, carnivals and demonstrations, telegraph wires, concrete and steel" (Rashkin 22). And yet, *estridentismo* equally involved "a linguistically complex, cosmopolitan intellectualism in dialogue with an international avant-garde, but unlikely to engage a mass audience" (Rashkin 22). That is, the *estridentista* project was constituted by a tension between, on the one hand, the avant-garde impulse to fuse art and life,[174] to turn art into a means for achieving political ends, and, on the other hand, the desire to insist on the autonomy of art as an end in itself. This tension derived from the peculiarities of Mexico's peripheral situation. Although uneven development was the common point of departure for futurist movements, the academic institutionalization of art did not exist to the same extent in Mexico as it did in Italy, for instance.[175] In order to articulate a

[174] It is easy to misinterpret this idea. Leaving aside some significant exceptions in the avant-gardes, the attempt to fuse art and life quite accurately anticipates the mainstays of post-WWII art. We can see this in Marjorie Perloff's clarification that "'Literature is a part of life!' meant in practice … (1) form should not call attention to itself; (2) the 'high' artwork should incorporate and come to terms with elements from 'low' culture—the newspaper headline, the popular song, the advertising poster; and (3) the making of art could become a collective enterprise, designed for what was perceived to be a newly collective audience" (37-38). All of these meanings could be said to describe the project of *estridentismo*.

[175] Carlos Monsiváis referenced this relative lack of an academy in his famously dismissive comments on the *estridentistas*: "*Estridentismo* was, in spite of itself, a parody of the avant-garde … Incoherent disciples of Marinetti and Tzara, their noisy, nonsensical, corny poems fought their battles on the terrain of simple typographic arrangements and never rose above the level of infantile entertainment … They accomplished a heroic mission: to represent the would-be *avant-garde* in a society that already looked upon the academy with mistrust … an infantile fuss over workers, machines, factories, telegraphs. At bottom, it was Edison, not Marinetti and Marx, who presided over this adolescent enthusiasm for the benefits of civilization" [El

radically modern, futurist avant-garde project, the *estridentistas* were thus compelled to treat art as both a means and an end, to rail against the academy in one moment and to argue that art was an absolute creation in another moment. This section, by examining the manifestos and Maples Arce's *Andamios interiores* (1922), will argue that this contradiction at the heart of *estridentismo* manifests itself in forms of montage that emphasize, on the one hand, functional social space through the permeability of interior and exterior, and, on the other hand, the abstract character of the city, which makes possible *estridentismo*'s cosmopolitan attitude and its radical notion of poetic equivalence.

Estridentismo began in December 1921 when Manuel Maples Arce posted his fiery manifesto "Actual No. 1" as a broadside in the streets of Mexico City.[176] Although Maples Arce was initially the lone member of the group, *estridentismo* quickly developed into a movement encompassing poets, painters and sculptors: Arqueles Vela, Germán List Arzubide, Fermín Revueltas, Ramón Alva de la Canal, Jean Charlot and Germán Cueto, among others. Although the *estridentistas* adopted a radically modernist and cosmopolitan stance, they were close to the muralists, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco, who attempted to develop an explicitly national art

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estridentismo era la parodia a pesar suyo de la vanguardia … Discípulos incoherentes de Marinetti y Tzara, sus poemas, ruidosos, disparatados, cursis, libraron sus combates en los terrenos del simple arreglo tipográfico y nunca superaron el nivel de entretenimiento infantil … Cumplían una misión heroica: representar la sedicente *avant-garde* en una sociedad que advertía con desconfianza aun a la academia … una alharaca infantil por los obreros, las máquinas, las fábricas, los telégrafos. En el fondo, Edison y no Marx y Marinetti, presidía este entusiasmo adolescente por los beneficios de la civilización] (169-173). Monsiváis argues, in other words, that in the absence of the academic institutionalization of art, the very *raison d'etre* of the avant-gardes, *estridentismo* necessarily devolved into a mere celebration of technological modernity.

[176] For the most complete history of *estridentismo*, see Schneider's *El estridentismo: Una literatura de la estrategia* (1970). See Rashkin and Flores, *Mexico's Revolutionary Avant-Gardes*, for more recent histories that have been able to draw on previously unpublished materials.

by drawing on indigenous, colonial and revolutionary imagery.[177] The *estridentistas* also collaborated frequently with the photographers Tina Modotti and Edward Weston during their time in Mexico. Despite the movement's focus on the metropolis, its avant-garde attitude echoed throughout the provinces, with a second manifesto published in Puebla. In 1925 Maples Arce became the secretary general for General Heriberto Jara, the governor of Veracruz, so the movement relocated to Xalapa and began to operate with provincial state patronage. But in the midst of internal conflicts over the direction of the Revolution, Jara was deposed in 1927 and *estridentismo* quickly dissipated.

Estridentismo, like other avant-garde movements, is largely defined by its relationship to a literary past. Its target was *modernismo*, the turn-of-the-century symbolist movement embodied in the poetry of Rubén Darío. List Arzubide articulates the project of *estridentismo* by opposing it to Darío's "literary politics," which are epitomized in the revealing phrase: "My wife is of the land, but my lover is from Paris" (10).[178] This phrase implies, as List Arzubide writes, that "of the land—that is, from his country—was the part dedicated to the vulgar, crude necessities of birthing children, caring for the house and closing oneself within four walls, while fantasy and ideality were dispatched to Europe, to divine Paris" (10).[179] The problem with Darío's literary politics, for List Arzubide, does not lie so much in privileging Europe over Latin America but in its categorical division between, on the one hand, the use-values and social needs of daily life—what Bolívar Echeverría calls "the natural form of social reproduction"—

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[177] The painters involved in *estridentismo* also painted muralists, but Vasconcelos almost exclusively selected Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros for his projects. The remaining muralists, in effect, were funneled into an alternative project: *estridentismo*.

[178] "Mi esposa es de la tierra, pero mi querida es de París."

[179] "De la tierra, es decir de su país, era la parte dedicada a los menesteres vulgares y rudos de parir hijos, cuidar la casa y encerrarse entre cuatro padres, mientras el ensueño, la idealidad, eran encargadas a Europa, al divino París."

and abstractions, aesthetic or social, on the other. *Estridentista* art, instead, turns to the metropolis because it is defined by the interpenetration or permeability of "crude necessities" and forms of abstraction, including revolutionary ideas, fantasies and the imperatives of capitalist value. To use architectural terminology, *estridentismo* seeks to eliminate the ornamental, superfluous elements of *modernismo*. The poetry, as I will show below, often explicitly stages a process whereby the idealist, decorative tropes of *modernista* aesthetics are emptied and reinvested with revolutionary content tied to the city and urban struggles.

By posting the first manifesto as a broadside on the streets of Mexico City, Maples Arce sought to assimilate *estridentistismo* to the urban settings and its forms of writing. Moreover, the manifesto's polemical principles align the movement with a global reality rooted in the metropolis.[180] The manifesto, entitled "Actual No. 1," consists of fourteen points, a large photograph of Maples Arce and an "directory of the avant-garde" of over two hundred, frequently misspelled, names of Latin American and European artists. In addition to the title, Maples Arce puts in large, bold letters "Comprimido Estridentista" [Stridentist Pill], suggesting, in the words of Tatiana Flores, that the manifesto constitutes "the tonic for curing the ills of Mexican culture" (*Revolutionary* 17). *Estridentismo*, in other words, involves a belligerent attack on the literary and political establishment in Mexico, presenting itself as a program for cultural renovation. For instance, one of the manifesto's first lines, "MUERA EL CURA

[180] Rashkin provides an excellent distillation of the manifesto's key points: "*Truth is subjective; meaning is unstable and depends on context. The artist creates his own truths and meanings*"; "*Twentieth-century life is the proper subject of twentieth-century art*"; "*Globalization is a reality that art must confront*"; "*Stridentism is the culmination of previous vanguards*"; "*The bankrupt cultural establishment can and must be overthrown; the revolution is imminent*" (25-29).

HIDALGO" [Death to Father Hidalgo], takes aim at the father of the Mexican Independence; and, shortly thereafter, Maples Arce writes, "¡Chopin a la silla eléctrica!" [Chopin to the electric chair!], a slogan that he jokingly claims to have trademarked ("Actual No. 1" 43). "Actual No. 1," in other words, evokes a critical attitude towards figures of the past, be they heroes of national history or classical, harmonious music. The manifesto goes on to delineate its affinities with Italian Futurism by invoking Marinetti's famous statement, "a roaring automobile … is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace" ("Founding and Manifesto" 51), and proclaiming his "decisive passion for typewriters and [his] effusive love for the literature of advertisements" ("Actual No. 1" 42).[181] Like the Futurists, Maples Arce celebrates velocity and modern technologies of communication, architecture and transportation, including steel bridges, factories, ocean liners and trains.[182] Section VI of the manifesto recalls Marinetti's description of a speeding automobile and bicycle crash when Maples Arce writes, "with half a glass of gasoline, we literally gulped down Avenida Juárez" (44).[183] Writing telegraphically, Maples Arce records advertisements and billboards on the street, like "Montezuma de Orizaba is the best beer in Mexico" (44).[184] But the manifesto also marks a departure from Futurism when Maples Arce writes, "No retrospection. No futurism. The whole

[181] "Mi apasionamiento decisivo por las máquinas de escribir, y mi amor efusivísimo por la literatura de los avisos económicos."
[182] In this way, "Actual No. 1" resembles David Alfaro Siqueiros's "Tres llamamientos de orientación Actual a los pintores y escultores de la nueva generación americana," which was published shortly before "Actual No. 1." Like Maples Arce, Siquieros calls for us to "*live our marvelous dynamic age!* Let us love modern machinery […], the life of our cities under construction, the sober and practical *engineering* of our modern buildings, striped of architectural complexities (immense bulks of steel and cement set into the ground)" (qtd. in Oles 273). But, as Tatiana Flores makes clear, Maples Arce and Siquieros depart over the role of indigenous culture and the destructive or constructive nature of art (39-47).
[183] *"En medio vaso de gasolina, nos hemos tragado literalmente la avenida Juárez, 80 caballos."*
[184] "Montezuma de Orizaba es la mejor cerveza en México, fumen cigarros del Buen Tono, S. A., etcétera, etcétera."

world, there, quiet, marvelously illuminated in the stupendous vertex of the present minute … Let's make presentism" (46).[185] In order for art to genuinely engage with reality, it must eschew futurist fantasies in favor of the present. The insistence on the present, as opposed to the past and future, also resonates with *estridentismo*'s insistence on a peculiar form of simultaneity. Maples Arce quotes a line from Blaise Cendrars's "Profound Today" that, as we will see below, will be crucial for *estridentista* poetics: "Ideas often get derailed; they are never continuous and successive, but simultaneous and intermittent" (44). Furthermore, simultaneity seems to acquire a global dimension in "Actual No. 1." Maples Arce emphatically rejects nationalist projects focused on the past in favor of a cosmopolitan attitude toward international reality; "Let's become cosmopolitan" (45).[186] This cosmopolitanism, I will show in more detail below, is intrinsically related to the metropolis. The abstract character of the metropolis constitutes the privileged space from which the *estridentistas* seek to participate in global modernity and grasp its intermittent character, that is, its contradictions.

Maples Arce enacts these aesthetic principles and the commitment to the metropolis in *Andamios interiores: Poemas radiográficos* (Interior Scaffolding: X-Ray Poems), a book of poetry published the following year in 1922. An early reviewer of the book, glimpsing its title, mistook it for "a book devoted to the analysis of construction materials" (Schneider 48). As this anecdote suggests, Maples Arce selects not a title that evokes romantic figures, as was common in *modernista* poetry, but rather one that links

[185] "Nada de retrospección. Nada de futurismo. Todo el mundo, allí, quieto, iluminado maravillosamente en el vértice estupendo del minuto presente; atalayado en el prodigio de su emoción inconfundible y única y sensorialmente electrolizado en el 'yo' superatista, vertical sobre el instante meridiano, siempre el mismo y renovado siempre. Hagamos actualismo."
[186] "Cosmopoliticémonos."

poetry directly to prosaic reality, to functional materials. In this way, Maples Arce indicates the importance of the architectural imagination for *estridentismo*, and the poems, accordingly, stage the construction of urban space.[187] The title, for instance, alludes to Marinetti's celebration of scaffolding in "Electrical War," a section of *Le Futurisme* (1911), in which he writes that his famous Samothrace line, with its focus on speed, should be supplemented with architectural construction: "Nothing is more beautiful than the scaffolding of a house under construction" (*Le Futurisme* 99, translation modified).[188] For Marinetti, scaffolding—a temporary, functional structure—represents a dynamic, unfinished city that is constantly and actively transformed, torn down and rebuilt. Consistent with the attempt to fuse art and life, and with functionalist architecture, Marinetti holds that modernity "has no need of royal palaces" and he imagines an architecture and aesthetic "directly responsive to utility" (98). As numerous architectural projects in Mexico City were beginning in the twenties, in the wake of the Mexican Revolution, Maples Arce similarly envisioned the construction of a city dictated not by outdated ornamental forms and idealist aesthetics, but by a revolutionary politics of useful social space. *Andamios interiores*, in other words, inaugurates "a poetry connected to the everyday life of the city under construction, that is, in the throes of modernization" (Rashkin 43). As we will see below, the poems themselves becomes construction sites in which the symbolist images are torn down, the debris being used to

[187] Rashkin suggests that "scaffolding" could also be a reference to the Mexican muralist painters, who used scaffolds to work on their massive murals around Mexico City (43).
[188] In the translation included in the Futurism anthology, "steel frame" is used instead of "scaffolding." Christine Poggi, one of the editors of the anthology, uses "scaffolding" in her book *Inventing Futurism* (69). Poggi elaborates on this passage: "Building the modern city implied forging its new inhabitants as well; their psychic and corporeal identity would be capable of constant transformation, always exemplifying the process of becoming as a form of autogenesis. Scaffolding, a metaphor of the inner will to power, would drive the forces of material self-fashioning" (70).

construct an urban social space whose figures are self-referential, not suggesting transcendent ideals, as in *modernismo*, but staging a back-and-forth between built space and the revolutionary city dwellers.

The book's subtitle, *Poemas radiográficos* (X-Ray Poems), contains another allusion to Italian Futurism, namely its vision of the permeability of interior and exterior, subject and object. Umberto Boccioni argues in his technical manifesto that Futurist painting must abandon "the opacity of bodies" and produce works that "yield results analogous of those X-rays" ("Futurist Painting" 65). The X-ray, in other words, negates the appearance of a hermetically sealed body, offering instead an image of corporeal permeability. In Boccioni's "The City Rises," for instance, human subjects are "built of layered flecks of color that seem partly to 'disaggregate' under streams of radiant light," making the figures blend—albeit unevenly, in its *impasto* manner—into the background (Poggi 106). The X-ray thus models a conception of social space in which interior and exterior are superimposed, not separated by an absolute rift. By drawing on Boccioni's link between the X-ray and social space, Maples Arce's poetry seeks "the poet's subjectivity merging with the objective world around him" (Rashkin 44). In this way, the figure of the X-ray also grasps a central concern of modernist architecture, namely its construction of interpenetrating spaces. Siegfried Gideon, for instance, made the Eiffel Tower into a touchstone for the modern architectural tradition because of the way interior and exterior spaces pass into one another. Modernist architecture thus foregrounds what Gideon calls *Durchdringung* (interpenetration), the "capacity to interrelate different aspects of space with one another" (Heynen 33). Interpenetration thus implies that spaces are no longer distinct but juxtaposed and overlapped in the form of montage. Scaffolding

and the X-ray are, in other words, architectural figures of a modern city, the former implying temporary, non-ornamental structures responsive to social needs, the latter representing a permeable social space in which interior and exterior, urban subject and built environment, are not alienated from one another but mutually responsive.

In *Andamios interiores*, Maples Arce articulates this architectural imagination by undoing the romantic conception of the contemplative urban subject. "Prisma," the first poem of the collection, stages this shift away from the *modernista* conception of the city as a decorative, aestheticized landscape, and toward the revolutionary metropolis, and the poem links this social space to the prism.[189] As an early reviewer explained, the prism entails a departure from photographic realism since the image is not simply indexical; rather, the object "reaches the glass receptor by means of a combination of concave and convex mirrors," and the poet, as a result, "must retrace the uneven line" from object to image (qtd. in Schneider 53).[190] The effect of this prismatic form is "a cubist ordering of reality" (Schneider 46) in which space is disarticulated and the obsolete figures of *modernismo* are preserved, denied their ability to evoke harmony, and juxtaposed with modern images of a revolutionary city. The first stanza of "Prisma," for instance, places the poetic voice "in an impasse, in the middle of the moment, / equidistant from the shipwrecked cry of a star" (*Andamios* 15),[191] constructing an ethereal, solitary space far

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[189] Jorge Luis Borges and the *ultraísta* poets also invoked the prism as a way of thinking about their avant-garde poetics.

[190] "El procedimiento que sigue Manuel Maples Arce … es un procedimiento que requiere una constante gimnasia mental porque él no toma la imagen como la cámara fotográfica, en línea directa, sino que el objetivo llega al cristal receptor, podría decirse, mediante una combinación de espejos cóncavos y convexos: cuando los espejos han modificado la imagen, marcando poderosamente los rasgos característicos, él la traslada al lienzo, por sus temas no se puede ir en línea recta; debe desandarse la línea quebrada que él siguió sobre los cristales reflectores."

[191] "Yo soy un punto muerto en medio de la hora, / equidistante al grito náufrago de una estrella." "Punto muerto" also suggests neutrality, when a car is in "neutral" (el punto muerto) instead of a specific gear. The

removed from the chaotic ground. The second stanza abruptly changes direction and announces "The insurrectionary city of illuminated signs," which "floats in the almanacs" and where "a trolley loses blood in the flattened street" (15).[192] This stanza establishes a counterpoint at almost every stage: detachment and neutrality (impasse, middle) are replaced by a radical taking-of-sides (insurrectionary); the muted sounds of empty space by eye-catching advertisements; frozen time by the calendar; solitude by crowds exiting a trolley. "Prisma" continues to switch back and forth between these planes—the space of romantic poetry and the modern metropolis—until the tension between the two is decidedly resolved in favor of the latter: "Locomotives, screams, / arsenals, telegraphs. / Love and life / are syndicalist today, / and everything expands in concentric circles" (16).[193] In saying that love and life are "syndicalist," Maples Arce alludes to another critique of Darío's symbolism. Whereas in *modernista* poetry love and life have a decidedly contemplative character, relegated to the ideal realm of harmony, syndicalism has an almost fetishized conception of direct, unmediated activity.[194] He thereby implies that "love and life" no longer stand opposed to "crude necessities"; rather, they have been incorporated, via the activity of revolutionary city dwellers into the metropolis. Maples Arce, therefore, does not dispense with the concerns and figures of romantic poetry;

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point, I believe, is that the poet, so far removed from the struggles taking place on the ground, can avoid taking a position.

[192] "La ciudad insurrecta de anuncios luminosos / flota en los almanaques, / y allá de tarde en tarde, por la calle planchada se desangra un eléctrico." The adjective "planchado" can also be used to refer to feeling depressed, but I think the flatness of the street is what is crucial here insofar as it contrasts with the verticality implied in the previous stanza.

[193] "Locomotoras, gritos, / arsenales, telégrafos. / El amor y la vida / son hoy sindicalistas, / y todo se dilata en círculos concéntricos."

[194] Syndicalists, like George Sorel, resembled anarchists insofar as they rejected any state or parliamentary activity in favor of a loose federation of trade unions. Their theory also has strong voluntarist tendencies, seen in the call for a general strike without any analysis of the conditions that would make such a strike possible or effective. The syndicalists believed, in other words, that the revolution was simply a matter of subjective will.

rather, he repositions these figures, lowering them from the ethereal heights in which they have an ornamental character and placing them in the city, where they appear either outdated or are refunctioned into elements of "syndicalist" space of the modern city.

Estridentista poetics often evoke this sort of equivalence of high and low, art and life, and in so doing produce poetic images with a double character. In part, *estridentista* poetics draw on the dictates of Marinetti's "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" (1912) and his call to use infinitives verb and double nouns, to abolish adjectives and adverbs.[195] In effect, Marinetti envisions a montage poetry in which nouns are simply juxtaposed, eliminating the connective tissue of metaphors and the distance between object and image.[196] *Estridentista* poetry does not contain this sort of experimental syntax, but Maples Arce utilizes a similar sort of montage on the semantic, connotative level.[197] Maples Arce articulates this form of montage through the idea that the poetic image is defined by equivalence. On the one hand, equivalence refers to the *estridentista* emphasis on poetic subjectivity, on the image as the equivalent expression of the artist's

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[195] Ultraísmo also called for the abolition of adjectives and adverbs in order to reduce poetry to its essentials: metaphor. Rubén Gallo argues that despite the self-professed debt to Futurism "the revolutionary spirit" of Maples Arce's poetry "resides in its theme and not in its style or literary technique; it is perhaps worth noting that there is nothing revolutionary in Maples Arce's use of language, and no subversion of syntax or experimentation with typography" ("Maples Arce, Marinetti, Klebnikov" 315). In the twenties, a rival literary group, the *Contemporáneos*, made a similar criticism, pointing to his continued use of the alexandrine. What this criticism fails to grasp is the way traditional poetic figures and verse forms—like the alexandrine—are refunctioned in *estridentista* poetry.

[196] The idea of a double noun, as we will see, is especially relevant to *estridentista* literature. Marinetti explains: "**Every noun must have its double**, which is to say, every noun must be immediately followed by another noun, with no conjunction between them, to which it is related by analogy … Just as aerial speed has multiplied our experience of the world, perception by analogy is becoming more natural for man. It is imperative to suppress words such as *like*, *as*, *so*, and *similar to*. Better yet, to merge the object directly into the image which it evokes, foreshortening the image to a single essential word" ("Technical Manifesto" 120). The notion of equivalence effectively corresponds to this final idea, the attempt to suppress the distance between object and image.

[197] See Hernández Palacios, "Acercamiento a la poética estridentista," for the most detailed examination of *estridentista* poetics and how they apply to "Prisma." For Hernández Palacios, the main advance of *estridentista* poetics resides in how it "reconsiders the procedures of connotative signification, of poetic signification" (136).

emotions. This axis of equivalence thus relates to *estridentismo*'s broader architectural imagination, in which urban subject and built environment interpenetrate and mutually determine one another. On the other hand, equivalence describes the relationship between objects or images within the structure of the poem. In *El movimiento estridentista* List Arzubide characterizes this axis of equivalence—or "abstractionism," as the *estridentistas* alternatively called it—in terms of the "Equality of things in value, which poetically means to create the leap from hypothesis to conclusion without intermediaries" (62).[198] *Estridentismo* thus grounds equivalence—the elimination of connective tissue, the leap from hypothesis to conclusion—on a process of abstracting away particular properties. And yet, this abstract equivalence does not flatten out all difference, yielding a smooth, homogeneous surface. Rather, as List Arzubide insists, equivalence produces a "double image" (65), a jagged montage or simultaneity resulting from the process of abstracting from different directions and radically different contexts.[199] To recall the Cendrars quote in "Actual No. 1.," this simultaneity is intermittent, not continuous. Because abstraction is a contradictory process, equivalence constitutes a form of montage that yields a multivalent, double image.

For the *estridentistas*, this conception of equivalence or abstraction appears intrinsically linked to the social space of the metropolis. Indeed, poetic equivalence is made possible by a pre-existing form of abstraction in the city. In his poetry, Maples Arce constructs a city defined not by local color or particularities but by a logic of abstraction. In this way, the metropolis enables the *estridentistas*' rejection of nationalism

[198] "Igualdad de las cosas en valor o estimación, que poéticamente es crear el salto de la hipótesis a la conclusion sin intermedios."
[199] "la imagen doble, que es el aporte más valioso que hemos dado los estridentistas de la poesía."

in favor of a cosmopolitan vantage point. Maples Arce's peculiar reference in "Actual No. 1" to *colonias* in Mexico City becomes clearer in this light. Near the beginning of the manifesto, Maples Arce boldly states, "DOWN WITH SAN RAFAEL-SAN LÁZARO" ("Actual" 41).[200] Maples Arce takes as his standpoint neither the former, a wealthy neighborhood in western Mexico City, nor the latter, a working-class neighborhood to the east. At its foundation, Maples Arce's cosmopolitanism entails a negative moment that strips away nationalist concerns, and he finds a model of this negativity in the dynamic of uprooting in the metropolis. It is only after this negation and abstraction that this cosmopolitanism can acquire a positive content—feeling at home in the world, a responsibility to distant neighbors, etc. In other words, the equivalence of *estridentista* poetics and its cosmopolitanism is made possible by an abstraction that already exists not within the domain of thought but in the city itself. The abstract character of the metropolis in Maples Arce's poetry also recalls Simmel's argument, which I discussed in the introduction, that the "metropolis has always been the seat of the money economy" (176). Money and the metropolis are mutually defined by equivalence, and the pervasive sense of uprooting in the metropolis has its social ground in the way money, in its "indifference, becomes the common denominator of all values; irreparably it hollows out the core of things, their individuality, their specific value, and their incomparability. All things float with equal specific gravity in the constantly moving stream of money" (178).[201] Money is one aspect of the social form of the metropolis, a social structure that

[200] "ABAJO SAN RAFAEL-SAN LÁZARO."

[201] As I mentioned in the introduction, Manfredo Tafuri reads this passage in Simmel's essay as a comment on montage, "a literary comment on a Schwitter *Merzbild*" (88). That is, Tafuri articulates explicitly what I think is implicit in Maples Arce's poetry and *estridentimso* more generally, namely the idea that montage and the metropolis are closely linked via the abstract character of money.

abstracts from the concrete differences of particular entities in space and time. The metropolis is, in other words, the spatial form of what Marx called the "real abstraction" of value.[202] Although Maples Arce does not, like Simmel and Marx, explicitly connect the abstraction of the city with money, urban space in his poetry becomes an abstract montage constructed from the metropolitan dynamic of uprooting, from a process of abstraction that tears subjects and objects from their original contexts. The montage character of *estridentista* poetry thereby visualizes how space is determined by principles that are both immanent and abstract, not transcendent ideals or local color. The *estridentista* metropolis embodies the contradictory dynamic in which the objective, impersonal logic of capital shapes concrete, useful space in its own image. But, because this abstraction denotes one aspect, albeit the dominant one, of the metropolis, its social space is not wholly devoid of concrete qualities. Rather, abstract value, insofar as it shapes the city by detaching elements from their original contexts and rearranging them, produces an uneven social space that must be rendered through a montage or double image.

Perhaps the best visual illustration of the double image and equivalence can be found in one of Ramón Alva de la Canal's woodcuts. It presents an abstract city, although one that is fragmented into a multiplicity of planes and perspectives. By collapsing figure and ground, the woodcut evokes the permeability of interior and exterior to which Maples Arce aspires in his *poemas radiográficos*. Moreover, the woodcut and poetry embody

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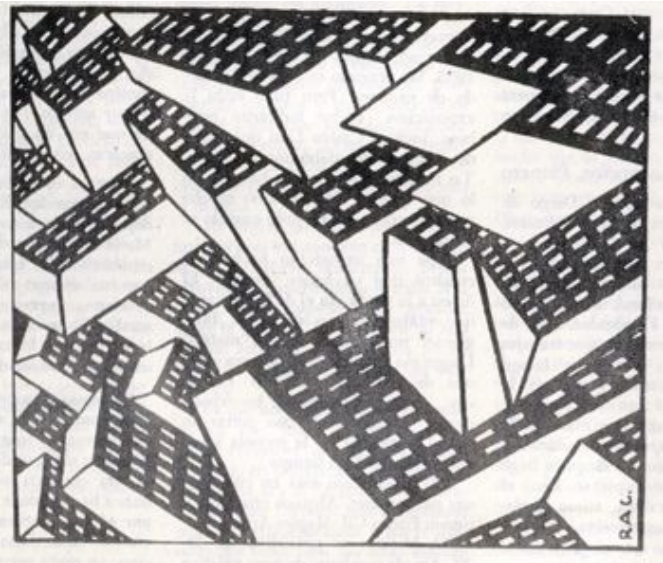
[202] On the metropolis as "real abstraction," see Cunningham, "The Concept of the Metropolis: Philosophy and Urban Form." My discussion of the abstract character of the metropolis also owes a debt to Henri Lefebvre's notion of "abstract space." For Lefebvre, this space, because of its abstractness, should not be confused with an empirical question; "it is not defined on the basis of what is perceived" (50). Rather, it is determined by its negative relationship to a "differential space-time" (50), that is, to concrete, historical reality.

estridentismo's initial conception of modernity in which the contradiction between use-value and value is neutralized, in which the abstract character of the city makes possible both a cosmopolitan attitude and an architectural space responsive to social needs.



IV. Untitled Woodcut, Ramón Alva de la Canal

Functionalism Between Capitalism and Socialism

As I mentioned above, early critics called attention to the striking disjuncture between the rhetoric of *estridentismo*, with its rigorous focus on modernity and the metropolis, and the reality of Mexico City in the first half of the twenties. Although the *estridentistas* imagined technologically-mediated architectural spaces, the prevailing architecture at the time was eclectic and neo-colonial. The most significant architect at the time was Carlos Obregón Santacilia, whose Centro Escolar Benito Juárez (1924-25), for instance, has decorative spires and a colonial tile roof. It is hard to imagine that the *estridentistas* would have found inspiration in this sort of architecture, with its evocation of tradition and the colonial past. Their avant-garde ideas would only begin to find echoes in the material structures of the city with the introduction of functionalist

architecture towards the end of the twenties—that is, after the *estridentistas* moved to Xalapa and then disbanded. In the early thirties, the functionalist architect Juan O'Gorman designed dozens of primary schools that were painted in what he called "strident" colors, perhaps as an homage to Maples Arce (Carranza 148).[203] And Juan Legarreta, O'Gorman's classmate and fellow functionalist, evoked the Futurist and *estridentista* manifestos when he attacked a statue of the Victory of Samothrace at the Academy of San Carlos and shouted "Death to Art" (Fraser 53). O'Gorman represents an architectural counterpart to *estridentismo*'s attack on academic aesthetics in favor of a modern, international form oriented toward human needs in the metropolis. But, as I will show in this section, O'Gorman ultimately became dissatisfied with functionalist architecture, insofar as its formula "maximum efficiency, minimal effort" was consistent with the profit-seeking activities of capitalist firms. Finally, this trajectory clarifies the terms of *estridentisimo*'s critical approach to modernity, which I will discuss more closely in the next section.

O'Gorman's early social and architectural commitments, in particular the subtle interplay of geometrical forms and national figures, can be seen in the dual studios he designed for Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. After seeing the functionalist house O'Gorman had recently built for himself in San Ángel, Rivera hired O'Gorman to build a pair of studios: one for him, the other for Kahlo. With their zig-zag roofs and exterior concrete staircases, the studios closely resemble the designs included in Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* (1923), which O'Gorman claimed to have read multiple times in

[203] The story of O'Gorman and the *estridentistas* is one of a series of missed encounters. Since O'Gorman was born in 1905, he would have only been a teenager when the *estridentistas* were active in Mexico City. And by the time O'Gorman began designing functionalist houses and schools in the early thirties, *estridentismo* had dissolved in the wake of Jara's resignation.

the second half of the twenties.[204] Adhering strictly to the principle "form follows function," O'Gorman did not hide functional elements, like electrical wires, behind walls, and he left water tanks conspicuously exposed on the roof. The cactus fence, however, seems to imply a departure from the purely mechanical, abstract forms of Le Corbusier's designs. And yet, it would not exactly be correct to say that O'Gorman nationalizes the International Style.[205] Rather, his architectural projects entail a radicalization of the fundamental commitments of functionalism. Whereas Le Corbusier insisted that the abstract, geometrical forms of modern engineering were more aesthetically pleasing than eclectic architecture, for O'Gorman functionalist architecture had nothing to do with Kantian beauty or any sensations it might evoke. Indeed, O'Gorman was surprised that Rivera found his house aesthetically pleasing; "he had designed the house to be useful and functional, not beautiful" (Fraser 42). The design and construction of the house was guided by a simple principle, which O'Gorman reiterated time and again in those years; "maximum efficiency for minimum effort." Indeed, the cost of the studios for Rivera and Kahlo was equivalent to the cost of workers' housing (Fraser 44). In this way, O'Gorman was perhaps closer to Adolph Loos than Le Corbusier, for the former insisted on a categorical distinction between purpose-oriented objects, including architecture, in which ornament is a "criminal" waste of materials and labor, and art proper, in which expression is not responsible to human needs. O'Gorman's radical conception of functionalist architecture was uniquely suited to addressing social needs in post-revolution Mexico,

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[204] In Nicolás Cabral's *Catálogo de formas*, a contemporary novel about O'Gorman, Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* has biblical connotations, referred to as "the Book."

[205] This is in part the argument of Kathryn E. O'Rourke in *Modern Architecture in Mexico City: History, Representation, and the Shaping of a Capital*. While she provides insights into O'Gorman's work, particularly into the tension he faced between architecture and painting, she struggles to convincingly relate her insistence on the representational significance of the façade to O'Gorman's international, functionalist commitments in the early years.

and he put these ideas in practice in the construction of dozens of inexpensive primary schools.

In other words, Juan O'Gorman saw functionalism as the architectural extension of the Mexican Revolution. This commitment to revolution indicates another point of disagreement with the principles of Le Corbusier. At the very end of the first section of *Vers une architecture*, Le Corbusier states emphatically, "It is a question of building which is at the root of the social unrest of to-day: architecture or revolution" (8). Le Corbusier seems at pains to distance his functionalist architecture from its association with socialism, especially in Germany. But, as Fredric Jameson explains, this formula is not a straightforwardly conservative statement; it is not that "he was committed to 'revolution,' but rather because he saw the construction and the constitution of new space as the most revolutionary act, one that could 'replace' the narrowly political revolution of the mere seizure of power" ("Architecture" 50-51). For Le Corbusier, the question of architecture and revolution revolves around the issue of housing, specifically the increasing gap between modern technologies (steel and concrete) and the inadequacy of traditional housing. "The machinery of Society," Le Corbusier writes, is "profoundly *out of gear*" (8). In effect, Le Corbusier suggests that technology has advanced beyond its social conditions, and architecture is thus conceived as the means for overcoming this imbalance and restoring harmony. The situation in post-revolution Mexico seems to be precisely the opposite. As Luis Carranza writes with regard to O'Gorman, "the Revolution had already taken place. The country now needed architecture" (135). That is, post-Revolution Mexico appeared to O'Gorman to have brought about a transformation in social relations, even if technical conditions remained relatively unchanged. If Le

Corbusier saw the need to bring housing in line with modern technologies, O'Gorman strove to advance the technical conditions to meet the social conditions of post-revolutionary Mexico. In a polemical talk in 1933, O'Gorman explains this situation in categorical terms, as a choice not between architecture or revolution, but between functionalism or "technical architecture," which "serves the majority" and "man," and "academic architecture," which "serves the minority" and "money" ("Conferencia" 75). O'Gorman thus sees functionalist architecture not as a way to discover the beautiful forms in modern engineering but as a powerful means for addressing fundamental social problems in post-revolution Mexico.

The principle "maximum efficiency for minimum effort," for instance, enabled O'Gorman to achieve the remarkable feat of building 24 primary schools for a million pesos. Article 3 of the 1917 Constitution codified the post-revolutionary state's commitment to a rational, non-clerical education, but in practice the state was slow to build adequate facilities for the population's needs. For instance, although Vasconcelos emphasized the importance of education, few schools were built during his tenure because he preferred the neo-colonial style, which, with its ornamental features, was prohibitively expensive. By the early thirties, there were nearly 30,000 children without schools in Mexico City (Rodríguez Prampolini 29-30). When Narciso Bassols was appointed Secretary of Public Education in 1932, his friend, Diego Rivera, suggested he talk to O'Gorman about the urgent lack of schools.[206] Bassols immediately hired

[206] Bassols is a fascinating figure. He attempted to move the Ministry of Education in a decidedly socialist direction. He also hired Paul Strand to be the Ministry's Director of Film and Photography, and during his time in Mexico, Strand would produce *Redes*, a classic in Mexican cinema. Bassols's tenure, however, was short-lived. On Bassols and his relationship to architecture, see Olsen 84-86. As Nicolás Cabral recounts the meeting in his novel *Catálogo de formas*, Bassols asked O'Gorman how he would build a school, to which he replied, "Forgetting art, attending strictly to function, preventing bribes" [Entonces le pregunté: ¿Cómo haría usted una escuela? El Pintor nos miraba, parecía entusiasmado, lo animaba su nuevo estudio,

O'Gorman. At every step of the way, the designs were informed by his dictum "maximum efficiency for minimum effort." O'Gorman eschewed all ornamental, superfluous elements, building austere geometrical forms that could be reproduced, with slight modifications, in multiple locations.

V. Untitled Photograph of Juan O'Gorman's Escuelas Primarias

In this photograph, which was probably taken by Manuel Álvarez Bravo or Agustín Jiménez, the functional character of the school is evident. One can also make out the porthole windows, a cheap, effective means for providing ventilation and, as O'Rourke argues, a subtle reference to Le Corbusier's interest in ocean liners (194). O'Gorman, however, probably would have argued that the affinities with Le Corbusier are of secondary importance. The point was not to imitate the Swiss architect's functionalist form; rather, this functional structure was an efficient, rational, technical solution to social needs and the problem of scarce funds. Any aesthetic pleasure one might get out of this building was irrelevant to the technical issue at hand.

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luminoso y amplio. El joven que lo había construido, a quien yo hacía la pregunta, respondió sin titubear: Desterrando el arte, atendiendo estrictamente la función, impidiendo los sobornos. Hagamos algunas entonces, le dije, preséntese mañana en mi oficina] (36).

At the same time that O'Gorman was overseeing the construction of these primary schools, he was engaged in a polemic on architecture. The 1933 "Pláticas sobre arquitectura" (Talks on Architecture) saw an aggressive confrontation between functionalists—including O'Gorman, Juan Legarreta and Alvaro Aburto—and academic architects. As we saw above, O'Gorman insisted that academic architecture served the minority and money. This distorted social role, O'Gorman argues in his presentation for the *Pláticas*, depends on a process by which "spiritual needs must intervene in the composition of architecture" ("Conferencia" 69). That is, even if academic architecture purports to respond to needs, it confuses subjective and objective needs. Spiritual necessities, for O'Gorman, amount to little more than advertising, vanity or aestheticism. Functionalist architecture, alternatively, addresses the objective needs of the majority, and it thus has little concern with ornamentation. "The form of the building," he writes, "would be the simple result of technical application" (74). On this basis, O'Gorman also responds to complaints that functionalist architecture is a foreign form: not "Mexican," but Swiss, German or international. O'Gorman writes that just as "The size of the door of a worker's house will be the same as the door of the philosopher's house" (69), certain needs are universal and will be mystified if they are made to have a specifically national character. The point of functionalist architecture, for O'Gorman, is not to construct abstract forms in the style of European architecture, but to address human needs in the most efficient manner possible. And in this sense functionalism may be more "Mexican" than neo-colonial architecture: in terms not of identity but of local needs. Moreover, O'Gorman argues, sounding very much like Maples Arce, that "architecture will have to become international for the simple reason that man is becoming increasingly

international" (74). Technical architecture seeks neither to represent a national identity nor to express the subjective needs of the dweller; rather, it simply finds the most efficient means for addressing needs imposed by the social and material conditions.

And yet, by 1936, only three years after the *Pláticas*, O'Gorman became deeply dissatisfied with functionalism, abandoning architecture and turning instead towards realist mural painting. In the late forties, O'Gorman returned to architecture, working on a house in in the *Pedregal de San Ángel*. This architecture could not have been further from his early functionalist works.

VI. Pedregal de San Ángel, Juan O'Gorman

The house was built into a cave, and the excavated rocks were used to cover the surfaces with intricate mosaics. O'Gorman saw this house as an example of the type of organic architecture espoused by Frank Lloyd Wright. Whereas functionalism, O'Gorman would write in the fifties, involves a form of abstraction, which rejects "the need to harmonize the architecture with the natural, physical environment," organic architecture "puts the accent on its relationship with nature" ("¿Qué significa?" 87). As this quote indicates, the crucial factor for O'Gorman is no longer human needs but architecture's relationship to

nature. Functionalism, as a result, undergoes a radical reversal in O'Gorman's thought. It initially represented a rejection of the academic attention to spiritual pseudo-needs in favor of a social commitment, but now it appears as detached—or abstracted—from material conditions as its academic rival. To a certain extent, O'Gorman evokes the oft-repeated lament that functionalism, the supreme opponent of "styles," became a style, one that connoted wealth and could be applied without regard to social needs. But, perhaps more fundamentally, O'Gorman also critiqued functionalism for its fetishism of the machine and its way of turning architecture into a form of automatism.[207] Insofar as functionalism involved the most efficient solution to a technical problem, in effect it became an automatic process that bypassed the specificity of the architect and social needs. It is not that O'Gorman recanted his previous views. He continued to attack academic architecture. But he reached the conclusion that functionalism came to designate a form of architecture that operated independently—behind the backs, so to speak—of the architect, dweller and the environment.

O'Gorman's *volte-face* has often been interpreted as displaying a new concern for Mexican identity, culture and history; this shift, however, must also be understood in terms of O'Gorman's critique of capitalist modernity. In "Arquitectura capitalista y arquitectura socialista" (1936), his first departure from functionalist ideas, O'Gorman noted the compatibility of utility and profitability. In the conditions of capitalism, "Maximum efficiency for minimum effort" ceased to be a way to efficiently address

[207] O'Gorman writes, "colonial or semi-colonial countries, like Mexico, are fertile lands for the exaggerated development of this mechanist thesis, since the lack of technology and machines in these countries makes them appear as the most important factor in the struggle for the liberation of the national economy" ("¿Qué significa?" 88). To a certain extent, this "appearance" is true. Import substitution projects could only go so far because of the absence of the technologies that would have enabled these countries to produce not just consumer goods but capital-intensive goods as well. Of course, this isn't simply a technical problem, but one embedded in the uneven accumulation of capital.

social needs and became "maximum efficiency for maximum profit." O'Gorman saw this play out first hand when the Tolteca Cement Company embraced functionalist ideas and aggressively advertised for their application. In effect, O'Gorman concluded that "there could be no 'socialist' architecture, given the structural relations that determine the nature and meaning of any particular work: only when all private property and the means of production were in the hands of the people could there be an architecture under socialism" (Carranza 160).[208] That is, a cultural revolution—in architecture, among other artistic forms—cannot substitute social revolution. Socialist architecture could only exist at some indefinite point in the future, in a socialist society, and post-revolutionary Mexico, despite rhetoric that occasionally suggested the contrary, was by no means socialist.[209] Functionalist architecture instead found itself caught within the fundamental contradiction of capitalism, between use-value and its subordination to self-valorizing value, its imperative to both expand productivity and reconstitute its social basis. Theodor Adorno identified this tension in a pithy statement by Adolph Loos: "Ornament is wasted work energy and thereby wasted health. It has always been so. But today it also means wasted material, and both mean wasted capital" (qtd. in Adorno 9). As Adorno argues, Loos's statement combines "two irreconcilable motifs," the "norms of profitability" and "the dream of the totally technological world, free from the shame of work" (9-10). Functionalist architecture envisions a situation in which technology exists to expand human productive capacities, not to produce more surplus-value, but so long as it remains

[208] For a more detailed discussion of this article, see Carranza 158-167. Most accounts of O'Gorman's "dissatisfaction" with functionalism jump rather quickly from the early thirties to his reflections on organic architecture in the fifties. This approach bypasses the question of architecture's relationship to capitalism and gives the impression that he initially abandoned functionalism because it was insufficiently "Mexican" or because it was not attuned to the natural environment.

[209] The Italian history of architecture Manfredo Tafuri would make the same point in the second half of the twentieth century in *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development.*

within capitalism, this situation is only a possibility. In light of this critique of capitalism, O'Gorman's comments on the "automatic" character of functionalist architecture acquire another valence. Functionalism becomes "automatic" in the sense that the architect, like any worker in capitalism, is reduced to an instrument, his or her will bent to the alienating, abstract process of valorization, which is blind to human, social needs. Insofar as functionalism turns into an architecture shaped by the abstract principles of capitalism, it illustrates on a smaller scale the process that structures the metropolis, a process that stands out in the later work of the *estridentistas*.

Runaway Modernity and "El Esquema de la Civilización"

Whereas most *estridentista* works construct revolutionary, functional urban spaces, Arqueles Vela's *La señorita etcétera* (1922) evokes the sort of abstract and alienating setting that O'Gorman saw as the logical culmination of a functionalism determined by the logic of capital.[210] Vela's *La señorita etcétera* is a montage novella composed of brief sections in which the narrator reflects on his obsession with a woman only referred to as "she." The novella takes up Baudelaire's and Poe's trope of the stranger in the urban crowd, but *la señorita* turns out to be not an individual, anonymous woman but a composite of various women the narrator encounters in the city. *La señorita*

[210] Originally from Guatemala, Arqueles Vela regularly contributed to *El Universal Ilustrado*, a weekly illustrated magazine that was the most important venue for modernist writers and intellectuals in 1920s Mexico. After the announcement of *estridentismo* in *Actual No. 1*, Vela quickly joined Maples Arce in his efforts to destroy the literary establishment and renew cultural production in Mexico. Some critics have claimed that Arqueles Vela was out of step with the *estridentista* program because he did not share their celebratory attitude toward modernity. Tatiana Flores, for instance, writes, "As is clear in his early articles, Vela was timid and hesitant in his embrace of the modern. By siding with Maples Arce he publicly declared his support of Estridentismo, but his writings nevertheless betray a wariness of modernity—both his columns and *La señorita Etcétera*" (149). Vela certainly represents a more critical take on modernity, but, as this chapter demonstrates, this negativity is the necessary, dialectical counterpart of Maples Arce's ostensibly futurist orientation toward modernity, and it is implicit in his works as well.

is pieced together from fragments of memories and present reality, giving the narrator the "sensation of a cubist portrait" (35).[211] The woman becomes an abstraction, indifferent to the particular qualities of the various women who compose *la señorita*. The same abstraction characterizes the city. In the first section of the novella, the narrator arrives in "a vulgar and unknown town," but he quickly states that the particularity of this town is irrelevant: "Any city would have admitted me with the same indifference" (31).[212] Indeed, the various sections of the novella ostensibly takes place in different cities, but, because they are figured in terms of abstract space, they are one and the same city. The woman and the city are constituted by a process of mechanization in which a figure is broken down and reorganized according to abstract principles. If, as we have seen, this abstraction was the condition of possibility of the *estridentistas*' cosmopolitan attitude and insistence on global modernity, in *La señorita etcétera* this abstraction undermines the possibility of a revolutionary city of functional social spaces. As Vela wrote in his column for *El Universal Ilustrado*, "The mechanism of modern cities tends to synthesize everything. To compress everything. We will not be anything more than the *outline of civilization*" (qtd. in Schneider 85, my emphasis).[213] Via this mechanization, the city, the putative representation of civilization, becomes an outline, an empty form devoid of content. Instead of a social formation that exists to improve the lives of its subjects, the city becomes an alienated form that dominates those subjects, indifferent to their needs.

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[211] "No me quedaría de ella, sino la sensación de un retrato cubista."
[212] "Llegamos a un pueblo vulgar y desconocido … Al fin y al cabo, a mí me era igual … Cualquier ciudad me hubiese acogido con la misma indiferencia. En todas partes hubiera tenido que ser el mismo."
[213] "El mecanismo de las urbes modernas tiende a sintetizarlo todo. A comprimirlo. Nosotros no seremos más que el esquema de la civilización."

While this conception of the city apparently runs counter to the revolutionary, modernizing thrust of Maples Arce's avant-garde project, I argue that it lies at the heart of his *Urbe: Super-poema bolchevique en 5 cantos* (1925). The work presents itself as a revolutionary work, evoking the Bolshevik Revolution in its title and carrying a dedication, "To the workers of Mexico."[214] Canto I initially continues this tone, praising the revolution and the modern, industrial city, but this canto then addresses a female figure, apparently prompting a more pessimistic direction. The world seems now to move away from the poetic speaker, who indicates the seeds of the revolution's failure. The second canto again alternates between the politicized masses and the absent beloved, turning to the port as both a modern, industrial space and a metonym for farewells. Canto III abounds in violent metaphors and images that suggest the decomposition of the revolution. This pessimistic tone finds an echo in the fourth canto as Maples Arce evokes the aftermath of the Great War and "winds of tragedies" from Soviet Russia. The beloved at this point has been reduced to mute, fragmented memories. The fifth canto reasserts the destruction, silence and desolation that permeates the poem, ending with the image of a "frayed sky" [cielo deshilachado], which is now "the new / flag / that flutters / over the city" (197-98).[215]

As this brief summary clearly indicates, *Urbe* contains a pessimistic revision of the sort of revolutionary modern city that we find in *Andamios interiors* and the manifestos. Tatiana Flores, for instance, argues that "*Urbe* represents Maples Arce's attempt to unite Estridentismo to socialist politics" since "he leaves behind his utopist

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[214] "A los obreros de México."
[215] "Bajo los hachazos del silencio / las arquitecturas de hierro se devastan. / … / y el cielo, deshilachado, / es la nueva / bandera / que flamea / sobre la ciudad."

vision of the city, describing the urban environment as a contested space, rife with social problems" (184). Other critics detect a more deep-seated ambivalence, one that challenges the idea of the poem's socialist politics. Rashkin, for instance, identifies a disjuncture between the way "the activism of workers and campesinos was a source of profound inspiration" and "the continued violence and instability," which "created feelings of insecurity and distress" (116). Rashkin's comments echo Maples Arce's own recollections about the composition of the poem. In his memoirs, he writes that after walking home during the May 1st workers' marches in 1923, he "sat down to write a canto beating with hope and despair" (*Soberana* 148).[216] These comments seem to corroborate the idea that *estridentismo*, for all its praise of modernity, hesitates to embrace the masses because of their violent character. Evodio Escalante has alternatively argued that this despair betrays an "unconscious resistance" to modernity, not to the revolutionary masses themselves (70). That is, *Urbe* entails a critical account of modernity, and this subterraneous critique surfaces in the course of Maples Arce's attempt to continue the project of *Andamios interiors*, namely the attempt to link interior and exterior, urban subject and built environment.

The first two cantos of *Urbe* rehearse the tension found in "Prisma" between a romantic poetry and urban modernity.[217] Maples Arce alternates between the beloved and the modern, industrial city. But, whereas "Prisma" undoes the romantic figures and

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[216] "Cuando llegué a casa, bajo las fuerzas estimulantes, me puse a escribir un canto en que latía la esperanza y la desesperación."

[217] Evodio Escalante persuasively frames this tension in terms of a "*libidinal sacrifice,*" in which "modernity can only be achieved by getting rid of the figure of the beloved" (51). *Urbe*, Escalante continues, accordingly has four moments: the constitution of the modern poet through the experience of catastrophe; the modern poem as the coordination of multiple spatial and temporal planes; libidinal sacrifice; return of the sacrificed, "the weight of the dead continues to loom over the economy of the poem in the form of a resistance, a burden that sabotages the euphoric ideology of the text" (54-55).

modernist tropes in order to situate them in the industrial, revolutionary city, *Urbe* interpenetrates the former and the latter. It is not that urban modernity occupies the background of the poetic subject's lyrical focus on the beloved. Rather, the poem collapses all sense of foreground and background, the beloved and the poet's emotions passing into urban forms and the city informing the poem's romantic images. That is, *Urbe* is premised on the sort of simultaneity of interior and exterior, of urban subject and built environment, that was the result of "Prisma." Arqueles Vela argued that this simultaneity was one of Maples Arce's most significant contributions. "For the first time in Mexican poetry," he writes, "excessive individuality finds its social resonance. The poet's anguish sings not its solitude alone, like the romantic or the surrealist, but the solitude refined in the crowds" (qtd. in Escalante 45). On the basis of this simultaneity of individual and social, figure and ground, *Urbe* rails against traditional romantic poetry. Evoking the futurist rejection of the nude and conceptions of beauty based on the feminine figure, Maples Arce writes in *Urbe* that romantic poets "will understand nothing / of this new sweaty / beauty of the century" (191).[218] He then reiterates the familiar futurist critique of the imagery of moonlight, describing it as "putrefaction / that reaches us / from intellectual sewage pipes" (192).[219] Against this ornamental, frivolous poetry, *estridentismo* offers a poem dedicated to the "city strong / and manifold, / made all of iron and steel"—that is, a poem devoted to the city's functional structures (192).[220] This is an "international city," "all made of mechanical rhythms," and through simultaneity

[218] "Los asalta-braguetas literarios / nada comprenderán / de esta nueva belleza / sudorosa del siglo." The phrase "asalta-braguetas literarios" is a notorious insult directed at the Contemporéaneos, who were attacked for their homosexuality. This was a heated debate in the mid-twenties. The Mexican Revolution, the estridentistas and others argued, demanded masculine writers, not effeminate cosmopolitans.
[219] "y las lunas / maduras / que cayeron, / son esta podredumbre / que nos llega / de las atarjeas intelectuales."
[220] "¡Oh ciudad fuerte / y múltiple, / hecha toda de hierro y de acero!"

and interpenetration of interiors and exteriors, the city and its inhabitants become the protagonist of the poem.

Urbe self-consciously reflects on this simultaneity through its repeated references to the panorama. The idea of a panorama initially implies a detached perspective from which one can see the landscape as a whole. This is the sort of standpoint with which Maples Arce begins "Prisma." The second canto of *Urbe*, conversely, begins with a reversal of this distance: "This new profoundness of the panorama / is a projection toward interior mirages" (193).[221] This "projection" is fundamentally ambiguous. On the one hand, the two-dimensional panorama acquires a third dimension, folding the subject within this "new profoundness." On the other hand, the subject overcomes the distance separating itself from the image, projecting itself into the panorama. Ultimately, the direction of this projection matters less than its consequence, namely the collapse of the distinction between foreground and background, between interior and exterior, subject and built environment. *Urbe* reiterates this idea in the fifth canto when he writes "the panorama is inside us" (197).[222] The tension between individual and masses, between interior and exterior, appears to have been satisfactorily overcome.

And yet, a different preoccupation surfaces in *Urbe*. Although the tension between individual and collective is resolved, it is ultimately displaced by a more fundamental opposition between the needs of the city's inhabitants and the city's alienating, destructive form. Immediately after the line "The panorama is inside us," Maples Arce initiates the pessimistic tone with which he will conclude *Urbe*: "Beneath hatchet blows of silence / iron architectures are devastated. / There are waves of blood

[221] "Esta nueva profundidadd del panorama / es una proyección hacia los espejismos interiores."
[222] "el panorama está dentro de nosotros."

and storm clouds of hate" (197).[223]). Iron structures represent the promise of functionalist architecture to construct non-ornamental spaces attentive to the needs of modern subjects, but they are notably destroyed in this passage, a victim of these "hatchet blows of silence." This silence registers the indifference of modernity to the needs of urban subjects. The resulting catastrophic city is no longer made for its inhabitants. The final lines of the poem forcefully articulate this point: "the sky, frayed [cielo, deshilachado] / is the new / flag / that flutters / over the city" (198).[224] The city is now dominated by a destructive force, the "cielo deshilachado," that flies above, or abstracted from, the urban ground. *Urbe*, in other words, is dedicated to the workers, to the "syndicalist" love and life with which "Prisma" ends, but *Urbe* concludes by returning to the sky, the very position that "Prisma" negates. This sky is characterized by destruction, not symbolist harmony, suggesting a dialectical reversal whereby the modernization project turns into, as a result of its own dynamic, an alienating form. This sky represents what Arqueles Vela called "the outline of civilization," an abstract form of civilization devoid of its content.

This "outline of civilization" informs *Urbe*'s spatial and geopolitical imagination. Although Maples Arce insists on the abstract character of the city, the poem is not entirely devoid of deictic markers. "Prisma" ends by imagining the city as the center of concentric circles, but *Urbe* involves a more complex, decentered spatial configuration. The poetic voice locates the city "On the spatial plane / of Whitman and Turner / and a bit closer [más acá] / to Maples Arce" (191).[225] That is, Maples Arce announces that he

[223] "Bajo los hachazos del silencio / las arquitecturas de hierro se devastan. Hay oleadas de sangre y nubarrones de odio."
[224] "y el cielo, deshilachado, / es la nueva / bandera / que flamea / sobre la ciudad."
[225] "En el plano espacial / de Whitman y de Turner / y un poco más acá / de Maples Arce."

will construct his metropolis with Whitmanesque enumerations and Turner-like images of industrial landscapes, of "distances in flames, smoke from industrial plants" (194).[226] But the "más acá" also implies a specific location that should not be confused with New York City or London, a location towards which "The lungs of Russia / blow the wind / of social revolution" (191).[227] That is, by dealing with the city of the Mexican Revolution, *Urbe* involves what Harsha Ram calls the "centrifugal impulse" of Futurism, a move towards the periphery, as against modernism's centripetal "gravitation toward metropolitan modernity as embodied by the core nations and cities of Europe" (315-316). Concretizing the references to the Mexican Revolution, in the second canto Maples Arce invokes "The resounding crowd … of *obregonismo*" in the streets (193).[228] But in the first canto, the ground of this spatial articulation of the revolutionary Mexican city is put under pressure. Despite being the center of the Mexican Revolution, Maples Arce writes, "I feel that everything moves away / … / Spectral trains that travel / toward far / away, panting with civilizations" (192).[229] Hence the crucial importance given to port imagery in *Urbe*, the port being the place where capital and raw materials enter and leave the national economy. The city appears embedded in a global form of abstract domination that is uneven and without identifiable centers. Civilization, the form of life made possible by the city, becomes an intangible term, without specific location, a spectral "outline" more than a reality.

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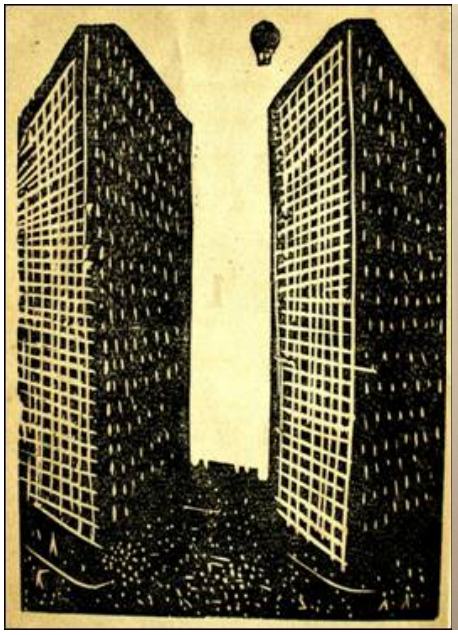
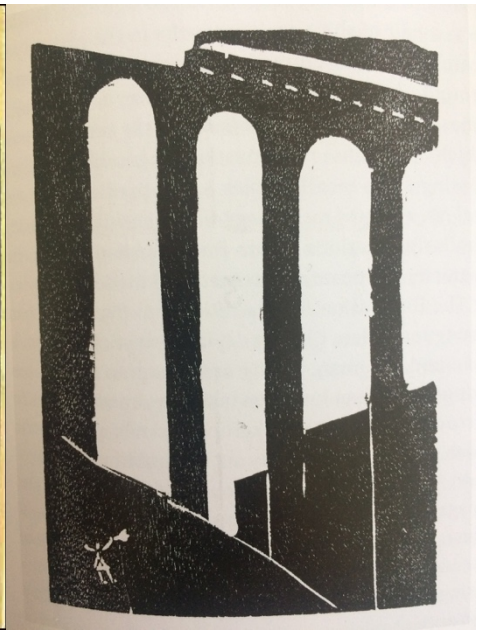
[226] "El puerto: / lejanías incendiadas / el humo de las fábricas."
[227] "Los pulmones de Rusia / soplan hacia nosotros / el viento de la revolución social." Of course, the Mexican Revolution predates the Bolshevik Revolution by seven years, but I think Maples Arce is imagining the possibility that the Russian Revolution push its equivalent in Mexico to take on a more socialist direction.
[228] "La muchedumbre sonora / hoy rebasa las plazas comunales / y los hurras triunfales / del obregonismo / reverberan al sol de las fachadas."
[229] "Yo siento que se aleja todo. / Los crepúsculos ajados / flotan entre la mampostería del panorama. / Trenes espectrales que van / hacia allá / lejos, jadeantes de civilizaciones."

Urbe clearly reverses the euphoric picture of the city contained in other *estridentista* writings, but the terms of this pessimism remain somewhat vague. Revolutionary modernization in *Urbe* becomes tragic and destructive, but Maples Arce does not exactly explain the reasons for the failure of its initial promise. Juan O'Gorman's critique of functionalism, I argue, clarifies the nature of this pessimistic turn. Just as O'Gorman initially conceived of functionalism as a means to meet concrete social needs, the *estridentistas* initially approached modernization as if it could be used to construct functional urban spaces, a revolutionary, global city made for its inhabitants. And just as functionalism in post-Revolution Mexico was subsumed under the logic of capital accumulation, used as a means to expand abstract value—i.e., profit—by increasing productivity relative to investment, the transformation and expansion of Mexico City took on a runaway, automatic character. Urban expansion becomes a destructive, an alienated process abstracted from the needs and capacities of city dwellers.

This conception of the city is underlined by the woodcuts that accompany the first edition of *Urbe*. The woodcuts were made by Jean Charlot, a French painter who moved to Mexico, where he produced murals and collaborated with the *estridentistas*. Charlot's woodcuts do not exactly illustrate the contents of the poem, but, as Tatiana Flores writes, "These stark prints, executed in a reduced visual language, present a bleak view of modernity" in which "technology dwarfs the individual" (185). The first woodcut depicts urban masses at the base of two simple skyscrapers that would have been much higher than any building in Mexico City at the time.[230]

[230] The tallest building in Mexico City at the time was the Metropolitan Cathedral at around seven thousand feet.





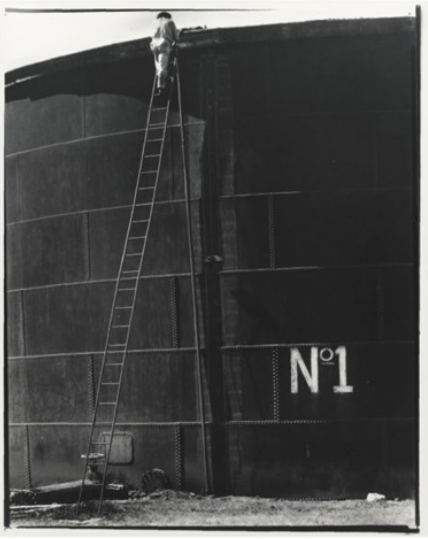
VII. Woodcut for Urbe, Canto I (1924), Jean Charlot

VIII. Woodcut for Urbe, Canto III (1924), Jean Charlot

That is, this woodcut does not present a romantic poet who reflects, from a distance, on the masses. Rather, it envisions the division of the city between its human figures, both individual and collective, and the massive structures in relation to which the former appears diminished, reduced to mere dots. In the woodcut that accompanies the third canto, a tiny human figure waves something—perhaps a white flag—at a train rushing by on a spectacularly elevated bridge. It is a futurist image that celebrates the speed of the train, and yet it also intimates an anxiety about the train passing, leaving behind the vanquished figure who pleads for it to stop. Individual and collective have become mutually permeable, but the technological, architectural forms of modernity recede and assume an accelerating, runaway character.[231]

[231] The woodcut accompanying the final canto suggests something similar. It depicts a massive, geometric ocean liner and stick figures who appear to be diving into the water, as if they were fleeing or had been thrown off the ship.

Tina Modotti produced photographs that similarly express this antagonistic gap between human figures and extra-human architectural forms.



IX. Tanque No. 1 (1927), Tina Modotti

X. Obreros (1926), Tina Modotti

The first photograph, "Tank No. 1" (1927), as Flores notes, alludes to *Actual No. 1*, the first *estridentista* manifesto, but the composition is dominated by the tank, a massive, functional, geometric shape. The worker has been displaced from the center of the frame

and is perched on top of the structure, perhaps on the verge of falling into the tank.[232] The second photograph, "Workers" (1926), is compositionally distinct, insofar as the workers fill the entire frame. The structure they are building, the Secretaría de Salud, has been cropped out to the point that it cannot be identified. But "Workers" does not seem to celebrate this labor; rather, the photograph captures the irony that the Secretaría de Salud—a testament to the post-Revolution commitment to the health and well-being of the population—must be built by tedious, arduous labor. The construction of the building, despite its modern purpose, is not a technologically mediated process but one that is made possible by cheap labor. Modotti grasps, in other words, the contradiction between human needs and massive architectural forms that are indifferent to those needs.

It is perhaps this conception of the city that caught the attention of John Dos Passos and led him to translate *Urbe* into English in 1929. As I will discuss in a moment, Dos Passos uses the skyscraper in *Manhattan Transfer* as a symbol for the perils of the industrial city, for what Maples Arce evoked with the catastrophic, frayed sky and what Charlot and Modotti intimated with their massive, extra-human forms. The American writer met Maples Arce during an extended trip to Mexico in 1926 and 1927. Initially, as Rubén Gallo recounts, Dos Passos traveled around Mexico with the poet Salvador Novo, a member of the rival literary group *Contemporáneos*, but, as Gallo writes, they "soon discovered they had very little in common" ("Dos Passos" 330).[233] Both writers were

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[232] "The tank's caption is curiously reminiscent of the lettering of Actual No. 1, but its message is here inverted. Instead of the exaltation of an individual, we find an ironic commentary on the plight of the worker in a newly industrialized country. It is hard to argue that the lettering refers to the laborer, who is minuscule in relation to the massive metal structure. Instead Modotti seems to imply that industry values itself over the thousands of people that maintain it" (Flores 233-234).

[233] Gallo's article "John Dos Passos in Mexico" is the most complete account of his time in Mexico. Dos Passos criticism often mentions that the character "Mac" in *The 42 Parallel* was based on Gladwin Bland, a Wobbly expatriate that Dos Passos met in Mexico during this trip, but does not say much else about his relationships with artists in Mexico or about his thoughts on the Mexican Revolution. Dos Passos only

interested in the city, but Dos Passos was dissatisfied with Novo's Mexico City, a "cosmopolitan center full of cars, tramways, billboards, and ubiquitous advertising campaigns" (333). It may seem ironic that Dos Passos would then discover an affinity with Maples Arce, whose poetry and manifestos abound with references to advertising and modern technologies. But, as we have seen, *Urbe* outlines a more critical account of the metropolis, and Dos Passos met Maple Arce in Xalapa, where he and the *estridentistas* were actively attempting to fuse art to radical politics through their collaboration with the Jara government. Moreover, *Manhattan Transfer* and *Urbe* are strikingly similar: "kaleidoscopic" works that foreground "the social tensions, the juxtaposition of riches and squalor," of the metropolis (Gallo 338). It is not clear if Dos Passos and Maples Arce stayed in contact in the following decades, but their meeting was significant enough to inspire Dos Passos to translate *Urbe* (with the title *Metropolis*) and include a characteristically *estridentista* illustration by Fernando Leal.[234] Moreover, Maples Arce's critical take on the direction of the metropolis probably resonated with Dos Passos's concern with "the big money"—that is, the emergence of abstract forms of domination such as monopoly capital and industrialized democracy—as he was beginning work on the *U.S.A* trilogy.

In *Manhattan Transfer*, published a few years before his encounter with the *estridentistas*, Dos Passos uses the image of the skyscraper as a figure for the perils of the metropolis. In 1934, Dos Passos wrote, "Industrial life is turning a corner and is either

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wrote about this trip in 1926 and 1927, but he visited numerous times in the following decades. Much more could be said about his contacts and experiences in Mexico, but it would require patient archival research.

[234] Tatiana Flores points out that Leal's illustration includes an advertisement for "ODOL," a brand of mouthwash that also appears in a painting of New York City by Stuart Davis. "ODOL" is rendered with vertical letters that, when read backwards (that is, from down to up), say "LODO," the Spanish word for dirt (Flores 189-190). This reversal brilliantly grasps Dos Passos's concern with the debasement of language in the hands of advertisers and the public relations mastermind Moorehouse in the *U.S.A.* trilogy.

going to make the curve or smash up in the ditch" (qtd. in Gelfant 54). The incessant construction of skyscrapers in the first decades of the twentieth century gave palpable form to this high-stakes turn, suggesting to Dos Passos that modernity and industrial urbanism had outstripped their human foundations. On the one hand, the Manhattan skyline reflected the economic demand to build upwards, to maximize the possibilities for rent in a delimited area. On the other hand, this skyline was designed by architects who insisted on the skyscraper as a self-sufficient aesthetic form. The architect Hugh Ferriss, for instance, produced various drawings of skyscrapers in *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* (1929) to envision how these buildings would look after the 1916 zoning laws required "setbacks" in order to increase light and air circulation at the street level. Whereas Ferriss's drawings expressed a vision of architecture and the skyline as an aesthetic end in itself, Dos Passos "questioned an aesthetic divorced from the concerns and experiences of ordinary lives" (Koritz 110).[235] Accordingly, the skyscraper in *Manhattan Transfer* symbolizes the ultimately doomed desire to lift oneself out of the chaos of life in the city. An architect in the novel, Phil Sanbourne, talks about his ideas for a city whose "buildins instead of bein dirty gray were ornamented with vivid colors" (*Manhattan* 234). Sanbourne, in other words, espouses a modernist conception of architecture as a way of achieving social equilibrium: "If there was a little color in the town all this hardshell inhibited life'd break down … There'd be more love an less divorce" (234). Sanbourne's fate, however, contrasts sharply with these hopeful aspirations: while distracted by a beautiful woman, he is hit by a car. Stan Emery similarly faces a tragic fate in spite of—or perhaps because of—his attention to the city's

[235] For a more detailed examination of the differences between the architectural visions of Ferriss and Dos Passos and Lewis Mumford, see Amy Koritz's "Urban Form vs. Human Function in the 1920s."

monumental forms. "Kerist I wish I was a skyscraper" (230), Emery says shortly before dying in a fire while intoxicated. It is as if looking up in *Manhattan Transfer* is necessarily an inappropriate, if not fatal, response to the metropolis. Amy Koritz summarizes this predicament nicely by paraphrasing a note from the introduction to Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers*—"We're not men enough to run the machines we've made"—to suggest that "*Manhattan Transfer* demonstrates that we are also neither man nor woman enough to live in the cities we've built" (112).

Against this monumental architecture posited as an end in itself, Dos Passos counterposes a functionalist conception of built space. Indeed, to a certain extent, architecture provides Dos Passos with formal structures for his literary works. In a review of *Manhattan Transfer*, José Carlos Mariátegui wrote that "this novel, though apparently incongruent, disordered and tumultuous, in reality has the solid structure of a *block-house*" (154).[236] Mariátegui continues: "John Dos Passos has constructed his novel from its foundations with Yankee engineering. The aesthetic of his work obeys the lines and materials of its structure. Everything is geometrically cubist in *Manhattan Transfer*, without baroquisms or arabesques" (154).[237] That is, despite the apparent chaos of the novel, the setting, details and characters are not ornamental but rigorously functional. That is, these literary elements are not naturalistic devices chosen to evoke the "local color" of Manhattan; rather, for Dos Passos they are means to articulate a formal dynamic that expresses the social logic of the metropolis. Although Dos Passos rejects the

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[236] "Esta novela, en apariencia incongruente, desordenada, tumultuaria, en verdad tiene una estructura sólida de **block-house**."

[237] "John Dos Passos [sic] ha construído su novela, desde sus cimientos, con arte de ingeniero yanqui. La estética de su trabajo obedece a las líneas y los materiales de su estructura. Todo es geométricamente cubista en **Manhattan Transfer**, sin barroquismo y sin arabescos."

skyscraper, he finds inspiration in modern architecture's various attempts to organize space purposefully, in the service of human needs.[238] It is perhaps not surprising that one of the prose portraits in the *U.S.A.* trilogy is dedicated to the organic architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright. This architecture expresses "a future that is not the rise of a few points in a hundred selected stocks … but a new clean construction, from the ground up, based on uses and needs" (*U.S.A.* 1130).[239] I suspect that Maples Arce would not have shared Dos Passos's preference for Wright's organicist architecture over the mass-produced, assembly-line modernism of functionalist architecture, but Dos Passos and Maples Arce equally saw the metropolis as the stage on which this historical process plays out, opening up a utopian potential while threatening to turn into runaway, destructive forms that are alienated from human needs.

Conclusion, or the Necessity of Estridentópolis

When the group moved in 1925 to Xalapa, that capital of Veracruz, *estridentismo* faced the challenge of turning its urban avant-garde ideas into a concrete urbanization project. As I mentioned earlier, the governor of Veracruz Heriberto Jara hired Maples Arce as his secretary general and in effect gave the *estridentistas* regional state patronage. With the support of Jara, the *estridentistas* began publishing the journal *Horizonte*, which often dedicated its pages to the social reform projects undertaken by Jara. Lynda Klich writes that in their Xalapa "phase, [the *estridentistas*] modified their strategies to accord

[238] To clarify, at the level of content, Dos Passos focuses on how elements serve as means to satisfy human needs, whereas, on the level of form, he considers how the elements serve as means to compose a literary form.

[239] To a certain extent, the language that Dos Passos uses to describe Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture resembles the functionalist ideas of Loos, which might seem at odds with Frank Lloyd Wright's organicism. But it seems likely that Dos Passos would have much preferred Wright's prairie homes to the more geometrical houses built by modernists in Europe.

with their roles as propagandists for Jara. The images from estridentismo's Xalapa period convey the conviction held by Maples Arce and his colleagues that as members of Jara's government they were attaining changes first envisioned in *Actual No. 1*" (104). For instance, *Horizonte* discussed the construction of a modern stadium, which Jara had commissioned architect Modesto Rolland to design and which still stands today. Though not especially large, the Xalapa stadium's most distinctive feature is its dynamic cantilevered roof. Xalapa stadium, List Arzubide wrote in *Horizonte*, is "architecture of the REVOLUTION. Strong in the MATERIAL and in the SPIRITUAL zeal that BUILT it" (qtd. in Klich 116). As Rubén Gallo has discussed, the Xalapa stadium differs in significant ways from Vasconcelos's plans for the National Stadium in Mexico City. Vasconcelos, with his penchant for classicism, "envisioned a Greek stadium made of stone; but much to his chagrin, he was told that the only affordable option consisted of two materials he considered vulgar precisely because they were modern: cast iron and cement" (Gallo, *Mexican Modernity* 203). Although classical materials could not be used, the design of the National Stadium still entailed a classical appearance.[240] The Xalapa stadium, by contrast, involved a design that was made possible by its materials, namely reinforced concrete.[241] Moreover, the stadiums express radically different visions of modernity: "Vasconcelos saw the National Stadium as a return to the past; Jara conceived his project as a bridge to the future" (Gallo 206). Indeed, the Xalapa stadium was conceived as one part of a larger urban project called *Ciudad Jardín* (Garden City). This project was "imagined as the inverse of an urban reality marked by overcrowding, poor

[240] Gallo compares this to pictorialist photography, using the photographic medium to produce images that resembled painting, as opposed to a form of expression that is specific to the photographic medium (*Mexican Modernity* 204).
[241] Maples Arce published a piece on reinforced concrete in *Horizonte*.

planning, lack of services, and economic inequality" (Rashkin 172). Although never completed, *Ciudad Jardín* would have included modern housing for workers, electricity, potable water, and it would have been located near the university, as if to fuse intellectual and manual labor. While the plans for *Ciudad Jardín* might not be as radical or strident as the images evoked in "Actual No. 1," they were entirely consistent with *estridentismo*'s modernizing, architectural imagination; in fact, these plans could be seen as *estridentismo*'s maximum point of concretion.

And yet, when the *estridentistas* formulated visions of the city during the Xalapa phase, the images became increasingly abstract, divorced from life in the present moment. The *estridentistas* imagined turning Xalapa into Estridentópolis, an avant-garde city, a sort of imaginary social space that overlapped and existed in tension with the real city. The plans for Estridentópolis seemed to be the culmination of the group's irreverent attitude.[242] The idea was certainly never developed into a detailed proposal, but its recurrence in *estridentista* writings, paintings and woodcuts indicates its centrality to their project. List Arzubide, in the 1926 version of *El movimiento estridentista*, writes, "Estridentópolis realized the *estridentista* truth: absurd city, disconnected from quotidian reality, that corrected the straight lines unfolding the panorama … its architectures have been erected from the audacious, watching lines of existence" ("El movimiento estridentista" 293).[243] Estridentópolis thus involves an imaginary abstraction from—or "correction" of—the city's empirical reality. Silvia Pappe has gone the furthest in arguing

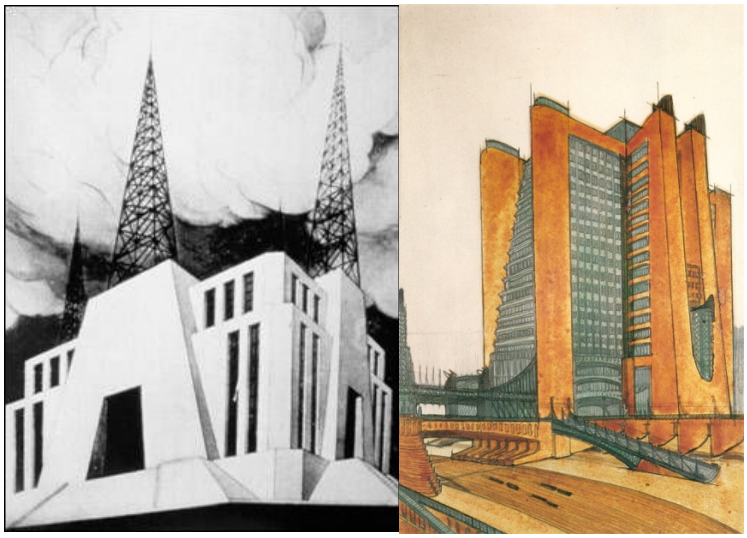
[242] At times, Estridentópolis seems to be no more than a playful idea, but it appears that Governor Jara entertained the idea to a certain extent, at least enough that the *estridentistas* believed they could set the terms of the cultural future of Xalapa.

[243] "Estridentópolis realizó la verdad estridentista: ciudad absurd, desconectada de la realidad cotidiana, corrigió las líneas rectas de la monotonía desenrollando el panorama … sus arquitecturas se han erigido de líneas audaces avisoras de la existencia."

that Estridentópolis has no referent—neither Mexico City nor Xalapa—and instead must be conceptualized as the "construction of a point of view" (31). The essence of this city does not lie, in other words, in representation but in formal principles: "multiple perspectives, allusions to the mechanical and at the same time its destructuration in the form of irregular zigzags and thick serrated lines, stylized wheels, spirals" (31). The formalist interpretation, however, ignores the avant-garde impulse to fuse art and life and *estridentismo*'s peculiar relationship to modernization. This urban project amounts to the attempt to make legible—by giving it visual/literary form and through exaggeration—the dominant social logic of modernity, namely, the abstract, non-empirical force that shapes the concrete reality of the metropolis, and thus points to its potential future form.[244] Estridentópolis took on an increasingly futurist form, despite Maples Arce's insistence on the present over the future, because it sought to indicate the possible forms that the metropolis might take. Ramón Alva de la Canal's plans for the Estridentópolis radio station, for instance, strikingly resembles the drawings of the futurist architect Antonio Sant'Elia's for *Città Nuova*.[245]

[244] Luis Carranza explains this well: "For the Estridentistas to achieve such legibility involved a mediation of both the logic of the metropolis and ways to make it comprehensible, centered on translating the existing conditions of the Mexican city—its nascent and incomplete modernity—into an invented version (or "false" version, as they would define it) of the Mexican metropolis" (58).

[245] Ramón Alva de la Canal actually submitted these designs for a radio station that was to be built in Xalapa, but Jara rejected his plans, something that he would later regret.



XI. Estación de radio de Estridentópolis (1925), Ramón Alva de la Canal

XII. Città Nuova (1914), Antonio Sant'Elia

In both images, the vantage point is positioned at the base of, or even below, the building. This vantage point, combined with the diagonal lines, gives the pictures a sense of dynamism, an expansive verticality. That is, they are decidedly futurist images. This future orientation becomes even more explicit in Germán Cueto's painting "Estridentópolis en 1975," which imagines the city as it would appear nearly fifty years in the future.[246] This future metropolis is defined by tall, geometrical buildings, as opposed to the low, colonial-style houses that would have dominated Xalapa in the mid-twenties. It is an image of an "absurd city," insofar as it implies a radical distance from present reality.

But this "absurdity" betrays a historical reality, the dynamic imperatives of the value form in its drive to shape concrete particulars. Estridentópolis appeared to resolve the tension in the *estridentistas*' concern with art as an aesthetic end in itself and its

[246] "The peculiarity of *Estridentópolis en 1975* lies in the way that by imagining an exaggerated form of the metropolis in Mexico, the author (a non-architect) accurately predicts the morphological development of a typical city in the second half of the twentieth century" (Carranza 60).

desire to conceive art as a functional means for reconstructing urban space. When they collaborated with the Jara government on concrete political projects, they could no longer evade the difficulty of realizing their avant-garde ambitions. Instead, they projected the resolution of this tensions into the future, similar to the way O'Gorman ultimately argued that a truly functionalist architecture could only exist after a socialist revolution. In Estridentópolis, as a result, "purposefulness" seems to become "its own purpose," an "illusion" insofar as "Something would be purposeful here and now only if it were so in terms of the present society" (Adorno 7-8). Purposefulness abstracted from present needs, instead, indicates "certain irrationalities" that "are essential to society; the social process always proceeds, in spite of all particular planning, by its own inner nature, aimlessly and irrationally" (8). The significance of Estridentópolis does not lie simply in its prefiguration of modern, monumental buildings in Mexico City, but also in how its "absurd" distance from needs in the present anticipates the transformation of Mexico City into a chaotic megalopolis. It visualizes the increasing subordination of the social logic of concrete use-values to the quantitative logic of the value form, an "aimless," "irrational," runaway modernity that satisfies human needs only to the extent that they serve to expand that value form. More than the dramatic juxtaposition of colonial, indigenous and modern elements, it is this dynamic that essentially drives the blind and inexorable growth of Mexico City.

Chapter 3: Roberto Arlt's Urban Montage: Forms of Combination in the Peripheral Metropolis

In "Cómo se escribe una novela" (How to Write a Novel, 1931), a piece published in his daily column *Aguafuertes Porteñas* (Buenos Aires Etchings), the Argentine novelist Robert Arlt (1900-1942) envisions his literary works as the literal products of cutting, what he calls "the work of scissors" [la tarea de tijera] (*Aguafuertes* 144). Arlt explains that, "[h]aving finished the 'bulk' of the novel, that is, the essentials, the author who works in a disorganized manner, as I do, must dive, with monumental patience, into an enormous chaos of papers, clippings, notes, marks in red and blue pencil" (143-44).[247] Arlt prefers this chaotic process of revision over the moment of creation on a blank piece of paper perhaps because "the work of scissors" does not simply describe the final stage of writing; it indicates Arlt's materialist approach to the readymade materials of urban modernity. Just as he cuts and rearranges a chaotic mass of papers and clippings, Arlt constructs his writing by juxtaposing fragments he discovers in the city. As we will see in this chapter, Arlt frequently presents himself as a figure picking up scraps in Buenos Aires, his novels being a sort of collage of these urban remnants. In the prologue to *Los lanzallamas* (The Flamethrowers, 1931) Arlt similarly articulates his literary project in terms of montage, arguing that the contemporary moment demands literature whose disjointed form articulates the contradictions of the social totality. Although Arlt aspires to write a beautiful, "panoramic canvas" like the novels of Flaubert, "today, among the noise of an inevitably collapsing social edifice, it isn't possible to think about

[247] "Terminado el 'grueso' de la novela, es decir lo esencial, el autor que trabaja desordenadamente, como lo hago yo, tiene que abocarse, con paciencia de benedictino, a un caos mayúsculo de papeles, recortes, apuntes, llamadas en lápiz rojo y azul."

ornamentation" (*LSL/LL* 285).[248] At these various levels—in editing, in its relation to the city, its connection to history—Arlt's writing is characterized by dissonant montage. Arlt feels he must abandon harmony and write works that "contain the violence of a 'cross' to the jaw" (286).[249] Against the idealist impulse to produce works whose seamless unity compensates for social reality, Arlt grounds literary construction in montage.

Arlt, like Maples Arce and Mariátegui, conceives of montage not only as a device to produce shock but also as a realist technique intrinsically linked to the structure of the peripheral metropolis and the interwar moment more broadly. Since this "'cross' to the jaw" derives from social forms, not merely artistic innovation, Arlt's novels call for a rethinking of the seemingly outdated realism and modernism debate. Modernist studies today rarely evoke hackneyed claims about realism's historical obsolescence or faith in the transparency of representation. Instead, critics have rightly insisted that realism and modernism are far more intertwined than the idea of a debate suggests.[250] In place of this opposition, modernism has become "something of a master term for aesthetic practices," being used to designate works previously consider realist or initially excluded from the canonical modernism based in the metropolis (Stasi 324).[251] This temporal and spatial

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[248] "¡Cuántas veces he deseado trabajar una novela que, como las de Flaubert, se compusiera de panorámicos lienzos …! Mas hoy, entre los ruidos de un edificio social que se desmorona inevitablemente, no es posible pensar en bordados. El estilo require tiempo, y si yo escuchara los consejos de mis camaradas, me ocurriría lo que les sucede a algunos de ellos: Escribiría un libro cada 10 años, para tomarme después unas vacaciones de diez años por haber tardado diez años en escribir cien razonables páginas discretas."

[249] "que encierran la violencia de un 'cross' a la mandíbula."

[250] Joe Cleary, for instance, has argued that the opposition of realism and modernism derives less from the modernist moment itself and more from Cold War narratives pitting a socialist realism against apolitical modernism. See Cleary, especially 261-263.

[251] To a certain extent, Rancière makes a similar argument. The concept of "aesthetic regime" does not designate a modernist break with realism; rather, realism and modernism appear as two complimentary aspects of the aesthetic regime's negation of the intrinsic link between social and aesthetic hierarchies. Nineteenth-century realism's focus on subjects—like the poor—previously deemed unworthy of artistic representation is entirely consistent with modernist defamiliarization, insofar as it seeks to render reality newly visible or strange.

expansion of modernism serves as a necessary corrective to the assumption that only metropolitan nations can give rise to modernist works or the presupposition that modernism involves a fundamental rupture with realist practices. And yet, expansion is insufficient. Arlt's novels, as we will see throughout this chapter, suggest peripheral modernity requires that we insist on the identity and non-identity of realism and modernism, meaning that we cannot simply displace one term in favor of another. David Cunningham, following the lead of Fredric Jameson, suggests an approach that resonates with Arlt's work. Instead of invoking a rigid separation of realism and modernism or neutralizing the tension by reducing one term to the other, Cunningham draws attention to the antinomies of realism and modernism—of narration and description, of past and present, the gap between concrete details and the abstract social forms of modernity, etc.—and maintains that these antinomies stem from their mutual "confrontation with the impossible 'totality' of capital itself and with the seeming impossibility of its (sensuous) representation" (57).[252] That is, the challenge lies in articulating modernism and realism on the basis of their internal tensions, which, in turn, derive from the underlying social contradictions that they seek to formally mediate in different ways.[253] Arlt's novels, as we will see in this chapter, suggest that the truth of peripheral modernity—its duality and

[252] The brilliant move of Jameson's *Antinomies of Realism* is to reframe the question of realism from an external opposition (realism vs. modernism) into an inquiry into realism's constitutive antagonism: "My experiment here claims to come at realism dialectically, not only by taking as its object of study the very antinomies themselves into which every constitution of this or that realism seems to resolve: but above all by grasping realism as a historical and even evolutionary process in which the negative and the positive are inextricably combined, and whose emergence and development at once and the same time constitute its own inevitable undoing, its own decay and dissolution" (6). My argument in this chapter is that Arlt's *LSL* and *LL* stage the tension not only between realism and modernism but also within each term.

[253] My argument here also owes a debt to the Warwick Research Collective's reformulation of Adorno's theory of modernism. As WReC writes, "what is at stake in Adorno's defense of modernist literature is paradoxically (its) *realism*," but the "inverse holds true, too: the defense of realism will take the form of an identification of its *modernism*" (66). This chiasmus of realism and modernism—of the modernist character of realism and the realist character of modernism—serves to indicate the contradictory character of both terms.

non-self-contemporaneity—is formally grasped by articulating the tension between modernist and realist tendencies and by demonstrating their mutual determination.

Critics often point to peripheral situations to unsettle the opposition of realism and modernism. Peripheral modernists, indeed, often feel less constrained by this sort of either/or logic, shifting back and forth between realists and modernist techniques on the premise that neither on its own adequately grasps the peripheral situation. But the context of 1920s Buenos Aires also demonstrates the extent to which modernism and realism often remain antagonistic in the periphery. A polemic, for instance, emerged in these years between two groups: Boedo and Florida.[254] Critics now largely agree that the idea of a polemic is misleading, leading subsequent literary historians to exaggerate the divide. Indeed, most writers moved within both circles, but the polemic nevertheless reveals something of the social character of Argentina's literary field. Whereas "Boedo" has come to designate a group of politically committed realist writers, "Florida" is associated with cosmopolitan modernists who were devoted to art for art's sake. In geopolitical and literary terms, Boedo's point of orientation was Moscow—for its revolutionary socialist politics and for its debt to the realist tradition of Dostoevsky and Gorky—while the Florida group looked toward Paris and its avant-garde movements. The name "Boedo" refers to a neighborhood and the location of the leftist publisher *Claridad*, to which many of the Boedo writers contributed. "Florida" also refers to a street, one where these writers would meet at a café to collaborate on the avant-garde journal *Martín Fierro*.[255] That is, Boedo and Florida designate different areas of Buenos Aires: the

[254] For strong critical accounts that examine writers associated with Boedo and Florida, see Masiello and Leland.

[255] The name Martín Fierro comes from José Harnández's famous nineteenth-century gaucho poem, indicating that Florida's cosmopolitanism coexisted quite easily with an interest in national culture.

former is the name of a street and popular *barrio* (neighborhood); the latter evokes a pedestrian street located in the old city center. As I will explain in more detail below, *barrios* became increasingly visible in the early decades of the twentieth century—as a result, in part, of the massive wave of immigration to Argentina—and started to compete with the old colonial center for the city's identity and for political and economic resources. Many Boedo writers were indeed children of immigrants who grew up in these *barrios*, whereas the writers associated with *Martín Fierro* typically had surnames inextricably linked with Argentine history. With this polemic in mind, Beatriz Sarlo identifies "two types of writer": "those who were 'Argentines without effort,' because they did not need to disguise a foreign accent, and those who by their origin and their language could not claim to be part of any long national tradition" (*Borges* 102).[256] Put differently, the art-for-art's-sake line of *Martín Fierro* was premised on the accumulated wealth of these writers' families, whereas the Boedo writers could not devote themselves to literature, needing instead to work to support their literary aspirations. In the context of this peripheral situation, the debate between realism and modernism remains and acquires definite social contours.

The biographical and literary trajectory of Roberto Arlt traverses Florida and Boedo while highlighting the antagonism between the groups. Critics initially presented Arlt as the paradigmatic figure of Boedo, but in reality he illustrates the mutual entanglement of the two groups. A near exact contemporary of the Florida-identified

[256] These different social classes also had a decisive impact on how writers conceived literature's relation to the market. Sarlo suggests that the literary field is structured by two intersecting axes, where the "debate between profit and art was overlaid by the social contradiction between old Argentines and immigrants" (103).

Jorge Luis Borges, Arlt embodies a very different social background in Argentina.[257] While Borges's maternal family was deeply involved in the wars of independence and the foundation of the Argentine nation, Arlt's parents were immigrants from Prussia and Trieste. And whereas Borges received a classical education in Europe, Arlt had minimal formal education, a fact that he repeatedly emphasized and exaggerated. This, along with Arlt's apparently unrefined way of writing, led many critics to conclude that he wrote poorly. Arlt responded that, unlike some of his contemporaries with a more secure social status, he could not afford style, that his artistic pursuits invariably clashed with his need to work as a journalist. And yet, one of Arlt's earliest supporters was Ricardo Güiraldes, a sort of father figure to many of the writers involved in the journal *Martín Fierro*. Güiraldes hired Arlt as his secretary and helped him publish his first book, *El juguete rabioso* (Mad Toy, 1926). It should be noted, however, that when a photo—which was included in the thirty sixth issue of *Martín Fierro*—was taken at the celebration of the publication of Güiraldes's *Don Segundo Sombra*, Arlt does not appear.[258] Arlt evidently did not feel he belonged in the group. Echoing this interstitial social position, Arlt's literary works fit in both the modernist (Florida) or realist (Boedo) tradition and in neither.

This chapter reads Arlt's *Los siete locos* (The Seven Madmen, 1929) and *Los lanzallamas* (The Flamethrowers, 1931) for their simultaneous articulation and disarticulation of modernist and realist aesthetics. Critics have often registered this formal

[257] I do not want to rely too heavily on the familiar Borges/Arlt contrast. As this chapter will show, there are remarkable similarities between their works, especially with regards to the level of metafictional self-reflection. Nevertheless, their biographies do illustrate the extent of the social divisions in Argentina at the time.

[258] In addition to Güiraldes, the photograph includes Borges, Oliverio Girondo, Leopoldo Marechal, among others.

inconsistency, but they have formulated it in different terms. Ricardo Piglia in an interview once stated that "*Los siete locos* in fact brings together two novels" (*Crítica* 24). By extension, we could maintain that *LSL* and *LL* are two novels, not in the sense that one was published in 1929, the other in 1931, but in the sense that they form a single novel with two distinct formal logics. The Argentine critic Adolfo Prieto argued that the coexistence of distinct formal patterns in *LSL* and *LL* exemplifies Arlt's shift from a "harrowing realism" to the fantastic, a mode that he would fully explore in his theatrical works in the thirties (12). Julio Prieto has recently challenged the grounds of this claim, namely the supposition that "the realist mode" entails the "exclusion of the fantastic" (70). Instead, Julio Prieto argues that "what distinguishes this writing … is its way of bringing into play a continuous *friction* of reality and delirium" (70). Realist representation and modernist distortion thus remain antagonistic, but the effect of Arlt's novels derives from montage, from the peculiar mode of their articulation into a non-unitary whole. This chapter seeks to connect this "continuous friction" to Piglia's claim that Arlt's novels deal with "the possibility of fiction to transmute reality … the possibility to *make believe*" (*Crítica* 24).[259] *LSL* and *LL* enact realist techniques, specifically journalistic conventions and factual forms, but at the same time these novels abound in expressionist distortions and bare their devices, thereby putting into question what counts as a credible fact. Following the lead of WReC, we could also say that Arlt's novels are works of "critical irrealism." WReC argues that modernist techniques—"anti-linear plot lines, meta-narratorial devices, un-rounded characters, unreliable narrators,

[259] For Piglia, this "possibility to make believe" characterizes one of the two novels that make up *Los siete locos*, namely the Astrologer's novel. The other novel, "Erdosain's novel," is "the protest story, the story of the attempt to pass to the other side, to escape the muddy opacity of everyday life" (*Crítica* 24).

contradictory points of view"—can also be understood as "determinate formal registers of (semi-)peripherality in the world-literary system, discernible wherever literary works are composed that mediate the lived experience of capitalism's bewildering creative destruction (or destructive creation)" (51). Arlt's expressionist distortions thus amount to more than a literary technique. They mediate what Beatriz Sarlo calls the "culture of mixture" in Buenos Aires—that is, the historical experience of peripheral modernity's contradictions. Arlt thereby underlines the realist character of modernist techniques and the unreliability of factual, documentary realism.

As was suggested by the quotes with which I opened this chapter, Arlt's articulation and disarticulation of modernism and realism relates to his collage aesthetic, which itself derives from the peripheral metropolis and the contemporary moment. Collage appears most clearly in Arlt's journalistic writings and novels through the appropriation of discarded materials, urban voices and types found in the metropolis. In this way, Arlt comes close to Joycean montage in *Ulysses*. But *LSL* and *LL* also take this montage in a different direction, pushing the objective, realist conventions and subjectivist, modernist techniques to their extremes, thereby highlighting the extent to which they clash and pass into one another. In part, *LSL* and *LL* present themselves as journalistic forms insofar as they incorporate documents. But, in a second step, these documents are deprived of their evidentiary status and become of overdetermined by the formal logic of the novel, a logic arising from the interplay of extremes, of self-evident facts and unreliability.[260] This dynamic, antagonistic kernel of fact and illusion, the

[260] My formulation of this dialectic owes a great deal to Roberto Schwarz and Antonio Candido. In "Objective Form," Schwarz makes the following point: "the form is considered as a profound synthesis of the movement of history, as opposed to the relative superficiality of documentary representation. In this sense, the emphasis on the mimetic value of the *composition*, as against the descriptive value of the parts,

novels suggest, constitutes urban life, and its consequences appear more dramatic in the peripheral metropolis. The city, for Arlt, replaces personal bonds with an alienating anonymity mediated by impersonal, quasi-objective social structures, thereby cultivating both a cynical attitude and a desire to believe. The city, in this way, provides a concentrated expression of social and historical tendencies in the interwar moment: the rise of fascism, technological revolutions and the spread of journalistic information. In the second half of this chapter, I argue that the terms of *LSL* and *LL*, fact and illusion, can be recast as "geometry and anguish," a phrase used by Federico García Lorca to describe New York City. This chapter specifies the contours of this dialectic of geometry and anguish—of objective, inhuman spatial forms and distorted experience—in Arlt's work by examining how it also unfolds in rationalist and expressionist conceptions of architecture and photography. By reframing the tension between documentary fact and deception in terms of geometry and anguish, this chapter further shows that Arlt grounds the formal inconsistency of his novels in the combination of extremes he finds in the peripheral metropolis, particularly on Calle Corrientes: a chaotic, modern street in the center of Buenos Aires. Corrientes, for Arlt, embodies the increasing gap between the oppressive, existent form of the city and the emancipatory potential that modernity ceaselessly generates but cannot realize. Whereas this gap is often occluded by the historical experience of linear historical time in the metropolis, Arlt's novels suggest that the periphery's non-self-contemporaneity exacerbates this gap, constantly creating

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implies a more complex consideration of reality, which cannot be grasped in the immediacy of events … Aesthetic reading and historical totalization are related. Both suspend the facts in a complex whole without suppressing them" (17). This is not to say that the documents are irrelevant; rather, they have to be read in terms of both their evidentiary function and in terms of their relationship to the formal structure of work. The formal structure registers an objective social logic that cannot be contained in any discrete document.

possibilities that remain abstract and divorced from concrete reality. This contradictory social form, Arlt suggests, can be grasped not by modernism or realism alone, but only by the dissonant articulation of these aesthetics in virtue of their internal tensions.

"The Ugliest City in the World": Buenos Aires in the Early Twentieth Century

In an article published in the journal *Sur*, the Argentine architect Alberto Prebisch makes this startling statement: "If we set aside the foreigner's more or less interested or deliberately polite opinion, if we close our spirit off from any hint of our very laudable patriotic optimism, we are forced to recognize the painful truth of the following assertion: we live in the ugliest city of the world" (216). Despite the frequently repeated claim that Buenos Aires was the "Paris of the South," an idea that emerged at the turn of the century, the contrary impression—that Buenos Aires was a fundamentally ugly city—surfaces time and again in this period. Writers often attributed this ugliness to the city's rapid growth amidst the flatness of the pampa, to the expansion of its monotonous, geometrical urban grid. Whereas Lima and Mexico City were the centers of colonial Latin America and were built over the ruins of indigenous buildings, Buenos Aires remained an insignificant colonial outpost for centuries. Modern Buenos Aires appears as a city devoid of the organic, accumulated history that characterizes most European cities and the old colonial centers of Latin America. That is, against the often celebratory remarks about Buenos Aires, Prebisch expresses a concern with the city's lack of cultural, historical identity, an anxiety that is related to the rapid growth of the city, to massive immigration, to the struggle between the center and barrio over the heart of Buenos Aires, and to the collapse of the nation's export economy and liberal oligarchy.

By reviewing these concerns, this section will outline the discussions in which Arlt implicitly and explicitly engages, setting the terms for the rest of the chapter.

Illustrating the velocity with which Buenos Aires seemingly grew out of nothing, Adrián Gorelik points to the difference between the year 1887, when the city contained about 400,000 inhabitants, and 1936, when the city's population reached more than 2.5 million (13). In 1887 the limits of the Buenos Aires were expanded, increasing the size of the city from four thousand hectares to 18 thousand. At the time, this newly added territory was sparsely populated, but "five decades later, around 1936, the new territory was completely urbanized, to the extent that it was no longer possible to distinguish the original municipality from its annexation" (Gorelik 13).[261] From 1887 to 1936, Buenos Aires went from being "la gran aldea" (the great village), which had not changed much since the colonial period, to a densely populated metropolis in which the grid extended throughout the city's eighteen thousand hectares.

What enabled the spectacular growth of Buenos Aires? It derived in large part from the massive wave of immigration to Argentina, which was second only to the United States at the time. Immigration reached its peak in 1914, when half of the population in Argentina was foreign-born. More fundamentally, the expansion of Buenos Aires—in terms of infrastructure and urbanization—was made possible by a pattern of economic growth that Argentina would never again experience. From the second half of the nineteenth century to the interwar period, the prevailing economic model involved the export of agricultural raw materials and beef to industrializing economies in Europe and the US. As Ernesto Laclau argued in an early essay, this arrangement—in which labor-

[261] Grete Stern, whose work I will examine below, made this contrast palpable in a photomontage that was used in a brochure for the Estudio del Plan de Buenos Aires in 1949.

intensive and even pre-capitalist modes of production persisted in Latin America while industrialization rapidly advanced in the center—typically enables the formation of an average rate of profit whereby surplus-value produced in Latin America compensates for the rising organic composition of capital and the corresponding tendency for the rate of profit to fall in metropolitan centers. Argentina, however, held a peculiar position in the global economy. While entirely dependent on export, the relatively high level of productivity of the land in Argentina lead to a situation in which, according to Laclau, differential rent enabled Argentina to appropriate surplus value produced elsewhere, a surplus that peripheral nations, whose economies revolve around the export of agricultural goods, cannot normally capture (292).[262] Buenos Aires thus constituted a peripheral metropolis because of its peculiarly dependent and exploitative position in the global capitalist economy.

The contradictions of this social formation would manifest themselves over time in the divisions within Buenos Aires.[263] In the twenties and thirties, the most fundamental

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[262] Laclau's argument, of course, draws on Marx's theory of rent. Against the neoclassical approach for which rent is a form of income whose source is the land, Marx insists that labor is the singular source of value and rent refers to a particular distribution of surplus value to landowners. Landed property presents an obstacle to the movement of capital and complicates the formation of an average rate of profit. Whereas the average rate of profit normally involves the transfer of surplus value from industries with a lower organic composition capital (OCC) to industries with a higher OCC, landed property, because of the obstacles it poses, enables surplus value to be captured in the form of rent by less capital-intensive industries, like agricultural produciton.

[263] This chapter will mostly focus on the center/barrio division, but there are other important divisions in Buenos Aires between north and south, east and west. As the city expanded beyond its colonial confines and areas became more densely populated, the wealthy abandoned the older, more centrally located neighborhoods and moved to newer neighborhoods in the north: Palermo, Recoleta, Barrio Norte. Conversely, most of the poor immigrants from Italy were funneled into the south, into neighborhoods that would come to be known as La Boca and Barracas, among others. North and south, accordingly, have indelible connotations in the public imaginary even in the present. But, alongside this north/south division, Buenos Aires was also conceived as split between the east and the west. Eastern Buenos Aires represents the city's port and, by extension, its cosmopolitan orientation toward Europe or its imperial domination by England. Western Buenos Aires, conversely, consisted of a vast, rapidly expanding sprawl toward the pampa. The west was associated with poverty, but it also seemed to represent a more authentic relationship to the nation and its cultural identity. All of these divisions are at play to a certain extent in *LSL* and *LL*, but

tension in Buenos Aires—on the social, political and cultural levels—was perhaps the division between the city center and the popular, suburban *barrios*, a word that connotes "neighborhood" in both a spatial and affective or communitarian sense. Universal male suffrage—which became law in 1912 and then impacted the 1918 elections—turned the popular masses into a political force and initiated a shift away from urban projects focusing on modernizing the city center and towards the integration of the *barrio*, with its large immigrant population, into the city and the nation. At the same time, the *barrio* came to embody a picturesque tradition that was under threat by the city's rapid modernization.[264] As we will see in the work of Arlt and his Argentine contemporaries, *barrio* and center are not unambiguous terms, but the tension between *barrio* and center constitutes the fundamental axis around which the question of the city revolves, the antagonism that gives rise to multiple interpretations.

If the center/*barrio* division is the underlying problem for the city in the twenties and thirties, the growth of Buenos Aires also presented problems for broader national history and identity. Whereas the dominant tradition in Argentine intellectual life in the nineteenth century associated the city with the Enlightenment, civilization and progress—as opposed to the barbarism of the countryside—the actual development of Buenos Aires seemed to belie these optimistic expectations. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento provided in *Facundo: Civilización i barbarie* (Civilization and Barbarism, 1845) the most well-

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the center/barrio problematic is perhaps the predominant one, even if it has not always been the main focus in critical accounts of Arlt's approach to the city.

[264] Adrián Gorelik, in his brilliant cultural history of Buenos Aires, outlines three different ways in which the *barrio* was represented in these decades. First, the *barrio* was represented in the press as "the cordial neighborhood, the progressive, hard-working neighborhood" that "will take up political reformism" (311). Secondly, in "cultural production"—literature and tango—the *barrio* is disarticulated from political reform and comes to represent a "picturesque" element in the city (311). Thirdly, and relatedly, the *barrio* becomes a "reservoir of a past whose extinction had been, however, the prerequisite for its own existence" (311).

known articulation of this "culturalist interpretation," which "deterministically links urban form and culture" (Gorelik 29). According to this interpretation, the rationality of the city was exemplified by the urban grid. With his idea of "la ciudad ordenada" (the ordered city), Ángel Rama similarly grasped this association of the grid with rationality, pointing in particular to the Renaissance idea that the Americas constituted a blank slate onto which a rational urban order could be imposed, in contrast to chaotic medieval towns and their historical baggage.[265] But, in passing from a clearly delimited colonial village to a vastly expanding metropolis, the grid assumed a radically different form. Gorelik explains that "the city, through the grid, realizes the threat of the pampa; its expansion cannot be seen as the culturalization of the plains, but rather as its metamorphosis" (30).[266] Despite its initial link with reason and historical progress, the urban grid comes to appear as the culmination of irrationality and a reversion to a state of nature.[267]

The essayist Ezequiel Martínez Estrada perhaps went furthest in identifying the urban grid of Buenos Aires with a pessimistic interpretation of the nation's historical trajectory. In *Radiografía de la pampa* (X-Ray of the Pampa, 1933), Martínez Estrada

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[265] See Rama, *The Lettered City* 1-15.

[266] Gorelik also cites an observation from the Italian writer Massimo Bontempelli: "Buenos Aires is a piece of the pampa translated into city" (qtd. in Gorelik 30).

[267] Moreover, the grid, with its seemingly endless, straight streets, distinguished Buenos Aires from medieval European cities that were organically formed over centuries and displayed the accumulation of history. Jean-Paul Sartre, in an article on American cities, distinguished between the ahistorical geometry of American streets and the organic forms of European cities. European cities, he wrote, are "closed cities" whose "slanting, winding streets run head on against walls and houses; once you are inside the city, you can no longer see beyond it," but the American metropolis contains "long, straight unobstructed streets" (Sartre 124). Sartre also argues that New York is a colonial city, a city divorced from history. Ernst Bloch makes nearly identical statements about Berlin. Bloch, for instance, wrote that Berlin was an "eternal colonial city … a structure that, so to speak, always becomes and never is" (Bloch, *Literary Essays* 366). For Sartre, "New York is a colonial city, an outpost" (130). The "colonial" character of these cities, for Bloch and Sartre, has less to do with imperial domination and more to do with the speed with which they are erected, as if out of nowhere and in an empty space.

writes that, like the endlessly flat pampa, Buenos Aires "lacks a third dimension" (146). Skyscrapers would only begin to be built in the second half of the thirties, so at the time Buenos Aires was composed of relatively low houses and buildings. If "New York is all front," all façade, Buenos Aires is "all roofs" (146). And this extensive plain of roofs gives one the sense of looking out onto the pampa, the plains surrounding the city's western edge. These comments on the city's flatness echo Martínez Estrada's pessimistic reformulation of Sarmiento's "civilization or barbarism." As I mentioned in the introduction, Martínez Estrada does not simply invert the formula, privileging nature and rural life over urban society; instead, he insists on their underlying identity: "What Sarmiento did not see is that civilization and barbarism were the same thing, like centripetal and centrifugal forces of a system in equilibrium. He did not see that the city was like the country and that within the new bodies were reincarnated the souls of the dead" (256). The attempt to distinguish civilization and barbarism, city and country, for Martínez Estrada, repeats the primordial sin of Argentine history: Trapalanda, the mythical city sought by Spanish conquistadores. In Martínez Estrada's account, Argentine history involves the repetitive postulation of a utopia, a separation from nature, or withdrawal from the world, and the subsequent disenchantment that results from the failure to find Trapalanda.[268] As an irreversible, progressive movement, history in Argentina is ultimately an illusion; it is the eternal return of the same underlying conflict. And yet, even if the conflict remains the same, it does seem to intensify at particular moments. Buenos Aires may be, for Martínez Estrada, the most dramatic manifestation of

[268] What makes Martínez Estrada's work fascinating and difficult to follow is that at times he seems to valorize nature and rural life, but in fact his pessimism runs deeper, directed at both the city and the country. Authentic life, for Martínez Estrada, seems to reside only in the constant struggle with nature, even though the struggle necessarily ends in failure.

this perennial, intractable problem. In *La cabeza de Goliat: Microscopía de Buenos Aires* (Goliath's Head, 1940) Martínez Estrada compares Argentina to a disproportionate giant's head and a "malnourished and poorly developed body" (30). The illusory attraction of Buenos Aires has drawn the Argentine population towards the city as if the "head suck[ed] the blood of the body" (30). Martínez Estrada thus implies that the very inability of the city to distinguish itself from the countryside has led to a situation in which the city expands uncontrollably and parasitically, drawing everything into itself.

Borges was similarly interested in moments in which city and country became indistinguishable, but his reflections are not thoroughly steeped in the sort of pessimism that characterizes Martínez Estrada's work. As critics often mention, when Borges returned to Buenos Aires in 1921, after spending nearly a decade in Europe, the city was radically different from the one he left. The expansion and modernization of Buenos Aires had continued unabated, making Borges's childhood city into an unfamiliar space. Despite his involvement in avant-garde movements, Borges's subsequent poetry does not celebrate this urban modernization; rather, it reflects on nostalgia and urban spaces seemingly unmarked by modernity. In "Las calles" (The Streets), the first poem from *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923), Borges opens with an apparently avant-garde image: "Las calles de Buenos Aires / ya son mi entraña" [My soul is / the streets of Buenos Aires] (*Poems* 4-5, translation modified). The poem does not figure the city as a mere setting or object of contemplation; the city constitutes the poetic voice's very being, his soul. However, the translation of "entraña" as "soul" fails to grasp the poem's ambiguity: the plural form "entrañas" refers to guts or entrails, implying a more visceral, jarring, avant-garde image. And yet, the avant-garde connotations fall away as the poem

continues: "No las ávidas calles, / incómodas de turba y de ajetreo, / sino las calles desganadas del barrio, casi invisibles de habituales" [Not the greedy streets / jostling with crowds and traffic, / but the neighborhood streets where nothing is happening, / almost invisible by force of habit] (4-5). Borges's Buenos Aires is not a bustling metropolis whose dynamism the avant-garde assimilates; it represents a sort of physical simplicity and stillness. These "calles desganadas" are found not in the city center but at the city's limits, its *orillas*. Beatriz Sarlo has shown how Borges construed the *orillas*, this "ambiguous region where the end of the countryside and the outline of the city became blurred" (*Borges* 20), as the oblique position from which to rework and insert himself into world literature, as the peripheral location that allowed him to appropriate with irreverence the Western canon. In effect, Borges's project—what Sarlo calls "urban avant-garde crilloismo"—involves not the attempt to revert to the old, no longer existent, city but the endeavor to link tradition and modernity via the *barrio* and the city's limits.[269]

Borges's poems attest to quasi-hegemonic position attained by the *barrio* in the twenties, but the city center reasserted itself during the following decade. In the thirties, Mariano de Vedia y Mitre, the mayor of Buenos Aires from 1932 to 1938, completed numerous urbanization projects focused less on improving conditions in the popular barrios and more on modernizing the city center.[270] Against the cultural and political

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[269] This conception of time also emerges in "La Recoleta," another poem in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. Whereas the Recoleta Cemetery, one of the city's historical and cultural landmarks, provides an illusory certainty of the ability to surmount death and the passage of time, Borges explores in more mundane urban locations the inevitability and terror of death, which comes to be another chiasmus or hinge in which time passes into eternity and eternity passes into time.

[270] These projects included: completing the northern and southern diagonal lines that lead to the Plaza de Mayo; widening various avenues in the center; massive demolition and construction for the Avenida 9 de Julio, known as the widest avenue in the world; and the construction of the Obelisk.

concerns of the *barrios*, which implied a dispersed, heterogeneous city, these urbanization projects amounted to what Gorelik calls a "*symbolic refoundation of the center*" (392). The renovated center, with its newly constructed obelisk projecting vertically into the sky, was supposed to combat the seemingly limitless, horizontal expansion of the city and distinguish Buenos Aires once and for all from the surrounding pampa. Moreover, de Vedia y Mitre's urbanization projects responded to the sense that the city's identity had been lost during recent, eclectic changes, which were associated with immigration, the runaway growth of the city and foreign modernizing influences. The "refoundation of the center" aimed to give the city a sense of historical continuity, from the colonial period to the present. It was, in other words, a form of modernization that attempted to complete the past. The projects of de Vedia y Mitre thus recall the classicist "return to order" in the context of an increasingly chaotic decade, an attempt to use the most modern means to ensure the stability of the present and its unambiguous relation to the past.

The shift from *barrio* to center implies that Argentine cultural politics radically changed from the twenties to the thirties, but this shift was largely the expression of latent, structural tendencies throughout the entire interwar period. The historian Luis Alberto Romero claims that with "the First World War—much more than the crisis of the 1930s—a stage in the history of the Argentine economy came to an end" (42). WWI revealed that Argentina's export economy, despite decades of prosperity, was incredibly tenuous. The model was successful as long as export demand remained high, but demand dropped during the war and subsequent economic crisis. Moreover, foreign capital moved back to Europe during the recovery period, and exports from the United States began to

outcompete those from Argentina. "From 1914 onward," Romero writes, "the country entered a more complex world that required a defter handling of economic policy, and in which the future was relatively uncertain, to such a point that doubts and pessimism predominated" (42). The extent of the crisis was not immediately apparent, since the global economy stabilized in the twenties, but its ramifications became unmistakable after 1929. While governments in the United States and Europe embraced Keynesian policies and forms of state capitalism, Latin American governments attempted to move away from export and develop national industries.

The political consequences of the interwar crisis in Argentina were equally dramatic. With universal male suffrage, the Radical Party became the dominant political force in the nation. Although the Radical Party did not question the dependence of the Argentine economy on export, it did represent a moderate challenge to the oligarchical class. Hipólito Yrigoyen, the Radical Party candidate who won the presidency in 1918 and 1928, emphasized "distributive justice," using the gains from the export economy to improve the conditions of the nation's middle and working classes.[271] While the program of "distributive justice" may have been feasible at the height of Argentina's export boom, there was far less wealth to distribute in times of crisis. Yrigoyen's popular support began to fade after the stock market crash in 1929, opening an opportunity for the military to dispose him. The "conservative revolution" on September 6, 1930 marked a dramatic shift towards authoritarian nationalist ideas that had been circulating in the twenties. According to these nationalists, the chaos of Yrigoyen's presidency represented the utter

[271] To be clear, Yrigoyen's stance towards labor was ambiguous. Although he claimed to arbitrate in favor of unions, he ultimately called on the military to break up strikes and passively condoned the acts of the Liga Patriótica, a right-wing paramilitary organization.

failure of liberalism. In the periodical *La Nueva República*, one of the mouthpieces of the radical nationalist movement, democracy entailed "the rule of 'the incapable, the dishonest'; it brought 'corruption, waste, the annihilation of culture, incompetence, parasitis, overblown cities and agitators'" (Rock 83). Liberal democracy, like immigration and the *barrio*, appeared to constitute a radical departure from the nation's past, its natural-social hierarchies, Catholic spirituality and moral values. Liberalism, they argued, led invariably towards a spiritual vacuum, towards materialism and individualism. In order to recover this lost past, these nationalists often took up quasi-conspiratorial politics and turned to the military as a political subject. While the nationalists largely abhorred popular support, because of their aristocratic orientation,[272] the ideas gained popularity in the interwar period, especially among the political and military leaders of the 1930s, a period that would come to be known as the "infamous decade" for economic depression, electoral frauds and political repression. This volatile mixture of authoritarian, conspiratorial nationalism, crisis and urban transformations constitute the socio-historical raw materials of Roberto Arlt's *LSL* and *LL*. Moreover, these raw materials mediate the peripheral metropolis's shifting position within the global capitalist economy and the geopolitics of the interwar moment.

[272] The historian David Rock explains that what distinguishes this authoritarian nationalism from Italian and German fascism is its "incapacity to galvanize the masses" and its opposition to "the idea of basing their movement on popular support and mobilization" (xvii). Moreover, European fascists were committed to "a revolutionary transformation of society," whereas Argentine nationalists "were pure reactionaries who always looked to the past for the society and government of the future" (xvii). As we will see, Arlt draws on both Argentine nationalism and European fascism in the collage construction of his characters.

"Century of Phrases": Montage as the Unity of Documentality and its Opposite

The characters of Arlt's *LSL* and *LL* appear atypical, unlikely to reveal underlying historical tendencies, but Arlt suggests that the novels and characters bear a fundamental relationship to the historical situation. Indeed, Arlt insists these characters are not simply literary illustrations of the historical moment; rather, he claims they are "individuals and women from this city whom I have met" (*Aguafuertes* 139).[273] Arlt, in other words, had no need to invent his characters because they existed readymade in Buenos Aires, embodying the historical shifts of the interwar moment. Arlt thus implies that *LSL* and *LL* are documents of a historical moment, and, indeed, the novels internally present themselves as a form of reportage, as a journalistic account of real events. But what do *LSL* and *LL* document? The novels, he writes, register "the disorientation that, after the great war, has revolutionized the consciousness of men, leaving them empty of ideals and hopes" (*Aguafuertes* 139).[274] The characters, in Arlt's words, "Hate this civilization. They would like to believe in something, to kneel before something, to love something, but they are denied the gift of faith, 'grace,' as the Catholics say" (*Aguafuertes* 139).[275] They are, in other words, spiritually homeless, a condition that for Arlt is endemic to life in the metropolis and in the interwar moment more generally. Urban life, as perhaps the

[273] "Son individuos y mujeres de esta ciudad, a quines yo he conocido." Arlt's friends and contemporaries often reiterated this idea, claiming that the characters in *LSL* and *LL* were real people. Onetti, for instance, once described his friendship with Kostia—the nickname of Italo Constantini—Arlt's lifelong friend who claimed to know various characters in the novels. See Juan Carlos Onetti (127-137). Mirta Arlt, Roberto's daughter, claimed that Ergueta was her childhood dentist in Córdoba.

[274] "la disorientación que, después de la gran guerra, ha revolucionado la conciencia de los hombres, dejándolos vacíos de ideales y esperanzas." In the novels, the narrator makes no such socio-historical explanation. The narrator's explanations are few in number and largely psychological in nature. But these explanations are difficult to take seriously because the novels cultivate a pervasive sense of unreliability.

[275] "Odian esta civilización. Quisieran creer en algo, arrodillarse ante algo, amar algo; pero, para ellos, ese don de fe, la 'gracia' como dicen los católicos, les está negada. Aunque quieren creer, no pueden. Como se ve la angustia de estos hombres nace de su esterilidad."

purest expression of capitalist social forms, replaces overt social relations with a structure in which "the independence of individuals … has as its counterpart and supplement a system of all-around material dependence" (Marx, *Capital* 202-3).[276] That is, insofar as urban life is defined by alienation, anonymity and a social form mediated by the impersonal, quasi-objective logic of commodities and money, subjects in the metropolis are devoid of reliable social bonds, becoming cynical at one moment and naïve at other moments. They increasingly put their trust not in intersubjective relationships but in apparently self-evident factuality: commodities and impersonal information transmitted via mass communication. And yet, *LSL* and *LL* do not simply represent or document this historical condition; the novels also enact this dynamic in their own formal structures. The documentary elements lose their evidentiary relation to empirical reality insofar as they are mediated by the contradictory formal logic of the novels. Siegfried Kracauer wrote, "Only from its extremes can reality be revealed" (*Salaried* 24), a quote that Arlt surely would have taken to heart. His novels trace a process of extremes passing into their opposites, whereby the most documentary moments of the novels are also the most unreliable, and whereby forms of distortion become historically rooted and are therefore the most realistic moments. *LSL* and *LL* thus formalize what Arlt calls the "century of phrases," a paradoxical combination of pervasive deceit and the inability to believe, the

[276] The point of the Marxist critique is not, as Hylton White clarifies, to "free the subject from the world," from its relations with objects (675). The "source of the problem" is not "being brought into relation through material things," as if society could reproduce itself without material production (678). Rather, the problem is that "In a setting in which the means of production have all been turned into capital … human actors find little opportunity to engage in this material sociality, except as producers of things that circulate as commodities. But as makers of commodities, human actions do not follow from the plans that subjects have for themselves, for things, or for other subjects. Instead … human actors are brought into relation here as elements of capital" (678). That is, because this material dependence is form-determined by capital, society reproduces itself as an unconscious process, behind the backs of human subjects, rather than a situation in which human subjects consciously relate to each other through the objects they produce.

idea that the most fundamental reality of this historical moment are the empty clichés and phrases that are entirely divorced from reality and yet used to shape society. At a later point in this section, I will refer to Dos Passos and Heartfield in order to clarify the peculiar dialectical reversals in *LSL* and *LL*. In the *USA* trilogy John Dos Passos similarly used montage to illustrate the debasement of language in journalism and its manipulation for political and commercial ends. John Heartfield's photomontages bear an affinity with Arlt's novels insofar as they critically appropriate fascist images and slogans, visualizing the realization of those images and thereby undermining them. In this section, I will also discuss certain *Aguafuertes* in which Arlt writes about the city and explains his relationship to journalism, thereby elucidating the way that he approaches Buenos Aires as a sort of montage. But first I will provide a brief summary of *LSL* and *LL* to demonstrate the relevance of the journalistic pieces discussed here.

Los siete locos begins as Remo Erdosain is accused of stealing money from his employer, the Compañía Azucarera (Sugar Compnay). To return the money he stole, Erdosain goes to the suburban neighborhood of Temperley to seek out the help of the Astrologer and the Rufián Melancólico (Melancholy Pimp). Erdosain subsequently becomes involved in the Astrologer's plans to use brothels to finance a pseudo-communist, pseudo-fascist secret society. To obtain the initial capital needed for the brothels, Erdosain proposes that they kidnap, ransom and murder his brother-in-law, Barsut. The plan fulfills Erdosain's need to kill in order "to be." In the end, the Astrologer fakes the murder in order to satisfy Erdosain's need and to recruit Barsut, whom he will double cross in the next book.

In *Los lanzallamas* the story becomes increasingly dispersed and disjointed. Erdosain moves into Barsut's old boarding house and begins work on plans for a chemical weapons factory that would allow the Astrologer's secret society to rapidly spread terror and overthrow the Argentine government. At the boarding house, Erdosain gets engaged to the owner's daughter, the Bizca (Cross-Eyed Girl). In the meantime, the Rufián Melancólico is murdered by a rival pimp. The Astrologer establishes an alliance with the wife of Erdosain's friend, Hipólita, to whom Erdosain had confessed the plan to kill Barsut in the previous novel. Hipólita initially plans to blackmail the Astrologer, but his fascinating ideas convince her to become a devout follower. After Barsut kills the Astrologer's dim-witted assistant, Bromberg, the Astrologer and Hipólita burn down the house in Temperley and leave the country. Simultaneously, Erdosain delivers the plans for the chemical weapons factory to the Astrologer, murders the Cross-Eyed Girl and then commits suicide on a train.

Before looking more closely at the novels, we will look at the collage aesthetic in Roberto Arlt's journalistic pieces—the *aguafuertes porteñas*—because it illustrates how Arlt relates to the readymade materials of the peripheral metropolis and it highlights subtle structuring principles of his novels. For instance, in "El arte de juntar puchos" (The Art of Collecting Cigarette Butts), a piece written in 1931, Roberto Arlt discusses how desperate *porteños*—inhabitants of Buenos Aires—devised inventive strategies to deal with the harsh economic realities of the interwar period. Arlt quotes a man he met in a café:

> This city lacks nothing in misery and poverty to match European cities. The only thing that distinguishes us from over there are appearances. Because, tell me: "Who, seeing my look, this cheap tie, my cheap boots, my cheap suit, my cheap hat, which all together give me the appearance of

> a decent person, could suspect that many nights, at twelve or one in the morning, I go out to gather cigarette butts in the streets so I have something to smoke the next day?" (*Aguafuertes* 239)[277]

This acquaintance abruptly reverses the conception of European cities and their peripheral counterparts. The Latin American city has caught up to the metropolis not through modernization but because it is its equal in terms of misery. And yet, the porteño clings more desperately to the fading appearance of distinction than those in London, Berlin and Paris.[278] Rather than give up smoking, this acquaintance—and, as Arlt relates, many others whose economic position would not seem to necessitate such desperate measures—continues this habit by recovering the scraps of bourgeois society. The cigarette-butt collector thereby thrives on the city's inequality. Whereas the inhabitants of the city's poor neighborhoods could not afford to waste anything, smoking the cigarette till nothing was left, wealthy neighborhoods are a cigarette-butt collector's paradise because a rich *porteño* might take a drag or two before causally throwing the cigarette onto the street. Arlt, I would argue, is fascinated by the cigarette-butt collector's attention to the disregarded materials of the city because this figure articulates how Arlt in his writings gathers and arranges prosaic scraps that elude the typical *porteño*'s attention. Arlt, like his acquaintance in the café, is "a ragpicker, at daybreak, picking up rags of speech and verbal scraps with his stick and tossing them, grumbling and growling, a little

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[277] "A esta ciudad ya nada le falta en miseria y pobreza para igualarse a las ciudades europeas. Lo único que nos diferencia de allá son las apariencias. Porque, decime: ¿Quién viendo mi pinta, esta corbata regalada, mis botines regalados, mi traje regalado, mi sombrero regalado, que en conjunto contribuyen a darme la apariencia de una persona decente, puede sospechar que yo, muchas noches, a las doce o la una, salgo a juntar puchos por las calles para tener con qué fumar al otro día?"

[278] Roberto Schwarz makes a similar observation concerning Machado de Assis's *Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas.* The protagonist of the novel "has recourse to the stock of enlightened appearances," but because they are out-of-place in a society based on slavery, these appearances are "taken to [their] final consequences" insofar as they are "subordinated to a principle contrary to [them] and thus deprived of credibility" (*Master* 23).

drunk, into his cart" (Benjamin, *II.1* 310). Walter Benjamin famously used these words to describe Siegfried Kracauer. Arlt developed a similar montage technique grounded in the particulars of the peripheral metropolis.[279] The reality of the interwar crisis is rife with tensions—especially the tension between capitalist value and material wealth, which ceaselessly renders concrete use-values obsolete in terms of value. These tensions cannot simply be dissolved in a conceptual synthesis; rather, Arlt recognizes that they demand a montage that is not simply a contingent combination of mundane objects but a conscious form of construction that articulates the relationship between the elements of an inherently contradictory social reality.

Roberto Arlt's *Aguafuertes porteñas* were incredibly popular in the twenties and thirties and were intimately linked to the newspaper in which they appeared: *El Mundo*. Indeed, his column—published four or five times per week—became so popular that the editor decided to include the *aguafuertes* in the paper on an inconsistent schedule, encouraging readers to purchase the paper every day in the hope of reading Arlt's column. Indeed, the newspaper *El Mundo* and Arlt share a similar biography. As Beartriz Sarlo explains:

> *El Mundo* wanted to differentiate itself from the newspapers of the "señores," the organs written and read by the political class and erudite sectors. It provides material configured on the basis of brief articles, which can be consumed entirely during the commute to work, on the tram platform, on the train or subway cars. The newspaper, because of its tabloid format, does not demand the comfort of the house or the desk. (*Modernidad periférica* 20)

El Mundo, in other words, was directed not at those "Argentines without effort" for whom the need to work was obviated by family biography and accumulated wealth, but

[279] Indeed, Arlt takes up this *aguafuerte* as if it were one of the scraps he found in the city and reuses the material in a chapter of *Los lanzallamas*.

at those immigrants and children of immigrants who preferred the spectacle of modernity over the *criollo* past. Moreover, Sarlo has discussed how modern newspapers in Buenos Aires in the twenties and thirties, in apparent violation of the standards of journalism, presented an almost fantastical combination of news, technical information and utopian technological dreams.[280] These newspapers formally embodied what Sarlo calls the "culture of mixture" in Buenos Aires. The newspaper provides an exemplary instance of this collage of incongruous elements because it incorporates, without any apparent hierarchy, heterogeneous registers on the same page: fact, fiction, banal and sensationalized observations. Declan Kiberd, writing of the affinities between *Ulysses* and the newspaper, similarly argues that "the meaning of the newspaper is largely a do-it-yourself construction on the part of the reader-as-stroller" (466). Indeed, the reader approaches the newspaper much like an urban subject approaches the city insofar as "the lack of a fixed narrative voice mimics the absence of any universally recognized authority in the city" (Kiberd 466).[281] *El Mundo*, unlike more traditional newspapers at the time, fully embraced this urban disorder, making *El Mundo* almost synonymous with the turbulent interwar moment and the porteño "culture of mixture."

Moreover, Arlt's journalistic practice differs significantly from that of the *crónica modernista*: the journalistic writing of turn-of-the-century Latin American poets. As numerous critics have shown, the chronicle (*crónica*) played a fundamental role in the constitution of Latin American literature.[282] Since Latin America's publishing industry

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[280] See Sarlo, *Imaginación técnica*, especially the chapters "Arlt: la técnica en la ciudad" and "Divulgación periodística y ciencia popular."

[281] Kiberd's brilliant discussion of the newspaper occurs in the context of an interpretation of Joyce's *Ulysses*. For Kiberd, *Ulysses* "can be read as a slow-motion alternative to the daily newspaper of Dublin for 16 June 1904" (463).

[282] See González and Ramos.

was still in its infancy at the time, poets turned to journalism as a source of steady income, initiating literature's incomplete autonomy from political power. But journalism also represented a serious threat to literature. Aníbal González, for instance, refers to the *modernista* concern that "journalism not only degrades the author, but it also 'chops him to pieces'" (89). Unlike the time-intensive craft of poetry, the newspaper's "impersonal, reportorial 'telegraphic style' was, for them, the very negation of style, and, therefore, of the author" (89). The chronicle constituted, as Julio Ramos argues, the place "where literature would represent (at times anxiously) its encounter and conflict with the technologized and massified discourses of modernity" (xli).[283] As a result, the *modernista* chronicle registers the gap between prosaic object and unitary poetic subject, marking the uneven modernization of Latin American literature. But in Arlt's journalism, as we will see more clearly below, the author no longer maintains a rigid separation between self and urban modernity. Instead, Arlt combines his voice with other voices in order to render visible the inherently fractured and multiple nature of the urban subject who has been pieced together from impersonal urban fragments.[284]

For instance, in addition to the appropriation of urban materials, the collage aesthetic of Arlt's journalistic writings involves overlapping and open-ended quotations.

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[283] Ramos's account, however, seems to artificially separate *modernista* journalism and poetry. The chronicles were not simply a buffer, absorbing the shock of modernity. Rather, they gave the poets an opportunity to flex their literary muscles by writing poetically about non-poetic topics. For instance, *modernistas* often wrote about American and European cities—chaotic, crude realities far removed from the ethereal forms of *modernista* poetry—to show that the poet could make even the city into a stylized, beautiful object.

[284] In this way, Arlt's *aguafuertes* may bear more similarities with the articulation of voices in Baudelaire's prose poems and with a set of modernist fragments that Andreas Huyssen had identified as "metropolitan miniatures." These short prose pieces—written by Kracauer, Benjamin and Bloch, among others—dispense with plot and character. Preferring a provisional, kaleidoscopic approach to the city, the miniature both performs and reflects on the urban transformation of subjectivity and perception. The multiperspectivism of the literary miniature coordinates, without collapsing, the distinct modes of expression that overlap and coexist in the metropolis: slang, advertisements, headlines, etc.

In the second half of "El arte de juntar puchos," Arlt describes a discussion with a friend who elaborates on the details of this practice. The friend's voice initially appears as one quote among others, subordinated to Arlt's authorial voice, but the abrupt, perplexing ending suggests that the second half of the text is either one continuous quote without quotation marks or an ambiguous mixture of two voices. As a reporter, Arlt defers to the friend's account, but Arlt neither returns to make a final comment nor makes a clear distinction between direct discourse and the discourse of the column writer. Arlt thus violates the supposed objectivity of journalism, insofar as it is based on the separation of reporter and words reported. This *aguafuerte* thereby becomes what Bakhtin might describe as "double-voiced," since "we hear in that word another person's voice" (152). Furthermore, this double-voiced word does not amount to stylization or parody—phenomena in which the speaking subject, out of agreement or disagreement, subordinates the intentions of another speaker. The words of the friend (and Arlt) would be more accurately described as passively double-voiced. The voices enter into a dialectical relationship in which "the other person's word" ends up "exert[ing] an active influence and inspiration on the author's speech, forcing it to change accordingly" (Bakhtin 164).[285] Roberto Arlt had a distinctive journalistic persona in Buenos Aires, but,

[285] As an avid reader of Dostoevsky, Arlt appears to have independently come to the Bakhtinian conclusions about dialogism. And because of the massive wave of immigration to Argentina in the early twentieth century, dialogism was an urgent political matter, prompting conservative writers and the dominant class to defend the purity of literature as a model of the national language. But Arlt, as Ricardo Piglia argues in a memorable moment from *Respiración artificial*, "works with what *remains*, what is sedimented in language, with leftovers, fragments, amalgams, that is to say, he works with what really is the national language" (134). The negativity of this prosaic national language disqualifies it as a static model, whether real or ideal, to be copied. Arlt, in short, does not reproduce a static, pre-existing language; he rearranges and overlaps verbal scraps, thereby capturing the inherent dynamic of spoken language. Along these lines but in a different *aguafuerte*, Arlt argues against the need for a "grammar" of Argentine language. "The peoples" who do not have "new ideas to express," he writes, "don't need new words," but porteños "are in constant evolution" and "extract words from all angles" [Los pueblos bestias se perpetúan en su idioma con lo que, no teniendo ideas nuevas que expresar, no necesitan palabras nuevas o giros

seen in light of the collage of scraps and urban voices, this persona appears not as a singular personality but as a composite of tendencies in the peripheral metropolis.

Arlt often relies on this constructed persona in his novels, but he deploys it in peculiar ways. Unlike Arlt's first novel, *El juguete rabioso* (Mad Toy, 1926), a quasi-picaresque novel that narrates in the first person the protagonist's youthful struggles and aspirations, *LSL* and *LL* are narrated by a journalist figure and present themselves as reportage, as the non-fictional reconstruction of events that have been sensationalized in the news. The narrator, who is referred to as "the commentator,"[286] claims to have housed Erdosain for three days, during which time Erdosain explained the details of the story. After Erdosain commits suicide, the commentator explains that he consulted other characters, police sources, and journalistic accounts. The novel's jarring *media res* opening becomes clearer in this light.[287] The narrator provides no background but simply jumps into the first scene, assuming on the level of subtext that the reader already knows about Erdosain from having read the newspaper. Moreover, the commentator, as a journalist, often appears not as a fictional persona but as Arlt himself. In various footnotes, Arlt appears to speak directly, announcing, for instance, the details of the second novel or commentating on the remarkable similarities between the Astrologer's plot and the "conservative revolution" of September 6 in Argentina.[288] Occasionally,

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extraños; pero, en cambio, los pueblos que, como el nuestro, están en una continua evolución, sacan palabras de todos los ángulos] (*Aguafuertes II* 224).

[286] The narrator also refers to himself as "cronista," "comentarista" and even "autor." For the purposes of simplification, I will use "the commentator," the most frequent name the narrator gives himself.

[287] In a recent television adaptation of the novels, Ricardo Piglia's opted to foreground the relationship between Erdosain and the commentator. The series opens with Erdosain waking up on the commentator's couch and beginning to recount the story.

[288] On September 6, 1930, the military overthrew president Yrigoyen, replacing the largely liberal orientation of the Argentine government with an authoritarian, nationalist tendency that curtailed popular participation and distanced itself from the export model in the economy.

these comments carry the heading "author's note" and thus appear to set themselves apart from notes made by the narrator.[289] But not always. The last footnote in *Los lanzallamas,* simply labeled "note," reiterates Arlt's frequent complaints about the temporal constraints he faced as a writer and journalist: "This work was finished with such speed that the publisher was printing the first sheets as the author was editing the final chapters" (*LSL/LL* 599).[290] These are surely Arlt's words, but they appear in the footnote, the space seemingly reserved for the narrator's comments. The notes thus open the possibility, which we will explore in more detail below, that the novels are factual documents of real people and/or pure fiction. A qualitative distinction, of course, exists between Arlt, as author, and the narrator, and Arlt would not deny such a distinction. But he writes the novels in such a way that they constantly shift back and forth between fictional and factual registers, asking the reader to do an impossible task: to see the novels as both simultaneously.

The footnotes in *LSL* and *LL* play an integral role in this dialectic of fictionality and factuality. Surprisingly, critics have paid very little attention to Arlt's use of footnotes, even though they are one of the most unique aspects of the novels and in many ways anticipate Borges's own work with footnotes.[291] While the footnotes entail a complex mediation of author and narrator, they also produce reality effects through journalistic references to contemporary events. The novels thereby make explicit the connection between the plot and the interwar moment, and perhaps more importantly,

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[289] In his translation of *Los siete locos*, Nick Caistor renders all the footnotes as "commentator's notes" and thus eliminates the way Arlt problematizes authorship

[290] "Con tanta prisa se terminó esta obra, que la Editorial imprimía los primeros pliegos mientras que el autor estaba redactando los últimos capítulos."

[291] Vicky Unruh links the footnotes to the way Arlt problematizes authorship and addresses himself to a more variegated reading public.

they claim empirical verification for the reality of the story. Arlt, in other words, does not create reality effects by means of meticulous descriptions of seemingly insignificant domestic objects and urban settings, as in a novel by Flaubert or Balzac. Instead, he relies on documents, on forms of writing whose factual status seemingly enables them to make truth-claims. In *Los lanzallamas,* for instance, Erdosain claims that there is no escape from suffering, because "Every coast of the world is occupied by ferocious men who, with the help of canons and machine guns, install factories and burn alive poor indigenous people who resist their robbery" (*LSL/LL* 492).[292] The commentator agrees, including in a footnote a recent report from a French newspaper about Chinese writers and Communists who were executed or burned alive. This addition in a footnote causes a shift in perspective in which Erdosain's anguish appears not only as that of a fictional character but also as a document of a total historical moment. These moments constitute the novelistic counterparts of Arlt's claim, mentioned above, that the characters were people in the city whom he met, people who embody the contradictions of the interwar period. The narrator presents himself as a journalist, even as *LSL* and *LL* deny their own fictionality through the use of documents. These reality effects do not simply make the novels "plausible"; they establish a direct link to the historical situation and thereby claim empirical verification.

In this way, Arlt's use of footnotes resemble the montage form of Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* trilogy. Whereas the montage character of *Manhattan Transfer* owes a debt to certain cinematographic attempts to move back and forth between stories occurring simultaneously, fusing different plot lines into a kaleidoscopic formation, the *U.S.A.*

[292] "Todas las costas del mundo están ocupadas por hombres feroces que con auxilio de cañones y ametralladoras instalan factorías y queman vivos a pobres indígenas que se resisten a sus latrocinios."

trilogy deploys separate modes: narratives, biographical prose poems, the stream-of-consciousness Camera Eye, and the Newsreels. Many critics have attributed the genesis of the *U.S.A.* trilogy to Dos Passos's frustration over the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti—two Italian immigrant anarchists—but Donald Pizer traces the specific formal logic of *U.S.A.* to Dos Passos's attempt to construct a book devoted to defending their case. This work, entitled *Facing the Chair*, "consists of documents that have been edited and arranged to demonstrate the thesis of a frame-up of two innocent men because of their beliefs" (Pizer, "Modernist Style" 60). Dos Passos had already experimented with documents in *Manhattan Transfer*: for instance, the reference to a Gillette advertisement in one of the opening vignettes. But documents assume a much more prominent role in *U.S.A*. The Newsreel sections are pieced together from scraps of popular songs and news reports from the *Chicago Tribune* and the New York *World*. Some of the newspaper clippings are trivial, whereas others follow crucial historical events, like the start of WWI. These documents thereby serve to buttress the trilogy's attempt to objectively reconstruct the recent history of the twentieth century.

And yet, since these factual forms do not posit an unambiguous relationship to historical reality, they illustrate the constitutive contradictions of the documentary novel. As Barbara Foley defines it in her brilliant study, the documentary novel "purports to represent reality by means of agreed-upon conventions of fictionality, while grafting onto its fictive pact some kind of additional claim to empirical validation" (25). The point, as Foley makes abundantly clear, is not to eradicate the distinction between fictional and factual discourse, since the documentary novel asserts that such a qualitative distinction exists precisely by shifting back and forth across the dividing line. The documentary

novel, in its peculiar montage of fact and fiction, posits and overdetermines two Gestalt frames of interpretation simultaneously, even as its denies the possibility of their synthesis. In Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* the documents not only insist on the empirical validity of the story; they also highlight the "vacuousness of popular belief and expression in America" (Pizer, *U.S.A.* 80). In other words, the aspects of the novels that carry the burden of historical reference are also the ones that demonstrate the reduction of language to cliché and its manipulation, for instance, in the hands of someone like J. Ward Moorehouse, the publicists who works for Rockefeller and for the US government during the war. Accordingly, this degradation of language is not isolated to the Newsreels. Despite the separation of modes, the montage form establishes relations between discrete parts. For instance, degraded language extends from the Newsreels to the narratives where, as Sartre put it, the "characters' utterances" are presented "in the style of a statement to the Press. Their words are thereby cut off from thought, and become pure utterances, simple reactions" (100). In large part, *U.S.A*. involves a struggle over language, its possibilities for expression and its reification in modern capitalist media. Documents in *U.S.A.* thus have a dual character insofar as they fold within themselves this historical tension.

While *LSL* and *LL* by no means include the same level of historical documentation as the *U.S.A.* trilogy, Arlt similarly incorporates documents while reversing their normal function. Arlt's documents always have a dual character: one the one hand, they establish a link with empirical reality and assert the factuality of the story; on the other hand, they negate their claim to be immediately verifiable. For instance, towards the beginning of *Los lanzallamas* the Astrologer justifies his conviction that

"half a dozen willing associates can turn the best made society upside down" (353)[293] on the recent news that Al Capone and George Moran had formed an alliance. Despite operating outside the law, these men have become so powerful that the alliance is reported as if it were "an offensive or defensive treaty between Paraguay and Bolivia, or Bolivia and Uruguay" (354).[294] The Astrologer thus seeks to convince his interlocutor, the Lawyer, and the reader by extension, of the feasibility of his secret society on the basis of what is actually happening elsewhere in the world. The commentator, however, footnotes updated news on the alliance: Capone's thugs, disguised as police officers, killed many of Moran's men and nearly killed Moran himself.[295] The alliance, it seems, was simply a deceitful maneuver, a way to get close to Moran in order to then destroy his organization. Correspondingly, the news report—the fact that presents itself as immediately verifiable—turns out to be an unwitting illusion.

This footnote also begins to underline a pervasive problem and formal principle in the novels: unreliable narrators. The footnotes often interrupt the narrative flow in order to offer a conflicting perspective or even explain that something is false. During the meeting of the secret society, in a chapter aptly named "La farsa" (The Farce), a Major in the military proposes how the Argentine military could be used to serve the society's goals. Yet, after delivering his speech on the failings of parliamentary democracy, the Major admits that he is playing a role, that "this was nothing more than a rehearsal, but some day we'll act out the drama for real" (178/165).[296] But the footnote reverses the

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[293] "una media docena de voluntades asociadas, pueden poner patas arriba a la sociedad mejor constituida"
[294] "tratado ofensivo y defensive entre Paraguay y Bolivia o Bolivia y Uruguay"
[295] By referring to the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, as it became known, the commentator implicitly foreshadows the failure of the Astrologer's secret society.
[296] "Este no fue nada más que un ensayo … ya que representaremos la comedia en serio algún día." I rely on Nick Caistor's translation of *Los siete locos*. Citations for *Los siete locos* will include the page number

picture once again: "It was later discovered that the Major was a real rather than an imaginary officer" (178/165).[297] Suspicions multiply further when the Gold Prospector, another member of the secret society, tells a captivating story about the discovery of colloidal gold in Patagonia, only to admit to Erdosain that the story was false. Unreliable narrators are the norm in these novels. Erdosain's testimony constitutes the fundamental basis of the commentator's reconstruction, and while Erdosain does not appear to deliberately deceive, unlike other characters, his hallucinations and delirious experiences put in question his own reliability. Even if the novels, in their fictional self-presentation, aspire to the objectivity of reportage, the narration and its sources cannot coalesce into a factual report. The commentator may claim to rectify apocryphal accounts, but the narration cannot completely eliminate the unreliability of its sources. Moreover, this unreliability is not simply an ineradicable trace of subjectivity; rather, in raising the question of belief in the context of a self-declared factual presentation, *LSL* and *LL* ask what counts as a fact.[298] The footnotes thus stage a dialectical reversal whereby the most factual moments of the novels—journalistic reality-effects that claim empirical validation—reveal their falseness and, in another reversal, suggest that deceit may be the fundamental truth of the historical situation.

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from the English translation and then the page number from the Spanish version of both *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*.

[297] "Más tarde se comprobó que el Mayor no era un jefe apócrifo, sino auténtico, y que mintió al decir que estaba representando una comedia."

[298] In part, Arlt's approach to journalism is not unique. Aníbal González has argued that the Latin American avant-gardes, unlike their *modernista* predecessors, often incorporated journalism into literature with "the effect of undermining journalism's claim to be fundamentally different from fiction" (104). Yet, with the exception of Borges, whose use of footnotes and reality effects uncannily resembles those of Arlt, no one takes this relationship of literature and journalism to such extreme ends. And, as I will explain, what is at stake in Arlt is not simply the postmodern erosion of the distinction between fiction and reality but a dialectical shifting that maintains without reifying the distinction.

Arlt articulates the latter idea, that social reality rests not on unambiguous materiality but on a peculiar form of distortion, in the figure of the Astrologer and his plans for a secret society. As many critics have noted, the Astrologer anticipates a form of paranoid and conspiratorial politics that culminated in Juan Domingo Perón, but this insistence on the anticipatory character of Arlt's novels misses how the Astrologer's ideas are a collage of contemporary historical sources: Mussolini and Lenin, above all.[299] The Astrologer bases his secret society on the need for what he calls "the metaphysical lie" [la mentira metafísica] (154/142), the need for myth. In his diagnosis, modern rationalization and the brutality of recent world events have led to a spiritual and existential crisis: "Once science has extinguished all faith, nobody will want to go on with a purely mechanical existence … an incurable plague will return to the earth … the plague of suicide" (142/153).[300] In this desperate situation, the Astrologer proposes "tak[ing] a step backwards" [volver para atrás] (143/154), inventing gods and cultivating myth, a non-historical form of thought that revolves around origins and repetition.[301] And

[299] A non-contemporary historical reference would probably be Louis Auguste Blanqui, the French anarchist who espoused the idea of a dictatorship of the few who would carry out the revolution. Marx's notion of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was meant as a direct rebuke to Blanqui's sectarian, conspiratorial politics.

[300] "Nadie tendrá interés en conservar una existencia de carácter mecánico, porque la ciencia ha cercenado toda fe. Y en el momento que se produzca tal fenómeno, reaparecerá sobre la tierra una peste incurable … la peste del suicidio."

[301] In using the term "myth," I intend to invoke its formulation in the writings of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. Susan Buck-Morss provides a useful gloss of this idea in their work: "Within myth, the passage of time takes the form of predetermination … Strictly speaking, myth and history are incompatible. The former dictates that because human beings are powerless to interfere in the workings of fate, nothing truly new can happen, while the concept of history implies the possibility of human influence upon events, and with it, the moral and political responsibility of people as conscious agents to shape their own destiny. Myths give answers to why the world is as it is when an empirical cause and effect cannot be seen, or when It cannot be remembered. Although they satisfy the desire felt by human beings for a meaning-filled world, it is at the high price of turning that world back upon them as inescapable fate. Mythic time is, clearly, not limited to a particular discourse. Science as well as theology, rationalism as well as superstition can claim that events are inexorably determined" (78). That is, Adorno and Benjamin refuse the hypostasize the distinction between history and myth. Historicism, for instance, easily takes on a mythical form; myth, conversely, should be understood as historically conditioned. Arlt suggests something similar insofar as the Astrologer's myths are not naturally given but the results of his conscious activity. Moreover, the

yet, his attempt to recreate a messianic figure and a meaningful world outside time is not premised on any genuine belief; rather, it derives from a cynical, calculating and completely disenchanted view of human existence. The members of the secret society, he says, must know fundamental truths if they are to effectively deceive the masses with mythical images:

> [M]y idea is this: there will be two castes in this new society, with a gap between them … or rather, an intellectual void of some thirty centuries between the two. The majority will live carefully kept in the most complete ignorance, surrounded by apocryphal miracles, which are far more interesting than the historical kind, while the minority will be the ones who have access to science and power. That is how happiness will be guaranteed for the majority, because the people of this caste will be in touch with the divine world, which today they are lacking. The minority will administer the herd's pleasures and miracles, and the gold age, the age in which angels roam along paths at twilight and gods are seen by moonlight, will come to pass. (145/155)[302]

Deceit would thus serve as the cement holding together the secret society and the society it would rule. And despite the language of "miracles" and "divine world," the insistence on a thirty centuries gap demonstrates that the Astrologer in no way attempts to return to a pre-industrial age. The secret society is based on a rigorous division of labor and its myths are suffused with technological imagination. It will not be a traditional secret society, but one based on industrialism, in the wake of Ford, Morgan and Rockefeller, god-like men who "were capable of destroying the moon … [who] could wipe out a race

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mythology of this secret society would be based not on nature but on spectacles made possible by industry and science. In this way, his ideas do not appear all that fantastic; rather, they quite accurately grasp the fantasy of modern technology independent of its social forms.

[302] "Mi idea es organizar una sociedad secreta, que no tan sólo propague mis ideas sino que sea una escuela de futuros reyes de hombres. Ya sé que usted me dirá que han existido numerosas sociedades secretas … y es cierto … todas desaparecieron porque carecían de bases sólidas, es decir, que se apoyaban en un sentimiento o en una idealidad política o religiosa, con esclusión de toda realidad inmediata. En cambio, nuestra sociedad se basará en un principio más sólido y moderno: el industrialism, es decir, que la logia tendrá un elemento de fantasía, si así quiere llamar a todo lo que le he dicho y otro elemento positivo: la industria, que dará como consecuencia el oro."

with a snap of their fingers, just as you trample on an ant-hill in your garden" (141/152).[303] The Astrologer thus attributes to modern industrial capitalism a prevailing existential homelessness, but he also sees it as the key to the construction of a modern mythology.

The Astrologer's grandiose ideas appear absurd, but they are nothing but a collage of pseudo-fascist and pseudo-communist clichés that were readily recognizable at the time in Argentina and globally.[304] The paradoxes of the Astrologer's plans have less to do with the character's eccentricities and more to do with the contradictions of the ideas in circulation and with the way Arlt fuses, overlaps and juxtaposes these clichés. In part, in his construction of the Astrologer, Arlt appropriates the ideas of authoritarian nationalists in Argentina and their critique of modernity's lack of values. In "El discurso de Ayacucho" (1924) the poet Leopoldo Lugones, for instance, lamented the levelling effect of democracy and proposed that society should follow the lead of the military. For Lugones, the height of Latin American nations occurred in the struggle for independence, and "*the hour of the sword has sounded*"—that is, in the midst of the chaos of modernity, the nation must unite once again around the military, "the last existing aristocracy, which is to say the last chance at hierarchical organization left before the demagogic dissolution" (82-83).[305] In a certain sense, Lugones's argument coincides with that of the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, who visited Buenos Aires multiple times in

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[303] "hombres como Ford, Rockefeller o Morgan fueran capaces de destruir la luna … podían destruir con un solo gesto una raza, com usted en su jardín un nido de hormigas"

[304] We might draw a comparison to Fredric Jameson's description of Wyndham Lewis's "collage-composition" insofar as it "draws heavily and centrally on the warehouse of cultural and mass cultural cliché, on the junk materials of industrial capitalism, with its degraded commodity art, its mechanical reproduceability, its serial alienation of language" (*Fables* 73).

[305] Lugones implies that the greatness of the military implies a struggle against a common enemy, but in "El discurso de Ayacucho" Lugones does not elaborate on this enemy. Other writings, however, make clear that Lugones's main target is Bolshevism and immigration.

the twenties and thirties and whose ideas were frequently discussed by porteño intellectuals. Ortega y Gasset's *La rebelión de las masas* (1930) insists on the inertness and emptiness of mass society and on the need for an aristocratic elite to assume intellectual, spiritual leadership, to restore social hierarchies and to direct the inherently aimless masses. While Ortega y Gasset's work does not contain the violence of Lugones, it similarly calls for a small group to recover aristocratic hierarchies and a lost spiritual form of existence. These ideas, which were increasingly influential in Argentina in the late twenties and thirties, filter into the Astrologer's plans, but Arlt also draws heavily on European fascism. The Astrologer's paradoxical denunciation and celebration of industrialism, as I will explain in more detail below, was one of the defining features of fascist ideology. Moreover, José Amícola has shown that one of the Astrologer's most notorious quotes—"We'll be Bolsheviks, Catholics, fascists, atheists or militarists, depending on the level of initiation" (150/161)[306]—evokes a well-known statement made by Mussolini.[307] This quote, more than any other that expresses the putative content of the Astrologer's plans, grasps the way in which the Astrologer constructs himself as a collage in which the intrinsic value of each element is displaced by the end that can be achieved from their combination. The Astrologer's ideas have a magnetic attraction, but this distorts the fact that the Astrologer's ideology has no positive content: its emptiness, instead, serves to articulate the extremes of the historical moment. By condensing the

[306] "Seremos bolcheviques, católicos, fascistas, ateos, militaristas en diversos grados de iniciación" (150/161).

[307] Mussolini: "Noi ci permettiamo il lusso d'essere aristocratici, conservatori e progressisti, reazionari e rivoluzionari, legalisti e illegalisti, a seconda delle circostanze di tempo, di luogo, d'ambiente nelle quali siamo costretti a vivere ed agire" (qtd. in Amícola 39). At the time Arlt was writing these novels, German National Socialism had not attained the level of visibility that Italian fascism had, but one can imagine that the novels would have been littered with Hitler's sayings, if Arlt had written the novels in the mid- or late-thirties.

contradictions of the historical situation into the plans for a secret society, Arlt presents the Astrologer as a caricature comprised of overdetermined ideological clichés and historical fragments. [308]

LSL and *LL* construct an intricate historical collage, but it is precisely the most documentary character of this collage that highlights its unreliability. The factual documents—sayings, propaganda, footnotes, etc.— in *LSL* and *LL* posit the novels' relationship to the historical situation, but they also appear as mere "phrases," as empty words used to deceive, overdetermined words that appear to fill in the longing for stable meaning. Because of the way his words assume the form of an overdetermined montage, the Astrologer is the master of what Bakhtin calls the loophole, "the retention for oneself of the possibility for altering the ultimate, final meaning of one's own words" (233). The Astrologer rearranges readymade phrases and always holds open the possibility of another reorganization that would transform the meaning. Accordingly, Arlt's documents must be understood in terms of how their montage configuration points in two directions: in terms of their relation to the historical reality outside the text from which they are extracted and on which they claim empirical verification; and in terms of their relation to the inherent, albeit contradictory, structure of the novels, which transforms the documents into empty phrases that can be constantly reworked to solicit and manipulate belief.[309] But the critical thrust of the novels does not reside in the demystification of the Astrologer's plans, as if illusion could be dispensed with once and for all. Such a

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[308] Devin Fore has reconstructed the context in which caricature fascinated montage artists like Heartfield and Eisenstein because caricature, like montage, "designate[s] a supercharging," seen in the Italian root of the word *caricare* (259).

[309] LSL and LL stage the impasse of modern fictionality, which, as Catherine Gallagher argues, involves a peculiar mode of reference on the basis of its non-referentiality and its imprisonment in plausibility. Arlt's novels reverse the standard sequence insofar as its apparent referentiality becomes the ground of its non-referentiality—that is, the documents lose their immediate relation to reality and turn into fiction as deceit.

procedure, Arlt might respond, fails to grasp how the contemporary historical situation is constituted by a contradictory kernel of illusion and fact, by the extent to which illusions become objective insofar as they inform human activity. By tracing the operations of the Astrologer's plans, *LSL* and *LL* highlight the extent to which social reality can be structured by illusions.

In this regard, there is a striking affinity between Arlt's novels and the photomontages of John Heartfield. Unlike his earlier work with Berlin Dada, which was characterized by explosive fragmentation and the disintegration of illusionism, Heartfield's photomontages in *AIZ* (*Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*) amount "to a zealous *over*coding" of the techniques of "mimetic illusionism" (Fore 247). In these photomontages, Heartfield rarely used his own photographs; instead, he rearranges exclusively pre-existing images and sayings, factual and imaginary materials in circulation that most readers would have been able to recognize. Moreover, Heartfield deploys montage to simultaneously create the appearance of reality and to parody the imagery of National Socialism. At first glance, many of Heartfield's photomontages for *AIZ* do not even appear to be montages. Their resemblance to straight photography prompted the editors of *AIZ* to supplement standard photographs with a note explaining that it had not been manipulated (Kahn 71). Montage instead enters the image in the way Heartfield overdetermines the elements, prompting a shift from an initially realist image to its critical reversal. Heartfield's "Hurrah, die Butter ist alle!" (Hurray, the Butter is Gone, 1935), for instance, presents a quasi-realistic image of a bourgeois dining room in which the family eats pieces of metal. The image realizes Hermann Göring's absurd statement that butter and lard make the nation weak, but ore makes it strong. In

appropriating and imitating fascist images and sayings, Heartfield does not present an unambiguous message but rearranges fragments in such a way that they say more than was intended and thus highlight a contradiction. Accordingly, Devin Fore writes, following the lead of Sergei Tret'iakov in his monograph on Heartfield, that montage does not consists of "mere accumulation"; rather, montage only happens when "pieces have been assembled in a way that supercharges the image semantically, giving rise to dynamic visual impressions and a multiplicity of potential interpretations" (258). As a result, Heartfield's photomontages often assume the form of a Gestalt figure, like the duck-rabbit, that must be understood simultaneously in two mutually exclusive ways, even if the figure can only appear in one way at a given moment. In "The Meaning of the Hitler-Salute: Millions Stand Behind Me!" (1932), for instance, "millions" refers both to the mass support behind the Nazis and to the fact that German capitalists had rallied behind Hitler (Fore 265). Heartfied slightly inverts Hitler's saluting arm to show him receiving money behind his back from an oversized, faceless capitalist. Apart from the proportions, the image appears entirely realistic. The images thus illustrate how Heartfield's photomontages, in the words of Sabine Kriebel, "stage our illusory, unstable apprehension of the world by exploiting the discourses of illusion, of false cognition, by engaging in and reproducing its very terms … Thus, the viewer experiences a constant relay between illusion and disillusionment, myth and demystification" (12). Rather than explode the appearance of coherent reality, as in Dada, or present utopian images of Communist workers, Heartfield realistically imitates mythical images and illusory appearances, staging a dialectical montage that operates as their immanent critique.

Arlt similarly deploys and overdetermines realistic techniques—footnotes, documents, journalistic conventions—in order to undermine fascist imagery and claims to immediate verification. The collage-composition of *LSL* and *LL* attests to Siegfried Kracauer's contemporaneous statement in *Die Angestellten* (The Salaried Masses) that "Reality is a construction" (*Salaried* 32). This realization, for Kracauer, complicates the goals of reportage, since, despite its "self-declaration of concrete existence" (32), it remains just as distant from reality as idealist thought. Arranged arbitrarily in the form of reportage, facts and individual reports remain abstract—that is, they fail to account for their social and historical mediation. Kracauer's representational strategy in *Die Angestellten* instead emphasizes conscious mediation, the relations between facts, "in the mosaic that is assembled from single observations on the basis of comprehension of their meaning" (32). The mosaic, in other words, remains confined to the facts; but it is assembled in such a way that it reveals the historically specific logic underlying the facts and the provisional nature of this social construction. The tension between factual forms and unreliability in *LSL* and *LL* operates in the same manner, not in order to assert that all reality is fictional but to insist on the need for a dialectical mediation, a shifting back and forth, that grasps the contradictory imbrication of reality and illusion.

Ultimately, the dialectical relation between factuality and deceit unfolds in the peripheral metropolis. For Arlt, cynical reason prevails among urban subjects, but this cynicism also paves the way for myth and deception. In "Por algo somos desconfiados" (We Are Suspicious for a Reason), an *aguafuerte* published in 1929, Arlt insists that "you cannot believe anyone" (*Aguafuertes* 206).[310] Sitting on the train or in the park,

[310] "Yo, a trueque de pasar por cínico, diré que no se puede creer en nadie."

overhearing conversations, Arlt notices a recurring pattern of deceit in the city. No one believes, but the pervasiveness of deceit suggests that people believe all too easily. In the countryside, Arlt explains, deceit is uncommon because everyone knows everyone else, but the city is "a sort of masonry forest where a wild animal hides in every cavern and stalks its prey" (*Aguafuertes* 206).[311] The city constitutes perhaps the most extreme expression of how in capitalism, to recall the Marx line quoted above, replaces personal relations of dependency with personal independence in a framework of objective dependence, asocial social forms based on money and commodities.[312] Insofar as it is structured by the logic of capital, modern urban life entails anonymity and alienation, not reliable, intimate bonds. Moreover, for Arlt, urban modernity creates cynical subjects who deceive in order to avoid being deceived. Accordingly, Arlt states that we are witnessing "the twilight of compassion … This is the *century of phrases*" (206, emphasis added).[313] Arlt does not elaborate on this terse historical diagnosis, but "phrases" (*frases*) refers to quotations, empty sayings and clichéd language, linking thereby the proliferation of mass media and disingenuous political propaganda in the early twentieth century to life in the peripheral metropolis. The idea of a "century of phrases," in other words, encapsulates the historical situation formally enacted in *LSL* and *LL*, namely how urban

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[311] "La ciudad, en cambio, es una especie de bosque de mampostería donde en cada caverna está escondida una fiera que acecha la presa."

[312] If I were to use Slavoj Zizek's Lacanian vocabulary, I would say that *LSL* and *LL* are fundamentally concerned with fantasy, that unconscious beliefs subsist in our actions and inform social reality. Commodity fetishism is one of Zizek's privileged examples of fantasy. Commodity fetishism does not involve a mistaken belief about things. It is an objective, necessary distortion that results from the structure of capitalist production, an illusion that becomes objective insofar as it informs human activity. This illusory distortion, in other words, is not simply a question of thought—the misrepresentation of reality, which could be corrected with correct ideas—but a question of illusion that is inscribed into social reality in response to fundamental social contradictions.

[313] "Escribí una vez que, en esta época, a nosotros, los hombres, nos había tocado asistir al crepúsculo de la compasión. Esa es la verdad. Se vive con más fiereza que las mismas fieras, desalmadamente, cínicamente. ¿Mal del siglo? ¡Macanas! Yo creo que éste es el siglo de las frases."

cynicism and pure factuality prepare the ground for their opposite, creating the conditions for deceit and a desired return to mythical images.[314]

Geometry and Anguish across Photography and Architecture

At the beginning of *Los siete locos*, Erdosain is interrogated by his supervisors at the Compañía Azucarera (Sugar Company) for having stolen money from the company. Why would Arlt decide to make Erdosain an employee of a sugar company? His decision alludes to the export model of the Argentine economy, in which raw materials cultivated in the countryside pass through the port of Buenos Aires and into the global economy. The production of sugar in Argentina has largely been concentrated in the northeast, in the province of Tucumán in particular. This connection between sugar and Tucumán points to another possible connotation of the Compañía Azucarera. In 1924, the Argentine architects Alberto Prebisch and Ernesto Vautier developed plans for a "ciudad azucarera en la provincia de Tucumán," a sugar city. Images of the plans, which draw heavily on Le Corbusier and Tony Garnier's "Industrial City," were included in an early issue of *Martín Fierro*, and Prebisch contributed frequently to the journal on questions of modern architecture.[315] The opening scene of *LSL* could thus be read as a coded reference to Arlt's discontent, as I will demonstrate in this section, with modernist architecture and its attempt to mobilize modernity, rational calculation and geometrical forms to achieve harmony.

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[314] My analysis here owes a great deal to Peter Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason*. It is worth remembering that a large part of Sloterdijk's analysis of cynical reason derives from the Weimar Republic.
[315] As was noted above, Roberto Arlt was on the fringes of the close-knit circle of writers at *Martín Fierro*, and the opening scene of *Los siete locos* could be said to stage his own feeling of estrangement.

If the previous section outlined the reversal of realist directions of *LSL* and *LL*, this section concentrates on Arlt's modernist techniques—expressionist distortions, in particular—in light of modern architecture and photography. Moreover, if the realist tendencies of Arlt's novels ultimately move in modernist directions, Arlt's modernism turns out to be rooted in reality. Julio Prieto summarizes very nicely this chiasmus: "Like the curved glass of a fish bowl that determines what is seen *from within*, this would be a realism of distorting interiors that exude and saturate the vision of the exterior, in a specific effect of condensation and reflection-bending of the social and historical panoramas" (53). Prieto's quote grasps how Arlt's modernist realism, or realist modernism, does not simply involve the projection of subjectivity onto reality because these distortions are a literary mediation of objective historical tendencies. And despite the mediation, these terms retain their non-identity and antagonism. In other words, the fundamental premise of Arlt's formal logic is the impossibility of harmony in modernity. With regards to the city, this implies an artistic form that embodies the constitutive tension between what Frederico García Lorca called the city's "geometry and anguish," its "extrahuman architecture and furious rhythm" (xi).

In this regard, Alberto Prebisch represents the precise opposite of Arlt's montage logic insofar as his architectural projects attempt to reconcile modernity and the past in a harmonious form. For the urbanization projects of Mariano de Vedia y Mitre, Prebisch designed the Obelisk and the modernist Cine-Teatro Gran Rex. In "Una ciudad de América," an article published in *Sur* in 1931, Prebisch makes a contrast between the present state of Buenos Aires and the "humble city" of the nineteenth century, "without diagonals, subways or pretensions" (218). Prebisch does not attribute the problem to

immigration per se; indeed, the simple beauty and unpretentious homes of the humble city, which constitutes Buenos Aires's "own architecture," were the result of "Italian taste" and "colonial style" (219). The rapid growth of the city at the turn of the century, however, disrupted this balanced architecture, generated excess and eclecticism and spread "progressive superstitions" (217). Prebisch's modernism, accordingly, sets itself in opposition to the recent modernization of Buenos Aires. As Justin Read argues, "Prebisch's advocacy of *modernism* stemmed from a desire to correct *modernity* as he had experienced it up to 1931" (133). The Obelisk, which was constructed in 1936 along with other projects to commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of the founding of Buenos Aires, achieves this purpose insofar as it is a modern, non-ornamental, geometric form. Moreover, the Obelisk establishes a link with the Pirámide de Mayo, the monument for the independence struggle, and thus creates a continuity between modern Buenos Aires and the traditional, humble city once located in the center.[316] Modernization introduced disorder into the city, but the rationality of modernist architecture would restore harmony through geometrical forms.

Geometry, in other words, makes modernity compatible with classicism, not by drawing on and combining various historical forms, but by uncovering pure forms in both classical art and modern engineering. Le Corbusier consistently invoked geometrical forms in his written and architectural work, and in 1929, Le Corbusier gave a series of lectures in Buenos Aires on modern architecture which were warmly embraced by Argentine intellectuals from Victoria Ocampo to Alberto Prebisch.[317] In *Towards an*

[316] For more on Prebisch's role in the "symbolic refoundation of the center," see Gorelik 408-426.
[317] Victoria Ocampo commissioned Le Corbusier to design her house, but ultimately Alejandro Bustillo, a rather traditional architect, begrudgingly agreed to design her house in the modernist manner. In typical fashion, Le Corbusier proposes large-scale projects to reform Buenos Aires: including a business district

Architecture (1923) Le Corbusier formulates a set of axioms for modern architecture around the following terms: mass, surface and plan. The plan is the category to which all others are subordinated: "The whole structure rises from its base and is developed in accordance with a rule which is written on the ground in the plan: noble forms, variety of form, unity of the geometric principle. A profound projection of harmony: this is architecture" (48). The geometrical plan, with its rationalist, quasi-Platonic connotations, ensures that modern architecture achieves harmony and keeps a safe distance from eclecticism.[318] Moreover, the idea of the plan plays a fundamental role in the attempt to overcome the camera's mechanical character and articulate a modern photographic art. Todd Cronan maintains "that the conceptual ideal of the plan is the rhetorical model for photographic notions of visualization or previsualization which was a dominant photographic discourse between 1920 and 1960" ("Why Architecture Matters"). According to this model, it is only by planning and visualizing the image prior to taking the photo that photography becomes more than just a mechanical reproduction. Whether in architecture or photography, geometrical forms imply a rational orientation that avoids superfluous and unintentional ornamentation.

In 1920s and 1930s Argentina, modernist photography and architecture develop alongside one another. Many of the period's most iconic photographs were taken by

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erected over the Río de la Plata. Le Corbusier published the lectures from his trip to Buenos Aires in *Precisions on the Present State of Architecture and City Planning*. For a different take on the relationship between Le Corbusier and Arlt, see Sarlo, "Arlt: ciudad real, ciudad imaginaria, ciudad reformada."

[318] The historian of architecture Manfredo Tafuri has emphasized the place of the plan in the historical trajectory in which the goals of architectural ideology are realized by Keynesian policies and state capitalism, thus rending modernist architectural ideology obsolete: "Architecture as ideology of the plan is swept away by the *reality of the plan* when, the level of utopia having been superseded, the plan becomes an operative mechanism" (135). In this light, it might not be surprising that Alberto Prebisch's brother, Raúl Prebisch, became known as the Latin American Keynes for his work on unequal exchange and support for import-substitution industrialization.

Horacio Coppola, who was commissioned by de Vedia y Mitre to represent recent urbanization projects, including Prebisch's Obelisk and Cine-Teatro Gran Rex.[319] Coppola grew up in the center of Buenos Aires, and, after studying photography in Berlin at the Bauhaus, he returned to Argentina and began producing modern, straight photography.[320] As an advocate of straight photography, Coppola insists on the specificity of the photographic medium, not its attempt to imitate painterly conventions, and he refused to manipulate photos after the fact, as had been common among pictorialist photographers. When he returned to Argentina, Coppola deployed this straight aesthetic in photographs in which his "gaze … was unbroken by little else than the absolute modernity … of Buenos Aires" (Foster 140). And what characterizes this "absolute modernity," as it appears in Coppola's photographs, are the same geometrical forms that the modernist architect was trying to construct to combat the city's unplanned, eclectic modernization.[321] As I showed in the introduction, Coppola's photographs link the geometrical, modernist forms of Prebisch's neo-classicism to the simple, unadorned homes found on the city's edges.[322] These forms stand out in Coppola's photographs, eclipsing human figures in the city. Speaking of his own photographic project, Coppola

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[319] On Horacio Coppola and Grete Stern, see the special issue of the *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2015.

[320] The Argentine art critic Jorge Romero Brest praised Horacio Coppola and Grete Stern for having started artistic photography in Buenos Aires. See Romero Brest's review of their exhibition in *Sur*. Natalia Brizuela is critical of the received narrative of Coppola and Stern's "modernity," but she concisely links his conception of modern art to straight photography: "Modern for Coppola was the search for a photographic practice that made of it an art through its own materiality, its own ontology, its own particular way of being in the world" (253).

[321] This focus on geometrical, modern forms distinguishes Buenos Aires from other Latin American cities with a longer history and historical stratification that includes traces of indigenous civilization. Foster provides one of the pithiest articulations of this difference: "One could say that the display of modernity, in the case of Mexico City, is metonymic, while that of Buenos Aires, especially in the version provided by Horacio Coppola, is synecdochal" (140).

[322] Along these lines, Adrián Gorelik argues that Coppola sought to grasp the "essential order" underlying the modernization of Buenos Aires ("Images" 112). This meant presenting central and peripheral structures and spaces as if they were identical, ahistorical forms subsisting underneath the city's historical changes.

wrote: “My first adventure was to discover [Buenos Aires’s] geometric perspectives, symmetries and shadows that drew the black silhouettes of men on their backs, clinging to their newspapers” (qtd. in Foster 137). That is, Coppola does not seek to capture faces and human figures in the city. He completely avoids portraits, and, as the quote suggests, geometry represents a stable order that overshadows the vicissitudes of human figures. Take, for example, his photograph of Prebisch’s Obelisk.

XIII. Obelisco (1936), Horacio Coppola

The geometric Obelisk dwarfs the men at its base, and the chiaroscuro of the structure’s white surface intensifies obscurity to the extent that the individual human figures are almost indistinguishable. Even in more experimental photos that are organized along diagonal axes, Coppola’s photos consistently evoke geometric forms whose abstractedness suggest an affinity with the rational planning implicit in modernist architecture.

This idea of a rational plan, and its manifestations in urbanization projects, is evoked in *Los lanzallamas*. In a fascinating and troubling discussion about the truth of suffering and the fate of civilization, the Astrologer rejects this idea of rational urban planning insofar as it fails to address the underlying spiritual vacuum and the need for a metaphysical lie. "The Truth is Man. Man with his body" (*LSL/LL* 298),[323] he proposes. While intellectuals and artists turn toward abstractions, denigrating the body in turn:

> [B]usinessmen, soldiers and industrialists and politicians crush the Truth, that is, the Body. Complicit with engineers and doctors, they have said: man sleeps eight hours. To breathe, he needs so many cubic meters of air. To not rot away and to not corrupt us, which would be the most serious issue, so many square meters of sun are necessary, and with that criteria they build cities. (298)[324]

Cities, in other words, can be rationally organized only to the extent that people are reduced to bodies with predictable, definite needs. Paradoxically, the rationalist architect crushes the body precisely by making the body into the foundation of human existence. Alternatively, the Astrologer explains, "In order to not suffer, one would have to forget the body and man forgets the body when his spirit lives intensely, when his sensibility works strongly, it makes him see in his body the lower truth that can serve the higher truth" (299).[325] Put differently, "our civilization" has "made the body into an end, instead of a means," the effect of which is that "man feels the boredom that is his body and the pain of his body" (299).[326] Although some critics have been tempted to identify Arlt with

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[323] "La Verdad es el Hombre. El Hombre con su cuerpo."

[324] "A su vez, comerciantes, militares, industriales y políticos aplastan la Verdad, es decir, el Cuerpo. En complicidad con ingenieros y médicos, han dicho: El hombre duerme ocho horas. Para respirar, necesita tantos metros cúbicos de aire. Para no pudrirse y pudrirnos a nosotros, que sería lo grave, son indispensables tantos metros cuadrados de sol, y con ese criterio fabricaron las ciudades."

[325] "Para no sufrir habría que olvidarse del cuerpo y el hombre se olvida del cuerpo cuando su espíritu vive intensamente, cuando su sensibilidad trabajando fuertemente, hace que vea en su cuerpo la verdad inferior que puede servir a la verdad superior."

[326] "Nuestra civilización se ha particularizado en hacer del cuerpo el fin, en vez del medio, y tanto lo han hecho fin, que el hombre siente su cuerpo y el dolor de su cuerpo que es el aburrimiento." It is remarkable

the Astrologer, this would be a mistake since the form of the novels entails a critique of the Astrologer's project. While Arlt certainly does not share the Astrologer's plan to resurrect mythical images and construct a metaphysical lie, I would argue that the Astrologer's ideas here register Arlt's discontent with the idea of rational planning—in architecture and photography, among other areas—insofar as it entails abstraction from subjectivity and experience. The ideology of the plan, so to speak, focuses exclusively on geometry, whereas Arlt wants to explore the imbrication of and tension between geometry and anguish.

In terms of photography more explicitly, Arlt insists on how an excess inherent in photographic representation complicates its claim to objectively register reality. In the epilogue, the commentator narrates Erdosain's suicide on a train and the subsequent discovery of his body. Once the police find him and the press are notified, his body "was photographed one hundred and fifty three times in the space of six hours" (*LSL/LL* 597).[327] In the previous chapter, the same scene is told from the perspective of the newspaper. The editor sends a photographer to the scene of the suicide and express his excitement about how this story will help sell newspapers: "Awesome. Tomorrow we are going to print fifty thousand more copies" (595).[328] Photography and commerce thus

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how similar the Astrologer's speech is to one of the main argument of Ernst Jünger proto-fascist *On Pain*. Jünger, for instance, writes, "Boredom is nothing other than the dissolution of pain in time" (13). Like the Astrologer, Jünger advocates an attitude of "detachment" that "is able to treat the space through which he experiences pain, i.e., the body, as an object" (16). The similarity between the Astrologer and Jünger suggests to me that Arlt and Jünger were drawing on similar sources, which would strengthen my argument that the Astrologer is a collage of historical documents, but I haven't been able to track down a textual source to which they both would have had access.

[327] "Fué fotografiado ciento cincuenta y tres veces en el espacios de seis horas."

[328] "Macanudo. Mañana tiramos cincuenta mil ejemplares más." For Julio Prieto, the photographic documentation of Erdosain's body represents an ironic end to Erdosain's and the Astrologer's grand, messianic ideas: "It is not for nothing that the 'light' with which the novel concludes is not the mystical spark of the messianic story but the banal glow of modernization: the flash of the cameras that photograph Erdosain's cadaver in order to put it on the first page of the newspaper, reducing the mystery of the visionary or charismatic individual to the blind logic of mass reproduction" (76-77).

appear intertwined in a tendency toward overproduction. Along these lines, Siegfried Kracauer writes about the "blizzard of photographs" in illustrated magazines and how this excess of photographs "betrays an indifference towards what the things mean" ("Photography" 58). The presupposed rationality of photography—its ability to objectively capture reality—turns into a form of irrationality insofar as it detaches itself completely from this reality and is repeated indefinitely. The image of Erdosain's body is reproduced excessively and becomes a means to make money. And yet, at the same time, Arlt and Kracauer emphasize how photography retroactively distorts the reality it is supposed to objectively document. Kracauer speaks, for instance, of how "the world itself has taken on a 'photographic face'; it can be photographed because it strives to be absorbed into the spatial continuum which yields to snapshots" (59).[329] The pseudo-rationality of photography, its superficiality, is not confined to the medium itself; it also designates the abstract character of capitalist social reality. Arlt, for his part, criticizes the desire to be "photogenic" in "¿Soy fotogénico?," an *Aguafuerte* published in 1928. He notes a tendency for a man, for instance, "to spend days and nights puckering his lips and furrowing his brow to resemble" the actor Rodolfo Valentino (Arlt, *Notas* 40). According to Arlt, photography undermines self-consciousness insofar as it contributes to an attitude that wants to see itself as something else. While it apparently allows us to gain increased knowledge, photography, for Arlt, also hinders critical knowledge because of its tendency toward an excess that is indifferent to what is represented.

[329] Kracauer attributes this in part to the "*fear of death*": "What the photographs by their sheer accumulation attempt to banish is the recollection of death, which is part and parcel of every memory image" (59).

But Arlt is not straight-forwardly pessimistic when it comes to photography.[330] In an unpublished version of one of his plays, Arlt links what Julio Prieto calls "illegibility" to photography, normally the most transparent of media: "Other times I think I fall into a pit. Before me pass elongated and blurring pieces of life, as if they were poorly taken photographs" (qtd. in Prieto 55).[331] Despite framing these images as a mistake, Arlt evokes a deliberate modernist tendency to defamiliarize reality through distortion, by increasing exposure in the case of photography. Against photography's apparent rationality and objectivity, Arlt has in mind the sort of photograph that immediately renders problematic the medium's evidentiary function, not by manipulating the photograph after the fact but by allowing the camera to grasp the distortion of reality itself. Arlt was not an experimental photographer.[332] Apart from the photographs taken for his *aguafuertes*, most of Arlt's surviving, unpublished photographs were taken on September 6, 1930, when President Hipólito Yrigoyen was overthrown in the coup d'état that initiated the so-called "Infamous Decade." In part, these photographs

[330] One way to view Arlt's approach to photography involves looking at the Aguafuertes he wrote while traveling to Patagonia, Spain and Morocco. In his columns dedicated to Patagonia, the relationship between image and text is rather straight-forward, the former serving as a visual illustration of what is described in the latter. But in the *aguafuertes* he wrote while in Spain and Morocco, the relationship between image and text becomes less immediate. For brief discussions of Arlt's photographs in his *aguafuertes*, see Brizuela (244-245) and Cimadevilla. Arlt might be said to be moving towards a montage construction in which meaning is not contained within image or text but rather depends on their juxtaposition.

[331] "Otras veces me parece que caigo en un pozo. Pasan ante mí trozos de vida alargardos y borrosos como esas fotografías mal sacadas"

[332] Mirta Arlt, his daughter, included a small number of photographs in the bequest; it is hard to say whether these represent a portion of the photographs he took, the totality, or only what survived Arlt's chaotic life.

XIV. Untitled Photograph (1930), Roberto Arlt

constitute a historical record of a decisive event in Argentine history. But they also exhibit certain formal patterns. This image, for instance, centers on the mounted police officer, but, because he is pointing and yelling at some unseen figure, the photograph also draws attention to the frame and what lies outside it. The tension, in other words, of the historical situation gets formally articulated in the way the photograph stages the dissonance of inside and outside and thereby incorporates a sort of blind spot within the image.[333] This emphasis on dissonance, whether it be in Arlt's photographs on September 6th or in his reference to poorly taken photos, suggests a very different orientation from that of Horacio Coppola. Whereas Coppola seeks to find harmony in the geometrical figures, the "inhuman architecture," of Buenos Aires, Arlt aims to discover and transmute contradictory formal structure, not simply by favoring "anguish" over "geometry," but by exploring their dissonance and mutual contamination.

[333] Coppola's modernist photographs also draw attention to what lies outside the frame, but in a different way. In his photos, as in those of Moholy-Nagy and Rodchenko, the geometrical forms of the city or modern industry typically extend beyond the frame. But this, I would argue, is entirely consistent with the neo-Platonic insistence on geometric harmony that is beyond human perception—i.e., the frame.

In terms of photography in Argentina, Arlt's aesthetic might have more of an affinity with Grete Stern. Born and raised in Germany, Stern met Coppola at the Bauhaus in Berlin, where they were both studying photography. After the Nazis rose to power, Coppola and Stern married and left Germany for Argentina. Although they did not remain married for long, Stern continued to live in Argentina, where she was involved in a number of artistic and social projects. In the thirties, she and Coppola shared a commitment to straight photography, but in the forties, she began working for the magazine *Idilio* and experimenting with photomontage.[334] *Idilio*, a magazine directed at women, contained a section entitled "El psicoanálisis le ayudará" (Psychoanalysis will help you) in which women would submit their dreams to be interpreted. Stern used these dreams as inspiration for photomontages that would accompany the Freudian interpretation of the dream. The first photomontage, "Sueño 1," illustrates quite well Stern's aesthetic and the questions of women's anxieties.

[334] We might say that montage is already implicit in Stern's straight photography. Stern's teacher at the Bauhaus, Walter Peterhans, devised "a visual syntax known as 'intellectual montage'" (Marcoci 23). For Peterhans, the previsualization of photography involves the juxtaposition of found objects. On Stern's photomontages and her work with *Idilio*, see Uslenghi.

XV. Sueño 1: Artículos eléctricos para el hogar (1950), Grete Stern

The woman here is reduced to a tiny figure compared to the faceless male presence. Moreover, she is expected to simply turn on at the flip of a switch, dramatizing her lack of autonomy. The photomontage stands out for its articulation of realist and modernist techniques, as well. The woman is perfectly placed between the hand's index figure and thumb in order to maintain the sense of depth, but the exaggerated proportions, both small and large, suggest the form of a dream in which the materials of daily life are rearranged and distorted by the tension between rational waking life and unconscious desires.[335] Stern's photomontages thus resemble those by John Heartfield. Although the content of their works is radically different, photomontage enables both Heartfield and Stern to present seemingly realistic images through modernist techniques and thereby

[335] It should be noted that the Surrealists drew on the Freudian concept of dream work in their montages and theoretical accounts of montage's formal principles.

stage a tension within fantastic forms, be it fascist imagery or a dream. "Stern realized," writes Alejandra Uslenghi, "that the visual force of photomontage was in its referencing and working against photography's indexicality, to both point to a world of known things and at the same time destabilize the viewer's relationship to that world" (176).

This imbrication of the extremes of reality and distorted subjectivity—of geometry and anguish—is also what constitutes Arlt's expressionism. Although, as the previous section showed, the novels often present themselves as a factual reconstruction of real events, they also just as frequently move in hallucinatory directions, exploring Erdosain's anguished, desperate fantasies. The chapter "En la caverna," for instance, begins as Erdosain rails against the city and its callous inhabitants, leading him to jump on a tram, where he thinks about Hipólita and his first meeting with her husband, Ergueta. The remaining chapter oscillates between three levels: Erdosain on the train (present); Erdosain's first encounter with Ergueta (past); and Erdosain imagining that he is telling Hipólita about his first meeting with Ergueta (hypothetical future). The narration often conflates these levels within a single sentence, reflecting Erdosain's own hallucinatory, muddled mode of thinking. The chapter insists again and again on Erdosain's inability to think clearly: "An obscure crowd milled about inside his soul" (207/192, translation modified).[336] On the one hand, this state of mind is linked to the sound and rhythm of the tram, but, on the other, it involves a peculiar internalization and projection of imagined/recalled space: "the bar, with its rectangular outlines, stood out and appeared in front of his eyes. These outlines seemed to project themselves directly into his chest, so that he could almost imagine that if he looked at himself in a mirror, the

[336] "Una muchedumbre obscura se movía allí, en el interior de su alma."

front of his body would show the interior of a narrow room, stretching out towards the mirror" (208/192-3, translation modified).[337] That is, it becomes impossible to identify in this scene the precise limits of reality or Erdosain's subjectivity. Geometrical figures—the "cuadrilátero exactamente recortado"—designate not harmony, as in Prebisch or Le Corbusier, but dissonance, suffering and hallucinations. Anguish, the "furious rhythm," ceases to be simply a subjective state and describes the reality surrounding Erdosain. This chiasmus is the result of Arlt's expressionism. As César Aira explains, for the impressionist, "it is the world that comes to the artist, in the form of perceptions," but the expressionist "takes a step forward, inserts him or herself in the material with which the work will be made" (55). This lack of distance between subject and object produces the tortuous distortions of Arlt's world, a world "of excessive contiguities and deformations from lack of space in a limited area" (57). Arlt's expressionism names not the harmonious resolution of artist and material—subject and object—but the antagonistic mediation in which, because of the lack of distance, geometry and anguish are exacerbated and each acquires properties of the other.

It would be a mistake, in other words, to think of geometry and anguish in terms of reality and fantasy. Rather, what we find in Arlt's novels and photographs is reality and the immanent torsion that creates gaps within reality.[338] The Arltian city, to anticipate the next section, embodies this sort of non-identity. Analía Capdevila captures this idea in

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[337] "[Y] ahora que el recuerdo había vencido la inercia de todas las células, aparecía ante sus ojos la fonda, como un cuadrilátero exactamente recortado. El cual parecía que ahondadaba sus rectas al interior de su pecho, de modo que casi podía admitir que si se mirara a un espejo, el frente de su cuerpo presentera un salón estrecho, ahondado hacia la perspectiva del espacio."

[338] Kracauer similarly rejects the external opposition of history and photography, the idea that photographs become historical through external contextualization, by being placed in a historical narrative. Rather, for history to enter the photograph, "the mere surface coherence offered by photography must be destroyed" ("Photography" 52). History is not external to the photographic image; it stitches itself into the fabric of the photography precisely in this non-identity.

her discussion of the "latent physiognomy" of the city. In Arlt's novels, the experience of the city, in virtue of the torsion of geometry and anguish, detects "the presence of the future in the present" (132). But it is not simply that the Arltian city closely anticipates the transformations of Buenos Aires in subsequent decades, as Beatriz Sarlo has convincingly argued. Rather, this "latent physiognomy" refers to "the disposition of the present towards the future," a present reaching beyond itself (140). Capdevila thereby articulates the stakes of Arlt's critique of rationalist modern art, including architecture and photography, and its exclusive orientation towards harmony. For Arlt, the contradictions of modernity have rendered such harmony impossible—or, more precisely, rationalist architecture becomes a compensatory gesture insofar as it concerns itself with harmony and abstracts itself from the tensions inherent in modern social life. Arlt, in his relentless commitment to dissonance, instead seeks within modernity the possibilities of the future, even if the present configuration of modernity constantly suffocates that very potential.

The Expressionist City

This historical dynamic, for Arlt, assumes its most dramatic form in the city center, on Calle Corrientes, in particular. In the early twentieth century, Corrientes was teeming with bars and cafés; numerous small theaters emerged on the street in these decades, and it became the birthplace of tango. This street, as a result, became a hub for artists, but also for immigrants and criminals. Prior to the twentieth century, Corrientes was an ordinary street without a distinctive identity. De Vedia y Mitre asked the novelist Leopoldo Marechal to write a history of Corrientes to commemorate the city's fourth

centennial and the recent urbanization projects, including the widening of Corrientes street. As Marechal explains in *Historia de la calle Corrientes* (1937), despite its location in the city center in the twenties and thirties, Corrientes was historically the "virtual northern limit of the city … a border territory in which city and countryside were joined and separated" (21). Corrientes is, in other words, emblematic of urban expansion in which the outside is progressively turned into the inside. And, as a result, the character of the street cannot be derived from the past. For Marechal, Corrientes is "a living index of a city marching forward" (17); "its history belongs to the present and, possibly, the future of our city" (19). Arlt similarly connected Corrientes with the future implicit in the contemporary moment. In an *aguafuerte* published in 1937, Arlt comments on the demolition of buildings that enabled the widening of Corrientes: "destruction is the spectacle man most likes to witness because instinct tells him that something new must be raised after what has been destroyed" (qtd. in Gorelik 396). This emphasis on the future implicit in the present distinguishes Arlt's interpretation of the city center from that of many of his contemporaries. While Prebisch aims to produce modern, harmonious forms in the center that would articulate past and present, at the expense of the future, and others privilege the barrio, as the reservoir of the past and authentic Argentine identity, over the center, Arlt does not frame Corrientes in terms of national identity, seeking instead to discern the contradictions internal to the modernity of the center that make the future possible.[339] I argue that the social logic of Corrientes—a logic of extremes—informs the structure of *LSL* and *LL* and its dialectic of geometry and anguish.

[339] Unlike many of his contemporaries, whose family names were intimately linked to the history of Buenos Aires and the nation, Arlt was a first-generation Argentine who, according to Beatriz Sarlo, "lacked all nostalgic feeling for the past" (Sarlo, *Imaginación* 44). Arlt "sees a city in construction, where other writers, his contemporaries, see a city that is being lost: for Arlt, Buenos Aires was not but will be: teams of

Apart from its physical modernity, Corrientes was also associated with nightlife, immigration, theatricality and criminals: a sort of contradictory microcosm of all the extremes of Buenos Aires. In "Corrientes, por la noche" (Corrientes, at Night), an *aguafuerte* published in 1929, Arlt presents Corrientes as a chaotic combination, as Argentina's Babel. "[A] unique and strange cosmopolitan humanity," Arlt writes, "shakes hands in this unique drain for the beauty and joy of this city" (*Aguafuertes* 148).[340] Arlt thus suggests that, as a result of mass immigration to Buenos Aires, cosmopolitanism assumes a peculiar meaning in Corrientes; no longer an expression of the desire to escape narrowly nationalist concerns, cosmopolitanism appears as a moment within the national frame, deflating ideas about a singular Argentine essence. The street is the most dramatic embodiment of Argentina's "culture of mixture."[341]

Moreover, Corrientes exhibits the creative destruction of capitalist modernity and thus the absence of natural, necessary foundations. Arlt's language in "Corrientes, por la noche" echoes *The Communist Manifesto* and the idea that all that is solid melts into air. In Corrientes, "Everything here loses its value. Everything is transformed" (149).[342] The restless pursuit of novelty sweeps away any fixed identity:

> Unique street, absurd street, beautiful street. Street for dreaming, for getting lost, for going from there to every success and every failure; street of joy, street that turns women into gauchos and thugs; street where tailors give advice to authors and where cops fraternize with morons … street that, as day breaks, turns blue and dark, because its life is only possible in

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workers dig the foundations of future skyscrapers, the disorder of the facades indicates the mixture of the old that is being demolished and the new that has not been finished" (46).

[340] "[U]na humanidad única cosmopolita y extraña se da la mano en este único desaguadero que tiene la ciudad para su belleza y alegría."

[341] Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz, in his *El hombre que está solo y espera* (The Man Who Is Alone and Waits, 1931), locates the national spirit in the man at the corner of Corrientes and Esmeralda, and envisions the porteño's unique capacity for combination through the metaphor of a drop of water. Just as water entails an amalgam of distinct elements, oxygen and hydrogen, the porteño is a "catalytic agent" that enables "a chemical combination of the races that fuel its birth" (22).

[342] "Todo aquí pierde su valor. Todo se transforma."

> the artificial light of methylene blue, of the copper sulfate greens, of the picric acid yellows, which inject in it a pyrotechnic, jealous madness. (150)[343]

With neon lights, the night opens up to new activities and encounters. Corrientes, in other words, breaks out of nature's constraints and rhythms. All rigid, seemingly natural hierarchies crumble in the absence of any firm foundation. In *El hombre que está solo y espera* (1931), Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz writes along the same lines that the porteño, whose center of gravity is the intersection of Corrientes and Esmeralda, "cannot be deduced" (40). He continues: "Neither his financial hierarchy, nor the lineage of his descendants, nor the character of his friends allow one to infer his ideas or feelings. There are conservative workers and revolutionary plutocrats" (40).[344] Corrientes highlights the disappearance of the past as a binding force, allowing for unprecedented combinations. While Scalabrini Ortiz envisions this process as leading to a new national identity, Arlt suggests that the absence of the past as a necessary foundation does not lead to a melting down process. Rather, it gives rise to a dynamic of extremes: without fixed meaning, any element can pass into its radical opposite and back again. Corrientes, in other words, possesses the structure of a montage in which the original meaning of elements is displaced while being preserved and mediated by a new configuration.

Arlt makes Corrientes, the Babel of Argentina, into the basis of his characters and the literary construction of Buenos Aires. And yet, *LSL* and *LL* never explicitly present

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[343] "Calle única, calle absurda, calle linda. Calle para soñar, para perderse, para ir de allí a todos los éxitos y a todos los fracasos; calle de alegría, calle que las vuelve más gauchas y compadritas a las mujeres; calle donde los sastres le dan consejos a los autores y donde los polizontes confraternizan con los turros; calle de olvido, de locura, de milonga, de amor … calle que al amanecer se azulea y obscurece, porque su vida sólo es posible al resplandor artificial de los azules de metileno, de los verdes de sulfato de cobre, de los amarillos de ácido pícrico que le inyectan una loctura de pirotecnia y celos" (150).

[344] Corrientes could also be said to be a site of theatricality. By acting, the porteño's behavior has no necessary link to his identity. And Corrientes stands in a metonymic relation to the New World fantasy, where one's personal trajectory is not determined by family or social status.

the sort of enthusiastic attitude toward the dynamic metropolis that we find in Arlt's comments on Corrientes. Indeed, the city operates on two levels in these novels: on the explicit level, the characters hate the city and attribute to it the evils of modern society, including their meaningless, anguished existence; on the implicit level, the novels are patterned on the historical dynamic and combinations of urban modernity. It is precisely this tension that grasps the contradictions of the city. The opening chapters illustrate clearly this formal dialectic of implicit and explicit narrative levels. *Los siete locos* begins in the city center, enumerating the various streets Erdosain passes as he thinks desperately about ways to come up with the 600 pesos he stole from the Compañía Azucarera. The city, at this point, reflects Erdosain's existential crisis, giving rise to the image of the "anguish zone," which we will examine below. But far from presenting a continuous path from one point to another, the narration jumps from one urban reference to another, skipping intermediate steps. Arlt even includes a chapter on Erdosain's penchant for walking in Palermo and Belgrano, the rich neighborhoods to the north, where he fantasizes that a millionaire woman will save him from his despair. But once Erdosain visits the Astrologer's house in Temperley, a suburban area south of Buenos Aires, this anguish becomes externalized. As he first approaches the house, "[h]e felt as if he were far from the city, in the middle of the countryside … the rose bushes gave off such a strong and penetrating scent that it seemed the whole garden was tinged with a red shimmer as cool as a mountain stream" (30-31/33-34).[345] In virtue of the way the Astrologer's house in Temperley first presents itself as natural oasis, anguish becomes externalized in the form of the city, and this anticipates the moments when the Gold

[345] "Le parecía estar en el campo, muy lejos de la ciudad … los rosales vertían su perfume potentísimo, tan penetrante, que todo el espacio parecía poblarse de una atmósfera roja y fresca como un caudal de agua."

Prospector rails against the city in his apocryphal speech on colloid gold and the Astrologer's comments on how the rotten city (*ciudad canalla*) embodies the deterioration of modern civilization, prompting his theory of the need for a metaphysical lie. But as these speeches turn toward ideas about dictatorship, mass deception and chemical warfare, the Astrologer's house in Temperley, initially presenting itself as an alternative to the rotten city, turns into the most radical realization of the destructive tendencies the characters identify in the city. Insofar as it contains the contradictions of its apparent opposite, the idea that the suburban house—and the countryside, by extension—represents an escape from the city is revealed to be a fantasy.[346]

This dialectic differs markedly from tango lyrics at the time. Although tango was born on Corrientes, it evokes a mythology of the barrio that represses the chaos of Corrientes and the lack of natural foundation. While, as Oscar Terán argues, tango imagines "the neighborhood as a *locus amoenus*, a familiar stronghold, protected from the anonymity of the big city and providing all primary affects," Arlt's representation of Corrientes emphasizes "exceptional marginality and social mixture," with "modernity … taken to its most intense extremes" (212-213). Despite the explicit opposition to the city and what it represents, the characters are made possible by and patterned on this modernity composed of extremes.[347]

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[346] The city, in other words, plays the role of the masses in Baudelaire's poetry, paraphrasing Benjamin, we can say that the city "had become so much a part of [Arlt] that it is rare to find a description of [it] in his works" (*SW IV* 322). We could also draw a parallel here between Arlt and Dostoevsky. In contrast to Balzac and Dickens, whose novels create panoramic descriptions of the city, Dostoevsky "experienced the city as a total environment thoroughly internalized and assimilated in his personality and outlook" (Pike 95). Dostoevsky was perhaps Arlt's biggest influence. *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*, for instance, were based in part on Dostoevsky's *The Demons*. Incidentally, Dostoevsky's novel was based on real events, so Arlt's inspiration to write a pseudo-reportage novel may have also come from his Russian precursor.

[347] To a certain extent, Arlt, like Simmel and Benjamin, registers the presence of the city in terms of overwhelming stimuli that disrupt the normal workings of mental life and generate anxiety. Maryse Renaud

Arlt's expressionist city is constituted by this underlying lack of distance from the city, its extremes and geometrical forms. Overpowered by the city, the expressionist cannot see buildings, streets and crowds as separate. The impressionist sees the city as landscape, like the natural settings he or she painted *en plein air*, but the expressionist seeks "the inclusion of the spectator in the frame of the street" (Frisby 238). In bringing the subject into the frame, the subject is contaminated by the object and the subject projects his or her intense emotional states onto the object. Accordingly, expressionist representations are often built on correspondences between internal and external, even if the correspondences are internally inconsistent. Additionally, whereas impressionists emphasize fleeting perceptions through soft edges and indistinct boundaries, expressionists use straight lines to figure the geometrically-organized metropolis. The city, organized according to a grid, can only be artistically rendered by a geometrical imagination. And, because of the correspondences, these geometrical forms are also figures of urban subjectivity.

Anguish, for instance, almost invariably assumes geometrical dimensions in *LSL* and *LL*. At the beginning of *Los siete locos*, Erdosain walks the streets in desperation:

> He imagined this zone floating above cities, about two meters in the air, and pictured it graphically like an area of salt flats or deserts that are shown on maps by tiny dots, as dense as herring roe. This anguish zone was the product of mankind's suffering. It slid from one place to the next like a cloud of poison gas, seeping through walls, passing straight through buildings, without ever losing its flat horizontal shape; a two-dimensional anguish that left an after-taste of tears in throats it sliced like a guillotine. (6/10)[348]

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thus highlights the characters' physical and psychic mobility: "restless, anxious, unstable, they seek to develop in a rather hostile environment, which drives them to cover an extensive range of experiences, to explore the capital's multiple hells" (198).

[348] "Erdosain se imaginaba que dicha zona existía sobre el nivel de las ciudades, a dos metros de altura, y se le representaba gráficamente bajo la forma de esas regiones de salinas o desiertos que en los mapas están revelados por óvalos de puntos tan espesos como las ovas de un arenque. Esta zona de angustia, era la consecuencia del sufrimiento de los hombres. Y como una nube de gas venenoso se trasladaba pesadamente

The anguish zone appears as the result of condensing the city's oppressive height into a horizontal plane. Both amorphous and razor-sharp, it cuts into domestic spaces and inflicts pain. Similarly, Arlt utilizes the image of a mill to depict how the city weighs on its inhabitants.[349] After his wife leaves him, Erdosain "felt himself crushed by a sense of pure dread. His life could not have been flatter if he had gone through the rollers of a sheet-metal mill" (70/70).[350] Although this sensation derives immediately from his wife's departure, the technical metaphor of the mill once again links Erdosain's suffering to the geometrical organization of city, flattening out individuality and thereby creating the anonymous existence of the masses. Arlt's expressionist city thus takes the geometrical character of Buenos Aires—its flatness—and makes it into a principle of construction for the novels and into the figural vocabulary for the anguished existence of urban modernity.

As we saw above, the flatness of Buenos Aires, its endlessly expanding grid, also raised questions in these decades about the relation between history and nature. Whereas the rational grid initially seemed to represent history and to distinguish the city from the natural countryside, it increasingly resembled the pampa and its absence of history. Arlt evokes this issue obliquely in his image of the copper rose. Erdosain invents the copper rose and then convinces the Espila family—with false, fantastical promises of future wealth—to devote their time to its production. In this invention, the rose—the organic poetic form par excellence—undergoes a mechanical, industrial transformation: "the

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de un punto a otro, penetrando murallas y atravesando los edificios, sin perder su forma plana y horizontal; angustia de dos dimensiones que guillotinando las gargantas dejaba en éstas un regusto de sollozo."

[349] See Renaud 204.

[350] "Erdosain se sintió aplanado en una perfección de espanto. Se lo hubieran pasado por entre los rodillos de un laminador, más plana por entre los rodillos de un laminador, más plana no podría ser su vida."

flower contained a botanical life that had been consumed by the acids, but was its very soul" (226/210).[351] In its submission to a technologically-mediated labor process, the copper rose negates organic life, but, at the same time, it reestablishes nature in its artificial "soul." The copper rose, in other words, exists as a form of second nature. As such, it displays a dialectical tension in which the man-made copper rose represents an "advance" over the merely natural rose but it also resurrects the very categories its invention would seem to render obsolete, making the natural into a product of the very modernization process that would claim to destroy it. As in the case of the anguish zone, the logic of this image is a literary mediation of the social logic of the city. Rather than a separation of nature and history that maps onto discrete entities—the city and countryside—the city appears in the figure of the copper rose as a technical human construction that, despite opening up emancipatory possibilities, comes to dominate its inhabitants as a form of unfreedom.

The dialectic implied in the copper rose also registers the structural contradiction in capitalism between value and material wealth. Through the pursuit of relative surplus-value, this contradiction gives rise to the peculiar historical dynamic of capitalist modernity, what Moishe Postone calls a "treadmill effect" in which the new and the same are produced simultaneously.[352] The expansion of capital requires ceaseless increases in productivity and thus "the ongoing transformation of social life in capitalist society, as

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[351] "El temblor de la llama de la lámpara de acetileno hacía jugar una transparencia roja, como si la flor se animara de una botánica vida que ya estaba quemada por los ácidos y que constituía su alma."

[352] The notion of the "treadmill effect" comes from Moishe Postone's brilliant discussion of the value-form and its temporal determination. Since value is an average, "socially necessary labor time," once increases in productivity are generalized, total value produced does not change, "increased productivity results neither in a corresponding increase in social wealth nor in a corresponding decrease in labor time, but in the constitution of a new base level of productivity—which leads to still further increases in productivity" (347). The treadmill effect is not, in other words, static; it is a dynamic that stays in the same place.

well as the ongoing reconstitution of its basic social forms" (Postone 300). The ambiguity of Arlt's expressionist city—as both revulsion in the face of meaningless modern existence and the intuition of futural possibilities, as mythical nature and history—gives form to the "shearing pressure" (Postone 295) of capitalism's contradictions, the way it pushes forward, pointing beyond itself, while staying in the same place.[353] Typically, aspects of this contradictory historical dynamic are conflated into a linear, unitary conception of history focused on the new. But insofar as the new is abstractly produced, each newness is qualitatively identical to every other, reducing it to the same. But periphery modernity is defined non-self-contemporaneity. That is, the structure of historical experience in the periphery tends toward the positing of duality rather than conflation into unity. If metropolitan modernism revolves around the new, on the premise that this linear, unitary historical movement will eventually realize the possibilities generated by capitalist modernity, the new appears to the peripheral structure of historical consciousness to exist elsewhere, as alluring possibilities that are utterly divorced from concrete reality. By naturalizing the technological invention and underlining the false promises it conjures up, Arlt's copper rose evokes this treadmill dynamic and its sundering in peripheral modernity.

The Astrologer's collage of ideas involves a similar attempt to fuse different historical forms, albeit with very different implications. Towards the end of *Los siete locos*, the Astrologer imagines a landscape that combines industrial dynamism and nature: "at the center, among clouds of coal dust, rise the blast furnaces, their cooling

[353] Unlike normal stress, which involves pressure from above, sheer stress consists of a vector of force from the side. To visualize the difference between normal stress and sheer stress, imagine a square that is turned into rectangle that is wider than it is tall (as a result of normal stress) vs. a square that is turned into a parallelogram (as a result of sheer stress).

systems like monstrous armor plating. Tongues of fire leap from the reinforced furnace mouths, while outside thick, impenetrable jungle stretches into the distance" (272-73/253).[354] In the Astrologer's secret society, technology would serve merely to reinstate mythical nature, and fantastic miracles would be made possible by scientific research and rationality. By juxtaposing mythical nature and intensified industrialization, the Astrologer's plan bears a striking resemblance to the German proto-fascism that Jeffrey Herf describes as "reactionary modernism." Herf uses this term to describe writers and intellectuals in German who rejected the philosophical and political heritage of the Enlightenment but affirmed "the most obvious manifestation of means-end rationality, that is, modern technology" (1). Unlike conservatives, who posited an insurmountable gap between technology and German culture, reactionary modernists like Ernst Jünger embraced modern technology for a reactionary defense, and even intensification, of the existing social order. This incongruous ideological combination, Herf argues, was made possible by the combination of rapid, yet partial, industrialization of the German economy and the absence of a corresponding bourgeois revolution (5-6). Herf thus suggests that interwar Germany, while not a peripheral nation, nonetheless shares certain characteristics of peripheral modernity. This internal unevenness marks both Germany and Argentina, even though the former occupies a core position in the global capitalist economy, the latter a semi-peripheral position. And the Astrologer's plans, accordingly, no longer appear as the deluded dreams of a madman but as the intensified description of

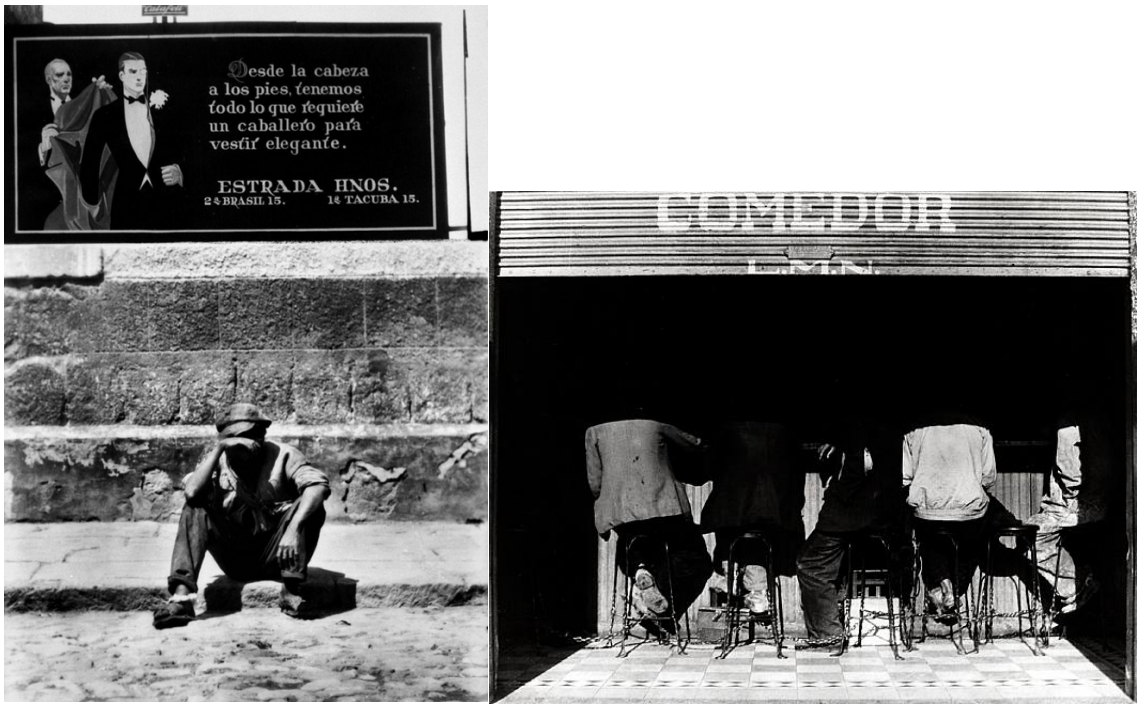
[354] "En la obscuridad se abre hacia el interior de su cráneo un callejón sombrío, con vigas que cruzan el espacio uniendo los tinglados, mientras que entre una neblina de polvo de carbon, los altos hornos con sus atalajes de refrigeración que fingen corazas monstruosas, ocupan el espacio. Nubes de fuego escapan de los tragantes blindados y la selva más allá se extiende tupida e impenetrable."

latent historical tendencies, of peripheral modernity's non-self-contemporaneity, its peculiar combinations of repetition and the new.

LSL and *LL*, through the distance they take from the Astrologer's plans, imply a critical form that highlights dissonance through the articulation of modernism and realism. Rather than deploy modern forms—be it industrialism or the geometrical forms of modern engineering and architecture—to evoke harmony or to intensify older social structures, with the effect of refusing the future, Arlt seeks to formally articulate the torsions whereby possibilities are created and stifled. The dissonance of *LSL* and *LL*—of documentality and illusion, geometry and anguish, the "constant friction of reality and delirium"—, in other words, implies not a positive solution but a critique that outlines the underlying impasses in social reality. This critical-literary project necessitates a constant articulation and disarticulation of modernism and realism. To grasp the extremes of peripheral modernity in the interwar moment and the internal contradictions of modernity generally, Arlt does not neutralize the tension between modernism and realism; rather, he seeks to switch back and forth between these literary modes, maintaining their non-identity even as each one internalizes aspects of its opposite.

Conclusion: Montage and the Photographic Frame

Consider the following two photogaphs: Tina Modotti's *La elegancia* (Elegance, 1928) and Manuel Álvarez Bravo's *Los agachados* (The Crouched Over/Submissive Ones, 1934).



XVI. La elegancia (1928), Tina Modotti; XVII. Los agachados (1934), Manuel Álvarez Bravo

Formally, the two photographs exhibit various similarities. Both are organized around a horizontal axis: the street wall and advertisement in the case of the former; the retractable door in the case of the latter. The meaning of each photograph derives from these divisions. The effect of *La elegancia* derives from the juxtaposition of an advertisement for elegant tuxedos and an exhausted worker—possibly unemployed, perhaps a recent migrant from the countryside—sitting on the sidewalk. The horizontal division suggests that wealth, be it real or imagined, weighs on the worker; it appears to be the very source

of his exhaustion. Álvarez Bravo's photograph entails a more ambiguous meaning.[355] Based on the setting, a small *comedor* or eatery, and the attire of the figures, it is obvious that the photograph deals with urban workers; however, they do not appear as downtrodden as the worker in Modotti's photomontage. Indeed, it is not entirely clear why Álvarez Bravo refers to them as "los agachados": the workers are sitting up, not crouching, and the photograph presents them outside of the workplace, where their "submission" would be more apparent. Instead, the meaning of the photograph derives from its formal arrangement and the almost humorous juxtaposition of details. The stools have been chained together and to the bar, suggesting confinement. Moreover, the word "comedor," printed on the metal curtain, along with the shadow that divides the photograph and decapitates the hungry workers, conjures up the idea that they are being eaten, their heads having already entered the void of the mouth.[356] In this way, the chains suggest that the workers were captured and have been brought to feed the beast that is Mexico City. And yet, the photograph also displays Álvarez Bravo's characteristic irony. The composition, based on juxtapositions found in the city, entails a critique of the peripheral metropolis, but the workers are presumably enjoying themselves as they eat a late-afternoon meal after the workday. Langston Hughes, a friend of Manuel Álvarez Bravo, sees this duality, for instance, in the use of shadows and light: "Whereas the sun in a Bravo photo almost always has a sense of humor, one cannot be sure about the shadows" (141). The sun and shadow, the positive and the negative, end up becoming

[355] He told a critic that *Los agachados* was one of his few "political" photographs (Mraz 89), but its political meaning is not presented directly.

[356] In this way, Álvarez Bravo could be alluding to Paul Strand's "Wall Street," which similarly suggests that human figures will be consumed by a dark abyss.

two sides of the same image, not contingently incongruous elements. The image simultaneously conveys a pleasant moment and the imminent threat posed by the city.

Another detail about these photographs must be mentioned: Modotti's image is a photomontage, whereas Álvarez Bravo's is a straight photograph. And yet, the peculiarities of the peripheral situation render insignificant the difference between photomontage and straight photograph. Because of the reality that it grasps, Álvarez Bravo's photograph already has a montage character. And, when artistic manipulation is used, as in Modotti's "La elegancia," the effect derives not from the peculiarity of a juxtaposition that would not occur otherwise, but rather from a very plausible contrast of wealth and poverty that one would find in the peripheral metropolis. To recall Neil Larsen's argument, which I discussed in the introduction, whereas montage in the metropolis proceeds from a unity and seeks to uproot that unity through "shock" in order to imagine the future, montage in the periphery begins with "a condition of disparity" and becomes "a formal means for imagining or projecting the space of historical experience as a *unity*" (134). Montage, in other words, becomes a question of framing. There is a difference between the sort of juxtapositions in the peripheral metropolis and those within a frame, even if there has been absolutely no artistic manipulation of the materials. Whereas in ordinary experience incongruous elements in the peripheral metropolis are often taken to be externally related or arbitrary placed side-by-side, the frame implies that even incommensurable elements are internally related to one another, that the identity of these elements is mediated by their relation to their opposite and to the contradictory totality articulated by the frame. Montage, in this way, enables Mariátegui, Maples Arce and Arlt to arrange or frame the seemingly incommensurable components of the

peripheral metropolis in such a way that they appear not as the results of modernity's incompleteness or its exteriority but as the results of the internal tensions of capitalist modernity.

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