

MARGINS OF POETRY: PERFORMING THE FORMLESS  
IN LORCA'S SURREALISM

By

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Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Spanish

December, 2007

Nashville, Tennessee

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*To:*

*my Mom, whose Michael the Martian  
taught me from my youth that  
the line between history and poetry is thin*

*my Dad, for his friendship*

*Mindy, for being by my side*

*Jeffrey, whose smile inspires my own learning to live*

*and*

*Ella, “¡Qué alegría más alta: vivir en los pronombres!”*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The interest in this project began several years ago in a dimly lit and dilapidated university classroom at Brigham Young University when I first read poets like Federico García Lorca and thinkers including Georges Bataille. It was at that moment—thanks to an inspiring teacher, mentor, and friend, Dr. Greg Stallings—that I first began to think seriously about Spanish literature, poetry, philosophy and the implications of these discourses in my life. I owe the development of these ideas (as well as much of my own intellectual development) to the enthusiastic teaching of Professor Stallings. At one moment when I considered another path, Professor Stallings, echoing Joseph Campbell, urged me to follow my bliss. I like to think that this dissertation is the fruition of some of that bliss. Thanks Greg.

The support at Vanderbilt University has been equally superb. I wish to thank my advisor, Professor Christina Karageorgou-Bastea, who has encouraged me in my efforts from my first day on campus. She has provided a stimulating and rigorous sounding board for my ideas and has met my project with optimism as she has pushed me to refine my analytical skills. This work would not have been possible without her. I am grateful for her close readings of my research, for her counsel and suggestions (which are always extensive), and for her friendship which is equally plentiful.

My committee members have been foundational to my development as a scholar and have greatly contributed to my education at Vanderbilt. My first contact with Vanderbilt came when Professor Cathy Jrade taught a mini-course on *Modernismo* at BYU. She has read my work with care and has offered valuable insight as a meticulous literary critic. I also owe a great deal of thanks to Professor Edward Friedman, who has been a wonderful source of

counsel, support, and encouragement of my work. His seminars on literary theory and meta-fiction have been highlights of my course work at Vanderbilt and his professionalism has provided a model for my own development as a scholar. I am grateful to Professor David Wood, whose courses on Heidegger, Derrida, 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy, and Nietzsche have sparked my interest and challenged my intellect. I feel fortunate to have been a part of these courses and to have enjoyed the fresh and at times entertaining insights to the thinking of important intellectuals of the last two centuries. The ethical and aesthetic facets of these philosophies have been important to me both academically and personally. Thanks for helping me see that sometimes the best way forward is found by taking the step back.

Professors William Luis and Carlos Jáuregui have also been valuable sources of friendship and encouragement throughout the writing of this dissertation. I have profited from my association with them during this *época de la soledad* and thank them for their counsel and support.

The academic and financial support at Vanderbilt has been constant and gracious. I am indebted to the College of Arts & Science for summer research grants during the summers of 2004 and 2005, and also to the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities for the summer 2006 and full-year 2006-2007 fellowships that enabled me to finish my dissertation. These grants have allowed me to dedicate my efforts to this project for the last three years. The Warren Center's Director, Mona Frederick, has been a warm and welcome source of friendship and support. I am grateful to her and to the Warren Center staff for their interest in my work. It has indeed been an honor to work in their presence.

I express many thanks to the staff and graduate students of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, for their friendship and interest in my development as an intellectual. I have

felt fortunate to be among such a stimulating group of young scholars at Vanderbilt. I am grateful to the Graduate Fellows with whom I have had the pleasure to work for the last year at the Warren Center: Lisa Battaglia (Religion), Carola Daffner (German), LeeAnn Reynolds (History), Tim Boyd (History), and Brian Rabinovitz (Philosophy). These scholars have met my work with unique perspectives and relevant insights. I have benefitted from associating with them in the inter-disciplinary environment provided by the Warren Center.

Finally, I offer my most sincere thanks to my family and friends who, even though they do not exhaust themselves considering the intricacies of my argument here, have offered a continual and needed moral support. My efforts have been magnified by their constant care and encouragement.

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## INTRODUCTION

*[A]ffirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit.*

— Georges Bataille

*Nothing in and of itself, the formless has only an operational existence: it is performative, [...] The formless is an operation.*

— Rosalind Krauss

*Así sea la poesía que buscamos, gastada como por un ácido por los deberes de la mano, penetrado por el sudor y el humo, oliente a orina y a azucena, [...] Una poesía impura como un traje, como un cuerpo, con manchas de nutrición, y actitudes vergonzosas, con arrugas, observaciones, sueños, vigilia, profecías, declaraciones de amor y de odio, bestias, sacudidas, idilios, creencias políticas, negaciones, dudas, afirmaciones, impuestos.*

— Pablo Neruda

*Me parece un absurdo imaginar que el arte puede desligarse de la vida social, cuando no es otra cosa que la interpretación de una fase de la vida por parte de un temperamento sensible.*

— Federico García Lorca

What is poetry and what does it *do*? Similar questions have been posed for centuries in an attempt to elucidate the relationships between art and life, poetry and praxis, literature and philosophy. Is poetry merely the twice-removed imitation of the ideal reality, as Plato concludes in Book X of *The Republic*, a dangerous and fictitious fabrication of representation, or is it, rather, a more crucial and integral part of the formations of identity and culture than one might at first assume? While the intersection of poetic expression and

philosophical inquiry will serve as a key point of reflection and investigation here, it will, furthermore, function as the catalyst for examining how the poetic utterance in avant-garde poetry is sovereignly performative, that is, how it effects the action to which it makes reference, or at least, how it interrogates official discourse through sustained critique. As Terry Eagleton purports in his lucid 2007 study, *How to Read a Poem*,

poems are performances, not simply objects on the page. We can think of a poem as a pattern of sound or meaning; but we can also see it as a strategy which aims to get something done. [...] What poetry can make happen is a kind of constructive non-happening. By refraining from an intervention in human affairs, it can allow truth and beauty to come about, in ways which may then make things happen. (88, 90)

Investigating what the poetic utterance *does* will recognize the relevance of poetry in modernity along with its concern for “human values, meanings, and purposes” (Eagleton 29). Such an examination will signal that modern poetry—more than an artistic imitation of life or a creative expression of the self—can indeed inform our understanding concerning contemporary socio-cultural constructs and relationships to otherness in the modern world, contemplations at once aesthetic and philosophical. As Martin Heidegger declares, poetic language can be the most dangerous linguistic expression as it subscribes to a manner of thinking that questions existence and relating. This understanding of art reflects the ability that poetry affords to rethink society by embodying what some scholars call the transformative power of art. Perhaps, in the modern age, poetry is one of few aporetic devices that will aid the human race in its continual process of engaging in what Jacques Derrida calls, in *Specters of Marx*, learning to live.

While poetic theories since Plato do, in fact, vacillate between art for art’s sake and art for life’s sake, that is, between art that is disinterested or unengaged with society versus art that explicitly and directly calls into question social or ethical norms, it will be argued

here that the poetry of the avant-garde (in Spain in particular) is exemplary of a poetic production that ruptures boundaries which place limitations between art and praxis. While most aesthetic movements in modern art claim to reject, renew, or renovate previous aesthetics, the avant-garde differs from such previous conceptions in modern literature—including romanticism, symbolism, parnassianism, and *modernismo*—in its sustained effort to *violently* break with (not just depart from) previous traditions. Yet, the avant-garde is not a period without its own interior contradictions and impasses. Even though Paris constituted the cultural and artistic capital of Europe during the first decades of the twentieth century, it is increasingly difficult to delineate the influence of poetic theories in an inter-European and inter-continental context. This is due to the fact that even while new aesthetic theories and movements surge forth from Paris and other cultural centers, outlying areas maintain their own traditions and aesthetic histories as they simultaneously appropriate foreign trends. The conflict between Parisian movements and their foreign counterparts raises important questions regarding how the critic can best approach any generic (or movement-based) analysis of literature while, at the same time, taking into consideration local aesthetic tendencies and necessities. The case of surrealism is exemplary in signaling this problem as noticed in its potential (mis)applications to artistic circles outside of Paris. In Spain, it is argued that an authentic surrealism never existed or that, at least, the models constructed by André Breton were not fully evidenced in the poetic production there. We might ask, therefore, how can the particular artistic and literary production in Spain that many call “surrealist” be more adequately approached? And how can the subtleties of the variations of “surrealist” expression in Spain be articulated in a way that recognizes the dissident possibilities offered by forms of cultural and aesthetic analysis that burst forth from the

margins of the critical canon?

The place of the French thinker Georges Bataille within critical and aesthetic theories of the avant-garde is provocative and instructive.<sup>1</sup> While Bataille was excommunicated from and marginalized by the Bretonian school of surrealist thought, his aesthetic and political ideas of the 1920s and 30s dialogue with modes of thinking and expression of other intellectuals in the avant-garde. Bataille's thinking constantly sought to question, critique, and destructure the then contemporary models of analyzing art, society, ethnography, and anthropology. His dissident surrealist review *Documents*, served as a forum for intellectuals in 1929-30 in France who were discontented with the directions taken by the aesthetic and theoretical movements of their time. The concepts that Bataille outlines there, like *informe* [formlessness], base materialism, the primitive, and alterity, counteract sublimated (or *surreal*) representations of reality evident in Breton's theoretical methods by recognizing the base drives evident in human existence and artistic production. The opposition to an exalted "above" reality in Bataille's thinking is similar to what the Spanish avant-garde poet and critic Juan Larrea calls an affinity towards a *subreality* as evident in Hispanic "surrealist" works of poets such as the Chilean Pablo Neruda and the Peruvian César Vallejo.

The tensions between Bretonian surrealism and dissident variations, like that of Bataille, are evident but not adequately recognized while analyzing the poetic and artistic production of this epoch. And in Spain, the ambiguity of surrealism heightens as critics vacillate between explications that range from applications of Breton's models of automatism and subconscious desire to a complete negation of the influence of surrealism

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<sup>1</sup> In the last few decades Bataille's thinking, and his relationship to surrealism, has received increased attention. Critics central to my reading of Bataille include Michael Richardson, Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster, Denis Hollier, Michael Taussig, and James Clifford.

on the Spanish front, claiming that Spain relied, rather, on its own traditions and methodologies, such as José Ortega y Gasset's insistence on dehumanized and uninterested art. Much of the resistance to the Bretonian model of artistic conception in Spain stems from Breton's insistence on chance, automatic writing, and lack of control. It is documented that some poets in Spain did in fact experiment with the Bretonian mode of artistic creation (as in portions of Vicente Aleixandre's and Luis Cernuda's poetic production, for example), but the majority of the poets and artists resisted the lack of control in artistic creation and claimed, like Federico García Lorca, the use of a "poetic logic." Lorca is explicit that this "logic" denies the lack of control inherent to Breton's surrealism. In a letter to a close associate Sebastià Gasch dated September of 1928, for example, Lorca relates that his flirtation with new styles and forms exhibits "una tremenda *lógica poética*. No es surrealismo, ¡ojo!" (3: 1080).<sup>2</sup> While this "poetic logic" at first glance seems like an oxymoron as it links *logos* and *poiesis*, I will maintain here that it signals an intersection of philosophy and literature in which both discourses demonstrate a calculated, but revolutionary, innovation in style. In many senses, the tension between Breton and Bataille also mimics the problem of interested versus disinterested art. Even while automatic writing does express a critique of social and artistic norms through the recourse to chance and the irrational, the poets of the Spanish Generation of 1927 seek critique through a careful articulation of language which consciously performs the attack that they wish to express, thus exemplifying a more directly engaged work of art than that of "automatic" writers.

The central problem for investigation in this dissertation is at least three-fold. First,

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<sup>2</sup> All citations of Lorca's work come from the Galaxia Gutenberg four volume *Obras completas* edited by Miguel García-Posada.

what is the relationship between philosophy and literature in the avant-garde in Spain? This question addresses the inadequacies of cultural models such as artistic dehumanization and automatism in capturing what is at stake in the Spanish “arte nuevo” as it examines the varying avant-gardist artistic measures that fluctuate between “poetic purity” and revolutionary practice. Second, what is the relevance of dissident poetic theories, specifically Bataille’s, in the analysis of early twentieth-century Spanish literature? While Bataille’s early avant-garde writings, especially those in the *Documents* journal, are the subject of what contemporary critics have called “dissident,” “ethnographic,” or “undercover” surrealism, his ideas have not been examined adequately within the Spanish context. It will be shown here that Bataille’s theoretical expositions, such as those on *informe*, base matter, and the void, further elucidate the surrealist tensions in Spain, particularly with reference to the anguish, death, and desire that so prominently figure in “Spanish surrealism.” Specifically I am interested in how Bataille’s thinking problematizes poetic expression in the work of Federico García Lorca and how, when set in dialogue with Bataille, Lorca’s work embodies and amplifies even the most radical of Bataillean tendencies. Although Lorca will be the poet of primary focus throughout this study, I see his particular brand of “surrealism” as an exemplary variant similar to much of what is happening in the works of other Hispanic poets of this period, among them Neruda, Vallejo, the Mexican José Gorostiza, and Spaniards Juan Larrea, Rafael Alberti, and Luis Cernuda. The third aspect to be investigated here pertains to the ethical conclusions that can be made concerning *informe* and its relationship to poetry, sovereign art, and socio-cultural constructions of identity, race, gender, and class. In essence, what is gained by radically, and at times violently, breaking down form in order to propose new spaces of thinking and creating? My initial hypotheses will claim that in the poetic

expression of Spain's Generation of 1927, artistic creation and philosophical inquiry do, in fact, intersect and inter-penetrate one another as art and praxis meld, and that the elaboration of Bataille's dissident surrealist and other aesthetic and political theories amplify our understanding of a period in Spain which is varied in its interests and forms of representations. The surrealist aesthetic, along with variations at its margins, comes to be a movement of supreme interest in the analysis of the hypotheses here due to the conclusions that can be considered with reference to the theoretical tensions within the Parisian surrealist movement itself and the problematic (mis)applications or implementations of its founding principles in outlying locations such as Spain.

In order to approach the hypotheses outlined above, I will examine several of Lorca's later literary productions in dialogue with some of Bataille's aesthetic principles. Even though Bataille is rarely considered within the context of early twentieth-century Spanish literature, it will be shown here that his theoretical and cultural inquiries of the 1920s and 30s do, indeed, provide a relevant context within which to examine the poetic production of one of Spain's most important twentieth-century poets. I will also examine points of contrast and tension in which the motivations of the Spanish poet and the French thinker differ. While the avant-garde production of Spain's "Silver Age" (comparable in richness only to its Golden Age) is characterized by the Spanish writer and cultural critic Ortega y Gasset as dehumanized and detached from socio-political spheres, the elucidations on Bataille's concepts such as general economy and artistic sovereignty will demonstrate the profound interest with which the poetry of the avant-garde in Spain was produced, its commitment to aesthetic and social renovation. As Lorca, many of the poets of this epoch are indeed deeply concerned with the exterior elements that are treated in their works, rather than claiming a

purely detached reaction to modernity (as Ortega purports),<sup>3</sup> or a response based in uncontrolled and purely irrational terms (as Bretonian automatism suggests). Lorca's later works, for example, offer a poetic and dramatic vision which dialogues heavily with personal and social crises as it questions the then contemporary conceptions of artistic, social, and political structures. The examination here highlights the socio-political nature of Lorca's work and the manner in which he systematically critiques and revises existing forms by rendering them *informe* (destroying them), and then proposing new spaces for expression and existence. His work of this period performs the destruction that it artistically refers to as it posits, with renewed purpose, the interpenetration of poetry and philosophy. In this manner, Lorca's work demonstrates how the work of art engages in concerns of identity, social class, gender, and race through this both ideological and methodological device of *informe*.

While the biographical information of each thinker may not lead to answers of direct influences and collaborations, the similarities in which Bataille and Lorca approach and deconstruct existing norms of thinking and art invites a detailed investigation and analysis. Therefore, I do not find it important to examine questions of influence or collaboration between the French thinker and the Spanish poets, although brief references will be made to specific instances that could encourage an investigation more historiographic in nature. Rather, I find key the manner in which philosophical inquiry and poetic expression maintain an inter-textual dialogue as intellectuals of the early twentieth century are concerned with similar issues derived from modernity and, at times, respond in like manners. The development of such an investigation examines not only the importance of the French critic

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<sup>3</sup> The tension between purity and commitment is the subject of in-depth studies such as Anthony Leo Geist's *La poética de la generación del 27 y las revistas literarias: De la vanguardia al compromiso (1918-1936)* and Juan Cano Ballesta's *La poesía española entre pureza y revolución*.

in helping to understand Lorca's obscure and difficult work from the late 1920s until his death in 1936, but it also draws attention to the importance of the Spanish culture and ambience in the development of one of the most provocative French thinkers of the twentieth century and his philosophical formation. By examining Lorca's work under the Bataillean lens, the poetic logic that Lorca claims directs his work takes on a new, weightier sense of radical critique (the rendering *informe*) of art and society. The poetic logic referred to here becomes the hallmark of Lorca's artistic agenda and is elucidated through the aesthetic and ethical implications of other Bataillean concepts such as putrefaction, sovereignty, and eroticism.

Chapter One of my dissertation, "Poetry and Philosophy: Bataillean Surrealism and the Spanish Avant-Garde," introduces the aesthetic, theoretical, and methodological contexts of my research. In order to amplify the contrasting ideologies evident in this period I will briefly trace major developments of the relationship between poetry and philosophy since Plato's *The Republic* and then examine contemporary subversions of the Platonic model which promote a dialogue and blurring of boundaries between poetry and philosophy. I posit questions concerning the impasses between "disinterested" pure poetry and other modes of poetic expression that seek revolution through social and political engagement in the avant-garde. I discuss, further, the surrealist tensions in France in the late 20s and the theoretical discord between Breton and Bataille, a discontent stemming from the idealism in Bretonianism versus the interest in base matter in Bataille. While positioning Bataille's *informe* as a theoretical device that stages a critique against extant forms of thinking, the first chapter also recognizes the aesthetic, socio-cultural, and philosophical implications of formlessness. Similar surrealist tensions are also evident in Spain concerning the "arte

nuevo” that surged forth as a result of the growing interest in avant-garde practices. This chapter analyses various artistic tendencies in Spain, including automatism and dehumanization, in an attempt to demonstrate their influence in the poetic production of the period, but also their areas of inadequacy in approaching the avant-garde. I will investigate other aesthetic criticisms of the early twentieth century, including both Bataille’s notion of *informe* and Larrea’s discussion of a sub-realism, both of which elucidate a tendency rooted in the overturning of conventional aesthetic and moral norms. The elaboration of Bataille’s models are not a question of merely celebrating abjection or formless base matter. Nor is it an issue of thematics that proves key in Lorca (although themes of the fallen and base are evident). Rather, it is the deconstruction of *logos*, idealism, form, identity, and aesthetic and social conventions that is of interest with reference to Lorca’s work.

Subsequent chapters test and amplify the theoretical hypotheses as outlined in Chapter One. Using Lorca’s late work as exemplary of the most radical strands of the artistic creation of the period, I employ Bataillean concepts to rethink the Spanish poet’s involvement in and renovation of the avant-garde. What I will initially claim and subsequently test through close readings and detailed analyses, is that in a manner similar to the way in which philosophy is interrogated and undone from its margins (a pattern inherited from Friedrich Nietzsche and modified in the thinking of twentieth-century philosophers), Lorca’s poetry makes radical critiques of prevalent idealist aspirations in artistic and social structures. Within the aesthetic currents of the 1920s and 30s, Lorca is found constantly renewing his creative styles, experimenting with new techniques, and reworking traditional art forms. Lorca was definitely influenced, like his contemporaries, by Juan Ramón Jiménez, José Ortega y Gasset, and Ramón Gómez de la Serna, as well as by exterior movements that

entered Spain and flourished there. However, in Lorca's later work—beginning in 1929 with *Poeta en Nueva York*, arguably his most “surrealistic” collection of poems—there is an abrupt change in styles and themes which anticipates ensuing writings such as *El público* and *Así que pasen cinco años*. In these works, Lorca departs from a rethinking of traditional Spanish themes and forms and proposes a violent critique of established discourse. Rather than a mere regress to prevalent (or even modernist) forms and aesthetics, a position which many critics have assumed, I contend that Lorca's poetry and drama constitute a significant departure from such forms and even their vanguardist revisions.

In Chapter Two, “An Aesthetics of *Informe* in Lorca's New York,” I propose that rather than a dehumanized and disinterested poetry as evident in many avant-garde circles, Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York* embodies a violent social critique, tinged with personal anguish and denouncement of religious and economic conventions which oppress and marginalize. In this collection of poems, the poetic subject dissolves and is broken down in the oppressive city and later seeks rebirth in the nature of Vermont and the lively sounds and senses of Havana. In *Poeta en Nueva York*, forms are a lie, sky-craving architecture is interrogated, and annihilation is seen in the numerous *vacíos* and *huecos* of the city as all is drowned in the sacrificial blood of the fallen. As in the poems “Grito hacia Roma” and “New York: Oficina y denuncia,” where “the pure shapes sink,” religious and economic oppression is exposed in a vigorous manner. In this chapter I also consider other works produced during the New York period, namely, several of the poet's drawings and a short screenplay titled *Viaje a la luna*. These pieces—all examples of Lorca's interest in a multiplicity of artistic genres—aid in examining the performative nature of Bataillean *informe* in deconstructing convention and “logically” expressing transgressive and irrational subject-matter, and thus

attaining a poetic much more sub-realist than sublimatory or orthodoxly *surrealist*.

Chapter Three, “The Destruction of the Theater and the Closure of Representation: Sovereign Subjects in Lorca’s *Retablillo* and *El público*,” investigates the interrogation of literary form in one of Lorca’s most radical theatrical works, *El público*.<sup>4</sup> In this play, borders are blurred as oppositions such as audience/actors, life/representation, and reality/dream are questioned. What is remarkable about *El público* is the manner in which Lorca questions representation by enacting (performing) its dissolution. Here, all boundaries between art and life are destroyed as the fulfillment of this “impossible” play involves the literal annihilation of theatrical space, thus exemplifying a performative capacity of discourse and literature counter to conventional theatrical performance or representation. The destruction of theatrical norms is similar to what Antonin Artaud (another dissident surrealist member who, like Bataille, was excommunicated from the Bretonian group) deems the “theater of cruelty,” a theater which reaches outside its borders and impacts the “real” world. This “closure of representation,” as Derrida explains with reference to Artaud, is brought to the forefront of Lorca’s work as the audience rebels against the staging of the play and sets fire to the curtains. In this chapter I highlight the correspondence between Lorca’s “impossible” plays and an early play that Lorca revised in 1930 and again in 1934: *Retablillo de don Cristóbal*. In this text, originally much longer and previously titled *Tragicomedia de don Cristóbal y la seña Rosita*, Lorca abolishes the limits of representation in dramatic discourse as a meta-theatrical Director and Poet enter, censure, and leave the dramatic space as they wish. It is significant that in a 1946 political publication in France which Bataille edited, the French

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<sup>4</sup> Although not to be treated here, Lorca’s other play from this period, *Así que pasen cinco años*, also presents a significant departure from conventional representation.

intellectual included Lorca's *Retablillo* in its entirety, a clear example of the sovereign literature that greatly interested the French thinker. The transgressive nature of these works exhibits the mission of *informe* and the Lorquian poetic logic which requires that, as Antonio Monegal astutely claims, "para salvar el teatro hay que incendiarlo y destruirlo" ("Introducción," *El público* 35).

In Chapter Four, "Rotten Roses and Other Botanical Bereavements, or, the Inadequacy of the Binary," I examine the culmination of *informe* in the termination of formal structure in both representation and content in Lorca's *Doña Rosita la soltera*. While this play does, in some sense, represent a return to a more conventional theater dealing with familiar themes and spaces, it also presents a radical break with aesthetic patterns as demonstrated in the putrefaction of both the rose and of Doña Rosita. Here, the "language of flowers"—the telling subtitle of the play and also the title of one of Bataille's *Documents* essays—points to the dissolution of form and the inadequacy of binary structures, specifically that of idea versus matter. The putrefying rose, along with the withering woman, rejects the idealization of love themes and the transcendent nature of beauty as evident in previous aesthetic movements (such as *modernismo*). Instead, in *Doña Rosita*, material putrefaction overcomes any sublimatory forces and, in the end, leads to the destruction of forms. Lorca's use of the rose metaphor is particularly subversive as it represents the old maid, not the paragon of beauty as in more classical, romantic, or *modernista* contexts. While the rose acts to symbolize the life-span of the human being, and whereas the human in a religious structure would experience a resurrection after its death as the spirit lives on, when represented as a withering flower, it has no sort of rebirth or renewal of the soul. Rather, the decaying rose (and the human subject by analogy) results in complete annihilation of form and life as a

soulless flower after putrefaction. But as the rose fulfills its purpose by rising, blooming, and withering as it ages, Rosita contradictorily does not progress in time. She is unfertilized, immobile, and continually wears clothing that belongs to the past as she tries to stop time's destructive forces. Therefore, Rosita is, at the same time, similar to the rose in her withering, but also its radical opposite in her immobilization, crossing boundaries of norm and difference.

In the Conclusion of this dissertation, “An Ethics of *Informe*: On Poetry and Learning to Live,” I briefly examine the ethical undertones of *informe*, and by extension, Lorca's work. These final remarks reinforce, further, the value of poetry in society and the extra-textual impacts that the poetic utterance has on cultural and ideological formation. I show the manner in which Lorca's work exemplifies the cultural engagement of avant-garde poetry and the desire to dialogue with and critique artistic and socio-cultural constructs. The poetic utterance, in essence, is always a political statement as it seeks to (re)establish and continually renovate parameters of a “general economy” without restrictions.<sup>5</sup> The aesthetical and ethical implications of Bataille's *informe* are noticed in the opening of new spaces of representation that question conventional norms of theater, the visual arts, and poetry. This manner of viewing the aesthetic has ethical significance. As Heidegger asks, echoing Friedrich Hölderlin, “what are poets for in a destitute age?” Bataille might answer by claiming that poets engage in a space of sovereign thinking that includes artistic, social, and political questioning. The ethical implications of *informe*, therefore, point toward a breaking down of established norms that seek to oppress while giving voice to marginal figures and

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<sup>5</sup> For Bataille, a “general economy”—governed by sovereign subjects, laughter, eroticism, and poetry—is diametrically opposed to the restricted economy based on hierarchies, control, and Hegelian lordship. For more, see Jacques Derrida's reading of Bataille in “From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve” in *Writing and Difference*.

spaces of otherness. This *informe*-ing<sup>6</sup> dialogues with later thinkers, like Derrida, who claim that in order to “learn to live,” we must first destroy the foundations of our conceptual thinking, engage in self-critique, and continually deconstruct and reconsider our modes of being, thinking, and relating. The claim here is that Bataille’s notions of poetry and *informe* have a central space in such a deconstruction, and that Lorca’s poetic and dramatic texts anticipate this ethical tone.

The critical and philosophical contexts that underlie this dissertation support an original and instructive approach to what some deem Lorca’s most difficult works. The hope is that by examining Lorca’s work under the lens of the performative and deconstructive capacities of Bataille’s *informe* (and similar concepts), the critic will be able to better understand the social, political, and aesthetic “interestedness” of the avant-garde as the work of art engages in sustained critiques of structural conceptions of reality. In elucidating this line of thought—and in drawing attention to the ethical value of the aesthetic object in society—I hope to signal that, in a more general sense, the reading, writing, and study of poetry and poetic theories, do indeed, facilitate the continual process of learning to live.

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<sup>6</sup> I continually manipulate Bataille’s notion of *informe*. I am intrigued by the performative nature of the *informe* as it actively critiques and destructures form and convention. *Informe*-ing, as such, is my way of referring to what the *informe* does, that is, how it actively renders things formless. Thus I change *informe* as a noun, or the *informe* as an adjective, into a verb: *informe*-ing and *informe*-s.

## CHAPTER I

### POETRY AND PHILOSOPHY: BATAILLEAN SURREALISM AND THE SPANISH AVANT-GARDE

#### Philosophy, Poetry, and the Literary Tradition

Since Plato, the frontier between philosophy and literature has been subject to constant questioning and rethinking. In *The Republic* the Greek philosopher states, “the power which poetry has of harming the good (and there are very few who are not harmed), is surely an awful thing” (263; bk. 10). Indeed, Plato viewed art as a second mimesis, a copy of a copy, and as such, an untruthful representation of the Idea. He condemns poetry from the Ideal State since it portrays lust, anger, desire, pain, pleasure, and irrational forces of the body. The Platonic discourse establishes, rather, that “the better part of the soul is likely to be that which trusts to measure and calculation” (260; bk. 10). The insistence on rational inquiry as the primary source of educating the people in the creation of the city-state forms the basis of Plato’s rejection of the poets since that which is artistically created is “untrue.” He was concerned with the educative power of fiction and the influence that it had on the people. Plato continues, “poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up; she lets them rule, although they ought to be controlled, if mankind are ever to increase in happiness and virtue” (264; bk. 10). While Plato does recognize the “power” of poetry, he considers it a negative and marginal discourse since it evokes and reflects the passions of the soul as it instructs the people based on distorted variations of truth and right.

According to Aaron Hughes’s description of the division between philosophy and literature in Plato, “In its most severe representation, philosophy and literature are seen as

occupying opposite ends of a continuum. Philosophy is about all that is unchanging, universal, and permanent; the purview of literature, on the other hand, is about the fickleness of specific characters making specific choices in response to localized contexts” (1). It is not difficult to see that concepts such as these will provide the basis for critique from later intellectuals, thinkers that will celebrate the passions and value of poetry. The separation of these two discourses, and the privileging of philosophy over poetry, forms the foundation of thinking throughout the history of Western civilization and provides a source of continual debate as later thinkers call into question such a division. Although thinkers such as the Neo-Platonists rethink Plato’s tenets, and poets including the romantics tend to conflate the two discourses, the most radical rethinking or subversion of the opposition between poetry and philosophy does not occur until the twentieth century. Later thinkers such as Bataille and Lorca will unite philosophical consideration and poetic expression that will extend towards a “poetic logic” involved in a carefully articulated critique, and will not simply be reduced to a mere “fickleness,” or “localized contexts.”

As Aristotle critiques Plato’s model of the world of the Ideas, he posits the importance of the empirical world, the world constituted by that which is visible and part of lived experience. Nevertheless, in *Poetics*, Aristotle still defines poetry as mimesis in that it imitates, through language, the visible world of appearances (Plato’s mimesis is defined as the imitation of the visible which is itself an imitation of the Idea). Aristotle differentiates between history and poetry since the former imitates what *has* happened and the latter represents what *might have* happened. In either case, the representation of both history and poetry are governed by verisimilitude, that is, by the possibility that the action being represented (imitated) could in fact happen. Within this theoretical scheme, Aristotle’s poetic

theories, as Plato's, operate under the premises of logic and reason. Therefore, resources such as the irrational and the impossible should be censured from poetic expression, since "the tragic plot must not be composed of irrational parts. Everything irrational should, if possible, be excluded" (Aristotle 53; ch. 25). When the irrational is included, under the condition that it has an artistic relevance and that it portrays a likelihood, it is still, for Aristotle, reduced to absurdity. Aristotle explains what is appropriate for poetic imitation: "things as they were or are, things as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be [...] [and] if he describes the impossible, he is guilty of an error" (53-54; ch. 25). Therefore, for Plato and Aristotle, poetry is a dangerous source of instruction since it unfaithfully imitates the world of Ideas and since it can represent impossible, irrational, or morally contradictory versions of truth.

An illuminating study which chronicles the development of poetic theory from Plato through romanticism is M. H. Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Abrams traces metaphors for poetic expression and examines how the idea of mimesis as espoused by Plato is revised and rethought in art throughout the centuries. For Abrams, the Platonic ideology of mimesis displays the way in which "works of art have a lowly status in the order of existing things" since they are twice removed from the truth of the realm of Ideas (8). Abrams also recognizes art's imitative characteristic with reference to Aristotle's conceptions. In this case, the poet is not seen as dangerous as in Plato's desired city-state, but is still given inferior status. In both cases, the poet is engaged in re-presenting nature and the actions of mankind (whether as a copy, or as a copy of a copy). In neither context does the poet occupy a central space of importance or relevance since "his personal faculties, feelings, or desires are not called upon to explain the subject matter or form of the poem" (Abrams 11).

Abrams outlines the metaphors that were developed in later theories of art including pragmatic theories which promoted that art had a purpose of teaching or delighting. With pragmatic theories, however, art is still imitative as it mimics what may be or what should be. Successive theories concerning the work of art tended to lead more towards the expression and genius of the poet. Abrams suggests that with expressive theories “the stress was shifted more and more to the poet’s natural genius, creative imagination, and emotional spontaneity” (20). Rather than art being merely a re-presentation or imitation of the natural world and its inhabitants, it came to be a projection (as if a lamp) of the impulses and imaginations of the inner soul of the poet. This echoes Plotinus’s conception of emanation where the image of the fountain serves to capture, metaphorically, the overflowing of light, good, and creation from the poet (Abrams 58-59). The metaphor of the lamp gives predominance to the sense of vision, to the eye, and to the unified organization of the body. With later poetic schools, like those of the romantics and symbolists, exterior images and symbols were employed in order to capture the inner feelings and thoughts in the poet’s mind and project them forth into the poem. Still, even with art as an expression of the poet’s inner soul, objective theories of art limited the effect or value that poetry had outside of its own construct.

The potential value of art and poetry was elaborated in terms of utility by the German thinker Immanuel Kant. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Kant postulated that art was “disinterested” and not concerned with any sort of utility. Artistic expression was solely a “heterocosm, a world of its own, independent of the world into which we are born, whose end is not to instruct or please but simply to exist” (Abrams 27). This art for art’s sake did not engage in the social or political spheres exterior to its own nature as an artistic

artefact. For the German critic Peter Bürger, “The relative dissociation of the work of art from the praxis of life in bourgeois society thus becomes transformed into the (erroneous) idea that the work of art is totally independent of society” (46). In romanticism, however, art attains a certain utility or value as poetry becomes supremely “interested” with or committed to the context of the exterior world. While romantic poetry still communicates the feelings of the poetic self, it also dialogues with its exterior contexts and circumstances. Abrams continues, “The most important function of poetry is, by its pleasurable resources, to foster and subtilize the sensibility, emotions, and sympathies of the reader. Romantic poetry remains poetry with a purpose” (103). In the final section of his study, titled “The Use of Poetry,” Abrams demonstrates the conflux between poetry as artistic expression and poetry with a social and cultural value. He states that “The need to justify the existence of poets and the reading of poetry becomes acute in times of social strain” (326). Poetry, Abrams shows, has intrinsic and extrinsic value as it expresses both the thoughts and feelings of the poet and as it acts “as a means to moral and social effects beyond itself” (327). In other words, Abrams notes how the romantics, through the usefulness of poetry, joined poetic expression and rational inquiry in the constructs and conventions of modern life. That poetry can have exterior effects and work transformatively regarding socio-cultural formation is a bold statement, but as Michael Hamburger asserts, “Commitment, again, is not only a matter of conscious attitudes; merely to write is to commit oneself, and to reveal a commitment that cannot possibly be confined to the aesthetic order” (17). In other words, poetry provides a link between the subject and society as it melds internal and external contexts. In Adorno’s informative study “Lyric Poetry and Society,” the German intellectual asserts that the “subject and object are no rigid, isolated poles, but can be identified only within the process

in which they interact, then lyric poetry is the experimental test of this philosophical proposition. In the lyric poem the subject negates both his isolated opposition to society as well as his mere functioning within rationally organized society” (162). Clearly not disinterested and unengaged, poetic discourse establishes an other: if not an explicit “you,” at least an always implied society.<sup>1</sup>

In Nietzsche’s *The Genealogy of Morals*, the Kantian idea of a “disinterested” work of art is heavily critiqued. Nietzsche posits that Kant’s claim is inaccurate since it examines the work of art from the spectator’s point of view rather than from the artist’s. Whereas for Kant art is meant to give pleasure “without interest” in exterior utility, Nietzsche posits that, when seen from the artist’s perspective, the work of art is closely tied to the author’s feelings and context. According to Giorgio Agamben, who continues Nietzsche’s critique of Kant, “For the one who creates it, art becomes an increasingly uncanny experience, with respect to which speaking of interest is at the very least a euphemism, because what is at stake seems to be not in any way the production of a beautiful work but instead the life and death of the author” (5). For Agamben, as for Nietzsche, the most relevant part of the work of art, then, becomes not the disinterested beauty or pleasure perceived by the spectator, but rather the personal, social, and aesthetic context within which it is produced by the artist. Certainly this conception of art as discourse—a summation of values, attitudes, and context, in addition to its formal characteristics—overcomes the disinterest of the spectator through the commitment and interest of the artist. A shift of focus is evident as the thinking of Nietzsche

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<sup>1</sup> Adorno’s essay “Commitment” further amplifies the issue of engagement since, essentially, all writing is constructed within and with reference to a social context. This undermines and separation of poetry/praxis, creation/inquiry, and art/life. Adorno asserts, “There is no content, no formal category of the literary work that does not, however unrecognizably transformed and unawarely, derive from the empirical reality from which it has escaped” (254).

and Agamben recognizes the importance of the work of art from the perspective of the artist. The interest in imitation is superseded not only by the commitment to functions exterior to the work of art, but also by the artist's need for expression as a matter of life and death. The destruction of aesthetics by Nietzsche and Agamben elicits consideration of what the work of art is, its purpose, and what it does, thus approaching what Abrams deems the use of romantic poetry.

María Zambrano's research is particularly revealing concerning the history of thinking and the relationship between philosophy and poetry. She elucidates the importance of the romantic movement in the shift from mimetic to expressive forms of poetry, and thus the separation of the two realms—an attainment which becomes influential in the Spanish avant-garde. In *Filosofía y poesía*, a history of the development of the relationship between art and philosophical inquiry, Zambrano summarizes the main point of strife between philosophy and poetry. For Zambrano, the tensions between the two discourses are based on ethics (as poetry is without morals), justice (as poetry cannot affirm the symbolic order), reason (as poetry is irrational and based on feelings), and identity (as poetry displays multiple spaces, forms, and copies). She shows a history of the quarrel between philosophy and poetry and notes how the former adheres to a desire for a stable and unified subject whereas the latter affirms a passionate and fluid being: “Pero hay, por el pronto, una diferencia; así como el filósofo si alcanzara la unidad del ser, sería una unidad absoluta, sin mezcla de multiplicidad alguna, la unidad lograda del poeta en el poema es siempre incompleta; [...] espacio abierto que rodea a toda poesía” (*Filosofía* 22). She traces the polemic from Plato, and while she does notice points of contact between the two discourses in many periods (such as in mysticism), the movement that most blurs the boundaries between philosophy and

literature is romanticism. Zambrano affirms this intersection by stating that “En el Romanticismo, poesía y filosofía se abrazan, [...] se funden con la pasión que precede a la muerte. [...] Poesía y filosofía desbordan cada una de sí, son igualmente extremistas” (*Filosofía* 79). This heritage is later seen in Symbolist poets such as Charles Baudelaire and Paul Valéry as poetry and philosophy treat similar concerns. The writers and thinkers of these movements interrogate identity and the passions of the soul and express themes such as love, creation, doubt, and pain. For Zambrano, this is why later intellectuals such as Martin Heidegger will draw on the writings of romantic poets like Friedrich Hölderlin as an intellectual that embodies the former’s mode of thinking concerning be-ing. In a similar fashion, avant-garde poets and thinkers in Spain will recognize an importance in the Spanish romantic poets like Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. The romantic heritage affirms breaking rules, irruptions of irrational forces, being outside oneself, and a laceration of the rational *cogito*.

Zambrano’s *Filosofía y poesía* is written in 1939 and does not take issue with the ideas of later post-modern thinkers and the manner in which they continue to confuse the boundaries between the poetic and philosophical discourse, nor does it reflect on similar tensions within the work of the poets of the Spanish Generation of 1927. Other than the allusions to this convergence with respect to the romantics, Zambrano’s study focuses on the differences between the two discourses and how that tension has formed modes of thinking throughout history. Yet Zambrano’s study does expound poetry as a marginal force occupying a marginal space. She shows how poetry uses the same tools as philosophy in order to subvert and create a space for its own expression. Indeed, “[e]l logos se traicionaba a sí mismo en la poesía, funcionaba ilegítimamente. Y es que la poesía aunque palabra no era razón. [...] El logos,—palabra y razón—se escinde por la poesía, que es la palabra, sí,

pero irracional. Es, en realidad, la palabra puesta al servicio de la embriaguez” (*Filosofía* 33).

This is an interesting move made by Zambrano, one which recognizes the instability of the margins in any supposedly defined and stable discourse. Just as a marginal discourse (such as the poetic) can open new modes of thinking, twentieth-century thinking will also explode from its margins as it rethinks itself and creates new spaces for difference. A similar conception of poetry as a marginal force is evident in Bataille’s theory of general economy since, for Bataille, poetry functions beyond the constraints of reason and calculation. In this sense the margins of poetry are the spaces of collapse, the spaces of *informe*-ing.

Zambrano’s later study *La confesión: Género literario* does, however, show a more prevalent post-structural blurring of poetic and philosophical discourse. Here, Zambrano shows how the genre of confession seeks to unite the previously separated discourses of life (poetry) and truth (philosophy). In the confession, there is a crisis in which the self must reconcile life and truth. To accomplish this, the self creates a non-assimilable “other.” The crisis caused by the previous division of reason and feeling creates a need for reconciliation; “por eso hubo que surgir la otra razón, la razón cercana a la vida y asequible a ella [...] posibilidad de expresarse” (*Confesión* 23). Surrealist poetry, for Zambrano, furthers the breaking of categorical boundaries as it blurs oppositions such as self/other, life/truth, real/imaginary, life/death, communicable/non-communicable, and possible/impossible. Furthermore, surrealism constructs an unstable poetic self that is dissolved in space and time and among cultural others (91-98). The literary avant-garde movements of the beginning of the twentieth century anticipate the fragmentation of the subject that the philosophers of that century would also later elaborate. The philosophy/poetry quarrel as described by Plato becomes subject to later constructions and deconstructions that shape philosophical and

literary discourse. While the revolutions of the avant-garde did, in some aspects, set the stage for (or at least anticipate) the later critique from a philosophical standpoint, many of the avant-garde movements, especially Bretonian surrealism, have been accused of working within the same framework that they seek to undermine—of paradoxically critiquing idealism through sublimation, love, and liberation.

The metaphors of the mirror and the lamp as articulated by Abrams, however, only have relevance in explaining literary production from antiquity through romanticism, symbolism, and *modernismo*. It seems evident that when considering the aesthetic tensions of the twentieth century, new metaphors are needed in order to describe the poetic production post-dating the artistic movements dealt with by Abrams. What most clearly distinguishes romanticism, symbolism, and *modernismo*, from later avant-garde movements is the violent nature with which these later aesthetics break with previous norms. While most movements since romanticism follow the cycle of continual renovation of previous aesthetics, as the Mexican critic and writer Octavio Paz notes throughout *Los hijos del limo*, the poetry of the avant-garde does constitute a more sustained and violent break. In a period of violence on all fronts, and between the World Wars, literature and philosophy are, to some extent, permeated by similar destruction. As Paz asserts, “hay algo que distingue a los movimientos de vanguardia de los anteriores: la violencia de las actitudes y los programas, el radicalismo de las obras. [...] No queda más recurso que una nueva transgresión” (159). In early twentieth-century philosophy, the need to violently transform (and perform) the necessary changes and interrogations of thinking is elaborated in Heidegger and continued in Bataille, Deleuze, and Derrida. While Heidegger declares the need for a destruction of

Western ontological thinking and claims that language has lost its meaning,<sup>2</sup> poets of the avant-garde periods signal a similar need to invent new modes of expression and representation. This is evident in Hispanic literature as poets configure new linguistic structures (as in César Vallejo's *Trilce* and Vicente Huidobro's *Altazor*) and insist, with increasingly more tenacity than previous poets including Baudelaire, in the representation of violent thematic material, including abject base matter, death, and sexual desire.

The continuation of Abrams's analysis of the mirror and lamp metaphors is evident in twentieth-century poetry through tropes entailing violent fragmentation. The discontent with logocentric and ocularcentric forms of representation (as displayed by the mirror and the lamp) is embraced by thinkers and poets alike in the twentieth century in favor of metaphors and motifs of darkness, blindness, and shadows. The progression of poetic metaphors observed by Abrams from antiquity until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could continue to reflect twentieth-century poetics in this manner: mirror (in which poetry is the imitation of the world) > lamp (in which poetry is produced by an enlightened and expressive prophet and seer) > blindness (in which poetry demonstrates the dissolution of form and skepticism with reference to identity and expression). Even though the persistence on this sort of analysis is outside the purview of the current project, the underlying discontent evident in avant-garde poetry with previous models of representation and enlightened projection will be apparent throughout.<sup>3</sup> Metaphors of blindness and destruction approach

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<sup>2</sup> These preoccupations are constant in Heidegger's writings. Most notably they are discussed in Section 6 of *Being and Time* (1926) and in the opening remarks of *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936).

<sup>3</sup> In reality, the "mirror, lamp, and blindness" analysis is another book-length project. It would be interesting (and relevant) to trace poetic metaphors throughout twentieth-century poetry, both Hispanic and not, in an attempt to chronicle and analyze the metaphors that best represent twentieth-century poetry. Poets of particular importance include T. S. Eliot, Rainer Maria Rilke, Gertrud Kolmar, Ezra Pound, Fernando Pessoa, Rafael Alberti, Luis Cernuda, Pablo Neruda, Vicente Huidobro, César Vallejo, Juan Larrea, José Gorostiza, and others.

what Bataille describes as the formless, the violent reaction against anything that proscribes form, clarity, and stable conventions. Later post-modern thinkers, including Derrida, articulate this discontent in terms of anti-ocularcentrism. And, it must be recognized that the recourse to violent rupture and the representation of base matter such as blood and excrement is necessarily performative and interested-ly engaged. That is, fluid and formless materials reject categorization, conceptualization, and structuralization. It might be said, then, that the formless “performs” the destruction to which it refers.

### Avant-Garde Art and Theory

In *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Bürger argues for a reading that links art and life as it destroys the bourgeois notion of art as an institution. Bürger recognizes the individual in the work of art and further elaborates the concept of engagement, or commitment, in the works of this period as they reject previous conceptions of aestheticism and the classical autonomy doctrine. Rather, for Bürger the avant-garde focuses on a dominating theme: the social function of literature and a work of art that is hardly disinterested.

Bürger examines the tensions of the ideological critique as evidenced in Marx as he elaborates how literature is a response to a social reality, to the contradictions of capitalist industry or the alienation phenomena of working life (9). This thinking opposes the bourgeois conception of art in which there is evident a distance from reality. Bürger continues: “Through the enjoyment of art, the atrophied bourgeois individual can experience the self as personality. But because art is detached from daily life, this experience remains without tangible effect, i.e., it cannot be integrated into that life” (13). In Bürger’s estimation, it is against the late nineteenth-century pure aestheticism (autonomous art) of previous

generations that the avant-gardists react. In this sense, the avant-gardists move beyond the Russian formalists' idea of defamiliarization as a characteristic of art since the avant-garde movements make shocking the recipient the primary focus of the work of art. Here, art steps outside of merely representing reality as it provides effects that extend beyond the page or canvas. Form is no longer just artistic matter, but rather a means of destabilizing and decentering (Bürger 19).

Another resounding feature of the avant-gardist work highlighted in Bürger's study is the self-critique of the present, of artistic conventions, and of art as an institution (21-2). Bürger, as critics such as Octavio Paz and Michael Hamburger, recognizes that the avant-garde responds to the tensions of modernity through self-critique. In this sense, as Derrida will later show in *Specters of Marx*, both Marxism and the avant-garde contribute to a legacy of radical self-critique that will later pervade deconstruction. The openness to radical critique is imperative for any process of artistic, philosophical, social, or cultural development. Indeed, if modern art is self-critical, this self-criticism encounters a sustained interest in the innovations of the avant-garde as "[t]he avant-garde protest, whose aim it is to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, reveals the nexus between autonomy and the absence of any consequences" (Bürger 22). In other words, how can art be critical if it is detached (disinterestedly and autonomously) from the reality and the social sphere of which it is a part?

The avant-garde critic must consider the social and political functions of art, its value and function. For Bürger, this occurs in the avant-garde since "The intention of the avant-gardist may be defined as the attempt to direct toward the practical the aesthetic experience (which rebels against the praxis of life)" (34). In this manner, art and praxis are connected

as aesthetic experience is “relevant” only in as much as it is practical or useful in enabling socio-cultural formation. It is clear that Bürger promotes the notion that art, beginning with the avant-garde, *does* something. As art and praxis join, the work of art becomes less representation and more a manner of practice, or, to use a more contemporary term, performance. Bürger continues, “All that remains is the individual who uses poetry as an instrument for living one’s life as best one can” (53). Here, in a manner similar to the renegade surrealist Antonin Artaud’s notion of the theater of cruelty, representation is undermined as the effects of the unsettling work of art (theater, in Artaud’s case) transgress the boundaries established between art and life. This understanding of art describes the most radical of avant-garde forms, including the un-representable or “impossible” nature of Lorca’s plays such as *El público* and *Así que pasen cinco años*. These avant-garde works seek the shock that Bürger speaks of which is “aimed for as a stimulus to change’s one’s conduct of life” (80), thus enacting effects that are exterior to the actual artistic artefact or performance.

The notion of engagement, along with the jointure of art and praxis as expounded by Bürger, corresponds with the legacy of artistic value left by the romantic poets as described by Abrams, albeit in a much more intensified and deliberate fashion. Bürger shows to what extent critical inquiry and artistic expression meld as artists engage (transformatively) in socio-cultural formation: “the avant-garde has radically changed the place value of political engagement in art, that the concept of engagement prior and subsequent to the avant-garde movements is not the same” (83). Furthermore, Bürger concludes that “One may go a step further and say that the avant-garde work does away with the old dichotomy between ‘pure’ and ‘political’ art [...] In such a view, avant-garde and engagement ultimately coincide” (91).

Gregg Horowitz continues Bürger's elaborations on the commitment of avant-garde art and the importance of humanized art since "the avant-garde impulse is the non-artistic reminder in art of the human needs that art has left unsatisfied" (758). In essence, for Horowitz the avant-gardist work of art mediates the interaction between oppositions such as artist/receptor, presence/absence, and purposefulness/dissatisfaction. Avant-garde art, according to Horowitz, renegotiates what is left out, absent, or overlooked in artistic production. A major impulse of this negotiation is provided through poetic figures, such as nearly incomprehensible metaphors, which renovate language and expression. This manner of viewing the avant-garde recognizes the overall aesthetic and socio-political thrust of the work of art in critiquing extant art forms and establishing spaces of innovative creation. Horowitz continues, "Thus, the opening up of the work of art, if it is to be an artistic opening, must be the work of the avant-garde impulse, of the muteness of the non-artistic as it begins to stir in the work of art" (759). In other words, the avant-garde artistic artefact performs a dissolution of boundaries between art and life that, in the wake of "disinterested" art, rejects the urge to divide artistic expression and the praxis of life. In the context of the Lorquian poetics of interest here, the jointure of art and life, poetry and philosophy, reflects the constant need for expression and the necessity to alter, destroy, and renovate the poetic utterance in order to capture expression. When examined within the parameters established by Bataille, there is evident a pattern of violent critique and renovation of aesthetic, social, and political conventions offered by the breaking down of structure as the first step in the creation of innovative expression.

## Post-Structural Poetics and Performance

In post-romantic philosophy as in avant-garde aesthetics, the connections between thinking, creative expression, and engagement are evident. It is not by chance that the development of aesthetic theories as Bürger outlines coincides with a similar unfolding of continental philosophy in the twentieth century (even though the most virulent revisions of philosophical models do not occur until the second half of the twentieth century with thinkers such as Deleuze and Derrida). For these thinkers, the separation of poetic and philosophical thinking is undone as they find the embodiment of their philosophical inquiries in concert with poetic utterance. For Phillip Wheelwright, “The contrast between philosophic and poetic texts, with the language appropriate to each, has been undermined since about 1960 by a number of French writers—notably the philosopher Jacques Derrida—on the basis of the theory of general linguistics” (909). But the thinking of Derrida and Deleuze concerning the work of art derives its lineage from the first deconstructors *avant la lettre*, namely Nietzsche, Bataille, and Heidegger (Asensi 443).

In Heidegger’s 1926 study *Being and Time*, the German philosopher affirms that a *destruktion* of Western ontological thinking is required in order to reconsider essential modes of inquiry, being, and relating that have been forgotten or dismissed. Heidegger describes that the concept of being is obscure and “emptied out” and, as such, needs to be elucidated. He calls for a new language to be used in order to approach the theoretical undertakings at hand. In this spirit, Heidegger’s theories of ontological difference examine the subtleties of be-ing and beings and creates new conceptualizations of thinking be-ing, such as being-there, being-in-the-world, being-with, being-toward-death, and the potentiality-of-being. The destructuring of Western thinking is articulated thus:

If the question of being is to achieve clarity regarding its own history, a loosening of the sclerotic tradition and a dissolving of the concealments produced by it is necessary. We understand this task as the deconstructing of the traditional content of ancient ontology which is to be carried out along the *guidelines of the question of being*. This deconstructing is based on the original experiences in which the first and subsequently guiding determinations of being were gained. [...] The deconstructing has just as little the *negative* sense of disburdening ourselves of the ontological tradition. On the contrary, it should stake out the positive possibilities of the tradition. (20)

For Heidegger, then, the task at hand for the philosopher is to return to certain originary premises in order to destructure, re-think, and re-encounter modes of thinking being. While the ontological question is not one of primary focus here, the “model” of deconstructing a system of thinking in order to examine and continually interrogate it is of key interest. As Heidegger postulates ten years later in the introductory remarks of *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936), “all fundamental words have been used up and the genuine relation to the word has been destroyed” (1). With the capacity of expression in jeopardy, and with linguistic articulation exhausted, Heidegger declares that language needs to be renovated, deconstructed, and re-thought. The legacy of deconstructing and self-critique left by Heidegger is crucial for later thinkers.

In addition to the relevance that the concept of deconstructing provides to the arguments here concerning the radicality of the avant-garde in Spain, along with the question of engagement in art, Heidegger’s “turn” towards poetry in the 1930s and 40s is also of prime relevance. For the later Heidegger, the work of art embodies a philosophical discourse as it points towards the creative moment or emerging forth of being (*phusis*). Heidegger draws on the Greek term *aletheia* to signal the revealing-concealing of being that is exposed in the work of art. In “The Origin of the Work of Art” (1935), Heidegger states “Thus art is: the creative preserving of truth in the work. *Art then is the becoming and happening of truth*”

(*Poetry* 69).<sup>4</sup> The specific role of poetry as the privileged form of art is affirmed as, Heidegger continues, “Art, as the setting-into-work of truth, is poetry. [...] The nature of art is poetry. The nature of poetry, in turn, is the founding of truth” (*Poetry* 72). In ensuing studies Heidegger examines the poetic utterance further as he elaborates the writings of Hölderlin. In “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” (1936), Heidegger demonstrates the manner in which Hölderlin’s writing dialogues with philosophical questions concerning truth, being, and identity. The poet is thus revealed as a demigod who serves to “enown” man unto the gods through the word. Heidegger shows how truth is founded and grounded through language and that it is for this reason that the poets occupy such an important space. The poet is the pointer who is needed in a destitute time in order to signal the arrival of the gods, found their space, and enact being-historical thinking. Therefore, according to Heidegger, “If we comprehend the essence of poetry, that it is the founding of being in the word, then we can divine something of the truth of the verse which Hölderlin spoke” (*Elucidations* 59). Here, it is clear that the former signals important poetic truths in the latter and that the latter embodies certain philosophical concerns of the former. Heidegger’s thinking concerning the work of art (and poetry and the role of the poet specifically) are important since they affirm an intersection of philosophical and poetic discourses. For Heidegger, it is the poet who is best equipped to use language in the naming, founding, and revealing of being. It is telling that, like Zambrano and Abrams, Heidegger turns to a romantic poet (Hölderlin) as one who exemplifies the enactment of philosophical inquiry in poetic expression.

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<sup>4</sup> The elucidation on “truth” in Heidegger is not geared toward a single absolute Truth, but rather centered on a “happening” of something essential, “ownmost” to be-ing. This poetics of “truth” will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 with reference to Lorca’s search for the expression of what he calls “my truth,” an intimate and highly contextualized aspect of subjectivity.

Derrida continues both Heidegger's task of destructuring modes of thinking and relating and the dialogue between philosophical interrogation and poetic naming in his examinations of several poets, playwrights, and novelists. Derrida does not have one particular poet or writer that can synthesize his thinking (as Heidegger finds in Hölderlin), but moreover, draws on the writings of Shakespeare, Joyce, Mallarmé, and others in order to examine the inner tensions and aporias of textuality and identity. Derrida's study titled "Mallarmé" presents the crisis of language and the manner in which Mallarmé's poetry diffuses meaning and rejects any reducible Platonic *logos*. For Derrida, the tensions at work within the literary text undo and deconstruct stable signification systems and meanings. This is seen in Mallarmé's work as follows:

Through the enigmatic *simul* of rupture and repetition we will define the *crisis*, the moment when simple *decision* is no longer possible, where the choice between opposing paths is suspended. A crisis, therefore, of criticism, which will always use judgement to *decide* on value and meaning, to distinguish between what is and what is not, what has value and what has not, the true and the false, the beautiful and the ugly, all signification and its opposite. (113)

Thus, according to Derrida, upon reading Mallarmé's poetry the reader passes through stages of undecidability in which traditional oppositions crumble in favor of a free-play of meaning and possibilities. Here, the word is liberated as sound and meaning are in constant flux. Derrida notices this in Mallarmé's poetry in which the French phonemic rendering /or/ corresponds with "now," "time," and "gold." In fact, on at least one instance in Mallarmé's poetry the linguistic variations build up and "the numerous *o*'s of this page, in the accumulated zeros which increase the value only to return it to the void [...] About the void itself, nothing is decided" (122). In literature as in philosophy, Derrida shows the dissemination and constant deferral of meaning and stable signification systems.

Derrida addresses the question of poetry and proposes a new interrogation into any conceptualization of poetics. In an interview titled “Che cos’è la poesia?” (1988), he suggests that “When, instead of ‘poetry,’ we said ‘poetic,’ we ought to have specified: ‘poematic’” (233). The poematics as proposed by Derrida recognizes the nature of the work of art as a destabilizing and dispersive artefact. This self-critical poematic effect of poetry is seen as self-conscious like the hedgehog that turns in onto itself while it simultaneously protects and pokes itself. The conception of “the poematic” *to-come* is outlined as follows: “You will call the poem from now on a certain passion of the singular mark, the signature that repeats its dispersion, each time beyond the *logos*, ahuman, barely domestic, not reappropriable into the family of the subject: a converted animal, rolled into a ball, turned toward the other and toward itself [...] Its event always interrupts or derails absolute knowledge” (235). The philosophical critique in Derrida as noticed in his ideas on poetry and Mallarmé extend, furthermore, to interrogations of political, social, aesthetic, and ethical discourses. Here the poetic text is a productive machine that advances open spaces for expression and interpretation.

Logocentric and aesthetic communications are increasingly challenged in Deleuze’s writings on Proust, thus amplifying the intersection of philosophy and literature. Proust provides a philosophical contemplation which highlights the work of art and its engagement in a deconstructive performance. Deleuze examines sign systems in Proust’s work and the way in which the world of signs is contrasted with any *logos* or simple reduction of signifier/signified relationships. Deleuze details how Proust’s use of sign systems affirms an anti-*logos* (or anti-Platonism) rather than clear, coherent meanings. He outlines the fluctuating nature of the sign as he proposes that “if the sign is always a fragment without

totalization of unification, this is because content relates to container by all the power of its incommensurability” (*Proust* 129). The work of art, therefore, is articulated by Deleuze as “anything it may seem; it is its very property of being whatever we like, of having overdetermination of whatever we like, from the moment *it works*: the modern work of art is a machine that functions as such. [...] It is a prophecy, a political warning, a cryptogram, a preposterous movie, and a writing on the wall” (*Proust* 145-46). The modern work of art, a productive working machine for Deleuze, destabilizes sign systems as it negates defined linguistic meanings. The inherent flux available in artistic signification in Deleuze is similar to what Bataille calls sovereignty in art, that is, art unbounded by convention and fixed meaning. This is evident in the experimental nature of avant-garde poetry as innovative forms and linguistic structures create voids in set signification and endlessly affirm multiple interpretive possibilities. What is key in Deleuze’s work is that he demonstrates how Proust’s text produces, from within, tensions that undermine logocentric totalization. These productive “machines” are revealed as forces within the text that perform a dispersal of meaning and complex signification networks.

In short, many thinkers of the late twentieth century undermine the Platonic separation of philosophical and poetic discourses. These contemporary intellectuals find in the writings of poets and novelists like Hölderlin, Mallarmé, and Proust a philosophical rigor which questions prevalent structures in aesthetics, ethics, and politics. These poets become engaged thinkers as they approach the concerns that preoccupy philosophical interrogation. What is most crucial here is that the modern poetic text, in similar fashion to the post-structural philosophical text, emerges from the margins to be considered a legitimate space for expression and thinking. As discourses open to marginal spaces, to “general economies,”

philosophy and poetry embody a similar questioning of stifled thinking, conventional uses of language, and limited expressive norms.

### Surrealism and Its Discontents

The avant-garde period in Europe exemplifies a particularly interesting case study as it presents a radical fissure from previous discourses and mode of expression, and as Bürger demonstrates, an interest in socio-political engagement. Movements like dadaism, cubism, surrealism, and futurism break with rationalist enlightenment models of thinking and expression. André Breton's ideas are clearly some of the most important of these movements. In his *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924), Breton envisions the surrealist poets as seers who are engaged in pure dreaming in order to contact an exalted pure reality. This quest for love, liberation, and the above reality (or *surreality*) was promoted as a neo-Platonic search for an artificial paradise. Herbert Gershman claims that

The surrealist aesthetic can be reduced to one theme: the attempt to actualize *le merveilleux*, the wonderland of revelation and dream, and by so doing to permit chance to run rampant in a wasteland of bleak reality. Not *le mystère*, the willful introduction of obscurity into art and life, which to Breton was a confession of weakness, [...] This private heaven could be attained in several ways [...] [and] this new mythology, recalling the neo-Platonists more than the romantics, had as its specific goal the conjuring up of an earthly paradise. (1-3)

While this lack of control does entail a critique against reason and society, it potentially does so without the conscious and calculated precision of rigorous artistic expression. With the lack of control inherent to automatism, surrealist writers were not explicitly engaged in their critique of society as they sought refuge in their exalting literary practices. The denial of conscious control—precisely that with which the Spanish surrealists disagreed—was only revolutionary inasmuch as it was irrational, but not in putting forth a direct and focused

critique *per se*.

The basis of disaccord between Breton and Bataille, and that which constitutes their major philosophical, ideological, and aesthetic orientations, stems from Breton's insistence on surrealism as a movement of sublimation of reality to a marvelous or dream-like status. In the first surrealist manifesto, Breton uses language that reflects this desire: "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*. [...] Let us not mince words: the marvelous is always beautiful, anything marvelous is beautiful, in fact only the marvelous is beautiful" (*Manifestoes* 14). These visions of the marvelous, beautiful, and absolute reality were attained through "Psychic automatism in its pure state" (*Manifestoes* 26). Yet while the first manifesto exposes the initial conceptions of the surreal as revelations, mystical flights, automatic writing, free association, spiritism, play, love, and liberation—all based in idealism and neo-Platonic marvel and beauty—the second surrealist manifesto (1930), takes on a more pointed focus of critiquing dissident surrealists, including a virulent attack on the "excremental philosopher" Georges Bataille. In 1929 the extreme elitism within the surrealist group reached such a pinnacle that Breton stated, "very few men [...] are of a caliber to meet with the Surrealists' exacting standards" (*Manifestoes* 135). In the second manifesto he critiques dissident surrealists who had either left the group or who had been excommunicated from it. Among those he lists are Artaud, Bataille, Jean Carrive, Joseph Delteil, Robert Desnos, Francis Gérard, Michel Leiris, Georges Limbour, André Masson, Philippe Soupault, and Roger Vitrac; several of whom would collaborate with Bataille on the 1929-30 journal *Documents* which sought to undermine surrealism from within.

In addition to the *Documents* writers who critiqued the Bretonian surrealist precepts,

the attacks of the second manifesto also provoked a small four page publication in 1930 called “Un cadavre,” which lashed out at the surrealist leader and the neo-Platonic focus of his ideology. “Un cadavre” was signed by several of the dissidents mentioned above as well as others such as Jacques Baron, Max Morise, Jacques Prévert, Raymond Queneau, J.A. Boiffard, Alejo Carpentier, and Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes. In contrast with Breton, these thinkers promote a descent from the elevated motivations of Platonism and espouse subversion through *informe*, heterology, and base materialism (as noted in *Documents* and “Un cadavre”). According to Gregory Stallings—one of few critics who have included Bataille in the debate concerning surrealism in Spain—the Platonic idealism as espoused by Breton was the source of Bataille’s discontent with the former’s artistic project. Stallings summarizes by stating that

In contrast to Breton’s lofty, Platonic tendencies, Bataille promotes a subversion of Platonic heights through a *fall* out of stable identity. Such falls in surrealist art plunge the human subject toward the radically temporal depths of *formlessness*. Thus the anti-platonic tendencies of surrealist art would bring about political and cultural subversion by bringing low the lofty “architecture” of the Platonic/Hegelian Western tradition. (202)

Bataille is critical of Breton in arguing that the “pope of surrealism” tries to be revolutionary but still operates within the same ideological and philosophical system that he critiques. Bataille systematically *informe*-s the philosophical systems that he attacks and works with heterological base materialism that seeks to undermine and erode totalizing forms and systems.

For Michael Richardson, Bataille’s ideas concerning surrealism underscore elements within surrealism that few critics have recognized, and thus give a new perspective to what surrealism may mean (2). A key work which examines the contrasting elements of the Bretonian and Bataillean theoretical directions is Hal Foster’s *Compulsive Beauty*. There,

Foster contrasts Breton's surrealist movement with Bataille's principle focus on death, trauma, and desire. Foster speaks of the "split between official Bretonian and dissident Bataillean factions circa 1929 [...] [and highlights that] although both groups recognize the uncanny power of desublimation, the Bretonian surrealists resist it, while the Bataillean surrealists elaborate it—especially, I want to suggest, along the line of its imbrication with the death drive" (110). The "idealism" inherent in Breton's notion of surrealist desire is articulated further by Foster as he claims that "while Bretonian surrealism seeks to reconcile such oppositions as life and death idealistically in the surreal, Bataillean surrealism works to destructure them materialistically in the *informe*—to contest Hegelian sublation with heterological abjection" (229).

In a 1931 essay titled "The 'Old Mole' and the Prefix *Sur* in the Words *Surhomme* [Superman] and *Surrealist*," Bataille further explains his attack on the intentions of the Bretonian surrealist project:

At first the "surrealist revolution" was independent of the revolt of the lower classes, indeed was defined as nothing but a confused mental state to which was added violent verbiage asserting the necessity of a dictatorship of *spirit*. [...] [T]his is the pitiful psychology of bourgeois revolutionaries before the Marxist organization of the class struggle. It leads to a representation of revolution as a redemptive light rising *above* the world, *above* classes, the overflowing of spiritual elevation and Lamartian bliss. (*Visions* 33-34)

Bataille goes on to examine the structures of words like surrealism and *surhomme* and the sublimatory "idealism" that is evident in their prefix *sur*. While Breton's "Revolutionary idealism tends to make of the revolution and eagle above eagles, a *supereagle*" (*Visions* 34-35), Bataille imagines the motif of the mole which burrows beneath the ground in order to "hollow out" the foundation upon which idealist thinking resides.

It is Bataille's affinity for dirt and root structures (counter-positioned with the sky and

above-ground flower structures, respectively) that elicits the critique from Breton in his second surrealist manifesto. Breton continues, “M. Bataille loves flies. Not we,” and that Bataille’s interest in base matter “allies him more closely with the dead than with the living” (*Manifestoes* 184). Bataille’s *Documents* project presented disparate articles (loose documents) on themes that sought rupture with Breton’s authoritative idealism. In this short-lived journal, Bataille outlined the attack on surrealism in terms of *informe*, base matter, the void, and putrefaction, all motifs that sought to undermine idealist notions of the stable self and conventional social and aesthetic norms. Bataille expounds the notion of *informe*, along with the task that it performs in *Documents* 7 (December 1929):

A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks. Thus *formless* is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat. On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only *formless* amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit. (*Visions* 31)

Bataille’s surrealist vision (or denigrated vision) consisted in evocations of the low, abject, and *informe*—all an attempt at fragmenting totalizing regimes, anticipating a similar vein of thought that Deleuze sees in the destabilization of unified signification systems as evoked by the inherent instability of the sign. In reality, *informe* can be seen as a central point of reflection concerning the entire *Documents* journal since the review does not present any sort of unified structure, thesis, or organization. As the title suggests, it is composed of scattered documents, notes, projects, and other random materials for analysis. These documents include meditations on primitive cultures (their masks, sacrifices, and erotic rituals), Cuban music, ancient cave paintings, cubist art, architecture, base matter, the putrefaction of plant-

life, human anatomy, self-mutilation, and commentaries on the artwork of painters such as Picasso, Dalí, Miró, and Van Gogh. The journal, in its organization as well as its thematic structure, enacts the destructive nature of formlessness to which it refers.

Rosalind Krauss elaborates the operational value of the formless by examining how it seeks to “bring down” sight, form, upright subjects, sublimation, synthesis, aesthetic pleasure, linearity, and chronology since “the formless (horizontal, base materialism, pulse, and entropy) responds item for item to these modernist claims” (*Formless* 26). It seems difficult, therefore, to approximate the work of some surrealist artists within the confines of Bretonianism as the vast majority of studies on surrealism provide. Instead, the base matter, perversion, and putrefaction—such as the excremental smearing in Dalí’s *El juego lúgubre* that was so celebrated by Bataille, and the splitting of the eyeball in Buñuel’s *Un chien andalou* which Bataille also lauded—seem to jibe more coherently with a fall from Platonism that adheres to Bataille’s notion of *informe*. Krauss elucidates the implications of the Bataillean aesthetic and invests much of her critical attention on the formless. In *The Optical Unconscious*, she expounds that “far more importantly, the *informe* is a conceptual matter, the shattering of signifying boundaries, the undoing of categories. In order to knock meaning of its pedestal, to bring it down in the world, to deliver it a low blow” (157). Bataille’s thinking not only provokes a shock through scandalous subject matter; it also ventures into decentering linguistic signification systems.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Krauss compares *informe* to deconstruction with respect to its performative nature (see *Formless* 18, 21, 114). Another engaging study in this line of thought is *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* in which Martin Jay examines Breton’s and Bataille’s ideas concerning vision (211-262). He pinpoints that whereas Breton saw the surrealist poets as seers, as literary prophets that had an enlightened vision of an *above* surreality, Bataille violently cuts vision in an attempt to question the foundations of Western thinking, its insistence on ocularcentrism, and a growing disenchantment with the eye. For similar connections between blindness and the avant-garde, see Bataille’s 1928 *Story of the Eye* and Luis Buñuel’s 1929 film *Un chien andalou*.

Krauss asserts the operational value of Bataille's notion of *informe* by relating it to the performativity of deconstructive critique. The formless is a force at work within a philosophical system or aesthetic object that undoes its own stable structure and form. It fragments rational vision and opposes totalization through difference. Krauss continues, "The operations of the scatological are, like those of deconstruction, performative: they *do something* to neutralization; they *lower it*. Or rather they produce the low, the base, as having always already been part of the high, the stain it carries within it" (*Formless* 114). This shattering of boundaries and contestation of accepted norms is a central motivation of Bataille's philosophical and aesthetic project. It is evidenced in the affinity for base matter like blood, vomit, excrement, and saliva as seen in his poetry and other works such as *Story of the Eye* and *Documents*. For Bataille, the philosophical import of base matter is explained in *Documents* 2.1 (1930) as he states that "base matter is external and foreign to ideal human aspirations, and it refuses to allow itself to be reduced to the great ontological machines resulting from these aspirations" (*Visions* 51). The affirmation of base forces and primal drives recognizes the heterological spaces of otherness which disrupt what Bataille calls ideal human aspirations. The recourse to myth and primitivism occupies an important part of the Bataillean critical apparatus as it presents the insistence on the value of marginal discourses characteristic of primitive culture and discarded forms of otherness.

Rather than seeing *informe* in opposition to form, it is most profitable to understand it materially and in opposition to idea(l)s. While this may seem paradoxical (since ideas, in some sense, may be manifestations of something formless) it is helpful to recognize that *informe* is part of form, as Benjamin Noys states, "The formless (*informe*) is always in-form" (34). The implications are far-reaching. Anthropologically, the formless subject is the fallen,

dissolved, and unstable entity, one which blends into its surroundings and becomes confused regarding its borders, according to Roger Caillois, a member of Bataille's secret society *College of Sociology*. *Informe* promotes blindness, that is, an anti-ocularcentrism that rejects a single viewpoint in favor of many perspectives. In turn, this rejects the Cartesian model of the rational *cogito* and other prevalent philosophical models that seek to establish understandings of subjectivity based on solipsism or the stable self. In contrast, *informe* favors drives that surge onto modes of relating to otherness (in Lorca, this would include the effects of *duende*, *cante jondo*, and jazz music). The "frock coat" that Bataille critiques in his "Formless" exposition metonymically speaks against the rational worlds of medicine, science, and religion in which the officiators wear white coats. Rather, he proposes irruptions of Dionysian energy that project towards otherness and radical modes of being involved in a general economy (versus a restricted economy). Such inclinations are evident in Bataille's writings on eroticism, poetry, *acéphale* and primitive societies, and inner experience. He likens these modes of being and thinking to political considerations by rejecting restrictive norms in political organization and presenting a sovereign subject whose desires explode beyond state control. These figures of otherness are deemed heterogenous forms marginalized by societies as waste product. It is against these homogeneous or political systems (specifically fascism and other mono-cephalic systems) that Bataille combats through recourse to acephalic structures and primitive cultures. This critique necessarily extends to an interrogation of social structures (such as those of class, race, and gender), philosophical models (including rational conceptions of relating and being) and subjectivity (in eroticism, communion, and poetry). Rendering these structures *informe*, or *informe-ing*, is a hallmark of the Bataillean critical apparatus and anticipates the "deconstructive"

underpinnings upon which many later thinkers of the twentieth century will establish their thinking.

The *informe* extends into aesthetic concerns as well. Bataille was fascinated by art (especially primitive art) that sought to enact his philosophical and political ambitions. The Bataillean aesthetic, best captured in the mobilization of *informe*, exposes scandalous or transgressive artistic expression as an operation that brings down beautiful art forms through the subversive image. This is achieved through the representation of blood, vomit, and excremental matter. Additionally, this desublimation of forms is gained through linguistic, temporal, and spatial fragmentation. This entails the rejection of established aesthetic models and a revolt based on the subversion of representational norms. It is clearly not pure poetry or art for art's sake, but rather an aesthetic theory that branches into social, political, and philosophical interrogation as its unnerving effects extend beyond the work of art and into lived experience.

#### The Spanish Context: Dehumanization, *Vanguardia*, and Surrealism

The situation of the avant-garde in Spain is complex since many of these poets and artists reject the dependence and direct influence of European (especially French) avant-garde movements and rely more heavily on renovations of Spanish traditions. Others, including Dalí, Buñuel, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Vicente Aleixandre, and Latin Americans César Vallejo, Vicente Huidobro, and Alejo Carpentier, constantly cross borders and introduce new forms and styles from foreign regions. In Spain, the movements that had the most impact on the avant-garde artistic production included creationism, ultraism, surrealism, neo-popularism, neo-romanticism, and pure poetry. As John Crispin effectively

examines, the avant-garde movements in Spain vacillate between the acceptance and incorporation of foreign techniques and the renovation of Spanish themes and forms. Yet, what is constant in all the avant-garde movements of the period is the desire to experiment as they reject (or at least revise) previous tendencies. As Hugo Verani summarizes, “Todos los movimientos vanguardistas destacados—fuera del mayor o menor logro estético, según los casos—comparten una voluntad general de rechazo de valores gastados y la necesidad de encauzar el arte por rumbos distintos [...] una liberación del conformismo y una búsqueda de nuevas posibilidades expresivas” (48). The liberation from conformity and search for new expressive models is approached further by Guillermo de Torre, whose 1925 study *Literaturas europeas de vanguardia* has been called the Bible of the avant-garde by many critics:

Hay un deber fundamental en toda generación disidente: toda promoción que marca un punto de ruptura con su antecedente y aspira a *comenzar en ella misma*: literariamente hablando, a inaugurar nuevas líneas de expresiones, de predilecciones y motivaciones. [...] Y, especialmente, en la necesidad de subrayar nuestra diferenciación explícita respecto a las figuras y jerarquías aceptadas. (41-42)

Concerning the new art evidenced in the growing avant-garde circles of the 1920s in Madrid, de Torre concludes that the need for distance from previous generations was an intense motivation in establishing their own identity as authentic and innovative artists. De Torre continues, “He aquí la llegada de una generación europea que ha roto los cordones umbilicales, que se ha desasido de todas las amarras. Y que aspira a ser ella misma: a adquirir su plena y genuina significación: a trazar sus normas, a elegir sus valores, no tolerando nada de lo impuesto o heredado sin previa revisión” (43). While the intention to dissent was important for these artists, the rich tradition that they inherited was the source of much inspiration and contemplation. Most critics consider the key influences in the

Spanish avant-garde to be the poetic production of Juan Ramón Jiménez, whose “naked poetry” captured a large portion of the new generation of young and aspiring writers, and Gómez de la Serna, whose “greguerías” renovated poetic expression through complex metaphors and fresh (and often illogical) linguistic associations. Most importantly, José Ortega y Gasset formulated the critical model to which many new artists adhered by examining the “arte nuevo” and its dehumanizing affect as it focused on originality, metaphor, pure poetry, anti-realism, anti-romanticism, and a negation of human sense and logic. Another important factor that contributed to the flourishing of the avant-garde in Spain was the growing number of artistic discussions among the newly formed Generation of 1927 literary group, their collaborations in the many new literary and artistic reviews, participation in café *tertulias*, and the new liberal educational system in Spain which supported the *Residencia de Estudiantes* in Madrid.

The ten poets usually regarded as the 1927 literary group are Pedro Salinas, Jorge Guillén, Gerardo Diego, Dámaso Alonso, Federico García Lorca, Rafael Alberti, Vicente Aleixandre, Luis Cernuda, Emilio Prados, and Manuel Altolaguirre. While most of these poets came from different locations, Madrid (especially the *Residencia de Estudiantes*), quickly became a central meeting point for their collaborations. For Víctor García de la Concha, “La Residencia de Estudiantes fue, con sus conferencias, exposiciones, tertulias, representaciones teatrales, etc., un lugar decisivo de encuentro de los poetas de *la joven literatura*” (22). There, painters, poets, film makers, scientists, and other elite intellectual minds gathered to expound upon the most recent artistic and scientific ideas of the day. Among them were some of Spain’s most important young creative minds including Lorca—who was at the *Residencia* continually between 1919-1925, and sporadically until

1928—Salvador Dalí, and Luis Buñuel. The associations made at the *Resi*, along with the artistic collaborations that would ensue, became key in the development of the aesthetic and the theoretical formation of many of the poets of this generation. Foreign visitors such as Paul Valéry and Louis Aragon were among the many intellectuals that presented their work at the *Residencia* during the 1920s.

This was a time of many literary café meetings (*tertulias*) at various locations in Madrid. Among the leaders of these groups was Ramón Gómez de la Serna. These *tertulias* provided a continual artistic forum for the young artists and poets to present, explain, and speak about their ideas and creative impulses. In addition to the physical spaces of cultural and social collaboration, the numbers of literary magazines increased greatly during this formative time, greatly extending the diffusion of the new ideas of the literary Generation of 1927. Some of the essential *revistas* of this period are: *Revista de Occidente*, *Alfar*, *Horizonte*, *Ultra*, *Plural*, *Índice*, *La Gaceta Literaria*, *Litoral* (Málaga), *Gallo* (Granada), and *Gaceta del Arte* (Canarias). In these reviews, the young writers were able to collaborate with their literary mentors of the previous generations: Juan Ramón, Antonio Machado, Gómez de la Serna, Ortega, Miguel de Unamuno, and others. The writers of the older generations (1898 and 1914), in many senses, approved of and encouraged the production of the new poetic group through the publication of the younger group's work in the many literary reviews. A good example of this is Ortega's promotion of the young writers in *Revista de Occidente*. In fact, some of these poets were introduced to the literary world by first working as editors of these reviews. Such was the case with Altolaguirre and Prados.

By 1920 an interest in new aesthetic styles was constant in Spain along with a desire to break with previous modes of expression (most directly Rubén Darío's *modernismo* which

permeated Spain in writers like Antonio and Manuel Machado and Juan Ramón).<sup>6</sup> According to many accounts, Gómez de la Serna's invention of "greguerías" signaled the first introduction of the avant-garde in Spain. Yet what distinguishes the Spanish movements from many of the other movements of the time is that, while they were indeed influenced by the *vanguardias* in Europe, in Spain there was a constant dialogue with tradition. As Vicente Gaos claims, they were always "conjugando tradición y revolución" (18). This is evident in the interest in Góngora which led to the 1927 gathering in Seville, and which, by many accounts, led to the naming of the group as the Generation of '27.<sup>7</sup>

The aesthetic agenda of the "joven literatura" was centered in an intimate dialogue with the tradition and a rupture from it, as examined extensively in Juan Cano Ballesta's *La poesía española entre pureza y revolución*. The break with the *modernismo* of Juan Ramón and the Machado brothers is evident as the poets of '27 feel a need to distance themselves from the literary tradition. Cernuda, in fact, opposes the *nuevo* with the *moderno* in an attempt to see reality from a different perspective and follow models like Picasso, Ramón, and Ortega (García de la Concha 44). This new perspective, as noted in Ortega's *La deshumanización del arte*, was focused on fragmentary styles and incoherent models that broke with realist representation and presented twisted and baroque language. This period is also characterized by an expansion of new ideas in all of Europe, especially in France. Due to Spain's geographical proximity, it was easy for Hispanic writers to continually cross

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<sup>6</sup> For a critical account of these Spanish poets' relationship with *modernismo*, see José-Carlos Mainer's *La Edad de Plata (1906-1939): Ensayo de interpretación de un proceso cultural*.

<sup>7</sup> Other accounts claim that the date 1927 reflects the appearance of key works of the period such as Lorca's *Romancero gitano*, Alberti's *El alba del alhelí*, Cernuda's *Perfil de aire*, Aleixandre's *Ámbito*, and Guillén's *Cántico*. Nevertheless, the date is problematic since some suggest that 1925 would be a better date, thus corresponding with the publication of Ortega's *La deshumanización del arte*. This latter line of thought is followed by John Crispin in *La estética de las generaciones de 1925*.

borders and introduce the most recent ideas from abroad into the Spanish literary circles. From the second decade on, movements such as dadaism, futurism, ultraism, imaginism, and creationism permeated the literary and artistic circles in much of Europe. While each movement had unique intentions, Vicente Gaos claims that the common denominator of all these -isms was their “continuo ejercicio de experimentos creadores” (18).

The social and political climate of these first decades of the twentieth century also has implications in the artistic production of the period. Most critics that deal with the generations of writers from the first decades of the twentieth century divide the trends into two major periods. From 1918 to 1929, following World War I, there was generally a sense of optimism in art and an inclination to forget the horrors of the past through evasion, whereas the period following the world-scale economic crisis in 1929 signaled a deeper spiritual and nihilistic anguish. With reference to the Generation of 1927, which generally is said to encompass the years extending from 1920 to 1936, many critics (including C. B. Morris and García de la Concha) divide this group into two periods (1920-1930 and 1930-1936). Aesthetically, that which is considered to be the impetus for this division is the entrance of the surrealist aesthetic in Spain. The division can be seen politically as it signals the 1930 fall of the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera and the declaration of the Second Republic.

One of the most important studies that situates the context of the Generation of 1927 poets' artistic response to the social and cultural changes in Europe during this time is Ortega y Gasset's *La deshumanización del arte*. Here, Ortega outlines the characteristics of the “arte nuevo” and observes a drastic rupture with anything that represents the past, especially nineteenth-century realism and naturalism. Ortega describes the dehumanized art as that

which avoids anything human, employs irony, rejects living forms, presents art as a self-sufficient artefact without transcendence, views art as a game, and as purely artistic and without social or political intentions. The Orteguian diagnosis of art gives much weight to the importance of the metaphor since, “la metáfora es el más radical instrumento de deshumanización [porque] consiste en un cambio de perspectiva habitual [...] [y en] alterar las formas” (Ortega 38). This break with the past and insistence on innovation recognized the radicality of past movements such as dadaism that put emphasis on the irrational and infantile. For Gaos, the “mundo del niño (‘dadaísmo’) [representaba] la innovación [que] alcanza a todo: lenguaje, métrica, temas” (21). The idea of the infantile was also evident in Ramón’s “greguerías” which sought to break any system of logical sequentiality and embark on the realm of the unsayable. In the sense that the “arte nuevo” was purely poetic and only representative of the artistic sphere, it was deemed dehumanized, and as such, disinterested. The focus on aesthetic originality outlined by Ortega detailed the incorporation of “pure poetry” in the Generation of 1927 (as exemplified in the work of Jorge Guillén and Pedro Salinas) and later, more radical, artistic responses such as surrealism (García de la Concha 547-552; Díez de Revenga 53-57).

Dadaism, a nihilistic movement first promoted in 1916 in Zurich by the Romanian Tristan Tzara, later found followers in Breton, Aragon, and Eluard in Paris in 1920. In 1921 some of these dadaist members grew disenchanted with the group and started to break away. By 1924 Breton formed his own group under the banner of the *Surrealist Manifesto*. Dadaism is usually not heavily considered with relation to the Spanish scene even though its founding principles influenced other movements such as ultraism, creationism, and surrealism that were practice to some extent in Spain. One can readily see the influence that

dadaism affords these other aesthetic responses with respect to its appeal to the irrational and the illogical. For Gaos, dadaism best captured “el reino de lo infantil [...], además de otra promesa de futuro, el reino de la incoherencia, de la falta de lógica. El niño es inconsciente de sus actos, vive fuera de lo real, su lenguaje es imaginativo y elemental, nos transporta a los misteriosos orígenes de la humanidad, a lo radicalmente nuevo” (26). Other than the influence that dadaism played in the development of Picasso’s work and the influence in Gómez de la Serna’s “greguerías,” the extreme nihilistic inclinations of dadaism *per se* did not penetrate the avant-garde following in Spain. Rather, movements such as ultraism beginning in 1918 (which cultivated the use of metaphor as in Guillermo de Torre’s writings and in Spanish-American writers like Jorge Luis Borges) and creationism beginning in about 1920 (which sought to use art to create rather than describe as in Vicente Huidobro and Gerardo Diego) were the main currents of the vanguard that surged on the Spanish front.

While dadaism and surrealism were two of the most radical responses to both aesthetic norms and historical conditions (such as WWI), a complete acceptance of their underlying principles in Spain is resisted. Rather, in Spain, poets embraced facets or variations of the largely French-based ideals and incorporated them into uniquely Spanish contexts. Regardless of this, the impact of the surrealism, for example, among visual artists is much more pronounced. While Spaniards such as Dalí and Buñuel were in Paris experimenting with the latest artistic ideas, the reception of surrealism among the Spanish poets was much less defined. Dámaso Alonso explicitly rejected membership in the surrealist school and Lorca claimed a controlled “poetic logic,” rather than the uncontrolledness of Bretonian automatism. (Other poets, such as Cernuda, Prados, and Aleixandre, do seem to have incorporated more faithfully the ideas of the French movement throughout portions of

their *oeuvre*.) A major area of resistance to surrealism was grounded in Breton's insistence on automatism. While the access to dream-realities and subconscious concerns and desires do enter the work of the Spanish poets, the interest in automatic writing *per se* is nearly non-existent. According to Cernuda, only Prados and Aleixandre had direct knowledge of the French surrealists, and as Cernuda claims further, Lorca and Alberti's knowledge of surrealism came from Spanish thinkers like Juan Larrea rather than from the Bretonian school of thought (García de la Concha 72). What is constant, though, whether in French surrealism or in the various surrealist tendencies in Spain, is a general rebellion towards conventional artistic representation and the inclusion of irrational and incoherent subject matter. When variations of the surrealist aesthetic do surface in Spain, the impetus behind "surrealistic" discourse and imagery is more firmly rooted in personal anguish and crisis, as in the case of with least Lorca, Alberti, Cernuda, and Aleixandre.

When confronted with opposing modes of artistic creation and theoretical application, many critics argue about what surrealism in Spain really is. Breton's theories and aesthetic tastes continually changed, the Bretonian group was in constant flux as members were regularly "excommunicated," and other dissident groups broke off from the authoritative Bretonian school. The fluctuation amid the French group creates complication and at times contradiction when examining the surrealist response in Spain. Ricardo Gullón, for example, stresses that "no hubo una España surrealista de estricta observancia" (122) and instead claims that much of the seemingly surrealist influence in Spain arises from a renewed interest in Góngora's baroque use of the metaphor, Bécquer's rule-breaking romanticism, and a continuation of Hispanic creationism and ultraism. These models present the new aesthetic as one in which "tras de la oscuridad se perfila un diseño preciso, una estructura bien

pensada” (Gullón 124) rather than uncontrolled automatic writing. Francisco García-Sarriá advances the argument from a linguistic point of departure by claiming that “surrealistic” language in Spain presents a break in both syntagmatic and paradigmatic levels of discourse and as such contradicts normal codes of language (350). For García-Sarriá, it is on a linguistic level that Spanish writers of the period are surrealistic. But again, this type of crossing of linguistic frames in poetry exhibits calculated logic and precision, not automatism.

In *La estética de las generaciones de 1925* John Crispin questions the very title “Generation of 1927” that is traditionally associated with this group of Spanish poets said to be influenced by the French surrealists. He opts for a different reading of the surrealists as a group to be associated with and influenced by Ortega’s seminal essay of 1925. Crispin affirms that the “Generation of 1925” formed around a synthesis of cultural traditions in Spain, schematic lessons from other vanguard groups, and an interest in primitivism (19). He proposes that “en las generaciones de 1925, ningún artista o escritor se puede clasificar dentro de un Surrealismo ortodoxo, y la mayoría niega su adhesión a esta tendencia, rechazando particularmente en su arte la ausencia de control creador” (155). Indeed, for Crispin, the Spanish poets resist the automatism inherent in Bretonian surrealism in favor of a poetics that reflects the anguish and annihilation of the subject: “*collage* fotográfico, rascacielos, máquinas, objetos rotos, trozos de cuerpo y figuras decapitadas de maniqués” (178).

With reference to surrealism in Lorca’s drama, the remarks of the poet’s friend Rafael Martínez Nadal offer additional insight to the problem of the Bretonian influence in Spain. In his study on motifs of love and death in Lorca’s work, Martínez Nadal makes the

following argument:

[S]i por surrealismo entendemos lo que entendieron Breton, Aragon y otros teorizantes del movimiento, *El público* nada tendrá que ver con esa tendencia literaria, y Lorca, uno de los poetas que con más brillantez ha utilizado técnicas surrealistas en un sector importante de su obra, no sólo quedaría al margen sino en declarada oposición al movimiento. [...] Lorca nada tenía que ver con el surrealismo de Breton.

No obstante, si por el surrealismo debemos entender actitudes y técnicas que facilitan la comunicación del mundo más íntimo del artista con el mundo exterior, la coexistencia de la realidad y el sueño, la intercomunicación entre distintas esferas, el derribo de los límites tradicionales de tiempo y espacio, *El público* será un drama surrealista y Lorca, en esta pieza, y en un sector importante en su obra, singular exponente del movimiento. (78-79)

Additionally, Martínez Nadal asserts, it would be difficult to speak of the work of other artists and poets, among them Aleixandre, Alberti, Neruda, Dalí, Buñuel, and Miró, as surrealists in the sense of abandoning all control of reason through a recourse to automatism. In Lorca's friend's estimation, there was nothing comparable in the writings of Breton's group to Lorquian texts such as *El público* and *Así que pasen cinco años*. Lorca's surrealism, therefore, hints at a much more multi-faceted aesthetic than the automatism and lack of control provided by Bretonianism. A similar fluctuation in surrealist terminology and application is evidenced by the Lorquain critic Julio Huélamo Kosma, who recognizes the "carácter polisémico" ("Límites" 207) of the term surrealism and proposes that it would be better to merely suggest general tendencies of a more amplified version of the surreal.

At the same time, other important Hispanist critics have traced certain tendencies within Spain that encourage a Bretonian (or at least more orthodox) reading of surrealism in Spain. These readings have dealt with the work of poets such as Aleixandre, Cernuda, Alberti, and Lorca, and have examined the Spanish appropriation of the Bretonian aesthetic of oniric writing, automatism, and an access to the subconscious on the Spanish front. C. B. Morris's 1972 study *Surrealism and Spain* traces surrealism in Spain and France in an intent

to “chronicle Spain’s contact with and knowledge of French surrealism and to measure the literary—and sometimes artistic—results of that contact” (8). He shows specific correspondences that link the Spanish and French movements (especially through Catalonia). This contact includes Breton’s 1922 visit to Barcelona and the establishment of literary reviews which highlighted artists such as Miró, Picasso, Mallo, and Dalí.<sup>8</sup> He draws further attention to the Tenerife conference in 1936 which Breton, Eluard, and Péret attended.

As Morris shows, the Bretonian aesthetic was evident in Spain to some extent. Some of the Generation of 1927 poets sought revolution through liberated love coupled with free expression and irrational poetic language. Even though it does not appear in its pure sense as psychic automatism, Bretonianism does show its influence in poets such as Aleixandre, Cernuda, and Prados as it insists on revolution through recourse to *above* realities and liberation in love and erotic desire.<sup>9</sup> Morris’s 1972 study draws attention, more than any other critic, to the decomposition, putrefaction, severed body parts, vomiting, and the baser drives that are evident in surrealism (28-30). Curiously, he states that “If the stars, sky, and horizons which recur in the surrealists’ writings demonstrate their preoccupation with *le haut*, the insects, corpses, torn flesh and dismembered limbs which they frequently imagined also show that they were greatly fascinated by *le bas*” (110). This approximates an aesthetic rooted in Bataille’s subversive base material rather than in ideals of sublimation and liberation. Morris then examines other motifs in Spanish “surrealist” writings that encourage a Bataillean reading (though he does not mention Bataille): cut bodies, beheading,

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<sup>8</sup> The Catalan magazine *L’Amic de les Arts* was a particularly important forum for avant-garde writers and artists.

<sup>9</sup> In Bataille’s writings published in the 50s and 60s, then at a distance from surrealism, his critical models focus increasingly on the erotic fusion as seen earlier in various forms in Breton. In the early writings, however, the transcendent nature of eroticism is nearly absent.

deformation, self-mutilation, blood, denigrated vision, slitted eyeballs, fallen images, garbage, excrement, putrefaction, impure poetry, decomposition, decay, eroticism, perversion, dehumanized and dead objects, insects, fallen forms, and uncanny juxtapositions of life and death (111-59). In these 50 pages, almost one-third of his entire study on surrealism, Breton is nearly forgotten, thus making problematic a purely Bretonian reading of surrealism in Spain.

An underlying concern and conflict remains, however, which reveals a fissure in the Bretonian method of artistic creation and its goals. How could Breton's critique of society, reality, and artistic norms succeed when it operated within an analogous system of sublimation and exaltation of a higher truth that it sought to undermine? In this sense, marginal aesthetic philosophies such as Bataille's notion of *informe* stand out against the extant avant-garde movements and their artistic missions. The formless is exposed, not only as a trope that directly combats the intentions of the Bretonian surrealists, but also as an operation which questions the goals of the avant-garde in general. As will be demonstrated in the continuing chapters with reference to Lorca's work, *informe* will provide a counter-structure through which to examine previously inexplicable aesthetic tendencies within the Generation of 1927, like Lorca's nebulous "poetic logic." Specifically, this amplifies the importance of poetry in general and demonstrates that rather than a poetry for poetry's sake, or a pure poetry without external interest or consequence, the *informe*-ing that Bataille effects (which is poeticized by Lorca) involves a sustained critique on many levels by showing the influence, but inadequacy, of previous models including Ortega's dehumanized art and Breton's surrealism of love and liberation.

Morris's in-depth examination of the points of contact with the Parisian environment

of the period and his focus on subversive imagery does invite a rethinking of Spanish surrealism in terms of the “excremental philosopher” and the *Documents* critics. In Dawn Ades’s analysis of the Spanish avant-garde,

The “heroic” period of surrealism, which since the first *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924) by André Breton had founded much of its creative activity on the idea of automatism, was more or less over; a number of artists and writers resented Breton’s authoritarian attitude and several had begun to collaborate with Georges Bataille, whose review *Documents* became a rival to official surrealism. (78)<sup>10</sup>

While it would be reductive to completely negate the importance of Breton’s models in Spain in the 20s, along with the importance he places on Freud—who according to Julio Huélamo Kosma, had been translated into Spanish and was widely being read and discussed (“Influencia” 59)—Bataille’s thinking provides additional cultural texture to a complex period and its ever-changing artistic tendencies. In many cases, as will be shown in the following chapters, Bataille’s models not only seem coherent within the Spanish avant-gardists’ conception of artistic creation, but they seem to elaborate more fully the poetic creation of this problematic period in Spain amid the many intents to classify this literary generation in terms of modernism, surrealism, automatism, and dehumanization. At the same time, and more importantly, it is not just a question of fallen imagery and formless matter, but instead one of dialogical inter-textual discourse which enriches the preoccupations and tensions within Spanish vanguardist literature and art.

The ideological tensions between the Bretonian and Bataillean schools of thought are implicitly evident in the Spanish poets in a number of ways. Juan Larrea—whose reading of

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<sup>10</sup> Ades’s most recent contribution to Bataille scholarship is a collection of essays, edited with Simon Baker, titled *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents*, published in 2006 in conjunction with an exhibition on surrealist art and theory at the Hayward Gallery in London. This volume includes contributions from major critics of both Bataille and surrealism, as well as translations of original *Documents* articles.

surrealism, according to Cernuda, was fundamental in Lorca's and Alberti's introduction to surrealism—also saw certain disparities between the various conceptions of surrealism. In his 1944 *El surrealismo entre viejo y nuevo mundo* Larrea alludes to a “sub-poetics” that combats sources of artistic inspiration and aspiration of previous generations. Larrea posits a Hispanic variant of surrealism that questions the intentions of Breton's ideas. This sub-poetics elaborates the rejection of light, beauty, life, exaltation, hope, “el ‘yo’ sublimado,” and prophecy (all qualities of both Darío's *modernismo* and Breton's surrealism, according to Larrea) in favor of a “sub-realism” which examines the base material of existence: corporeal decomposition, shadows, “el ‘yo’ degradado,” and drives toward death (92).

Whereas some strands of surrealism take an aesthetic dogma of “supervisión” and the “más allá” as the source of their inspiration (akin in many ways to similar motivations in Darío), Larrea examines how the Hispanic surrealist poets de-sublimate any exalting discourse (78). Larrea champions Pablo Neruda, a highly engaged political poet, as the writer that best exemplifies the “sub-realism” that is investigated. Through an examination of Nerudian works like *Tentativa del hombre infinito* and *Residencia en la tierra*, Larrea counter-positions Neruda to the Bretonian orthodox school of surrealism. Rather,

la poesía de Neruda carece de la fuerza medular que vertebraba al Romanticismo en su crecimiento hacia la Luz y en la que el surrealismo estriba su razón de verticalidad. [...] Al contrario. La voz de Neruda, opaca y purulenta, como de negro engrudo, gusta de redundar en oscuridades de cripta que ahueca cuanto puede para que giman lenta y lúgubrememente, al modo como en las soledades andinas gusta la angustia de oír retumbar la quena en tinaja. (86-87)

In contrast to the romantics' desire for illumination and light as examined by Abrams, and also in opposition to the verticality of visionary seership of Bretonianism, Neruda's *subrealism* (as noted by Larrea), recognizes the anguish and base drives evident in certain

manifestations of Hispanic “surrealist” expression. Neruda’s posture, Larrea continues, “es aquí contraria en orientación a la del surrealismo, cosa que nos permite comprenderla como una poesía sub-Realista, por bajo de la luz de flotación de la Realidad. Mientras el surrealismo mira de abajo para arriba tendiendo al despertar, la segunda se dirige de arriba hacia abajo sumiéndose en las fosas ilíacas del sueño” (87). Larrea’s reflections on a “sub-realism” couple with Bataille motifs such as *informe*, the primitive, base materialism, putrefaction, and fragmented vision which indicate a general inclination for desublimated forms of reality and expression.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the insistence on an “impure poetry,” expounded by Neruda in the 1935 Madrid review *Caballo verde para la poesía*, amplifies the importance of the material reality and context of the work of art—that which is external to the purely poetic artefact. Neruda proclaims that “La confusa impureza de los seres humanos se percibe en ellos, la agrupación, uso y desuso de los materiales, las huellas del pie y los dedos, la constancia de una atmósfera humana inundando las cosas desde lo interno y lo externo” (Verani 244). In essence, the interestedness and humanized aspects of an impure poetry as signaled by Neruda show the engagement of avant-garde poetry of the 30s and the inadequacy of the automatic and dehumanized art of the previous decades.

In the works of the Spanish avant-garde the implications of Bataille *informe* reveal the aesthetic and social disillusionment of the period in an sustained manner. Rather than examples of love and liberation, fusion with cosmic energy in pantheistic fashion, or an exalted reality, the “undercover” or darker side of the surreal reveals a fall to broken forms, fragmented bodies, utter anguish, and base matter. The ethical and political significance of

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<sup>11</sup> Bataille also writes against the eye, the eagle, architecture, the sun, and flowers while seeking to combat forms of sublimation and beauty.

the Bataillean discourse amplifies the level of commitment of avant-gardist poetry. The critique of the *above* necessarily provides a reaction to oppressive regimes of censorship, ideological imposition, and sociological norms. The “committed” ethical and political thrust of *informe* expands into a general destructuring of boundaries that limit race-, gender-, and class-related structures. For Allan Stoekl, “Bataille sees his critique of the elevated—the ideal, the *surreal*,—as inseparable from a political critique on fascism” (“Introduction” xv). While in many of the collections of Spanish avant-garde poetry a strict adherence to the prevalent surrealist models of Breton is questionable, the remarks which follow (and the insistence on the importance of Bataille’s ideas of *informe*) provide a counter-structure against which to evaluate the possibility of “surrealism” in Spain. And the performative and operational value of the formless will prove crucial in approaching Lorca’s most radical “surrealist” or sub-realist” works, including *Poeta en Nueva York*, *Viaje a la luna*, and *El público*.

## CHAPTER II

### AN AESTHETICS OF *INFORME* IN LORCA'S NEW YORK

Within the aesthetic currents of the 1920s and 30s, Lorca is found constantly renewing his creative styles, experimenting with new techniques, and reworking traditional art forms including the ballad, *cancionero*, alleluia, puppet play, elegy, and *cante jondo*. Lorca's trip to the New World in 1929, however, presented the poet with a different ambience in which to consider his aesthetic agenda and expressive possibilities. While the poet's sojourn in the Americas was a form of escape from emotional anguish (in fact, Lorca was lamenting a breakup with the sculptor Emilio Aladrén) and from oppressive censorship in Spain under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923-1930), it provided a new space for reflection and creative expression, notwithstanding the depression and, at times, lack of enthusiasm felt for the modern and mechanized New York metropolis. Lorquian critics including Luis Fernández Cifuentes, Antonio Monegal, Andrew Anderson, and Christopher Maurer agree that the year 1929 represents an influential turning point in Lorca's *oeuvre*. Starting in that year the poet more freely experiments with radical and innovative aesthetic forms such as lengthened Whitmanesque verses, "impossible" theatrical representations, base subject matter in drawings and poems, and increasingly transgressive themes, as is the case with the film script *Viaje a la luna*. The poetic collection that spawned from this period, *Poeta en Nueva York* (arguably Lorca's most "surrealistic" collection of poems), embodies an abrupt break in poetic styles and themes which anticipates works such as *El público* and *Así que pasen cinco años*.

Despite intentions to classify Lorca's American artistic works as surrealist, dehumanized, symbolist, modernist, or automatist, the newfound poetic logic, as described in Lorca's letter to Gasch, eludes any clear-cut categorical description.<sup>1</sup> Rather than conforming to aesthetic boundaries and expressive conventions—or even a rethinking of traditional Spanish themes as evident in earlier works such as *Poema del cante jondo* and *Romancero gitano*—the New York projects constitute an engaged critique that questions and destroys artistic and social norms. While Lorca does use irrational symbols and, at times, incomprehensible metaphors, he uses them in a conscious manner, thus allowing his poetry to critique convention in a controlled fashion. And rather than a dehumanized and uninterested pure poetry as evident in many avant-garde circles, Lorca's later poetics increasingly, and in a more sustained manner, addresses personal anguish, tinged with a denouncement of religious, social, and economic conventions which oppress and marginalize. This critique, as well as the evident anguish, are manifest in Lorca's vacillation among expressive forms during this period, a time-frame in which Lorca grapples with aesthetic genres including poetry, theater, drawing, and film script in an attempt to refine the articulation of desire, subjectivity, and discontent.

In the New York works, there is a continual crossing-over between philosophical and aesthetic agendas as the poet questions all conventions that prescribe artistic form and subsequently examines the potentiality for poetic expression. This experimentation of form is sustained on several fronts as he uses free verse, nearly incomprehensible metaphoric associations, and grotesque thematic subjects. The poetic logic, discussed in contrast to the

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<sup>1</sup> In Lorca's 1928 essay "Imaginación, insipiración, evasión" (3: 98-112), the poet describes the source of his most recent poetic expression in terms of an "hecho poético" (3: 101). For Lorca, "así como la imaginación poética tiene una lógica humana la inspiración poética tiene una lógica poética" (3: 103) But at the same time, Lorca declares that "la poesía pued[e] fugarse, evadirse, de las garras frías del razonamiento" (3: 104).

illogical lack of control of Bretonian surrealist automatism, works operationally (and logically) to break apart existing norms in order to consider new modes of articulating desire. Nevertheless, Lorca's aesthetic appears to be based more on ambivalence, vagueness, and spaces of absence than on clarity and comprehension—thus attacking constructs such as meaning. Here, the Bataillean operation of *informe* dialogues with Lorca's poetic logic to fragment logocentric structures as it establishes a discourse based in radical critique. While the desire to undermine aesthetic and social conventions is a constant in both Lorca and Bataille, the thinking of the latter (and his explanation of *informe*) is more consistently preoccupied with pure annihilation. In contrast, Lorca's work shows a profound tension between *informe* as shock and critique, and *informe* as an empty lamentation of loss, even a nostalgia for a moment pre-loss. The aesthetic object comes to be, for Lorca, the medium with which he articulates the void and laments the spaces of formlessness. The employment of the formless void (*huecos* and *vacíos*) is symbolic of a general emptiness and hopelessness, of lament and loss. At the same time, the representation of formless base matter and fluid substances in Lorca also counteracts "official discourse" (ie. social, religious institutions) on a larger scale—albeit not as nihilistically as in Bataille. Whether through the direct annihilation of form (as in Bataille), or through the more complex and multi-faceted nature of Lorca's use of *informe*-ing, the attempt to present an aesthetic that pushes beyond the limits of representation is constant.

In the texts dealt with in this chapter, including the poetic collection *Poeta en Nueva York*, as well as in other works produced during Lorca's stay in the American metropolis—such as the film script *Viaje a la luna* and various of the poet's drawings—a

reflection on poetic subjectivity is central.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the poems of *Poeta en Nueva York*, the poetic self contemplates its current state with reference to the past years of youth in Granada. (For instance, the year “1910” serves as the title of a poem in which the innocence of youth is nostalgically pondered in contrast to the more mature and developed understanding of the present.) But the consideration of the poetic subject is much more complex than just recognizing the tension between past and present as the construction of the self is also portrayed amid oppositions such as city versus countryside, desire versus reality, and insider versus outsider. It is in these spaces of vacillation that the poetic subject of *Poeta en Nueva York* is continually caught. The poetic voice exhibits the anguish of being caught between form and formlessness as it contemplates its surroundings. While the subject dissolves and is broken down in the oppressive city of New York, it later seeks rebirth in the nature of Vermont and the lively sounds and senses of Havana, a locus that Lorca finds key in refining and reconfiguring his poetic uncertainties generated in New York. And it is in Havana that Lorca’s openness about his homosexuality is unleashed and where he conceives some of his most transgressive art, including the “impossible” plays *El público* and *Así que pasen cinco años*.

Lorca artistically affirms throughout the New York drawings and poems that forms are a lie. Sky-craving architectures are interrogated and emptiness is seen in the numerous *vacíos* and *huecos* of the city as all is drowned in the sacrificial blood of the fallen. The thematic, structural, and discursive emergence of *informe* in Lorca’s work, starting in 1929, performatively effects the critique to which it refers through its denouncement of conventions

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<sup>2</sup> When I speak of subjectivity in Lorca, I am most interested in the construction of the lyric self, the expression of anguish, and the contradictory nature of desire.

and norms, structures which categorize and marginalize, but also as the poet struggles with artistic genres and expressive modes. This performance of the formless is evident first thematically through the representation of base matter such as blood, vomit, and other fluid and formless substances in the New York works, but also linguistically (in the Austinian sense) through the explicit denunciation of oppressive social norms embodied by the North American society. As Bakhtin suggests, “aesthetic activity [is] an actually performed act or deed, both from within its product and from the standpoint of the author as answerable participant” (*Toward* 54). The active force of the poetic word is double as it affirms expression which transcends the world (the poetic utterance), and as it denotes the expression of a subject acting in the world (the author). The poetic utterance in Lorca’s New York texts attests artistically to the vacated spaces of the self and desire as it simultaneously captures the need for expression of the poet. Bakhtin continues, “The world in which an act or deed actually proceeds, in which it is actually accomplished, is a unitary world that is experienced concretely: it is a world that is seen, heard, touched, and thought, a world permeated in its entirety with the emotional volitional tones of the affirmed validity of values” (*Toward* 56). In this sense, Lorca uses material (words, images, and spaces of void) and charges them with emotional and ethical values through metaphors and other rhetorical devices in order to articulate the experience of the poetic subject.

Of particular importance in the case of Lorca are the numerous aesthetic possibilities that are used as he seeks a mode that will accurately express anguish and critique. In essence, the poetic genre *as such* becomes performative as it presents a rupture with conventional and representational language and discourse. The recourse to poetic utterance (and difficult poetic language at that, riddled with twisted and tangled metaphors) allows Lorca to rethink

expression and conventional forms of representation. Lorca struggles with modes of expression as he turns from verse to film script, to drawing, to dramatic text during this period. Amid the tensions of expression and poetic possibilities, Bataille's theories concerning art and praxis are particularly revealing. For Bataille, poetry (except "beautiful" poetry) is by nature performative, revolutionary, and transgressive as it constitutes part of a general economy. (*Cante jondo* and jazz are aesthetic forms that are also indicative of an irruption of otherness through a contestation of official discourse.) Along with laughter, eroticism, and sovereignty, poetry is an expression at the limits of the possible.

As the poetic subject contemplates the exterior surroundings and happenings of the city (whether it be the death of nature, the oil in the Hudson, the marginalization of the Negro culture, or the decadent festival on Coney Island), the destruction and general discontent are mimicked by the anguish of the thinking subject. In this sense, and I believe this to be the most instructive embodiment of the formless in Lorca's work, the formless is not only represented in the object matter that Lorca uses to "bring down" high forms of representation, nor is it just through the articulation of a calculated denunciation, but also it constitutes the anguished locus and near impossibility of any articulation of desire obtained throughout the collection. That is, *informe*-ing in Lorca seeks at once to recognize the tensions and contradictions of the articulation of desire and subjectivity and also to examine and critique through poetic utterance (to render *informe*) the structures that delimit, categorize, and regulate aesthetic expression. In this sense Lorca continues in a poetic agenda of rupture as espoused by previous Hispanic poets (including those of romanticism, *modernismo*, and earlier vanguardist movements). Yet he innovates that cycle of departure from tradition as his works exude an intensified focus on violence and anguish.

After examining the affinity towards death and the irruptions of the irrational that both Lorca and Bataille find in Nietzsche (which provides not only a basis for comparison between the two intellectuals, but also recognizes the common pedigree of their thinking), the analysis here will elucidate various operational aspects of *informe* in Lorca's New York works and the manner in which an aesthetics of the *informe* examines surrealist tensions in Lorca's work. While automatism and dehumanization are questioned in favor of an ethnographic reading of surrealism in Lorca's avant-garde experimentations, the ensuing critical posture will subsequently approach the (im)possibilities of expressing desire, conceptualizing subjectivity, and critiquing modernist ontologies concerning the primacy of vision, subjectivity, and meaning.

#### A Nietzschean Beginning

Reading Lorca through a Bataillean lens invites comparisons between the two writers' thinking and the manner in which they reacted aesthetically to their intellectual environments. Although different in important aspects, establishing a dialogue between Lorca and Bataille provides an insight to a particular set of aesthetic issues. A constant preoccupation that pervades the work of both Bataille and Lorca is the inevitable manner in which the final product of desire is death. In a short essay about Lorca and the importance of death in Spanish art and culture, fellow poet Pedro Salinas states that "El destino de casi todos los personajes que Lorca pone en pie, así en sus romances como en sus tragedias, es la muerte" (280). Salinas shows that death is not only the cornerstone of Lorca's poetics, but that it is also central to Spanish culture and the construction of Spanish identity. Salinas calls this the "culture of death," evidenced in a heightened interest in death. The consideration of

death, however, is not purely nihilistic or negative. It is, rather, as Salinas continues, “[una] concepción del hombre y su existencia terrenal en que la conciencia de la muerte actúa con signo positivo, es estímulo, acicate al vivir y a la acción y permite entender el sentido total y pleno de la vida” (285). Death becomes, for Lorca and others, an enabling force, a stimulus for creation, and a motivation for contemplation. As Salinas concludes, the culture of death in Spain always involves the consideration of a “morir para la vida” (287). In short, it is through a contemplation of death that writers such as Lorca and Bataille express possibilities for living. Whereas for Bataille the aesthetic and social agenda would involve transgression as such, for Lorca the central preoccupation is rooted in the shaping of artistic creation. In essence, while Bataille annihilates form altogether, Lorca uses form(s) in order to re-arrange, manipulate, and create expression.

Lorca approached the “culture of death” in the evocation and anguish of socially marginalized cultures, thus demonstrating a sustained interest in figures of otherness. In his essay “Importancia histórica y artística del primitivo canto andaluz llamado ‘cante jondo’” (3: 1281-1303), Lorca describes the sources for an artistic expression rooted in ancient cultural forms. What fascinated Lorca in the primitive music of the gypsy culture in Andalusia was the deep emotion and anguish that were so penetrating. For Lorca, “[El cante jondo] es un canto teñido por el color misterioso de las primeras edades de cultura” (3: 1283). Its foundations are the emotions of a socially outcast people, their pain, suffering and ritualistic expression. The gypsy music is born of anguish and death, noted by Lorca as “la siguiya gitana comienza con un grito terrible” (3: 1284). Uncontainable weeping and nearly convulsive shouting permeate the highly demoniac music. What is more, it is a music moved by death and centered on death. In the same conference address, Lorca affirmed that “las

coplas tienen un fondo común: Amor y muerte” (3: 1291), thus underscoring the important motivational force held by death in artistic expression.

With the goal of preserving the feelings and emotion of primitive art forms, Lorca assisted Manuel de Falla in organizing a festival in the summer of 1922 to commemorate Andalusian *cante jondo*, for which the address on *cante jondo* was written. In *cante jondo* anguished emotion surges forth as the cantaoor’s singing is at once performance of the music, but also an intimate feeling (enactment), thus breaking down the division between art and life. Furthermore, *cante jondo*, as Lorca will later notice in jazz, is an aesthetic form based in part on screams, moans, and cries—all improvised sounds that evade calculated reason and highlight art forms of *otherness*. In essence, the aesthetic object turns performative in its enactment of the emotion that it thematically refers to. It is this aspect of artistic expression—an expression at the limits of representation—that Lorca signals in his lectures on *cante jondo*, reflections that involve a poetics of anguish as the work of art presents and performs the pain, suffering, grace, and emotion of social outcasts. The lesson Lorca learns concerning the performative aspects of *cante jondo* (as life and art unite) provides a foundation upon which, in later projects, anguish, distorted syntax, and poetic metaphors will present a more vanguardist version of the poetic performance (as in the New York works).

In subsequent revisions of the *cante jondo* essay—such as that of 1930, titled “Arquitectura del cante jondo” (3: 33-52), delivered in Cuba and Spain, and that of 1934, delivered in Buenos Aires and Montevideo—Lorca further elaborates on death as a source of artistic expression. More in concert with his 1933 essay “Juego y teoría del duende” (3: 150-62), Lorca adds the following to the revised version of his *cante jondo* talk: “vamos a oír al duende de los duende, al de los sonidos negros” (3: 36). The “black sounds” of the

*duende* alluded to here are modified in the 1934 *cante jondo* lecture as “una fuerza fecunda” (3: 1304) from which artistic expression can originate. The reflections on death and dark sounds that permeate his early writings on *duende* are elaborated in his later texts with increasing violence and anguish.

For the young Bataille, this sort of expression based on the inspiration from uncontrollable and illogical moans is of prime interest. Years later he would formulate a more radical notion of artistic expression in transgressive theories in which poetry, sacrifice, and eroticism all play a central role in undermining aesthetic and moral norms. Lorca’s ideas on the irruptive expression inherent to *cante jondo*, along with its performative aesthetic nature, anticipates qualities of Bataille’s general economy and the “pure emotion” that resists reason. This sort of aesthetic is characterized by Bataille as a relationship with otherness based on ecstatic fusion, such as in eroticism. Bataille encountered this heightened sense of emotion in art when he first visited Spain in 1922 as an exchange student at the School of Advanced Spanish Studies (later the Casa de Velázquez). He was fascinated by the anguish, emotion, and treatment of death that were so evident in portions of Spanish painting (most notably, in Goya), bullfighting, dancing, and singing. As a part of his eight months of study in Spain, Bataille experienced *duende*-inspired culture through attendance at both the bullfight in Madrid in which Manuel Granero was gored to death, and the *cante jondo* festival in Granada. While the information related to his stay in Spain is minimal, three letters to his sister Marie-Louise Bataille (dated between February and September of 1922) as well as a 1946 publication entitled *Actualité*, detail several of his experiences there. In the latter of these sources, Bataille maintains that pure *emoción* coupled with anguish (as seen in the bullfighting spectacle and the *cante jondo* festival) is what best describes Spanish culture.

In *Actualité*, Bataille reflects on his experiences in Spain and recalls the specific qualities of the aspects of Spanish culture that resonate with his own conceptions of expression at the limits: “Je commençais à comprendre alors que le malaise est souvent le secret des plaisirs les plus grands. La langue espagnole a pour désigner cette sorte d’exaltation que sous-tend l’angoisse un mot précis, *la emoción*: c’est exactement le sentiment que donnent des cornes de taureau manquant *d’un doigt* le corps *du torero*” (120).<sup>3</sup> The idea that uneasiness can provide the most intense pleasure—a pleasure that is felt by the bullfighter when coming into close proximity of death—present anew the manner in which a consideration of death (including the importance of *duende* in artistic inspiration) leads to an experience of an intensely richer life.

Bataille observes a similar emotion as evoked by a dancer that he saw perform in Spain when her ecstatic but anguished pleasure was displayed on stage: “La danse, essentiellement mime du plaisir angoissé, exaspère un défi qui suspend la respiration. Elle communique une extase, une sorte de révélation suffoquée de la mort et le sentiment de toucher l’impossible” (*Actualité* 122). The connections between the aesthetic representation of death and the performative value that it effects as the work of art portrays that which it refers to is evident in Bataille’s experiences with Spanish art. The miming of the “anguished pleasure” by the dancer hints at an art form which captures a painful yet ecstatic excess of emotion. This conception of art coupled with anguish points towards the impossible, an aesthetic at the limits of expression and communication. Bataille’s experiences in Spain, and the impact that these aspects of Spanish culture provided during this visit, later led to the

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<sup>3</sup> Other than the texts cited in Spanish, all other foreign languages will be cited in English when translations are available. Texts that have not been published in translation, such as the 1946 review *Actualité*, will be left in their original language.

conception of some of Bataille's most enigmatic writings, including the 1928 novel *Story of the Eye*, and other essays on bullfighting, on Spanish art, and on Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (a novel dealing with the loyalist/nationalist tensions in the Spanish Civil War). What is constant in his reflections on Spain, whether in his personal letters, creative writings, or theoretical analyses, is the predominance of Spain as a country dominated by emotion and anguish.

As with Lorca, Bataille's writings are also profoundly centered on death, although focused on different motives. In *Story of the Eye*, Bataille autobiographically relates the experience of witnessing Granero's death in which one of the bullfighter's eyes was viciously gouged out. The protagonist details how "Granero was thrown back by the bull and wedged against the balustrade; the horns struck the balustrade three times at full speed; at the third blow, one horn plunged into the right eye and through the head [...] under a blinding sun; men instantly rushed over to haul away Granero's body, the right eye dangling from the head" (64). According to Michel Surya, "this mutilation gripped and fascinated him [...] [and provided] the most disturbed pleasure" (43). The enchantment with which Bataille describes the intrusion into Granero's eye approaches what he deems sovereign or transgressive art, art which freely captures emotion and inner experience. The pleasurable anguish that was experienced during the tragic bullfighting scene in Madrid, an anguish also evident with the appearance of *duende*, was augmented months later at the *cante jondo* festival in Granada.

On June 13 and 14, 1922, Bataille traveled south to Lorca's home town of Granada in order to witness the *cante jondo* music festival and tournament. Surya insists that one of the most important events that contributed to Bataille's early thinking was "the *cante hondo* tournament he attended in Granada and the appearance of a flamenco singer, Bermúdez"

(43). Twenty-four years later Bataille records his impressions concerning this event in an article on Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.<sup>4</sup> Bataille's article on Hemingway in *Actualité*, however, deals more with aspects of Spanish culture and Bataille's 1922 experience in Spain than it does with Hemingway. The references to Hemingway seem to serve, rather, as a pretext that enables Bataille to expound upon aspects of Spanish art. He states that the *cantaor* Bermúdez of the *cante jondo* festival: "Après quelque accords de guitare, assis sur l'estrade, il chant (plutôt lança sa voix en une sorte de cri excédant, déchiré, prolongé et, lorsqu'on l'imaginait épuisé, accédant, dans ce prolongement d'un rôle, à l'inimaginable)" (*Actualité* 124). In reference to this experience at the *cante jondo* festival, the performative nature of the Andalusian singing is evident as pain is part of the form and content of the *cantaor*'s singing. Regarding the same events, Lorca's biographer, Ian Gibson, details that the

[g]ran sorpresa del concurso fue la actuación de Diego Bermúdez Calas, *el Tenazas*, viejo *cantaor* de setenta años, casi olvidado de la "afición", que, según se decía, había venido andando a Granada durante tres días desde Puente Genil para participar en el certamen. [...] Y en Granada triunfó, cantando la primera noche con poderoso "duende". (1: 326)

The *duende*, or daemonic source of artistic inspiration, of which Gibson speaks is central to Lorca's poetics and focuses on an interest in the primitive drives and passions of Andalusia's gypsies. Gibson continues, "[p]ara Lorca, el duende vendría a significar una inspiración siempre relacionada con el peligro, el sufrimiento y la muerte, y que anima especialmente

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<sup>4</sup> The article, titled "A propos de *Pour qui sonne le glas?* d'Ernest Hemingway," appeared in the journal *Actualité* which Bataille edited. The journal was published by the Calmann-Lévy editorial in 1946 and only issued this lone number subtitled "L'Espagne libre," dedicated exclusively to Spanish politics, economy, art, and culture. The edition, prepared by Bataille, contains several significant pieces, among which we find a preface by Albert Camus; articles by Jean Camp, Maurice Blanchot, and Bataille; a translated version of chapter 19 of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (to which they gave the title "L'Odeur de la Mort"); and the short puppet play *Retablillo de don Cristóbal* written by Lorca.

al artista que actúa en público, corpóreamente” (1: 322). Whether Lorca and Bataille corresponded in any way during the festival in Granada is not known. According to some accounts of the festival there were nearly 4000 people in attendance (Stainton 100).

What is significant about the two thinkers’ interest in bullfighting and *cante jondo* music is that both of these events demonstrate Bataille and Lorca’s affinity towards a contemplation of the relationship between the arts, pure emotion, anguish, and death. The interest in death for both Lorca and Bataille, along with the inspiration derived from *duende*, takes shape in light of Nietzsche’s writings as both thinkers appeal to the primitive Dionysian drives of marginalized cultures. The Dionysian roots of *duende*, evident in Lorca’s reflections on *cante jondo* music, dance, and bullfighting, are later apparent in the transgressive aspects of *Poeta en Nueva York*.

Lorca’s interest in Nietzsche, and the role that this affinity plays in a Bataillean reading of surrealist variations in Spanish literature, is elaborated by Manuel Asensi as he comments on the irrational forces contained in certain music forms which “no representa[n] ninguna racionalidad, ningún orden, ningún logos, ninguna distancia, sino la embriaguez del dolor, la pulsión pura, el afecto, la irracionalidad inexpresable [...] de la pérdida de identidad y de personalidad” (446). Here, the destruction and trans-valuation of values inherent to Nietzschean thinking couple with the anti-Platonic presentation of the “low” and remind not only of Bataillean *informe* and irrational figures such as sacrifice and acephalous revolution, but also of Lorca’s interest in primitive culture and *cante jondo*. Asensi further elaborates Lorca’s interest in Nietzsche through *duende* and the use of music: “Quien supo mejor interpretar la idea nietzscheana de ‘música’ fue probablemente Lorca, por ejemplo, en su conferencia ‘Teoría y juego del duende’, vincula el duende a la creación, a la música y al

efecto desgarrador. El duende, dice Lorca (el arte, según Nietzsche), es un ‘poder y no un obrar, es un luchar y no un pensar’” (448). The common Nietzschean groundwork in Lorca and Bataille highlights the importance of sovereign art forms, irrational irruptions of desire and emotion with the appearance of *duende*, and the inclination toward death. Indeed, as Nietzsche claims, the rebirth of the primitive man in modern culture is key in jettisoning some of the scientific advancements of modernity while seeking to reincorporate myth and Dionysian energy into artistic expression (117). With the interest in *cante jondo* and gypsy culture, Lorca seeks to reawaken a sensibility for aspects of culture that have been relegated to peripheral positions. For Nietzsche, “every culture that has lost myth has lost, by the same token, its natural healthy creativity. [...] The images of myth must be the daemonic guardians, ubiquitous but unnoticed. [...] Man today, stripped of myth, stands famished among all his pasts and must dig frantically for roots, be it among the most remote antiquities” (137). Lorca’s intent on “digging for roots” through an inclination for aesthetic forms such as *cante jondo* continues as the poet maintains an interest in primitive ritualism in the Negro culture of Harlem and a renovation of the theater which requires the spectator to be more “esthetically responsive” (Nietzsche 136). At each step Lorca is negotiating tradition and rupture, returning to roots and radically reconfiguring expression.

In his 1933 essay on *duende* Lorca affirms a Nietzschean heritage as one of “verdadero estilo vivo; es decir, de sangre; de viejísima cultura, y, a la vez, de creación en acto [...] el mismo duende que abrasó el corazón de Nietzsche, [...] al dionisiaco grito [...] que agota, que rechaza toda la dulce geometría aprendida, que rompe los estilos” (3: 151-53). Art forms conceived by and through the *duende*, then, are much more than just manifestations of a source of artistic inspiration since they provide the active and “live”

styles (“estilos vivos”) which are opposed to other styles or forms based on calculation (“geometría”). The *duende* that Lorca continually evokes renders geometry *informe* as it irrationally (but systematically) breaks forms, transgresses norms, and appeals to cultures of otherness. Inclinations towards death drives in the poetics of Lorca—even from the earliest poems—come to the forefront of the more mature poetry of the following years. Just as the interest in the motivating strength of *duende* (as evidenced in the gypsies’ deep song) provides a major catalyst for artistic expression in Lorca’s pre-New York work, the continual insistence on irrational musical pulsations find their space in Lorca’s later poetic works which represent the jazz music of the blacks of Harlem, thus situating otherness *in* and *as* aesthetic form. And similar to the interest in a “culture of death” found in the primitive cultures that were central to the poetic theories adhered to by Lorca in Spain, *Poeta en Nueva York*—initially carrying the working title “Introducción a la muerte” (Maurer xxi)—continues and elaborates (in a much more violent manner) modern sources of death and the frustrations of desire that they provoke.

### The Formless in New York

In *Poeta en Nueva York* the reader is bombarded with images of broken and fluid forms, blood, and vomit.<sup>5</sup> The interest in the base matter of New York is key in understanding the poetic discovery of North American culture at the beginning of the twentieth century, including its racial and social structures. The fragmentation of forms in the metropolitan cityscape functions as an operational *informe*-ing of systems. And while this Dionysian destruction of values does lead to new ways of relating to art and being, it does not entail

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<sup>5</sup> For more on the corporeal matter in *Poeta en Nueva York*, and on the imminence of death, see Flint page 189.

either the sublimatory goals of surrealist beauty, or the lack of poetic control. The shattering of boundaries through denunciation and the representation of base matter, along with the attack on capitalistic mercantilism, are some of the hallmarks of Lorca's New York works.

The most basic evidences of critique are expressed in *Poeta en Nueva York* through direct and explicit linguistic performances, even though Lorca's complete use of *informe* proves much more complicated. Throughout the collection, the identification with marginalized others is constant and a tone of reclamation of a space for social outcasts is sustained. The poetic subject in "Nueva York: Oficina y denuncia," for example, denounces the oppression of animals and figures of otherness as it performatively exclaims:

Yo denuncio a toda la gente  
que ignora la otra mitad,  
la mitad irredimible  
que levanta sus montes de cemento  
donde laten los corazones  
de los animalitos que se olvidan (1: 556)

As J. L. Austin describes in *How to Do Things with Words*, critical language can, in fact, not just allude to critique, but actually enact a critique. Austin outlines the manner in which expressive or emotive utterances are performative and names "I criticize" as an example of this case (78-79). He calls these "behabitives," and asserts that by saying "I criticize" or "I denounce," the subject is not only saying this utterance but effectively doing what the utterance refers to, that is, critiquing or denouncing. In Lorca's text, the "yo denuncio" conforms to what Austin deems one of the "classic examples of performatives, all with verbs in the first person singular present indicative active" (56). The poetic subject in this poem not only states that it is at odds with the current marginalization of and ignorance toward figures of otherness ("la otra mitad"), but effectively denounces social convention through a verbal attack.

But Austin's purely linguistic claims concerning the performative fall short with reference to the aesthetic object, and specifically the poetic utterance. In fact, Austin claims that the poetic utterance has no performative strength as he affirms that "a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a particular way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, [...] all this we are *excluding* from consideration" (22). This claim moves poetry into a marginal position, outside of context, and into an area in which it has no real effect outside itself as a *disinterested* (to use the Kantian term) artistic artefact. Derrida revises this claim in his rebuttal of performativity in Austin. For Derrida, any act of speech is subject to displacement of context and, as such, all performative acts are subject to contestation. The written utterance, however, "within the same time, within the same space, manages to loosen the limits, to open the *same field* to a much greater range. Meaning, the content of the semantic message, is thus transmitted, *communicated*, by different *means*, by technically more powerful mediations" (*Margins* 331). For Bataille and others, the performative nature of the poetic utterance moves one step further. The poetic utterance unsettles convention and meaning as it presents metaphorical associations not purely based on logic and signification (what Lorca might call a "poetic logic"). Here linguistic performatives couple with social, aesthetic, and ethical discourse to rupture conventional representation and present modes of critique which transcend prosaic uses of language. Lorca's lyrical denouncement of social conventions, then, proceeds in a critical and performative manner through the poetic utterance. In this sense, writing— especially lyric poetry—performs or enacts the emotive volition of the lyrical subject. The poet uses language (or non-conventional formations of language) in order to develop expressions of desire and subjectivity.

From the first lines of *Poeta en Nueva York*, spaces and materials that evoke formlessness are evident as the poetic subject is trapped in a nearly uninhabitable environment. It is within and from these spaces of void and “crisis personal” (Sahuquillo 493) that the poetic voice seeks to articulate its expression. According to Krauss and Bois’s analysis of *informe* in *Formless: A User’s Guide*, four operations function through formlessness to destabilize and decenter the pillars of modernist ontology: horizontality, base matter, pulse, and entropy. Each of these aspects of *informe*, in its own right, operates within Lorca’s New York works to “bring down” high art and thinking as it posits an open space within which to consider art and living. Lorca’s poetic expression moves beyond the four manifestations of Bataille’s notion of the formless signaled by Krauss and Bois as his verses also seek renovation through recourse to other modes of formlessness, specifically the instability of memory and the difficulty of articulating desire. It is through Lorca’s articulation of memory and desire that the spaces of tension and anguish are examined, and in turn, through which Lorca’s creative expression seeks to establish a new space within which to contemplate being and living, both philosophical and ethical claims that come to the forefront of Lorca’s later literary works.

### Subjectivities of Anguish

The poetic logic in *Poeta en Nueva York* exhibits a radical questioning of modernist versions of individuality as it posits the self as a fallen and horizontal figure. Rather than aspirations of an uprightly constituted subject, *Poeta en Nueva York* displays numerous references to the dismembered poetic “I.” This version of the organism directly critiques the unified subject as one of proportion, symmetry, and beauty. The anti-Platonic subversion of

form and beauty is exposed in one of Lorca's most important drawings from the New York period. In "Hombre muerto," the fetish with the termination of vision is reinforced as the dead man's eyeball hangs down into his mouth. Furthermore, the uncanny presentation of the living-dead portrays the inevitable impact that an oppressive society has on a poet. As Cecelia Cavanaugh observes in her study of Lorca's poems and drawings, "Several drawings recall these images, featuring the recurrent motif of an eye placed by itself on a page. Images of dangling nerve cells, which often accompany this eye, may also be viewed as the roots of an aquatic plant that descends, suspended into the dark water" (79). This drawing thematically represents a destruction of the subject in its depiction of blindness<sup>6</sup> and death as Lorca translates poetic metaphors into a visual medium in order to capture the anguished expression of the poetic subject.<sup>7</sup> In nearly all of the New York drawings, Lorca shows that fallen forms break down any sense of elevated ideals of formal unity or solidity, thus drastically critiquing conventions both aesthetic and sociological. Whereas the tension that is created between the living and the dead approaches the representation of the surrounding environment in New York, in nearly every case in the drawings and verses of *Poeta en Nueva York*, this tension also mimics the anguish of the poetic subject. These "texts" are

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<sup>6</sup> Images of blindness in Lorca resonate with other avant-garde works, most notably Buñuel and Dalí's *Un chien andalou*, but also with Bataille's *Story of the Eye*. Juan Carlos Rodríguez makes the following insightful connection:

[L]a pasión por los ojos arrancados, por la redondez de los senos arrancado también, ya desde el "Martirio de Santa Olalla" hasta los poemas neoyorkinos, es algo también que recuerda directamente a la *Historia del ojo*, de Bataille, el amor como transfiguración de la muerte, o de la relación entre la literatura y el mal. Hablar de Brecht, de Kafka o de Bataille no es gratuito: quizá sea la mejor manera de intentar clarificar por qué se puede considerar a Lorca un clásico moderno. (173)

<sup>7</sup> As noted by Christina Karageorgou in "Amat y Lorca de viaje a la luna," Lorca's film script also uses metaphor in an innovative manner: "La metáfora no representa el tropo privilegiado de la escritura de un guión y mucho menos de la cinematografía. Sin embargo, el tropo puede servirnos de clave para entender la relación entre ambos como una composición aglomerante de diversos materiales" (261). See also page 272n1 in Karageorgou's article for more on the possibilities for the use of metaphor in film.

representative of both the annihilation of nature as evident in the exterior environment, but also the interior fragmentations of the poetic self.

The first poem of the collection, “Vuelta de paseo,” prefigures much of the angst and protest that permeates the other poems as it condemns the assassinating force of the sky which demolishes nature, desire, and the poetic subject. From the opening verses, the lyrical voice cries out against the death and the mutilations that are provoked by the two elements that Lorca says the traveler to New York first captures, the city’s “arquitectura extrahumana y ritmo furioso. Geometría y angustia” (3: 164):

Asesinado por el cielo,  
entre las formas que van hacia la sierpe  
y las formas que buscan el cristal,  
dejaré crecer mis cabellos.  
Con el árbol de muñones que no canta  
y el niño con el blanco rostro de huevo.  
Con los animalitos de cabeza rota  
y el agua harapienta de los pies secos.  
Con todo lo que tiene cansancio sordomudo  
y mariposa ahogada en el tintero.  
Tropezando con mi rostro distinto de cada día.  
¡Asesinado por el cielo! (1: 511)

Being assassinated by the sky reminds the reader of the Icarian sun that blinds and mutilates the beholder of those that search for it, and highlights a subversion of accepted norms of beauty by instead recognizing the sky as a source of death. This inversion of forms is continued in the second and third verses that indicate a space of formlessness between serpentine, low forms and crystalline, high forms. According to Christopher Maurer these areas of void and emptied spaces aid in representing the monstrous and oppressive New York scene:

Lorca’s vision of the impermanence or emptiness of forms—forms abandoned in the senseless flux of life: the “husks of insects,” lost gloves, or cast-off suits of clothes—give rise to one of the most frequent and most

untranslatable images in the book: the *hueco*: void or hollow, space or emptied space. The atmosphere of New York is riddled with *huecos* [...] Lorca gives color and weight to the notion of annihilation itself. (xxix)

As Maurer suggests, the numerous hollows or voids of the New York cityscape embody the spaces of formless and annihilated subjects. Through the anaphoric repetition of both “con” and “y el,” the poetic “I” identifies with other figures that cannot attain the objects of their desire: the tree, the young boy, the broken animals, the water, the deaf and dumb, and the butterfly. Rather, these subjects are tripping, stumbling, and falling as they yearn for fulfillment. The amputated tree cannot (re)produce since it is cut down and unable to fulfill its destiny; the identity of the small boy is seemingly erased as his face is merely a white and blank space; the water with dry feet does not even contain the properties that are most essential to its being water (wetness); the deaf and dumb are unable to communicate as they are deprived of the ability to hear and articulate language; and the word is drowned like a butterfly in the inkwell as expression is stifled by the inability to write. Along these lines, Ángel Sahuquillo suggests that “El yo poético se solidariza con la descendencia de la serpiente, ‘los animalitos de cabeza rota’, porque la serpiente y él comparten el mismo destino: ser creados con cierta forma e instinto para, después ser acusados, condenados y sacrificado por ser como son” (500). Amidst this “assassination from the sky” in “Vuelta de paseo,” the poetic voice is similar to the other figures that it names and identifies with, each one unable to find a stable existence in the oppressive environment of the metropolitan space.<sup>8</sup>

The evocations of the formless as seen in *Poeta en Nueva York* (and especially in the

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<sup>8</sup> Miguel García-Posada alludes to the oppression that this ambience entails in the poems of this collection: “Rascacielos encajonados, como tumbas que suben hasta lo alto, como muros de prisión: en este espacio cósmico suenan las voces de las víctimas de la ciudad unmundana” (*Lorca: Interpretación* 130).

first verses of the collection) are approximated by Christopher Flint as he acknowledges the connection between formlessness (as the destruction of form) and death:

In *Poeta en Nueva York* the theme of change is immediately expressed in “Vuelta de paseo” where the poet’s sense of dislocation stems from his being caught between formlessness—“entre las formas que van hacia la sierpe”—and a fragile rigidity—“y las formas que buscan el cristal”—and from doubts about his identity [...] Not having an identifiable, integrated body, and hence lacking a stable self, leads to the experience of death. (202)

The fallen self that is in constant flux in “Vuelta de paseo” is visually represented in Lorca’s drawing “Autorretrato en Nueva York” in which only the poet’s head and hands are noticed. Here, we are reminded of Krauss’s exposition on the desublimated subject and its inclination towards horizontality. Krauss examines the writings concerning insect mimicry of Roger Caillois (one of Bataille’s collaborators) and investigates the impact that the environment has on a subject: “The body collapses, deliquesces, doubles the space around it in order to be possessed by its own surrounds. [...] The body then de-solidifies with his thoughts, the individual breaks the boundaries of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. [...] They are [subjects] falling, falling from the vertical into the horizontal” (*Optical* 155-56). Indeed, in the case of Lorca’s texts and drawings in New York, the poetic self has fallen between form and formlessness.

The portrayal of the disintegrating subject is noticed throughout the collection, as in “Luna y panorama de los insectos” where the subject cries out “cuida tus pies, ¡amor mío!, ¡tus manos!, / ya que yo tengo que entregar mi rostro. / ¡Mi rostro, mi rostro, ¡ay mi comido rostro!” (1: 554). Here, as the poetic subject tries to navigate spaces of erotic encounter and desire, an element of its identity (the face) is attacked by its environment of moons and insects. According to Neil McKinlay, “The poet needs to cry out in pain and anger, but he also wants to create a unique artefact which overtly establishes its artificial status. The

dehumanization is only partial because the frame is only partial [...] It creates a distance between poem and reader” (162). The dehumanizing effect of Lorca’s text is evidenced by McKinlay as the surrealist language ruptures with logic discourse and creates estrangement between poet, text, and reader. Distorted linguistic signification—which for Judith Butler “takes on a non-ordinary meaning in order precisely to contest what has become sedimented in and as the ordinary” (145)—unsettles discourse and presents innovative forms of expression and articulation.

In these poems and drawings, where constructions of the subject are rendered *informe*, the poet finds a space in which pulsations and daemonic drives lead toward innovative artistic creation through an irruption of differentiation from the norm. The fragmentation of form and of the subject not only levels a critique on stable forms, but it also provides a space for new thinking and creating. In this sense, *breaking form* and *giving form* prove to be equally important parts of the aesthetic act. As María Zambrano highlights, the relationship between form and artistic expression is one of mutual dependence since “el acto de la creación es un acto estético, de dar forma” (*Filosofía* 78). But for Lorca, the aesthetic act is not merely one of giving form. Form is indeed pertinent, but it is also necessary to first break down artistic norms concerning meter, versification, and thematic propriety that regulate expression in order to then find a space for artistic creating. It seems that for this reason, Lorca’s New York creations continually vacillate between artistic genres in an attempt to find an adequate form for expression. In contrast to previous aesthetic movements that also sought renovation, Lorca’s destructuring of form relentlessly and violently draws attention to the injustices of society and the resulting deformation of the subject. The feelings, tones, and attitudes of Lorca’s New York texts continually evoke the struggle that

the poetic voice encounters amid the oppressive space of the city. In that environment, assassinated by the sky, the lyrical “I” wrestles with its ambience and seeks to find the poetic utterance that can express its anguish, desire, and self. In Cavanaugh’s words,

The line “asesinado por el cielo” is also important because it provides the poet with an empty space in which to begin his task. His point of reference, himself, has already been emptied, eradicated, clanked out, and he employs vocabulary suggesting negation and annihilation throughout the poem. Into this empty space he begins to place a new identity. (142)

Poetic subjects, along with artistic and social structures, are rendered *informe* in an attempt to rupture boundaries that delimit the experience of the poetic self. Lorca’s texts and drawings display the self as fallen and searching to give form to anguish and desire. Yet while Bataille’s notion of the formless would promote pure annihilation of form, Lorca uses the space of the void to demonstrate the conflictive nature of individuality and to express the anguish inflicted on the poetic subject. In a more general sense, the Bataillean task of breaking form, and the Lorquian continuation that seeks to give form through aesthetic expression, are solely the basis for a way of rethinking and reversing any processes that prescribe form.

Lorca’s use of *informe* in the New York poems and drawings (noticed in the formless, amputated, fallen, and horizontal figures) is evidenced as the poet appropriates and employs an oppressive structure (that of demolishing, crushing, and fragmenting of the subject) in order to critique the lack of livable space that is available to the lyrical “I” in the city’s environment. This provides the most multi-faceted manifestation of the formless in Lorca: it is at once a symptom that is felt as the subject is demolished by its ambience, *and* an operation that is enacted by the poetic voice through critique. The vacant space in-between being formed and unformed is the space of the *informe* in Lorca. On many levels this is a

function similar to what Elaine Scarry calls, in *The Body in Pain*, the making and unmaking of the world. For Scarry, just as warfare “unmakes” the world, artistic creation seeks to give a voice to pain and suffering. Art, as such, has a central role in the expression of pain since “it begins to externalize, objectify, and make sharable what is originally an interior and unsharable experience” (16). Lorca’s poetic spaces of *informe* are the unmade portions of experience waiting to be filled and formed. His works, therefore, suggest that the subject is demolished by the environment that it is a resident of (rendered *informe* by the city as by an oppressive regime or social structure). But he then further employs this structure of *informe*—through the representation of formless identities and materials—in order to critique the forms that oppress.

### A Philosophical Poetics

The obsession with fallen subjects and the termination of rational vision as portrayed artistically in Lorca’s work is evident not only in Bataille’s theoretical works, but also in his creative works. The affinity for the formless void and the constant dispersal of sacrificial blood are seen in Bataille’s poems from the 1940s and 50s and they provide a relevant lens under which to consider the intersections of poetic and philosophical inquiry in Lorca’s work. Here, the poetic text and philosophical critique embodied by *informe* converge in a powerful manner. These poems elucidate the importance which Bataille places on the work of art and its role in dialoguing with philosophical critique. For Spitzer, “The poetry of Bataille is definitely the poetry of a philosopher. There are certain themes—the immensity, the impossible, the void, desire, nothingness—which keep cropping up in his verse. These are themes which have been defined in previous works by Bataille, but take on a different

form in poetry” (xi). Bataille’s poetry illustrates a constant termination of enlightenment motifs such as vision, the unified self, and stable form—all of which lead to a fall into the nullification of identity and expression. Bataille’s poem “The Window” is replete with blindness, fragmentation, disintegrations, and most importantly, assassinations from the sky as also displayed in the Lorquian text of 1929-30 cited above:

Little bird  
a thousand colors  
a death fills the sky

a flat crow  
dead eyes  
the wind tears out the sky

whisperings  
of a dead woman  
madness open the sky. (*Collected* 27)

While Bataille’s poem is fraught with destruction and madness, both of which appear to be the goal of his writing, when compared to the Lorquian poem examined previously, one notices how Lorca’s text uses the vacated spaces as contemplations of expression (creation). And rather than mere thematic conceptions of *informe*, the poetic utterance *as such* in both cases enacts a resistance to linguistic and logical norms. As stated by O’Shea, “Poetry for Bataille is a continual mode of praxis, a continual play and movement between a suspension of meaning and its oblivion in the void” (58). This is what is at stake in the poetic utterance (and also the resorting to drawing and other aesthetic forms) in Lorca, since the poetic subjects search for the form through which to express subjectivity and desire. The intended meaning that is to be captured is not available through prosaic modes of language, and thus, poetry becomes necessary. O’Shea continues, “Language can not do justice to it [desire] since it is something of the rational world. At best we can try to describe desire by putting

language into play through poetry. Desire remains as an irrational force, beyond human rational, conscious comprehension yet capable of seizing us and taking us beyond our world of laws, taboos, language and beautiful poetry” (60). In the poetry examined here, meaning and language are continually in flux through metaphoric associations which elude logic. In their desire to engage in social and aesthetic revolt, the texts of Bataille and Lorca compliment one another even though their central preoccupations differ since total annihilation is most evident in Bataille and the struggle for expression is key in Lorca.

For Michael Richardson, whose writings on Bataille and his relationship to surrealism are invaluable, the poetic text of the avant-garde is performative in its desire to revolt: “Poetry embodies the form of revolt that surrealism sought to establish as a first principle” (23). The interpenetration of poetic discourse and philosophical critique is central for the French intellectual as noted by Marie-Christine Lala: “Bataille points out that if there is no subversion, poetry stays trapped in the realm of everyday activity, which reduces it to the status of merely ‘beautiful poetry’, that is, pure rhetoric, or poetic verbiage” (108). In place of poetry with the intention to represent the beautiful or marvelous, Lorca’s poetry and the poetic and philosophical writings of Bataille embody a “poetic logic” which executes a performative *informe*-ing: a destruction of form and enlightenment thinking through subversion and interrogation of privileged hierarchies.

Along with constant evocations of the hollows and voids, *Poeta en Nueva York* is replete with other references which signal the discontent with high form. A few examples that illustrate the attack on form are evident in verses such as “formas que van hacia la sierpe” (1: 511), “se hundieron las formas puras / bajo el cri cri de las margaritas”(1: 515), “las formas que buscaban el giro de la sierpe” (1: 547), “Mira formas concretas que buscan

el vacío” (1: 548), and “Son mentira las formas” (1: 553). Verses such as these remind the reader that not only is the disintegration of form a key point of contemplation in *Poeta en Nueva York*, but that this *informe*-ing seeks to bring down the privileged pillars of culture and art. The incessant evocation of the void seeks a subversion of Western thinking through a recourse to undefined spaces and cultures. According to Elide Pittarello, Lorca’s *Poeta en Nueva York* demonstrates that,

en contra de la tradición que domina el pensamiento racional Occidente (esa tendencia a ocuparlo todo con identidades y casualidades), la prevalencia del vacío es necesaria para que la vida se manifieste y tenga sentido, a pesar de los significados ya atribuidos por los nombres o las iconografías del *logos* [...] [Está] en contra del idealismo humanístico que fija un orden armonioso, el sujeto acude a la deformación unilateral para evidenciar lo que, siguiendo las medidas acostumbradas, pasaría desapercibido. (204)

Here the void ruptures the fixed order of *logos* and presents spaces in which the poetic self can find expression. In “Vuelta de paseo” the most important verses are possibly the last two which signal a fragmentation of the subject (a different face of each day) as a result of the assassinating sky. The dissolution of the self makes philosophical claims against any notion of a stable, rational *cogito* as it presents a version of the self that is in flux, split, and fallen. As Nick Land affirms with relation to Bataille’s thinking, “In a play upon the classic formulation of Cartesian subjectivism, poetry is depicted as a shattering derangement of vision and a dislocation of the ego” (202). Avant-garde poetry, therefore, in its innovative use of language acts performatively to question stable identities and linguistic associations. Returning to Butler, we might say that the non-ordinary language used in poetry subverts and polemicizes being and relating.

This laceration of the self is a hallmark of Lorca’s New York poetry and a central point to Bataille’s writing on literature and poetry. For Bataille, poetry only attains its

mission when it is revolutionary and works to violently attack high form:

It seemed to me that true poetry was only reached through hatred. Poetry had no powerful meaning except in the violence of revolt. But poetry attains this violence only by evoking the *impossible* [...] Humanity is faced with a double perspective: in one direction, violent pleasure, horror, and death—precisely the perspective of poetry—and in the opposite direction, that of science or the real world of utility. (*Impossible* 10)

In *Literature and Evil*, a 1957 collection of essays on writers such as Brontë, Kafka, Baudelaire, and Sade, Bataille discusses poetry as a transgressive discourse which engages in self-critique and auto-mutilation (a similar connection is made in an earlier essay on Van Gogh in *Documents*). Auto-mutilation is linked to sacrifice and the primal drives of eroticism and the sacred. Bataille favors hatred of the type of poetry which merely exposes the beautiful parts of nature. Against beauty, “The workings of death in the text of *Haine de la poésie* designate the place where the subject of the speech-act comes to die, to dissolve and be born again, or, more precisely, to lose himself in order to recompose himself differently, since loss is the enabling condition of symbolic enactment” (Lala 108). Maurice Blanchot also highlights this discourse that is treated artistically by Lorca and theoretically by Bataille. For Blanchot, the violence of poetry leads to the articulation of a space that provides the possibility for language to search for the object of its desire. Blanchot affirms that “Poetry, by the tearing apart it produces, by the unbearable tension it engenders, can only want the ruin of language; but this ruin is the only chance it has to be fulfilled, to become whole in broad daylight, in its two aspects, meaning and form, without which it is never anything but distant striving for itself” (53). This “tearing apart,” and hatred of the beautiful, is evident in Lorquian poems such as “El rey de Harlem” where the poetic subject calls for the death of the blond street vendors, violence against social norms, and the gouging out of the crocodiles eyes.

## Desires and Memories

As in “Vuelta de paseo,” where the poetic subject and the figures that it identifies with cannot attain the object of their search, the poem “Fábula y rueda de los tres amigos” also presents subjects that cannot survive within their current environment. Here the three friends Enrique, Emilio, and Lorenzo are frozen, burned, and buried as they search for the objects of their desire. In the “Fábula,” the poetic voice concludes that “Cuando se hundieron las formas puras / bajo el cri cri de las margaritas / comprendí que me habían asesinado” (1: 515). As the friends in the poem, the lyrical self’s tone and experience echo the anguish and discontent that it feels with relationship to its own situation of lamentation. The poetic “yo” establishes an “other” (“ellos”) through which it reflects on the dehumanizing environment. The lyrical self becomes a voice for the “drowned” others as the poetic utterance enacts the death and mummification of the three friends. The poetic self declares,

Los vi perderse llorando y cantando  
[...]  
por mi dolor [...]  
por mi alegría [...]  
por mi pecho [...]  
por mi muerte [...] (1: 514)

The “Fábula” establishes the importance of the ethical relation between self and other in the aesthetic discourse as, following Bakhtin, the poetic object performs the moment of an “I-for-the-other” (*Toward* 54). This act not only constitutes the self in and through a relationship to the other, but it also represents a self-knowledge and self-recognition.

A contrast between past innocence and present understanding is presented in the collection’s second poem, “1910.” The evocation of the past offers a valuable counter-point

against which to examine the metropolitan ambience of 1929.<sup>9</sup> The poem compares the life of a Granadine youth in 1910 with a mature man years later under the New York sky. In Lorca's "1910" (in a manner similar to poems such as "El niño Stanton" and "Tu infancia en Menton" which also nostalgically reflect the tensions between past and present levels of knowledge), the poetic subject contemplates a past age in which everything was seen with innocent eyes. In the first stanza, and through constant negation, the poetic voice outlines what its eyes did *not* see in 1910:

no vieron enterrar a los muertos  
ni la feria de ceniza del que llora por la madrugada  
ni el corazón que tiembla arrinconado como un caballito de mar (1: 512)

The atrocities of death, fairs of ash, weeping, and trembling with fear and desire were not evident in the innocence of youth. Here memory serves as a space that mediates present and past, a space *in between* the current contemplation of anguish and death and the evocation of a past naturalness of "white walls" and "ancient dust," "En el sitio donde el sueño tropezaba con su realidad. / Allí mis pequeños ojos" (1: 512). The memory of a past age functions not only poetically as a sort of aesthetic remembering, or reconstructing of a lost happiness, but more importantly, it functions to intensify the gravity of the 1929 experience in which nothing can find the fulfillment of its desires.

The third and fourth stanzas of "1910" continue the contrast between the temporal spheres as they evoke a more innocent youth. While the past does contain cruel and grotesque elements ("un jardín donde los gatos se comían a las ranas," "cangrejos devorados," and "la blanca pared donde orinaban las niñas"), these are images based in

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<sup>9</sup> While there are dangers to reading this and other poetic collections as autobiographical, Lorca does allude to the connection between his own anguish and that of the poetic subjects. In the poet's lecture entitled "Un poeta en Nueva York" Lorca mentions the personal nature of this poem by declaring that "Yo, solo y errante, evocaba mi infancia de esta manera" (3: 165).

natural instincts and aspects of simple rural life (1: 512). They are, furthermore, starkly contrasted to the violent “assassination from the sky” evoked in the urban landscape of New York. Lorca’s remembering of his Andalusian context (while not entirely ideal or purely nostalgic *per se*), when examined in comparison with the present, does reflect a process of understanding in which the eyes discover new, and increasingly horrific, landscapes. Youth is also represented as a time of religious formation, mixed with a sexual component (“en el seno traspasado de Santa Rosa dormida”); a time of discovered sensuality (“en los tejados del amor, con gemidos y frescas manos”); and a time of cruel interaction of natural forms (“en un jardín donde los gatos se comían las ranas”) (1: 512). In these verses the resurgence of 1910 provides a level of discovery with which to juxtapose the 1929 situation.

The poem, subtitled “Intermezzo,” is indeed an intermediate point in the process of (self)understanding and discovery, a space that negotiates what was seen in the past with reference to what is experienced in the present. Contrary to the innocence and natural courses taken by the subjects of the past, the current moment in New York is dominated by despair. The poetic voice of 1929, amid the economic and social tensions of the day, exemplifies intense anguish through a tone of sorrow in the final stanza of “1910”:

No preguntarme nada. He visto que las cosas  
cuando buscan su curso encuentran su vacío.  
Hay un dolor de huecos por el aire sin gente  
y en mis ojos criaturas vestidas ¡sin desnudo! (1: 512)

The poetic subject proclaims the utter despair of the things that search for their course or meaning in existence. Rather than finding what they desire (and the verb “buscar” pops up repeatedly throughout the collection), they fall into a void, a painful space of hollow. The lyric self testifies concerning the darkness of the current situation and the unsatisfied intentions of those that seek to find their course. In this space of unfulfillment, rather than

denuded figures of innocence, all are clothed and covered. For the poetic voice, the past is a temporal frame that is to be highly valued in order to continue in the process of modifying and relating to the present age. But the reflection on the past is not based on pure nostalgia. Rather, the poetic self longs for images and symbols of the past (such as innocent modes of relating, discovery, and natural instincts) through which to consider the present, but not to be superimposed upon it.<sup>10</sup>

While memory serves as a formless space through which the poetic utterance is constructed, the space occupied by desire also constitutes an innovation in Lorca's use of *informe*. The most sustained and intensified contemplation of desire and the fluid and fragmented nature of subjectivity in *Poeta en Nueva York* is seen in "Nocturno del hueco." Here the *huecos* and *vacíos* take on more richly charged (and at times contradictory) connotations as they capture a feeling of ambivalence in an affirmation of the complexity of desire and the incomprehensibility of surrealist discourse. Furthermore, the *hueco* signals an overarching tone of lament and emptiness that is constant throughout the poetic collection. The nocturne, a word which encompasses much of the ambiguity that will surface in the poem, presents a somber search for an object of desire. The poem commences with an allusion to the fact that all is lost, "que todo se ha ido, / para ver los huecos y los vestidos" (1: 547). In the empty space of desolation and sadness the poetic voice vacillates between a recognition of the hollows of desire that are left vacant and the satisfaction that comes through the fulfillment of the spaces of desire. As in the poems previously analyzed where

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<sup>10</sup> A similar contemplation of the importance of past forms of thinking is evident in Derrida's *Specters of Marx* in which the deconstructive process of "learning to live" is outlined. That is, for Derrida, we can only continue in the process of rethinking and reconsideration of the present and the future through a contemplation of our past. The ability to renegotiate our present is, in fact, determined by our relationship with our past. This sort of evocation of ghosts, this politics of memory and rethinking of the way in which we think about ourselves as temporal and ethical beings will be returned to in the Conclusion.

the figures that search for objects of desire cannot attain what is sought, the subject here is also left wanting. With an attitude of general dissatisfaction, the poetic subject details that even the shapes that want to search for the low serpentine spaces are captured in “duro cristal definitivo” (1: 547) and unable to reach their point of desired destination.

The nocturne at once laments the *hueco* as an empty space of loneliness as it simultaneously celebrates the “huecos puros” of desire that are remembered. Here the poetic subject establishes the complex nature of the *hueco*; first as a space of loss and lament, but also as a sort of nostalgic void that considers a pure type of desire (“huecos puros”). Lorca employs the absence of an ideal and pure love relationship in order to posit the possibilities of lament and loss. He uses idealism and form in order to articulate an ambivalent, difficult, contradictory space of desire (and its absence). The first part of the poem revolves around the relationship between the lyric self and an “other” (“amor mío”). The poetic self is emphatic that “todo se ha ido” as it repeats this verse seven times throughout the first part of the poem. Since all is gone (lost), that which remains are the *huecos*, the spaces of void and hollow. Analogous to the holes without anything to fill them are objects such as clothing, gloves, and lungs—all figures that in some manner or another need something to complete them, such as a body, a hand, and air. In contrast to the moments of pain and loss associated with the void, the poetic subject does portray brief moments of satisfaction. With a tone of mixed and ambivalent feeling the voice exclaims:

Dentro de ti, amor mío, por tu carne  
¡qué silencio de trenes boca arriba!  
¡Cuánto brazo de momia florecido!  
¡Qué cielo sin salida, qué cielo!

Es la piedra en el agua y es la voz de la brisa  
bordes de amor que escapan de su tronco sangrante.  
Basta tocar el pulso de nuestro amor presente

para que broten flores sobre los otros niños. (1: 547-48)

These two stanzas intertwine the mixed significations of the void as the poetic voice establishes what we might call an “archeology of love.” The self enters and passes through the body of the other, becoming renewed in the erotic contact of the present moment. During the sexual encounter with the other there is silence that could at once signal loneliness and also a pure repose. In the moment of enveloping and being enveloped by the other as a “piedra en agua” or as a “voz en la brisa,” the fulfillment of desire nears culmination. Desire in this poem is at once corporeal and aesthetic as the *huecos* represent both erotic spaces of encounter and aesthetic voids to be filled with expression. Aroused feelings of interaction burst forth as “bordes de amor que escapan” and as the pulse of the present love will flourish into the lives of others. But the discourse is riddled with images that evoke a delimited and somber tone as well; such is the case with the references to “momia” and “cielo sin salida,” where decomposition of form and hopeless aspiration are present. The source of the poem is one of constant pain and anguish as evidenced by the “tronco sangrante,” thus demonstrating that love is not dominated by beauty and fulfillment.

These verses demonstrate that plenitude can be attained in some sense through contact with an other, but that it is a complexly negotiated space of pleasure, lament, and loss. Among the high and low forms of the poetic environment, between lament and satisfaction, and amid the forms that search for their void and the forms that look for the sky—but that are trapped below it—the poetic self contemplates the “huecos puros, por mí, por ti” (1: 548). The pure shapes, images noticed in other poems from this collection as well, come to embody an attitude of innocence, pure desire, and possibly rebirth (that is, a pure space from which expression can flourish). Lorca uses the contrast between void and

fulfilment in order to accentuate the tension that exists between desire and loss. And at each moment of the poetic discourse, the subject simultaneously laments and praises the spaces of void and hollow. The ambivalent posture toward the void, therefore, signals a complex and richly productive device with which to examine the conflictive structures of desire and amorous lyricism in Lorca.

Nevertheless, the final stanza of the first part of the nocturne anticipates a change in tone that dominates the second part, a tone of increased discontent. The poetic self recognizes the inevitable loss of the object of desire:

Para ver que todo se ha ido  
¡amor inexpugnable, *amor huido!*<sup>11</sup>  
No, no me des tu hueco,  
¡que ya va por el aire el mío!  
¡Ay de ti, ay de mí, de la brisa!  
Para ver que todo se ha ido. (1: 548)

Since all is gone, the aspirations of the poetic subject cannot be realized as it is left to lament its loss. Nor can it satisfy the needs of another since its own *hueco* (or ability to fulfill) is gone in the wind. While the first part of the poem instructs concerning *huecos* of desire in

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<sup>11</sup> My italics. The fleeting nature of the love object, “*amor huido*,” is not new in Lorca, and continually evokes the tension between desire and death. In his 1925 play *Amor de don Perlimlín con Belisa en su jardín*, the comedic tone of the Second Scene is broken through the tragic lyrical monologue of the protagonist Perlimplín:

Amor, Amor  
que estoy herido.  
Herido de *amor huido*,  
herido,  
muerto de amor.  
Decid of todos que he sido  
el ruiseñor.  
Bisturí de cuatro filos,  
garganta rota y olvido.  
Cógeme la mano, amor,  
que vengo muy mal herido,  
herido de *amor huido*,  
¡herido!  
¡Muerto de amor! (2: 253, my italics)

general (and the *huecos* that cause pain contrasted with the “huecos puros” that fulfill), these final verses indicate the direction of the last part: my *hueco* which is going through the sky, in a space in between forms, floating as in other poems of *Poeta en Nueva York*.

The second section starts with a verse containing a single word: “Yo.” This verse is repeated five times throughout the course of the last part of the poem and gives much emphasis to the personal presence of the poetic subject. The self is portrayed “[c]on el hueco blanquísimo de un caballo” (1: 549). References to horses and stables are replete in Lorca and in many cases signal instinctual desire. One need only look to *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, for example, to notice that the corral is the space of erotic encounter and that the allusion to horses has clear sexual connotations. Says Adela, “El caballo garañón estaba en el centro del corral, ¡blanco! Doble de grande. Llenando todo lo oscuro” (2: 624). Similar connections between the horse and erotic desire are evident in *Bodas de sangre* and *El público*. In the second section of the nocturne, the reference to the “hueco blanquísimo de un caballo” could be read to imply that the desire of the poetic subject is one that is pure (“blanquísimo”), based on some sort of innocence. Or, when examined within context of the poem in which the verse “Yo” stands alone, without connection to any verb or object, the image of the “hueco blanquísimo” could refer to a desire that is blank, empty, alone. Additionally, the superlative “-ísimo” gives emphasis to the intense level of emptiness.

As in many instances in this collection of poems, Lorca establishes an ethics based on an autonomous morality, on a self-imposed version of what is acceptable rather than conforming to norms established by social or religious dogma.<sup>12</sup> The poetic subject’s pure

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<sup>12</sup> Julián Marías discusses autonomous versus heteronomous morality in *Tratado de lo mejor: La moral y las formas de la vida* and affirms that, “la moral puede y debe ser autónoma o heterónoma, si el sujeto legisla por sí mismo, se da sus propias normas, o las recibe desde fuera, desde una instancia que le es ajena. [...] Pero desde adentro, desde la vivencia de esa perspectiva, se trata del descubrimiento de *la verdadera realidad de uno*

desire (or desire that is lonely) is not satisfied as the formless void of the *hueco* is left empty. Desire is lost in ash and “traspasado con axilas rotas” (1: 549). The subject is abandoned, dismembered. What is certain is that while the poetic self is left alone, desire does not terminate. Rather, the lyrical “I” is left in anguish, denied any sort of rebirth, revival, or enlightenment. The last verses indicate this despairing state as provoked by the city’s ambience:

Yo.  
Mi hueco sin ti, ciudad, sin tus muertos que comen.  
Ecuestre por mi vida definitivamente anclada.

Yo.  
*No hay siglo nuevo ni luz reciente.*  
*Sólo un caballo azul y una madrugada.* (1: 549)

As surely as the subject is left alone *without* fulfillment, it is also left *with* desire. With the final word “madrugada” one is at once reminded of the poem titled “Aurora,” in which the dawn only serves as a new beginning to more death rather than any sort of pastoral beauty and rebirth. Lorca’s nocturne effectively approaches what is at stake with desire and the (im)possibilities of articulating and fulfilling it. The *huecos* and *vacíos* of the poem are simultaneously those which cause pain, but which also provoke new spaces of hope and expression, pure voids that search for fulfillment. The text is a poem of absences, formless voids in which stable forms are lost, of colors without vibrance, and in which desire is ultimately frustrated. The poetic voice shows that the hollows are much more than just physical or material voids of the city as they, rather, provide spaces of contemplation and potential articulation of desire. Through the portrayal of a desire that is always in constant

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*mismo*, y por tanto la última justificación de esa norma, que sería la más rigurosa forma de autonomía como liberación” (29, 35).

flux, Lorca laments that the empty forms of New York, and the figures therein, inevitably fail in their search for completion.

In their own way, both Lorca and Bataille present vanguardist texts which explore spaces of void in order to examine the conflictive natures of desire and expression. Whereas Lorca uses the void to investigate the contradictory nature of desire and loss, Bataille celebrates the void as a substitution for the love object (woman), thus overcoming loneliness. In a prosaic-poetic portion of the long poem “The Roof of the Temple,” Bataille further communicates what is at stake with desire as he states that:

*At the same time, love was burning me. I was limited by words. I had exhausted myself with love in the void, as if in the presence of a desirable and undressed—but inaccessible—woman. Without even being able to express a desire.*

[...]

*As I was staring at the void in front of me, a touch—immediately violent and excessive—joined me to that void. I saw that void and saw nothing, but it, the void, was embracing me. (Collected 99)*

Here the void enters into contact with the poetic subject and becomes the agent of the embrace. While this view of the void varies from Lorca’s lament of loss in the “Nocturno,” it does continue to instruct concerning the fluid nature of desire. The poetic subject in Bataille’s text is limited by words and cannot articulate the expression that it wishes to, whereas the lyrical voice in Lorca’s poem vacillates between accepting pure hollows and lamenting voids of loss. The void, therefore, serves as a space within which to contemplate the inability to fully express desire and its constant presence.

In both cases the formless void is a space that triggers an awareness: the need for expression. It is an ambiguous drive which encompasses both the anguish of suffering and the nostalgia for the filling of its own space. As Greg Simon concludes,

En 1930 Nueva York era la ciudad más grande del mundo, la más grande de judíos, de católicos, de negros, de blancos, de marineros, de profesores, de borrachos y poetas. Estaba llena, pero no llenaba, por lo menos a un visitante. El alma andaluz de Lorca empezó a sentir nostalgia por los *huecos*. (29)

The *huecos* for Lorca (and for the poetic subjects of his poems) become some of the most important and complex motifs in his poetry, spaces of despair as they represent the desire that is unfulfilled and frustrated, but also the impetus for his artistic creation, the source of his reflection on sexual and poetic desire, as well as on the constitution of the lyrical subject. These *huecos* show a desire for physical pleasure through contact with the other, but also a realization of the pain provoked by the “amor huido.” As Lorca writes in another poem from the collection, “Navidad en el Hudson,” “Lo que importa es esto. Hueco. Mundo solo. Desembocadura” (1: 531). In Lorca’s poems, the void that is evoked during the assassination of the subject provides an area in which to reconsider both artistic creation and being-with-desire. Béa Anderson concludes that “Lorca’s physical turning of the abysmal motif shows that it is a space waiting to be filled, urging the poet to find himself and ultimately, to build his identity through textual construction. [...] [T]he void is then the necessary space for artistic activity as the poetical activity compensates for the loss” (162). Even though not as violent in tone and attitude as Bataille’s writings (Lorca’s text is more geared toward expression of absence rather than representation of present violence), both uses of the void postulate a transgression of modern notions of being and expression. The poetic subject desires something that is beyond language, below the surface of convention. For Bataille, the outcome is a renewal of the sacred in an ecstatic general economy, for Lorca, it is a continual examination of the possibilities of lyrical expression.

## Base Matter and Primal Drives

Lorca and Bataille approach and critique modernized mechanization in a like manner as much of their poetic expression and critical thinking stems from Nietzschean drives and irrational articulations of desire and matter. As in Bataille's critical writings which seek to question form and stable identities through a fall to corporeal fluidity and formless substance, Lorca's New York poetic collection is also replete with base matter as provoked by death, though conveyed with a markedly distinct tone of torment. References to sacrificial blood, scatological matter, descents into the void, and putrid corpses are numerous. A brief listing of such references could include verses such as: "Llegaban los rumores de la selva del vómito / con las mujeres vacías, con niños de cera caliente" (1: 527), "Yo, poeta sin brazos perdido / entre la multitud que vomita" (1: 528), "Ese marinero recién degollado" (1: 530), "No es sueño la vida. ¡Alerta! ¡Alerta! ¡Alerta! / Nos caemos por las escaleras para comer tierra húmeda" (1: 532), "El verdadero dolor que mantiene despiertas las cosas / es una pequeña quemadura infinita / en los ojos inocentes de otros sistemas" (1: 534), "*No hay siglo nuevo ni luz reciente*" (1: 549), "mi corazón tiene la forma de una milenaria boñiga de toro" (1: 552), "¡mi rostro, mi rostro!, ¡ay, mi comido rostro! [...] Los insectos / Los insectos solos, / crepitantes, mordientes, estremecidos, agrupados" (1: 554), "un hombre se orina en una deslumbrante paloma" (1: 561), "ha de gritar con la cabeza llena de excremento" (1: 563), and "Los muertos se descomponen bajo el reloj de las ciudades" (1: 566). Even though taken out of their poetic contexts (I will elaborate several shortly), these verses portray the death that is the result of a mechanized environment. And by representing the spilling of blood, the flow of vomit and urine, and the lowering of the human architecture, Lorca calls into question the social and artistic structures which prescribe form. Indeed Lorca searches for

a type of form, possibly a pure form through which to capture expression, but in many of the poems the poetic subject cries out in denunciation against the decadent city in which the powers of primitive drives are lost. In this sense, Lorca's use of *informe* is not a complete deconstruction of systems as Bataille's is, but is rather the lament of the void as the verbal expression of grief. In Lorca, the base matter is the by-product, the excess of the assassination from the sky.

Bataille's *Documents* writings offer a desublimated reading of surrealism which highlights the base matter of existence with the intention to shock and scandalize high form. The structures of critique vary, but the pattern of lowering exalted symbols through the low is constant. Whether the uprightness of human and city architecture, the beauty of the rose, the brightness of the sun, or the meta-physicality of *surrealism*, Bataille's thinking reacts against convention in a violent manner. Bataille attacks the Bretonian mode of thinking that leads to "a representation of revolution as a redemptive light rising above the world, above the class, the overlooking of spiritual elevation and Lamartian bliss" (*Visions* 34). As Bataille outlines in his *Documents* article titled "Base Materialism and Gnosticism," the inclination toward the base is geared to question high form: "Base matter is external and foreign to ideal human aspirations, and it refuses to allow itself to be reduced to the great ontological machines resulting from these aspirations. [...] [It is] a question of disconcerting the human spirit and idealism before something base, to the extent that one recognized the helplessness of superior principles" (*Visions* 51). While in fact Lorca does search for a superior principle rooted in the potentiality of expression, this ideal is embodied by the poetic utterance as he restores a sense of the spiritual by pointing out its lacerating absence. In this sense, Lorca's poetics of *informe* is at odds with Bataille's more nihilistic questioning and destruction of

form which negates any need for “superior principles.”<sup>13</sup> For Stoeckl, “The fall of one system is not stabilized, is not replaced with the elevation of another; the fall in Bataille’s allegory is a kind of incessant or repetitious process. Thus filth does not ‘replace’ God; there is no new system of values, no new hierarchy” (“Introduction” xiv). Seen in a poetic context of Lorca’s use of base matter, rotting corpses, and blinded subjects, the representation of the low presents the vacated spaces which provoke a consideration of living and artistic creation. These spaces represent the zone of desire for the poetic subject, a void wanting to be fulfilled. By critiquing the current modes of expression—by representing the *informe*-ing effects through base matter, horizontality, and daemonic pulsations—Lorca’s texts create spaces for new artistic and social possibilities.

Lorca’s simultaneous appropriation of formless matter and critique of the systems that demolish the poetic subject present a relevant way in which to examine much of *Poeta en Nueva York*’s use of base matter. As in the poem “Paisaje de la multitud que vomita (Anochecer de Coney Island),” the representation of vomit and saliva conveys an atmosphere dominated by disfigured forms. While Lorca seems to empathize with such fallen figures, two other motivations also run rampant through poems such as these: an analogous sense of despair in the poetic subject itself, and an attack on the environment that reduces such figures to near oblivion. The apocalyptic procession of death in the portrayal of the vomiting multitude is lead by a decadent “fat woman” who destroys everything living in her path:

La mujer gorda venía delante  
arrancando las raíces y mojando el pergamino de los tambores.  
La mujer gorda,  
que vuelve del revés los pulpos agonizantes.

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<sup>13</sup> In Bataille’s later writings including *Eroticism*, *Inner Experience*, and *The Absence of Myth*, a sense of the spiritual is much more prevalent as he seeks a restoration of myth and a Hegelian synthesis of being(s) through mystical communion and sacred eroticism.

[...]  
y dejaba por los rincones pequeñas calaveras de paloma  
y levantaba las furias de los banquetes de los siglos últimos (1: 527)

The scene is replete with the horror that proceeds from the living-dead's march through the city:

Llegaban los rumores de la selva del vómito  
con las mujeres vacías, con los niños de cera caliente,  
con árboles fermentados y camareros incansables  
que sirven platos de sal bajo las arpas de la saliva. (1: 527)

While Lorca's language is difficult to decipher (incomprehensible at times) and full of metaphors that evade logical explanation, the general sense of a poetic environment that destroys meaning is evident, thus accentuating the performative ability of *informe*. Here, the women are infertile and unproductive and the wax children (similar to those egg-white faced children in "Vuelta de paseo") are void of expression. In this poetic scenario, "Son los muertos que arañan con sus manos de tierra / las puertas de pedernal donde se pudren nublos y postres" (1: 528). The sweet things of life, the desserts and dreams of a better life, are destroyed as the dead have no strength in their "hands of clay" with which to effect the desires of their soul. Among the crowds "de los barcos y de las tabernas y de los jardines" (1: 528) the poetic self feels the effects of the vomiting multitude:

¡Ay de mí! ¡Ay de mí! ¡Ay de mí!  
Esta mirada mía fue mía, pero ya no es mía  
[...]  
Me definiendo con esta mirada  
que mana de las ondas por donde el alba no se atreve.  
Yo poeta sin brazos, perdido  
entre la multitud que vomita,  
sin caballo efusivo que corte  
los espesos musgos de mis sienas. (1: 528)

The poetic self, again as in other poems, is deformed, caught in a space in which living is nearly impossible. The subject's surroundings assassinate life and provoke the vomiting and

decadence of all in its presence. In comparison with the variations of the past and present viewpoints as seen in “1910,” the “I” here is increasingly decentered as its gaze is now longer its own. Additionally rich is the image of the moss that covers the subject’s temples. This symbol, also seen in the final verses of the poem “Ciudad sin sueño,” is, for García-Posada, a signifier of death since it covers and buries the subject (*Lorca: Interpretación* 173).<sup>14</sup> The mutilated poet without arms, incapacitated to write, can only rely on his gaze to understand the spiritless march of death.

The insistence on the flow of base matter as a means through which to represent the empty anguish of the poetic subject reacts against the structures that instigate, on a larger scale, demolition of a marginalized other. This source of critique is most forcefully evident in *Viaje a la luna*, the screen-play that Lorca wrote during his stay in the New World. With reference to the vomiting multitude and the frustration of desire that provokes death, this text outlines a similar process of *informe*-ing as the poems do; that is, it articulates a space for desire as it simultaneously critiques existing norms through the recourse to base matter. The text was written in New York as a result of Lorca and Emilio Amero’s discussions concerning Buñuel and Dalí’s *Un chien andalou* which had premiered months earlier in Paris.<sup>15</sup> The text consists of 72 numbered “scenes” or images that incorporate poetry, film,

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<sup>14</sup> Even though the moss and other plant life evoke negative connotations throughout Lorca’s New York collection, García-Posada does highlight a pair of occasions when the “musgo” attains a positive value. Such is the case in “1910” when the “estatuas y musgos” are described in concert with childhood games and discoveries. In other poems the “musgo” represents life and nature (García-Posada, *Lorca: Interpretación* 173-74).

<sup>15</sup> A major reason that it has only been considered critically in the last few decades stems from its previously unknown location. The text was first given to Emilio Amero by Lorca in 1929 as a gift. It later appeared translated into English by Bernice Duncan and included in the *New Directions* magazine in 1964. But the 1964 translation was based on a film transcription done by Amero, not on the manuscript itself. Later, in 1980, Marie Laffranque was able to produce a transcription of the text in Spanish, but it was based on copies of the original facilitated by the *New Directions* director. As such, the Laffranque version was missing several portions. The original remained with Amero until his death and was found by Christopher Maurer in 1989 in the home of

and drawings, relying heavily on an irrational surrealistic confluence of varying times and spaces. Essentially, the script presents poetic metaphors which are translated into filmatic representation in a manner which transcends expression available to poetic or written media. For Antonio Monegal, “Las imágenes de *Viaje a la luna* están cargadas. Cada una de ellas es el núcleo de una condensación de significado que, puesto en relación con las demás, constituye una pieza en un complejo entramado de metáforas” (“Introducción,” *Viaje* 16).<sup>16</sup> Rather than in prose format, the text proceeds through a series of fade ins and outs, jumping from poetic image to poetic image. The change in artistic register or genre affords Lorca additional possibilities of expression to incorporate into his art, including silence, pause, absence, sound, and motion.

The script begins with the appearance of a white bed and the constant juxtaposition of images, numbers, body parts, and insects. The text ends with a body on a morgue bed, thus suggesting through a circular structure that the bed is the space of desire and death, eros and thanatos. The conflictive nature of this desire scheme represents what Estrella de Diego calls “la imposibilidad última del encuentro” (197). This leads to a central theme in *Viaje de la luna*: the attempt (albeit frustrated) to artistically articulate desire. As “Nocturno del hueco,” Lorca’s film script maintains that desire is in flux and as a result is difficult to articulate. Desire is, further, a search which leads to emptiness and death. De Diego proposes that, “el deseo se escapa de las páginas, se desliza entre las teorías: no puede ser atrapado, expresado” (195). In this sense, Lorca’s text picks up where the poetic collection leaves off, attempting to express desire through the renovation of artistic representation. For Christina

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Amero’s wife Barbara, then living in Norman, Oklahoma. It was then acquired by the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid (Monegal, “Introducción,” *Viaje* 9-10).

<sup>16</sup> See also Frederic Amat’s notes on the film script, particularly page 190.

Karageorgou, “Si ahora concebimos el deseo como algo proteico e inestable, que se esconde del discurso, el salto genérico que da el poeta, despojándose de la lírica, es describir su propio deseo de la manera más transparente, para implorar el volumen de la imagen y perderse en él” (269). In its more overt use of ambiguous and undecipherable images, *Viaje a la luna* presents a form of expression that evades clear signification, “[una] escritura ambigua que reflej[a] la propia esencia escurridiza, cambiante, fragmentaria, compleja que configura el deseo” (de Diego 195). In essence, the form of the writing (or lack thereof) mimics the fleeting and fragmentary possibilities of articulating desire.

In Scene 50 the text shows the impossibility of satisfaction since no one in the bar is able to drink from the full glasses as they wish:

Se disuelve sobre un bar donde hay varios muchachos vestidos de esmoquin. El camarero les echa vino pero no pueden llevarlo a su boca. Los vasos se hacen pesadísimos y luchan en una angustia de sueño. Entra una muchacha casi desnuda y un arlequín y bailan en ralenti. Todos prueban a beber pero no pueden. El camarero llena sin cesar los vasos, que ya están llenos. (2: 274-75)

This scene draws a comparison between thirst and desire since there is continual frustration as the men try to lift the cups to their mouths. Even though the glasses are full no one is able to quench his thirst. Instead, the glasses are burdensome and the men all fight against the resistance with anguish. While the waiter fills the already full glasses, that is, as the flow of desire continues, those hoping to drink and be fulfilled are left empty and wanting. The allusions to desire are obvious as the object that is sought after is denied and as the search for satisfaction is truncated. The film script echoes what Lorca portrays in the New York poems concerning the problematic nature of desire and its artistic representation. The waiter continues to fill the glasses even though they are already full, thus referring to a desire that always flows, regardless of consumption or fulfillment.

The images of *Viaje a la luna* are more sustained in their attack on high form and more violent in their images of death and desire than those of the poems of the same period. Lorca uses this new medium due to the inability to fully capture expression in *Poeta en Nueva York*. According to Monegal, “En el cine lo nuevo no es el mensaje, sino el mismo medio” (“Misterio” 13). While the anguish of the poetic subjects in the poems had been dealt with up to that point through his poems and drawings, *Viaje a la luna* employs a new artistic form through which the subject attempts to capture his desired expression. Ironically, as Nigel Dennis has asserted, Lorca’s New York works are destined to fail in their intent to resolve the problem of expression since they can only approach it through language and images that are nearly incomprehensible (139). The result is the struggle for expression, the frustration of desire, and the un-remediable fall to death.

The reaction against the inability to express oneself and articulate desire is effectively embodied by the text in its incorporation of one of Lorca’s most violent sketches. Scene 38 evokes the vomiting, bleeding, and death of Saint Radegund as the text states, “Doble exposición de barrotes que pasan sobre un dibujo: *Muerte de Santa Rodegunda*” (2: 272). The saint in Lorca’s drawing is bent over a table as she is vomiting and bleeding from her mouth, bleeding from four wounds to her chest, and bleeding from her sexual organs. The abundance of base material such as blood and vomit is akin to similar images in the previously discussed poems from *Poeta en Nueva York*, such as “Paisaje de la multitud que vomita.” The drawing captures the constant despair that permeates Lorca’s New York artistic corpus and mimics, although in a more violent manner, the struggle for expression seen in the poems. The quest for expression is one of anguish since language cannot capture desire. Indeed, as Karageorgou proposes, “La palabra carece de volumen, le falta la voluptuosidad

que acompaña el deseo” (268). For this reason the visual image is so central to Lorca’s use of the cinematic register. One could read the vomit and blood in the Saint Radegund drawing as expression, that is, as that which surges forth from the interior realms of the body. The vomiting motif is repeated in Scene 55 as “Aparece una cabeza que vomita. Y en seguida toda la gente del bar que vomita” (2: 275). One gets the sense that whatever is ingested goes against one’s system as everything that should seemingly nourish will not fulfill the corporeal need and will be expelled. The culmination of desire (both aesthetic and erotic) is never met and what ensues is frustration, sickness, and violent death. This ultimate impossibility of the sexual encounter is summarized by Dennis as follows: “a fin de cuentas, lo que hemos ido siguiendo en *Viaje a la luna* es el recorrido del deseo—del deseo erótico, quizá del deseo prohibido—que conduce no a la consumación feliz sino a la frustración y a la muerte” (143). As in the poem “Niña ahogada en el pozo” from *Poeta en Nueva York*, where the water “never reaches the sea,” the fluids in *Viaje a la luna* never reach their point of desired destination either.

The poetic discourse on fallen and fragmented identity, as discussed above with reference to “Vuelta de paseo,” is replicated in the Saint Radegund drawing. The horizontal figure, fallen to this position is doubled by a similar but increasingly distorted figure. The double sets of eyes are equally hollow; one set is colored in black, one is blank. As other works of the avant-garde period, *Viaje a la luna* also portrays the violent termination of vision as in Scene 61 when a man pushes his fingers into the sockets of a woman with the intention to blind. For Monegal, “En este gesto de cegar los ojos encontramos también el eco de *Un chien andalou* y la asociación entre erotismo y conocimiento, entre el deseo y la mirada: los dedos parecen querer penetrar los ojos, en una violación metafórica”

("Introducción," *Viaje* 34). The empty or blinded eyes are significant with reference to the erotic connotations, but also with reference to artistic and ethical contexts. That is, by seeking the termination of vision—a posture similar to the termination of form through *informe*—what remains is a leftover space (a hollow void) for artistic creation and the re-creation, or re-articulation, of new ways of viewing or thinking about desire and expression. As de Diego asserts, "al cegar su mirada, la obliga a aprender unos nuevos ojos. Al rechazar él su identidad impuesta, obliga a la mujer a revisar la suya. Al privarle de identidad y transformar su cuerpo en huella, la suspende el tiempo, le da la posibilidad de empezar desde otro punto" (201). Following this assault, the woman's body turns into a white plaster bust (Scene 63). The "hombre de venas" uses the body of the other as a space for expression as he leaves "huellas de labios y huellas de manos" on it (Scene 64). Expression surges forth from the cadaver, and the word is born of death. On the other, and through the other, the "hombre de venas" inscribes and sculpts as he wishes. In essence, what much of *Poeta en Nueva York* and *Viaje a la luna* offer is a contemplation of formless spaces of the void and the manner in which desire and subjectivity can (or cannot) be expressed or asserted through art. By doing this, Lorca's work rethinks the aesthetic and ethical functions of the void and the possibilities for expression that they present.

#### Pulse: Primitivism and Desire

While the texts analyzed thus far introduce aspects of *informe* through horizontality, fragmented subjectivity, and base matter, much of the rest of the creative energy of the poems is generated through Lorca's evocation of the blacks of Harlem. The attack of stable social orders is elaborated in terms of racial marginalization and irruptions of cultural

otherness in the poems dealing with the Negro population of New York City. In poems including “Danza de la muerte” and “El rey de Harlem” Lorca explores the ethnographic essentiality of recognizing outcast cultures. While these poems continually evoke the base matter of New York as seen in the aforementioned poems and drawings, they also present the pulsations of primitive rituals and music which disrupt modern ontologies of stable identity and rational thinking. Within the context of variations of surrealism in Spain, the interest in primitivism based in sacrificial rituals and the unrelenting spilling of blood highlights important aspects of what James Clifford and Michael Richardson recognize as an “ethnographic surrealism.”<sup>17</sup> In a manner similar to the heightened sense of emotion evident in the *cante jondo* of the Andalusian gypsies, Lorca’s New York poetic texts capture the cultural vitalization of the blacks of Harlem in the throbbing beat of the Negroes’ jazz music. But the rhythmic pulsations in Lorca’s collection go beyond solely attempting to reflect the unrestricted expression of Harlem jazz (and Cuban *son*) as the rhythmic beating is also related to the poetic subject’s conception of desire.

In a lecture that reflects the poet’s experiences in New York, Lorca describes the uncanny and disquieting impact of his frequent visits to Harlem: “Lo que yo miraba y paseaba y soñaba era el gran barrio negro de Harlem, la ciudad negra más importante del mundo, donde lo lúbrico tiene un acento de inocencia que lo hace perturbador y religioso” (3: 166). Lorca’s poems, in their continual conflux of high and low forms, enact an *informe-*ing effect on civilized societies. In the instance of Harlem, Lorca’s notion of a disruptive but religious ambience elevates the low to a sacred status, thus operating a destabilizing force

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<sup>17</sup> See Richardson’s introduction to Bataille’s *The Absence of Myth* and Clifford’s article titled “On Ethnographic Surrealism.”

within the sublime, the “lúbrico” within the “religioso.” This sort of innovation of artistic and cultural form rejects the calculated and rational institution in favor of the primitive. In the poems that deal with the black culture of New York City we notice the appearance of primitive African masks, the life-blood of the blacks, and the culture that is expressed through dance and music. In “Danza de la muerte” the poetic subject focuses on the primitive black culture that invades the corruption of the capitalistic metropolis by seeking to express its own anguish and find its own space. The synecdochical mask is celebrated as a sign of an anguished and revolutionary culture:

El mascarón. ¡Mirad el mascarón!  
¡Cómo viene del África a New York!  
[...]  
El ímpetu primitivo baila con el ímpetu mecánico,  
ignorantes en su frenesí de la luz original.  
[...]  
El mascarón bailará entre columnas de sangre y de números,  
[...]  
¡Oh salvaje Norteamérica!, ¡oh impúdica!, ¡oh salvaje! (1: 524-25)

Here, the primitive energies of the dance of black culture demonstrate a destructuring operation as the irruptions of creative strength disrupt the North American systematization of numbers and calculation. Again, the poetic subject enacts a frenzied force within the environment of the rational mechanization as the mask dances amid the decadent interest in exchange and calculation.

In Bataille’s thinking, the focus on primitive masks and cultures is key as he sees in ethnography a return to heterological and mythical forces that have been repressed by society. In these *other* cultures Bataille sees surrealism as a “looking back to the ‘primitive’—not to re-create what had been lost, but to gain an insight into it, and as a means of practical knowledge to confront the ‘absence of myth’ in contemporary society” (Richardson 14).

Furthermore, much of the theoretical and artistic focus of Bataille's dissident journal *Documents* centers around ideas of primitivism. Writers including Carl Einstein and Alejo Carpentier contributed articles that explored primitive masks, Cuban *son*, jazz music, and the primitive-erotic passions exposed in primal dance. Just as the oriental focus in Lorca's *cante jondo* reflections, the exposure to the Harlem culture in *Poeta en Nueva York* furthers the affinity with primitive in art and its performative nature as it conflates the high and low, profane and sacred. In this sense, otherness is not merely a matter of race or appearance, but rather an enactment and performance of certain types of artistic forms based on improvisational surges of emotion. Einstein elaborates the force of primitive art and its operational value as follows:

Primitive art: that means the rejection of the capitalistic art tradition. European mediateness and tradition must be destroyed; [...] If we explode the ideology of capitalism, we will find beneath it the sole valuable remnant of this shattered continent, the precondition for everything new, the masses of simple people, today still burdened by suffering. It is they who are the artist. (124)

Here, the value of art is central as it occupies a space of relating to society based on expression rather than on exchange.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Picasso's cubism—an art form celebrated in the pages of *Documents*—presented a direct relationship between primitivism, the fragmentation of forms, and artistic expression. Through his use of the artistic aspects of black culture (dance and music), Lorca shows that art can have an effect on socio-cultural formation, thus pointing towards the transformative power of art.

The final verses of the poem further illustrate the coming invasion of a marginalized

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<sup>18</sup> An argument in opposition to this claim is seen in the manner in which the European avant-garde groups were, in fact, very interested in the mass consumption and the commodification of art as they were major proponents of the surging number of art galleries. Nevertheless, with reference to the interest in primitive energies and art forms in Lorca and Bataille, the focus is much more centered towards a critique of the monetary thrust of modern economies as they both find a mythical importance in *other* forms.

culture and the effect that it will have on the capitalistically-minded North American society:

Que ya la Bolsa será un pirámide de musgo.  
Que ya vendrán lianas después de los fusiles  
y muy pronto, muy pronto, muy pronto.  
¡Ay Wall Street!

El mascarón. ¡Mirad el mascarón!  
¡Cómo escupe veneno de bosque  
por la angustia imperfecta de Nueva York! (1: 527)

The poetic subject calls out against Wall Street and foresees the impact of the African culture as the Stock Exchange soon turns into a pyramid of moss, emblematic of the jungles and natural environment. The influence of the African Negroes presents primitive forces of a discriminated culture which penetrate the modern metropolitan space. The forest venom from the mask representing the influence of the black culture spits at New York and retaliates against its own unjustified position as inferior in a society due to class and race.

The focus on primitivism in the *Documents* journal and in Lorca's New York poems exhibits the importance of another culture and takes an ethical stance of inclusion towards marginalized social groups.<sup>19</sup> The primitively inclined poetic voice in "Danza de la muerte" is the lone voice which recognizes an oppressed culture (that of the Negroes) and the value of their dance. It is the poetic subject that hears them, appreciates their uniqueness, and sympathizes with their anguished dance ritual. Death is invoked here as a force allied with the lowly that will finally demand justice for these oppressed masses. Piero Menarini asks "¿Quiénes son, entonces, los que participarán en el desfile? [...] son los marginados, los que han sido privados de la esperanza, de la dignidad humana y del sentido de justicia por un mundo dominado por un orden injusto" (154). In "Danza de la muerte" Lorca invokes

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<sup>19</sup> For more on the importance of ethnography in *Documents* see Conor Joyce's study *Carl Einstein in Documents*.

primitive African cultures in order to reply to the injustices of a contemporary social scenario. In this sense, the primitive surges as a response to modern categories and constrictions and seeks to render them formless by creating (or at least re-membering and re-presenting) modes of artistic expression based on cultural difference.

“El rey de Harlem” amplifies the recourse to the primitive as elements of *informe* are evidenced in the rampant and sacrificial dispersal of blood—“Sangre que busca por mil caminos muertas enharinadas y ceniza de nardos / cielos yertos, en declive” (1: 520)—and in the beating pulsations and improvised irruptions of jazz music. Here, the poetic subject notices the anguish of the blacks while their king barbarically enucleates crocodiles and sings with the black masses:

Con una cuchara de palo  
le arrancaba los ojos a los cocodrilos  
y golpeaba el trasero de los monos.  
Con una cuchara de palo.  
[...]  
Es preciso cruzar los puentes  
y llegar al rumor negro  
para que el perfume de pulmón  
nos golpee las sienes con su vestido  
[...]  
para que el rey de Harlem cante con su muchedumbre,  
[...]  
¡Ay, Harlem, disfrazada!  
¡Ay, Harlem, amenazada por un gentío de trajes sin cabeza!  
Me llega tu rumor,  
me llega tu rumor atravesando troncos y ascensores,  
a través de láminas grises,  
donde flotan sus automóviles cubiertos de dientes,  
a través de los caballos muertos y los crímenes diminutos. (1: 518-22)

While the poem initially expounds upon the degraded situation of the blacks in New York, it later proceeds to demonstrate the violence of the sacrificial flowing of blood, and finally resorts—as many of the poems in the collection—to a state of despair. The pulsation of jazz

music has a de-sublimating effect on order, thus undermining capitalistic intentions. As Krauss asserts, “the beat surges upward, from low to high, [...] Its importance within the context of the *formless* is its vector, which is to say its reaching upward toward the sublimated condition of form in order to undo that order, and to de-sublimate that vision through the shock effect of the beat” (*Formless* 165). The pulsating force of jazz surges from Harlem and expresses the creative energy of a primitive and oppressed culture. As Clifford recognizes in his ethnographic reading of Bataillean surrealism, “A surrealistic practice, on the other hand, attacks the familiar, provoking the irruption of otherness—the unexpected.” (562). In *Poeta en Nueva York* this irruption of otherness is evidenced in the blacks’ jazz and dances of death. Lorca’s interest in the other is not merely based on race, color, or social standing. Rather, otherness is situated and recognized in artistic forms such as music and dance. These bursts of creative artistic energy challenge the traditional conceptions of art and social structure as they seek expression in voices of difference. In New York, as in Spain, Lorca identifies with the art of marginalized others of his surroundings and, through the poetic performance, denounces the systems that oppress them.

For Gregory Stallings, “Jazz, like sexuality, possesses an *anti-Platonic* quality: it wounds previously stable identities, causing a fall toward formlessness” (207). Here the Nietzschean and Dionysian roots of both Lorca and Bataille’s thinking meld as the pulsations signal not only musical beats and creative energy, but also the throbbing nature of erotic desire. The representation of desire through the image of the pulse is evident in *Poeta en Nueva York*. In the poem “Poema doble del Lago Eden” the poetic subject is wounded and divided in its search for the love object. It exclaims, “¡Ay, voz antigua de mi amor! / ¡Ay, voz de mi verdad! / Ay, voz de mi abierto costado.” (1: 537). The subject of the poem is at

once the subject's "voz antigua" and also the voice of "mi verdad." The current moment of unfulfilled desire leads to the wounding of the poetic self as it laments, "yo no soy un hombre, ni un poeta, ni una hoja, / pero sí un pulso herido que ronda las cosas del otro lado" (1: 538). Rather than recognizing the self as man, poet, or nature it proclaims itself to be merely a pulse, thus evoking images of the heart, heartbeat, blood, emotion, and desire, the desire for "my love" and "my truth" "para decir mi verdad de hombre de sangre" (1: 538). The struggle to express "my truth" and "my love" is a constant tension in Lorca's work from this period. As in *Poeta en Nueva York*, works such as *Viaje a la luna*, *Así que pasen cinco años*, and *El público* are all similarly insistent on a personal and unique version of love and truth. The image of the pulse is also evident in the "Nocturno" examined above as the poetic voice, while declaring that all is lost, evokes the love pulse as the only thing that matters: "Basta tocar el pulso de nuestro amor presente / para que broten flores sobre otro niños" (1: 548).

Dionysian and disruptive pulsations that unsettle norms are constant throughout *Poeta en Nueva York*. It is telling that the final poem of the collection Lorca posits musical pulsations in concert with the pulse of erotic desire. The blood pumping through the heart, along with the musical rhythms of Cuban *son* offer a space of freedom and expression nearly unfelt during the New York stay. Lorca states in a letter to his family that he was enchanted by the paradise-like Caribbean island and that "El ritmo de la ciudad es acariciador, suave, sensualísimo (3: 1164). The poem serves as a stark contrast to the materialism of Wall Street since, as Sarah Wright affirms, "the poem becomes an assertion of an ethnic, colour related identity developed in opposition to the pragmatic character of U. S. Hegemony [and thus explores the] possibility of opening a space for synthesis" (136). As in previous parts of

*Poeta en Nueva York* and earlier collections which recognize the heritage of marginalized cultures like gypsies and blacks, Lorca's *son* emphasizes the African presence in Cuba. Wright continues, "Lorca sees Cuba as throbbing with musicality, a pulsating cathedral of sounds, with palm trees which sing from the rooftops [...] Lorca's imaginary Cuba is an harmonious riot of ecstatic musicality [...] a landscape of desire" (136). A rhythmic structure is captured in "Son de negros en Cuba" which repeats the verses "Iré a Santiago" 18 times. For the poetic voice, this place of desire to which it will travel is a place characterized by "los techos de palmera" which sing of "cintura[s] caliente[s]," "Brisa y alcohol," and "Calor blanco" (1: 572-73). These images are coupled with the lively senses of freshness and sweetness as exhibited in the poem's last verses: "¡Oh bovino frescor de cañavera! / ¡Oh Cuba! ¡Oh curva de suspiro y barro! / Iré a Santiago" (1: 573). It has been well documented that Lorca's stay in Cuba was refreshing both personally and artistically and led to the creation and flourishing of important works within the vanguardist canon, works which further push the envelope with reference to *informe*-ing artistic conventions and articulating desire. It is not coincidence that in Cuba—on an island on the margin of U. S. culture, a space of celebration of African *son*—Lorca would produce his most thematically and structurally liberated and transgressive works, *El público* and *Así que pasen cinco años*, works which attack form on both spatial and temporal levels, opening new spaces concerning artistic and socio-cultural norms.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE DESTRUCTION OF THE THEATER AND THE CLOSURE OF REPRESENTATION: SOVEREIGN SUBJECTS IN LORCA'S *RETABLILLO* AND *EL PÚBLICO*

When Lorca arrived on the Cuban island in the Spring of 1930, the more lively but relaxed atmosphere was a welcome change. There he produced some of his most intimate and experimental works. One notices, for example, a markedly more optimistic tone when considering the five letters that Lorca wrote from what he called a Caribbean paradise. The change in disposition noted in his letters is reflected in his works of this period in their increasingly more liberated style, as well as in their use of less restricted thematic content and artistic forms. Texts including *El público*, and *Así que pasen cinco años*—which according to some accounts were at least partially outlined while in New York City—come to fruition in the liberating and sensual Cuban ambience. Lorca's change in tone—from pure anguish in New York to a more liberated expression in Cuba—is also exposed in a change of artistic genre. Whereas much of the production in New York was poetry, the impulse in Cuba and during the years that follow in Spain is increasingly centered on writing drama.<sup>1</sup>

In the plays developed in part in Cuba, Lorca grapples further with themes of desire and expression as in the New York poems, but insists with a more sustained effort on the transgression of official discourse with reference to both aesthetics and morality. The contention in this chapter is that Lorca's texts of this period, specifically the *Retablillo de*

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, Lorca's interest in renovating Spanish theater provided the impetus for forming *La Barraca*, a government sponsored theatrical production group comprised largely of university students. Funded by the Republic, *La Barraca* traveled throughout Spain from 1932-1936, taking its shows to rural villages in order to educate the people concerning the simplicity and modernity of Spanish classical theater.

*don Cristóbal* and *El público*, search for the articulation of an unmasked and human truth, the most intimate of personal expressions which are presented through recourse to grotesque and subversive subjects and which radically redefine moral and aesthetic norms. These texts posit a dramatic subject beyond the limitations of conventional morality and a dramatic text based on the questioning of bourgeois expectations of representation—both facets which elicit a serious contemplation on the part of the audience through a theater based on participation. While much of the criticism on plays such as *El público* focuses on Bretonian surrealism, Freudian subconsciousness, expressionism, homosexual desire, love, and death,<sup>2</sup> the examination here will center specifically on theatrical frames of representation and their break-down. Additionally, I will examine the subversion of moral norms through the establishment of a theatrical subject who expresses a highly contextualized and intimate “truth” which is unrestricted by social censoring or limitations. The consideration of “truth,” which is alluded to in Lorca as “my truth,” the “truth of the masks,” and “the truth of the tombs,” functions not only to signal a reflection on the subject’s version of truth (ie. its authentic and unmasked subjectivity<sup>3</sup>), but also tropologically as an individual and particular space for expression, living, and being without restrictions.

The theater of Lorca’s “surrealist” period (1929-1931) questions theatrical ideals with reference to both temporal and spatial frames, and challenges the conventions of the extant

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<sup>2</sup> Major studies on *El público* and others of Lorca’s plays include Rafael Martínez Nadal’s *El público: Amor y muerte en la obra de Federico García Lorca*, Julio Huélamo Kosma’s *El teatro imposible de García Lorca: Estudio sobre El público*, Gwynne Edwards’s *Lorca: The Theatre Beneath the Sand* and several important essays but María Clementa Millán, Andrew Anderson, and Carlos Jerez Ferrán. Lorca’s *Retablillo* (1930), what some call a minor play, does not enjoy extensive critical treatment.

<sup>3</sup> Authenticity, a problematic term, will be used to refer to being true to oneself, to the expression of subjectivity without regard for societal norms or opinions. I will elaborate on the connections between authenticity, poetry, and society in the following pages, drawing on ideas from, among others, Lionel Trilling’s *Sincerity and Authenticity*.

theater of the period. In essence, Lorca pulls apart theatrical representation as mimesis and mere entertainment by requiring a more engaged public. In this sense, the theater is not just imitative of reality, but rather a medium that requires active and engaged participation (at least intellectually and emotionally). While some of Lorca's earlier plays, most notably *Amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín* and *La zapatera prodigiosa*, also sought similar engagement from the audience, in the works of 1929-1931 the thrust of a participative imperative are explicit and central aspects of the drama. In his departure from forms of realist mimetic representation of the nineteenth century, Lorca's drama is much more closely aligned with (and in many instances influenced by) some of the most innovative theorists and playwrights of the early twentieth century: Valle-Inclán, Pirandello, Grau, Cocteau, and Artaud, all of which sought rupture with previous aesthetic norms concerning the theater.<sup>4</sup> The theatrical innovations of the avant-garde period are not geared toward a relaxed and passive imitation of life in its re-presentation, but rather interested in a crossing-over into actual lived experience; the total spectacle *is* life and not just an imitation of it. By examining the theatrical structures and discourse in plays including the *Retablillo* and *El público*, one readily discovers the undermining effect of Lorca's vanguardist theater. The discourses embedded in these texts destructure (render *informe*) theatrical patterns of representation. Not only does the type of theater with which Lorca experiments challenge representation (in fact it ends representation as such, according to Derrida's reading of vanguardist theater) by breaking down convention and repositing modes of a total theatrical experience, but in doing so it posits an innovative dramatic-lyrical subject based on fully liberated expression. This

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<sup>4</sup> For more on the historiographical and artistic context of Lorca's plays of this period, see María Clementa Millán's "Introducción" to *El público*, especially pages 15-26.

dramatic subject (*personaje* or character) that Lorca's plays make manifest undermines masked individuality and strives for an authentic presentation of self, unfettered by limitations of time, space, and expression of desire. This brand of character in Bataillean terms is deemed sovereign, a self-constituting desiring subject beyond the control of hierarchical relationships. As such, the theatrical genre provides a unique medium through which Lorca explores masked versus unmasked subjectivities and fiction versus reality in aesthetic re-presentation.

### A Lorquian Theory of Drama

Lorca's theories concerning the theater illuminate our understanding about the socio-cultural importance of both the aesthetic and thematic nature of his experimental work. In comparison with the earlier period, relatively few poems were written during these later years. However, Lorca does not completely abandon poetic expression. Among his late poetry are the poems from *Diván del Tamarit*, "Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías," *Seis poemas galegos*, and the *Sonetos del amor oscuro*. But these are relatively sparse when considering the ample poetic production of his earlier years up until *Poeta en Nueva York*, which included: *Libro de poemas*, *Canciones*, *Suites*, *Poema del cante jondo*, and *Romancero gitano*.<sup>5</sup> Yet in reality, theater for Lorca is always inseparable from his poetic vision since his theater is always informed by poetic figures and suggestive metaphors. The poet affirms: "¿Que por qué haré lo que voy a hacer? Digan lo que digan, si algo ocurre en mi sombrero, si se me ocurre soltar algo, pongamos una frase, una metáfora que no viene al caso, ¿qué importa? Eso está dentro de lo que las masas pueden atrapar sin explicárselo, con

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<sup>5</sup> For a comprehensive study of the later poems see Andrew A. Anderson's *Lorca Late Poetry: A Critical Study*.

sólo sentirlo; está en la poesía, en la poesía de teatro para la gente, que yo quiero hacer. Poesía de teatro” (3: 475).<sup>6</sup> At the heart of this aesthetic vision (which flourishes in Cuba) is the profound preoccupation with a human sensibility, a denuded and intimate portrait of the unmasked subject, a lyrical self that is at the core of his theater. And it is precisely the dramatic genre—always informed by a poetic sensibility—which best enables the poet to question representative frames and intimate subjectivities:

Tengo un concepto del teatro en cierta forma personal y resistente. El teatro es la poesía que se levanta del libro y se hace humana. Y al hacerse, habla y grita, llora y se desespera. El teatro necesita que los personajes que aparezcan en la escena lleven un traje de poesía y al mismo tiempo que se les vean los huesos, la sangre. Han de ser tan humanos, tan horrorosamente trágicos y ligados a la vida y al día con una fuerza tal, que muestren sus traiciones, que se aprecien sus olores y que salga a los labios toda la valentía de sus palabras llenas de amor o de ascos. (3: 630)<sup>7</sup>

Here, the performative nature of the theater offers a space of convergence between two distinct poles, poetry and life. The theater against which Lorca is reacting is a theater that involves the unengaged and merely entertained spectator, and as such, a lack of human concerns. Lorca’s dramatic theory clearly entails a more intimate and committed stance toward the relationship between art and life. The poet is interested in accessing the interior and unmasked aspects of human reality, and this is denoted in the previous declaration by the exposition of the bones and blood of the dramatic subjects. Generically speaking, the drama’s structure (the stage, the customs and masks, and the performativity) offers Lorca the medium

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<sup>6</sup> Lorca’s ample conferences, interviews, and declarations reveal much concerning the poet’s aesthetic theories and goals. While I will cite page numbers parenthetically, the titles and dates of such declarations will be given in footnotes. The majority of Lorca’s comments cited in the present chapter are from 1932-1936. The source of this citation is “Mientras se abre la zapatería, un párrafo de charla con Federico García Lorca,” *Crítica*, December 1, 1933 (3: 474-75).

<sup>7</sup> “Conversaciones literarias: Al habla con Federico García Lorca,” an interview with Felipe Morales, April 7, 1936 (3: 628-33).

through which to consider the relationships between life and art, truth and illusion. At the same time, these dramatic structures are radically subject to scrutiny. While much of the theatrical works of the nineteenth century are intently concerned with mimesis and comfortable realist representation, Lorca's drama centers on intellectual interaction with the sensibilities of the audience, clearly pushing the limits of representation, breaking down borders that regulate expression and propriety.

Lorca's new theater, structurally and thematically innovative, seeks not only to disrupt artistic norms of the previous century, but also to unsettle and educate a complacent audience. Themes including homosexuality, violence, and anguish come to center-stage in these works partially conceived in New York and Cuba. Not only does the audience which Lorca criticizes arrive late and only seek entertainment (not taking the work of art seriously), but they also resist seeking transcendent truths available in the represented work. Lorca comments on this complacency thus:

Aquí, lo grave es que las gentes que van al teatro no quieren que se les haga pensar sobre ningún tema moral. Además, van al teatro como a disgusto. Llegan tarde, se van antes que termine la obra, entran y salen sin respecto alguno. El teatro tiene que ganar, porque la ha perdido, autoridad. Los autores han dejado que el público se les suba a las barbas a fuerza de hacerle cosquillas. No, hace falta recobrar la autoridad perdida y poner dignidad artística en los camerinos. Hoy sólo algunos autores viejos tienen esta autoridad. (3: 545)<sup>8</sup>

In this sense, Lorca sees the renovated theater as a way to restore authenticity and authority to the Spanish stage. Furthermore, in a turn toward the didactic aspects of classical texts such as Plato's *The Republic* and Aristotle's *Poetics*, he sees the theater as a way to educate the audience and simultaneously renovate an artistic sensibility:

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<sup>8</sup> "Los artistas en el ambiente de nuestro tiempo," an interview with Alardo Prats, December 15, 1934 (3: 541-46).

El teatro es uno de los más expresivos y útiles instrumentos para la educación de un país y el barómetro que marca su grandeza o su descenso. Un teatro sensible y bien orientado en todas sus ramas, desde la tragedia al vodevil, puede cambiar en pocos años la sensibilidad de un pueblo; y un teatro destrozado, donde las pezuñas sustituyen a las alas, puede achabacinar y adormecer a una nación entera. El teatro es una escuela de llanto y de risa y una tribuna libre donde los hombres pueden poner en evidencia morales viejas o equivocadas y explicar con ejemplos vivos normas eternas del corazón y el sentimiento del hombre. (3: 255)<sup>9</sup>

As the work of art seeks to change the aesthetic disposition of the audience in its presentation of moral and social issues, it performs and embodies a transformative artistic power. That is, in its awareness and interest in social aspects—including the expression of intimate themes both moral and sexual in nature—the spectator of the work of art is continually challenged into thinking about the current reality and its problems or limitations. In its intent to “cambiar en pocos años la sensibilidad de un pueblo” Lorca’s vanguardist work of art succinctly blends the interests of both the personal and intimate aspects of the subject with a social engagement more universal in nature. As Lorca comments in an interview with Ricardo G. Luengo, “Hoy no interesan más que dos clases de problemas: el social y el sexual. La obra que no siga una de esas direcciones está condenada al fracaso, aunque sea muy buena. Yo hago lo sexual que me atrae más” (3: 612).<sup>10</sup> Clearly the audience to these types of works is urged to contemplate and confront the issues that are represented before them, pulling them out of merely seeking mindless diversion.

In essence, what Lorca’s work demands is an intimate and intellectual participation. Whereas nineteenth-century theater in Spain emphasized the mimetic representation of urban and rural realities, Lorca’s plays push the limits as they urge the spectator to consider more

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<sup>9</sup> “Charla sobre teatro,” February 2, 1935 (3: 254-57).

<sup>10</sup> “Conversación con Federico García Lorca,” November 15, 1935 (3: 611-16).

pressing matters, namely the stripped-down passions, anguish, and truths of the desiring subject. This theater reacts directly against nineteenth-century drama including “la ‘ilusión de realidad’ de las falsamente llamadas obras realistas” (Millán, “Introducción,” *El público* 15). Theoretically akin to playwrights such as Artaud, Brecht, Cocteau, and Pirandello, Lorca resists the meaninglessness of the theater of the period which seeks to present familiar and comfortable situations with which the audience can easily identify. In stark contrast to the highly commercial theatrical productions of authors including Jacinto Benevente and the Álvarez Quintero brothers, Lorca’s plays push the audience:

El teatro se debe imponer al público y no el público al teatro. Para eso, autores y actores deben revestirse, a costa de sangre, de gran autoridad, porque el público de teatro es como los niños en las escuelas: adoro al maestro grave y austero que exige y hace justicia, y llena de crueles agujas las sillas donde se sientan los maestros tímidos y adulones, que ni enseñan ni dejan enseñar. (3: 256)<sup>11</sup>

This innovation in theater focuses on human existence in its most bare and authentic state as it rejects pure dialogue through disorienting images of cruelty. The insistence on reclaiming the authority of the authors and actors at the cost of blood signals anew the importance of individuality in dramatic art. What Lorca’s theater presents at its core is a reflection on the intimate and inner workings of the subject, on *one’s own truth*. The poet affirms the interest in an intimate theater as he states, “El teatro, no obstante, también tiene una misión en este sentido. Y es la de presentar y resolver problemas individuales, íntimos” (3: 600).<sup>12</sup> As in the poems of *Poeta en Nueva York*, the subjects of these plays also seek to express their desires and intimate inclinations. The intense struggle with masked and unmasked subjectivities is anticipated by the contemplation of “my truth” as exposed in the

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<sup>11</sup> “Charla sobre teatro,” February 2, 1935 (3: 254-57).

<sup>12</sup> “Federico García Lorca habla para los obreros catalanes,” *L’Hora*, September 27, 1935 (3: 596-601).

New York poem “Poema doble del lago Eden Mills”:

Quiero llorar diciendo mi nombre,  
rosa, niño y abeto, a la orilla de este lago,  
para decir *mi verdad* de hombre de sangre  
matando en mí la burla y la sugestión del vocablo.

No, no. Yo no pregunto, yo deseo.  
Voz mía libertada que me lames las manos.  
En el laberinto de biombos es mi desnudo el que recibe  
la luna de castigo y el reloj encenizado. (1: 538, my emphasis)

Not only does the poetic self expose the aspects most central to its subjectivity in anguished fashion (my name, truth, blood, and desire), but it also affirms a necessity to liberally express desire through its utterance and writing. Even though these intimate realms of the self may be the source of lament, they are nonetheless part of the subject’s truth, and for this reason must be expressed. The poetic self here negotiates the labyrinth of folding screens as in the theater. The *biombo* serves as a space of revelation of masked and unmasked characters, a space of transformation and of revealing “my truth.” And the interest in one’s own truth is a continued focal point in Lorca’s later works, obtaining particular importance in the *Sonetos del amor oscuro*. In a poem from that collection, “El poeta dice la verdad,” for example, the lyrical subject exposes its most intimate wish—its truth as a desiring and anguishing subject: “Quiero llorar mi pena / [...] / y convertir mi llanto y mis sudores / en eterno montón de duro trigo” (1: 629). The insistence on the intimate nature of the desiring subject recognizes the pain that is inextricably associated with its “truth.”

Speaking later of the impossible plays that resist representation such as *Así que pasen cinco años* and *El público*, Lorca restates the intimate nature of his vanguardist theater: “Mis primeras comedias son irrepresentables. [...] En estas comedias imposibles está mi *verdadero* propósito. Pero para demostrar una personalidad y tener derecho al respeto he dado otras

cosas” (3: 631, my emphasis).<sup>13</sup> Lorca’s dramatic texts conceived between 1929 and 1931, including also the *Retablillo de don Cristóbal*, further portray the personal circumstances of the poetic subject as they establish an interest in “my truth,” the anguished truth of the poetic subject, the unmasked truth of flesh and blood, the truth of the sepulchers, and the truth of desire. Lorca’s “verdadero propósito” for the theater, as detailed here with reference to his declarations and interviews, is centered on an expression which pushes limits structurally and thematically in order to educate the audience through critique and shock, and to present the most intimate and unmasked truths through sovereign subjectivity.

### The Methectic Stage

The notion of a theater that requires direct participation and contact with the audience is not new, although this type of engagement is absent from much of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theater against which Lorca is reacting. The importance of participation in artistic expression has been examined by anthropological and ethnographical scholars, for example, with reference to primitive religious and ritualistic ceremonies. While different in nature and motivation from the necessity for participation in Lorca’s theater, the consideration of participatory engagement does provide an additional context through which to examine Lorca’s work and accentuates the importance that Lorca’s plays invest in the actor/audience relationship.

The Dutch cultural historian and intellectual Johan Huizinga speaks of the participation involved in ceremonial religious acts and rituals. The performativity of the

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<sup>13</sup> “Conversaciones literarias: Al habla con Federico García Lorca,” an interview with Felipe Morales, April 7, 1936 (3: 628-33).

nearly theatrical manifestation that Huizinga examines requires contact with the participants, often including vows and sacraments, the effects of which extend beyond the ritualistic act or “performance.”<sup>14</sup> For Huizinga, whose interest is in game playing and its roots in ancient and tribal cultural development, the structure of rituals with external consequences is elaborated in terms of its *methectic* nature. The *methectic* game is one in which “with the end of the play its effect is not lost; rather it continues to shed its radiance on the ordinary world outside” (14).<sup>15</sup> It is akin to “the sacred performances in archaic culture [where] we find that there is more of a mental element ‘at play’ [...] the sacred performance is more than an actualization in appearance only [...] it is also more than a symbolic actualization” (14). This aspect of the ritual or play obtains effects outside of its staging, and as such, is more a type of presentation or enactment than a representation. Huizinga continues,

The word “represents,” however, does not cover the exact meaning of the act, at least not its looser, modern connotation; for here “representation” is really *identification*, the mystic repetition or *re-presentation* of the event. The rite produces the effect which is then not so much *shown figuratively* as *actually reproduced* in the action. The function of the rite, therefore, is far from being imitative; it causes the worshipers to participate in the sacred happening itself. As the Greeks would say, “it is *methectic* rather than *mimetic*.” (15)

The problem with representation, then, is that “Representation means display, and this may simply consist in the exhibition of something naturally given, before an audience” (Huizinga 13). The enactment of life, its manifestation and production (and not mere imitation) is directly contrasted to the mimetic games in which at the end of the activity, “The game is over. The umpire’s whistle breaks the spell and sets ‘real’ life going again” (Huizinga 11).

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<sup>14</sup> For several studies that examine mythical, sacrificial, primitive, and totemistic relations in Lorca’s plays see the writings of Robert Lima.

<sup>15</sup> The word “play” in relation to Huizinga refers to both the activity of diversion and also the theatrical production.

The mimetic type of play, according to Huizinga, is similar to when a “child is *making an image* of something different, something more beautiful, or more sublime, or more dangerous than what he usually *is*” (13-14). The effects attained outside of the game are evident in the *methectic* play as the production of life does not provide mere entertainment, but is, rather, geared toward the expression of one’s truth.

Huizinga also examines the uses of masks in play-culture, thereby providing an additional point of view concerning the importance of reality versus appearance, a central focus in Lorca’s late plays. Anthropologically inclined, Huizinga discusses the use of masks in primitive and modern religious rituals and in children’s games. Within a religious festival, “the rites may be bloody, the probations of the young men awaiting initiation may be cruel, the masks may be terrifying” (21). These aspects not only entail participation, but also a relevance exterior to the ritual since mimesis is superseded in favor of *methexis*. Whatever the situation, whether religious, totemistic, or dramatic, the effects of specific types of play can be *methectic*. In the culture of the savage, for example,

We express the relationship between him and the animal he “identifies” himself with, as a “being” for him but a “playing” for us. He has taken on the “essence” of the kangaroo, says the savage; he is playing the kangaroo, say we. The savage, however, knows nothing of the conceptual distinctions between “being” and “playing”; he knows nothing of “identity,” “image,” or “symbol.” [...] In play as we conceive it the distinction between belief and make-believe breaks down. (Huizinga 25)

The distinction between what is part of the theater and the effect that this has outside the dramatic events is blurred. Communication between maker and beholder is confused as the mimetic representation is broken down and replaced by a *methectic* manifestation. It is this collapse between “being” and “acting” that Lorca’s plays demonstrate. The intimate and direct manifestation of “my truth” denies covering up interior aspects of subjectivity and in

this sense is transgressive as it disrupts the comfortable entertainment sought by the then contemporary audience. Rather, from the *methectic* play emerges an interest in the “huesos” and “sangre” of the lyrical self in Lorca’s works.

Huizinga’s reflections draw on the thinking of Jane Ellen Harrison, who investigates the performative and participatory nature of religious ceremonies in ancient communities. For Harrison, “The ceremonies are however still intensely sympathetic and cooperative; they are, [...] rather *methectic* than *mimetic*, the expression, the utterance, of a common nature participated in, rather than the imitation of alien characteristics. The Emu man still feels he *is* an Emu; the feathers he puts on, the gait he emulates, are his own, not another’s” (125). Harrison’s ideas are amplified by ethnographers Barbara Bolt and Paul Carter in their studies on aboriginal practices in Australia. What is constant in the examinations of these thinkers is the engagement that certain activities demand from the participants and spectators. In children’s play, ancient Greek theatrical practices, or aboriginal tribal religious rituals, (or in the dramatic space in Lorca’s case, to be discussed shortly), there is evident a movement away from representation and toward “presentation,” or the manifestation and enactment of reality.

The idea that an action can pass from “representation” to “presentation” is elaborated in terms of contemporary performativity (as described by Butler, for example). That is, the action is not simply a representation of something else, but it in fact becomes, produces, or enables something. For Paul Carter, any notion of “philosophical methexis corresponds to [the] term ‘performance’: to perform—to echo Husserl’s definition of intentionality—is always to perform something. There is never an actor on one side, something to be acted upon on the other; the two come into being through each other” (83). With reference to the

indigenous Aranda tribes of Australia—their rituals and the performative (and productive) nature of their ceremonies—Barbara Bolt asserts that “*methexis* is a transformative principle that dissolves the nexus of vision, light, and representation. It is not concerned with representation and meaning, but with the ‘performative presentations,’ ‘showings,’ and ‘manifestations’ of everyday life” (205). Structurally, *methectic* ceremonies and game-playing are similar to the engagement demanded by Lorca’s stage. The community-type relationship described by these thinkers is artistically prevalent in Lorca’s drama. The engagement and participation of *methexis* is in-line with what Lorca seeks in his theater—even though it is done through shock and critique—as the audience comes to terms with “my” and “their own” truth. The performativity of the *methectic* manifestation breaks with representation as it involves the audience in its very production. Bolt concludes: “*Methexis* shifts the terms in the economy of representation: knowledge production is embodied and locally situated and *methexis* has real effects in bodies and on the ground. [...] [R]esistance and subversion ha[ve] turned mimesis back into *methexis*, and imitation into participation, so that art production is not just a sign nor just a cultural commodity” (212). In its closure of representation and focus on participation which directly affects the audience, Lorca’s drama resists being a simple variation of entertainment and culminates in an intimate discourse on moral and aesthetic attitudes, thus pertaining to the “llores,” “gritos,” and all others concerns “tan humanos, tan horrorosamente trágicos y ligados a la vida” (Lorca 3: 360).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Conversaciones literarias: Al habla con Federico García Lorca,” an interview with Felipe Morales, April 7, 1936 (3: 628-33).

## The Closure of Representation

In the context of more contemporary theater, Lorca's stage amplifies the precepts of *methectic* presentation as he elicits participation and the breakdown of representation. In this sense, Lorca's work has affinities with what radical thinkers such as Antonin Artaud deem the "theater of cruelty," a theatrical presentation that unsettles the audience as the effects of the total spectacle branch beyond the stage and into the audience. For Artaud, one of the dissident surrealists excommunicated from the Bretonian school, the theater of cruelty asserts "the affirmation of a terrible, and moreover, implacable necessity [and] an appetite for life" (102). But what is the implacable necessity to which Artaud refers? In his essay on Artaud, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation," Derrida expounds upon this necessity and the Artaudian concept of cruelty in the following manner: "Is not the most naive form of representation *mimesis*? Like Nietzsche—and the affinities do not end there—Artaud wants to have done with the imitative concept of art, with the Aristotelian aesthetics in which the metaphysics of Western art comes into its own" (*Writing* 234). Artaud critiques modern theater by saying that "the theater has been lost," and proposes that "we need above all a theater that wakes up: nerves and heart" (84). Artaud challenges the realist theater, false in its pretenses, because he deems it too flowery, fake, and virtuous. He opposes those ideals by saying that "everything that acts is a cruelty. It is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that the theater must be built" (85).

The purpose of the theater of cruelty, and one of the definitions of it, lies in that "theatrical art should be the primordial and privileged site of the destruction of imitation" (Derrida, *Writing* 234). This helps in explaining that the necessity to which Artaud refers stems from fragmenting mimetic representation in the arts. Theater must also renovate

expression since for Artaud speech, script, language, and text should not govern the theater, but should be secondary concerns to the “extreme action, pushed beyond all limits” (85). There is no longer a privilege given to rational signification systems as the work of art exhibits “a break with the usual sense of language, to crack the armature once and for all, to get the iron collar off its neck” (Artaud 101). The breakdown of representation and the lack of texts and scripts on the stage help establish this variation of theater, grounded in a relentless barrage of cruel images and motives. The *methectic* nature of Lorca’s theater, pushed to the limits of cruelty through performativity, achieves the breakdown of representation as promoted by Artaud and Derrida: this is a theater nearly completely based on action and life, the complete spectacle. Indeed in Lorca’s estimation, the seats in the theater must be full of “cruelles agujas” (3: 256) as the aesthetic object becomes a complete spectacle in the overcoming of its nature as mere artifice and by crossing over into life, expression, and the performance of “my truth.” As Artaud affirms, “I have said ‘cruelty’ as I might have said ‘life’” (114), thus renovating the concept of what constitutes reality by making theater and life analogous and further by amplifying the importance for the effects of theater to extend beyond the stage.

Derrida exposes the mission of Artaud’s theater of cruelty by saying that it “announces the limit of representation [...] [and that] the theater of cruelty is not a *representation*. It is life itself” (*Writing* 234). Artaud explains by saying that “the Theater of Cruelty has been created in order to restore to the theater a passionate and convulsive conception of life, and it is in this sense of violent rigor and extreme condensation of scenic elements that the cruelty on which it is based must be understood” (122). For Derrida, “the stage, certainly, will no longer represent [...] the stage will no longer operate as the repetition

of a present, will no longer re-present a present that would exist elsewhere and prior to it” (*Writing* 237). As Artaud promotes, the idea of a theater of cruelty is necessary because it “makes out of theater a believable reality,” and includes in it “crime, love, war or madness [...] hence this appeal to cruelty and terror” (85-6).

The Artaudian theater favors an interrogation of conventions and representation as it proves to be a *methectic* experience for all involved. Not only does this theater shock and awaken the participants to understand a new aesthetic, but it also challenges and breaks down the very premises of representation. This theater creates an effect outside the production (at least an intellectual and artistic sensibility) as the result of the “extreme action, pushed beyond all limits” on the stage. The closure of representation in the theater of cruelty is asserted as a theater that puts death to the theater, that is, the death of classical mimetic representation in favor of the lived spectacle that erases boundaries between the actor and the public, since “the old duality between author and director will be dissolved, replaced by a sort of unique Creator upon whom will devolve the double responsibility of the spectacle and the plot” (Artaud 94). Representation is closed, fragmented, and stopped in affirmation of a new, primordial theater based on cruelty, violence, and the destruction of language.

The claim here is that much of the innovation in Lorca consists in his reliance on this sort of *methexis*, participation by and inclusion of the audience. It is certain that the audience constitutes the object of his attack, but this is in large part in order to educate them and urge them to think about relevant social and moral issues previously ignored. According to Christopher Soufas, Lorca’s and Artaud’s approaches to theater reform in early twentieth-century Europe are analogous in many ways. Soufas claims that,

Artaud conceives the performance as incessant interruption and irritation. The desire to liberate theater from its dependence on recited dialogue demands a

thoroughgoing reconception of theater which accords primacy to the mise-en-scène as an integrated totality. What distinguishes Artaud from his slightly earlier contemporaries, therefore, is precisely his “cruelty,” an intense vision that leaves no room for passive or “amused” spectating. (193)

The idea that the theatrical performance was not simply for entertainment is seen in Lorca’s posture that dramatic action should require the active intellectual and emotional engagement of the audience. Soufas continues by affirming that “the spectator is given no choice except to embrace. The theater of cruelty demands that the spectator receive the director’s vision as perhaps the most intense form of metatheater imaginable, as a primary reality” (193). Mimetic representation is overcome and what is performed is another level of reality, thus amplifying the theater’s ability to renovate notions of both art and life. Soufas concludes that “Lorca fully embraces the essence of Artaud’s ideas for the theater to transcend mere representation while he discovers what Artaud never could, a viable means to communicate such ideas before a theater audience” (205). While Artaud’s ideas were mostly theoretical in nature, Lorca’s plays unite theory and practice, providing a disruptive and innovative performance.

While in Lorca, and in much of the transgressive theater of the vanguard, the participation involved is not one of mutual agreement (in the theater of cruelty, for example, the audience is drawn into the action through shock and scandal), it does nonetheless present a rupture with imitation and representation as it requires a heightened sensibility for art and an intensified consciousness of the purposes and outcomes of the theater. For María Clementa Millán, “Con ello se pretendía sorprender al espectador por medio de imágenes crueles [...] Artaud se levantó contra la ‘tiranía de la palabra’ del teatro anterior, reclamando un teatro espectáculo, donde los componentes no literarios del hecho teatral cobraban una importancia inusitada” (“Introducción,” *El público* 18). What I want to stress here is that

Lorca's plays do not seek a representation which does not require the audience to consider it critically. Rather, in line with Artaud's postulations of a theater that unsettles the audience through the non-literary actions of a complete spectacle, and in concert with ancient ideas concerning a theater that requires participation, Lorca's "surrealist" plays seek a closure to representation through the *manifestation* of life and of intimate truths.

### Sovereign Art and Lorca's Puppet Plays

From Lorca's earliest theatrical conceptions—the puppets plays—a profound preoccupation with the boundaries between stage and audience is evident as these frames are confused, thus enacting a *methectic* and participatory art. In the opening lines of Lorca's first dramatic piece, *Tragicomedia de don Cristóbal y la seña Rosita*, for example, a meta-theatrical and mysterious mosquito orders the audience members to be quiet as it also announces the unfolding of events. First conceived in 1922, the prologue to this puppet play shows early on a vanguardist and subversive orientation that is amplified years later in the "impossible" plays. The mosquito, who criticizes the bourgeois audience, is elaborated later in the *Retablillo de don Cristóbal* as a Director who enters and leaves the dramatic space as he wishes. Lorca's use of puppet theater, the sources of which date back to the sixteenth century (Keller 206), presents a dialogue with tradition as it engages in pressing issues of the modern sensibility.

The protagonists of the *Tragicomedia*, Don Cristóbal and Rosita, were the subjects of constant renovation as Lorca traced their development through revisions and retellings of the original puppet play. These transformations and evolutions of the characters are seen in 1930 as Lorca revisits puppetry in the *Retablillo de don Cristóbal* and in 1934 when the

*Retablillo* is subject to further revisions while in Buenos Aires.<sup>17</sup> The *Retablillo* (1930), conceived during the same period as *El público* and *Así que pasen cinco años*, challenges dramatic discourse with reference to form and content as it blurs frames and exposes unabashed impropriety in its subject-matter.

According to Lorca's brother, Francisco, Cervantes's *entremeses* were of great importance in the development of the poet's dramatic productions, especially the puppet plays just mentioned. The Cervantine intertext not only stresses the blurring of boundaries between spatial frames, but also entails a pointed social critique. As in the *El retablo de las maravillas* and the "Retablo de Maese Pedro" episode from the *Quijote*, where elements exterior to the action of the play have grave importance for the action within the meta-theater, Lorca's *Retablillo* also seeks to provoke a dissolution and subversion of representative frames. While in Cervantes the aesthetic goal is closely informed by Baroque "competition" as evidenced in the tension between oppositions, in Lorca the focus is centered directly on the relationship between stage and audience. Francisco García Lorca elaborates the profundity of the puppet play as follows:

Todo teatro de muñecos dobla en profundidad la admirable ficción que el teatro es en sí. El personaje teatral, trasunto y encarnación de un ente de realidad, es en el guiñol, a su vez, suplantado por el muñequillo. Cuando el títere asoma su cabezota por el pequeño escenario con un muñeco en cada mano, asistimos a un raro hecho artístico. Cervantes fue el primero que supo darse cuenta y utilizar todas las posibilidades poéticas del complejo fenómeno.

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<sup>17</sup> Lorca's *Obras completas* includes the following versions of the puppet plays: *Los títeres de Cachiporra: Tragicomedia de don Cristóbal y la seña Rosita* (2: 37-79), the *Retablillo de don Cristóbal* variation, started in 1930 (2: 395-411), and the revised Buenos Aires version of 1934, *Retablo de don Cristóbal y doña Rosita* (2: 707-725). There is also a brief version, titled *Cristobical* (2: 726-731), that appears to have been written prior to the 1922 *Tragicomedia*. As noted by Miguel García-Posada in volume two of the *Obras completas* (2: 858), a version of the puppet play was performed in 1930 in Spain at the Sociedad de Cursos y Conferencias. The play was later reworked and performed in Buenos Aires on March 25, 1934, late into the morning hours, at the Teatro Avenida. Mario Hernández's edition of the 1934 version examines changes that Lorca made to the manuscript both in and following the Buenos Aires period. In 1934 and 1935, then returned to Spain, the *Retablillo* was represented at various locations in Madrid.

Este teatro popular, que consideramos primitivo—una forma elemental de arte—, se complace en ponernos de relieve la complicada trama de la ficción teatral. Aludo a la relación autor-personaje-público. (267)

The puppet play, as such, accomplishes the multi-faceted task of drawing the audience into the confusing theatrical space through its recourse to the play-within-the play. The meta-theatrical *retablos* in both Cervantes and Lorca provide a framework for the dramatic events that are not based on limiting theatrical spaces. The influence of the Baroque certainly left its imprint on Lorca's work according to his brother: "Cuando Federico denomina a una de sus obras *Retablillo*, se acoge, simplemente, a una reminiscencia cervantina" (269). While Lorca's *Retablillo* and Cervantes's "Retablos" are similar in theatrical structure and use of dramatic space, in its overt use of crude language, offensive sexual imagery, and freedom of unrestricted expression Lorca's text sustains a radical dialogue with moral convention. In the *Retablillo*, the poet's brother continues, "Se muestra ahora una preferencia por la expresión cruda, descarnada e, incluso, procaz. Hay que decir que, en relación con el teatrillo popular, este nuevo plan es verdadero" (282). In its use of insolent language and themes, which contain ambivalent and double meanings, the subject-matter of Lorca's puppet play mimics the transgressive and critical nature of its dramatic structure.

In both language and action, the puppets transgress moral norms and subvert official discourse concerning not only propriety but also in their employment of language unbounded by regulations. Similar to carnivalesque subversion as noted by Mikhail Bakhtin in his writings on Rabelais, Lorca represents the base that is always already contained within authoritative culture (albeit at the margins). According to Renate Lachmann, who astutely examines carnivalesque culture, "Bakhtin is concerned with seeking out the traces of ambivalence and double meaning in the curse word and in profane, degrading

nicknames—something which he succeeds in doing in his remarkable analyses of Rabelais’s poetics of cursing” (143). Linguistic freedom is thus attained as ambivalent carnivalesque culture overturns monovalent, accepted, and comfortable norms. With reference to the innovations of Lorca’s *Retablillo*, the poet’s brother continues,

a pesar de la libertad de lenguaje, es la obra de mayor intención crítica de su teatro; incluso, diríamos, la más “ejemplar”. No sólo por lo que especialmente se dice contra las convenciones teatrales sino porque la procacidad misma es el ejemplo más evidente del propósito de romper la convención. Se trata, en último término, de una defensa de la libertad creadora. (282)

In Cervantes’s “Retablo de Maese Pedro,” where Don Quijote attacks the puppet-master, he shows that as an audience member, he has been drawn into the play to the extent that he is not competent to distinguish between spacial frames. In essence, the play becomes life. This structural de-centering is elaborated in Lorca’s anti-theatrical and “impossible” plays and amplified in the linguistic and thematic transgressions of official discourse.<sup>18</sup>

The notion of a work of art that pushes the limits of expression through insolence, thus defending creative expression, approaches what Bataille deems sovereign art, art which entails violence, a breaking of limits, and a freedom of expression.<sup>19</sup> And it is not by mere coincidence that in a 1946 monograph edition of the journal *Actualité* Bataille included a translated version of Lorca’s *Retablillo de don Cristóbal* (1930).<sup>20</sup> The inclusion of Lorca’s puppet play in the journal is key due to its subversive thematic and structural nature, and

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<sup>18</sup> Ana Herrero Riopérez has edited an interesting volume titled *Dos retablos y un retablillo* (Madrid: Castalia, 1999) which contains Cervantes’s *El retablo de las maravillas* and “Retablo de Maese Pedro” episode, in addition to Lorca’s *Retablillo de don Cristóbal*. While the short introduction lacks critical rigor it does offer the beginnings of a provocative comparison between the use of puppet plays in the works of the two authors.

<sup>19</sup> According to Benjamin Noys’s reading of Bataille, “Sovereignty is always a bursting out of limitations, a transgression that haunts the limit as an internal possibility” (81).

<sup>20</sup> For more on *Actualité* see note 4 in the previous chapter.

provides a crucial point of contact between the Granadine poet and the French thinker. The continual erotic references to body parts and fluids in the *Retablillo*, along with the “performance” of the subversions that the text exposes, make the puppet play of great interest to Bataille, who strove for sovereign literature. Here, the theatrical representation breaks with mimetic art and presents a *methectic*, or real life presentation in which the borders of fiction and reality are annihilated. Lorca presents this “real life” dramatic scenario through a recourse to the artificiality of puppetry and through “adult themes” of death and eroticism.

Whereas traditionally the puppet plays would be designed for audiences of children, Lorca’s *Retablillo* inverts cultural values by issuing a puppet play which undermines these theatrical expectations. This transgression is evident at the beginning of the play when the Author enters into dialogue with the bourgeois audience. In this “Prólogo hablado” the Author greets the “Señoras y señores” and conditions them by asserting that they, as a “público culto,” will enjoy the play. By appealing to their “inteligencia y corazón limpio” (2: 398), he takes the expectations of the audience and places in their opposition course language, sexually overt themes, an “adult’s only” puppet play (an ironic subversion of the genre), and education rather than entertainment. Lorca’s play takes the physical and ideological space of the Andalusian peasants and puts it into dialogue with the educated public. As such, the *Retablillo* examines two social classes, two moral systems, two uses of language, and two roles for art. His play dialogues with the official versions of morality and language by continually countering the assumptions of the educated audience. In this manner, the *Retablillo*, from the initial prologue, goes beyond what critics have called neo-popularism, neo-folklorism, and neo-andalusism at it transgresses the cultural norms and expectations of the bourgeois and sets the stage for other subversions of official moral values in subsequent works.

In an anonymous introductory note to Lorca's *Retablillo* included in *Actualité*, presumably written by Bataille, it states that "La poésie et le théâtre de Garcia Lorca, sans caractère politique, font toutefois entrer dans les chambres mortes des mots tout un fracas de liberté. Sans 'principes', il est vrai" (88). The death, freedom, and truth embodied by Lorca's text were pertinent to the French thinkers of the 40's contemplating the role of the work of art within political spheres. In *The Accursed Share*, Bataille characterizes the sovereignty that is embodied by the texts in the *Actualité* volume as follows: "The sovereign, if he is not imaginary, truly enjoys the products of the world—beyond his needs. His sovereignty resides in this. Let us say that the sovereign (or the sovereign life) begins when, with the necessities ensured, the possibility of life opens up without limits" (198). From the sovereign subject the connection to an art form that expresses sovereign desire is exhibited in transgressive literature, texts that enter into direct dialogue with official discourse and use art to question conservative values which censure and determine the propriety of expression.

The political thrust of Bataille's *Actualité* journal recognizes art's power to take official discourse and radically subject it to critique. For Bataille, the most unbridled form of expression in art provides an access "to art finally free of respect for others and to sovereignty not limited by any prohibition, but only by the consciousness of an unbearable tragedy, at once dreaded and desired" (*Accursed* 148). This type of art, which recognizes the tension and relationship between horror and desire, offers the foundation for what Bataille deems sovereign. By resisting limitation with reference to language, structures, themes, and discourse, sovereign art critiques works that are merely entertaining, or even an "art for art's sake" that is disinterested in the socio-cultural reality outside its artifice. Sovereignty in art, on the other hand, is self-affirming as it gives access to the truth of subjectivity in its

dialogue with the conflictive attraction and repulsion of anguish. In contrast to sovereignty in art, “What the protagonists of art for art’s sake wanted was merely to escape from the preoccupations of a society that had set itself goals that had nothing to do with pure sovereignty” (Bataille, *Accursed* 419). Lorca’s work, on the other hand, maintains a dialogue between tradition and vanguard as it continually demands serious contemplation on the part of the spectator.

Bataille links sovereign art to the sovereign subject: “Indeed, sovereign art signifies, in the most exact way, *access to sovereign subjectivity independent of rank*” (*Accursed* 423). In this sense, the transgressive work of art seeks for an expression of subjectivity unbounded by restraint. Bataille exemplifies this brand of art in his essay on Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in the *Actualité* project. In this article, Bataille highlights the transgressive nature of Hemingway’s expression, an artistic sensibility which examines corporeal putrefaction and the smell of death. It is due to the aspects of sovereign art embodied in these texts that Bataille found the translated chapter from Hemingway’s novel and also Lorca’s *Retablillo* worthy for inclusion in his monograph study on freedom in Spain. In their freedom from constraints regarding propriety of expression, Bataille sees Lorca and Hemingway of great importance. Gwynne Edwards notices that liberation of artistic creativity is key in Lorca’s theater as it expresses an individual truth:

If the theatre is to communicate to its audience the true passions of men and women, and thus to survive as a living, meaningful form, writers must be free from the constraints imposed upon them; they must be free to express themselves, to be themselves; and, as a part of this freedom, to be able to express the truth as they see it in whatever form seems to them appropriate for its expression. (24)

For Lorca, the progression from sovereignty to sovereign art and subjectivity leads to the expression of “my truth,” supremely liberated from convention.

## The Confusion of Frames in the *Retablillo*

In addition to the “conditioning” and ironic manipulations that occur in the *Retablillo*’s spoken prologue, the introductory commentary by the Author establishes a connection between sovereign art and the blurring of theatrical boundaries. Also, the prologue further exposes the *methectic* or external strength of the play: the desire to educate the audience, and the need for free expression. The meta-theatrical Author, at once inside and outside the “representation,” comments on the aspects of prime importance in the play to be presented: liberty, desire, crude language. He relates that the puppet play will exude an “encantadora libertad” and will present the “fantasía del pueblo” (2: 398). Lorca’s use of puppets is in and of itself subversive in nature. According to Luis Fernández Cifuentes, Lorca’s puppets are without rules as they assert a resistance to convention: “El proyecto se justifica, en último término, porque la fórmula de las marionetas no constituye—como cabría suponer—una de tantas ataduras convencionales, sino precisamente el *paradigma de la libertad*” (66). The use of the puppets, furthermore, presents a poorly proportioned and deformed version of the dramatic subject. In a line of thinking similar to Bakhtin’s reading of the grotesque body in *Rabelais and His World*, Fernández Cifuentes concludes that “las marionetas constituirían así el paradigma de la fealdad, la deformidad, la exageración” (71)<sup>21</sup> and give access to a more expanded version of reality, thus directly confronting the audience with unsettling characters that shatter expectations. The confusion of theatrical boundaries and the expansion of reality are amplified when the “actors” of a play are puppets. As Lorca had done in his first work, *El maleficio de la mariposa* (1920), the “actors” that come to

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<sup>21</sup> Fernández Cifuentes continues by stating that “la plástica de la marioneta es apenas una intensa desfiguración del cuerpo del actor” (71, 73).

center stage are non-human figures. The result was a disorienting and alienating effect on the audience as it surpassed their horizon of expectations.<sup>22</sup> Using both insects and puppets as characters was an unwelcome novelty for the audience of the early twentieth century in Spain since, as Fernández Cifuentes describes, the audience found little interest in them as they hide the actors and present disproportionate figures (29-32).<sup>23</sup>

Lorca's *Retablillo* reacted directly against conventional theater in Spain as it confused layers of reality and artistic expression. For Fernández Cifuentes, “el teatro ordinario, desde el centro de esa realidad, la ‘imita’ y acaso la juzga; las marionetas desde un posición lateral (desde afuera, desde más allá), la trastocan, la invierten, la tergiversan, la exageran, para librarse de ella. No proponen una imagen de la realidad sino una alternativa” (71). In this manner, the inclusion of puppets as part of a dramatic performance—in essence, Lorca's use of the puppet play as such—enters into dialogue with established social norms and presents an extended and multi-layered transgression of values:

Construye de este modo el teatro de marionetas una subversión que afecta cuando menos a tres jerarquías tradicionales: la del dinero, la de la familia y la de lo masculino/femenino. En función de esta subversión, la trama original del teatro de marionetas, siempre flexible, no deja nunca de pedir en algún momento esta situación esencial y culminante: la celebración de las bodas entre Cristóbal y Rosita. (Fernández Cifuentes 76)

But even here, another layer of subversion is evident. The ceremony of the wedding, traditionally the final sacred gesture of the law upon a couple, is transgressed since on the wedding night, Rosita is found sleeping with several other men. For Fernández Cifuentes, whose reading is heavily informed by Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, the moment of

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<sup>22</sup> See Fernández Cifuentes's chapter in *García Lorca en el teatro: La norma y la diferencia* for more on the transgression of theatrical norms presented by the use of insects as protagonists in Lorca's early play (29-44).

<sup>23</sup> Specifically, Fernández Cifuentes alludes to the “empequeñecimiento” of the puppets and the “agigantamiento” of the insects (32).

the sacred ceremony is profaned since it is rendered through comic discourse.

The spoken prologue of the *Retablillo* purports further that the play will capture the “expresiones y vocablos que nacen de la tierra” (2: 398), thus emphasizing the source of artistic creation: the depths of the earth. The insistence on the “depth” highlights the importance of hidden, secret, and earthy desire. These preoccupations are central to Lorca’s dramatic theory of a theater “bajo la arena” that is evident in his other “impossible” plays and in the profundity of a truth (an authentic or even repressed truth) that is deep within the subject, as in the *Sonetos del amor oscuro* written in Lorca’s later years.<sup>24</sup> The Author continues by acknowledging the didactic and cathartic (in essence, intellectually challenging) thrust of the puppet play by affirming that the expressions “servirán de limpieza en una época en que maldades, errores y sentimientos turbios llegan hasta lo más hondo de nuestros hogares” (2: 398). The puppet play serves to educate, disturb, and challenge the public as it presents a dialogue based in truths from beneath the surface.

The relationship between author-text-audience is multi-layered and subject to continual evolution. Lorca establishes a division and progression of frames that might be outlined thus: Lorca (author of the play) > Author (a textual variant of Lorca) > Director and Poet > Actors > Puppets. The audience is left to negotiate between these theatrical frames, distinguishing spatial and fictional levels. Indeed the Author orients the audience by stating a horizon of expectations: “esta farsa de guiñol tiene la evidencia de que el público culto de esta tarde sabrá recoger, con inteligencia y corazón limpio, el delicioso y duro lenguaje de los muñecos. [...] Así, pues, el poeta sabe que el público oirá con alegría” (2: 398). This

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<sup>24</sup> While evident in Lorca’s previous theoretical and theatrical writings, the idea of a “theater beneath the sand” comes directly from *El público*. Its significance with reference to both “depth” and “truth” will be explored in more detail shortly.

prologue, however, establishes a paradoxical impasse of Lorca's text. While the expectation is that the audience will understand, enjoy, and profit from the performance, the reality is otherwise. According to Reed Anderson, "Guided by this prologue, the cultivated audience imagined by the Director will know both how to enjoy and to benefit from this vulgar escapade" (219). Yet the prologue is related with an ironic and subversive tone since the audience in reality will not embrace this sort of "delicious" and "crude" expression. In fact, when a later version of the puppet play was performed in Buenos Aires in 1934, the result was varied. According to Leslie Stainton,

Lorca's new version of *Don Cristóbal's Puppet Show* featured a Director, who periodically interrupts the action to rebuke cast members whenever they deviate from the written text, and who at the close of the play pleads for an end to the "boredom and vulgarity to which we have condemned the stage." Fast-paced, loosely structured, and filled with bawdy language, the new show was both an exploration and a defense of creative freedom. Several women and at least one man in the audience took offense at the play's salacious dialogue and blatant sexual allusions, and walked out on Lorca's early morning performance. (352)

While the intention was to educate the spectator through liberated expression, thus urging the audience to intellectually consider moral issues, the result offered objection by a shocked audience (as was probably at least partially expected).

Reed Anderson further illustrates the disorienting effect and subversive nature of the prologues in Lorca's *Retablillo* and other plays. He examines the way in which the prologues blur the frames of representation and engage the audience. These structures "actually obscure the conventional and even commonsense ways in which an audience may try to determine just when the play has begun. [...] [The plays] begin in the liminal space of the prologue" (R. Anderson 210-11). The prologue is ambiguously continued as the Poet enters the theatrical space and instructs the audience how to behave during the (re)presentation. He contends that

all the audience members should instantly be silent “[para] que haya un silencio tan profundo que oigamos el glú-glú de los manantiales” (2: 398). The idea of a depth, or intimate truth that resides within the self, beneath convention or in an occult space, is further elaborated by the Poet. He insists that they must be able to hear their hearts beating strongly. This sustains the interest in “profundity” or the depth of the words and expressions born of the earth as commented by the Author. Further, it elucidates the importance that Lorca saw in expressing the most intimate and interior truths, those from the heart.

In the *Retablillo*, the Poet’s remarks are interrupted by the Director who is upset that the Poet has strayed from his lines, editing and censoring the text as he wishes. Throughout the *Retablillo* these meta-theatrical digressions, which commence in the prologue, continually interrupt the action. The interjections and meta-theatrical commentaries challenge the theatrical space and the notion of representation. The result is an audience that is manipulated into seeing and contemplating real life. According to Reed Anderson, “in fact what they see is quite the opposite [of the theater]: truth instead of lies, reality instead of illusions, and they, as the audience, will be directly implicated in and addressed by the performance. [...] As such, the prologue plays a central role in this subversion precisely because of the ambiguity and indefinable nature of its theatrical space” (228-29). After the Poet and Director argue about the moral character of Don Cristóbal (whether he is at heart good or bad), the Poet calls to Rosita to see if she is ready to enter the scene. The meta-dramatic lyrical summoning reads,

Abre tu balcón, Rosita,  
que comienza la función.  
Te espera una muertecita  
y un esposo dormilón. (2: 399)

Not only are the Poet’s words self-conscious and self-reflective, but Lorca subversively

embeds into the Poet's enunciation a multifaceted word: "muertecita." Followed by the announcement of a "sleepy husband," the small death (or death of a little, old woman) refers at once to the beating of Rosita's mother and also to what the French call *le petite mort*, a telling reference to the sexual orgasms to come.<sup>25</sup> The lyrical sections of the play, such as this one by the Poet, present further ambivalence between tradition and renovation. This poem, a ballad in structure and rhyme, could be conceived of as a nursery rhyme-like poem for children. But considering the sexual references of "muertecita" and the erotic nature of the rest of the play, it is as if the Author (in Huizingian fashion) invites the audience into a childlike, but subversive game. Finally, after prodding from the Director, Cristóbal enters the scene and starts the second level of the dramatic plot: the interchange between Cristóbal and Rosita's mother, and later with Rosita herself.

After the initial introductory confrontations between the Author, Poet, and Director—who each seem to have their own agenda concerning the performance—the rest of the *Retablillo* traces the interactions between an old man, Cristóbal, and the young woman he has arranged to marry. Cristóbal pays Rosita's mother (who infuses in Cristóbal an intense erotic desire by salaciously describing her daughter), and later marries Rosita. After consummating the marriage, Cristóbal is caught in a profound slumber. A series of other men—including Currito, the Poet, and the Enfermo—enter the room, each one sleeping with Rosita while Cristóbal snores. The unfaithful Rosita ends up pregnant and giving birth to babies from five different men. Cristóbal, now aware of the scandal, beats Rosita's mother to death in a furious rage. But before Rosita can be punished, the Director re-enters the space

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<sup>25</sup> For more on death, eroticism, and literature see Bataille's *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, and Roland Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text*.

and breaks up the commotion, ending the play, and preventing things from getting further out of control.

Lorca's *Retablillo* presents a new morality in dialogue with the traditional sensibilities of the audience. The moral values espoused by the "guiñol popular" are based on a sovereignly composed desiring subject who is interested in its own individual truth ("my truth") and in the "secreto con el cual vivimos todos" (2: 399). The constant tension (and contradiction) between "my truth" and the "secret of all" is negotiated as the secrets are unmasked, thus revealing underlying truths. For Nicolás Bratosevich, the estrangement and distortion of sign systems in the puppet-play blurs the boundaries of moral judgement as they propose "una invitación a una nueva concepción en el acuerdo comunitario sobre los valores" (270). Cristóbal constantly contends with the Director who demands that the actions follow a prescribed and proper sequence. While the Director is worried about the audience's expectations—"Cállese y no diga barbaridades" (2: 400)—, Cristóbal has a level of control unrestricted by the theatrical conventions, "Ya voy, señor Director. Es que estoy meando" (2: 400). The crude and erotic language and imagery exhibits a dramatic text that pushes the limits of convention as it establishes characters unconfined by norms. The liberation of language in Lorca's puppet play hints at an additional act of subversion as examined by Luis Fernández Cifuentes. For Fernández Cifuentes, the play seeks to disrupt "official language" through its use of vulgar tones: "Con todo, insultos, groserías, juramentos, ocupan un espacio limitado en el texto de García Lorca y parecen comportarse como síntomas de una liberación más amplia del lenguaje. [...] El lenguaje oficial se ubica así entre dos limitaciones, prohíbe dos excesos ampliamente recuperados por el lenguaje de las marionetas, donde la transgresión es la norma" (83, 85). The Mother's language, for example, in her description

of Rosita, is meant to excite Cristóbal so that he will pay money to wed her. The underlying values in the sequence are emblematic of the linguistic crudity of the play:

Yo soy la madre de doña Rosita  
y quiero que se case,  
porque ya tiene dos pechitos  
como dos naranjitas  
y un culito  
como un quesito  
y una urraquita  
que le cante y le grita,  
Y es lo que digo yo:  
le hace falta un marido,  
y si fuera posible, dos.  
Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja. (2: 403)

Rosita's mother is emphatic that Rosita is sexually ready to be wed. Lorca's use of coarse language ruptures with the expectation of any refinement sought by the bourgeois audience. Fernández Cifuentes continues, "El atentado general contra la *autoridad del discurso* (y la del verso en particular) se manifiesta de forma especialmente intensa contra el *discurso de la autoridad*: la transgresión consiste en este caso en un exceso de explicitud desterrado del lenguaje oficial" (89). Additionally, Lorca's use of the diminutive here is masterful in its effect on the audience. The diminutive creates a juvenile poetic environment through which to present transgressive subject-matter and language. In this way, Lorca's text manipulates the spectator. According to Daniel López's reading of the diminutive in Lorca's theater, the use of this linguistic tool is a purely subversive technique. In the *Retablillo*, the diminutives make the vulgarities appear more playful and innocent, but in reality the text seeks to awaken and scandalize the audience by mocking them. These diminutives "attenuate the eroticism of her [the mother's] song, making it innocent and appealing" (López 90).

The fact that the mother desires two spouses for her daughter denotes the excessive nature of Rosita's sexual appetite (or at least the mother's assumption regarding it). This

exuberance of desire is directly expressed later in Rosita's soliloquy:

pero yo quisiera estar:  
en el diván  
con Juan,  
en el colchón  
con Ramón,  
en el canopé  
con José,  
en la silla  
con Medinilla,  
en el suelo  
con el que yo quiero,  
pegada al muro  
con el lindo Arturo  
y en la gran *chaise-longue*  
con Juan, con José, con Medinilla,  
con Arturo y con Ramón. (2: 405)

The desire to be with many men is fulfilled after the marriage to Cristóbal, while he sleeps. Yet after the men come and go, Rosita goes unpunished, thus providing the underpinnings of a truly subversive character and frustrating the goals of a conservative audience that would have her reap the consequences of her illicit and “immoral” behavior. And while the mother's language and intentions seem to subvert propriety, her death seems symbolic of the general tragedy and decadence of mass consumption. That is, her hoarding of silver and gold from Cristóbal in order to marry off her daughter amounts only to violent reaction and death. That Rosita is not chastised for her behavior accentuates the complete liberation of desire in contrast to the moral vision of a censoring society. With the Director's interruption of the dramatic space, however, another transgression occurs, this time aesthetic in nature. As Fernández Cifuentes notes, “en el mismo escenario [hay] una yuxtaposición violenta, ejemplar, de la persona—el cuerpo—del Director y las no-personas de los muñecos” (82). This confusion between puppets and actors continues the play's constant questioning of boundaries between life/art and manifestation/representation.

Lorca's *Retablillo*, then, presents a complete renovation: of theatrical structures and spaces, subject-matter, and moral value systems. The subjects embody the free expenditure of desire and expression. The *Retablillo* captures the truth of the individual, a truth that is rooted in the expression of a self without barriers. In essence, the Lorquian construction of the sovereign subject goes beyond what the surrealists sought in shocking the audience (although Lorca's *Retablillo* certainly did that too) as it establishes completely liberated characters that, without boundaries, pursue their own individual and contextualized truths. Whereas for the unfaithful wife this truth involves sexual relations without norms, for Cristóbal the truth of the subject is rooted in the expression of violence. The Director, upon terminating the action and outrage, summarizes the mission and effects of the staged puppet play. He insists that the crude language has been used in order to awaken a new artistic sensibility. Speaking to the audience he interjects:

Basta (*Agarra a los muñecos y se queda con ellos en la mano mostrándolos al público.*) Señoras y señores: Los campesinos andaluces oyen con frecuencia comedias de este ambiente bajo las ramas grises de los olivos y en el aire oscuro de los establos abandonados. [...] Las malas palabras adquieren ingenuidad y frescura dichas por los muñecos que miman el encanto de esta viejísima farsa rural. Llenemos el teatro de espigas frescas, debajo de las cuales vayan palabrotas que luchen en la escena con el tedio y la vulgaridad a que la tenemos condenada, y saludemos hoy [...] a uno de los personajes donde sigue pura la vieja esencia del teatro. (2: 411)

With these words the puppet-play ends. The Director's utterance reflects the renovation of the theater that Lorca sought, a renovation that posited a theater which required an engaged audience. This theory of theater signals the transformative and educative power of art as it urges the audience to rethink extant versions of (im)moral behavior. The Director emphasizes key aspects of the puppet play just witnessed: the "aire oscuro," which has a certain affinity with the interior secrets of occult desire (and an "amor oscuro"); the specific locus of the

expenditure of desire, the “establo” where these types of plays are accepted (recall also the importance of the stable in *La casa de Bernarda Alba*); the freshness and innocence with which the puppets purportedly, but subversively act; and the old essence of the theater, a primal theater based on a blurring of dramatic frames concerning actors and audience. Additionally, the Director frames the puppet play within the historical environment of the “campesinos andaluces” which resides at the margins of high culture. By doing this, Lorca (through the Director) evokes the moral, linguistic, and class-related issues that dialogue with, and subvert, traditional values.

The Director’s final words represent a direct address of the audience as he speaks to them, at once constructing and informing the spectators. For Bratosevich, “ese público nuevo queda incorporado a la continuidad espectáculo-espectador, [...] el espectador se autocontempla” (272). This new audience is forced to rethink itself *as such* and its relationship to the structure and subject-matter of the stage. The *Retablillo* expands value systems as it teaches the audience to learn to live. Bratosevich continues, “la operación del traspaso excede los límites de la experiencia teatral: didácticamente, ‘enseña a vivir’ a quienes se supone que han perdido el sentido de los valores primarios, y por lo tanto enseña a remodelizar su cultura” (272). The work of art surpasses the horizon of expectations as it engages in socio-cultural formation, transformatively and performatively educating and challenging the audience as it interrogates their bourgeois thinking.

The *Retablillo* is in some ways similar to Lorca’s earlier treatments of Don Cristóbal, although in the 1930 version, “Rosita is now a girl whose sexual appetites are never satisfied. In another sense, inasmuch as the figures of the Poet and the Director debate the play and its characters and intervene in the action, there are pointers to the techniques of the ambitious

and experimental *The Public*” (Edwards 38). The *Retablillo* certainly presents a new discourse that is partially evident in other works of Lorca’s, a discourse that examines the education of the audience, the renovation of the theater, and the contemplation of issues of morality and expression. This play exposes a transgressive theater which demands a new audience as it posits the sovereign expression of individual “truth,” at once the expression of oneself (desire, violence, passion, insolence, etc.), but also tropologically speaking as an open discourse without censorship or socio-moral constraint. Thus the theater exhibits “my truth,” a space of expression unbounded by exterior conventions. This variation of reality and truth is both autonomous (in the sense that it is dictated by the self, not in the sense that it has no relationship or importance to reality outside of itself) and self-constituting rather than imposed from the outside. And while these ideas are anticipated by the *Retablillo*, the most radical renovation of the theater, along with Lorca’s rethinking of the “truth” of the dramatic character, will occur in what is usually considered his most radical and unrepresentable play, *El público*.

### *El público* and the Theater Beneath the Sand

The *Retablillo* is innovative in the relationships that it establishes between actors and the audience and between aesthetic and ethical values. Furthermore, the subject-matter—the crude language and the sexually suggestive references—offers a discourse that unsettles the audience whose expectations lie in comfortable entertainment. Lorca’s 1930 play *El público*, increasingly transgressive in its approach and expression, amplifies the problems presented in the *Retablillo*. *El público* embodies Lorca’s most sustained attack on the conventional spectator by placing both the audience and the genre of drama at its focal point. Boundaries

between inside and outside (with reference to theatrical space) are demolished, the interpenetration of actors and audience is sustained throughout the play, and in the end, the curtains are burned, the characters “mueren de verdad” (2: 323-24), and the theater as such is destroyed. While the formalistic components of the play break the conventions of representation, the subject-matter and development of the dramatic subjects also demonstrate a renovation of the theater. By discussing openly the tensions evident in homoerotic desire, the play presents additional problems as well, specifically those of the masking, unmasking, transformation, and continual metamorphosing of the subject. In this sense, Lorca’s play not only unsettles convention with reference to theatrical representation, but it also posits a novel and transgressive subject based on the search for and expression of intimate truths. The examination here will establish “my truth” as a variation of truth that is at once highly contextualized and particular (in this case, “my truth” is the unmasking of homosexual desire), but seen in a more ample and tropological sense, and individual truth is a space of open expression and unrestricted authenticity.

While a reflection on authenticity may go against many of the avant-garde concerns, Lorca’s *El público* definitely searches for the authentic and faithful presentation of oneself through subjects that metamorphose and unmask themselves. Lionel Trilling’s *Sincerity and Authenticity* offers a compelling study of the tensions between sincerity and authenticity. Different from sincerity, which is always mediated by being true to oneself *and* seeking to be true to others, authenticity is concerned with solely being true to oneself, with “a less acceptant and genial view of social circumstances” (11). This idea is continued by Trilling as he asserts the polemical nature of authenticity and its tension with official culture and accepted norms: “[A]uthenticity is implicitly a polemical concept, fulfilling its nature by

dealing aggressively with received and habitual opinion, aesthetic opinion in the first instance, social and political opinion in the next” (94). The subjects in Lorca’s play search for this authenticity, the presentation of the self without giving importance to social constraints or norms. As such, they not only obtain an unmasked expression of self, but they also redirect conceptions of morality and authenticity.

The idea of transforming moral value systems is one of Trilling’s central concerns, and he outlines this preoccupation in the opening statement of the book: “Now and then it is possible to observe the moral life in process of revising itself, perhaps by reducing the emphasis it formerly placed upon one or another of its elements, perhaps by inventing and adding to itself a new element, some mode of conduct or of feeling which hitherto it had not regarded as essential to virtue” (1). What develops in Lorca’s *El público*, through the contemplation on “my truth,” in both its particular context and in a more metaphorical application, is a revision, amplification, and re-invention of aspects of moral life. Additionally, Trilling recognizes the importance that the work of art has in this re-definition, or continually metamorphosing expression of authenticity, by stating that “The authentic work of art instructs us in our inauthenticity and adjures us to overcome it” (100). In many senses, Trilling’s elaboration of authenticity (which he shows to historically come to fruition in the twentieth century) captures the freedom, lack of concern for regulation, and unrestricted expression of the Bataillean sovereign subject.

The focus in *El público* is essentially centered on the dramatic character, on subjectivity as such, and on gender identity. What Lorca’s play discusses (at the theatrical and the intimate levels) is the grotesque body, as Bakhtin puts it, the transforming, mutating, and continually changing subject and how it radically defies official discourse and

representation. While Lorca's play is not simply a discourse on carnival behavior and subversions, the writings of Bakhtin on the carnival do elucidate what is at work in *El público*. Additionally, the carnivalesque subject, outside convention and in contrast to official discourse, is very similar to the radical nature of Bataille's conception of the sovereign subject, as previously discussed with reference to the puppets in the *Retablillo*. In *El público*, Lorca issues an affirmation of a subject in flux, changing according to its desire and presenting unsettling truths and variations of possibilities.

*El público* was published posthumously by Lorca's friend Rafael Martínez Nadal, and much like *Viaje a la luna* and others of Lorca's texts which have come to light in the last few decades, it is riddled with uncertainties since the text we have today is to some extent "incomplete." By all accounts the text was started in Cuba in 1930 on letterhead from the "La Unión" hotel in Havana (although it is argued that some of the ideas for the play first occurred to Lorca while in New York City or before). The manuscript was finished that same year after Lorca's return to Spain, and dated in Granada, August 22, 1930. According to Martínez Nadal, to whom Lorca gave a copy of the play shortly before his death in 1936, Lorca gave public readings of portions of the play while in Cuba and in Carlos Morla's house in Madrid near the end of 1930 or beginning of 1931. Partial sections of the play were published in journals in Madrid in 1933. The manuscript which Lorca gave to Martínez Nadal in 1936 constitutes the most definitive version available today.<sup>26</sup>

The text is comprised of six Scenes (which Lorca called in 1930 "seis actos y un

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<sup>26</sup> For more on the history of the manuscript, see Rafael Martínez Nadal's study titled *El público: Amor y muerte en a obra de Federico García Lorca*, especially pages 19-25. Additionally, Miguel García-Posada outlines the basic information concerning the text's history in Lorca's *OC 2*: 852-56. Antonio Monegal's introduction to *El público* also contains insightful details (11-16), as does Julio Huélamo Kosma's book titled *El teatro imposible de García Lorca: Estudio sobre El público* (17-24).

asesinato” (3: 372)), but the precise order that Lorca intended for these Scenes is uncertain. One of the sections, for example, a brief interlude titled “Solo del pastor bobo,” is positioned between sections 3 and 4 whereas in other versions it appears between sections 4 and 5. Yet according to some critics the incomplete and imprecise nature of the text was quite possibly a very integral (and intentional) part of Lorca’s vision, indeed a performance of the type of text that Lorca had in mind. According to Luis Fernández Cifuentes, it is reductive to speak of the text’s incompleteness since the idea of completion and stasis undermines the “openness” and incessant blurring of frames evident in Lorca’s play. Fernández Cifuentes reacts against Martínez Nadal’s notion of the unfinished nature of *El público* and asserts that Lorca’s work was quite possibly finished in its very uncompleted nature, which amplifies the work’s ambiguity. Leaving the text incomplete or open on purpose adheres to an entirely different model in which any notion of complete/incomplete or correct/incorrect holds a new relevance as the marginal attains importance, in contrast to an aesthetic canon that seeks totality and completeness. The destruction of value structures is in this manner central to Lorca’s project in general. As such, Lorca’s work presumes to rupture with any idea of “lo completo, lo cerrado, la voluntad de finalizar, y, por lo tanto, de definir. En ningún momento parece alcanzarle [a Martínez Nadal] una mera sospecha de que el autor haya podido optar por *lo inacabado* como tal” (Fernández Cifuentes 281-82).

The incompleteness or unsettled nature of the manuscript is amplified by the general discursive thrust of Lorca’s play as one which opens value systems to the acceptance of other marginal possibilities. Of particular interest is the notion of truth, or “my truth” and the openness that it shares with versions of erotic expression. In essence, the play discusses the tensions and “disorders” of truth and love without discrimination or prescribing “correct,”

“complete,” or definitive versions of them. For Fernández Cifuentes, “el caso más elaborado de este tipo de desorden lo presenta la ‘verdad’. [...] Así la ‘verdad’—transparente o irrecuperable—no sólo se incorpora al conjunto de los otros fragmentos sino que comporta en sí misma la fragmentación, la diferencia y el vacío” (286). The disordered (yet intimate) truth that the characters speak of—which is referred to elsewhere as a poetic “my truth”—cannot be viewed simply as *the* truth or an ultimate truth, but rather as an individual and particular truth. The revolution against established models is evident in the open nature of both form and content, entailing thus a discourse based on difference. Antonio Monegal, in line with Fernández Cifuentes’s notion of the text as intentionally incomplete, alludes to Barthes’s theory of the text as a form that is fluid and always in process of becoming: “Lo que Lorca nos ofrece es la constante exploración de nuevas opciones” (“Introducción,” *El público* 18). According to this reading, the holes in the text are left to be filled through interpretation(s), offering the deferral of “meaning” and the aperture of possibilities. In this sense, Lorca’s play performs the ambiguity that the characters in the text embody. The work points toward the “exigencia a enfrentarnos a la ambigüedad y la indeterminación, a la imposibilidad de acceder a la verdad absoluta” (Monegal, “Introducción,” *El público* 24) in terms of both form and content.

The fragmented and formless nature of the play, along with the ambiguous aspects of the text, mimics the at times supernatural aspects of the work’s content. The importance of dream sequences, for example, confuses temporal and spatial conventions of representation. In fact, some critics argue that the entire play is part of the Director’s dream or subconscious since the scenes contain illogical images and broken successions of events. Whether the actions are dreams or not, what seems most relevant is the discourse and

attitudes that the play puts forth: one of fluid subjectivities, confusions of boundaries, and intimate truths—an opening up of variations of truth. Indeed for Monegal, “No es necesario, por ejemplo decidir si lo que la obra presenta ocurre ‘de verdad’ o si es todo un sueño del personaje del Director, como la escasa verosimilitud de la obra ha llevado a algunos críticos a sugerir” (“Introducción” 27). While the work is informed by dream sequences, the extent to which it can be classified as surrealist is highly debated. Many analyses examine the dreamlike nature of the play, in Bretonian terms, while others recognize that the play merely makes reference to dreams, but does not conform to dream-writing as such. Others, including Andrew Anderson, for example, investigate the relationship that Lorca’s *El público* obtains with European expressionism. The intention by Anderson is to elucidate questions of both coincidence and influence that are reflected in the similarities between Lorca’s work and that of other European avant-gardists.<sup>27</sup>

Martínez Nadal’s reflections on surrealism in *El público* are exemplary in that he recognizes the fluid nature of the movement and the manner in which the Spanish surrealists break form any orthodox reading of the surrealist aesthetic. For Martínez Nadal, Lorca’s brand of surrealism is more centered on intimate desire and anguish and less focused on automatism and lack of control in artistic expression. Whether the work abides by surrealist precepts or not is outside the interest of the present chapter. That said, when seen through the combination of theoretical viewpoints such as Bataillean sovereignty and Huizingan *methexis*, Lorca’s play certainly goes beyond both surrealism and expressionism in its much

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<sup>27</sup> For a more in-depth study on the importance of surrealism and expressionism in this play, see Andrew Anderson’s “*El público, Así que pasen cinco años y El sueño de la vida: Tres dramas expresionistas de García Lorca*” and Julio Huélamo Kosma’s “Lorca y los límites del teatro surrealista española” and “La influencia de Freud en el teatro de García Lorca,” all of which offer provocative insights concerning Lorca’s use of (and distance from) prevalent aesthetic movements of the European vanguard.

more extreme approach to the intimate and transgressive possibilities of artistic creation. This is accomplished through Lorca's insistence on authenticity, a "truth" without concern for social constraints, through the demand for engagement from the audience, and through the continual metamorphosing and the unmasking of the subject. Indeed, Lorca's play appears closer to what has been previously discussed as a sub-realist aesthetic, following Larrea's terminology, as it discusses the intimate and at times dark drives of the depths of the subject. These "dark forces" ("fuerza oculta" as the Director calls it (2: 323)) are unmasked in Lorca's *El público* and the performance presents an active examination of the intimate nature of the subject. In fact, *El público* is not a representation at all, it is impossible and irrepresentable, participative as it renounces the distance between actor and spectator. Experiencing the underpinnings of *El público*, for Lorca, was akin to experiencing life.

What is certain of Lorca's play is that it primarily addresses two central and pressing issues of both Lorca's time and his artistic agenda: the nature of theater *as such*, and the intimate workings of love and desire. These central matters are, as Monegal affirms: "la relación entre la identidad sexual y el amor, y la representación de la verdad en el teatro. [...] pero ambos pares resultan a la vez estar enlazados entre sí" ("Introducción" 24). It is in the confluence of these key issues that the problem of subjectivity is addressed, at once the construction of the dramatic subject and the intimate subject. Martínez Nadal summarizes these concerns as follows:

en esta pieza convergen, intensificadas, apremiantes, todas las ideas de Lorca sobre el arte teatral. Teatro en el sentido más amplio—teatro de vida—y en el más literal de técnica y estética. Con características inconfundibles, Lorca no muestra debilidades y vicios humanos para producir vergüenza o arrepentimiento de pecados en los que el poeta no cree, sino para provocar comprensión humana ante el total desamparo del hombre. (254)

Julio Huélamo Kosma amplifies the concerns of Lorca's play as Martínez Nadal details them

by situating the issues addressed in the work in terms of a multi-faceted tension. The Director of the work, and the audience by extension, are affected or confronted by what Huélamo Kosma calls a “doble problema.” Huélamo Kosma outlines the multi-faceted problem as follows:

—el individual, íntimo y amoroso en el que el Director es urgido a abandonar su farsa sentimental apegada al amor heterosexual (de ahí la presencia de Elena; no se olvide que es un hombre con hijos) y a mostrar su verdadera inclinación homosexual.

—el colectivo, social y profesional en el que el Director es llamado a un cambio de orientación de su teatro convencional, que necesariamente ha de ser sustituido por otro en el que se muestren los dolorosos dramas íntimos de cada uno. (*Teatro* 27-28)

The insistence on “my truth” and on the individual and particular references to homosexual desire as noted by Huélamo Kosma are evident in Lorca’s text. A key example from *El público* that captures both the specific variation of desire that is expressed as “my truth” and the tropological force that truth acquires is stated in the second scene as the Figura de Pámpanos and the Figura de Cascabeles discuss their mutations. After asserting a series of mutations and reactions to those mutations, the Figura de Pámpanos states, “Si tú te convirtieras en pez luna, yo te abriría con un cuchillo, porque soy un hombre, porque no soy nada más que eso, un hombre, más hombre que Adán, y quiero que tú seas aún más hombre que yo” (2: 289-90). While the act of “opening another with a knife” clearly has references to sexual penetration, it metaphorically carries value as it alludes to “opening another’s eyes,” that is opening their understanding, changing their point of view. In this sense, the allusions to “my truth,” to the profundity of a truth beneath the sand or truth of the tombs, deal at once with the particular and contextual expressions of marginalized occult desires (homosexual and sadomasochistic variations in *El público*, feminine adulterous desire in the

*Retablillo*), and more metaphorically to uncovering, opening, and creating space for variations of truth, thinking, relating, and being. The unmasking of marginalized versions of desire and identity is geared towards authenticity of being in the expression of oneself regardless of social convention. Subjects such as the *Figura de Pámpanos* and the *Hombre 1.º*, sovereign in their expression of desire, therefore, are shown by Lorca to assert themselves unbounded by restrictions or notions of acceptability. This characterization of the sovereign aids in the affirmation of the individual in contrast to the moral impositions of society.

The performativity of the intimate nature of the text conflates the two main concerns embodied by the work (theater and intimacy). By actualizing the issues that are referred to in the work, through stylistic, formal, and thematic rendition, *El público* is performative. While the examples of this performativity are numerous as the effects of the stage extend into the audience through fire, death, and the destruction of the theater, the final scene exemplifies the general breakdown of representation throughout the text. Here, the Director, now “open” to innovations concerning the theater asserts that “Aquí usted está pisando un teatro donde se han dado dramas auténticos y donde se ha sostenido un verdadero combate que ha costado la vida a todos los intérpretes” (2: 325). Again, the utterance attains double meaning as the life that the actors lose not only refers to the death of some of the characters (such as Gonzalo), but also more figuratively to the loss of the old self (masked and closed off) and the “opening up” of the subject to new ideas concerning drama and morality. Monegal affirms the performative aspect of the play as follows: “lo que la obra propone es lo que la obra hace. [...] Al actualizar dramáticamente estos dilemas, Lorca no sólo plantea y practica al mismo tiempo un modelo alternativo de teatro, sino que hace de ese debate el

vehículo de otras luchas más íntimas, [...] Desvelar la verdad del teatro pasa por desvelar la verdad del amor, y viceversa” (“Introducción,” *El público* 26). *El público* embodies the central tensions of theater and life, blurring the boundary as the preoccupations of both are uniquely melded into each other. As such the play demands a new audience, one that can respond both to the participatory nature of the theatrical performance and to the intimate truths presented therein.

The concerns that are brought to the forefront here are both discussed and performed (put into action) through reference to the Director’s distinction between “open air” theater and theater “under the sand.” These tensions are evident in the first moments of the play. *El público* begins in the Director’s room where the Criado enters and informs the Director that the audience is present and waiting for the play to start. The Director, who repeatedly invites the audience to enter, “que pase” (2: 282, 283, 327), declares that his theater will follow the parameters of an “open air” theater: conventional, comfortable, and perfectly conforming to what the audience expects. But the invitation to “pass through” or to “enter” the dramatic space fluctuates in meaning throughout the play, following the same transformations undergone by the Director himself. Where at the beginning of the play the Director’s invitation is that the audience simply enters in order to witness the “open air” theater, the same mandate at the end requires that the audience (hopefully a new audience capable of participating in a new theater) cross over, “pass through,” into an active participation in textual construction. While José Rubia Barcia declares that “La obra termina como empieza, invitando al público a que pase, como si no hubiera pasado aún” (397), Candelas Newton recognizes the command “que pase” as an invitation to transgress, cross a threshold or a limit. (50). Indeed, the invitation at the end of the play, from a Director that has himself

crossed the limit from an “open air” theater to a theater “beneath the sand,” urges the audience to cross the same boundary of discovery and understanding.

This natural environment of the “open air” theater is immediately penetrated by supernatural elements, however, as Caballos enter the dramatic space, blowing their horns and weeping. The Caballos—representative in Lorca of passion, natural instinct, and desire, and in contrast to the rational intentions of the Director—signal a new type of theater (one that will invert norms and expectations) as they produce a new language. While the Director wants to cast them out of his space (repress what they represent), some of the Caballos confuse, mix, and invert language, thus presenting a new linguistic order and relationship:

LOS CABALLOS [1.º y 2.º]. (*Furiosos*) Abominable  
LOS CABALLOS [3.º y 4.º]. Blenamiboá  
LOS CABALLOS [1.º y 2.º]. (*Reproche*) Abominable  
LOS CABALLOS [3.º y 4.º]. Blenamiboá (2: 283)

While Caballos 1.º y 2.º insist on a conventional use of language, the Caballos 3.º y 4.º present unintelligible linguistic variations. These inversions anticipate the blurring of frames and rupturing with official discourse and ideologies that will predominate the events of the entire play. Furthermore, the word “abominable” (together with its variation) shows aversion on the part of the Caballos. As a type of collective and critical audience that the Caballos comprise, they show disgust with and disapproval of convention.

From the beginning of the play the tension between two types of theater (conventional and the variation) is evident. Andrew Anderson summarizes the intentions of these very distinct version of theater by suggesting that,

If the “teatro al aire libre” represents conventional drama, untroubled and untroubling, designed to engage the spectators’ easier sentiments and to enable them to spend two or three hours of diversion in the theatre, then clearly the “teatro bajo la arena” points to innovation and experimentation, a concept of drama that will tackle more serious themes and challenge the

intellect of the audience. The conventional theatre fails to confront reality. (“Difícilísimo” 341)

The “teatro al aire libre” represents what the audience members are accustomed to, a theater that does not require any intellectual rigor or emotional engagement. In addition, the conventional theater deliberately maintains a distance from issues requiring a more profound contemplation on moral and aesthetic issues. The experimental theater, in contrast, confronts reality and lived experience as it unsettles the audience. The “open air” theater, which is meta-theatrically represented in the Director’s production of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, is immediately challenged with the appearance of three Hombres who provide the impetus for an renovated theater.

The dramatic innovations that Lorca’s text proposes does not discriminate between versions of desire, nor does it establish proper versus improper gender relationships. As the Hombre 1.º states while commenting on the Director’s representation of *Romeo and Juliet*, “Romeo puede ser un ave y Julieta puede ser una piedra. Romeo puede ser un grano de sal y Julieta puede ser un mapa” (2: 283). Not only are gender identity and sexual orientation irrelevant in Romeo’s and Juliet’s potential relationship, but the receptor of their affection does not even need to be human. Martínez Nadal astutely recognizes this overarching structure in Lorca: “El fenómeno amoroso podrá, pues, manifestarse en todos los niveles con idéntico dramatismo e intensidad. No es requisito imprescindible la intervención de los dos sexos, ni de dos seres humanos, ni siquiera, poéticamente hablando, de uno solo” (33). What Lorca highlights is a relationship based on randomness, without defined structures or roles. This subject mutates and transforms according to its desire and is not bound by propriety or convention. This unstable and protean figure is similar to the grotesque subject as outlined by Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*. What is important about this figure is the subversive

nature that it embodies, continually overturning the norms espoused by official discourse or authoritative culture. According to Bakhtin, the grotesque subject, evident prominently in Medieval and Renaissance carnivalesque culture,

is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world. [...] This is why the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows itself, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body. (*Rabelais* 317)

While the employment of grotesque figures is not new for Lorca (Lorca presents vomit, excrement, and dismembered subjects in the New York poems and drawings, for example) the transforming characters in *El público* do represent the most intensified and sustained mutations, or becomings, of forms and figures. María Clementa Millán validates the importance that the ambiguous mutations acquire in *El público*: “La transformación de los personajes, y la ambigüedad femenino-masculina de muchos de los caracteres, manifiestan el tema fundamental de la obra, en la que sólo unos pocos personajes no cambian su aspecto externo” (“Aportaciones” 815). In other words, in *El público* the formless and ever-changing figures are not just part of the subject matter as the demonstration of excess or base materialism, but they are in fact the central object of study, at once renovating the dramatic subject *and* presenting a new subjectivity based on intimate sovereignty, a subject beyond any norms and regulations.

Mary Russo’s reading of the Bakhtin’s theory of the grotesque body (seen through a feminist perspective) highlights the subversive nature of corporeal variation and mutation. For Russo, “The grotesque body is the open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming, process, change. The grotesque body is opposed to the classical body, which is monumental, static, closed, and sleek, corresponding to the aspirations of bourgeois

individualism” (325). In *El público*, the grotesque character is evident on several levels: in the constant transformations of the characters, in the confusions in gender identity through cross-dressing, in the deviations in sexual behaviors, and in the obsessions with anality and defecation. Lorca’s characters change roles and expectations as they seek an environment in which desire can be expressed regardless of how it might conform to or rupture with accepted social and moral conventions. Renate Lachmann eloquently argues that for Bakhtin, the carnivalesque spirit anticipates a “utopian world in which anti-hierarchy, relativity of values, questioning of authority, openness, joyous anarchy, and the ridiculing of all dogmas hold sway, a world in which syncretism and a myriad of differing perspectives are allowed” (118). Lorca’s text affirms a discourse based on this utopian world which is open to many perspectives and possibilities concerning inter-subjective relationships, including those based on homosexual desire.<sup>28</sup> His theater pushes the audience to recognize differing viewpoints with reference to both the goals of theater and to the possibilities for subjectivity.

In *El público* the characters use a *biombo*, folding screen, in order to accomplish identity confusions and transformations. As they pass behind the screen they emerge as changed figures. Not only do they appear with different clothing, grow beards, and change gender, but they also experience a change in psyche as well. After undergoing the transformations behind the *biombo* they become participants of the theater “under the sand.” In Scene 1, the Director is pushed through the *biombo* by the Hombre 1.º and reappears with a vague and twisted identity:

HOMBRE 1.º. Pasar adentro, con nosotros. Tenéis sitio en el drama. Todo el mundo. (*Al Director.*) Y tú, pasa por detrás del biomo.

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<sup>28</sup> The text also references other occult variations of desire such as sadomasochistic expression. See for example 2: 289, 291, 306.

*(Los Hombres 2.º y 3.º empujan al Director. Éste pasa por el biombo y aparece por la otra esquina un Muchacho vestido de raso blanco con una gola blanca al cuello. Debe ser una actriz. Lleva una pequeña guitarrita negra.)* (2: 286)

Identity and gender are instantly confused and transformed as the Director notices that he has undergone a change and now engenders feminine characteristics as he wants to wear lipstick and embroider. For Huélamo Kosma, “el tránsito del Director por el biombo lo revela como alguien radicalmente distinto al que se nos presenta en la confortable apariencia de su yo consciente: se trata de un arlequín, conocido prototipo de ambigüedad sexual” (*Teatro* 31). Genders are further confused as the Director pushes the Hombre 2.º through the *biombo*, who enters in a dress and with a beard. Elena then appears, the prototypical feminine figure, and accuses the Hombre 3.º of sleeping with the Director and of hiding a secret truth. The first Scene ends as the Director asks if they can now start the play, thus giving the first section a prologue-like status or at least the first meta-theatrical level with which the other Scenes will intersect.

The culmination of the transformations and shape-shifting appears in Scene 2 with the dialogue between Figura de Cascabeles and Figura de Pámpanos. With the change of scenes comes a complete rupture in spatial and temporal frames as well. Scene 2 no longer presents an “open air” theater as Scene 1 does, but rather presents the increasingly transgressive and supernatural ambience of the theater “under the sand.” Additionally, this Scene presents more sexual ambiguities as gender and sexual roles are inverted. The desire to be *other*, to transform oneself into something else, is perpetual in Scene 2. This metamorphosing and “act of becoming,” as Bakhtin call it, denies stable identity and affirms a carnivalesque transmutation of forms. The Figura de Cascabeles and the Figura de Pámpanos discuss what the other will do if one changes form. If one changes into a cloud,

for example, the other will change to an eye, as if to be cut or penetrated in a manner similar to the imagery in *Un chien andalou*. With all the other pairings of transformations, fusion, penetration, or intimate contact is suggested: the *caca* is penetrated by the fly, the white sheet envelops the other's chest, and the ant lives in the dirt. Whatever the characters become, the other becomes something with which an intimate fusion can be obtained. In carnivalesque fashion, the relationships established affirm "gay relativity, instability, openness and infiniteness, the metamorphic, ambivalence, the eccentric, materiality and corporeality, excess, the exchange of value positions (up/down, master/slave), and the sensation of the universality of being" (Lachmann 136). The continual transformations and doublings of characters, in addition to their carnivalesque mutations, are all centered on accessing an authenticity of being, what Lorca refers to as "my truth." For Lachmann, "The rationality of Bakhtin's carnival is decentered; i.e, it is not oriented towards *the* definition, *the* one truth. It is a rationality of doubling" (131). Lorca at no point appears to be establishing *the* truth as such, but rather points to a contextual and subjective variation of truth through the expression of oneself.

For Bakhtin, the grotesque body is communal, not isolated or closed-off: "if we consider the grotesque image in its extreme aspect, it never presents an individual body; the image consists of orifices and convexities that present another, newly conceived body. It is a point of transition in a life eternally renewed, the inexhaustible vessel of death and conception" (*Rabelais* 318). The permeable nature of this body is compared by Lachmann to the fusion that occurs between bodies in Bataille's notion of eroticism (148). For Bataille "Eroticism always entails a breaking down of established patterns, the patterns, I repeat, of the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of existence as defined by separate

individuals” (*Erotism* 18). What Bataille sees in eroticism is the continuity of the subject through contact with an other. By attaining fusion, becoming one, individuals obtain “a miraculous continuity between two beings. Yet this continuity is chiefly felt in the anguish of desire, when it is still inaccessible, still an impotent, quivering yearning. [...] The final aim of eroticism is fusion, all barriers gone” (Bataille, *Erotism* 19, 129). The grotesque and changing characters in *El público* seek fusion through the constant confusion of bodies. After the series of transformations, the Centurión arrives with the Emperador who looks for “one,” to which both Pámpanos and Cascabeles respond that they are he:

FIGURA DE PÁMPANOS. Uno soy yo.  
FIGURA DE CASCABELES. Uno soy yo .  
CENTURIÓN. ¿Cuál de los dos?  
FIGURA DE PÁMPANOS. Yo.  
FIGURA DE CASCABELES. Yo. (2: 293)

The Centurión, a macho man with beautiful wife and 200 children chastises the two figures and both the Centurión and the Emperador insist that “only one is one.” But what the Figuras discuss is that in the erotic act two become one, fused. Just as they each underwent their metamorphosing, and as nearly every pair had a fusion-type relationship in which it was penetrated or became confused with the other, the subject also denies the idea of a single, isolated subject. Rather than an “uno es uno” ideology, as the official discourse of the Emperador puts it (2: 293), the Figuras affirm fusion into the “one.” Says Lorca in a conversation with Martínez Nadal, ““El amor es el ansia constante de llegar a uno, pero si existiera el uno sería la negación del amor. Morimos solos, como mitades solas”” (Martínez Nadal 87). Indeed the anguish of isolation as well as the need for fusion persistently infuse *El público*.

The ambivalent shape-shifting and gender confusions in *El público* are coupled with

inversions of gender roles. In her relation with the Caballos in Scene 3, Julieta is exemplary in the subversion of conventional bourgeois gender roles. The importance of the Caballos is instructive since Julieta denies the macho Caballos Blancos and seeks refuge in the more homoerotic tendencies embodied by the Caballo Negro. She shuns the advances of the Caballos Blancos as she rejects “ese deseo [heterosexual] que tan bien conozco” (2: 300). Tired of convention, Julieta adjoins the Caballo Negro who affirms “No un deseo; todos los deseos” (2: 305). In her distancing from the heterosexual desire of the Caballos Blancos, Julieta presents a series of different possibilities for desire. Now a self-asserting and strong woman, not the subservient and accommodating feminine figure that the Caballos Blancos wanted, Julieta proclaims:

Pues ahora soy yo la que quiere acostarse con vosotros, pero yo mando, yo dirijo, yo os monto, yo os corto las crines con mis tijeras.  
CABALLO NEGRO. ¿Quién pasa a través de quién? ¡Oh amor, amor, que necesitas pasar tu luz por los calores oscuros! (2: 304)

The Caballo Negro affirms that the expression of love is negotiated through the opposition of the ideal and the low, through light and dark. This demonstrates that the truth of one’s desire is not necessarily to be found on the surface, but rather within the inner workings of the soul. This draws further attention to the Lorquian preoccupation with presenting (accessing) one’s own truth, authentic and stripped of masks or appearances that stifle the expression of sovereign subjectivity.

The relationship between the gender inversions and the desire for truth (as it is expressed in a “new” theater) is evident in the dialogue between the Caballos in Scene 3. The Director, even though now dressed as an Harlequin, still resists the dark truths as he shouts for “¡Teatro al aire libre!” (2: 305). But the characters of the theater “under the sand” state the directions and intentions of the newly renovated theater. Following the Caballo Blanco

1.º's retort, the Caballo Negro and the Hombre 1.º elaborate:

CABALLO BLANCO 1º. No. Ahora hemos inaugurado el verdadero teatro.  
El teatro bajo la arena.

CABALLO NEGRO. Para que se sepa la verdad de las sepulturas.

LOS TRES CABALLOS BLANCOS. Sepulturas con anuncios, focos de gas  
y largas filas de butacas.

HOMBRE 1º. ¡Sí! Ya hemos dado el primer paso. Pero yo sé positivamente  
que tres de vosotros se ocultan, que tres de vosotros nadan todavía en la  
superficie. (*Los tres Caballos Blancos se agrupan inquietos.*) [...] tenéis  
miedo de la verdad. (2: 205)

While the three Caballos Blancos understand desire to some extent, they do not fully capture the complete erasure of boundaries that the theater “under the sand” entails. This theater presents the truth of the tombs which reflects the intimate desire of the subject, containing at once the unrestricted drives of desire and death. The contradiction of desires exposed in *El público* (and in much of Lorca’s writing) has been examined by several critics as the occult regions of the grave signal the latent and intimate homosexual desires of the subject. But this desire is linked to death since it is non-productive.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the theater “under the sand” implies that which is hidden, covered, and not readily evident by the appearances on the surface. It is to these occult and obscure regions that Lorca’s text draws attention, and within which the truthful expression of oneself is found. As previously stated, Lorca’s true purpose, or “verdadero propósito” (3: 631), was examined in the impossible plays, *El público* among them. The hope to discover and to express a truth, “my truth” is evident in Lorca’s later work with reference nearly always to that which is in the depths or in the darkness. (Such is certainly the case with the *Sonetos del amor oscuro*, for example.)

Within the context of what has been said in previous chapters regarding the intentions

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<sup>29</sup> This tension between homosexual desire and the inevitability of death due to the subject’s inability to propagate itself through offspring is the central point of focus in José Angel Valente’s article “Pez luna” and Ángel Sahuquillo’s article “El asesinato de ‘Vuelta de paseo’ de Federico García Lorca.”

of and tensions within the variations of surrealism in Europe, it is relevant that “truth” for Lorca’s characters is found in the subterranean world, under the sand, or in the dark. This posture or inclination towards the low is more in-line with what Larrea calls the sub-realist aesthetic than it is to the sublimatory direction of Bretonian surrealism.<sup>30</sup> Lorca’s theater “under the sand” anticipates the obscurity of Larrea’s sub-realism, but amplifies it by alluding to the occult forces and intimate nature of this obscure and marginal “space.” And for Bataille, who celebrates the fallen and broken nature of forms, the tendency towards a sub-realist expression is adequately captured in the obscure regions under the sand. Julio Huélamo Kosma relates the subterranean world of intimate desire and truth to that of poetry. He alludes to this in *El público* as part of a “structure of the decline” which indicates the depths from which truth surges (*Teatro* 42). This essentially Bataillean scheme is, for Huélamo Kosma, what provokes “la caída en otro plano psicológico más profundo de la conciencia [...] el sepulcro va a constituirse en espacio plenamente desesperanzado y funeral; reflejo de la consumación y destrucción totales, de la muerte en suma” (*Teatro* 42). Through this “estructura de descenso” (Huélamo Kosma, *Teatro* 42, 50, 105), the instincts and authenticity of desire can thrive.<sup>31</sup> Huélamo Kosma continues by asserting that, “en el sepulcro accedemos a la tensión entre los puros instintos, y a ello corresponde el empleo de un soporte no ya lógico, no ya mítico o histórico, sino poético. La poesía se va a configurar así como marco apropiado en la indagación de la verdad más profunda, es decir, la verdad poética” (*Teatro* 50). And the fall to the formless depths of the profound, secret, and dark

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<sup>30</sup> Ángel Berenguer refers to much of what happens in *El público* as part of a “subteatro” which, even though he does not elaborate on his use of the term, does refer to a “‘teatro oculto’, ‘bajo la arena’, ‘subterráneo’” (11).

<sup>31</sup> The Director later states that true theater only comes from this lower region: “Todo el teatro sale de las humedades confinadas. Todo el teatro verdadero tiene un profundo hedor de luna pasada” (2: 323).

depths of the subject leads to the revelation of an authenticity and truth of being. As Huélamo Kosma concludes: “la estructura de descenso ya comentada [...] trata de acceder a lo más profundo, a lo más enterrado, pero también a lo más verdadero” (*Teatro* 105).

The path of discovery to “my truth” is attained through the constant transformations of the characters in *El público*, as well as through the inclination towards the subterranean realms of subjectivity. Accessing this “truth” entails a process of stripping away the surface and reaching the most interior and intimate space. *El público* is replete with references to veins and bones which remain beneath the surface of the skin. The inclusion of the X-ray machine in the text highlights the importance of seeing beneath the surfaces. Gwynne Edwards suggests that, “In particular, the juxtaposition of the hand, covered with flesh, and the X-ray plates, revealing the bones underneath the flesh, vividly suggests the play’s intention to expose the truth that lies beneath appearances and façades” (68-69). The X-ray, furthermore, as a medical tool, implies not only that the interior aspects of reality can be seen, but that they can be studied, examined, and understood. As sustained by David George, “the graphic exposition of veins and tendons parallels the play’s harsh exposure and analysis of bare essentials contained in the image of the X-ray” (116). The X-ray is one of several devices that Lorca uses to draw attention to the importance of seeking the intimate and “underlying” truths of reality which “revelan de manera gráfica lo que permanece invisible por debajo de la piel. Ropaje, ambos símbolos, ocultador de lo que no es aparente a simple vista y que se aclarará y reforzará con la presencia añadida del ‘biombo’ mágico, capaz de descubrir la oculta personalidad de quien lo cruce por detrás” (Barcia 391). Only by examining what lies beneath the many layers of facade will the characters be able to truly discover themselves and express their authentic individualities: a sense of subjectivity which

is open to transformation, fluctuation, and ambiguous representations of the self.

In addition to the X-ray, which illuminates the innermost portions of the subject, another important level of discovery of the faithful presentation of oneself is attained through the shedding of masks and clothing. The characters are only seen expressing themselves openly and freely after they shed their masks. The relevance of stripping masks away is evident in Scene 3 when the Hombre 1.º speaks to the Director and indicates the nature of their struggle:

HOMBRE 1º. (*Al Director.*): Mi lucha ha sido con la máscara hasta conseguir verte desnudo. (*Lo abraza.*)

[...]

HOMBRE 1º. Te amo delante de los demás porque abomino de la máscara y porque ya he conseguido arrancártela. (2: 305-06)

It is not until the Director understands the falsifying nature of the masks that he is able to realize the intimate nature of unrestricted expression. Once the masks are pulled off, in essence, once the characters are “naked,” they are able to see one another in their most authentic states. The Director, however, resists this realization until the final Scene of the play:

When the Director reappears in scene 5, however, he has completely changed his ideas on the role of the mask in the theatre. He no longer defends or is afraid of mask, but is convinced of the arguments that Hombre 1 had forcefully put to him earlier [...] that the theatre should not be afraid to rip away masks and deal with difficult and controversial subjects. (George 122)

The Director finally sees the relevance of the theater “under the sand” and the levels of truth that it reveals.

The breaking of conventions with reference to theatrical subjectivities and issues of gender and sexuality is amplified by the spatial and structural transgression involved in this innovative type of theater. In the final two Scenes, the effects of the theater “under the sand”

are evident. The fictional audience, unprepared for the transgressive nature of the play, and upset about the scandal just witnessed, seeks the death of the Director. Amid chaos and revolution, onlookers comment on the destruction of the theater:

DAMA 2ª. ¡Qué horror!

DAMA 3ª. Han encontrado al Director de escena dentro del sepulcro.

DAMA 1ª. ¿Y Romeo?

DAMA 4ª. Lo estaban desnudando cuando salimos.

MUCHACHO 1º. El público quiere que el poeta sea arrastrado por los caballos.

DAMA 1ª. ¿Pero por qué? Era un drama delicioso y la revolución no tiene derecho para profanar las tumbas. (2: 313)

Not only were the events of the theater “beneath the sand” too scandalous for the audience, but they were shocked as they discovered that the actor representing Julieta was actually a young boy and that Romeo was an older man. The students comment on the uproar that this discovery caused:

ESTUDIANTE 4º. El tumulto comenzó cuando vieron que Romeo y Julieta se amaban de verdad.

ESTUDIANTE 2º. Precisamente fue por todo lo contrario. El tumulto comenzó cuando observaron que no se amaban, que no podían amarse nunca.

ESTUDIANTE 4º. El público tiene sagacidad para descubrirlo todo y por eso protestó. (2: 313)

The university students talk about the audience’s reaction and discuss what is and is not acceptable in the theater, and whether the transgression of norms and transformation of forms is justified:

ESTUDIANTE 1º. Romeo puede ser un ave y Julieta puede ser una piedra. Romeo puede ser un grano de sal y Julieta puede ser un mapa. ¿Qué le importa esto al público?

ESTUDIANTE 4º. Nada, pero un ave no puede ser un gato, ni una piedra puede ser un golpe de mar.

ESTUDIANTE 2º. Es cuestión de forma, de máscara.

[...]

ESTUDIANTE 2º. En último caso, ¿es que Romeo y Julieta tienen que ser necesariamente un hombre y una mujer para que la escena del sepulcro se

produzca de manera viva y desgarradora?  
ESTUDIANTE 1°. No es necesario, y esto era lo que se propuso demostrar  
con genio el Director de escena. (2: 314)

This discussion points to several main themes that are transmitted throughout the play. That the actors are in fact male and female matters little to the argument as it presents open variations of desire rather than convention. The genders and preferences of the characters are arbitrary and in flux, and it is due to this randomness that they obtain their subversive strength. But for the audience, the reality of the actors (their actual gender, for example) has crossed over into concerns beyond the stage, rupturing levels of expectation and making the play disconcerting for the spectators rather than just providing fictional entertainment. Representation is ended as the actions of the play breach into life and the effects overflow the framework of the dramatic space. Martínez Nadal relates that in *El público*, “Más que la representación podría hablarse de ‘desrepresentación’, de veracidad frente a ficción teatral” (253). The play is participatory in that the images and actions presented effect the audience’s actions, ultimately leading to revolt.

The full thrust of the play, however, fails as the audience reacts violently and rebels against the theater and the director. The new theater demands a new public, and this is precisely what Lorca sought with his “impossible” plays. As the theater blurs the life and art it presents a radical new vision of the performative and transformative effects of the aesthetic object. According to Edwards, “In *The Public* there is no separation between its action and its audience. The playgoer, observing on the stage episodes and incidents that, often painful, embarrassing and shameful, seemingly have no relevance to himself, is made aware that he is looking at an actor who is, in fact, himself, and that the play is merely a reflection of the larger scale of life” (68). This type of manifestation on the stage necessarily forces the

audience to consider the theater as a means for self reflection. As Candelas Newton concludes, Lorca's play does not just seek an impact on the audience,

sino la participación de éste como productor del sentido de la obra. [...] se le hace al receptor partícipe de la mecánica del signo artístico, de su juego entre verdad y artificio, indentificación y distanciamiento, patetismo y reflexión. [...] El diálogo inconexo de la figuras revela la movilidad del intercambio discursivo donde la identidad se fragmenta en su refracción entre el yo y el otro. [...] Ese juego de refracciones insiste en la autorreflexividad del espectáculo teatral y en el juego entre la identificación y el distanciamiento. (49-50, 53)

Lorca's *El público*, quite possibly the poet's most radical and transgressive work, pushes the limits aesthetically, discursively, and thematically. In its rendition of grotesque and transforming figures, the play breaks barriers of representation and propriety. And in its participative nature, that is, as it shocks the audience and demands that the onlookers intellectually engage the work, it renders representation insufficient. Indeed, it seeks the closure of representation. The innovative characters that permeate *El público*, sovereign and unstable, reflect the incompleteness and openness of desire and erotic relationships as they search for the expression of "my truth": the individual and particular manifestation of homosexual desire *and* the opening up of newly contextualized possibilities for art, social interaction, and moral norms. The strength of desire and its expression, specifically with reference to its occult variations, is exerted in *El público* in unrelenting fashion, pushing the limits and crossing boundaries, and undeniably manifesting that the authentic representation of the self is found when one removes its mask.

## CHAPTER IV

### ROTTEN ROSES AND OTHER BOTANICAL BEREAVEMENTS, OR, THE INADEQUACY OF THE BINARY

The transgressions of temporal, spatial, and gender traditions in the *Retablillo* and *El público* stifle conventions aesthetically, structurally, and thematically and demonstrate some of the most violent of Lorca's vanguardist writings. His works created in the Americas (New York and Cuba) present innovative forms of expression as the poet experiments with artistic genres and expressive possibilities. The drawings, dramas, and poems push the limits of representation and exhibit both aesthetic renovation and social critique. Lorca's later works continue the artistic course set in the new world even though the poet returns to familiar themes from his earlier works including provincial Spanish geographies and subjects—topics dealing specifically with women and society (as in *Bodas de sangre*, *Yerma*, *Doña Rosita*, and *La casa de Bernarda Alba*). As Andrew Anderson recognizes in *Lorca's Late Poetry*, the socio-political thrust of Lorca's work, found earlier in his poetry, is embodied in his later years in his dramatic works (12-13). While the three tragedies written between 1931 and 1936 (*Bodas*, *Yerma*, and *La casa*) have received extensive critical evaluation, *Doña Rosita la soltera o El lenguaje de las flores*, also written during this period, does not enjoy a similar amount of attention. However, like the poetic production of the later years which revisits the tradition of poetic forms with a vanguardist orientation (including the sonnet, as in the curiously engendered and erotically charged *Sonetos del amor oscuro*), *Doña Rosita* also presents a reconsideration of traditional themes and conventions. And similarly to the works devised in the Americas, *Doña Rosita* continues the legacy of *informe*-ing, although Lorca's

late drama moves beyond highlighting the base and the putrified as it increasingly questions the binary system in general through an ambivalent posture toward both idealism and materialism.

*Doña Rosita* presents the complexity of the Lorquian aesthetic on many levels, including the manner in which Lorca's texts work within the literary tradition in order to redirect expression. His innovative interpretation of traditional themes in *Doña Rosita* includes that of the rose motif as its significations disperse toward radical vanguardist meanings. The reorientation of the rose motif is demonstrated most prominently in *Doña Rosita* as the metaphor of the rose comes to symbolize the old maid, the *solterona*, thus highlighting that the destiny of the rose (and Rosita by extension) is death in which no rebirth or renewal are possible, subversively undermining religious, social, and aesthetic conventions. In this sense, binary structures are shown to be insufficient as the rose metaphor illuminates the marginal space of the spinster. While much of the criticism concerning Bataille's involvement in the avant-garde centers around whether or not his critical models merely subvert existing structural paradigms of "high" and "low" by repositioning the base as superior to the ideal,<sup>1</sup> Lorca's work supercedes the entire program of hierarchical oppositions which are themselves idealist in nature. In *Doña Rosita*, Lorca presents a play that undoes oppositional dominations by showing a vacillation and constant tension between high and low, materialism and idealism, which, for Paul Julian Smith highlights a key facet of Lorca's work: ambivalence. According to Smith, Lorca's texts draw sustained attention to an ambivalence not resolved or assimilated: "it [ambivalence] refuses the resolution of the

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion on this critique of Bataille, see Allan Stoekl's Introduction to *Visions of Excess* (especially page xiii), and his reading of Bataille's relationship to fascism in *Yale French Studies* 78 (1990): 181-205.

dichotomy through either inclination (the opting for the one term over another) or the equilibrium (the dialectical synthesis of the two terms). Thus in ambivalence affirmation and negation (love and hate, activity and passivity) are simultaneous and inseparable” (“New York, New York” 170). In *Doña Rosita*, the ambivalence evident between idealism and materialism, for example, presents an aesthetic which denies categorical specifications of metaphorical meanings. The rose motif in Lorca comes to embody significations which extend beyond passion, idealistic Platonic ascent, and the fugitive nature of beauty as it presents a continual alteration of proportion, thus representing a marginal figure that is distorted, varied, formless, outdated, grotesque. Much of Lorca’s work considers this vague space between forms, a space of void in which to posit figures that challenge genre, gender, and identity, thus drastically critiquing conventions of nineteenth-century Spain as it ironically displays *cursi* exterior pretensions which are at odds with the inevitabilities of life and death.

The sources and symbolism of the roses in Lorca’s poems and plays are treated at length by several Lorquian critics. Marie Laffranque’s “Federico García Lorca, de *Rosa Mudable* a la *Casida de la rosa*,” for example, offers a comprehensive study which traces the use of floral symbols in Lorca and the ways in which they differ over the span of much of the poet’s literary production. Yet in most attempts to approximate what is at work in Lorca’s use of the rose motif, critics incessantly re-inscribe Lorca’s employment of the rose within traditional literary aesthetics and philosophical models which fail to recognize the manner in which Lorca uses the rose motif as a vanguardist device. These analyses rely on how previous major literary movements define the rose as primarily “a principle and symbol of beauty and love [which] is furthermore enshrined forever in convention—the rose in its

abstracted form becomes a kind of timeless and everlasting platonic ideal or archetype” (Anderson, *Lorca’s* 126). Such traditions or conventions of the rose motif include the courtly love and *carpe diem* motifs of the renaissance, the idealization of liberated love themes of romanticism, and the transcendent nature of beauty in many strands of modernism (including *modernismo*). The legacies of these tendencies establish symbolic paradigms within which the rose most prominently signifies ideal beauty, love, unified form, and Platonic ascent, but rarely recognize vanguardist and transgressive reorientations that Lorca’s roses embody. What proves remarkable in Lorca’s use of the rose motif in his later works—including the drawing “Rosa de la muerte,” the poem “Casida de la rosa,” and the play *Doña Rosita*—is the vanguardist departure from these accepted meanings of the rose motif and the vacillations of meaning and ambiguous spaces that the botanical language offers. Lorca indeed inherits traditional uses of the rose symbol, yet his play demonstrates a rethinking of forms and posits, through a tragic structure and a final recourse to death, that the ideal forms of the tradition are in descent. The rose no longer symbolizes love or beauty, but rather metaphorically captures the vague subjectivity of the old maid.

Lorca alludes to his text’s dialogue with tradition when he states:

Estoy escribiendo una comedia, en la que pongo toda mi ilusión: *Doña Rosita la soltera o El lenguaje de las flores*, diana para familias dividida en cuarto jardines. Será una pieza de dulces ironías, de piadosos trozos de caricatura; comedia burguesa, de tonos suaves, y en distintas épocas. Va a sorprender mucho, creo yo, la evocación de estos tiempos, en que los ruseñores cantaban de verdad y los jardines y las flores tenían un culto de novela. Aquella maravillosa época de la juventud de nuestros padres. Tiempos de polisión; después, las faldas de campánulas y el ‘cutroví’, 1890, 1900, 1910. (3: 541)

Lorca’s play, written in the conflictive period of the Second Republic, recognizes the past period of the Spanish Restoration when “the nightingales sang of truth and the gardens and

flowers were like in novels.” *Doña Rosita* employs this past age in order to critique the bourgeois public which dreams the ideal and will not recognize the decadence around them, thus signaling the tension between pretense and reality.

The vanguardist spirit, in contrast to the nineteenth-century optimism and idealism, is posited by José Moreno Villa (poet, artist, intellectual, and friend of Lorca’s) in the modern work of art’s instinctual propensity toward death (Huerco Cardoso 31). The language of flowers in Lorca’s play, therefore, cannot solely signal the love, beauty, and eroticism of previous literary traditions due to the flower’s inherent material putrefaction. And rather than a focus on Platonic architectures of the rose (its uprightness and lofty aspirations towards the exalted), Lorca’s treatment of botany signals a fall of form and constitutes a fissure from forms and symbols of beauty. The use of the rose in *Doña Rosita* and other Lorquian works—as well as in other treatments of the rose in the Spanish vanguard which will be examined here—affirms the dissemination of meaning toward ambiguously engendered spaces and voices, such as the *solterona*. As Derrida appraises concerning the nullification of stable meanings when considering the rose symbol, “Thus, in (the) place of the flower, the anthographic, marginal and paraphrasing text: which no longer signifies” (*Glas* 30).<sup>2</sup> In Lorca’s text, through a presentation of material putrefaction (literally, symbolically, and poetically), rotten roses dialogue with and rethink the literary tradition and the prevalent idealist models of the epoch. With the passing of time and with Rosita’s and the *rosa mutabilis*’s progression towards putrefaction, high aspirations and stable meanings are grounded. These movements toward the low and fragmented forms outline Lorca’s aesthetic

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<sup>2</sup> The thinking of other post-structural critics offers similar readings of botanical destabilizations. For Deleuze and Guattari, for example, subversive rhizomatic structures undo relationships of hierarchy, meaning, identity, and other systems of stable linguistic relations. See in particular *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pages 3-25.

and that of the avant-garde by affirming an affinity to heterogeneous and fluctuating symbolic meanings.

This considered, the Spanish poet and playwright's *Doña Rosita la soltera* engages in similar philosophical concerns of "base materialism" and *informe* as his New York works as examined previously but go beyond even Bataille's notions of the base as it argues for the inadequacy of the binary relationships.<sup>3</sup> The withering plants, the rotting roses, and the "sinister plant life"—as Mario Hernández calls it (*Line* 130)—disrupt both the idealist goals (including their hierarchies of above/below, *sur/sub*, beauty/filth) and their modernist renovations of "marvelous beauty." In essence, Lorca's use of the rose metaphor radically overturns conventional uses of this symbol as it presents a comparison between the rose and the spinster (or old maid), rather than between the rose and a beautiful woman. Lorca's text questions a monovalent meaning as it presents a floral signifier in flux, not purely ideal nor material. In his critique of such idealist inclinations within the Surrealist revolution which favored a marvelous private heaven or wonderland, Bataille attacks the elevated forms and spiritual motifs and suggests that, "on the other hand, a plant thrusts its obscene-looking roots into the earth in order to assimilate the putrescence of organic matter, and a man experiences, in contradiction to strict morality, urges that draw him to what is low, placing him in open antagonism to all forms of spiritual elevation" (*Visions* 36). Bataille's language of flowers opposes anything that affirms illumination, spiritual clairvoyance, Platonic

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<sup>3</sup> Even though not a surrealist text *per se*, examining *Doña Rosita* through the surrealist tensions highlighted by Breton and Bataille, offers insight into similar theoretical impasses in Lorca's work. While at first the base repulsed Breton and was excluded from his notion of the surreal and its sublimating force, it seems that he later retracts this position as he favors a dissolution of the binary, even though he still does not see the importance of the base as Bataille does and resorts to calling him the excremental philosopher (*Manifestoes* 185). In the *Second Manifesto* (1930) he states that "Everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions" (*Manifestoes* 123).

ascents, or “above” realities. Yet in contrast to Bataille, Lorca does not use the rose simply to present a discourse on annihilation *as such*, but rather, affirms a value in putrefaction as it signals a degree-zero of meaning, and a space through which to articulate marginal voices. This posture neither reinforces oppositional hierarchy nor does it reconcile them through assimilation of one to the other. Rather, it continually offers an ambivalent flux between idea and matter, recognizing their inseparability and tension.

It is revealing that “The Language of Flowers,” the subtitle of Lorca’s play, is the same title as a short theoretical piece by Bataille from the 1929-1930 review *Documents* which attacks the idealist goals of the Bretonian Surrealists. Both thinkers (Lorca and Bataille) continually take issue with traditional appearances and pretenses and reject previously privileged notions of beauty, vision, and architecture, by underscoring the well-known facts that flowers decay, the sun blinds, and buildings fall. From both an aesthetic and philosophical point of departure, these thinkers argue that the “language of flowers” signifies material putrefaction. Lorca employs traditional models and motifs (such as love and the symbolism of flowers) and gives them a new orientation, which rejects nineteenth-century conceptions of love and art, while revealing the ethical and aesthetical novelty of marginal voices: that of an unmarried woman whose ideals and appearances finally lead to her decay, and that of the abundant flowers which signal the same temporal process of putrefaction and death. Lorca does not consent to merely demonstrate the fall into formless and base material in the rose’s inevitable death and decay. Rather, he examines the inadequacy of hierarchical relationships on many levels, including social, aesthetic, and philosophical structures. The conflictive void between oppositions resists the delimitation of forms of expression and representation by creating spaces of ambiguous and ironic fluctuations. As exemplified by

Lorca's vanguardist orientation of the rose symbol (signifier)—which revises the motif of the flower and presents it as a metaphor in which withering is the destiny of the unproductive old maid—Rosita's decay and death position her in contrast to any notion of *carpe diem*, utility, and rebirth as love and beauty are reduced to nothingness.

What Bataille theorizes in his early *Documents* writings, and what Lorca amplifies in the drawing "Rosa de la muerte," the poem "Casida de la rosa," and *Doña Rosita* (through Rosita's decay and the *rosa mutabilis*'s withering) is that *within* exalted forms such as the rose of the literary tradition (albeit at the margins), there are forces at work that seek to bring about the dissolution of meaning and unified form. Rather than opposing *informe* to form (which would form an idealist binary structure), Rosalind Krauss asserts that *informe* "work[s] at the heart of form, to erode it from within" (*Optical* 167). The *rosa mutabilis* is one of such mutating forms that undoes itself from within through its inherent recourse to death since it draws attention to both the Platonic ideal of beauty and elegance, but also to the inescapable putrefaction through decay and rotting. Rosita, the unproductive, unused, and unmarried woman couples with the decay of the rose to provide a radical botanical metaphor which reflects a vanguardist destiny toward death. Lorca's text, then, redirects the rose motif to capture the anguish, discontent, and destruction of ideals, and as such, critiques nineteenth-century values of idealism, pretense, and *cursilería*.

### Rose Traditions

Lorca's revision of the rose motif is rooted in the significations of the rose as employed by previous literary traditions, but departs drastically from them as his text confers upon the rose a subversive and sinister destabilizing force. In her 1960 study titled *The*

*Symbolic Rose*, Barbara Seward traces the origins of the rose's symbolic meanings to Greece and Rome and examines the modifications that it undergoes through Christianity, the renaissance, and the nineteenth century. She recognizes the rose's appeal to man and asserts that "its petals embrace the deepest positive values ever held by man" (1). In each literary period and in each symbolic case, Seward examines the complex network of sublimated meanings which include love, beauty, escape, salvation, paradise, and grace. She states that for the romantics and symbolists, the rose provides a "fundamental impulse to communicate ideals that transcend the material limits of life and the denotative limits of language" (4). Here, the rose not only gives stimulus for reflection on life's purest and most uniform organisms, but it also approximates a representation of the lofty aspirations of the romantics and attains a level of spiritual significance since it seeks to express the inexpressible. Yet whereas the rose symbolizes love and joy in the majority of the settings of the literary and philosophical tradition, Seward also recognizes its counterpart, sorrow, but only to re-inscribe it within the framework of the ideal. She states that "If the flower of joy has also been the flower of sorrow [because it has thorns and succumbs to withering], it has belonged to sorrow only because it first belonged to joy" (7).

The affirmation of *carpe diem* is a key part of the rose tradition, especially for Lorca, as it presents the decay of the life-form through the passing of time. In the literary tradition of courtly love, the subject is drawn to the object of desire as a result of obstacles and understands that as time passes the opportunity of unification with the ideal love-object is fleeting. As seen in many poems of the Spanish lyric tradition, including Garcilaso's "Soneto XXIII" and Góngora's "Mientras por competir," the *carpe diem* motif—even though it recognizes the decay and fleeting nature of time and beauty—still affirms the ideal and

uniform qualities of love and beauty. Seward recognizes additional forms associated with the rose symbol which, in literary and philosophical contexts, provide models that will later be revised in their respective spheres. Namely, the sun, light, vision, and knowledge (all associated with the rose) serve as foundational structures from which renaissance, romantic, and modernist writers derive inspiration. As Seward states, “The symbol of the rose or rose-shaped flower vitalized by an omnipotent sun [...] was central among the earliest organized attempts of man to comprehend the universe around him” (11). The edifice constructed around the rose symbolism provides an ideal form of contemplation which reflects the ideal forms of existence, love, and unity.

In Lorca, the uses and meanings of floral symbols are rich and varied. The many sources for *Doña Rosita* and the dialogue that this text maintains with traditional meanings of the rose are explained by, among others, the poet’s brother Francisco García Lorca, Marie Laffranque, Daniel Devoto, Catherine Nickel, Francie Cate-Arries, Arturo Jiménez-Vera, and Andrew Anderson. Along with a persistence on elucidating the many sources for the work, these critics examine the work’s dramatic structure, use of language, prosaic and poetic forms, and social messages. In nearly all the criticism, the central points of focus are the play’s poetic passages which highlight the passing of time and the process undergone by the changing rose. For Francisco García Lorca, for example, “[e]n *Doña Rosita* la acción es, esencialmente, el paso del tiempo; del tiempo cronológico” (322). The importance of time as it is exposed in the “rose poem” portion of the play is exemplified by Devoto as he recognizes its central function in the play’s structure and dramatic progression: “La verdadera acción comienza y acaba en el acto primero [en el poema de la rosa.] [...] Lo confiesa doña Rosita al final del último acto: ‘Yo lo sabía todo. Sabía que se había casado... Todo estaba

acabado” (409). The rose poem highlights the central motif of the fleeting time of the flower and of Rosita as it explains the process of the *rosa mutabile* which opens in the morning and blossoms to a beautiful red color, withers to white in the afternoon, and dies in the evening as the sun lowers and the cold night beckons. Devoto examines the multiplicity of sources that inform Lorca’s play, such as eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French botany manuals, popular fashion of the early 1900s including proverbs and other trite sayings, people in Lorca’s life such as teachers and neighbors, and early literary sources like Lope, Garcilaso, and Francisco Camprodón (*Flor de un día*). Devoto is indeed correct in asserting a multiplicity of sources as he states that “Lorca construye su drama con multitud de elementos vinculados a estos [...] datos fundamentales (color de época, lenguaje de las flores, amaneramientos y figuras de antaño, formas de decir, juegos, versillos, refranes, conjuros, supersticiones y otras formas tradicionales)” (433). Yet all these sources, when attributed to Lorca, insert him back into “otras formas tradicionales” such as the ideal rose themes of the renaissance and their *carpe diem* motifs, romantic idealism, and modernist beauty. These ascriptions are certainly relevant, but as will be shown here, a violent reaction to such structures is also evident in Lorca’s text as sustained attention is drawn to a destiny of death.<sup>4</sup>

Andrew Anderson’s analysis of Lorca’s use of rose symbolism, along with the

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<sup>4</sup> Catherine Nickel’s examination of *Doña Rosita* focuses on the “symbolic correspondence of the heroine and the rose” through different uses of prosaic and poetic language (522). She analyzes prosaic and poetic structures (including the use of *cursilería* and clichés) in the rose poem, “Romance de la rosa,” and in the flower ballad, “Lo que dicen las flores.” Nickel examines the language in the *manolas*’ ballad, which “reflects a regional folklore, [...] of the ambience of the turn of the century in Granada” (526), but does not elaborate on key contrasts between the two poems which evidence a departure from the rose tradition in the rose poem versus the return to a *cursi* tradition in the flower ballad. Rather, she insists on the “traditional associations of flowers” (530) and fails to highlight the break with such conservative norms. Francie Cate-Arries, on the other hand, departs from a conventional reading of the text by positioning the work within a Freudian framework as established in relation to *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The connections drawn by Cate-Arries are detailed and provocative as she furthers and rethinks the existing criticism on “sources” and presents the inherent instability of the signification of the language of flowers as a changing language of the repressed.

traditions from which it derives its meaning, is a foundational study of the sources for *Doña Rosita*. Anderson recognizes nineteenth- and twentieth-century sources for the work, as most of the criticism has done, but also draws attention to earlier sources that have significance in Lorca's *oeuvre*. Specifically, he examines "in greater detail some representative examples of rose symbolism from the so-called Spanish Golden Age: a symbolism which in turn derives primarily from classical authors" ("More" 152). His study centers on the rose poem from *Doña Rosita* in which the fleeting life of the *rosa mutabilis* is outlined. Anderson attributes the origination of the symbolism of the *rosa mutabilis* to classical poets such as Ausonius, Virgil, and Horatio. This tradition is later translated into Golden-Age Spain through poets and playwrights including Garcilaso, Góngora, Lope de Vega, Quevedo, and Calderón. Anderson alludes to the elevated forms and representations of the rose in these early Spanish writers and their opposing motifs of "dew, wind, fainting, night and the sea" ("More" 162). These influences, sources, and traditions are indeed essential to Lorca's works, but the Granadine poet furthers the potency of the rose in *Doña Rosita* to reconsider the sublimated nature of "the idea" and to draw attention to the materiality of the rose, to its putrefaction, and to the ensuing critiques and claims that such a dissolution of form makes. This position questions idealist structures and focuses on the dispersal of matter and an inclination towards the destructuring effects of formlessness, ambivalent and subversive subjectivities, and inherent destinies of withering.

#### Vanguardist Variations of the Rose: Lorca's Floral Fascinations

In the writings of many avant-garde poets and intellectuals, the rose motif acquires a privileged place of aesthetic contemplation as it undergoes a radical reorientation. Any

study of the sources for Lorca's *Doña Rosita* should take into account not only the poet's other poetic and pictorial representations of the rose, but also his declarations concerning the play, and other general renovations of floral motifs that occur in the avant-garde. The genesis of *Doña Rosita*, and the poet's formal introduction to the *rosa mutabilis*, takes place in 1924 in Madrid while Lorca converses with José Moreno Villa. The former later related his conversation with Moreno Villa to Felipe Morales in an interview on April 7, 1936:

Mi última comedia, *Doña Rosita o El lenguaje de las flores*, la concebí en el año 1924. Mi amigo Moreno Villa me dijo: "Te voy a contar la historia bonita de una flor: *La rosa mutabile* de un libro de rosas del siglo XVIII". Venga. "Había una vez una rosa..." Y cuando acabó el cuento maravilloso de la rosa, yo tenía hecha mi comedia. Se me apareció terminada, única, imposible de reformar. Y sin embargo, no la he escrito hasta 1936. Han sido los años los que han bordado las escenas y han puesto versos a la historia de la flor. (3: 631)<sup>5</sup>

This interview reveals much about the originary source material for the play, and subsequently confirms the renewed insistence on the figure of the mutating rose, but it does not inform us of the specific poetic value that Lorca wanted to capture with his portrayal of the *rosa mutabilis*. Rather, the reader is left to gather insight into the flower's function within the play from the dramatic text itself.

The influence and poetic thinking of Moreno Villa, however, does elucidate the importance of floral motifs and their revisions in the Spanish vanguard. In Moreno Villa's 1932 piece titled "Poética," the poet from Málaga clarifies his desire for an interrogation of

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<sup>5</sup> The encounter between the two writers, along with the conversation concerning botanical motifs is related by Moreno Villa as follows: "Recuerdo que una tarde tomando café en el Palace Hotel con él [Lorca], Dalí, y Pepín Bello, les conté mi hallazgo del día: un libro sobre la Rosa. Un libro francés de principios del siglo XIX muy sugestivo, con todas las variedades conocidas y los nombres latinos y modernos. Pronto me olvidé de aquello, pero, a los dos años, se presentó con 'Doña Rosita la soltera', y aparecían algunos de los nombres que le dije, entre ellos el de 'Rosa mutabilis' que es toda una evocación. Por esto, al estrenarse la obra en Barcelona, le puse un telegrama diciendo: 'Te felicita cordialmente el abuelo de Doña Rosita'" (*Vida* 121). There is much debate concerning the dates indicated by Lorca and Moreno Villa. The discrepancies are treated by Luis Martínez Cuitiño (15-17) and Daniel Devoto (410-11).

tradition and past values. In the first sentence of his “poetics” Moreno Villa states, “Quisiera establecer mi línea poética” (*Poesías* 8), and then continues:

penetro en una zona luminosa y sorda, [...] En aquella zona mandan mucho los contrarios: la luz y la sombra, la ironía y la gravedad, la fe y la incredulidad, la pena y la alegría. Son los que dan claroscuro. [...] Una de las cosas que diferencia a la poesía moderna de la antigua es la riqueza ilimitada de elementos que maneja. Explicándome diré: ayer, solamente la perla, el rubí, la aurora, la rosa y otras preciosidades al alcance de cualquier memoria, por indocumentada que fuese; hoy todos los *documentos*, datos, elementos, se relacionan y montan en imágenes vívidas y tembleteantes. (*Poesías* 8-9, italics in original)

For Moreno Villa, the vanguardist work of art gives much attention to a new and innovative uses of past images and motifs. Similar to Lorca’s conflux of opposing images inherent to modern art (as analyzed in Chapter two with reference to the obscure but religious sense felt among the Negroes of Harlem), Moreno Villa also signals the way in which the new is represented in modern poetry. The vanguardist spirit uses the past in order to revise and rethink contemporary preoccupations that extend beyond the purview of traditional forms. Moreno Villa’s poetic theory concerning the vision and revision of the artistic subject matter of “yesterday” is similar in theme to Lorca’s explanation of *Doña Rosita* and the renovation that it makes of the nineteenth century’s focus on appearance and objects of beauty, including the rose, the “song of the nightingale,” and the “time of our parents’ youth.”

Additionally relevant to the discussion here on Lorca’s revision of the rose motif in *Doña Rosita* and other texts (and especially the importance that Bataille’s early writings have in such an analysis), is Moreno Villa’s reference to the *documentos* that form part of the source and subject matter for the poetic writing of “today.” Moreno Villa, a well-traveled avant-garde intellectual, was in-tune with the artistic pulse of the epoch and widely read in local and international journals, literary and artistic reviews. According to Humberto Huergo

Cardoso, Moreno Villa's inclusion of the *documentos* in his "Poética" is a direct reference to the French avant-garde journal *Documents*, edited by Bataille and the forum for much of the excommunicated surrealists' writings, Bataille's included. For Huergo Cardoso, "No menos importante fue el influjo ejercido por las revistas internacionales de Vanguardia, que [Moreno Villa] también empieza a leer para esta época [...] y en época más tardía, la surrealista *Documents*, a la que alude de manera velada en su 'Poética' (1932)" (*Temas* 26).<sup>6</sup> Later, in his short theoretical essay titled "Formas florales," written in 1954, Moreno Villa continues the interest in floral metaphors and images as well as the importance of the Bataillean subtext in such theoretical postulations:

*Las flores se prestan más que los cuerpos humanos a la invención de formas y alteración de proporciones.*

Tal vez haya que expresar esto de otro modo. Partiendo de las formas características de la rosa, el pirrito, la campanilla, el pensamiento, puedo introducir variantes en ellas sin que molesten al observador a pesar de que ya no sean dibujos copiados de la naturaleza.

[...]

Con la flor me parece que no se cae en la caricatura porque ella es de por sí una cosa absurda; bella, pero absurda y monstruosa en realidad. Los animales y los hombres, aunque también pueden ser absurdos y monstruosos, no lo son por principio. (*Temas* 630-32)

Following Bataille, Moreno Villa signals the unseen parts of the flower and draws attention

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<sup>6</sup> In fact, in 1929 the appearance of the new Parisian journal had been announced twice in the Madrid-base literary magazine *La Gaceta Literaria*. In the May 1, 1929 issue of *La Gaceta Literaria*, Enrique Lafuente and Sebastià Gasch comment that "[se] prepara la publicación en París de 'Documents', una gran revista de mucho tono, que comentará extensamente todas las manifestaciones del arte actual" (5). The following month, in the June 15 issue, Lafuente and Gasch continue,

"Documents", la revista que dirige Carl Einsteins [sic]—uno de los críticos más prestigiosos de Europa—, acaba de publicar su primer cuadro. Revista de gran tono; la sola enumeración de los miembros de su Comité de redacción, evidencia claramente la gran solvencia intelectual de esta publicación. [...] La arqueología y la etnografía—tratadas, no con la habitual fraseología muerta del erudito, sino con vivísimo léxico y aguda percepción—son estudiadas al lado de ensayos sobre el arte más reciente. (5)

to the absurd and monstrous reality underneath its outside appearance. First and foremost, flowers of this type (according to this poetic theory) are grotesque and repulsive, hardly the sublimated version of the rose which signals passion and beauty. Furthermore, flowers, according to Moreno Villa, deform proportion and provide a figure open to mutation. Huergo Cardoso notes that “La tesis general del artículo—el carácter monstruoso de las flores—recuerda a Bataille, ‘Le langage des fleurs’, *Documents*” (*Temas* 629 n1081). And as if guilty of a similar dissidence, Moreno Villa includes Lorca in his own affinity for radical revisions of traditional themes and forms: “Y como en todo movimiento imaginativo, en seguida apareció el disidente, que fué Federico” (*Vida* 113). Moreno Villa and Lorca alike capture the rose’s quality of distortion which affirms the introduction and possibility of variants.

Whether in Moreno Villa’s early discussions with Lorca or in his later poems, the thinking of Moreno Villa captures the revision of the traditional aesthetic of the rose and sheds more light on the vanguardist questioning of motifs based in the marvelous or beautiful. In “Confusión y bloqueo,” a poem from his collection of *Poemas escritos en América*, written between 1938 and 1947, the rose undergoes a violent and radical transformation in which the base is considered an integral parte of the rose’s formation. Moreno Villa’s poem highlights the permeable border between high/low and beauty/filth:

Un desencaje torvo  
confundió realidades y sofismas,  
mezcló cieno con flores  
y veneros de sierra con cloacas.  
[...]  
La flor bella y absurda no brota sin estiércol.  
[...]  
Tú tienes que pensar contrario que tu padre.  
Aquella luz de ayer es tiniebla de ahora. (*Poesías* 487-89)

Much like the poems of Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York*, Moreno Villa's poem is fraught with references to base matter and fallen forms and exudes a discourse rooted in decadence and a questioning of past modes of thinking ("pensar contrario que tu padre"). The elements of the high mix with lowly forms and provide a discourse that recognizes the unstable relationship between inside and outside, old versus new. The rose is an image which confuses oppositions as it presents exterior beauty alongside but inseparable from interior deception and death, as a form open to continual disfigurements and the "alteration of proportions."

Moreno Villa was clearly obsessed with floral motifs as evident in his "new discovery" shown to Lorca in 1924, his short article "Formas florales," and his numerous poems which deal with botanical mishaps. Possibly the most deliberate reference to the conflictive nature of the flower is demonstrated by his "Canciones a Xochipilli," an 18 part poem which gives homage to the Aztec god of flowers, love, and beauty. Yet in this poem, the poetic voice does not sing praises to the beautiful appearances of the flowers, but rather, recognizes the decay of the floral image, thus presenting a radical vanguardist vision of botanical destruction. The poetic voice asserts,

No vale nada la flor  
si le quitas el vestido,  
que es forma, color y olor

(Formas: concreción de vida.  
Color: templanza sensual.  
Olor: dávida divina.) (*Poesías* 530)

The flower is not seen as a valuable object, but only one of exterior appearance and pretense. And later, in verses that capture the idealism of a past epoch as evident also in *Doña Rosita*: "Andar con flores: / andar entre ilusiones" (*Poesías* 532). In the end, the rose in Moreno

Villa's poem is thrown aside, unwanted, and buried as excess waste. With death there is no afterlife, only material decay, thus amplifying the reorientation of concerns both aesthetic and religious through the vanguardist rose:

Dios no recoge la flor,  
la barre el hombre.

Por piedad y por limpieza  
la recoge.

Pétalos mustios  
formas deshechas,  
perfumes agrios,  
¡fuera, fuera! (*Poesías* 533-35)

In concert with his own avant-garde poetic theory based in an instinct for death, José Moreno Villa's poems redirect the traditional conception of the rose motif. As in the works of Moreno Villa and Lorca, other Hispanic poets of the period also sought innovation by re-presenting some of the Western literary traditions most emblematic forms.

The symbolism of the rose, along with its potential for change, mutation, and alteration of forms is amplified by the Mexican critic Efrén Ortiz Domínguez in *La rosa en fuga*. Ortiz Domínguez, who examines the concept of Western literature within the context of developments in Mexican poetry, affirms the “múltiples despliegues semánticos” encapsulated within the variations of rose motifs in literature (19). This comprehensive study of the rose traces floral representations through classical, pre-Hispanic, Hispanic, colonial, romantic, modernist, and contemporary periods. In each case the rose is examined in its fugitive nature between significations that range from *carpe diem* and spiritual aspirations; images of youth, passion, and femininity; and the embodiment of particular poetic theories. Ortiz Domínguez probes into the particular case of the Mexican poet Xavier Villaurrutia and affirms that with his verses a substantial break from previous rose metaphors is evident. The

poetic environment of Villaurrutia signals an

[a]mbiente de confrontación, de franco carácter negativo, que va a signar, también, un año más tarde, el proceso de escritura de “Nocturno rosa” [...], poema que es una declaración de guerra contra algunos poetas-jardineros y profesión de fe en una nueva estética, capullo entonces de abrirse. Tras publicarse, las rosas sufren un proceso de hibridación. Los esquejes pueden asumir un matiz disímil, pero ninguna puede ignorar el patrón común que los sustenta. Villaurrutia hace explícita una tradición y coloca a los poetas frente a la disyuntiva: en adelante, o se la acata, lo que supone el triunfo de la referencialidad y el respeto a las ataduras de convención, o bien, se libera de la mimesis e intenta crear de acuerdo con otros parámetros. De acuerdo con esta segunda posibilidad, en adelante las rosas se convierten en imagen del trabajo poético. (Ortiz Domínguez 174)

The new floral image—innovative, obscure, multi-faceted, ambivalent, and violent—reorients the rose metaphor in terms of anguish and decadence as it simultaneously represents the poetic utterance. Ortiz Domínguez summarizes the importance of Villaurrutia’s renovation of the rose motif and its break with tradition by concluding that

escribir sin Villaurrutia, significa permanecer en las coordenadas grecolatinas (rosa: disfrute de la belleza efímera); místicas (rosa: Virgen María); neoclásicas (rosa: cualidad sensorial positiva); románticas (rosa: mujer); o modernistas (rosa: belleza efímera); escribir a la Villaurrutia, componer *rosas*, implica este hacer consciente el proceso de escritura poética bajo coordenadas formales y estilísticas precisas (*rosa*: poesía dedicada a invocar la paradoja de la belleza efímera o para aludir a una propuesta estética). (192-93)

The rose in Lorca’s *Doña Rosita* advances an aesthetic proposal based on a hybridization of meanings, an alteration of forms, and continual variation—a use which goes beyond the *modernista* principles of ephemeral floral beauty. These meanings always in flux offer for Lorca a new metaphor of the rose as a *solterona* destined to death.<sup>7</sup>

*Doña Rosita*, however, is not Lorca’s first attempt at portraying the withering of plant

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<sup>7</sup> There are many examples of avant-garde poetry written in Spanish which exhibit a dissolution and alteration of floral forms. Other poets that could be added to a more extended discussion concerning the renovation of botanical forms in the Hispanic avant-garde include Gerardo Diego, Rafael Alberti, Juan Larrea, Ricardo E. Molinari, and Pablo Neruda.

life and the connection between roses and death. While Marie Laffranque does examine the changes of floral motifs in Lorca's work, she does not take into account his drawings. In fact, many other poems and dramatic texts can be considered in order to amplify the richness of the floral motifs in Lorca's work.<sup>8</sup> A detailed study of the vegetal life in Lorca's drawings reveals a progression from realist versions of gardens and flowers of the early years (which would conform to a more nineteenth-century *modernista* representation of the rose), to the decadent and dying flowers of the later years. Drawings from the earlier years, colorful and with vivid floral life, include *Jardín con el árbol del sol y el árbol de la luna*, 1923 (232),<sup>9</sup> *Muchacha granadina en un jardín*, 1924 (131), *Casa de huerta entre dos árboles*, 1923-25 (138), and *Camino y bosque*, 1924-25 (138). A vacillation of floral structures within the poet's drawings from the last years of his life (1929-36) presents an abundance of deathly forms that include putrefying flowers and rhizomatic structures. This notable shift in floral representations is evident first in 1927 (with the publication of *Romancero gitano*) when the tone, colors, and representational forms change. The shapes fragment, fall, and are based on anguish and destruction as they embody a more subversive orientation. The cover for *Romancero gitano*, for example, exhibits one of Lorca's drawings of three black and withered sunflowers (203, 215), thus giving rise to a desublimated version of the usually lively and colorful flower and hinting at the flower's destiny of withering. A similar flower arrangement is seen in *Florero sobre un tejado*, 1929-1930 (172). The New York drawings display the death of plant life as in the *Autorretrato en Nueva York*, 1929-1931 (176) and

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<sup>8</sup> Some have examined, for example, the root structures in Lorca's drawings with relation to nerve anatomy. See especially the work of Cecelia Cavanaugh.

<sup>9</sup> All page numbers of the drawings are from Mario Hernández's 1986 catalogue *Dibujos*.

*Hombre muerto*, 1932 (181).<sup>10</sup>

The culmination, however, of the decadence (and ambivalence) of plant life in Lorca's drawings is most potently depicted in the 1934 sketch "Rosa de la muerte" (228), produced for the Argentine poet Ricardo E. Molinari's poem *Una rosa para Stefan George*. Lorca first met Molinari when in Buenos Aires in 1934 and the two collaborated on another collection of poems, *El tabernáculo* (also published in 1934), for which Lorca provided five drawings. In a similar fashion, both poets express an immense amount of loneliness and loss in their poems and drawings. According to Ian Gibson, "Los dibujos expresan otra vez la obsesión de Lorca con la muerte: marineros ahogados, manos y cabezas seccionados—goteando sangre—, las flores mortíferas que aparecen en tanto dibujos del poeta, escalofriantes formas espectrales" (2: 290). After Lorca's death, Molinari, with whom Lorca had established a personal and poetic kinship, dedicated three poems to him: "Casida de la bailarina" (1937), "Elegía a la muerte de un poeta" (1937), and "Elegía y casida a la muerte de un poeta español" (1946). María Cristina Sirimarco and Héctor Roque Pitt allude to Molinari's artistic affinities with Lorca by proposing that

En 1933 él mismo dirá que, si bien el artista es siempre un anarquista no debe dejar de escuchar "las tres voces fuertes": la de la muerte, la del amor y la del arte. El homenaje a George revela en ambos poetas la preocupación por indagar en estas tres presencias dominantes: se vive más allá de la muerte y sólo se muere con sentido cuando hay lucha, búsqueda de la esencia, de aquello que singulariza nuestra existencia en la tierra. El tiempo daña, contamina la existencia, la palabra no alcanza, la muerte es preferible porque en ella el hombre encuentra la individualidad que lo define, aquello por lo que ha luchado de manera incesante. (184)

In fact, Lorca's drawing "Rosa de la muerte" treats the conflictive nature between these three

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<sup>10</sup> Lorca also decorated his signature with pictorial versions of anguishing flowers in downward spirals. For example, see *Firma con motivos vegetales y copla*, 1935 (186), *Firma con luna reflejada*, 1935 (186), *Firma con motivos vegetales*, 1934, 1935, 1936 (186, 187, 215, 221). Other botanical bereavements are evident in *Florero*, 1934-1936 (189), *Jarrón con dos peces*, 1935-1936 (190), and the title page of *Llanto*, 1935 (219).

sources of love, death, and art all with a vanguardist orientation that, as Moreno Villa declares, leans on an instinct of death. Beyond a mere thematization of fallen forms inclined toward death, this drawing exudes a constant tension between love and death.<sup>11</sup> Recognizing a subversive vanguardist orientation of the rose in Lorca's later works, Margaret Rees proclaims that "Flowers are mysterious forces, sharing the secret wisdom of insects and water (the flowers and water typical of Granada), and possessing magical healing powers" (87). Rees continues, "Some of the most arresting of Lorca's images associate flowers—usually things of beauty—with wounds, blood, death, and grief. [...] [I]n their determination to jolt people out of their mental ruts, regularly compared the traditionally beautiful with the traditionally horrible or humdrum" (93). Rees shows the subversion of the floral motifs and exhibits how botanical language functions in Lorca with the intent to overturn and question traditional associations.

Lorca's drawing of the rose of death is littered with words and roots, and presents a text that conflates the spiritual idea of the rose with its material substance. Here, death is central to beauty as matter and idea are seen as inseparable, neither one dominating the other, but rather, both relying on a constant dialogue between high and low. The drawing includes

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<sup>11</sup> This posture is similar to other avant-gardists who, anticipating Octavio Paz's assessment of the vanguard in *Los hijos del limo*, present a work of art that violently breaks with traditional expressions of love and death (159). Furthermore, Paz elaborates this tension in an engaging essay on the Mexican poet Xavier Villaurrutia. For Paz, Villaurrutia's *Nostalgia de la muerte* best exemplifies this conflux of love and death: "When he contemplated the complexity of sensations and passions, he discovered that there are secret corridors running between dreaming and wakefulness, love and hate, absence and presence. The best of his work is an exploration of these corridors" ("Hieroglyphs" 103). Villaurrutia depicts his vanguardist version of the rose as follows:

No, no es la rosa rosa  
sino la rosa increada,  
la sumergida rosa,  
la nocturna,  
la rosa inmaterial,  
la rosa hueca. (*Nostalgia* 50)

the following textual representations (from top to bottom): “Aire para tu boca, TierraTierraTierra, MaderayMadera, cuerpo [5 times], Nunca [six times], ysiempreysiempre, yNunca, y siempreysiempreysiempre, MUERTEE[MU]ERTEMEU, MuerteyMuerte, Agua para tu amor, Fuego para tu ceniza, MuerteyMuerteyMuerte, Tierra / para / tu / alma, MuerteyMuerteyMuerte.” Gregorio Prieto calls this drawing one of mystery which contains all of Lorca’s obsessions (crosses, fish, arrows, and poppies)—all with an “inquietante engima” (176). The overriding theme is embodied by the central and circular words in the middle of the sketch: death. But Lorca shows that death is complex and contradictory as it is caught between temporal tensions like “always” and “never”; material oppositions including dirt, wood, fire, mouth, and ash; and more inspired terms like “air” and “soul.” The relationship between death and love is evidenced by Prieto as he asserts that “El verdadero amor es siempre puro y luminoso. Pero como el amor es fuego, precisamos del agua que le impida propagarse demasiado, consumiéndolo todo” (179). Not only does the drawing present a rose that is fraught with decay and destruction, but it negates the solely spiritual and idealistic notion of the rose (the idea of beauty) as it draws attention to the material aspects of love, including the corporeal references to the mouth and hands (which in fact, form the letter “m” for the word *muerte*, “death”). While the superior part of the sketch signals the uprightness of the rose—its reaching for the air of the sky (an air that gives life, voice, and breath to the mouth)—the opposing earth, wood, body, and death pull the spiritual aspects of aspiration down into the dirt, represented in the lowest textual reference: “Dirt for your soul, death and death and death.”

The 1934 sketch elaborates the multifaceted relationship between love and death. And while Lorca’s poetic and pictorial creations associated with Molinari approximate a

vanguardist poetics of anguish and death, several poems from the last years of the poet's life contain additional references to floral decay and innovative revisions of floral form which emphasize the material aspects of withering, rather than the previously associated floral significations of love, beauty, and idealist aspirations.

In David Cluff's "Rose Symbolism in the Works of García Lorca," connections are drawn between the rose, the woman, erotic passion, equilibrium, creation, and fertility. Cluff recognizes the Spanish tradition that Lorca inherits by signaling the "influences of differing traditions—the folk tradition, the modernist-symbolist tradition, and that of his contemporaries, such as Guillén and Jiménez" (n. pag.). Cluff makes brief allusions to death in Lorca's poems and dramas which are influenced by his surrealist period and cites "El niño Stanton" and other poems which highlight that "life is searching for death" (n. pag.). A poem that Cluff does not cite in his study of rose symbolism in Lorca, but which further strengthens the ambiguous nature of the rose is the "Casida de la rosa," from the collection written between 1931 and 1934, *Diván del Tamarit*:

La rosa,  
no buscaba la aurora:  
casi eterna en su ramo,  
buscaba otra cosa.

La rosa,  
no buscaba ni ciencia ni sombra:  
confín de carne y sueño,  
buscaba otra cosa.

La rosa,  
no buscaba la rosa:  
inmóvil por el cielo  
buscaba otra cosa. (1: 604-05)

This poem examines the inner tensions of the rose image in Lorca's poetics. In each of the three quartets, the rose is defined through specific affirmations and negations. The rose is at

once eternal on its stem, a confine of flesh and dreams, and immobile. The poetic voice declares, however, that the rose is not interested in the dawning of the sunlight, science and shadow, or its own ideal form and traditionally symbolic meaning. Rather, it searches for something else, an *other* form, “otra cosa.” The ambivalence of the “other thing” that the rose searches for adequately captures the interest in breaking with fixed norms and traditional qualities of the rose motif, exceeding expectations and presenting an alteration of forms. Lorca’s rose is an agent, it searches, and is not a set idea with affixed meanings. It is, rather, whatever it desires to be as it seeks to be defined through a process of distancing itself from itself, denying expectations of what it “should be.” Similar to the abundance of ambiguously shaped forms and subjects in Lorca’s *Poeta en Nueva York* and *El público*, the rose is seen here in its search for something other. This inclination towards something *other* rejects traditional notions of artistic and expressive conventions as it functions outside (or at the margins of) expectative norms and affirms the introduction of variations.

What is significant about the rose in this poem is that it is not content with the destiny that has been given it and by traditional uses of it, as a symbol of love and beauty. Additionally, the poem captures the continual impasse concerning desire and fulfillment. The rose searches (“busca”), but it never finds and is never fulfilled. The frustration of attainment is constant in Lorca and is not absent here. Even in the last verses of the poem, as Laffranque reminds us, “[e]l irresignado silencio de la rosa no deja de buscar” (299). The verb tense of the verb “buscar” (“buscaba,” the imperfect past tense) sheds light on the nature of the search in which the flower is involved. For Robert Gillett, whose article “Reading the Rose” provides an insightful analysis of the tensions of the unfulfilled quest in the poem, “the tense of ‘buscaba’ not only makes us party to a terrible and almost timeless simultaneity, but also

draws attention to something at once endless and unfinished” (136). By association, the rose functions as a metaphor for the poetic subject which searches, but to no avail. Gillett continues by elaborating the subversive and contradictory nature of the rose as Lorca uses it in his later works:

In other words, because it entails yearning and an end of yearning, because it represents unashamed sexuality and all the spiritual constructions which have been placed upon it, because it is at once intimately involved and ecstatically alone, [and] because it enfolds androgyny and teases out gender, [...] the rose and the poem devoted to it uncannily encapsulate the contradictions of love. (137)

While critics have painted the rose as a mobilization of the desires and struggles of Lorca himself (see Laffranque, Rees, etc.), it is additionally productive to examine the poetic structure of the “Casida” and what it tells us about Lorca’s mobilization of the rose motif in general, along with the overarching aesthetic statement that such a utilization makes. The thematic sources and symbols inform us about how Lorca uses a traditional motif such as the rose and manipulates it in order to present innovations in floral meaning. The rose not only searches for an *other* form, but the poetic form that Lorca employs, the Moorish “Casida,” is an artistic form of otherness. In homage and tribute to another culture, Lorca’s *Diván* demonstrates a general awareness and openness to cultural and aesthetic hybridity. But this is not new in Lorca as noted in previous chapters here with reference to the poet’s interest in *cante jondo* and jazz music. For Gillett, the subversion of artistic forms is part of a critique of the repression of desire inherent to Western religion. Gillett asserts, “against repressive Christianity, Lorca chose to pay tribute to them [the Moors] not by formal imitation nor by strict adherence to the various thematic and other prescriptions of an ultimately petrified tradition, but by invoking, in the titles both of the collection and of the individual poems in it, the spirit of their civilization” (138). Through the representation of a rose which searches

to for something *other*, and through an aesthetic form of otherness which resists Western thinking and relating, Lorca's "Casida de la rosa" revises cultural values and traditional creative motifs as it breaks with aesthetic expectations.

Perhaps the *other* forms of the rose capture the innovative mode of thinking that Lorca wanted to portray with the roses in *Doña Rosita*, using the rose as the unproductive spinster whose fate lies in decay. In an interview with Pedro Massa on December 15, 1935 in Barcelona, Lorca discusses the originations of the play as he states:

¡Cuántas damas maduras españolas se verán reflejadas en doña Rosita como en el espejo! [...] Doña Rosita tiene un tío que es botánico. Su fino arte consigue una rosa que él llama la rosa mutáble, flor que por la mañana es roja; más roja al mediodía; a la tarde blanca, y por la noche se deshace. Esta flor es como el *símbolo del pensamiento* que he querido recoger en *Doña Rosita*. (3: 620-21, my emphasis)

Rather than affirming the ideal form, albeit fleeting, that is embodied in the accepted meanings associated with the rose, Lorca emphasizes his affinity towards an *other* mode of thought which is captured by the mutations and heterogenous nature of the rose of death. This *rosa mutabilis* is a form that is by nature in continual flux and open to change, but yet destined to death and denied the possibility of propagating itself.<sup>12</sup>

Written in 1927, Lorca's short unfinished drama "Rosa mudable" (2: 755-56) establishes the fluctuating nature of the rose and contributes an additional reading of Lorca's innovative use of the rose. This text commences, in a manner similar to *Doña Rosita*, with a question concerning the absence of something: "¿Y el niño?". Throughout the entire work

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<sup>12</sup> The anxiety over offspring is constant in Lorca's poetic and dramatic production. See, for example, the poem "Iglesia abandonada" (1: 522-23) from *Poeta en Nueva York* in which the anguished poetic subject exclaims "Yo tenía un hijo. / Se perdió por los arcos." For more on the concern for engendering in Lorca's work see Miguel García-Posada's *Lorca: Interpretación de Poeta en Nueva York* (158-64), and the previously cited article by José Angel Valente article titled "Pez luna," where the inability to engender is interpreted as another form of dying.

the preoccupation with the location of the little boy is constant. In the end it is revealed that the boy is lost in the snow and does not return. The play terminates, “El fin de todos está en el frío” (2: 756). All ends in coldness and death as Margarita and two men with whom she converses contemplate the coming snow storm. Generally, the unfinished play can be seen as an anticipation of the events and tone of *Doña Rosita*. For Laffranque, “Rosa mudable” presents “los temas esenciales de la poesía y el teatro loquiano hacia 1930. El niño muerto o agonizante, solo y abandonado bajo la nieve, ausente, ya imposible, a falta de amor. [...] Las dos mujeres ausentes, despersonalizadas por lo abstracto de su papel, estilizadas en forma de símbolos multitudinarios si no universales” (292). The focus advances the idea of a destiny of cold and death rather than the beautiful flowering of life and desire. And as many critics assert, the rose is emblematic of human existence itself since “[l]a rosa es en él, desde entonces, la imagen del ser que antes de volverse pasto de la muerte como otro cualquiera, como todo ser viviente por el ancho universo, quiere florecer y expresarse; quiere florecer diciendo quien es” (Laffranque 295). Here, the flower—and its desire to reach upward, blossom, and flourish—continues the previous poetic preoccupation of *Poeta en Nueva York* and *El público* in which the subjects continually wish to express *my* truth, “decir mi verdad de hombre de sangre” (1: 538).<sup>13</sup> Yet in contrast to the earlier texts in which some sense of a liberated expression of the self is attained, the flowers in *Doña Rosita*, and the protagonist herself, passively succumb to withering. In essence, the vanguardist rose as developed by Lorca, Moreno Villa, and others offers a metaphor for variation, alteration, and decay. This linguistic and aesthetic opening presents an ethical space in which other voices and figures

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<sup>13</sup> Laffranque connects the poetic subject with concerns of identity as she highlights the rose’s importance as a metaphor for human existence. Specifically, she cites the “Poema doble” from *Poeta en Nueva York*: “Quiero llorar diciendo mi nombre, / rosa, niña y abeto” (1: 538).

are positioned. Additionally, and beyond any hope in *carpe diem*, these ambiguous roses present a shifting of destiny to one more consistently rooted in death.

### Lorca, Bataille, and the Language of Flowers

While many critics recognize the importance of the rose in *Doña Rosita*'s development and unfolding of events with reference to temporal progression, few notice the subversive nature of the metaphor of the rose as a spinster. As *solterona*, the rose has a destiny of unproductivity. It is a marginal figure that reflects (to use Moreno Villa's reading of botanical terminology) a constant "alteration of proportions" both linguistically and materially. As such, the rose is ambivalent, ambiguous, and destined to decay as it overturns traditional cosmogonies. A reversal of the preceding models of the floral tradition and an affirmation of the instability of the meanings of the rose motif are evident in the beginning lines of Lorca's play during an interchange between the uncle and the housekeeper. The fleeting and disappearing system of stable signification ("seeds," "*semillas*," "*semes*") is alluded to in the play's first lines:

TÍO. ¿Y mis semillas?  
AMA. Ahí estaban.  
TÍO. Pues no están. (2: 530)

The absence of seeds signals a lack of fertility and the eminent reality that no seed will be planted and nothing produced (engendered). Without the seed, there is no lineage, no product, no direction, no provenance. Drawing attention to the lack of seeds at the beginning of the play prefigures a similar deficiency in engendering that will characterize Rosita, making her a truly transgressive figure. The genealogical structure is, rather, rhizomatic, novel, innovative. Luis Martínez Cuitiño states that "En *Doña Rosita* abundan los personajes

sin descendencia: los tíos, las solteronas, el señor X, don Martín, Rosita” (18). As in the “Rosa mudable,” the possibility of the presence of the son is absent; the only thing that reigns is lost illusion and failed hope. Martínez Cuitiño continues, “Rosita buscará refugio en su propio jardín sin tiempo donde florecen los mitos de una mujer que se niega a crecer, a aceptar su papel en la vida” (31). Rosita’s (and the rose’s) non-productivity points toward the inadequacy of certain social roles and the danger to society that any marginal derivation might provide.

The variations of social roles and genealogical structures in *Doña Rosita* provide a break with conventional expectations. Luis Fernández Cifuentes’s analysis of the *Doña Rosita* recognizes this facet of Lorca’s play as he examines various reviewers’ reactions to the play during its showings in Barcelona in 1935-36. Fernández Cifuentes provides detailed accounts of how *Doña Rosita* departs from aesthetic and social conventions by creating a feeling of “desconcierto” that supercedes the margins of the “horizonte de expectativas del público de García Lorca” (215). Lorca’s text presents a reorientation of social norms since “el tema de *Doña Rosita* no es sólo la tragedia de la solterona, sino también su disimulo, su ocultamiento. El espectáculo documental es parte de la tragedia porque sirve, en primer término, para encubirla y enmascararla; la tragedia es parte del espectáculo porque, en su último término, lo traspasa, lo denuncia, lo borra” (Fernández Cifuentes 218). In this sense, Fernández Cifuentes shows that Lorca’s work erases boundaries on several levels: those of genre (comedy/tragedy); time (an ambivalent time in which current and dramatic time interpenetrate one another); public/author (in which the time of the work and the time of the audience vacillate); the interiority of the house versus the exteriority of the epochal time; and the portrayal of the gender roles of Rosita and the cousin in which the traditional masculine

role of presence and stability is subverted by “una ausencia o un borroso simulacro” (230). *Doña Rosita* critiques established social roles and affirms, rather, a constant interpenetration between norm and difference: “no ejerce en *Doña Rosita* la mera repetición de lo familiar; no se indentifica con los modelos establecidos, sólo los alude” (Fernández Cifuentes 222). This adherence to a non-identification with conventional social models demonstrates Lorca’s undermining of other prevalent models and forms, such as the rose symbol.

Lorca’s figure of Rosita erases the borders of representation as the operations at work in the play “hacen de Rosita una presencia intermedia, desdibujada, fronteriza” (Fernández Cifuentes 229). In essence, Lorca’s play reacts against nineteenth-century aesthetics and stale versions of closed thinking, like a “jardín cerrado.” For José Martín Recuerda, *Doña Rosita* shows the “[m]undo revelador de toda una suave impotencia del alma granadina. Impotencia muy dentro de la tradición española, amputada antes; impotencia de todos aquellos que no quisieron ver la realidad y saben vivir de sus recuerdos, enriqueciendo su vida (20). The idealism, the dreaming, and the pretensions all point toward the shortcomings of conservative and restrictive aspects of provincial Spanish society.

The culmination of Fernández Cifuentes’s study—which in turn shows the defamiliarizing effect of Lorca’s work as it reverses many social norms—centers on three motifs: family structure, family relations, and the home as a discursive space. Here, the inadequacy of social roles and structures is evident in the presence of numerous single women and their unused bodies. Fernández Cifuentes shows how the family members in *Doña Rosita* are reduced to mere roles since they are only named with titles (*ama, tía, tío*, etc.) and not with proper names. The family authorial relations are ambiguous since Rosita is without mother or father and only has an aunt and uncle in these symbolic positions. The

absence of her parents, for Fernández Cifuentes, signals a premonition of her own future sterility and lack of children (232). Furthermore, the house as a discursive space is seen as a “territorio ambiguo donde conviven la fiesta y la hostilidad” (232). Fernández Cifuentes examines the power of the various speech acts in the drama (poems, letters, promises, etc.) and concludes that the dramatic tension is only capable of resolution (and only a moderate resolution at best) when the speech acts are terminated. This is evident when the last letter is sent to Rosita from the cousin. She, in turn, becomes resigned to the fact that he is with another woman and will not return. Finally, the cousin’s promissory speech act is nullified by a written act and Rosita begins to accept her fate. For Fernández Cifuentes, the negation of the previous promissory act “trata de una mera inversión: a la *promesa* corresponde ahora una *amenaza*; lo que primero había engendrado un deseo, una esperanza, pide ahora el castigo” (239). Here, in a similar manner to Lorca’s renovation of the meaning of the “language of flowers”—which subsequently illustrates how the inherent putrefaction of flowers is eminent, that the ideal irreducibly gives way to matter, and that beauty results in death—Fernández Cifuentes demonstrates how Lorca reverses norms and traditions and questions any stable conceptions of genre, gender, time, promises, hopes, and *ideas*.

Botanical discourse as employed by Lorca offers a trope which destabilizes language. Intersections of literary and natural (botanical) languages are examined at length by Claudette Sartiliot who, in *Herbarium Verbarium: The Discourse of Flowers*, argues against patriarchal or logocentric representations of femininity and flowers by redefining the accepted notions of floral motifs. Rather than affirming one meaning of the flower symbol (as the literary tradition affirms), Sartiliot echoes how thinkers like Bataille, Deleuze, and Derrida use botanical language and motifs which affirm a dissemination of meaning, “a scattering and

gathering of ‘seeds’ (seeds and signs)” in order to subvert the structural signifier/signified system (2). She focuses on writers and philosophers who detach the flower from any fixed symbolism prescribed by literary traditions. This revision of floral language recognizes an inherent polyvalent nature of botanical metaphors. Sartiliot’s viewpoint offers an appropriate insight for the introductory lines of Lorca’s play (“¿Y mis semillas?”) since plant structures undergo a similar process of symbolic detachment and linguistic de-stabilization as they mutate, change, and decay. Rosita’s aunt continues the discussion of the location of the seeds by eliciting a telling response from the housekeeper regarding the flowers and the natural fate they will inevitably encounter:

TÍA. Luego bien te gusta olerlas.

AMA. No, señora. A mí las flores me huelen a niño muerto, o a la profesión de monja, o a altar de iglesia. A cosas tristes. (2: 530)

Here the death of the plant life (which prefigures the destiny of withering for Rosita) is coupled with other dead and stale forms which are rhetorically associated with both stifled propagation (“niño muerto”) and the non-productivity of women who have a marginal and vicarious relationship with the church (“profesión de monja”). For Lorca, the “rose of death” (as seen in the drawing discussed previously) affirms decay, fallen form, and a foul smell as it conflates rotten or perishable substances (the body, the rose) with spiritual ideals and aspirations (air, breath, the soul). The language of flowers is therefore exposed from the beginning as a discourse that critiques established convention. Throughout the entire play, the rose does not serve as a *carpe diem* motif in which Rosita’s beauty is the center of desire. Rather, the text is dominated by what Noël Valis calls *cursi* and kitsch appearances that question *idea(l)s* and present constant temporal and spatial deferrals, the absence of production, and a recourse to vegetal decay.

This course of action and natural succumbing to material putrefaction is explained by Rosita's uncle in his description of the *rosa mutabilis* and in the poem which outlines its life-course (which is repeated by Rosita herself at the end of Acts I and III). The botanist uncle describes the roses of his garden as follows:

Es una rosa que nunca has visto, una sorpresa que te tengo preparada. Porque es increíble la *rosa declinata* de capullos caídos y la inermis que no tiene espinas, que maravilla, ¿eh?, ¡ni una espina! Y la mirtifolia que viene de Bélgica y la sulfurata que brilla en la oscuridad. Pero ésta las aventaja a todas en rareza. Los botánicos la llaman *rosa mutabile*, que quiere decir: mudable; que cambia... En este libro está su descripción y su pintura, ¡mira! (*Abre el libro.*) Es roja por la mañana, a la tarde se pone blanca, y se deshoja por la noche. (2: 532)

The rose without thorns is defenseless, the passive recipient of its natural process, and lacking any free will to overcome withering. In a rhetorical movement of descending climax the uncle draws attention to the finality of the rose and its recourse to death. The insistence on descents (“*declinata*”), falling (“caído”), and mutation and instability (“*mutabile*”) signal a focus on the rose on which neither the Platonic idea nor the traditional rose symbol of love and beauty can lay claim. The uncle's description is then followed by the rose poem which outlines the movement of the play and provides the symbolism behind the unfolding of each dramatic event:

Cuando se abre en la mañana  
roja como sangre está.  
El rocío no la toca  
porque se teme quemar.  
Abierta en el medio día  
es dura como el coral.  
El sol se asoma a los vidrios  
para verla relumbrar.  
Cuando en las ramas empiezan  
los pájaros a cantar  
y se desmaya la tarde  
en las violetas del mar,  
se pone blanca, con blanco

de una mejilla de sal.  
Y cuando toca la noche  
blando cuerno de metal  
y las estrellas avanzan  
mientras los aires se van,  
en la raya de lo oscuro  
se comienza a deshojar. (2: 532-33, and later 543-44 and 578-79)

The language of flowers that Lorca describes with the rose poem delineates the birth, brightness, and decay of the rose, all a material reading of the flower. Lorca, therefore, approaches the language of flowers with ambivalence and a certain sense of tragic realism, recognizing that the rose, like Rosita, are destined to wither. In contrast to Rosita's seemingly felicitous attitude of the first act which "underlies the idealism, the ardour and the faithful promises of love [from the cousin,] the romantic dream fades quickly as Rosita reads aloud the poem about the fading rose" (Edwards 218).

The multiplicity of meanings embodied in the language of flowers is outlined in Bataille's 1929 article "The Language of Flowers" which sought, among other things, to critique the authoritative idealism that was prevalent in Bretonian Surrealism.<sup>14</sup> The vegetal language that Bataille espouses, which ideologically finds its aesthetic counterpart in *Doña Rosita*, is based on a negation of the external appearances. Bataille recognizes that within the selfsame structures that are affirmed by many philosophical, literary, and aesthetic traditions exist baser drives which render *informe* the elevated ideal. In other words, any flower which rises toward the sunlight will inevitably scorch and rot into a pile of manure-like compost. Bataille states that "[w]hen the word *materialism* is used, it is time to designate the direct

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<sup>14</sup> Another provocative study concerning the connections made here is Michael Taussig's article titled "The Language of Flowers" in which he focuses on a Bataillean reading of the Colombian artist Juan Manuel Echavarría's "humanized" flowers. In these representations, bone fragments are portrayed as flower parts. The series of paintings, titled *Flower Vase Cut*, perturbs but awakens the beholder and calls for a response to certain social conditions concerning violent Colombian amputation techniques of the 1940s and 50s.

interpretation, *excluding all idealism*, of raw phenomena” (*Visions* 16). In reality, the flower contains grotesque hairy parts that are hideous, according to Bataille, and as such, “the interior of a rose does not at all correspond to its exterior beauty” (*Visions* 12). Bataille speaks out about how such ideal and pretentious forms of nature and philosophy betray their own aspirations of grandeur as he links the reality of the flower to death. He continues,

But even more than by the filth of its organs, the flower is betrayed by the fragility of its corolla: thus far from answering the demands of human ideas, it is a sign of their failure. In fact, after a very short period of glory the marvelous corolla rots indecently in the sun, thus becoming, for the plant a garish withering. Risen from the stench of the manure pile—even though for a moment to have escaped it in a flight of angelic and lyrical purity—the flower seems to relapse abruptly into its original squalor: the most ideal is rapidly reduced to a wisp of aerial manure. [...] [Therefore] *love smells like death*. [...] Roots, in fact, represent the perfect counterpart to the visible parts of a plant. While the visible parts are nobly elevated, the ignoble and sticky roots wallow in the ground, loving rottenness just as the leaves love light. (*Visions* 12-13)

Bataille shows that the low is part of elevated form, inseparable, and that ideal form erodes itself from within.<sup>15</sup> According to Rosalind Krauss’s reading of the language of flowers, “Bataille insists on staying with the very image of the flower, on fixating on it in terms of the very stain it bears, the stain of its own almost instant putrescence as its movement upward toward the light decrees at the very same time that it will hideously wither and fall” (*Formless* 111). The motif of the rotting rose, and of formless matter, signals much more than just an innovative aesthetic, or anti-aesthetic. In Lorca, these innovations of artistic motifs points toward an intersection between literature and philosophy where structural and hierarchical systems are undermined. This assault on established discourse includes those related to aesthetic norms, gender and sexual conventions, literary forms, and other social,

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<sup>15</sup> In *Documents*, Bataille makes similar analogies with the sun, architecture, and the posture of the human body.

religious, and political systems which establish hierarchies and stratifications. Therefore, the implications concerning the Lorquian aesthetic are enormous as they point beyond any modernist or regressive reading that would delimit the aesthetic of the Granadine poet as a work representing provincial Spain. Rather, the affirmation of putrefied base matter (as exposed here in *Doña Rosita* and alluded to previously in the reference to the poet's drawings and other works) revises representational forms. In place of paradigms that would establish linguistic associations based on a fixed signifier/signified relationship, Lorca's floral metaphor presents a signifier in flux in which the rose is hope, death, desire, and sterility—conflictive relationships that, when transferred onto Rosita, issue an ambivalent version of the subject. The marginal *solterona*, unused and sterile, functions outside of the established order of symbolic meanings and structures which hierarchize. While Rosita does in fact reinforce an opposition of form/formless, beauty/repulsion, inside/outside, and upward movement/decay, she also affirms constant fluctuation and variation. In other words, she is a middle-ground figure similar to the “rose of death” where the oppositions are inseparable and in constant tension.

Commenting on the historical context in *Doña Rosita*, Arturo Jiménez-Vera hints at the important marginal space that Rosita occupies as an unmarried woman, or “old maid.” He asserts that the play demonstrates “the difficult and increasingly unnatural situation in which an unmarried woman is placed” (135). The social critique within the text “expose[s] the cruelty and injustice that lay behind society's treatment of the old maid” (136). Lorca's *solterona* is a ridiculed figure in an oppressive society and, as such, the text issues a critique of the ideological structures in the society that marginalizes such figures. Antonina Rodrigo takes the social concerns one step further by elaborating how the text exudes a frustration

with the situation of women in Spanish society: “En el tiempo en que el feminismo era ignorado, ridiculizado o duramente combatido, García Lorca denuncia la frustración del mundo femenino, generada por la opresión de unas estructuras sociales y formas de vida que coartaban la libertad” (118). The discontent with the social marginalization of the female underlies much of Lorca’s late dramatic innovation. While the social critique in *Doña Rosita* is evident, as these critics ascertain, the manner in which Lorca’s text attains this revision of social norms is noteworthy. His play goes beyond simply calling attention to social marginalization as it presents an aesthetic renovation of the rose metaphor and draws attention to the spinster’s nihilistic fate.

At the end of Act I, Rosita’s cousin departs in order to fulfill obligations in his parents land. He promises to return and to marry Rosita who assures she will wait. The beginning of the Act II, however, represents the passing of ten years and contrasts the nature of idealistic waiting with the withering characteristic of the material reality. In a discussion with Señor X concerning modernity and progress, Rosita’s uncle exclaims, “El siglo que acabamos de empezar será un siglo materialista” (2: 545). The ironic focus on materialism provides an opposition to the insistence on appearances and ideas as seen in subsequent comments by Rosita and the extravagantly-dressed *manolas*. This contrast, wrought with ambivalence towards idealism *and* materialism, signals the inadequacy of such oppositions since progressive, agricultural, and traditional discourses are all ridiculed. The stubborn Rosita has her “raíces muy hondas, muy bien hincadas en [su] sentimiento” (2: 552) and reacts to the pressures to find another man and to stop wasting her time. She later negates reality and insists on the *idea* of a projected desire as she insists that her fiance’s scar was only a small burn: “Pero no era una cicatriz, era una quemadura, un poquito rosada. Las

cicatrices son hondas” (2: 557). These instances further presage the vacillation between idea and matter (or pretense and reality, desire and withering) that follow.

In the debate between the uncle and Señor X, Lorca invites the reader to empathize with the uncle who tirelessly tries to legitimate his art in front of the intellectual and progressive (modern but *cursi*) Señor X. The idea/matter opposition is intensified by the housekeeper who yells at Rosita and exclaims disgust for her dreaming of lofty ideas of love. She states that “A veces me gustaría tirarle un zapato a la cabeza. Porque de tanto mirar al cielo se le van a poner los ojos de vaca” (2: 548). That is, in Rosita’s incessant obsession with looking forward to a sincere and everlasting love, she is blinded by the reality concerning her present time and space, that of an old maid waiting for a love which will never return.

Just as the Lorquian aesthetic in *Doña Rosita* cannot be reduced to a complete affirmation of traditional values and motifs as Fernández Cifuentes shows, neither can the play be reinserted in a conventional conception of the “culture of nostalgia.” In *The Culture of Cursilería: Bad Taste, Kitsch, and Class in Modern Spain*, Noël Valis shows how marginal forces abound within structures of nostalgia, and thus complicate the relationship between reality and pretense. For Valis, the mastery of Lorca’s play resides in the break with the tradition of nostalgia as evidenced in the absurd *curislería* of the *manolas* and other traditional figures. While the *manolas* try to be attractive and elegant, but are not, so also do Rosita and the roses intend to be useful and beautiful, but result in decay and putrefaction. This tension between pretense and effectiveness is doubled by other aesthetic, social, and economic deficiencies examined in the play as Rosita is unproductive in every sense. Valis highlights points of departure from the tradition when she states that “Lorca does two things:

he puts the marginal—the feminine as doubly provincial (obsolete *and* Granadine)—squarely at the center of his play; and, in the process, he subtly conflates gender identity with cultural identity (local and national)” (247). She ascribes to Lorca the refusal of any mere “idealizing lens of nostalgia” (248) in which he also resists the tendency to “idealize the local” (250). Rather, Valis proposes that “the effects of nostalgia tend to deterritorialize and dematerialize the original object or event, mythicizing it and enveloping it in an aura” (251). What is revealing about Valis’s study is that she points to the ambiguity and multifaceted nature of the language of flowers by suggesting that “Lorca seems to suggest that *cursilería* is also *not* *cursilería*, that what appears conventionalized and transparent is also individual and concealed. Herein lies a significant part of the double-codedness of the language of flowers” (259). Lorca’s aesthetic conception and ethical address drastically negates the reduction of the rose symbol to any one of several traditions and suggests that the language of roses—and the mode of thinking, or “*pensamiento*,” that was to be captured in this play—rests outside the sources and conceptions of the language of flowers previously analyzed. Furthermore, Valis continues, “Flowers have wide-ranging symbolic-cultural meanings, and Lorca’s use of such imagery created multiple layers in his poetry and plays. It would be unwise and terribly limiting to restrict the Lorquian language of flowers to a single frame of reference” (271). Valis briefly hints at other subversions of the rose tradition as she alludes to the death and foul odors of the plant life in *Doña Rosita*: “The sense of decay that lies beneath the sweet delights of flowers anticipates Doña Rosita’s wasted life and years [and points toward] the cruder material realities that the language of flowers covered over” (271).<sup>16</sup> But, rather

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<sup>16</sup> While she does not develop this insight any further, Valis does allude to the writings of Bataille and Derrida concerning flower motifs in a brief footnote (347 n55).

than affirming the purely material significations of the rose—such as death and decay—Valis shows how any stable system of representation is deficient as she negates binary structures that favor either “ideas” or materiality.

Rosita’s hope in the idea of her cousin’s return ends in Act III as she (now Doña Rosita, 25+ years later) receives notice that he has married and that she has waited and withered in vain. Lorca’s use of the rose centers on this withering as the spinster’s destiny. She is not loved, her wishes are denied, and she is rejected. Her beauty is reduced to nothingness and there is no possibility for *carpe diem*. Since the only one who really ever understood the language of flowers (the uncle) has died, Doña Rosita, the housekeeper, and the aunt must sell the house and move away. Rosita (dressed in outmoded clothing) and the other women are confronted by Don Martín, a local professor of rhetoric. Don Martín is upset that the children (which represent the current, contemporary, and modern) do not want to listen in his class concerning the “Concepto y definición de la Harmonía” (2: 568). In the current age of materialism, the old forms of the tradition and the harmony of ideas, seen also in Don Martín’s anachronistic spelling of “Harmonía,” are now obsolete. Don Martín’s old values no longer quench the thirst of the younger generation. The housekeeper, who has heard his lectures, states that “Cuando él explica en la sala baja del colegio, yo voy a la carbonería para oírlo: ¿‘Qué es idea’? ‘La representación intelectual de una cosa o un objeto’” (2: 571). This definition of the idea points toward the Platonic tradition which has Rosita caught-up in her dreams and illusions and finally leads to her withering. Ironically it is the housekeeper, the one who has been most in-touch with reality throughout the play, who is contented by Don Martín’s discourses on the idea, harmony, and rhetoric (2: 571-72). The fluctuation between idealist and materialism intentions, pretense and reality, shows how any

confidence in binary structures that affirm either pure ideals or material reality can eventually end in destruction. The insufficiency of an interpretation of reality rooted either purely in the idea *or* in matter is captured in the ambivalence of the rose as spinster. At the end of the play the aunt scolds Rosita by exclaiming, “Te has aferrado a tu *idea* sin ver la realidad y sin tener caridad de tu porvenir” (2: 575, my emphasis). Then comes the rain, the cold, the night, and the withering demise of Doña Rosita through which Lorca shows the destined destruction of the rose and Rosita. The idealist intentions and hopes are in constant tension with the material nature and reality of marginal discourses, such as that of an old maid in Spain who fulfills no social role. Lorca is critical of the antiquated society that produces the idealist thinking that reduces women to this—human beings without voice, sterile, unproductive. Rosita, then, is at once a conventional and marginal figure, traditional in her views, subversive in her outcome; as an old maid *and* rose, constantly negotiating norm and difference.

#### Weeding through Lorca and Bataille

The “mode of thinking” that Lorca captures in *Doña Rosita*—or, the language of flowers that he exposes—questions purely idealist structural oppositions in favor a dispersal of floral significations which capture the tensions between idealist and material readings of the rose. When, in 1929, Bataille was invited to attend a meeting that would shape the future of surrealism, his reply was telling: “Don’t waste my time with idealism” (Surya 115). This critique of idealist models points towards the subversion of the conventional language of flowers as a discourse which is, rather, affined to the material putrefaction and death of high form. Bataille captures this subversion of the ideal by concluding,

It is interesting to observe, however, that if one says that flowers are beautiful, it is because they seem to *conform to what must be*, in other words they represent, as flowers, the human *ideal*. [...] [But] Materialism, whatever its scope in the positive order, necessarily is above all the obstinate negation of idealism, which amounts to saying, finally, of the very basis of *all* philosophy. (*Visions* 12, 45)

Lorca's interrogation of the binary, though, is much more subtle and ambivalent than just affirming the low. The rotting roses in *Doña Rosita* effectively portray the instability of fixed lexical significations and stable social roles, a variation that is manifest in Lorca's many uses of the rose. The correspondence that I have sought to make between the destabilization of accepted discourses concerning the natural languages of the botanical world and the intersections of literary and philosophical languages of the Lorquian and Batailleian discourses is amplified by Sartiliot:

[T]he flower seems to have no *topos*, no clear or real place, no role. If flowers are traditionally—and as literary emblems, primordially—associated with feminine beauty, life, and innocence, they shift in the same texts into their opposite: they represent sin in Milton's *Paradise Lost*; in Baudelaire, they become flowers of evil; in Genet, they are associated with criminals and homosexuals; in Proust, they suit both the description of the *jeunes filles en fleurs* and the decorum of homosexual attraction. Their actual morphology seems to invite this symbolic crossing of genders: the receptacle-shaped corolla readily becomes a symbol of womb, whereas the pistil with its erect style points to phallic symbolism. Remarking on this impossibility for the metaphor of the flower to remain in one particular and predetermined locus, Derrida shows in *Glas* that flowers seem to occupy instead the degree zero in the chain of signification. Involved in the process of dissemination, flowers appear only to disappear, [...] Instead of asking the traditional question (what do flowers express?), we should ask rather what motivates their appearance in texts, and what their appearance obscures. (17-18)

So, what motivates the appearance of the flowers in Lorca's *Doña Rosita*, poems, and drawings where flowers seemingly surface only in order to wither? The floral signifier is grounded, emptied out, and relegated to what Sartiliot calls a "degree zero" of meaning. From that space, empty and *informe*, Lorca posits an innovative reading of the rose as a *cursi*,

sterile, decadent, spinster. The “mode of thought” (“pensamiento”) that Lorca captures in the symbol of the rotten roses is that of critique of idealist models, traditional discourses, and linguistic associations that hierarchize and delimit expression.

As Valis reminds us concerning the social implications of *Doña Rosita*,

The nostalgic aura of a bygone era enveloping Lorca’s play, along with his implicit critique of inaction and evasiveness, appear as evocative of a corresponding resonance with the Second Republic’s social and political crisis. It is worth remembering, too, that Lorca started thinking seriously about this play of social frustration and repressed emotions during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera” (253).

Therefore, Lorca’s play continues in the proliferation of new modes of thinking and of innovative engagements with time and space, identity and desire. The Bataille reading of the rose motif in the avant-garde proves a productive analytical posture as it amplifies the importance of the material nature the rose’s symbolic value. And while Lorca’s *Doña Rosita*, the “Casida,” and the “Rosa de la muerte” drawing do not present purely material readings of the rose as Bataille’s theoretical postulations might, they do point toward the complexity of Lorca’s work as it presents ambiguous, *cursi*, and vacillating figures. Neither the dreamy and ideal waiting, nor the material putrefaction are sufficient poetic and theoretical stances. Clearly what is sought is “otra cosa,” something that exceeds expectative norms and conventions, open to alteration and variation. In this context, Rosita’s rotting is exemplary. After 25 years (1885-1910) of proverbially plucking petals from the flowers as she idealistically waits for and wonders about her cousin, the putrid Rosita finally has no more petals to offer since she has literally lost her bloom. Lorca’s Rosita is one whose destiny is in putrefaction and suggestive of, as Edwards affirms, “the emptiness that lies at the end of our passage through time” (212). In the end, the love and beauty of the ideal rose succumb to the waste of death, and Rosita—“[*mientras*] [*v*] *acila un poco, se apoya en una silla y cae*

*sostenida por el Ama y la Tía que impiden su total desmayo*” (2: 579)—might as well  
exclaim, “he loves me not!”

## CONCLUSION

### An Ethics of *Informe*: On Poetry and Learning to Live

*Let us remember...that in the end we go to poetry for one reason, so that we might more fully inhabit our lives and the world in which we live them, and that if we more fully inhabit these things, we might be less apt to destroy both.*

— Christian Wiman, Editor of *Poetry*

During the summer of 2006, I was fortunate enough to presence an art exhibition titled *Picasso: Tradición y vanguardia*, housed jointly at the Prado and Reina Sofía museums in Madrid. I was struck by the intricate organization that this exhibit displayed and the manner in which Pablo Picasso's paintings had been masterfully placed aside (or facing) pieces from the Spanish tradition, thus giving context and intertext to Picasso's vanguardist works. The most impressive of these pictorial pairings involved *Guernica*, which faced Francisco de Goya's *Los fusilamientos del 3 de mayo*, in the Reina Sofía. I could not help but feel entangled between these two paintings, encircled by depictions of tension, war, death, and destruction. Equally prevalent in these war paintings, one senses the profound desire for humanity, even more intensified as they face one another and suggest a contemporary continuation of the strife captured by Goya in 1814. In a sense the spectator is de-centered when positioned between these two works, wondering whether the stories of history will merely repeat the cycle of brutal murder, torture, and death—many times in the name of freedom, religion, democracy, and progress. I am beginning to think that my eighth-grade history teacher was right as she continually told us, echoing Marx, that history does repeat itself. But why don't we learn to overcome strife? How can the human species learn to

respect, accept, “tolerate,” and embrace difference without merely reducing or assimilating otherness into the environment of the self? And what do Lorca, Bataille and a study on Spanish poetry have anything to do with the social, political, and historical issues that confront our world today?

In the preceding chapters, I have been interested in the manner in which spaces of void, formless matter, and formal and discursive innovations destructure official discourse and provide a new consideration of the late poetics of the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca. While the major themes of discussion have centered on the tensions of surrealism in Spain, on Lorca’s later poetry and drama, and on the transformative and performative power of art, I am increasingly interested in the ethical considerations that have arisen. The breaking down of form in order to re-consider, re-constitute, and re-elaborate expression and subjectivity entails a substantial ethical component. For Gregory Stallings, whose analysis of Lorca’s use of *informe* in the New York poetry provides a unique reading of jazz and surrealism, “Ethics and jazz coincide in *Poeta en Nueva York* with other form-dissolving forces that work ‘against architecture’ (Bataille’s phrase)” (215). In essence, the fragmentation of the self (for Bataille, the violent splitting of the self, the coupling with the other in ecstatic fusion) constitutes an ethical act, one in which the self opens onto the other. In these spaces of formlessness, the self expresses itself in conjunction with an other. For Juan Carlos Rodríguez, Lorca (even from his early poems in *Libro de poemas*) is lost in his environment, broken, fallen, and suffering as an outsider: “Ese no encontrarse a sí mismo es sin duda lo que le obliga a buscar otras raíces, tanto en el silencio de la música como en cualquier *otredad* también diferenciada: la de los márgenes, los gitanos y los perseguidos.” (165). The expression of the self at the margins finds its voice in poetry through ethical

identifications with others.

Implicit with reference to a Lorquian ethics, the preceding chapters have each discussed ethical spaces that are created when forms are rendered *informe*. The opening of spaces for the *other* discussed here and evidenced in Lorca's work are at once socio-cultural (through reflections on the marginalization of others such as gypsies, the Blacks of Harlem, oppressed women, and homosexual desiring subjects) and aesthetic (as otherness extends beyond race and gender and is considered through artistic expression: *cante jondo*, jazz music, etc.). In essence, what I see as a certain "ethics of *informe*" entails the breaking down of constructed notions of identity, art, and social relations in an attempt to re-posit open possibilities for relationships with marginal forms of otherness: in desire, aesthetics, race, gender, and social class. The poetic utterance is key in this process because it is part of a discourse that resides beyond calculation, part of what Bataille calls a general economy. Coupled with laughter, eroticism, and madness, poetry for Bataille resists pure reason, progress, and the enlightenment models of thinking and relating that have been landmarks of twentieth-century industry and capitalism. The appeal to sovereignty, to the irruptions of energies of excess in Bataille's notion of general economy has ethical implications as it signals a mode of relating to that which is *other*. The ethical opening, then, in Bataille is not a theoretical gap or space that can be filled or universalized. It is, rather, the signal of certain aporetic structures such as responsibility, obligation, and hospitality in which otherness cannot be assimilated to sameness. Bataille's "ethics" on the margin as noted in poetry, erotism, transgression, *informe*, and primitivism calls restrictive boundaries into question.

Just as *différance* for Derrida is "the opening of the space" through temporal and spatial deferral and differing (*Margins* 6), eroticism for Bataille "always entails a breaking

down of established patterns, the patterns, I repeat, of the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of existence as defined and separate individuals” (*Erotism* 18). In an attempt to think otherwise, both Derrida and Bataille question barriers and implement modes of ethically relating to otherness without just assimilating (as in Hegelianism) the other to the self’s paradigm. As many critics and philosophers argue (Heidegger among them), the obsessive focus on production and machination, *Machenschaft*, produces the destruction of human “values” and denigrates the ability to live sensitively in the world; it stifles *mit-dasein*, or being-with. In a world in which tolerance, difference, hybridity, and co-habitation are important concepts (but still problematic) it seems that something has been lost in our ability to relate to the other. Permeated with a similar concern, Heidegger’s later writing (his “turn” to poetry) elaborates the tension between poetry and historical engagement. For David Wood, “the crisis of *machenschaft* is of such an order that only the resources of Hölderlin’s poetry will be able to help” (*Thinking* 174). It does not seem coincidental that near the same time that Heidegger wrote *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936) in which he sharply speaks out against machination, he was also delivering lecture versions of “The Origin of the Work of Art” (in 1935), and “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” (written in 1936), two illuminating essays that highlight the importance of art and poetry in be-ing-historical thinking. In *The Step Back: Ethics and Politics after Deconstruction*, Wood notices further, echoing Heidegger, how “art and poetry open worlds, and how technology enframes them” (55). Indeed for Heidegger, the poetic utterance founds being; it establishes, through the word, the creation of the world and our relationship to it. Wood continues, “His [Heidegger’s] concern with the world-opening power of poetry, with the way in which language sustains and infuses our very being in the world, is a tacit repudiation of the model

by which subjects constitute the world by their own ‘acts.’ Language forces us to a recognition of a certain dimension or moment of passivity, community” (*Step* 135).

If Derrida is right, no period of human history has known the quantity of human death and suffering that the twentieth century has produced (*Specters* 85). Lorca witnessed the changing face of modernity and struggled with the tensions between literary and bourgeois modernity, the latter of which espoused progress, production, and the proliferation of resources. Lorca’s work speaks against the death and destruction of his age, but also anticipates the growing tensions of fascism, intolerance, and marginalization that occur later in the century’s history. If we are to negotiate the complexities of the tasks that lie in our future, it seems that self-critique will be a fundamental part of our responsibility (Derrida, *Specters* 88). This responsibility, according to Derrida is part of what he calls a “politics of memory,” a continual looking back, stepping back, and re-evaluation of the past with the hope of bettering our future (*Specters* xix). Through a more serious and engaged association with our past, with the ghosts of the past which haunt and instruct, we are more able to navigate our present, increasing our ability to live with others, ever continuing in the process of learning to live:

Someone, you or me, comes forward and says: *I would like to learn to live finally.*

Finally but why?

*To learn to live:* a strange watchword. Who would learn? From whom? To teach to live, but to whom? Will we ever know? Will we ever know how to learn to live and first of all what “to learn to live” means? And why “finally”? [...]

But to learn to live, to learn it *from oneself and by oneself*, all alone, to teach *oneself* to live (“I would like to learn to live finally”), is that not impossible for a living being? Is it not what logic itself forbids? To live, by definition, is not something one learns. Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death. [...] It is ethics itself: to learn to live. (Derrida, *Specters* xvii-xviii)

It is when we close off our thinking to the past, to heritages and histories (our own and those of others), that we encroach into the dangerous space of ignorance, discrimination, and hatred. Learning to live, on the contrary, promotes the continual process of self-critique, openness to the other, and an ethical responsibility in the interest of humanity.

The humanist Henry David Thoreau captures the value of learning to live and the importance that *informe*, spaces of being reduced to their most essential state, has in such a process. In *Walden* he proclaims:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow or life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms. (86)

Here, Thoreau recognizes that part of living entails reducing life to its most basic (base), simple, lowest terms. While his discourse on simplicity may simplify the complexities of the *informe* as studied here in Lorca and Bataille, the interest in a return to a state pre-form—or at least prior to structural formulations and prescriptive social categorizations—is key in an engagement in living. David Wood calls this, echoing Heidegger, *the step back*, a continual recalling of the past in order to respond to the present:

The step back marks a certain shape of philosophical practice, one that does not just resign itself to, but affirms the necessity of, ambiguity, incompleteness, repetition, negotiation, and contingency. [...] [T]he step back, the promulgation of negative capability, is the key to philosophy serving the ends of peace, rather than promoting the unthinking identifications whose defense leads to violence. (*Step 4*, 7)

It is poetry, for Heidegger and others, which founds the world, renews relating, and appeals to a social and historical sensibility. And this poetic sensitivity is key in the founding of

peace, community, and being-with.

Is the answer to contemporary issues of strife and destruction a return to poetry, recognizing the betterment that is offered to humanity by opening ourselves to the literary and imaginative sensibilities afforded by art? Indeed for Abrams, who refers to the great poet William Wordsworth as a example for linking aesthetic and ethical concerns, “[Wordsworth] indicated his explicit justifications of poetry, the ‘science of feelings,’ in the contemporary world of international crises and social dislocation. Such a service, he said, was never more needed ‘than at the present time’” (330). Thoreau connects the process of learning to live to the importance of poetry and its enlivening effects:

If we respected only what is inevitable and has a right to be, music and poetry would resound along the streets. When we are unhurried and wise, we perceive that only great and worthy things have any permanent and absolute existence, that petty fear and petty pleasures are but the shadow of the reality. (91)

Lorca was a poet who recognized the importance of art in society, and he translated this concern into his involvement with the theater group *La Barraca* which traveled throughout Spain with the goal of educating the people about their artistic heritage. He was not a political or economic socialist in any sense; in fact, he resisted political parties altogether. But he was in many senses a compassionate socialist, one concerned with understanding marginalized figures, seeing the other within its own culture, in its own ambience, in its own language, and on its own terms. His work sought renovation through critique, a sustained engagement with his particular time and space in which he sought to “poner en evidencia morales viejas o equivocadas y explicar con ejemplos vivos normas eternas del corazón y el sentimiento del hombre. (3: 255). By emptying out existence, by reducing life to its lowest forms (as in Thoreau) by seeking annihilation, *huecos*, and the articulation of lament, Lorca’s

work elaborates new significations based on difference and openness. The *informe*, as Lorca uses it, like *destruktion* for Heidegger, and deconstruction for Derrida, all engage in a critique in which forms of otherness are given a voice. Returning to María Zambrano's conception of the aesthetic act, which is one of giving form, Lorca's works signal the spaces of void and absence, the destruction of form from which poetic expression is born. Through the aesthetic object as an affirmation of life, Lorca's work employs spaces of formlessness in order to posit sites for marginal voices.

The social thrust evident in Lorca's work supports the thesis of Peter Bürger that the avant-garde was profoundly interested in the connection between art and praxis. Theodor Adorno makes a similar claim on the basis that both poetry and society employ language, albeit in different ways:

Thus language begets and joins both poetry and society in their innermost natures. Lyric poetry, therefore, shows itself most thoroughly integrated into society at those points where it does not repeat what society says—where it conveys no pronouncements—but rather where the speaking subject (who succeeds in his expression) comes full accord with the language itself, i.e., with what language seeks by its own inner tendency. (“Lyric” 161)

It might be said that while society and art both use language, it is the poets who use it by maximizing its fully expressive capabilities. And this potential for expression signals an experience that at once contains individualized particularities and collective reflection. Concerning the German poet Stephan George (to whom Lorca and Ricardo Molinari referred in some poems and drawings conceived in Buenos Aires), Adorno continues,

George has his truth in his poetry's breaking through the walls of individuality, in its perfection of the particular, in its sensitivity arrayed against the banal as much as, in the end, against the exquisitely choice. If its expression concentrated itself in the individual, completely saturating him with substance and experience garnered from its own loneliness, then precisely this speech becomes the voice of men between whom the barriers have fallen. (“Lyric” 170)

And it should not go unnoticed that certain strands of surrealism, a key point of departure for the investigations here, also provided a social engagement through critique. As Keya Ganguly shows in a lucid reading of surrealist variations according to Adorno and Benjamin, the surrealist aesthetic must include a realist contact with everyday living and relating to the world, of vivifying lived experience which extends beyond Breton's theory of dream writing.

In contrast,

Adorno upheld the conventional modernist belief that the artistic techniques of the surrealists, based on the principle of cinematic montage, intensified the fossilized terrain of everyday life [...]. In doing so they not only 'salvaged' (a word Adorno uses to describe the surrealist act) what is out of date but looked forward to a future in which the subject could once more experience authentic forms of art and life. This opinion, representing a kind of homeopathic theory of experience, is of course in line with his interpretation of lyric poetry, Schönberg's music or Kafka's fiction, all of which he sought to interpret as resisting the reification of everyday life. (265)

This posture on the surreal exemplifies a conscious contact with reality which sought a heightened experience of life. As examined in the last chapter, Moreno Villa's vision of the vanguard as an aesthetic rooted in a destiny of death demonstrates the possibilities for further considerations of living. This aesthetic vision focuses on the emergence of variations, the alteration of proportions, the formless grotesque other, and a break with official discourse. The formless spaces in Lorca, the *huecos* and *vacíos*, are the ground zero of significations which imply the space of possibility for new significations, new meanings, new subjects, and cultural hybridity—even beyond Bataillean pure annihilation and destruction.

What I have tried to show here, throughout this dissertation, is that Lorca's poems, drawings, and dramas react against calculated form, whether they be forms concerning art, social norms, sexual preference, or expressive means. Lorca's poetic and dramatic subjects suggest that the ability to express oneself authentically was being stifled in modern-day

living. But my reflections here do not proclaim to simply demonstrate the way in which Lorca uses poetic expression to articulate the self, one of anguish, desire, flesh, and blood. I have tried to draw attention to the relationship between society and poetry (as alluded to by Adorno, Bürger, Lorca, and others), and the important role that poetry has in cultural formation. That is, in an age when the culture industry is driven by the latest fads, it seems that what is lost is a genuine concern for *living-with*. Amid this milieu my contention is that poetry, creative expression as such, and a concern for the arts are necessary for the healing and re-creation of the human race. In a day when inter-cultural understanding (on the other's terms) is seemingly at a low, perhaps, the poetic utterance can restore a sense of a Heideggerian *being-with*. Indeed for the attuned literary critic Edward Hirsch, poetry is essential for our species and for the vivification of our relating to the other:

Poetry is as ancient as the drawing of a horse at Lascaux, or an Egyptian hieroglyphic, and yet it also feels especially relevant to a post-9/11 world, a world characterized by disaffection and materialism, a world alienated from art. The horrors we face daily around the globe—terrorist bombings, ethnic cleansing, the ravages of the HIV epidemic, children becoming soldiers—challenge us to find meaning in the midst of our suffering. Poetry answers this challenge. It puts us in touch with ourselves. It sends a message from the interior and also connects us to others. It is intimate and secretive; it is generously collective. [...] Poems are always in dialogue with other poems and in conversation with history, and they invite readers into that conversation, which offers a particular form of communication, communion, fusion. (xiv)

Poetry helps us understand ourselves, others, and a human sensibility that is necessary in our world. It connects us to our own time and space by allowing us to examine our history and that of other cultures. Hirsch continues:

That's why I consider poetry—which is, after all, created out of a mouthful of air—a human fundamental, like music. It saves something precious in the world from vanishing. It sacramentalizes experience. It is an imaginative act that starts with the breath itself. It arises from breathing. It is a living thing that comes from the body, from the heart and lungs, and thus seems

hardwired to us. It enters our bodies through the material stream of language. [...] Poetry speaks with the greatest intensity against the effacement of individuals, the obliteration of communities, the destruction of nature. It tries to keep the world from ending by positing itself against oblivion. The works are marks against erasure. I believe that something in our nature is realized when we use language as an art to confront and redeem our mortality. We need poems now as much as ever. We need these voices to restore us to ourselves in an alienating world. We need the sounds of the words to delineate the states of our being. Poetry is a necessary part of our planet. (xv)

For Hirsch, poetry provides the necessary contact with our most intimate sensibilities, and for that reason, it is a fundamental part of our relating with humanity and our world. The reading, sharing and experiencing of the poetic text leads to a lived interaction, a collective (yet highly individual and contextual) communication with the other. Abrams agrees with this posture which asserts the use of poetry in society, for human betterment, and for the development of humanity: “The product effects human betterment, but only by expressing, hence evoking, those states of feeling and imagination which are the essential conditions of human happiness, moral decision, and conduct. By placing the reader in his own affective state of mind, the poet, without inculcating doctrines, directly forms character” (329). In this sense, poetry aids in forming culture and transforming the world into a space of an engaged social community.

Learning to live as posited here implies several things: first, that it is a process that is not, and probably never will be complete; and second, that the appeal to a poetic sensibility, if we follow the thinking of the intellectuals examined here, will aid humanity in the needed recovery of a contemporary relating to otherness. Bataille’s thinking on *informe* offers an initial step in a radical destruction of aesthetics and values, but my reading of the formless in Lorca amplifies the possibilities of Bataille’s motif to signal a more complex operation of breaking forms which lead to the creation of discourses of otherness. The poetic

and dramatic texts provided by Lorca during the first decades of the twentieth century elucidate voids and hollows which provide a voice to figures from the margins. Learning to live by stepping back, by rethinking our relating to others, and by being open to the possibilities offered by a poetic sensibility, will necessitate an engaged relationship to the poetic, political, and social discourses of history. Returning to the historical thinking embodied in the work of Goya and Picasso, rethinking our present through our past, provides the impetus for a step forward based on the step back. In a poetic passage in his book on Lorca, the poet's friend, painter Gregorio Prieto, summarizes the aesthetical and ethical thrust of Lorca's life and work:

Arcángeles, mujeres, flores, estrellas, lunas, muchachos..., todo cabe  
en el mundo lorquiano: tragedia y farsa, pena honda y  
alegría celeste, la vida y la muerte, amante y libertadora del poeta.  
Y, coronándolo todo, la bondad y el amor. (198)

Lorca's poetic discourse, based on opening boundaries, on an ethics of *informe*, opens spaces of expression which include innovation in modes of thinking, creating, relating, and being. If poetry alters language, it helps us alter ourselves as it facilitates thinking our relationships anew, beyond calculation and reason. Indeed, if we allow it to, poetry will help us live, and to learn to do it better.

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